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H A J Kruger, Department of Biblical Literature, Faculty of Theology, University of Durban-Westville, Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000, Republic of South Africa.

Shepherd, vine-grower, father - divine metaphor and existential reality in a community lament (Psalm 80)

G T M Prinsloo (UP)

ABSTRACT

Exegetes are unanimous in classifying Psalm 80 as a communal lament. Here the consensus regarding the poem ends. The poem is dated somewhere between the time of Saul and the second century BC. In this paper, Psalm 80 is analysed on two levels: Firstly, a careful intratextual analysis is made. Secondly, this information is used to determine the social and historical setting of the psalm by means of an intertextual analysis. Three metaphors are used to describe God: That of vine-grower (9-14), shepherd (2-3) and father (16 and 18). It is argued that these well-known metaphors are used by a community of believers in exilic times to enhance the disparity between God's tender care in the past and their present existential crisis. Against this background they lament their deplorable situation and pray for salvation.

A INTRODUCTION

Exegetes are unanimous in classifying Psalm 80 as a community lament. But here the consensus regarding the psalm ends. The psalm presents the exegete with numerous problems. On the intratextual level, textcritical and interpretational problems cause numerous uncertainties. On the extra- and intertextual level diverging viewpoints are expressed regarding the date, social and historical setting, redactional history and *Traditionsgeschichtliche* background of the psalm. The purpose of the present study is twofold: Firstly to determine the intent of the psalm by means of a careful intratextual analysis, secondly to use this material to illuminate the extra- and intertextual context(s) of the poem. In the process a few passing remarks on the intent and theology of community laments will be made.

B TEXT AND TRANSLATION

		1	למנצח אל-ששנים ערוח לאסף מזמור:	2a	To the conductor. According to 'Lilies'. A testimony. Of Asaph. A psalm.
I	A	1	רעה ישראל האזינה נהג כצאן יוסף ישב הכרובים הופיעה:	2a	O Shepherd of Israel, listen, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned on cherubim, appear!
		2	לפני אפרים ובנימן ומנשה עורכה את-גבורתה ולכה לישעיה לנו: אלהים השיבנו וקאר פניה וננשעה: יהנה אלהים צבאות ער-מתי עשנת בהפלת עמך:	3a	Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh - summon your heroic powers and come to save us! O God, restore us, let your face shine that we may be saved! Yahweh God Sebaoth How long will you remain angry in spite of the prayer of your people?
		5	האכלתם לחם דמעה ושקמו ברמעות שליש:	6a	You fed them with bread of tears, you gave them tears to drink - a full measure.
		6	חשימנו סרוץ לשכנינו ואיבינו ילעגו-למו: אלהים צבאות השיבנו וקאר פניה וננשעה: גפן ממצרים חסיע חגלש גוים וחטעה:	7a	You made us a source of strife for our neighbours, our enemies mock among themselves. O God Sebaoth, restore us, let your face shine that we may be saved! You dug up a vine out of Egypt, you drove out the nations and planted it.
Re	3		פנית לפניה ושפרש שרשיה וחמלא-ארץ:	10a	You made room for it, it shot forth roots and filled the land.
		10	כסו הרים צלה וענפיה ארו-אל: חשלח קציריה ער-ים ואל-נהר יונקוהיה: למה פנצת גרתיה וארוה כל-עברי נכה: יכרסמה חזיר מגער וניז שרי ירעהנה: אלהים צבאות שרב-נא:	11a	Mountains were covered by its shade, by its branches the mighty cedars. It extended its tendrils to the sea, and to the river its branches. Why have you torn down its walls, so that the passerby pluck it clean? The boar of the forest consumes it to the ground, the beasts of the field graze it off. O God Sebaoth, return,

		15	הבט משמים וראה ויפקר גפן זאה: וכנה אשר-נטעה ימינה ועל-בן אמצעה לך: שרפה כאש פטרחה מנערת פניה יאכרו: חיה-ינה על-איש ימינה על-בן-אדם אמצע לך: ולא-נסוג מנך חמינו ורשמה נקרא: יהנה אלהים צבאות השיבנו וקאר פניה וננשעה:	b	look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine. <Restore> what your right hand has planted, the son whom you have raised for yourself. It is burnt by fire and hacked to pieces, at the rebuke of your face, they perish. Let your hand be over the man at your right hand, the son of man whom you have raised for yourself! We will not forsake you, Give us life, and we will call on your name! O Yahweh God Sebaoth, restore us, let your face shine that we may be saved!
		16		b	
G		16		17a	
		17		b	
		17		18a	
		18		b	
		18		19a	
		19		b	
Re		19		20a	
				b	

C PSALM 80: A STARTLING MAZE OF OPINIONS

Exegetes are almost unanimous in their opinion that Psalm 80 is a community lament composed 'for a day of prayer and penitence' (Anderson 1972:581; cf Weiser 1962:547; Eissfeldt 1966:224). Such laments are proclaimed 'on special occasions of crisis' (Mowinkel [1962] 1992:193). They normally commence with references to Yahweh in the vocative (Gunkel [1933] 1985:121; cf Ps 80:1) and contain at least three elements: Lament (Ps 80:5-7, 13-14), petition (Ps 80:2-4, 8, 15-18, 20) and words of encouragement (Ps 80:19; cf Gunkel [1933] 1985:125). Three subjects occur: Yahweh (Ps 80:2, 4, 5, 8, 15, 20), the people/'we' (Ps 80:4, 5-8, 19-20) and the enemies (Ps 80:7, 13-14; cf Westermann 1981:174).

A startling diversity of opinions have been expressed concerning the date and historical origin of Psalm 80.

The references to Israel (2a), Joseph (2b) and Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh (3a) lead most interpreters to the conclusion that the psalm originated in the *northern kingdom*.

Heinemann (1949/1950:297-302) argues that the *איש ימינה* 'man of your right hand' (18a) refers to Saul, a man from the tribe of Benjamin (cf 3a). His father is described as *איש מבן-ימין* 'a man from Benjamin' in 1 Samuel 9:1 (cf also 2 Sm 20:1; Es 2:5). Accordingly, he dates the psalm in the time of Saul's wars against the Philistines (Rendsburg 1990:73).

Eissfeldt (1966:229-231; 1968:132) dates the psalm between 732 and 722 BC. He argues that Ephraim still existed as an independent political unity, but Galilee, the Trans-Jordan and coastal regions had already been lost (2 Ki 15:29). According to him, the name Yahweh Sebaoth belongs to Silo and is a distinctly northern tradition. The 'man at your right hand' (18a) and 'the son of man' (18b) refer to king Hosea ben Ela (2 Ki 17:1-6; cf also Ridderbos 1958:310; Weiser 1962:547).

