

# Psalm 5: A theology of tension and reconciliation<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

### Psalm 5: A theology of tension and reconciliation

*Psalm 5 is one of the less known psalms. Yet, it is an extraordinary poem. The most conspicuous characteristic of Psalm 5 is the tension between Yahweh, the righteous and the wicked. This tension is skilfully expressed in the poetic structure of the psalm, where strophes concerning the relationship between Yahweh and the righteous on the one hand and Yahweh and the wicked on the other hand, appear in juxtaposition. Tension is created between the three role players. The aim of this article is to determine the theological relevance of these tensions. This aim is reached via a detailed analysis of the intratextual relations in the poem. In the process problems concerning the strophic structure, genre and social setting of the psalm receive attention. The conclusion is reached that the tensions are used to clarify the relationship between God, the righteous and the wicked, thus serving as dominant interpretational key to determine the theology of the psalm.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Psalm 5 is one of the less popular psalms. Apart from discussions in commentaries, the poem has attracted little attention<sup>2</sup>. The main interest in the psalm focuses upon its genre, social setting and date. The psalm aptly illustrates the problems confronting modern exegetes when they try to interpret ancient texts. More often than not, the psalm simply gives no concrete information on these matters.

It probably was Willem Sterrenberg (Riempies) Prinsloo's greatest contribution to the study of the Psalms that he instilled in his students the importance of analysing the intratextual relationships of a psalm before asking extra- or intertextual questions. In almost all his publications he emphasised the importance of such a close reading<sup>3</sup>. He was not only my teacher, colleague and *Doktorvater*, but also a friend. In this psalm that oscillates between despair and hope, I would like to follow in my teacher's footsteps and indicate that a careful intratextual analysis indeed aids the exegete in interpreting an ancient text<sup>4</sup>.

## 2 TEXT AND TRANSLATION<sup>5</sup>

		1	למנצח אלהנחלית מזמור לדוד:		To the conductor: to the accompaniment of flutes <sup>6</sup> . A Psalm. Of David.
I	A	1	אמרי האזינה יהוה	2a	To my words give ear, Yahweh,
			בינה הגיגי:	b	give heed to my groaning.
		2	הקשיבה לקול שועי	3a	Listen to the sound of my cry
			מלכי ואלהי	b	my King and my God,
			כִּי־אֵלֶיךָ אֶתְפַּלֵּל:	c	because to you I pray.
		3	יהוה בקר תשמע קולי	4a	Yahweh, in the morning you will hear my voice,
			בקר אערך־לך ואצפה:	b	in the morning I prepare for you and wait.
II	B	4	כי לא אל־חפץ רשע אתה	5a	Truly, you are not a God who delights in wickedness,
			לא יגרוך רע:	b	an evil man may not sojourn with you.
		5	לא־יתיצבו הוללים לנגד עיניך	6a	The boastful may not stand before your eyes,
			שנאת כל־פועלי און:	b	you hate all evildoers.
		6	תאבד דברי כזב	7a	You destroy those who speak lies,
			אִישִׁי־דִמְיוֹ וּמִרְמָה יִתְעַב יְהוֹה:	b	Yahweh abhors <sup>7</sup> bloodthirsty and deceitful men.
	C	7	ואני ברב חסדך אבוא ביתך	8a	But I, through the abundance of your mercy I may enter your house,
			אשתחוה אל־היכל־קדשך ביראתך:	b	I may worship in your holy temple because I revere you.
		8	יהוה נחני בצדקתך	9a	Yahweh, lead me according to your righteousness
			למען שוררי	b	for the sake of my oppressors,
			הורש לפני רכך:	c	make straight before me your way.
III	D	9	כי אין בפיהו נכונה	10a	Indeed in their mouth <sup>8</sup> there is no truth,
			קרנם הוות	b	their innermost being - destruction.
		10	קבר־פתוח גרונם	10c	An open grave is their throat,
			לשונם יחליקון:	d	their tongue is an instrument of flattery.
		11	האשימם אלהים	11a	Hold them guilty, o God,
			יפלו ממעצותיהם	b	let them fall by their own counsels!
		12	ברב פשעיהם הריחמו	11c	Because of their many transgressions cast them out,
			כִּי־מָרוּ בָךְ:	d	for they have rebelled against you.
	E	13	וישמחו כל־חֹסֵי בך	12a	But let all who seek refuge in you be glad,
			לעולם ירננו	b	for ever let them shout with joy,
			ותסך עלימו	c	and may you cover them.
		14	ויעלצו בך	12d	May they exult in you
			אהבי שמך:	e	all that love your name
		15	כִּי־אַתָּה תְּבָרֵךְ צְדִיק יְהוֹה	13a	Truly, you bless the righteous, Yahweh,
			כַּצֶּנֶה רֶצֶן תַּעֲסֶרְנוּ:	b	like a shield with favour you crown him.

## 3 INTERPRETATIONAL PROBLEMS

Psalm 5 is normally classified as an individual lament<sup>9</sup>, although variations upon the theme exist<sup>10</sup>. Inevitably, the social setting has been sought in the cult. According to most exegetes, two verses point to a definite cultic setting, namely verses 4 and 8<sup>11</sup>. Verse 4 is taken as a reference to the preparations for sacrifice, verse 8 as a reference to the actual participation



in the temple worship. The exact nature of this supposed cultic setting has been interpreted in different ways. Some regard the so called New Year festival as background for the psalm and interpret it as a prayer by the (Davidic) king<sup>12</sup>. Others are of the opinion that the psalm was spoken in the sanctuary at the time of the morning sacrifice by a member of the "godly" who were threatened by a group of "wicked" people. He expects a (cultic) answer, probably in the form of an omen or oracle or other sign<sup>13</sup>. Some regard a hypothetical juridical procedure in the sanctuary as a more appropriate setting. According to this viewpoint the psalmist fled to the sanctuary to escape his enemies. There he finds protection because he is righteous<sup>14</sup>. Some regard it as a private petition intended for use at any sanctuary in a time of misfortune<sup>15</sup>.

