

ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE THEME OF
LIBERATION IN THE PSALMS

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BY:

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As required, I hereby state that the whole thesis, except where specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

Signed: *M. J. ...*

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to promote faith in God among the people of Namibia, as it helps them to reflect on their present experience of liberation and independence in the light of the Old Testament idea of liberation.

In the first two chapters, this study begins with investigating the uses of the Hebrew concepts for liberation in the psalms of community and individual laments. Here the results of the analysis show that liberation was sought and experienced in historical and concrete realities of human slavery in Egypt, oppression, enemy threats, sickness and its consequences of death and entry to Sheol. As such, liberation has its goals, which are realized in the people's possession of land, and their experience of *shalom* "wholeness" and security. In all these instances, the people look to God as the one who provides them with liberation.

In the third and fourth chapters, the thesis proceeds to explore the significance of liberation in the psalms of community and individual thanksgivings. At this point we have seen that various experiences of liberation, such as the return from exile, prosperity of land, deliverance from military enemies, and restoration to health prompted the people to praise God.

In the fifth chapter, the study concentrates on the hymns. Here we have seen that liberation is presented as the reason for praising God, and as such it is the subject of proclamation.

After this, the thesis investigates the royal psalms. It demonstrates that liberation was one of the tasks of the king, associated with his functions of maintaining justice and effecting economic prosperity. Lib; J. econ-prop.

Further, our study looks at the connection between liberation and *torah* as it appears in Psalm 119. Subsequently, the study indicates that liberation has *torah* as its norm and motive, as the psalmist hopes for God to liberate him in accordance with *torah* and on the basis of his being faithful to it. One of the ideas pointed out here is that in Psalm 119 liberation is not sought for the psalmist's own good only, but mainly for the purpose of observing God's *torah* better. In other words, *torah* facilitates liberation while liberation enhances the observance of *torah*.

Finally after summarizing the findings, the thesis attempts to relate the results of the investigation to the context of Namibia by providing some suggestions as to how Christians in this particular country can praise God in response to their own experience of national liberation and independence.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Aim

My motive of writing this thesis is more pastoral than theological. It has grown out of a pastoral concern for a modern generation in Namibia, which seems to have very little interest in worship and is thus losing faith in God. Before independence the youth used to be very active in the church. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), for example, the youth were much involved in their religious meetings. The students joined the Student Christian Movement (SCM), while those who left school participated lively in the ELCIN Youth Organisation. At that time many of the youth led a prayerful life. They enthusiastically read the Bible and praised God in the form of songs. But today only few of the youth show these characteristics.

Since our national independence I have observed the decrease of the religious life among our youth. This is noticeable in their low attendance of worship services, negative attitudes towards the church, and denial of parental guidance. Many of the youth at present seem to be preoccupied with other things such as entertainment at beer parties and passing time in night clubs. Some of them, particularly male, have even become a threat to the society as they commit all sorts of crime, although some of these misdeeds were already experienced even before independence.

We as Namibians are supposed to praise God for our independence, but when it comes to this point it appears that only few people recognize God's involvement in our history. Many of the youth and even adults seem to regard our achievement of independence as something which we have obtained through our own human efforts alone.

This decline of religious life among our modern generation is the actual background of my thesis. To promote interest in the worship of God among the youth and other fellow people who share the same problem, I have chosen to study the idea of liberation in the Psalter.

My main purpose of analysing the theme of liberation in the psalms is to help my particular people in Namibia to reflect on their present experience of liberation in the light of the Bible.

It should therefore be made clear at the very beginning of this writing, that here I am not going to deal with the theology of liberation, as the one which has been propounded by liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutierrez,¹ Allan Boesak² and

¹ Gustavo Gutierrez is a professional theologian in Latin America. He wrote numerous books and articles on liberation theology. His main publications, among others, include: "A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation" (1985); "We drink from Our Own Wells" (1983); and "Liberation and Change" (1977).

² Allan A. Boesak is a black South African theologian and minister of the Dutch Reform Church. He wrote a number of books on black theology from the perspective of liberation theology. His writings include: "Farewell to Innocence" (1977); "Black Theology Black Power" (1978).

others. My thesis is aimed at a demonstration of the basic reasons of the Old Testament people for professing faith in God, who, as the scriptures testify, revealed himself to humanity through his acts of creation, providence, and especially of liberation. It is particularly through God's acts of liberation, as we will see in this thesis, that they have come to know God and to experience his presence in their own life and history. God's acts of liberation, among others, such as creation and providence, constitute the core of Israel's faith as they are at the centre of her confessions, prayers, laments and songs of praise (cf. Kraus 1986:60ff.). In other words, the readers of this thesis will be introduced here to one of the reasons or motives for Israel's worshipping, praising God and even lamenting against him.³

My enquiry in this thesis will thus concentrate on the uses of the Hebrew verbs and nouns for liberation in the psalms. Here we will see how both the need and experience of liberation play an important role throughout the Psalter. The psalmists, for example, lamented or complained against God whenever they lacked liberation, but they rejoiced and praised him when they were experiencing it. Hence it can be observed that it was in the context of God's deeds of liberation that the people professed their faith in him (cf. Richardson 1976:169f.; Kraus 1986:31, 51).

³ Murphy (1977:15) provides two basic reasons for praising God in the hymn psalms, namely: God's action in creating (a continuous sustaining action), and his saving acts in Israel's history - the two themes which embrace a vital message of Old Testament theology

Terms for
E/J
+
Experience

Why Ps?

Ps for all
(Quote)

I have chosen to work on the psalms, as they are the expressions of Israel's faith.⁴ In them we see what the Old Testament people thought, felt and believed about God and about themselves, their life and world in the presence of God. Furthermore, the Psalter, as Luther stated: "is the book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find or wish for anything better" (Luther 1960:35,256).

This study intends not only to help one gain knowledge about the particular divine acts, but also to appreciate and acknowledge their author in one's own life and situation.

For a Christian, the Old Testament is not an end in itself. It is rather an introductory or preparatory way to the New Testament faith. Without the Old Testament one finds it difficult, if not impossible, to apprehend and appreciate the New Testament (cf. Von Rad 1965:357-409; see also Baker 1976). It is therefore essential for us to do this study and write on the proposed thesis if we have as our primary aim to provide our modern generation in Namibia, with at least a guide to one of the elements of faith in the Old Testament, namely liberation, as this, I believe, will help them not to loose faith in their creator.

⁴ Broyles (1989:11) also holds that the Psalter is a testimony of the faith of ancient Israel.

1.2 Definition of the Concept

We have the theme of "liberation" in the psalms as the subject of our study. The term "liberation" *per se* does not occur in the English versions. But its concept is well described by a number of Hebrew words. In the Psalter the idea of liberation can be obtained through the investigation of various Hebrew terms, namely יָשַׁע, נָצַל, גָּאֵל, פָּדָה, חָלַט, פָּלַט, and their derivatives. These terms are frequently rendered "save", "deliver", "redeem", or in their noun forms as "salvation", "deliverance", and "redemption, which makes their meaning to be somehow obscure. The Old Testament idea of liberation ought not to be confused with the concept of "salvation".

In the traditional theology of the church the term "salvation", as Pedersen puts it, "has throughout become charged with the contents of the *soteria* of the New Testament, and when it is used to render the above mentioned words [that is יְשׁוּעָה and its synonyms] it is apt to cause ideas from the domain of the New Testament to be transferred into the Old Israelitic terms. Salvation instinctively suggests the idea of something beyond, deliverance from the misery of this world into another world" (1973:330). This same observation is made by Nolan, who holds that "salvation in the church has been reduced to the forgiveness of sins - the salvation of souls" (1988:109).⁵ While salvation

⁵ In the history of the Christian worship, the psalms, for example, have been spiritualized. The sicknesses have been understood as sins, the enemies as spiritual enemies (cf. Tomes 1989:254).

as designated by the Greek "soteria" suggests the idea of deliverance from the misery of this world into another world, that is from corporeal life into spiritual life, liberation as expressed by the Hebrew הַצִּילָה and its synonyms has the idea of deliverance from any suffering, whether slavery, sickness, poverty, hunger, danger or any other problem into happy life here on the earth and in this physical world. In the Old Testament one is liberated for the world, not from the world (cf. Pedersen 1973:334).

So, "salvation" in its New Testament sense and traditional Christian usage appears not to be the appropriate term for expressing God's acts of liberation, which we come across in the Old Testament and, more specifically, in the psalms.

When we talk about liberation in the psalms, we mean "salvation" of the whole person - experienced both in spiritual and physical sense. This liberation (salvation of the whole person), as we see it in the psalms and elsewhere in other texts of the Hebrew Bible, can refer to an event of rescue from intolerable situation from which the person is unable to deliver himself.

As will be explicated in this thesis, liberation in the Psalter is something tangible and concrete. The deliverances celebrated and looked for are this worldly ones: liberation from Egyptian bondage (Pss. 74, 77); victory over enemies and their oppression (Pss. 22; 31; 35; 40; 5; 71; 109); return from exile (Pss. 6; 88;

116) and even escape from physical death (Pss. 56; 86). The nation looked for being able to live in its land in peace and prosperity (Pss. 67; 85; 144; 147); the individual a life under God's protection and blessing (Pss. 23; 27; 91; cf. also Tomes 1989:267).

The concept of liberation was not only connected with the community or its individual members, but it was also relevant to their king. The royal leader sought for liberation to enable him to enjoy a long and successful reign (Pss. 72).

In the psalms the impact of the idea of liberation has penetrated even the sphere of torah, to the extent that it can be inferred also from Psalm 119.

As such, liberation affected the physical lives of the nation as well as those of the individual person. When liberation was absent, the people could lament, but when it was present they rejoiced. Liberation did not only affect the lives of the people, but it also influenced the way they related to God. As we will see in this thesis, during the absence of liberation, the people complained against God, but when it was present they praised him in response of that gift of liberation. Hence the categories of lament and praise in the Psalter (cf. Westermann 1980:23ff.).

To sum up, liberation in the Psalter, as we will observe, is sought and experienced especially in social, political and economic dimensions.

1.3 Method of Approach

This thesis is primarily analytical and thematic in form. Throughout the whole study we will be concentrating mainly on the uses of the Hebrew terms for liberation.

Our thesis consists of nine chapters. The first two chapters will analyze the theme of liberation, first in the communal laments and then in the individual laments. For the communal laments, we will especially make use of Psalms 44; 60; 74; 77; 80; and 85. Concerning the individual laments, Psalms 6; 22; 26; 31; 35; 39; 40; 55; 56; 71 and 109 will be treated.

I have chosen to start with the psalms of lament, because their structure, unlike other types, matches with our life experiences. In other words, the laments set the pattern of our own lives, as they travel a path from brokenness to wholeness, from complaint to praise (cf. Murphy 1977:19), just as we strive to move from suffering to joy, from oppression to liberation. Thus beginning with this category of psalms will help us to discover ourselves in the psalms and thus to convey the message of this thesis home. } L+
ctxm

The third and fourth chapters will be devoted to the discussion of liberation in the psalms of thanksgiving. } L Here we will attempt to indicate how the past experience of liberation served as the source whence the hope of the psalmists was drawn, and also how this same experience motivated the liberated people to respond

to their liberator in ways of thanksgiving. The third chapter deals with communal thanksgivings while the fourth focuses on the individual thanksgivings. In connection with the communal thanksgivings, Psalms 65; 67; and 107 will be investigated. While the discussion of the individual thanksgivings will draw from Psalms 18; 34; 116 and 118.

The fifth chapter will focus on the meaning of liberation in the hymns. Here Psalms 96; 98 and 103 will be dealt with.

In the sixth chapter, we will explore the significance of liberation in the royal psalms. Psalms 20 and 72 will be consulted for this purpose.

The seventh chapter will endeavour to relate the idea of liberation to the concept of torah. Here the investigation will focus on Psalm 119.

In chapter eight I will try to present the meaning of liberation in the Psalter by summarizing the contents of the preceding chapters. And in chapter nine, which is the final chapter, I will attempt to concretize the results of my investigation by relating them to the context of Namibia.

At this point, it should be noted that in writing this thesis, there is no intention of providing a full-fledged exegesis on the psalms, or to give a catalogue of ideas and views which are already held by others about the psalms. But relevant passages

Meaning of
Concept

See
Summary

Apply
Context

Not full
exegesis
of ps

will be identified, read in the original language (Hebrew), analyzed, studied, exegeted and constructively interpreted as to show how the concept of liberation is portrayed in the Psalter. In the treatment of the psalms, I will also try to pay special attention on their genres, formal structures and historical settings.

What type of analysis:

CHAPTER 1

LIBERATION IN THE PSALMS OF COMMUNITY LAMENT

Identify themes to brief comment
 then 2
 e.g. 2 case studies
 → E in Royal Pss (P45)
 → D. in — (P72)
 → study details on these Pss
 Intro to ch

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the analyses of the theme of liberation in the psalms of community lament. In dealing with these laments, I will limit my investigation only to those psalms which employ the Hebrew terms for liberation.

Scope
 Def. (Heb.)

Generally speaking, liberation is always from certain oppressive situations and for specific goals. So, the main questions which this study will attempt to answer here are the following: From what do lamenters in these psalms want to be liberated? What do they seek to achieve by liberation? Where does liberation come from? And, who are the people who can be liberated? We will understand the idea of liberation in the Psalter through the process of answering these questions.

(Intro)
 Def. of concept
 Dates for analysis

Before we embark on this investigation we first need to discuss briefly the genre, formal structures and settings of this group of psalms as these will help us to arrive at the basic meaning of liberation in these particular psalms.⁶

Content-

⁶ The significance of knowing the setting or "life-situation" of a text is also underlined by Burger in the following words: "If one knows the concrete life situation (*Sitz im Leben*) in which a text came into being, this can help one greatly to understand the text. This background knowledge can even be essential

Historic setting of text-

22 Pss.

For the theme for liberation we will concentrate on the psalms in which the terms for liberation occur. The terms for liberation in the psalms of this genre are used especially in the forms of petition and confession of trust. Since our task is to analyze the theme of liberation, our investigation will be mainly confined to these forms. In order to make our investigation manageable, only Psalms 44; 60; 74; 77; 79; 80; and 85 will be studied. These psalms will not be treated individually, but they will be analyzed together according to their contents under the following headings: (1) The oppressive situations which required liberation; (2) The goal of liberation; and (3) God and liberation.

How to analyze?

Psalm 77 is usually classified as an individual lament rather than a community lament; yet we prefer to treat it together with this group of psalms because of its content which is concerned with the affairs of the nation.

1.2 Outline of Genre, Formal Structure and Setting

1.2.1 Genre and Formal Structure

The laments of the community are one of the major genres in the Psalter. These psalms are classified as communal laments because in them the nation of Israel as whole declares its experience of suffering before God in the form of laments and prays that he may liberate them.

to understanding of the texts" (1987:19).

Old Testament scholars seem to differ in their attribution of psalms to this genre. Gunkel (1967:32), for example, classified as communal laments only Psalms 44; 74; 79; 80; 83; and 89. While Mowinckel (1962:I,194) adds to Gunkel's list Psalms 12; 58; 60; and 144. The list of Weiser (1962: 66) differs from that of Gunkel by including Psalms 90; 137 and excluding Psalm 79. Westermann (1980:31) seems to have adopted Gunkel's classification of community laments with a slight difference, for he counts also Psalms 60 and 49 as part of this genre. Other scholars, such as Murphy (1968:573), Anderson (1983: 235) take also Psalms 123; 126; 129 as community laments, in addition to those which are commonly identified as such.]L

Outside the Psalter, examples of community laments are found especially in Jeremiah 14; Isaiah 63: 7 - 64: 12; Habakkuk 1; and Lamentations 5 (cf. Westermann 1980: 31; Day 1990: 33). Besides the above mentioned texts, there appear elsewhere in the Old Testament passages which also show reminiscences of the community laments both in form and content. These include, among others, Hosea 6:1-6; 14::3-19; Jeremiah 3:22b - 4:2; 15:1-4 (cf. Eissfeldt 1965:113).

In structure, the psalms of community lament consists of the following elements (cf. Eissfeldt 1965: 117-8; Gunkel 1967:32-39; Gerstenberger 1974:198-207; Westermann 1980:36-45; 1981:52-64; Day 1990:33-34):

(a) The invocation where the suppliants address God by one of his

titles: "O Shepherd of Israel" (Ps. 80:2), or "O God" (Pss. 44:2; 74:1). This element is always brief and often occurs at the very beginning of the psalm where it is combined with "the introductory cry for help" (Westermann 1981:53).

(b) The lament proper or complaint (cf. Gunkel 1967:34; Eissfeldt 1965:117). This part often includes three aspects: (1) a "thou" lament; (2) an "I" or "we" lament; and (3) a "they" lament (cf. Westermann 1980:39). The first aspect comprises an accusation directed against God. This accusation or complaint is sometimes in the form of a question: "How long, O Lord? Wilt thou be angry forever?" (Ps. 79:5; cf. Pss. 74:10; 80:5; 94:3), or "Why dost thou hide thy face?" (Ps. 44:25; cf. Pss. 74:1,11) and sometimes in the form of a statement that God has forsaken them or the like (Pss. 44: 10-10-17; 60: 3-5; 80:6-7; cf. Hayes 1976:119; Day 1990:34).

The second aspect of the lament, namely an "I" or "we" lament is a personal complaint, consisting of two parts (cf. Westermann 1980:40; 1981:178-9). One part is a lament about the suffering: "In the dust of the streets lie the young and the old" (Lam. 2:21) or "Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure" (Ps. 80:6), and "Thou hast made us like sheep for slaughter and hast scattered us among the nations" (Pss. 44:12). The other part is a lament about the shame or disgrace of suffering: "We have become a taunt to our neighbours" (Ps. 79:4; cf. Ps. 44:14), or "Thou dost make us the scorn of our neighbours" (Ps. 80:7) and "behold and see our

same analysis to eq 13 s'l I?



disgrace" (Lam. 5:1b).

The third element of the lament, i.e. a "they" lament is the complaint about the enemies (cf. Gunkel 1967:34; Westermann 1980:40): "The heathen have come into thy inheritance; ... They have given the bodies of thy servants to the birds... They have poured out their blood like water..." (Ps. 79: 1-3), or "Thy enemies are in tumult; .. They lay crafty plans against thy people; ... They say, "Come , let us wipe them out as a nation" (Ps. 83:2-4).

As far as the sequence is concerned, these three aspects of the lament have no fixed place and one of them can appear more than once in a single psalm.

(c) The recollection of God's past help shown to the people (cf. Westermann 1981:55f., 215f.): "We have heard with our ears, ... our fathers have told us, what deeds thou didst perform in their days, ..: thou with thy own hand didst drive out the nations, but them thou didst plant; ..." (Ps. 44:2-4), or "Lord, thou wast favourable to thy land; thou didst restore the fortunes of Jacob. Thou didst forgive the iniquity of thy people; ... Thou didst withdraw all thy wrath; ..." (Ps. 85:2-4).

(d) The confession of trust or affirmation of confidence (cf. Gunkel 1967:35; Gerstenberger 1974:200): "Through thee we push down our foes; ... For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me. But thou hast saved us from our foes, ..." (Ps. 44:6-8),

or "Yet God my King is from old; working salvation in the midst of the earth. Thou didst divide the sea..." (Ps. 74:12-17).

(e) The petition or appeal to God (cf. Westermann 1980:42; Hayes 1976:123). Here the people ask for God to intervene on their behalf with his deliverance: "Rise up, come to our help! Deliver us for the sake of thy steadfast love!" (Ps. 44:27); "Help us" (Ps. 79:9); "Restore us" (Ps. 80:4, 8, 10, : 85:5), "Protect us, guard us" (Ps. 12:8). The petition sometimes includes "an imprecation on the enemy" (Day 1990:34), such as : "Return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbours the taunts with which they have taunted thee" (Ps. 79:13), or "Let them be put to shame and dismayed for ever; let them perish in disgrace " (Ps. 83:17).

(f) The protestation of innocence (cf. Hayes 1976:120; Day 1990:34): "All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten thee, or been false to thy covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from thy way" (Ps. 44:18-19). This element appears very seldom in the psalms of this genre but more frequently in the individual laments (cf. Pss. 5:4-8; 7:4-6; 17:1-5; 26). Contrast
Comparison

(g) The divine response (cf. Gunkel 1967:14, 21). This element is variously referred to as the "*priesterliche Heilsorakel*" = "priestly oracle of salvation" (Begrich 1934:217); "divine answer" (Mowinckel 1962:II,58f.); "divine oracle" (Eissfeldt 1965:113), or "oracle of salvation" (Westermann 1981:59; or "certainty of hearing" (cf. Bellinger 1984:78ff.; Day

1990:30ff.). This phenomenon is noticed in the "change of mood" (Weiser 1962:79), which can be observed at the conclusion of a number of laments where the sorrowful tones of complaints and petitions for divine help are followed by expressions of confident assurance that the prayer has been heard. This can be observed, for example, in Psalm 60: "God has spoken in his sanctuary: "With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Vale of Succoth. Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; ... upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph" (vv. 8-10). We find a similar expression in Psalm 85: "Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints, to those who turn to him in their hearts" (v. 9).

This change in mood is explained as having been brought about by a priestly oracle of salvation in which the lament of the suppliant is granted a successful hearing. This theory was first proposed by F. K uchler in 1918 (cf. Day 1990:30). But it was J. Begrich's article, "Das priesterliche Heilsorakel", in 1934 which made the most influential contribution to this discussion (cf. Gerstenberger 1974:163; Westermann 1981:62). In his study of Deutero Isaiah, Begrich identified a number of passages which seemed to follow the basic form of the "priestly oracle of salvation." The oracle consists of the following elements: (1) a promise of divine intervention on behalf of those in need; (2) a statement of the results of God's intention; and (3) a declaration of God's purpose in choosing to intervene (cf. Gerstenberger 1974:163).

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The passages which were pointed out by Begrich as containing the oracle of salvation are Isaiah 41:8-13, 14-16; 43:1-3a, 5; 44:2-5; 48:17-19; 49:7, 15f.; 51:7f.; 54:4-8. These oracles are characterized by the words "Fear not, for (ׁ) ..." (cf. Day 1990:30). Begrich observed that some of the expressions found correspond to those used in some psalms of individual lament. Thus he concluded that the author of Deutero Isaiah had borrowed this particular form from the cult and lament psalms (cf. Bellinger 1984:79).⁷

The detailed description of the oracle of salvation can be found in 2 Chronicles 20: 3-17 (cf. Westermann 1980: 44) where, after the national prayer, Jahaziel, under the inspiration of God's spirit, charged the people of Judah and King Jehoshaphat to fear not but to be assured of God's victory. We have other good examples of the oracle of salvation in Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 1:9-2:11, and in Isaiah 38 concerning Hezekiah's sickness. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the oracles of salvation are preserved in Isaiah 33: 10-13; 49:22; 59:15; Jeremiah 4:1-2; 51:36; Hosea 6:5-9; Joel 2: 1ff; Micah 7:11-13; Habakkuk 3:3-15.

In the Psalter, the oracle of salvation is not only found in the communal laments but it is also a regular feature in the

⁷ Since Begrich's time ancient near eastern comparative material has also been consulted to support the idea of an oracle of salvation. Some scholars, however, appeared to be not convinced by the idea of using a priestly oracle to explain the change of mood in some of the lament psalms (cf. Day 1990:31). One of the scholars who, after Begrich, has also studied the oracle of salvation in Deutero Isaiah is C. Westermann (cf. Gerstenberger 1974:163f.).

individual laments (cf. Pss. 27: 8, 14; 35:3) as well as in the royal psalms (cf. Pss. 20:7; 21:9). Mowinckel is of the idea that the oracle of salvation or "a divine answer", as he describes it, "is certainly to be presupposed even in psalms where nothing is said about it" (1962:II,59).

(h) The vow of praise (cf. Westermann 1980:45, 1981:220ff.; Hayes 1976:121): "Then we thy people, the flock of thy pasture, will give thanks to thee for ever; ... we will recount thy praise" (Ps. 79:13) or "Let the poor and needy praise thy name " (Ps. 74:21b), and "... we will never turn back from thee; ... and we will call on thy name " (Ps. 80: 19).

These elements have no specific place in the order or sequence the psalm. The exception being the invocation, which always appears at the very beginning.

1.2.2 Setting

The psalms of community lament seem to have been prompted by various occasions of national disaster. Such situations are reflected in the contents of these psalms. The most probable occasions are the following:

(a) The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple about 587/6 BC. Psalms 74 and 79 are taken by scholars to be concerned with this situation (cf. Weiser 1962: 68; Dahood 1965-70:I,199; Hayes 1976: 121; Day 1990:34). Psalm 74, for example, commences

with a cry to God for help and pleads for remembrance of Mount Zion and its sanctuary which have been destroyed by the enemies (vv. 1-3). The destruction of the temple and presumably the city around it is furthermore depicted in verses 4-11; cf. Hayes 1976:121; Broyles 1989:95). Psalm 79 also hints to this situation: Jerusalem and the temple are laid "in ruins" (v. 1). The people have been brutally killed (vv. 2, 3, 10b), and their "habitation was laid waste" (v. 7). The description of this incident is so devastating that it can be related to the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 587/6 BC (cf. Klein 1979:19, 20; Broyles 1989:157; Day 1990:34). *Refer to history*

(b) The Babylonian Exile. This event is vividly recalled in Psalm 137 (cf. Anderson 1962:441f; Broyles 1989:98). In this psalm, "the exiled community of Israel in Babylon gather on the banks of the irrigation canals which bring the waters of the Euphrates to the fields of the city (cf. Ezek. 1:1) for a ceremony of mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem and prayer for restoration" (Toombs 1971:299; cf. also Ackroyd 1968:225).

(c) A certain military defeat. This situation features particularly in Psalm 44: "Thou hast made us turn back from the foe; and our enemies have gotten spoil. Thou hast made us like sheep for slaughter, ..." (vv. 11-12; cf. v. 20, 23). Hence some scholars understood this psalm as presupposing a service of supplication held on the occasion of defeat similar to a tradition in 2 Chronicles 20:7ff. (cf. Weiser 1962: 354; Eaton 1967:121), and as referring to the situation around the death of *use scholars work*

Josiah or that concerning Senacherib's invasion of Judah (cf. Broyles 1989:140). Although others recognized it as pointing to the disaster of 587/6 BC when Jerusalem was invaded, the temple devastated and the people were led into exile by the Babylonians (cf. Ackroyd 1968:45, 226, 233; Von Rad 1975:81; Klein 1971:18).⁸ This same occasion is also reflected in Psalm 60, where the army seems to have suffered a vanquishment: "thou has rejected us, broken our defence; ... Thou hast made their people to suffer hard things" (vv. 3-5). The defeat in battle appears also to be in the background of Psalm 89: "Thou hast breached all his walls; thou hast laid his strongholds in ruins" (v. 41) and "thou hast turned back the edge of his sword, and thou hast not made him stand in battle" (v. 43).

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(d) The invasion of the nation by foreigners. This situation seems to underline the thought of Psalm 80. The refrain "restore us" in verses 4, 8, 15 and 20 indicates that this lament was said by the people in the religious setting during the critical situation following the destruction of their cities by the enemies (cf. vv. 13, 14, 17; also see Broyles 1989:96). The mention of Israel and Joseph (v. 2), Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh (v. 3) shows that the psalm originated in the Northern Kingdom. The psalm might have been composed some time before the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 721 BC (cf. Weiser

occurrence of a certain meaningful exp?

Place?

Date?

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According to Klein (ibid), this psalm can be dated to the exile by the following data: (a) Israel's armies have been beaten (v. 9); (b) her foes have been killed while others have been scattered among the nations (vv. 11-12; (d) her neighbours view her with scorn vv. 13-16).

Dating of ps

1962:547; Dahood 1965-70:I,255; Haglund 1984:58).

(e) National drought. Psalm 85, in particular, reflects a people and a land lacking "life" (v. 7) and blessing (vv. 9-14; cf. Broyles 1989:98).

In general, the settings of the psalms of community lament are to be understood in the light of Joel 1:1ff. which mentions a special service of lamentation on the occasion of a plague of locusts and drought when the whole community was called upon to sing a lament in the house of God and observe various rites such as fasting, rendering of clothes and girding with sackcloth (cf. Gunkel 1967:13; Weiser 1862:68).

Other passages

Elsewhere in the Old Testament similar days of lamentation are presupposed in the historical sources, especially in the Naboth narrative (1 Kings 21:9ff.; also cf. 1 Sam. 7:6) and in the prophets (Am. 5:16; Is. 22:12;29:4; 32:11f.; Jer. 14:2; cf. Gunkel 1967:14; Day 1990:33).

In summary, the communal psalms of lament have been occasioned by political and military disasters as well as by other catastrophes such as drought and locusts which afflicted the nation.

Summary

1.3 The Oppressive Situations which Required Liberation

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thoughts underlying

1.3.1 Egyptian Bondage (Pss. 74; 77)

The purpose of this section is to investigate the oppressive situations in which the people of Israel as a nation needed liberation. We begin here with the Egyptian bondage as one of these situations. This situation is described especially in Psalms 74 and 77.

(a) Psalm 74

In Psalm 74, the idea of liberation from the Egyptian bondage can be derived from the uses of the Hebrew terms גאל (v. 2) and פְּשׁוּעָה (v. 12).

Heb term +

The term גאל in Psalm 74 occurs in the context of a prayer for help: "Remember thy congregation, which thou hast gotten of old, which thou hast redeemed (גאל) to be the tribe of thy heritage" (v. 2). גאל can mean "lay claim to a person or a thing", "claim back from another's authority", "redeem" as a person from bondage (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:162. It has also the idea of "setting free", "liberating" (cf. Ringgren 1980:351). This term had a background in family law, where the גואל "redeemer" was a kinsman who undertook the responsibility to redeem a relative from slavery (Lev. 25:47-55), bought back their lost land (Lev. 25:23-34) or undertook marriage to a female relative in a way of removing her widowhood (Ruth 4; cf. Procksch 1967:333; Day

It's analysis (esp. in case studies)

C other passages

1990:127). In other words, לָאֵל signified the redemption of what is one's own, and therefore of the restoration of a former owner's relationship (cf. Dentan 1962:21).

The term is used in Psalm 74:2 with reference to God's action of redeeming his congregation, i.e. Israel (cf. Gen. 10:16) and made them his נַחֲלָה "heritage" (cf. Ringgren 1980:353). Elsewhere in the Psalter God is the לֹאֵל "redeemer" of Israel (Ps. 78:35), who redeemed Israel from the Egyptian foe (Pss. 78:42-43; 106:10; see also 77:16) as well as from oppression and violence (Ps. 72:14).

The idea of the redemption of Israel by God in Psalm 74 is reminiscent of Exodus 6:6; 15:13, 16, where the term לָאֵל is used with reference to the event of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (cf. Ibid 1980:354).

Supporting Psalm 74's idea of liberation from Egypt is also the association of לָאֵל with זִמְרָה "olden time" (v. 2a). This term is used in other passages in reference to the early years of Israel before the settlement (cf. Deut. 32:7; Mic. 7:20; Is. 37:26), i.e. the time of the Exodus. As such, it is probably echoing Exodus 15:13, 16, and the deliverance from Egypt (cf. Briggs et al 1960:II,152; Anderson 1972:539).

In the light of the use of לָאֵל in connection with זִמְרָה as well as its employment in Exodus 6:6; 15:13, it can be said that the very term in Psalm 74:2 refers to the liberation of Israel from Egypt. The prayer is therefore for God to remember his people whom he

had liberated from the Egyptian slavery and oppression in the past.

In addition to לאל, which is used in prayer, Psalm 74 also employs the noun form of the Hebrew root *YV'*, occurring in the confession of trust (v. 12). In its verbal form, *YV'* may mean "deliver", "give width and breadth to", or "liberate" (cf. Brown et al 1951: 446). The term can refer to the liberation from present danger or trouble, including enemies, military defeat and other oppressive experiences (cf. Brown 1963B:358; Fohrer 1971:974; Pedersen 1973:332f.; Sawyer 1990:442).

Psalm 74:12 speaks about God's past actions of *YV'* in a summarized sentence: "yet God my King is from old working *YV'* in the midst of the earth". The Hebrew noun *YV'* as used in this psalm, occurs also, among other texts, in Exodus 14:13 and 15:2 where it has as its context the people's actual and historical experience of God's liberation from the Egyptian bondage at the Red Sea (cf. Richardson 1962:171f.). Here *YV'*, as לאל in verse 2, is also used in connection with קד and thus refers to God's earlier acts of liberation towards Israel.

So, the idea of a term which can apply to people's liberation or to their deliverance from any other threat is expanded in verses 13-17 where God is praised for his acts of creation.⁹ Here God's acts of *YV'* "liberation" are extended to his acts of "dividing

⁹ Similarly Heidel (1951:109, 112-1130 associates this concept with Israel's passing through the Red Sea. On this same idea see also Weiser 1962:520).

the sea", the "breaking of the heads of the dragons" (v. 13), and to his "crushing of the heads of Leviathan" (v. 14).

The Hebrew word for "dragon" is נָחַשׁ "serpents" or "sea-monsters" (Brown et al 1951:1072). It can also be taken as another name for sea (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,206). And Leviathan (v. 14) is the name of the primeval dragon - the monster of chaos, elsewhere referred to as Rahab (Ps. 89:10; Job 26:12-13; Is. 27:1; cf. Pritchard 1958:121f.; Day 1985:6).¹⁰

The breaking of the heads of the dragons and of Leviathan here has its parallel in the Babylonian mythology concerning the god Marduk who split in half the dragon monster Tiamat, symbolized by the chaotic ocean, and from her dead body created the universe.¹¹ Corresponding to this is the Canaanite mythology concerning Baal who is said to have broken the heads of the unruly judge river with a magic club (cf. Toombs 1971:283). So the dividing of the sea in this psalm may refer to historical events of the crossing of the Red Sea, depicted in the mythological concepts of creation. One can therefore say that

¹⁰ In other passages, such as Psalms 77:17; 104:6, the monster of chaos bears the name אֲדַמַּיִם , rendered in the RSV as "the deep", i.e. the cosmic deep (cf. Gottlieb 1980: 33, 68).

¹¹ It was Gunkel who in his book, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen, 1895), recognized the mythical character of the various passages in the Old Testament which speak of a conflict between Yahweh and the sea and the dragon or dragons, variously called Leviathan, Rahab, etc. and saw these as an Israelite appropriation of the Babylonian myth of Marduk over Tiamat at the time of creation recounted in Enuma Elish (cf. Pritchard 1958:189; Day 1985:2).

liberation from the Egyptian bondage was conceived in terms that make it comparable to the act of creation (cf. Ringgren 1963:101). In other words, the passing of the idea of verse 12, viz. God's acts of $\eta\gamma\iota\psi'$ in the midst of the earth, into verses 13-17 indicates that God's creative activity and his liberating deeds ($\gamma\psi'$) are regarded to be identical (cf. Westermann 1981:56), or that the same imagery which was used to portray the creation of the world could also be used to describe historical events involving the defeat of hostile powers (cf. Ringgren 1963:102; McCurley 1983:29). To some extent, primeval and historical events are here interwoven and seen as a unity. As Barth states: "Tales about the Creator's victory express what Israel knew as God's saving act at the beginning of its own history. Pharaoh and his army were for Israel a terrible incarnation of chaotic forces..., but by virtue of the Lord's victory, Israel escaped them" (1991:14f.).

On the basis of what is presented above, one can state here that Psalm 74, which is believed to be a prayer for help in a situation in which the Babylonians have destroyed the temple (cf. Weiser 1962: 518; De Vaux 1965:343; Dahood 1965-70:II,199; Kidner 1975: 264; Brueggemann 1984:69), recalls God's former acts of redeeming and liberating Israel from the Egyptian slavery in a depiction of the myth.

(b) Psalm 77

Psalm 77 is another text where liberation of the people from

Egypt is reflected.¹² Structurally, Psalm 77 falls into two parts. Its first part (vv. 2-11) is a lament. The second part (vv. 12-21) is the vow of praise. The theme of liberation is the central idea in this praise part. The psalmist being perplexed with the meaning of the present - the plight of the nation in experiencing the situation of being abandoned by God (as expressed in the lament, vv. 2-11), he seeks consolation by recalling God's mighty acts of liberation in the past (vv. 12-21).

The key word for our investigation here is the Hebrew verb לָאָל "redeem"¹³ in verse 16, which reads: "Thou didst with thy arm redeem (לָאָל) thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph". Here the concept לָאָל is applied to the liberating actions of God in the history of Israel who is represented in this verse by "the sons of Jacob and Joseph". The concept of God redeeming (לָאָל) his people with his "arm" is used elsewhere in the Psalter with reference to the redemption of Israel out of the Egyptian bondage (cf. Pss. 74:2; 106:10; 107:2). And it is in this sense the concept is used in Psalm 77.

The liberation of Israel from Egypt as designated by the Hebrew

¹² This psalm is usually classified as an individual lament, but the subject of its lament part differs from those in the traditional form of individual laments, for the psalmist here does not complain about his personal misfortunes such as his own illness or persecution by enemies, but the national plight. Hence we discuss it here together with the community laments.

¹³ For the meaning of this verb see on Psalm 74 above.

verb לאַל here is not a simple act of God in history, but it is recognized in this psalm as one of his פְּלֵא "wonders" (vv. 12b, 14), and as such, it belongs to God's מַעַלְלֵי "mighty deeds" (v. 12a). The term פְּלֵא "wonder" (vv. 12b, 14) is reminiscent of Exodus 15:11, the context of which is the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The term מַעַלְלֵי is also mentioned in Psalm 78:7 in connection with God's miraculous deeds which he has performed on behalf of the fathers of Israel in the land of Egypt as well as at the crossing of the sea (cf. Ps. 78:11ff.). So, the psalmist by "wonders" and "mighty deeds" is alluding to an event which signified God's redemptive purposes which facilitated the escape of slaves from Egypt (cf. Anderson 1986:73ff.).

The liberation of Israel from Egypt, being one of God's פְּלֵא "wonders" and מַעַלְלֵי "mighty deeds", is compared to his act of creation - God's victory over the primeval ocean of chaos: "When the waters saw thee, they were afraid, yea, the deep $[\text{תַּהוֹמֹת}]$ ¹⁴ trembled" (v. 17). The concept of God conquering the primeval ocean occurs also in Psalms 74:12-14; 89:8-10; 106:9; 114:3 (cf. Von Rad 1975:178; McKeating 1979:184). So, as in the case of Psalm 74, already discussed above, the mythological description of the primeval chaos here refers to the exodus and the deliverance from Egypt (cf. Von Rad 1975:137; Weiser 1962:533; Day 1985:96). As in Psalm 74, in Psalm 77 too liberation from

¹⁴ The etymology of this Hebrew term has been disputed among scholars (cf. Heidel 1951:98ff.; Day 1985:7), but its mythological content as well as its linguistic connection with the name Tiamat in Babylonian mythology can still be maintained (cf. Gottlieb 1980:33ff.).

Egypt is an event which can be described in mythological categories of creation, that is as a battle against a dragon. The creation was God's first and decisive victory over the powers of chaos, and therefore also an act of liberation. In the same way, the deliverance from Egypt is understood as a new victory over the evil powers and a new creation of the people (cf. Ringgren 1963:103f.; Barth 1991:243).

The idea of Israel's liberation from Egypt as creation is also observed by Pedersen in the following statement: "The creation of the people took place at the liberation from Egypt and is thus identical with the vanquishing of the dragon" (1973:476).

The concept of the Egyptian bondage as the primeval chaos or dragon is not unique to the Psalter, but it occurs also in Deutero Isaiah: "Awake, awake, put on the strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the dragon? Was it not thou that didst dry up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that didst make the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?" (Is. 51:9-10).¹⁵ The crossing of the Red Sea is thus identical with the splitting of the dragon of primeval times. And Egypt is identical with the dragon, Rahab,

¹⁵ In this passage too, the context of which is the exile of the Israelites in Babylon, myth and history are combined. Cosmic victory and historical deliverance are woven in such a way that Yahweh's battle over the monsters would seem to have taken effect in history when God accomplished the exodus. Now in the time of Second Isaiah, that same cosmic victory was about to be realized anew as an exodus from Babylon (cf. McCurley 1983:27f.).

as it is also mentioned elsewhere in Psalm 87:4 and especially in Isaiah 30:7; (cf. Heidel 1951:110f.; Pedersen 1973:476).¹⁶ This identification of liberation from Egypt with creation is also noted in Latin American theology (cf. Fiero 1983:475).

In Psalm 77 the picture of Israel's liberation from Egypt as God's act of creation is expanded in verses 17-19: it is accompanied by the warrior god who not only liberates his people from slavery but cuts "a path through the great waters" for them (v. 19). The verse refers to the miracle at the Red Sea when God prepared the way for Israel to cross the sea on the dry land (Exod. 14:19-24; cf. Von Rad 1975:137f.).

Together with the acts of deliverance the psalmist also recalls God's acts whereby he led his people of Israel "like a flock (לְאֵי) by the hand of [his servants] Moses and Aaron" (v. 21). Elsewhere God's leading of his people לְאֵי "like a flock" is described in Psalm 78:52 with geographical reference - נִמְרָךְ "in the wilderness".

In perfecting his acts of liberating Israel from bondage, God took them out of Egypt, prepared for them the path through the waters of the sea and led them through the wilderness to the promised land (cf. Exod. 15:13).

¹⁶ The reason for designating Egypt as a dragon is probably because of the oppressive role which she (Egypt) has played vis a' vis Israel before the exodus, aided by the fact that the heart of the deliverance actually took place at the sea (cf. Day 1985:88ff.).

At this stage of our investigation of Psalm 77, it can be said that liberation in this psalm as expressed by the Hebrew term לְדַל concerns God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the peak of which is the event at the Red Sea as well as his subsequent care through the wilderness. Hence these acts are recalled in this psalm to serve as the comforting assurance to the psalmist that God will not abandon his people in their difficulties.

In other psalms too, the event of liberation from Egypt is not just the memory of the past, but it also has some significance for the present. Its significance in Israel's faith is expressed in the form of praise of God sung by the congregation (e.g. Pss. 68:19-20; 105; 106; 136) as well as in the laments (e.g. Pss. 41; 44; 78; 80).¹⁷

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the belief that God had worked liberation for Israel at the Red Sea is determinative of all Israel's subsequent reflection on God's nature and activity (cf. Douglas 19:1057. This experience of deliverance has prompted Israel to have a conviction that God was their special liberator.¹⁸ This particular idea does not only constitute the prologue to the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1-2; Deut. 5:1-6), but it is also celebrated by the community of Israel in a form of memorial service - the passover feast (Exod. 12:1-20), re-enacted in

¹⁷ This particular event has been remembered throughout the history of Israel (cf. Bright 1960:122; Gottlieb 1980:70f.).

¹⁸ This theme underlies the many images of the God who leads, who delivers, who feeds, who quenches thirst and gives light (cf. Jacob 1958:191).

ritual (Exod. 13:3-16), chanted about by the people (Exod. 15:1-21), transmitted by the parents to their children in a form a recital (Deut. 6:20-24; Jud. 6:13), and confessed by an offerer at the presentation of the first fruits in the religious sanctuary (Deut. 26:2-10; cf. Richardson 1976:171-172; Douglas 1982:1057). It is also relevant to the prophetic literatures, where it is being referred to as a contrast-motif in the prophets's historical reviews (Am. 2:10; Jer. 2:5-7; Ezek. 20:3-13; 23:1-3, 19, 27; cf. Westermann 1982:37).

As we have observed here, the people of Israel recognized their liberation from Egypt as God's act of intervention on their behalf and they were thus ready to confess¹⁹ and thank God because of this experience. We too in Namibia have experienced liberation from colonial powers. How do we as Christians see our political liberation and independence in relation to God? Do we too consider it as one of God's works in our history, as the people of Israel have done with their deliverance from Egypt? We will come back to these questions in our concluding chapter.

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etc.

1.3.2 National Enemies (Pss. 44; 79)

(a) Psalm 44

Another situation from which the people were liberated or sought

Other instances

¹⁹ Wherever it occurs, the phrase "Yahweh delivered his people from Egypt" is confessional in character and, as such it is the dramatic mid-point around which the historical events details are grouped (cf. Von Rad 1975:176).

liberation is identified in Palm 44. The identification of this problem has taken place in a form of a confession of trust: כי הוֹשַׁעְתָּנוּ מִצָּרֵינוּ "because you have liberated us from our foes" (v. 8). The threat is pointed out here as צָרִים "adversaries" or "foes" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:815). The question which may be raised here is: Who are these adversaries?

The noun צָר or צָרִים is used three times in this psalm where it occurs in parallel with קִמְיָנוּ "those who rise against us" (cf. Davidson 1970:656) in verse 6 and with מִשְׂנְאֵינוּ in verses 8 and 11. The latter word is the past participle form of the verb שָׂנֵא, meaning "to hate" and in its present form "those who hate us", or simply "our haters" (cf. Davidson 1970:729). The use of קִמְיָנוּ and מִשְׂנְאֵינוּ in parallel with צָרִים shows that the latter can be taken as having the same meaning with the former. So, צָרִים in verses 8 and 11 should be understood as one and the same with the מִשְׂנְאֵינוּ "the haters", i.e. those whose attitudes and acts are motivated by hatred. At the same time, on the basis of verse 6, the צָרִים are the קִמְיָנוּ "those who rise against the people", i.e. the "adversaries" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:832).

Elsewhere in the Psalter, the noun צָרִים occurs in parallel with קִמְיָנוּ (Ps. 3:2), אִיְיָנוּ (Pss. 13:5; 27:2; 89:43); and רִיבֵינוּ (Ps. 119:157) where it refers to personal enemies. But in Psalm 44 the plural nominal suffix יָנוּ in verses 6, 8 and 11 indicates that צָרִים is used here with reference to national foes. The exact identity of these enemies cannot be easily specified. But Mowinckel (1962:I,197), holds that, in the national psalms of

lamentation, the enemies are real and historical, they are the "nations" who have attacked and invaded Israel (or Judah) and now are oppressing it. In Psalm 83, for example, the enemies are explicitly mentioned : "the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites, Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined them" (vv. 6-8). These all were Israel's neighbouring nations. Croft (1989:35) too confirms that the enemies, mentioned in Psalm 44, are foreign armies. On the basis of this information it can be stated here that in Psalm 44 liberation is from national foes (אֹיְבֹתַי), the foreign armies who rise against Israel (cf. v.6) with acts and attitudes motivated by hatred (cf. אִשְׁמוֹנְיָהוּ, vv. 8,11).

It is not only difficult to establish the exact identity of the enemies mentioned in Psalm 44, but it is also not easy to determine the precise period during which they were rising against the nation of Israel. Psalm 44, however, seems to refer to enemies in two different categories. A distinction can be made between the אֹיְבֹתַי "foes"²⁰ mentioned in verses 6, 8 and those referred to in verse 11. Having the formal structure of this psalm in mind, the foes mentioned in verses 6 and 8 are part of the past predicament from which the nation has already experienced liberation, while those who are referred to in verse 11 constitute part of the current oppressive situation, the present crisis from which the nation needs to be liberated. Since

²⁰ The picture provided by Psalm 44 likewise Psalms 60, 74, 78, 81, 105, 106, 107, and 136 - more than half the total in which this Hebrew concept appears - is redolent of foreign domination of Israel or rescue from it (cf. Rosenbaum 1974:80).

