PSALM 74: A LITERARY-STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

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Ps 74 is not an easy psalm to translate or interpret. This article approaches the task through an inductive analysis of the structure of the text, in the process of which a fresh translation is also provided. It then focuses on the significance of the structure for three themes: religious rhetoric in times of national crisis; the self-identity of the community; and concern for the name of God.

1. *The Literary Structure of the Psalm*

My investigation of the structure of the psalm as given herein will include these steps: determining the basic structure, analyzing the relationship between structure and content, and then interpreting the role of structure for the total meaning of the psalm.

Determining the Basic Structure

By structure[1] I mean the "inherent framework"[2] of the psalm which arises to the reader's view from a close analysis of the text. Such a framework may or may not be evident at first reading. It can seldom be reduced to a mere "outline," as is attempted by most commentaries.[3] The emergent pattern must be multi-dimensional;

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[1] This approach is to be differentiated from both form-critical and structuralist approaches. The form-critical scholar is primarily interested in correlating texts with pre-supposed social situations from which the literature may have arisen. The newer structuralist method focuses on binary structures of the mind and their manifestation in the text. My concern is rather the literary-structural shape of the text.

[2] Rolf Knierim, "Old Testament Form-Criticism Reconsidered," *Int* 27 (1973): 459.

[3] Although many commentators consider it too problematical to give an outline for our psalm, some have tried. L. Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning* (New York, n.d.) 2: 151-152, simply divides at vs. 12. A. Weiser, *Psalms* (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 518-520, emphasizes the contrast between Elohim and the

pathos and movement must be charted along with the more static elements of the text.

How do we begin to describe the structure of a text? The first step is familiarity, achieved both by reading and by hearing the text read. Certain features—figures, ideas, metaphors, metre—will become evident. The observant reader will be alert to the presence and placement of words and phrases, along with variations in the pace and intensity of the text. Particular attention should be given to the verbal pattern, because the action words in any language carry both meaning and movement.

In analyzing structure, it is important to recognize that various types of pattern are possible. The interpreter must take care not to superimpose a pattern that is alien to the text itself, and then try to compensate for the ill-fit by emending the text and restructuring the stanzas!

In the following examination of Ps 74, it is the verbal pattern that will first claim our attention. Not only do the verbs dominate by their position and power, but they can be easily divided according to tense into five consecutive groups. With attention to the primary or initial verb of each line, we can group the verses of Ps 74 in this way:

    1-3   Imperatives (apart from introductory complaint)
    4-9   Perfects (with supplementary imperfect in vs. 9)
    10-11 Imperfects
    12-17 Perfects (with supplementary imperfect in vs. 14)
    18-23 Imperatives (and supporting jussives, etc.)

If we reduce the pattern to main verbs only, the possibility of a chiastic or mirror-structured psalm emerges:[4]

enemy. C. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Edinburgh, 1907), 2: 150-151, prefers three parts—each consisting of three tetrameter tetrastichs—, but relies heavily on the presence of supposed glosses. E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms* (Dublin, 1964), pp. 329-331, chooses four strophes of six verses: 1-5, 6-11, 12-17, 18-23.

[4] For discussion and examples of chiastic literary constructions in biblical literature, see, e.g., N. W. Lund, "The Presence of Chiasmus in the Old Testament," *AJSL* 46 (1930): 104-126; idem, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1942). On the psalms, see the studies of Robert L. Alden, "Chiastic Psalms: A Study

    A. Imperatives
        B. Perfects
            C. Imperfects
        B'. Perfects
    A'. Imperatives

      The result is an inverted symmetrical structure in which the imperative paragraphs (A and A') introduce and conclude the psalm, the perfect verbs (B and B') develop some concrete actions in the psalm, and the central verses (C) form the central axis, pointing back to the earlier sections and forward to the subsequent ones.

      In the next stage we examine the fit between the verbal structure and the contents of the psalm.

Relationship of Structure and Content

      If we overlay the linguistic features and content of the psalm on the skeleton above, the result is a symmetrical but dynamic structure in which individual features can be seen as contributary to the whole. The composition is complex and yet clearly co-ordinated, with minimal interplay between motifs until the final paragraph and climax.

      We now translate and examine each paragraph, noting its theme, subjects, and mood. Between each paragraph lies the significant literary device of a "hinge" which formally links part to part.