The structure of the psalm is also discussed with reference to the cultic setting. Various elements in the psalm is associated with different phases in cultic worship. Some identify five elements in the psalm: An introductory prayer and invocation (vs 2-4), a confession of the petitioner's lack of guilt (vs 5-8), a central prayer where the distress of the poet is described (vs 9-10), a final prayer where the wicked and the righteous are compared (vs 11-12) and a confession of trust (vs 13)<sup>16</sup>. Others identify even more elements: The superscription (vs 1), an initial plea and invocation (vs 2-3b), a description of worship (vs 3c-4), hymnic praise (vs 5-7), a petition (vs 8-9), imprecation against enemies (vs 10-11) and a blessing upon the congregation (vs 12-13)<sup>17</sup>.

Exegetes agree that it is difficult to postulate an exact date for the psalm<sup>18</sup>. Some argue that nothing excludes a pre-exilic date<sup>19</sup>, but many exegetes regard the psalm as post-exilic<sup>20</sup>. Extratextual information forms the basis for the abovementioned interpretations. In this article it is argued that the key towards the interpretation of Psalm 5 should rather be sought in the poem itself. Therefore close attention will be paid to intratextual relations in the poem in the analysis which follows.

## 4 THE STRUCTURE AND INTENT OF PSALM 5

### 4.1 Structure

When intratextual information is taken seriously, Psalm 5 is quite an extraordinary poem. Apart from verse 1, which serves as the psalm's superscription<sup>21</sup>, five strophes can be identified. The most obvious characteristic which can be used to divide the poem into its relevant sections, is the juxtaposition of verses concerning the relationship between Yahweh and the righteous on the one hand and Yahweh and the wicked on the other hand<sup>22</sup>.

*Strophe A* (2a-4b) is characterized by 2 masculine singular verbs (either imperatives or imperfects) and suffixes referring to Yahweh and 1 singular verbs and suffixes referring to an individual in distress. The person in distress is never explicitly identified. On a literary level it can be assumed that the poet is at the same time the petitioner. A change of subject occurs in *Strophe B* (5a-7b). Yahweh is still referred to in the second person, but now various synonyms for wickedness occur. Wicked persons are referred to either in the 3 masculine singular (5ab; 7b) or plural (6a-7a). In *Strophe C* (8a-9c) the first person singular speaker reappears, while all references to Yahweh are still in the second person. An abrupt change occurs in *Strophe D* (10a-11d). Suddenly all suffixes are either 3 masculine singular (10a) or plural (10b-11d). Without stating it explicitly, these suffixes refer to the wicked persons mentioned in *Strophe B* (5a-7b). References to Yahweh are still in the second person. In *Strophe E* (12a-13b) the pattern of a strophe with 1 singular forms followed by a strophe with 3 masculine singular or plural forms is broken. Yahweh is still referred to in the second person, but now he is called upon to help the righteous. They are referred to in the third person plural (12a-e) or singular (13ab).

The five strophes can be grouped together in three stanzas. *Stanza I* comprises of *Strophe A*, which can be regarded as an introductory prayer by a follower of Yahweh in a time of distress. While he experiences suffering, he is at the same time certain that Yahweh will save him. Strophes B and C can be grouped together as *Stanza II*. There is a clearcut polarity between the two strophes. The wicked may not appear in Yahweh's presence (*Strophe B*). The poet, on the other hand, have access to Yahweh (*Strophe C*). Therefore the poet can call upon Yahweh to intervene in his present distress. The polarity between the wicked and the righteous is explained further in *Stanza III*. On the one hand Yahweh is called upon to destroy the wicked (*Strophe D*), on the other hand he is implored to grant the righteous joy and protection (*Strophe E*). The fact that Yahweh in the end destroys the wicked and protects the righteous, indicates that the poet is indeed correct in his supposition that Yahweh is the only one who can help in a time of distress. His faith will not be in vain.

The structure of Psalm 5 can be schematised in the following manner:

Stanza I (2a-4b) Prayer for salvation

*Strophe A* (2a-4b) Listen to me, o Lord!

Stanza II (5a-9c) In the presence of the Lord...

*Strophe B* (5a-7b) No place for the wicked

*Strophe C* (8a-9c) But I may enter your house



Stanza III (10a-13b) Destruction or protection?

*Strophe D* (10a-11d) Cast out the wicked!

*Strophe E* (12a-13b) You bless the righteous!

## 4.2 Content

### Stanza I (2a-4b) Prayer for salvation

*Strophe A* (2a-4b) contains an urgent prayer by a righteous follower of Yahweh. He experiences distress. The exact nature of the problem is not specified, but in his distress he calls upon God. The threefold accumulation of invocations<sup>23</sup> stresses the urgency of the prayer<sup>24</sup>. At the same time it enables the poet to draw near to Yahweh with confidence<sup>25</sup>. The poem commences with an urgent prayer. The urgency of the prayer is aptly stressed by means of two emphatic imperatives (הַאֲזִינָה in 2a and בִּינָה in 2b) as well as the chiasmic relationship between 2a and 2b (noun + imperative in 2a, imperative + noun in 2b). הִגִּיטִי “my groaning” in 2b indicates a softly spoken lament (cf Ps 39:4)<sup>26</sup>. In 3abc the urgency of the prayer is once again stressed, firstly by means of yet another emphatic imperative (הִקְשִׁיבָה in 3a), secondly by means of the causal phrase in 3c (כִּי אֶתְפַּלֵּל “because to you I pray”), indicating that Yahweh is the only source of salvation. 3abc is parallel to 2ab, but the contrast between 2ab and 3abc is noteworthy. In 2a the poet prays silently, in 3abc he cries for help<sup>27</sup>. He calls Yahweh מֶלֶכִּי וְאֱלֹהֵי “my king and my God” (3b, cf Ps 44:5; 68:25; 74:12; 84:4), indicating that Yahweh is the ultimate judge<sup>28</sup>, the only real source of power, but at the same time his personal protector<sup>29</sup>. The fact that the poet can call Yahweh “my king” and “my God”, indicates a close relationship between him and Yahweh<sup>30</sup>. The call for help is no formal liturgical formula, but a personal prayer<sup>31</sup>.

