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AN EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY  
ON PSALM 103

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## CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

John De Pater was born on October 15, 1923, in Scherpenzeel, the Netherlands. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts in 1962 from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. He received his Bachelor of Divinity Degree in 1966 from Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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## INTRODUCTION

The present writer believes that Psalm 103 is a literary unity and wishes to show the integrity of the text. It is the intent of the writer to show the thematic unity of Psalm 103. The poem appears to have a central climax, with both halves joined together by means of interlocking devices, such as the inclusio and the progressive thought relationship of the parallelism. He will attempt to show that there is an intricate pattern which binds the successive cola of this psalm together. In fact there is such a close interrelationship that a division into larger poetical units or strophes presents a problem. The thought pattern seems to flow together in such a way that it is better not to attempt a strophic division of this poem. The writer hopes to point out at least some of the features which seem to contribute to the unique character and beauty of this poem.

W.F. Albright<sup>1</sup> has said that "no competent lexicographer in any language fixes the precise meaning of a word by its etymology but rather by collecting as many passages where the word occurs as possible or practicable and by listing all meanings and shades of meaning in them". These words of Albright have been kept in mind in the course of this thesis. A concentrated word by word study leads to a deeper appreciation of the meaning of the Psalm.

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<sup>1</sup>From the Stone Age to Christianity, (2nd edition), Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1957, p.46.

CHAPTER I

HEBREW TEXT AND TRANSLATION OF PSALM 103

Psalm 103

1. לדוד  
ברכי נפשי את יהוה  
וכל קרבי את שם קדשו  
2. ברכי נפשי את יהוה  
ואל תשכחי כל גמוליו  
3. הסלח לכל עונכי  
הרפא לכל תחלתיכי  
4. הגואל משחת חייכי  
המצטרכי חסד ורחמים  
5. המשביע בטוב עדיך  
תתחדש כנשר ועוריכי  
6. עשה צדקות יהוה  
ומשפטים לכל עשוקים  
7. יודיע דרכיו למשה  
לבני ישראל עלילותיו  
8. רחום וחנון יהוה  
ארץ אפים ורב חסד  
9. לא לנצח יריב  
ולא לעולם יטור  
10. לא כחטאינו עשה לנו  
ולא כעונותינו גמל עלינו  
11. כי כגבה שמים על הארץ  
גבר חסדו על יראיו

- 12 כרחק מזרח ממערב  
 הרחיק ממנו את פשעינו  
 13 כרחם אב על בנים  
 רחם יהוה על יראיו  
 14 כי הוא ידע יצרנו  
 זכור כי עפר אנחנו  
 15 אנוש כחציר ימיו  
 כציץ השדה כן יציץ  
 16 כי רוח עברה בו ואינו  
 ולא יכירנו עוד מקומו  
 17 וחסד יהוה מעולם  
 ועד עולם על יראיו  
 וצדקתו לבני בנים  
 18 לשמרי בריתו  
 ולזכרי פקדיו לעשותם  
 19 יהוה בשמים הכין כסאו  
 ומלכותו בכל משלה  
 20 ברכו יהוה מלאכיו  
 גברי כח עשי דברו  
 לשמע בקול דברו  
 21 ברכו יהוה כל צבאיו  
 משרתיו עשי רצונו  
 22 ברכו יהוה כל מעשיו  
 בכל מקומות ממשלתו  
 ברכי נפשי את יהוה

1. By David  
Bless Yahweh, O my soul,  
and all my inmost parts His holy name.
2. Bless Yahweh, O my soul,  
and do not forget His beneficial deeds.
3. The One who pardons all the sin of your life,  
The One who heals all the sicknesses of your life.
4. The One who ransoms your life from the pit;  
The One who crowns your life with covenant love and mercies.
5. The One who satiates with good your ongoing life.  
The youth of your life renews itself like an eagle.
6. A doer of righteousness is Yahweh,  
and of judgment on behalf of the oppressed ones.
7. He used to make known His ways to Moses,  
and to the sons of Israel His miraculous deeds.
8. Merciful and gracious is Yahweh;  
He is slow to anger and great in covenant love.
9. He will not forever press charges  
and not always does He retain His anger.
10. Not according to our sins has He treated us,  
And not according to our iniquities does He pay us back in full.
11. But rather as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
His covenant love prevails toward those who fear Him.
12. As far as the east is from the west,  
So far and further has He removed our transgressions from us.
13. As a father exercises compassion toward his children,  
So Yahweh exercises compassion toward those who fear Him.
14. For He knows our fashioning,  
He remembers that we are dust.
15. Man, like grass are his days,  
like the flower of the field so he blooms.
16. But the wind passes over it and it is no more,  
and its place does not know it anymore.

17. But the covenant love of Yahweh is from eternity to eternity  
toward those who fear Him,  
and His righteousness is for children's children,
18. For the keepers of His covenant  
and for the ones remembering His charges to do them.
19. Yahweh has established His throne in the heavens  
and His royal power rules over all.
20. Bless Yahweh all you His angels,  
you mighty warriors, executors of His word;  
paying eager attention to the sound of His word.
21. Bless Yahweh all His hosts,  
You who are His ministers, doers of His will.
22. Bless Yahweh all His works,  
in every place of His dominion,  
Bless Yahweh, O my soul.

CHAPTER II  
EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY ON PSALM 103

It is appropriate to begin by looking at the heading of this psalm: ldwd. Of the 150 psalms, approximately 70 are joined to David by means of such a superscription. Biblical scholars used to regard these headings to be of little or no value. Briggs is an outspoken representative of this school of thought. The concept of lamedh auctoris he rejects out of hand. He states, "an effort was made to rally about the Davidic authorship of those Pss. which have l<sup>e</sup>dāwid in their title, or the theory that l<sup>e</sup> is l<sup>e</sup> of ascription to an author. But this position could not be maintained."<sup>1</sup> In his conclusion he says, that "The l<sup>e</sup> is not l<sup>e</sup> of authorship, as has generally been supposed."<sup>2</sup> Nahum M. Sarna points out that this questioning of the validity of the psalm headings began at a very early date. "Theodore of Mopsuestia recognized that the titles and superscriptions were secondary, and he even suggested that many psalms were composed as late as the Maccabean period."<sup>3</sup> Sarna himself disagrees with Briggs and the many others who simply dismiss the headings. "The editorial colophon to the second book of Psalms clearly shows that the superscription le - David was very early understood

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<sup>1</sup> Briggs, *The Psalms*, Vol. I, p.lvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.lxi.

<sup>3</sup> Bittenweiser, *The Psalms*, p.xv.

as signifying authorship."<sup>4</sup>

It seems that new evidence from the late Qumram discoveries supports this opinion. "What is now very clear is that attribution of Davidic authorship did not come after the Psalter was fixed, but was applied to a smaller collection of psalms and to individual psalms over a long period of time."<sup>5</sup>

Hans J. Kraus gives serious consideration to the headings, especially to those that contain biographical information and refer to definite situations. He lists the psalms where ldwd is found in such a connection and says, "die Verbindung zwischen l<sup>e</sup>dāwid und der unmittelbar folgende situations - angabe dab es unmöglich ist, das l<sup>e</sup> in l<sup>e</sup>dāwid anders denn als l<sup>e</sup> - auctoris zu deuten."<sup>6</sup>

This renewed interest in the psalm headings as indications of authorship seems to be connected with the recent rejection of a post-Exilic date for the majority of the psalms. "The earlier judgment (.....) that most of the psalms are pre-Exilic, and that some may have been composed in the

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xiv.

<sup>5</sup> J.A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1967, p.13.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen*, 2 Teilband, Wageningen, Niederlande, H. Veenman en Zonen N.V., 1961, p.xx.

Davidic period is corroborated by new evidence deriving from the textual study of the last hundred psalms."<sup>7</sup>

There are nine psalms which have only ldwd as a superscription. They are: 25; 26; 27; 28; 35; 37; 103; 138 and 144. Some of these psalms appear to have certain particular features in common. The Psalms 25, 26, 28, 103, 138 and 144 seem to consist of two halves intimately related to a central climax or low point by means of different interlocking devices. It could prove to be a worthwhile study to see whether there are some specific poetic constructions found in these nine and other psalms with Davidic headings that seem to point to a single author. Such research, however, goes beyond the scope of this paper.

The writer is prepared to consider accepting the heading of Psalm 103 as a possible indication of Davidic authorship. He tends to agree with Ridderbos that the evidence presented against Davidic authorship and an early date, based on the theory of literary dependence on Deutero-Isaiah is inconsequent since the same argument could be applied the other way.<sup>8</sup>

One can hardly avoid reading ldwd as part of the actual text of Psalm 103, even when leaving the question of author-

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<sup>7</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III, The Anchor Bible*, New York, Doubleday & Company Inc., 1970, p.xxxiv.

<sup>8</sup> Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, Vol. II, p.477.

ship unsettled. All the Greek translations have tō Daid included in the text of Psalm 103. The Hebrew Mss. found at Qumram seem to follow the same pattern. This can be seen in a facsimile of such a scroll reproduced by Patrick W. Skehan.<sup>9</sup> It is true that only the last letter of ldwd is clearly shown, but the exact measurement of the missing letters seems to warrant reconstruction of the missing word and read ldwd.

