

# Divine Names in the Book of Psalms: Literary Structures and Number Patterns

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"The biblical text, in its received form, is indeed a work of literary art and careful attention to questions of literary structure will pay rich and surprising dividends to the careful exegete." Although these words were written by another scholar,<sup>1</sup> they could just as easily have come from the pen of Moshe Held, whose love of the Tanakh's literary beauty was only one of the qualities for which those of us who had the privilege of sitting under his tutelage will always be thankful. It is therefore with a sense of gratitude not only to Professor Held himself but also for what I learned from him in varied disciplines that I dedicate this essay to his memory.

In recent years, and particularly since the early 1970s, increasing attention has been paid to the surface structures of Biblical literature (New Testament as well as Old Testament). Inclusios, chiasms, concentric structures, ring structures, alternations, number patterns—all these, and others, have drawn their fair share of interest. It has become increasingly clear to many students of Scripture that such features—dealing as they do with arrangement, size, proportion, and the like—were an important part of the literary stock in trade of the Biblical authors and were deliberately used by them to serve various ends. Giving them their due regard, then, can assist us in exegesis and therefore in understanding. It is with such matters in mind that I wish to treat the use of divine names (primarily, though not exclusively, *YHWH*) in the Psalter, especially as they relate to various literary structures and number patterns.<sup>2</sup>

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1 D. L. Christensen, *JBL* 104 (1985), 134.

2 Bibliography on the presence of literary structures and number patterns in the Bible is immense. In addition to commentaries and other standard works recent studies include, e.g., J. Trublet and J. N. Aletti, *Approche poétique et théologique des Psaumes: Analyses et Methodes* (Paris, 1983); J. Limburg, "Sevenfold Structures in the Book of Amos," *JBL* 106 (1987), 217–22; A. Deissler, *Zwölf Propheten II: Obadja, Jona, Micha, Nahum, Habakkuk* (Würzburg, 1984); M. J. J. Menken, *Numerical Literary Techniques in John: The Fourth Evangelist's Use of Numbers of Words and Syllables*, *NovT Supp.* 55 (Leiden, 1985); M. Kessler, "Inclusio in the Hebrew Bible," *Sem.* 6 (1978), 44–49; J. Staley, "The Structure of John's Prologue: Its Implications for the Gospel's Narrative Structure," *CBQ* 48 (1986), 241–64; S. Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," *VT* 30 (1980), 154–73; J. W. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim, 1981); *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical*

# I. *Inclusios*

Perhaps the best-known examples of *inclusio* (a poetic device in which the opening word, phrase or theme reappears at the end) in the Psalter in which a divine name figures prominently are the so-called Hallelujah Psalms. The majority of them are in Book Five (Psalms 107–150), which closes with a series of five psalms (the final Hallel, Psalms 146–150) that begin and end with the phrase *Hallelûyâh* (“Praise YH[WH]”). Other similar psalms in Book Five are 113 and 135 (the *Hallelûyâh* *inclusio* in the latter psalm signals to the reader, in effect, that the so-called “Psalms of Ascent”—Psalms 120–134—are now concluded and we can therefore proceed to other kinds of psalms). Formally similar, but questionable as a *Hallelûyâh* *inclusio* type, is Psalm 117: Although it ends with *Hallelûyâh*, it begins with *Hallelû ʿēt-YHWH*.

Given the prominence of the *Hallelûyâh* *inclusio* type in Book Five, it is tempting to shift the *Hallelûyâh* from the beginning of Psalm 112 and add it to the end of Psalm 111, thereby giving a *Hallelûyâh* *inclusio* structure to the latter. Such a shift turns out to be not only premature but also unwise, however, when it is observed that Psalms 111 and 112, as they stand, bear striking resemblance to each other. Following the *Hallelûyâh* introduction, each proves to be an acrostic, with the first two lines serving as the introduction, the middle seventeen as the main body of the poem, and the last three lines as the conclusion. More plausible—though by no means certain, of course, in the light of the fact that Psalms 115–117 all end with *Hallelûyâh* and would therefore appear to constitute a series—is the suggestion that the *Hallelûyâh* that concludes Psalm 115 be shifted to the beginning of Psalm 116, thereby adding the latter to psalms of the *Hallelûyâh* *inclusio* type.

Psalm 106, the last psalm in Book Four (Psalms 90–106), is clearly in the *Hallelûyâh* *inclusio* category. In the light of its strong similarity to Psalm 105, perhaps the latter was originally in the same category before it accidentally lost its opening *Hallelûyâh* to the end of Psalm 104. In any case, removing *Hallelûyâh* from the end of Psalm 104 would give us a series of two psalms (Psalms 103–104) each of which begins and ends with *Bārēkî napšî ʿēt-YHWH* (“Bless/Praise, O my soul, YHWH”).