The certainty of being heard is metaphorically expressed in 4ab by means of the well known motif of help which comes in the morning<sup>32</sup>. Traditionally the morning was the time when justice was administered (cf Jer 21:12; Zeph 3:5; Ps 101:8; 143:8; Job 7:18; Lam 3:23). It was the time for salvation (cf Ps 30:6; 46:6; 90:14). It was also the time for prayer and sacrifice (cf 2 Kgs 3:20; 16:15; Am 4:4)<sup>33</sup>. The background of this motif must be sought in the well-known depiction of the sun-god who appears in the morning to assist the helpless and maintain justice on earth<sup>34</sup>. The parallelism between 4a and 4b enhances the motif. אָעֲרַךְ in 4b indicates a careful arranging of material, sometimes of sacrifices (cf Lev 1:7,8,12; 6:5). This could suggest a cultic setting for Psalm 5<sup>35</sup>. The verb sometimes refers to the composing of a speech, mostly in a juridical sense (ie “my case”, cf Job 13:8; 23:4; 32:14; 33:5; 37:19), which would sug-

gest that the poet has been accused of a crime and waits for Yahweh's verdict<sup>36</sup>. The verb often has a more general meaning "to prepare"<sup>37</sup>. The following verb אָצַפֶּה refers to the anxious waiting of the sentry on the wall (cf Is 21:6; Mic 7:7; Hab 2:1). It makes sense to understand עָרַךְ in this more general way. The poet prepares for and waits anxiously upon Yahweh's answer to his plea<sup>38</sup>. 4ab does not necessarily imply a cultic or juridical *Sitz im Leben*. It is metaphorical language expressing the certainty of the poet that Yahweh will hear his plea<sup>39</sup>.

## Stanza II (5a-9c) In the presence of the Lord...

A change of subject occurs in *Strophe B* (5a-7b). These three lines are concerned with the relationship between Yahweh and the wicked. This strophe stands diametrically opposite *Strophe A*. Three negative and three positive remarks are made concerning this relationship<sup>40</sup>.

The strophe is introduced by an emphatic כִּי "indeed"<sup>41</sup>. On the negative side three parallel expressions occur: "you are not a God who delights in wickedness" (5a), "an evil man may not sojourn with you" (5b) and "the boastful may not stand before your eyes" (6a). Especially noteworthy is the appearance of the verb גִּוַר in 5b. The verb indicates someone who lives in a foreign place, enjoying the protection of his host (cf Gen 47:4; Ps 120:5). It is sometimes used metaphorically of the righteous enjoying the protection of Yahweh (cf Ps 15:1). Thus the wicked can never enjoy Yahweh's protection. On the contrary, they may not even appear in his presence (6a). The הוֹלָלִים "boastful" (6a) are those who rely upon their own strength, those who think that they do not need Yahweh's protection and are therefore foolish (cf Ps 73:3; 75:5). Such people can never escape the careful scrutiny of Yahweh (cf Ps 66:7)<sup>42</sup>.

Three parallel expressions also occur on the positive side: "you hate all evildoers" (6b), "you destroy those who speak lies" (7a) and "Yahweh abhors bloodthirsty and deceitful men" (7b). The change from second person to third person in the last of the three positive expressions, reminds one of the same trend in the so-called "Einzugstora" (Ps 15; 24:3-5)<sup>43</sup>. These expressions state the reason why wicked people may not appear in the presence of Yahweh. Yahweh hates the פְּעֻלֵי אָוֶן "evildoers" (cf Ps 6:9; 14:4; 28:3; 36:13; 53:5; 59:3; 64:3; 92:8,10; 94:4,16; 101:8; 125:5; 141:4,9). They are people who plan evil things against others<sup>44</sup>. Their intent is explained in 7b and 7c - they are untrustworthy, deceitful and bloodthirsty. Such people have no place in the presence of Yahweh.

The strophe is primarily concerned with Yahweh, with his holiness which is opposed to evil<sup>45</sup>. Yahweh's nature makes the destruction of the wicked a certainty.



*Strophe C* (8a-9c) stands in direct opposition to *Strophe B*. The wicked may not appear in Yahweh's presence. By contrast, the poet can enter into Yahweh's house<sup>46</sup>. The strophe picks up and expands the theme of *Strophe A* (2-4)<sup>47</sup>. 8a is introduced by a *waw adversative*. 8ab contains a chiasm. The two prepositional phrases provide an interesting perspective on the act of worship. In 8a the poet states that he can worship בְּרֹב חֶסֶדְךָ "through the abundance of your mercy". Thus, Yahweh's love for his chosen ones enables the poet to worship<sup>48</sup>. The poet does not call upon Yahweh because he perceives himself as self-righteous, but because he knows that divine grace enables him to worship<sup>49</sup>. Yahweh's grace gives the poet confidence to pray (4ab)<sup>50</sup>. On the other hand, in 8b it is stated that he can worship בִּירְאָתְךָ "because I revere you". This expression contains the other side of the same coin - worship is only possible where people willingly accept Yahweh's lordship<sup>51</sup>. Both phrases describing the act of worship ("I may enter your house" [8a] and "I may worship in your holy temple" [8b])<sup>52</sup> refer to the sanctuary. Thus the *Sitz im Leben* of the psalm has often been sought in the cult. However, it can also be interpreted metaphorically. The motif of longing for the temple is well known in the Psalms (cf Ps 23:6; 42:1-12; 43:1-5). The motif refers to salvation by Yahweh. Thus the poet indicates that he can appear in the presence of Yahweh because he has been saved by him<sup>53</sup>. The prayer expresses the "desire of the worshiper to enter the living presence of God, not for a temporary act of worship, but as a perpetual state"<sup>54</sup>.

