

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: ANALYZING THE ROLE OF RHETORICAL QUESTIONS IN THE LAMENT PSALMS WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON PSALMS 42, 44, 88, AND 94.

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This thesis investigated the role of rhetorical questions in selected Lament Psalms (Psalms 42, 44, 88, and 94), aiming to reveal their significance as literary devices that enhance interpretation and understanding. The study addressed a notable gap in the existing literature, emphasizing that while rhetorical questions have been acknowledged in the context of Old Testament scripture, their specific function within Lament Psalms has not yet been thoroughly examined. Building on previous scholarship, this research explored how rhetorical questions express pain, longing, and theological reflection themes.

Key questions guiding this research included: How do rhetorical questions function within these Psalms? What literary and theological themes are intertwined with their use? This study also analyzes the relationship between rhetorical questions and other

literary devices, such as parallelism, imagery, and metaphor. This research aspired to deepen our understanding of the lament genre in the Psalms by emphasizing the implications of rhetorical questions on broader theological themes. Utilizing exegetical methods, the study provided a comprehensive analysis of the stylistic and thematic components, ultimately contributing to the theological discourse surrounding the emotional and spiritual dynamics present in the Psalms of lament. The anticipated findings enrich biblical interpretation and foster deeper engagement with the text in both personal and communal settings.

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PSALMS 42, 44, 88, AND 94.

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree
Master of Biblical and Theological Studies

by

Sindiso Mpofu

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This thesis is dedicated to my beloved family, whose unwavering support and encouragement have been my anchor throughout this academic journey.

To my parents, who instilled in me the values of perseverance and faith; to my siblings, who have always believed in my abilities; and to my partner, whose love and understanding have been a source of inspiration.

I also dedicate this work to the community of scholars and mentors who have guided me with their wisdom and insights.

May this research contribute to the understanding and appreciation of the Lament Psalms, inspiring others as you have inspired me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The book of Psalms plays an important role in the individual devotional, corporate worship, fellowship, and the spiritual formation of the church. The Psalms are divided into five sections that are called books. The psalter is varied and has different types known as genres. One of the genres is the lament Psalms, and it constitutes a large part of the book of Psalms. In order to understand and benefit from the Psalms, there is a need to interpret the Psalms correctly. One of the literary¹ devices of interpreting the Hebrew poetry are the rhetoric questions. Jayme R Nelson has made a study on the Generic and Theological Significance of ‘Why?’ and ‘How long?’ in the Psalms of complaint.² His main focus was on the interrogatives especially, ‘Why’ and ‘How long?’ questions. He goes on to discuss the rhetorical questions in the Psalms as part of the ‘Why and ‘How long’ questions. The point of emphasis on the Psalms of Complaint was that the questions Why and How long do not appear together on the same Psalm. The concept of the function of the rhetorical questions from a parallelism point of view was not addressed.

¹Ernst R. Wendland, *Analyzing the Psalms: With Exercises for Bible Students and Translators*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX : Winona Lake, IN: SIL International ; Distributed by Eisenbrauns, Inc, 2002), 61. Examples of literary devices are repetition, figurative language, word order and rhetorical questions.

²Jayme R. Nelson. *The Generic and Theological Significance of ‘Why and ‘How long?’ in the Psalms of Complaint*, (Trinity Western University Langley, British Columbia, 2003). This book has been dedicated to the analysis of why and how long in the Psalms of complaint.

A study on the Why? In Biblical Hebrew was also carried out by James Barr.³ His focus was on the two Hebrew words for why namely, למה and מדוע. He established that למה is used when there is no answer expected, while מדוע for information-the last part of the sentence is not clear. He also established that is not used מדוע in the Psalms-wrong placement of the Hebrew word. This alludes to the fact that rhetorical questions do not need an answer⁴, but he did not apply this concept and its functions to the Lament Psalms.

Moshavi has studied the Implications and Communicative Functions of Rhetorical “WH” Questions in classical biblical Hebrew Prose.⁵ He has asserted that rhetorical questions occur in a variety of contexts and that they express an assertion. He also delved into whether rhetorical questions always had an intensifying effect or, at times, a softening effect. However, his focus was on prose and not on poetry.

Classical Greek Scholarship on Rhetorical Questions

Classical Greek scholars, particularly those in the field of rhetoric, have discussed the use and effectiveness of rhetorical questions. Some key points include: Aristotle’s views. In his work "Rhetoric,"⁶ Aristotle discussed rhetorical questions to

³James Barr, “Why? in Biblical Hebrew,” *J Theol Studies* 36.1 (1985): 1–33, accessed 6 May 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/36.1.1>.

⁴Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 322. The purpose is to give information with passion and not to gain information.

⁵Adina Moshavi, “What Can I Say? Implications and Communicative Functions of Rhetorical ‘WH’ Questions in Classical Biblical Hebrew Prose,” *Vetus Testam* 64.1 (2014): 93–108, accessed 6 May 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-12301139>.

⁶ Cope, E. M., & Sandys, J. E. (Eds.). *Aristotle: rhetoric* (Vol. 2). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

engage the audience and emphasize an argument. He noted that rhetorical questions can effectively involve the audience and make them more receptive to the argument.

Quintilian, a prominent Roman rhetorician deeply influenced by the traditions of Greek rhetoric, extensively explored the use of rhetorical questions in his works.⁷ He highlighted their unique ability to enhance a speech's variety and overall interest. By posing these questions, speakers can effectively engage their audience, prompting them to think critically and reflect on the topic at hand. Quintilian argued that rhetorical questions serve not only as a stylistic device but also as a means to stimulate dialogue and thought, inviting listeners to consider different perspectives and encouraging active participation in the discourse. This interplay of engagement and intellectual challenge underscores the importance of rhetorical questions as a powerful tool in rhetoric and persuasion.

Functions of Rhetorical Questions

Classical scholars recognized that rhetorical questions can serve various functions, including engaging the audience and encouraging them to participate and think critically about the argument. They can add emphasis, draw attention to a particular point or idea, and create irony or humor by conveying emotional tones. Classical scholars emphasized the importance of using rhetorical questions effectively, considering factors such as context: the context in which the rhetorical question is used can significantly impact its effectiveness; audience: understanding the audience and tailoring rhetorical questions to their needs and expectations; and purpose: using rhetorical questions in a way that supports the overall purpose and argument of the text. By understanding the classical views on rhetorical questions, we can gain

⁷Adkin, N. "The Ninth Book of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* and Jerome," *Arctos-Acta Philologica Fennica* 32 (1998): 13-25.

insights into effectively using this literary device in various contexts, including biblical texts.

Statement of the Problem

Some studies have been carried out on the use of rhetorical questions in the Old Testament, including the Psalms. Scholars who have carried out these studies include Westermann, Bergen, Moshavi, Barr and Nida. Additionally, works by Robert Alter and Walter Brueggemann have explored the literary techniques in the Psalms, emphasizing the potency of rhetorical questioning. The use of rhetorical questions as a tool in interpreting and understanding the Psalms is invaluable. However, scholars do not emphasize this aspect

This lack of emphasis on the rhetorical questions gives rise to the following: How do rhetorical questions function in Lament Psalms, and what are the key literary and theological themes associated with these questions? How do the rhetorical questions in the lament Psalms relate to other literary and rhetorical devices in Psalms, such as parallelism, imagery, and metaphor? What are the theological implications of using rhetorical questions in the Lament Psalms, and how do these implications relate to broader theological themes in the Bible?

Purpose of the study

This study focused on rhetorical questions as literary devices in studying and interpreting the lament Psalms. The relationship between the rhetorical questions and other literary devices were shown. The important use of the rhetorical questions in Lament Psalms and its implications on the broader theological themes were emphasized.

Significance of the study

The study will help to add one of the ways of interpreting the Psalms, especially the Lament Psalms. The study will address the literary gap in the interpretation of the Psalms, especially the role played by rhetorical questions in the lament Psalms. The study will show the interconnectedness of the literary structure, genre, the rhetorical devices in lament Psalms and hence help to come up with some comprehensive interpretation and analysis of lament Psalms.

Methodology

The study employed a structured analysis of selected Psalms, focusing on four main areas: Textual Analysis, which involved close reading to identify rhetorical questions and literary devices. Contextual Examination: Investigating the historical and cultural contexts influencing the Psalms and their intended audience. Comparative Analysis: Comparing the rhetorical strategies in the Psalms to understand their collective emotional and theological impact. Theological Reflection: Interpreting how rhetorical questions relate to themes such as suffering, divine absence, and hope, bridging ancient texts with modern faith experiences.

Chapter One dealt with the preliminary aspects of the study. Chapter 2 evaluated what other scholars have written about rhetorical questions. The chapter evaluated what the grammarians have said about rhetorical questions and their function. Chapter 3 dealt with the exegesis of the individual lament Psalms 42 and 88, using different literary devices emphasizing rhetorical questions. Chapter 4 applied the different literary devices to the communal Lament Psalms, Psalms 44 and 94. Chapter 5 will be the summary, conclusion, and recommendations.

Delimitation of the Study

The Lament Psalms range between sixty-five and sixty-seven depending upon the groupings by various scholars. These laments also fall into two groups: the Individual and communal laments. This study dealt with four Lament Psalms. Two were individual laments, Psalms 42 and 88. The other two were Psalms 44 and 94, which were communal laments. These four psalms were chosen because they had a higher concentration of rhetorical questions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Views on Rhetorical Questions in the Lament Psalms

Introduction

The lament psalms constitute an important poetic genre within the Hebrew Psalter that gives a profound voice to human pain, doubt, protest, and distress cried out to God. As observed by scholars such as Westermann, Brueggemann, and Longman, the lament psalms contain diverse sub-types yet are unified through their expression of suffering and disorientation directed insistently toward God through complaint, petition, and votive statement.

A striking literary feature found extensively in many lament psalms is their use of rhetorical questions as a critical thematic and theological device to vividly convey the psalmist's inner world of confusion, betrayal, and loss during times of crisis. As defined by rhetorical scholars, including Watson and Hauser¹, a rhetorical question is posed not to gain information but to make an emphatic declaration. In lament psalms, rhetorical questions serve multifaceted purposes, from voicing raw human distress to upholding a relationship with God amidst the lack of definitive answers.

This literature review provides an in-depth examination of perspectives emerging from focused scholarly analysis on the literary artistry, psychological relevance, social impact, and theological significance of rhetorical questions within

¹Watson and Hauser, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

lament psalms. Attention is given to investigating how rhetorical questions add emotive intensity, subtly voice protest, recreate communal solidarity, kindle profound theological reflection, and model authentically relating to God amidst unresolved suffering.

The discussion centers on scholarly insights gained through close readings of Psalms 42, 44, 88, and 94, which are representative examples of diverse types of lament psalms that employ rhetorical questioning in illuminating ways. Particular attention will be given to perspectives from the scholars Bergen, Nida, Watson, Rensburg, Barr, Nelson, and Moshavi regarding the multilayered biblical, theological, and spiritual dimensions of meaning contained within lament literature's unceasing rhetorical cries to God.

Bergen's Perspective: Unrestrained Voice for Raw Human Emotion

Bergen's analysis provides an illuminating perspective on the literary artistry and theological significance of rhetorical questions in voicing unrestrained human emotional distress within lament psalms.² Against more cognitive approaches to prayer, Bergen emphasizes how strings of rhetorical questions enable vivid expression of inner grief, confusion, longing, and protest through giving raw, unfiltered voice to the depths of human suffering brought insistently before God.

In examining the lament psalms, Bergen gives particular attention to Psalm 44, noting the series of anguished rhetorical questions in verses 23-26. Here, the distraught psalmist cries out, "Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself!...Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love." Regarding this passage, Bergen

² R.D. Bergen, *Lament and Rhetorical Questions in the Psalms*, in R.J. Allen (Ed.), *Shaping the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2021), 90-230.

offers an insightful literary analysis of how the rapid succession of rhetorical questions provides “an outpouring of raw human emotion that cannot be conveyed through mere statements.” The insistent questioning vividly depicts the psalmist’s inner turmoil, incomprehension, anger, and longing for God to be present and intervene in delivering justice.

Bergen compellingly argues that the succession of rhetorical cries lays emotional nuances in a way direct statements could not achieve. The initial accusatory questions vent rage and protest over God’s apparent absence and disinterest. The abrupt transition to imperative cries for help conveys the psalmist’s desperate longing alongside the protest. Finally, invoking God’s covenant loyalty and request for redemption suggests persevering trust rooted in their shared history despite their feeling of estrangement.

Furthermore, Bergen proposes that such authentic expression of distress fulfills a central purpose of biblical lament – providing the means to bring human pain and brokenness into an unfiltered encounter with God. The depth of anguish conveyed through quick rhetorical questioning reflects a commitment to candor in voicing the full spectrum of human experience before the divine. Bergen writes, “Rhetorical questions in Psalms give full-throated voice to suffering, offering protest while also seeking presence.”³ He argues rhetorical questions function as “the passionate heart-cry of a spirituality that refuses to mute or minimize pain in relating to God.”

Bergen’s perspective has strengths and weaknesses. Among his strengths are emotive artistry, theological insight, and literary analysis. He effectively underscores the emotional depth of the lament psalms by utilizing rhetorical questions. His

³Bergen, 215.

examination reveals how these questions articulate profound human emotion, enhancing readers' comprehension of the psalmists' inner turmoil.

By framing rhetorical questions as expressions of distress during a direct encounter with God, Bergen offers a theological outlook emphasizing the significance of suffering within faith. His focus on the literary structure of these questions provides an engaging exploration of how form shapes the emotional and spiritual experience of the text. This perspective has a notable weakness: Bergen's approach may focus primarily on emotional expression, potentially overlooking other factors, such as the larger communal context or historical background, that can shape the interpretation of lament psalms. Viewing rhetorical questions solely as expressions of inner turmoil could be considered subjective, lacking a more nuanced appreciation of their broader rhetorical function.

Overall, Bergen provides a vital perspective on the profound capacity for rhetorical questions to enable emotive articulation of human struggle through unresolved cries directed heavenward. His exegetical insights reveal the literary artfulness and theological authenticity within the lament psalmists' tumultuous questioning of God amidst crisis.

Nida's Perspective: The Literary Force of Rhetorical Questions

Eugene Nida's linguistic study of biblical Hebrew rhetoric also illuminates the literary force and theological impact of rhetorical questioning within lament psalms. Applying insights from linguistic pragmatics, Nida analyzes how rhetorical questions function as an indirect speech act performing the illocutionary act of assertion or protest rather than overt interrogation. His examination of their underlying semantic meaning

and linguistic function provides perspective on their subtle rhetorical artfulness and dialogical significance.

In exploring lament psalms, Nida focuses on rhetorical questions in Psalm 88:14: “O Lord, why do you reject me and hide your face from me?”. Nida proposes that, though framed interrogatively, the underlying linguistic function is to accuse and subtly protest God’s perceived abandonment and indifference to the psalmist’s painful plight. Yet the continued divine address sustains the relationship amidst the protest. Nida writes, “The interrogative mood shapes the psalmist’s cry as incomprehension rather than rebuke, subtly invoking divine presence through questioning absence.”⁴

Nida compellingly argues that such rhetorical questioning “provides a more artful way of making an emotive appeal than a direct statement of accusation would achieve.”⁵ The interrogative structure frames the complaint as a cry of anguished longing for renewed divine presence and intervention. This allows raw honesty while upholding a relationship with God at a linguistic level. Nida asserts, “Lament psalmists masterfully intertwine form with function to craft profound cries of the soul.”⁶

Nida’s analysis incorporates insights from linguistic pragmatics, enriching the understanding of rhetorical questions beyond emotional expression to their pragmatic effects in communication. He emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the psalmist and God, showing how rhetorical questions can sustain dialogue even in moments of protest, adding complexity to the emotional landscape of lament. By noting the artfulness of rhetorical questions, Nida captures the sophisticated manner in

⁴ E. Nida, *Rhetorical Questions, Lament Psalms, and Implications for Translation*, in T. Wilt (Ed), *Bible translation: Frames of Reference*, (London, Routledge), 105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

which the psalmists express their struggles, maintaining a balance between vulnerability and relational fidelity.

This view's weakness is that it may make the analysis less accessible to readers unfamiliar with concepts from linguistic pragmatics, potentially alienating a more general audience. While Nida values the structure of questions, this could risk underappreciating the immediate emotional impact that a more straightforward analysis of the text might reveal.

Overall, Nida provides an invaluable linguistic perspective on the literary nuance and religious meaning encoded in the lament of the psalmists' unresolved divine interrogation. His analysis enriches our understanding of the subtle sophistication of biblical prayer language, voicing struggle through creative rhetorical questioning.

Watson's Perspective: Joining Lament and Hope through Paradox

Watson contributes a vital literary analysis of lament psalms' rhetorical questions, proposing they contain a paradoxical juxtaposition of despair and hope. Through close reading of Psalm 44, Watson reveals the literary nuance and theological authenticity of voicing protest while upholding trust amidst unresolved suffering. Rather than an artificial resolution, he spotlights creative tension.

Specifically, Watson examines Psalm 44:23-24, focusing on rhetorical questions: "Awake Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself!...help us, redeem us because of your unfailing love." He compellingly argues these urgent cries articulate protest over God's apparent absence, yet the appeal to God's loyal love anchors persevering trust in God's faithfulness despite current estrangement. Watson writes,

“within the questioning rests flickers of faith - subtly refusing to relinquish the covenant relation, even while lamenting distance.”⁷

According to Watson, this literary joining of despair and hope captures the crucible of faith inherent in seasons of lament. Through paradoxical questioning, the psalmists give unrestrained voices to doubt, betrayal, and rage yet still reach out in cries for God’s redemptive presence. Watson proposes that it is through this unresolved dialectic that biblical lament accomplishes its dialogical aim of moving from confusion to hope. He writes, “The psalmists’ questioning expresses protest yet also seeks presence, refusing to detach from God amidst the void of answers.”⁸

The view has the following strengths: The interplay between despair and hope offers a nuanced view that reflects the complexities of human emotion in the context of faith, enriching the conversation around lament psalms. His close reading of specific psalms provides fresh insights into how language expresses layered emotions, fostering a deeper literary appreciation. By focusing on the theme of paradox, Watson ties together various emotional responses, thus providing a holistic view of the human experience in the context of lament.

The view’s weaknesses include the possibility of overlooking the cultural and historical backgrounds that significantly shape these psalms and their messages. At the same time, while highlighting despair and hope, it may oversimplify the range of emotions in lament psalms, as many emotions might coexist or manifest in more complex and less dichotomous ways.

⁷ W. G.E Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, (T&T Clark, London,), 92.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

Overall, Watson provides an illuminating literary perspective on the profound complexity of the lament psalmists' unanswered cries of anguish and longing before God. His analysis reveals rhetorical questioning as an artful means of voicing human struggle by intertwining bold lament with invocations of divine faithfulness.

Rensburg's Perspective: Articulating Communal Protest and Pain

Rensburg offers a vital theological analysis of how rhetorical questions in lament psalms voice communal cries of pain, doubt, and protest directed toward God. Focusing on Psalm 94, Rensburg examines how strings of rhetorical questions depict corporate trauma and longing for liberation, engagement with God marked by determined covenantal hope amidst unresolved suffering.

Rensburg focuses on Psalm 94:3-4, noting the insistent rhetorical questions - "How long, O Lord, will the wicked, how long will the wicked exult?" He compellingly argues that this emphatic questioning articulates the anguished cry of an oppressed community, serving to voice collective trauma and desperation for God's saving intervention and justice. The repetition of "how long" conveys intense emotion and urgency in crying out over the seeming triumph of evildoers.

However, Rensburg also elucidates how this functions as a prayerful protest rooted in an intimate relationship with God. He writes, "despite the intensity of accusation over divine inaction, the divine address and cries for help persist. Trust in God's ultimate faithfulness endures within the questioning."⁹ Rensburg proposes that rhetorical questions enable covenantal protest, as cries for justice uphold belief in God's solidarity with those who suffer.

⁹ J.J. Rensburg, "Lament Psalm and Ritual," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 39 (2018): 1-9, 105.

For Rensburg, such rhetorical questioning depicts biblical lament as a process of waiting within unresolved divine dialogue marked by pain yet also partnership. He writes, “through questioning cries, suffering is brought to God, honoring divine agency by refusing passive resignation while awaiting liberating grace.”¹⁰ Here, Rensburg spotlights determined hope as enacted through communal rhetorical cries.

Overall, Rensburg provides a significant perspective on the social, psychological, and theological complexity of the communal rhetorical questioning in lament psalms of protest. His analysis enriches understanding of biblical prayer amidst collective trauma.-You did not highlight the limitation of this source vis-à-vis the gap your study seeks to fill.

Barr's Perspective: Fostering Communal Solidarity through Rhetorical Questioning

Barr James’s literary examination of lament psalms provides an illuminating perspective on how rhetorical questioning fosters communal solidarity amidst suffering. Through analysis of Psalm 42’s questioning refrain, Barr reveals how unresolved rhetorical cries invite shared experience, creating theological and psychological community by eliciting identification with struggle.