Some take 13a-14b as their point of departure. It refers to the destruction of the people. The Assyrian occupation of Israel and the destruction of Samaria in 722 BC are seen as the most likely circumstances which caused the poem to be composed (Gunkel [1929] 1986:353; Oesterley 1939:366; Dahood 1968:255; Sabourin 1969:161; Williams 1989:81; Schneider 1996:168). Many see confirmation for this point of view in the Septuagint's addition 'concerning the Assyrians' in verse 1 (Anderson 1972:581; Kissane 1954:47).

Briggs and Briggs (1969:202) argue along similar lines, but regard 17a-18b as an addition from Maccabean times, giving the poem a distinctly Messianic interpretation.

A second possibility is that the psalm originated in the *southern kingdom*.

Some argue that the psalm was composed in Jerusalem by worshippers who were interceding for the northern kingdom (Eaton 1967:199). They had the whole of the people in mind. Schmidt (1934:154) is of the opinion that a time when both kingdoms were in distress, especially the time of Aramaean domination (1 Ki 22:29), is most appropriate. He even applies 18ab to king Ahab!

Others prefer a date in the time of Josiah's reforms, when some areas from the north temporarily became part of the southern kingdom (Kraus 1966:557; Anderson 1972:581; Tate 1990:311; Schneider 1996:168).

A third possibility is that the psalm originated after the *destruction of Jerusalem*.

Buttenwieser (1938:233-234) proposes an exilic date. The allegory of the vineyard (9a-12b) has the people as a whole in mind, the poet laments their destruction (13a-14b) and prays for their restoration (15a-16b). Buttenwieser refers to the Book of Enoch, where the boar (cf 14a) is used as metaphor for Edom. From this he concludes that the psalm refers to the destruction of Jerusalem (cf the Book of Obadiah for the role of Edom in the destruction) and was written in the ruined country (cf Perowne [1878] 1976:82; Kirkpatrick 1903:483; Baethgen 1904:251; Kittel 1922:269).

Some are more cautious about an exact date. The references to the northern

kingdom might only indicate that a northern tradition was incorporated here (Westermann 1984:29). The psalm can be applied to numerous calamities, therefore it is difficult to propose an exact original setting (Rogerson & McKay 1977:156; Van Uchelen 1977:303).

Deissler (1964:311) argues that the reference to the northern tribes picks up the promise of Ezekiel 37:15-28 and expresses the hopes of the post-exilic community once again to experience the glory of old (cf also Van der Ploeg 1974:42-43).

According to Duhm (1899:209) the psalm is a plea for the return of Jews from the diaspora. He dates the psalm in the second century BC.

A fourth possibility is that the psalm is a *redactional anthology* from various epochs in the history of Israel.

According to Beyerlin (1973:9-24) verses 2-3 are the oldest section of the psalm. It dates from a time when the three central Palestinian tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh formed a league against Philistine oppression (about 1020 BC). To this a community lament (5-7; 17b-19) was added by believers in the southern kingdom after the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. They lamented the plight of their northern brothers. It happened in the time of Josiah (639/638-609 BC). The refrain (4, 8 and 20) was added late in pre-exilic times when the poem found a place in the liturgy of the congregation. After the fall of Jerusalem (587 BC) the allegory of the vineyard (9-16a) was added. In post-exilic times 16b was added to express the hopes for the restoration of the monarchy. The single word דָּוִד was added in 18b even later in post-exilic times to give the poem an eschatological dimension. Even later still is the heading (v 1). A similar approach is propagated by Waaijman ([s a]:94-103).

This overview clearly indicates one of the major problems in traditional psalm exegesis - the difficulty in proposing a historical and social setting simply because the text itself provides so little information. It is clear that often information outside the text form the basis for the various arguments presented above. Another avenue will be investigated here, taking the text as starting point.

D THE STRUCTURE AND INTENT OF PSALM 80

Apart from the heading (80:1), which will be dealt with in the next section, the most conspicuous feature of the psalm is the recurrence of a *refrain* in verses 4, 8 and 20.

In each case the refrain consists of one line with two feet. The second foot is identical in all three cases (הַשְׂמֵךְ פְּנֵיךָ וְנִשְׁעָה) 'let your face shine that we may be saved'. In the first foot an additional element is added to the name of God, creating a *climax* at the end of the psalm, a so-called 'growing refrain' (White 1984:123; cf Kirkpatrick 1903:488):

השכינו	אלהים	4a
השיבנו	אלהים צבאות	8a
יהוה	אלהים צבאות	20a

The psalm can be divided into three stanzas.

STANZA I (2a-8a): Shepherd and flock

Stanza I (2a-8a) is characterised by *metaphorical* language. God is likened to a shepherd (רעה in 2a) tending (נהג in 2b) his flock (צאן in 2b) and terminology associated with the kingship of God appear (ישב הכרובים 'you who are enthroned upon cherubim' in 2c and יהוה צבאות 'Yahweh Sebaoth' in 5a). The stanza consists of two strophes, both concluded by the *refrain* (4ab; 8ab).

Strophe A (2a-3c): Shepherd, tend your flock!

Strophe A (2a-3c) comprises two lines with three feet each (2abc; 3abc). The strophe commences with a *metaphor*, where God is likened to a shepherd (רעה 'shepherd' in 2a and נהג 'leader' in 2b) and a *comparison*, where Israel is likened to his flock (כצאן in 2b). The metaphor is common in the Old Testament (cf Gn 48:15; 49:24; Ps 23:1; 78:52; Ezk 34:11) and denotes the close relationship between God and people (Kraus 1966:557). The line is further characterised by the threefold *repetition* of participles in the construct state at the beginning of each foot. Equally conspicuous is the *repetition* of ישראל (2a) and the synonymous יוסף (2b) and the strange word order in 2b, where the *comparison* (כצאן) breaks the normal construct chain. ישראל refers to the people as a whole, while יוסף carries the undertone of 'Israel in Egypt' (Kraus 1966:557) and calls to mind the deliverance from Egypt (Ps 77:15; 81:5). In 2c God is designated as ישב הכרובים 'enthroned on cherubim'. The phrase is closely associated with the cult at Silo (1 Sm 4:4) and refers to God enthroned as king (Mettinger 1982:113-117; Kraus 1966:557). The 'cherubim' are

winged creatures closely associated with the ark of the covenant (Ex 25:19-22). The concept went with the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sm 6:2) and played an important role in the cultic tradition at Zion (2 Ki 19:15; Is 37:16; Ps 18:10; 97:2; 99:1). Both the first and last foot are concluded by emphatic imperatives (האזינה 'listen' in 2a and הופיעה 'appear' in 2c - cf Ps 50:2; 94:1). What is prayed for, is a theophany, a disclosure of the might of Yahweh (Van der Ploeg 1974:44). The lasting impression is one of three closely *parallel* feet, knitted together by the *repetition* of emphatic imperatives at the beginning and end, thus suggesting an *inclusion*.