The sound relationship between Yahweh and the poet gives him confidence to once again call upon Yahweh to help him in his struggle against his enemies. He urges Yahweh נַחֲנִי בְצִדְקָתְךָ "lead me according to your righteousness"<sup>55</sup> (9a). In this context צִדְקָה refers to the revelation of Yahweh's salvation, to his help for those who lament<sup>56</sup>. The implication is that Yahweh should do the expected thing - he should protect the poet from his oppressors (שׁוֹרְרֵי in 9b)<sup>57</sup>. 9c contains another plea הוֹשֵׁר לִפְנֵי דְרֶכְךָ "make straight before me your way". This expression calls to mind the metaphor of Yahweh as shepherd who leads and protects his sheep (cf Ps 23)<sup>58</sup>. The "way of Yahweh" is a well known motif in the Psalms (cf Ps 25:4, 5, 12; 27:11; 32:8; 86:11). It is a metaphorical expression indicating "die konkrete Weisung die Jahwe dem einzelnen mitteilt"<sup>59</sup>. The plea is not that Yahweh should remove all obstacles preventing the poet to worship him, but rather that Yahweh should provide him with the guidelines, grant him the ability to tackle the problems<sup>60</sup> and reveal new possibilities of existence to him<sup>61</sup>. Only if the poet himself is guided by Yahweh, only if his relationship with Yahweh is sound, can he call upon Yahweh to destroy his ene-

mies<sup>62</sup>. If his own relationship with Yahweh is blemished, he will be brought down by his own weapons<sup>63</sup>!

### Stanza III (10a-13b) Destruction or protection?

In *Strophe D* (10a-11d) the poet once again turns to a description of the wicked. He elaborates upon the themes of *Strophe B*<sup>64</sup>. There the poet indicates that the wicked may not appear in the presence of Yahweh. Here the focus shifts towards their untrustworthiness (10a-10d) with the accompanying prayer that Yahweh should destroy them (11a-11d). Thus *Strophes B* and *D* are parallel to each other.

10a is introduced by an emphatic כִּי “indeed” (cf the same introductory particle in 5a)<sup>65</sup>. 10ab contains a parallelism. 10a depicts the negative side of the wicked’s character (“in their mouth there is no truth”). 10b describes the same lack of character, but this time in a positive fashion (“their innermost being - destruction”). 10cd contains a chiasm. 10c is a nominal sentence commencing with the predicate followed by a reference to a part of the body (קֶרֶב־פֶּתוּחַ גְּרוֹנָם “an open grave is their throat”). 10d commences with a reference to a part of the body, followed by a predicate (לְשׁוֹנָם יְחִלְיוּן “their tongue is an instrument of flattery”). The external parallelism between 10ab and 10cd emphasises the untrustworthiness of the wicked. It is further emphasised by the word play between קֶרֶבם “their innermost being” in 10b and קֶרֶב־פֶּתוּחַ “an open grave” in 10c<sup>66</sup>. It is also stated elsewhere in the Old Testament that death is never satisfied in his greed for more victims (cf Prov 27:20; Jer 5:16; Hab 2:5). The reference to parts of the body functions as metaphor for the deceitful words spoken by wicked people. Nobody can rely upon them.

Given this fact, the poet can now urgently pray that Yahweh should destroy the wicked (11a-11d). In 11a Yahweh is depicted as judge. He is called upon to find the wicked guilty (הַאשִׁימָם “hold them guilty!” - cf Ps 34:22-23; Hos 4:15; 5:15; 10:2; 13:1; 14:1)<sup>67</sup>. He prays that they may fall in the trap they set for others (יִפְּלוּ מִמַּעֲצוֹתֵיהֶם “let them fall by their own counsels!” in 11b). Thus their misfortune is caused by their own plans<sup>68</sup>. This “Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang” is one of several wisdom motifs in the poem<sup>69</sup>. Yahweh should cast them out (הִדְחֵמוֹ in 11c - cf Jer 8:3; 24:9; 27:10; Dan 9:7 and the related form דָּחָה in Ps 35:6; 36:13; 62:4; 118:13; 140:5). Two reasons are stated for this prayer. The wicked have transgressed and rebelled against Yahweh.

The prayer for the destruction of the wicked is not born from a vengeful heart<sup>70</sup>, but originates in the poet’s respect for the holiness of Yahweh<sup>71</sup>.



*Strophe E* (12a-13b) picks up the theme of prayer, but stands in direct contrast to *Strophe D*. Whilst the actions of the wicked lead to destruction, the righteous can rely upon Yahweh. This strophe is parallel to *Strophe C* and reminiscent of *Strophe A*<sup>72</sup>. However, here the whole of the faithful community stands in the focus of attention<sup>73</sup>. As was the case in *Strophe D*, *Strophe E* is introduced by a *waw adversative*.