Psalm 44 is referring to the disaster of 587/6 BC, as some scholars maintained (cf. above, p. 20f.), the enemies here should be the Babylonians, who did not only defeat the Israelite army, but plundered the nation and left the survivors scattered among the nations (cf. vv. 10-13; see also Ps. 106:27). This calamitous situation is expressed in a form of a lament (vv. 10-23), where both the people and the king alternatively uttered their complaints to God (vv. 10-17) and also asserted or declared their innocence before him (vv. 18-23; cf. Craigie 1983:333f.). The whole situation is understood by Israel as the consequence of being abandoned by God (v. 10).

The issues which are mentioned in the lament: the terrible defeat by the enemies which made Israel an object of taunt, derision and scorn in the eyes of the nations (vv. 14-15), as well as the shame which covered their king (v. 16-17) caused the need of liberation.

(b) Psalm 79

The theme of liberation from national enemies can also be traced in Psalm 79, of which the historical situation behind it, as in Psalm 44, is most likely to be the destruction of Jerusalem and the defilement of the temple by the Babylonians in 587/6 BC (cf. Weiser 1962:544; Klein 1979:20; Brueggemann 1984:7; Day 1990:34). This can be derived from the introductory verses (1-3), which make references to this disaster as having been perpetuated by

the ׀ׁלל "nations" (v. 1),²¹ who have raided God's "inheritance" that is Jerusalem, defiling the temple, destroying the city and massacring the people of God, "his servants" (v. 2).

It is this situation of suffering perpetuated by the gentiles which prompted the people of Israel to approach God in petition (vv. 6-12), requesting him to "deliver" them (v. 9). The Hebrew word for "deliver" here is לל. This verb can mean "tear away", "snatch away", as a prey from the mouth of an animal (cf. 1 Sam. 17:35), or "remove from" the power of an enemy, as in Genesis 37:21, where Reuben told his brothers to spare the life of Joseph, or in 2 Samuel 19:19, where the people testify that David has enabled them to escape from all their enemies (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:630).

Another significance of לל can be derived from its use in Exodus 3:8; 6:6; 12:27; 18:8, 9, 10 (cf. Lisowsky 1958:951): the context of a struggle between God and Pharaoh through Moses which ends in the liberation of Israel from Egypt and the defeat of their oppressors in the sea (cf. Durham 1987:32, 78, 244).

In the Psalter, לל is used 46 times where it can mean "deliver" from either enemies (Pss. 18:18; 20:21; 82:4; 69:15; 144:11), trouble (Ps. 34: 5, 18), sin (Ps. 51:16), or death (Ps. 56:14;

²¹ The term ׀ׁלל is used often in the Old Testament with reference to the non-Israelite nations who threatened Israel's existence (cf. Clements 1975:430ff.). This particular term is rendered "heathen" in the RSV, KJV, and many commentaries (cf. Weiser 1962:543; McCullough 1955:425; Dahood 1968:79; Rogerson and McKay 1977:II,152).

Def-in
PSS

cf. Bergman 1979:97). Thus Bergman (as quoted in Westermann 1982:37f.) says the following concerning this term: "The background for the use of *nsl* with a divine subject is the experience and expectation of Israel that Yahweh will liberate the people and the individual in various ways from distress, will rescue them when they are threatened".

In Psalm 79, the verb לָצַד is used in the context of prayer for deliverance from the גוֹיִם "nations" (v. 1; cf. Anderson 1972:577), who act here as the enemy of Israel. Thus the meaning of this verb as "tear away" or "snatch away" suits its use in Psalm 79. The people are here praying to God, whom they trust as their liberator, to snatch them away from the hands of the enemies - the gentiles and the suffering which they have caused. As it is already indicated above (cf. also section 1.2.2), this psalm describes the fall of Jerusalem by the Babylonians which took place around 587/6 BC. It can therefore be said that liberation in Psalm 79 comprises God's deliverance of Israel from the national enemies - the Babylonians who did not only destroy Jerusalem (cf. v. 1), but have also killed numerous people and left their bodies as food for the carrion birds and the wild animals (cf. vv. 2-3).

Def. in specific context

Proper meaning in psalmic context

Historical

1.3.3 Affliction and Oppression (Ps. 44:24-27)

Psalm 44 has already been discussed above under section 1.3.2 in connection with the Babylonians and their disastrous invasion of Jerusalem in 586 BC and the subsequent exile as one of the

oppressive situations from which Israel sought liberation. Another cruel situation from which this nation looked for liberation is described in verses 24-27 of this particular psalm. These verses are a petition where the king, together with the people, ask God not to cast them off for ever nor to forget their affliction and oppression, but to rise up and deliver them.

The difficulty is mentioned in this petition as $\text{לְצָרָתֵנוּ וְלִבְיָשָׁרֵנוּ}$ "our affliction and oppression" (v. 25). The noun בְּיָשָׁר is derived from the verb יָשָׁר , which can mean "to bestow labour upon", "to be afflicted" or to be depressed" (cf. Brown et al 1951: 777). In the Psalter, the noun בְּיָשָׁר occurs elsewhere in Psalm 107:10, 41 where it is applied to the misery of the prisoners or the exiles (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:641ff.) and in Psalms 9:14; 25:18; 31:8; 119:50, 92, 153 where it describes the suffering of the individuals by personal antagonists. In some other places in the Old Testament, this noun is used in Exodus 3:7, 17; 4:31; Deuteronomy 16:3 where it refers to the suffering of Israel under the king of Syria. Its parallel noun צָרָה derives from the verb which, according to Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:479), could mean "squeeze", or "press" or "oppress". This noun is employed in Psalms 42:10; 43:2 to refer to the oppression of an individual by an enemy. But elsewhere in the Old Testament, צָרָה refers to the oppression of Israel in Egypt (Exod. 3:3, 9) and by Syria (2 Kings 13:4) or someone's imprisonment (1 Kings 22:27; 2 Chron. 18:26). In Deuteronomy 26:7 the formula צָרָה וְבְיָשָׁר is used with reference to the affliction and oppression of Israel in Egypt (cf. Brown et al 1951:537).

From the above references one can conclude that these terms עַן וְלַלְלָהּ , where they are used in connection with the community of Israel as a whole, they generally describe the suffering of the people by the hands of the national enemies similar to the Egyptians. Since Psalm 44 is understood as a community lament prompted by the Babylonian invasion and the subsequent exile (see under section 1.3.2 above), the meanings of עַן וְלַלְלָהּ as affliction and oppression as they were experienced by Israel in Egypt are applicable here. Thus one can rightly take these nouns here as referring to the suffering and oppression of Israel as a community by the foreign powers of Babylon, i.e. the exilic situation. So, when the people prayed in Psalm 44:27 for God to "rise up and deliver" them, it was from this עַן וְלַלְלָהּ "affliction and oppression". The idea of liberation from affliction and oppression can be derived from the use of the Hebrew verb for "deliver" in this context. The verb "deliver" in verse 27 is a rendition of the Hebrew verb קָדַם , meaning "buy (off)", "ransom", or "redeem" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:752). This term, like קָדַם , belonged originally to the sphere of law (cf. Von Rad 1975:177). It referred to the redemption of a slave or captive (cf. Exod. 2:18) or the ransom of an animal or a person from death, either by a substitute or payment of money (cf. Exod. 13:13, 15: 34:2; Lev. 27:27; Num. 18:15f.; see also Procksch 1967:333). This word קָדַם , which had a close association with the idea of releasing slaves or reclaiming persons and things, was also taken up into the vocabulary of Israel's writers to describe the liberation from slavery of those whom Egypt had kept in bondage (cf. Deut. 15:15; 24:18; 2 Sam. 7:23; Neh. 1:10; Pss.

78:42; 11:9; see also Brown 1978:198). It is in this latter sense לְחַדְשׁ is used in Psalm 44 to refer to the liberation of Israel from the oppression as experienced in the Babylonian exile. It is then the idea of Psalm 44 that liberation could ever be present if God would "rise up" and "deliver" the oppressed from oppression and the suffering from the cause of their affliction, i.e. if he would rescue them from the hands of the Babylonian oppressors.

1.3.4 God's Anger as a Problem (Pss. 80; 85)

The psalms of community lament do not only refer to Egypt, Babylon or some other national enemies and their oppression as the repressive situations from which the people needed to be liberated, but they also identify God's anger as another cause of their suffering. This can be derived from the contents of Psalms 80 and 85. Some exegesis of these passages will facilitate our investigation here.

(a) Psalm 80

In Psalm 80,²² God's anger seems to be what is in the background

²² This psalm has been taken by many commentators as having originated in the northern kingdom, for it mentions Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh (v. 3; cf. Leslie 1949:244; Eissfeldt 1965:112f., 447; Weiser 1962:547; Dahood 1968:II,255). Although other exegetes including König and Schmidt, as cited by Anderson (1972:581) ascribed it to the Judean circles which sympathized with their northern brethren. If this psalm is of northern origin, as many scholars believe, then it may be related to the invasion of the Assyrians around 721 B.C. as shown by its superscription in the LXX (cf. Weiser 1962:547; Kidner 1975:288; Rogerson & McKay 1977:156).

*Psalm
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of the Hebrew phrase: לכה ליִשׁעֲתָה לַנָּו, literally "come for our liberation" (v. 3; cf. Anderson 1972:583).²³ This phrase occurs here in the context of a cry for help. This formula reoccurs with different wording: וְהָאֵר פְּנֵיךָ וְנִשְׁעָה "and let your face shine that we may be liberated" in the refrain at the end of the first petition (v. 4), and at the end of the first section of the lament (v. 8), as well as in verse 20, which concludes this psalm.²⁴

The repeated recurrence of the refrain containing the Hebrew term for liberation יִשׁוּעָה is not a simple formal element, but in each case the context provides it with the particular significance. In verses 3 and 4 the call for יִשׁוּעָה constitutes the opening petition of the psalm, in verse 8 it follows on from the lament and in verse 20 it forms the conclusion of the psalm. The threefold repetition of the refrain containing the Hebrew root יָשַׁע emphasizes the opening petition: לכה ליִשׁעֲתָה לַנָּו "come for our liberation" (v.3). Hence the cry for liberation is the basic motif which determines the thought of this psalm.

The term לַיִּשׁוּעָה in verse 3 is a noun form prefixed with ל "for" or "to", making it to be equivalent to an infinitive construction expressing purpose (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,256; Williams 1976:50). The prayer is for God to come with the purpose to liberate the

²³ On the literal meaning of this phrase see also Briggs (1960:II,204).

²⁴ The expression "let thy face shine" is reminiscent of the words of the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:25 (cf. Kidner 1975:290).

Gramm. Purpose

suppliants.

The petition in verse 3 is preceded by the address to God where God is addressed by a divine predicate "Shepherd of Israel" (v. 2a). The use of the divine predicate here corresponds with the idea in Psalm 79:13, where Israel is described as the people of God and "the flock of his pasture" (cf. Rogerson & McKay 1977:II,157; Westermann 1984:27). Elsewhere in the Psalter, Israel is referred to as "the sheep" and the "flock of God's pasture" (cf. Pss. 74:2; 95:7; 100:3). The predication of God as the "shepherd" and Israel as the "sheep and flock of his pasture" originated in the pastoral life of the early Israelites, especially that of the ancestor Jacob, which was also the employment of David when a youth, and which was ever one of the chief occupations of the inhabitants of Bethlehem (cf. 1 Sam. 16:11; see also Briggs et al 1960:I,208). Elsewhere Yahweh is the true shepherd of Israel (Gen. 49:24) who guards Israel (Jer. 31:10), and restores her to pasture (Jer. 23:3; 59:19; Ezek. 34:11-22; cf. Napier 1962:315f.; Post 1962:486ff.; McKenzie 1968:803).

In the present psalm the analogy between God and the shepherd is expanded in the same verse "thou who leadest Joseph like a flock" (v. 2). This kind of expression is found elsewhere in Psalm 77:21 where it refers to God's leading of his people by the hand of Moses and Aaron (cf. Anderson 1972:561). Here we can also refer to Psalm 78:52 which tells about God leading forth "his people like sheep , and guided them in the wilderness like a flock".

Verse 2 of Psalm 80 is thus recalling God's providential guidance of Israel through the wilderness (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:484; Weiser 1962:533). The call or cry for liberation לַכֹּהֵן לִישׁעָהָה לַנָּוֶה (v. 3) is directed to the one whom the people of Israel know and trust as their shepherd, as he has proved himself to be so in the past by his leading and caring for them through the wilderness.

The cry for liberation here is directed to a God who is not only a shepherd, but he is also the one "who is enthroned upon the cherubim" (v. 2b). God is described in this way also in Psalm 99:1. The epithet seems to have been borrowed from the ancient cultic tradition of calling upon the God of the sacred Ark who is enthroned upon the cherubim, which we find elsewhere in 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 1 Kings 19:15; Isaiah 37:16 (cf. Weiser 1962:547f.; Eichrodt 1967:II,193; Mettinger 1982:23, 36f., 120; Kraus 1986:18). It appears that while the image of the shepherd is used to depict God and his relationship to Israel through the wilderness, i.e. before the settlement in Palestine, the tradition of the cherub throne is used to present the presence of God in the settled population - the enthroned God (cf. Westermann 1984:28).

In the immediate context of the imperative "come to liberate us" (v. 3), we find a number of imperatives. The first one being הַצִּיֵּן הַצִּיֵּן "shine forth or out" (v. 2). This kind of expression occurs elsewhere in the psalms of community lament (Ps. 94:1), where it is used in the context of a cry for help. In Psalm 50:2 and Deuteronomy 33:2 it is the character of God's glorious and

victorious appearance (cf. Mayes 1979:398; see also Thompson 1974:307; Rogerson & McKay 1977:I,236).²⁵ In Psalm 80:2, God is asked to shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. In this sense we can say that liberation in Psalm 80 is viewed as a revelation of God's power and glory, for it is activated by his "shining forth".

The second imperative used here, which also adds to the meaning of liberation in this psalm, is לְשׁוּבָה , meaning "restore us" (v. 4 ; cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1953; Haglund 1984:60). This refrain reoccurs in verses 8 and 20, each time with the divine title: אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת "God of hosts".²⁶ The meaning of the plea "restore us" is debated by many commentators. Kirkpatrick (1951:485), for example, translates the phrase as "turn us again", but spiritualises it, taking it to refer to national repentance. While Weiser (1962:588) on the other hand understands this phrase to have a larger meaning, comprising simultaneously man's external welfare and what takes place in the human soul, metabasis and metanoia : restoration of external circumstances and the turning of man's soul to God. These interpretations seem to have not taken the context of this prayer into consideration. The plea לְשׁוּבָה here resumes the prayer of verse 3 "come for our liberation". The people pray in verse 4 to be "restored" so that

²⁵ As Miller (1973:77f.) has noted, the verb is found in the Ugaritic texts in battle contexts: it denotes the appearance of the gods in battle. This sense suits well the present context.

²⁶ Kraus advanced the view that this divine epithet may be regarded as "the solemn, cultically legitimate name of the God who was present in the sanctuary of Jerusalem and honoured there" (1986:17).

they may be liberated. The phrase הַלְוֵנוּן in verse 4 can be taken as a subjunctive mood expressing purpose (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,256). The crisis from which the people ask to be restored and to be liberated is not described in the prayer but in the lament of this psalm.

The explanation of the plea in verse 4 is to be found in the following lament. The people are to be restored from what is described in verses 5-7. In verse 5, the affliction of the people is interpreted as the anger of God. The people see themselves being in the situation where God is angry with their prayers (cf. Briggs et al 1960:204; Weiser 1962:548; Anderson 1972:583). God whom, as history taught them, led Joseph like a flock is now angry with them. God, instead of making his sheep (Israel) lie down in green pastures and leading them beside still waters, has now fed them with "bread of tears" and has given them "tears to drink" (v. 6). Both concepts, "the bread of tears" and the "drinking of tears" elsewhere refer to the situation of suffering which resulted either from God's anger (Ps. 102:10) or his absence (Ps.42:4). The people's prayer for restoration (vv. 4, 8, 20) is from this particular situation - the life under God's anger and every kind of suffering which accompanies it. It appears then that only when restoration from God's anger is realized liberation can be experienced.

Besides the lament section, which we have just discussed, further inferences concerning the theme of liberation in this psalm can be drawn from the parable of the vine (vv. 9-13). Here the people

present their past history using the allegory of the vine. Israel is compared to the vine which was brought out of Egypt (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:486; Anderson 1972:584). The allegory of the vine re-echoes Isaiah 49:22; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1, where Israel is depicted as the vine of God. This allegory recounts the events of the exodus, conquest and settlement of Israel in Canaan (cf. Weiser 1962:549f.; Murphy 1968:590; Westermann 1984:31). This notion occurs elsewhere in Psalms 78:55 and 44:3. Israel was brought out of Egypt by God, nations were driven out for her to be planted, i.e. to be settled in the land (cf. Exod. 15:17; 23:28ff.). As the vine takes deep roots and fills the land, so Israel became a big and powerful nation in the land of Canaan.²⁷ This can be said to be the period when Israel was enjoying לְחֵירוֹן "liberation" (cf. also Westermann 1981:219). Yet all these appear to be only the experience of the past. The present situation is confronted with the contradiction as described in verses 13-14. The walls of the vine are now broken down, allowing all who pass along the way to pluck its fruit (v. 13). This same depiction appears also in Psalm 89:40, 41 where it illustrates the plight of the king after his defeat in battle (cf. Briggs et al 1960:262; Hayes 1976:106ff.).

In Psalm 80:13 the complaint is made against God for having broken down the walls of his vine. The metaphor refers to the destruction of Israel's defence - her military powerlessness and political inability to ward off enemy attacks (cf. Is.5:3-15;

²⁷ "The mighty growth of the vine probably refers to the full flowering of the Israelite empire in the time of David" (Rogerson & McKay 1977:II,158).

Metaphor

Leslie 1949:246). This resulted in the vine being plucked by "all who pass along the way" and ravaged by the "boar from the forest"²⁸ (vv. 13b-14). The implication is that Israel is invaded by strangers and foreign nations who, as we have indicated above (cf. footnote no. 22, p. 42) seem to have been the Assyrians.

In this context, we can conclude that the petition "restore us so that we may be liberated" in Psalm 80 is said with the aim for God to help Israel resume her former relationship with God where she enjoys political power and is free from enemy attacks and foreign invasions. In other words, liberation in Psalm 80 has the idea of restoration from God's anger - the state in which the people are politically powerless and are subject to hostile forces.

(b) Psalm 85

Psalm 85 is another text which contains the idea of liberation from God's anger. As in the case of Psalm 80, the theme of liberation is underlined here by the use of the Hebrew noun $\text{V}\text{V}^{\text{v}}$ "liberation" in verses 5, 8, and 10. In the first and second instances the Hebrew noun $\text{V}\text{V}^{\text{v}}$ is used in the context of petition, while in the last instance, it is part of the oracle of salvation (vv. 9-14). We will concentrate here on verses 5-8 and leave out

²⁸ The boar from the forest, according to Anderson (1972:585), was an unclean animal and therefore a suitable symbol for the enemies of Israel (see also Rogerson & McKay 1977:II,158).

the rest for other discussions. In verse 5, the noun לְשׁוֹבֵת is used as the divine title: $\text{יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְשׁוֹבֵת}$ "God of our liberation". The immediate context in which God is invoked by this title is the prayer for restoration which is expanded in the plea for God to put away his indignation from the people (v. 5). Elsewhere in the Psalter God is addressed by this title in Psalm 79:10 in the context of prayer, and in Psalm 65:6 in the context of praise. Israel by invoking God by this title is acknowledging his liberating and helping power (cf. Kraus 1986:31). Hence in Psalm 85 the people approach him with the petition: יְיָ שׁוֹבֵת "restore us" (v. 5). In the first place God is asked to restore Israel for he is $\text{יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְשׁוֹבֵת}$ "God of our liberation". The verses which preceded the petition (vv. 2-4) give witness to God's acts of liberation in the past (cf. Briggs et al 1960:232; Weiser 1962:572; Anderson 1972:610).²⁹ The verb שׁוֹבֵת "restore", which is the word of prayer in verse 5, already appeared in verse 2 as the word of confession of trust. So, God has been known as the liberating God in the past, for he is the one who "didst restore the fortunes of Jacob" (v. 2b). In this context, God's acts of liberation are linked with his showing of favour to the land (v. 2a), his forgiving of sins (v. 3) and even his turning from his "hot anger" (v. 4). Beginning from verse 5 and the following, it seems that, in spite of God's past liberation and intervention, the situation of the people has deteriorated. The people's prayer for liberation in verses 5-8 appears to have been prompted by the critical situation in which the people found themselves (cf. McCullough

²⁹ Contrary to this view is H. Gunkel's idea who, as cited by Murphy (1968:591), understood this passage to be referring to the future eschatological deliverance.

1955:451). Such situation is interpreted by the people as God's "indignation" (אָפּוֹר), i.e. his "vexation", "anger", or "grief" caused by human beings through acting against him, for example, by worshipping other gods such as in 1 Kings 15:30; 21:22; 2 Kings 23:26 (cf. Brown et al 1951:494f.; Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:449). Hence the plea "put away thy indignation" (v. 5), and the questions if God will be angry with them for ever and prolong his anger to all generations (v. 6). According to the people's recollection, in the past God's withdrawal of his wrath and his turning from anger was realized in his forgiveness of sins, his showing of favour to the land, as well as in his restoration of the fortunes of Jacob (cf. Briggs et al 1960:II,231f.). But now when God's anger is retained both the land and the people are no longer enjoying his favour.

This psalm is recognized as having some affinity with Haggai 1:5-11; 2:15-16 and Zachariah 1:12 and thus to have its origin in the post-exilic period (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:510f.; Eaton 1967:11; Anderson 1972:610; Broyles 1989:166).³⁰ The hardship, disillusionment and sin which characterized this psalm are also to be found in these texts. Zachariah 1:12, for example, mentions the indignation of God which lasted for "seventy years". The passages in Haggai provide some details about God's anger as

³⁰ Some scholars, of course, have different views about the historical setting of this psalm. Weiser (1962:572) and Dahood (1965-70:II,286), for example, place the composition of this psalm in the pre-exilic period. But the post-exilic time seems to be a possible date of this psalm, since in its first three verses (2-3), the writer gives thanks for a great deliverance most likely the return from exile (cf. Rogerson & McKay 1977:II,174).

drought (Hag. 1:10-11; cf. Petersen 1985:53f.), and poor financial income (Hag. 1:6; 2:15-16; Ibid 1985:50, 90; Mason 1977:16, 23). These particular passages provide us with the context which is similar to that of Psalm 85. So the problem of God's anger in this psalm can be explained in the light of these texts of its time. When the people of Israel were praying for God to restore them (v.5), and to grant them liberation (v. 10), it was probably from such national drought, which is regarded here as the consequence of God's anger upon them because of their sins (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,286).

Elsewhere in the Old Testament sin is regarded as the cause of drought. This idea is stressed in King Solomon's inaugural prayer for the consecration of the temple: "When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against thee, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them, then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants..." (2 Chron. 6:26-27; cf. Jer. 3:2-3; 5:24-25; see also Myers 1974:37; Holladay 1986:114, 197).³¹

So, in the light of what we have discussed about Psalm 85 thus far, one can conclude that the people of Israel at some time knew God's anger as the source of their distress, yet at the same time they hoped and expected God to release and liberate them from

³¹ Even the disaster of 586 BC was understood as the result of the divine wrath (cf. Ackroyd 1968:47) and as due to a relative withdrawal of divine favour (c. Ibid 1986:227).

the effects of that anger.

1.4 The Goal of Liberation

In this section we will concern ourselves with the examination of some of the goals of liberation. In the psalms of community lament, the goals of liberation are realized especially in the possession of land, protection and the life characterized by *shalom* "wholeness". Examples of these aspects can be observed in Psalms 44:2-4; 60 and 85:9-14.

1.4.1 Possession of Land and Protection (Pss. 44:2-5; 60)

The goals of liberation as the possession of land and the people's protection can be discovered through the investigation of Psalms 44:2-5 and 60.

(a) Psalm 44:2-5

We have already treated Psalm 44 as a lament which refers to national enemies of Israel (cf. section 1.3.2) and her experience of "affliction and oppression" in exile (cf. section 1.3.3). This particular psalm does also refer to one of the goals of liberation. Verses 44:2-5 describe the great deeds which God had done to the ancestors of Israel in the past, "the days of old", which are designated here as לְיָמֵינוּ "liberations" (v. 5a), rendered "victories" in the RSV and "deliverances" in the KJV. These deeds comprise God's driving out of the nations and

planting the fathers of Israel in the land (v. 3). This verse (v. 3) is reminiscent of Psalm 80:9-12 where Israel, under the figure of the vine, is said to have been brought out of Egypt and planted in the land by God after the foreign nations (גוֹיִם) were driven away from it. This same idea is also found in Psalm 78:55: God drove out nations before Israel, apportioned them for a possession and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents. The thought is in line with the tradition of the holy war such as in Exodus 23:28-31 and Deuteronomy 7:17ff. The primary aim of the holy war was not only for defensive protection (see Von Rad 1991:65, 118), but it was also to enable Israel to possess the land of Canaan (cf. Exod. 23:30; Deut. 17:7; 8:1).

So, God's deeds of הַיְשׁוּעָה which he had performed for Israel, as they are described in Psalm 44:2-4, provide us with some background to the goals of liberation and thus to some of its meanings in the Psalter. In other words, Psalm 44:2-4 shows that in the Psalter liberation can refer to Israel's victory over her enemies - the foreign nations (גוֹיִם), as well as the possession of the land.³²

(b) Psalm 60

The detailed description of the goals of liberation as the

³² The morality of actions such as this one is questionable to the modern mind, but we must see the issue of land and its rightful ownership here in the light of the divine promise to the patriarchs (cf. Gen. 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3; 28:4, 13; 35:12; 48:4).

possession of land and protection of the people is provided in Psalm 60, which can be taken as a cry for help at a time of national disaster (cf. Bellinger 1984:73; Day 1990:12, 33), when the nation of Israel suffered humiliation through national divisions and alienation of portions of its territory by foreigners (cf. vv. 8-12), probably after the downfall of Assyria in 612 BC (cf. Zeph. 2:1-3:20; also Taylor 1955:313).³³

The goals of liberation as possession of the land and protection of the people in this psalm can be understood from the background of the petition in verse 7 which uses the Hebrew terms for liberation $\eta\epsilon\psi\eta\eta$ and $\chi\lambda\eta$ as well as from the "oracle of salvation" in verses 8-11.³⁴

In verse 7 the prayer is for the beloved to be "delivered" ($\chi\lambda\eta$, v. 7a). This deliverance would take place when the beloved is given $\eta\epsilon\psi\eta$ "liberation" or "victory" (v. 7b). The term $\eta\epsilon\psi\eta$ "beloved" here refers to Israel, for it is the Old Testament tradition to describe Israel as the beloved of God (cf. Deut. 33:12; Pss. 108:7; 127:2; Jer.11:15; 12:7).

³³ Some scholars would like to associate the original setting of this psalm with the time of David "when he was at war with Aram-Naharaim and Aram-zobah, and Joab marched back to destroy twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt" according to its title in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Briggs et al 1960:II,57; Dahood 1968:II,76; Rogerson & McKay 1977:II,54f.; Kidner 1973:I,215). Weiser (1962:438f.) favours its post-exilic origin.

³⁴ Briggs et al (1960:II,57) too has taken these verses as an oracle giving Israel possession of the land and supremacy over his neighbours. On the concept of the "oracle of salvation" see above pp. 17ff.

The context of הַלְוִיָּה , which is prayed for in verse 7 is to be found in the "oracle of salvation" (vv. 8-11). This phenomenon is noticed in the change of mood from the petitions for divine help (vv. 3, 4, 7) to the expression of confidence that the prayer is heard, as seen in God's answer in verses 8ff. (cf. above, pp. 17ff.) In Psalm 60, the oracle of salvation, being the answer of God to the lament in general and to the prayer in verse 7 in particular, can shed more light on what is meant by הַלְוִיָּה "liberation" in the context of this psalm (cf. Weiser 1962:440; Dahood 1968:II,79; Rogerson & McKay 1977:II,56). In this oracle of salvation God presents himself as a victorious warrior who, after conquering the land, divides it up and apportioning it out to his people (v. 8). As a victor, God also declares his right of possession of the territories (vv. 9-10). The picture of dividing the land and apportioning it out is reminiscent of the conquest of the land under Joshua (cf. Josh. 23:4-5; see also Briggs et al 1960:II,59; Murphy 1968:II,586f.; Toombs 1971:279).

God, in answering his people's prayer, tells them that Shechem will be divided up and the Vale of Succoth will be apportioned out (v. 8). The names Shechem and Succoth mentioned here are names of geographical places. Shechem was a city in central Palestine, which belonged to the tribe of Ephraim, while the valley of Succoth was in central Trans-Jordan in the territory of Gad (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,80). These places are known elsewhere in the Old Testament where they are associated with the history of the patriarchs (cf. Gen. 33:17, 18). Hence some scholars are of the opinion that "these two places may be named,

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because of their connection with the history of Jacob, who halted first at Succoth and then at Shechem, when he returned to Canaan" (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:342f.; Weiser 1962:440). According to Eaton (1967:155), these places may be mentioned as representative of the two major divisions, to be found west and east of the Jordan. Yet this verse can be taken as the declaration of God's assurance to fulfil his promise to Jacob, apportioning to his people the land in which their great ancestor settled (cf. Gen. 33:17, 18; see also Bright 1960:82, 111; De Vaux 1965:289; Barth 1991:45f).

So, the prayer for liberation למען יחלצוך ירידך הושיעה ימינך
 1111 "That your beloved may be delivered, liberate with your right hand and answer us" in verse 7 gets its response in verse 8: the land will be divided up and apportioned out to the people. God will do like Joshua during the period of the conquest, dividing the land up and apportioning it to the people. To put it differently, in answering the people's prayer for liberation, God tells them that they will have an access to their ancestral land and continue to possess it.

One can therefore say that according to Psalm 60 access to the land and possession thereof comprise liberation. The aspects which seem to be missing in our present experience of liberation in Namibia.

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The oracle of salvation continues in verses 9-10 where God declares his right of possession of Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim and

Judah (v. 9) as well as his supremacy over Moab, Edom and Philistia (v. 10). Gilead, the main Israelite area east of the Jordan, and Manasseh, one of the greatest northerly tribes stands here for the territory east of the Jordan. Ephraim, which is described as God's helmet symbolizes strength, and Judah, depicted as God's sceptre symbolises material and royal rule, are standing here for the territory west of the Jordan (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:345; Taylor 315; Eaton 1967:155).

God declares all these territories as his own. So, being God's areas, they will definitely enjoy his protection. God by proclaiming his ownership over these territories he announces his protection over them. In other words, God's ownership of Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim and Judah implies his protection over these territories and their inhabitants, namely the people of Israel, those who are referred to as his beloved ones in verse 7.

Thus God in replying to his people's prayer for liberation, gives them the assurance for protection. It can therefore be said that liberation in Psalm 60 includes also protection.

The idea that liberation in Psalm 60 involves protection can also be derived from the content of verse 10. This verse mentions the names Moab, Edom and Philistia. While the names mentioned in verse 9 refer to the land and the nation of Israel, the names in this verse (10) apply to the neighbouring nations (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,80; Van Zyl et al 1979:98f., 119ff.; Broyles 1989:147f.). While the territories of Israel (v. 9) are described

in terms of great honour, viz: helmet and sceptre in connection with Ephraim and Judah, the nations in verse 10 are depicted in figures of disgrace. Moab is God's "washbasin". The washbasin is a footbath where one can wash his feet (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,80). Moab who is described elsewhere in Isaiah 16:6 as a proud and arrogant nation is here likened to the footbath. This is a symbol of servitude or subjugation (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:342; Taylor 1955:316) So Moab will cease to be a challenge or threat to Israel as she will be reduced to a "washbasin". The fact that Moab will no longer continue to be a challenge to Israel confirms the point we have made earlier that the idea of liberation in Psalm 60 includes also protection.

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The second neighbouring nation, Edom is also described in Obadiah 1ff. as the proud nation. Upon this nation God will cast his "shoe". This concept can be understood as a symbolical act to proclaim entrance into possession of something in the light of Ruth 4:7 (cf. Murphy 1968:587; Toombs 1971:279).³⁵ Edom will thus become a possession of God. As God's possession Edom will no longer be a threat to Israel.

The third nation, Philistia will also be reduced to the position of the defeated nation, for God will shout in triumph over it (cf. Ps. 108:10). As in the case of other nations, Philistia too

³⁵ This concept is taken by some scholars as referring to the oriental custom of slaves to carry shoes or sandals of their masters in the light of Matthew (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:342; Kidner 1973:218). But this interpretation seems to correspond less with the context of this particular text than the explanation which we have adopted.

will cease to be a threat to Israel. The implication here is that Israel will be safe.

To summarise: From the contents of Psalms 44:2-4 and 60, we can derive the opinion that liberation in the Psalter has as some of its goals the right of the people to possess their ancestral land as well as the provision of their protection and safety.

1.4.2 The Experience of *Shalom* (Ps. 85:9-14)

The idea of *shalom* as another goal of liberation in the Psalter can be drawn from Psalm 85:9-14, the communal lament which we have already discussed in connection with the problem of God's anger (see above, pp. 49-52). We need to read this text in the light of verse 8 which precedes it. In verse 8 the people reiterate their prayer for $\mathbb{V}\mathbb{V}^{\prime}$ "liberation". God's answer to this prayer is provided in the oracle of salvation as occurring in verses 9-14 (cf. Westermann 1981:62; Anderson 1983:108f.). Verse 9, which introduces this oracle, relates $\mathbb{V}\mathbb{V}^{\prime}$ to $\mathbb{S}\mathbb{L}\mathbb{O}\mathbb{M}$ "well-being" or "wholeness" (cf. below, pp. 60f.). This verse reads: "Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace [*shalom*] to his people". God will provide the people with $\mathbb{V}\mathbb{V}^{\prime}$, according to their request in verse 8 in the form of *shalom*. If we read the divine response in verse 9 in the light of the request in verse 8, we can gather here the idea that $\mathbb{V}\mathbb{V}^{\prime}$ in Psalm 85 is taken to be synonymous to *shalom* (also see Dahood 1965-70:II,288f.; Murphy 1968:591; Toombs 1971:286).

The meaning of VW^{\prime} is expanded in verse 10 where it is associated with ךָלָל "glory" and אֶרֶץ "land". Elsewhere in the Psalter ךָלָל is a term which refers to the revelation of the presence of Israel's God (cf. Pss. 24:7-10; 26:8; 29:3, 9; also Kraus 1989:39). Like ךָלָל "glory", VW^{\prime} is something which derives from the revelation and the presence of God (cf. Pss. 36:6f.; 57:4; 85:8; 98:3; 109:26). Being founded in the revelation and presence of God, VW^{\prime} is therefore the manifestation of God's protection and deliverance on earth. As such, VW^{\prime} "liberation" does not only take place in the spiritual sense but, as verses 10 and 11 attest, it takes place in material sense - in the land. It is בְּאֶרֶץנוּ "in our land", i.e. in the land of Israel, where VW^{\prime} , God's liberation would be experienced in the form of *shalom* "well-being" and in the realization of צְדָקָה "justice" (v. 11).³⁶

The Hebrew term *shalom*, etymologically "wholeness", "completeness", "soundness", or "well-being" (cf. Brown et al 1951:1022; Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:979), is traditionally translated "peace"; however, it has a much broader sense connoting the happiness and harmony that obtain in a well-ordered covenant relationship (cf. Pedersen 1973:I-II, 263-335; see also Otzen 1980:132). As such *shalom* is a statal term designating the quality of soundness or wholeness of a community. This quality of wholeness or soundness does not only apply to spiritual well-being, but it also includes welfare in the physical sense (cf. Westermann 1982:113). Thus *shalom* of the community is realized

³⁶ On the meaning of צְדָקָה "justice", see Excursus I below this section.

in the form of health, safety, economic prosperity and security (cf. Good 1962:705).

The meaning of *shalom* in the Psalter is summarized by Kraus (1986:82) in the following four distinctive points: (1) The people pray for, hopes for, and await *shalom* for the land and for the whole earth which will be manifested in the form of fruitfulness and undisturbed growth, prosperity, and life. (2) Israel prays for, hopes for, and awaits *shalom* for the whole nation. (3) *Shalom* is the basic theme involved in the activity of the king. (4) *Shalom* is a distinctive force that is available to the city of Jerusalem.

The goal of $\text{V}\text{V}^{\text{v}}$ in Psalm 85 is moreover described in terms of NMA "faithfulness"³⁷ which would spring up from the earth and QLY which would "look down from the heavens" (v. 12). We find this instance in the prophecy of Isaiah 45:8 where the plea is made for the heavens to rain down QLY and the earth to let both *shalom* and $\text{V}\text{V}^{\text{v}}$ spring up. The implication of the idea is that God's $\text{V}\text{V}^{\text{v}}$ will take place in the perfection of harmony between earth and heavens (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:514; Kraus 1986:82). In the prophecy of Hosea, for example, the harmony takes place in

³⁷ NMA can also mean "firmness", "trustworthiness", "stability", "reliability", "permanence", "truth" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:66f.; Brown 1951:54). This concept was used of things that had to be reliable; of that is really true, on which a person can rely, or of a human being on which others can rely. In connection with God, NMA is something which determines God's nature, which is a part of his being divine, which makes it possible for human beings to trust in him (cf. Jepsen 1974:309-316)

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the form of heavens answering the earth and the earth answering grain, wine and oil (Hos. 2:23-24 = English 21-22; cf. Mays 1969:52f.; Wolf 1974:53f.)

In Psalm 85, the meaning of $\text{V}\text{V}'$ is further enlarged in verse 13: "the land will give what is good and will yield its increase". This verse refers to the fruitfulness of the land, the good harvest, or in other words, the prosperity of the land. The fruitfulness of the land is described elsewhere in Psalm 67:7 as the sign of God's blessing on the earth. The Old Testament frequently reiterates that part of God's blessing is of material kind (cf. Lev. 26:3-13; Deut. 28:1-14; etc; see also McCullough 1955:462).

From our investigation of Psalm 85, the conclusion can be made that $\text{V}\text{V}'$ in the psalms has a deeper and larger meaning, for it includes the realization of both רָצוֹן "justice"³⁸ and *shalom* in its various dimensions of "well-being", "wholeness and "prosperity"³⁹

In the light of our discoveries here, one can conclude by stating that, according to the Old Testament view, there is no liberation without the experience of liberation.

³⁸ On the idea of God's "justice", see Excursus I below this section.

³⁹ Our conclusion here corresponds with Pedersen's explanation of this concept that in its broader sense $\text{V}\text{V}'$ has the idea of "unchecked prosperity, happiness in security under the strong God, the abolition of all dangers" (1973:332f).

Excursus I: The Justice of God in the Old Testament

Throughout the Old Testament it is proclaimed that God Yahweh is the author of justice, and, as a just God, is bound to act justly (II Chr. 12:6; Neh. 9:8; Pss. 7:9; 103:17; 11:3; 116:5; Jer. 9:24; Dan. 9:14; Zeph. 3:5; Zech. 8:8; etc. (cf. Quell 1959:4; Achtemeier 1962:82). The Hebrew word used here is קָדַשׁ, which in its verbal form can mean "be in the right", "have just cause", "be just", and in its noun form "righteousness" or "justice" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:794).

קָדַשׁ is a concept of relationship referring to an actual relationship between two persons and implying behaviour which corresponds to, or is true to, the claims arising out of such a relationship (cf. H. Cremer as quoted in Eichrodt 1961:I,240). It is the standard not only for human's relationship to each other, or towards God, but also for God's relationship to his people. The way in which קָדַשׁ is used in connection with God shows that it is a term denoting relationship between him (God) and the people. When Israel praises the justice of Yahweh, she thanks him that he stands on Israel's side and in his action avows himself to her. The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 speaks of קָדַשׁ יְהוָה "Yahweh's righteous acts" and by this expression means his saving acts in history (Von Rad 1975:372). The righteousness or justice of God was thus spoken in connection with his help to Israel, his triumphs against her outside enemies (cf. Eichrodt 1961:I,242).

The glorification of God's קָדַשׁ "saving acts in history" occurs in many passages of the Old Testament (see 1 Sam. 12:7; Mic. 6:5; Pss. 48:11f.; 103:6; cf. Von Rad 1975:372). In Deutero Isaiah God's קָדַשׁ is linked with his acts of לְפָדוֹתָם "liberation". A good example of this connection occurs in Isaiah 45:8; 46:13; 51:8 where these terms are used as synonymous for each other (cf. Sawyer 1990:458f.). Thus God's justice is a demonstration of his acts of salvation or liberation (cf. Kraus 1986:42f.). His justice was active not only in the sphere of history, but it was also operative in the realm of nature as it can be derived from Joel 2:23f. (cf. Von Rad 1975:375).

God's קָדַשׁ is moreover shown in his function as a judge (cf. Achtemeier 1962:82). Yahweh is the קָדַשׁ אֱלֹהִים (righteous God) because he judges righteously (Ps. 7:9, 11). He cuts the cords of the wicked (Ps. 129:4). His judgements are just (Ps. 119:137). Elsewhere God is pictured as one who gives קָדַשׁ וְצִדְקָה "righteous judgement" (cf. Pss. 9:4, 8; 50:6; 96:13; 99:4; Is. 5:16; 58:2; Jer. 11:20). Hence the psalmists demand that Yahweh should judge them in accordance with their righteousness and his justice (Pss. 26:1; 35:24; 43:1). They demand it with the same confidence with which the poor demand judgement from the king (cf. Pedersen 1973:349). As a human judge does, Yahweh helps those who have had their right taken from them to regain it

(cf. Achtemeier 1962:83). In this connection Kraus writes: "The righteousness of Yahweh is the perfection of the one who, true to his responsibilities to the community, helps all who are oppressed, falsely accused, persecuted, or suffering, and reveals himself as their deliverer" (1986:43).

One can therefore conclude with Pedersen (1973:349) who stated that on God's justice Israel bases her confidence in the subsistence of harmony.

1.5 God and Liberation

As will be clear in what follows, in the Psalter one cannot discuss liberation without talking about God. In the psalms the concept of liberation is always related to God. We will begin our exploration of this aspect by focusing on God as the source of liberation. Here we will gather our information especially from the investigation of Psalm 44:4, 5, 7. We will then continue to deal with liberation as the divine predicate. At this point we will draw our inferences particularly from Psalms 79 and 85.

1.5.1 God as the Source of Liberation (Ps. 44:4, 5, 7)

The idea that God is the source of liberation can be derived from the use of the Hebrew root YV^{b} in Psalm 44.⁴⁰ This word occurs in its noun form in verse 5 and in its verbal form in verses 4, 7 and 8. In verse 4, the verb YV^{b} is used in its hiphil perfect form, referring here to the act of giving victory in battle (c. Brown et al 1951:447). This verse attributes the act of giving

⁴⁰ We have already treated this psalm above in connection with the aspects of liberation from the national enemies (cf. pp. 34ff.) and their oppression (cf. pp. 39ff.) as well as the goal of liberation (cf. pp. 53f.

victory to יְמִינֶךָ "the right hand and arm" of God. יְמִינֶךָ in this context refers to the might or power of God (cf. Soggin 1990:101).⁴¹ Elsewhere in the Psalter יָצַח is used to refer to the act of giving victory in battle which is associated with "the right hand and the arm" of God (Pss. 20:7; 60:7; 98:1; 108:7; cf. Brown et al 1951:446; Sawyer 1990:462; see also below, pp. 168f.).

Psalm 44 in attributing יָצַח to God here corresponds to the idea of the deliverance from Egypt as a direct act of the יָד "arm" of God (cf. Exod. 6:6; Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 26:8; see also Helfmeyer 1980:133f.). It also confirms the idea which we find elsewhere in Job that only God's right hand brings about יָצַח , the human being's hand cannot unless he ceases to be a creature and becomes a creator (cf. Job 40:14; see also Perdue 1991:219f.).⁴² The idea that only the יָד "arm" of God can give victory is also common to Isaiah 59:16; 63:5.

In the Old Testament, the concept that a human being cannot bring about יָצַח can be traced back as far as the period of Judges (cf. Sawyer 1990:451). In the book of Judges 7:2, for example, we read about Gideon warned by God not to allow Israel to go into

⁴¹ The right hand is usually the most active one. It can also denote the might or power of a person (Ps. 89:26) or of a people (Ps. 89:43); cf. Anderson 1972:178, 801).

⁴² Man's intervention to help and liberate (along the lines of יָצַח) can take place legitimately only if God works in them and through them (cf. Fohrer 1971:975).

the danger of attributing הַשׁוֹמֵר to her own hand (לָהּ ; cf. Brown 1963B:358).⁴³

In Psalm 44 besides the יְמִי and לְפָנֶיךָ of God another means of bringing about הַשׁוֹמֵר is God's אֵר פְּנֵיךָ "light of countenance" v. 4). The formula which occurs elsewhere in Exodus 33:14-15; Deuteronomy 4:39 and Isaiah 63:9 where it is used with reference to Yahweh's leading Israel through the desert (cf. Fohrer 1973:163). In other psalms, this expression appears in Psalm 4:7; 89:16 where it is used in the context of prayer of deliverance from personal enemies. In Psalm 31:16 it is the petition for liberation, for God should let his face shine on his servant as he comes to liberate (לְשׁוֹמֵר) him.

The thought of verse 4 is picked up in verse 5 which continues to attribute הַשׁוֹמֵר to God, who is addressed here as the מֶלֶךְ "king" (v. 5; cf. McCullough 1955:229; Gerstenberger 1988:184). This verse, according to the structure of Psalm 44, is understood to be the words spoken by the king where he affirms his trust in God, who in the past had given victory to Jacob, i.e. Israel as a nation (cf. Hayes 1976:119; Craigie 1983:332f.). God can give victory to his people (Jacob), because he is their king (cf. 1 Sam. 12:12; Is. 6:5; 43:15; Pss. 24:710; 47:7; 98:6; 149:2; etc.).

⁴³ It was only through the might of God the people of Israel gained victory (cf. Anderson 1972:340). That there is no deliverer but Yahweh is the central confession of Israel (cf. Barth 1980:439)

Elsewhere in the Psalter to bring about לְשׁוֹשֵׁב and to maintain it in Israel was the main task of a human king (cf. Pss. 20:7-8, 10; 21:2; 72: 2-4). This point will be discussed in detail in the sixth chapter where we will be dealing with the theme of liberation in the royal psalms.