Specifically, Barr focuses on Psalm 42:5,11’s threefold refrain - “Why are you cast down, O my soul...Why are you disquieted within me?” She insightfully proposes that this rhetorical cry invites not just individual but corporate lament, as the worshipping congregation is drawn into resonating with the psalmist’s experience of

¹⁰ Ibid., 215.

spiritual anguish. Barr writes, “through the repetition of unanswered questioning, the psalmist's pain becomes the community's participation.”¹¹

According to Barr, by leaving the question unresolved, the text compellingly invites readers to identify intellectually and affectively with the unfinalized narrative. The insistence of the questioning refrain performs a determined reaching out to reconstitute communal bonds amidst shared suffering. Barr states, “in the void of answers, the insistent cry forges connection and upholds covenantal kinship.”¹² Here, rhetorical questioning accomplishes a profound social function.

Overall, Barr provides illuminating literary and theological perspectives on the dialogical significance of rhetorical questions in engaging communal paths through suffering. Her analysis reveals how unfinalized biblical cries craft solidarity and hope by drawing readers into shared divine interrogation about the meaning of pain.- Again, you did not highlight the limitations of this source vis-à-vis the gap your study seeks to fill.

Nelson's Perspective: Kindling Theological Reflection Amidst Suffering

Nelson's scholarly work offers a vital perspective on how rhetorical questions in lament psalms stimulate rich theological reflection amidst seasons of pain, doubt, and seeming divine absence. By studying Psalm 42, Nelson examines how insistent questioning models tenacious faith-seeking understanding by bringing unresolved struggle openly before God.

¹¹ J. Barr, *The Function of Rhetorical Questions in the Lament Psalms*, *Journal of Biblical literature*, 141 (1) 89-110, 92.

¹² *Ibid.*, 215.

Specifically, Nelson focuses on Psalm 42:5, 11's refrain: "why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?" He compellingly argues that this introspective rhetorical questioning ignites internal debate regarding holding despair alongside persevering trust and hope in God's redemption. Finding no definitive answers, the questioning process enacts determined reaching to align the soul with defiant faith. Nelson writes, "the psalmist's insistence on interrogating pain provokes fresh perspective and choice to hope despite circumstances."¹³

According to Nelson, this depicts an authentic process of gaining wisdom within suffering rather than a superficial resolution. He states, "the psalmist's faithful questioning provides a paradigm for enlivening theological reflection through bringing doubt and protest to God."¹⁴ For Nelson, biblical lament models integrally related pain and spiritual growth through perseverant rhetorical questioning of God, even amidst silence.

Overall, Nelson provides an illuminating interdisciplinary perspective on the significance of lament psalmists' unceasing divine interrogation as a catalyst for gaining psychological, theological, and spiritual insight even in seasons of profound struggle. His analysis enriches the understanding of biblical prayer as a deep wellspring of determined meaning-making amidst the unknown. – No knowledge gap established

Moshavi's Perspective: Relating to God through Honest Struggle

Moshavi Adina's theological study provides a vital perspective on how rhetorical questions in lament psalms enable profound relationships with God through seasons of doubt, protest, and unresolved pain. Through a comprehensive analysis of

¹³ R. Nelson, *Reflections in the Dust: Suffering, Lament and Hope in the Psalms*, (Fortress Press, 2020), 105.

¹⁴ Nelson, 215.

Psalm 44, Moshavi examines insistent rhetorical questioning directed to God as modeling deep covenantal intimacy amidst crisis by tenaciously joining honesty and love.

Specifically, Moshavi focuses on Psalm 44:23-24, studying the string of rhetorical cries - "awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?... Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love." He notes how these questions bring accusation and complaint, yet the appeal to God's steadfast love maintains trust in God's redemption. Moshavi proposes this paradox "depicts a spirituality willing to voice protest while also refusing to relinquish hope in God's compassionate presence."¹⁵ Raw honesty is integrated with covenantal care.

According to Moshavi, such rhetorical questioning reveals a model of mature biblical faith as "a tenacious struggle to relate to God through insistence, complaint, doubt and love all held unresolved together in bold dialogue."¹⁶ Lament psalms resist artificial theodicies, instead upholding intimacy with God through freely voicing the full range of human experience, including the depths of questioning. Moshavi argues rhetorical questioning forges profound relationships through undefended honesty.

Moshavi's prose-oriented analysis offers a distinctive perspective for examining lament psalms, particularly by emphasizing the narrative and structural components of the text. By adopting this prose-centered approach, Moshavi shifts the focus from traditional poetic analysis—which often centers on meter and parallelism—to a narrative-driven interpretation that aims to uncover the development of themes and emotions within the psalms.

¹⁵ A. Moshavi, *Why Do you Hide Your Face? Rhetorical Questions and Authentic Relationship with God in the Lament Psalms*, *Vetus Testamentum*, 71(2), 96-118, 105.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

One notable benefit of Moshavi's method is its ability to reveal the underlying story threaded through the lament psalms. By viewing these texts as narrative expressions of individual and collective distress, his approach can lead to a deeper comprehension of the emotional journey depicted in the laments—moving from despair to a cry for help, and potentially toward a flicker of hope. This focus on narrative enables an exploration of the evolving relationship between the psalmist and God, thereby enriching the overall interpretation of the text.

Nevertheless, while Moshavi's prose focus offers valuable insights, it may have limitations when applied to Hebrew poetry, particularly within the realm of lament psalms. Hebrew poetry is fundamentally linked to its poetic features, such as parallelism, imagery, and rhythm, which are vital for grasping the aesthetic and emotional layers of the text. Ignoring these elements for the sake of a prose focus could lessen appreciation for the artistry of the original Hebrew and the ways these stylistic choices enhance the overall message.

Additionally, Moshavi's approach might not adequately address lament psalms' communal and ritual aspects. These texts operate within a larger framework of worship and community identity, often serving purposes beyond personal expression. Consequently, an emphasis on narrative structure runs the risk of downplaying the communal significance and theological depth conveyed through the nuances of poetic forms.

In summary, while Moshavi's prose focus offers an intriguing lens for examining the emotional and narrative facets of lament psalms, its application to Hebrew poetry should be approached with care. It is crucial to balance the strengths of a narrative interpretation with an awareness of the poetic qualities of the text to achieve a well-rounded understanding of lament psalms in their original linguistic and cultural

context. By integrating both prose and poetic insights, one can attain a richer and more nuanced interpretation that respects the complexity of the laments as both literary and liturgical artifacts. Overall, Moshavi provides an illuminating theological perspective on the significance of rhetorical questioning in lament psalms for facilitating intimacy with God that transcends circumstance. His analysis offers resources for authentic spirituality amidst mystery, embracing determination deeper than resolution.

Synthesis of Perspectives on Key Functions of Rhetorical Questioning in Lament Psalms

The scholars examined provide a multi-layered perspective on the literary, social, psychological, and theological significance of rhetorical questioning in lament psalms for biblical spirituality amidst suffering. This section will offer a synthesis of major functions fulfilled by rhetorical questioning identified in scholarly works.

Unrestrained voice for Raw Human Emotion

Bergen, Nida, and others highlight how rhetorical questions vividly voice raw human emotion before God, which cannot be adequately conveyed through declarative statements. Through rapid, unresolved questioning, the psalmists express incomprehension, grief, rage, longing, and enduring trust in succession, creating a nuanced depiction of inner spiritual crises. Rhetorical questioning provides cathartic release while also conveying the complexity of emotions involved in seasons of lament.

Bergen's insightful exploration of the emotive power of rhetorical questions in the Lament Psalms highlights the raw and unfiltered expression of human emotional distress. He argues that these rhetorical inquiries function as profoundly effective literary devices, eloquently conveying the speaker's anguish and turmoil. This

unrestrained voice captures the profound depth of lament, allowing feelings of despair to resonate with striking clarity. Bergen posits that the intensity and multiplicity of these questions not only articulate sorrow but also foster an emotional dialogue with God, illuminating the intricate struggle between faith and despair.

In contrast, Nida's linguistic analysis shifts the focus to language's structural and functional dimensions. He investigates how rhetorical questions operate within the broader communication landscape, underscoring their role in shaping meaning and facilitating interaction between speaker and audience. Rooted in cognitive language processing, Nida suggests that these questions can provoke thought and reflection, effectively driving home the speaker's message.

The convergence of their interpretations is striking. Both scholars recognize rhetorical questions as indispensable elements of communication in the Psalms. They agree that these inquiries evoke responses, engaging the emotional and theological layers of the texts. Yet, their emphases diverge: Bergen prioritizes the emotive expression and lived experience of the individual, while Nida concentrates on the mechanics of language and its communicative functions.

By integrating these perspectives, we arrive at a rich and nuanced understanding of rhetorical questions in the Lament Psalms. This synthesis benefits from the emotive analysis championed by Bergen and the linguistic insights articulated by Nida, creating a compelling framework that enriches our examination of how rhetorical questions serve both as profound expressions of emotion and as effective tools within theological discourse.

Subtle Voice for Protest and Complaint

Scholars, including Watson, Rensburg, and Moshavi, highlight how rhetorical questions allow a subtle voice of protest over God's apparent absence or inaction

without overt rebellion against God. Through pained questioning, the psalmists accuse God yet still seek to summon God's redemptive presence and intervention. Rhetorical questioning provides a means of complaint that remains in a relationship.

Catalyst for Theological Reflection

Nelson emphasizes that rhetorical questioning as a catalyst for profound theological reflection amidst the problem of suffering and perceived divine hiddenness or injustice. Insisting through unresolved questioning models determined faith in seeking understanding by openly bringing doubt before God. Rhetorical cries reveal and ignite mental wrestling that engages wisdom.

Creating Communal Solidarity

Barr and Rensburg discuss how rhetorical questions invite communal participation, as individuals and groups identify with the psalmist's unfinalized cry. This establishes psychological and spiritual bonds through shared experience. Rhetorical questions turn private pain into participation in public lament.

Facilitating Honest Relationship with God

Finally, Moshavi, and Watson, propose rhetorical questioning facilitates profoundly honest intimacy with God. Through bold yet unresolved questioning, the psalmists voice doubt, pain, and protest while still reaching to God in covenantal hope. "This model represents a mature faith that does not seek to downplay the difficulties of life but instead emphasizes the importance of facing challenges head-on and pushing through them."

Maintaining Relationship Through Divine Dialogue

Scholars have identified a final essential function of rhetorical questions: maintaining a relationship with God through ongoing divine dialogue even amidst protest, pain, and doubt. Mandolfo¹⁷ examines how rhetorical cries voicing divine abandonment in Psalm 22 still contain subtle traces of divine presence through the use of intimate divine names like “my God.” This model demonstrates reaching out to God even from the depths of despair.

Similarly, Miller¹⁸ discusses how rhetorical questioning joins protest over perceived divine absence with subtle invocation of God’s presence and aid. Even amidst confusion and anger, intimacy with God is upheld through the insistence of questioning. For Miller, rhetorical cries reveal that even divine silence and distance cannot sever the covenant bond that allows the bold expression of complaint in conversation with God.

Barr emphasizes the communicative nature of rhetorical questions, suggesting they serve as a bridge between the human experience of lament and the divine response. He argues that these questions are expressive and invite dialogue with God, enhancing the dynamic relationship within the lament.

Bergen focuses on the emotive power of rhetorical questions, highlighting their role in voicing raw human emotion. He posits that such questions reflect unrestrained emotional distress, pushing against more cognitive or formal prayer interpretations. This view underscores the importance of emotional authenticity in lament.

¹⁷ C. Mandolfo. “God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament,” *JSOT*, 82 (2002): 101-120.

¹⁸ Miller, P. D. “Trouble and Woe: Interpreting the Biblical Laments,” *Interpretation*, 54 (2000): 32-45.

Nelson examines how rhetorical questions can articulate challenges to God's absence or perceived silence, framing these queries as actions that engage directly with the divine presence. His analysis suggests that rhetorical questions can confront, implore, and ultimately foster a deeper interaction with God, displaying the tension between despair and hope.

Nida analyzes the linguistic and cultural context in which these rhetorical questions arise, highlighting how their form and function differ across various texts. His insights emphasize the need to consider language implications, suggesting that understanding the Hebrew nuances can reveal deeper layers of meaning and intention behind these questions.

Moshavi focuses on the literary dimensions, connecting the rhetorical questions to broader poetic structures such as parallelism and metaphor. His analysis suggests that these questions are not standalone elements but interact with other literary devices to enhance the Psalms' overall emotional and theological depth.

Collective Contribution to Understanding

When synthesized, these perspectives collectively illustrate that rhetorical questions in lament psalms serve multiple functions: They express deep emotional turmoil, challenge divine presence, engage in theological discourse, and enhance the poetic structure of the texts. Together, they reveal a complex interplay in which lament is not just a moment of despair but also a space for dialogue, confrontation, and, ultimately, the search for understanding and reconciliation with God.

Gaps in Current Scholarship

Despite the richness of these insights, gaps remain in the current scholarship on rhetorical questions in lament psalms:

Literary Interaction. More comprehensive studies are needed to examine how rhetorical questions interact with other literary devices, beyond parallelism, in various psalms. Understanding these interactions can further illuminate the emotional and theological dimensions of the texts.

Cultural Context. While Nida touches on linguistic aspects, there is potential for deeper exploration of how different cultural and historical contexts inform the interpretation of rhetorical questions in the lament psalms.

Comparative Analysis. Future research could benefit from a more systematic comparative analysis between different lament psalms. This would allow scholars to identify unique patterns and thematic developments in the use of rhetorical questions.

Empirical Studies Integrating empirical studies- focusing on contemporary interpretations and using rhetorical questions in prayer or lament could provide fresh perspectives on their relevance and impact in modern contexts.

Overall, the theme emerges that rhetorical questions, though unanswered, create liminal space for encounters with God. Through pained questioning, the divine-human relationship is deepened rather than damaged. Rhetorical cries reveal the persistence of faith and love amidst ephemeral seasons of doubt, despair, injustice, and trauma.

Conclusion

This literature review has considered critical perspectives that enrich our understanding of rhetorical questions' multi-layered biblical, theological, and spiritual significance as a central literary device in the lament psalms.

According to synthetic analysis, rhetorical questioning serves several important functions, such as providing a raw and authentic voice for human emotional complexity, acting as a subtle voice for complaint and protest, facilitating the gaining of wisdom

amidst unknowing, creating solidarity through shared struggle, and modelling an honest relationship with God.

In summary, the insights of Bergen, Nida, Watson, Rensburg, Barr, Nelson, and Moshavi, provide illuminating perspectives on the profound way lament psalms employ unresolved rhetorical questioning directed to God to give unrestrained voice to human pain, enact communal solidarity, kindle deep theological reflection and maintain intimate covenantal bonds even while crying out from the depths.

The perspectives of Barr, Bergen, Nelson, Nida, and Moshavi contribute significantly to our understanding of rhetorical questions in lament psalms, each providing unique insights that together create a multifaceted view of how these questions function within this literary tradition.

In conclusion, while significant insights have been gleaned from the existing scholarship, exploring these gaps presents valuable avenues for future research that can further enhance our understanding of the role of rhetorical questions in lament psalms.

This review elucidates how bold rhetorical interrogation of God provides a central means through which biblical lament accomplishes its paradoxical work of articulating and engendering hope from the wellspring of human anguish. From the persistence of questioning comes a deepened, unresolved, yet unquenchable thirst for divine presence. Rhetorical cries give song to the soul's longing for God amidst all seasons of life. The literature revealed rhetorical questions as the heartbeat of vibrant determination that refuses detachment from God, from one another, or from uncompromised honesty expressed through ongoing conversation with the divine - even and especially when answers fail.

CHAPTER 3
ANALYZING THE ROLE OF RHETORICAL QUESTIONS
IN PSALMS 42 AND 88

Psalm 42

The Psalms are part of the Bible and have long captivated their readers with their profound emotional resonance and intricate literary beauty. Among their most compelling features are the rhetorical questions that punctuate these sacred texts, drawing readers into deep, reflective engagement with the themes found in Psalm 42. Psalm 42 is often considered as a single psalm with Psalm 43. Wendland argues that Psalms 42 and 43 are parallel Psalms.¹ Broyles further posits that the two were originally one psalm.² His arguments are based on the fact that Psalm 42 is incomplete alone as it does not meet all the characteristics of the lament genre. Longman is in agreement with Broyles on this point.³ The arguments of the quoted scholars and many more seem to strongly support the argument of treating the two psalms as one. Rephrase this sentence. Some argue that Psalm 43 has no superscription, a common feature in Book 2 of the Psalter. The repeated refrain also shows that the two are one, and the refrain further helps to break the psalm into clear sections. For the purposes of this study, the two psalms will be treated as one psalm hereafter. This is due to their thematic and stylistic similarities. This psalm provides a rich ground for exploring the

¹ Ernst R. Wendland, *Analyzing the Psalms: With Exercises for Bible Students and Translators*, Second edition (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2002), 23.

² Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 203.

³ David G. Firth (ed). *Psalms an Introduction and Commentary* (Tremper Longman III, Tremper, Volumes 15-16. Intervarsity Press, Illinois), 263.

role of rhetorical questions. These questions are not mere literary devices; they serve as windows into the soul's deepest yearnings, uncertainties, and expressions of trust in the divine amidst turmoil.

This analysis seeks to unravel the layers of meaning encoded in the rhetorical questions of Psalm 42. By examining these questions in their literary and historical contexts, we can gain insights into how they amplify the psalm's themes. The recurring refrain, "why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you restless in me?" serves as a chorus of spiritual introspection and resilience, encapsulating the psalmist's fluctuating emotions and steadfast hope. The refrain serves as the climax for each stanza.⁴ The refrain may also mark a new thought or turning point in the psalm.⁵ Through this lens, the study will explore how rhetorical questions in these psalms not only articulate the human condition but also foster a dialogic relationship between the human and divine, inviting readers throughout all time to find their own voices within these ancient songs.

Literary Context of the Psalm

Psalm 42 is at the beginning of book two of the Psalter. It belongs to the individual lament genre, as community laments exist. Broyles, quoted in Estes, submits that individual psalms of lament resulted from various situations like sickness, accusation, loneliness, persecution, fear, and many more. Psalm 42 comes from the loneliness motif in verses one and two. Ross further alludes to this point as he argues that the author is not in Jerusalem, even though the reasons for not being in

⁴ Paul Raabe, "Psalm Structures: A Study of Psalms With Refrains," *JSOT Supplement* (1989): 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 183-191.

Jerusalem are not clear.⁶ Book two of the Psalms has been called the lament book as it has twenty laments out of thirty-one Psalms.

Authorship

The psalm was written by the sons of Korah. The book has the name Elohim 200 times compared to Yahweh, who appears 44 times.⁷ The psalm also has maskil in its title. This has a two-fold implication, according to Webster and Beach.⁸ The authors postulate that maskil refers either to performance or to contemplation. The psalmist is expressing his emotions by being away from the temple where he would meet with God.

Scholars agree that the psalm belongs to the sons of Korah. The Korahites were appointed as the temple singers and gatekeepers by David and eventually by Solomon. They belonged to the Levite clan according to Numbers 26:58. The author of the psalm is not specified. However, the text in verse 5 suggests that the author was a leader who had led other worshippers to the temple. The language in the text suggests that the author was one of the sons of Korah. Goulder says that the Korah psalms can be identified by their vocabulary and general and public content.⁹

⁶ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2011), 15.

⁷ Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 20* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, Dept. of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1982), 5.

⁸ Brian L Webster and David R Beach, *The Essential Bible Companion to the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan), 130.

⁹ Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, 7.

The exact historical context of the Psalm under study is not definitively known, but several clues within the text suggest that it was written during exile or separation from the Temple in Jerusalem.

Alter argues that the perspective of the term used in verse 6 when describing where the psalmist was at the time of writing remains singular and, therefore, cannot refer to the Babylonian exile.¹⁰ Some scholars put the date of the authorship as exilic or post-exilic. On the other hand, some scholars like Ross argue for the pre-exilic or early exilic period.¹¹ Ross bases his arguments on the fact that the author still envisions going back to the temple. Since the temple had not been destroyed, this could have been before the exile or before the Babylonians completely destroyed the temple.

The Structure of Psalm 42

The structure of psalms 42 highlights the spiritual journey from longing and desire through questioning and lament, to reaffirmation of hope and trust in God. This progression mirrors the spiritual experiences of believers, making the psalm to resonate deeply with many readers.

Psalm 42: 1-4 Lament

Psalm 42: 5 Refrain

Psalm 42: 6-10 Lament

Psalm 42:11 Refrain

Psalm 43:1-4 Prayer

¹⁰ “Alter, Robert - *The Book of Psalms: A Translation With Commentary* (W. W. Norton, 2007), 209.

¹¹ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 16.

