Conversing with the God of the Pilgrimage Psalms

Melinda Cousins

The Psalms are prayers and songs, words spoken by the people of God *to* their God. Their dialogical nature invites the community of faith to sing, pray, speak, and enact these words so that we too might enter into conversation both with and about God. The Psalms are also Scripture, part of the canon through which the church seeks to discern the divine discourse, to hear the voice of God. The Psalms are thus both the words of the people to God, and the word of God to the people. How are these two perspectives to be held in tension? How can participating in psalmic conversations about and with God enable us also to hear God speak?

Many theological approaches to the Psalms have considered these texts primarily as a source of information about God with the intent of then arriving at an accurate description of the God the psalms present. They consider what statements the Psalms make about God's character and activities and what metaphors they use to express God's attributes and actions. But should the Psalms be treated primarily as a sourcebook for doctrine about the nature of God?

Nasuti argues that this kind of approach is not enough and that understanding the way these texts *make available a relationship* between God and those who use them is at least equally as important.[1] The Psalms invite us into an experience of conversing with God, and with one another about God, and it is from this conversational experience that our theology is shaped. My own doctoral research, which sought to offer a theological interpretation of a particular group of Psalms utilising a canonical-theological approach paired

---

Melinda Cousins is a lecturer in Biblical Studies at Tabor College in Adelaide. She is an ordained Baptist pastor and also works for Baptist Churches of South Australia, overseeing the accreditation and training of pastors. She has recently graduated with a PhD from Charles Sturt University. Her thesis was on the Psalms of Ascents (Psalms 120–134). This article has been peer reviewed.

with a performative interpretation, highlighted similar ideas. By translating, learning, internalising, and sharing these psalms in community, I was able in some way to enter into these texts and experience them from the 'inside', and to invite members of my faith community into this experience as well. Their feedback, as well as my own autoethnographical reflections, demonstrated the relational nature of these psalms and that a key way they are theologically constructive is not by imparting doctrinal content, but by engaging participants in an experiential conversation.

The particular psalms I considered, the Psalms of Ascents (Psalms 120–134), contain very few explicit theological statements and only a handful of declarations about the character of God. Instead, their theological vision emerges primarily by inviting conversation with and about God. Furthermore, rather than using direct metaphors about God, such as the familiar images of king, rock, and refuge found throughout the rest of the Psalter, this collection uses a number of what I have called 'open metaphors', where an image is used for the people from which a corresponding role for God can be inferred. In this paper, I will provide a brief overview of the performance research undertaken and some of the audience responses received. I will then explore three of these open metaphors, as well as the overarching metaphor of pilgrimage which provides the canonical frame for this collection of psalms, and consider how these images help reframe the community's relationship with a God who is not easily defined or restrained, but is engaged within an ongoing, transformative conversation.

Canonical-theological interpretation

I am seeking to focus not only on what the Psalms say, but on the effect they have, that is, on their relational dimension, their role as an encounter with the divine. This approach not only describes the theology of the psalms but also functions hermeneutically, using a theological lens that is drawn from the psalms themselves.[2] This is a way of doing theology that is rooted in a present encounter between God and people.[3] Rather than merely an objective investigation of what was, it allows for the voices of a variety of interpretive communities to participate in the conversation.[4] It also takes seriously the poetic nature of the psalms with their preponderance of imagery that engages the right-side of the brain rather than the more analytical left-side.[5] This can make it appear more subjective but also leaves room for unresolved tensions in the text and tentativeness in the conclusions drawn.[6] It aligns

well with the performance methodology I undertook, entering into the text and seeking to experience it from the inside.