The first colon, brky nps̄y 't yhw̄h, must now be considered. One does well to notice at the outset that this opening colon is repeated at the close of the poem. By the use of this poetic device called inclusio the author draws attention to its unity. This device is regarded to be of great value in Hebrew poetic art. With it the "Einheit von Versgruppen"<sup>10</sup> is clearly emphasized. "Die inclusio, wonach Anfang und Ende einer Versgruppe gleichleuten",<sup>11</sup> is an eye-catching phenomenon. This device is used in other psalms as well, Ps. 104 for example. The occurrence of this feature alone moved some of the older scholars to regard Psalm 103 and 104 as one poem. "It is needless to spend time on proving

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<sup>9</sup> Patrick W. Skehan, "A Psalm Manuscript from Qumram", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 26, 1964, p.313-322.

<sup>10</sup> Heinrich Herkenne, *Das Buch der Psalmen*, Bonn, Peter Hanstein Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936, p.16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

that the great hymn to Providence (Pss. ciii, civ) belongs to the same period as Ps. cv - cvii, viz. the second half of the Persian rule."<sup>12</sup> It appears to the writer that such conclusions cannot be drawn from the fact that Psalm 103 and 104 begin and end in the same way.

brky the feminine form of the Piel Imperative of brk agrees with its vocative npšy and is found in this particular form only in Psalm 103 and 104. This is important, since such a way of addressing oneself seems to stress the personal element.

It looks as if one deals here with a modified cultic expression in standard practice. As a rule brky was used in the context of praise and prayer, with yhwh or 'lhym as its object. This can be seen in many poetic passages such as, Judges 5:2,9; Ps. 66:8; 68:27; 96:2; 100:4; 134:1,2 and 135:19, 20.

Gesenius says of the verb brk that "The primary notion lies in breaking, breaking down."<sup>13</sup> The first meaning of the Piel is given as "bless God, adore with bended knees."<sup>14</sup> In

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas K. Cheyene, *The Origin and Religious Content of the Psalter*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1891, p.63.

<sup>13</sup> Gesenius's *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, London, Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1846, p.CXLII. (Henceforth Ges.)

<sup>14</sup> F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, p.138, 139. (Henceforth B.D.B.)

another lexicon as third meaning is listed "bless God = declare God the origin of fortunate power = praise God."<sup>15</sup> The use of the imperative in the poet's self-exhortation seems to stress the intensity of his feeling.

The word npšy describing the soul, life or total personality of someone is frequently used in the Bible but seldom in the same way as here. It seems proper to consider npšy as an emphatic personal pronoun, intentionally selected by the poet to bring out his personal involvement. One can see a similar use of this word in Gen. 49:6; Numb. 23:10; Ps. 34:3; 104:1, 35; 116:7 and 146:1. It is likely correct to say that npš is just a pronoun at large.<sup>16</sup> Yet this hardly does justice to the peculiar place of npšy linked to its parallel expression qrby. Neither does it take into account that this very term by means of the feminine personal suffix is used as an intricate device to tie the first 10 cola of this poem together. To say that, "To address one's soul is merely a Hebrew device for addressing oneself,"<sup>17</sup> and leaving it at that with regard to Psalm 103, is missing the fine point of this specific use of npš and its related suffixes in the context of this Psalm.

The next colon with wk1 qrby as its vocative object is

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<sup>15</sup> L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1958, p.153. (Henceforth K.B.)

<sup>16</sup> *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. I, 1955, p.193.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193.

modified by the same verb. When one verb rules two successive cola in this way they are most closely joined together. The poet appears to do this with artistic deliberation to enhance the unity of the poem. There is no other occasion in the Old Testament where qrby is used in the vocative.

The writer favours the plural reading of qrby, accepting the Masoretic pointing as correct. Such a reading is supported by the Septuagint, which reads pánta tã entós mou. There is an instance in Is. 16:11 where the vocalization of the Masoretic text calls for a singular while the Greek reading has the plural, just as in Ps. 103:1, kai tã entós mou. Dahood favours the plural reading of qrby in Ps. 103:1 and claims that the Masoretic pointing can be defended on the basis of metre, since it brings about a perfect match in the syllable count of the second and fourth colon.<sup>18</sup>

The word under discussion is found often in the Old Testament. When used for man it seems to indicate his inner self, the seat of his thoughts and emotions; his mental and spiritual faculties.<sup>19</sup> There appears to be progression looking at qrby standing parallel to npšy. And the poet used npšy in his self-exhortation to express his total personality. By using this additional term, preceded by wk1, he is calling forth all the inner facets of his being to be involved in

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<sup>18</sup> Dahood, *Psalms III*, p.25.

<sup>19</sup> B.D.B., p.899.

this song of praise.

It is noteworthy that qrb is found in many outstanding passages speaking about covenant renewal such as Is. 26:9; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26, 27 and Ps. 51:12. It would be interesting to check every occurrence of this word to see whether it is not applied to man in a specific way to distinguish him from other creatures. This, however, would go beyond our present scope.

The remaining words of this colon 't šm qdšw form a single thought unit, parallel to the preceding yhwh. There is a significant development here. Yahweh is not just a far-away God, who made vague promises. Rather, He is the covenant God, who is real to the poet and shows this by spelling out His name for him. The God of the covenant reaches out to His people. They can call on Him and He listens. The above words therefore are not simply an added phrase or just another appellative. They appear in a conscious effort of the poet to give direction to his self-exhortation.

There are similar occurrences of qdšw with šm, parallel to yhwh in other poems, see e.g., in Ps. 105:3 and 145:21. Also in prose selections šm and qdšw are found side by side as a synonym of yhwh, the name of the covenant - God. This can be seen in Lev. 20:3; Ezek. 36:20, 21; 39:7; 43:8 and other places. It is remarkable to see how often šm qdšw is

mentioned in the context of either the breaking or renewal of the covenant.

One also ought to look at the literal meaning of qdš<sup>Y</sup> as it is found here. The root carries the notion of separation and withdrawal but always with the thought of consecration or dedication for a special purpose or service.<sup>20</sup> This is demonstrated in numerous ways by the adjectival use of qdš. Yahweh is holy indeed and needs to be treated with special care. But He separates Himself for the purpose of action. This is why qdš is suitably used in the divine oath formula, see e.g., Amos 4:2 and Ps. 89:36. Yahweh is the God who binds Himself to action. This is why qdš is a cultic word of the first order, describing all that was set aside for the service of God. These things were to be actively used. Even in passages where the term is applied in derogatory fashion, as in I Kings 14:24, 25, the stress still falls on action. One ought to keep this in mind in order to appreciate the progressive development of the succeeding cola. Action is emphasized throughout this poem.

The first half of verse 2 is an exact repetition, stressing the fact that the praise of yhwh is the poet's main objective. The second half of this verse continues and further develops the thought expressed but in negative terms;

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<sup>20</sup> K.B., p.825, 826 and B.D.B., p.871-873.

wkl-tskhy kl-gmwlyw. This introduces an element of surprise. The previous imperatives change to the negative 'l, less harsh than the negative l'. With the jussive 'l- must rather be considered as a "simple warning, do not that!"<sup>21</sup> One should note that by using the Piel the poet maintained his stress, while increasing his intensity through a different format of expression.

The second feminine singular suffix joined to the verb links tšky and npšy together. The skillful use of the suffix throughout the first five verses greatly enhances the unity of the poem with the repeated reference to npšy.

It has been pointed out that qdš carries the implication of action. This is further developed in the selection of the verb škh, "to forget". If one were to think of this verb separated from action, either in the past, present or future, it loses its meaning. It is therefore well suited to serve as a bridge leading to the closing term of these introductory cola.

kl-gmwlyw stands parallel to and appears to be in agreement with 't-šm qdšw. The masculine singular suffix shows the finishing touch of his poetic hand. Throughout these two verses one is made vividly aware of the fact that yhwh is the object of praise.

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<sup>21</sup> W. Gesenius and E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960, p.317. (Henceforth: G.K.)

The root gm describes activity carried out to perfection. It means, "to deal fully or adequately with, to complete or accomplish something".<sup>22</sup> The primary meaning of the verb appears to have been positive. Certain bad connotations seem to have developed at a later date.<sup>23</sup> The noun gmwl in question, stands for action or work well done. Twelve of its fifteen occurrences describe God as being active in repaying or returning finished evil deeds of the past. Yahweh is the only one who is able to do such a thing and do it well.

In Prov. 19:17 this noun describes the good deed of giving help to the needy. It is found in 2 Chron. 32:25, referring to the healing of Hezekiah as God's miraculous deed. The plural of gmwl with the suffix is found nowhere else in the Old Testament. The unique selection of this peculiar form shows how thoughtfully the poet deals with his subject. He is about to sing of something good and marvellous which his God had done for him. The poet strains his poetic power to demonstrate why Yahweh deserves all praise.

H.J. Kraus is quite correct when he calls these first two verses an "Einleitung".<sup>24</sup> It would indeed be hard to imagine a poet composing a more fitting introduction.

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<sup>22</sup> B.D.B., p.168.

<sup>23</sup> Ges., p.CLXXV.

<sup>24</sup> Kraus, *Psalmen*, 2 Teilb, p.701.