The first two feet in 12abc contains a chiasm. The poet prays that those who seek refuge in Yahweh will be glad (וּשְׂמַחוּ כָּל־יְחוּסֵי בָךְ) "but let all who seek refuge in you be glad" (12a). 12b commences with a temporal phrase, followed by the prayer that they should shout with joy (לְעוֹלָם יִרְנְנוּ) "for ever let them shout with joy"). In the last foot he turns directly towards Yahweh with the request that Yahweh may cover them (עֲלֵימוֹךְ) "and may you cover them" in 12c). This is of course a metaphorical expression that the presence of Yahweh may protect them, evoking the imagery of God's protection covering his children like that of a bird covering its chick protectively with its wings (cf Ps 91:4)<sup>74</sup>.

The themes of joy and protection is expanded upon in the next two lines (12de and 13ab). 12de expands the theme of joy with the request that all who love Yahweh may exult in him. In this context, the name of Yahweh refers to Yahweh himself in his capacity as Redeemer of Israel<sup>75</sup>. 13ab expands upon the theme of protection with the assurance כִּי־אַתָּה תְּבָרֵךְ צְדִיק "truly, you bless the righteous, Yahweh" (13a). In 13b Yahweh's protection is metaphorically likened to a shield (כַּצֶּנֶה רִצּוֹן תַּעֲתִרְנִי) "like a shield with favour you crown him"). The צֶנֶה is a big shield which covered the whole body (cf Ps 35:2; 91:4; Jer 46:3; Ez 23:24; 38:4; 39:9).

The poem which commences as a lament, ends as a hymn<sup>76</sup>. Through suffering and prayer the poet has renewed his faith in Yahweh and now he can rejoice in eschatological hope. The intent of this strophe is to confirm that only the righteous can enjoy the protection of Yahweh. Only they have a future.

## 5 GOD, THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED IN PSALM 5

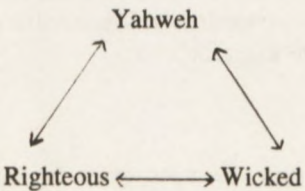
The analysis above indicates that the most conspicuous characteristic of Psalm 5 is the tension between Yahweh, the righteous and the wicked. This tension is skillfully expressed in the poetic structure of the psalm, where strophes concerning the relationship between Yahweh and the righteous on the one hand (Strophes A, C and E) and Yahweh and the wicked on the other hand (Strophes B and D), appear in juxtaposition. The effect of this tension is enhanced by the occurrence of polarities in the text. In Stanza II

Strophes B and C appear in direct opposition. Both are concerned with the prerequisites to appear in God's presence. Strophe B indicates that the wicked have no access to Yahweh, whilst Strophe C states the opposite - the righteous do have access. The fate of the wicked and the righteous is further explained in Stanza III. Strophe D is parallel to Strophe B. Those who have no access to Yahweh, naturally head for destruction. In opposition to this, Strophe E is parallel to Strophe C. Those who do have access to Yahweh, can be assured of his protection, therefore they will experience joy<sup>77</sup>.

On a semantic level, the relationship between the various strophes can be schematised in the following manner:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a A (2a-4b) Prayer by a righteous sufferer   | b <sup>1</sup> D (10a-11d) Destruction of the wicked   |
| b B (5a-7b) No place for the wicked          | c <sup>1</sup> E (12a-13b) Protection of the righteous |
| c C (8a-9b) Always a place for the righteous |  |

This is neither the time nor the place to enter into the debate about the identity of the wicked in the psalms<sup>78</sup>. Suffice to say that there is no evidence in the psalm that the poet refers to specific enemies. He simply refers to evildoers in general, people who rebel against God and in their *hubris* prevent others from living a tranquil life in the presence of God<sup>79</sup>. The relationship between Yahweh, the righteous and the wicked can be described as a triangular relationship and schematised in the following manner:



The poet experiences tensions within this triangular relationship. On the one hand there is tension between the poet and the wicked, because they oppress him. On the other hand there is tension between the poet and Yahweh, because Yahweh allows the wicked to gain the upper hand. In his distress the poet turns towards Yahweh, his King and God (vs 3), praying for these tensions to be resolved. The tensions are skillfully expressed in the text as indicated above. The theological intent of these polarities is to express the poet's certainty that Yahweh has no relationship with the wicked. Only the righteous can count upon his protection. Therefore the righteous can rely upon him in a time of distress. The theology of the



psalm can be called “a theology of tension and reconciliation”. The poet is certain that Yahweh will help him in his distress and will resolve the tension in his relationship with Yahweh. On the other hand the poet is equally certain that tension between Yahweh and the wicked will increase up to the point where the wicked are annihilated<sup>80</sup>.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Extratextual material can provide important background information for the interpretation of a psalm. Using it as interpretational key, however, leads to distortion. The differences of opinion with regard to Psalm 5 clearly illustrate this point.

In this analysis, intratextual material was used as a key to interpret the psalm. The conspicuous occurrence of strophes concerned with the relationship between Yahweh and the righteous on the one hand and the lack of a relationship between Yahweh and the wicked on the other hand has been identified as the dominant textual strategy in Psalm 5. Two lines of thought emerge from this textual strategy: On the one hand Yahweh has no relationship with the wicked. This leads to their destruction. On the other hand the righteous can appear in Yahweh's presence. Only they can rely upon his protection. Given this fact, the poet has confidence when he expresses his needs before Yahweh.

The polarity between the strophes enhances the truth that it is worthwhile to rely upon Yahweh in a time of distress. The poet's prayer in the context of “a theology of tension and reconciliation” opens new perspectives and enables him to live as a צדיק.