Further information concerning the source of liberation can be collected from the use of the verb לְשׁוֹשֵׁב in verse 7. This verse can be understood in the light of the preceding verses (5-6). Verse 7 disapproves liberation as human being's own achievement: "For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword (לְשׁוֹשֵׁב עַיִן) liberate me." This verse by denying human power as the source of liberation, confirms the thought of verses 5-6, which ascribes the liberating acts to God's direct intervention in history (cf. Craigie 1983:33). The phrase בְּךָ "in thee" (v. 6) reminds us of the similar expression in Psalm 22:6, where it is used in the context of the confession of trust: "To thee they cried, and were saved; in thee they trusted, and were not disappointed". The same applies here. The king instead of trusting in his own bow and sword, i.e. in his own power or strength, is confessing here his trust in God's power to liberate him (cf. Anderson 1972:339f.). He appeals, on behalf of the nation, to God's activities of liberation in the past which he desires to be repeated in the present (cf. Croft 1987:115, 121f.).⁴⁴ This same concept is expressed elsewhere in the Psalter: "The king is not liberated

⁴⁴ The emphasis in verse 7, "not in my bow ..., nor can my sword ...", echo the idea of verse 4: "not by their own sword ..., nor did their own arm" (cf. Kidner 1973:169).

by a great army; the warrior is not delivered by great strength" (Ps. 33:16).

The prevailing awareness in Psalm 44 is that God can liberate both the king and his people.⁴⁵ Outside the Psalter this idea is found in the context of the narrative concerning David and Goliath, the fact that David succeeded to kill Goliath by the help of God (cf. 1 Sam. 17: 47).

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So, on the basis of our investigation of Psalm 44:4, 5, 7, one can conclude that the Hebrew term יְהוָה may mean victory in battle or liberation from the enemies which is experienced and hoped for as coming about through the intervention of God. In other words, Psalm 44 points out that the source of liberation is God. This does not mean that the people of Israel did not play an effective role in bringing about their liberation. To use the words of Barth: "The Israelites, of course, played their part. They fought courageously. They used clever strategy. They made alliances as needed, they were not just onlookers watching the Lord at work. Nevertheless, it was the Lord alone who granted the victory. The glory finally belonged to him" (1991:170; see also Von Rad 1991:56-73).

⁴⁵ This can be derived especially from the rehearsal of God's past acts of liberation in verses 2-5 (see above pp. 53ff.) and the expression of confidence in verses 5-9 (cf. Rogerson & McKay 1977:I,207).

1.5.2 Liberation as the Divine Predicate (Pss. 79:9; 85:5)

In the psalms of community lament liberation is not only referred to as having God as its source, but it is also used as the divine predicate. Here we will refer especially to Psalms 79:9 and 85:5 where God is addressed as *יְשַׁעְנוּ אֱלֹהֵי* "God of our liberation".⁴⁶ This divine predicate is used in Psalm 79 in the context of petition (vv. 6-12). This petition is preceded by the lament (vv. 1-5), where the people complained about the disaster which has befallen them and their city (cf. Hayes 1976:122; Klein 1979:20). In this situation the people had to pray to God, addressing him as *יְשַׁעְנוּ אֱלֹהֵי* "God of our liberation" (v. 9), i.e. the God who grants us liberation or deliverance (cf. Anderson 1972:579). In Psalm 85 too the phrase *יְשַׁעְנוּ אֱלֹהֵי* appears in the context of prayer (v. 5).

Elsewhere in the Psalter the phrase *יְשַׁעְנוּ אֱלֹהֵי* can also be used in the context of communal thanksgiving (see Ps. 65: 6; cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,111). This same phrase features also in the psalms of individual lament (cf. Pss. 18:47; 24:5; 27:9; 51:16).

⁴⁶ This phrase is rendered "God of our salvation" in the RSV and KJV, but on the basis of the setting of this psalm, i.e. the fall of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587/6 BC (cf. and the exilic situation which followed after (cf. pp. 19f. above), our own rendition of this expression as "God of our liberation" seems to be more appropriate. See also Dahood (1965-70:II,249) who translates it as "triumphant God of ours".

Wherever this divine title occurs in the Old Testament, it is used as an acknowledgement of God's power to liberate. The people's knowledge of God as $\text{יְשׁוּעַתֵּנוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ}$ derives from their experience with God in history. Hence God himself and his name, in the words of Kraus, "are symbols of liberation and deliverance, the prototype of which is the choosing of Israel and Israel's liberation out of bondage in Egypt" (1986:31).

$\text{יְשׁוּעַתֵּנוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ}$ "God of our liberation" is the God who has repeatedly delivered his people in the past; thus he is a God of liberation, one who can provide liberation to his people in the present also (cf. Anderson 1972:610). It is with this knowledge and trust that the people in Psalms 79:9 and 85:5 approach God asking him to "deliver" and "restore" them.

1.6 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to analyze the theme of liberation in the psalms of community lament. In our investigation of these psalms, we have observed that the Hebrew terms for liberation can apply to the people's deliverance from Egypt, as in the case of Psalms 74 and 77. These terms are also used in petitions for liberation from national enemies and their oppressive actions, as applies in Psalms 44 and 79. While in Psalms 80 and 85, the people have used these terms in their requests for liberation from God's anger.

Our study has also noticed that in the psalms of community lament

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liberation has its goals, which are realized in the possession of land and protection of the people, for example in Psalms 44:2-4; 60, as well as in the experience of shalom, as it applies in Psalm 85:9-14. Above all, the worshippers in these psalms know that liberation stems from God (Pss. 44:4, 5, 7; 79:9; 85:5).

CHAPTER 2

LIBERATION IN THE PSALMS OF INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

2.1 Introduction

Our purpose in this chapter is to investigate the meaning of liberation in the context of the psalms of individual lament. For the sake of analysis, relevant passages will be examined under the following headings: Liberation from the enemies of the individual; liberation from oppression; liberation from sickness, death and sheol; liberation from sin; and characteristics deserving liberation. The classification of the psalms under these headings is based on the oppressive situations which required liberation in the respective psalms.

Under the first heading we will examine Psalms 22, 31, 35, 71 and 109. In these psalms the Hebrew terms for liberation are used often in connection with deliverance from enemies, designated by various nouns such as אֹיְבֵי, רָשָׁעִים, צָרָרִים, etc. Besides the mentioned psalms there are also some other psalms of individual lament in which the terms for liberation are used in connection with deliverance from the enemies, but for the sake of avoiding redundancy, these will only be cited where appropriate without offering any detailed discussion on them.

Under the second heading we will investigate Psalm 55, while Psalms 6, 56, and 86 will be treated under the third heading. The

fourth concentrates on Psalm 39, while the fifth heading focuses on Psalms 26 and 40.

In order to analyze the theme of liberation in this type of psalms properly, one needs first to make a brief survey on their genre, structure and setting.

2.2 Outline of Genre, Structure and Setting

2.2.1 Genre and Structure

Psalms of individual lament constitute the largest group within the Psalter. The following psalms are often reckoned to this type: 3, 5, 6, 7, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 35, 39, 41, 42-3, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69, 71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 140, 141, and 143 (cf. Weiser 1962:66; Westermann 1967:53; Anderson 1972:38). In the community psalms of lament the suppliants describe themselves in the first person plural "we" terms, while the speaker in the individual laments identifies himself in the first person singular "I" terms. The psalms of this genre can be recognized by their common patterns which include the following main elements (cf. Gunkel 1967:34-5; Eissfeldt 1965:117-8; Gerstenberger 1974:198-200; Hayes 1976:58-64; Westermann 1981:64-80):

(a) The address to God opens the psalm. This element may contain an invocation "O Lord" and introductory cry for help: "Give ear to my words" (Ps. 5:2), or "Hear my prayer, ... Let my cry come

too thee!" (Ps. 102:2). At some places an address to God may also include a brief confession of confidence "O Lord my God, in thee do I take refuge" (Ps. 7:2) or "O God, thou art my God, I seek thee" (Ps. 63:2).

(b) The lament where the psalmist describes the distress or misfortune from which he wants to be liberated: "How many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of me, there is no help for him in God" (Ps. 3:2-3); "... I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief, my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away" (Ps. 31:10-11).

Sometimes the description of the distress is expressed in terms of a complaint against God: "How long, O Lord? Wilt thou forget me for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" (Ps. 13:2). Or "... because of thy indignation and anger; for thou hast taken me up and thrown me away" (Ps. 102:11).

(c) Petition. Here the poet prays for God to liberate him from suffering: "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death" (Ps. 13:4); "Deliver me from my persecutors; for they are too strong for me! Bring me out of prison ..." (Ps. 142:7-8).

Another aspect found in this element is the prayer against the enemy: "Rescue them according to their work, and according to the

evil of their deeds; ... render them their due reward" (Ps. 28:4); "Let them be put to shame and dishonour who seek after my life! Let them be turned back and confounded who devise evil against me! Let them be like chaff before the wind ... " (Ps. 35:4-5).

(d) Confession of trust which shows the psalmist's confidence in God's ability and readiness to intervene on his behalf: "But thou, O Lord, art a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy hill. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the Lord sustains me. I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me around about ... For thou dost smite all my enemies on the cheek ..." (Ps. 3:4-8); " For in thee my soul takes refuge; In the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfils his purpose for me. He will send from heaven and save me, he will put to shame those who trample upon me" (Ps. 57:2-4).

(e) The protestations of innocence. In some psalms of this genre are found assertions of innocence: "If thou triest my heart, if thou visitest me by night, if thou tested me, thou wilt find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress. With regard to the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have avoided the ways of the violent ..." Ps. 17:3-5); "...I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. ... and I walk in faithfulness to thee. I do not sit with false men,

nor do I consort with dissemblers; ... I wash my hands in innocence ..." (Ps. 26:1-7).

(f) Vow of praise: Here the psalmist states a promise of thanksgiving, which is sometimes addressed directly to God: "I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee" (Ps. 22:23); "With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to thee; I will give thanks to thy name, ..." (Ps. 54:8).

At other times, as Hayes (1976:16) suggests, this vow seems to have been addressed to the worshipping audience or the priests: "I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me" (Ps. 13:6b); "I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving" (Ps. 69:31).

(g) The vow of praise is sometimes followed by the praise: "From thee comes my praise in the great congregation; ... All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; ... For dominion belongs to the Lord, ..." (Ps. 22:26-29); "Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves therein. For God will save Zion ..." (Ps. 69:35-37).

(h) Also discernible in these psalms is the assurance of being heard. Although this element is not explicitly stated in the psalms, its presence can be recognized in the shift from complaint to praise which features in a number of psalms (cf. Hayes 1976:62). Psalms 6 and 28 can be used here as some

examples. Psalm 6:2-8 is characterized by the lament and prayer for help. Suddenly the mood of the psalm changes to a condition of certainty. Psalm 6:9-11 no longer laments but it expresses the suppliant's assurance of God's intervention on his behalf. The same applies to Psalm 28. The lament part (vv. 1-5) is followed by the verse displaying the assurance of being heard: "Blessed be the Lord! for he has heard the voice of my supplications ... so, I am helped, and my heart exults, ..." (vv. 6-7).⁴⁷

2.2.2 Setting

The psalms of individual lament seem to have their original use in worship service or the cult (cf. Gunkel 1967:20; Weiser 1962:68f.). One example of this setting is found in the story of Samuel's mother at the beginning of 1 Samuel: Hannah, having been in the great trouble, came to the temple and expressed her need to God (Cf. Westermann 1980:53f.). As their contents indicate, most of these psalms were prompted by various situations of distress in the lives of the individual Israelites. In any situation of need and affliction, the sufferer would respond to God in the form of lament (cf. Anderson 1972:37). The most probable situations of distress in the background of the individual psalms of lament are the following:

(a) Bodily sickness

A number of psalms seem to describe bodily sickness as the

⁴⁷ For further details about "the assurance of being heard", see my discussion on "the oracle of salvation" under section 1.2.1 above.

occasion in which the individuals sought God's help in the context of worship (cf. Gunkel 1967:20; Eissfeldt 1965:116; Hayes 1967:64ff.). According to Gunkel's reconstruction of the occasion, the sick man would appear in the sanctuary in order to obtain healing. There sacred acts must have taken place in which, in a response to his prayer, he is absolved of his sin, or in which he attests his innocence (cf. 1967:20).⁴⁸ In this group are Psalms 6, 13, 31, 38, 39, 88 and 102 (cf. Hayes 1967:65; Murphy 1968:572). In Psalm 6, the worshipper pleads with God: "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord heal me, for my bones are troubled" (v.3). And he expresses the distress of his situation: "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of my grief, it grows weak because of all my foes" (vv. 7-8).

Psalm 38 describes another situation of bodily sickness as follows: "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thy indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin ... my wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness, ... For my loins are filled with burning and there is no soundness in my flesh" (v. 4-8).

The individual psalms of lament even though they were liturgical

⁴⁸ In connection with this setting, Seybold would like to suggest that this group of psalms, "Psalms of Ill-health", were not offered in the temple, but "by those who are far from the sanctuary and cult but who wish to adhere to rites, in effect prayers of expiation" (199:117).

prayers, could be prayed not only in the religious sanctuary but also in a private dwelling. The story of the sickness of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38 is another example. In this case the king prayed to God from his sickbed for healing, and the prophet Isaiah was sent to him to announce that God had heard him (cf. Westermann 1980:54)⁴⁹

(b) Persecution and oppression by the enemies

Numerous psalms of individual lament reflect the occasions of harassment, persecution and oppression by the enemies of various designations (cf. Anderson 1962:411; Hayes 1976:74; Croft 1987:15ff.). Among these are Psalms 3, 7, 13, 25, 31, 35, 38, 40, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 69, 70, 71, 86, 109, 120, 141 and 143. In Psalm 3, for example, the worshipper describes his persecution by the enemies as follows: "O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of me, there is no help for him in God (vv. 2-3). And in Psalm 71, he says: "For my enemies speak concerning me, those who watch for my life consult together, and say, "God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is none to deliver him" (vv. 10-11).

The situation of oppression is lamented in Psalm 55: "I am overcome by my trouble. I am distraught by the noise of the

⁴⁹ Eissfeldt (1965:119f.), although he postulates that these psalms have their origin in the cult, has also pointed out that a large proportion of the individual songs of lamentation which have come down to us were composed without reference to the cult and represent private utterances of pious individuals.

enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked" (vv. 3-4). The same applies to Psalm 56: "Be gracious to me, O God, for men trample upon me; all day long foemen oppress me" (v. 2).

(c) Accusation by the enemies

Some psalms presuppose the situation where the individuals have been subjects of unjust accusations (cf. Eissfeldt 1965:119; Murphy 1968:572; Day 1990:28f.).⁵⁰ Such instances are found especially in Psalms 7, 26 and 27 (cf. Hayes 1976:70). In Psalm 7, for example, we find the words which sound like an avowal of innocence in the face of slanderous accusations: "O Lord, my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, if I have requited my friend with evil or plundered my enemy without cause, let the enemy pursue me and overtake me, and let him trample my life to the ground, and lay my soul in the dust" (vv. 4-6). In

⁵⁰ Hans Schmidt, as cited in Eissfeldt (1965:119), has proposed that some of the individual songs of lamentation, which he calls "prayers of the accused", belong to a procedure of legal examination, with a view to obtaining divine judgement, which took place with the accused at a holy place, and that they were here recited by the accused or on his behalf during the proceedings, partly - namely the complaint and prayer - before the divine judgement decision, and in part - namely the thanksgiving which frequently stands at the end - after the pronouncement of the oracle in favour of the accused. Another scholar L. Delekat considered most texts of this genre to be mural inscriptions scribbled on the temple wall by people who sought refuge in the sanctuary (cf. Gerstenberger (1974:204). Another approach in this direction is taken by W. Beyerlin who shares the view that in a number of individual lament psalms the psalmist is undergoing a sacral trial in the temple. The one falsely accused utters a psalm in order to encourage Yahweh to intervene in judgement in his favour. This judgement is understood as taking place in the cult (cf. Day 1990:28).

Psalm 26 also there are expressions which sound like pleas for vindication in the face of false accusations (cf. Dahood 1965-70:I,161; Hayes 1976:72f.): "Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity" (v. 1) and "I wash my hands in innocence" (v. 6). Again in Psalm 27, we read: "When evildoers assail me, uttering slanders against me" (v.2), and "Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witness have risen against me" (v. 12).

(d) The nearness of death

In some of the psalms of individual lament, the worshippers speak of their proximity to death as a threat (cf. Broyles 1989:89ff.). This situation is described especially in Psalms 39, 41 and 88. In Psalm 41, the worshipper says: "All who hate me whisper together about me; they imagine the worst for me. They say, "A deadly thing has fastened upon him; he will not rise again from where he lies" (vv. 8-9). In Psalm 88, the problem is expressed in these words: "I am reckoned among those who go down to the Pit; I am a man who has no strength, like one forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, .." (vv. 5-6).

2.3 Liberation from the Enemies of the Individual

As we have already indicated above, some of the occasions which prompted the individual laments were persecution, oppression and false accusation by the enemies. Here we will then examine the use of the Hebrew terms for liberation in connection with these

enemies. Unlike in the psalms of community lament, where the people had national enemies as one of their threats from which they asked to be liberated, in the individual laments the individual express their need for liberation from individual enemies. As we will see below this section, the enemies of the individual, sometimes, are described as the previous problem, i.e. one which is already past, but at some places they are referred to as the present problem. In these psalms, the enemies are not identified by one word, but by various terms such as persecutors, wicked or accusers. To facilitate our investigation of this topic, we will begin here with discussing the aspects of previous and present enemies. At this point we will focus on Psalm 22. The next item will concentrate on liberation from enemies of multiple identities as they occur in Psalm 31. In the third point we will treat the subject of liberation from the enemies as persecutors by examining Psalm 35. In the fourth place we will discuss the problem of the enemies as the wicked. Here Psalm 71 will be utilized. Lastly, our discussion will be centred on liberation from the enemies as the accusers as occurs in Psalm 109.

2.3.1 The Previous and Present Enemies (Ps. 22)

(a) The Previous Enemies

In Psalm 22 the idea of liberation from the previous enemies can be derived from the use of the Hebrew verb וַיִּלֶּח in verse 5. According to the structure of this psalm, this verse is part of

the confession of trust (vv. 4-6), occurring between the lament sections (i.e. vv. 2-3 and 7-9; cf. Hayes 1976:109; Anderson 1983:78). This verse reads: כַּךְ נִטְחוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ נִטְחוּ וְחַפְּלָטְמוּ "In thee our fathers trusted; they trusted, and thou dost deliver them" (v. 5). The verb חַפְּלָט, as used here, is in its piel form, which can mean "bring into security", "carry away safe" (Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:762) or "deliver" (Brown et al 1951:812). In this verse, the particular verb is used with reference to God's past acts of deliverance to the fathers of Israel (cf. Westermann 1989:31). The nature of these acts is not specified in this verse, but the one praying here is cognizant of the fact that in the past God delivered his ancestors who trusted in him. The significance of חַפְּלָט in this verse is underscored by the parallel idea in the following verse: "To thee they cried (וְזָעְקוּ) and were saved (וְנִמְלָטוּ), v. 6).

The idea of the people crying out of need to God and being delivered by him is emphasized elsewhere in Psalm 107:6, 13, 19 (cf. 2 Chron. 20:9). The people's crying out of need to God here is reminiscent of וַיִּזְעַקוּ וַחֲעַל שׁוֹעֲחֵם אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים "and they cried out and wept and their cry came up to God" in Exodus 2:23, the context of which is the Egyptian bondage. In Psalm 22:5, it is acknowledged that God responded to those who had cried to him in his acts of delivering them (חַפְּלָטְמוּ), just as he had answered the people's cry in Egypt with the acts of יִשְׁעַ and יִצְלַל, delivering and liberating (cf. Exod. 3:8; 6:6; 14:30). So, in both situations God responded to the cry of the people with liberation (cf. Ringgren 1963:101; Rogerson & McKay 1977:I,99). In Psalm 22,

the verb וַיִּלֶּךְ "to deliver", like וַיִּלְוֶה "to liberate" is thus God's response to those who cry out to him in need.

In the context of this psalm, the reference to the past liberating acts of God has a special function. Verses 4-6 in which this statement occurs are classified as the confession of trust (cf. Weiser 1962:221; Anderson 1983:78; Gerstenberger 1991:108).⁵¹ These have the lament as their broader context (cf. vv. 2-3, 7-9). So, the reference to the acts of liberation as they were experienced by Israel in the past serves here as the basis of hope. These past acts of liberation are not only the basis of hope but they are, at the same time, the source from which the lamenting individual derives his strength and confidence in God (cf. Ringgren 1963:101).

(b) The Present Enemies

In Psalm 22 the idea of liberation from present enemies is found in the petition section (vv. 20-22). In the confession of trust section of this psalm, the situation which required liberation is related to the past, but in its petition part the enemy threat appears to be current. While in verses 4-6 the psalmist expressed his hope and confidence in God's power to intervene on behalf of his people by his acts of liberation, in verses 20-22 he prays for his own deliverance. The "cry out in need" is expressed here by the hiphil imperative forms of the Hebrew verbs הַצִּילֵה

⁵¹ Westermann (1981:214-220) describes this particular element as the "re-presentation" of history, or the "look back at God's earlier saving deeds".

"deliver" (v. 21) and הוֹשִׁיעַנִי "liberate me" (v. 22). In both instances the threat from which the psalmist seeks liberation is identified. In the first instance the threat is specified as חֶרֶב "the sword" and יָד-גִּבּוֹרֹת "paw of the dog" (v. 21). While in the second instance the threat is depicted as פִּי אַרְיֵה "mouth of a lion" and as קַרְנֵי אֲוֵן "horns of the wild oxen" (v. 22). All these terms are used here in a figurative language to describe the enemies whose acts and attitudes towards the psalmist are lamented in verses 7-9, 13, 14, 17-19 (cf. Weiser 1962:224; Anderson 1983:83). The substance of these verses illustrates the true nature of the particular enemies and the threat which they constitute for the individual. They are depicted as those who despise and ridicule the individual (vv. 7-9). In verses 13 and 14 the arrogance of these antagonistic humans is portrayed in the imagery of beasts - the bulls of Bashan, denoting their physical strength, for Bashan is known as a fertile region east of the Jordan, capable of producing fat cattle and sheep (cf. Deut. 32:14; Am. 4:1; Mic. 7:14; see also Dahood 1965-70:I,140).

Animal imagery is used here to give profile to the anonymous evildoers or to materialize the evil suffered by the psalmist (cf. Gerstenberger 1991:111). In Isaiah 34:7, for example, "strong bulls" is used as a symbol of formidable enemies (cf. Dahood 1965-70:I,170). So, the antagonists in Psalm 22 are not beasts but fellow human beings referred to in Hebrew as מַעֲשֵׂי רָע "evildoers" (v. 17a; cf. Pss. 26:5; 27:2; 64:3 Is. 1:4; 31:2; Jer. 20:13; 23:14; cf. also Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:902; Davidson 1970:688). Their evil or wickedness is so severe that

it has gone to the extent of doing the psalmist bodily injury - piercing his hands and feet (v. 17b). To worsen the situation, the רָעִים have also robbed the psalmist of his clothes (v. 19).

The fact that the individual in this psalm was despised, ridiculed, bodily injured and materially robbed can be said to have involved psychological, physical and economic suffering. The psalmist's prayer for הַצִּילָהּ (v. 21) and הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי (v. 22) here is thus to be liberated from his present psychological, physical and economic sufferings perpetuated by the רָעִים "evildoers".

2.3.2 The Enemies of Multiple Identities (Ps. 31)

Psalm 31⁵² is another individual lament where the suppliant seeks liberation from personal enemies through petition using the Hebrew concepts פָּלַט (v. 2), נָצַל (vv. 3, 16) and יִשְׁעַל (vv. 3, 17). He also employs the term בָּרַח in the confession of trust (v. 6). The uses of these concepts will be considered here. Besides these terms, this psalm contains also some other Hebrew words which,

⁵² A number of scholars have argued against the unity of Psalm 31 (cf. Taylor 1955:162; Westermann 1984: 174). While others seem to be in favour of its unity (cf. Eaton 1976:67f.; Rogerson & McKay 1977:I,138f.; Croft 1987:46, 123f.; Gerstenberger 1991:137). The unity of this psalm is suggested by the use of common terminology, repeated words and phrases extending throughout the psalm, and providing a framework of coherence. We can note here the following repeated words in this psalm: בָּרַח "seek refuge (vv.2, 20), וְנִחַם "be ashamed" (vv. 2, 18), נָצַל "deliver" (vv. 3, 16), יִשְׁעַל "liberate" (vv. 3, 17), יָד "hand" (vv. 6, 9, 16), בָּרַח "trust" (vv. 7, 15) אַהֲבָה "steadfast love" (vv. 17,22); also cf. Craigie 1983:259).

as we will see, underline the idea of liberation.

(a) The Application of פלט

We start here with the concept פלט as occurs in verse 2, which forms part of the petition section (vv. 2-5) with which Psalm 31 begins. The idea of פלט in this verse, that of the other concepts for liberation in other verses, is to be understood in the light of the setting of this psalm.⁵³ The situation behind this lament is suggested by its text. The whole thrust of the petition sections assumes that the enemies of some kind are at the root of the suppliant's problems (cf. vv. 2-5, 16b-19). Here is reiterated the need of refuge and protection from God (vv. 2, 3, 15), which suggests the situation of threat and persecution. In the image of hunting (v. 5; cf. Ps. 9:16), the enemies have set a net to entrap the innocent person (cf. Craigie 1983:260). In the lament parts (vv. 10-14, 16-19) also the psalmist refers to enemies - the "adversaries" (v. 12) and "persecutors" (v.16) who scheme together" against him (v. 14) as well as the "lying lips" which speak insolently against him (v. 19). Thus we suggest here

⁵³ The opinions of scholars vary regarding the setting of Psalm 31. There are those who associate it with the king whose city was under a seige by foreign nations (cf. Eaton 1976:68; Croft 1987:66). Weiser (1962:272) and Day (190:26) seem to attribute it to situation of illness. Taylor (1955:162) and Westermann (1984:174) consider the setting of this psalm to be difficult to determine, as they have taken it to have been composed out of several psalms that once existed independently. While Schmidt (1927:156ff.) and Beyerlin (1970:44f., 118f.) understood the setting of this psalm in the light of 1 Kings 8:31, 32 - the temple trial in which a falsely accused pleads with God for his acquittal. But all these postulations appear to be not a relevant setting of this psalm.

the setting of Psalm 31 to be the situation where a worshipper is falsely accused and persecuted by personal enemies (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:155; Oesterly 1953:307; Bellinger 1984:34). Being under this threat, the worshipper turns to God with the request for help $\text{פִּלְטֵנִי בְּצִדְקָתְךָ}$ "in thy righteousness deliver me" (v. 2b).

The Hebrew verb פִּלַּט , as we have already pointed out, can also mean "bring into security" or "carry away safe" (Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:762). In this psalm God is asked to do the act of פִּלַּט i.e. to bring the suppliant into security. And he has to do this in his צִדְקָה "righteousness", i.e. justice (cf. Von Rad 1975:370ff.). The similar expression occurs in Psalm 71:2. The meaning of the verb פִּלַּט in Psalm 31:2 should also be understood in the context of the whole psalm. In this psalm the suppliant asks God to take him out of "the net which is hidden" for him (v. 5). And he complains about his צָרָרִים "adversaries" who scorn at him (v. 12). Furthermore he hears the whispering of many as they scheme together to take his life (v. 14). These all constitute the threat from which the suppliant asks to be delivered (פִּלַּט). And the psalmist was aware that God, because of his justice, would deliver, i.e. bring into security and carry away safe the person who is threatened by his enemies. So, the use of פִּלַּט in Psalm 31 shows God as the helping and liberating one for those who are threatened by their enemies. פִּלַּט is therefore the word which designates liberation from the hostile situation. And, as such,

it is an act which is associated with the צדקה "justice" of God.⁵⁴

(b) The Application of צל] and ופ'

The thrust of the prayer for liberation, as introduced in verse 2 above, is continued in verse 3, where the terms צל] and ופ' are used. The verb צל] occurs here in its hiphil imperative form, expressing the urgency of the need of liberation on the side of the suppliant. A similar form is repeated in the petition of verse 16. Elsewhere in the Psalter the hiphil imperative form of צל] is used in the petitions (cf. Pss. 79:9; 82:4). The problem from which the suppliant asks to be delivered in Psalm 31 is not mentioned in verse 3 but it is specified in the petition of verse 16 as מִיַּד-אֹיְבֵי וּמִדַּבְּרֵי "from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors".⁵⁵

In Psalm 31 the word אֹיְבֵי is not used without qualification: it is אֹיְבֵי "my enemies." Hence the enemies of this psalm are personal. That is, they are enemies within Israel. Similarly Botha (1992:261) has indicated that in the case of laments of the individual, the evidence also points in the direction of the same community (that is Israel) as it appears in Psalm 71:10-11. The word אֹיְבֵי is used in this sense elsewhere in Psalms 54:9; 55:13.

⁵⁴ God's צדקה is to be understood as a demonstration of his acts of liberation (cf. Excursus I above, pp. 63f.)

⁵⁵ For the identity of the אֹיְבֵי "enemies" see Excursus II below pp. 94ff.

The nature of the enemies in Psalm 31 is clearly described in the petition of verse 5 and in the lament of verse 14. In verse 5 the acts of the enemies are depicted as those of hiding the net for the psalmist.⁵⁶ By this one can understand that these enemies were prepared to trap or catch the psalmist, probably in words with the final purpose to afflict him. The actions of these personal enemies are further described in verse 14, as those of scheming and plotting against the psalmist with the purpose to take his life, i.e. to kill him (cf. 1 Sam. 24:12; 1 Kings 19:4, 10, 14; Ezek. 33:6). In all instances the enemies show hostile attitudes towards this individual. Hence they are called אֲנִי־וְאֵלֵי (v. 12), literally "those who show hostility towards someone" or "those who perform harassment" (cf. Brown et al 1951:865).

Together with אֲנִי־וְאֵלֵי in verse 16 there is used another concept, אֲנִי־וְאֵלֵי. This word is the qal participle form of the verb אָלַף, meaning "pursue", "persecute", "chase" or harass" (Davidson 1970:677). In its participle form, this word can mean "those who persecute" or "those who harass". Elsewhere in the Psalter, this word is used in the sense of those who persecute the individual "me" (cf. Pss. 7:2; 35:3; 119:84, 157). This particular term is also employed in the personal laments of Jeremiah (Jer. 15:15; 17:18; cf. Carroll 1981:112-20; McKane 1986:350-61, 408:414). The psalmist probably chose to make use of this same word as he was also suffering persecution similar to that of Jeremiah.

⁵⁶ The metaphor of a "net", which is drawn from hunting practices (cf. Is. 51:20), is not uncommonly used by the psalmists for the devices being prepared for their downfall by the plotting enemies (cf. Pss. 9:16; 25:15; 35:7; 140:6; also Taylor 1955:164).

In Psalm 31, the term לצל is utilized in close association with לשׁוּׁב in verse 3, and both are paralleled to each other in verses 16 and 17, which indicates that they are regarded here as synonyms. By the word לצל (vv. 3, 16), the psalmist is not praying for something different from what he asks by the term לשׁוּׁב (vv. 3, 17). Both words are used here with the intention to secure liberation from the enemies - those who persecute him.

(c) The Application of פָּדָה

Alongside the verbs לשׁוּׁב , לצל , and פָּלַט , Psalm 31 also employs the verb פָּדָה .⁵⁷ Unlike the other verbs, which are used in the petitions, פָּדָה appears here in the confession of trust:

$\text{פָּדִיתָהּ אֹחֲתִי}$ "thou hast redeemed me" (v. 6). The verb פָּדָה "redeem" is used here in its qal perfect form, thus expressing the past experience of redemption or liberation. The plight from which the suppliant of this psalm was redeemed is not specified in this particular verse. But, as this psalm is a lament and prayer because of the threat of the enemies in the present, the crisis from which this individual was liberated in the past might also be his previous enemies.⁵⁸ "He [the psalmist] had been

⁵⁷ The Hebrew verb פָּדָה redeem or "ransom" (cf. Brown et al 1951) elsewhere can denote the ransom of a first born from being killed (Exod. 13:13, 15; 34:20; Lev. 27:27; Num. 18:15-17), a slave from slavery (Deut. 15:15; 24:18), or the redemption of people by God (Deut. 9:26; 13:6; Is. 50:2; cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:752).

⁵⁸ Craigie 1983:260) takes the prayer to be redeemed (v.6b) as having a temporal sense: the psalmist requires redemption from the present enemies. In other individual laments too פָּדָה is used for deliverance from enemies (cf. Pss. 69:19; 71:23).

privileged to experience the faithfulness of God in his life, and that experience also gives him now the confident hope that he will be delivered from his present affliction" (Weiser 1962:276)

At this point we can say that in Psalm 31, liberation, as expressed by the word פְּדוּת , is not only something which is prayed for, but it is also the concept of trust and confidence in the midst of enemy crisis.

(d) Other Concepts Underlining the Idea of Liberation

In Psalm 31, accompanying the prayer for liberation is the concept of God as צוּר-מַעֲלוֹן "rock of refuge" (vv. 3, 4, 5) as well as the idea of him liberating in his אַהֲבָה "steadfast love" (v. 17). In verses 3, 4 and 5 God is acknowledged as צוּר-מַעֲלוֹן "rock of refuge" which liberates (cf. v. 3). The verb לְהוֹשִׁיעַנִי in verse 3 is the infinitive construction, expressing purpose (cf. Williams 1976:50). God is asked in this petition to act as a rock of refuge to liberate the psalmist.

The concept צוּר-מַעֲלוֹן "rock of refuge" is used to describe God as the support and defence of his people (cf. Brown et al 1951:849; Kraus 1986:31). This concept features elsewhere in the Psalter in Psalms 62:9; 71:3 (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:799). This concept is related to the designation of God as אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָי "God of my liberation" (Pss. 18:47; 89:27; 95:1). The relationship between the concepts אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָי and צוּר-מַעֲלוֹן can be seen in Isaiah 17:10 where they are used in parallel.

The use of the concept of God as לַיְהוָה-גִּבּוֹר in relation to יְשׁוּעָה and its synonyms, as it applies in Psalm 31, indicates that liberation is an act which stems from God's ability to defend and protect.

Liberation in Psalm 31, moreover, is regarded to issue from God's חַסְדּוֹ (v. 7). This Hebrew word can be translated as "steadfast love", "relationship", "goodness", "grace", "mercy", or "kindness" (Lisowsky 1958:512; Brown et al 1958:338f). The word can be used to refer to the mutual liability of those who are relatives, friends, master and servant or belonging together in any way, the solidarity, joint liability (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:318).⁵⁹ Elsewhere in the psalms of individual lament, the people who are praying cry out to God and appeal to his חַסְדּוֹ . For example, "deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love" (Ps. 6:5); "have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love" (Ps. 51:2; cf. Ps. 109:26).

What is meant by God's חַסְדּוֹ in the Psalter can be deduced especially from Psalms 136 and 128: it is God's liberating, helping, healing mercy extended to Israel and the poor in Israel (cf. Kraus 1986:44). Hence the individual in Israel whenever and wherever he encounters any threat to his life, as in the case of Psalm 31, he trusts and hopes in God to deliver him in accordance with his חַסְדּוֹ .

⁵⁹ On the meaning of חַסְדּוֹ cf. below, p. 93f. For detailed discussion see also Zobel (1986:44-64).

From the study of Psalm 31 one gathers the information that liberation as signified by the Hebrew terms פָּלַט , נָצַל , פָּדָה and פָּלַט involves deliverance from hostile and threatening situations. This liberation is perceived as an act which stems from God's ability to defend and protect (cf. vv. 3-4), and as such, it is related to his צְדָקָה "justice" (v. 2b) and חַסֵּד "steadfast love" (v. 17).

Excursus II: The Identity of the Enemies and Evildoers in the Individual Laments

The problem of the identity of the individual enemies in the Psalter has received due consideration among Old Testament scholars. As early as 1892, this question was tackled by Alfred Rahlfs in his influential study " $\text{עַוְוֹנוֹת וְצַדִּיקִים בְּשִׁבְעַת פְּסַלְמֵי דָוִד}$ in den Psalmen" (cf. Johnson 1951:198). He advanced the view that the enemies were a group or party of godless Jews in the post-exilic period. According to this theory צַדִּיקִים , עַוְוֹנוֹת or צַדִּיקִים on the one hand and the עַוְוֹנוֹת on the other were parties opposed to each other within the Jewish community at that time (cf. Anderson 1965.6:22). The former being the righteous (צַדִּיקִים) who piously obey the law, while the latter are the ungodly apostates or worldly minded (cf. Mowinckel 1962:207).

The particular issue was also dealt with by Gunkel (1933:172-265). For him two interpretations must be admitted: in some cases the enemies stand within the Israelite faith and look at the petitioner's distress as punishment for sin; in other cases, the enemies deride the faith of the believer with its hope for and trust in the ultimate victory of righteousness. Related to this theory is the view of Schmidt (1927) who maintained that the enemies in the individual laments are people who, by deducing from the suppliants's affliction, accuse him falsely of having committed some serious misdeed.

Another approach to this particular problem has been made by Sigmund Mowinckel (cf. Johnson 1951:197f.). Mowinckel was primarily concerned with the question of the עַוְוֹנוֹת . His main arguments were that in these particular terms, which are commonly rendered "evildoers" or "workers of iniquity", the word " עַוְוֹת " indicates supernatural or magical power that the " עַוְוֹת " were sorcerers and their demonic allies who by their potent spells brought about the affliction of the pious sufferer and that the particular psalms were employed to ward off or counteract the evil effects of the black arts practised by the " עַוְוֹת ".

Correspondingly Mowinckel's theory rejects the older view that the enemies were a party of ungodly renegades within the post-exilic Jewish community (cf. Anderson 1965-6:23f.). This view of Mowinckel has found little support among the exegetes (cf. Johnson 1951:199; Gerstenberger 1974:203ff.; Coetzee 1992:165).

Another scholar who contributed to the debate on this subject was a disciple of Mowinckel, Harris Birkeland.⁶⁰ He maintained that the enemies were in principle identical with those of the nation, viz. the gentiles. For Birkeland the enemies even in the individual laments were foreigners, i.e. "enemies in war or alien rulers" (cf. Birkeland 1955:9-11). This view-point, however, is criticised of having been forced and overstated (cf. Anderson 1965-6:28f.).

One of the recent scholars who challenged Birkeland's theory is Rosenbaum (1974:58-64). He demonstrated that the two terms wicked (אֲשֵׁר) and enemies (אֹיְבֵי) are not synonymous in the psalms, as Birkeland has concluded, but they refer to two different groups of antagonists, Israelites who have gone astray and foreign enemies respectively.

Another recent scholar who has attempted to solve this particular problem is Croft (1987:33-48). He classified the אֹיְבֵי into two different categories: "the national; enemies" and the "personal enemies". For Croft the national enemies are often the foreign military enemies such as in Psalms 44 and 132. In other words, they are foreign nations at war with Israel. While the personal enemies, according to Croft, are individual enemies within Israel, for example in Psalm 127:5.

From the above views we can derive the conclusion that there seems to be an agreement among recent scholars that Mowinckel's idea is not acceptable, but that the enemies of the individual were real enemies. They were criminal elements in Israel who mistreated their fellow people either through deceit (Pss. 5:7; 12:3; 26:4), false accusation (Pss. 27:12; 35:11), slander (Pss. 5:10; 27:12; 56:3; 59:7-8) oppression and exploitation (Ps. 35:10).

⁶⁰ Birkeland published three important contributions to this area of Psalm study: ani und anaw in den Psalmen (1933); Die Feinde des Individuums in der israelitischen Psalmenliteratur (1933) and The Evildoers in the Book of Psalms (1955; cf. Anderson 1965-6:25).

2.3.3 The Enemies as Persecutors (Ps. 35)

In Psalm 35, the idea of liberation from the enemies as persecutors is underscored by the uses of the direct designation of God as $\text{יְשַׁעְתֶּךָ אֱלֹהִים}$ "I am your liberation" (v. 3), the expressions of praise: $\text{תְּשׁוּבָה בְּיְשׁוּעָתוֹ}$ "it shall exult in his liberation" (v. 9), and מַצִּיל עַנְיִים "one who delivers the weak" (v.10) in connection with the enemy concepts throughout the text.

The direct designation of God $\text{יְשַׁעְתֶּךָ אֱלֹהִים}$ "I am your liberation" concludes the opening prayer of this psalm (vv. 1-3). In praying for God's liberation, the psalmist uses the metaphorical language of battle (cf. Craigie 1983:285; Gerstenberger 1988:150). God is imperatively invoked to take military weapons: "shield and buckler", "spear and javelin" in order to combat the רֹדְפֵיךָ "persecutors" of the psalmist (v. 3). The depiction of God as warrior⁶¹ reminds us of Moses's song in Exodus 15. Although the context of Exodus cannot be directly applied to Psalm 35, the same picture is utilized (cf. Weiser 1962:302; Rogerson & McKay 197:I,161).

The actions of God, as he battles against the persecutors of the psalmist, would herald the good news of liberation. Hence the direct designation of God: $\text{יְשַׁעְתֶּךָ אֱלֹהִים}$ "I am your liberation" (v. 3). The corresponding form of this formula is $\text{יְשַׁעְתֶּנִּי אֱלֹהִים}$,⁶²

⁶¹ For the idea of God as a "warrior", see below, pp. 166f, 205.

⁶² On the use of this formula, see above, pp. 64-69.

occurring elsewhere in Psalms 25:5; 27:9, where it is used in the petition. To address God as "my liberation" is a way of expressing confidence in him (cf. Pss. 27:1; 62:3, 7). In Psalm 35 God is addressed in this way by the suppliant in anticipation for liberation that would come when God rose up on his behalf.

The appellation of God as "my liberation", in the context of this psalm, shows that for the psalmist liberation would become his personal experience through God's intervention - his taking hold of shield and buckler, and drawing the spear and javelin against the psalmist's ׀ׁׁׁ "persecutors" (v. 3). The persecutors are the threat which prompted the psalmist to approach God in lament and prayer for liberation.

The description of the persecutors as the threat is contained in the curse formula (vv. 4, 8) and in the ׁ] clause which supports them (v. 7; cf. Croft 1987:143). According to this description, the persecutors constitute a problem to the psalmist, as they are the ones who seek after his life (v. 4). "Seeking after one's life" in Israelite tradition is tantamount "to make an attempt on someone's life", i.e. to want to kill someone (see Exod. 4:19; 1 Sam. 20:1, 23; 23:15; 25:29; 2 Sam. 16:11; Jer. 19:7, 9; 34:20; cf. Wagner 1975:230). So, the psalmist was under the threat of being killed by these persecutors. Death is what is also implied in verse 7b, where the persecutors are said to have dug a pit for the psalmist's life.

The actions of the persecutors are furthermore described in terms

of the net which is hidden for the psalmist (vv. 7a-8). This is a metaphor of hunting (cf. Taylor 1955:164). The persecutors have set a net to entrap the innocent person. This metaphor is used elsewhere in Psalms 31:5; 57:7; 140:6 to portray the actions of the enemy against the innocent individuals (cf. above, pp. 90, 98 and below, p. 162).

The description of the threat is continued in verses 11 and 12. It involves false accusations made by the persecutors against the psalmist (cf. vv. 19-21).

The prayer and the wish of the suppliant in Psalm 35 is therefore to be liberated from the persecutors and all their actions as described above. For the psalmist this liberation would bring about joy and happiness in his life. Hence the vow of praise: "Then my soul shall rejoice in the Lord, exulting in his deliverance [תְּשִׁיחַ וְיִשְׂמְחָה לַיהוָה]. All my bones shall say, O Lord, who is like you,⁶³ One who delivers the weak [מִצַּדִּיק עַל הַיָּסוּרִים] from him who is strong for him..." (vv. 9, 10; cf. Brueggemann 1984:65; Broyles 1989:195).

Elsewhere in the Psalter the vow of praise is used especially in the individual laments at the occasion when the petitioner is assured of his deliverance or comes to learn of the reversal of his problem (cf. Pss. 6:7; 28:6). This assurance of being heard

⁶³ The phrase "Lord, who is like you" is a liturgical shout pointing to incomparability of the liberator God (see Exod. 15:11; Craigie 1983:287; Gerstenberger 1988:151).

or delivered seems also to be in the background of this psalm (cf. Westermann 1981:74).

The use of the phrase $\text{נִשְׁוַעַתוּ} \text{שִׁי} \text{נ}$ in verse 9 refers to the favourable condition which would result from God's acts of intervention on behalf of the psalmist. These results are designated here as נִשְׁוַעַת "liberation", where the psalmist would rejoice and exult. The nature of this נִשְׁוַעַת is elaborated in verse 10, where God is referred to as נִצְּאֵל עַנְי "one who delivers the weak". So, נִשְׁוַעַת in this psalm entails God's deliverance of "the weak from the strong, [$\text{נִצְּאֵל עַנְי} \text{וְאֵל עֲנִי}$] the weak and needy from him who despoils him" (v. 10b). This double formula occurs elsewhere in Psalms 35:10; 37:14; 40:18; 70:6; 74:21 86:1; 109:16, 22; cf. Lisowsky 1958:12f.). In the context of Psalm 35:10, the Hebrew concepts נִצְּאֵל עַנְי have the meaning of the oppressed and the poor (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:4, 720; see also Excursus IV below, pp. 126ff.), while the substantive נִצְּאֵל here has the sense of "one too strong for" (Brown et al 1951:305), i.e. one who abuses his strength over the weak person. And the active participle נִצְּאֵל in this verse denotes "the one who robs" or simply "the robber" (Schupphaus 1975:456f.). The idea of this verse can be understood against a background of a monarchy which has developed into a class society.⁶⁴ During this

⁶⁴ In its initial tribal form, Israel's socio-economic relations were egalitarian in the sense that the whole nation was assured of approximately equal access to basic resources by means of its organization into extended families, protective associations, and tribes, federated as an inter-tribal community. But with the beginning of the political hierarchy, introduced by the monarchy, the former communally owned means of production, vested in extended

time the monarchical institutions produced a class of officials who profited from their posts and the favours granted them by the king. Others by hard work or good luck, made profits from their lands. Prosperity was the order of the day (Is. 2:7; cf. De Vaux 1965:73). The prophets condemn their contemporaries for their lives of luxury (Am. 3:15; 5:11; 6:4; Is.16-24; 5:11-12). The wealth of the day was often badly acquired, for those who coveted fields or houses simply seized them (Mic. 2:2). The rich landlords mercilessly defrauded the poor (Am. 8:5-8; Mic. 2:1f.), and the judges received bribes (Is. 1:23; Jer. 5:28; Mic. 3:11; 7:3; see also Gelin 1964:17f.). In other words, the monarchy gave rise to a feudalism that ruthlessly exploited the small landowners and the agrarian and urban proletariat, the practice which persisted even through the exilic age (Gerstenberger 1991:31). It can therefore be said that the idea of both VW^{7} and $\text{לַל]$ here concerns with the liberation of the oppressed and the poor from oppression and exploitation.