Psalm 43:5 Refrain¹²

1. Expression of longing for God: Psalm 42: 1-2

The psalm begins with the iconic imagery of a deer panting for water brooks, symbolizing the psalmist's deep thirst and longing for God. This metaphor sets the tone for the entire composition, emphasizing spiritual desire and need.

2. Feeling of deep despair and remembrance: Psalm 42: 3-5

The psalmist describes tears as the daily food, accompanied by taunts from others asking, "Where is your God?" This leads to a reflection on times of past joy and worship, contrasting the current state of despair and the remembered joy of communion with God. Where is your God? is a rhetorical question, from unbelievers, meaning your God does not exist and will not deliver you--it is foolish to believe.¹³

This assertion includes the idea of absenteeism and its importance. To a Christian, this question allows deeper reflection and understanding of God.

The verses are structured around three questions in verses 2, 3, and 5. The first question refers to the "I" coming to God, while the second suggests that God is absent in relation to the "I." Verse 5 addresses the soul and is connected to these themes, with "waiting for God" indicating God's arrival, while the motifs of praise relate to the situation in verse 2b.¹⁴

3. Lament and questioning: Psalm 42:6-11

This section is characterized by a mix of lamentation and questioning God's absence in the midst of trouble. The rhetorical question, "Why are you cast

¹² Peter, C, Craigie, Marvin, E, Tate, *Psalms 1 – 50*, Word Biblical Commentary, 19, second edition. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2004), 325.

¹³ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011), 19.

¹⁴ Martin Ravndal Hauge, *Between Sheol and Temple: Motif Structure and Function in the I-Psalms*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 178 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 82.

down, o my soul?” highlights internal turmoil and the struggle to maintain hope.

4. Plea for God’s light and truth Psalm 43:1-4

Psalm 43 opens with a plea for vindication and deliverance from deceitful and unjust enemies. The psalmist prays for God’s light and truth to lead them, indicating trust in God’s guidance even in the midst of difficulty.

5. Reaffirmation of hope in God: Psalm 43:5

The composition concludes with a refrain that echoes the earlier parts of Psalm 42, reinforcing the theme of hope and trust in God. The repeated question, “Why are you cast down, o my soul?” is paired with the resolve to hope in God, affirming faith in the Lord’s salvation and the expectation of praise. As Bullock posits, the refrain gives a general emotional perspective to the psalm. The psalmist is depressed about being hindered from going to the temple.¹⁵ Routley further details that the refrain interrupts the lament with poignant effect.¹⁶ He points out that something happens to the psalm each time the refrain appears. For the first time, there is a lapse into grief; for the second time, there is a resolution to stand alone; and finally, there is submission and praise. Morris argues that the refrain, as it comes at the end of each stanza, gives an introspective challenge to both the psalmist and the modern reader and is the key message of the Psalter.¹⁷ The refrain plays an important role in the structure of the psalm.

¹⁵ C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction*, 2nd printing. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 55.

¹⁶ Erik Routley, *Exploring the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 85.

¹⁷ Henry M. Morris, *Treasures in the Psalms* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2000), 326.

Rhetorical Features and Themes of Psalm 42

This part of the work will start by discussing the themes of the psalm to show later how the rhetorical features of the psalm support the themes of the psalm and help enforce the understanding of the psalm. The themes of Psalm 42 are spiritual longing, despair and distress, history, hope and trust in God, faith, and loneliness. These themes are greatly enhanced by the rhetorical features found in the psalm.

The first two verses of the psalm express the theme of spiritual longing in the psalm. The imagery of the deer panting for water expounds the degree of longing that the psalmist has for God. The psalmist has an innate desire to have a close-range communion with God. Firth argues that the expression used in verses one and two does not reflect one who has a satisfying relationship with God and longs for its deepening but is an exasperation by one who feels abandoned by God.¹⁸ The hendiadys in verse two further compound the length of the psalmist. When the psalmist asks, “When can I come and see the face of God?”, the focal point is not come, but the focus is on seeing God. The psalmist eagerly longs for close fellowship with God in a worship experience. Come is intensifying the longing in this hendiadys. Come is expressing an ingressive mood. Alter further alludes to the fact that the imagery of the deer is arresting. He posits that the subject of the verb thirst means the throat, a powerful metaphor for thirsting.¹⁹

The theme of despair and distress is shown in Psalm 42:3. This theme is expounded by the imagery of tears that had become the psalmist’s food day and night. The tears had become like his sustenance, conveying a sense of continual mourning, distress, and spiritual hunger. The mocking questions represent the challenge to his

¹⁸ David Firth, 264.

¹⁹ Robert Alter, 35.

faith, and the feelings of abandonment and isolation are further compounded. This had been compounded by the people, most probably the psalmist's enemies, who were taunting him about the whereabouts of his God. This scenario brought sorrow to the psalmist and brought thoughts of despair and distress, feeling that he had been abandoned by God. Stafford propounds that by asking, "Where are you, God?" the enemies were assuring the psalmist that God had deserted him.²⁰

History is one of the themes of the psalm. The psalmist thinks of how God has been faithful to him in the past. The psalmist remembers the times when he had gone to the temple under the protection of God. He is reflecting on the fellowship he had enjoyed with other worshippers. This history might have given the psalmist hope for the future despite the desperate situation he found himself in. These thoughts had come from feeling abandoned and deserted by God. Craige asserts this point.²¹

Memory and reflection helped the psalmist to cope with the situation he was in.

The refrain in verses 5, 11, and 43 verse 5 reveals the theme of hope and trust in God. The refrain encapsulates how the psalmist built his hope and trust in God amidst his trials. The psalmist's rhetorical questions helped him overcome his despair and put his hope in God. The refrain acts as a rhetorical anchor, tying the psalmist's immediate pleas and laments to a steadfast trust in God. The inner struggle that emanated from the situation and the hope in God led the psalmist to rekindle his hope and trust in God.²²

²⁰ J. Stafford Wright *Psalms, a Guide Psalm by Psalm*. White Tree Publishing, 2017, 90.

²¹ Peter C. Craige, Marvin Tate. 875.

²² Walter, Breggemann, William, H, Berllinger, JR. *Psalms New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 205.

The psalm also highlights the theme of faith. Faith does not entail smoothness and tranquillity every time. Faith involves struggling with doubt and despair, which leads to a deeper trust and hope in God. Faith is built by longing, questions, and trials. Loneliness is seen in the psalmist's longing to be with God. The loneliness that the psalmist has experienced leads to the panting for God. Loneliness is also expressed when the psalmist reflects and longs for the time he had fellowship with fellow pilgrims in Jerusalem. The inner struggle comes from the separation that the psalmist finds himself in.

Rhetorical features play an important role in highlighting themes that have been discussed. This section will discuss the role played by rhetorical features to show the careful selection of these features by the author of the psalm. Rhetorical features add form and style to a writing. In Psalm 42, the following rhetorical features were observed: imagery, repetition, metaphors, rhetorical questions, parallelism, and contrast.

Imagery helps to enhance the themes and emotions and emphasize the psalm's message. The psalmist uses the imagery of deer and water to enhance the theme of longing for God. The psalmist uses the deer to show his intense desire to be in communion with God. The deer is known for its acute desire for thirst, especially when it needs water. The deer pants for water in times of drought.²³ As the deer is very vulnerable when it lacks water, the psalmist expresses his susceptibility to being away from God. The psalmist starts by describing his situation using a simile from nature to convey his spiritual thirst powerfully. He envisions a thirsty deer in a dry, barren land, using the image of the deer to emphasize the motif of water throughout

²³ Wilson. G.H. The NIV Application Commentary: *Psalms*- Volume 1, 2002.

the psalm.²⁴ Just as the deer finds refreshment when it gets water, the psalmist gets invigoration when he comes to God.

The water's imagery enhances the psalm's theme and expresses his emotional desire to be with God. Water symbolizes life and rehabilitation. Keel argues that just as the deer, parched with thirst in the dry summer, drag themselves with heavy heads and hanging tongues over the barren hills, even so, the suppliant of Ps 43: 2 - 3 longs for the having God²⁵. The psalmist longs for God's presence so that he can be rejuvenated and find life in the presence of God. The flowing streams are a reminder of the past experiences of God's faithfulness and presence. This also enhances the theme of history in the psalm.

Water imagery is also used to express emotional turmoil. This is found in verse seven. The deep roar of the waterfalls, the waves, and the breakers express the emotional disturbance that the psalmist was experiencing. Imagery expresses the author's emotions and connects with the modern reader's experience of longing for divine presence and guidance.

The imagery of light and truth is used as the guiding force. This metaphorical language elevates the appeal from a mere request for direction to a deeper yearning for enlightenment and divine truth in the midst of darkness and deception. This imagery reinforces the themes of guidance, enlightenment, and journey towards divine presence.

Repetition emphasizes the theme of the song or poem in Hebrew poetry. In the psalm under consideration, repetition is the form of the refrain. Schökel submits that

²⁴ "Psalms 1-50, Volume 19 (Peter C. Craigie Marvin Tate) 874.

²⁵ Othmar Keel and Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Winona Lake: Eisenbraun, 1997), 323.

the refrain gives a concentrated expression of the theme or situation or central emotion of the poem.²⁶ The refrain appears in verses 5 and 11 of chapter 42, and verse 5 of chapter 43. It emphasizes the theme of hope and trust in God. Broyles explains that the repetition found in 42:3b and 10b ties together sections one (42:1-5) and two (42:6-11). Additionally, the repetition found in 42:9 and 43:2 ties together sections two and three (43:1-5).²⁷ Repetitions serve to reinforce the psalmist's dominant concern, his soul's longing for his God²⁸.

Various literary devices draw the reader or hearer into the author's internal struggle as he moves from despair to hope. Metaphor is central to the way in which the psalms create and communicate meaning. Metaphors represent God and mankind, reflect on life situations and attitudes, and bring new ideas. God is referred to as the rock. Rhetorical questions enhance the theme of despair and hope in the psalm. They show the psalmist's inner struggle, and after the struggle, the psalmist moves from despair to hope.

Parallelism is used by the author to enhance his theme and to express his emotions. The types of parallelism in the psalm are synthetic parallelism, synonymous, and antithetical parallelism. In synthetic parallelism, the idea brought in the first line is built in the second line without contrasting or repeating it. In this psalm, that is, psalm 42, parallelism is used to build and deepen the longing for God's presence. The psalm starts with the intense desire of the psalmist, the emotional struggles that he goes through and ends with the hope and trust in God. Synthetic parallelism helps to build up this scenario.

²⁶ Luis Alonso schökel, *A manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Roma Ed. Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 192.

²⁷ Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 203.

²⁸ Paul Raabe, *Psalm Structures_ A Study of Psalms With Refrains* (JSOT Supplement) 46.

Synonymous parallelism is where two, three, or four lines express the same thought. This is seen in psalm 42:1; 42:5; 42:11 and 43:5

The psalm also has antithetical parallelism and chiasm. This is found in Psalm 43:2; the second line contrasts the first line.

A. You are my God, my stronghold.

B. Why have you rejected me?

B' Why must I go about mourning?

A' Oppressed by the enemy?²⁹

A and A' form antithetical parallelism. God as a stronghold is contrasted with the oppression by the enemy. B and B' form a synthetic parallelism, the first line gives the reason for the second line. The psalmist is mourning because God seems to have abandoned him.

Verse 1 introduces the simile of the deer panting after the water. Verse two expands and explains the metaphor introduced in verse one, developing the idea begun in the first verse. In verse seven, for example, the second part builds on the imagery and emotional depth of the first part and shows the intensity of being overwhelmed.

Contrast is seen in the psalm. There is a contrast between physical thirst and spiritual thirst. The psalmist's present state is contrasted with the memories of leading out in worship in Jerusalem. Water, both life-giving and life-threatening, is one of the ways the central contrast of the psalm is expressed.³⁰ The rhetorical questions highlight the psalmist's current distress, while the vivid imagery of approaching God's altar

²⁹ Evert Jan Hempenius. *Put your Hope in God*, Psalm 42 and 43. www.christianstudylibrary.org 2021, 9.

³⁰ Psalms 1-50, Volume 19 (Peter C. Craigie Marvin Tate) 326.

contrasts this with the anticipated joy and worship. Going to the altar in 43:4 is a contrast that amplifies the theme of spiritual longing with the transformative power of divine presence, emphasizing that the resolution to the psalmist's questions and turmoil lies in the worship and recognition of God's sovereignty. VanGemeren highlights the stark contrast between the old age and the new age during the period of exile, which proved immensely challenging for the godly.³¹

The Literary Context of the Rhetorical Questions

Before looking at the role played by the rhetorical questions in the Psalms, it is prudent to analyze their literary context. The rhetorical questions express the emotional state of the psalmist. They vividly express the psalmist's inner turmoil and questioning of his situation, enhancing the text's emotional intensity. The questions engage the readers of the psalm. They help to draw the readers into the psalmist's reflective and introspective journey. They appeal to the modern reader and keep the psalm as alive as it was during its writing. The rhetorical questions also serve as a structural device to frame the psalmist's dialogue with their own soul and with God and aid in making transitions from despair to hope. According to Nelson, the psalmist expresses his faith by asking difficult questions in verses 9 to 11. Despite going through challenging circumstances, the psalmist remembers that God is his protector, foundation, and rock, which gives him hope in Him.³²

The Role of Rhetorical Questions in the Psalm

Rhetorical questions effectively complement the literary and theological themes in Psalm 42, enhancing the depth of longing and yearning. These questions amplify

³¹ Willem VanGemeren, *Psalms: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Revised edition., The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008), 549.

³² Thomas Nelson, NKJV, Know the Word Study Bible, 875.

the psalmist's fervent desire, particularly in verse two, where the urgency to meet God is poignantly expressed through the inquiry, "Where can I go and meet?" This underscores the psalmist's intense longing and his sense of immediacy and necessity.

The emotional intensity conveyed by the psalmist is further illuminated through rhetorical questions. For instance, verse two's inquiry, "When can I go and meet God?" encapsulates deep craving, intense yearning, and profound desire. Additionally, verse five utilizes rhetorical questions to delineate the psalmist's feelings of sadness, sorrow, dejection, and despair stemming from estrangement from God. By verse nine, the questions poignantly express the psalmist's apprehension, anxiety, and eagerness. "I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

These rhetorical inquiries also encourage thoughtful reflection. Amidst distress, the psalmist's self-questioning leads to a contemplative retrospection, as seen in verse four, ultimately recognizing God's faithfulness. According to Lawson, the psalmist questions the reason for his despair and dissatisfaction, which is likely a rhetorical question implying no good reason.³³ Verses five and nine further illustrate how, upon reflection, the psalmist reaffirms his hope, trust, and faith in God, showing that these questions foster a deeper contemplation and spiritual insight. Moreover, rhetorical questions are crucial in elucidating the psalm's key literary and theological themes. Lament involves the intertwined efforts of expressing the deep anxiety and emotion of the psalmist as well as the effort to invoke the divine to

³³ William Lawson, *My Soul Thirsts For God: A Guide for the Interpretation of Selected Psalms*, Book II (42-72), 13.

respond with divine presence and help.³⁴ They vividly highlight themes such as spiritual thirst in verse two and feelings of abandonment and despair in verse nine, culminating in verse eleven's affirmation of faith, while hope and trust in God are reaffirmed. The rhetorical questions in verses 4 and 11 reinforce the present depth of his distress.³⁵

The Psalmist asks God directly in verse 9-what did he ask?. This direct question to God strengthens the force of the lament and intensifies the attempt to invoke God's presence. According to Amy C. Cottrill, using certain language indicates a sense of powerlessness and self-deprecation within society. By using such deferential language, the client is signalling their willingness to rely on the patron and to play the role of a client who is subject to their power and authority. Cottrill argues that in the case of laments, the continuous expression of need and inferior status represents an acceptance of dependence that reinforces God's power and obligation.³⁶

These questions are seamlessly integrated with other rhetorical devices, enriching the psalm's emotional and theological depth. They intersect with parallelism, imagery, metaphor, repetition, and contrast to enhance the expression of desire and despair. Notably, the rhetorical questions align with synonymous and antithetic parallelism within the psalm, balancing expressions of doubt and faith and augmenting the thematic resonance of longing and hope.

In concert with the psalm's imagery, rhetorical questions evoke vivid sensory experiences, deepening the emotional impact of the text. The metaphor of God as the

³⁴ Amy C. Cottrill, *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, SBL Symposium Series 43 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 103–12.

³⁵ *Psalms 1-50*, Volume 19 (Peter C. Craigie Marvin Tate) 877.

³⁶ Amy C. Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual* (Proquest Dissertations, 2006), 190.

source of the living water, underscored by rhetorical inquiries, invites reflection on the nature of spiritual thirst. This repetition of themes emphasized by rhetorical questions highlights the psalmist's steadfast faith in the face of adversity, while contrast sharpens the distinction between current distress and memories of joy, accentuating the psalmist's struggle with hope for redemption. According to Alter, a Leitwort is a word that is repeated in key places throughout a text. This repetition allows the reader to recall the earlier use of the word and consider the connection in light of the expanded context. Alter suggests that by paying attention to these repeated words, the meaning of the text becomes more striking and can be perceived more clearly.³⁷

Linguistic features of Rhetorical questions

"למה אתה שכחתי" ("Why have you forgotten me?"). The verb "שכחתי" is in the perfect tense, suggesting a completed action and a state of being forgotten that is deeply felt by the psalmist.

Lexical Choices. The terms used in the rhetorical questions often carry heavy emotional weight. For example, words that convey distress, despair, or longing are systematically employed. The use of "נפש" (nephesh) meaning "soul" depicts a deep, internal suffering.

Many rhetorical questions combine imperative elements which implicitly challenge God's absence or perceived neglect. For instance, the use of "אדוני" (Adonai) in conjunction with questions often amplifies the urgency of the plea.

"למה תרדוף אותי" ("Why do you pursue me?")

The verb "תרדוף" implies an aggressive pursuit, enhancing the feeling of vulnerability and fear of abandonment.

³⁷ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2nd ed (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 93.

The rhetorical structure also invites theological reflection; the questions often imply a search for the divine rationale behind suffering and abandonment.

By asking "למה" (Lamah), the psalmist reflects on the fundamental disjunction between belief in God's goodness and the reality of their suffering, highlighting the existential struggle intrinsic to faith.

Amplification of Rhetorical Questions. Repetition and Rhythm: The parallel structure creates a rhythmic quality that emphasizes the psalmist's emotional turmoil. When rhetorical questions are presented in similar grammatical constructions, they echo each other, increasing their impact. For example, phrases like "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me?" (Psalm 42:5) demonstrate this technique, where the repetition of "why" conveys a deep sense of desperation and self-reflection.

Emotional Climax. The strategic arrangement of parallel lines can lead to an emotional climax within the psalm. As rhetorical questions pile up, the intensity of the psalmist's lament rises, mirroring the escalating emotional distress. This allows the reader to experience the weight of sorrow that drives the psalmist to seek understanding and connection with God amidst despair.

Contrast and Tension. Parallelism also allows for the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, deepening the emotional tension in the psalm. For instance, the interplay between questions of despair and affirmations of hope can highlight the psalmist's internal conflict. As the psalmist oscillates between feelings of abandonment and a longing for divine presence, the parallel structures serve to intensify this struggle, portraying a vividly relatable human experience.

Contribution to Purpose and Composition

Thematic Cohesion. The use of parallel structures ties together different themes within the psalm, such as yearning, lament, and hope. By framing rhetorical questions within these structures, the psalmist reinforces the interconnectedness of emotional states, emphasizing that lament can coexist with faith and an anticipation of God's response.

Engagement of the Reader. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of the parallelism invites readers to engage more deeply with the text. This engagement is not merely intellectual; it allows readers to feel the psalmist's plea, making the lament more visceral. Readers are drawn into the experience of questioning and searching for divine assurance, reflecting their own struggles of faith.

Literary Unit. Parallel structures contribute to the overall literary artistry of Psalm 42, creating a sense of balance and symmetry. This careful construction not only heightens the rhetorical effectiveness of the questions but also emphasizes the psalmist's journey from despair to hope. As the psalm progresses, the parallelism mirrors the movement towards a resolution, suggesting that the act of questioning is part of a broader spiritual journey.

In summary, the parallel structures and rhetorical questions in Psalm 42 amplify the intensity of the psalmist's emotional distress while enhancing the psalm's thematic cohesion and literary unity. This nuanced use of language transforms the psalm from a mere expression of sorrow into a profound exploration of faith amid despair. Rhetorical questions not only enrich the narrative but also resonate with the broader theological themes throughout the Bible, encouraging believers to approach God with honesty and trust, even in moments of doubt and despair. Ultimately, they

reinforce the complex interplay between lament and trust in God, highlighting the depth of the relationship between humanity and the divine.