Numerous other examples in the Psalms occur in which a divine name figures prominently in an *inclusio* structure. Psalm 20 begins and ends with *YHWH*, a form of the verb *ʿny* (“answer”), and *bēyôm* (“when”). Psalm 21 begins and ends with *YHWH bʿzk* (“O YHWH, in your strength”). The only occurrences of the divine name (in this case *YHWH*) in Psalm 23 are in its first and last verses, and the same is true of Psalms 101 and 131. In these three psalms the *inclusio* is restricted to the mention of the divine name and (if present at all) is subliminal rather than overt.

Psalm 70, in its first and last verses, not only exhibits the names *ʿĒlōhîm* and *YHWH* in parallel lines but also includes the imperative *ḥūšâ* (“Come quickly!”) and the noun *ʿezr(āt)î* (“my help”). The compact structure of this brief psalm makes it

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*Literature, JSOT* Supp. 19 (Sheffield, 1982); R. Alter and F. Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA, 1987); E. R. Follis, ed., *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, JSOT* Supp. 40 (Sheffield, 1987). The present study is intended merely as a beginning to what I believe to be a potentially fruitful approach to the furtherance of our understanding of authorial intention in the Psalter. Under such circumstances, some of my analyses will be less compelling than others. (The psalm titles, which constitute later additions to the MT and are therefore not integral to the hymnic structure of the psalms, have been eliminated from consideration here.)

virtually certain that it is a literary whole in and of itself and is not an Elohist variant (see below) of Psalm 40:14–18 (vv. 13–17 English). Rather, the latter is a Yahwistic variant of Psalm 70 used by the author of Psalm 40 to conclude his hymn.

The inclusio in Psalm 82, featuring <sup>2</sup>*Ēlōhîm* and the verb *šp!* (“judge, defend”), serves to focus attention on other so-called “<sup>2</sup>*Ēlōhîm*” (vv. 1, 6) who should be “defending” the weak and fatherless, the poor and oppressed (v. 3), but instead are “defending” the unjust and the wicked (v. 2).

A striking inclusio appears in Psalm 118, which begins and ends with “Give thanks to YHWH, / for he is good, / for his love (*hasdô*) lasts forever.” This sentence, a common liturgical motif in the OT,<sup>3</sup> also opens the antiphonal Psalm 136, which then uses its final stich as a refrain throughout. The last verse of Psalm 136 balances its first three verses, giving it an inclusio-like structure the elements of which provide a frame into which the poet inserts a litany celebrating the *magnalia Dei* of the past (vv. 5–24) enveloped by a brief description of those of the present (vv. 4, 25).

Internal inclusio—for example, bracketing the main material within a psalm stanza—was also a literary device used by the psalmists. An interesting case in point is the first stanza of Psalm 128, which begins and ends (vv. 1, 4) with *yĕrē*<sup>2</sup> (“he who fears”) YHWH. On occasion internal inclusio and overall inclusio combine in impressive ways. The first stanza (vv. 1–4) of Psalm 139, for example, begins and ends with YHWH who “knows” the psalmist and his thoughts, while at the same time the entire psalm begins and ends with YHWH/<sup>2</sup>*Ēl* who “knows” and “searches” the psalmist and his heart. The apparent purpose of all such inclusions—internal and/or overall—is to stress the theological truth that God is (graciously—and unavoidably) present with his people at the beginning and at the end of everything they experience: doubt as well as faith, sorrow as well as joy, judgment as well as restoration, death as well as life.

Two additional inclusions in which one or more divine names figure in the Psalms deserve mention since they combine the inclusio structure with either the “ring” structure or the “concentric” structure (see next section). The first is the three-stanza Psalm 122, the first stanza (vv. 1–2) of which begins with *bêt* (“the temple of”) YHWH and the last (vv. 6–9) of which ends with the same phrase. The middle stanza (vv. 3–5), however, ends with *bêt* (“the dynasty of”) *Dāwîd*, thus stressing the importance of the Davidic dynasty to the ongoing peace and prosperity of the Jerusalem temple.

The second and final psalm to be considered in this section is the five-stanza Psalm 8. Its first stanza, v. 2a (1a English), and its last stanza, v. 10 (9 English), are identical: “O YHWH, our lord, how (*mâ*) majestic is your name throughout the earth!” The divine wonders “above” God’s heavens, praised by little children in the second stanza, vv. 2b–3 (1b–2 English), are balanced by the divine works “under” man’s feet, placed there by the same God, who made man ruler over them, in the fourth stanza, vv. 7–9 (6–8 English). In the very center of the third or middle stanza, vv. 4–6 (3–5 English), we read: “What (*mâ*) is man that you are mindful of him . . . ?” God and man meet at the hinge of the psalm, where we are served notice that despite man’s glory—he is, after all, only “a little lower than <sup>2</sup>*Ēlōhîm*,” v. 6 (5 English)—he is nevertheless relatively insignificant in the cosmic scheme of things.