Turning to verse 3 one sees a striking shift of emphasis. Yet the closing term of verse 2 gmwlyw has sharpened the reader's attention and prepared him for what is now following. Yahweh's gracious and wonderful deeds are to be extolled. By the skillful use of participles the full stress falls on Yahweh's action. The successive active participles show an explicit development, describing in emphatic detail what the gmwlyw, the deeds of Yahweh are and what they meant in the life of the poet.

At once hslh lkl wnky reveals that one faces a different focus here. Yahweh, the object of praise, now is presented as the subject of action, the Doer. Here too there is something unique about the way in which the poet employs his terms. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is the Kal active participle of slh found in this way. The emphasis on action is underlined, moreover, by prefixing the definite article to the participle. Although it appears to be unusual to make a participle definite in such a way, here one finds it five times in succession. And all these participles are definitely related to Yahweh the Actor.

Two factors need to be discussed at this point. First of all there is the question about the significance of the active participle. It "indicates a person or thing conceived as being in the continual uninterrupted exercise of an

activity".<sup>25</sup> The full emphasis falls upon the fact that the covenant God acts on behalf of His people and continues to do so. This thought is driven home with insistence by means of the additional definite article.

The article used to have the force of a demonstrative pronoun, but it rarely functions as such. Yet when it is joined to a participle it retains this emphasis. This counts for

those instances in which the article, mostly when prefixed to a participle, joins on a new statement concerning a preceding noun. Although such participles, etc., are no doubt primarily regarded always as in apposition to a preceding substantive, the article nevertheless has in some of these examples almost the force of hu' (.....) as the subject of a noun clause.<sup>26</sup>

In the passage under discussion, Yahweh is personally involved in each of the activities described by means of appositions. It seems to have been the best way available to the poet to draw a lively character sketch. For by employing the participle in this fashion, "a character is described to them which is inseparably connected with their personality".<sup>27</sup>

The psalmist draws attention to his own experience by his intentional arrangement of words. He spells out the reasons why one, and he especially, ought to praise Yahweh.

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<sup>25</sup> G.K., p.356.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.404.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.356.

The same thought is expressed in Ps. 113:5, my kyhwh 'lhyw. There appears to be a close affinity between those two Psalms, 103 and 113, in grammatical structure as well as thematic arrangement.

Westermann draws attention to the skillful use of participles in Ps. 113:5, 6 in order to enhance the purpose of praise. "These participles which make the declaration more specific, speak of precisely the other element: that he descends from that height to our depths. The only significance which the majesty of God has for the one giving praise here is that it comes down to where we are".<sup>28</sup> Much of what is said here does also apply to Ps. 103:3, 4, 5. The writer quoted Westermann since he draws attention to the skillful use of participles in Ps. 113, a phenomenon even more prominent in Ps. 103. Five times in succession the active participle occurs preceded by the definite article in such a pronounced fashion that the reader is left with the same feeling of awe and wonder as is expressed in Ps. 113:5, "Who is like Yahweh our God?".

Regarding slh one ought to remember that this verb is found as a rule in a covenantal context. This can be seen in, Ex. 34:9; Numb. 14:19, 20; Deut. 20:19; I Kings: 8:30, 34, 36; 39, 50; Is. 55:7; Jer. 31:34; 33:8 and 36:3. As a

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<sup>28</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms*, Richmond, Virginia, John Knox Press, 1965, p.120.

finite verb it is found only once in Ps. 25:11. In Ps. 130:4 its derived noun is used and in Ps. 86:5 it appears as an adjective. The verb as such frequently occurs in the setting of the sacrificial cult, especially in Leviticus.

In the Old Testament the verb slh always has God as its subject and in each instance there is an expressed object following it, such as sin, transgression, rebellion, etc. That which is forgiven is pictured as a separate object, distinct from the sinner involved. It seems correct to say that "The primary idea is of lightness, lifting up."<sup>29</sup> Its synonym nš' carries the same basic meaning of "lift, lift up".<sup>30</sup> Yahweh is presented here as actively engaged in lifting the load of sin and guilt from off the shoulders of the psalmist. The expressed object lkl-~~ew~~nky makes the illustration quite clear.

Parker remarks on this verb that "The word 'forgive' (salach) in vs. 3 is used only of divine pardon, prompted by divine grace. It suggests restoration of favor, the putting of all memory of offense out of mind and implies no necessity for atonement or expiation."<sup>31</sup> The writer questions whether it is correct to say that it implies no necessity for atonement or expiation. This verb occurs in connection with the

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<sup>29</sup> Ges., p.DLXXXVIII.

<sup>30</sup> K.B., p.635.

<sup>31</sup> *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. I, 1955, p.193.

expiatory sacrifices in Leviticus. The very fact that the participle of g'l stands parallel to hslh seems to upset his theory.

The first impression of lkl-ewnky is that of inclusiveness since lkl leaves no room for exceptions. The noun ewn stands for crooked or perverted action in a conscious or intentional way.<sup>32</sup> This meaning seems to support the concept of sin as a conscious act. Such a view of sin as related to man's mind and conscious behaviour is worthy of note. It appears that the poet has purposely selected a rather broad concept of sin here. For ewn does not only mean "sin" as such, but it also stands for "guilt" bound up with it and it signifies even the "penalty" which sin incurs.<sup>33</sup>

By retaining the link with npšy the poet underlines the fact that it is his own sins he is talking about. ewn occurs between 200 - 300 times in the Old Testament and frequently with the personal suffix. It is amazing to note how often this noun is mentioned in connection with either a prayer for or the promise or act of removal and forgiveness.

A notable progress can be seen in the second half of this verse, hrp' lkl thl'yky. Yahweh not only forgives sins, He also is engaged in curing their painful consequences. He heals the wounds sin has left behind. "Forgiveness and

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<sup>32</sup> K.B., p.689.

<sup>33</sup> B.D.B., p.730, 731.

healing are equated by parallelism here because even the most devout looked upon disease as divine chastisement, however mysterious."<sup>34</sup> Although there is a relationship between forgiveness and healing, one could question the term "equation through parallelism". In progressive parallelism one ought to be alert to further thought-development. The term "equation" appears to limit one's perception rather than to sharpen it and is not a happy choice.

Checking the occurrences of rp' in its various forms one finds that it is hardly at all applied to healing of physical illness pure and simple. Ps. 147:3 uses the word in the same way as Ps. 103:3. Yahweh there is said to be the mender of a broken heart. In Numb. 12:13 it is applied to the healing of Miriam. But her sickness is mentioned as being the direct result of her rebellion. In Ex. 15:26 it is found in the context of a reference to the plagues in Egypt, which were the consequences of wilful disobedience. The reference to Yahweh as their healer is found immediately following Israel's rebellion and connected with an urgent appeal for a renewal of their covenant loyalty. Only once, in 2 Chron. 7:14, is rp' found for sickness without reference to either a broken fellowship or a covenant renewal. This single late occurrence hardly invalidates the fact that rp' as Yahweh's healing power

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<sup>34</sup> *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. I, 1955, p.193.

is a term applied consistently to the restoration of broken relationships in an act of covenant renewal. This can be seen in; Is. 30:26; 50:18, 19; Jer. 3:22; 8:22; 17:14; 30:17; Hos. 5:13; 14:5; Ps. 6:3; 30:3; 41:5; 60:4; 107:20 and Lam. 2:13. In each of the above passages, the broader perspective of salvation is present along with a restoration of covenant fellowship and deliverance from the consequences of sin. Even in Gen. 20:17, mentioning the healing of Abimelech's wives and slave girls, the covenant is the background of what is reported. A detailed study of every single occurrence of rp' is valuable but cannot be pursued here.

Ps. 147:3 because of its close affinity to Ps. 103:3, warrants a more detailed discussion. Psalm 147 as one of the Hallel psalms has the same aim as Ps. 103; the praise of Yahweh. Yet the personal emphasis of Ps. 103 is missing since it is directed to public praise. Here as in Ps. 103 the participle with the definite article is employed as an appellation of Yahweh. The participle stands clearly parallel to Yahweh, the expressed subject of both bwnh yrwšlm and ndhy yśr'el ykns. It is helpful to note the thought development in Ps. 147. Yahweh is described first as the real builder of Jerusalem. The participial form makes for a lively presentation. Then one finds out how the city is populated and this time a finite form of the verb kns is used but in its strongest form,

the Piel, only found elsewhere in Ezek. 22:21 and 39:28. The way in which the people will live there is explained in vs. 3. The Israelites coming back from slavery must have felt downhearted. The skillful use of the active participle with the definite article and its demonstrative force in vs. 3 presents Yahweh, the builder of the city who brought His people there, as the mender of their broken hearts. One can hardly imagine a physical illness here. A state of mind is expressed; a spiritual or mental condition of distress.

The last half of Ps. 147:3 employs another participle wmḥbš l'šbwtm parallel to hrwp' thus making it more emphatic. Yahweh is shown in the act of binding up the wounds or aching spots.<sup>35</sup> If one reads Ps. 147:2 against the background of a return from captivity and gracious restoration, it is hard to miss the progressive development of these cola. Yahweh not only restores the fortunes of His people, but also wipes out the traces of their past rejection. He heals the pain felt as a result of the bitter experiences of the past and gives special attention to the mental anguish of the still aching spots by binding them up.