The pattern is continued in 3abc, but the focus shifts to images from the holy war (Gunkel [1929] 1986:351). By mentioning three tribes of Israel (אפרים אפרים ומנשה רבנימין in 3a), the poet picks up the reference to Israel/Joseph in 2ab. The mention of these three tribes caused much debate. Most exegetes conclude that it denotes a northern origin of the poem (Gunkel [1929] 1986:351). However, exactly these three tribes are mentioned in Numbers 2:17-24 in relationship to the Ark (Perowne [1878] 1976:84). The mention of Joseph in 2b and the cherubim in 2c naturally leads to the mention of the Rachel tribes (Tate 1990:312) and can give no conclusive evidence on the date and origin of the psalm. Here it simply denotes Israel as a whole (Tate 1990:312). In 3bc two emphatic imperatives again appear (עוררה 'summon' in 3b and ולכה 'come' in 3c), but this time at the beginning of each foot, suggesting a *chiastic* relationship with the previous line. The *parallelism* between 3bc is further emphasised by the *repetition* of words from the semantic field of salvation (גבורתך 'your heroic powers' in 3b and לישענה 'for salvation' in 3c). Both are associated with the traditions of the holy war. Thus the prayer of the psalmist is that God 'would again lead his people, again go forth at the head of their armies as he did of old' (Perowne [1878] 1976:84; cf Anderson 1972:582).

Refrain (4ab): Restore us that we may be saved!

The *refrain* (4ab) concludes the strophe. The occurrence of two more imperatives (השיבנו 'restore us' in 4a and האר 'let (your face) shine' in 4b) finally characterises strophe A as an urgent plea for help, a call for the restoration of Israel (Kraus 1966:558). האר פנים 'let your face shine' (4b) is a metaphorical expression for God's gracious intervention (Nm 6:25; Van Uchelen 1977:304). The *repetition* of the root ישע in 4b (cf 3c) emphasises the urgent need for salvation. God is mentioned for

st time by name (אלהים in 4a), indicating that he is the only source of help.

Strophe B (5a-7b): How long will you neglect us?

Strophe B (5a-7b) consists of three lines with two feet each (5ab; 6ab; 7ab). 5ab is an *enjambment*. Special emphasis is placed on the vocatives in 5a (יהוה & אלהים). The elaborate title is *repeated* in 20a. Much had been written on the origin and exact meaning of the phrase. An excellent overview is given in Kraus (1982:109-138). He concludes that the name denotes the kingship of God and is closely associated with the cherubim throne. It happens in Psalm 80:1 (cf the phrase ישב הכרובים 'you who are enthroned on cherubim' in 2c). The question in 5b (עַרְמַתִּי עַשְׁנָה 'how long will you remain angry?' [literally: 'how long will you smoke?']) emphasises the *contrast* between the metaphorical depiction of God as shepherd in strophe A and the stark reality experienced by the people. God once led his people like a flock (2b), but now he 'smokes (in anger)' as they pray (בְּתַפְלֹת in 5b; cf Lm 3:44). This metaphorically describes God's anger, his unwillingness to reveal himself as saviour of his people (Tate 1990:314). This is confirmed by the *parallelism* in 6a (2 masculine singular verb + 3 masculine singular suffix + object in both feet). Instead of looking after them, God now gives his people 'bread of tears' (לֶחֶם דַּמְעָה in 6a) to eat (cf the contrast with Ex 16:32; 17:6-9) and 'tears' (בְּדַמְעוֹת in 6b) to drink (cf the contrast with Is 27:3; Ps 78:15). The *repetition* of דַּמְעָה in both feet enhances the parallelism and emphasises the suffering of God's people. The line metaphorically expresses existential reality - God's people are suffering.

6b contains a *chiasmus* (verb + noun in 7a, noun + verb in 7b). The attention is directed towards the reaction of Israel's neighbours. God makes Israel an object of scorn (מָרַן in 7a) for her neighbours (cf 2 Sm 21:20; Jr 15:10; Hab 1:3). They vie with another to plunder her (Perowne [1878] 1976:87). She becomes the laughing stock to her enemies (cf Ps 44:14; 79:4). Israel loses all dignity and becomes a laughing stock (Kraus 1966:558), completely at the mercy of her enemies.

(8ab): Restore us that we may be saved!

Nevertheless, Israel still turns towards God for salvation. The *refrain* (8ab) again repeats this strophe. The *repetition* of the refrain places special emphasis upon the

urgent pleas of strophe A (Van Uchelen 1977:305). Only God can intervene and restore his people (Kraus 1966:558).

STANZA II (9a-14b): Vine-grower and vineyard

A change of subject marks the transition to *stanza II* (9a-14b). Israel is no longer mentioned directly, but *metaphorically* referred to as a vine (גֶּפֶן in 9a) and a vineyard (13a-14b). A new *metaphor* is used to describe the relationship between God and people - that of a vine-grower and his vineyard. The metaphor is applied so consistently that the passage can indeed be described as an *allegory* (Kraus 1966:558) relating the history of Israel (Van Uchelen 1977:305; Kroll 1987:230). The stanza consists of three strophes.

Strophe C (9a-10c): You planted a vine

Strophe C (9a-10c) consists of two lines, one with two (9ab) and the other with three (10abc) feet. In 9ab the occurrence of three 2 masculine singular verbs (חָטַעַת 'you dug up' in 9a, חָגַרַשׁ 'you drove out' and יָחַטְעָה 'you planted it' in 9b) *emphasises* the care of the vine-grower for the vineyard. The line metaphorically describes Israel's salvation from Egypt (9a) and settlement in Canaan (9b). The metaphor of the vine is well-known in the Old Testament (cf Hs 10:1; 14:8; Jr 2:21; Ezk 15:6; 17:6-9; 19:10-14 and especially Is 5:1-7). The verbs emphasise that the salvation of Israel was the initiative of God.

It is confirmed by the 2 masculine singular verb commencing 10a (פָּנִיתָ 'you made room'), indicating that God was the principle agent in the conquering of the land. He drove the nations away. 10bc contains a *parallelism* (3 feminine singular verb + noun in both feet). The vine took hold in the new country and gradually expands to fill the land (cf Gn 49:22). The *repetition* of the root שָׂרַשׁ in 10b emphasises the growth of the vine.