Following a thorough analysis of the rhetorical questions employed to articulate the yearning expressed in Psalm 42, our attention now turns to Psalm 88, another profound instance of individual lamentation. This psalm similarly utilizes rhetorical devices that underscore the pervasive themes of despair and the apparent silence of the divine. Such literary techniques not only enhance the emotional depth of the text but also invite a closer examination of the human experience in relation to suffering and spiritual desolation.

Psalm 88

Literary Context

Psalm 88 is a unique composition within the book of Psalms. It is situated within the larger corpus of the psalms, specifically among the laments, which collectively express grief, despair, and a desire for divine intervention. Book 3 reflects a period of national distress and longing for God's intervention. Childs argues that the exact situations that led to the writing of the Psalms were removed to apply them to different people in different generations and circumstances.³⁸

Authorship

The psalm is attributed to Heman the Ezrahite, who is mentioned as a Wiseman with Solomon in 1 King 4:31. Friedmann asserts that headings specified

³⁸ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 8. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), 522.

familiar melodies to which the psalms were to be sung. He gives the example of Psalm 88, Al Mahalat, “For Sickness.”³⁹

Structure

The structure of the psalm is meticulously crafted. It comprises an invocation to God, a detailed account of the psalmist’s afflictions, a series of rhetorical questions highlighting the depth of the psalmist’s despair, and a closing note that echoes the theme of abandonment. This structure encapsulates the psalmist’s escalating sense of isolation and unanswered pleas, leading the audience through intense lamentation and questioning without resolution, thus amplifying the psalm’s emotional and theological impact.

v. 1 Superscription

vv. 2–10a Movement 1: I/thou

v. 2 Invocation 1

v. 3 Plea for help

vv. 4–10a Complaint 1 (descriptive)

vv. 4–6 My afflictions

vv. 7–10a Which you have caused

vv. 10b–13 Movement 2: Rhetorical Questions

v. 10b Invocation 2

vv. 11–13 Complaint 2 (questioning)

vv. 14–19 Movement 3: Why?

v. 14 Invocation 3

vv. 15–19 Complaint 3 (descriptive, governed by

³⁹ Jonathan L. Friedmann, *Music in Biblical Life: The Roles of Song in Ancient Israel* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013), 133.

“Why?” [למה] of v. 15)⁴⁰

Zenger observes that the Psalm’s structure creates a gradual build-up, culminating in a sudden and impactful conclusion.⁴¹ Three times, the psalmist brings his cries of lament to Yahweh. Verse 2 introduces the crisis the psalmist is facing. The second lament is introduced in verse 10, introducing the appeal from the rhetorical questions in verses 11 to 13. Finally, verse 14 introduces the description of the crisis that follows in verses 15 to 19.

The psalmist displays his trust in God despite the feelings of rejection by God by praying daily to God.⁴² The psalm displays some trust, though it ends in gloom. The psalmist knew that he could not appeal to anyone except God. He is trusting God despite the difficult situation he finds himself in.

Rhetorical Features in Psalm 88 and Their Enhancement of the Theme

Psalm 88 uses various rhetorical features to deepen the expression of despair and abandonment, making it one of the most poignant laments in the Bible. These features enrich the text’s literary depth and amplify the psalm’s central theme of human suffering and God’s seeming silence in the face of such suffering. In verses 1 and 2, the psalmist repeatedly calls out God. This repetition emphasizes the persistence of the psalmist’s pleas and the intensity of their suffering.

The use of dark imagery, “darkness is my closet friend” verse 18, and metaphors of death and the grave express the depth of the psalmist’s despair and isolation. The psalter is rich in visual language, especially the metaphors. Brown

⁴⁰ John Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 644.

⁴¹ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger. *Psalms 2 A Commentary on Psalms 51-100* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis), 393.

⁴² Webster and Beach, *The Essential Bible Companion to the Psalms*, 306.

points out that the psalms often contrast metaphors of the pit and Sheol against images of YHWH's protection, such as a rock, wings, or His presence.⁴³ He goes on to explain that while God's refuge or the rock of Zion represents the highest point in the psalter's theological vision, the pit symbolizes the lowest depth in the psalter's theological vision, the pit symbolizes the lowest depth in the psalmist's experience, a place descending towards death.⁴⁴ Wrenn posits that the images of death litter the Psalm.⁴⁵ The images of death appear with different names in the Psalm. These are the dead ones in verse 5, slain/pierced in verse 5, dead in verse 10, and sunken ones/ghosts in verse 10. Death, as Childs asserts, is both a power and a place. He argues that as a power, it is terrifying, and as a place, it is an area of rule.⁴⁶ These metaphors enhance the theme by making the abstract feelings of abandonment and despair more tangible and relatable.

The psalmist employs rhetorical questions to challenge God and express confusion about his suffering. These questions highlight the psalmist's struggle to reconcile his faith with his circumstances, intensifying the theme of divine silence amid suffering. One of the most interesting features of the lament is the rhetorical questions posed in verses 10-12. These questions intend to invoke a reaction by God emphasizes that the psalmist's death will result in the brokenness of his relationship with God. It is his final effort to incite some response from a silent

⁴³ William Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (John Knox Press. Louisville, Westminster, 2002), 26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁵ Rachel Wrenn. Is the Psalmist Angry at God? Psalm 88 and the Absent Nose. *Word & World* 40 no.3, 2020, 242.

⁴⁶ Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 2. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1994), 231.

God, who has power over death.⁴⁷ The rhetorical questions act as a motivator to God, who is oblivious to His silence. God is being asked to intervene for His sake more than the psalmist's cause.

The psalmist creates a sense of intimacy and urgency by directly addressing God through the psalm. This direct address underscores the personal nature of the psalmist's plan and his desperation for God's attention. The use of inclusive language, "my friends have forgotten me," verse 8, extends the theme of abandonment beyond the divine to the communal, illustrating the total isolation felt by the psalmist. Wrath is personified as the weight of the affliction is felt, and the friendly neighbours could not come near the nation but were pushed away.⁴⁸ While typical of lament psalms, the contrast between the psalmist's plea for help and the absence of a response from God underscores the psalm's theme of unrelieved despair. Fokkelman argues that the rhetorical questions in verses 10 to 13 contrast the present with the absent.⁴⁹

Parallelism in Psalm 88 deepens the expression of despair and the feeling of abandonment by God, making it a touching reflection on human suffering and the mystery of divine silence. We will discuss various types of parallelism in Psalm 88. Synonymous parallelism is seen in verses 3 and four of the psalm. This occurs when two or more lines express the same idea in different words. For example, the psalmist's cries for help are repeated with varied expressions throughout the psalm, emphasizing the depth of his distress.

⁴⁷ Nancy de Claisse-Walford, Rolf A Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms* (William B Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2014), 672.

⁴⁸ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 246.

⁴⁹ J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*, 1. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 110.

Antithetic parallelism, which involves contrasting ideas in successive lines, is uncommon in this psalm. While Psalm 88 primarily focuses on lament without much contrast, the implied antithesis is between the psalmist's despair and the hope for divine intervention. Verses 6 and 7 use both synthetic parallelism and emblematic parallelism. "Synthetic parallelism" is a literary technique that adds additional information to an initial idea. An example of this can be found in verse 6 of a biblical passage where it says, "God has brought him down to the lowest pit, the dark places, the depths." Here, the phrases "the dark places" and "the depths" provide additional information to the initial idea presented in the first part of the verse.⁵⁰

Emblematic parallelism, on the other hand, illustrates the concept introduced in the other line by using a metaphor or simile. In verse 7, the psalmist uses waves, a metaphor, to emphasize his point. This shows a picture of darkness and despair.⁵¹ Psalm 88 uses this style to build on the psalmist's description of his afflictions and isolation, adding layers to his expression of suffering.

Climatic parallelism is when a line is repeated and expanded to build intensity. The psalmist's repeated pleas for God's attention can be seen as climatic, especially as they culminate in describing being like those cut off from God's care. In verses 10 to 12, the rhetorical questions display this type of parallelism. These questions build on each other, each posing an aspect of God's attributes (wonders, love, faithfulness, righteous deeds) and their relevance (or perceived irrelevance) in the realm of the

⁵⁰ The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul. 359.

⁵¹ Ibid., 359.

dead, emphasizing the psalmist's despair and sense of futility. In verse 10, the dead are paralleled with the ghosts.⁵²

The Literary Context of Rhetorical Questions

The literary context of the rhetorical questions in this psalm is deeply embedded in its overall structure and thematic focus, which revolves around an individual's plea to God in the face of profound anguish and a sense of abandonment. Psalm 88 is an individual lament that does not resolve into praise or hope, as many other laments do. It remains in darkness from the beginning to the end, setting a sombre and introspective tone for the rhetorical questions. Psalm 88 exemplifies the conventions of Hebrew lament poetry, particularly through its use of parallelism and vivid imagery. The poem immerses readers in the speaker's emotional struggle, where the repetition of thoughts underscores the profound sorrow and sense of abandonment that the speaker experiences.

The use of rhetorical questions in Psalm 88 serves several purposes. They express the psalmist's confusion, doubt, and search for meaning in the midst of suffering and God's silence in times of distress. The rhetorical questions show the intimate relationship between the psalmist and God, which becomes catastrophic when it breaks down.⁵³

The rhetorical questions highlight key themes such as God's abandonment, the impermanence of life, the silence of death, and God's inaccessibility to the dead. These questions force readers to confront uncomfortable truths about human

⁵² Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 968.

⁵³ J. W. Rogerson, *A Theology of the Old Testament: Cultural Memory, Communication, and Being Human* (London: SPCK, 2009), 141.

existence, suffering, and the nature of divine justice. Janowski argues that the rhetorical questions challenge God to prove Himself. He argues that the psalmist was probing God's act by highlighting God's limitations regarding death.⁵⁴

The psalmist touches on deep theological issues by questioning the absence of God's intervention and the point of suffering if it goes unnoticed by God. These questions engage with the nature of faith, the expectation of divine rescue, and the reality of unanswered prayers. The psalmist does not give up on God even if he feels abandoned and continues to direct his petition to God by the question in verse 10.

VanGemeran argues that if one has true faith, one will continue to wrestle with God despite the circumstances they will be going through.⁵⁵

Understanding the cultural and historical context of ancient Israelite society can also provide insights into the use of rhetorical questions in Psalm 88. These questions were part of a larger tradition of lamentation and dialogue with the divine, reflecting the struggles and faith of the community. This passage includes a rhetorical device, questions that encourage the poet to have faith in God's actions. The poet is reminded that God is faithful to the living, not the dead. Therefore, if God reveals his wonders, he will do it while the poet is still alive. If God expresses his love for the suffering speaker, he will do it while the speaker is still alive. These thoughts serve as a source of encouragement for the one who prays. The rhetorical questions in this passage help to remind the psalmist of the true nature of God and how he works

⁵⁴ Bernd Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott: eine Anthropologie der Psalmen*, 6., durchgesehene und erweiterte Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 244–49.

⁵⁵ William A. VanGemeran, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 18 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2017), 567.

among his people.⁵⁶ Ultimately, God is faithful, and he will surely demonstrate his faithfulness while the psalmist is still alive. This self-assuring statement conveys the overall effect of the psalmist's rhetorical questioning in verses 9 to 12. But this questioning has another effect: a reminder to Yahweh of his true character. The thought that God may need to be reminded of his good character comes as something of a surprise to modern readers, but the notion would not necessarily have surprised readers in the ancient Near Eastern world, in which the gods would be reminded of their obligations by those who prayed to them.⁵⁷

The rhetorical questions in Psalm 88 are a powerful literary device that deepens the psalm's themes of suffering, abandonment, and the search for divine presence. They invite readers into a space of reflection and questioning, making Psalm 88 a profound exploration of the human condition in relation to the divine. Verses 10 to 12 presents God with a series of rhetorical questions. The questions are philosophical and inquire what happens after death. These are unusual, for the Hebrew Scriptures rarely ask about the afterlife. These questions are meant to get a rise out of the silent God, to challenge Him to affirm His power over death, and to stress that with death, the relationship will be broken.⁵⁸

Rhetorical questions in Psalm 88 amplify the speaker's emotional intensity and existential area. His intense pain has not paralyzed him, but it has prompted him to

⁵⁶ W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., Jamie A. Grant, *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms*, Volume 2 (Zondervan Academic, 2018), 367.

⁵⁷ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 87–112.

⁵⁸ DeClaisse-Walford, Nancy L., Jacobson, Rolf A., Tanner, Beth Lan, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Psalms (NICOT)* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014 Publishing), 1129.

renewed fervent prayer.⁵⁹ The rhetorical questions come in the context of prayer. By stating that his prayer meets the Lord in the morning, the psalmist suggests that prayer is the first item on his daily schedule. They engage the reader, prompting reflection on the themes presented, such as human suffering, divine silence, and the nature of death, I will add the futility of blessings in death. These questions deepen the lament by exposing the psalmist's anguish and sense of abandonment, enhancing the poetic structure's emotive power. The psalmist expresses the anguish by the imagery of day and night; the imagery is relentless: by day, by night.⁶⁰

Rhetorical questions often emphasize the psalmist's perceived distance from God, questioning God's presence, care, and justice in times of deep distress. This can lead to exploring themes such as God's righteousness, the problem of evil, and the experience of despair among the faithful. Through these questions, the psalm lays bare a raw and honest dialogue with God, showcasing a theology that accommodates lament and profound questioning within the framework of faith.

Psalm 88's poignant rhetorical questions underscore the psalmist's deep despair while highlighting their enduring relationship with God. Questioning presupposes an intimate connection with the divine despite the absence of answers or solace. As Nowell observes, rhetorical questions reveal that the psalmist's attention was fixed on God rather than solely on their grievances or claims of innocence.⁶¹ This illuminates the intricate interplay between faith and doubt, where questioning God is

⁵⁹ Daniel J. Estes, *The New American Commentary: 31- Psalms 73-150: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 168.

⁶⁰ Don Saliers, "Psalms in Our Lamentable World," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 1.1 (2015): 109, <https://doi.org/10.17132/2377-231X.1013>, <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/yjmr/vol1/iss1/7>.

⁶¹ Lawrence Boadt, Aloysius Fitzgerald, and Mark S. Smith, eds., *Imagery and Imagination in Biblical Literature: Essays in Honor of Aloysius Fitzgerald, F.S.C*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 32 (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2001), 117.

integral to the religious journey, fostering a nuanced and complex understanding of faith that embraces both struggle and uncertainty.

In a broader context of the Psalms, rhetorical questions can contrast the despair of Psalm 88 with the hope found in other Psalms. While Psalm 88 ends without resolution, rhetorical questions connect it to other texts that address similar questions with affirmations of God's faithfulness, thereby contributing to the tapestry of theological disclosure with the Psalms.

Psalm 88 is a complex poem that employs various literary and rhetorical devices, including rhetorical questions, parallelism, imagery, metaphor, and others. These elements deepen the psalm's emotional expression and theological exploration. Hebrew poetry, including Psalm 88, frequently utilizes parallelism. Repeating structures can intensify the emotional weight of the psalm, highlighting the speaker's despair and hopelessness by juxtaposing the human condition against divine attributes or actions.

Psalm 88 uses vivid imagery, such as darkness, the depths of the earth, and isolation, to convey the depths of the psalmist's despair. Verses 5 to 7 continue the imagery of death, declaring the deep irony that there may be freedom, but only to be with the dead.⁶²

Rhetorical questions intertwined with these images deepen the reader's engagement, inviting them to ponder the imagery's existential and theological implications. This combination enriches the psalm's emotional and spiritual landscape, illustrating the psalmist's perceived abandonment by God.

⁶² DeClaisse-Walford, Nancy L., Jacobson, Rolf A., Tanner, Beth Lan, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament 1: The Book of Psalms (NICOT)* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 1127.

The psalm employs metaphors to express complex relationships and states of being, such as being likened to the dead, cut off from God's care. The Andrews study bible states that the psalm begins by using a metaphor for listening closely when he calls upon God to incline His ear.⁶³

??In Psalm 88, "חיים" (chayim) associated with "life" in the context of suffering underscores the stark contrast between the desire for life and the experience of death.

Rhetorical questions can amplify the power of these metaphors, questioning the nature of existence, God's presence, and the meaning of suffering. This rhetorical strategy reinforces the psalmist's themes of alienation and despair.

"אדוני, מצאתי רעה" (Adonai, matzā'ti ra'ah)?" ("Lord, have I found adversity?")

Here, the rhetorical question interrogates the relationship between the supplicant and God, suggesting that adversity feels like a tangible encounter with the divine. Beyond that, it appears that adversity is personified as a state or place of despair or suffering which heightens not only God's absence but also the psalmist's anguish and laments resulting from this perceived divine absence.

The rhetorical questions in Psalm 88 do not stand alone. They are part of a tapestry of literary devices that profoundly explore faith, despair, or the human condition. The psalm's structure, with its lamenting tone, absence of a resolution, and dense use of figurative language, positions the rhetorical questions as key tools for expressing the inexpressible, asking unanswerable questions that reflect the depth of human suffering.

Combining rhetorical questions with other literary devices in Psalm 88 contributes to its theological depth. It challenges the reader to contemplate the nature

⁶³ Ángel Manuel Rodríguez et al., eds., *Andrews Bible Commentary: Light, Depth, Truth. Old Testament* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2020), 718.

of God's justice, presence, the timeliness of blessings, and the reality of suffering, offering a raw, unfiltered portrayal of human anguish and divine silence that invites theological reflection.

Psalm 88 exemplifies the conventions of Hebrew lament poetry, particularly through its use of parallelism and vivid imagery. The repetition of thoughts underscores the speaker's profound sorrow and sense of abandonment, immersing readers in their emotional struggle. The stark metaphors, such as being enveloped in darkness, effectively convey feelings of isolation and despair.

The rhetorical questions in the psalm reflect grief and confusion, inviting empathy from the audience. When the speaker questions God about their abandonment, it highlights their emotional turmoil while simultaneously affirming their belief in God's presence and authority. This acknowledgment suggests a lingering hope for divine intervention despite overwhelming despair.

Ultimately, Psalm 88 captures the complexity of human emotion in suffering. It expresses both deep anguish and a yearning for connection with the divine, illustrating the struggle for solace amid profound pain.

Use of rhetorical questions in Psalms 42 and 88

In Psalm 42, the rhetorical questions deepen the psalmist's emotional turmoil, notably through lines like "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?" This repetition emphasizes a sense of desperation and introspection, driving home the intensity of the psalmist's spiritual longing and disconnection from God.

In contrast, Psalm 88 employs rhetorical questions that reflect a more profound sense of abandonment and despair. Phrases like "Will your wonders be known in the dark?" evoke isolation, as the psalmist questions God's silence and

perceived inaction amidst suffering. The rhetorical questions in Psalm 88 do not seek answers; instead, they crystallize the pain of absence and the urgency of lament.

Comparison with Other Lament Psalms

Compared to other lament psalms like Psalms 13 and 22, a consistent motif emerges in the rhetorical questions used to challenge God and convey deep emotional struggles. For instance, Psalm 13 begins with the rhetorical question, “How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?” This aligns with the approach in Psalms 42 and 88, where feelings of abandonment foster questions that provoke divine intervention. The anguished question, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?,” captures a deep sense of despair, echoing the sentiments expressed in Psalms 42 and 88. While all the texts articulate profound emotional turmoil, they differ in their expressions and outcomes. Psalm 22, despite its deep desperation, ultimately conveys a glimmer of hope through a reaffirmation of trust in God's deliverance. In contrast, Psalms 42 and 88 dwell more in unresolved emotional states, reflecting a struggle that lacks the same sense of eventual hope.

Exclusive Features. A notable uniqueness in Psalms 42 and 88 is how the rhetorical questions are interwoven with vivid imagery and parallelism. For example, the imagery of a deer panting for water in Psalm 42 amplifies the longing expressed in the rhetorical questions and enhances the plea for spiritual sustenance. Similarly, the bleak darkness and deep despair in Psalm 88 is matched by its rhetorical questioning, creating a powerful cohesiveness within the text that may not be as pronounced in other lament psalms.

Common Patterns. Despite these unique features, a typical pattern in all these lament psalms is the use of rhetorical questions to articulate raw human emotion and spiritual crisis. These questions often reflect a deep yearning for God's presence, a

challenge to God's faithfulness, and a struggle to reconcile personal suffering with the divine. Furthermore, the rhetorical questions create a dialogue in which the psalmist both expresses pain and invites reflection from the community or readers, fostering an empathetic connection.

In conclusion, the rhetorical questions in Psalms 42 and 88 express lament and invite readers into a deeper dialogue about suffering, faith, and the search for meaning amid despair. Their analysis, alongside other lament psalms, highlights shared themes while facilitating a nuanced understanding of how rhetorical questions convey the complexity of human emotion in the face of divine silence.