From our investigation of the theme of liberation in Psalm 35, one understands that liberation, as expressed by the uses of the Hebrew roots VW^{7} and $\text{לַל]$, is real experience in life, which comes into realization through God's acts of deliverance of the

families, fell into the hands of a minority of state officials, merchants, and large landholders, who never constituted more than five to ten percent of the total population. Between the tenth and the early sixth centuries, the combination of domestic social conflict and imperial aggression destroyed this egalitarian social system, in both the northern and southern kingdoms (Gottwald 1976:465). On the egalitarian system of Israel, see also Ibid (1979:489-91; 547; 580-82; 694-95). A good review of Gottwald's social theories has been provided by Long (1982:252-5).

individual from any personal threat, including the persecutors and their actions, ranging from false accusations to attempts to kill. This liberation brings about joy and happiness in the life of the person who is liberated. Such joy and happiness are always expressed in the praise of God (cf. vv. 9-10, 18, 27-28; see also Pss. 22:23-27; 31:20-25; 69:31-37).

2.3.4 The Enemies as the Wicked (Ps. 71)

The idea of liberation from enemies as the wicked (רְשָׁעִים) is present in Psalm 71. This psalm can be read as a lament and petition of an individual who, being in his old age (vv. 5,6), is under persecution by personal enemies, the רְשָׁעִים "wicked" (v. 40, and is praying for deliverance from them in the place of worship or temple (cf. Weiser 1962:497f.; Dahood 1965-70:II,172; Toombs 1971:282).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Contrary to our view here is the opinion of Eaton (1976:54) and Croft (1986:44f.), who hold that Psalm 71 would appear to be a royal psalm composed for king's use when facing treachery or threats from internal enemies. Eaton and Croft interpret Psalm 71 as the royal psalm as they recognize instances of the royal address to Yahweh in verses 3 and 5. Such conclusion probably derives from the use of the Hebrew phrase צִיּוֹן מְעוֹן (v. 3), which seems to have some affinity with the wilderness of Maon where David was unexpectedly delivered from Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 23:24-26).

For us, it seems to be inappropriate to interpret Psalm 71 as a royal psalm on the basis of צִיּוֹן מְעוֹן in verse 3. This phrase in the Psalter occurs elsewhere in the community lament (Ps. 90:1) which does not show any connection with kingship. The phrase, moreover, has its synonym צִיּוֹן מְעוֹן "rock of refuge" in Psalms 31:3; 62:9, where it is not related to the king.

The presence of the idea of liberation in Psalm 71 is demonstrated by its use of the Hebrew words לְפָדוּ (vv. 2, 3, 15), לְצַל (vv. 2, 11), פָּלַט (vv. 2, 4) and פָּדָה (v. 23). If one looks at the particular words and the verses in which they occur in this psalm, one can observe that they are almost evenly distributed all over the psalm, represented in various forms of the psalm, including the petition, lament, and vow of praise, although petition appears to be predominant.

This psalm opens with the petition (vv. 1-4), which has as its main point the plea for liberation $\text{לְפָדוּ מִיַּד הַרְשָׁעִים}$ "from the hand of the wicked" (v. 4). The concern for liberation is emphasized here by the uses of three Hebrew terms for liberation, namely לְפָדוּ , which is used in its hiphil imperative form in verse 3, פָּלַט , used in hiphil imperfect in verse 2 and in piel imperative in verse 4, and לְצַל , which appears in its hiphil imperfect form in verse 2.

In verse 2 and 3, the verbs for liberation are used indefinitely without any identification of the problem from which the psalmist seeks liberation. But it is mentioned in verse 4 as $\text{לְפָדוּ מִיַּד הַרְשָׁעִים}$ "from the hand of the wicked". All the verbs for liberation, which are used in verses 2 and 3, seem to have their culmination in verse 4: the prayer is for liberation from לְפָדוּ "the wicked".

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to explore the meaning of לְפָדוּ in Psalm 71. In this psalm we find statements concerning both the characteristics and actions of the לְפָדוּ . In their characteristics, the לְפָדוּ are described as unjust and cruel (v.

4). They are denoted as both אֹיְבֵי "enemies" (v.10) and שׁוֹטְט "accusers" (v. 13).

The actions of the שׁוֹטְט, which are directed to the individual in Psalm 71, can be summarized as follows:

1. They speak concerning the psalmist (v. 10).
2. They watch for the psalmist's life, consulting together with the purpose to seize the psalmist after they have established that God has forsaken him (v. 11).
3. They seek for the hurt of the psalmist (v. 13).

It is from these actions, conducted by the people of such characteristics, as described above, the suppliant of Psalm 71 seeks to be liberated.

Elsewhere in the Psalter, the noun שׁוֹטְט is used to describe those who are guilty of hostility to God's people (Pss. 10:2; 17:13; 28:3; 55:4; 82:4; cf. Lisowsky 1958:1358f.; Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:910f.). This term applies also to those who are guilty of sin against either God or fellow human beings (Pss. 1:6; 12:9; 26:5; 50:16). The שׁוֹטְט is the wicked as opposed to צַדִּיק "righteous" (Pss. 11:5; 32:10-11; cf. Brown et al 1951:957).

Outside the Psalter this particular term is also used to describe those who are guilty of crime which is deserving punishment (Exod. 2:13; 23:1; 1 Sam. 24:14; Jer. 5:26; Prov. 17:23; Job 9:24; cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:911; see also Brown et al

1951:957). It is also the term describing murderers (Num. 35:31).

From the above instances one can observe that the term עוֹלָם refers to the wicked people or criminals within Israel, for they are being evaluated according to the Israelite standard of life, i.e. the torah, for example, in Psalms 1:6; 50:16). It is also said that they are found among God's people (Jer. 5:26). The term עוֹלָם therefore does not describe the non-Israelite enemies, as it is often the case with אֲרָמִים , but the wicked within Israel (cf. Croft 1987:19). Similarly Botha 1992:260) has pointed out that the wicked in the Psalter seem to be a segment of God's own people. In the Psalter, the wicked (עוֹלָם), while they are mentioned in the same breath as the גוֹיִם "nations" (Ps. 9:6, 18, are said to recite God's commandments and to profess the covenant (Ps. 50:16) and even to pray (Ps. 109:7). The impression is given that they are mostly Israelites who should know better, but nevertheless transgress the commandments (Ps. 119:53), borrow without returning (Ps. 37:21), lie (Ps. 58:4) and make unfair profits (Ps. 10:3). They do these since they have no respect for God (Ps. 36:2; see Botha 1992:260).

We can therefore conclude here that liberation in Psalm 71 entails deliverance from the עוֹלָם - the wicked in Israel. It is from those who, like enemies and accusers, seek to hurt and endanger the life of the individual, the suppliant in this psalm sought liberation in petition.

2.3.5 The Enemies as the Accusers (Ps. 109)

The thought of liberation from the enemies as accusers features in Psalm 109, where it is underlined by the Hebrew term $\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$, used in the petition (v. 21), and $\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$, occurring in the petition (v. 26) as well as in the praise (v. 31). In both verses, the psalmist asks God to deliver ($\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$, v. 21) and liberate ($\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$, v. 26) him, because and according to his $\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$ "steadfast love". The problem from which the psalmist asks God to deliver or liberate him is not mentioned in the particular verses, but it is named in verses 20 and 29 as $\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$. This word is the gal participle form of the Hebrew verb $\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$ "to be hostile", "to oppose", or "to accuse" (cf. Davidson 1970:710). Thus in its present form, this word can mean "those who oppose me", or "those who accuse me". The word is derived from the same root with the verb $\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$ "they accuse me" in verse 4, as well as the noun form $\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$ "accuser" in verse 6.

So, in the light of the occurrences of the root $\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$ in verses 4, 20 and 29, one can notice that the accusers who are mentioned in the latter verses are the same people whose actions are described in the opening lament (vv. 2-5). In these verses the accusers and their attitudes towards the psalmist are portrayed as those who, by their wicked and deceitful mouths and lying tongues, speak against him, besetting him with words of hate, attacking him without cause and accuse ($\text{לצ}[\text{ל}]$) him, in spite of him doing them good and even praying for them when they were troubled.

The hostile attitudes and actions of the accuser are furthermore described in the curse formula of verses 6-20.⁶⁶ These can be summarized as follows: The ךוּו "accuser" did not remember to show רַחֲמֵי "kindness" i.e. his obligations towards other members of the community (cf. Anderson 1972:763), but he pursued רַב־צָרָה וְעָנָו "the poor and needy", i.e. he exploited them (v. 16; cf. Brueggemann 1984:83).⁶⁷ He did not bless, but curse (v. 17-18).

From the contents of verses 22-25, it is clear that the psalmist is not an observer of the evil actions of the accuser, as described above, but himself is one of the victims of such hostile attitudes (cf. Brueggemann (1984:84). In these verses the psalmist identifies himself with the רַב־צָרָה וְעָנָו "poor and needy" (v. 22), just as he is mentioned in verse 16 (cf. Anderson 1972:763). He furthermore portrays a sorry picture of himself: "my heart is stricken within me. I am gone... my body has become gaunt" (vv. 23-25).

In the light of the accusers' actions as well as of the condition of the psalmist, as portrayed in the text of Psalm 109, one is

⁶⁶ Some scholars seem to be not clear with the pronunciation of the curse in verse 6-20, as they have taken it to be the words of the psalmist where he repeats before God the imprecations which his accusers have uttered against him (so, Weiser 1962:690; Toombs 1971:292). While others regard this curse formula as the words whereby the psalmist calls down upon his adversaries the very evils they hurl at him (cf. McCullough 1955:582; Allen 1983:77; Brueggemann 1984:83f.; Croft 1987:32). The last opinion appears to be most appropriate, especially when seen in the light of verse 20.

⁶⁷ For detailed discussion on רַב־צָרָה וְעָנָו see, Excursus IV below, pp. 125ff.

led to take this psalm as a lament and prayer of a person who is falsely accused, the setting of which fits into the context of what is described in 1 Kings 8:31-32 (cf. Weiser 1962:690; Anderson 1972:758; Allen 1983:75f.; Croft 1987:32; Day 1990:27).

So, being faced with the situation where he is falsely accused and maltreated by his accusers, the psalmist asks God for his deliverance and liberation: כִּי-טוֹב חַסְדְּךָ הַצִּילֵנִי "Because your steadfast love is good, deliver me" (v. 21b), and הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי חַסְדְּךָ "liberate me according to your steadfast love" (v. 26b). Having based his petitions on God's חַסְדְּךָ "steadfast love",⁶⁸ the psalmist praises God as he anticipates him (God) to liberate (וַשִּׁיעַ) him from his accusers, "those who condemn him to death" (v. 31).

2.4 Liberation from Oppression (Ps. 55)

Up to this point, in this chapter, we have discussed only the idea of liberation from the enemies of various identities and dispositions. But under this heading we will explore the concept of liberation in connection with the problem of oppression. In the community laments, for example, Psalm 44:24-27 was cited as a passage where the people expressed their need for liberation from oppression. In the individual laments, too, the idea of liberation from oppression can be found. This can be traced, for example, in Psalm 55.

⁶⁸ On חַסְדְּךָ see above, pp. 93f.

In Psalm 55, this particular idea can be derived from the lament elements (vv. 3-9, 10c-15), and confession of trust (vv. 17-20), where the Hebrew terms ױײׁ (v. 17) and ײׁ are used. In the laments of verses 3b-6 and 10c-15 the suppliant describes the nature of the trouble from which he is suffering. The trouble is specified, among others, by the Hebrew terms ײׁ (v.4) and ײׁ (v. 12). The term ײׁ derives from the verb ײׁ , meaning "to press", or "to cause to totter" (cf. Brown et al 1951:734; Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:690), and as a noun, the term can mean "pressure" (cf. Lisowsky 1958:1109), "oppression", or "affliction" (cf. Davidson 1970:592). The term is used in Psalm 55:4 in its sense of oppression (cf. Gesenius 1979:649).⁶⁹ Thus in verse 4 the psalmist complains about the pressure or oppression which is afflicted upon him by the enemies.

In parallel to the idea of ײׁ is the concept ײׁ (v. 12), the noun form of the verb ײׁ which has the sense of "oppress" or "treading under foot" as of wine (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:1028). In its noun form this word can also mean "oppression" as it occurs elsewhere in Psalm 10:7 where it is associated with the wicked (Brown et al 1951:1067; Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:1028).

⁶⁹ The ISV and some commentaries such as Dahood (1965-70:II,28) translate the word ײׁ as "stare", identifying it with the Ugaritic 'q "eyeball" to match it with ײׁ "voice" (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,32). But this word is construct form of the Hebrew noun ײׁ "pressure", which is derived from the Aramaic root ײׁ (cf. also Briggs 1960:II,27).

To the suppliant of Psalm 55, such oppression, which is designated in Hebrew as $\eta\eta\gamma$ and $\eta\eta$, and is inflicted upon people by the $\eta\eta\gamma$ (v. 4), was so terrible like the death itself that he wished to have wings as a dove so that he might fly away and be at rest (vv. 5-9; cf. Anderson 1972:278; Gerstenberger 1991:224). The impact of this oppression was not only felt by the psalmist alone, but it has escalated throughout the whole city, including its market places (vv. 11-12; cf. Weiser 1962:419).

The question which may be raised here is: who are the perpetrators of this oppression? It seems that the oppressive schemes which are described in Psalm 55 were not conducted by the foreign enemies, but by the local Israelites (cf. Croft 1987:44; Bellinger 1984:42). This is evidenced by the contents of verses 13-15: "It is not an enemy who taunts me - then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me - then I could hide from him. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to hold sweet converse together; within God's house we walked in fellowship" (vv. 13-15). These kind of instances can be found elsewhere in Psalms 31:11; 35:11ff; 69:8, 20f.; 88:8, 18. From here it can be surmised that the enemies of this kind were the Israelites who no longer abide according to the torah, which is also the case in Psalm 55, for the $\eta\eta\gamma$ here do not keep torah (v.20).

So, Psalm 55, in general, reflects the corruption of the society where the rich and the powerful oppress and exploit the weak and

the poor.⁷⁰ Under such circumstances of oppression, the psalmist confesses his trust that God will liberate him (יִוָּשֶׁעַנִּי; v. 17) and deliver his soul in safety (פָּרָה כְּשֵׁלֹם נַפְשִׁי; v. 19).

2.5 Liberation from Sickness, Death, and Sheol

Here we will examine the concept of liberation in connection with sickness, death and Sheol, as some of the major problems in the lives of the worshippers about which they lodged their complaints before God and asked him for liberation from them.

2.5.1 Liberation from Sickness (Ps. 6)

One who reads Psalm 6 will not fail to observe how the theme of liberation is strongly reflected in its 5th verse, which uses both verbs וַיִּוָּשֶׁעַ and יִלְחֹץ. In order to analyze the theme of liberation in this psalm properly, one needs first to have a glance on its setting.

The key to the setting of Psalm 6 is in verse 3 and, to some extent, verses 6-8. These verses show that the psalmist is sick (cf. Taylor 1955:39f.; Dahood 1965-70:I,38; Bellinger 1984:44). This psalm seems to have been used as a prayer of sickness during the healing ritual (1 Kings 14:1-3; 2 Kings 4:18-36; 5:11; cf. also Gerstenberger 1991:62). The idea that this psalm is concerned with the suppliant's illness is also partly recognized

⁷⁰ On the description of economic situation in Israel see above, pp. 99f.

by Weiser (1962:130), and Croft (1987:136) as they see in it the concern for both the suppliant's illness and other forms of danger, particularly enemies. But Croft (ibid) concludes that Psalm 6 has been composed as a general formula to be sung on behalf of suppliants in a wide variety of circumstances in need of a favourable answer from Yahweh.

The hostility of the enemies cannot be the main ground for this lament. The position of the enemies in this psalm is explained by Kirkpatrick in the following summary: "The psalmist has been suffering from severe and long-continued sickness, which has brought him to the brink of a grave. The most bitter part is that he feels it to be a token of God's displeasure; and malicious enemies aggravate his suffering by taunting him with being forsaken by God" (1951:25).

In this psalm, the suppliant having expressed his need and distressful feelings in the introductory petition and lament (v. 2-4), reiterates his petition once more in verse 5, where he makes use of the imperative forms of the Hebrew verbs YV ' "liberate" and $\text{Y}^{\text{L}}\text{N}$ "deliver". These verbs are used here in connection with the problem which is already raised in the preceding verse, viz. the psalmist's languishing condition and his troubled bones and soul (vv. 3, 4).

The question which may be posed here is: what is the nature of this problem? This can be discovered through the investigation of verse 3. In the first place, this verse presents the problem

as אֲנִי אֶמְלֵךְ rendered "for I am languishing" In the RSV. The term אֶמְלֵךְ is the Hebrew adjective of the verb אָמַל , which can mean "to languish" (cf. Lisowsky 1958:107), but also "to be sick" (cf. Davidson 1970:32). This term is used in the sense of being sick elsewhere in Ezekiel 16:30. Its meaning of sickness suits well in the context of this psalm. This is supported by the uses of the Hebrew term עֲצָמוֹתַי "my bones" (cf. Gerstenberger 1979:648) which are said to have been troubled (הִתְהַלְּלוּ) as well as the qal imperfect רַפֵּאנִי "heal me" in this same verse. In the Psalter the Hebrew noun עָצָם , from which the construct form עֲצָמוֹתַי derives, occurs in Psalms 38:4, where it is used in parallel with בָּשָׂר "flesh" or "body" Cf. Brown et al 1951:142). Such parallel usage occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament (Gen 2:5; 29:14; 2 Sam. 4:1; 19:13; Job 2:5) which indicates that עָצָם denotes the whole physical organism of the living human being (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:728).

So, in the context of Psalm 6, the suppliant by the construct form עֲצָמוֹתַי means his whole physical body. It is his physical being which was sick (אֶמְלֵךְ , v. 3). The view that this psalmist was suffering from physical sickness is also supported by his request for healing רַפֵּאנִי "heal me" (v. 3). This Hebrew verb derives from the root רָפָא "to heal", which is frequently used in the Old Testament in connection with physical healing (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:903; Davidson 19870:689). In the Psalter this verb is, for instance, used in connection with healing from illness (Ps. 41:4; cf. 30:2) and wounds (Ps. 147:3. Outside the Psalter this word is used with reference to the healing of human

beings from tumours (1 Sam. 6:3), wounds (2 Kings 8:29; Is. 19:22; Job 5:18), bodily injury (Exod. 21:19) and skin disease (Lev. 13:18, 32; cf. Brown et al 1951:950).

Although we cannot be precise about the nature of the problem from which the suppliant of Psalm 6 looked for liberation, our investigation of the content of 3 reveals that this individual was suffering from physical illness of a certain nature. This psalmist, having been subjected to such illness, he uses the imperative forms of the verbs לְשׁוּבָה "liberate" and לְיָדָיִךְ "deliver" in his petition with the purpose to achieve what he has already prayed for by the verb לְרַפְּאֵךְ (v. 3), namely healing. The results of לְשׁוּבָה and לְרַפְּאֵךְ , "to liberate" and "to heal" are thus understood here to be one and the same.⁷¹ The health of the body is in itself the sign of liberation in the same way as liberation embraces health. The combination of liberation and health occurs elsewhere in Jeremiah 17:14, where לְשׁוּבָה and לְרַפְּאֵךְ are used in parallel.

From this consideration one can conclude that liberation as designated by its Hebrew terms לְשׁוּבָה and לְיָדָיִךְ in Psalm 6, is something which involves deliverance from sickness (cf. Fohrer 1971:976). As such it is a provision of health to humanity - without it one dies and goes to Sheol (v. 6; cf. Pedersen 1973:332).

⁷¹ In the same way Mbon maintains that "deliverance in Psalm 6 for the psalmist, then, is equivalent to physical healing or restoration" (1992:6).

Apart from sickness, the suppliant of Psalm 6 does also complain about his foes (אֹיְבָבָי, v. 8) and enemies (אֹיְבָבָי, v. 11). But, as we have already indicated in the setting of this psalm, these appear not to be the main problem in this lament. The enemies here seem to be the people who have reacted negatively to the psalmist's sickness like the friends of Job (cf. Mbon 1982:7). The whole problem of this psalmist would be over in a moment once God responds to his prayer for liberation from sickness through the restoration of his health (cf. vv. 10-11).

In concluding our discussion on this aspect, we must state here that liberation in the Psalter does not only involve deliverance from enemies and their actions but it also comprises healing from sickness.

2.5.2 Liberation from Death and Sheol (Ps. 56, 86)

Among the psalms of individual lament, the idea of liberation from death and Sheol is presupposed in Psalms 56 and 86. We will discuss these psalms in turn.

(a) Psalm 56

In this psalm we find the Hebrew terms for liberation פָּלַט (v. 8)⁷² and אֶלַּי (v.14) used in connection with death (מוֹת). Here

⁷² The Hebrew text פִּלְטוּ-לָמוֹן אֶל-אֹיְבָבָי poses a lot of difficulties in translation (cf. "recompense..." in the RSV and "shall they escape" in the KJV). But the normal usage should be אֶלַּי מִן "deliver from", instead of אֶלַּי "deliver unto" (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,42).

liberation from death constitutes the basis or motif of the vow of praise: *כִּי הִצַּלְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמּוֹת* "For thou hast delivered my soul from death" (v. 14; cf. Westermann 1981:71; Gerstenberger 1991:226).⁷³ This vow of praise is said in response to the petition and laments of verses 2-3 and 6-7, which have been heard or ascertained of being heard. Elsewhere in the Psalter declarative praise for the sake of being delivered from death can be traced in Psalms 18:5, 6; 68:21; 116:3, 8 and in the confession of trust (Ps. 9:14).

In Psalm 56 death, from which the psalmist has been delivered seems to have been brought about by the enemies who oppressed him (v. 2), trampled upon him (v. 3) and even waited for his life (*יִשְׁפַּךְ לִי קַיִן*, v. 7). The verb *קַיִן* "to wait for", "hope in", "lie in wait for" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:830; Davidson 1970:656), or "conspire" (Dahood 1965-70:II,43, as used in connection with *שָׁמַר* in Psalm 56:7, carries the idea of watching for the opportunity to take one's life, i.e. to kill him (cf. Ps. 119:95; Ezek. 22:27; see also Kirkpatrick 1951:318). So, the psalmist being under such threat of death, he cried to God for deliverance, and he is assured of this (v. 14).

Deliverance or liberation from death, as indicated in the confession of trust (v. 10) would only be realized when the

So, we have adopted the proposal of Dahood (ibid) that this verse should read: "from their malice deliver us".

⁷³ On the use of the "vow of praise" in the psalms see above, pp. 19f. and 76f.

enemies who are the cause of death are turned back (𐤓𐤓), i.e. when they are discomfited (cf. Taylor 1955:295).

At this point we need to briefly look at the general understanding of death in the Old Testament. The view of death as presupposed in the Old Testament is quite different from modern biological concepts. We determine the state of being dead at the moment of the extinction of physical life. The people of the Old Testament too are aware of the brevity and frailty of human life (Pss. 90:3-10; 103:14-15). But unlike us, for them death's domain reached further into the realm of the living (cf. Von Rad 1975:I,387). Death is regarded as working in us now, during our historical experience. Its power is felt in the form of sickness, imprisonment, oppression by the enemies and any threats to a person's welfare (cf. Anderson 1983:122).

Death represents the utmost degree of uncleanness (Num. 9:6; 19:11, 16, 18, 31:19). The uncleanness issuing from the dead infected not only human beings in the vicinity of the dead person, but things as well (Lev. 11:33ff.; cf. Von Rad 1975:I,276). But worse than this, death separates one from the communion with God, because the dead is outside the province of God's worship (Ps. 88:11-13). In death there is no remembrance of God or the praise of God (Ps. 6:6).⁷⁴ There is no profit in

⁷⁴ Contrary to this view, the religion of ancient Egypt had happy ideas about the happy state of the dead: "the sleepers all together praise thy beauty when the light of thy countenance beams forth.... Dost thou pay no heed to them, then darkness veils them, and each lies once more in his coffin" (Erman, A. 1927. Literature of the Ancient Egyptians, London, quoted in Von Rad

death as the dust cannot praise God (Ps. 30:10). In other words, death was regarded as a disturbance of one's relationship to God in life (cf. Von Rad 1980:198). Thus deliverance from death is liberation from the power of destruction⁷⁵ which interferes with one's living relationship with God (cf. Kraus 1986:166f.). Hence the worshipper of Psalm 56 says: "For thou hast delivered my soul from death, yea, my feet from falling that I may walk before God in the light of life" (v. 14). In the same mood the singer of Psalm 118:17 cries out: "I shall not die, but I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord". So, the purpose for liberation from death, as we see it here, is to live and praise God.

(b) Psalm 86

In Psalm 86 the theme of liberation can be detected from the use of $\text{V}\Psi^{\text{v}}$ in verses 2 and 16, as well as in the use of $\text{L}\Psi\text{J}$ in verse 13. Verses 2 and 16 in which $\text{V}\Psi^{\text{v}}$ is occurring are the elements of the introductory and concluding petitions (vv. 1-7 and 16-17).

1975:I,369).

⁷⁵ In the Canaanite mythology which has profoundly influenced the Old Testament portrayals of death, *Mot* (Death) was regarded as a God in his own right - the powerful king of the underworld. According to Ugaritic mythological literature from about 1400 BC, *Mot* seeks to extend his kingdom over the earth and thereby challenges the authority of *El*, the father of the gods. However, the youthful storm-god, known as *Aleyn Baal*, takes up the challenge and wins a great victory over *Mot* whereupon *Baal* is enthroned as king (cf. Beyerlin 1978:212-4, 217-20; Anderson 1983:125). In the psalms death is a power that reaches out greedily to lay hold of the living, a deposed king whose shadowy kingdom encroaches upon the historical world, an enemy that stands in opposition to the purpose of God (cf. Barth 1966:49-55; Lloyd 1979)

While verse 13, where לַצִּל is employed constitutes the motif of praise or thanksgiving (v. 12-13; cf. Murphy 1968:591). In both verses 2 and 16 the suppliant prays for liberation, using the hiphil imperative form of לָצַד while describing himself as עַבְדְּךָ and $\text{בֶּן־תַּלְמִידֶיךָ}$, God's "servant and son of his handmaid", denoting his closer relationship to God (cf. Gen 14:14; also Kirkpatrick 1951:518).

Both verses 2 and 16 do not supply us with the information regarding the nature of the problem from which the suppliant seeks to be liberated. The information concerning the nature of this problem is provided in the basis of the declarative praise (v. 13) and in the lament (v. 14). Verse 13, in the form of thanksgiving (cf. Weiser 1962:578; Dahood 165-70:II,86), uses the Hebrew term for liberation, לַצִּל , with reference to the deliverance of the suppliant's soul from Sheol: "For great is thy steadfast love (רַחֲמֶיךָ) toward me; thou hast delivered (לַצִּל) my soul from the depths of Sheol".⁷⁶

Psalm 86 does not provide us with clear information as to whether the deliverance concerned is already experienced in the past or is anticipated. But what is evident is that this particular deliverance is from the factors which can lead one's soul (נַפְשִׁי) to Sheol. These factors may be those mentioned in the lament (v. 14), viz. $\text{אֲנָשִׁים בְּרִיָּה$ "insolent" or "presumptuous men" (cf. Brown et al 1951:267; Day 1991:23), who are designated here as $\text{אֲנָשִׁים בְּרִיָּה}$

⁷⁶ For the meaning of Sheol see Excursus III below this section.

"ruthless men" or "violent men" (cf. Lisowsky 1958:1114) seeking the life of the psalmist. To seek one's life in the Old Testament, as we have noted earlier, implies plotting to commit murder. So, death by the hands of these presumptuous men seems to be the factor which would lead the psalmist's נַפְשׁוֹ "soul" to Sheol. The implication of the idea in this context may be that to be delivered from the cause of death is tantamount to be delivered from death and Sheol itself. Hence in verses 12-13 the psalmist expresses his gratitude towards God for such deliverance.

The idea of liberation in Psalm 86, as our investigation reveals, concerns the deliverance of the soul of the individual from the factors which can lead to the sphere of the underworld, known in Hebrew as Sheol.

Excursus III: The Concept of Sheol in the Old Testament

For the people of the Old Testament the world was thought of as surrounded on all sides by "the waters of chaos" which at the time of creation, Yahweh conquered and pushed back in order to give creatures space in which to live and to perform their God-given task (Gen. 1:1-2:3). The earth is depicted as a kind of island suspended over the waters of the "deep", and beyond the great blue dome overhead are waters of the heavenly ocean which unless held back by the protective barrier of the firmament would flood the world with chaos (cf. Pedersen 1973:I-II,470ff.; Anderson 1983:122). Within the "deep" (אֲבוֹתַי)⁷⁷ is located Sheol, the realm of the dead (cf. Day 1990:130). Here the dead gather, lying on their beds of worms and corruption (cf. Pedersen 1973:I-II,460).

(i) The Characteristics of Sheol

Sheol is the deepest place in the universe (Is. 7:11; 57:9; Prov. 9:18), It was the home of the departed, a realm from

⁷⁷ On the concept אֲבוֹתַי "deep" see above, p. 29f.

which there is no return (2 Sam. 12:23; Job 7:9; 10:21; 16:22; Ps. 88:9). Moreover, Sheol is described as the place that is cut off from Yahweh: "In death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give you praise?" (Ps. 6:6). Just as for the Old Testament faith, praise is the characteristic mode of life, so too the silencing of praise is the characteristic of Sheol, the realm of death (Pss. 30:9; 88:11-12; 115:17; Is. 38:18-19; cf. Kraus 1986:165),. The realm of the dead is the home of evil. There illness and plagues belong (Hos. 13:14). It is filled with misfortune, pain and trouble (Ps. 116:3; cf. Pedersen 1973:I-II,462). Common to Sheol is also darkness (cf. Otzen 1980:33). Job describes it as the "land of gloom and deep darkness" (Job 10:21f., 18:18; see also Ps. 88:7). The dead are those who do not see light (Ps. 49:20). It is characterized by weakness and helplessness (Ps. 88:5f.). And here lies the bitterness of death (cf. Von Rad 1975:276; Day 1990:130f.).⁷⁸

(ii) The Relationship between Sheol and Grave

Often the words "grave" or "pit" are used as synonymous for Sheol (Pss. 16:10; 88:88:6; see also Gen. 37:35; 47:30). So the ideas of grave and Sheol cannot be separated, for grave is the opening of the depths of Sheol in to the world (cf. Kraus 1986:166). Sheol as Pedersen (1973:I-II,462) describes it, is the entirety into which all graves are merged. All graves have certain common characteristics constituting the nature of the grave, and that is Sheol. So for Pedersen (ibid) Sheol, is the "Ur" grave, belongs deep down under the earth, but it manifests itself in every single grave. Where there is grave, there is Sheol, and where there is Sheol, there is grave.

Obviously, to fall into the sphere of Sheol was a terrible fate for the people of the Old Testament (cf. Day 1990:131). Hence the psalms are full of allusions to the desire for liberation from Sheol and thanksgivings which are given for deliverance from death. He who is struck by evil, by unhappiness, disease or other trouble is in Sheol (Ps. 88), and when he escapes from the misery, then he has escaped from Sheol (Ps. 30:3-5; cf. Pedersen 1973:I-II:466). When God intervenes, his grace is acknowledged with gratitude: "O thou who liftest me up from the gates of Sheol" (Ps. 9:13). Here the "gates of Sheol" are the entrance to Sheol, which has made an incursion deep into the realm of life (cf, Kraus 1986:166). In other psalms such as 18, to which we will return later (cf. below, p. 162f.), Sheol is pictured as the watery abyss that "hunts" man (cf. Murphy 1968:578). It is thus described in terms of

⁷⁸ In Mesopotamian sources is found an account of the city of the dead, with its walls, towers, and gates from which there was no escape. This city was one of unrelieved desolation and gloom (cf. Keel 1978:63).

mythical language appropriated from the Canaanites (cf. Beyerslin 1978:203, 212-20; Anderson 1983:124; Day 185:122-5).

2.6 Liberation from Sin (Ps. 39)

In Psalm 39, the idea of liberation is expressed in verse 9, the context of which shows that this psalm is a cry of an individual who attributes his suffering as the sign of God's chastisement upon him (vv. 10-12). The psalmist turns to God to be delivered (לצ) not merely from his suffering but מכל פשעי, from all his transgressions (v. 9) which he recognizes as its cause. We do not know the exact nature of this פשע, from which the psalmist asked to be delivered. But what can be derived from this passage and elsewhere in the Old Testament is the fact that sin, either by its designation as פשע (v. 9) or חטא (v. 12), is believed to have resulted in suffering (Jud. 6:1-10; 13:1-5; Jer. 25:1-14; Ps. 40:12; Job 8:4; 33:9; cf. Ringgren 1963:66f; Fohrer 1973:194; Pedersen 1973:433ff.). This can also be learned from the general concept of sin in the Old Testament, as summarized by Devries: "The general belief in the OT is that Yahweh holds all men accountable to him for their sin, it is also he who brings their penalty upon them" (1962:366).

It is for the above reason that the prominent terms for sin such as חטא and חטא in the Old Testament involve penalty. When Cain cries out: "My חטא is greater than I can bear" (Gen 4:13), it is the punishment of his crime that troubles him, not the evil deed in itself. The fire and brimstone which rains down upon Sodom is

called the רָיָל of the city" (Gen. 19:15). Aaron pleads with Moses: "Oh, my lord, do not lay כּוֹלֵךְ upon us because we have done foolishly and (לְכָל־אֶרֶץ) have sinned" (Num. 12:11; cf. Devries 1962:367). In other words, sin as an act was believed to have its consequences, i.e., punishment which had destructive effects on the individual and community alike (cf. Von Rad 1975:266). This punishment falls upon humans as sickness (cf. Harrison 1962:848ff.), and suffering of all sorts (cf. Eichrodt 1961:I,378-381). So the main problem here is not sin or transgression itself, but the physical suffering which the people experience.⁷⁹ It was therefore crucial for the suppliant of Psalm 39 to ask God for deliverance from sin, for by this he would also be liberated from its consequences, i.e. suffering.

The prayer for liberation from sin and its consequences occurs elsewhere in the Psalter in Psalm 51:16, where the worshipper asks to be delivered (לְצַדִּיק) from bloodguiltiness (דָּמַיִם). The idea that God can liberate from sin and thereby from its consequences is also traceable in Psalms 79:9; 119:170 (cf. Brown et al 1951:665; see also Brown 1963B:360; Sawyer 1990:462).

As we have seen in our investigation of Psalm 39, the concept of liberation in the Psalter applies also to deliverance from sin which is understood as one of the main causes of physical sufferings such as oppression and persecution by the enemies, sickness and other distresses

⁷⁹ Cf. our discussion on "liberation from God's anger" above pp. 41-52.

2.7 Characteristics Deserving Liberation (Ps. 26, 40)

In our discussion of the other psalms we have mentioned the people who sought or experienced liberation from various problems. These people show certain characteristics which made them deserving of liberation. These characteristics, as we will observe, include particularly being innocent, righteous, poor and needy. Our analysis will begin here with Psalm 26 and conclude with Psalm 40.

(a) Psalm 26

Psalm 26 is taken by Dahood (1965-70:I,161) as the lament of the person who was accused of idol-worship. This kind of view is maintained by a number of commentators, including Weiser (1962:242) and Murphy (1968:580) who see the setting of this psalm against a background of what is described in 1 Kings 8:31-32, the lament of a person who has been unjustly accused which was utilized in the context of the temple trial. This view corresponds with the content of this psalm. Throughout Psalm 26 the suppliant asserts his innocence, using various expressions, e.g. כַּתְּמִי הִלְכָתִי "I have walked in my integrity" (vv. 1, 11); הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּאֵמֶתְךָ "I walk in faithfulness to you" (v. 3) and אֶרְחֹץ בְּנִיְקִי וְנִפְי "I wash my hands in innocence" (v. 6; cf. Weiser 1962:242ff.; Croft 1987:29). By these expressions the psalmist declares his innocence as deserving of God's redemption. It is on the ground of his innocence that he approaches God with a petition that he would be delivered (פָּרָה) by him (v. 11).

So, the characteristics of $\square\square$ (v. 1), i.e. "guileless" or "integrity" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:1030) and $\square\square\square$ "innocence" (v. 6), i.e. freedom from guilt (cf. Ps. 73:13; Gen. 20:5; cf. Brown et al 1951:667) are taken here as the qualities which make the individual entitled for liberation.

Elsewhere in the Psalter, to walk in integrity ($\square\square\square$) secures a person for God's help and protection (Pss. 25:21; 41:13). This idea is also found in Proverbs where to walk in integrity enables a person to enjoy God's protection (Prov. 2:7) and blessing (Prov. 20:7; cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:1030).

Similar to the idea of $\square\square$ and $\square\square\square$, in connection with $\square\square\square$, is the concept of $\square\square\square$ in relationship with $\square\square\square$ "the righteous" whom God would provide with liberation (cf. below, pp. 172ff.)

In the case of the suppliant of Psalm 26, he sees himself to have the right to be liberated, not because he knows how to pray, but it is because of his integrity, faithfulness and innocence before God.

(b) Psalm 40

Psalm 40 is another text where the characteristics which deserve liberation can be traced. This psalm employs the Hebrew terms for liberation in various places, but the key answer to the question about who is qualified for liberation is located in the confession of trust: "as for me, I am poor and needy [$\square\square\square$]

but the Lord takes thought for me" (v. 18), which concludes this psalm. This verse is recognized by Gerstenberger (1991:173) as that which gives the express intention of the whole psalm. Here the psalmist describes himself as poor and needy, the characteristics which he presents here as the ground for his liberation, already requested in the petition of verse 14 and underlined through the predication of God as מַלְאָכִי "my deliverer" in verse 18.

So, אֶבְיָוֹן וְצָרָה "poor and needy" are taken here as the personal qualities which secures a person for the help and liberation of God. The self-description אֶבְיָוֹן וְצָרָה "poor and needy" is replete with meaning (see Excursus IV below, pp. 126ff). The concept of being poor and needy as the characteristics deserving of God's liberation is not unique to Psalm 40. This same idea occurs also in Psalms 70:6; 86:1; 109:22 and 140:13. Elsewhere in the Psalter, the favourite object of God's מַלְאָכִי "liberation" are the אֶבְיָוֹן "poor" (Pss. 12:6; 18:28; 69:30; 76:10) and צָרָה "needy" (Ps. 109:31), for God hears and liberates the poor one who cries to him out of all his troubles (Ps. 34:6; cf. Ps. 86:1). This aspect can also be learned from the book of Jeremiah, where the prophet identifies himself as one of the poor: "Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy [צָרָה] from the hand of evildoers" (Jer. 20:13; cf. Gunkel 1967:34).

In our investigation of Psalms 26 and 40, it has become clear that the people who are recognized as deserving of liberation, by its various Hebrew designations, are those who walk in

integrity, the innocent, the righteous, and the poor and needy.

Excursus IV: The Concept of Poor and Needy in the Psalms

In Old Testament scholarship the meaning of the Hebrew terms for the poor, as those of the "enemies", has received considerable discussion. Much of the debate has concentrated on the relationship between the two terms 'JY "poor and 'JY "afflicted" (cf. Croft 1987:49).

The detailed investigation of these concepts was provided by A. Rahlfs (1892), who held that 'JY as well as 'J and 'J'K in pre-exilic times referred to poverty in the sense of material deprivation, but that mainly through the influence of the prophets and the exile the term 'JY became almost identical with the term 'JY (cf. Wittenberg 1982B:1). Subsequently, Rahlfs maintained that the 'JY "the humble" were a party within Israel a specific group of committed followers of Yahweh (cf. Kraus 1986:150), who were opposed and persecuted by another party, the 'YV' "evildoers" (cf. Excursus II above, p. 94ff.; Wittenberg 1982B:1). This theory has influenced many psalm commentators, for example B. Duhm, R. Kittel, W. Staerk, and H. Gunkel (cf. Clements 1983:98; Kraus 1986:150; Coetzee 1992:161).

The first attack on the principle behind the theory of Rahlfs was launched by Mowinckel in his *Psalmenstudien* I of 1921 (cf. Mowinckel 1962:II,25). For him the terms 'JY are not to be regarded as having developed a common religious emphasis in virtue of the party strife of post-exilic Judaism, but denote the condition and the characteristic of the one who is afflicted or bowed down by illness or other form of social oppression (cf. Johnson 1951:198; Anderson 1965:66:23f.; Wittenberg 1982B:1). Mowinckel later restated his opinion. In his "Psalms in Israel's Worship", for example he came to maintain that the terms 'JY, 'JY and 'J'K do not indicate "parties", but they refer to "Israel", the people and the congregation themselves, who are "weak" and "helpless" and "poor". and "wretched" and actually "suffering" in relation to powerful pagan enemies and oppressors (cf. Ibid 1962:II,91). Although Mowinckel seems to have recognized the social or political connotations of the particular terms, he still spiritualized them as for him these terms sometimes imply the "humble", who are patiently waiting for the help of Yahweh (cf. Ibid).

The decisive corrective to the party theory of Rahlfs was given by Birkeland who (as cited by Johnson 1951:201f.), undertook a careful re-examination of the use of the terms 'JY and 'JY in the Psalter. Birkeland, while regarding 'JY as probably no more than corruption of 'JY and rejecting the view that 'JY had a religious connotation from the

first, accepted Mowinckel's idea that the terms in the Psalter do not reflect the party strife which came to a head in post-exilic Judaism (cf. Ibid 1951:201). For Birkeland the "afflicted" (אָפֶּטֶחַ) are the people of Israel as a whole, who see themselves opposed to the nation's enemies, the foreigners, and the affliction is war, or (in some instances) the illness of the king (cf. Anderson 1965-6:26f.).

A recent comprehensive examination of this problem has been done by Carl Schultz (1973), who concludes, against Birkeland, that the two words אָפֶּטֶחַ and אָפֶּטֶחַ are different in origin and meaning. For him אָפֶּטֶחַ does not refer to a party, but is a group term for the faithful in Israel, while אָפֶּטֶחַ merely describes a person in any kind of affliction (cf. Croft 1987:50f.).

Up to this point we can say that scholars have attempted to solve the problem of the identity of the "poor" in the psalms, but as we have seen, they seem to have emphasized the religious or spiritual meanings of the Hebrew terms for "poor" and neglected their socio-economic dimensions. These particular terms have social and economic connotations, an aspect which seems to have been taken into account by some of the most recent scholars. Socio-ec

One of the most recent scholars who underlines the social and economic meanings of the Hebrew terms for "poor" is Wittenberg (1982B). He focuses especially on the formula אָפֶּטֶחַ וְאֶבְיָוֹן "the poor and the needy", investigating its uses in the psalms and other passages of the Old Testament, among others Proverbs 31:1-9; Amos and Jeremiah 22. Wittenberg concludes that it would be wrong to deny any socio-economic relevance to the formula אָפֶּטֶחַ וְאֶבְיָוֹן in psalms, even where the religious overtones are strong, and to characterize the suppliant simply as afflicted and in need of help as Birkeland has done (cf. Ibid 1982B:12). His arguments can be summarized as follows:

(1) The אָפֶּטֶחַ וְאֶבְיָוֹן is somebody who is in a court case and is in danger of losing his right because he is too poor and too dependent on others to be able to defend himself. אָפֶּטֶחַ וְאֶבְיָוֹן

(2) The double form אָפֶּטֶחַ וְאֶבְיָוֹן in Proverbs 31 and Psalm 72 refers to those who are economically deprived, the poor, widows and orphans who depended on the king's protection and administration of justice

(3) In Amos, for example, the terms for "poor" viz. אָפֶּטֶחַ, אָבְיָוֹן and אֶבְיָוֹן refer to the Israelite peasants who, through economic misfortunes and exploitation, have become impoverished and dependent on rich landowners.

(4) The formula is used by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel with reference to socially and economically poor.

(5) The vocabulary of poverty started to be linked with religious values only after the temple was destroyed. Yet even in post-exilic times the formula לְעָנִי וְלְעָרֵב did not lose its primary socio-economic connotation.

Another recent scholar who also opposed the spiritualization of the Hebrew terms for "poor" is Kraus (1986). He understands that in the psalms the "poor" are the victims of their enemies. The essential feature of this situation of "poverty" is the attack by hostile forces and the resulting state of helplessness and need (cf. Ibid 1986:151). Kraus furthermore describes the poor as those who are denied justice, who possess no influence or status, who are at the mercy of opponents. The poor, as Kraus understands them, are those without bread (Ps. 132:15), those who have been robbed (Is. 3:14), those without land or possessions, the dispossessed, the strangers. Thus the expression לְעָנִי וְלְעָרֵב "poor and needy" is not a formula of pious phraseology and religious humility, but has reference to a wide range of concrete reality (cf. Ibid 1986:153f.)

From the above summaries of both Wittenberg and Kraus, one can derive the conclusion that the Hebrew terms for "poor" do not refer to a religious party in Israel, nor do they represent in a spiritual sense a type of persons whose piety is to be considered as an ideal. But these terms point to those who are socially and economically helpless, deprived, oppressed and exploited (cf. also Brueggemann 1984:83; Kraus 1986:153; Croft 1987:62).

2.8 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, we have treated the psalms of individual lament. Here our investigation has exhibited that the terms for liberation can refer to the people's experience of deliverance from personal enemies, those who used to threaten the individuals, either in the past or in the present, as it is the case in Psalm 22. The idea of liberation, as it is expressed by its various Hebrew terms in these psalms, is used in the context of prayers for rescue from enemies of multiple identities, including those who are described as persecutors (Ps. 35), the wicked (Ps. 71), and the accusers (Ps. 109). Here the emphasis

was also laid on the aspect of liberation from the oppression caused by the enemies (Ps. 55).

Besides the subject of liberation from the enemies, here the individual suppliants have also utilized the particular Hebrew terms in their petitions for liberation from sickness (Ps. 6), death (Ps. 56), Sheol (Ps. 86), and even from sin and its consequences (Ps. 39).

According to the individual psalms of lament, the people who deserve of being liberated by God are particularly the innocent ones (Ps. 26), the righteous (Ps. 37), and "the poor and needy" (Ps. 40).

CHAPTER 3

LIBERATION IN THE PSALMS OF COMMUNITY THANKSGIVING

3.1 Introduction

The main question which our study seeks to answer here is: what is the basis of Israel's praise? The simple explanation to this question is our assumption that the experience of liberation in history is the reason. In the psalms of thanksgiving the worshipping community is responding to the initiative of God. In this context a helpful comment is provided by Anderson who wrote: "Israel's praise is a reflex of the prior action of God which moves people, as one psalmist testifies, "to seek God's face" (Ps. 27:8), that is, to visit the temple" (1983:39).

In this chapter we will thus discuss the significance of the "prior action of God" - the experience of liberation in the life and faith of the worshipping community, Israel. As the past experience of liberation in the psalms of lament had been the source whence the hope of the worshippers was drawn, so too in the psalms of thanksgiving this same experience, as our investigation will reveal, has motivated the liberated people to respond to their liberator, God in ways of thanksgiving.

In our treatment of the theme of liberation in the category of psalms we will be selective, investigating mainly those psalms

where the Hebrew concepts of liberation are utilized.