This kind of theological interpretation is an activity both by and for the church. The church is the community called by Scripture to discern the meaning of Scripture, as well as the community Scripture seeks to direct and transform.[7] Discovering communal approaches to interpretation is a challenge in our individualistic culture, but the involvement of the community as 'audience' in performances of the text offered one such possible approach. The Psalms of Ascents are read, then, not only as part of the canon of Scripture, but also taking seriously their canonical location and framing as a collection with a shared superscription. The shared superscription (literally, 'a song of the steps')[8] is the collection's most immediately obvious feature. There is a broad consensus that the 'steps' of the title refer to pilgrimage. It is also important to note the inherently performative nature of these psalms as 'songs'. Thus the title provides a canonical framework for the collection, a reading strategy, and performative frame that shapes their theological interpretation. The idea of pilgrimage functions as a hermeneutical lens through which they are heard, read, understood, enacted, and experienced.

Performance research of the Pilgrimage Psalms

The Psalms are inherently performative, preserved so they can be enacted by future communities of faith. Their use is deeply connected to liturgy and ritual. Psalms are not intended to be merely read, recited, or sung; they are to be performed or, perhaps better, enacted. They are to be embodied. Those who participate in their use thereby have their understanding of the world in which they live reframed or reshaped.

Studying the biblical texts as performances can bring new life to interpretation. Rhoads likens biblical critics who interpret these writings without giving attention to the nature of their performance to musicologists who study the score of a composition without ever hearing it performed.[9] Performing biblical texts allows the interpreter to encounter them from a new perspective, stepping 'inside' the world of the text.

Biblical performance criticism not only acknowledges that all translation is interpretation, it celebrates this fact by inviting both performer and audience into a live interpretation event. Performing and hearing texts open up new possibilities for identifying and understanding discourse features.[10] The act of translating for oral performance can lead the translator to notice

aural and oral features of texts otherwise overlooked. Performance explicitly acknowledges that communication involves more than merely an exchange of ideas; it engages the imagination.[11] In performance, the text becomes living and active and it is hoped that people experience the transcendent, the sacred.

Unlike much silent reading, performance also has an inherently social and relational nature. The presence of others means the audience responds as an ensemble or collective.[12] Performance has a public dimension, which can function as a helpful reminder that biblical interpretation should not take place behind closed doors, but instead needs to be engaged with the faith community's social and political context.[13]

Those who have participated as audiences in performances of biblical texts speak of it as a shared experience that often feels as though they were hearing the text for the first time.[14] More than giving information about the text, performance invites the community into a transformational encounter with it. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that audiences experience performances of biblical texts as more memorable, engaging, and affective than hearing them read,[15] and the audience responses appraised as part of my research confirmed this.

My translation of the Psalms of Ascents was learned and prepared for performance, allowing me to 'inhabit' the text, considering space, movement, tone, and emotion, and providing a feedback loop to adjust the translation if necessary. To be able to perform a text one must first know it thoroughly and comprehensively. Performing it provides further knowledge of a different kind. As the text is experienced, its perspective is embraced and owned by the performer. Certainly the imaginative and emotive dimensions were highlighted, but the theological content of these psalms was also experienced in new ways, opening up further possibilities for exploring the text's key theological ideas as well as discerning the divine discourse within the text.

The translation was performed multiple times to audiences of members of the Christian community of faith. Qualitative data was then obtained from the audience, reflecting on their experience of the performance and theological insights or emphases drawn out by it. The feedback I received from audience members also highlighted the emotive, imaginative, and relational dimensions of these Psalms. Thirty-four respondents (57%) noted that the emotions they saw or felt were what would primarily stay with them from the performance.[16] Many commented on the range of different emotions

expressed in these psalms—from joy to despair—as well as the ability of the performance to engage with them emotionally. These responses suggest that performance of the text is *affective*, allowing the text to be not simply heard or even understood, but felt. Some examples of audience members' responses:

> The emotion of the performance was palpable . . . the expression of them with emotion and from the personal point of view made me feel their heartfelt content rather than just hearing the content.
>
> I wanted to cry at times. In fact, I seemed to be carried along with the emotions of the performer. I was able to relate to what emotion seemed to lie behind the text.
>
> I was able to savour something of the pathos and feeling of this at a more visceral or 'gut' level than otherwise.
>
> I usually read the words and look for meaning . . . but I seldom reach the depths of emotion that I did in the performance . . . I was caught up in the tears and joy.
>
> I experienced more emotions by hearing than by reading. When I read I tend to analysise [sic] the text, when I hear I feel.