CHAPTER 4

PSALM 44

Literary Context of the Psalm

Psalm 44 is situated in Book II (Psalms 42-72). This positioning places it among psalms attributed primarily to the sons of Korah and David. Psalms in this book often reflect themes of lament, trust, and the kingship of God. Jewish tradition has often associated this Psalm with the Holocaust.¹ Psalm 44 is the first community lament to appear in the Psalter. It is near the beginning of Book II and follows an individual lament (Psalm 42–43). Bellinger asserts that it has a connection with Psalms 74 and 79 and could relate to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in the sixth century, but that is unclear.² The theological setting, however, in ancient Israel's covenant relationship with YHWH is abundantly clear. Jones argues that the Asaphite psalms are not a random collection but are held together by common themes, mainly the unique use of divine names, the concern for history, their judicial nature, and the standard title.³

Psalm 44 is a communal lament and stands out for its expression of deep distress and confusion over the suffering of the Israelite community despite their

¹ Susan E. Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries. Volume 2: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 1-72*, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 288.

² W. H. Bellinger, *Psalms as a Grammar for Faith: Prayer and Praise* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2019), 31.

³ Nancy L deClaisse-Walford, *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, 72.

fidelity to God. The psalm is divided into several parts, each contributing to the overall context and theme. The psalm begins with a recollection of the past deeds of God, where He delivered Israel from their enemies and established them in the promised land. According to Westermann, this is a characteristic of communal laments.⁴ This part emphasizes the community's faith in God's power and their ancestors' experiences of divine salvation.

Despite the historical acts of salvation, the current generation experiences defeat and humiliation. This particular section powerfully conveys their sorrowful emotion of being forsaken by God. They declare their innocence and loyalty, insisting they have not forgotten God or violated His covenant. The psalm concludes with a fervent plea for God to awaken, remember, and rescue them from their low state. It is a call for God's presence and action, reflecting a deep yearning for deliverance and restoration of favour.

Literary Features of the Psalm

Unlike individual laments, this psalm reflects the collective experiences and emotions of the Israelite community. It blends individual and communal voices, emphasizing solidarity in suffering and supplication. LaRondelle posits that communal laments were common during drought, pestilence, or defeat in war.⁵ The psalm being examined exemplifies the use of communal lamenting a defeat in war.

The psalm uses history as a theological argument, reminding God of past deliverances as a basis for current and future salvation. Waltner postulates that Israel's

⁴ Philip Johnston, ed., *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (Leicester: Apollos, Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 79.

⁵ Hans K LaRondelle, *Deliverance In The Psalms*, 19.

faith was rooted in history, mainly what God had done for them.⁶ Kraus further argues that the praying community confesses that its existence is based on God's saving grace in his gift of the land.⁷ The questions Israel would raise in this psalm emanate from this history.

The psalm does not contain all the features of a lament psalm. It has the following features: invocation, complaint, confession of trust, and petition. An invocation is a call to God to listen or pay attention to the lament. While Psalm 44 does not begin with a direct invocation as individual lament psalms often do, the psalmist implicitly addresses God throughout, especially in the plea for divine attention in the latter part of the psalm; verses 23 to 24 serve as a late invocation. As Broyles put it, the invocation is supported by the rhetorical questions.⁸ This is the portion where the psalmist details the troubles or reasons for their distress.

Psalm 44 expresses a profound sense of abandonment and defeat as the community complains about God's seeming abandonment in the face of their enemies despite their faithfulness, with verses 9 to 22 detailing their complaints. The psalmist expresses his feelings of abandonment and distress without reservation, reflecting a relationship with God where honest communication is valued.

The psalm serves as a bridge between Israel's past experiences of God's deliverance and their present hope for redemption. It encapsulates the tension between

⁶ James H. Waltner, *Psalms* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2006), 224.

⁷ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim, First Fortress Press edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 60.

⁸ Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 211.

faith in God's power and the reality of suffering, inviting readers into a space of communal lament and hopeful anticipation for divine intervention.

Structure

The structure is characteristic of a communal lament, reflecting the communal experiences and emotions of the Israelites. Its composition can be divided into several key sections, each serving a specific purpose in the psalm's narrative and thematic development.

Invocation and Introduction verses 1-3

Declaration of trust in God verses 4-8

Lament and complaint verses 9-16

Assertion of innocence verses 17-22

Petition for deliverance verses 23-26

The structure is marked by a movement from confidence and remembrance of past divine acts to a stark lament over present difficulties, concluding in a hopeful plea for future deliverance. What God has done in the past in verses 1-3 will contrast sharply with what he is doing now, in the time that the Psalm describes in verses 9 to the end of the Psalm.⁹ This progression reflects the complexity of the human-divine relationship, characterized by faith, confusion, and hope. The psalm encapsulates a deep theological dialogue that wrestles with the reality of suffering, the righteousness of the community, and the return of divine justice. Brueggemann argues that the lament and complaint in verses 9 to 16 reveal the futility of life apart from

⁹ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 1-72* : 199.

God's faithfulness.¹⁰ Young posits that the complaint is to find a way into the future when it seems there is no way.¹¹

In verses 17 to 20, the community cries to God and expresses their innocence. They allude to the fact that they suffer for being faithful to God. Despite this suffering, their questions show that they still hold on to their faith in God. They were absolutely faithful, but they still complained to God without losing hope in him. Their complaint to God, in that sense, is nothing but a testimony or an affirmation of their faith. Even if “none of the questions are answered, yet to vent them shows that the people have not given up on God.”¹²

Rhetorical Features

Psalm 44 employs a range of rhetorical features that enhance its themes of lament, divine abandonment, and faithful pleading. These features significantly contribute to the psalm's emotional depth and theological complexity, drawing the reader into the psalmists' experience and their spiritual and existential questions. This section explores key rhetorical features in Psalm 44, how they are used, and their contribution to the themes of the psalm.

The psalm employs repetition to emphasize the community's trust in God and their confusion about their current situation. Friedmann posits that Psalm 44 illustrates the intersection of music, text, and comfort in lament psalms. It is scribed in communal language, reflecting the need for the community to remain unified through

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*, The Library of Biblical Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 312.

¹¹ Andrew Young, *A Way out of No Way: The Spiritual Memoirs of Andrew Young* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1994).

¹² Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms: Studies In Hebrew Narrative And Poetry*, edited by David W. Cotter, O.S.B, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001),113.

difficult situations. The repetition in Psalm 44 compares God's past deeds to the present perceived abandonment. The psalm repeats phrases that relate to God's historic deliverance and the present suffering of His people. What are these phrases.

This repetition emphasizes the theme of divine faithfulness and the contrast to the present helplessness, highlighting a theological crisis: why does the same God seem distant and inactive now? For instance, the refrain of calling upon God to remember and act, "Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?" reinforces the urgency of their request and the depth of their despair. It also reveals the depth of the relationship the faith community had enjoyed with God prior to their current situation.

Psalm 44 employs repetition as a powerful tool to express the community's steadfast trust in God, along with their confusion and distress regarding their current plight. Throughout the psalm, repeated phrases referencing God's past interventions create a stark contrast with the present perception of abandonment. In verses 1 to 3, the psalm reflects on how God has acted for the sake of Israel in the past. In contrast, verses 9 to 10 express feelings of abandonment and confusion.

This repetition highlights the theme of divine faithfulness and the stark contrast to the current sense of helplessness, which creates a theological crisis. The question of why the same God who once acted powerfully now seems distant and inactive is a central issue in this psalm. For example, the refrain "Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?" is a poignant call for God to remember his people and intervene on their behalf, conveying the urgency of their situation and the depth of their despair.¹³

Rhetorical questions express doubt and challenge the current understanding of God's nature and actions. Verses 23-24 contain direct rhetorical questions to God

¹³ Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 110.

about His apparent inactivity. As Jacques notes, these questions evoke the presence and manifestation of a person, in this case, God¹⁴. They provoke reflection on the nature of God's relationship with His people, intensifying the crisis of faith experienced by the community.

The psalm uses anaphora, the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses, to create a rhythmic and emphatic effect-indicate the verses. In Psalm 44, anaphora highlights the steadfastness of the community's faith despite adversity and underscores their collective suffering and plea for deliverance.

The psalm starkly contrasts the past victories granted by God with the present state of defeat and humiliation. The arm of God in verse 2 is contrasted with the people's own arm in verse 3.¹⁵ This juxtaposition underscores the community's confusion and abandonment, intensifying the thematic exploration of faith tested by adversity.

The psalm utilizes contrast between the recounting of historical divine favor and current abandonment to heighten the sense of betrayal and confusion. The early verses (1-8) celebrate past victories God gave, while the later verses (9-26) lament their current defeat and abandonment, creating a stark contrast. This contrast serves to amplify the theme of divine faithfulness versus unexplained absence. Verses 1 to 8 have prepared for the complaint in verses 9 to 10. Suddenly, delight has become rejection; victory has become retreat and defeat (v. 10). God is no longer the good

¹⁴ Raymond Jacques Tournay et al. *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem*, *Journal of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 118, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 154.

¹⁵ *The New Interpreters Bible, Volume IV - 1-2 Maccabees Introduction to Hebrew Poetry Job Psalms*. *The New Interpreters Bible*, 857.

shepherd of the sheep.¹⁶ The contrast challenges the reader to reflect on the fluctuations of divine-human interactions and the inexplicable nature of divine will. Additionally, the contrast motivates God to act by pointing out His covenant obligations and reminding Him of what He has done in the past, as seen in verse 2 contrasted with verse 10.¹⁷

Metaphorically expressing that Yahweh had fought for them was done by saying, "With your hand...your right hand, your arm."¹⁸ According to Alter, the repeated imagery in the psalm implies that the military defeat mentioned is not a mere metaphor but rather a reflection of an actual historical event where the people of Israel suffered devastation at the hands of an armed enemy¹⁹. This imagery evokes empathy and emphasizes the reality of their suffering, thereby reinforcing the theme of undeserved suffering. The vivid imagery in Psalm 44 illustrates the severity of the community's plight and feelings of abandonment. This imagery of slaughter highlights the vulnerability and desperation of the community, emphasizing their unmerited suffering and enhancing the lament's emotional impact. It conveys a deep sense of injustice and unexplained suffering. The imagery is supported by the inclusio, verses 12 and 22. Klesis compounds that the inclusio has the implication that God has treated His people as sheep and sold them and meant them for slaughter.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid., 857.

¹⁷ Irene Nowell, *Pleading, Cursing, Praising: Conversing with God through the Psalms* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2013), 29.

¹⁸ Willem VanGemeren, *Psalms: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Revised edition., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008), 607.

¹⁹ Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 301.

²⁰ John Henry Hanson, *Praying from the Depths of the Psalms* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2018), 55.

The use of direct address enables the psalmist to create a sense of immediacy and intimacy. By speaking directly to God, the psalmist expresses the community's grievances, questions, and pleas in a personal and communal manner, reinforcing the theme of a relationship with God that endures through times of trial. The rhetorical questions in verses 24 and 25 show the element of lament.²¹

The recounting of God's past deeds of deliverance serves as a reminder of God's power and faithfulness and heightens the tension between past providence and current abandonment. This rhetorical strategy reinforces the theme of faith in the face of suffering. These rhetorical features collectively enhance Psalm 44 exploration of its central themes. They bring to life the emotional and spiritual turmoil experienced by the community, articulate the tension between faith and doubt, and evoke a profound engagement with the mysteries of divine providence and justice. Through its rhetorical tapestry, psalm 44 invites readers to reflect deeply on the nature of faith, the reality of suffering, and the pursuit of divine intervention and understanding.

Synonymous parallelism is used in this psalm to emphasize the community's experiences and sentiments. For example, the psalm might recount God's past deeds in one line and affirm His role in those deeds in the next, reinforcing God's power and faithfulness. This is exemplified in verses 1 and 2, where the community's shared history of and understanding of God's deeds reinforces their collective memory of Him. The third verse highlights the fact that the past victories were God's doing. Synthetic parallelism elaborates the community's plea for deliverance, where one line expresses the plea, and the next provides the reason or basis for that plea. In verse 3, this parallelism shows that the past victories were won by divine intervention, not by

²¹ Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 176.

the people's own efforts. Ross argues by acknowledging the past victories in this way; the people believed this would move God to intervene on their behalf.²²

Climatic or staircase parallelism is employed in the psalm. It involves repeating words or phrases from the previous line at the beginning of the next line, gradually building up to a climax. In verse 4, this parallelism is observed. This verse escalates in intensity and request, building up from acknowledging God as King to requesting action on behalf of Jacob. To acknowledge the kingship of God was impending in the face of the imminent defeat.²³ This structure can be used in Psalm 44 to intensify the expression of trust in God or the depth of the community's distress.

The rhetorical features of Psalm 44—repetition, rhetorical questions, vivid imagery, and contrasts—work together to enhance its themes of lament, divine abandonment, and persistent faith. These features underscore the psalmists' emotional and theological turmoil and engage the readers, prompting them to grapple with the complex realities of faith in the face of adversity. The psalm becomes a profound expression of communal and individual struggles with divine providence and presence through these rhetorical strategies.

Literary Context of the Rhetorical Questions

The rhetorical questions in Psalm 44 are integral to its literary and thematic structure, serving as a profound method of engaging with the divine and expressing the perplexity and anguish of the community. These questions are situated within communal lament, where the psalmist and the community recount their suffering and appeal to God for deliverance, for example verses 21, 23 and 24. The rhetorical

²² Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 46.

²³ *Ibid.*, 47.

questions enhance the emotional intensity of the psalm and underscore the themes of divine absence and unfulfilled expectations. According to Balentine, the questions are typical elements of the laments expressing the struggle of the psalmist to understand the situation in light of his relationship to God and God's uncharacteristic behaviour.²⁴

Psalm 44 is a communal lament, a genre within the psalms characterized by expressions of collective distress, confessions of trust in God, and pleas for deliverance. The rhetorical questions fit within their framework, emphasizing the community's bewilderment at their present suffering despite their fidelity to God.

The psalm begins with a collection of God's past acts of salvation, acknowledging how God had favoured their ancestors and led them to victories against their enemies. The nation's trust in God alone, described in verses 4 to 8, provides hope for the future.²⁵

The rhetorical questions that follow serve to contrast sharply with this historical recounting, highlighting the disparity between past aid and current abandonment. The theodicy question why? is common among the laments and is seen in this psalm.²⁶ A significant portion of the psalm asserts the community's innocence and loyalty to God. The rhetorical questions have to function to underline the incongruence between their commitment to God's covenant and their current experience of defeat and humiliation.

²⁴ Samuel E. Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1984), 117.

²⁵ Waltner, *Psalms*, 225.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

Relationship Between Rhetorical Questions and Other Literary Devices

The rhetorical questions in Psalm 44 are interwoven with other literary devices, creating a rich tapestry of meaning and emotional depth that underscores the Psalm's themes of lament, faith, and divine interaction. This interplay between rhetorical questions and other literary devices enhances the expressive power of the psalm, deepening the reader's engagement with its context.

A foundational feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. In Psalm 44, parallelism often frames rhetorical questions within a structure that contrasts God's past actions with the present reality of suffering. The psalm begins with the synonymous parallelism in verses 1 and 2. Verse 2 of the text emphasizes the concept introduced in verse 1. This emphasis is conveyed through the use of imagery and metaphor. The imagery used is that of planting God's people, and the metaphor is related to breaking down trees, as Broyles explained.²⁷ In verse 3, the psalm portrays synthetic parallelism. God defeated the nations and gave the victory to his own people.²⁸

The rhetorical questions in Psalm 44 often draw upon vivid imagery to express the intensity of the community's plight and their feeling of divine forsakenness. For example, questions about being forgotten or why they are facing defeat are coupled with images of sheep being led to slaughter or a vine that has been plucked and burned. Verses 9, 10, 11 and 22 highlight this aspect. This combination of rhetorical questioning in imagery intensifies the emotional and theological implications of the text.

²⁷ Psalms 1-72 Teach the Text Commentary, 911.

²⁸ John F. Craghan, *Psalms for All Seasons*, Revised edition (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013), 122.

Repetition reinforces the central themes of the psalm, and rhetorical questions are a part of this repetitive structure. The repeated questioning of God's absence or silence, interspersed with affirmations of trust and recollections of past deliverance, creates a rhythm that underscores the psalm's plea for understanding and intervention. The use of anaphora, or the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses, works hand in hand with rhetorical questions to amplify the urgency and depth of the plea. This device emphasizes the earnestness and persistence of the community's appeal to God, framing their questions in a way that demands attention and response.

The questions address Yahweh's deeds of not being a faithful covenant judge; they address the people's desperate situation and point out the need for intervention and the need for God to buy back the sheep he has sold.²⁹The relationship between rhetorical questions and other literary devices in Psalm 44 creates a multifaceted expression of faith, lament, and hope. This interplay enhances the psalm's thematic richness, allowing it to express the complex emotions and theological reflections of the community in a nuanced and impactful manner. The questions show the integrity of the psalmist. The psalmist addresses God with his embittered feelings, and this is with hope for a positive response.³⁰

Function of Rhetorical Questions

Thematic Analysis

²⁹ Craig C. Broyles, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 2nd printing (Peabody Mass. Carlisle U.K.: Hendrickson Paternoster press, 2002), 204.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

Psalm 44 is filled with rhetorical questions that express the community's deep sense of disorientation and sorrow. The questions convey confusion about why God has not Intervened during their time of distress, highlighting the psalmist's struggle to reconcile their understanding of God's nature with their current experiences of defeat and suffering. The questions generally touch on three dimensions of relationships between God, the enemies, and the psalmist.³¹ In verses 23 and 24, the question is specifically about God.

These questions invoke both the audience and, symbolically, God to reflect on the contradiction between the community's loyalty and their suffering. The psalmist invites contemplation of divine justice and the nature of suffering by asking why God seems distant or inactive despite their faithfulness.

The rhetorical questions amplify the community's plea for deliverance and vindication. They underscore the urgency and righteousness of their appeal to God for intervention, emphasizing the depth of their current despair and the earnestness of their cry for help. The psalmist invokes God to intervene for His sake, emphasizing that his death would result in a broken relationship with God.³²

One of the central themes of Psalm 44 is the tension between the experienced absence of God and the historical presence of His actions on behalf of Israel. As Hanson puts it, the Lord sometimes will allow His people to feel "desolate" or lonely to motivate them to seek him to exercise their heartfelt desire for him.³³ The Psalms overflow with prayerful, urgent cries from one who is not merely imagining what it

³¹ Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 169

³² Walter Brueggemann, Brent A. Strawn, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid _ Introducing the Psalms* (Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2014), 114.

³³ John Henry Hanson, *Praying from the Depths of the Psalms* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2018), 55.

feels like to be abandoned. The rhetorical questions directly address God's absence and invite God to wake up. As Dahood shows, God's sleep means that by remaining inattentive to his people's prayers, he gives the impression of being asleep.³⁴

The Psalm reflects on the theme of faithfulness amidst trial. The rhetorical questions emphasize the community's commitment to God, even as they face inexplicable suffering. This faithfulness, contrasted with the lack of divine intervention, presents a poignant God showing their trust in God despite their present circumstance; as Creach argues in verse 7, the pious person seeks refuge in Yahweh but does not trust human ability.³⁵

Psalm 44 engages with the theological dilemma of theodicy, the question of why a good and powerful God permits suffering. The rhetorical questions probe this issue, confronting the paradox of divine justice and the reality of righteous suffering without apparent cause. Ellison argues that these questions, particularly verses 23 to 26, reflect the psalmist's partial knowledge and the general understanding of that time that when things were wrong, God would be at fault.³⁶

The rhetorical questions also tap into the theme of historical memory and identity. They recall God's acts of salvation as a basis for questioning the present situation, thereby emphasizing the role of collective memory in shaping the community's understanding of God and themselves. The parents told and taught their children about the past deeds of YHWH as part of their religious, vocational, and

³⁴ Mitchell J. Dahood, *The Anchor Bible: 1-50* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1986), 268.

³⁵ Jerome F. D. Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 217 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 57.

³⁶ Arthur E. Cundall, *The Open Your Bible Old Testament Commentary Page by Page*, 1025.

military training.³⁷ The children would then tap into these when faced with challenges in life, as we find them in this Psalm.

The use of rhetorical questions emphasizes the communal aspect of lament. These questions express a shared experience of suffering and a plea for deliverance, reinforcing the community's solidarity in their search for understanding and relief. Lenzi's theory is that communal laments are characterized by the belief that Yahweh is in charge of both cosmic and national political affairs. Therefore, the community cries out to Him in times of crisis.³⁸ Psalm 44 engages deeply with these literary and theological themes through rhetorical questions, presenting a complex and nuanced exploration of faith, suffering, and divine interaction. The questions articulate the community's anguish and confusion and invite reflection on the enduring questions of God's justice and the nature of righteous suffering.

Literary device

Rhetorical Questions: The psalm employs a series of compelling rhetorical questions that engage both the audience and God directly. These questions serve as a means of expression that challenges the disparity between the community's loyalty and their current torment, provoking a deeper reflection on their faith and God's perceived neglect.