3.2 Outline of Genre, Formal Structure and Setting

3.2.1 Genre and Formal Structure

There is no universal agreement among Old Testament scholars which psalms should be attributed to this category. To this group of psalms Gunkel (1933:315) counted Psalms 66:8-12; 67; 124; and 129;⁸⁰ Weiser (1962:83) only Psalm 124, while Westermann (1980:48; 1981:81) has Psalms 124 and 129. Other scholars include more psalms in this category. Hayes (1976:124), for example, counted Psalms 65; 66; 67; 75; 100; 105; 106; 107 and 124, while Anderson (1983:236) has Psalms 65; 67; 75; 107; 124 and 136.

As far as the structure is concerned, nearly all of the community psalms of thanksgiving share the following basic elements:

(a) A call to give thanks: "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel now say..." (Ps. 124:1); or "O Give thanks to the Lord,... Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Ps.107:1-2; cf. Ps. 29:1).

(b) The description of the distress from which the worshipping community was delivered: "Some wandered in the desert wastes" (Ps. 107:4); or "When men rose up against us, then they would

⁸⁰ Gerstenberger (1974:207) too consider only these psalms as those which qualify as national songs.

have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us ..." (Ps. 124:3; cf. Ps. 129:3)

(c) An account of the appeal for help: "Then they cried to their Lord in their trouble" (Ps. 107:6, 13, 19).

(d) A report and acknowledgement of God's gracious acts of liberation: "... who has not given us as a prey to their teeth! We have escaped!" (Ps. 124:6,7); or "He has cut the cords of the wicked" (Ps. 129:4).

(e) A renewal of Praise: "Let all the ends of the earth fear him" (Ps. 67:8); or "Blessed be the Lord " (Ps. 124:6a).

A recognizable feature of the psalms of community thanksgiving is the fact that normally a number of people are spoken to, for example, "Bless our God, o people" (Ps. 66:8); or are speaking, for example, "we give thanks to thee, O God (Ps. 75:1).

The second mark of this group of psalms is the fact that almost every word is filled with joy. Hence, as Westermann (1981:82) observed, the following three features recur in them:

- (1) God has acted; let him be praised or blessed.
- (2) Praise is a direct response to the act which has just occurred.
- (3) Praise is expressed joyfully.

3.2.2 Setting

The community psalms of thanksgiving would originally at least

have been occasioned by God's acts of intervention to liberate his people in the course of their history, for instance, the deliverance from Egypt and the subsequent passage through the Red Sea, such as in the Song of Miriam:

"Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea"
(Exod. 15:21; cf. Westermann 1980:48f.).

One of the historical events which could also have occasioned this category of psalms is the people's experience of the deliverance of God at the raising of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians under Sennacherib (cf. Barth 1966:19). A good example of what these communal thanksgiving for deliverance or victory looked like can be found in the praise of the Philistines in Judges 16:

" Our God has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager
of our country who has slain many of us ... " (vv. 23ff.)

Another significant divine act of intervention in the history of Israel is the return of the people from the Babylonian exile (cf. Brown 1963B:359; Ackroyd 1968:237ff.; Fohrer 1971:977f.). We shall examine this element in section 3.3 of this chapter.

Besides the historical events which we have discussed above, some psalms of this category could have as their original setting some other national problems from which the people experienced relief through the intervention of God. The Psalter contains some community psalms of thanksgiving, for example, Psalms 65 and 67

which thank God for the good harvest (cf. Hayes 1976:125; Barth 1966:20), and thus presuppose drought or famine as the threat from which the people were delivered by God. Such view can also be supported by the psalms of community lament, for example Psalm 85 which displays drought or famine as the problem from which the people expected deliverance (cf. Weiser 1962:571; Dahood 1965-70:II,286). There are also indications in two prophetic texts, Jeremiah 14 and Joel 1-2, that collective lamentation could also be occasioned by other disasters such as drought and locusts (cf. Day 1990:33). If people had hoped and prayed for God to deliver them from the problems of drought and famine in psalms of lament, they can also thank and praise him for his deliverance from those particular problems in the psalms of thanksgiving. As some of the psalms of community lament had their original setting of drought or famine, so too the psalms of communal thanksgiving can have as their original setting the occasion and experience of deliverance from the national problem of drought or famine.

Toombs (1971:258) is of the opinion that these psalms were probably used in the temple ritual just before the sacrifice of thank-offering. They were thus the public testimony of the community to the goodness of God which had touched and transformed their lives. In such psalms the worshipping community look back on the previous distress and sorrow from the calm and security of liberation. The experience of suffering and alienation is still clearly recalled, but bitterness has been brought to an end by God's intervention (cf. Toombs 1971:258; Westermann 1981:82).

3.3 Liberation as the Return from Exile (Ps. 107)

The Psalter contains a few psalms which refer to the events of the exile and the return from Babylonia (Pss. 106:44-46; 107:1-32; 137:1-7; cf. Ackroyd 1968:225f.). But among these only one text, Psalm 107, which presents the return from exile as an event inviting thanksgiving and praise (cf. Haglund 1984:107). Hence Kidner describes it as "a piece to celebrate the return of exiles" (1975:383). In line with this idea is StuhlmueLLer's view, who maintains that the original text of Psalm 107, i.e. verse 1-22, have been composed "under the influence particularly of Second Isaiah (chaps. 40-55) and Job, in order to express communal gratitude for the return from Exile" (1983:122).

Some scholars, however, seem to have failed to recognize this phenomenon. Mowinckel (1962:II,42), for example, considered Psalm 107 as a psalm of thanksgiving, which may have been used to celebrate great communal thank-offering festivals, at which different groups of people who had been saved would come with their sacrifice and say their Amen. Weiser described it as a thanksgiving recited in the festival cult, for which "festival pilgrims from every part of the world had gathered in the sanctuary" (1962:685). While Hayes took this psalm as a thanksgiving which "enumerates various disasters from which people were delivered" (1976:125).

But when Psalm 107 is properly analyzed, one will not fail to recognize that it presents the disaster of the exile and the

episode of the return, depicting them in various ways (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:637; Kidner 1975:383; Day 1990:48).⁸¹ We will concern ourselves with this task under the following sub-headings.

3.3.1 The Exile as Dispersion (Ps. 107:2-3)

During the 6th century BC the people of Israel witnessed the destruction of their city, Jerusalem, together with their temple, which culminated in the exile of the Israelite nation in Babylon. This event was in itself traumatic to the whole nation - the distress from which Israel has come to get relief later when the Babylonian Empire came to an end under Nabonidus (555-539; cf. Bright 1960:360-4; Ackroyd 1968:17-20; Fohrer 1973:307ff.). The people of Israel had to experience feelings of being at liberty and joy which accompanied it once more in their lives when the head of the Persian Confederation, Cyrus, conquered Babylon in 539 BC, and in 538 BC issued an edict for the return of the Jewish community to Judah and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-6; cf. Bright 1960:361ff.; Ackroyd 1968:138-152; Greenfield 1988:1026). The end of the Babylonian exile, the return of the people to Judah and the rebuilding of the most cherished religious place, the temple could have occasioned great jubilation and praise of God, the portions of

⁸¹ Anderson (1972:749), too, would like to consider Psalm 107 as a pre-exilic composition adapted to the needs of the restored community of the Persian period. So, its use in the Persian period, as suggested by Anderson here, would, to a certain degree, support our view-point, namely a thanksgiving because of the restoration from exile.

which have come down to us in the Psalter, such as in Psalm 107:

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, who he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south" (vv. 2-3).

In these verses the people are described as יְהוָה יִגְאֹלֵם⁸² "those redeemed by the Lord" (v. 2a). This phrase is taken by many expositors as referring to redemption from exile in Babylonia (cf. Dahood 1965-70:III,81;⁸³ Rogerson & McKay 1977:III,49; Day 1990:48).⁸⁴ Kirkpatrick (1951:639) is of the opinion that this phrase is taken from Isaiah 62:12 and that it clearly denotes the Israelites who had been released from exile in Babylon and elsewhere, and brought home to Jerusalem. This view is also supported by Murphy, who sees Psalm 107:2-3 as "a clear reference to a community restored from Exile" (1968:596).

The people of Israel are referred to as "the redeemed" of the Lord elsewhere in the Isaianic texts, but always in connection with their return from exile (cf. Is. 35:9, 10; 51:10, 11; 63:4).

⁸² The word יִגְאֹלֵם is the qal participle plural construct state of the verb גָּאֵל cf. Davidson 1970:127). On its meaning see above pp. 23f.

⁸³ Dahood is of the opinion that the plural אֶרְצוֹת "lands" (v. 3) suggests a widespread diaspora, doubtless that of the Babylonian exile.

⁸⁴ Rogerson & McKay (1977:III,48) hold that it is natural to regard Psalm 107 as having been composed after the exile in verses 2f., and an allusion to the return from Babylon across the desert in verses 4-7, and to that defeat of Babylon which led to the return, in verses 10-16. Barness (1931:517) too would like to consider Psalm 107 as referring to the release from Babylonian captivity, although he maintained that the psalmist is half-consciously remembering it.

In addition to the description of Israel as יִשְׂרָאֵל the idea that Psalm 107 refers to the return from exile is also attested by the use of the verbs לָאָה "redeem" (v. 2b) and קָבַץ "gather" (v. 3). As we have already observed the verb לָאָה is used elsewhere to describe God's redemption of Israel from the Egyptian bondage (cf. above, pp. 23-25 and 28ff.). But in Isaiah 35:9; 44:22f.; 48:20; 52:9; etc, the verb is applied to the home coming of the people of Israel from exile (cf. Brown et al 1951:145; Ringgren 1975:354). In both instances, the verb signifies the release of the people from captivity. The idea of לָאָה as redemption from Babylonian exile in Psalm 107 is explained by its combination with the verb קָבַץ "gather" (v. 3), which appears in passages concerning the gathering of the people from dispersion, either in Assyria (Is. 11:12; Mic. 2:12; 4:6; Zeph. 3:19) or Babylonia (Is. 43:5; 54:7; Jer. 23:3; 31:8, 10; 32:37; Ezek. 11:17; 26:34; 36:24), but not in connection with the exodus (cf. Haglund 1984:30).⁸⁵

In connection with our analysis above, the striking phenomenon can be observed that in Psalm 107 the people are celebrating their experience of liberation - the return from exile. Haglund is therefore right in concluding that "it is possible to regard

⁸⁵ A rather different view is maintained by Oesterly (1939:455) who holds that the words "from the lands he gathered them" indicate that the dispersion of Jews had already taken place. And that by dispersion is meant not forcible settling of Israelites and Judahites in other lands, which took place in 722 BC and 597 BC, respectively, as well as in 351 BC, but the voluntary settlements formed for the purpose of trading and the like, which took place, mainly, during the Greek period, i.e. about 300 BC and onwards.

Psalm 107 as an answer to exilic prophecy - an acknowledgement that YHWH has fulfilled the prophecies of salvation as an answer to prayers" (1984:33). The theme of the return from exile is thus not an extra element to Psalm 107 as some commentators claim (cf. Allen 1983:61), but it is central to the message of the psalm. It is because of that remarkable experience of liberation, the return from exile, that Psalm 107, at its very beginning (v. 1), calls for those who have experienced this particular event to give thanks to God.

3.3.2 The Exile as Desert (Ps. 107:4-9)

The situation of the return from Babylon is alluded to in Psalm 107:4-9 where it is pictured as a journey across the desert (cf. Rogerson & McKay 1977:III,48). Some scholars have taken Psalm 107:4-9 as referring to the wandering of the Israelites in the desert after the exodus from Egypt as recorded in Exodus 13:17-22 (cf. Dahood 1965-70:III,82). But if one looks at this passage, especially verses 4-7, in the context of the introductory verses (Ps. 107:1-3) one is led to see it as another depiction of what is already described in verses 2 and 3, namely the return from Babylonian exile.

Our idea here is in line with Weiser, who, although he does not see Psalm 107 as referring to the return from exile, argues that "from the grammatical point of view verses 4-9 directly continue the thought developed in the general introduction and are therefore to be understood as being of the whole community's

experience of salvation and not only, as most commentators assume, of a particular group of those taking part in the festival (for instance merchants or leaders of caravans)" (1962:686). Supportive to our view here is also Kidner, who maintains that the four scenes of this psalm, i.e. verses 4-9, 10-16, 17-22, and 23-32 are "four ways of looking at the same reality, namely the disastrous situation from which Israel has now been rescued" (1975:384).

The idea of the return from exile in Psalm 107:4-9 is also implied by the phrase עִיר מְנוּחָה "a city to dwell in" (vv. 4,7), which is recurring in verse 36, where it can only mean a permanent home (cf. Rogerson & McKay 1977:III,50), probably referring to Jerusalem (cf. Haglund 1984:31). Such interpretation helps one to understand that the worshippers in Psalm 107:4-7 are rehearsing the return from exile to the city of Jerusalem - the permanent home of the people of Israel.

The thought of God leading his people through the desert by הַיָּשָׁר "straight way" (v. 7a) is also showing similarities with Ezra 8:31f.; Isaiah 35:6, 8f.; 43:19; Jer. 31:7ff., passages which are dealing with Israel's return from exile (cf. Brown et al 1951:202; Koch 1978:289f.).

The use of the hiphil form of the verb לָקַח "take away", "snatch away" in verse 6, which, as we have already indicated above (see pp. 37f.), is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to either the deliverance of the people from their enemies (cf. Gen

37:21; 2 Sam. 19:9), or of Israel from Egypt (cf. Exod. 3:8), can also be taken here as referring to the "taking away" of Israel from the desert of exile.

One can therefore say that in this passage we have an encounter with Israel acknowledging her return from the Babylonian exile - the experience of liberation which she attributes to God in the imagery of travelling through the wastes of the desert. We look further at other ways in which Israel portrayed and celebrated her liberation.

3.3.3 The Exile as Prison (Ps. 107:10-16)

Another picture of Israel's return from Babylonian exile is presented in Psalm 107:10-16, where it is described as liberation from prison (cf. Murphy 1968:596). The imagery of the exile as

חַשְׁךְ וצִלְמוֹת "darkness and shadow of death" (v. 10) resembles a theme which we find in Isaiah 9:1-2, a text dealing with the conquest of the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali - the part of Galilee, and especially in Isaiah 42:7; 49:9, which are concerned with the liberation from Babylonian exile (cf. Barth 1991:231). The concept of בַּרְזֶל "iron" (v. 10) occurs also in Jeremiah 28:14, where it is used with reference to the Babylonian oppression.

Psalm 107:10-16 is crowded with imageries and concepts signifying liberation. The hiphil imperfect of the verb מָצָא "bring out" (v. 14) is used elsewhere in Exodus in connection with the liberation of Israel from Egypt (Exod. 3:10-12; 6:13-27; 15:6; 18:1; 20:2;

Jos. 24:6; cf. Brown et al 1951:422), but the author of Psalm 107 has used it with reference to the return from exile in the same way as it is used in Isaiah 42:7 and Ezekiel 20:34, 41, 34:13. The idea of liberation is furthermore expressed by the concept of "breaking the bonds" in verse 14. This concept appears in Jeremiah 30:8, where it is employed in connection with the breaking of the bonds of the Babylonian exile, and in Nahum 1:13, in connection with the end of the Assyrian dominion (cf. Haglund 1984:31). The "shattering of the doors of bronze" and "cutting of bars of iron" in verse 16 are also resembling Isaiah 45:2, which deals with the exile (cf. Anderson 1972:753).

On the basis of the above observation, one can state that in Psalm 107 the liberation from Babylonian captivity, which was also predicted by the prophets, is seen as realized. So, what we have here is Israel's response to that specific event - the divine act of liberation in her history expressed in the form of praise and thanksgiving.

3.3.4 The Exile as Sickness (Ps. 107:17-22)

The picture of the exile and the home-coming as sickness and recovery can be derived from Psalm 107:17-22 (cf. Day 1990:48). This passage is interpreted by scholars in divergent ways. Weiser, for example, has taken it to refer to "sick people who have recovered from their illness" (1962:687). While Eaton understands it as "a figure of salvation from the gates of death concerns a disease which falls upon "fools", men who despise what

is right" (1967:257). Such interpretations seem to have not read this unit in the context of the whole psalm (Ps. 107) and of the Psalter at large.⁸⁶

The meaning of Psalm 107:17-22 can only be arrived at when it is seen in the light of the introductory verses (i.e. Ps. 107:2-3) and especially of Psalm 147:2-3. The latter tells about the return from exile - "the gathering" of the outcasts of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem in conjunction with "the healing" of the sick - "the brokenhearted", describing them in the language of Isaiah 56:8; 61:1 (cf. McCullough 1962:750f.). As in Psalm 147 healing from sickness is used in association with the return from exile (cf. Allen 1983:309), so, in Psalm 107 too, restoration from sickness can be regarded as referring to the home-coming of the exiles.

The idea of sickness as punishment of sin, reflected in Psalm 107, is common to the Old Testament (cf. 1 Kings 8:37-40; Jer. 14:12, 18; 16:1-13; Ezek. 6:11-14; 7:14-16; Ps. 106:13-16).⁸⁷ And it seems that it is used metaphorically in Psalm 107:17-22 to refer to the exile (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:637f.). The thought of the passage seems to be that the exile had been a sickbed to which the people's own moral perversity had sent them (cf. Ps. 106; see also 2 Chr. 36:16; Is. 53:4; Jer. 33:6, 7). But God's liberating and healing word had come to them with assurance of

⁸⁶ On the idea of physical sickness and healing from it, see above, pp. 77f, 110f. and below, pp. 121f.

⁸⁷ For the concept of sin as the cause of sickness and other sufferings see above, pp. 121ff.

forgiveness (cf. Is. 40:1-2; also Allen 1983:64).

3.3.5 The Exile as Sea Storm (Ps. 107:23-32)

Psalm 107:23-32 presents us with another description of the exile in a metaphor of sea travellers. This passage when taken literally would be difficult to interpret. The Old Testament does not report any famous sea voyages besides Solomon's expedition to Ophir (1 Kings 9:26-28) and Jonah's to Ninive. Moreover navigation has not played any important role for the Old Testament trade or imagination (cf. Anderson 1972:755; Haglund 1984:34). From this perspective one should rather apply the metaphorical interpretation on the passage. The exile is described in this way also in Isaiah 54:11, where the exiles are said to be storm-tossed (cf. Kidner 1975:386; Day 1990:48).⁸⁸ Out of the sea of exile the people of Israel experienced vividly the power and steadfast love (לִוְנָה,⁸⁹ Ps. 107:31) of God, revealed to them through liberation - the home-coming. The redeemed were thus prompted by this divine intervention in their lives to extol God in the congregation of the people and praise him in the assembly of the elders (Ps. 107:32).

In concluding this section, we must stress here that through the

⁸⁸ Some scholars, however, would like to see Psalm 107 as a general thanksgiving psalm for various groups of individuals (cf. Anderson 1962:437; Hayes 1976:125). Even this psalm was originally used as such, in its final form (cf. vv. 2-3), it seems to have been adapted for the returning exiles (cf. Day 1990:45, 48).

⁸⁹ On the meaning of לִוְנָה see above, pp. 93f.

suffering of the exile and the joy of liberation - the home-coming, the divine acting and presence were personally experienced by the community of Israel. Hence in this thanksgiving psalm they give testimony for what they have seen and gone through.

We too in Namibia have just experienced the home-coming of our people who were in exile. Some returned from African countries, others from Europe and elsewhere in the world. The question is: How do we consider this experience in relationship with God? We will return to this point in our final chapter.

Another point which is worth mentioning here is the fact that liberation, as displayed in Psalm 107, has a political meaning. It is the deliverance from the dominion of the Babylonian regime and the guaranteeing of the right for self-determination to the people of Israel. The political meaning of liberation cannot be seen only in this psalm, but it is also traceable in other psalms of community thanksgiving, as our investigation will show in the next section.

3.4 The Signs of Liberation (Pss. 65; 67)

A number of community psalms of thanksgiving, viz. Psalms 65 and 67 display some aspects, as we will see, which can be said to be signs of liberation in the community. These aspects comprise the experience of God's gifts of security and prosperity. The latter is amplified in the fertility of the land/earth and in a good

harvest. All of these aspects can be appropriately summed up in a single word: God's "blessing" (בֵּרַךְ). This word generally denotes a bestowal of good, usually conceived of material (cf. Deut. 11:26; Prov. 10:22; 28:20; Is. 19:24; Cf. McKenzie 1965:98; Scharbert 1975:298f.). But it includes also peace from enemies and political greatness (cf. Von Rad 1975:229). Thus, as Kraus (1986:54) has maintained, Yahweh's blessing is bestowed as a consequence of an act of liberation and salvation (cf. also Link 1980:210). In this part of our thesis, we will therefore demonstrate how the signs of liberation in the psalms are God's blessing, recognized in his bestowing of security and prosperity.

3.4.1 The Experience of Security (Pss. 65:2-6; 67:2-5)

The idea of security as a sign of liberation is to be found in both Psalms 65 and 67. Both psalms are seen by most scholars as thanksgiving for abundance in nature and a good harvest, associated with festivals of Harvest and Tabernacles (cf. Mowinckel 1962:I,120, 162; Weiser 1962:461; Hayes 1976:124; Day 1990:164). But the opening of Psalm 65, i.e. verses 2-6, as well as Psalm 67:2-5, show clearly that they had much wider significance for the political and religious life of the people (cf. Rogerson & McKay 1977:II,72, 81).

In Psalm 65:2-6a, for example, there are two motifs of thanksgiving which may be distinguished from that of prosperity in verses 6-14. The first motif is described in verses 3b-4. And it concerns a single problem, namely sins or transgressions (cf.

Brueggemann 1984:135). The motif for communal joy and celebration here is the fact that God "forgives" their sins. The Hebrew term סלח "forgive" used here is a priestly term, not meaning "pardon" in a juridical sense, but a priestly act of covering over the guilt to rob it of its power (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:451f; Brueggemann (1984:135). Psalm 65:2-6a is thus displaying a public celebration of God's forgiveness of sins.

We need to understand sin in its Old Testament tradition as the cause of suffering (cf. above, pp. 121ff.). The community having been forgiven by God could feel secure for forgiveness is always accompanied by deliverance (cf. 1 Kings 8:31ff.; Ezek. 37:23-28).

In Psalm 65 too, forgiveness leads to deliverance, the second motif described in verse 6a: "By dread deeds thou dost answer us with deliverance". The Hebrew term rendered by "dread deeds" is

מאורעות, meaning "fearful", "dreadful" or "terrible things" (cf. Brown et al 1951:431). This term is often applied to the mighty works of the exodus (Deut. 10:21; 2 Sam. 7:23; Is. 64:3; Pss. 106:22 145:6; cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:400; Fuhs 1990:302). Psalm 65:6b is thus showing that thanks are given to God for his intervention in powerful ways that have given victory and liberation to Israel. God has done this in response to the people's prayer (v. 3). Brueggemann (1984:135) regards the thought of verse 6b as the pivot of the psalm. Accordingly, Kirkpatrick (1951:360) holds the idea that the poet of Psalm 65 does not only see before him the promise of a more than ordinary bountiful harvest, but the recollection of a great national

deliverance seems to be fresh in his mind. This above view gains support from the coincidences of thought and language with Psalm 46, which belongs to that time (cf. StuhlmueLLer 1983:I,241), and with Isaiah 37:30,⁹⁰ as well as from the general similarity of Psalm 65 to Psalm 66, where there are good reasons for connecting it with the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians (cf. Barth 1966:19f.).

The idea of liberation as leading to security can also be derived from Psalm 67. This can be inferred from the words and phrases used in the psalm. In the first place, the psalm opens with the Aaronic benediction: "May God be gracious to us and bless us ..." (v. 2). These words, taken from Numbers 6:24-26, are the blessing which Aaron and his sons proclaimed in the name of God. Rogerson and McKay describe it as "a prayer for the knowledge of God's vital and personal presence (his face) which brings blessing beyond measure ..." (1977:II,81). So this blessing, in other words, is a pointer to God's living presence which makes people feel safe and secure. The worshippers in Psalm 67 were knowledgeable of this fact. As Hargreaves (1990:79) says, they would not have proclaimed this blessing if an event had not occurred on an earlier occasion, i.e. if God had not rescued them from Egypt and shown them his special deeds of liberation in the past.

⁹⁰ The third year foretold by Isaiah 37:30 when the retreat of the Assyrians had left the Israelites once more free to till their fields in peace, offers the most appropriate historical basis of this psalm (cf. Clements 1980:286; Jensen 1984:294f.).

The idea that here the people are recalling the divine acts of liberation can also be derived from the use of the noun יְשׁוּעָתְךָ (v. 3), rendered "thy saving power" in the RSV. Since it is said that it should be known "among all nations" (בְּכָל־גּוֹיִם), one can see here a picture of a significant divine act of intervention comparable to the deliverance from Egypt which surprised the non-Israelite people (cf. Exod. 15:4-15). Although it can also be taken as referring to the universal worship of God (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:361f.; Day 1990:132).⁹¹

Psalm 67 may thus be connected in origin and purpose with Psalm 65. In both psalms we do not only have a thanksgiving for plentiful harvest, but also a recollection of some great deliverance. We cannot claim to know with precision the nature of this deliverance or of the threat from which the community of Israel was liberated. But the fact remains, in Psalm 65 and 67, likewise in 107, there are praises of a liberated people - the people experiencing security because of God's acts and presence.

To know whether the people's problem was drought, war, Assyrian invasion or any other threat is perhaps not more important than the fact that in these psalms we see, to use the words of Brueggemann, "A people prepared to get on with its business, because Yahweh has acted" (1984:136).

⁹¹ Dahood (1965-70:II,110) understands the verse as pointing to "the eschatological day when God will reward or punish each man according to his deeds".

3.4.2 The Experience of Prosperity (Pss. 65:6b-14; 67:7-8)

Another sign of liberation shown in Psalms 65 and 67 is the blessing of property which is manifested in the fertility of the land and good harvest.

Psalm 65:6b-14, for example, is a declarative praise that articulates God's powerful work in the arena of creation (cf. Brueggemann 1984:136). These verses emphasize God's gracious visiting of the earth which he has created and sustained. God is praised for watering the earth with showers, enriching it and for providing the grain. God's activity clothes the pastures and meadows with growth and flocks and the valleys and hills are decked with grain and shout and sing for joy (cf. Hayes 176:124).

The thought of Psalm 65 here needs to be understood from the background of the Old Testament concept, such as the one preserved in Joel 2:17-19 that disaster and defeat, drought and scarcity put Israel to shame before the nations (נִבְזָה), while deliverance from danger and domestic prosperity were evidence to the nations of the true character of Israel's God (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:373).

In Psalm 65 too the deliverance of God is recognized through his blessing and the provision of the grain (cf. vv. 6, 10-14). The God who is here designated as אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵנוּ "God of our liberation" (v. 6), that is, one who delivers his people from any danger and oppression (cf. above, pp. 69f.), also has the power to cause

creation to "bring forth". The subject of creation in relationship with the liberating activities of God is discussed by Von Rad in the following statement: "Most surprising of all is the use of this thought [i.e. the concept of redemption related to the doctrine of creation] in the prayer for offering first-fruits contained in Deut. 26:5ff. The worshipper does not give thanks for the fruits which the Creator has provided for him, but simply acknowledges that he is a member of the nation which God brought into the promised land by historical saving act, thus making him heir to the blessing of the land" (1966:132). Psalm 65, at this point, displays creation theology which gives thanks for the ordering and blessing of all life. For God in this psalm not only intervenes in the historical processes of oppression, but also governs the reliability of creation, which gives life (cf. Brueggemann 1984:136).

The link between God's deliverance, or simply, liberation and blessing is also maintained in Psalm 67. We have already indicated above that this psalm opens with the priestly blessing (v. 2), which the worshippers quoted because they were recalling God's special deeds of deliverance. Besides this motif, the psalmist also recalls the theme of God as a just ruler of the world (cf. Pss. 96:10; 99:4)⁹² which he presents as the reason for the universal rejoicing of the nations (v. 5; cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:362f.; Toombs 1971:280f.). The divine manner of dealing with the people - his delivering them (v. 2) and his judging (עָשָׂה, v.

⁹² On the concept of God as a just ruler, see Excursus I above pp. 63f.

5), i.e. ruling them with equity (רַחֲמֵיךָ) is here seen and proclaimed together with his gift of blessing the earth: "The earth has yielded its increase; God our God, has blessed us ..." (vv. 7-8).

Looking at the abundant harvest (v. 7a),⁹³ the thankful people declare that God has indeed blessed them, and they also express their faith and wish that by this sign of blessing the remotest nations (אֲרָצוֹת) of the world should also become "fearers of God", i.e. his worshippers (cf. Day 1990:132).

In conclusion, one should mention here that in Psalms 65 and 67 God is acknowledged as both the liberator and provider of prosperity. And it is on this basis the people have responded with thanksgivings to him.

3.5 Summary and Conclusion

In our treatment of the theme of liberation, in the psalms of communal thanksgiving, we have examined especially Psalms 107, 65 and 67. Here the concept is presented in various ways. In Psalm 107 liberation has both historical and political dimensions, for it entails the deliverance of the Israelite

⁹³ This verse is understood by some scholars as referring to the Babylonian belief that before they created the ordered universe the gods had to subdue the raging sea of chaos, personified as the dragon-monster Tiamat (cf. Rogerson 1977:II,65; Toombs 1971:281; see also above pp. 27ff.) In the present psalm the powers of chaos is understood to be embodied in the enemy nations at present (cf. Day 1990:82).

community from Babylonian exile as well as their return to Jerusalem. The exile is displayed in different colours, pictured as dispersion, desert, prison, sickness and sea-storm.

In our investigation of Psalms 65 and 67 we have concentrated on three aspects, viz. the signs of liberation, its sense of security and prosperity. The particular psalms contain praises of people who are experiencing security because of both God's acts and presence. Here the people's experience of liberation is also linked with God's blessing of prosperity, manifested in the fertility of the land and good harvest.

To wrap up our conclusion of this chapter we can say that in the psalms of communal thanksgiving the people express their responsive thanks to God for his liberating them from physical pressures and providing them with prosperity.

CHAPTER 4

LIBERATION IN THE PSALMS OF INDIVIDUAL THANKSGIVING

4.1 Introduction

Just as in the community psalms the people gave thanks to God in response to their liberation, in the individual psalms too the individuals followed suit. They praised God whenever they experienced relief from their difficulties. The individual psalms of thanksgivings then, as we will observe in this chapter, are the opposite side of the individual laments. While in the individual laments, the situations of the people are characterized with sufferings and need of deliverance, in the thanksgivings the lives of the psalmists are marked with happiness because they are liberated from their threats. In this chapter we will thus examine the meaning of liberation in the lives of these individual psalmists.

For the sake of analysis, we will first define the psalms of individual lament by looking at their genre, formal structure and setting. After this we will then deal with the idea of liberation as victory over enemies. At this point we will examine particularly Psalms 18, 118 and 138. Here we will concentrate mainly on two categories of enemies: cosmological enemies and military enemies.

In the third place, we will treat the subject of the recipients of liberation. This will be facilitated through the investigation of Psalm 34. In the next point we will discuss the concept of liberation as healing, focusing on how the individual worshipper experienced it and responded to it. Here we will concentrate on Psalm 116.

4.2 Outline of Genre, Formal Structure and Setting

4.2.1 Genre and Formal Structure

The psalms of individual thanksgiving are classified as a third major type in the Psalter. As applied to the community thanksgivings, here too Old Testament scholars differ in their opinions regarding the inclusion of psalms to this category. According to Westermann's (1980:72) classification, examples of this genre are found in Psalms 9; 18; 30; 31:7-8, 19-24; 32; 40:1-12; 66:13-20; 92; (107); 116; (118); 138; also Jonah 2; Lam. 3:25-58; Job 33:26-28; Sir. 51; Psalms Sol. 15:1-6; 16:1-15; Song of the Three Young Men 1:65-66; and Odes Sol. 25; 29. Anderson (1983:236) would list Psalms 18; 21; 30; 32; 34; 40:1-11; 66:13-20; 92; 103; 108; 116; 118; 138; also Is. 38:9-20 and Jonah 2:2-9, while Seybold (1990:117) counted only Psalms 30; 32; 34; 40; 41; 66; 92; 116; 118 and 138.

The structure of the psalms of individual thanksgiving differs slightly from that of community thanksgiving in terms of content but not in form. The psalms of this type consist of the following

elements (cf. Westermann 1980:73-74; 1981:102-122; Gerstenberger 1988:15).

(a) The proclamation where the psalmist announces his wish and determination to praise God:

"I will extol thee, O Lord," (Ps. 30:2);
 "I will come into thy house with burnt offerings" (Ps. 66:13).

(b) An introductory summary where the worshipper gives an account of his appeal for help: "I call upon the Lord ..., and I am saved from my enemies" (Ps. 18:4); "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry" (Ps. 40:2); "Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free" (Ps. 118:5).

(c) The "looking back at the time of need" (Westermann 1981:109). Here the psalmist gives an account of the distress from which he was delivered: "The words of death encompassed me," (Ps. 18:5); "when I declared not my sin, my body wasted away" (Ps. 32:3); "All nations surrounded me, ... on every side ... like bees (Ps. 118:11,12).

(d) Report of deliverance, usually in a threefold message: "I cried to God - He heard - He delivered me" (Westermann 1981:108). In this section the worshipper acknowledges God's gracious acts of liberation. For example in Psalm 18: "... to my God I cried for help. From His temple He heard my voice, ... He reached from

on high; He took me, He drew me out of many waters" (vv 6-17), and in Psalm 34: "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (v 8).

(e) The renewed vow of praise: "For this I will extol thee, O Lord, among the nations: (Ps. 18:49); "That my soul may praise thee and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to thee" (Ps. 30:13); "Thou art my God, and I will give thanks to thee; thou art my God, I will extol thee" (Ps. 118:29).

(f) The renewed vow is usually followed by praise: "Great triumphs he gives to his being, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his descendants for ever" (Ps. 18:51); "Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me" (Ps. 66:20); "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever" (Ps. 118:29).

In fact a psalm of individual thanksgiving can be said to be consisting out of three main parts: The introduction, which includes the proclamation and the introductory summary as described under (a) and (b) above; The main section, which contains "the looking back at the time of need" as well as the report of deliverance; And the conclusion, which comprises the renewed vow (of praise) and praise.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ The three-fold structure is maintained especially by Anderson (1972:35f.) and Westermann (1980:74).

4.2.2 Setting

The settings of the psalms of individual thanksgiving are to be understood from the background of the situation of distress as well as the vow of praise expressed in the psalms of individual lament.

It is a common feature of the individual psalms of lament that nearly all of them contain vows of praise pledged by the worshippers where they made references to future acts of praise and thanksgiving to be conducted which they would perform once the cause of their distress had been eliminated. The useful example here is Psalm 13:7: "I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me" (cf Ps. 22:32). Or Psalm 56:13-14: "My vows to thee I must perform, O God; I will render thanks offerings to thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death". In Psalm 71:15 the following vow is pledged: "My mouth will tell of thy righteous acts, of thy deeds of salvation all the day". All these instances indicate that the praise of God has emanated from the experience of liberation when God has intervened on behalf of the worshipper and has brought to an end the cause of his distress and suffering. Therefore Murphy explains that the psalms of individual thanksgiving were "presumably uttered on the occasion of a thanksgiving sacrifice (*toda*) which was offered up after some saving experience" (1968:573).⁹⁵ These psalms were

⁹⁵ Westermann sees this type of psalm as "statement" which originally "accompanied a sacrifice of praise" (1980:72). Gunkel (1967:32) already recognized that among the thanksgiving songs of the individual are a few which clearly presuppose the worship service and

thus sung or recited "in public services in the sanctuary" (Hayes 1976:87), as fulfilment of the vows of praise made in the laments (cf. Westermann 1989:72).

The above point of view can be attested by the contents of many of the thanksgiving psalms themselves. Psalm 66, for example, expresses this thought:

"I will come into thy house with burnt offerings;
I will pay thee my vows,
that which my lips uttered
And my mouth promised when I
was in trouble.
I will offer to thee burnt offerings
of fatlings,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats" (vv 14-16).

In this line of thought another psalm expresses the following:

"What shall I render to the Lord
for all his bounty to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,
I will pay any vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.
.... I will offer to thee the sacrifice
of thanksgiving.
And call on the name of the Lord
I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of his people,
in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem" (Ps. 116: 12-14, 18-19).

Individual psalms of thanksgiving could have been used in various situations. One of the important contexts was that of recovery

which were to be sung at the thanks-offering.

from illness (cf. Hayes 1976:87; Day 1990:46).⁹⁶ Examples of the psalms of thanksgiving which have healing from sickness as their setting, as we will observe below in this chapter, are to be found in Psalms 30, 32 and 116. The experience of healing as a possible occasion for the psalms of thanksgiving is also affirmed by King Hezekiah's hymn of thanksgiving in Is. 38:10-20, which he wrote after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness (cf. Craigie 1983:251; Day 1990:46). Moreover supportive of this idea is the speech of Elihu in Job:

"Man is also chastened with pain upon his bed,
 And with continual strife in his bones;
 So that his life loathes bread, ...
 ..., then man prays to God,
 And he accepts him, he comes
 into his presence with joy.
 He recounts to men his salvation,
 And he sings before men, and says:
 'I sinned, and perverted what was right,
 And it was not requited to me.
 He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit,
 And my life shall see the light". (Job 33:19-28.)

Another possible setting of this type of psalms is the experience of deliverance from personal enemies, for example in Psalm 18; 118 and 138, the identity of whom will be discussed in detail in the following section.

⁹⁶ Hayes (1976:87) in his discussion of the use of thanksgiving psalms has indicated that a secondary service of sacrifice before God was required of persons who had been healed from certain contagious diseases. Gerstenberger (1988:136), on the other hand, held that the thanksgiving rites were always performed at the request of the individual and group who had experienced Yahweh's help, and the cured or saved patient was at the centre of the affair.

4.3 Liberation as Victory over Enemies (Pss. 18; 118; 138)

In the psalms of individual lament we have already come across the danger of personal enemies of various dispositions from whom the individuals sought liberation (cf. Pss. 22; 31; 35; 71; 109).

The enemies of the individual feature also in the psalms of thanksgiving. In this category the psalms, unlike in that of individual lament, the enemies are no longer the problem for the present but of the past. Hence liberation is not sought but celebrated. Striking here is the fact that liberation, as we will observe below in this section, is celebrated as victory over enemies, expressed in mythical terms of cosmology (cf. Ps. 18:2-20) and in military language (cf. Pss. 118; 138). Each of these portrayals will be examined in turn and an attempt will be made to illuminate each context with information from other accounts dealing with Yahweh's cosmic intervention on behalf of his people.

4.3.1 Cosmological Enemies

In analysing this sub-theme, we will refer to Psalm 18, which is best seen as a royal song of thanksgiving after victory in battle (cf. Weiser 1962: 185; Croft 187: 37).⁹⁷ This psalm, also appears with a number of orthographic and grammatical variants

⁹⁷ Psalm 18 is classified as a royal psalm by many scholars, including Kirkpatrick (1951:84f.); Dahood (1970:104); Eaton (1976:113) and Westermann (1981:578).

in 2 Samuel 22. It has a title which indicates that it was used on the day when David was delivered from his enemies in general and from Saul in particular. Yet, as Craigie (1983:172f.) indicates, the context of the title in the parallel passage (2 Sam. 22) does not permit the identification of this psalm with a particular event or military victory; it follows an account of Saul's death and then a summary account of a series of military campaigns against the Philistines (2 Sam. 21:15-22). It may have been employed in a deliberation of victory after a series of campaigns, or it may be interpreted as having been used in one of Israel's great annual festivals.

This psalm has a rich mythological background.⁹⁸ In its first part (vv 2-31), the poet celebrates the greatness of Yahweh who delivered him from his enemies (vv 2-4), associating them with the imageries of חַבְלֵי מוֹת "cords of death", חַבְלֵי שְׂאוֹל "cords of Sheol", and מִוְקְשֵׁי מוֹת "snares of death" (vv 5,6). These metaphors derive from the ancient myths concerning Sheol, the watery abyss that "hunts" man (cf. Excursus III above, pp. 119ff.). From the terminology of the hunt are borrowed images and motifs that illustrate the situation of being beset by enemies (cf. Sawyer & Fabry 1986:176). The enemies of the individual are humans, but their nature and work are surrounded by an eerie darkness that has come from the mythological tradition (cf. Kraus 1986:134).

⁹⁸ In the same way Craigie (1983:173) holds that the whole theme has been given cosmic dimension, which has been achieved by the utilization of language which is rooted in near eastern mythology, but has been transformed to express the Lord's deliverance of his human servant.

Elsewhere in the Psalter the "cords of the wicked" (חַנְּלֵי רְשָׁעִים) ensnare (לָכַד) the devout (Ps. 119:61); they have dug pitfalls (שִׁחַחוּ, Ps. 119:85); they have laid a snare (מָנִין, Ps. 119:110), and the latter can protect himself only by reliance on the torah of Yahweh. With systematic cunning (מָנִין "trap", חַנְּלֵי "cords", רֶשֶׁת "net",⁹⁹ and מִקְשָׁיִם "snares") the arrogant attempt to destroy the psalmist (Ps. 140:6).

The concepts of the "cords of death" and "cords of Sheol" as they occur in Psalm 18 are meant to show the imminent mortal danger to which the worshipper is exposed. In combination with מִקְשָׁי מוֹת "snares of death" and נַחְלֵי נְלִיעַל "torrents of perdition", the חַנְּלֵי "cords" illustrate the tight constraint exercised by the powers of the underworld. The worshipper sees himself already there, entwined in the bonds of death" (Sawyer & Fabry 1986:176).

Mbon (1982:10) is also of the opinion that the enemies as described in Psalm 18 are nothing less than the very forces of evil and death. As in the psalms of lament, the well-being of the psalmist here was threatened by what Mbon calls "the miserable experience of death-in-life" (1982:10), which in this psalm is represented by the enemies. In this condition the psalmist cried to God for help and God heard him (v 7).

Verses 8-20 describe how God "came down" in "thick darkness" and thunder out of "hailstone and coals of fire", sent out his "arrows" and scattered the enemies, thus bringing deliverance to

⁹⁹ For the use of this concept, see above pp. 95, 103.

the worshipper. The depiction of God's intervention here borrows the usual literary dress of the Old Testament theophany¹⁰⁰ such as that original one which took place at Sinai (Exod. 19) or the one described in Habakkuk 3:4ff. (cf. Weiser 1962:189; Murphy 1968:578).

Elsewhere in the Old Testament God intervenes in the earthly battle with thunder and lightning, which he sends out like arrows and strikes terror into the hearts of the enemies and puts them to flight (Jud. 5:4-20; cf. De Vaux 1965:260; Von Rad 1991:41-51).

The intervention of God on behalf of the psalmist is amplified by verses 16-18. By God's power the waters of the sea retreat, its bed is seen and the hidden bases of the world are laid bare just as it happened at the exodus when God rebuked the Red Sea and it was dried up (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:92). Again here the creation myth is the background for God's control over the sea (cf Murphy 1968:478).¹⁰¹

The divine intervention is furthermore depicted in verse 17 as the act of "drawing" the psalmist from "many waters". The verb

¹⁰⁰ The term "theophany" denotes a manifestation or appearance of God to human beings. In the Old Testament, Yahweh was spoken of as coming to earth and appearing to human beings. Often this took place in the form of visions during the waking state as described, for example, in Exodus 24:9ff; Judges 6:11ff.; 1 Samuel 3:10 (cf. Fohrer 1968:107; Von Rad 1975:366). A thorough study on this subject has been carried out by Jeremias (1977).

¹⁰¹ On the creation myth, see above, pp. 27-33.

used here is the imperfect form of מָשַׁח "to draw out", which is found elsewhere only in Exodus 2:10, to which there may be an allusion.¹⁰² God drew the psalmist out of many waters of distress as he drew Moses out of the waters of the Nile (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:92). The concept מַיִם רַבִּים "many waters" (v.17) can refer to the waters of the netherworld (cf Dahood 1970:110), as well as to the whole sphere of influence of chaos (cf Anderson 1972:159). As such it is an emblem of danger (cf Pss. 32:6; 66:12; 69:3,4). These figures, the sea and "many waters" are explicitly associated with the psalmist's enemies אֹיְבֵי in verse 18 from whom the psalmist is said to have been delivered (לָצַל). The whole experience of this deliverance is rendered by the psalmist as being brought "into a broad place" (v. 20).¹⁰³

Granted the above line of interpretation, one can conclude here that in the first part of Psalm 18, (viz. verses 2-31) the psalmist celebrates his historical experience of liberation from mortal danger caused by the enemies who are here portrayed in the cosmic dimensions of the "sea" and "many waters".

¹⁰² It has been suggested that the use of this verb (מָשַׁח) serves as a pointer to the Mosaic stories and to the salvation-history as a whole (cf. Anderson 1972:159)

¹⁰³ Dahood (1965-70:I,111) has postulated that "in broad place" (מַרְחָב) is a poetic name for the underworld. The view seems to be irrelevant here, for in Hebrew idiom "distress" is a condition of being hemmed in by trouble, while "deliverance" is to be brought out of the affliction, out of the stranglehold of distress into a broad place to be set at liberty (cf. Ps. 4:2; also Anderson 1972:160).

4.3.2 Military Enemies

The idea of liberation as victory over military enemies in Psalm 18 is to be found in verses 32-46. In these verses the psalmist uses military language (cf Craigie 1983:175), as he praises God for having trained him for war, supplied him with a miraculous bow (vv. 32-35), given him victory over his enemies (36-44) and invested him with dominion over foreign nations (vv 44-46).

The element of liberation in this part of the psalm is amplified by the use of the Hebrew concept $\text{נִשְׁבַּח שָׁמַיִם}$ which God is said to have given to the psalmist in verse 36. The phrase is a combination of two nouns, viz נִשְׁבַּח which here can mean "victory" or "liberation" and שָׁמַיִם meaning "shield" or "buckler" as the one carried by a warrior for defence (Jud. 5:8; 2 Sam 1:21; 2 Kings 19:32; cf. Brown et al 1951:171). God is thus likened to some heroic warrior who leads the king through the battle-field to victory, protecting him with his powerful shield (cf. Weiser 1962:195; McKay 1977:82). The latter occurs also in verses 3 and 31 where it is used with reference to the nature of God as defence as he has been experienced by the psalmist. Elsewhere in the Psalter God is known as the defence of his people (cf. Pss. 28:7; 33:20; 59:12; 84:10,12; 115:9, 10, 11; 119:114; 144:2).

In Psalm 18:32-46 the worshipper is thus acknowledging the fact that his victory stems from God, who provided him with strength and supplied him with weapons (cf. Dahood 1965-70:I,116). In other words, he sees himself as the divinely equipped warrior,

mighty in battle, because of his God-given equipment (cf. Craigie 1983: 175). He could only conquer because of God.

The worshippers' description of victory to God can be clearly observed, for example in the following verses:

"For thou didst gird me with strength for battle;
Thou didst make my assailants sink under me.
Thou didst make my enemies turn their backs to me,
And those who hated me I destroyed.
(Ps. 18:40-41).