A further nine respondents spoke of the text's 'immediacy', indicating that the performance connected the psalms to them personally in a more direct way than reading the text, again underlining the ability of this method of interpretation to transform:

> A sense of immediacy, of the performer's strong connexion to the text, which I felt came through to me personally.
>
> It lifted from the page—brought an immediacy—got me thinking about how doing this shapes community and forms disciples.

However, several respondents noted that although their emotions and imaginations were engaged, the performance did not help them feel they 'understood' the text more. This appears to reflect the Protestant emphasis on intellectual understanding of texts as the primary goal and suggested that

engaging with Scripture via emotion or imagination is a foreign experience for many. Other respondents were able to articulate a distinction between understanding and experience. They therefore began to consider the benefits of this different way of engaging with the text:[17]

> Greater understanding [and] . . . greater enjoyment. 'Coloured' the words . . . Expanded them.
>
> I'm not sure how much 'new' stuff, new understanding I gained in terms of 'head knowledge' off a first performance . . . but hearing them this way makes me want to hear them again.
>
> 'Understand'—maybe not . . . It added/reinforced my understanding. But it helped me *experience* them, participate in them. It was very helpful in moving beyond comprehension.

Twenty-four responses (40%) used the words 'conversational', 'dialogical', or synonyms, indicating that the performance particularly accentuated this aspect of the Pilgrim Psalter. The impact of the performance translation appeared to be to draw audience members in as though they were participants in a dialogue:

> I also 'heard' the different voices of the supplicant, God, narrator, accuser, etc.
>
> I felt we were in conversation.
>
> [The performance] elucidated the dialogical nature of these psalms.
>
> It felt like a personal conversation.

The relational dimension of this collection of psalms was thus accentuated in performance. Clear decisions were made about when the text is addressing God directly and when it is addressing the audience and how these conversations work together. The public nature of performance reinforced that even personal prayers have a corporate dimension, as confession and plea take place in the context of the community. I was very aware that engagement between the audience and myself was not the only, or even the primary, relational dynamic present. By directly speaking to God I embodied

a relationship with him to the audience, a relationship that at times they were invited to observe and at other times to enter into as well. Feedback received from the audience confirms that the relational dimension of the collection was key to the way they entered into its theology. For example:

> How focused on relationship with God they were.
>
> [It is] more about relationship of God, author, hearers than about abstract theology.
>
> The depth of relationship between the psalmist and YHWH.
>
> The sense of *immediacy* between the psalmist and the Lord God.

The relational dimension of these psalms is thus one of their key effects on those who engage with them and provides an entry point into discovering their theological perspective.

Open metaphors in the Pilgrimage Psalms

The Psalms of Ascents contain only a handful of declarations about God's character and other explicit theological statements. The theo-logic of the text is instead apparent in its dynamic two-way relational dimension that has the effect of inviting enactors to participate in a three-way conversation: *with* God and with one another *about* God's actions and activity.

This dialogical nature of these psalms, similar to the Psalter as a whole, functions as an invitation to enter into conversation with God. Seven psalms in the collection directly address God. These include both singular forms, the words of an individual before God (Psalms 120, 130, and 131), and plural forms, with the community speaking together in supplication (Psalms 123, 125, 126, and 132). The act of speaking and embodying these psalms therefore engages participants in both individual and corporate prayer. Despite the absence in the collection of the Psalter's most familiar call to worship, *hālal*, there are exhortations to praise God, using *bārak* ('bless'), in Psalms 124 and 134. The collection as a whole thus becomes an invitation to worship.