A: Vss. 1-3

מַשְׂכִּיל לְאָסָף ¹   A Maskil of Asaph

לָמָה אֱלֹהִים זָנַחְתָּ לָנֶצַח   Why, O Elohim, are you perpetually

יֶעְשַׁן אַפְּךָ בְּצֹאן מַרְעִיתֶךָ:   angry?[5] Why do your nostrils smoke against the sheep of your pasture?

in the Mechanics of Semitic Poetry in Psalms 1-50," *JETS* 17 (1974): 11-28, and sequels *JETS* 19 (1976): 191-200; 21 (1978): 199-210.

    [5] A study of this word in its Qal form does not support the usual rendering, "to reject, spurn, abandon." Most OT uses are intransitive like the Akkadian verb *zenu*, referring to a state, not an action requiring an object. See R. Yaron, "The Meaning of ZANAH," *VT* 13 (1963): 237-239.

זְכֹר עֲדָתְךָ קָנִיתָ קֶּדֶם גָּאַלְתָּ שֵׁבֶט נַחֲלָתֶךָ הַר־צִיּוֹן זֶה שָׁכַנְתָּ בּוֹ:	2	Remember your congregation, acquired of old! Redeem your inheritance, Mt. Zion where you dwelt!
הָרִימָה פְעָמֶיךָ לְמַשֻּׁאוֹת נֶצַח כָּל־הֵרַע אוֹיֵב בַּקֹּדֶשׁ:	3	Lift up your feet[6] toward the perpetual ruins! Every evil doer is in the sanc-tuary!

The initial approach to Elohim is in question form, and serves as an introduction to the whole psalm. The tone then quickly moves with the urgent imperatives—"Remember! ... Redeem! .. . Lift up! . . ." —to the most direct form of address possible. The subjects of the plaint are the people of God and the place of sacred presence, a dual motif which extends throughout the psalm. The first paragraph thus introduces all the characters and emotion of the drama, with a plea for intervention.

The final colon (vs. 3b) thematically links the first and second paragraphs by juxtaposing the offenders and the plaintiffs and announcing the subject of the second paragraph.

B: Vss. 4-9

שָׁאֲגוּ צֹרְרֶיךָ בְּקֶרֶב מוֹעֲדֶךָ שָׂמוּ אוֹתֹתָם אֹתוֹת:	4	The adversaries roared in the middle of your assembly; they set up their ensigns (for signs).[7]
יִוָּדַע כְּמֵבִיא לְמָעְלָה בִּסֲבָךְ־עֵץ קַרְדֻּמּוֹת:	5	They slashed like a man who goes up with an axe into a thicket of trees;[8]
וְעַתָּ פִּתּוּחֶיהָ יָּחַד בְּכַשִּׁיל וְכֵילַפֹּת יַהֲלֹמוּן:	6	and then all its carved work they smashed with hatchet and axes.

[6] The Hiphil imperative "Lift up!" is clear, but the object is debated. Dahood assumes the addition of the *yodh* due to the unfamiliarity of the Massoretes with *pa* as a conjunction. F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (Edinburgh, 1873) 2: 329, paraphrases, "May God then lift His feet up high ... i.e. with long hurried steps, without stopping, move towards His dwelling-place that now lies in ruins, that by virtue of His interposition it may rise again."

[7] The second colon is generally considered corrupt and untranslatable. Weiser refuses to translate the final word and all of vss. 5-6. Dahood redivides the consonants and translates "emblems by the hundreds." See P. R. Ackroyd, "Some Notes on the Psalms," *JTS* 17 (1966): 392.

[8] The verses here are considered as being among the most difficult in the entire

שִׁלְחוּ בָאֵשׁ מִקְדָּשֶׁךָ	7	They have burned your sanctuary com-
לָאָרֶץ חִלְּלוּ מִשְׁכַּן־שְׁמֶךָ׃		pletely;[9] they desecrated the dwelling-place of your name.
אָמְרוּ בְלִבָּם נִינָם יָחַד	8	They said in their hearts, "We will utterly destroy!" They burned all the assemblies of El in the land.[10]
שָׂרְפוּ כָל־מוֹעֲדֵי־אֵל בָּאָרֶץ׃		
אוֹתֹתֵינוּ לֹא רָאִינוּ אֵין־עוֹד נָבִיא	9	Our signs" we have not seen; there is no one among us who knows "Until when?"
וְלֹא־אִתָּנוּ יֹדֵעַ עַד־מָה׃		

The attention of Elohim is now directed to the enemies who have ravaged the sanctuary. The citation of destructive acts is not

Psalter, with no definitive translation possible. The difficulty begins immediately with *yiwada'*, a rarer form from the verb "to know." However, the context provides no object, and the concept of knowing is not congruent with the sense which would favor an act, preferably violent. Here we follow Bardtke's text in *Biblia Hebraica*, where he emends to *yigd^e'u*, "they smash/break in pieces."