The idea is also highlighted in verse 44, which describes the psalmist's military victory in terms of חפלטני מריני עם "you have delivered me from contentions of people" the same applies to verse 49, where the experience is declared: מפלטני מאיני "who delivered me from my enemies", and מאי ש חמס חצילני "you have delivered me from the violent man". In all these instances one can notice the uses of the Hebrew terms designating liberation, viz חפלט and פלט . The experience of victory over enemies is thus presented by the psalmist as God's acts of liberation. The enemies over whom the psalmist triumphed are most probably military (cf. Weiser 1962:195; Dahood 1965-70:I,117; Mbon 1982:10). Such view can, of course, be derived from the use of several terminologies which are much more reminiscent of actual warfare. Enemies are pursued (v.38), thrust through (v.39), destroyed (v.41), beaten into dust (v.43), and the psalmist has overcome and taken them captive (vv. 44-46).

The question whether the enemies were Israelites or gentiles can

be raised here. The fact that these enemies cried out to the Lord (cf. Ps. 18:42), seems to indicate that they were Israelites, but the $\text{רָגְלֵי} \text{זָרִים}$ "strangers" or "foreigners" of verses 45 and 46 suggest that they were non-Israelites who have been completely subdued (cf. Murphy 1968:578).¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Anderson takes them to have been "most likely the hostile nations" (1972:166). The idea of liberation from enemies features also in Psalm 118:

"All nations surrounded me:
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
But the Lord helped me.
The Lord is my strength and my song;
He has become my salvation [$\text{יְהוָה} \text{יִשְׁׁוּׁעִי}$]" (vv 10-14).

The above verses are taken by Murphy as "the victory song" (1968:597), and by Anderson as "thanksgiving for deliverance from the actual hazards of war" (1972:439).¹⁰⁵ As in Psalm 18, the poet of Psalm 118 also attributes his experience of victory over the enemies to $\text{יְמִינֵי} \text{יְהוָה}$ "the right hand of the Lord" (v 16; cf Ps. 18:36), i.e. Yahweh's own power (cf. above, pp. 65).

The fact that it is the right hand of God which delivers the individual from his enemies is also known by the poet of Psalm 138:

¹⁰⁴ Craigie here provides two different answers. For him "the implication may either be that the enemies were Israelites and so called upon the Lord for help, or else that they were foreign enemies who called upon the Lord for help when no aid was forthcoming from their own gods" (1983:176).

¹⁰⁵ Croft (1987:104) also describes this psalm as a song of rejoicing for victory.

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
 thou doest preserve my life:
 thou doest stretch out thy hand against
 the wrath of my enemies,
 and thy right hand delivers me" (V.7).

In all of the citations which we have considered above the experience of victory over the enemies, either in the picture of cosmology or in military terms, is given as the reason for thanksgiving. So the praise of God in the psalms of individual thanksgiving is not just based on the fantasies of the poets, but it is grounded in the experience of people who speak in them. And their experience is that of liberation from military enemies.

4.4 The Recipients of Liberation (Ps. 34)

In our treatment of the individual laments we referred to Psalms 26 and 40 as describing the characteristics which deserve liberation. Related to that idea is the theme of Psalm 34. This psalm is a thanksgiving in which the status and characteristics of the recipients of liberation are clearly described.¹⁰⁶ Except for the call to worship (vv 1-3) and the testimony of the retribution which will befall the wicked and the evil (cf. vv 17,22), Psalm 34 proclaims the liberation of God, his deliverance and protection for different individuals. This psalm makes seven

¹⁰⁶ Psalm 34 is considered by (Weiser 1962:296) to have been recited in the festival services of the community of the godly, who are also called "the humble, the saints, the righteous". But Dahood (1965-70:I,205) takes it as a thanksgiving composed by an individual whose prayer for deliverance from tribulation was heard by Yahweh, and to which he invites the afflicted to join in his hymn of praise.

references to the personal liberation in the following way:

- (1) I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and "delivered" (לצַל) me from all my fears (v.5).
- (2) This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and "saved" (לְשׂוּבָה) him out of all his troubles (v.7).
- (3) The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and "delivers" (לצַל) them (v.8).
- (4) When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and "delivers" (לְשׂוּבָה) them out of all their troubles (v.18).
- (5) The Lord is near to the broken hearted, and "saves" (לְשׂוּבָה) the crushed in spirit (v.19).
- (6) Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord "delivers" (לצַל) him out of them all (v. 20).
- (7) The Lord "redeems" (לְפָדוֹת) the life of his servants, those who take refuge in him (v.23).

From the above verses one can identify recipients of liberation as following:

(i) "Those who seek the Lord"

Like the psalmist himself (v. 5) the recipients of liberation in Psalm 34 are described as לְשׂוּבָה יְיָ "those who seek the Lord" (v.11; cf. v.5). The verb שׂוּבָה "to seek" may denote both a visit to a sanctuary as in Amos 5:5, and the worship of God in general as in Amos 5:6. The verb is also the usual word for consulting

the divine oracle (Gen. 24:22; 1 Sam. 9:9; cf. Wagner 1978:298-304). The term is used in Psalm 77:3 to describe the desperate search for the presence of God or his help. In Psalm 34 the poet may have had in mind both meanings, that is, to visit the sanctuary for the purpose of worshipping God (cf. Anderson 1972:204). This same description of the recipients of liberation occurs also in Psalm 40:17.

One can therefore conclude that in the psalms of individual thanksgiving the recipients of liberation are people who worship God and seek help from him.

(ii) The poor

As in Psalm 40 which is already treated above (cf. pp. 124ff.), in Psalm 34 too, the recipient of liberation is referred to as an "poor man" (v. 7). Some scholars tend to spiritualize this concept, describing it as referring to the "humble man" (cf. Weiser 1962:297) or to the "man who has seen affliction" as occurs in Lamentations 3:1 (cf. Anderson 1972:270). But when seen in the context of other psalms as well as of other passages in the Old Testament, "poor" refers to the disadvantaged group within the nation whom the king is obliged to protect by virtue of his office (see Ps. 72:4). In other words, the particular concept refers to those who are socially and economically poor (cf. Excursus IV above, pp. 126ff.). Elsewhere in the Old Testament this disadvantaged people are dependent on God's help and protection (cf. Excursus I above, pp. 63f.). Thus in the present psalm the psalmist as the recipient of liberation thanks God who

Poor

spirit-

Real poor

Ref. to Excursus

because of his justice towards the poor has liberated him.

(iii) Those who fear God

Another characteristic of the recipients of liberation in Psalm 34 is ל'אָר' "those who fear him", i.e. אָר' (vv. 8, 18; cf. v.12). The expression refers to the people who are faithful to God, as the phrase אָר' אָר' "the fear of the Lord" always includes both the devout reverence which is essential to God, and the conduct which it demands (cf. Prov. 8:13; 9:10; Is. 11:2, 3; see also Kirkpatrick 1951:173). Those who fear the Lord show an attitude and awe of God, which, in the words of Anderson, "does not become terror or dread but finds expression in praise and prayer, obedience and loyalty" (1972:271). These people, according to Psalm 18 are assured of God's deliverance and liberation, as his angel encamps around them (v.8) i.e. he protects them.

(iv) The righteous

Associated with liberation in Psalm 34 are also the אָר' "righteous" (vv 16, 18, 20).¹⁰⁷ In its Hebrew concept, as Anderson elaborates, this word "describes persons who are what they should be. The criterion is not primarily certain ethical norms as such, but the fulfilment of the demands of the relationships within which one finds oneself. The Israelite stood in a particular relationship to his God, his fellow men, and his

¹⁰⁷ This term is missing in the Masoretic text at verse 18, but the Septuagint, the Syriac and Targum versions add οἱ δίκαιοι "the righteous" which seems to be the correct interpretation of the Masoretic text (cf. Anderson 1972:274; Craigie 1983:277).

world in general, and each of these relationships made certain demands upon him from day to day. The righteous man accepted his responsibilities and carried them out accordingly" (1972:62f.).

Elsewhere in the Psalter, the definition of the righteous is provided in Psalm 1: They are those "happy" ones (v. 1), whose lives are always open to God's instruction (v. 2).¹⁰⁸ In other words, the righteous, as McCann describes them, are the people "who know the lessons taught by the laments, the hymns, the royal and enthronement psalms. They know what is wrong with themselves and the world; their consciousness is structured by an awareness of their finitude and fallibility that leads them to profess "My help is in God. They know that their lives are not their own, and they live to glorify God rather than to gratify self" (1992:127).

In Psalm 34 the righteous are special objects of God's intervention and know themselves to be recipients of his favour. Hence they are thankful. They are those to whom God attends in peculiar ways (cf. Brueggemann 1984:134):

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous (v. 16).
 The Lord hears the cry of the righteous (v. 18).
 Many of the afflictions of the righteous (v. 20).
 The righteous are the ones whom God sees (v.16), hears (v. 18), is near (v.19) and delivers (לַצַּדִּיק, vv 20-21).

Alongside their being the recipients of God's liberation, the

¹⁰⁸ The term צַדִּיקִים "the righteous" is frequently used in the psalms in contrast with רְשָׁעִים "the evil-doers" or "the wicked". These two terms have often been taken to indicate two "parties" or "tendencies" within the Jewish community: the piously obedient to the law, and the ungodly apostates or worldly-minded (cf. Excursus II above pp. 100ff.).

righteous in Psalm 34 have the responsibility for reshaping life and reordering social life (cf. vv. 14-15). In the words of Brueggemann, "The righteous may or may not be the good, but they are surely the socially marginal, who no longer expect the dominant society to support them, and so they look to Yahweh as the alternative source of help. Thus the cry of the righteous is an act of de-legitimizing the primary structures that have reduced people to helplessness" (1984:34). Although the righteous may be hated (v. 22), because they look to Yahweh, their "bones" (v. 21), i.e. their physical welfare and lives will always continue to be under the divine oversight and care (cf. Craigie 1983:281).

(v) The brokenhearted and the crushed in spirit

The Psalmist also refers to לֵב שֶׁבַר "the brokenhearted" and רוּחַ אֶבֶן "crushed in spirit" (v.19). This expression occurs elsewhere in Psalms 51:19; 147:3 as well as in Is. 57:15; 61:1. Here the psalmist seems to declare that the liberating power of God is always at hand, as long as the afflicted person turns to God in humility and trust (cf. Weiser 1962:299f.).

Elsewhere God is always in solidarity with the brokenhearted and the ones with the crushed spirit (cf. Is. 57:15; 61:1). What is important in this process of brokenness of the heart is not the circumstances of the person concerned but rather his attitude to God (cf. Anderson 1972:274). This brokenness may not be a psychological dismantling, but as Brueggemann states, "it may as well be an economic unburdening, a political risking, a stepping

away from whatever form of power we have used by which to secure ourselves" (1984:101). In the present Psalm (34:19) these persons experience the nearness of God, i.e. his fellowship with them which is always realized in his liberating acts.

(vi) Those who take refuge in God

Psalm 34 moreover has ׀] ׀'׀׀׀׀ "those who take refuge in him", i.e. in Yahweh (vv 9,23) as the recipients of liberation. This phrase occurs elsewhere in the Psalter. The people who take refuge in God are assured of his blessing (Ps. 2:12). Thus they can rejoice and sing for joy (Ps. 4:12). In Psalm 34 they are the objects of God's acts of redemption (לאל v.23) just as they are subjects of his acts of liberation (׀׀׀) elsewhere in the Psalter (cf Ps. 7:2).

In concluding this section we may state that the recipients of liberation in the Psalter are pointed out as those who seek the Lord, the poor, those who fear God, the righteous, i.e. the just, the brokenhearted and those who take refuge in God. All these are assured of the divine liberation not because they are poor or good, but because they look to God.

4.5 Liberation as Healing (Ps. 116)

In our treatment of the settings of the psalms of individual lament (cf. above, pp. 77f.) as well as of Psalm 6 (cf. above, pp. 110-114, in particular, we have noticed that people who were sick used to participate in healing rituals where they secured

their healing through prayers. It was therefore natural for one who was healed to celebrate his recovery in the form of a thanksgiving (cf. Is. 38:9-20; see also above, p. 160ff.). In the Psalter this phenomenon can be discovered through the investigation of Psalm 116, which has been generally classified as an individual thanksgiving (Hayes 1976:85; Anderson 1972:790; Anderson 1983: 236) or as a "narrative praise by the individual" (Westermann 1982:72). In this psalm the theme of liberation can be analyzed by examining two aspects, namely the actual experience of the worshipper and his response to such an experience.

4.5.1 The Worshipper's Actual Experience

The worshipper in Psalm 116 had an experience of deliverance from some great distress. The description of the actual situation of the distress in this psalm, in the opinion of some scholars, appears to be unclear or vague (cf. Weiser 1962:719; Mbon 1982:12). To a certain extent this vagueness is typical: "The psalmist does not intend to relate what happened to him, but to testify to what God has done for him. For the congregation before whom he praised God with this confession the important thing was not "the individual features" but the "testimony of the witness" (Westermann 1981:109). The one confessing in Psalm 116 did not, in the first place, intend to give the details of what had happened, but to declare the praise: "I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications" (v.1). Yet, in spite of this seeming vagueness we can still try to investigate and figure out the background of the experience in Psalm 116.

In the first place the actual situation of the psalmist can be derived from the description of the distress in verses 3-4.¹⁰⁹ Here we find the use of the mythological pictures of "the cords of death" and "the pangs of Sheol" (v.3), almost as they occur in Psalm 18:5-6 (cf. above, p. 162f.). But unlike Psalm 18, where these concepts are closely associated with the אֹיְבֵי "enemies", in Psalm 116 there is no reference to enemies. In our treatment of Psalm 18 earlier we have already indicated that the concept מוֹת חַלְלֵי "cords of death" is used to show the imminent mortal danger to which the worshipper is exposed. But the term חַלְלֵי "cords" can also mean "pain" or "pangs" as it appears in Is. 66:7; Jer. 49:24; Job 21:17 (cf Brown et al 1951:286). Hence the expression מוֹת חַלְלֵי "cords of death" may also mean "most terrible pains or sorrow" (cf Anderson 1972:156). And this is the meaning which seems to be in the background of the particular expression (cords of death) in Psalm 116:3. Given this line of interpretation, the actual situation of the worshipper in this psalm can be taken to be related to the experience of serious illness.¹¹⁰

The actual situation of Psalm 116 needs to be examined in the light of Psalms 6 and 30 which almost employ similar expressions. The idea of personal deliverance from death and Sheol in Psalm 116:3-4, 8 corresponds to the prayer for deliverance from death

¹⁰⁹ Hayes states that "verses 3-4 of Psalm 116 demonstrate that the psalm was offered by one who has recovered from sickness" (1976:91).

¹¹⁰ A number of scholars have also suggested sickness as the most likely situation (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:687; Anderson 1962:438; Dahood 1976:145; Allen 1983:114; Croft 1987:65).

and Sheol in Psalm 6:3-6, where the concept is closely associated with רפא "heal" (v. 3). In Psalm 30, which is another psalm of individual thanksgiving we also find reference to "Sheol" (v.4) and "death" (v. 10) as the threats from which the worshipper was delivered, and these are mentioned in the context of healing: "O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help and thou hast healed me" (רפא, Ps. 30:3).¹¹¹ So, as it applies to Psalm 30, the cause of death and consequent entry into Sheol in Psalm 116 can also be taken to be sickness and the act of deliverance from this particular danger may be regarded as healing. The experience of illness is thus tantamount to being in Sheol or in the netherworld, and therefore healing can be described as a deliverance from the underworld (cf. Ps. 30:3).¹¹²

Secondly, the interpretation of Psalm 116 as a psalm of recovery after sickness, according to Croft (1987:129), is supported by Job 33:

"Then man prays to God and he accepts him, he comes into his presence with joy. He recounts to men his salvation, and he sings before men and says: 'I sinned and perverted what is right and it was not required to me. He has redeemed my soul from going into the pit, and my life shall see the light'" (vv 26-28).

¹¹¹ The verb רפא is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to healing from physical sickness (cf. Exod. 21:19, Lev. 13:18; 1 Sam. 6:3; 2 Kings 8:29; Is. 19:22; Job 5:18; Ps. 157:3; see also Brown et al 1951:950f.; Stoebe 1979:804f.).

¹¹² Sheol was not so much a geographical location as a sphere of influence: wherever one finds the characteristics of Sheol, such as weakness, disease, misery, forsakenness, etc. there is Sheol (cf. Excursus III above pp. 127f.).

The text of Job is a typical thanksgiving, similar to Psalm 116, and its background or context is, no doubt, the sickness of Job.

So from what we have discussed above, one can come to the conclusion that liberation in the Psalter comprises healing from physical sickness and its consequent death and entry to Sheol.

4.5.2 The Worshipper's Response

Accompanying the theme of liberation in Psalm 116 is the recognition of God as the one who provides health and the psalmist's response to this experience. Several times the psalmist emphasized that it was God who had liberated him: "He has heard my voice (v.1). "He inclined his ear to me (v.2); "he saved [YV³] me" (v.6); "the Lord has dealt bountifully with you", i.e. "my soul" (v.7); "thou hast delivered [Y³Π] my soul from death" (v.8); "Thou hast loosed my bonds" (v.16). The psalmist has understood and interpreted his recovery in this way. He attributed all what he has experienced to the liberating intervention of God. The poet of Psalm 116 like other worshippers, was accustomed to telling God about his troubles, and miseries as part of his worship. And when relief was realized and joy experienced again he looked on God as one who had delivered him, and so he told him of his gratitude (cf Hargreaves 1990:148).

One can observe here that the psalmist was claiming two things in particular:

- (1) God liberated me, i.e. it did not happen by chance or

on my own power.

- (2) God liberated me because I asked him to do it, i.e. "he heard my supplications" (cf. v.1) and did what I wanted (cf. v.4).

On the grounds of the experience of liberation as described above and of the recognition of God as its author, the psalmist, in wonder of the greatness of the gift of liberation which he has received, cannot but raise the question: "What shall I render to the Lord?" (v.12). The Hebrew verb נָתַן translated "render" here can mean "to return", "to give back" or "to pay back" (cf. Brown et al 1951:996ff.). The psalmist asks here what he can return or give back to God for the תַּגְמוֹת "benefit" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:1018), i.e. all favours which he has received from him (cf. Dahood 1965-70:III,149). What follows after this question is the worshipper's response to the divine bounty i.e. the experience of liberation. The psalmist's "giving back" or simply response to God in Psalm 116 consists of the following elements:¹¹³

- (1) Public acknowledgement of what God had done: For example, "I will ... call on the name of the Lord" (vv 13, 17). To call יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ "in the name of the Lord" is an ancient formula widened in the patriarchal narratives, for example Gen. 12:8. The phrase is understood by Westermann as "the verbal expression of a turning to God which begins with the invocation of his name" (1989:194). This saying can describe a call for help i.e. prayer

¹¹³ Westermann recognizes here "the two chief aspects of worship, word (13b and 17b) and sacrament (13a and 17a), prayer and sacrifice" (1989:194).

as in verse 4, but in verses 13 and 17 it is tantamount to the proclaiming of Yahweh's name in thanksgiving (cf. Anderson 1972:794). Such proclamation is also expressed by the formula: הַלְלֵהוּ-יְיָ ¹¹⁴ "Praise the Lord" as in verse 19.

(2) Rededicating of oneself to the service of God: This would, for example, take place through the payment of vows (vv 14, 18), through being God's servant (v.16) and by symbolic actions (cf Hargreaves 1990:150). These actions were to "lift up the cup of salvation" (v.13a), and to offer the זֶבַח תְּנוּחָה "sacrifice of thanksgiving" (v.17).

The cup of salvation ($\text{כַּסְּיֵי שְׁלוּמֵהוּ}$) according to Anderson (1972) can mean the following things: (i) a drink offering [of wine] which was part of the thanks-offering (cf. Num. 28:7); (ii) a metaphor of deliverance and the opposite of the cup of Yahweh's wrath (cf. Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15); (iii) a cup connected with some particular ordeal (cf. Num. 5:16-28); (iv) a cup of wine used at the thanksgiving meal (cf. Ps. 23:5). While for Dahood (1965-70:III,149) the cup is to be drunk as a part of the thanksgiving sacrifice for a major deliverance.

In Psalm 116 the meaning of the cup as a drink offering seems the most probable, because "the cup" must represent something rendered to Yahweh, as an expression of the psalmist's gratitude

¹¹⁴ The Hebrew root הָלַל "praise, extol" is cognate with the Akkadian verb *alalu* "shout exultingly" and with the Arabic *halla*, meaning "sing joyfully to someone" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:235), Ringgren 1978:404). In the majority of the Old Testament passages, God is the object of this verb (cf. Ibid 1978:406).

(cf. v. 12; cf. Rogerson & McKay 1977:III,82). While "sacrifice of thanksgiving הקריבן תודה was a communion sacrifice, the purpose of which was to express gratitude for the divine help received and to bear testimony to the liberating work of God (cf Eichrodt 1961:I,147).¹¹⁵ Moreover, both actions, the lifting up of the cup and the offering of the sacrifice of thanksgiving would be conducted in celebration of God's liberating acts as experienced by the worshipper.

In concluding this sub-section we need to make use of Westermann's vocabulary: "God acts and speaks in order to elicit a response both in action and in speech" (1982:152). In this psalm too one observes both the side of God which is realized in the acts of liberation and the human part which is expressed in responsive praise.

4.6 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we concentrated on the theme of liberation in the psalms of individual thanksgiving. We began with exploring the idea of liberation as victory over enemies, investigating mainly Psalms 18, 118 and 138. Psalm 18, for example, celebrates the liberation from enemies whose sphere of influence is not only portrayed in cosmic dimensions of the "sea" and "many waters" but it is also described in military terms.

¹¹⁵ Westermann explains the meaning of this concept differently, for him it can mean "either a sacrifice consisting of the praise of God or the sacrificial meal, that is a shared offering when a vow was discharged" (1989:195-195).

We continued with examining the identity of those who receive liberation. Here we dealt specifically with Psalm 34. The results of our analysis show that the recipients of liberation in the Psalter consist of the people, all who seek, fear and take refuge in God, the poor, the just and the brokenhearted. These are assured of God's liberation because they look to him.

Another aspect which we considered in this chapter is liberation as healing. Here our study was centred on Psalm 116 where we examined two aspects, viz. the worshipper's actual experience as well as his response. The investigation attempted to demonstrate that the worshipper of this psalm has experienced healing from physical sickness after which he has responded to God, who he believes had healed him, with vows of acknowledging him publicly and rededicating himself to his service.

So, in these psalms too as in the communal thanksgivings, the experience of liberation promoted a joyful response to God, which is expressed in words and actions of thanksgiving.

CHAPTER 5

LIBERATION IN THE HYMNS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters on the psalms of lament and thanksgiving we have seen that the Hebrew terms for liberation are frequently used in the contexts of prayer or thanksgiving for deliverance from the oppressive situations. In the hymn psalms too, although these terms seem to be not frequently utilized, there are some psalms which underline their meanings. In these psalms liberation is presented as the reason for praising God. And as such, it is also taken into account. These ideas can be found especially in the psalms which will be examined in this chapter. We will first discuss the possible setting of this category.

5.2 Genre,

5.2.1 Genre

The designation of the songs of praise as hymns is revealed in the history (cf. 1933:32-94)

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4	48550-ONDERNEMINGSBESTUUR-878	8	Groen	03:00	(BA)
16	48550-ONDERNEMINGSBESTUUR-888	8	Groen	03:00	(BAS)
22	24813-KLINIESE SIELKUNDE-878	3	Geel	03:00	(AN)

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refers to the
of Yahweh as
in Israel's
1933:32-94)

defined this category of psalms as hymns of praise,¹¹⁶ while Westermann (1983:85-96) preferred to call them "descriptive praise". The basic moods of these poems are enthusiasm, adoration, reverence, praise and laudation (cf. Gunkel 1933:68).

There are about twenty-five psalms classified as hymns in the Psalter (cf. Johnson 1951:66). Although scholars differ in their assignments of psalms to this genre. Gunkel (1933:32) lists as hymns Psalms 8; 19; 29; 33; 65; 67; 68; 96; 98; 100; 103; 104; 105; 111; 113; 114; 117; 135; 136; 145; 148; 149 and 150. While Westermann (1980:85) adopts almost the whole list of Gunkel, but he leaves out Psalms 67; 68; 96; 98, and adds Psalms 57:7-11; 66:1-7; 89:5-18; 134 and 139. Weiser (1962:53) too follows Gunkel's list, although he takes also the so-called "Zion" psalms (Pss. 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; 122 and the rest of the "enthronement psalms" (Pss. 47; 93; 97; 99) as belonging formally to this genre. The other scholars either follow Gunkel's suggestion or that of Westermann (cf. Hayes 1967:21; Anderson 1983:239-242). Outside the Psalter, the hymns can be found in Exodus 15:21; Judges 5; Isaiah 6:3; Jeremiah 10:6-16 and many other passages (cf. Westermann 1980:85).

In structure, the hymns of praise share common characteristics features, underlined by the following three elements (cf. Gunkel 1933:38-58; Mowinckel 1962:I,81-89); Gerstenberger 1974:209):

¹¹⁶ Gunkel introduced the term "hymn" as a translation of the Hebrew הַלְלָהּ, meaning "praise" or "song of praise", the term which in its plural form was generally used as the title of the Psalter (cf. Eissfeldt 1965:105). This particular term can also refer to Yahweh himself and his praiseworthy actions (cf. Koch 1969:163).

(a) A hymnic introduction or an invitation to song with which the psalm begins (cf. Koch 1969:1612). This part may be an imperative directed to those to whom the invitation is extended: "O Sing to the Lord a new song" (Ps. 98:1), or "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands" (Ps. 100:1). This imperative call to praise may be expanded by describing the object of praise: "Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament" (Ps. 150:1), or by defining the people addressed: "Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord" (Ps. 134:1; cf. Anderson 1972:33). Sometimes the introduction may be jussive: "Let them praise the name of the Lord", or cohortative: "... let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation (Ps. 95:1-2; cf. also Eissfeldt 1965:107).

There is a diversity in those who are addressed and invited to praise. Sometimes the psalmist calls upon his soul to praise God (Pss. 103:1; 104:1). At other times it is the nation Israel, the sons of Zion, (Ps. 149:1-2), or the servants of God (Pss. 113:1; 135:1). The world at large is summoned (Ps. 100:1; 117:1). Sometimes it is the heavenly beings, the angels who are called upon to praise God (Ps. 29:1-2; 148:1-2). At other times the created elements or all creation are invited to offer praise (Pss. 66:1; 148:3-4; cf. Hayes 1976:22f.).

(b) The main section or body of the hymn (cf. Anderson 1972:33; Westermann 1980:93). This element contains the actual proclamation of divine praise (cf. Hayes 1976:23). This is often introduced by the thematic sentence which begins with the conjunction ']

"for" or "because" and gives reasons for praising God (cf. Koch 1969:161f.; Weiser 1962:53). Here are some examples of the thematic sentence: "For the Lord Most High is terrible" (Ps. 47:3), or "For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself ... " (Ps. 137:4). Following the thematic sentence is the enumeration of God's attributes and historical deeds (cf. Koch 1969:162; Hayes 1976:21). This enumeration may utilize participles such as "who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live" (Ps. 103:3-4). Sometimes it can employ relative clauses such as "thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted" (Ps. 8:2b; cf. Eissfeldt 1965:107; Anderson 1972:33).

Another notable characteristic of the main section of the hymn concerns the way in which God is referred to. The majority of the hymns refer to God in the third person, i.e. they praise God not in direct address but in statements and acclamations about God (Cf. Hayes 1976:24; Tomes 1989:258). Some hymns, however, such as Psalms 8 and 104 praise God in direct address, referring to him in the second person.

(c) The main section is followed by a concluding statement. This varied from hymn to hymn. Sometimes the concluding section is a general expression of hope: "May the Lord bless his people with peace" (Ps. 29:11; cf. Hayes 1976:25). Frequently the introductory invitation to song is repeated (cf. Koch 1969:163). For example Psalms 146-150, which all begin and conclude with the acclamation "Halleluya" or "Praise the Lord". Occasionally the

hymns conclude with a call to bless the Lord (Ps. 135:19-21) or with a request (Ps. 104:35) or with a vow (ps. 115:18: cf. Hayes 1976:25). Sometimes the hymn simply ends with a thematic sentence (Ps. 47:9b); or a thematic sentence can be placed before the conclusion to the song (Ps. 146:109), sometimes including a reference to those who do not have this unique relationship to God (Ps. 135:15-18; cf. Koch 1969:163).

The hymn psalms must have been used in certain religious contexts. We will now look at their possible settings.

5.2.2 Setting

As with psalms of other genres, the hymns too must have been used in certain religious occasions. The idea that these psalms had certain ceremonial backgrounds is indicated by their introductions and conclusions (cf. Koch 1969:163f.). Here it is shown that some of the songs were to be accompanied by musical instruments (Pss. 47:7; 146:2). And that they were to be sung in a particular place, in the "house of the Lord" (Ps. 135:2), i.e. in the temple. And were to be sung by the cultic community, which consisted of Aaronic priests, Levitical deacons, and the god-fearing, i.e. lay people (Ps. 1345:19, 20; cf. Koch 19069:164). The quotation of and references to some of these psalms in Chronicles (1 Chron. 16; 2 Chron. 5:13; 7:3; see Ezra 3:11) suggest that in the post-exilic period at least these psalms were used on important festival occasions and were sung by Levites to instrumental accompaniment (cf. Tomes 1989:259).

Some of the possible accessions where these hymns were utilized are the following:

(a) The ceremony celebrating Yahweh's kingship

As early as 1922, S Mowinckel proposed that certain of the hymns together with other psalms which contain the acclamation "The Lord reigns" (Pss. 47; 93; 95-99) had been used in the pre-exilic period during a New Year festival to celebrate the enthronement¹¹⁷ of Yahweh as King (cf. Johnson 1951:190-7). Mowinckel reconstructed these psalms on the basis of the Babylonian New Year festival where Marduk was enthroned (cf. Anderson 1972:34). The idea of such a festival provides an imaginative setting which many psalms can be fitted with more or less plausibility (cf. Johnson 1967:54-102), but as there is no explicit data that the pre-exilic autumn festival in Jerusalem had this character, the point of regarding the psalms as having been used in this way remains hypothetical (cf. Tomes 1989:259).

(b) The ceremony of remembrance of Israel's salvation

This occasion can be derived from the context of Psalm 135 - a hymn in honour of Israel's salvation history (Koch 1969:165). Von Rad (1966:3-13, 41-48) has pointed out that Israel regarded the period between the exodus from Egypt and the entry into Palestine as salvation history in its most eminent sense, and was strongly

¹¹⁷ According to Anderson (1972:34f.) the term "enthronement" seems to be misleading, for who was in position to enthrone Yahweh? He thus suggests that it is plausible to speak about these hymns as "celebrating Yahweh's kingship".

represented at cultic celebrations even before the founding of the state. In other words the people of Israel used to hold festivals where they commemorated their liberation. As Koch (1969:165) has pointed out, this normative *Heilsgeschichte*, at a later stage, would have been augmented by the history of the earliest times, and thus in the psalms the creation will have been made to precede the events of Egypt. The most important events of this period were recited by the priest or other professional speakers, and perhaps even presented in the form of ritual drama. The community accompanied the performance or ended it with a hymn as Psalm 135.

5.3 Liberation as the Reason for Praise (Pss. 98; 103)

In our discussion of the settings of the hymns we have already indicated that the community of Israel used to hold ceremonies where they remembered their history of liberation. The idea of liberation as one of the reasons for praising God can be derived from Psalms 98 and 103, which we will now discuss in turn.

(a) Psalm 98

In Psalm 98¹¹⁸ the idea of liberation as the basis for praising God can be found in verses 1-3. These verses enumerate God's acts for which he is to be praised. These acts include, among others,

¹¹⁸ Psalm 98 resembles Psalm 96, and as such it is taken by some commentators as an enthronement psalm (cf. Weiser 1962:637; Rogerson & McKay 1977:226), or as a hymn praising Yahweh's kingship (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,365). But Anderson (1972:690) described it as a hymn of praise for deliverance which Yahweh has wrought for his people.

God's revelation of his הוֹשִׁיעַ "liberation". These are introduced by the causal conjunction כִּי "for" or "because" (v. 1b)¹¹⁹ and are thus given here as the grounds for praise (cf. Brueggemann 1984:174f.). The root יָשַׁע "save" or "liberate" is used three times in these verses (cf. vv. 1b, 2a, 3b).¹²⁰ What is meant by הוֹשִׁיעַ in the context of this psalm can be understood in the light of the term מַעֲלָמוֹת "marvellous things" (v. 1b; cf. Anderson 1972:691; Kidner 1975:352), which serves here as part of the thematic sentence (cf. Koch 1969:161f.).

The term מַעֲלָמוֹת designates the wonderful and extra-ordinary deeds of Yahweh, his triumph over the cosmos and his liberating deeds wrought in the course of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (cf. above, pp. 29f; see also Anderson 1972:565).¹²¹ In this light הוֹשִׁיעַ in this psalm can thus be taken as referring to God's conquest over his cosmic rivals by giving Israel victory over the nations (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,365). These miraculous intervention on behalf of Israel constitute here the reason for praising God. As in Miriam's song (Exod. 15:6), the singers of Psalm 98 were motivated to express themselves in this way by God's way of dealing with them, his manifestation of his liberating deeds to Israel as well as to the whole world (v. 2; cf. Briggs et al 1960:II,307; Weiser 1962:637f.).

¹¹⁹ On the use of כִּי as a causal conjunction, see Williams (1976:72).

¹²⁰ On the meaning of יָשַׁע elsewhere in the O.T., see above pp. 25f.

¹²¹ The marvellous deeds could also include the return from the Babylonian exile (cf. McCullough 1955:525; Rogerson & McKay 1977:226).

(b) Psalm 103

Psalm 103 is another hymn which gives liberation as one of the reasons for praising God. The psalm can be described as an individual thanksgiving in the form of a hymn (cf. Anderson 1972:712; Hayes 1976:89). As other hymns, this psalm too consists of an introduction (vv. 1-2), two main sections (vv. 3-5 and 6-18), and a conclusion (vv. 19-22).

The first main section gives the reason for praising God in a series of participles which summarize God's characteristic action (cf. Brueggemann 1984:160). The participles describe God as one who heals, redeems, crowns and satisfies the psalmist. Here one of the Hebrew terms for liberation לָאָל "redeem" is used (cf. v. 4).¹²² In Psalm 103, the psalmist, among others, is praising God for redeeming his life¹²³ from the Pit,¹²⁴ i.e. for liberating him from the cause of death and subsequent entry to the grave, which in this context may be disease (cf. v. 3c).¹²⁵ So as in Psalm 98 here too liberation is presented as the basis for praise.

¹²² On the meaning of לָאָל , see above, pp. 23ff.

¹²³ On the meaning of "life", see below, p. 237.

¹²⁴ On the meaning of "Pit", see Excursus III above, pp. 119ff.

¹²⁵ For the connection between healing from disease or sickness and the idea of liberation, see on Psalm 6 above, pp.110ff.

5.4 Liberation as the Subject of Proclamation (Ps. 96)

In the previous section we have seen that the theme of liberation occurs as the reason for praising God. In the hymns, the theme of liberation comprises not only the reason for praise, but it is also the content of the message which is to be proclaimed. This point is underlined in Psalm 96 (cf. Weiser 1962:628).¹²⁶ The idea occurs here in the introductory call to praise (vv. 1-3) which mention God's הַלְלוּ as a subject of proclamation. The thought is emphasised here by the uses of the imperatives לְהַלְלוּ (v. 2b) and לְהַגִּידוּ (v. 3a). The former is the piel imperative plural form of the verb הָלַל , meaning "to announce", "to declare", "to tell good tidings", "to herald as glad tidings" or "to bring good news" (cf. Brown et al 1951:142; Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:157; Davidson 1970:123). The word can be used with reference to a joyful announcement or proclamation of Yahweh's saving deeds (cf. Schilling 1975:3125). While the latter is piel imperative plural form of the verb הִגִּיד , which can mean "count", "recount", "enumerate", "make known", or "declare" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:665). The word is used elsewhere with reference to the rehearsing of Yahweh's glorious deeds (Pss. 44:2; 73:28; 78:3, 4; 79:13) or of his praise (Exod. 9:16; 1 Chron. 16:24; Jer. 51:10; Pss. 9:15; 102:22; cf. Brown et al 1951:707f.).

In the context of Psalm 96 both verbs הָלַל and הִגִּיד are used with

¹²⁶ Psalm 96 as Psalm 98 is described by some commentators as an enthronement psalm (cf. Weiser 1962:628; Westermann 1981:148ff.). But others prefer to refer to it as a psalm celebrating the sovereignty or kingship of Yahweh (cf. Dahood 1965-70:II,357; Rogerson & McKay 1977:220), the setting of which was the Israelite New Year festival (cf. Anderson 1972:681).

reference to the proclamation of God's הַלְלוּ (v.2). The exact meaning of הַלְלוּ here depends on the interpretation of the psalm. The word has been taken as referring to some recent deliverance of Israel (such as the return from Babylonian exile) or Yahweh's victory at the end-time (cf. Anderson 1972:682; Rogerson & McKay 1977:220f.). But the meaning of הַלְלוּ in this psalm can be understood in the light of God's כְּבוֹד "glory" and נִפְלְאוֹת (v. 3) which are used here in parallel with it. As we have already noted in our earlier discussions, כְּבוֹד is an expression which refers to the revelation of the presence of Israel's God (cf. above, p. 60f.). While נִפְלְאוֹת points to Yahweh's victory over cosmos and his liberating deeds wrought in the course of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (cf. pp. 29f. and see also on Ps 98 above). So, הַלְלוּ in this connection may then mean liberation as experienced by Israel in the form of her deliverance from Egypt or her return from Babylonian exile.

We can therefore say that in Psalm 96 the people are invited to pass on their knowledge of the miraculous liberating deeds of God to the "nations" (v. 3), i.e. to all the peoples of the world, so that his majestic power may be praised (cf. Weiser 1962:629). Furthermore we can also observe here that the encounter with liberation brings about joy among the people which not only motivates them to praise God, but it also prompts them to share their experience and excitements with others .

5.4 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have observed that the hymn psalms share

common elements, viz. the introduction, where the invitation to praise is extended; the main section, which contains the actual proclamation of divine praise; and the conclusion, which may include an expression of hope or any other form.

We have also noted that these psalms seem to have been utilized in certain religious occasions, such as the ceremony celebrating Yahweh's kingship, and the ceremony of remembrance of Israel's history of liberation. In this genre too, the theme of liberation can be traced. In Psalms 98 and 103, as we have observed, God's liberating acts are given as the reason for praise. And in Psalm 96 the divine deeds of liberation are taken as the subject of proclamation.

CHAPTER 6

LIBERATION IN THE ROYAL PSALMS

6.1 Introduction

The royal psalms have been discussed in various ways in secondary literature but it is not the intent of this chapter to review that literature. Here we will attempt to analyze the O.T. concept of liberation in connection with the role of the human king. In the preceding chapters one must have observed that liberation was experienced as the divine act, coming about through God's helping intervention in the history of the people as well as in the lives of the individuals. In the present chapter however, liberation, as we will see, is more than the divine acts only. In the royal psalms, which are the focus of this chapter, liberation may come about through human beings. In these psalms the by now familiar Hebrew word for liberation VW^{7} is used in the sense of providing liberation and dispensing justice by the human king. Here liberation is presented as one of the tasks of the king, which are laid on him by God and whose discharge secures happy and prosperous life for the people.¹²⁷ Our main concern in this chapter is thus to enquire into the aspect of liberation as both the divine gift to the king as well as the king's character and commission whereby he effects social justice and brings about

¹²⁷ The idea of liberation as one of the tasks of the king features especially in Psalms 20; 33:16; 72. The idea is also common in the narratives of the Deuteronomic historians, such as in Judges 12:2f.; 13:5 and especially in 2 Sam. 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26 (cf. McKenzie 1978:760).

economic prosperity. In dealing with this aspect we will concentrate especially on Psalms 20, and 72, which make references to liberation. But before we embark on the study of the idea of liberation in the particular psalms we need first to present a brief survey of their genre as well as to outline their settings or occasions in which they might have been used.

Ps 20
72

Genre
Setting
Occasion

6.2 Outline of Genre, Formal Structure and Setting

6.2.1 Genre and Formal Structure

The royal psalms were recognized by Gunkel (1933:140ff.) as one of the main genres, but in actual fact a formal category of royal psalms is not found in the Psalter. Rather, they comprise psalms of various categories, viz. laments and thanksgivings in which the king is in the foreground (cf. Mowinckel 1962:I,47; Hayes 1976:97; Westermann 1980:105). These psalms are classified primarily on the basis of content rather than on linguistic form or literary characteristics (cf. Murphy 1968: 574; Kraus 1986:107). The only distinctive feature of the royal psalms is the central figure of the king, which establishes the theme of kingship (cf. Kraus 1986: 107). In other words the royal psalms are those in which the king plays the dominant role.

No formal category

Distinctive feature

Scholars differ in their classification of psalms as royal. For Gunkel (1967:23), royal psalms in the O.T. are Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 101; 110; 132 and 144:1-11. While Mowinckel (1962:I,47) includes among royal psalms the following songs: Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 101; 110; 132; as well as 28; 61;

as in class

63; 89 and others unspecified. In addition to Gunkel's classification, Westermann (1980:105; 1984:56) isolated also Psalms 61:6-7; 63:11; 89 as royal psalms.

A few scholars, including J.H. Eaton and S.J.L. Croft, have argued for a very large number of royal psalms (cf. Day 1990:88). Eaton (1976:vii), for example, lists the following songs as psalms with clearly royal content: Psalms 3; 4; 7; 9-10; 17; 22; 23; 27; 28; 35; 40; 41; 57; 59; 61; 62; 63; 66; 69; 70; 71; 75; 89; 91; 92; 94; 108; 118; 138; 140; 143; and less clear cases: Psalms 5; 11; 16; 31; 36; 42-3; 51; 52; 54; 55; 56; 73; 77; 86; 102; 109; 116; 120; 121; 139; 141; 142. Croft (1987:179ff.) on the other hand envisages the following psalms as royal in addition to Gunkel's classification Psalms 3; 5; 7; 9/10; 16-17; 22; 23; 26-28; 31; 83; 40; 44; 55-57; 59-63; 66; 69-71; 92; 94; 116; 118 and 138-143. Both Eaton and Croft's classifications here leave the impression that most of the individual laments are royal psalms.

While it may be conceded that Eaton and Croft have made a contribution in the attempt to locate the origin of some of the terminology in these psalms, their arguments for royal interpretation seem to carry little weight.¹²⁸ Many other

¹²⁸ An extensive argument against Eaton's interpretation of most of the psalms of individual laments as royal is provided by Bellinger (1984:29-31) who, among others, writes that though at first glance Eaton's arguments for his position look impressive, when considered individually, they do not show as much as he claims for them; they do not assure the royal interpretation. The arguments of both Eaton and Croft are also considered to be weak by Day (cf. 1990:89-90).

scholars, however, follow Gunkel's classification of royal psalms (cf. Murphy 1968: 574; Hayes 1976: 97; Kraus 1986: 107; Seybold 1990:115).

6.2.2 Setting

In seeking to understand the theme of liberation in the royal psalms one needs first to clarify the occasions in which they were sung or recited. Scholars agree that a number of occasions or experiences in Israelite life provided opportunity for the utilization of the royal psalms (cf. Murphy 1968:574; Hayes 1976:97; Tomes 1989:259). We can list the various occasions as follows:

(a) The royal coronation

In the Psalter the context of the royal coronation can be inferred from the contents of Psalms 2; 72; 101 and 110 (cf. Hayes 1976:99; Day 1990:982). Such setting is suggested by several divine oracles for the king which occur in these psalms, for example: "I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "you are my son, today I have begotten you" (Ps.2:7), and "The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool." ... The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, you are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedeck" (Ps. 110:1-4).

Another good example of the coronation ceremony can be derived elsewhere in the O.T. from the enthronement of Jehoash in 2

Kings 11:¹²⁹

"Then he [Jehoida the priest] brought out the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they clapped their hands, and said, "Long live the king!" ... and they brought the king down from the house of the Lord, marching through the gate of the guards to the king's house. And he took his seat on the throne of the kings" (vv. 12, 19).

From the above verses one can observe that the coronation ceremony was held in a sacred place, "the house of the Lord" (2 Kings 11:19), i.e. the temple.¹³⁰ It can also be gathered from this passage that the ritual had the following steps:

(i) The investiture which consisted of placing the crown upon the king's head and presenting him with the testimony.¹³¹

¹²⁹ For the detailed description of Jehoash's coronation, see De Vaux 1965:102ff.).

¹³⁰ In the case of Solomon in 1 Kings 1, the coronation ritual took place at the Spring of Gihon which was, of course, one of the sacred places in Israel.

¹³¹ What is meant by the "testimony" (תִּיבָה) is not completely certain but it is most likely to be connected with the "decree" (פֶּקֶד) mentioned in Psalm 2:7ff. (cf. Day 1990:92). The nature of the testimony which was solemnly presented to the new king is described by Von Rad (1966:225f.) to have been associated with the written document, "the royal protocol" presented to the new pharaoh in Egypt upon his accession. This document, associated with a divine origin, spelled out the rights and conditions of the monarch's rule and also contained the new names or titles bestowed upon the king. The testimony mentioned in 2 Kings 11 is thus best understood as the Israelite counterpart to that Egyptian royal document (cf. De Vaux 1965:103; Hayes 1976:98).

(ii) The anointing of the king, which involved the pouring of sacred oil upon his head (cf. 1 Sam. 10:1; 1 Kings 1:39).¹³²

(iii) The acclamation of the people which is observed in the blowing of the trumpet, the clapping of hands, and the shout, "Long live the king!" (1 Kings 1:34, 39; 2 Kings 11:12).¹³³

(iv) The royal procession, when the people participated in a march escorting the king to his palace where he took his seat upon the throne and thus assumed the role and authority bestowed upon him (cf. Kings 11:40, 44, 46, 48; 2 Kings 11:19; cf. also Hayes 1976:99).

(v) The jubilant celebration has also marked the ceremony. At Adonijah and Solomon's coronation in 1 Kings 1, for example, the celebration consisted of the offering of sacrifice (vv.9,19), eating and drinking (v. 25), playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy (v.40; Szikszai 1962:14; Hayes 1976:99).

(b) A royal wedding

This group of psalms include Ps. 45 which suggests a royal

Royal wedding

¹³² The significance of this ritual was perhaps to set a king apart as a sacred one who is endowed by God (cf. De Vaux 1965:103ff.; Hayes 1976:98). Hence the Hebrew word מָשִׁיחַ the "anointed one" (1 Sam. 26: 9; Ps. 2:2). In the coronation ritual the Israelite king thus became the Messiah.

¹³³ For detailed discussion on the acclamation, see Mettinger 1976:131-137.

marriage as its setting (cf. Anderson 1972:346; Day 1990:93). The royal bridegroom is described in verses 3-10 and the bride in verses 11-16. Hence modern scholars, including Day (1990:93) rightly accept that there can be no doubt that Ps. 45 was intended for the marriage of an Israelite king.