Strophe D (11a-12b): The vine prospered

Strophe D (11a-12b) elaborates upon the theme of the growth of the vine. It consists of two lines with two feet each (11ab; 12ab). The *chiasmus* in 11ab emphasises the growth of the vineyard. Metaphorically it describes the expansion of Israel to the mountains (הַרְיָם in 11a) in the north where the mighty cedars (אַרְזֵי־אֵל in 11b,

cf Ps 36:6; 104:16) grow (Van der Ploeg 1974:45). The *chiasmus* in 12ab describes the expansion to the west (עַרְוִים in 12a) and the east (אֶל-נְהָר in 12b, indicating the Euphrates). The total absence of 2 masculine singular verbs is conspicuous. The focus has shifted from the care of the vine-grower to the prospering of the vine itself (Van Uchelen 1977:305). The underlying thought is of the great empire of David (Kraus 1966:559; Tate 1990:315), recalling the ideal boundaries of Israel (Dt 11:22-25; cf Van der Ploeg 1974:45).

Strophe E (13a-14b): *Why have you neglected your vineyard?*

In *Strophe E* (13a-14b) there is a shift in the metaphor from the growing vine to the walled vineyard (Kraus 1966:559). The strophe comprises two lines with two feet each (13ab; 14ab). The reappearance of a 2 masculine singular verb (פָּרַצְתָּ 'you have torn down') as well as a question (לְמָה 'why') in 13a is noteworthy. The question picks up the theme at the end of the previous stanza (5ab), giving the two stanzas a strongly *parallelistic* character. The *contrast* between strophe E and strophes C and D is striking. The care of the vine-grower for his vine (strophe C) and the growth of the vine (strophe D) are suddenly completely reversed. The sudden shift is shocking. Once again God takes the initiative. But now he becomes an agent of destruction! He has torn down the walls (13a; cf Ps 89:40-41), allowing passersby to pluck the vineyard clean (13b). Within the context of the allegory, the walls refer to the boundaries of Israel and the passersby to the neighbouring states already mentioned in 7ab (Van der Ploeg 1974:45). The image strongly resembles the description of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7 (Kraus 1966:559).

The *chiasmus* in 14ab emphasises the destruction of the vineyard even more. The *repetition* of the root רָעָה 'graze' (14b), first encountered in 2a (רָעָה יִשְׂרָאֵל 'shepherd of Israel'), strikes a strongly *ironic* note. The 'shepherd of Israel' allows his vineyard to be 'grazed off' by wild beasts! Both the חֲזִיר מִיַּעַר 'boar of the forest' (14a) and the זֵיז שָׂדֵי 'beasts of the field' are again allusions to the enemies of Israel on the rampage (Van der Woude 1974:46). It probably is best not to apply the metaphor to a specific enemy, but to Israel's neighbours in general (Perowne [1878] 1976:88).

The absence of the *refrain* in this stanza is conspicuous. It enhances the *contrast* between the care of the vine-grower in strophes C and D and the total lack of care in strophe E. Equally conspicuous is the total absence of direct references to the

name of God in this stanza, especially after the elaborate references in stanza I. The underlying implication is that God had abandoned his people completely.

STANZA III (15a-20b): Vine-grower and father

In *Stanza III* (15a-19b) themes from the first two stanzas are picked up. The *metaphor* of the vine still continues, but a new *metaphor* is introduced - God is likened to a father caring for his son (16a; 18ab). After the complete lack of care, the total destruction described in the previous strophe, it does not come as a surprise that the urgent pleas of stanza I surface once again. The stanza consists of two strophes.

Strophe F (15a-16b): *Visit the vine, restore your son!*

Strophe F (15a-16b) is comprised within a line with three feet (15abc) and a line with two feet (16ab). 15abc commences with a reference to God (אלהים צבאות 'God Sebaoth'), thus picking up the theme of the *refrain* (4ab; 8ab) and the opening words of strophe B (יהוה אלהים צבאות 'Yahweh God Sebaoth' in 5a). Desolation and destruction force the poet toward Yahweh once again. It is emphasised by the *repetition* of the root שׁוּב 'return' in 15a (cf 4a; 8a). The fourfold *repetition* of imperatives (שׁוּב 'return' in 15a; הִבֵּט 'look down' and רֵא 'see' in 15b; פִּקֵּר 'visit' in 15c) is also reminiscent of the numerous imperatives in the first stanza. Thus the urgent plea for salvation surfaces again. On the other hand, the *repetition* of גִּפְּוֹן 'vine' in 15c (cf 9a) creates a strong link with the previous stanza, indicating that the allegory of the vineyard is still in the poet's mind.

In 16a the *repetition* of the root נָטַע 'plant' (16a; cf 9b) confirms this observation. The reference to God's right hand (יְמִינֶךָ) is an *allusion* to בְּנֵימִינֶיךָ 'Benjamin' in 3a. The poet urgently prays for the restoration of Israel. In 16b a new *metaphor* is encountered. Now God's care for his people is applied on the human level and Israel is likened to a son brought up by God. It is neither necessary to delete this foot as a later addition (Anderson 1972:587; Tate 1990:307), nor to interpret כִּן as another way of referring to the vine (Kirkpatrick 1903:488; Van Uchelen 1977:306). Rather, the early history of the people is called to mind, when God looked after his people like a father. Exactly the same image appears in Exodus 4:22 and Hosea 11:1 (Cohen 1945:266; Ridderbos 1958:314; Van der Ploeg 1974:47).

Strophe G (17a-19b): *Look after your son and we will call on your name*

Strophe G (17a-19b) consists of three lines with two feet each (17ab; 18ab; 19ab). The ambiguous application of the vineyard-allegory and the father-metaphor is continued. In 17ab the vineyard stands in focus. It is burnt (שרפה) and hacked to pieces (כסרוחה) because of the wrath of God (מגעת פניו). Many exegetes interpret יאבדו 'they perish' (17b) as a petition to God, pleading for the destruction of the enemies (Dahood 1968:260; Tate 1990:308). It seems much more natural to interpret it as a reference to the destruction of Israel (Delitzsch [1889] 1973:388; Ridderbos 1958:315; Van Uchelen 1977:306; Kroll 1987:231). It is important to note the contrast between the negative influence of God's 'face' in 17b and the prayer for the positive influence of his 'face' in the refrain (4b; 8b; 20b). At the moment God's presence is destructive. The poet urgently prays for a reversal (Van Uchelen 1977: 306).