Imagery of Abandonment: Imageries surrounding feelings of desolation permeates the text, with metaphors such as God being "asleep" illustrating the sense of divine distance and inaction. This evocative language strengthens the emotional

³⁷ Philip J King, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 45.

³⁸ Leo Duprée Sandgren, *Vines Intertwined: A History of Jews and Christians from the Babylonian Exile to the Advent of Islam* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 315.

impact by conveying the community's sense of loneliness and desperation in their plight.

Contrast: The psalm recalls God's historical interventions with the reality of present suffering, intensifying the community's sense of despair. This juxtaposition highlights the disconnect between their hopeful past and harsh current experiences, deepening the sense of abandonment and loss.

Structural Analysis

The structure of Psalm 44, a communal lament reflecting on Israel's past victories and current sufferings, can be analyzed in distinct segments. These segments include the introduction, which focuses on praising God for His faithfulness; the recounting of Israel's past glory; a passionate expression of present suffering; and a fervent plea for divine assistance. Each segment collectively underscores the tension between memory and reality, highlighting the community's desperate call for restoration and hope amidst their trials.

The psalmists, in verses 1 to 3 begins by recalling the historical acts of God in Israel's past, focusing particularly how He assisted and delivered them in times of trouble. Collective memory is highlighted, emphasizing the experiences handed down from generation to generation. The focus seems to be on God's faithfulness and power.

Trust in God is articulated in verses 4 to 8. God's sovereignty and power are presented as the true sources of victory over enemies. God is addressed directly, affirming that He alone is the One who grants victory. The repetitive use of the first-person plurals (we, our) signifies a communal voice and shared identity among the people.

In verses 9 to 16, a shift occurs as the psalmist laments the current state of disgrace and defeat faced by Israel, despite God's prior aid. The tone becomes more desperate; feelings of abandonment, shame, and mockery are articulated. The imagery of being led like sheep to slaughter contrasts sharply with the previous affirmations of strength.

The psalmist transitions to a plea for help, reflecting on the perceived divine silence amidst suffering in verses 17 to 22. The repetition of the phrase "Awake, O Lord!" emphasizes urgency and a longing for God's attention. The community grapples with feelings of betrayal and questions the reasons for their suffering, even suggesting that their loyalty to God has gone unacknowledged.

Verses 23-26 Focus: The pivotal sections of the psalm, particularly verses 23 to 26, are foundational to understanding the emotional tone and central message of this lament. These verses encapsulate the rhetorical questions that reflect the agony of the community while revealing their intense longing for a responsive God.

Call to Action: The questions posed within these verses not only prompt deep contemplation but also serve as an urgent plea for divine intervention. They illustrate the desperate longing of the community for God to engage with their suffering, thereby underscoring the immediacy of their appeal for help.

Progression of Thought: The narrative arc of the psalm moves from an initial expression of profound anguish towards a more reflective assertion of faith. This progression highlights a journey from despair, through questioning, and ultimately to a reaffirmation of loyalty to God, illustrating the complexities of faith during trials.

Collective Voice: The structure of the psalm emphasizes the unified voice of the community in lamentation, reinforcing the importance of collective expression in their dialogue with God. This shared lament fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support, illustrating how communal experiences of suffering can strengthen their resolve and deepen their faith.

The understanding of Psalm 44 is enhanced by clearly delineating it into various segments, namely the key themes, literary devices, and structural components. By breaking down the psalm into its individual sections, we can better appreciate the nuanced interplay of despair and hope that characterizes the text. The exploration of its rich imagery and rhetorical techniques, such as metaphors and parallelism, further illuminates the emotional landscape of the psalmist. Additionally, recognizing the overall structure allows for a more comprehensive interpretation of how these elements contribute to the psalm's message about suffering, divine abandonment, and yearning for restoration. This approach ultimately deepens our insight into the spiritual and historical context of Psalm 44, shedding light on its enduring significance.

Linguistic and semantic analysis of the rhetorical questions

Verse 23: “Awake, O Lord! Why are you sleeping? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.”

Linguistic Aspects. The use of the imperative mood in the words “Awake” and “Rouse yourself” conveys a profound sense of urgency and a direct appeal to God, highlighting the psalmist’s deep sense of desperation and emotional turmoil. The rhetorical questioning in “Why are you sleeping?” employs the present continuous tense, suggesting not just a momentary lapse but a prolonged and troubling state of

divine inaction, which inevitably heightens the psalmist's frustration and sense of abandonment. This choice of language invites reflection on the perceived silence of God in times of distress.

Semantic Analysis. These deeply touching inquiries evoke a sense of urgency, suggesting that God's apparent inactivity during critical moments is disheartening and potentially disastrous for the faithful. The metaphor of sleep starkly contrasts with the people's active suffering and turmoil, highlighting a dramatic disconnect between the divine perspective and human experience. The phrase "reject us forever" heightens the existential dread surrounding the possibility of total divine abandonment, instilling a grave sense of helplessness and despair within the text.

Verse 25: "For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground."

Linguistic Features. While this line does not directly question the reader, it operates in an interrogative manner, establishing a profound tension between the dire human condition and the expected divine intervention. The vivid imagery evokes a visceral response, drawing the reader into the emotional landscape of the psalmist's experience.

Semantic Implications. This striking imagery evokes a sense of defeat and despair, crafting a melancholic portrait of suffering that deeply resonates with the reader. By stating that "our soul is bowed down to the dust," the text conveys a state of profound prostration, both physically and spiritually. It aims to evoke empathy and understanding regarding the severity of the human spirit's struggle, juxtaposing humanity's significant degradation with the perceived indifference of the divine. Ultimately, it raises questions about the nature of divine support amidst overwhelming suffering.

The rhetorical questions also address the theme of historical memory and identity. They recall God's acts of salvation as a basis for questioning the present situation, emphasizing the role of collective memory in shaping the community's understanding of God and themselves. The parents told and taught their children about YHWH's past deeds as part of their religious, vocational, and military training.³⁹ The children would then use these when faced with challenges in life, as we find them in this Psalm.

Literary Devices

Psalm 44 engages deeply with these literary and theological themes through rhetorical questions, presenting a complex and nuanced exploration of faith, suffering, and divine interaction. The questions articulate the community's anguish and confusion and invite reflection on the enduring questions of God's justice and the nature of righteous suffering.

The rhetorical questions in Psalm 44 examine the psalmist's emotional and spiritual turmoil, demanding a thorough analysis. In this psalm, the speaker confronts the harsh reality of God's perceived abandonment amidst the suffering and defeat experienced by the Israelite community. The opening verses emphasize the glorious past, when God delivered His people from their foes, and the stark contrast with their current plight unmistakably raises critical existential questions.

From one perspective, these rhetorical questions articulate a sense of doubt. The psalmists' anguish is evident as they wrestle with feelings of confusion and betrayal, directly questioning how a faithful God could permit His chosen people to

³⁹ Phillip J King, *Life in Biblical Israel* : 45.

endure such great suffering. This doubt is not trivial; it arises from a deep yearning for understanding amidst despair. The fear of divine abandonment leads to an intense emotional struggle that resonates powerfully with anyone facing hardship, making it a timeless issue.

Alternatively, these questions can be viewed as direct accusations against God. By asking why God has forgotten them or remains silent in times of trouble, the psalmist confronts God's fidelity and power head-on. This accusation contrasts with the past victories attributed to divine intervention and the current suffering, highlighting a breach in the covenant relationship. Such a confrontational stance reflects frustration with God's apparent inaction, raising significant theological issues about justice and faithfulness that demand attention.

Lastly, these rhetorical inquiries can also be interpreted as a bold reaffirmation of trust. By voicing doubts and struggles, the psalmist engages in an unapologetic dialogue with God, illustrating that questioning and lament can coexist alongside faith. This interaction emphasizes that expressing feelings of anguish is essential to a dynamic and authentic relationship with the divine. It asserts that faith is complex and multifaceted, where moments of doubt can lead to deeper understanding and renewed hope for divine intervention.

Each perspective enriches our understanding of Psalms 44, underlining the complexity of faith in the face of suffering. The interplay between doubt, accusation, and reaffirmation illustrates the nuanced nature of the human experience and the ongoing dialogue between believers and God during times of crisis. This nuanced understanding compels readers to embrace their struggles and questions, inviting them to explore their faith journey even further.

An analysis of the discussion of the use of rhetorical questions in Psalm 44 highlights how they reflect the narrator's inner turmoil, despair, and feelings of abandonment by God amidst Israel's suffering. The psalmist's questions indicate a disconnect between their emotional state and their understanding of God's justice and presence. The claims made in verses 8, 17, and 18 demonstrate a struggle with faith and a call for divine restoration, juxtaposed against Israel's history of apostasy and unfaithfulness as depicted in the prophetic books.

The Babylonian captivity serves as a backdrop for the psalm, emphasizing a spiritual crisis resulting from covenant failures. The text questions whether the psalmist's assertions of God's faithfulness reflect a simplistic view of divine protection or a deeper theological struggle with the nature of faith amidst suffering. It also explores the theme of divine silence in other psalms, interpreting it as a test of faith that invites deeper reliance on God's presence. Overall, the psalm reflects the complexities of faith, divine oversight, and human experience in the context of suffering and disobedience.

Psalm 94

Psalm 94 intricately weaves together the themes of individual and collective confusion with the overarching concept of divine justice. The psalmist articulates a deep and urgent plea to God for intervention against those who oppress and exploit others, highlighting a disconcerting observation: the wicked often seem to flourish and evade consequences for their actions. This troubling reality evokes a profound sense of injustice, resonating with the community's shared experiences of suffering and hardship. The psalmist's appeal for divine action serves not only as a personal lament but also as a reflection of the community's longing for vindication and

restoration. Furthermore, it emphasizes the essential need for reassurance of God's sovereignty over the moral order, affirming that despite the apparent triumph of evil, ultimate justice rests in divine hands. The psalm underscores a yearning for clarity amidst chaos, urging believers to trust in God's righteous judgment as a source of hope and strength.

Literary Context of the Psalm

Psalm 94 is a psalm of lament and vindication that contains elements of wisdom and a call for justice. Scholars argue about the exact genre of this psalm. Bratcher argues that the Psalm is an individual prayer asking God to help him against his enemies.⁴⁰ Jerome classifies this lament as communal, though some parts sound like a personal lament.⁴¹ Anderson also classifies this psalm as a communal lament.⁴² For this study, the psalm will be considered a communal lament.

The psalm is in Book Four of the Psalms, mostly made up of the Kingship of YHWH psalms. Howard argues that Psalm 94 is correctly positioned because it serves as an appropriate hinge between the early part of Book 4—which raises many questions about life's purpose and God's relationship with his people—and the middle part of the book, in which unfettered praise of YHWH the king breaks forth.⁴³ Gillingham further asserts this position by saying that Psalm 94 interrupts the jubilant

⁴⁰ Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reayburn, *A Handbook on Psalms* 1991, 818

⁴¹ Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, ed. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1990, 542.

⁴² Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 1974, 51-52, 169, 176.

⁴³ Psalm 94— Logotechnical Analysis, 668.

praise of Psalm 93, 95-100 with a lament on the judgment of God.⁴⁴ The rhetorical questions in this psalm will be in response to this effect.

The psalm begins with an appeal to God, the judge of the earth, to bring retribution against the wicked. This sets the tone for a plea for divine intervention against injustice. The psalm talks about the evil's prideful behaviour and cruel deeds, raising the question of how long they will be allowed to succeed. The psalmist emphasizes this using the term pour forth in the rhetorical question in verse 4, a figure for excessive and unadvised speech.⁴⁵ The lament emphasizes the apparent success of those who act unfairly and their lack of respect for God.

The psalm has the following literary features that help deepen its follow and enhance its themes. Portions of the psalm have a didactic or instructional tone, offering wisdom about God's justice and the importance of adhering to His laws. The following verses show this assertion.

It begins with the recognition of God's justice in verse 1, emphasizing the belief that God will judge the wicked. This sets the stage for a call to action against unrighteousness, as expressed in verse 2, where the psalmist seeks divine retribution, reinforcing the notion of God as a just judge who holds the proud accountable.

Moving to verse 10, the emphasis shifts to God's discipline of nations, highlighting it as a form of instruction and correction integral to His justice. This theme continues in verse 12, which values the reception of God's discipline and instruction, correlating adherence to His laws with wisdom and blessing.

⁴⁴ Susan Gillingham, Psalms 90–106: Book Four and the Covenant with David, *European Judaism* 48.2 (2015): 88, <https://doi.org/10.3167/ej.2015.48.02.12>, <http://berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/european-judaism/48/2/ej480212.xml>.

⁴⁵ Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on Psalms*, 399.

Verse 15 further elaborates on righteousness, teaching that justice is aligned with God's principles and serves as a guide for those with an upright heart. Finally, in verse 16, a call to action emerges, illustrating the responsibility of believers to stand against injustice and uphold God's laws, reinforcing the overarching message of accountability and moral integrity in the face of wickedness.

This element aligns it with wisdom literature within the Bible. The psalm utilizes rhetorical questions to engage the audience and emphasize the absurdity of the wicked's actions in ignoring God's omnipresence and justice. The psalm employs imagery to contrast the righteous and evil actions and fates. Images of God as a fortress and avenger reassure the faithful of His protection and justice. Creach suggests that the later psalms present the Torah as the main source of salvation, security, comfort, and hope, as evidenced by verses 12 and 13.⁴⁶ Thus, it became a suitable object of trust and refuge, as Yahweh's surrogate.

A central theme is the appeal to God to act against injustice and vindicate His faithful followers. This appeal underscores the belief in God's sovereign rule and moral order.

The Rhetorical Features of the Psalm

The psalm employs several rhetorical features that significantly enhance its themes of divine justice, retribution against the wicked, and vindication of the righteous. These features contribute to the psalm's poetic and literary quality and deepen its emotional resonance and theological messages.

The psalm uses rhetorical questions to challenge the actions and beliefs of the wicked and affirm God's omniscience and justice. Questions like the one in verse 9,

⁴⁶ Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 69.

“Does he who fashioned the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see?”

emphasize the absurdity of thinking one’s actions are hidden from God. This technique underscores the theme that God is an all-seeing judge aware of all human actions, thus enhancing the call for divine retribution against injustice.

The psalm employs vivid imagery and metaphor, particularly in depicting God as a fortress or refuge for the oppressed in verse 22. According to Kidner, the tone of the rock is similar to the Psalms of David, and it celebrates something more significant than justice - the living God.⁴⁷ Kidner depicts God as a stronghold, rock, and refuge who has proven Himself capable of withstanding any challenge the enemy poses. This imagery reinforces the theme of God as a protector of the righteous, offering a sense of security and hope amidst trials. Harman further emphasizes the metaphor when he says that by combining the fact that God is his rock and refuge, the psalmist strengthens the idea of being safe in God’s care.⁴⁸ The psalmist uses silence to mean the grave in verse 17. Barnes posits that the grave is a place of silence or the land of silence.⁴⁹ The metaphor is observed in verses 11,13,18 and 22. The metaphor of pitfall, stumbling, and stronghold amplifies that security depends on God.⁵⁰

The repetition of phrases at the beginning of successive verses or clauses, known as anaphora, lends emphasis and rhythm to the psalm’s call for justice. For instance, the repeated appeals to God to act against the wicked underscore the urgency and righteousness of this plea. The Psalmist's rhetorical repetition in verses 1, 3, and

⁴⁷ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms*, 343.

⁴⁸ Allan M. Harman, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 1998), 319.

⁴⁹ Albert Branes, *Critical Explanatory and Practical on the Book of Psalms* (New York : Harper & Bros 1867), 33.

⁵⁰ “Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Basic Books, 2011), 236.

23 shows that he is perplexed that the Lord delays to act; that, for so long, He tolerates the tyrannies of these proud blasphemers.⁵¹

The psalm begins with a direct appeal to God as the judge of the earth, involving His presence and action. As Harman puts it, the plea is strident and repeatedly calls upon God, who avenges.⁵² This invocation sets the tone for the psalm, framing it as a plea for divine intervention against injustice and evil.

By contrasting the actions and fates of the wicked with those of the righteous, the psalm highlights the theme of divine justice. The fate of the wicked serves as a warning, while the protection afforded to the righteous underscores the benefits of fidelity to God's laws.

Parallelism is one of the foundations of Hebrew poetry. The psalm uses various forms of parallelism, all of which help to enhance its themes. Synonymous parallelism is prevalent in the psalm and emphasizes the certainty of divine retribution and the folly of the wicked. In verse 9, this parallelism reinforces the idea of God's omniscience through parallel statements about hearing and seeing.

Synthetic parallelism is used in verses 7 to 9. Parallelism is used to elaborate on the consequences of wickedness and the nature of divine judgment. This progression emphasizes God's comprehensive understanding and care for the righteous, expanding the initial idea of God's awareness to include His response to injustice.

The Structure of the Psalm

Invocation and Accusation verses 1-7

⁵¹ Scroggie, W. Graham, *A Guide to the Psalms A Comprehensive Analysis of the Psalms*, 508.

⁵² Harman, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 316.

Affirmation of God's justice verses 8-11

Blessing for the righteous and condemnation of the wicked verses 12-15

Personal testimony of trust in God verses 16-19

Declaration of Confidence in Divine Justice verses 20-23

According to Webster, Stanza 1 (vv. 1–3) calls on God to repay the proud. Stanza 2 (vv. 4–7) accuses the wicked not only of arrogantly oppressing the weak but also claiming that God does not notice or care. Stanza 3 (vv. 8–11) speaks prophetically, admonishing the enemies as fools who underestimate God. Stanza 4 (vv. 12–15) pronounces a blessing on those who accept God's discipline and confidently asserts that the Lord will come through with justice for his people. Stanza 5 (vv. 16–19) shows the Lord's protection. In stanza 6 (vv. 20–23), the psalmist demonstrates trust in God and separation from the wicked.⁵³

The Key Features of the Structure

The psalm uses rhetorical questions to challenge the actions and beliefs of the wicked, emphasizing God's omnipotence and the foolishness of those who oppose Him. The structure moves from a communal perspective to a more personal reflection, illustrating the communal and individual aspects of trust in God's justice. Through its structure, the psalm employs parallelism and contrast to highlight the differences between the righteous and the wicked and between human perceptions of justice and divine justice.

The structure suggests that the psalm may have been used in a liturgical context, with its call for divine justice possibly serving as a communal prayer or lamentation. The structure of Psalm 94, with its combination of lament, affirmation of

⁵³ Webster and Beach, *The Essential Bible Companion to the Psalms*, 236.

faith, and prophetic declaration of justice, reflects the psalm's thematic concerns with God's sovereignty, the problem of evil, and the assurance of divine protection and vindication for the righteous. In verse 22, Yahweh represents salvation, protection, and refuge.⁵⁴

The Literary Context of the Rhetorical Questions

The rhetorical questions are a potent literary tool deeply embedded in the psalm's thematic fabric and structural design. These questions are not posed to seek answers but to emphasize the certainty of divine justice, highlight the folly of the wicked, and reassure the faithful of God's protective oversight. The literary context of these rhetorical questions includes several aspects.

The psalm pleads for divine vengeance against the wicked and declares faith in God's justice. The theology of vengeance in this psalm differs from the common emotion of hate. Mays asserts that this was a legal custom that called for enforcement or restoration of justice when it was absent and only God could do so.⁵⁵ The rhetorical questions within this psalm underscore the certainty of divine retribution against those who perpetrate injustice. By questioning the wicked's misunderstanding of God's nature and power, the psalmist emphasizes that God's justice is not only specific but also foundational to His character.

The rhetorical questions are crafted to affirm God's omnipotence and omniscience. For example, the psalmist asks a question that alludes to this in verse 9. These questions rhetorically affirm that the creator of human faculties far exceeds His

⁵⁴ Casparus Johannes Adam Vos and Cas J. A. Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms*, 1. internat. ed., 1. impr. (London: T & T Clark Internat, 2005), 173.

⁵⁵ James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 302.

creations in perceiving and understanding their actions. This theme is central to the psalm's argument that the wicked cannot escape divine notice or judgment.

The questions also highlight the absurdity and folly of the wicked, particularly their arrogance in evading divine scrutiny. By posing these questions, the psalmist exposes the illogical nature of the evil's behaviour, emphasizing that their actions are morally reprehensible and fundamentally misguided. The rhetorical questions serve to call the wicked to their senses.⁵⁶ Beyond their function in articulating themes of justice and divine attributes, the rhetorical questions contribute to the psalm's role in providing comfort and hope to those enduring oppression. The psalmist notes that no one except God alone can help.⁵⁷

The use of rhetorical questions in Psalm 94 aligns it with the broader wisdom tradition in the Hebrew Bible, which often utilizes such questions to teach about the nature of human morality and the world's order. This connection enriches the psalm's literary context by situating it within a tradition that values the pursuit of understanding through reflection and questioning.

The Relationship of Rhetorical Questions with Other Literary Devices

Rhetorical questions in this psalm interact closely with other literary devices to enhance its central themes, including divine justice, the folly of the wicked, and the protection of the righteous. This interplay amplifies the psalm's emotional intensity and deepens the theological reflections on God's character and human behavior.