## NOTES:

- 1 This article is an adaptation of a paper read at the Society of Biblical Literature's Thirteenth International Meeting in Budapest, Hungary, 23-26 July 1995. As it was the last international conference that Willem Sterrenberg (Riempies) Prinsloo and I attended together before his untimely death, I gladly dedicate this publication to his memory.
- 2 Cf the bibliographies in E S Gerstenberger, *Psalms. Part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, (FOTL XIV), Grand Rapids 1988, 61; P C Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, (WBC 19), Waco 1983, 83; K Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, (HAT I/15), Tübingen 1996, 40.
- 3 Cf W S Pinsloo, “Psalm 114: It is Yahweh who transforms the rock into a fountain”, *JNSL* 18 (1992), 163-176 for a typical example of his methodology.
- 4 Cf G T M Prinsloo, “Analysing Old Testament poetry: An experiment in methodology with reference to Psalm 126”, *OTE* 5 (1992), 229-231 for a discussion

of the terms “extratextual” and “intratextual” and its relevance for the interpretation of poetic texts.

- 5 Some exegetes revert to severe textcritical emendations. H-J Kraus, *Psalmen I. Teilband*, (BKAT XV/1), Neukirchen <sup>3</sup>1966, 36-37 proposes several emendations on metrical grounds (cf also the proposals in BHS). M Dahood, *Psalms I 1-50*, (AB), New York 1979, 29-36 also accepts several emendations, partly for metrical reasons, partly because he detects a Canaanite (Ugaritic) background for numerous expressions in the psalm (cf also the discussion in R Kittel, *Die Psalmen*, (KAT XIII), Leipzig <sup>6</sup>1922, 17). Numerous emendations are also proposed by C A & E G Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, (ICC), Edinburgh 1906, 41-45. On the whole, however, the text of the psalm is legible. Metrical grounds alone are not sufficient to emend a text, given the uncertainty about the exact nature of the Hebrew metrical system. The few real problems will be discussed in the notes below.
- 6 The exact meaning of נחילת is not clear. The translation given here relates the word to חליל “flute, pipe”. The LXX apparently relates the word to נחל “to inherit”. In that case it could refer to the name of a tune and not to a musical instrument (cf Craigie, *op cit*, 84).
- 7 The 3 masc sing יתעב “he abhors” is sometimes emended to a 2 masc sing תתעב “you abhor” with reference to the Vulgate (cf Craigie, *op cit*, 84). The reason for the emendation is sought in the number of 2 masc sing forms earlier in the verse. However, the MT is perfectly legible and need not be emended.
- 8 The 3 masc sing suffix in the form בפייהו seems strange. All the other suffixes in the strophe are 3 masc plur. There are manuscriptural support to emend the suffix to 3 masc plur (cf BHS). Such a reading is also supported by the LXX, Peshitta and Targum (cf A A Anderson, *The Book of Psalms Volume I Psalms 1-72*, (NCB), Grand Rapids 1972, 85; Craigie, *op cit*, 85).
- 9 Cf Anderson, *op cit*, 81; A Deissler, *Die Psalmen*, Düsseldorf 1964, 42; Gerstenberger, *op cit*, 59; H Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, Göttingen <sup>6</sup>1986, 18; H Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*, (HKAT), Göttingen 1933, 172; K Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method*, London 1969, 171; Kraus, *op cit*, 37; J P M Van der Ploeg, *Psalmen Deel I*, (BOT), Roermond 1973, 51; A Weiser, *Die Psalmen Erster Teil: Psalm 1-60* (ATD 14), Göttingen <sup>9</sup>1979, 83. C Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, Edinburgh 1981, 80 points to the fact that Psalm 5 is one of the laments of an individual which does not contain petition but also praise. The praise stems from the certainty of being heard. Thus it can also be called a psalm of confidence.
- 10 Cf Dahood, *op cit*, 29 who maintains that the psalm can just as well be classified as a psalm of innocence. W Beyerlin, *Die Rettung der Bedrängten in den Feindpsalmen der Einzelnen auf institutionelle Zusammenhänge untersucht*, (FRLANT 99), Göttingen 1970, 95 however, is of the opinion that lament is not the main intention of the psalm. Though some elements of a lament occur, the psalm should rather be classified as “ein breit angelegtes Bittgebet”. S Mowinkel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship I*, Sheffield [1962] 1992, 220 prefers to call it a protective psalm or a psalm of confidence, a view with which Craigie, *op cit*, 85 concurs. G Fohrer, *Psalmen*, (De-Gruyter-Studienbuch),