3 Ps. 100:4–5; 106:1; 107:1 (cf. 138:8); Jer. 33:11; 1 Chr. 16:34 (cf. v. 41; 2 Chr. 5:13; 7:3, 6; 20:21; Ezra 3:11). For a brief discussion of its literary function in the Psalms, cf. G. H. Wilson, “The Use of Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter,” *JSOT* 35 (1986), 87.

## II. Ring, Concentric and Chiastic Structures

Ring (A-X-A'), concentric (A-B-X-B'-A', expandable to A-B-C-X-C'-B'-A' and beyond) and chiastic (A-B-B'-A', expandable to A-B-C-C'-B'-A' and beyond) patterns<sup>4</sup> are exceedingly common in the Bible. All three are examples of literary inversion, and each receives its fair share of attention in connection with the use of a divine name in the Psalter.

Psalm 122, discussed above, exhibits a ring structure. Other examples will be treated below.

Psalm 8, also discussed above, exhibits a concentric structure. In addition to other examples to be treated later in another connection, I wish to call attention to three psalms that use a divine name in concentric patterns in three dissimilar ways.

The first is Psalm 85, which clearly displays *YHWH* once in each of its four stanzas: vv. 2-4, 5-8, 9-10, 11-14 (1-3, 4-7, 8-9, 10-13 English). Upon closer sequential examination, however, we observe also what appears to be a deliberate use of various divine names concentrically: *YHWH*, v. 2 (1 English): <sup>2</sup>*Ēlōhē Yis'ēnū* ("God of our salvation"), v. 5 (4 English; the *yeša'* in that title forms an inclusio with the same word in the final verse of its stanza); *YHWH*, v. 8 (7 English); *hā-<sup>2</sup>Ēl YHWH* ("YHWH God"), v. 9 (8 English); *YHWH*, v. 13 (12 English). That this structure is intentionally concentric would seem to be mandated by the position of the middle attestation of the divine name: *YHWH* appears in the centering verse, which is thematic of the psalm as a whole: "Show us, YHWH, your love, / and your salvation grant to us."

The second example is Psalm 90. Like Psalm 85 it displays various forms of the divine name five times, again providing us with an apparently intentional concentric pattern: <sup>2</sup>*Ādōnāy* (v. 1), <sup>2</sup>*Ēl* (v. 2), *YHWH* (v. 13), <sup>2</sup>*Ādōnāy* (v. 17), <sup>2</sup>*Ēlōhēnū* (v. 17). The first two divine names begin and end the first stanza, forming an inclusio there. The last two divine names abut each other in the last stanza. The middle divine name is the only occurrence of *YHWH* in the poem and, though appearing very late in it, is again in a verse that is thematic of the poem at large: "Relent, YHWH! How long? / Have compassion on your servants!"

The third and last example is Psalm 125. Each of its five verses contains the name *YHWH*—except the third. The absence of the divine name in this central and longest of the verses in the poem is doubtless deliberate since it underscores the ominous results that obtain when the wicked are allowed to rule over the righteous, the two groups whose respective banishment and blessing are what the entire poem is all about.

Although a chiasm or two will be treated below in connection with other literary concerns, a possible example of chiastic structure appears in Psalm 3. Listing the occurrences of divine names in the psalm produces the following pattern: *YHWH-<sup>2</sup>Ēlōhīm-YHWH-YHWH-YHWH-YHWH-<sup>2</sup>Ēlōhay-YHWH*. That the placement of the two attestations of <sup>2</sup>*Ēlōhīm* is intentionally balanced would appear to be the case since both occur in concert with forms of *yšc* ("deliver[ance]"), the theme of the poem (as its final verse demonstrates).

4 The basic structure formulae defining the three patterns are those of Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations," 170. For further discussion and additional bibliography, cf., e.g., J. T. Willis, "Alternating (ABA'B') Parallelism in the Old Testament Psalms and Prophetic Literature," in Folliis, ed., *Directions* 49-76.

There is at least one example in the Psalter of an internal chiasm in which divine names figure. Ps. 30:9–11 (vv. 8–10 English) exhibits two divine names (*YHWH-ʾĀdōnāy*) in its opening verse and two (*YHWH-YHWH*) in its closing verse.

### III. Stanzas and Refrains

Meaningful distribution of divine names in clearly delineated stanzas and refrains was also a device employed by the literary craftsmen who produced the canonical Psalter. Psalm 13, for example, is a lament hymn that consists of three two-verse stanzas (complaint, appeal, expression of confidence). The only occurrences of divine names in the psalm are arranged in a pattern that combines ring and inclusio and that rivets our attention on the middle stanza: *YHWH* (beginning of first stanza), *YHWH ʾĒlōhay* (beginning of middle stanza), *YHWH* (end of third stanza). Similar in some respects are Psalms 39 and 65. Following a lengthy introductory stanza, Psalm 39 consists of three stanzas each of which includes a single occurrence of a divine name, which taken together form a ring: *YHWH, ʾĀdōnāy, YHWH*. Each is in the first line of its respective stanza, and each is a vocative. Psalm 65 likewise contains three stanzas in which the divine names exhibit a ring pattern: *ʾĒlōhīm, ʾĒlōhē Yišcēnū, ʾĒlōhīm*. Each divine name is in the first verse of its respective stanza, thereby highlighting it.