The phrase "who goes up" from the Hiphil fem. sing. Part. poses a problem of gender, but the meaning is clear. See J. A. Emerton, "Notes on Three Passages in Psalms Book III," *JTS* 14 (1963): 2. Also cf. Jgs 9:48; Neh 8:15; Isa 40:16.

The second colon contains a *hapax legomenon* where the clearest member is "tree." I understand the bicolon as a simile in which a man goes up a hillside into a thicket of trees with axes to chop them down. In Zech 11:2ff. the felling of trees, sounds of lions roaring, and the misfortune of the flock are again combined. See also Isa 10:33-34 and Jer 46:22.

[9] The literal rendering is "to the ground"—an idiom meaning "completely" or "utterly."

[10] Dahood reads, ". . . let all their progeny be burned, all the divine assemblies in the land," but this assumes some equation between "progeny" and "assemblies." B. D. Erdman, *The Hebrew Book of Psalms* (Leiden, 1947), p. 354, proposes that "all the younger generation, the offspring of the oppressors, will believe that all the places of assembly of El have been burned up." This would require the fusion of two cola into one, and force an unnecessary future sense upon the text. As Delitzsch, p. 329, notes, the Qal fut. of *sargu* equals the Hiphil *hunah* "to force, oppress." See also Num 21:30 and Exod 24:19.

[11] Although straightforward in the MT, this verse is a *crux interpretum*. The 3d-person masc. pl. suffix on "signs" is not to be overlooked, as is done by some interpreters. "Our signs" is to be contrasted with "their signs" in vs. 4. See J. J. M. Roberts, "Of Signs, Prophets and Time Limits: A Note on Psalm 74:9," *CBQ* 39 (1967): 481.

merely an indictment of the violent invaders; it is designed to incite
Elohim to avenging action; it is his sanctuary and assemblies that
have been harried.

      Vs. 9 serves both as a verbal and dramatic link to the next
paragraph. Not only is there already a transition from "they" to
"we," but the single phrase "Until when?" is immediately repeated
at the start of C.

<div align="center">C: Vss. 10-11</div>

עַד־מָתַי אֱלֹהִים יְחָרֶף צָר יְנָאֵץ אוֹיֵב שִׁמְךָ לָנֶצַח:	10	Until when, 0 Elohim, will the adversary revile? Will the enemy deride your name forever?
לָמָה תָשִׁיב יָדְךָ וִימִינְךָ מִקֶּרֶב חֵוקְךָ כַלֵּה:	11	Why do you draw back your hand, even your right hand from the middle of your assembly?[12]

      The pivotal paragraph of the psalm refocuses the major issue
by the use of direct questions which recall both previous para-
graphs (A and B). The subjects there are now presented in the light
of a new motive: Elohim's possible concern for his own name. This
move from the extrinsic to the intrinsic requires reflection on part
of the deity, heightening the psychological engagement of the
psalm. The threat to reputation is presented as a greater danger
than the accomplished destructions, as a more urgent basis of the
appeal for salvation.

      This section itself is the hinge of the whole psalm in its
synthesis of prior arguments and its anticipation of A'. However,
the simple *waw* at the beginning of vs. 12 acts as a paragraph
connector—a rare occurrence in this psalm.

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[12] The first colon is clear, but the middle word of the line could be placed in
either colon. Does God keep his hand in the fold of his garment instead of laying it
upon his enemies in destruction (cf. Exod 4:6ff; Isa 52:10; Lam 2:8), as most
translations suggest? The LXX and versions misread or emend *huqka* to mean
your bosom." See also Ezra 8:18, Ps 80:18, and Isa 50:2 in support of "hand" in a
favorable sense.