The psalms also provide words for community members to share with one another about God, describing his character (Psalms 129 and 130) and recounting his actions (Psalms 121, 126, 127, and 132). For example, God is repeatedly described as the maker of heaven and earth (Psalms 121, 124,

and 134), emphasising his creational authority. The few declarations that are made about God's attributes—righteousness (Psalm 129), faithful love, forgiveness, and redemption (Psalm 130)—echo descriptions found throughout the Hebrew Bible in the stories of his involvement with his people. They therefore function to draw later readers and enactors into that story and its continuing impact.

In this collection, however, there are no direct metaphors for God. None of the familiar images found throughout the rest of the Psalter such as king, rock, and refuge are included. Instead, there are a number of what I have called open metaphors, using an image for the people from which a corresponding role for God can be inferred. I want to conclude this paper by considering four of these open metaphors that emerged from the conversational nature of my performance interpretation. Each illustrate the psalmic invitation into relational conversation with God. I propose that the effect of this open imagery, where only the human side of the relational metaphor is stated, is to draw focus not primarily to who God is, but to what it means for us to be in relationship with him. They allow us to draw connections based on our own underlying experience and understanding and serve as a further invitation to engage in the relational dimensions of these experiences for ourselves.

Psalm 120:5 Distant sojourner [and centre/light]

> *'Woe is me! For I sojourned in a far away land, I dwelt amongst a people of darkness.'*

This geographical image is found in the opening psalm of the collection, and it is preceded by the interjection, *ʾôyâ*, which can be heard as an involuntary, onomatopoetic exclamation of grief and despair.[18] The place names Meshech and Kedar were understood and translated for performance as metaphors. Why? It is unlikely these are intended as literal references to geographical locations as the two places are very far from one another. Although some have suggested they function as synonyms for 'barbarians',[19] I argue it is preferable to see their metaphorical function as connected to their distance from Israel both physically and spiritually.[20] Meshech is known primarily for its distance, while the phrase 'tents of Kedar' is used in Song 1:5 as a poetic synonym for black or dark. My translation was thus both explanatory and emotive for a contemporary audience who have no imaginative referent

for the place names themselves, enabling them to experience the sense of distance and isolation evoked.

When speaking this Psalm as a prayer, this image creates a sense of relational distance for the individual not only from the community of faith, but consequently from God himself. Entering into this conversation with God, we find ourselves at a distance, sojourning in darkness, at the margins of lived experience. The negative context of this metaphor within the psalm encourages participants towards the alternative. Security and contentment are not found in the experience of isolation. The implication is that the individual pilgrim needs connection with both God and the community of faith to experience all the benefits of *shalom.*

Perhaps in reading this psalm, one would simply notice the idea of being far away. But far away from what? Participating in this psalm as a conversation with God, the conversation partner must implicitly take on the alternative and unspoken dimension of the metaphor. If I am a distant sojourner, God is the implied centre to whom I am seeking to make my way. If I am dwelling in a place of darkness, God is the implied light I hope to find. But rather than naming these as theological truths about God, the metaphor is left open, allowing the one enacting it to enter into the dynamics of this relationship in a more personal and powerful way. For the collection as a whole, this first psalm can be seen as representing a departure point for the pilgrimage. By enacting it, we name the relational isolation in order to leave it behind to embark upon the journey forward, entering into the conversation with God, a God who, as Middleton notes in his paper, 'actually wants a vigorous conversation partner'.[21]

Psalm 124:7 Trapped bird [and rescuer]

> *'Our life is like a bird escaped from a trapper's snare, the trap was broken and we escaped.'*

This image evokes an animal to be hunted, killed, and eaten. The metaphor is used for war scenarios both elsewhere within the biblical text[22] and in Ancient Near Eastern literature.[23] The repeated verb is similarly used in war contexts, but here, unusually, the agent of the deliverance is unstated. We are like a trapped bird that has escaped. Entering into the relational and conversational dimension of this psalm invites us to imagine that experience and thus provokes the question, who has rescued us?