Psalm 147:2, 3, due to its overall universal content, has a lesser degree of personal intensity, but in structural development it is much like Psalm 103:3-5. A comparison with

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<sup>35</sup> K.B., p.726.

this related passage appears to give ground to read the term hrp' in Ps. 103:3 in a similar way.

The choice of the next term lkl-thl'yky seems to be quite deliberate and gives some cogency to the thought that the poet does not just mean physical illness. This term is derived from the verb hl', a secondary form of hlh.<sup>36</sup> 2 Chron. 16:12 seems to be the only place where this noun is applied to a disease, the sickness which struck Asa after his apostasy. It occurs in four other places in the Old Testament. In Deut. 29:21 thl'yk is applied to the curses uttered as a threat to those who would break the covenant. mkwt, standing for "blows, wounds or plagues",<sup>37</sup> does precede it and the Piel of hlh with Yahweh as the subject follows it. The verb could be interpreted as "to bring sickness upon someone". There seems to be a fine distinction between hly and thl'ym, since the root of hly is employed side by side with thl'ym and as such appears to have a distinct meaning. On the basis of this, it does not seem to be justified to say that thl'ym simply means sickness. The context allows for the theory that a special kind of sickness or calamity is meant here, as a result of the direct intervention by God due to a breach of covenant.

The same impression is left by the two passages in Jeremiah, where this noun is found in the context of faith-

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<sup>36</sup> G.K., p.215.

<sup>37</sup> K.B., p.520.

lessness to the covenant. In Jer. 14:18, thlw'y in the construct state modifies reb, "hunger". This hunger serves as the means whereby the thl'ym become a reality as the climax of the covenant curse. This can also be seen in Chapter 16:4. In 2 Chron. 21:19 King Jehoram is pictured in his life of apostasy as a covenant breaker. Note that here too hlyw and thl'ym are used alongside each other. Since hly is both "sickness" and "disease",<sup>38</sup> the question about a distinct meaning for thl'ym is relevant. The meaning of the verb hl' seems to cast some light on it. "To rub" or "strip" is given as a first alternative and also "to rub and to smear the eyes with collyrium".<sup>39</sup> Although "to be sick" or "diseased" is also listed, there is added "perhaps properly to be rubbed away".<sup>40</sup> Another lexicon gives "to be sick" or "diseased" as its first meaning but adds as a second meaning "to sin" or "defile".<sup>41</sup>

Nearly every time thl'ym states the direct consequences of covenant breaking. It is not unlikely that the poet of Psalm 103 in choosing this word tries to express that Yahweh heals the mental anguish bound up with the psychological repercussions of a guilt-complex, which does have a bearing on

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<sup>38</sup> B.D.B., p.318; Ges., p.CCLXXX.

<sup>39</sup> Ges., p.CCLXXVIII.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.CCLXXVIII.

<sup>41</sup> B.D.B., p.316.

one's physical condition and yet differs from an ordinary bodily illness.

Although the writer has attempted to show that there might be an aspect regarding disease distinguished from what is ordinarily meant with this term, this does not alter the fact that forgiveness and healing are bound together here. "Forgiveness and healing are parallel and associated words of God . . . . . The Old Testament writers, and the psalmists in particular, do not see forgiveness of sins as an isolated question. For them it is part of the total concept of God's salvation, and is never viewed except as part of that totality".<sup>42</sup> Within this framework, however, it is good to note the fine distinctions between related words. It is quite feasible to think of the poet as selecting this relatively rare term with purpose to express the fact that Yahweh is the healer of the pain of a guilt-complex. This seems to provide as well a more natural transition to the next colon.

In verse 4 one is brought face to face with the question of atonement (see the writer's remarks regarding this matter on page 19). For the third time in succession the reader is presented with an action picture through the use of the participle.

hgw'l mšht hyyky emphatically states that what has thus

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<sup>42</sup> Henry McKeating, "Divine Forgiveness in the Psalms", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 18, 1965, p.19.

far been mentioned, stands in intimate relation to the atonement or expiation provided. The stress of this new thought-unit falls on hgw'l, pointing out that Yahweh Himself brings up the ransom. A detailed study of g'l in its various forms demonstrates that this verb always indicates the buying back of property or life. Passages such as Numb. 35:19, 21, 24, 27; Deut. 19:6, 12; Josh. 20:5, 9 and 2 Sam. 14:11 clearly show how this term was applied to the avenger of blood in the context of the lex talionis, g'l means "to pay back" a life for a life. The avenger of blood was a kinsmen obligated to avenge the murder of a blood relative.

By the same token this relative had the duty to buy back the lost property of his relative and even his person if he had been sold in slavery. The book of Ruth presents a clear picture of the social function of a g'l in Israelite society. In Lev. 25:25, 26 the participle is used for a person who buys back and restores to freedom a brother in bondage. In Lev. 27:13, 15, 19, 20, 31; the verb indicates the act of paying the full price, with an additional 20 percent, for a votive gift dedicated to God, which for some reason could not be surrendered. Such passages show that g'l means an actual payment of which one can correctly speak as a "ransom".

This becomes evident also in the many cases where

Yahweh is presented as the actual provider of the ransom by means of the participle or as the subject of the verb. In the patriarchal blessing found in Gen. 48:16, there is an identical occurrence which differs from Ps. 103:4 only in that here it is written defectively. hml'k hg'l stands in perfect parallel to h'lhym hrch and h'lhym 'šr of the two preceding cola. One can conclude from this that the angel or messenger who paid the price for Jacob's life is the same as the God who cared for him and the God of his father Abraham and Isaac.

The active participle of g'l, describing Yahweh as the God who pays out the ransom on behalf of His people, is an outstanding feature in both the Psalms and prophetic books. See e.g., the many Isaiah passages in Chapter 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5; 59:20; 60:16 and 63:16. And for the Psalms check 19:15; 69:18; 72:14; 74:2; 77:15; 78:35; 103:4; 106:10 and 107:2. Job 19:25 is another passage, very closely related to Ps. 103:4, where the participle occurs. The fact that the poet of Psalm 103 uses the participle of g'l to demonstrate that Yahweh Himself brings up the ransom for his life can hardly be questioned.

For the psalmist it was apparently a matter of life and death as can be seen in the words mšht hyyky which follow. The poet's redemption and delivery is complete. He has received a new lease on life. Yahweh bought him back from the

pit of destruction. The noun šht is derived from the verb šwh which means "to bow down, vanish" or "sink down". The meaning of šht is listed simply as "pit" or "hollow place", with a vague reference to the two parts of š'wl in Jewish and Christian theology.<sup>43</sup> Another lexicon is a little more specific. It lists "pit" but adds "grave" or "dwelling place of the dead ones".<sup>44</sup>

There are a number of passages where šht can be translated as a trap or pit dug to ensnare someone. In Ezek. 19:4, 8; Ps. 7:16; 9:16 and 35:7, šht can be read this way, but each time there is a certain finality about the expression which indicates that the trap was set to take a life. This carries in the notion of death which fits the usual reading of šht elsewhere.

There seems to be some ground also for bringing the noun šht back to the verb šht, which means "to spoil, ruin, corrupt" or "destroy".<sup>45</sup> Such a relationship makes good sense if one considers passages such as Is. 38:17, where delivery from death is in the picture, and Ps. 55:24 and 94:13, where the term is applied to the ultimate judgment of God upon the wicked. When one considers the frequency with which this word is found parallel to terms such as mwt; š'wl; and 'l-*pr*,

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<sup>43</sup> B.D.B., p.1001.

<sup>44</sup> K.B., p.963.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.763.

there seems to be something in favour of relating the noun to this particular verb. As a rule, the element of corruption is properly associated with the element of decay present in a grave. "It is clear from the authority of the New Testament that there is a šahat signifying corruption, from šahat".<sup>46</sup> There are passages similar to Ps. 103:4, where one finds the same positive emphasis on delivery from death and destruction in the context of salvation. Jonah 2:7; Ps. 16:10 and Job 33:18, 22, 24, 28 and 30 seem to corroborate the reading of "destruction" when facing the noun šht in such a context.

As far as its etymology is concerned, hy does not warrant a lengthy discussion. It simply stands for "life"; not a declining or languishing life, but a vigorous life, throbbing with vitality. This word refers to one's entire personality and gives expression to his whole being. In Ps. 104:33 and 146:2 one finds that to live and to praise the covenant God goes together. It is noteworthy that in both these passages bhyy is found parallel to bwdy, indicating the continuation of life. This reveals a remarkable affinity to Ps. 103:4, 5, where cdyk appears to have the same significance.

Although hy is a familiar term in the Old Testament, it is seldom found with the personal suffix. Here, as throughout the verses 1-5, the poet uses the personal suffix linked to npšy thus underlining the personal aspect and enhancing the

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<sup>46</sup> Ges., p.DCCCXVI.

unity of the poem in a peculiar fashion. The poet emphasizes the fact that his own life is restored due to Yahweh's redemptive act. In the next colon he appears to give special attention to the element of continuation.