B': Vss. 12-17

Hebrew	#	English
וֵאלֹהִים מַלְכִּי מִקֶּדֶם פֹּעֵל יְשׁוּעוֹת בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:	12	Yet, 0 Elohim, you have been my[13] king from of old; performing deliver-ances in the middle of the land:
אַתָּה פוֹרַרְתָּ בְעָזְּךָ יָם שִׁבַּרְתָּ רָאשֵׁי תַנִּינִים עַל־הַמָּיִם:	13	You split[14] Yam with your strength; you shattered the heads of Tanninim upon the waters.
אַתָּה רִצַּצְתָּ רָאשֵׁי לִוְיָתָן תִּתְּנֶנּוּ מַאֲכָל לְעָם לְצִיִּים	14	You[15] crushed the heads of Leviathan, and gave them as food to the people of the desert.
אַתָּה בָקַעְתָּ מַעְיָן וָנָחַל אַתָּה הוֹבַשְׁתָּ נַהֲרוֹת אֵיתָן:	15	You cleaved spring and stream; you dried up the perennial rivers.[16]
לְךָ יוֹם אַף־לְךָ לָיְלָה אַתָּה הֲכִינוֹתָ מָאוֹר וָשָׁמֶשׁ:	16	To you belongs the day, yet more to you belongs the night; you established luminary and sun.[17]

[13] The suffix is changed to "our king" in the Syriac, but reflects the community's later use of the psalm rather than any textual variant.

[14] The translation of *porr^eta* is hotly disputed. Some have seen here the division of the Red Sea (Exod 14:21), but since the work of H. Gunkel, the mythological reading has strongly influenced commentators. Although "divide" is the common translation, the root means "to cleave/break." The object is *yam*, a surprising form, when the poetic use is more often plural, as in the second colon. It is probably a personification, hence my translation.

[15] The emphatic personal pronoun is used seven times to emphasize the subject of the actions.

[16] "Cleaved" is used of the dividing of the Sea in Exod 14:16, Ps 78:13, Isa 63:12, etc., but whether it is to be used so here is unclear. The context and other parallels (Ps 89:11; Isa 51:9; Job 27:12-13) suggest rather a hostile action. However, is "spring and stream" a suitable object? The parallelism of cola suggests a reference to the sea, perhaps the ocean currents and subterranean channels from which the forces of chaos rush up, as in Gen 7:11. See H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (Gottingen, 1901), pp. 70, 132. Emerton, "'Spring and Torrent' in Psalm LXXIV.15," *VT, Suppl.* Volume du Congres Geneve, 1965, suggests instead that "the whole of Ps. lxxiv.15 describes the removal of the primeval waters from the earth. God cleft open springs so that the water might descend through them."

[17] "Luminary" probably refers to moon. God thus establishes his dominion over both light and dark zones at creation. See Isa 40:26ff.

אַתָּה הִצַּבְתָּ כָּל־גְּבוּלוֹת אָרֶץ   17   You appointed all the boundaries of
קַיִץ וָחֹרֶף אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּם: the earth; summer and winter—you
                                          formed them.[18]

What a transformation of tone! God is now addressed with the
emphatic pronoun; his "deliverances" are recited in an ancient
hymn; the very initial vocative erases the previous tone of com-
plaint—an affirmation of faith in the context of perplexity. The
psalmist wishes to stimulate confidence in Elohim's present ability
to defeat the enemies of the nation.

A subtle but deliberate link between B' and A' is provided by
the word play upon *horep*, "winter" in vs. 17 and *herep*, "revile"
in vs. 18.

A': Vss. 18-23

זְכָר־זֹאת אוֹיֵב חֵרֵף יְהוָה   18   Remember this![19] The enemy has re-
וְעַם נָבָל נִאֲצוּ שְׁמֶךָ:   viled Yahweh; and a foolish people
                                          has spurned your name.[20]

אַל־תִּתֵּן לְחַיַּת נֶפֶשׁ תּוֹרֶךָ   19   Do not give the life of your dove to a
חַיַּת עֲנִיֶּיךָ אַל־תִּשְׁכַּח לָנֶצַח: wild animal; Do not forget the soul of
                                          your afflicted ones!

הַבֵּט לַבְּרִית כִּי מָלְאוּ   20   Consider your covenant,[21] for the dark
מַחֲשַׁכֵּי־אֶרֶץ נְאוֹת חָמָס: places of the land are full of violent
                                          inhabitants!