In my performances, I was struck by how powerfully this image speaks of salvation without explicitly describing God's involvement. A bird inside a trap is utterly helpless and can do nothing without outside intervention. The image in the text is thus one that necessarily implies a saviour. The simile engenders emotions associated with liberation, such as exhilaration and a palpable sense of relief and lightness. More than mere statements of deliverance, this imagery and movement provides enactors with an imaginative experience of having been delivered from a life-threatening situation. As the text engages the imagination, it has the effect of placing us within the scenario, leading us to own the story as our own history and connect it to our own life experience. Rather than simply declaring that God is our rescuer, we are invited to imagine what that looks and feels like, and then to respond relationally to God as the one who has taken on this unspoken role.

Psalm 131:2 Child [and mother]

> *'No! I have stilled and quieted my life like a weaned child*
> *upon its mother, like the weaned child upon me is my life.'*

This image has been variously understood. The basic meaning of the verb *gāmal* is 'to complete, perfect,'[24] with the derivative meaning of weaning a child.[25] If the young age of the child is primarily in view,[26] then the image can be viewed as a generalised picture of mother and contented child.[27] Others read weaned in the sense of sated, picturing a baby resting after being breastfed.[28] I picture a child who no longer needs breastfeeding, content to lie upon its mother without needing anything from her.[29] It is an image of an inner life calmed and not seeking or grasping for things beyond its reach.

The image of the *gāmal* is repeated and some scholars have proposed deleting the second occurrence, ascribing it to a scribal error,[30] while others have proposed emendations to the text.[31] (The Greek Septuagint translates the first and second occurrences of *gāmal* with *apogegalaktisménon* ['weaned one'] and *anatapódosis* ['reward'] respectively.)[32] Direct reiteration is common throughout this collection, however, adding emphasis as well as developing the image through subtle variations. Here, the subtle variation is found in the shift from a third person perspective to a first person perspective: 'upon its mother' to 'upon me'. The subject of the first person pronominal suffix has most commonly been understood as the subsequent *nepeš* ('soul'),[33] but this understanding introduces a psychological distinction

between the 'I' and the 'soul' that is not suggested by its use elsewhere in the collection. The repetition is therefore more naturally read with the subject of the preposition as the *gāmal*.[34] This could indicate an original female speaker.[35] Performance of this psalm highlighted how the subtle variation in the image shifts the picture from one of observing a child upon its mother to visualising a child upon oneself, emphasising the emotional experience of both child and mother.

Again, it is not explicitly stated that God is like a mother, but the implication is clear. If I am like a child, God is the implied mother in the image. Rather than making a theological declaration, the text invites us to imagine God as tender, loving, and gentle and reiterates the intimacy and dependence of the relationship his people have to him. Interestingly, in my performances, I observed that as an adult, visualising a child upon its mother involved visualising a child in my own arms; it is much more difficult in practice to picture myself as the child. This perspective on the image is then affirmed by the addition of 'upon me' in the final line of the simile. The effect of the text is therefore to invite us to put ourselves in God's place, identifying with him as the one holding us content in his arms. Enactors are thus drawn into the image in two different ways, thinking of themselves as the child but visualising themselves also as God holding that child. The mutuality of the relational image is thereby enhanced.

Psalms 120–134 Pilgrim [and God]

'A song of the pilgrimage.'

The shared superscription also works as a metaphor, inviting those who participate in these psalms to see themselves as pilgrims. It is possible that this might have been the originally intended context of the collection's use, but even if it was not, this descriptor provides later communities with pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a concrete context within which to imagine the theological implications of the text.