Psalm 110, which has evoked considerable theological discussion, is also a poem of exquisite literary beauty. It alternates two short, equally-balanced stanzas (vv. 1, 4) with two longer, equally-balanced stanzas (vv. 2–3, 5–7). In each of the four stanzas God is the subject of the first line (*YHWH* in the first three, *ʾĀdōnāy* in the fourth)—unless the fourth stanza is addressed to God himself, in which case *ʾĀdōnāy* there parallels the same title in the first stanza and perhaps in both places refers (1) originally to the newly-crowned son of the reigning Israelite king and (2) ultimately to the future Messiah who, in a manner similar to his typological predecessor, would sit at God's "right hand" (vv. 1, 5).

The exilic Psalm 137 also contains four stanzas, this time two longer ones followed by two shorter ones. The first two (vv. 1–3, 4–6) nostalgically recall Jerusalem as she was (*zkr* ["remember"] forms an inclusio in vv. 1, 6), and the last two (vv. 7, 8–9) implore the Lord to "remember" (*zkr* begins v. 7) Edom's gloating over her destruction and apostrophize Babylon, her destroyer, respectively. The only two occurrences of the divine name—in this case *YHWH*—are in the first lines of the middle two stanzas and thus stand in a chiastic relationship with *Bābel*, which appears in the first lines of stanzas one and four.

Another four-stanza hymn, Psalm 96, consists of three stanzas (vv. 1–3, 4–6, 7–9) of equal length followed by a concluding stanza (vv. 10–13) that is considerably longer. Here the distribution of the divine name—again, in this case *YHWH*—alternates among the stanzas, occurring in each of the three lines that begin stanzas one and three and in the first line of stanzas two and four. In addition, *YHWH* occurs one more time in each of the final three stanzas (vv. 5, 9, 13).

A fascinating example of divine-name distribution is that in Psalm 2, which is composed of four stanzas of relatively equal length (vv. 1–3, 4–6, 7–9, 10–12). A divine name occurs once in each stanza, and the arrangement is chiastic (accidentally?) in terms of position within the stanzas: *YHWH* in the middle verse of the first and



fourth stanzas, a divine name in the initial verse of the second and third stanzas (*ʾĀdōnāy* and *YHWH* respectively). Furthermore, each of the first three stanzas contains a title of the reigning Israelite king (and ultimately of the Messiah): *mēšīḥō* ("his anointed one," v. 2), *malkī* ("my king," v. 6), *bēnī* ("my son," v. 7). The absence of such a title in the fourth stanza gives renewed plausibility to the traditional translation and messianic interpretation of *naššēqû-bar* in v. 12: "Kiss the son." That *bar* is Aramaic rather than Hebrew might then be explained as reflecting the poet's desire not to repeat the *bēn* of the third stanza, resulting in the use of four ostensibly different terms for the king/Messiah in the four stanzas of the psalm.

The last of the four-stanza poems to be discussed here is Psalm 130. Each of the first three stanzas contains two occurrences of a divine name, alternating them as follows: *YHWH-ʾĀdōnāy*; *Yāh-ʾĀdōnāy*; *YHWH-ʾĀdōnāy*. The fourth and final stanza also has two divine names. This time, however, the pair is *YHWH-YHWH*, perhaps because redemption<sup>5</sup> (vv. 7–8) is the focus of the hymn's conclusion.

Like Psalm 39 (discussed above), Psalm 49 has a lengthy introductory stanza, which in this case is followed by two sets of two stanzas apiece, each set concluding with a one-verse refrain: (1) vv. 6–10, 11–12, 13 (vv. 5–9, 10–11, 12 English); (2) vv. 14–16, 17–20, 21 (vv. 13–15, 16–19, 20 English). The twice-repeated refrain summarizes the theme of the psalm: A person's wealth notwithstanding, death is the great leveler. The only two attestations of a divine name (in this case *ʾĒlōhīm*) in this poem, however, provide a ray of light in a scene of otherwise unrelieved gloom. The first stanza in each set concludes by linking God with the redemption of life (*ḥayy ʾnpš*)—by implication in the first set, vv. 8–10 (7–9 English), and explicitly in the second set, v. 16 (15 English).

The final example to which I wish to refer in this section is Psalm 80. The wording in each occurrence of its threefold refrain, vv. 4, 8, 20 (3, 7, 19 English), is identical with but one exception: the form of the divine name employed in each. In the first refrain it is *ʾĒlōhīm*, in the second *ʾĒlōhīm Šēbāʾōt*, and in the third *YHWH ʾĒlōhīm Šēbāʾōt*. The progressive augmentation of the divine name is striking indeed and brings the poem to an impressive climax.