In verse 3 and 4a, just discussed, the active participles employed demonstrate what one could call the negative side of Yahweh's saving action. The poet has pointed out how Yahweh has removed his sins, wiped out the consequences of sin and redeemed his life from destruction. In the middle of this verse one reaches a remarkable turning point. The second half of this verse and the next verse deal in a well-balanced way with the positive counterpart of what has been discussed in verses 3 and 4 thus far.

hm◄trky hsd wrhym at once indicates a remarkable shift of emphasis. The very first word draws attention to this change. Again one finds the active participle, this time in the Piel. What is striking is the fact that the suffix referring back to npsy is joined to it. It was pointed out on page 18 that the position of the definite article joined to a participle is irregular and gives it demonstrative force. This comes out more strongly here since normally a noun or participle with a pronominal suffix is considered to be in the genitive case and therefore is definite without the article. The poet of Ps. 103 defies this rule. One other occurrence is cited

in G.K. "When as in Job 40:19, the participle with the noun-suffix hācōśō he that made him, also has the article (c.f. § 127 i), the anomaly is difficult to understand, since a word determined by a genitive does not admit of being determined by the article."<sup>47</sup> The poet of Psalm 103 used an odd grammatical construction. Yet there seems to be more than a structural similarity to Job 40:19. There hśw stands parallel to Yahweh and serves as its appellative similar to what happens in Ps. 103:4. By using the suffix in this peculiar fashion the psalmist retains his inherent unity of thought along with an intense personal emphasis.

The verb ct̄r is found only seven times in the Old Testament. In the Kal it simply means, "to surround", as can be seen in I Sam. 23:26 and Ps. 5:13. In the Piel it indicates "to crown" or "to make a wreath". In Ps. 8:6; 65:12; 103:4 and Cant. 3:11 ct̄r is used in this fashion. The Hifil is only found in Is. 23:8 and can be rendered "to bestow with crowns".<sup>48</sup>

Ps. 8:6 has some similarities to Ps. 103:4. The poet of this psalm gives a description of what God does with man as His creature. The context and even the construction differ from Ps. 103:4 as one reads, wkbwd whdr tct̄rhw. The relationship seems to come out when one compares hśd wr̄h̄mym with wkbwd whdr. The glory and majesty with which Yahweh crowns the poet

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<sup>47</sup> G.K., p.358, f.n.

<sup>48</sup> K.B., p.698.

in Ps. 103 are of a different nature, consisting of covenant love and tender mercies, but not less glorious and majestic.

The selection of this relatively rare verb seems to have been made purposefully. There were other verbs to express the idea of encompassing or surrounding, but none as closely bound up with the notion of adornment as ct. In a way, man, in this case the poet, has been reinstated in a position of glory and honour in a restored covenant relationship with his God. It is quite accurate to read, "Yahweh is the one crowning my total personality (my soul) with His covenant faithfulness and tender mercies".

The term hsd is next in order of discussion. Much can and has been said regarding this word, but the scope of this paper requires severe limitation of the discussion. It seems justified to leave the history of this word and its use in secular context out at this point. Much light has been cast on this term by Nelson Glueck in Hesed in the Bible. Scholars agree on the fact that hsd is a covenantal term. Its character and the nature of the relationship which it implies has been the subject of much debate.

Glueck "has demonstrated that hesed constitutes 'the proper object of a b<sup>e</sup>rit and may almost be described as its content. The possibility and maintenance of a covenant rests in the practice of hesed."<sup>49</sup> It appears to the writer that in

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<sup>49</sup> Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1967, p.6.

this book the secular use of hsd is given too much attention at the expense of the meaning of divine hsd. Only in the last thirty pages is there a serious attempt to evaluate this term in a sacred context.

Glueck refers to the passage of Ps. 103 now discussed when he speaks of the spiritual meaning of hsd. He says,

God's hesed although understood as being in accordance with the covenant is viewed not as a right but as a gift. This idea is clarified in Ps. 103 where the psalmist praises God, Who forgives his sins and Who crowns him with hesed and rahanim, reciprocal love and forgiving grace.<sup>50</sup>

The fact that Glueck allows for this element of grace in hsd has enriched the depth of his understanding.

A debate has been going as to the time in which this "new" element is supposed to have been added. Glueck traces it back to the time of the Exodus, while others hold to a much later date. Bowen questions Glueck's view because to him the notion of grace was a late theological development. "Forgiveness as an expression of divine hesed is a conspicuous emphasis, Bowen finds, and may represent an original contribution of the late prophetic writers."<sup>51</sup>

There also seems to be a slight misrepresentation of hsd found in secular context. Driver says, that "hesed is a

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

quality exercised mutually among equals",<sup>52</sup> and indeed in many cases this may have been so. This does not, however, exhaust the meaning of hsd. There are treaty relationships, depicted as bryt, with a definite inequality of partnership. Even the marriage covenant viewed in the light of tribal relationships can hardly be deemed to be an agreement between equals.

Mendenhall and Eissfeldt have done much work in this area. It seems to be substantiated that one could speak of a covenant relationship, initiated by one partner, the suzerain, with the vassal; entailing mutual obligations for both parties following the initiation. It appears that the same applies to the exercise of divine hsd, where one can speak of Yahweh, who establishes the covenant as the one making the first move of initiation. Such a relationship once established by Yahweh's hsd of course does involve a mutual act of covenant love. In Ex. 20:6 this is clearly demonstrated.

The concept of a God who makes the first move toward men in His covenant love stands out clearly when one examines Gen. 9:9-17, where God made a covenant with Noah. There can hardly be a question as to who initiated the covenant in that instance. This holds as well in the case of Abraham. God came to him first when calling him away from his country in Gen. 12. In Gen. 17:2, 4, 7 and 11, regarding the whole

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.74.

context, it appears that the actual covenant was made by God Himself. At the same time the mutual element is present. Discussing the divine h<sub>sd</sub> in the context of the bryt, in spite of the fact that one finds two parties with mutual obligations, one finds no ground to consider them as equals.

What has been mentioned about bryt involves the consideration of h<sub>sd</sub>, since one deals here with the kind of faithfulness and love exercised normally in the context of the bryt. How this operates is demonstrated most vividly in the case of a covenant renewal. Many occasions of such a renewal are recorded in the Old Testament. Each time the way in which Yahweh exercises His h<sub>sd</sub> leaves no question regarding the initiative.

h<sub>sd</sub> takes on special prominence in Ex. 34:6, 7. These verses are closely related to Ps. 103:5, 8 and 11. Yet one does well to consider the whole context of the Exodus passage in which h<sub>sd</sub> is highlighted. The Israelites are pictured here as breakers of the covenant vows so solemnly given, as is recorded in Ex. 19:8. Ex. 32 gives a description of how this happened. It is against this background of faithlessness that Yahweh's h<sub>sd</sub> appears in its operation in Ex. 34:6, 7.

yhwh yhwh 'l rhwm whnwn wrb-h<sub>sd</sub> w'mt. A combination of divine character traits are mentioned here with h<sub>sd</sub> in a prominent position. The fact that Yahweh is that kind of

God, who is great in His covenant love, is the reason why Israel is not destroyed, but the covenant relationship is restored. "God practiced hesed toward His people even after they had turned away from Him through sin."<sup>53</sup>

It does seem questionable to the writer, however, to make the operation of Yahweh's hsd impingent upon the condition of "repentance as evidenced by renewed ethical and religious conviction and conduct".<sup>54</sup> To say that "the fear of God makes the granting of His hesed possible",<sup>55</sup> calls into question the matter of a divine initiative in the operation of hsd. The repeated use of hsd in Ps. 103 seems to show the reverse. This can be seen in the verses 3-5. Also in vs. 8 the greatness of hsd is displayed in the fact that sinners are not punished as they should have been. In the climatic vs. 11, hsd is pictured as being so powerful that sins are removed. The way in which Glueck explains Numb. 14:19, as if the covenant renewal from the side of the people did create the possibility for divine forgiveness and the exercise of hsd, does not appear to be entirely in accordance with the biblical account.<sup>56</sup>

The second half of vs. 4 and vs. 5 seem to form the well-balanced positive counterpart of what is found in vs. 3

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.89.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87.

and 4a. The writer is basically in agreement with Glueck, that "Hesed is really the positive element in the pardoning of sins by which God confirms that the union between Him and His people is restored."<sup>57</sup> The question remains whether one has exhausted the meaning of hsd when stating this.

The problem at this point is whether hsd is gratuitous in character or can be regarded as a favour to be won by re-commitment and repentance. The fact that hsd is in many cases found parallel with rhwm and hnwn seems to plead for its gratuitous character. Grace, as the disposition to grant something freely and undeservedly, seems to mark the exercise of hsd as a divine quality in the context of the covenant. "Still hesed is not identical with God's favor. However, since the relationship between God and His people was established by the grace of its election, hesed is based upon the grace of God."<sup>58</sup>

The character description of Yahweh found in the beautiful poem of Micah in chapter 7:18-20 does appear to speak of hsd as the basis of forgiveness. Why does Yahweh pardon iniquity, pass over transgression and hold back His anger? He does so because He is pleased or delighted in the exercise of His hsd. This same sentiment is expressed in various ways in Is. 54:8;

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87.

Jer. 31:3; Joel 2:13; Ps. 25:10; 85:10; 86:5, 15; 145:8 and other places. Where such a God has pledged His word in the covenant promises, it appears that sinners have a reason to ask for and expect forgiveness.