In 18ab the father-son relationship is again emphasised. The repetition of both ימינו (18a; cf 16a) and the phrase על-בן-אדם אמצת לך (18b; cf 16b) strongly binds this strophe to the previous one. To whom do 'man at your right hand' (18a) and 'son of man' (18b) refer? There are two schools of thought. Some refer to comparable terminology in Psalm 2:7 and 110:1 and apply the line to the king (Kraus 1966:55; Dahood 1968:260; Van der Ploeg 1974:46; Van Uchelen 1977: 306). Others refer to verse 16b where 'son' clearly should be interpreted as Israel and they apply the line to the people (Kirkpatrick 1903:488; Gunkel [1929] 1986:353; Ridderbos 1958:315; Westermann 1984:32; Tate 1990:315). Within the context it seems to be the most plausible interpretation (Is 5:7, cf Deissler 1964:312). But perhaps the ambiguity is intentional. The relationship between people and king is inseparable, what happens to the one, also happens to the other (Van Uchelen 1977: 306; Tate 1990:315). What is called for is the restoration of the people to the former glory, when God alone was king (Tate 1990:316).

In 19ab yet another imperative occurs (חיינו 'give us life' in 19b), picking up the theme of urgent plea. Two 1 plural verbs (נטורג 'we will (not) forsake' in 19a; נקרא 'we will call upon' in 19b) emphasises the response of the praying community to the saving acts of God. Implicitly they acknowledge that the present calamity is their own doing. They forsook God and paid the penalty. When he restores them,

they will not make the same mistake again. Thus the line should be interpreted as a renewal of the relationship between God and his people (cf Jos 24:16-18).

Refrain (20ab): *Restore us that we may be saved!*

The stanza is concluded by the refrain (20ab). The repetition of the refrain (cf 4ab; 8ab) ensures that the poem ends in a climax. The repetition of both אלהים צבאות and the root שרב (20a; cf 15a) at the beginning and end of the stanza creates an *inclusio*.

Taken as a whole, the repetition of two roots points to the central theme of the poem, namely שרב (4a; 8a; 15a; 20a) and ישע (3c; 4b; 8b; 20b). The poem is an urgent plea that God should bring about a turning-point in the fate of his people (cf Prinsloo 1992:239-240 for a discussion of exactly the same motif in Ps 126) and save them (Westermann 1984:29; Williams 1989:83).

The structure of Psalm 80 can be schematised in the following manner:

STANZA I (2a-8a): Shepherd and flock

- Strophe A* (2a-3c) : *Shepherd, tend your flock!*
Refrain (4ab) : *Restore us that we may be saved!*
Strophe B (5a-7b) : *How long will you neglect us?*
Refrain (8ab) : *Restore us that we may be saved!*

STANZA II (9a-14b): Vine-grower and vineyard

- Strophe C* (9a-10c) : *You planted a vine*
Strophe D (11a-12b) : *The vine prospered*
Strophe E (13a-14b) : *Why have you neglected your vine?*

STANZA III (15a-20b): Vine-grower and father

- Strophe F* (15a-16b) : *Visit the vine, restore your son!*
Strophe G (17a-19b) : *Look after your son and we will call on your name*
Refrain (20ab) : *Restore us that we may be saved!*

The psalm displays an interesting pattern of semantic parallelisms and tensions:

STANZA I	STANZA II	STANZA III
A Petition -> <i>care</i> // <u>Shepherd</u> Refrain -> <i>care</i>	C Describe -> <i>care</i> // <u>Vine-grower</u>	F Petition -> <i>care</i> <u>Father</u>
-----	D Describe -> <i>prosperity</i> <u>Vine</u> -----	
B Lament -> <i>no care</i> // <u>Enemies</u> Refrain -> <i>care</i>	E Lament -> <i>destruction</i> // <u>Vineyard</u> <u>Enemies</u>	G Petition -> <i>care</i> Vow Refrain -> <i>care</i>

In strophe A God is called upon as shepherd to care for his flock. Strophe B stands in sharp contrast to the shepherd's loving care. God simply does not care. It is a cause for lament. Parallel to strophe A, God is described in strophe C as a vine-grower tending his vine. Under his careful supervision, strophe D describes the prospering of the vine. This makes the sudden lack of care, described in strophe E, all the more striking. This strophe is parallel to strophe B. God's sudden lack of care is a cause for lament. Strophe F is closely parallel to strophe C (and thus to strophe A) and contains an urgent plea that God should once again tend his vineyard. Strophe G is parallel to strophe E (and thus to strophe B) because it describes the destruction of the vineyard and pleads for the restoration of the people. In a sense it continues the laments of strophes B and E. The poet asks that the negative circumstances be removed and pledges the loyalty of the people who experience salvation once again. The threefold repetition of the refrain enhances the theme of the poem - God the shepherd, vine-grower and father should once again care for his people! Seen from this perspective, strophe D stands in the centre of the poem. Special emphasis is placed upon the prosperity and growth of the people of God. This makes their current crisis all the more striking. Thus the laments of strophes B and E and the urgent pleas of strophes A, F and G are put into perspective.

What prompted the composition of this song is the disparity between the faith of the community, beautifully expressed in Psalm 80 by means of three metaphors, and existential reality.

E THE CONTEXT OF PSALM 80

Keeping the detailed intratextual analysis in mind, it is now necessary to place the poem in its social and historical context. This will be done by means of a social-scientific analysis (Elliot 1993:7). Attention will firstly be focused on the original field of social interaction and then on the subsequent field(s) of interaction, including the reception of the text by later generations (Elliot 1993:71-72; cf also Prinsloo 1996:478-481).

1. Social and historical setting

It is notoriously difficult to determine Psalm 80's exact social and historical setting. What can be gleaned from the text itself? At least the following is clear: There are three major actors in the poem - God, the community of believers and the enemies.

God is referred to by means of three metaphors:

In strophe A (2a-3c) he is called upon as shepherd (2a) who tends his flock (2b). Connected with this metaphor are images related to kingship-ideology. God is seated upon cherubim (2c) and is called Yahweh (God) Sebaoth in 5a, 8a, 15a and 20a; a formula is especially associated with the kingship of Yahweh. What is focused upon in this metaphor is God's care for his people. But it is important to note that the care is projected into the distant past. Once God looked after his people. Now they can only pray that he do so again or lament the fact that he doesn't do so now.

The second metaphor is encountered in both stanzas II (9a-14b) and III (15a-19b). God is likened to a vine-grower. This metaphor is worked out in great detail and can be described as the most dominant feature of the psalm. The whole history of the people is recalled as the metaphor develops. God is a vine-grower who took a vine from Egypt (9a) and planted it in a new country (9b). He drove out the nations (9b) and made room for it (10a). As a result of his loving care, the vine shot forth roots (10b) and grew strong (10c). It expanded and prospered (11a-12b). These images recall Israel's salvation from Egypt, its settlement in the land and the growth of the empire under David. But then disaster struck. The vine-grower tore down the walls of his vineyard (13ab) and it became desolate (14ab). It describes the contrast between God's care in the past and the present plight of his people. Therefore God is called upon to begin once again in caring for his vine (15a-16b).