#### IV. Combined Psalms

That the number of canonical psalms is 150 is surely deliberate. At the same time, however, it is distinctly misleading since it is a well-known fact that some of the psalms are composite while others were originally combined. It is to two of these originally-combined psalms that I now wish to turn our attention.

Among the many indications pointing to the fact that Psalms 42–43 were once a single hymn is the identical refrain that concludes each of its three stanzas: (1) 42:2–5, 6 (42:1–4, 5 English); (2) vv. 7–11, 12 (6–10, 11 English); (3) 43:1–4, 5. The distribution of the various divine names appearing in Psalms 42–43 provides yet another reason for assuming them to have been originally one. In the first and third stanzas *ʾĒlōhīm* occurs seven times each and *ʾĒl* once each, while in the middle stanza *ʾĒlōhīm* is found three times and *ʾĒl* twice. (It hardly needs to be observed that the numbers seven and

<sup>5</sup> For the connection between redemption and the divine name *YHWH*, cf., e.g., Exod. 6:2–8.

three—perhaps above all others—are often symbolic in the Bible.)<sup>6</sup> The only other occurrence of a divine name in the combined psalm is *YHWH*, which appears but once—in the very center of the second stanza (which is one verse longer than the first and third), and therefore (if the combination of Psalms 42 and 43 be allowed) in the very center of the original hymn of lament.

The second originally-combined psalm consists of Psalms 9–10. That these two psalms were formerly one arises from the following considerations: (1) Among Psalms 3–32, Psalm 10 is the only one without a title, leading to the conclusion that it was originally the last eighteen verses of Psalm 9. (2) In the LXX, Psalms 9–10 constitute one psalm. (3) Together Psalms 9–10 may originally have been a single acrostic poem, the stanzas of which began with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. To these (and other) observations may be added the fact that Psalm 9 uses the divine name *YHWH* nine times and Psalm 10 uses it five times—a significant numerical feature only if the figures are added together (fourteen, which equals twice seven). It may not be merely accidental that the second occurrence of *YHWH* in Psalm 9, v. 8 (7 English), is balanced by its second-to-last occurrence in Psalm 10 (v. 16)—in the sense that these are the only two references (apart from 29:10) in Book One (Psalms 1–41) of the Psalter that underscore God's eternal reign as King.

## V. *The Number Seven*

Flagrant abuse of various forms of numerology, including especially *gematria*, should not be permitted to blind us to the undoubted use of numbers in a figurative sense or of number patterns as a literary device in the Bible (as well as elsewhere in the ancient world).<sup>7</sup> Among the numbers, seven<sup>8</sup> proved to be the most tantalizing of all to the writers of the Tanakh, including the psalmists (see the previous section).

We begin our survey of the use of various divine names and their relationship to the number seven in the Psalter with the first psalm in which that relationship appears: Psalm 7 (naturally!). *YHWH* <sup>ʿ</sup>*Ēlōhay* begins it and *YHWH* <sup>ʿ</sup>*Elyōn* ends it, providing an inclusio to the whole. The name *YHWH* appears a total of seven times in the poem, as does <sup>ʿ</sup>*Ēl(ōhīm)*. If it be granted that <sup>ʿ</sup>*Ālāy* in v. 9 (8 English) means “Most High” and that <sup>ʿ</sup>*Al-ʿĒlōhīm* in v. 11 (10 English) means “The Most High God,”<sup>9</sup> then the divine appellation “Most High” appears three times (in three different forms) in the psalm, resulting in a total of seventeen—fourteen plus three (see above), or ten plus seven (see below)—occurrences of various divine names in all. <sup>ʿ</sup>*Ālāy*, as it turns out, is thus the ninth and centering appearance of the divine name in Psalm 7 and, as it so happens, is flanked on either side by *YHWH* and <sup>ʿ</sup>*Ēlōhīm* respectively. By combining

6 Cf. M. H. Pope, “Number, Numbering, Numbers,” *IDB*, 3:564.

7 *Ibid.*, 564–66.

8 M. H. Pope, “Seven, Seventh, Seventy,” *IDB*, 4:295: “It is hard to say what the numerous symbolic uses of seven in the Bible have in common. Perhaps the simplest and most comprehensive generalization that can be made is that seven denotes completeness, perfection, consummation.” For the frequent use of seven and its multiples as symbolic numbers in the early chapters of Genesis—including their employment with respect to divine names—see U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part I: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem, 1961), 12–15, 26, 94, 191–92.

9 Cf. M. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50*, AB 16 (Garden City, NY, 1965), 45–46.

"Most High" with <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm and then with YHWH later in his poem, the psalmist reminds us that God/YHWH is highest and therefore unique.