- Berlin-New York 1993, 174 calls the psalm a lament of an individual with the specific aim to declare his innocence.
- 11 Cf Gerstenberger, *op cit*, 60; F-L Hossfeld, "Psalm 5 Morgengebet um Rechtshilfe", in F-L Hossfeld & E Zenger, *Die Psalmen I Psalm 1-50*, (NEB), Würzburg 1993, 63. According to Hossfeld it is doubtful whether verse 4 should be connected to the cult. However, the cultic background can clearly be discerned in verses 5-8, especially in verse 8, which belongs to the "Einzugstora". Hossfeld compares it to Ps 15 and 24:3-5.
  - 12 Cf J H Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, London 1976, 65 who regards the use of "my King and my God" in 3b, the force of the prayer against the wicked in 10a-11d and the rejoicing of the whole nation in 12a-13b as indications that the psalm is a royal prayer. He expresses the same opinion in his commentary on the psalms (J H Eaton, *Psalms*, (TBC), London 1967, 37-38). S J L Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms*, (JSOT Supplement Series 44), Sheffield 1987, 95-96 regards Psalm 5 as a declaration of the king's innocence in preparation for the enthronement festival. Cf also H Birkeland, *Die Feinde des Individuums in der Israelitischen Psalmenliteratur: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Semitischen Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte*, Oslo 1933, 249-252.
  - 13 Cf F Baethgen, *Die Psalmen übersetzt und erklärt*, (GHAT II/2), Göttingen 1904, 12; Briggs & Briggs, *op cit*, 37; Gunkel, *Einleitung*, 176-177; Kittel, *op cit*, 17; Koch, *op cit*, 176; Kraus, *op cit*, 38; W O E Oesterley, *The Psalms Vol. I*, London 1939, 132; Weiser, *op cit*, 83. Weiser refers to 2 Kgs 3:20 and Am 4:4 to substantiate his argument. According to Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 18 it is one of the few individual laments where the relationship with the cult can clearly be distinguished. Fohrer, *op cit*, 174-175 regards the cultic connection of the psalm as beyond doubt. However, the *Sitz im Leben* is not the daily morning sacrifice of Num 28:3-7, nor the prescribed daily morning prayer which is only known from intertestamental times, but a private sacrifice accompanied by prayer. B Duhm, *Die Psalmen*, (KHAT XIV), Leipzig-Tübingen 1899, 17 is of the opinion that the poet might be a priest who seeks Yahweh in sacrifice and prayer.
  - 14 Cf Beyerlin, *op cit*, 90-94.
  - 15 Cf Gerstenberger, *op cit*, 60.
  - 16 Cf Hossfeld, "Psalm 5", 63-64; J Ridderbos, *De Psalmen I Psalm 1-41* (COT), Kampen 1955, 44.
  - 17 Cf Gerstenberger, *op cit*, 58. Quite a number of variations on these themes exist. Van der Ploeg, *op cit*, 52 identifies the following elements: A lament directed to Yahweh as ultimate judge (1-4), a lament directed to Yahweh, who hates evildoers (5-7), a prayer uttered on the premises of the temple (8), a prayer for the destruction of the enemies (9-11) and praise (11-13). Weiser, *op cit*, 84 identifies the following elements: An introductory lament (2-4), a general reflection on God's relationship with the wicked (5-7), the psalmist personal relationship with God (8), a personal prayer for right guidance (9), a petition for the destruction of the enemies (10-11) and confident expectancy of the gracious help of God for the community. Kittel, *op cit*, 17-18 identifies only four elements: An initial prayer (2-4), "the others and I" (5-8), prayer and lament (9-10) and "their and our destiny" (11-13). Kraus, *op cit*, 37 prefers the

following elements: A lament uttered early in the morning (2-4), only the righteous can enter into the presence of Yahweh (5-8), a prayer for Yahweh's guidance (9) accompanied by a prayer for the indictment of the wicked (10) and insistence upon their destruction (11). The poem is closed by the joy and blessing of the righteous (12-13). Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 19, has more or less the same divisions. These diverging opinions indicate that most exegetes use extratextual material to determine the constituent parts of the poem. In this paper, an intratextual analysis provides the material for the segmentation of the poem.

- 18 Cf Craigie, *op cit*, 85 and Kraus, *op cit*, 38 who refrain from dating the psalm at all.
- 19 Cf Ridderbos, *op cit*, 46; Weiser, *op cit*, 83.
- 20 Cf Anderson, *op cit*, 81; Kittel, *op cit*, 17; Oesterley, *op cit*, 132. Deissler, *op cit*, 42 points to various similarities between Psalm 5 and other passages in the Old Testament to substantiate his argument that the psalm is post-exilic. M Buttenwieser, *The Psalms chronologically treated with a new translation*, Chicago 1938, 409-410, discerns various parallels between Psalm 5 and Job. Therefore he concludes that the psalm must be late post-exilic and dates it later than 400 B.C. He substantiates his argument with other information, inter alia that the enemies are foreign oppressors and that the miserable state of affairs described in the psalm only developed later in Israel's history. As will be seen, the language used in the psalm is too general to come to such specific conclusions about its date.
- 21 For the purpose of this paper, no detailed explanation of the superscription is given. Cf the various commentaries cited here for more information.
- 22 Cf Craigie, *op cit*, 85-86. N A Van Uchelen, *Psalmen I (1-40)*, Nijkerk 1979, 33 clearly points out this characteristic. He calls the overall structure of the psalm symmetric. As will be shown in the discussion below, the relationship between the various strophes is more complex.
- 23 Cf Oesterley, *op cit*, 133 and Van Uchelen, *op cit*, 34 for a discussion of the significance of the threefold repetition. Especially noteworthy is its relation to the three negative and three positive statements about the wicked in Strophe B.
- 24 Cf Anderson, *op cit*, 81.
- 25 Cf Weiser, *op cit*, 84.
- 26 Cf Anderson, *op cit*, 81; Kraus, *op cit*, 38.
- 27 Cf Craigie, *op cit*, 86.
- 28 Cf Fohrer, *op cit*, 175.
- 29 Cf Anderson, *op cit*, 82; Kraus, *op cit*, 38; Ridderbos, *op cit*, 46; Van der Ploeg, *op cit*, 52; Weiser, *op cit*, 84.
- 30 Cf Anderson, *op cit*, 82; H. Brandenburg, *Der Psalter: Das Gebetbuch des Volkes Gottes I: Psalm 1-72*, (Das Lebendige Wort), Giessen 1967, 31; Craigie, *op cit*, 86.
- 31 Cf H Lamparter, *Das Buch der Psalmen I Psalm 1-72*, (BAT 14), Stuttgart 1962, 45.
- 32 Cf Van Uchelen, *op cit*, 34.
- 33 Cf in this regard especially Lamparter, *op cit*, 44-45.
- 34 Cf Hossfeld, "Psalm 5", 63.
- 35 Cf Weiser, *op cit*, 84 who connects the verse with the morning sacrifice. According to Kraus, *op cit*, 38 it refers to the arranging of the pieces of the