The fact that hsd is mentioned first in a series of parallel concepts bringing out the full positive perspective of redeemed life might indicate its enduring quality which surpasses temporal bounds. "The endurance of covenant love has, God believes, eschatological overtones, as expressed in the formula used in relation to the Exodus tradition 'for His hesed endures forever' [Ps. 136. See also I Chron. 16:34, 41; 2 Chron. 5:13; 7:3, 6; 20:21; Ezra 3:11; Ps. 100:5; etc.]"<sup>59</sup> The writer will attempt to deal with this eschatological perspective in the discussion of vs. 5.

The next term to be considered is wrhym. It is an intensive plural in absolute sense. Its original meaning is listed as "brotherhood, brotherly or motherly feeling". It is the plural of rhwm, interpreted as "compassion".<sup>60</sup> An older lexicon mentions that this term stands for the bowels as the seat of the emotions. It renders it, "very tender affection, love or natural affection", and "pity, grace or favour", when used of God.<sup>61</sup> The word is used 36 times in the Old Testament

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>60</sup> B.D.B., p.933.

<sup>61</sup> Ges., p.DCCLXVI.

and in only 11 cases does it describe the feeling of compassion in human beings and even then usually in relation to something God has done. Twenty-five times it refers strictly to God and as a rule is found in covenantal context often bound up with the restoration or renewal of covenant relationships.

The term occurs as a pleading ground in prayer and as a basis in the search for forgiveness. The fact that Yahweh has given evidence of His rhym gives the suppliant courage to make his request. This can be seen in the way in which this word is used in the psalms. See Ps. 25:6; 40:12; 51:3; 69:17; 79:8 and 119:77 and 156.

Ps. 25:6, 7 deserves special attention. Here rhmyk and whsdyk stand side by side, separated only by the vocative yhwh, to which both words are bound by means of the pronominal suffix. Forgiveness of sin is discussed here as in Ps. 103:3-5. A play on the word zkr, "remember - remember not" gives the passage its peculiar flavour. The importance of hsh is brought out by the element of repetition. Forgiveness of sin by a sharing in Yahweh's covenant love is the basic notion underlying this prayer, where in Ps. 103:3-5 this is stressed as a reason for giving praise. In Ps. 51:3 rh is mentioned following hsh as the basis of a personal appeal for forgiveness. The same is true for Ps. 79:8, where also the idiom "do not remember our sins" is used. The term rhym is introduced in

a peculiar fashion here. There is warrant for translating, "Let us hastily meet your mercies". In those prayers referred to there is a close affinity to Ps. 103:3-5, since the aim is to obtain forgiveness of sin, stated there as a fact.

The language of Ps. 103:3-5 is such that one can consider it as a report of Yahweh's action in a personal restoration of life and covenant renewal. The descriptive words are intended to arouse the spirit of adoration and praise. This is done at an intense personal level. In Is. 54:7, 8 mention is made of another such covenant renewal, be it on a broader scale, with reference to the people of Israel. There are many striking similarities in content. The word-order is reversed from rhym to hsd to g'l. The overall emphasis is on the restoration of fellowship and life.

One finds a discussion of a covenant renewal in very personal terms also in Hos. 2:21. The figurative use of the courtship formula is employed here in relating Yahweh's action in re-establishing a covenant bond. The verb 'rś can hardly be interpreted in any other fashion.<sup>62</sup> Although sdq and mšpt precede hsd and rhym here, the same terms are also found in Ps. 103:6. The prophetic writer employs the emphatic preposition b four times in succession to maintain the intensity in a way comparable to what the poet of Psalm 103 has done.

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<sup>62</sup> K.B., p.90; Ges., p.LXXXII; B.D.B., p.76, 77.

In both passages the new relationship is described which flows from covenant love.

Is. 63:7 also deserves attention in connection with Psalm 103. Not only are rh̄m and h̄sd found side by side here, but the merciful deeds of Yahweh are also described more than once by the verb gm̄l. This verb here reflects action similar to the deeds of Yahweh set forth as an object of praise in Ps. 103:3-5.

The last half of the verse just discussed in comparison with Ps. 8:6, can be called man's second coronation. New life comes with new endowment. Glory and majesty are replaced with covenant love and tender mercies reflecting the glory and majesty of Yahweh the Redeemer. Verse 4b can well be regarded as the climax of these 3 verses.

Verse 5 is next to be considered, hm̄śbȳc bt̄wb c̄dyk. Again one is faced with the uniqueness of this poem. There is no other occurrence of the Hifil participle with the definite article in the entire Old Testament. Yahweh is pictured here as engaged in the act of granting full satisfaction. The primary idea of the verb is to grant an abundance of drink and food.<sup>63</sup> While this idea of abundance and overflowing satisfaction must always be retained, one must be aware of the wider

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<sup>63</sup> Ges., p.DCCLXXXIII.

dimension of this verb through metaphorical use. Many occurrences of šb<sup>c</sup> testify to the fact that it is employed to express the abundant fulness of the covenant blessing.

In Ps. 51:10, satisfaction involves the fulness of joy and gladness flowing from the experience of forgiveness and covenant restoration. In Ps. 81:17; 105:40; 107:9; 132:15; 145:16 and 147:14 the Hifil of šb<sup>c</sup> mentions satisfaction with food and drink, yet each time the context suggests the wider perspective of the full covenant blessing.

In the two closing cola of Ps. 91:16, it is Yahweh who is introduced as the One who satisfies. In this passage one is confronted with a profound eschatological perspective. The climax of life for the one who has sought refuge with Yahweh is described here. 'rk ymym 'šby\*hw could be rendered "With length of days I will satisfy him". The reading "endless days" could be defended on the basis of the phrase 'rk ymym, which stresses continuation. The closing half of the colon binds the promise of prolonged life to that of full salvation.

w'r'hw bšw<sup>e</sup>ty is rather peculiar in construction. First, there is the causative force of the Hifil here. Yahweh will cause to see or show. The emphasis on experience from the preceding context is carried over into the last word by means of the emphatic preposition b<sup>e</sup>. Yahweh's promise carries the flavour of eternal glory for this is included in the full salvation

promised.

Even where šbc is found in the Kal one can in many cases detect a similar eschatological overtone. This can be seen in Ps. 16:11; 17:15 and 22:27 for example. A separate study of these texts is not possible in this paper, but there does seem to be a definite hint of eternal life in the passages mentioned as well as in Ps. 103. Mitchell Dahood cites Ps. 103:4, 5 as evidence against the view of Sheldon Blank, who said that "The idea of a reward after death does not belong in the book of psalms".<sup>64</sup> The same theme appears also in some of the prophetic writings and the book of Job.

It can safely be concluded that šbc has become part and parcel of what can be called a covenantal vocabulary. In addition to the passages discussed, this can be seen in Deut. 33:23; Is. 58:10, 11; Ps. 90:14 and Prov. 13:25 as well as in other places.

Turning to btwb, it is interesting to note that there are other places where this word stands as the object of the verb šbc. In Ps. 107:9 twb can be regarded as the direct object of both šbc and ml'. npš is designated here as the object filled. In Ps. 103:5, the pronominal suffix links hmšbyc up with npšy. In Ps. 65:5 btwb indicates what it is with which the psalmist and the believing community are satisfied, just as in Ps. 103:5. Forgiveness of sin and other

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<sup>64</sup> Dahood, *Psalms III*, p.11.

blessings are mentioned giving a similar covenantal content to the passage cited. Jer. 31:14 is another text that warrants comparison. There is a less pronounced personal element here but a similar way of presenting the fact of covenant restoration wemy 't-twby šb<sup>c</sup> bears a close resemblance to Ps. 103:5. Translating this clause as "My people shall be satisfied with my goodness", one must keep in view the full spectrum of Yahweh's covenant blessings meant by 't-twby.

In Deut. 26:11, bk1-htwb is to be regarded as the sum-total of the covenant blessings in which Israel may rejoice. Deut. 30:15 follows the public presentation of both the curses and blessings of the covenant. The term here is cast into the mold of a covenant renewal and equated with life, standing as it does in antithesis to death and evil. Good and evil are mentioned in the same fashion in Is. 7:15.

The word twb in the Psalms also frequently indicates moral good in the light of proper covenant responsibility. This can be seen e.g., in Ps. 25:8 and 37:3. A further pursuit of this meaning is not possible here.

It is amazing to note how often, in the psalms especially, h<sub>s</sub>d and twb are found side by side as attributes of Yahweh. The clause lyhwh ky-tw<sub>s</sub>b ky l<sup>c</sup>wlm, is a familiar cultic expression found in; Jer. 33:11; Ps. 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1; Ezra 3:11; 1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Chron. 5:13 and 7:3. The enduring

quality of Yahweh's hšd is bound up with the fact that He is good. This interrelationship between twb and hšd can be seen in many other parallels, such as, Ps. 52:11; 63:4; 69:17; 86:5; 92:2; 100:5; 109:21; and 145:7-10. The overwhelming textual evidence of twb occurring in a covenantal and liturgical setting in relation to Yahweh makes it a word of special significance. The scope and depth of its meaning ought to be evaluated with great care.

The writer wants to draw attention to the fact that twb is employed here in what appears to be an eschatological perspective. Also in Ps. 23:6 one finds a picture which could be interpreted as a reference to eternal life. This psalm begins and ends with a positive emphasis and has its low point in verse 4 in the centre. The two closing cola seem to form the natural climax of the psalm. The colon 'k twb whšd yrdpwny kl-ymy hyy leaves the impression of the prolonged continuation of the full covenant blessing represented under the terms twb whšd. The plural of hy seems to have special significance. It would be a worthwhile study to assess each occurrence of hyy in the Old Testament in its context but this cannot be done in this paper.