The next psalm that uses one or more divine names seven times is Psalm 14 (naturally!). It has often been observed that certain groups of psalms (for example, Psalms 42–83) prefer the divine name <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm while others (for example, Psalms 90–106) prefer YHWH.<sup>10</sup> Psalms 14 and 53 are two versions of what is basically the same poem. The major differences are twofold: (1) 14:5a–6 does not equal 53:5b–d (vv. 6b–d English) and (2) Psalm 53 (as might be expected in light of its position in the Psalter) uses <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm exclusively while Psalm 14 uses both <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm and YHWH. In both versions the divine name is used seven times: Psalm 53 exhibits only <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm seven times, while Psalm 14 alternates the two most common divine names, beginning with <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm and ending with YHWH in the following alternating pattern: <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm-YHWH-<sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm-YHWH-<sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm-YHWH-YHWH. Another example of divine names occurring seven times in an alternating pattern may be found in Psalm 38, in this case all vocatives: YHWH-<sup>2</sup>Ādōnāy-YHWH-<sup>2</sup>Ādōnāy <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhay-YHWH-<sup>2</sup>Ēlōhay-<sup>2</sup>Ādōnāy <sup>2</sup>Tēšû<sup>c</sup>āî. In addition, the non-YHWH names in this petition all differ from each other, however slightly.

In several other psalms the name YHWH occurs seven times, but never exclusive of the appearance of other divine names. (The closest exclusive sevenfold attestation of YHWH in a psalm would be in Psalm 138—if we are willing to grant its implicit existence after <sup>2</sup>ôdkā, "I will praise you," in v. 1, balancing yôdûkā YHWH, "They will praise/May they praise you, YHWH," in v. 4.) Framed by <sup>2</sup>Ēl at the beginning and Šûrî wě-Gô<sup>2</sup>ālî ("my Rock and my Redeemer") at the end, the rest of Psalm 19 uses YHWH seven times. Five of the seven occurrences of YHWH in Psalm 84 are combined with other divine names in a concentric pattern: YHWH Šēbā<sup>2</sup>ôî (at the end of the first verse)—YHWH-YHWH Šēbā<sup>2</sup>ôî-YHWH <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm Šēbā<sup>2</sup>ôî-YHWH <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm-YHWH-YHWH Šēbā<sup>2</sup>ôî (at the beginning of the last verse). The middle and fullest name—YHWH <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm Šēbā<sup>2</sup>ôî—is flanked (distantly, to be sure) on either side by its two components (YHWH Šēbā<sup>2</sup>ôî and YHWH <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm respectively).

Three of the seven appearances of YHWH in Psalm 92 are paralleled by another divine name in the second half of the verses in which they appear: <sup>2</sup>Elyôn in v. 2 (1 English), <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhēnû in v. 14 (13 English), Šûrî in the final verse of this Sabbath song. Its middle occurrence of YHWH is found in its centering line, v. 9 (8 English), which constitutes a brief stanza of its own and is the psalm's theme: "But you are exalted forever, YHWH." Psalm 99 uses YHWH seven times, four of which are in the familiar compound title YHWH <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhēnû. Although thirty-one verses long, Psalm 109 uses YHWH only seven times (the first time not until v. 14, the last time in v. 30). Its middle attestation of YHWH is in the unusual compound title YHWH <sup>2</sup>Ādōnāy (v. 21), which occurs a total of only seven times (with its components sometimes reversed) in the entire Psalter (Ps 68:21 [20 English]; 71:5, 16; 73:28; 140:8 [7 English]; 141:8; here). In Psalm 140 YHWH appears seven times, here again once in the compound title YHWH <sup>2</sup>Ādōnāy—this time, however, functioning quite differently. The fourth (middle) occurrence of YHWH is in the poem's centering line, v. 7 (6 English): "Hear, YHWH, my cry for mercy," a sentiment that is thematic of the entire psalm. The fourth YHWH is in turn flanked closely by the only other two divine

10 Cf., e.g., *ibid.*, XXXI; W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, 1968), 31–32.



names in Psalm 140:  $\text{Ḳēl}$  and the aforementioned  $\text{YHWH Ḳdōnāy}$  respectively. The last of the “seven- $\text{YHWH}$ ” psalms is Psalm 147, already treated earlier in another connection. If John Stek is correct in analyzing it as a three-part song (vv. 1–6, 7–11, 12–20),<sup>11</sup> then  $\text{YHWH}$  interacts with the other divine names in the psalm in consistent alternating patterns:  $\text{YHWH-Ḳlōhēnū-YHWH-Ḳdōnēnū-YHWH}$ ;  $\text{YHWH-Ḳlōhēnū-YHWH}$ ;  $\text{YHWH-Ḳlōhayik-YHWH}$ . Is it merely coincidental that the final two “seven- $\text{YHWH}$ ” psalms are Psalms 140 and 147—twenty times seven and twenty-one times seven respectively—as if to balance the first two psalms that exhibit seven occurrences of a divine name (Psalms 7 and 14)?