The third metaphor occurs in 16b and 18ab. God is here described as father. Once he tended his people like a father. Now he should do so again.

In accordance with the three metaphors, the community of believers is likened to a flock (2b), a vine (9a and 15c) and a vineyard (13a-14b) and a son (16b; 18ab). The community of believers refer to themselves as Israel (2a), Joseph (2b) and Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh (3a), thus recalling the early history of Israel when God led his people through the wilderness to the promised land. What immediately catches the attention is that the community of believers is in distress. Urgent prayer (2a-3b), especially emphasised by the occurrence of a refrain (4ab; 8ab; 20ab) is followed by lament (5a-7b and 13a-14b), and again by urgent prayer (15a-19b). The people suffer (6ab), become an object of scorn and ridicule (7ab) and are devastated (13a-14b). Between the lines one can detect an undertone of guilt. Their present predicament is their own doing because they have forsaken God (19a). Therefore the psalm ends with a promise - if God saves them again, they will not forsake him (19a) but remain faithful (19b).

The enemies are not often mentioned often in Psalm 80. But a clear picture emerges: They have the upper hand. They compete with each other to ridicule God's people (7ab). They are likened to wild beasts (14ab) on the rampage. In the process the people of God are devastated.

It can now be asked: In what historical and social context does this picture fit? Many answers can be given. Careful consideration of the facts point in one direction: The psalm describes the plight of the exilic/post-exilic community. There is a vast difference between present reality and past experience. Therefore the community prays: Restore us to former glory! In doing so many images from the distant past are used and applied in a new context.

2 Canonical setting

How did the community of believers subsequently perceive Psalm 80? The best place to start investigating this question, is the psalm's superscript. According to Psalm 80:1 the psalm was part of a greater collection, namely the psalms of Asaph (50, 73-83). Two questions are touched upon: Who were the Asaphites? And what do the Psalms of Asaph have in common?

As far as the first question is concerned: The Asaphites as a guild of temple singers are known especially from Chronistic material (Nasuti 1983:333). In

1 Chronicles 6:16-32 the genealogy of the sons of Levi is given up to the time of David. David appointed these families as singers under the leadership of Heman (1 Chr 6:33), Asaph (1 Chr 6:39) and Ethan (1 Chr 6:42). All three are mentioned in 1 Chronicles 15:17 as leaders of the temple singers (cf also 1 Chr 16; 25:1-3; 2 Chr 20:14; 29:18-30). They are mentioned in Ezra 2:41 and Nehemiah 7:44 amongst the groups returning from exile and are specifically referred to as singers. In Ezra 3:10 they are identified as Levites playing musical instruments. Asaphites also appear as temple singers in Nehemiah 11:17,22 and 12:46. From all this can be concluded that the Asaphites existed as a guild of temple singers during the time of the second temple. They undoubtedly had a history which might reach back into pre-exilic times. Schelling (1985:204) is of the opinion that the group actually came into being during the exile. They are especially associated with the singing of hymns (Illman 1976:59). They gradually became merged with the Levites (cf Neh 11:17). From this Gelston (1969:194) concludes that the collection of the twelve psalms occurred no later than 450 BC.

As far as the second question is concerned: It is impossible to give a detailed account here of these psalms or the history of their investigation. These questions have been dealt with in great detail (cf Illman 1976:7-16; Nasuti 1983:47-118; Schelling 1985:9-27; Seybold 1994:143-155). Suffice to say that it is not incidental that these psalms share a common superscript. They existed as an independent collection (Seybold 1994:143) and share many common characteristics.

The community responsible for these poems perceived themselves as a 'people' (DV, cf Ps 50:4, 7; 73:10; 77:16, 20; 78:1; 79:13; 80:5; 81:9, 12, 14; 83:4) and above all they use the metaphor of shepherd and flock to express the relationship between them and God (Ps 74:1; 77:21; 78:52, 70-72; 79:13; 80:2). Related to this is the motif of the closeness and care of God (Ps 73:23-28; 75:2; 78:7, 8, 22, 26, 32, 35, 37, 53; 80:15). The psalms from this group show a clear affinity to the historical traditions of Israel, including the salvation from Egypt and settlement in Canaan (Ps 74:12-17; 76:7; 77:12-21; 78; 80:9-16; 81; 83:10-12), the election of Israel (Ps 74:2; 78:54 and 59-72; 80:9-12), the covenant at Sinai (Ps 50; 74:20; 81:9-14; 83:6), the establishment of Zion (Ps 50:2; 74:2; 76; 78:54, 68-69; 79:1) and creation (Ps 74:12-14, 15-17; 75:4; 77:17-19). But equally important is the fact that these psalms have a negative side. All contain references to God's judgement, to being abandoned by God and helplessly delivered into the hands of enemies.

With the exception of two psalms (73 and 77), all the psalms in this collection are written from the perspective of the community; they are 'collective' poems (Seybold 1994:144) and as such have their *Sitz im Leben* in a community. It can be taken for granted that all of these psalms have a 'history' behind them, but the overall impression is that they depict a situation of suffering and uncertainty, a situation where a political vacuum (Seybold 1994:147) existed. The psalms show a preference for traditions associated with the northern kingdom (Gelston 1969:195; Rendsburg 1990:73-80). They refer to themselves as 'Israel' (Ps 50:7; 73:1; 76:2; 78:5; 80:2; 81:5, 9, 12, 14; 83:5), 'Jacob' (Ps 77:16; 78:5; 79:7; 81:2, 5), 'Joseph' (Ps 77:16; 78:67; 80:2; 81:6) and 'Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh' (Ps 80:3). This might indicate that they originated in a community north of Jerusalem (Seybold 1994:147), but does not imply that these psalms date back to the time of the northern kingdom (Illman 1976:51-52).

After careful consideration of each individual psalm in this group, Schelling (1985:230) comes to the conclusion that all of them date from exilic or post-exilic times. This is in accordance with the analysis of Psalm 80 presented above. As part of the Asaphite tradition, Psalm 80 laments the destruction of Jerusalem and calls upon God to help his people once again as he did so long ago.

The Psalms of Asaph occur in Book II (Ps 42-72) and III (Ps 73-89) of the Psalter. There they are part of the so-called 'Elohistic redaction' (Ps 42-83), a group of psalms with a preference for the name אלהים instead of יהוה. Though it could indicate the hand of a redactor, it might just as well be a group of psalms composed in circles with a preference for the name אלהים (Schelling 1985:232). The tendency also occurs in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles, possibly out of respect for the name of God (Schelling 1985:133). The 'Elohistic' group comprises three smaller collections: A 'Davidic' collection (Ps 51-72) and two collections of temple singers, the Korahite psalms (42-49) and the Asaphite psalms (50, 73-83). At the end of the 'Elohistic' psalms an appendix of mixed nature, but without the preference for the name 'Elohim' occurs. 84-85 and 87-88 are Korahite psalms, 86 is ascribed to David and 89 to Ethan (Gillingham 1994:239). The Korahite psalms are mainly concerned with 'God's protective presence in Jerusalem' (Gillingham 1994:239) which might suggest a pre-exilic background for some of them. The Asaphite psalms, on the other hand, show a preference for northern traditions, which might indicate that they 'came from prophetic circles in a northern provenance' (Gillingham 1994:239).