אַל־יָשֹׁב דַּךְ נִכְלָם   21   Do not let the ashamed sit oppressed![22]
עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן יְהַלְלוּ שְׁמֶךָ:   Let the afflicted and miserable praise
                                          your name![23]

[18] This is a classic chiastic construction in which the very sounds of the words
create an aesthetic balance—a fitting conclusion to the sevenfold paeon. Perhaps the
verse reflects a polemic against the season-based Baal cycle.
       [19] The initial verb is to be repointed as an imperative, as in vs. 2.
       [20] This synonymous parallelism forms an inclusio or envelope around the hymn
(B') with the same idea in vs. 10.
       [21] Dahood redivides the syllables, replacing "covenant" with "temple," but this
seems unnecessary. The real difficulty is with the rest of the verse, where the syntax
is unclear and the metre undefined. I assume that the subordinate clause is designed
to provide a motive for God to "Consider the covenant."
       [22] The command is either "Do not (let) return" or "do not (let) sit, dwell." The
Syriac seems to be correct in interpreting the practice as part of a mourning ritual.
       [23] The second colon is parallel to the first, but states the thought positively. The

קוּמָה אֱלֹהִים רִיבָה רִיבֶךָ   22   Arise, 0 Elohim, and plead your
זְכֹר חֶרְפָּתְךָ מִנִּי־נָבָל כָּל־הַיּוֹם: case![24] Remember that your insult
comes from the foolish one daily!

אַל־תִּשְׁכַּח קוֹל צֹרְרֶיךָ   23   Do not forget the voice of your adver-
שְׁאוֹן קָמֶיךָ עֹלֶה תָמִיד: saries, the uproar[25] of your opponents
which arises continually!

The abrupt movement from the hymn of acclamation in B' to the intense appeal for deliverance in A' is striking. No room appears to be allowed for denial of the urgent pleas of the psalmist. The direct entreaty recapitulates the previous appeals and synthesizes the incentives. In the structure it corresponds to A (note the use of "Remember!" as the initial imperative), but it also incorporates thematic threads from B ("Enemy"/"enemies," "roar"/ "uproar") and C ("adversary"/"adversaries," "your name," "enemy," "revile"/"scorn," etc.). Elohim's anticipated reaction is a response to blasphemies of the oppressor, the pleadings of the oppressed, and the dishonor done to the divine name.

The Role of Structure for the Total Meaning of the Psalm
The third step in describing the structure of the psalm examines the less obvious but integral movements within the psalm which further endorse our proposed analysis and suggest an interpretive stance.
The general structure outlined above highlights five distinct but related paragraphs. Each exhibits its own predominant verbal tense, mood, and sentence type; yet, assisted by the editorial linkages, the psalm moves toward a crescendo of intensity.

chiastic construction of the verse demonstrates the anticipated movement from depression to delight:
Do NOT LET sit . . . ashamed, oppressed;
afflicted, miserable
Do LET praise your name.
[24] The verb and noun cognates *ribah ribeka* have no English equivalent, but the theme is familiar to OT readers as the legal idiom of the lawsuit. Yahweh's response is conceived to be shaped by the covenant procedures, hence the appeal in vs. 20.
[25] "Uproar" may be compared with "roared" in vs. 4 on onomatopoeic as well as lexical grounds.

The chiastic structure of the psalm suggests a mode of inter-pretation in which the paragraphs may be seen as wholes in relation to other sections. If we first examine A, C, and A', we detect a common form of plaintive address that is not shared by B and B'. Here the main thread of the psalm centers around the religious, political, and psychological consequences of the work of the enemy. The direct appeal to Elohim employed here is rare in the OT; the urgent imperatives are near the edge of the human capacity of language. The interrogatives of C advance into cries of desperation in A'. Although A' recapitulates the imperatives of A, the intensification is obvious.

The two intermediary paragraphs B and B' serve a contrasting purpose. Each group of six verses is a catalog of actions in the perfect tense, yet these stand in antithetical relation to each other: the enemy's acts of destruction are "answered" by Yahweh's de-liverances. Although the verbs in each paragraph are clearly strong and active, not one of the actions of the enemy is predicated of Yahweh, or *vice versa*. J. P. M. van der Ploeg notices this contrast, but concludes that it is not certain whether in the psalmist's mind this was intentional."[26] However, the structural opposition of B and B' forces us to favor deliberate construction.

The hymn of Yahweh's deliverances in B' may then be seen as a negation of the account of the enemy's work. In so doing, it is first of all a statement of faith—transcending present religious bewilderment by recourse to the supra-historical understanding of God as "King"—which attends the entreaty sections, A, C, and A'. It is also a sermon (we assume the psalm was composed and communicated to the community in public prayer) in which the psalmist seeks to alleviate religious anxieties by recalling traditions which preceded the existence of the sanctuary. Finally, the hymn as addressed to God himself urges the Divine One to demonstrate again his superiority over all evil and mortal sacrilegious forces, to pitch his creative power in a radical demonstration of antithesis to the destructive rampages of the enemy.