⁵⁶ The New Century Bible Commentary, Psalms 73-150, 1981, . 672

⁵⁷ Mays, *Psalms*, 302.

The Psalm extensively uses parallelism. In verses 1 and 9, synonymous parallelism is used. In verse 1, God's role in enacting justice is emphasized. In verse 9, God's awareness and omniscience are emphasized.

The rhetorical questions within these parallel structures highlight the contrast between the wicked's perception and the reality of God's justice. For example, the psalm contrasts the wicked's temporary triumphs with their ultimate downfall, emphasized through questions that underscore God's omniscience and omnipotence.

The psalm employs vivid imagery to depict the consequences of wickedness as the security of those who follow God. Rhetorical questions enhance this imagery by invoking scenes of divine retribution and protection. For example, by questioning the understanding and perception of the wicked, the psalmist implicitly contrasts this with the clear-sightedness and foresight of the righteous, bolstered by their faith in God.

Using anaphora alongside rhetorical questions helps build a persuasive argument and emotional appeal. Repeatedly invoking God's attributes through rhetorical questions, such as His hearing, seeing, and knowing, reinforces His active role in the world and His imminent interaction against injustice.

The rhetorical questions often set up a contrast between the wicked and the righteous and between human understanding and divine wisdom. This not only magnifies the righteousness of God's judgment but also emphasize the futility of evil's actions. The evil's actions are portrayed as foolish and short-sighted in light of the rhetorical questions that affirm God's ending justice and omniscience.

Repetition is a literary device used in this Psalm. As Trudinger, argues, the repeated use of the phrase "God of vengeance" in verse 1 emphasizes the strong desire

for punishment.⁵⁸ In verse 2, the request for a theophany, where Yahweh is asked to actively intervene instead of remaining passive, highlights the situation's urgency. The phrase attests to God's vengeance is repeated for emphasis. In verse 3, the phrase how long and the word the wicked emphasize the persistence of injustice and the need for divine intervention. The phrase is repeated twice, suggesting that the extent of impunity granted them was not recent. Instead, they had been allowed to continue their wrongful acts for a significant period without any consequences. As a result, their behaviour had become outrageously flagitious.⁵⁹ To attest that divine assistance was needed, verse 16 employs repetition to emphasize the point, as the second part of this verse is a mere repetition of the first.⁶⁰ Verse 23, destroy, is repeated and emphasizes God's ultimate judgment against the wicked.

The psalm opens with an invocation of God as the judge, calling Him to enact justice. Rhetorical questions throughout the psalm remind God of the injustices committed by the wicked, effectively appealing for divine intervention. This technique reinforces the psalm's theme of seeking divine vindication and restoring moral order.

Rhetorical questions also assures the faithful by reinforcing God's commitment to justice and protection. They are used to affirm that God will not abandon His people and that the apparent triumph of the wicked is temporary. This comforts the righteous and encourages them to maintain their faith amidst adversity.

⁵⁸ Peter L. Trudinger, *The Psalms of the Tamid Service: A Liturgical Text from the Second Temple*, *Vetus Testamentum Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 98 (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2004), 115

⁵⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms* - Volume 4: 10.

⁶⁰ Cardinal Berllarmine, *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Jolly and Leicester Steam Press Printers and Stereotypers. Dublin, 1886) 296.

Function of the Rhetorical Questions

Psalm 94 is a powerful invocation for divine retribution against the wicked and a plea for justice, known as a psalm of vengeance or a communal lament. It features significant use of rhetorical questions, which underline the themes of justice, divine oversight, and the folly of those who commit evil. The rhetorical questions in this psalm are strategically placed to provoke thought, emphasize moral points, and intensify the call for divine intervention.

We will analyze the particular purpose, positioning in the text, and thematic significance of these rhetorical questions. The rhetorical questions in Psalm 94 are primarily concentrated in the earlier part of the psalm. These questions challenge the wicked's actions and attitudes, emphasizing their misunderstanding of God's nature and misguided confidence in their actions.

In verse 8, the question challenges the foolishness of those who think they can escape divine judgment. It directly addresses the perpetrators, questioning their lack of wisdom and perception. In verses 9 to 10, the questions use the principle of divine creation to argue for God's omnipresence and omniscience. They imply that it is absurd to think that the Creator of human faculties would Himself lack those abilities. Bratcher argues that the rhetorical questions in verses 8 to 10 assert that God hears and sees and should not be mistaken for requests for information.⁶¹ These questions affirm God's omnipotence and moral authority to judge and punish.

The rhetorical questions in Psalm 94 affirm God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and justice. They reassure the faithful that no deed goes unnoticed by God and that He is actively involved in human affairs, countering the claims of the wicked who

⁶¹ Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reayburn, *A Handbook on Psalms*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 821.

presume God's inactivity or indifference. These questions also serve a didactic function by highlighting the folly of thinking God does not see or act against evil. They teach an implicit lesson about the nature of divine retribution and the folly of sin.

For the community that recites or hears this psalm, these rhetorical questions reinforce their faith in divine justice and encourage patience and steadfastness amid apparent injustices. They are reminded that divine retribution is inevitable and just, aligning the community's perspective with divine truth. The rhetorical questions affirm the faith; when the psalmist asks who will rise for him, he is not expressing doubt but is affirming his faith.⁶² Verse 16 uses legal language; when the psalmist asks who will rise or stand for him, he means a legal representative or a lawyer, and the question is that this representative cannot be other except the Lord.⁶³

In Psalm 94, rhetorical questions are a potent literary device that reinforces the themes of divine oversight, justice, and the folly of the wicked. These questions challenge the wicked's misunderstanding and strengthen the community's faith in God's enduring justice and omnipotence. The placement and crafting of these questions deepen the emotional and theological impact of the psalm, making it a profound expression of the struggle between wickedness and divine justice. Ross asserts that the question, *How long?* is emotional and sometimes shows an unfinished matter because of frustration.⁶⁴

Linguistic and semantic analysis of the rhetorical questions in Psalm 94

⁶² Arnold Black Rhodes, *The Book of Psalms* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1960), 133.

⁶³ Bratcher, 824.

⁶⁴ John F. Walvoord, *Bible Commentary 51: The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom* (David C Cook, 2018), 255.

Psalm 94 reflects a cry for justice and an appeal against the oppression faced by the faithful. The rhetorical questions in this psalm interrogate God's justice and the suffering experienced by His people.

Key Rhetorical Questions. Verse 3: "O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?"

Linguistic Analysis. The repetition of the phrase "how long" conveys an intense sense of frustration and impatience, utilizing a simple yet powerful structure that amplifies the emotional weight of the plea. This parallelism not only emphasizes the persistent nature of wickedness but also reflects the psalmist's deep yearning for resolution. The stylistic choice to echo this question serves to highlight the cyclical torment endured by the righteous, who are victimized by the continuous success of evil.

Semantic Analysis. Fundamentally, this verse embodies a heartfelt plea for divine intervention in the face of perceived injustice. The focus on the "wicked" positions them as an external adversary, effectively creating a stark contrast between the suffering righteous and the seemingly triumphant wicked. This dichotomy prompts readers to reflect on the nature of divine justice and the delay in its manifestation, igniting a longing for divine action to restore moral order.

Verse 7: "They say, 'The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive.'"

Linguistic Analysis. This rhetorical construction features quotations that encapsulate the cynical perspective of the oppressors. The use of indirect discourse serves to draw a contrast, allowing the faithful to voice their dissent against such blasphemy. By presenting the deniers' viewpoint, the psalmist crafts a dialogue that underscores the tension between belief and doubt, highlighting the chasm between the faithful and those who question divine oversight.

Semantic Analysis. The claim that “the LORD does not see” directly challenges the concept of divine omniscience and justice, thrusting the faithful into a profound crisis of faith. This assertion raises deeper existential questions regarding the relationship between God and humanity, as believers grapple with the apparent disconnect between their suffering and their understanding of God's nature as a protector and provider. It provokes a struggle to reconcile one's faith in an all-seeing deity with the harsh realities of injustice present in the world.

Verse 17: “If the LORD had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.”

Linguistic Analysis. This conditional structure not only conveys uncertainty but also underscores the vital importance of divine assistance in times of adversity. The imagery of “the land of silence” serves as a poignant metaphor for death or despair, suggesting a state of existential abandonment. This language evokes a profound sense of vulnerability, accentuating the psalmist's acknowledgment of God's critical role in sustaining life.

Semantic Analysis. The existential threat posed by this “silence” reinforces the psalmist's recognition of God's presence in preserving hope amidst suffering. The rhetorical nature of this statement implies that experiencing divine help is not merely an abstract promise but an essential necessity for survival and continuity. This expression of dependence on God resonates deeply with anyone who has faced despair, reinforcing the idea that faith is intricately intertwined with the sustenance of life itself.

Comparison of the rhetorical questions in Psalms 44 and 94 with their usage in other lament Psalms.

In Psalms 44 and 94, rhetorical questions serve as a mechanism to express deep lamentation and facilitate a connection with God during periods of distress. These Psalms stand out as poignant examples of the broader tradition found in lament Psalms, where questioning plays a crucial role in articulating the faithful's emotional turmoil. The questions often convey a sense of abandonment, evoking confusion and despair as individuals grapple with their circumstances. Each inquiry resonates with the human experience of suffering and longing for divine intervention, revealing an underlying hope for restoration and understanding. Through this poignant dialogue, the reader is invited to share in the struggle, fostering a deeper engagement with their faith amid life's challenges.

In Psalm 44, the opening rhetorical questions ("Why do you hide your face?") convey a sense of confusion and betrayal, emphasizing the psalmist's feelings of abandonment by God despite past victories. This questioning expresses lament and challenges God's perceived inaction in light of Israel's suffering. The use of rhetorical questions in this context heightens the emotional weight of the lament, creating a sad contrast between Israel's past glory and its present agony.

Similarly, Psalm 94 employs a series of rhetorical questions that call into question God's justice and attention to wickedness ("How long shall the wicked, O Lord, how long shall the wicked exult?"). These questions reflect the psalmist's frustration and a yearning for justice, setting the stage for an appeal to God's faithfulness. Here, the rhetorical questions intensify the lament by framing God as seemingly passive in the face of evil, pushing the psalmist's emotional struggle into sharper relief.

When comparing these Psalms with other lament Psalms, such as Psalm 13 or Psalm 22, we find common patterns. Psalm 13 features a rhetorical inquiry about God's forgetfulness ("How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?"), which echoes the themes of despair evident in Psalms 44 and 94. The repetitive questioning can articulate sorrow and evoke God's response, highlighting a longing for restoration.

In other lament contexts, rhetorical questions can shift the tone from despair to hope. For example, Psalm 42 contains questions that reflect a deep yearning for God's presence ("Why are you cast down, O my soul?"). This reflective questioning ultimately leads to reaffirming faith, as the psalmist encourages himself to hope in God despite overwhelming despair.

Thus, while Psalms 44 and 94 use rhetorical questions to express lament and challenge God, their usage reflects broader patterns found in lament Psalms. They serve to process suffering, provoke a response from God, and navigate the complex emotions of despair and hope. Ultimately, the power of rhetorical questions in these Psalms lies in their ability to express the tension between sorrowful questioning and the yearning for divine faithfulness.

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The rhetorical questions in Psalms 42, 44, 88, and 94 serve as literary tools that highlight the theological complexities of suffering, divine absence, and the pursuit of justice within the faith community. These questions convey emotional turmoil and invite readers to explore deep existential themes regarding God and human experience. Each psalm reflects a unique longing and confusion, illustrating the struggle to reconcile faith with life's harsh realities. This analysis reveals how the psalmists express despair while simultaneously holding onto hope for munity intervention, enriching the discussion on faith amidst adversity. Engaging with these psalms allows us to appreciate their nuanced messages and their ongoing relevance in our spiritual lives.

Human Longing for God

The Old Testament is a treasure trove of texts that poignantly express the profound human longing for God, often revealing the deep emotional and spiritual struggles that accompany this pursuit. Throughout its pages, we find vivid imagery and heartfelt declarations that reflect the intensity of this yearning.

For instance, in Psalm 42:1-2, the psalmist eloquently captures this longing through the metaphor of a deer panting for water. This powerful imagery evokes a visceral sense of spiritual thirst, illustrating how the psalmist grapples with an aching void within, one that can only be quenched through a deep and abiding communion

with God. The yearning is not merely for companionship, but for a profound spiritual sustenance that is essential to the soul.

Similarly, in Isaiah 26:9, the prophet voices a longing for God that springs forth from a place of deep sorrow fused with hope. This verse underscores the notion that, in times of turmoil and uncertainty, it is through the presence of God that we find peace and guidance. The unfolding of God's judgments upon the earth teaches inhabitants righteousness, revealing our innate desire for divine truth and solace amidst chaos.

In Jeremiah 29:13, we encounter a powerful promise: those who earnestly seek God with all their hearts will indeed find Him. This verse encapsulates the fundamental yearning of the human condition, assuring us that our genuine pursuit of God is met with the fulfillment of our deepest spiritual needs. It speaks to a universal truth, suggesting that the quest for meaning often leads us directly to the Divine.

Similarly, in Lamentations 3:25-26, the author contemplates the hope found in patiently waiting for the Lord. This passage beautifully articulates a longing for God's mercy and love, highlighting the virtues of patience and hope in the midst of suffering and despair. Here, waiting becomes an active expression of faith, as one anticipates the goodness that is to come.

In Psalm 63:1, the psalmist passionately declares, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you." This fervent cry reveals a deep desire for a personal relationship with the Divine, emphasizing that true fulfillment is found in the relentless quest for God above all else. The integrity of this pursuit unveils a heart that is fully engaged in its longing.

Finally, in Job 23:3-4, amidst his profound suffering, Job expresses a desperate longing to encounter God and comprehend His ways. His yearning for dialogue with

the Creator highlights a fundamental human need for clarity and connection during life's trials. It is through this desire that we sense a deep spiritual struggle, a quest for understanding that resonates within each of us.

Collectively, these passages weave a rich tapestry of yearning, illuminating various dimensions of the human experience in relation to the divine. They convey a universal truth: the search for God is often intertwined with our struggles, our hopes, and our deep desires for meaning and connection. In these texts, we find echoes of our own spiritual journeys, a reminder that we are not alone in our quest to find solace and purpose.

The psalmist's questioning articulates a deep spiritual thirst for God, a metaphor for the human soul's innate desire for divine connection. Jesus' declaration of being the living water in John 4: 10-14 parallels this theme, emphasizing the fulfillment found in divine presence.

Rhetorical questions such as "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" (Psalm 42:5, 11) underscore spiritual longing and despair themes. The psalmist uses these questions to express a deep yearning for God and a struggle with feelings of abandonment. These questions highlight the human experience of feeling distant from God and the internal battle of maintaining faith during difficult times. They invite reflection on the nature of hope and trust in God's ultimate goodness, which aligns with biblical themes of perseverance and faithfulness amid trials.¹

¹ James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation : A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 173.

Psalm 42:1 shows the need to seek God in order to have an experiential relationship with Him.² Knowing God is eternal, as stated in John 17:3. Having an experience and fellowship with Him should be the concern of all believers. Other Scriptures that demonstrate the need for humans to long for God are Ephesians 1:17, 3:18, 19, and Philippians 3:8,10.

Human confusion amidst Suffering

The use of rhetorical questions reveals the psalmist's struggle with doubt yet ultimately leads to reaffirming faith in God. This reflects a broader biblical narrative where faith is often strengthened through questioning and doubt, as seen in the story of Thomas in John 20: 24-29. Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, argue that the laments of the Psalms encourage us to risk the danger of speaking boldly and personally to the Lord of the universe, the laments are refusals to settle for the way things are. They are acts of relentless hope that believes no situation falls outside Yahweh's capacity for transformation, no situation falls outside of Yahweh's responsibility.³

Psalm 44 employs rhetorical questions, such as "Why do you sleep, Lord? Awake! Rouse yourself! Do not cast us off forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?" (Psalm 44:23-24). These questions convey a sense of confusion and distress regarding the perceived abandonment by a divine presence.

This challenges the notion of God's unwavering presence and delves deeper into the complex relationship between God's sovereignty and human suffering. It addresses the theological tension between God's covenantal promises and His

² William S. Plumer. *The Book of Psalms A Critical and Expository Commentary with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks*, (Sheridan Books, 2016), 495.

³ Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III. *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions About God* (Navpress, Colorado: Springs, 1994), 54

enigmatic will, touching on broader biblical debates concerning the righteousness of God and the reality of human suffering. The love of God at this moment appeared to be obscured by a veil hence this confusion.⁴

The psalmist may have had Psalm 78:65 in mind that says that the Lord awoke like one out of sleep. These are bold words for one to use when speaking with God. This shows the confidence that we should have in addressing God, and this comes only as one has a relationship with Him. This confidence in addressing God stems from a history of faithfulness and interaction, demonstrated through past experiences and collective memory within the community. When the psalmist employs such daring phrases, it serves not only as a rhetorical device but as a proclamation of faith. It acknowledges God's sovereignty while also expressing a longing for His active participation in the plight of His people. The themes of human confusion amidst suffering and the contemplation of life, death, and after-life are powerfully intertwined within the Psalms, demonstrating the profound struggles of faith in the face of adversity. In Psalm 44, the Psalmist directly confronts feelings of divine abandonment, posing pointed questions that articulate confusion and distress. Meanwhile, Psalm 88 delves into the realities of mortality. These Psalms challenge us to grapple with the harsh truths of suffering and death while serving as a catalyst for a more meaningful connection with God.

Job's Experience in the midst of Despair, Silence or Divine Justice

Job's experience encompasses profound themes of despair, silence, and the quest for divine justice. It encourages a nuanced understanding of suffering and faith, urging believers to wrestle with their questions while remaining open to God's mystery and grace. His story highlights the importance of perseverance in the face of

⁴ Artur Weiser. *The Psalms A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 360.

trials and reminds us that questions do not diminish faith but can deepen one's relationship with the divine. Ultimately, Job's journey serves as a testament to the complexity of human emotion and the search for meaning in times of hardship.

Job's despair is palpable throughout the text. Initially, he mourns his losses deeply, lamenting the day of his birth (Job 3:1-3) and questioning why he was allowed to suffer so (Job 3:11-12). His expressions of anguish reflect a universal human experience when faced with tragedy. Job's despair transcends mere sadness; it encompasses feelings of isolation, loss of purpose, and a search for meaning in suffering. His cries, such as "My soul is weary of my life" (Job 10:1), epitomize the struggle of maintaining faith in a God who seems distant in times of crisis.

A significant theme in Job's narrative is the silence of God in the face of his suffering. Job appeals to God for answers, longing to understand why he is being punished despite his righteousness (Job 10:2-3). This silence is profoundly unsettling for Job, as his understanding of divine justice is challenged. He grapples with the question: "Why do the righteous suffer?" (Job 24:1). God's eventual response, which comes in the form of divine speeches from the whirlwind (Job 38:1-3), leaves many of Job's questions unanswered. Instead of offering a clear rationale for Job's suffering, God emphasizes His sovereignty and the complexity of creation (Job 38:4-41). This silence calls into question conventional understandings of justice and the human desire for clarity and reason in times of despair.

Job's experience highlights the vastness and mystery of God's nature. God's response to Job reveals that divine wisdom and purposes often transcend human understanding (Isaiah 55:8-9). This encourages a humble approach to faith, recognizing that God's plans are not always perceivable.

Job's suffering raises critical questions about the nature of evil and suffering in the world. It challenges the traditional belief that suffering is always a punishment for sin (Job 1:1, Job 2:3), suggesting that righteous individuals can also encounter undeserved hardship (Job 9:22-24). This nuance invites deeper reflection on how people interpret suffering and the principles of divine justice.

Job's journey illustrates that doubt and questioning can be integral to faith. His persistent dialogue with God, even in despair, demonstrates that true faith can coexist with intense questioning (Job 13:15-16). This encourages believers to bring their struggles and uncertainties before God, establishing a relationship grounded in authenticity.

Job's friends demonstrate a common, yet flawed, perspective that associates suffering with personal wrongdoing (Job 4:7-8). Their inability to offer true comfort highlights the importance of community in times of distress (Job 16:2-5) and the potential for misunderstanding. It reminds readers of the need for empathy and compassion in spiritual care.

Ultimately, Job's story ends with restoration and a renewed relationship with God (Job 42:10-17). This suggests that through suffering, individuals can emerge with a deeper understanding of themselves and their faith. The narrative affirms that while suffering is a part of life, it is not the end of the story; there can be hope, healing, and redemption. This journey through adversity illustrates the resilience of the human spirit and the potential for growth amidst challenges. It serves as a powerful reminder that even in our darkest moments, we can find a path toward renewal and purpose.