The personal stress found in Ps. 103:3-5 as a result of its link through the suffix to npšy is present in Ps. 23 as well. The first person pronominal suffix in vs. 6a, followed

by the verbal form of the first person in vs. 6b, drive home the same well balanced personal emphasis. If one interprets twb whsd correctly as describing the enduring blessings of Yahweh, it hardly seems correct in the light of progressive parallelism to translate the closing words of the last colon l'rk ymym simply as "a long life". The reader of Ps. 23 is left with the impression of the neverending covenantal fellowship in the presence of Yahweh. In Ps. 4:6-8 and 73:26-28 this same aspect of lasting life with God seems to be present. This reference in Ps. 23 has been discussed to draw attention to what appears to be a similar feature found in Ps. 103:5.

Psalms 23, 73 and 103 have been recognized as psalms of a kind because of their related characteristics.<sup>65</sup> The writer considers the aspect of the hope of eternal life expressed in these psalms as one of the elements of mutual affinity.

If it is warranted to read vs. 5 in the light of an eschatological perspective, it will help to establish the correct interpretation of edyk, which must now be considered. One lexicon states that its meaning is dubious although the fact is recognized, that, as it is found in the text, the suffix refers to npšy.<sup>66</sup> The Septuagint has tēn epithumian

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<sup>65</sup> Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, Vol. II, p.132.

<sup>66</sup> B.D.B., p.725.

sou, but such a reading appears questionable in the light of contemporary studies. "In the O.T. and Judaism epithumia is an offense against God, who demands of man, total obedience and love from the whole heart. Dt. 5:5."<sup>67</sup>

There has been a considerable amount of discussion around this word and different opinions are held. There are many who favour the reading of ornament and some make a strong plea for it.<sup>68</sup>

The R.S.V. translates the first half of vs. 5 as, "who satisfies you with good as long as you live". Charles Briggs favours a similar translation and rejects the A.V. rendering "thy mouth". He says that such a reading is generally abandoned.<sup>69</sup>

Some scholars find it hard to accept the change of suffix from ky to k. There are suggestions to alter the text because of a supposed textual corruption. "Plainly the final letter is one of those which are or may be corrupt; otherwise why is not the form of the suffix the same as elsewhere, viz. -ky or yky?"<sup>70</sup> Indeed ky is used consistently in the verses

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<sup>67</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co., 1965, p.167.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas K. Cheyne, *The Book of Psalms*, Vol. II, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1904, p.116., Herkenne, *Das Buch der Psalmen*, p.308, 309., King, *The Psalms*, p.427., Perowne, J.J.S., *The Book of Psalms*, Vol. II, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1966, p.230., Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, Vol. II, p.479.

<sup>69</sup> Briggs, *The Psalms*, Vol. II, p.325.

<sup>70</sup> Cheyne, *The Book of Psalms*, Vol. II, p.116. See also: Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, Vol. II, p.479.

3-5 for the second feminine singular suffix. This particular form of the suffix is listed as an unusual one, probably Syriac in origin.<sup>71</sup> The fact that in the case of edyk the regular form of the suffix is supplied by itself can hardly be considered a sufficient ground for emendation of the text. This change may well have been intentional for metrical reasons as well as for the purpose of emphasis.

If it is proper to consider edy a collective noun, meaning "ornament", derived from edh and its secondary meaning,<sup>72</sup> it cannot be deemed improper to read edy as a noun reading "continuity", based on the primary meaning of the verb edh, "to pass on, advance".<sup>73</sup> At least one lexicon gives "age" as a rendering of this word, listing Ps. 103:5 as a reference.<sup>74</sup> ed is also listed as a preposition of continuation or duration with a poetic variant of edy, vocalized exactly as it is in Ps. 103:5.<sup>75</sup> A greater emphasis falls on the suffix attached to the preposition if one reads it that way. Then it would be proper to supply the "my soul" to which the suffix refers back. The reason why a different form of suffix is employed here might well be to draw attention to this fact.

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<sup>71</sup> G.K., p.258.

<sup>72</sup> B.D.B., p.725.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.723.

<sup>74</sup> Ges., p.DCVIII.

<sup>75</sup> G.K., p.304.

On the basis of the discussion, the writer proposes to translate verse 5a as, "He [Yahweh] is the one who satisfies with goodness my ongoing life".

There appear to be other occasions where edy expresses continuity or lasting life. This can be seen in Is. 26:4; 65:18; Ps. 21:7; 22:27; 61:9 and 92:8. In the references cited there appears to be a certain stress on the enduring character of life. They show a perspective of continuation of life, be it less pronounced than in Ps. 103:5.

The second half of this verse rounds off this particular thought unit, developing it to a climax: One is prepared for a certain unique emphasis by a structural change in style. The established pattern of successive participles is broken and a finite verb is again introduced. The Hithpael of hd occurs only once in the Old Testament in Ps. 103:5. Such an exception draws attention. The Hithpael stem is a reflexive of the Piel and carries an emphasis as pronounced as that of the participle with the definite article.<sup>76</sup> The suffix assures the continuity of the thought pattern. The personal stress is maintained not only by means of the suffix it is brought out further by the application of the Hithpael which indicates an action performed in "one's own special interest" and in such cases it readily takes the accusative as happens also in Ps. 103:5.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, -p.149.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150, 369.

The use of the imperfect tense is quite important here and seems to have a bearing on the aspect of eternal life. It makes for an increased stress on this element, since of a participle it can be said that it expresses "mere duration". The shift to the imperfect tense at this point underscores the fact that "progressive duration" is meant here, and the renewal of youthful vigour is presented as "continuous uninterrupted action".<sup>78</sup> This meaning confirms the reading of "ongoing life" in vs. 5/a.

The closing half of this colon appears to round off the thoughts expressed in the verses 3-5 in a rather striking fashion. This is done by means of the Hithpael imperfect and the manipulation of the suffix. The verb hdš lends itself very well for this purpose. In Sirach 43:8, one finds another occurrence of the Hithpael imperfect. Goodspeed translates this clause, "She increases marvellously as she changes".<sup>79</sup> One could also read, "as she changes [or renews] herself". As a verb hdš is sparsely found in the Old Testament. In Is. 61:4 it seems to have eschatological significance. In Ps. 51:12 in the context of prayer it conveys the meaning of a new birth. Artur Weiser interprets this word in a similar way in

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.315.

<sup>79</sup> Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Apocrypha*, New York, Random House Inc., 1959, p.308.

Ps. 103:5. "This is the Old Testament understanding of what the New Testament describes as 'being born again'."<sup>80</sup> In Ps. 104:30, the verb is employed to express the creative power of Yahweh's spirit in the realm of nature. Yet when one takes into account what follows in the next two cola of vs. 30, yhy kbwd yhwh l#wlm, the interrelationship between this renewing power and the eternal existence of Yahweh becomes apparent. One cannot speak of a nature-grace scheme in the Old Testament. Word pictures from one sphere are easily applied to another.

This is evident in the metaphorical use of nšr, following this verb. The poet makes a definite attempt to give shape to the eternal realities of his faith. He does so by using a distinguished bird in his comparison. The eagle was listed as an unclean bird in Lev. 11:13 and Deut. 14:12. As such it was not to be touched or eaten. At the same time, however, its majestic flight, swiftness and strength were noted as a marvel to behold, in Job 39:27 and Prov. 30:19.

The eagle is frequently used in comparisons. In Ex. 19:4 and Deut. 32:11 this bird stands as a simile for Yahweh's protecting care and guidance. There is, however, not a single instance, apart from Ps. 103:5, where the point of comparison is that of renewal of strength and life. Even in Is. 40:31 it is its soaring flight which is applied to God's people metaphorically. The fact that one deals here with a unique

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<sup>80</sup> Weiser, *The Psalms*, p.660.

presentation of an image draws attention to the poet's idea of a lasting life in all its fulness and youthful vigour.

The term nšr indicates "buzzard" or "vulture", but only in Micah 1:16 and Job 39:27 can such a reading be accepted with any degree of certainty. Nearly always nšr appears to stand for the common eagle or even the golden eagle. These birds, once they have reached maturity at four years of age, go through a yearly moulting period, which makes them all seem young again.<sup>81</sup>

Gesenius refers to Ps. 103:5 in no uncertain terms, saying, "To the eagle itself, which often changes its feathers, just as a serpent its skin, we must refer the words".<sup>82</sup> There appears to be a likelihood that this is

An allusion to the fable of the eagle; renewing its youth in old age. Gunkel [.....] is probably right [.....] in seeing here a reference to the story of the phoenix; c.f., Job. XXIX. 18, ....., 'and I thought, Though I perish like its nest, I shall multiply days like the phoenix.' ..... These allusions fit in most naturally with the interpretation of vss. 4-5 as a description of immortality.<sup>83</sup>

The last word of this colon nšwryky, seems to supply the finishing touch which makes the picture complete. As a noun nšwrym stands for "youth, early life",<sup>84</sup> particularly the

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<sup>81</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 7, Chicago-London-Toronto, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1956, p.822.