The repeated use of the word pilgrimage in the titles of the psalms invites us to visualise ourselves as pilgrims when we enter into conversation with them. It also invites us to understand the whole collection as a pilgrimage, entering into the collection as a journey with expectations that it would take us from one place to another in some way. Pilgrimage becomes an underlying metaphor for the relationship the psalms describe and enact

between the community speaking and the God to/of whom they speak. In response to my performances, a number of audience members commented on this, for example:

> In modern times, these [titles] would be a movie synopsis. They tell a story, making the audience part of the story and the storytelling.
>
> The possibility that this canonical unit outlines or conveys one's entire moral-theological pilgrimage.
>
> Pilgrimage is a perfect descriptor—the psalms spoke to me of the journey we take in life.

These psalms thus seek to redefine our identity. Enactors of the Psalms of Ascents understand themselves to be pilgrims, or better, members of a pilgrimage community. Although the pilgrim may begin the journey alone, the experience as a whole is inherently corporate as we are drawn into community along the way and drawn toward a flourishing expression of that community as part of the goal. Joining in the pilgrimage is a choice, as those who are outsiders to the community of faith are not viewed as pilgrims. Pilgrims are on a journey, but it is not a simple or linear path. Along the way, there is a broad range of possibilities and a full range of experiences of life and relationships, resulting in emotional highs and lows. There is, moreover, a sense of forward motion even throughout the ups and downs of life. Being a pilgrim means seeking rather than being comfortable, continually looking to and for something more. It also means having a destination in mind, anticipating that there is something yet to come and to be.

The question that I had asked at the beginning of my study of the Psalms of Ascents was whether there is another side to this relational metaphor. I am a child, God is my mother. I am a servant, God is my master. I am an escaped bird, God is my rescuer. I am a pilgrim, God is . . . what? Who is this pilgrimage God we are invited to converse with?

The collection as a whole reveals that God is present with his people and yet there is an invitation to experience more of him as they walk the journey with and toward him. He is near them and with them, yet above them and awaiting them. He yearns to dwell with them even as they make their way closer to him. The relationship enactors are invited into is thus reciprocal and responsive as they discover and understand God not by

learning about him but by engaging relationally with him. Enactors of the Psalms of Ascents trust in a God who is both known and continuing to reveal more of himself. He is the maker of all that is and the one who calls the community into the journey of pilgrimage. He is present in every part of the journey, guiding and walking with us, willing to listen to our cries, and drawing us ever onwards. He desires and longs for us to dwell with him and as pilgrims we are called to believe that he has even more of himself to offer as we move onwards.

In undertaking my research, I had hoped to conclude with a metaphor for God that captures this dynamic of relating to him as pilgrims. Is he our Guide, or our Map, or our Destination, or our Home? But the Psalms of Ascents, like the whole of Scripture, do not present us with a God who can be so easily contained in one image alone. Each of these metaphors captures something of God's role in the pilgrimage and yet each has limitations. It seems best then to leave this as another open metaphor, allowing the community of faith to experience what it means for God to be their God throughout the pilgrimage as they undertake that pilgrimage and converse with that God themselves. The conversation, though very different from that between God and Job, is always open and ongoing, affirming, as Middleton has shown, the value placed by God on his human dialogue partners.

Endnotes

1. Harry P. Nasuti, 'God at Work in the Word: A Theology of Divine-Human Encounter in the Psalms', in *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 29, emphasis added.
2. Rolf A. Jacobson, 'Christian Theology of the Psalms', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 506.
3. Nasuti, 'God at Work', 43.
4. Beth Tanner, 'Rethinking the Enterprise: What Must be Considered in Formulating a Theology of the Psalms', in *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms*, 142.
5. Tanner, 'Rethinking the Enterprise', 142–43; see also Nasuti, 'God at Work', 39.