(c) Preparation for a royal battle

*Prep. for
royal battle*

Another possible setting for some of the royal psalms is the special occasion of preparation for warfare. Psalms 20 and 144, for example, are generally taken to have the situation prior to war as their setting (cf. Hayes 1976:112; Tomes 1989:259; Day 1990:93).

JPs

Outside the Psalter, a good example of the preparation for a royal battle is found in 2 Chronicles 20 (cf. day 1990:93f.). The passage refers to King Jehoshaphat, who, when he was faced with an invasion of Moabites, Ammonites and Meunites, called a fast and offered a prayer to God for deliverance in the temple (vv. 6-12). Thereupon Yahweh's answer was given by Jahazael, an Asaphite, who delivered an oracle of salvation, stressing that the war was Yahweh's war. The main duty of the people was to believe in God and his promises (cf. Anderson 1972:174).

JOT

(d) Thanksgiving occasions after triumphs in military engagements

Psalm 18, for example, is commonly classified by a number of scholars as royal thanksgiving (cf. Murphy 1968:574; Anderson

1972:153f.; Day 1990:94). This psalm describes a situation of distress and subsequent liberation for which thanksgiving is offered by the king after triumph in military engagements (cf. Hayes 1976: 109).¹³⁴

(e) Situations of national or personal crisis

Besides the coronation rituals, royal weddings, preparations for warfare and celebrations of triumph in military engagements, there could have been other occasions of crisis. When the nation was threatened, the king as a ruler and representative of the people was involved in a special way. Like any other individual, the king also underwent times of individual and personal crisis. The clearest example of a royal lament is Psalm 89 (cf. Anderson 1972: 630f.; Hayes 1976:106).¹³⁵

Concerning the date of the royal psalms Gunkel (1967:23) had already indicated that the natural explanation, that the royal psalms belong to the royal period of ancient Israel, is to be affirmed. It is also believed that most if not all royal psalms belong to the pre-exilic period (cf. Day 1990:91), although it is not absolutely impossible that some of them are post-exilic messianic psalms (cf. Anderson 1972:40).

date of royal psalms

Ancient Israel

Post-exilic

¹³⁴ The meaning of Psalm 18 as an individual thanksgiving has already been discussed in detail above in chapter 4 (cf. pp. 161-165).

¹³⁵ We identify Ps. 89 as royal, although Westermann (1989:58) would like to describe it as a communal lament occasioned by the fall of the Davidic dynasty in 587 BC.

6.3 Liberation as God's Gift to the King (Ps.20)

The idea of liberation as God's gift to the king occurs in Psalm 20. A close examination of this psalm will help us to recognize this phenomenon. In our discussion of the settings of the royal psalms we have already referred to Psalm 20 as one of the songs which have the preparation for the royal battle as their original setting. Similarly, Anderson (1962:417) and Craigie (1983:185) consider it as a liturgical prayer for the king which was used in a special service prior to the departure of the king and his army for a battle or military campaign.¹³⁶

In Psalm 20 the concept of liberation as God's gift to the king can be derived from the opening verses (2-6), which contain the petitioning oracle addressed to the king, expressing the people's hope that God would hear the prayers of the king, send him help from the sanctuary and grant him support from Zion so that he may fulfil his plans. The petition concludes with the people's wish and hope that they may shout for joy over the king's $\mathbb{V}\mathbb{V}'$ (v.6).

The identity of a person who has addressed this prayer cannot be determined. The question whether this prayer was said by a priest or a prophet or a temple choir or some representative of the community or the whole congregation is not very important for the

¹³⁶ Weiser holds a different view. He suggests for Psalm 20 to be assumed as "an essential part of the ritual of the feast at which Yahweh is glorified at Jerusalem on the New Year's day in conjunction with the occasion of the king to the throne" (1962:206).

purpose of our thesis.¹³⁷ But what is clear for us is that from its content ,viz. the petition for God to "answer", "protect", "send help", "give support," "remember", "regard with favour", "grant" and "fulfil", one can gather the idea that the prayer is for God to intervene on behalf of the king in his military undertakings so that the king himself, together with his people, may rejoice in his victory (YV').

The word YV' in this context means liberation from enemies hence "victory" (cf. Anderson 1972:177). So the king's military victory over the enemies is taken here as something which provided by God. It is God's gift to his servant, the king. God is the one who enables the king to triumph over the enemies. The idea should be understood from the background of the concept of Yahweh as the great "Warrior" (cf. Cross 1973:91-105; Craigie 1983:187). In ancient Israel Yahweh was believed to have participated with his people in the experience of warfare, providing them with YV' (Ex. 15:3). Sometimes Yahweh had even accompanied them into battle in "person" (cf. 1 Sam. 4:3ff.). Yahweh himself was Israel's Y'V'V'D "liberator" (1 Sam 10: 19; cf. Ps. 21:2) and the king was his chosen instrument for liberating his people (2 Sam. 3:18).

The idea of Psalm 20:2-6 thus derives from the traditional concept of Yahweh as the one who provides victory in war (cf. Pedersen 1973:I-II,141ff.; Von Rad 1991:44f.). This idea is not new to Israel. It has been a traditional practice for an

¹³⁷ Also Hayes (1976:11) and Craigie (1983:186) cannot identify the person who has spoken these statements, although Dahood (1970:127) takes the verses as a prayer for the congregation.

Israelite king or leader to offer prayers and sacrifices to God prior to departure to war.¹³⁸ We find this in 1 Samuel 7:7-10. In this passage we hear that when the Israelites were threatened by the Philistines at Mizpah, Samuel, as the leader of the people and the representative of God, offered sacrifices and prayed to God for him to liberate (YV⁷) Israel from the hand of the Philistines (v.8) Consequently God rescued the Israelites and enabled them to triumph over their enemies. In 1 Samuel 13:9-12 it is also reported that when Saul had seen that his people were scattering from him, and that his enemies, the Philistines would come down upon him at Gilgal, he (Saul) offered the burnt offering in a way of entreating the favour of God.

Another good example where the king prayed for YV⁷ before going into battle occurs in 2 Chronicles 20, the content of which is already described above in our discussion of the setting of these psalms.

All of the instances cited here enable one to recognize the fact that the royal prayer for liberation before war, as we have it in Psalm 20, has emerged in the usual liturgical and ritual context of Israel (cf. Fohrer 1973:207; Hayes 1976:112). The fundamental belief here is that YV⁷ is the gift from God. Hence in Psalm 20:2-6 there is an expression of the people's prayer on behalf of the king in the context of warfare with the ultimate purpose that he may be given victory, which is in line with the

¹³⁸ The reason for this is that the wars of Israel were the wars of Yahweh. During battle, it was Yahweh who fought for Israel. He called into service the elements of nature and threw the enemies into confusion (cf. De Vaux 1965:258-265).

tradition. After all the king was a לְוֹדֵי "liberator" (2 Kings 13:5), who delivered (לָצַל) the nation from its enemies (2 Sam. 19:10), whom the people who are troubled and threatened could call to their aid (2 Kings 6:26; cf Sawyer 1990:452f.).

In Psalm 20 the people by praying for the king have not only prayed for him but also for themselves, because the king was their representative. Thus victory would not only be an answer to the king's sacrifice and prayer but also the ground for the people's rejoicing (v.6; cf. also Craigie 1983:186).

Beginning with verse 7, Psalm 20 is no longer in the form of a prayer, but it takes on the character of confidence and assurance: "Now I know that the Lord will liberate [לְוֹדֵהוּ] his anointed [מָשִׁיחַ]; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories [לְוִשׁוֹתָיִם] by his right hand (v.7; cf. above, pp. 65f., 168f.). The statement begins with the word עַתָּה "now," which is an emphatic term, indicating a turning point in the ritual (cf. Craigie 1983:186). What prompted the new found confidence is thought by Dahood (1965-70:I,128) to be a word received from the battlefield that the king has scored a military triumph. While Anderson (1972:177) regards it as a result of a divine oracle promising salvation. Whether the transition was due to recent news from the battlefield or by a divine oracle of salvation, the fact remains that behind all this there is an assurance and faith that God had responded favourably to the king's petition and would answer him by granting him "victory"

or liberation.¹³⁹

Associated with the act of liberation in verse 7 is the source from which it sprang. The verse points out that liberation comes from "his holy heavens" (שָׁמַיִם קִדְשׁוֹ), namely from the divine presence which is merely symbolized in the sanctuary in Zion (v.3; cf. Briggs et al 1960:179f.; Rogerson & McKay 1977:I,91f.). And as such it comes about by God's יְמִינֵי "right hand."¹⁴⁰ The point here is that victory of Israel or that of her king over enemies is not taken as a result of her own power or that of her king, but as a divine gift. So the king in Israel could only appropriate the victory or liberation of his people which had been already won by Yahweh (cf. v.8).

Psalm 20 is therefore reflecting the conviction of Israel that God was always present in their historical experience. Although they had to participate in war against their enemies practically and militarily, the people of God did not ascribe victory and achievements of liberation to their own strength, but to God's power. Hence they were always ready to approach him in prayer whenever they encountered threat: "O Lord liberate [הוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ] the king and answer us on the day when we call" (Ps.20:10). They were also used to come to him with responsive praise whenever they have experienced his liberating intervention, for example: "O Lord, in your might the king rejoices, and in your victory

¹³⁹ The Hebrew verb הוֹשִׁיעַ in verse 7a is, apparently, a prophetic perfect which describes an event in the future with such certainty as if it had already taken place (cf. Anderson 1972:177).

¹⁴⁰ On the meaning of יְמִינֵי, see under section 1.5.1 above, pp. 65f.

[יְשׁוּעָה], how greatly he exults" Ps. 21:2).

In conclusion it can be said that Israel, including her kings, was always ready to acknowledge her victories in war as well as her liberation from the hands of political enemies as the acts of God. Hence Israel always felt duty bound to thank and praise this God who granted her victory and wrought her liberation.

6.4 Liberation as Part of the King's Commission (Ps.72)

In the coronation ritual the Israelite king received the royal commission. This involved both righteousness¹⁴¹ and blessing,¹⁴² i.e. justice and prosperity. So the Davidic ruler was not only a leader in warfare,¹⁴³ but he was considered as an upholder of both social order and economic life. As an upholder of social order, the king was responsible for the maintenance of justice. He was, in a special way, a defender of the poor, widowed, and orphaned - the dispossessed in the land (cf. Hayes 1976:97; Wittenberg 1980:146f.).

The royal functions of justice and prosperity can be found in Psalm 72 where they are presented as aspects of liberation (cf. Fohrer 1971:974; McKenzie 1978:760). The *Sitz im Leben* of this

¹⁴¹ See Kraus (1986:119), who maintains that the king's inner significance of charisma and commission involved right and righteousness.

¹⁴² We have discussed the military role of the king in connection with Ps. 20 above.

¹⁴³ Kingship in Israel had a totally positive significance as the mediator of God's blessing activity. This is particularly shown in Psalm 72 (cf. Westermann 1982:76-78).

psalm is generally suggested as the coronation of the king or the yearly celebration of his enthronement (cf. Murphy 1968:588; Anderson 1972:518).¹⁴⁴ We will therefore examine the royal function of liberation in this psalm. In facilitating our analysis we will first deal with the concept of the king's function of liberation as social justice, secondly the connection between justice and liberation and then the effects of the king's justice and liberation to economic prosperity.

6.4.1 The Royal Function of Social Justice

J. Liber, ec. forrop.
} Soc. J

Psalm 72 contains a number of verses which stress justice as the function of the king within the society (cf. vv. 1,2,4). In these verses God is addressed in a petition that he would give the king מִשְׁפָּטִים "judgements"¹⁴⁵ and צֶדֶקָה "justice" or "righteousness" (v.1). The term מִשְׁפָּטִים here can be understood from the background of the written law which was handed over to the king during the enthronement ceremony (cf. Deut. 17:18ff.; 1 Sam. 10:25; see also Anderson 1972:519).¹⁴⁶ The underlining idea is

Ps 72
J. Liber

¹⁴⁴ For detailed description of the enthronement ceremony, see our discussion of the setting of the royal psalms above.

¹⁴⁵ The term מִשְׁפָּטִים could be rendered "judgements," "statutes," or "divine ordinances" as in the case of Pss. 36:6; 119:7 (cf. Brown et al 1951:1048; Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:579). But I take the term as a synonym of צֶדֶקָה "righteousness," used in the same line, hence justice (cf. Brown et al 1951:1048; also Anderson 1972:519).

¹⁴⁶ Westermann is of the opinion that behind the form of words in Ps. 72:1: "Give the king thy justice, O God" lies the very ancient notion that the legal statutes were actually handed to the king in a cultic ceremony on the occasion of his coronation (cf. Westermann 1981:62).

that the king should function as the highest judge and the advocate for the poor (cf. Kraus 1986:119). The prayer in Psalm 72:1 is thus for the king to receive the gift of rendering helpful judgements and dispensing justice. In the words of Hayes, "the king is here presented as the guarantor of the social order responsible for the operation of justice in the community" (Hayes 1976:103). As the defender of justice, the king carried a special responsibility: He was commissioned to judge the people of God King J OT OT "in righteousness" and OT OT "in justice" (v. 2). This task of the king would be realized in his defense of the poor and the needy against those who would oppress them (v.4). As the one who defended the divine will for justice against the wicked and oppressors, the king was expected to carry out the office of judge on behalf of those to whom justice had been denied (cf. Kraus 1986:119). He would do so because, in his judicial task, he is the vicegerent of God who loves justice (Ps. 45:7; cf. Mettinger 1976:244; Lemche 1988:230).

Elsewhere in the Old Testament to uphold social justice was one of the main duties of the king. In 2 Sam. 8, for example, King David is said to have administered justice (OT OT) and equity (OT OT) to all his people (2 Sam. 8:15). King Solomon's function, too, was recognized by queen Sheba as that of executing OT OT "justice" and OT OT "righteousness" (1 Kings 10:9). The acts of David as a judge are furthermore attested in 2 Samuel 14, a narrative concerning a woman of Tekoa, who as a member of a clan had a right of appeal from the judgement of her clan to the king himself (cf. De Vaux 1965:23; Mettinger 1976:241ff.). In the case of King Solomon, we have the story of the two harlots who came

to him for judgement (1 Kings 3: 16-28). To seek justice and to do righteousness was not only the task of David or Solomon, but also of the king who would come after them (cf. Is. 16:5; see also Lemche 1988:231).

For a king to act as a judge and advocate of the poor was nothing unique to Israel in ancient Near East,¹⁴⁷ but what has no parallel is the fact that the judicial activities of the kings in Jerusalem were to be seen in their consistent reference to Yahweh, the God of righteousness and justice (cf. Kraus 1986: 119). Similarly Boecker states the following: "The laws of the OT were not promulgated by the king and therefore not by the state either. They were given by God. Jahweh, the God of Israel was the sole legislator. This was essentially different from other ancient eastern countries" (1980:41). In Israel הקדש and טפס proceed directly from God.¹⁴⁸ As such, justice was thus an essential part of the king's commission. The king could not effectively govern or rule without justice, because it is only "by justice [טפס] a king gives stability to the land, but one who exacts gifts [i.e. demands taxes] ruins it" (Prov. 29:9). More than this, it was by judging (טפס)¹⁴⁹ the lowly with truth (אמת), the king could establish his throne (Prov. 29:14; cf.

*Ref. to
Yahweh*

¹⁴⁷ In royal hymns and rituals from the ancient Near East the just rule of the king and his concern for the weak is repeatedly stressed (cf. Westermann 1981:62).

¹⁴⁸ In his office, the king acts as a mediator and trustee of God's justice (cf. Von Rad 1975:375).

¹⁴⁹ The verb can signify "to judge" as well as "to rule" (cf. Anderson 1972:519).

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Importance of Justice in Israel
Pss 213

also Pedersen 1973:81).¹⁵⁰ Hence Jeremiah says to Jehoiakim that it is not splendour or luxurious life, but application of justice to the poor and needy which makes the king (Jer. 22:15-16).¹⁵¹ And he appeals to the king of Judah, "who sit on the throne of David" as well as to his servants, that they shall do justice and righteousness (משפט וצדקה), deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed, not oppress foreigners (גרים), orphans and widows nor shed innocent blood. If they fulfil these words, then kings will continue to sit on the throne of David, but if not the royal house shall become a desolation (Jer. 22:1-5).

From all the above instances one can gather the idea that the king in Israel was expected to act as an upholder and preserver of social justice. The king as the ruling body or government was obliged to see to it that equity was realized amongst his people, including the weak members of the society, i.e. the poor, widows, orphans and foreigners.

In Psalm 72 the responsibility of the king as to protect and

¹⁵⁰ "Within the context of old wisdom", as Wittenberg observed, "there is, however, another line of thinking. God has created the order of the universe. Within this order every body has his station and place, the rich and the poor. But the poor, because they are on the lowest rung of the social ladder need special protection. This is the task of the king who as the guarantor of the order of creation has to see that justice is done" (1979:180).

¹⁵¹ On the meaning and background of this passage, see Wittenberg (1982A:110-116).

defend the weak members of the society is the theme of verses 12-14:

"For he delivers the needy when he calls,
the poor and him who has no helper.
He has pity on the weak and needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
From oppression and violence he redeems their lives;
and precious is their blood in his sight" (Ps.72:12-14).

The king was placed under the moral obligation to defend the defenceless, to aid the needy, and to pity the weak. This moral imperative in Israel was not applied to the kings only, but to the whole society (cf. Hayes 1976:104). Isaiah and Amos, for example, have demanded justice in social affairs as service to God (cf. Am. 5:10-15,24; Is. 1:12-23). In this connection Hayes (1976:104) has observed that the treatment of the poor, the fatherless, the widows, and the needy was seen as the real test of a society's commitment to the divine justice.

6.4.2 The Connection between Social Justice and Liberation

Use (?)
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Another main aspect we need to investigate here is the connection between justice and liberation. In Psalm 72 the king's function of justice is closely associated with his task of liberation. The combination of justice or righteousness with liberation occur particularly in verses 1-4 and 12-14, which contain the Hebrew words of liberation, viz. לְפָדוֹת (vv. 4,13), לְצַדִּיק (v. 12) and לְגֹאֵל (v. 14). As the content of these verses indicate both concepts לְפָדוֹת and לְצַדִּיק are used here as expressions of מִשְׁפָּט and צְדָקָה . In the first verses, for example, the king would judge the people in צְדָקָה and the poor in מִשְׁפָּט (v. 2) by defending the cause of the poor and by giving לְפָדוֹת "liberation" to the needy (v. 4).

Already here one can observe that the king's justice is shown in his acts of liberation. In other words, the justice or righteousness of the king is to be realized in his deliverance or liberation of the poor and needy - the weak members of the society.¹⁵²

The meaning of justice as liberation is rehearsed in verses 12-14. Here the king's exemplary action as the guardian of the divine will for justice is depicted: he is the guarantor of all who are deprived of their right, the surety of the oppressed who but for him would nowhere "find a helper, their blood in his sight is precious" (Von Rad 1975:322). In these verses the king's just rule is perfected in his acts of לָצַד "deliver," יָצַו "save" or "liberate" and לָקַח "redeem", which are applied to the poor and needy, the weak and the oppressed.

The idea of the king as both the just ruler and liberator or saviour was common to other nations in Ancient Near East. In Egypt the king is within the country the perfect ruler above all as "administrator of justice" in the widest sense of the word (cf. Engnell 1967:12). According to De Vaux (1965:110) there is a hymn about Sensusret III which reads: "He has come to us, he has brought the people of Egypt to life, he has done away with their afflictions." Another hymn describes the reign of Ramses IV in these words:

"Those who had fled returned to their towns,

¹⁵² The weak in the society were to be delivered and protected from the wealthy men, moneylenders, and property holders (cf. Lemche 1988:230f.).

those who had hidden showed themselves again;
 those who had been hungry were fed,
 those who had been naked were clad,
 those who had been ragged were clothed in fine garments;
 those who were in prison were set free,
 those who were in bonds were filled with joy..." (cf. De
 Vaux 1965:110; Engnell 1967:14).

In Babylonia, Hammurabi, the king of justice, wrote:

"At that time Anum and Enlil named me
 to promote the welfare of the people,
 to cause justice to prevail in the land,
 to destroy the wicked and the evil,
 that the strong might not oppress the weak,
 to rise like the sun over the black-headed people
 and to light up the land (cf. Pritchard 1958:210).

In Canaan too, the justice of the ruler was emphasized. A
 Ugaritic text depicts the mode of government of a Canaanite king
 with the words: "He judges the cause of the widow and tries the
 case of the orphan" (cf. Gottlieb 1980:85).

In the Old Testament the connection between justice and
 liberation did not only apply to human kings, but also to Yahweh
 (cf. Excursus I above, p. 63f.).

In Psalm 72, the king, being the mediator or trustee of God's
 מִשְׁפָּט and צְדָקָה, is commissioned to apply and implement justice
 combined with liberation. He has to act as a liberator and as an
 upholder of social justice at the same time.

6.4.3 The Effects of the King's Justice and Liberation on Economic Prosperity

Psalm 72 also shows the close association between the king's

functions of justice and liberation and the nation's well-being and economic prosperity. This features especially in verses 3,6,7 and 15-16. Here prayer is made for the mountains to bear prosperity for the people in $\eta\eta\eta\eta$ "righteousness" or "justice" (v. 3), his reign to fall upon the nation like the showers and rain that fall upon the land, rejuvenating the crops (v. 6; cf. also Hayes 1976:103). The prosperity attendant upon the king's just rule is described also in the pleas of verses 15-16:

"May there be abundance of grain in the land;
on the tops of the mountains may it wave;
may its fruit be like Lebanon;
and may men blossom forth from the cities
like the grass of the field" (v. 16).

So, during the just government of the king the land would experience economic prosperity as it would know abundance and its cities would blossom with men - that there would be fertility in field and family (cf. Hayes 1976:104). Of course, we would be mistaken to think that the king had power over the forces of nature; he did not participate in the creative power of God or in God's power that sustains the world. Yet the effects of Yahweh's liberating presence with his king was felt in the life of the people and in the world of nature (cf. Kraus 1986:119-120). Through his relationship to Yahweh and his deeds of liberation and maintenance of justice the king was the channel of divine blessing for his people (cf. Anderson 1972:427). In Psalm 72, life (vv. 5, 15), bounteous harvest (v. 16) good fortune and blessing (vv. 15,19) are expectations associated with Yahweh's presence with his king (cf. Gottlieb 1980:84ff.).

The blessing bestowed on the king is not just personal, but it is to be shared by the whole nation as it brings about the fertility of the land, its crops and fruits (cf. vv. 6,16).

The concept of the king as one who ensures the prosperity and welfare of his people was widespread among other nations of the ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia, *Assurbanipal*, according to De Vaux (1965:110), said the following:

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"From the moment that *Assur, Sin*, etc. placed me on the throne, Adad made his rain fall, *Ea* opened her springs, the corn grew five cubits high, the harvest of the land has been abundant".

In the same manner *Adad-shum-usur*, a priest, wrote to King *Assurbanipal* as follows:

"*Shamash and Adad* ... have destined for my Lord the king ... good government, days of justice, years of righteousness, abundant rains, powerful floods, good commerce ..., those who have been ill for many days are cured. The hungry are satisfied, the starved grew fat ... Women give birth, and in their joy tell their children: Our Lord the king has given you life" (De Vaux 1965:111).

In Egypt too the people saw their state safely integrated with nature. Those powers operating beyond the range of man's control were made to benefit the community through the mediation of the divine king (cf., Frankfort 1948:49-58).¹⁵³

¹⁵³

The Egyptian king occupies such central position for he is identical with the high god and hereby with the universal order, with the cosmos, that he upholds by virtue of his function in the ritual (cf. Engnell 1967:15).

Egypt

From the content of those Mesopotamian examples one can get the idea that the king was the bearer of blessing, who bestowed fertility and prosperity on his country. It is therefore not surprising to find similar developments of thought in Israel as appears in Psalm 72.

In verse 7 of Psalm 72 the request is made for צדקה and שלום "righteousness" or "justice" and "peace" to flourish in the days of the king's reign. The wish and hope here is for the community to experience the right conditions and total well-being realized not only in history but also in nature (cf. vv. 3,16).¹⁵⁴ These favourable conditions were, of course, to be brought into existence through the works of liberation and justice performed by the anointed of Yahweh, the king (cf. Kraus 1986:120).

Elsewhere in the O.T. the influence of the king on the life of the people and nature is highlighted in the messianic passage of Isaiah 32:

"Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule in justice ...,
until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
and the wilderness become a fruitful field.
And the effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust
forever ..." (Is. 32:15-20).

In this connection we can conclude with Kraus who says that "the influence of the monarchy operating under the authority of Yahweh

¹⁵⁴ The justice of the king seems to have derived from Yahweh's קדש which was active not only in the sphere of history but it was also operative in the "realm of nature" (Von Rad 1975:375; see also Excursus I above, pp. 63f).

went beyond the sphere of justice and the pronouncement of verdicts. It involved the shalom (shalom) of the land and the people" (1986:119).¹⁵⁵ One must also state here that in Psalm 72, blessing, liberation and just government work together (cf. Westermann 1989:64). They do not only operate together but they also effect well-being and prosperity.

6.5 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that the royal psalms have been used in various situations, including the royal coronation, wedding, preparation for a royal battle, thanksgiving occasions after triumphs in military engagements, as well as situations of national or personal crisis.

In these psalms the theme of liberation is reflected especially in Psalms 20 and 72. In Ps. 20 liberation is considered as the divine gift given to the king in form of victory in military engagements against the enemies. It was the conviction of Israel that any victory won or liberation achieved was due to Yahweh's intervention. This awareness has prompted the king, together with his people, to approach God with petitions in times of enemy threat as well as to come to him with responsive thanksgiving and praise when victory was experienced.

The theme of liberation as occurs in Psalm 72 is associated with justice and economic prosperity. These all are thought to be brought into realization and to be effected by the king. The king

¹⁵⁵ On the meaning of *shalom*, see above p. 60f.

has a charisma and commission to apply and maintain justice as well as to effect economic prosperity through his government. He was thus a liberator and an upholder of justice. His acts of liberation and justice were applied to the whole nation but especially to the weak members of the society - the poor, orphans, widows and foreigners. The king's just government was a necessity for it was by it liberation was made a reality to the people and the well-being of the people , including economic prosperity, were brought into existence. So liberation in the royal psalms comprises all basic needs for people which the king as the head of the government was expected to ensure.

CHAPTER 7

LIBERATION IN THE TORAH PSALM 119

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will investigate the presence of the theme of liberation in Psalm 119. Of course, liberation is probably not the dominant theme in this psalm; yet its presence there can clearly be observed. In this psalm, as we will demonstrate, the idea of liberation is closely associated with the concept of *torah* and its synonyms.

In Psalm 119 *torah* is all, the norm, motive and purpose of liberation. It is the norm of liberation in this sense that the one who prays in Psalm 119 is asking God to deliver him in accordance with it (*torah*). *Torah* is also the motive of liberation in this sense that the psalmist is praying for God to liberate him because of his faithfulness to it. And as such, it is one of the purposes of liberation, for the author of this psalm would like to be liberated "so that he may" observe God's *torah* better.

Before we embark on the investigation of the above mentioned aspects, we will first introduce this psalm (119) by discussing its formal structure, canonical context and setting. In order to facilitate our analysis of the theme of liberation in Psalm 119, we also need to study the term *torah* and its synonyms beforehand. Given the length and complexity of this psalm, only relevant

verses will be dealt with.

7.2 Formal structure, Canonical Context and Setting

7.2.1 Formal Structure

Psalm 119 is an acrostic psalm. It consists of twenty two strophes which correspond to twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet (cf. Weiser 1962:739; Anderson 1972:805). Each strophe consist of eight verses, which begins with the same Hebrew letter. So in the twenty-two strophes the author works through the entire alphabet, from *aleph* to *taw*. As a result, the whole psalm forms a very detailed acrostic poem.

The acrostic pattern is used elsewhere in the Psalter; for example, in Psalms 9; 10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; and 145 (cf. Dahood 1965-70:III,172; Day 1990:56). The closest parallels to Psalm 119 in acrostic style are the first four chapters of Lamentations and Proverbs 31:10-31 (cf. Kidner 1975:417).

The exact role or purpose of the acrostic scheme cannot be fully determined. There are, however, some suggestions concerning its purpose. Brueggemann, for example, indicates that the acrostic scheme in this particular psalm (119) is "intended to enable full obedience to be offered" (1984:39). Meanwhile, Craigie (1983:129), in his general description of an acrostic scheme, proposes the following three roles: (1) it was an artistic device, which provided the poet with a distinctive framework within which to express his thought; (2) it may have been used

as a mnemonic and educational device; (3) it may imply completeness, that a subject is covered from "alpha to omega". Craigie's second proposal here agrees with Anderson (1983:222), who also understands that the acrostic scheme was a convenient device for use in teaching or memorizing.

In type, Psalm 119 is considered by some scholars to be a wisdom psalm (cf. Von Rad 1972:248; Perdue 1977:305; Allen 1983: 139), but, in content, this psalm is identified as a "torah" psalm (Anderson 1983:242; Day 1990:56), for it contains a great doxology of God's "torah" (cf. Westermann 1980:117). Similarly, Kraus understands this psalm to be "the most impressive document of torah instruction" (1986:92). This is, however, a content designation rather than a literary genre.

From the formal point of view, it is widely recognized by most of the Old Testament scholars and commentators that Psalm 119 combines different types and psalm forms. Gunkel (1926:511f.), for example, considered it to represent several types (*Gattungen*), such as song of complaint (*Klagelied*) of the individual, hymn, song of thanksgiving, and wisdom teaching. In the same way, Westermann sees it as "devotional poetry" in which "almost all psalm types and psalm forms occur," but "they have been fitted together in a manner that is far removed from the living organic totality of real psalms" (1981:252). Anderson (1972:806), too, holds this same view that Psalm 119 incorporates many elements of different psalm types.

So, as we have tried to illustrate in the chart in appendix 1.

Psalm 119 consists of a medley of various forms which include: petition, praise, thanksgiving, lament, confession of trust, wisdom saying, comparative saying, vow of future obedience, assertion of innocence or faithfulness, blessing and curse.

7.2.2 Canonical Context of Psalm 119

In its acrostic pattern, Psalm 119 shares some similarities with a number of psalms (Pss. 9; 10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 145), but in its subject Psalm 119 shares the same theme with Psalms 1 and 19:7-10, God's *torah*. McEachern (1981:140), for example, concludes that Psalm 19:7-10 is restated in Psalm 119. These three psalms are in total agreement as far as the concept of *torah* is concerned, hence they are all described as "*torah* psalms" (cf. Childs 1979:513).

It has been suggested that Psalm 119 was originally composed especially to close an earlier collection of psalms as a counterpart to Psalm 1, which begins it (cf. Westermann 1981:253). These two psalms (1 and 119), then, form the framework or *inclusio* for the earlier or original psalter. The earlier or original psalter was probably what is now Psalms 2-118 (cf. Westermann 1981:252ff.; Rendtorff 1985:248f.; see also Childs 1979:513).

It seems that in Psalm 119, the psalmist has tried to sum up all that has gone before in the Psalter, just as he has tried to give an introduction to it by Psalm 1 (cf. Rogerson & McKay 1977:III,89). The theme of seeking to know the will of God which

is developed briefly in Psalm 1 came to be expanded in Psalm 119. The implication of this framework (Pss. 1 and 119) seems to be that the entire psalter is to be understood - and is now understood under the rubric "*torah* of God" - as the divine word of instruction. This view seems also to be given some support by the use of the acrostic pattern in Psalm 119, especially by its role of marking "completeness."

The purpose of the particular framework, as provided by Psalms 1 and 119, is explained by Westermann, who understands that " it bears witness to an important stage in the traditioning process in which the Psalter, as a collection, no longer had a cultic function primarily, but rather circulated in a tradition devoted to the law, [the stage in which] the psalms have now become the word of God which is read, studied and meditated upon" (1981:253). In other words, Psalm 119 together with its counterpart (Ps.1), gives new meaning to the Book of Psalms, a meaning which is geared to the love of God's *torah*.

7.2.3 Setting

Psalm 119 is generally taken by most scholars to have its origin in the period after the Exile (cf. Gunkel 1926:516; Mowinckel 1962:II,139; Weiser 1962:740; Allen 1983:141). The precise setting of Psalm 119 is not easily determined, but there are several suggestions about it. These vary from those which emphasize its cultic setting to those which stress its non-cultic setting.

Among recent Old Testament scholars, the view which argues for the cultic setting of Psalm 119 is hinted at by Weiser who recognized this particular psalm as "the hymn in praise of the law which can be traced back to its ultimate roots in the manifestation of Yahweh's will in the tradition of the cult of the covenant" (1962:64). This view is also held by Perdue (1977:168), who sees Psalm 119 as one of the poems written by sagacious authors to be used in the cult. Perdue derives this view mainly from the penitential character of its contents, as he concludes: "It is an important point to stress that the penitential character of the contents of the psalm further illustrate a conclusion we have reached in our investigation: The wise not only exalted prayer as the single most important cultic act, but considered themselves to be able creators and gifted speakers of prayers, based on their ability to write artistic poetry and to speak cogently, and upon their conviction that the prayer of a wise and righteous person possessed an extremely efficacious character, as such, we regard the poem to be intended for the cult, and thus a wisdom psalm" (Perdue 1977:312).

Contrary to the opinion which emphasizes the cultic setting is another which stresses its non-cultic setting. Neale (1874:2f.), had already expressed that the tone of Psalm 119 marks the period of the Jewish nation when the spiritual character of their law, apart from and above its ceremonial precepts, began to be recognized by the more devout believers as the chief glory of the chosen people. Mowinckel too (1962:II,78) considered it to be a non-cultic psalm of lamentation. This opinion is maintained more specifically by Holm-Nielsen, (1960:20), who concludes that it

is improbable for Psalm 119 to have any connection with a cultic act in the temple, especially because of its mere length. He (Holm-Nielsen 1960:34), moreover, suggests that Psalm 119 belongs in the "house of instruction," where its purpose was that of teaching the many-sided excellence of the law. This same view is also shared by Anderson (1972:806), who sees that the lack of cultic allusions in this psalm may indicate that it did not belong, at least originally, to a cultic setting, but probably in what might be described as a "house of instruction." This idea is in agreement with the view of Kraus (1986:92), who regards Psalm 119 as an example of the study that was done in small groups. Gunkel (1926:515), who preceded most of these Old Testament scholars, would also suggest the non-cultic setting for this psalm, as he regarded it to have emerged out of the struggle between the righteous and the wicked, i.e., between those who followed God's law and those who did not. For him (Gunkel), the author acted as a spokesman on behalf of the righteous.

One appreciates many of these scholars for attempting to establish the setting of this particular psalm; yet their conclusions appear not to have answered the whole question regarding the precise setting of this psalm.

In conclusion we must indicate here that the precise setting of Psalm 119 may only be established on the basis of its forms and content. On the basis of these, a total cultic setting is difficult to accept, for it leans heavily towards torah-oriented wisdom teaching (cf. Allen 1983:141). This is revealed by its content, the subject of *torah*, and by the presence of forms of

wisdom (e.g., comparative sayings and wisdom sayings). An absolute non-cultic setting here is also impossible, for this particular psalm includes the usual forms of petition, praise, lament and thanksgiving, which can be identified as cultic elements. This psalm's emphasis on *torah* and its reflection of both wisdom elements and cultic elements provides us with enough reasons to conclude that its precise setting is to be established in a background of a cultic setting which leans towards *torah*-oriented wisdom teaching.¹⁵⁶

Perhaps what needs more clarification is how *torah* was understood, and this point will be dealt with in the following section.

7.3 A Study of the term "*Torah*" and its Synonyms in Psalm 119

In order to facilitate our investigation of the idea of liberation in Psalm 119, we need to familiarize ourselves with the concept *torah* and its parallel words, which appear to be the major subject of this psalm. Hence this section will be devoted this task. Due to the limits of this thesis, we will concentrate only on the theological meanings of these terms rather than on their historical developments.

¹⁵⁶ Our conclusion derives partly from Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, p. 187, where he concludes that the cultic expressions could be used by the wise ones in the new sense, one which is "spiritualized" and transferred to other spheres of life. It also derives, in part from Perdue (1977:312,362), where he stresses the cultic purpose of Psalm 119 and argues for sagacious participation in the cult. Our conclusion is also supported by our analysis of form designation as presented in this section.

תורה (Torah)

The dominant word in Psalm 119 is תורה, which occurs twenty-five times in this psalm and about 220 times in the whole Old Testament. This word is probably derived from the verb תר' "to throw' or "to cast," which in its hiphil form also means "to instruct" (cf. Brown et al 1951:434).

The Hebrew word תורה has various meanings and thus cannot be correctly translated by any single word (such as "law", in English versions). תורה may mean any or all of the following: "instruction", "guidance", "direction", "teaching", "oracle" and sometimes "law" or "law code" (e.g., in Deuteronomy and some post-exilic literature; cf. Brown et al 1951:434; Sanders 1976:909).

In some passages of the Old Testament the term תורה can mean human instruction as given by fathers to their children (Prov. 3:1; 6:23; 7:2; 8:14) or by mothers (Prov. 1:8; 6:20; 31:26) and sages (Prov. 13:14; 28:4), and also an instruction given by a priest in a particular situation (Jer. 18:18; Ezek. 7:26; 22:26; cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:1023). While in other places תורה can refer to the divine instruction, the teaching of God's will as it was given through the prophets (Is. 1:10; 2:3; 5:24; 8:16, 20; Jer:3; cf. Brown et al 1951:435f.).

This term is, moreover, used as a synonym for God's word or way in the prophetic speeches (Jer. 6:19; 26:4 Zach. 7:12; Gutbrod 1967:1045). In its broadest sense, as Sanders (1976:909) writes,

תורה designates the divine will for Israel in the covenant relationship - both specific directives and the entire body which relates God's gracious acts and anticipates Israel's obedient response.

In other words, תורה may be explained as the "divine pointing out of the way" (Allen 1983:141), that is, as indicative of how one should live in obedient response to the free acts of God which God performed in creating and preserving Israel for himself.

תורה, in general, is thus both God's communication of moral truth and a demonstration of his grace and guidance (cf. Allen 1983: 142), or, as Von Rad puts it, "the whole of the bestowals of Yahweh's saving will [Willensoffenbarung]" (1975: 222).

In Psalm 119, then, the term תורה, is also a broad concept. As Dahood (1970:173) indicates, it includes all divine revelation as the guide of life and prophetic exhortation as well as priestly direction. Hence the concept תורה, as appears in Psalm 119 cannot be confined to the "written law" (cf. Holm-Nielsen 1960:26), for it denotes the divine instruction, the totality of God's revealed will to humans for their religious and moral living (Botz 1979: 283).

דבר (Word)

One of the terms used as a synonym of torah in Psalm 119 is דבר, which occurs twenty-four times in this Psalm. In the Old Testament this noun is generally rendered as "word" (Ex. 8:11), "matter" (Ex. 18:16) or "something" (Gen. 24:66; cf. Lisowsky

1958:337ff.).

In the Old Testament דבר is generally used with reference to both human word (1 Sam. 16:18; Is. 36:5; 41:28) and word of God as a divine communication in the form of commandments, prophecy and words of help to his people (1 Sam. 15:10; Is. 38:4; Ps. 107:20). דבר or דברי' can refer to the "ten words" of God (Ex. 34:28; cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:201f.). In Deuteronomy 17:18ff. the term refers to the message or content of torah and, as such, is used in parallel with God's "statutes" and "commandments". דבר may indicate not only a particular message of God (Is. 2:1; Jer. 7:2), but also the sum total of his revealed will (Dt. 4:2; see also Anderson 1972: 808).

The use of דבר as a synonym of torah in this psalm indicates that the pious Israelites of the post-exilic period understood God's torah not as an impersonal set of rules, but as a dynamic word from the mouth of God which is addressed to humans (cf. Kraus 1986:34). For them, torah in its aspect as the "word" of God is the characteristic means whereby God guides his people and makes his will known to them. In other words, it is the medium of God's revelation and manifestation of his righteous will. The author of Psalm 119 has this same concept of torah as the word of God, and this is why he does not forget it (v. 16) but always keeps it (vv, 17, 57, 101).

דבר (Testimony)

The term דבר occurs twenty-three times in Psalm 119. It is

derived from the verb לָו , "to bear witness" or "to testify" (cf. Brown et al 1951:729f.). In some places in the Old Testament this term is used with reference to the ark which contained the tables of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 25:22; 26:33; Num. 4:5; Lev. 24:3). Even the tabernacle in which the ark was kept was referred to as "the tabernacle of testimony" (Ex. 38:21; Num. 1: 50, 53; see also Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:683; Davidson 1970:689).

In Psalm 119, like in Psalm 19 the term לָו is used as a synonym of *torah*. This phenomenon shows us that God's *torah* is not just "law" but, among other things, it also includes his "testimonies".

מִצְוָה (Commandments)

Another synonym of "*torah*" is מִצְוָה , which occurs twenty-three times in Psalm 119. This term is derived from the verb צָו , "to lay charge upon", "to give charge", "to command" or "to order". As a noun, the term is translated "commandment(s)" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:556; Davidson 1970: 641). In the Old Testament, this term occurs in both singular and plural forms. In its singular form this term is used in reference to a direct command from higher authority, either from a human being, for example, a king (1 Kings. 2:43; Is. 36:11), or God, for example, in 2 Chronicles 8:13; Psalm 19:19; cf. Brown et al 1951:846). This term is also used to refer to the code of wisdom (Prov. 19:16; 6:23). But wherever this term occurs in plural form, it only refers to the commandments of God (cf. Ibid).

In Psalm 119 מִצְוָה , as a synonym of *torah*, conveys some of its

special meanings and functions as experienced by the psalmist: torah as the divine authority whereby God gives charge and order to his people for their well-being.

משפטי (Judgements)

The term משפטי is derived from the verb שפט "to judge", "to govern", or "to deliver". As a noun the term may be rendered as "judgements" or "ordinances" (cf. Brown et al 1951: 1048). In Psalm 119, this term occurs twenty-three times. Originally, the verb from which this particular term derives had the judicial sense, but in some cases it also has the sense of deliverance from oppression or injustice, for example, in Samuel 24:15 (cf. Unger & White 1980:824).

משפטי "judgements", as occurs in Psalm 119, points to other special meanings and functions of torah, namely the maintenance of the divine order among God's people and, at the same time, God's justice and mercy in cursing evil, giving everyone his\her due and rescuing the helpless ones.

פקודות (Precepts)

The term פקודות is used twenty-one times in Psalm 119. This term seems to be derived from the verb פקד "to attend", "to visit" or "to appoint". As a noun the term may be translated as "something appointed", "charge" or "precept" (cf. Brown, et al 1951: 824).

In Psalm 119 פקודות "precepts" is understood and experienced as

torah itself was. For it, too, is the object of "keeping" (שמר, vv. 4, 56), meditation (vv. 15, 78) and love (v. 159). And, as such, it is the means whereby God gives insight to his people (Ps. 119:104) and even grants life to them (v. 93).

זְקֵנָה (Statutes)

One of the synonyms of " *torah*" in Psalm 119 is זְקֵנָה, which is used twenty-one times in this psalm. This term is derived from the Hebrew verb זָקַן, "to cut in", "to engrave", "to inscribe" or "to decree" (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:328). In its singular form the noun may be rendered as "something prescribed", "a statute" or "due", and in plural form as "enactments" or "statutes" (cf. Brown et al 1951: 349). This term is generally used with reference to *torah*, as it is the case in Psalm 119 (cf. Ibid).

In Psalm 119 זְקֵנָה, like *torah*, is an object of keeping (vv. 5, 8, 145 and meditation (vv. 23, 48). As such, it is experienced by the psalmist as a spring of comfort in times of loneliness, for he understood it as his song during his pilgrimage (v. 54) which he could not forget (v. 83).

אמרה (Promise)

Another synonym of *torah* in Psalm 119 is אמרה, which is derived from the verb אמר, meaning "to say", "to utter" or "to tell". And as a noun, this term can be rendered "utterance", "saying", "word" or "promise" (cf. Brown et al 1951:55ff.). This particular

word is used in the Old Testament with reference to both God's sayings and human sayings (Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:63).

Torah as אַמְרָא "promise" of God is experienced to be worthwhile to keep (v. 67) and to meditate on (v. 148). As such, it is something sweeter than honey (v. 103) for which one may rejoice (v.162), because it gives life (vv. 50, 154) and enables a person to walk in a way acceptable to God (v. 133). Those who accept *torah* as God's promise can possess it as their own treasure in their hearts (v. 11) which they always long for (v. 82) and, of course, love, for it is pure when tested (v. 140).

In concluding this section, we must make some summary remarks. As it can be observed in the chart in appendix 2, the term "*torah*" is a dominant one for the following reasons: (1) It occurs more frequently than all other terms, and (2) unlike other terms, "*torah*" is equally distributed among the strophes throughout the psalm. In this psalm, a variety of terms, originally with distinct meanings, have been brought together to bear on one reality: *torah*. This theological development of Israel's concept of God's *torah* is commonly ascribed to the post-exilic period.¹⁵⁷ *Torah* is now understood to include all aspects of God's revelation: God's words, testimonies, commandments, precepts, promises, judgements and statutes. This shows that God's *torah* has a broader meaning and a more multiple function or purpose than mere "law". In Psalm 119, God's *torah* includes

¹⁵⁷ Many Old Testament scholars agree that Israel's life was at the stage in which it was no longer determined by nature and history, but by law and one's faithfulness to it (cf. Eichrodt 1967:344ff.; Von Rad 1975:200ff.; Kirkpatrick 1951:701).

all that people can know about God. To use New Testament language, what is called "torah" in Psalm 119 was experienced and understood to include all God's demands and promises, his threats and comforts, and even his judgement and grace. This is why the psalmist could state with appreciation: "If your *torah* had not been my delight I would have perished in my affliction" (v. 92), and express himself by acclamation: "How I love your *torah*!" (v. 97).

With all those aspects, *torah* in this psalm is not "a dead letter", nor is it a set of rules, but the means whereby God guides, protects, liberates, blesses and provides life¹⁵⁸ to his people. As Brueggemann puts it, it is "a mode of God's life-giving presence" (1984:40). The pious Israelite who confessed this psalm or the psalmist(s) who wrote it did not know *torah* as something legalistic nor did they find it to be restrictive or burdensome, but something open (vv. 32, 35) and delightful (vv. 16, 24, 47, 70, 77, 92, 174). In summary, *torah*'s aspects of word, judgment, promise, precept, statute, commandment, and testimony help us understand *torah* as not just one thing - law - but as God's revealed will in which all his blessings, judgement and grace are included.

After discussing the general idea of *torah*, we will now turn to

¹⁵⁸ By "life" is not meant eternal life or regeneration in the Christian sense, but the life which is assured of God's blessings of health, safety, family, peaceful community, prosperity, freedom, etc. In other words, this life on earth which is filled with many sided communion with God (cf. Fohrer 1968:214-222; Brueggemann 1984:41).

its special meaning in the present psalm, concentrating mainly on its application to liberation.