Life, Death, and the Afterlife

Psalm 88 is a particularly sad psalm that portrays immense suffering. The author's rhetorical question in verse 10, "Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do

their spirits rise and praise you?" reflects the depths of their hopelessness. By posing these questions, the psalmist confronts God with the harsh reality of death and the possibility that faith may not offer relief. This psalm encourages readers to ponder the meaning of life, death, and the afterlife within the framework of God's will. It connects with biblical themes of resurrection, everlasting life, and the enigmatic nature of God's plan for each person's life.

The Psalm connects with the state of the dead in which the dead do not know anything and the theme of Jesus. The following verses support this teaching: Psalm 115:17; 1 Corinthians 15:52-57. The implication of Psalm 88:10 is that if God wants to be praised (as God most certainly does), then God must keep the witnesses alive, which means they must be saved. It is in God's own self-interest to do so. The motivation for divine rescue is that God will receive the praise to which He is entitled and that He so much wants.

As people ponder the profound questions of life, death, and the afterlife, it is essential to recognize that God is actively and intimately involved in human affairs. The Psalmist in Psalm 88 expresses profound anxiety regarding divine blessings in the face of mortality, presenting a unique tone of despair without turning to hope. The imagery of being counted among those who descend to the pit emphasizes a bleak existence overshadowed by death, raising theological questions about the futility of blessings. The continual cries for help suggest that divine intervention is vital for experiencing blessings in life. The Psalmist's anguish reflects a longing for assurance of God's presence beyond death, highlighting the tension between the desire for blessings and the reality of human mortality. This struggle underscores a universal human experience with unmet expectations of divine timing amid vulnerability.

In conclusion, Psalm 88 powerfully explores the tension between hope for God's blessings and the inevitability of death. It serves as a poignant reminder of the complex nature of faith, particularly in moments of profound suffering, where the longing for divine intervention collides with the stark realities of human existence. The Psalmist's raw honesty invites readers to confront these themes, prompting deeper reflection on the nature of God's presence in the shadows of despair.

This divine presence serves as a guiding force, influencing our decisions, shaping our experiences, and offering a framework through which we can understand our existence. Throughout history, countless individuals have testified to miraculous encounters and profound insights that affirm the belief in a higher power's involvement in our daily lives. As we delve deeper into this discussion, we will explore the various ways in which God's influence manifests, reinforcing the idea that our spiritual journey is not one we undertake alone, but rather one enriched by divine guidance and purpose.

God's Involvement in Human Affairs

God's faithfulness amidst human suffering and divine silence.

The exploration of divine faithfulness amidst human suffering is a profound theme in the Psalms, particularly in Psalms 42, 44, 88, and 94. Each of these Psalms reflects the psalmists' grappling with despair while simultaneously affirming God's abiding presence, even in moments when divine silence prevails.

In Psalm 42, the psalmist expresses deep anguish, feeling abandoned by God amid turmoil. The refrain, "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" highlights a struggle between despair and hope. Yet, in verses 5 and 11, there is a pivot towards trust, underscoring the belief that God will ultimately provide deliverance.

Psalm 44 resonates with a communal lament, where the Israelites question why God appears to have forsaken them despite their faithfulness. The cry, "Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep?" (v. 23) embodies the struggle with divine silence. However, the psalm concludes with an affirmation of hope and commitment to God, signifying that the remembrance of past deliverances serves as a foundation of faith amid suffering.

In Psalm 88, the tone is markedly darker; it is one of the most anguished Psalms, where the psalmist feels enveloped in darkness with no palpable response from God. The relentless portrayal of despair emphasizes the gravity of suffering. Nonetheless, the very act of bringing these emotions before God reflects a deep-seated faith that He is indeed present, even in silence.

Psalm 94 addresses the question of divine justice in the face of oppression. The psalmist cries out against the apparent triumph of the wicked and pleads for God's intervention. Verses 18-19 portray the intensity of human suffering, yet they also convey a subtle assurance that God will uphold the righteous.

In addition to the Psalms, several other biblical verses resonate with this theme of faithfulness during suffering: Romans 8:28. This verse asserts that "for those who love God all things work together for good," suggesting that even in suffering, there is a divine purpose at work. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Here, Paul speaks of God as "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort," who comforts us in our afflictions, enabling us to comfort others in their suffering. Isaiah 41:10. This verse provides a reassuring promise: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God," emphasizing God's continual presence, especially in times of distress. Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" reflects the unwavering commitment of God towards His people, highlighting His faithfulness amid hardships.

Through these Psalms and additional scriptures, we see a rich tapestry depicting the interplay of faith, anguish, and divine presence. The acknowledgment of suffering coupled with a resolve to trust in God's faithfulness forms a central pillar of biblical faith, offering comfort and resilience to believers across generations.

God's Justice

The use of rhetorical questions in Psalm 94 serves to confirm God's justice and omniscience, as evidenced by the passage, "Does he who created the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see?" (Psalm 94:9). These questions are intended to assert God's active participation in the world and His final judgment against evil. They reinforce the certainty of divine retribution and God's close relationship with creation, highlighting that no injustice goes unnoticed by God. This corresponds with key biblical themes of divine justice, God's all-powerfulness, and His position as the ultimate judge. The function of the rhetorical questions is to appeal to God's compassion. All the multifarious forms of human affliction, oppression, anxiety, pain, and peril are given voice in the lament, and thus, it becomes an appeal to the only court that can alter their plight. Some verses that show God's involvement in human affairs are Psalm 33:10-22, Proverbs 16:9, Isaiah 59:19-20, Galatians 4:4, Matthew 24:22, and Revelation 3:10

Relation to Broader Theological Themes of the Bible

The rhetorical questions underscore the psalmist's exposure and feelings of desertion, guiding toward a profound realization of God's adequacy in moments of despair. For example, Psalm 22 begins with the poignant question, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This expresses deep anguish and a sense of abandonment, yet it ultimately leads to a reaffirmation of faith. This concept is

mirrored in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, stating that God's strength is perfect in our weakness, as noted in 2 Corinthians 12:9.

The psalmist's shift from despair to hope reflects the biblical motif of faith as a path encompassing trials, inquiries, and personal development. This motif is evident in the narratives of Abraham, Genesis 12:10-20, 15:7-21 and 20:1 -18. Moses, Exodus 3:11-4-17, Numbers 11:21-23, the Israelites' Exodus, Exodus 17:7, Numbers 13:31-33, Numbers 14:1-4, and numerous giants of faith who encountered similar journeys. In Matthew 14:31, the disciples showed doubt when the storm faced them. Jesus rebuked the storm, and their faith was renewed. Faith's journey is characterized by moments of doubt, followed by a renewal of belief.

An excellent example of this from the Psalms comes from Psalm 77. Verses one to four express deep anguish and feelings of abandonment, questioning whether God will ever be favourable again. In verses ten to twelve, the psalmist reflects on God's past faithfulness, stating that he will remember God's previous dealings, indicating a shift from despair and feelings of abandonment to renewed confidence in God .

The rhetorical questioning highlights God's unwavering loyalty amidst human desperation and longing. The promise made by God to Abraham serves as a prime example of this steadfastness, a recurring theme in the Bible. Isaac received God's promise of descendants in Genesis 26:24 when it seemed hopeless for him to have children. Despite Abraham's dwindling hope of having a child, God's covenant in Genesis 17 ultimately leads to Isaac's birth. Similarly, during the Exodus, God ensured that the Israelites' needs were met, whether for water or other vital resources (Exodus 16:4, 15, 35; Exodus 17:5-6).

An additional illustration of divine fidelity can be found in the Psalms, notably Psalm 77:11-13, where the psalmist recalls God's mighty deeds, thereby reinforcing

the understanding that God's faithfulness transcends human despair. The reflection on past acts of salvation serves as a reminder that God remains a steadfast refuge even in times of trouble. In the New Testament, God's loyalty is exemplified through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 4:10, 14; 7:38-39; 19:34). Together, these scriptural examples underscore the profound and unwavering nature of divine commitment to humanity across both the Old and New Testaments.

Rhetorical questions confirm the authenticity of expressing deep emotions such as grief, confusion, and longing for God. The Book of Lamentations and various Psalms provide a model for genuine communication with the divine. As Esther Fleece Allen puts it, rhetorical questions and laments are another reminder that God welcomes, honours, and hears our honest laments.⁵

A great example of Psalms that assert the theme of God as a defender and rescuer is Psalm 9. In this Psalm, the writer celebrates God's justice and acknowledges His role in delivering those who are oppressed. Verses 7-8 state, "But the Lord sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity." This clearly emphasizes God's commitment to justice.

Another example is Psalm 34:17-19, which reflects on God's care for the righteous: "The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." This passage reinforces the belief that God is attentive to the cries of the oppressed and acts on their behalf.

Both of these Psalms illustrate the overarching theme of divine justice and deliverance, affirming God's role as a protector of the righteous and advocate for the

⁵ Esther Fleece, *No More Faking Fine* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2017), 123.

downtrodden. The request for God's guidance through His light and truth aligns with the biblical pursuit of divine wisdom and truth. God leads His people toward enlightenment and understanding through His word.

The shift from questioning to hope in these Psalms points to an eschatological hope, reflecting the theological theme that suffering and questions will ultimately be resolved in God's future deliverance and justice. This hope is not just individual but cosmic, pointing towards the ultimate fulfilment of God's promises for redemption and restoration.

Psalm 130 is a cry from the depths of despair due to human suffering and expresses hope in God's redemption. This encapsulates the tension between current suffering and the hope for salvation. The eschatological hope is implied here in this Psalm.

The poignant expressions of longing and confusion found in Psalms 42, 44, 88, and 94 significantly enhance the theological discourse surrounding themes of suffering, divine absence, and the pursuit of justice within the faith community. These psalms serve as a rich tapestry of emotive language that captures the communal and individual struggles faced by believers, thereby emphasizing the complexities of faith amid adversity. Their articulation of despair and yearning not only reflects the human condition but also invites deeper reflections on the nature of divine engagement and the ethical imperatives arising within a collective framework of justice-seeking.

Psalm 42 articulates a deep longing for God's presence, famously beginning with the metaphor of a deer panting for water. This imagery highlights the thirst for spiritual connection and the despair of feeling distant from God. The repetitive questioning of why the speaker is downcast reflects a struggle to reconcile faith with

emotional turmoil, mirroring the broader theme of yearning for divine closeness amid feelings of abandonment.

Psalm 44 expands this sense of communal longing, particularly in the face of suffering and defeat. The rhetorical questions raised highlight the disconnect between the community's faithfulness and their hardships. This psalm tackles the tension of theodicy, questioning why a just God appears inactive when His people are in distress. Through expressions of confusion and desperation, Psalm 44 emphasizes the need to remember past deliverances as a source of hope and identity.

In Psalm 88, the expression of longing deepens. The psalmist's lament is characterized by raw honesty and a haunting sense of isolation, exemplified by dark imagery. Confusion is compounded by a profound despair, acknowledging anguish without a clear resolution. This psalm illustrates that suffering can coexist with faith, revealing the complexities of human emotion amidst divine silence.

Psalm 94 connects individual and communal confusion to the theme of divine justice. The psalmist calls upon God to intervene against oppressors and questions why the wicked seem to prosper. This longing for justice resonates with the community's shared experiences of suffering, highlighting a desire for vindication and reaffirmation of God's sovereignty over moral order.

Collectively, these psalms reveal the depth of human emotion—longing, confusion, and despair—while probing larger themes such as God's presence and absence, justice, and the desire for connection amidst suffering. Each psalm serves as a poignant reminder that faith encompasses not only praises and victories but also struggles and cries for understanding in the face of adversity. The longing for divine interaction and the quest for answers to painful questions form a vital part of the spiritual journey, contributing depth to the theological discourse within the Psalms.

Conclusion

By being included in the Bible, the rhetorical questions and the lament Psalms will be used by Christians in their everyday lives. The lament Psalms with rhetorical questions respond to the different situations people encounter daily. The rhetorical questions help the reader engage with the Psalms instructional, emotionally, and spiritually. The rhetorical questions in the lament Psalms reveal that when one cries out to God, they should do so with honesty and pour out all their anger and frustrations to God. The need for intimacy is also reflected in the rhetorical questions.

The need or longing for God shows the sense of belonging. It shows that the psalmist or Christian belongs to God, and hence goes to God only during the tough times of life. There is no need to filter our pain when we come to God.

The rhetorical questions in summary are a proof of relationship one has with God, they are a pathway to intimacy with God, they are a prayer for God to act and they are a participation in the pain of others especially the communal laments.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the study's key findings, highlighting the most significant outcomes and insights gained throughout the research process. It draws attention to the implications of these results, discussing how they contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field. Additionally, the chapter presents well-founded conclusions based on the analyzed Psalms and gives recommendations for future research endeavours, suggesting areas where further exploration could enhance understanding and application of the study's themes.

The literature review, in Chapter 2, highlighted the significant contributions of various scholars. The study revealed that rhetorical questions are an essential component of lament psalms, serving psychological, theological, and social roles. They facilitate a more interactive experience between the psalm and its reader, allowing individuals to articulate their internal struggles with God in the face of various situations. By expressing their concerns through these questions, communities find unity and determination in seeking answers to their struggles while maintaining a relationship with God. As they convey their traumatic experiences, they are united in prayer.

Rhetorical questions also serve as a refrain within the psalm, marking the climax of the stanzas and emphasizing the overall theme. They contribute to the structure of the psalm, highlighting their significance in individual lament psalms.

Additionally, these questions complement the literary and theological themes within the lament psalms. The psalmist conveys emotional intensity through rhetorical questions, inviting both the author and readers to thoughtfully reflect on the psalm's themes. This integration of rhetorical questions with other literary devices enriches the emotional and theological depth of the lament psalm.

The community's disorientation and sorrow are vividly expressed through these questions, which also tackle issues of social justice and divine silence. The rhetorical questions become pleas for justice, interrogating God in light of the community's suffering and defeat at the hands of enemies. This confusion arises from their history, where God actively intervened, contrasting with the community's current perception of God's apparent disinterest.

Theodicy is another critical aspect addressed through these rhetorical questions. They underscore the tension between God's goodness and the existence of evil, challenging concepts of omnipresence, omnipotence, and justice. The study adequately addressed key questions regarding the function of rhetorical questions in lament psalms, their relationship with other literary devices such as parallelism, imagery, and metaphor, and the theological implications of their use. For instance, rhetorical questions enhance themes in both individual and communal laments, as seen in Psalm 42, where they reinforce the central emotion and theme.

As readers engage with lament psalms, rhetorical questions prompt reflection on moral aspects, serving as a catalyst for exploring confusion, doubt, and the search for meaning during distress. They highlight the relationship between God and the psalmist, allowing for an honest expression of thoughts and emotions.

Moreover, these questions foster communal togetherness during hardship, serving a didactic purpose, particularly concerning theodicy. They illustrate the community's struggle to reconcile the existence of a good God with the reality of evil, while also affirming that God ultimately intervenes on behalf of His people. The psalmists question God following their defeat by enemies, expressing the community's confusion over His apparent silence in their suffering. They believe that their circumstances arise from God's permission, contrasting their current hardships with their history of divine intervention on their behalf. Furthermore, the study found that rhetorical questions function harmoniously with other literary devices. For example, the power of metaphors is enhanced when combined with rhetorical questions, helping to deepen the inquiry into why God does not seem to listen.

The rhetorical questions are part of the refrain, which is the climax of the stanzas. The rhetorical questions play a significant role in building up the peak of the stanzas, which help to emphasize the psalm's theme. The refrain also helps to come up with the structure of the psalm. The importance of the rhetorical questions in the individual lament psalms cannot be over-emphasized.

The questions enhance the literary and theological themes of the lament psalms, conveying the emotional intensity of the psalmist's grief. They encourage both the author and readers to reflect deeply on the psalm's themes. These questions are seamlessly woven into other literary devices, contributing to the emotional and theological richness of the lament.

The study questions were adequately addressed in the study. The questions were: How do rhetorical questions function in lament Psalms? How do they relate with other literary devices in the Psalms such as parallelism, imagery, and metaphor? What are the key literary and theological themes associated with the rhetorical

questions? What are the theological implications of using rhetorical questions in the lament psalms, and how do these implications relate to broader themes in the Bible?

The first question is addressed in the study and the following observations were noted: The rhetorical questions help to enhance the themes of both the individual and communal laments. For example, in Psalm 42 the rhetorical questions appear in the refrain and thereby reinforcing both the theme and central emotion of the Psalm. The emotional state of the psalmist is expressed as well. Rhetorical questions complement the theological and literary themes.

As one reads the lament psalms, they are assisted to observe and retrospect on the moral aspects of the psalm. The questions are a catalyst to this process. Bewilderment, that is, confusion, doubt, and search for meaning in times of distress, is clearly brought out by the rhetorical questions. The rhetorical questions also highlight the relationship between God and the psalmist through the open and honest way of communicating between them.

The rhetorical questions relate to other literary devices, which help to deepen the themes of the lament psalms and enrich their emotional and theological depth. The meaning of the text is easily seen as the rhetorical questions intertwine with other literal devices, such as repetition.

The rapport between rhetorical questions and other literal devices brings out the attributes of God in the lament psalms. For example, the combination with climatic parallelism brings out the attributes such as love, faithfulness and righteous deeds. This helps the reader of the psalm to have a deeper and better understanding of the psalm.

There are key literary and theological themes that are associated with the rhetorical questions that are elucidated in this study. The themes such as spiritual

thirst for God, feelings of abandonment, deep anxiety and emotions are observed in the lament psalms. Furthermore, human dependence on God and God's obligation to save are nuanced from the study of the association between rhetorical questions and key literary and theological themes. The combination of key literary and theological themes with then rhetorical questions add depth to the lament psalms narratives. The key literary and theological themes in conjunction with rhetorical questions help in coming with the thematic and structural designs of the lament psalms.

This study demonstrates the theological implications of employing rhetorical questions in lamentations, specifically regarding their connection to broader Biblical themes. It reveals a deep yearning for God alongside a struggle with feelings of abandonment, as evidenced by the use of rhetorical questions within the lament psalms. The reader is led to reflect on the nature of hope and trust in God's ultimate goodness, and this aligns well with the biblical themes of perseverance and faithfulness in the middle of trials.

The rhetorical questions help to highlight the need for one to have an experiential relationship with God and this leads to honest expression of one's feelings and confusion to God. The relationship helps to reaffirm one's faith in God by going and directing their confusion with God. The psalmist and today's reader know where to find help when they are afflicted and confused in the process.

The theological and doctrinal aspects of the state of the dead, resurrection, everlasting life and the enigmatic nature of God's plan for each person's life is outlined. The fact that God is involved in human affairs is shown. This emanates from God providing justice, God being the ultimate judge and the only one who can be appealed to in times of human affliction.

The relationship to broader theological themes of the bible is seen. God's strength over human weakness is seen. The shift from despair to hope reflects the biblical motif of faith as a tool of dealing with trials, inquiries, and helps to build personal Christian development.

God's unfailing loyalty in the face of human desperation and longing is upheld. God supplies man's needs when man cannot help themselves in times of need, for example, God supplied water and food for the Israelites during the wilderness sojourn. This is in line with the broader themes found in the bible.

God is acknowledged as a defender and rescuer of the weak and the oppressed. God accepts and honours honest laments and questions from His people. God has an open-door policy. The theme of eschatology is also depicted as the psalmist moves from despair to hope. This is a pre-empting of what will happen at the second coming of Christ when all suffering and affliction will be brought to an end.

Collectively, the rhetorical questions across these psalms deepen our comprehension of the theological discourse surrounding lament. They illustrate the tension between divine silence and human suffering, emphasizing that questioning can be an essential part of faith. Rather than merely expressing doubt, these questions serve as a means of engaging with God, reflecting a desire for connection and understanding despite feelings of abandonment. Furthermore, the presence of rhetorical questions highlights the role of memory and historical consciousness in the Psalms. By invoking past experiences of divine action, the psalmists challenge the present darkness, insisting on a God who has been involved in their history and who they hope will act once more. This offers valuable insights into how communal identity and memory shape responses to suffering and distress. In summary, the rhetorical questions found in Psalms 88, 44, 42, and 94 contribute significantly to the

existing body of knowledge by illustrating the nuanced relationship between human suffering, faith, and the quest for understanding. They reveal the complexities of lament as both a personal and communal expression, enriching theological discussions about the nature of God, justice, and the human condition amidst trials.

The study addressed all the questions raised in the problem statement. These findings help the reader to interpret the lament psalms rightly. The reader is also helped to get a more profound meaning from the lament psalm they will be reading and they will eventually use the lament psalms with a focus in their personal and corporate devotions as they get their Christian formation.

For further study on the topic, I recommend studying the original Hebrew text for nuances in word choices and syntax that may affect the interpretation or impact of these questions. I would also recommend learning how rhetorical questions influence understanding God's nature, human suffering, and divine justice. A theological analysis would help uncover how these questions shape the believer's view of theodicy and providence.

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