6. See Tanner, 'Rethinking the Enterprise', 145–46.
7. Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 150–51. Donald A. Carson, 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, but...' in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. Michael Allen (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 203–4, perhaps fairly criticises the movement for claiming to speak for the church whilst largely remaining the work of scholars within the academy.
8. Psalm 121 has the slight variation, 'a song *for* the steps'.
9. David Rhoads, 'Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part 1', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2006): 119. See also David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.
10. See David Rhoads, 'Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part 2', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2006): 170.
11. William J. Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 157.
12. Kristin M. Langellier, 'A Phenomenological Approach to Audience', *Literature in Performance* 3 (1983): 36.
13. See Jeanette Mathews, 'Prophets Performing as Public Theologians', in *The Bible, Justice and Public Theology*, ed. David J. Neville (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 104.
14. See Richard F. Ward and David J. Trobisch, *Bringing the Word to life: Engaging the New Testament through Performing it* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), ix.
15. See Dennis Dewey, 'Performing the Living Word: Learnings from a Storytelling Vocation', in *The Bible and Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*, eds. Holly E. Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 152–53.
16. There were also two respondents who clearly stated that they felt nothing from the performance. The balance of responses overall seems to differ somewhat from Boomershine's experience of highly literate audiences who are 'thinking so hard that they can't feel anything'. Thomas Boomershine, *The Messiah of Peace: A Performance-Criticism Commentary on Mark's*

Passion-Resurrection Narrative (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 11. The distinction could be due to these texts being poetry.

17. One audience member later shared that they returned home and read the text after the performance, something they would not have done otherwise, demonstrating that the performance elicited a desire and willingness to engage further with the Scripture.
18. See Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), §105b.
19. For example, Leopold Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning* (New York: Alba House, 1974), 259.
20. See Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 436; John Goldingay, *Psalms 90–150* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 452. See also Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part II and Lamentations*, FOTL 15 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 319, who argues that the preservation of the psalm for the purpose of later use requires a symbolic or metaphorical reference to maintain meaningfulness.
21. See J. Richard Middleton's paper in this issue, 15–16.
22. For example, Ezekiel 19.
23. Notably, by Sennacherib, 'The siege of Jerusalem', in *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, eds. James Bennett Pritchard and Daniel E. Fleming (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 269–71.
24. G. Sauer, 'גמל', *TLOT* 1:321.
25. The passive participle occurs twice in this verse and twice in Isaiah (11:8; 28:9).
26. As in Isaiah 11:8.
27. Willem A. VanGemeren, 'Psalm 131:2—*kegamul*: The Problems of Meaning and Metaphor', *Hebrew Studies* 23 (1982): 51–57. See, for example, Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part II*, 360–61, who reads into the image a 'frightened' child finding comfort from its mother; Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 312, who focuses on the idea of dependency.
28. Samuel L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 843; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, Hermeneia, trans. L. M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 451–52;

Goldingay, *Psalms 90–150*, 537, reasons simply that 'the image of a weaned child with its mother is odd'!

29. Marianne Grohmann, 'The imagery of the "weaned child" in Psalms 131', in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Erich Zenger (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 517. See also Walter Beyerlin, *Wider die Hybris des Geistes: Studien zum 131. Psalm* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1982).
30. For example, Patrick W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1971), 61–62. See also Beyerlin, *Wider die Hybris.*
31. For example, S. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien* Vol 1 (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1921) 165, n. 3; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswlad (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 469, who both emend כגמל to חגמל.
32. Bernard P. Robinson, 'Form and Meaning in Psalm 131', *Biblica* 79 (1998): 180–97, likewise attempts to make sense of the parallelism as a pun on the two meanings of the word: 'like a toddler on its mother, surely you have coddled my heaving breast'.
33. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), 753. So ASV, ESV, NASB, NKJV, NLT.
34. Proposed by Gottfried Quell, 'Struktur und Sinn des Psalms 131', in *Das Ferne und Nahe Wort: Festschrift Leonhard Rost*, ed. Fritz Maass (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967), 173–85. So NRSV.
35. See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 447; Melody D. Knowles, 'A Woman at Prayer: A Critical Note on Psalm 131:2b', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 387, who suggests emendation of the first עלי, arguing that the MT pointing has 'obfuscated' her voice.