7.4 *Torah as a Norm of Liberation (Ps. 119:41, 154, 170)*

In Psalm 119 liberation has *torah* as its norm, i.e., it is provided in accordance with God's revealed will. This idea is especially maintained in verses 41, 154 and 170.¹⁵⁹ In verse 41, for example, the psalmist prays for יְשׁוּעָה "liberation" to be given to him כְּאִמְרֹתֶיךָ "according to your promise", i.e., in accordance with God's promise. (We have already explained the meaning of this Hebrew concept above). It is in accordance with this the worshipper in Psalm 119 asks God to provide him with יְשׁוּעָה (v.41), i.e., God's act of liberation. This divine act of liberation, which is due to be experienced by the psalmist here, should not be understood in the sense of spiritual deliverance from sin as it is the case, for example, in Psalm 51:1, or spiritual blessing as it applies in Psalm 132:16. In the present psalm, however, יְשׁוּעָה is used in the socio-political sense - the deliverance from adversaries (cf. Rogerson & McKay 1977:III,98). The psalmist is here looking forward to experiencing God's יְשׁוּעָה in being liberated from the hands of those who taunt him (v.42).

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the idea of liberation having God's promise (אִמְרָה) as its norm can be found in David's hymn of

¹⁵⁹ Both Hebrew prepositions כְּ occurring in verses 41, 170, and לְ used in verse 154 express the norm, meaning "in accordance with" or "according to", e.g. כְּחַסְדֶּיךָ "in accordance with your kindness" such as in Ps. 51:3, or $\text{עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֵהוּ}$ "fruit-trees producing fruit according to their types" in Gen. 1:11 (cf. Williams 1976: 47,49).

praise after he was delivered from all his enemies and from the hand of Saul (2 Sam. 22:1-51; cf. Lisowsky 1958:125).¹⁶⁰ In this passage liberation as expressed by its Hebrew terms, viz. יְשׁוּעָה (vv. 3, 4, 28, 36), נִצְלָה (vv. 1, 28, 20, 49), פָּלַט (v. 44) is linked with אִמְרַת יְהוָה "the promise of the Lord" (v.31).

In other psalms the אִמְרַת "promise" of the Lord are also instrumental for liberation, for it secures safety for the poor and needy (Ps. 12:6-7; cf. also Wagner 1984:344f.). Hence the worshipper of Psalm 12 has the courage to pray for God's protection from the wicked (cf. vv. 8-9). The promise of the Lord proves true because God himself is a shield for all those who take refuge in him (Ps. 18:31; see also Prov. 30:5).

Torah as a norm of liberation, in Psalm 119, is used not only in connection with the Hebrew term יְשׁוּעָה , but also with נִצְלָה (cf. v. 170), as well as גָּאֹל (cf. v. 154), the terms which elsewhere can apply to liberation from the Egyptian bondage¹⁶¹ or enemies.¹⁶² The psalmist uses these words in his prayer for deliverance from trouble, which can be enemies too as we will discuss below this chapter. And his prayer has as its ground the promise (אִמְרַת) of God (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951:729; Anderson 1972: 843). In other

¹⁶⁰ The heading (v. 1) of this passage is an interpretative addition, reminiscent of the "historical" notes in the headings of certain psalms such as Pss. 3; 7; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 60; 63; 142; yet its authorship as well as literary integrity are debatable (cf. Anderson 1989: 261f.).

¹⁶¹ Cf. Exodus 3.8; 4:13; 6:6 where these words are used in the context of liberation from the Egyptian slavery; see also above, pp. 23ff.

¹⁶² Cf. above pp. 38ff., where we have treated the term נִצְלָה .

words, one can conclude by saying that the poet of Psalm 119 asks God to make his promise real and visible in his acts and experience of liberation.

7.5 Faithfulness to Torah as a motive of Liberation (Ps. 119: 94, 153, 166, 173-174)

The poet of Psalm 119 understands himself to be liberated by God because of his relationship to torah. In other words, he regards his faithfulness to torah as God's motive for liberating him. This thought is expressed particularly in verses 94, 154, 166 and 173-174. The idea that faithfulness to torah or its keeping is employed here as a motive of liberation can be understood from the background of the Hebrew causal clause ׀ "because" or "for" used in these verses (cf. vv. 94, 153, 173).¹⁶³

In verse 94, for example, the psalmist asks God: הושיעני "liberate me", while motivating his prayer, כי פקודיך דרשתי "because I have sought your precepts." As Mowinckel (1962:II,139) has observed, the author of Psalm 119 is here using his love for torah as "a motive of being heard." He is thus hoping to be liberated because of his seeking of the פקודיך of God.

In connection with the psalmist's prayer for liberation because of his keeping of torah, here one needs also to look at the problem from which the suppliant seeks help. The threat which caused the psalmist to cry out for help in verse 94 is described

¹⁶³ The Hebrew conjunction ׀ may be used in different ways, but here it can be rightly taken as a causal clause (cf. Williams 1976: 72, 73, 89).

in the following verse: "The wicked are waiting to destroy me" (v. 95). This line reminds one of verse 61, where the adversaries are figuratively portrayed as hunters setting their snares to entrap their victim (cf. Job 36:8; Ps. 140:7; also see Anderson 1972:826). Here their evil scheme is more intensified; they are waiting or they lie in wait (cf. Ps. 56: 7) to destroy the psalmist (cf. Ezek. 22:27), that is, they are watching for the opportunity to kill him.

The identity of these enemies is not easy to determine. What appears obvious is that they are presented as opponents of God's torah (Ps. 119:53, 155), and thus the opponents of those who keep God's torah (cf. Ps. 119:61, 95, 110). Croft (1987:45) has identified these wicked as "Israelites who have strayed from Yahweh", found not only in Israel but all over the earth. While Botha (1992: 252-263) describes them in a different picture. For him, the enemy in Psalm 119 is a literary motif constituted through a combination of concepts of the enemies in other psalms, notably laments of the individual and wisdom psalms.

Botha's point of view gives the impression that the wicked in Psalm 119 do not refer to historical antagonists, and the experience of suffering and antagonism in this psalm is probably not genuine and personal to the psalmist. Yet, on the other hand when Psalm 119 is seen in the light of its function as a framework or *inclusio* for the earlier or original Psalter, one can understand that the enemies here are historical, just as they

were real in other psalms.¹⁶⁴

After all, whether the poet of Psalm 119 has experienced persecution of any nature because of his relationship to God's torah or he has only employed it as "literary motif," is, not the main focus of this section of our thesis. Our aim at this particular juncture is to demonstrate how liberation is understood in close association with torah in Psalm 119. The poet of Psalm 119 believed that God provides the pious with liberation simply because (וְ) they seek and keep his torah.

Another example of faithfulness to torah as the motive of liberation can be found in the petition of verse 153, which reflects a calamitous situation from which the psalmist needed to be delivered. In this verse (153), the psalmist appeals to God to deliver him from such a situation, making use of a well-known prayerful appeal to God: וַיִּבֶן "look on my suffering" (Pss. 9:14; 25:18; 31:19)¹⁶⁵ and one of the Hebrew verbs for liberation חָלַץ "deliver, while motivating his prayer: כִּי - תוֹרַתְךָ לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי "for I have not forgotten your torah". Here the author pleads his unforgetfulness for torah as a motivation of his prayer. In spite of the cords of the wicked (Ps. 119:61a), i.e.,

¹⁶⁴ Weiser (1962: 740) also regarded the statements concerning persecution and oppression in Psalm 119 to be genuine and personal to the psalmist, and that they are to be taken seriously as being at the root of the poet's utterances.

¹⁶⁵ The Old Testament concept that God looks on the suffering of the people and delivers them seems to have its origin in God's self declaration in Exodus 3:7f., where God is commissioning Moses to lead his people out of Egypt declared, "I have seen the suffering of my people ... and I have come down to deliver them." cf. Anderson 1972:843).

the plot of the wicked against him, the suffering condition (Ps. 119: 83a, 153a), state of humiliation (Ps. 119: 141) and the danger to which he was exposed (Ps. 119 :109a),¹⁶⁶ the psalmist has never forgotten to keep God's torah (cf. vv. 61b, 83b, 109b, 141b, 176b). He was determined to remember God's torah (vv. 16, 93), for to forget it for him would mean to be the wicked (cf. v. 53). and to be an arrogant or a godless one (cf. v. 85).¹⁶⁷ It is on the basis of remembrance of God's torah, the psalmist knows and trusts that God will not remain indifferent to his suffering. He thus approaches his lawyer, God, to defend his case against the hostile people, viz. ׀ַרְרִי וְצַרִי "persecutors and adversaries" (Ps. 119: 157).

The idea that faithfulness to torah in Psalm 119 is used as a motive for liberation can also be seen in verses 173-174, where the psalmist pleads three reasons for an answer to his prayer: (1) he has purposely chosen God's ׀ַקְוֵהָי (v. 173b); (2) he has longed for God's ׀ַלְוֵהָי (v. 174a), and (3) he has God's ׀ַנְּוֵהָי as his delight (v. 174b). These reasons, taken together with the petition of verse 173a, show a close connection between the ideas of torah and liberation in this psalm. The psalmist expects God to respond to his prayer for help and liberation because, unlike the wicked, his persecutors and adversaries, he (the psalmist)

¹⁶⁶ The expression "my life is in my hand" (v. 109a) occurs elsewhere in Judges 12:3; 1 Sam. 19:5; 28:21 and Job 13:14, where it means to take a great risk and thus to endanger one's own life (cf. Oesterly 1959:495).

¹⁶⁷ Elsewhere in the Psalter to forget God is understood as being false to his covenant (Ps. 44: 18) and as following other gods (Ps. 44: 21; cf. Weiser 1962:358).

has the right to claim God's help - his choosing of his precepts and his delight in his torah. The idea which is conveyed here is that only those who comply with God's will can be delivered, but those who do not do this are far from such opportunity.¹⁶⁸ The idea of choosing God's torah as the means of obtaining life¹⁶⁹ can also be traced in Deuteronomy 30: 15-19, where Moses sets life and death, blessing and curse before the Israelites and asks them to choose life by obeying God's commandments, loving him and walking in his ways (cf. Kirkpatrick 1951: 732; Anderson 1972:846).

The use of the psalmist's own attitude to God or his torah as the ground of his petition here should not be taken as boastfulness or self righteousness. In fact, assertions of faithfulness, such as the one here, are modestly laid before God as tokens of sincerity of purpose and not by way of self aggrandizement (cf. Leupold 1959: 834), or bargaining. In this connection, Brueggemann remarks: "The psalm understands that life with Yahweh is a two-way street. Torah keepers have a right to expect something from Yahweh. Obedience gives entry to seek God's attention and God's gift. Though close to it, this psalm does not bargain" (1988:41).

¹⁶⁸ Unlike one who keeps torah, the wicked do not even try to seek it and they are thus far from God's liberation (cf. Ps. 119:155). The life of the wicked is contrary to that of the righteous discussed earlier (cf. above pp. 172ff.)

¹⁶⁹ On the meaning of "life" in this context, see footnote no 158 above, p. 237.

7.6 Keeping Torah as a purpose of Liberation (Ps. 119: 17, 45, 88, 117, 134, 146)

Liberation in Psalm 119 has a purpose. This can be derived especially from the contents of verses 134 and 146. Verse 134, for example, expresses the idea that one who prays in this psalm would like to be "redeemed"¹⁷⁰ from man's oppression so that he may well keep God's precepts. Such a purpose of liberation is conveyed by the Hebrew phrase: **וּאֲשַׁמְרָה** (v. 134b), which preserves the subjunctive or volitive ending expressing purpose "that I may keep" (cf. Dahood 1972: 188). The psalmist, as a result of his redemption or liberation by God and by the strength which God gives him, will continue to keep God's precepts.

The idea that in Psalm 119 liberation has the keeping of torah as its purpose is also expressed in verse 146. Here the suppliant expresses his fervent petition for liberation: **קְרָאתִיךָ הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי** "I cry to you, liberate me!" (v. 146a) and states the purpose of such liberation: **וּאֲשַׁמְרָה עֲדוֹתֶיךָ** "that I may keep your testimonies" (v. 146b). As in verse 134, the verb **וּאֲשַׁמְרָה** (v. 146b) is in a volitive mode, and thus expresses purpose (cf. Dahood 1972: 190). The psalmist is here praying to be liberated from a certain threat or danger, which is to be understood from the background of the Hebrew phrase **קְרָאתִיךָ** (v. 146a)¹⁷¹ And his purpose for

¹⁷⁰ On the meaning of the Hebrew verb **פָּדָה** "redeem", see above p. 40f. The term is used here figuratively to describe God's acts of deliverance from the hands of the oppressors (cf. also Anderson 1972: 840).

¹⁷¹ The phrase **קְרָאתִיךָ**, "I cry", which is used here is a common expression in the individual laments (cf. Pss. 17:6; 31:18; 88:10). This indicates that there was a certain urgency about the author's situation for

being liberated from this problem is not for his own interest, but as verse 146b makes clear, the psalmist's purpose in life is to honour God by observing or keeping his torah. He wants, then, to be liberated so that he may freely continue doing that.

Some more examples of the purpose of liberation in Psalm 119 can be found in verses 17, 45, 88, 117. In all of these verses the Hebrew verbs for liberation are not used as they apply in verses 134 and 146; yet the idea of God's help or intervention on behalf of the psalmist as that which enables him (the psalmist) to observe God's torah better can still be detected.

In verse 17, for instance, the psalmist prays to God to deliver him from any kind of danger which could harm his life or even bring an end to it. This can be derived from the Hebrew verb *למל*, which literally means "to do good" or "to deal bountifully" and in some places, as here, has a connotation of delivering from danger (cf. Allen 1983: 135)¹⁷² The danger from which the psalmist needs to be rescued could be either persecution by enemies or some other evil things. Here the psalmist's main purpose for which he prays is: "so that I may live and keep your word" (v. 17b). He knows that he lives and can do so because of God and for God. In other words, the psalmist is aware that it is only by God's *למל*, that is, God's acts of deliverance that he can be in existence. The main objective of the psalmist's life

which he asks God to answer him (v. 146), i.e., to liberate him. The notion of urgency in this strophe can be derived from verse 150 - the encroachment of the persecutors with their evil device.

¹⁷² See, for example, also Pss. 13:6 and especially 116:7, in which *למל* is used in the context of deliverance.

is to keep God's word as revealed in his torah. His aim is thus to learn and to understand it, to know it and to live in accordance with it. And he could only do all these when God intervened on his behalf with his liberating help.

In verse 45, in line with his purpose for liberation, the psalmist also ambitiously expresses his trust that "[he] will walk about in freedom" (v. 45a). The Hebrew word חָוֵר , which is rendered "freedom", literally means "wide," "broad," "large" or "spacious" (cf. Brown et al 1951:931f.; Davidson 1970:680). The term refers to that which is free and open, something in which there are no limits and restraints, where one can feel secure from affliction and other misfortunes of life (cf. Pss. 4:2; 31:9; 118:5). With this particular word, the psalmist indicates that he would feel free from everything which seems to fetter his goings, either oppression, enemies, disease, or sin. He would experience such freedom for he has sought God's precepts (v. 45b), that is, he has studied God's torah and applied it to his life. Again here one can see that liberation is sought in order to enhance the observance of God's torah.

The purpose of liberation is expressed also in verse 88. Here the author, as ever, prays for his life (cf. vv. 17, 25, 37, 50). He wants to be revived, i.e., to be rescued from the troubles of persecution or some other difficulties of life and to be granted new physical and spiritual strength as well as an ability to lead the new life again (cf. Pss. 71:20 80:18). His purpose for life is to keep God's testimonies, as he sets it forth in the form of a vow, "and I will keep the testimonies of your mouth" (v.

88b). So, the psalmist as a result of his liberation by God, and by the strength which God gives him, would continue keeping God's testimonies.

The petitions in verses 116 and 117 show that the psalmist needs God to "sustain" him (v. 116a) and support him (v. 117a). The verb לָמַד "sustain," "uphold" or "support" is often used in the psalms to refer to God's help in general, which brings deliverance and blessing (cf. Pss. 3:6; 37:17; 54:6; 145:14; see also Koehler & Baumgartner 1958: 661). With this word the psalmist prays to God to help him according to his promise, i.e., God's promise of deliverance. He needs that divine sustenance for the basic purpose - that he may live (cf. v. 50). The thought of verse 116 is continued in verse 117, where the author makes use of the verb לָמַד , "support" or "sustain" cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958: 662), which has almost the same meaning as לָמַד in the preceding verse (11). It too can be used to describe God's help (cf. Pss. 20: 3; 41:4; 94:18). While in verse 116 the psalmist asks God to help him so that he may live, in verse 117 he needs the divine support so that he "may be safe" (v. 117a), and his main purpose for all these, life and safety, is to "have regard for [God's] statutes continually" (v. 117b). The psalmist thus understands that both, his existence and well-being, are for the glory of God, expressed in the observance of his torah.

So, liberation in Psalm 119 is not an end in itself. But it is like in those days of the exodus, when the people of Israel were liberated from Egypt. One of the purposes for which these people were led out of Egypt was to worship God (cf. Exod. 3:12, 18;

5:1, 3; 7:16; 8:1, 8, 28; 9:1; 10:3, 8-11; 12:31; Josh. 24: 16-18).

Psalm 119 thus provides us with an answer to the possible question regarding the purpose of liberation. In the particular psalm, the purpose of liberation is that the psalmist may better keep God's torah. To keep God's torah in this context is no longer an obligation, but it is a joyful response to God because of his liberation.¹⁷³

7.7 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have investigated Psalm 119, dealing with its formal structure, canonical context and setting. We have also discussed torah and its synonyms in this psalm.

Our main concern in this chapter, however, was to discuss the theme of liberation. Hence we have observed that in Psalm 119 the idea of liberation is linked with that of torah. Here liberation has torah as its norm, as the psalmist prays and hopes for God to liberate him in accordance with such torah.

Our study has also revealed that in this psalm (119), liberation has faithfulness to torah as its motive. The poet of this psalm prays for God to liberate him on the basis of his being faithful to God's torah.

¹⁷³ In the same line of thought, Westermann, too, understands that the "ordering of the commandments and laws to the revelation at Sinai after the deliverance from Egypt shows that they are intended as a response to God's saving deed" (1982:179).

Another aspect which we have considered here has to do with the purpose of liberation. In Psalm 119, liberation is not sought for the psalmist's own good only, but it is asked mainly for the purpose of observing God's torah better.

One can therefore conclude by stating that, in Psalm 119, torah facilitates liberation, while liberation enhances the observance of torah.

CHAPTER 8

RETROSPECT

In this chapter we will attempt to summarise the findings of our investigation. The idea of liberation in the psalms cannot be described in a single word, for it encompasses a variety of dimensions: political, social, physical as well as spiritual. To the people who sang or recited the psalms, life was worthwhile only when liberation was present or experienced, but during its absence misery and suffering made themselves heard and felt. Hence the psalmists were always eager to seek liberation through their petitions, and rejoice over it once they have obtained it. What liberation meant to the worshippers of the psalms can be summarized under the following headings:

8.1 The Meaning of Liberation

8.1.1 Liberation as Deliverance from Slavery

In the first chapter we have analyzed the theme of liberation in the psalms of community lament. We began with Psalms 74 and 77. Here we have seen that the idea of liberation in the Psalter can apply to Israel's deliverance from the Egyptian bondage. In these texts the people, being in the situation of need, sought consolation by recalling God's former acts of redeeming or liberating them from the Egyptian slavery in a depiction of the creation myth. In other words, in these psalms the event of the exodus is described in terms of creation. As the creation was

Retrospect
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God's first and decisive victory over the powers of chaos, the exodus too is understood as a new victory over the dragon and evil powers of Egypt and a new creation of Israel. The ideas of the exodus and creation are thus combined and, as such, are taken as God's acts of liberation. The results of this investigation can then be condensed in the following three statements:

1. Liberation as described in Psalms 74 and 77 is a wide concept, for it can refer to both God's cosmic victory over chaos and his historical deliverance of Israel from Egypt through the exodus. In other words, liberation has cosmic and historical meanings.

2. God's acts of liberation are not just a memory of the past, but they are remembered to serve as the comforting assurance to the suppliants that God will not abandon them in their present oppressive situation, but will deliver them as he did to their ancestors in the past.

3. The people of Israel recognized their liberation from Egypt as God's act of intervention on their behalf and thus confessed and thanked God for this experience. This should be a good lesson for us in Namibia to see our political liberation and independence as one of God's works in our history, as we will elaborate in the final chapter.

8.1.2 Liberation as the Return from Exile

Dialogue, follows ad hoc framework

In chapter three we have referred to Psalm 107 as dealing with the exile. This psalm, which is one of the communal

thanksgivings, presents the disaster of the exile and the episode of the return depicting them in various ways. The home-coming of the exiles is portrayed here as the redemption and gathering of Israel - the redeemed from different countries (vv. 2-3-). This event is also pictured as a journey across the desert (vv. 4-9); liberation from prison (vv. 10-16); recovery from sickness (vv. 17-22); and rescue from sea-storm (vv. 23-32).

The idea of liberation in this psalm is underlined by the use of the Hebrew terms for liberation, viz. לָאָל "redeem", לָצַד "snatch away" and other concepts for example יָצַד "gather" (v. 3) which elsewhere appear in passages concerning the gathering of the people from dispersion in Assyria or Babylonia, and הוֹצֵא "bring out", used elsewhere in Exodus in connection with the liberation of Israel from Egypt.

As our investigation has revealed, in this psalm liberation from Babylonian captivity, which was also predicted by the prophets, is seen as realized. Through the suffering of the exile and the joy of liberation - the home-coming, the divine acting and presence were personally experienced by the community of Israel. Thus Psalm 107 at its very beginning calls for those who have experienced this particular event to give thanks to God.

What can be observed here is that liberation, as displayed in Psalm 107, has political dimensions. It has political dimensions for it is deliverance of the exiles - the people of Israel from the Babylonian regime. Through this process of the return from exile the people of Israel were given the right for self-

determination and independence in their home-country.

Israel's experience of the exile and the return from Babylon can be paralleled with the Namibians' experience of the exile and the return, as it will be discussed in the final chapter.

8.1.3 Liberation as Deliverance from Enemies

The concept of liberation from enemies is exemplified in a number of psalms. In chapter one Psalms 44 and 79 were pointed out as describing the people's recollection of liberation from national foes, the foreign armies who rose against Israel (Ps. 44:5-8), and the prayer for deliverance from the gentiles who raided Jerusalem (Ps. 79:1-9). In these passages the Hebrew words for liberation are used, viz. לְפָדוּ (Ps. 44:8) and לְצַדֵּק (Ps. 79:1; 9).

Although the exact identity of these enemies cannot be easily specified, a number of scholars agree that they were foreign nations - Israel's neighbouring nations (cf. Ps. 83:6-8) and more specifically the Babylonians, who attacked and invaded Israel, plundering the nation (cf. Ps. 44:10-10-13), destroying the city and massacring the people of God (cf. Ps. 79:1-2). Here we can observe that the idea of liberation in the Psalter can also apply to the deliverance of the people from foreign nations.

In chapters two and four we have observed that the idea of liberation from enemies is underscored in many individual psalms as well as in some of the individual thanksgivings. The suppliants of the individual psalms of lament have used Hebrew

terms for liberation in their prayers for deliverance from personal enemies, described variously as persecutors (Ps. 35), wicked (Ps. 71), and accusers (Ps. 109). While in the individual thanksgivings, the worshippers thank God for liberating them from personal antagonists, portrayed in cosmic dimensions of the "sea" and "many waters" (Ps. 18:2-31), as well as in military terms (Ps. Pss. 18: 32-51; 118:10-14; 138:7). So the Old Testament idea of liberation does not only apply to deliverance from national enemies, but it can also refer to the rescue from individual adversaries.

8.1.4 Liberation as Deliverance from Oppression

Our examination of one of the communal laments, viz. Psalm 44:24-27 reveals that the Hebrew idea of liberation can apply to the deliverance of Israel from political oppression. As indicated in this text, liberation could be present if God would "rise up and deliver" the oppressed from oppression and the suffering from the cause of their affliction.

In our explication of Psalm 55, which is one of the individual laments, we also pointed out that the suppliant, being under oppression inflicted upon him by his fellow people, confesses his trust that God will liberate him. At this point one can see that in the Psalter liberation has also a social meaning, for it is sought in the context of a corrupt society, where the rich and the powerful oppress and exploit the weak and the poor.

8.1.5 Liberation as Deliverance from Sickness, Death and Sheol

In our study of both categories of individual laments, viz. Psalms 6; 56; 86; and individual thanksgivings, viz. Psalm 116, we have seen that liberation in the Psalter does not only involve deliverance from enemies and their actions, but it also comprises healing from physical sickness (Ps. 6) and its consequent death (Ps. 56) and entry to Sheol (Pss. 86; 116:3-4, 26-28).

Of course, not every death is caused by sickness. Some deaths are caused by the enemies (cf. Pss. 56:2, 3, 7; 86:14). In Psalm 56, for example, liberation from death, as appears in the confession of trust (v. 10), would only be realized when the enemies who are the cause of death are discomfited. The purpose for deliverance from death is to live and praise God.

8.1.6 Liberation as Restoration from God's Anger and Its Effects

In the Light of our analysis of Psalms 80 and 85 one can understand that the people of Israel sometimes knew God's anger as the source of their distress, experienced in forms of military powerlessness and political inability to ward off enemy attacks (Pss. 80:9-14), or of national drought (Ps. 85:5-8). Yet at the same times the people hoped and expected God to release and liberate them from the effects of that anger (Pss. 80:2-8, 15-20; 85:9-14).

8.1.7 Liberation as Deliverance from Sin and Its Consequences

In our investigation of Psalm 39, we have observed that the concept of liberation in the Psalter can also apply to deliverance from sin. It was therefore crucial for the suppliant of this psalm to ask God for deliverance from sin, for by this he would also be liberated from its consequences, i.e. suffering.

In this connection one can see that liberation is not a concept which is confined to physical and political dimensions only, but it has also a spiritual meaning, for it can refer to deliverance from God's punishment.

8.2 Liberation as a Concept Associated with *Torah*

In chapter seven, where we have studied Psalm 119, we have seen that the idea of liberation is connected with the concept of *torah*. In this text, the psalmist prays for his physical deliverance using the Hebrew terms for liberation. His prayer is based on *torah*, i.e. he uses it as the ground and reason for his petition. The psalmist does so because he believes that God provides liberation in accordance with his *torah*. From this point one can derive the conclusion that in the Old Testament *torah* is understood as God's means through which he provides liberation to his people. When seen in this light the usual Christian concept of regarding *torah* as God's demands and threats (cf. Rom. 4:15; 5:20) is misleading and deficient. To be sure, Psalm 119 does not show a Pauline understanding of the law of God. This psalm, however, points out that *torah* is not a set of rules, but

is the norm and means of liberation whereby God guides, protects, delivers, blesses and provides life to his people.

Another aspect which our study of Psalm 119 has revealed is the concept of faithfulness to *torah* as a motive of liberation. The worshipper of this psalm sees himself to be liberated by God because of his relationship to *torah*. In his request for liberation this poet pleads his faithfulness to *torah* as a motivation of his prayer. This underlines the idea that only those who comply with God's will can be liberated, but those who do not do this are far from God's deliverance.

Furthermore our investigation of Psalm 119 has shown that liberation is sought with the purpose of keeping God's *torah*. The worshipper of Psalm, 119 seeks liberation from oppression so that he may freely observe God's *torah*. In other words, as Psalm 119 demonstrates, liberation is not required for the worshipper's own benefit only, but to give glory to God through the observance of his *torah*. Here we can therefore conclude by saying that liberation in the Old Testament is not an end in itself. But, as such, it has its ultimate goal which is to lead a happy and healthy life, free from any physical and spiritual constraints, where God's people can enjoy the opportunity to worship and praise their creator.

8.3 The Goals of Liberation

8.3.1 Liberation Provides Access to the Land

In chapter one we have referred to Psalms 44:2-4 and 60 as linking liberation with the land. In these passages we have observed that in the Old Testament liberation has as one of its goals the right of the people to possess their traditional land where they can enjoy protection and safety.

In Psalm 60, for example, the prayer for liberation received its answer in God's promise to divide up the land and apportion it out to the people. In other words, in answering the people's prayer for liberation, God tells them that they will have an access to their ancestral land and continue to possess it. This provides us with an answer regarding the ownership of land which is applicable to our present problem of the land in Namibia.

From the results of our investigation of these psalms we can conclude that liberation is realized fully in the possession of the land. If in any given situation a segment of the nation or certain members of the society are denied the right of access to the land those people are not yet liberated and do not enjoy the fruits of liberation in spite of them being citizens of a liberated and independent country.

In the light of the Old Testament, as we can infer from the psalms, liberation and the right of the people to own land cannot be separated. They should go hand in hand. Liberation provides

the people with both the right and the opportunity to have an access to the land, to own it, either for farming or building houses.

8.3.2 Liberation Leads to the Realization of Justice

In chapter six, where we have dealt with the royal psalms, viz. Pss. 20 and 72, we have seen that liberation as the divine gift to the king is closely associated with the royal function of applying justice in the society. In Psalm 72, for example, the king's justice is shown in his acts of liberation, that is, in his deliverance of the weak members of the society - the oppressed, the poor and needy. In his capacity as a representative of God, the king was to act as a liberator of the poor and the oppressed. The kings' acts of liberation were thus realized in his upholding of social justice, i.e. through his acting as a defender of the poor, widowed, and orphaned - the dispossessed in the land against those who would oppress and exploit them.

In this connection we can conclude that there is no liberation without justice. Liberation and justice should go hand in hand. Liberation in line with the Bible is that which takes into account the situation of the oppressed, the poor and needy - the landless, homeless and jobless people in the country.

8.3.3 Liberation Leads to the Experience of *Shalom*

In the Psalter the idea of *shalom* as another goal of liberation

can be derived from Psalm 85:9-14, as discussed in chapter one. In our investigation of this text, we have observed that the Hebrew concept *šālôm* includes the realization of both justice and shalom in its various dimensions of "well-being", "wholeness" and "prosperity". Related to this idea are the thoughts of Psalms 65 and 67, dealt with in chapter three. These psalms contain praises of people who are experiencing security because of God's liberating presence. Again here the people's experience of liberation is connected with the divine blessing of their land with prosperity: fertility and good harvest. This same idea can also be found in Psalm 72, one of the royal psalms treated in chapter six. Here the king through his relationship to Yahweh and his deeds of liberation and maintenance of justice was a channel of blessing and *shalom* to his people.

So the goals of liberation in the Old Testament cannot be narrowed to a single idea. As such, liberation is a broad concept which takes place mainly in a material sense rather than in a spiritual sense. It is in "our land" (cf. Ps. 85:10-11), i.e. in the land of Israel where God's liberation would be experienced in the form of *shalom* which is not only seen in spiritual well-being, but is realized in the health, safety, and economic prosperity and security of the nation. These aspects of liberation would challenge our present situation in Namibia.

8.3.4 Liberation Elicits the Praise of God

In the Psalter liberation is not only an element of petition, but also of praise. We have seen this especially in the psalms of

thanksgiving. In Psalm 107 the liberated people were prompted by the intervention of God in their lives to extol God in the congregation of the people and praise him in the assembly of the elders (Ps. 107:32). This same aspect was also pointed out in our study of Psalm 116. Here the psalmist, after his experience of healing from physical sickness, responded to God, whom he believes had healed him, with vows of acknowledging him publicly and rededicating himself to his service. A similar idea is found in Psalm 119. In this poem liberation is not sought for the psalmist's own good only, but it is asked mainly for the purpose of observing God's *torah*. The aspect of liberation as an elicitor of praise is also underlined in the hymn psalms such as Psalm 98, where it is presented as the reason for praising God.

So, the people felt duty bound to thank God for providing them with liberation. The whole process was reciprocal: God gives liberation; the people respond with songs and acts of praise as they receive liberation. Even where they were practically involved in the struggle for their deliverance, they did not ascribe glory to themselves, but to God alone.

8.4 The Characteristics of the Recipients of Liberation

In the Psalter the characteristics of being innocent, righteous, poor and needy, are taken as qualifications for God's liberation. This can be found especially in Psalms 26; 34 and 40. In Psalm 26 the suppliant claims to have the right to be liberated because of his integrity, faithfulness and innocence before God.

In Psalm 34 the recipients of liberation consist of all the people who seek, fear and take refuge in God, the poor, the just, and the brokenhearted. While in Psalm 40 the people who are recognized as deserving of liberation are the poor and needy.

8.5 The Source of Liberation

In most of the psalms the people are cognizant of the fact that liberation is provided by God. But this idea is stressed especially in Psalms 20; 44; 79 and 85.

In Psalm 20, which is one of the royal psalms discussed in chapter one, liberation is regarded as God's gift to the king in the form of military victory against his enemies. It is God who enabled the king to triumph over the enemies. In other words, the king could only appropriate the victory or the liberation of his people which had been already won by Yahweh.

Although Israel, had to participate in war against her enemies practically and militarily, she did not ascribe achievement of liberation to her own strength or that of her human kings, but to God's power. Israel always acknowledged her liberation from enemies as the acts of God. Hence she always felt obliged to thank and praise God who wrought her that liberation.

In Psalm 44 too, which we have discussed in chapter one, the people's liberation from enemies was experienced and hoped for as coming about through the intervention of God. While in Psalms

79 and 85 the Hebrew terms for liberation are used as God's predicates.

In crystallizing our conclusion, we must state here that in the psalms liberation has many meanings. It comprises deliverance from slavery, exile, enemies, oppression, so it is political. It involves healing from sickness, so it is physical. Liberation effects *shalom*, justice and prosperity of the land, so it is both social and economic. It concerns deliverance from sin and its consequences, so it is also spiritual.

CHAPTER 9

PROSPECTS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE PSALMS IN THE NAMIBIAN CONTEXT

In this final chapter, I will try to relate the Old Testament idea of liberation, as occurring in the Psalter, to our experience of political liberation in Namibia. If we look at the results of our investigation, we can draw some parallels for the whole nation as well as the individual members of the community. Here I will therefore attempt to provide suggestions as to how we, as Christians, can praise God in response to our own experience of national liberation and independence. Besides this, I will also try to consider here individual experiences of liberation.

9.1 The Context of National Liberation

9.1.1 The Issue of Liberation and Independence

It is now almost four years since we have attained our independence. The time before this was characterized by suffering, including political oppression, racial discrimination, economic exploitation, war and the struggle for freedom, which can be paralleled to the suffering of the Israelite people in Egypt. Thus our liberation and independence, which we have achieved four years ago, can be compared to the liberation of the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage.

The people of Israel, as we have seen them in the psalms,

recognized their liberation as God's act of intervention on their behalf. They believed that God had delivered them from that slavery.

In this connection the following questions can be raised: How do we, as Christians, look at our liberation and attainment of independence? Do we too recognize the hand of God behind all which has led to our attainment of liberation and independence? Or do we consider this as the achievements of our own human efforts?

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) today a prayer is offered in worship services, the introductory part of which can be translated as follows:

God almighty, gracious father, we thank you, for you have guided our nation with thy powerful hand until it attained its freedom. You have granted to us this land, where you made our fore-fathers to live. In this same land you have prepared us and our descendants to live. You are the one who caused it to rain and the seeds to germinate in cultivated fields, so that we may have food. You have been our hope in difficult times of war, famine and deadly deceases. Let your name be praised.

As can be observed in this prayer, the church is praising God because of the independence in the form of a thanksgiving prayer. Here it can be said that this particular church in so doing is following the examples of the psalmists. The question which can be raised here is: How many of our youth believe that God is the one who guided our nation until it achieved its freedom?

Often when our history is told, homage is paid to the veterans

and those Namibians heroes and heroines who sacrificed their precious lives for the cause of freedom and independence of our country. Of course, these people played a significant role, which cannot be forgotten or ignored as far as our history of the liberation struggle is concerned.

But one main aspect, which we, as Christians, need to take into consideration concerns the involvement of God in our liberation struggle and achievement of independence. The people, whom we meet in the psalms, also went through war situations, where, sometimes, they had to participate in battle fields. They physically fought against their enemies, as attested, for example, in Psalms 18, 44 and especially in the royal psalms, such as Psalms 20 and 144. But in all these instances they attributed their military victories to God.

We as Christians in Namibia can learn a lesson from this people as described in the psalms, who, although they knew that they were physically engaged in their struggle for freedom, recognized God's involvement in whatever they achieved. And thus gave glory to God.

We too need to look at our liberation struggle and attainment of independence with the eyes of faith. If we look at our history from this perspective of faith, then we will, indeed, not fail to recognize God's involvement in our history. And we can therefore follow the examples of the psalmists by always praising God and thanking him in response to our liberation and independence.

9.1.2 The Returnees

As we have seen in Psalm 107, the people thanked God for bringing them back from the Babylonian exile. We too in Namibia have many of our people who were in exile and now have come back home. Like those who are described in Psalm 107, our people too have returned from different countries of the world. Some were in African countries, others in Europe and the rest of the world. How do we regard this event? Perhaps, some of us may take this as one of the achievements of the United Nations. The people of Israel, as represented in the psalms, did not doubt the role of God in their return from exile. So, we too ought to consider the return of the exiles as something which happened because God has guided, and as such, it was not simply the work of the United Nations alone.

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), for example, we used to pray for the safe return of those who went into exile. This petition was part of the situational prayer of the church, which was designated for use in the worship services prior to independence. So, the safe return of our people from exile can also be taken as God's answer to our prayers and therefore one of his liberating interventions on our behalf for which we should thank him.

9.1.3 The Problem of the Land

Our investigation of Psalms 44 and 60 has revealed that in the Psalter the idea of liberation also includes the right of the

people to possess their ancestral land. If we were to compare these aspects to our present experience of liberation in Namibia, one cannot fail to see that they are lacking, as far as the people's accessibility to land is concerned. We may not be mistaken by saying that in Namibia, in spite of the official declaration of liberation and independence in 1990, and the 1991's national conference on land reform,¹⁷⁴ still the majority of our people in Namibia have no land which they can claim as theirs. This kind of situation is, of course, falling short of the Old Testament standard of liberation. If we were to meet the biblical standard of liberation, there is still much which needs to be done in Namibia. This state of affair needs to be challenged by the Old Testament concept of liberation, which as we have observed, has *shalom* as one of its goals. And *shalom* is realized in the well-being and material prosperity of the nation. In Namibia, how can the majority of the people prosper if they don't have land? And how can they experience wholeness if they don't have accommodation?

So, for the wholeness of the nation to be realized in Namibia our political leaders need to be inspired by the biblical idea of liberation. In Israel, moreover, it was the function of the kings to apply and maintain justice in the society, even in matters related to the land. In Namibia too it should be the task and responsibility of our political leaders to see to it that

¹⁷⁴ In 1991, the government of Namibia organized and sponsored a "national conference on land reform and the land question", the participants of which, among others, consisted of government officials, churches, community organizations and groups, delegates from districts and communities, and traditional leaders.

those who were illegally dispossessed of their land regain it.

9.2 The Context of Individual Liberation

In our investigation of the individual laments we have observed that the suppliants have gone through varied experiences of suffering, including oppression and persecution by personal enemies and bodily sickness. In the midst of their sufferings, the psalmists expressed their need for liberation to God in forms of laments and petitions. And whenever they experienced relief from these problems, as can be noticed in the praise parts of the laments and in the thanksgiving psalms, these psalmists did not hesitate to thank and praise God because of this.

Today in our communities there may be those who are suffering economically, as they have no jobs or land where they can grow their food. Some may be suffering from diseases, others through lack of safety in their homes and families. These people can have the testimonies of the psalmists as their source of inspiration. The awareness that the psalmists too had suffered but God liberated them can encourage those who are suffering today to face the future and strive for their liberation knowing that God can also help them.

At the same time, among us there may be those who did not have employment but now have jobs, sick but now have recovered. These people too can follow the example of the psalmists and express their thanks to God in various ways.

9.3 Various Ways of Praising God in Our Present Context

In our study of the different categories of psalms, we have seen that liberation brings about joy and happiness in the lives of the people who have experienced it. And this joy and happiness is always expressed in the praise of God. In Namibia too, our experience of liberation from colonial powers has brought us joy and happiness for which we need to praise God. So, we will consider here different forms in which we can express our praise of God today.

In one of the individual thanksgivings, namely Psalm 116, we were already introduced to some forms of expressing the praise of God, which include public acknowledgement of what God had done and rededicating of oneself to the service of God. So, the praise of God can take place in various forms, through words, deeds and attitudes.

In our context, I suggest, we can also express our response to God for our liberation and independence through thanksgiving prayers, sermons, songs and poems. And this would be best done in the context of worship services in the church. To bring this into effect, more relevant prayers need to be formulated and songs to be composed. This would be the task of pastors or priests and worship committees in their respective church denominations and congregations.

The praise of God can also be expressed with any good work which glorifies God. Those who are blessed with material resources can

praise God through helping the poor. Those who are gifted with skills and means of organizing and setting up income-generating projects can do so, so that those who have no jobs can get employments.

Today, when the world is faced with the killer disease - AIDS, our youth can play a significant role in the prevention of the spread of this particular disease, as part of their responsive praise to God, because of our independence.

In this thesis we have observed that the idea of liberation includes also the concept of *shalom*, "wholeness" or "peace". After all, as Croatto has reminded us, liberation is a process toward freedom, "the ontological "locus" wherein human beings can be fulfilled" (1981:5). At present, in Namibia the wholeness of many is being destroyed by certain elements of our society, the youth who are involved in all sorts of crime, including burglary, rape, theft, pickpocketing, and robbery. The youth who have dedicated their lives to the praise of God will, of course, refrain from committing such crimes. At the same time they will try to convince others to join the church and to attend the worship services. In a nutshell, we all as a nation and individuals, including our youth, need to praise God in response to our liberation and independence by acknowledging and exalting him in words and deeds.

Process

APPENDIX I

TABLE 1

A CHART SHOWING VARIOUS FORMS
REPRESENTED IN PSALM 119

Forms	Verses of Occurrence	Total Verses	%
1. Petition	5, 8b, 10b, 12b, 17, 18, 19b, 22, 25b, 26b, 27b, 28b, 29, 31b, 33a, 34a, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 49, 58, 64b, 66, 68b, 73b, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 86b, 88a, 94a, 107b, 108, 116, 117a, 121b, 122, 124, 125, 126, 132, 133, 134, 135, 144b, 145a, 146a, 149, 153, 154, 156b, 159b, 169, 170, 173a, 175, 176b	50½	28.7
2. Lament	19a, 20, 25a, 28a, 51a, 61a, 69a, 70a, 81a, 82, 84, 85, 87a, 95a, 107a, 109a, 110a, 120, 123, 131, 136, 139, 141a, 143a, 150, 157a, 161a, 174a, 176a	19½	11
3. Praise/ Vow of Praise	7, 12a, 13, 14, 46, 64a, 68a, 89, 90, 91, 92, 129, 130, 137, 138, 142, 144a, 156a, 160, 162, 164, 171, 172	20½	11.6
4. Thanksgiving	65	1	0.6
5. Confession of Trust	4, 6, 23, 24, 26a, 42, 45, 50, 52, 54, 57a, 73a, 74, 75, 81b, 83, 86a, 105, 111b, 114, 118, 119, 140, 143b, 151, 152, 155, 165, 166, 174b	26	15
6. Assertion of Innocence/ Faithfulness	10a, 11, 30, 31a, 47, 48a, 51b, 53, 55, 56, 59, 60, 61b, 62, 63, 67b, 69b, 70b, 87b, 94b, 95b, 97, 101, 102, 104, 106, 109b, 110b, 111a, 112, 113, 121a, 127a, 128, 141b, 147, 148, 157b, 158, 159a, 161b, 163, 168, 173b	34½	19.6

TABLE 1--Continued

Forms	Verses of Occurrence	Total Verses	%
7. Vow of Obedience	8a, 15, 16, 27b, 32, 33b, 34b, 44, 48b, 57b, 88b, 93, 117b, 145b, 146b	10	5.7
8. Wisdom Saying	9, 96, 98, 99, 100	5	2.8
9. Comparative Saying	72, 103, 127b	2½	1.4
10. Blessing	1, 2, 3	3	1.7
11. Curse	21, 115	2	1.1
12. Appreciation of Suffering	67a, 71	1½	0.8
TOTAL		176	100.0

Note: In figuring total verses, two half verses (e.g., vv. 19b and 22b) are counted as one verse.

TABLE 2

STROPHES AND VERSES IN WHICH
THE TERM "TORAH" AND ITS
SYNONYMS ARE REPRESENTED

		V E R S E S						
1)	1 To	2 Te	3	4 Pe	5 S	6 C	7 J	8 S
2)	9 W	10 C	11 Pe	12 S	13 J	14 Te	15 Pe	16 S,W
3)	17 W	18 To	19 C	20 J	21 C	22 Te	23 S	24 Te
4)	25 W	26 S	27 Pe	28 W	29 To	30 J	31 Te	32 C
5)	33 S	34 To	35 C	36 Te	37	38 Po	39 J	40 Pe
6)	41 Po	42 W	43 W,J	44 To	45 Pe	46 Te	47 C	48 C,S
7)	49 W	50 Po	51 To	52 J	53 To	54 S	55 To	56 Pe
8)	57 W	58 Po	59 Te	60 C	61 To	62 J	63 Pe	64 S
9)	65 W	66 C	67 Po	68 S	69 Pe	70 To	71 S	72 To
10)	73 C	74 W	75 J	76 Po	77 To	78 Pe	79 Te	80 S
11)	81 W	82 Po	83 S	84 J	85 To	86 C	87 Pe	87 Te
12)	89 W	90	91 J	92 To	93 Pe	94 Pe	95 Te	96 C
13)	97 To	98 C	99 Te	100 Pe	101 W	102 J	103 Po	104 Pe
14)	105 W	105 J	107 W	108 J	109 To	110 Pe	111 Te	112 S

STROPHES

TABLE 2--Continued

		V E R S E S							
S T R O P H E S	15)	113 To	114 W	115 C	116 Po	117 S	118 S	119 Te	120 J
	16)	121 J	122	123 Po	124 S	125 Te	126 To	127 C	128 Pe
	17)	129 Te	130 W	131 C	132 J	133 Po	134 Pe	135 S	136 To
	18)	137 J	138 Te	139 W	140 Po	141 Pe	142 To	143 C	144 Te
	19)	145 S	146 Te	147 W	148 Po	149 J	150 To	151 C	152 Te
	20)	153 To	154 Po	155 S	156 J	157 Te	158 Po	159 Pe	160 J,W
	21)	161 W	162 Po	163 To	164 J	165 To	166 C	167 Te	168 Te,Pe
	22)	169 W	170 Po	171 S	172 Po,C	173 Pe	174 To	175 J	176 C

Note: C = Commandments
 J = Judgments
 Pe = Precepts
 Po = Promise

Te = Testimonies
 To = Torah
 W = Word

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