In three psalms,  $\text{Ḳl(ōhīm)}$  is used seven times. Psalm 46<sup>12</sup> has three three-verse stanzas, the second and third of which conclude with the same refrain. Each of the stanzas and refrains has a divine name in its first line.  $\text{Ḳlōhīm}$  appears in each of the stanzas and refrains (three times in the second stanza).  $\text{YHWH}$  occurs three times in the hymn,  $\text{Ḳlyōn}$  once. Two of the occurrences of  $\text{YHWH}$  are in the compound form  $\text{YHWH Ṣēbāʾōt}$ , and two of the occurrences of  $\text{Ḳlōhīm}$  are in the compound form  $\text{Ḳlōhē Yaʿāqōb}$ ; the compound divine names are restricted to the refrains. The end result of this distribution is that the three-verse stanzas of Psalm 46 contain only simple (one-word) divine names while its one-verse refrains contain only compound divine names.

Psalm 57 includes  $\text{Ḳl(ōhīm)}$  seven times, and it too contains a twice-appearing refrain—this time after each of two sets of three stanzas. In the first set, the last stanza does not contain a divine name; in the last set, the first stanza does not contain a divine name. The second divine name includes  $\text{Ḳlyōn}$  as part of its compound structure; the second-to-last divine name is  $\text{Ḳdōnāy}$ . All the other divine names in the psalm are either  $\text{Ḳlōhīm}$  or  $\text{Ḳl}$  (the latter only in v. 3 [2 English]).

Apart from its sevenfold use of  $\text{Ḳlōhīm}$ , Psalm 62 exhibits only one other divine name ( $\text{Ḳdōnāy}$ )—and that in its final verse.

In at least two psalms, the sum total of all the divine names in each is seven. In Psalm 51, for example,  $\text{Ḳlōhīm}$  appears six times and  $\text{Ḳdōnāy}$  once. The only compound divine name in the psalm is  $\text{Ḳlōhē Tēšūʿāt}$  in v. 16 (14 English); it is the fourth or middle occurrence of the various divine names in the poem. If it be granted (as seems likely) that  $\text{zibhē Ḳlōhīm}$  (“the sacrifices of God”) in v. 19 (17 English) should be repointed as  $\text{zibhī Ḳlōhīm}$  (“my sacrifice, O God”), then all occurrences of divine names in Psalm 51 are vocatives.

The pattern of the seven divine names in Psalm 83 is 4:2:1, in which each new successive divine name occurs half the number of times as its predecessor:  $\text{Ḳl/Ḳlōhīm}$  four times ( $\text{Ḳlōhīm-Ḳl-Ḳlōhīm-Ḳlōhay}$ ),  $\text{YHWH}$  twice,  $\text{Ḳlyōn}$  once. The first verse in the psalm exhibits  $\text{Ḳlōhīm}$  and  $\text{Ḳl}$ , while its last verse contains  $\text{YHWH}$  and  $\text{Ḳlyōn}$ .

11 J. Stek, in K. L. Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1985), 938.

12 That even translators and editors of the Bible—including the Psalms—have been fascinated by the possibilities latent in using numbers and number patterns to further a particular agenda is well known. A tantalizing and oft-repeated example is the reputed relationship of William Shakespeare to Psalm 46 in the *KJV*, nicely summarized in *Bible Review* 2/4 (Winter 1986), 8: “Is it possible that in his 46th year, Shakespeare translated Psalm 46 and gave us a secret clue by making the 46th word from the beginning ‘shake’ and the 46th word from the end ‘spear’?” Whether Shakespeare himself translated Psalm 46 is, of course, a moot point. If there is indeed a relationship, a friend of his on the *KJV* translating committee might well have decided to honor him by locating the words “shake” and “spear” as indicated.

Of all the hymns in the Psalter, perhaps Psalm 50 is most deserving of being known as the psalm of the names of God. Seven different divine names and titles appear in it—three at the beginning of the first verse, the other four scattered throughout the rest of the psalm. Apart from <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm, which appears a total of nine times, the other six divine names occur only once apiece. The psalm begins with <sup>2</sup>Ēl <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm YHWH, a combination occurring elsewhere only in Josh. 22:22. Other designations are Šôpêṭ (“Judge”), v. 6 (cf. also 94:2; Gen. 18:25; Judg. 11:27); <sup>2</sup>Elyôn, v. 14; and the rare name <sup>2</sup>Ēlôah, v. 22. The seventh name, <sup>2</sup>Ehyeh (“I Am”; cf. Exod. 3:14), is tucked away in v. 21 where it is rarely noticed<sup>13</sup> (for another possible occurrence cf. Hos. 1:9<sup>14</sup>). Fittingly, the final word in this psalm of the names of God is <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm. It is entirely possible, of course, that Šôpêṭ is not intended (or does not function) as a name for God here. If that be true, the nine occurrences of <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhîm, added to the five other divine names appearing in the psalm, total fourteen—that is, twice seven.

This in itself may be significant numerically,<sup>15</sup> since at least two other psalms exhibit the same phenomenon. Psalm 27, which begins and ends with the name YHWH, contains that name thirteen times. The only other divine name to appear in the psalm is <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhê Yiš'î (v. 9), the latter element of which is an echo of the same word in v. 1. Thus the total number of divine names in this poem is fourteen.