- offering. The petitioner brings his sacrifice early in the morning, expecting a word of salvation from Yahweh (Cf also J Begrich, "Das priesterliche Heil-sorakel", *ZAW* 52 (1934), 81-92; Oesterley, *op cit*, 133.
- 36 Cf Dahood, *op cit*, 30; Hossfeld, *op cit*, 63; E König, *Die Psalmen eingeleitet, übersetzt und erklärt*, Gütersloh 1927, 275; Ridderbos, *op cit*, 47; Van der Ploeg, *op cit*, 53.
- 37 Cf A F Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, Cambridge 1921, 22; E J Kissane, *The Book of Psalms I (Psalms 1-72)*, Dublin 1953, 19.
- 38 Cf T E Bird, "Some Queries on the New Psalter", *CBQ* 11 (1949), 78-79; König, *op cit*, 276.
- 39 Cf Craigie, *op cit*, 86; Van der Ploeg, *op cit*, 53.
- 40 Cf Gerstenberger, *op cit*, 59; Hossfeld, *op cit*, 63; Van Uchelen, *op cit*, 35.
- 41 Cf Van Uchelen, *op cit*, 35.
- 42 Cf Van der Ploeg, *op cit*, 53.
- 43 Cf Fohrer, *op cit*, 176; Hossfeld, *op cit*, 63.
- 44 Cf Van der Ploeg, *op cit*, 53. According to S Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien I*, Amsterdam 1966 the פַּעֲלֵי אֹרֶן are magicians. Most exegetes reject this hypothesis and accept a much more general meaning for this expression (cf F Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms Vol I*, Grand Rapids 1952, 122; König, *op cit*, 277).
- 45 Cf Weiser, *op cit*, 84-85.
- 46 Cf Kirkpatrick, *op cit*, 23.
- 47 Cf Briggs & Briggs, *op cit*, 39; Van der Ploeg, *op cit*, 54.
- 48 Cf Ridderbos, *op cit*, 48.
- 49 Cf Craigie, *op cit*, 87; Lamparter, *op cit*, 46; Weiser, *op cit*, 85.
- 50 Cf Duhm, *op cit*, 18; Van Uchelen, *op cit*, 35.
- 51 Cf Brandenburg, *op cit*, 32; Weiser, *op cit*, 86.
- 52 Some exegetes regard this phrase as a reference to the direction of worship: "I will worship towards your holy temple". Van der Ploeg, *op cit*, 54-55 refers to Ps 28:2b; 132:7; 134:2; 138:2; 1 Kgs 8:22, 30 and Dan 6:11 to illustrate the point. Weiser, *op cit*, 85 also connects the verse to the cult and specifically the direction of worship (Cf also Anderson, *op cit*, 84). However, the parallelism with 8a probably points towards one act of worship, namely the entering into the sanctuary and the worshipping before Yahweh.
- 53 Cf Ridderbos, *op cit*, 45.
- 54 Cf Craigie, *op cit*, 87.
- 55 Dahood, *op cit*, 33-34 assumes that the verse refers to paradise on the premise that מִדְּבָרָה means "meadow" and refers to the Elysian Fields. It really has no support in the numerous occurrences of this form in the Old Testament.
- 56 Cf Beyerlin, *op cit*, 92; Kraus, *op cit*, 43.
- 57 Cf Brandenburg, *op cit*, 32; Kissane, *op cit*, 20; Van der Ploeg, *op cit*, 55.
- 58 Cf Kissane, *op cit*, 20; Van Uchelen, *op cit*, 36.
- 59 Cf Kraus, *op cit*, 43.
- 60 Cf Anderson, *op cit*, 85.
- 61 Cf Hossfeld, *op cit*, 66; Kraus, *op cit*, 43; Van Uchelen, *op cit*, 36.
- 62 Cf Fohrer, *op cit*, 177.
- 63 Cf Weiser, *op cit*, 86.

- 64 According to Fohrer, *op cit.*, 177 Strophe D (10-11) is parallel to Strophe C (8-9). It is of course true that Strophe D builds upon the previous one. However, it is not parallel to Strophe C in the sense that it contains the same line of thought. It clearly picks up the themes of Strophe B (5-7), but this time in the form of a prayer that the wicked should be destroyed. Duhm, *op cit.*, 18 quite rightly points to the parallels between Strophes B and D (cf also Briggs & Briggs, *op cit.*, 40).
- 65 Cf Van Uchelen, *op cit.*, 36.
- 66 Cf Dahood, *op cit.*, 34.
- 67 Cf Van Uchelen, *op cit.*, 37.
- 68 Cf Anderson, *op cit.*, 85; Ridderbos, *op cit.*, 49.
- 69 Cf Hossfeld, *op cit.*, 63.
- 70 Cf Craigie, *op cit.*, 88; Lamparter, *op cit.*, 47.
- 71 Cf Ridderbos, *op cit.*, 50; Weiser, *op cit.*, 86.
- 72 Cf Briggs & Briggs, *op cit.*, 40.
- 73 Cf Weiser, *op cit.*, 87. Hossfeld, *op cit.*, 66 indicates that something similar happens in other psalms (Cf Ps 3:9; 28:9; 29:11; 67:2,7f). It is part of the psalm and should not be regarded as a later redactional addition.
- 74 Cf Craigie, *op cit.*, 88.
- 75 Cf Brandenburg, *op cit.*, 33; Craigie, *op cit.*, 88-89.
- 76 Cf Weiser, *op cit.*, 86.
- 77 Cf Weiser, *op cit.*, 84.
- 78 Cf in this regard G W Anderson, "Enemies and Evildoers in the Book of Psalms", *BJRL* 48 (1965), 18-29; Birkeland, *op cit.*; Kraus, *op cit.*, 40-43. For a more recent discussion cf Croft, *op cit.*, 15-48.
- 79 Cf Craigie, *op cit.*, 87-88; Van Uchelen, *op cit.*, 33.
- 80 Cf Van Uchelen, *op cit.*, 33.