Both guilds of singers are only known from the Chronicler, which suggests that the collection of the psalms under their present headings was a post-exilic process (Gillingham 1994:239). The reasons for the juxtaposition of psalms of Korach, Asaph and David in Books II and III are the subject of much debate and cannot be discussed here (Schelling 1985:133-134).

3 Psalm 80 in Jewish and Christian tradition

In later Jewish tradition, Psalm 80 receives a distinctly Messianic interpretation. Thus the Targum applies verses 16 and 18 to the coming Messiah. As the trials and tribulations of the people continue, the expectation of salvation becomes more profound and connected with the coming of a Messianic king.

Psalm 80 is never quoted in the New Testament. However, it finds many echoes in the Christian tradition. The metaphors of Jesus as the good shepherd (Jn 10) and the vine (Jn 15) are reminiscent of the images in Psalm 80. But it is especially the figure of the 'Son of Man', so often applied to Jesus in the Gospels, that should be mentioned here. In the Gospels it is a distinctly Messianic term. Usually the background for this figure is sought in Daniel 7:13. Gelston (1969:196) has argued that Psalm 80:18 plays a major role in the growth of this tradition. He applies the references to the 'son of man' in Psalm 80:18 to the king. In Jewish tradition the king became the Messiah, thus paving the way for the authors of the New Testament to apply it to Jesus (cf also Hill 1973:268). Di Lella (1977:16) points to the fact that the phrase 'son of man' in both Psalm 80 and Daniel 7 probably refers to the people. Only in Jewish and later in Christian tradition was it applied to the Messiah.

F CONCLUSION

Much confusion surrounds the interpretation of Psalm 80. After careful analysis of both the intra- and intertextual relations of the poem, it becomes clear that the psalm was composed during the most trying experience of the community of believers in ancient Israel - the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The great saving acts of God are still fresh in the poet's memory. He vividly recalls the greatness that once was contained in the central metaphor of the vine-grower and his vine (80:9-12). He recalls the tender loving care of the vine-grower (80:9-10) and right in the centre of the poem stands the memory of the once glorious empire

(80:11-12). This memory places the existential crisis of the community of believers in stark perspective and prompts two kinds of reaction: On the one hand lament (80:5-7 and 13-14), on the other hand urgent prayer (80:2-3 and 15-19). In the prayer two more metaphors with care as their central theme are used, namely God as shepherd in 2-3 and God as father in 15-19. The urgent prayers are enhanced by the occurrence of a growing refrain (80:4; 8; 20). The overall impression is one of a beautifully balanced poem expressing the urgent needs of a community of believers in an existential crisis.

NOTES

- 1 The term **למנצח** occurs in the superscription of 55 psalms. The exact meaning is unclear. Presumably it refers to a cultic dignitary conducting the music (Schelling 1985:160-161).
- 2 The function of **ששנים** 'lilies' is unclear. Presumably it refers to the melody according to which the poem should be sung (Schelling 1985:162).
- 3 **ערוח** (cf Ps 60:1) presumably classifies the content (Schmidt 1934:80). The exact meaning is uncertain.
- 4 The Septuagint adds *ὕπερ τοῦ Ἀσσυρίου* 'concerning the Assyrians'. The addition is sometimes used as argument to date the psalm in the eighth century BC (cf the discussion later on).
- 5 Direct references to God in this psalm are varied (**אלהים** in 4a; **יהוה אלהים צבארוח** in 5a and 20a; **אלהים צבארוח** in 8a and 15a). Exegetes sometimes argue that it indicates redactional carelessness and harmonise the various references to God. Duhm (1899:208) is even of the opinion that the redactor couldn't copy the refrain properly a single time! Especially popular is the viewpoint that Psalm 80 underwent a so-called 'Elohistic' redaction. Accordingly, all the names of God are emended to **יהוה** and **צבארוח** inserted where it is absent (Baethgen 1904:251; Gunkel [1929] 1986:354; Kraus 1966:555; Westermann 1984:27; Tate 1990:305). However, it will be argued that the references to God display a pattern and gradually lead to a climax in 20b. Therefore the Masoretic text is retained.
- 6 Some exegetes give the psalm a strongly schematised character by inserting the refrain after verses 11 and 17 and by adapting the similar-sounding verse 15 to conform to the refrain (Oesterley 1939:367-368; Briggs & Briggs 1969:202). These emendations have no textual support and should not be accepted (Kraus 1966:555).
- 7 The Septuagint reads 1 plural suffixes as in the next verse. The Masoretic text should be retained (Kraus 1966:555).
- 8 Literally: 'a third measure'. It is usually used to indicate a third of a larger quantity. It is assumed that the word here refers to a large container, something like a 'keg' (Gunkel [1929] 1986:354; Tate 1990:306). The implication is that they suffered a lot.
- 9 **מרר** 'strife' is sometimes emended to **מנור** 'shake, wag'. The assumption is that the neighbours shake their heads in amazement at the plight of Israel (Ps 44:15, cf Westermann 1984:27). There is no textual evidence for this emendation. The Masoretic text should be retained (Tate 1990:306).
- 10 The 3 masculine plural suffix seems out of place, taking the parallelism between 7a and b into account. Two Hebrew manuscripts, the Septuagint, Symmachus and the Peshitta read a 1 plural suffix. The emendation is often accepted (Schmidt 1934:153; Kraus 1966:555). However, Tate (1990:307) interprets the preposition as an ethical dative and retains the Masoretic text: 'our enemies mock among themselves.' The Masoretic text is retained as the more difficult reading (cf also Baethgen 1904:252; König 1927:354).
- 11 Literally 'the cedars of God', a translation given by numerous exegetes (Kraus 1966:554). However, **ל** functions here as an indication of the superlative, hence the translation 'mighty' (Dahood 1968:259; Tate 1990:307).
- 12 Some exegetes argue that the refrain should be inserted here. Such a strong schematisation is unnecessary. Semantically, verses 11 and 12 are strongly linked. The Masoretic text is retained (Kraus 1966:555).
- 13 Note the peculiar writing of **מיער** in BHS with suspended 'ayin. According to Jewish tradition this is due to the fact that the **ו** is the middle letter of the Psalter (Delitzsch [1889] 1973:386). Others regard it as an indication of textual corruption and propose the emendation **מיאר** 'from the Nile', an allusion to Egypt (Anderson 1972:585).
- 14 The verb **יכרסנה** is a *hapax legomenon*. Verbs with four consonants are extremely rare in Hebrew. It developed from the root **כסס** 'to cut off' by dissimilating one of the double letters in the intensive form (Cowley [1910] 1978:102; cf Anderson 1972:585). Von Mutius (1979:18-21) investigates the interpretation of the word by three prominent Jewish exegetes from the Middle Ages. Saadja Gaon prefers the meaning 'to graze off'. Raschi renders it by 'to trample down'. David Kimchi prefers 'to destroy' (cf also the Septuagint).
- 15 The meaning of **יוי** is uncertain. According to Victor (1964/1965:294-295) it refers to the ferocious leader boar. He uses the translation in the Septuagint to confirm his supposition. Thomas (1964/1965:385) refers to the Akkadian *zizanu* 'locust' as basis for his argument that the word should be translated by 'locust' or some other kind of insect or worm. The parallelism with **מיער** in 14a calls for a translation such as 'beasts' or 'animals' (Tate 1990:307).
- 16 **כנה** is a *hapax legomenon*. The Septuagint reads *καὶ κατόπισθα ἀνάστη* 'and restore her'. The Septuagint obviously derived **כנה** from the verb **כור**. It makes excellent sense in the context (Schneider 1996:168). Numerous other possibilities have been proposed. Ridderbos (1958:314) regards it as an imperative of **כנן** for which he proposes the meaning 'protect' (cf Delitzsch [1889] 1973:387; Eaton 1967:201, who relate it to the root **גנן** 'protect with a wall'). Dahood (1968:259) prefers the meaning 'take care' and refers to Judges 12:6 as corroborating evidence. Many exegetes emend the form to **גנה** 'the garden', which suits the context well (Gunkel [1929] 1986:355; Schmidt 1934:153; Kraus 1966:555; Tate 1990:307). Van der Ploeg (1974:46) retains the form as a *hapax legomenon* related to the Syriac *kana* 'roof' but translates it by 'twig'. Baethgen (1904:253) doubts whether the word can be explained at all and deletes it. The Septuagint is followed here because an imperative fits the context perfectly (cf also Dahood 1968:259).
- 17 It is often assumed that this foot is a reduplication of 18b and it is deleted (Kraus 1966:555). Tate (1990:307) argues that it probably is an editorial addition venturing to apply the kingship language of verse 18 to the vine, which is Israel. However, the repetition is functional and the Masoretic text should be retained.
- 18 The two passive participles are often emended to 3 masculine plural verbs with suffix: **שרפה** 'they burnt her'; **כסחרה** 'they hacked her to pieces'. The implication is that the wrath of God (17b) will