The second psalm to be treated in this connection is Psalm 29, which many scholars consider to be one of the oldest in the entire Psalter and to be a Yahwistic modification of a still earlier Canaanite hymn.<sup>16</sup> However that may be, its three stanzas are constructed with consummate symmetry. The two outer four-line stanzas each attest the name YHWH four times, once in each line. The middle stanza—seven verses long, with the first and seventh verses containing three lines apiece (the others, as in the rest of the psalm, are each two lines in length)—contains YHWH ten times. It hardly requires mentioning that ten (see the next section) and four (see below) are significant symbolic numbers in their own right.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, however, we observe that the seven-verse fulcrum of the poem contains not only YHWH ten times but also qôl YHWH (“the voice of YHWH”) seven times. It is therefore possible that the author wishes us to combine the ten occurrences of YHWH in his central stanza with either the four occurrences of the first or the four of the last (or, alternatively, both) to arrive at the number fourteen. At the same time he calls attention to the centering line of the psalm (v. 6) by making it the only verse that omits the name YHWH entirely. The only other divine name in Psalm 29 is <sup>2</sup>Ēlōhê kâbôd (“the God of glory,” v. 3), which serves to enhance the other three occurrences of the word kâbôd in the hymn (vv. 1, 2, 9).

The last psalm that I wish to treat in this section is Psalm 91. Although the total of its various divine names is seven (if we grant the implicit appearance of a divine name in v. 14), four different names appear in the first two verses: <sup>2</sup>Elyôn, Šadday

13 For details, see R. Youngblood, “A New Occurrence of the Divine Name ‘I AM,’” *JETS* 15/3 (Summer 1972), 144–52.

14 Cf., however, C. S. Ehrlich, “The Text of Hosea 1:9,” *JBL* 104 (1985), 13–19.

15 Pope, “Seven,” 294.

16 E.g., Dahood, *Psalms I*, 175, citing the theory first espoused by H. L. Ginsberg.

17 Pope, “Numbers,” 565–66.

("the Almighty"), *YHWH*, <sup>2</sup>*Ēlōhay*. The possibility that this is not merely coincidental is perhaps signaled by the occurrence of other sets of four synonymous (or closely related) terms in the psalm: "terror," "arrow," "pestilence," "plague" (vv. 5–6); "lion," "cobra," "great lion," "serpent" (v. 13); and probably "shelter," "shadow," "refuge," "fortress" (vv. 1–2).

## VI. *The Number Ten*

Like seven, the number ten also frequently symbolizes completion or fullness in the Bible. It may therefore not be amiss to assume that when one or more divine names appears ten times in a particular psalm the idea of completion/fullness is intended by its author.<sup>18</sup>

Psalm 25 exhibits the name *YHWH* ten times (half of which are vocatives).

Divine names are found a total of ten times in Psalm 56. Nine times the name is <sup>2</sup>*Ēlōhîm* and once *YHWH*. That one occurrence of *YHWH*, however, is the seventh of the total of ten appearances<sup>19</sup> of divine names in the psalm—and the reason is not far to seek: It serves to highlight the similar endings of the second and fourth stanzas of the poem. Verse 5 (4 English) reads: "In God, whose word I praise, / in God I trust; I am not afraid. / What can flesh (*bāšār*) do to me?" Verses 11–12 (10–11 English) read: "In God, whose word I praise— / in *YHWH*, whose word I praise— / in God I trust; I am not afraid. / What can man (<sup>2</sup>*ādām*) do to me?"

Psalm 145 begins with its single occurrence of the name <sup>2</sup>*Ēlōhîm*. It then exhibits the name *YHWH* ten times—but only if the standard MT is augmented by the insertion of an additional verse between v. 13 and v. 14: "YHWH is faithful to all his promises / and loving toward all he has made." The sentence was doubtless in the original praise-hymn in any event, since without it the psalm lacks the *nûn*-verse to complete its obvious acrostic. The missing verse is, in fact, found in one manuscript of the MT as well as in a Qumran manuscript, the LXX, and the Syriac version. Recognition of the tenfold use of *YHWH* in the psalm, however, strengthens the correctness of restoring that missing verse.

"Treatment of the aesthetic techniques of the biblical texts has all too long been lacking in commentaries." Although these words were written by another scholar,<sup>20</sup> they could just as easily have come from the pen of Moshe Held.

18 Ibid., 565. The divine name *YHWH* occurs ten times in the Song of Moses and Miriam (Exod 15:1–18), perhaps the oldest hymn in the Bible; cf., e.g., Albright, *Yahweh*, 12.

19 For a parallel example, cf. the appearance of Enoch as the "seventh from Adam" (Jude 14) in the ten-name Sethite genealogy (Genesis 5).

20 E. D. Mallon, *CBQ* 48 (1986), 304.