[26] J. P. M. sin der Ploeg, "Psalm 71 and Its Structurce," in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament:. Studies Presented to Professor M. A. Beek on the occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Asses. 1974). p. 209.

With this foregoing overview of the structure in relationship to the total meaning of the psalm, we are ready to note further the three themes mentioned earlier—religious rhetoric in times of national crisis, the self-identity of the community, and concern for the name of God.

2. Prominent Themes in the Psalm

Religious Rhetoric

What I have stated above about B and B' reveals that these sections serve a distinctly rhetorical purpose, especially as the hymn in B' simultaneously speaks hope to the worshippers and elicits help from God. Once the hymn is stated, the psalmist returns to the present crisis, but is now himself reinforced with a stronger sense of both the urgency and the possibility of Elohim's response. His questions are replaced with a holy courage that relentlessly pushes the psalm to a crescendo—and then a severe silence.

Thus, the placement of paragraphs B and B' serves a clear rhetorical function in the total address: In the mind of the congregation, Elohim's salvations now displace the destructions of the enemy; but, recited as a hymn to Elohim, they also appeal to God to "live up to his name."

Self-Concept of the Community

Our second theme examines the status and self-concept of a community bereft of their house of worship and ritual apparatus and oracles—and hence, also of their national and religious confidence. The petition is much more than a mere personal complaint, as the "we" continually indicates. Several figures are used for the community's self-designation, but the animal imagery— "sheep" and "dove"—is the most vivid.

In A and A' the movement within this imagery is most marked. The sheep metaphor is the conventional rural image of the relation between God and people immortalized in David's Twenty-third Psalm.[27] There the leadership of God is expressed, but here,

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[27] See also Ezek 34.

in A (vs. 1) Elohim seems to snort at, rather than succor, the flock.

The counterpart in A' only partly resolves the question. The people no longer see themselves as a domestic herd resting "in green pastures ... beside the still waters" under the watchful, benevolent care of a divine shepherd. Rather, they are the innocent, defenseless, and pathetic dove about to fall prey to vicious carnivores: "Do not give the life of your dove to a wild animal!" The people, like the bird, are "your" possession as King of creation, as the one who had power to crush Leviathan (vs. 14) and the Sea Monster (vs. 13).

In this way, the intervening hymn has transformed the image of God from shepherd of the domestic flock to Lord of the total animate creation. The self-designation of the community is likewise adjusted. The metaphor is heightened, the appeal made more forceful.

The Name of God

Our third theme for interpretation in light of the psalm's structure is the "name" of God. Far more than mere appellation, the name is a metonym for the total character, presence, reputation, and authority of God. As the sanctuary in Jerusalem was the acclaimed "dwelling-place of your name" (vs. 7), so the attack upon it by the invaders was an attack upon the character, credibility, and honor of God himself. In B, Mt. Zion, "where you dwelt" (vs. 2), becomes "the sanctuary ... the dwelling place of your name" (vs. 7). Here begins the drawing of Elohim's self-concern. The central section of the plea is explicit in its questioning, "Will the enemy deride your name forever?" (vs. 10). The same theme is taken up immediately after the hymn, "a foolish people has spurned your name" (vs. 18), suggesting that the hymn is recited in the ears of Elohim to remind him of his reputation. Then the final use of the name offers the possibility that, if God acts in harmony with his past actions and delivers his people, then even "the afflicted and miserable [will] praise your name" (vs. 21).

In this interpretation, the destructive acts of the enemy in B provide a negative incentive for Yahweh to act, especially when linked in C with the direct verbal taunts of the blaspheming invaders. The positive incentive in reminding Elohim of his reputation in history and creation (B') is linked in A' with the prospect

of praise instead of ridicule and derision. If indeed C is the axis of
the petition, then the primary theme of the psalm is the status of
God's name and reputation. The flanking paragraphs work to
heighten the issue and prompt God to an act of salvation for the
desperate community.

3. *Conclusion*

Each of the three themes provides a pattern of development in
which the chiastic structure of the psalm is demonstrated as being
basic. This is particularly so with regard to the thematic opposi-
tion, yet functional co-operation, between B and B', and the
pivotal position of C.