be directed against those who mistreated his people (Gunkel [1929] 1986:355; Kraus 1966:555; Van der Ploeg 1974:46). However, the context suggests exactly the opposite. It is the people who are burnt and hacked to pieces by the wrath of God. Tate (1990:307-308) opts for both interpretations. He regards 17a as a description of Israel's destruction, but 17b as a petition that God should destroy the enemies of Israel.

- 19 In the Book of Psalms these laments are relatively scarce (Westermann 1989:21) - only Psalms 44, 60 (in part); 74; 79; 80; 83 and 89 can undoubtedly be classified as such (Gunkel [1933] 1985:117). Four of these are psalms of Asaph (74; 79; 80; 83). There are examples of this genre in other types of literature as well (cf Jr 14; Is 63:7-19; Hab 1) and these laments are often referred to in the historical books (Ex 32:11-14; Dt 9:25-29; Jos 7:7-9; Jdg 20:23-26; 21:2-4; 1 Sm 7:6; 1 Ki 8: 21:9, 12).
- 20 Westermann (1981:52) identifies five elements: Address, lament, confession of trust, petition and vow of praise.
- 21 The use of the specific title caused much debate. Many exegetes are of the opinion that the original title was only יהוה צבאות 'Lord of hosts' (Briggs & Briggs 1969:27), a title denoting the kingship of Yahweh (Mettinger 1982:118) that was closely associated with the sanctuaries at Shiloh and later Jerusalem (Kraus 1966:558).
- 22 The appearance of אלהים is ascribed to the so-called 'Elohistic redaction' of Psalms 42-83. The title אלהים צבאות also occurs in Psalm 59:6, 80:5, 12 and 84:9. Apparently אלהים is perceived as an attribute of Yahweh, therefore אלהים does not occur in the construct state.
- 23 Briggs & Briggs (1969:207) regard 18ab as a later interpolation trying to give the psalm a Messianic significance. While the verse is interpreted in such a sense in the Targum, there is no need to regard it as an addition.
- 24 Cf Illman (1976:17-43) and Schelling (1985:51-142) for a detailed discussion.

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G T M Prinsloo, Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0002, Republic of South Africa. E-mail: Prinsgtm@libarts.up.ac.za.

Qoheleth as 'Deconstructionist'

**'It is I, the Lord, your Redeemer . . . who turns
sages back and makes their knowledge nonsense'
(Is 44:24-25)**

Mark Sneed (Magnolia Bible College, USA)

ABSTRACT

The Wisdom Literature is one area that has not been explored extensively from a post-structuralist perspective. This article represents such a contribution. It explores some ways in which Qoheleth works similarly to Deconstructionists, specifically Derrida. Derrida is known for taking delight in deconstructing overly-simplistic and often prejudicial dichotomies (man/woman, e g). The author shows how Qoheleth does something similar to this with the polarity: wisdom/folly. Qoheleth is also shown to create a never-before-used dichotomy that deconstructs a traditional position of wisdom theology.

The title, 'Deconstructionist', is appropriate in that Qoheleth presses traditional concepts to their limits and shows how easily they will break down. He shows how human constructions of meaning are ultimately fabrications that may not have any correlation with the real world.

While brushing up on post-modern literary criticism, which, of course, included reading Derrida, I immediately began to see parallels to the Preacher.¹ Of course, the Preacher is not deconstructive in the modern sense of the term, but more than any other Biblical author, he seems aware of the difficulties involved in the linguistic construction of meaning, though he probably would not have been able consciously to formulate that awareness. The Preacher does things with words and concepts that are strikingly 'deconstructive'. And by contrast with other deconstructive styles, what Derrida does bears a closer resemblance to Ecclesiastes. This is no surprise since Derrida is the unsurpassed master of this post-modern method. And it should be no surprise that the gadfly of the Hebrew Bible, Qoheleth, would be the writer most comparable to this avant-garde, Jewish philosopher.