<sup>82</sup> Ges., p.DLXXVII.

<sup>83</sup> Dahood, *Psalms III*, p.27.

<sup>84</sup> B.D.B., p.655.

stage just preceding marriage, when the prime of life has been reached.<sup>85</sup> In Ps. 103:5, it seems justified to translate the last half by, "My life continues to renew herself, like an eagle her youth". The by now well known suffix carries the personal stress right through to the very end.

In the verses 6 and 7 there occurs a shift of emphasis away from the personal. The concept of action is retained by means of the active participle עֹשֶׂה. In this the picture of Yahweh as the great Doer remains there. This fact of seeing Yahweh in action appears to be a unifying factor throughout the entire poem. The dropping of the definite article with its demonstrative quality prepares one for a decrease in personal stress. This becomes clearer yet in the shift to the finite tense and the abandoning of the second feminine singular suffix. The attention is drawn away from what happened in the poet's own life to the historic fact of the Exodus and the covenantal involvement of Yahweh with His people in the wilderness. This could be expected of an Israelite. After all, the historic reality of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and His people was the very basis of the great deeds Yahweh had shown in the poet's own life and which were so vividly portrayed in vs. 3-5. The poet does not regard himself simply as an individual; he belongs to a community. If one keeps this in

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<sup>85</sup> K.B., p.621.

mind while studying this poem, it will prevent him from making a one-sided individualistic interpretation.

The Kal active participle, עֲשֵׂה, here brings out the fact that Yahweh acts in history. As a verbal noun עֲשֵׂה modifies שְׂדָוֹת and מִשְׁפָּטִים, with יְהוָה standing immediately parallel to עֲשֵׂה. Throughout the shift from the individual to the community the stress on Yahweh as the Doer of great deeds is retained.

A transitive verb such as עֲשֵׂה always requires an object, even as a participle, and the meaning of this object has a bearing on the reading of the verb or participle. The participial form of this verb is found 27 times in the Old Testament for human action and 15 times for divine action. Of the 15 times, 10 times the action of God takes place in the realm of nature. There are 5 times that this word takes on a different dimension.

In Ex. 15:11 עֲשֵׂה pl' is found in direct connection with the miraculous intervention of Yahweh at the passage through the Red Sea. Zeph. 3:19 mentions a special act of Yahweh on behalf of the oppressed much like what is found in Ps. 103:6. Ps. 72:18 and 77:14 also relate occurrences parallel to what is described in Ps. 103:6. In fact each of the references is embedded in a like redemptive covenantal context.

The author of Psalm 103 continues to portray Yahweh

as the One who acts as the covenant God. The very concept of the verb śh makes a divorce from action impossible. The living action of Yahweh is highlighted by the use of the participial form.

From what has been said above, it can be expected that the action described in Ps. 103:6 is to be redemptive in character. At first sight, however, sdqwt may give a different impression. The verbal meaning behind it is "to be right" or "to have a just cause".<sup>86</sup> This could make one think that the concern here is cold justice. But it would be incorrect to neglect the context of gracious delivery in which this noun is found here and elsewhere.

There is justification for interpreting sdqwt as "saving deeds" on certain occasions.

It should be emphasized that sdqh implies relationship .... Even the righteousness of God is primarily His covenantal rule in fellowship with His people. The definition of sdqh as a concept of relationship [not, however, an ideal concept] already includes both the forensic elements and the idea of saving action .... This linking of right and salvation is most deeply grounded in the covenant concept. sdqh is the execution of covenant faithfulness and the covenant promises. God's righteousness as His judicial reign means that in covenant faithfulness to His people He vindicates and saves them.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> K.B., p.794, 795.

<sup>87</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. II, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1964, p.198.

In the passage under discussion, this saving aspect is demonstrated by the fact that šdqwt is the object of the participle śh, which functions as a structural continuation of the series of participles found in the verses 3-5. By the same token śh is linked up with gmwlyw at the close of verse 2.

A brief evaluation of the usage of this term in the Old Testament is in order. There are only a few places where it is applied to human action. In Judges 5:11; 1 Sam. 12:7 and Micah 6:5 it indicates an historic act of divine saving intervention on behalf of His people Israel, similar to what is found in Ps. 103:6. In Is. 45:8; 46:13; 51:8; and Ps. 40:11 šdqh or šdqwt is found parallel to yšc, "salvation" and in each case the covenantal aspect of redemption is marked. This word also functions as a key term in the plea for deliverance, see e.g., Ps. 5:9; 31:2 and Dan. 9:16. There are even passages where it seems to mean the divine provision of righteousness in a saving fashion, as can be noted in Is. 54:17 and Ps. 22:32. The references cited do seem to point out in Ps. 103:6, that the experience of salvation in the poet's own life has a precedent in the past, in what happened to the covenant community in history. Yahweh is wont to act in this way with respect to those who take His covenant seriously.

The immediate parallel term mšptym seems to introduce a new element. Eight times out of ten this word appears in the context of human action. But in Ps. 103:6 the term is

found in relation to divine action.

In Deut. 10:18 mšpt occurs in the same setting as Ps. 103:6. It stands as the object of the participle śh parallel to hb. The judgement referred to in this passage is rooted in love. It is found as part of a serious challenge to covenant renewal. A similar kind of judgement is asked for in the dedicatory prayer of Solomon in I Kings 8:29. The same tenor prevails in Is. 26:8 where judgements are conceived of as gracious acts of delivery by Yahweh. Here too it appears to be a matter of personal relationship. Yahweh is obligated by virtue of His covenant promise to take the side of His people in judgement and come to their help. In Ps. 105:5, the term occurs in a historical setting similar to what is found in Ps. 103:6. The same term is found in Ps. 140:13 with a close affinity of thought.

From the passages mentioned it appears that one can even conceive of the mšpt of Yahweh as springing forth out of love. "If the term mšpt is related to this relationship denoted by bryt, the most general and comprehensive definition of mšpt is perhaps to be found in the statement: 'I will be your God and you will be my people'."<sup>88</sup> It is pointed out how the fact "that mšpt can take on the sense of grace and mercy

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<sup>88</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p.926, 927.

may be seen from a passage like Is. 30:18 ff."<sup>89</sup> "Because the judgment of Yahweh, which establishes the right, means humiliation for the uplifted and exaltation for the lowly, the term mšpt carries no fears for the poor and the oppressed. For them judgment means help and deliverance."<sup>90</sup> When one considers that mšptym in Ps. 103:6 stands in the context of forgiveness, healing and redemption it becomes obvious that the light of grace colours its interpretation. "Hence the mšpt of Yahweh revealed itself not merely in the upholding of the covenant of grace but also in the cancelling of sins by judgment or by grace."<sup>91</sup>

In Is. 9:6 mšpt and šdqh stand next to each other as the cornerstones of the coming Messianic kingdom. Yahweh, the subject of the verb śh, is presented as the One who will bring about this new age. There appears to be an affinity between this passage and Ps. 103:5-7 in structure and content.

The word next to be considered is śwqym, the passive participle of śq. The verb plainly carries the sense of oppression and violence in the treatment of another person. Its essential meaning is to "treat anyone unjustly".<sup>92</sup> The singular participle passive is used in Deut. 28:29, 33; Hos.

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.929.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.930.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.931.

<sup>92</sup> *Ges.*, p.DCLX.

5:11 and Prov. 28:17 to describe those who are oppressed as a result of forsaking Yahweh. The impression is created that the ill treatment here is deserved, since those oppressed appear to have a guilty conscience. It is surprising that wherever the plural participle passive is found those oppressed are unjustly exposed to violent treatment. This can be seen in Jer. 50:33; Ps. 146:7; Job. 35:9 and Eccles. 4:1 as well as in Ps. 103:6. In Jer. 50:33 the word occurs in the context of covenantal redemption and stands parallel to bny-yśr'1 as in Ps. 103:6. Yahweh is also called their Redeemer in Jer. 50:34. Ps. 146:7 seems to be closest in likeness to Ps. 103:6. The participle of śh is found here with mšpt as its expressed object. The impression is given that the oppressed ones are treated with injustice and Yahweh is about to correct this with His judgement. It is interesting that also in Ps. 146, Yahweh's saving deeds are enumerated in the form of participles. He brings saving help in the way of judgement to counter those who violated justice by oppressing God's people.

Verse 7 tells in detail who the oppressed people are. This colon shows a marked change from the participle to the imperfect, although the emphasis still falls on Yahweh as the subject of the verb ydc. It should be noted that the object of the verb is conceived as existing in the context of a historical reality. This might well have been done intention-

ally. The poet's speaking of Moses and Israel of old seems to draw attention to the fact that Yahweh continues to act in the same manner toward His people. The imperfect is used for that very purpose. "To express actions, &c., which although, strictly speaking, they are already finished, are regarded as still lasting on into the present time, or continue to operate in it."<sup>93</sup> The poet seems to attempt this very thing. What Yahweh did in the past, for those with whom He stood in covenant relation, He has the custom of doing. Thus the imperfect is employed to "express facts known by experience which may at any time come into effect again."<sup>94</sup>

Concerning the meaning of the verb yds one needs to remember that it means much more than simply "to know someone" or "something" in an objective sense. The verb seems to imply an element of personal involvement on the part of the subject. To know means to "be acquainted with, understand, know by experience, confess, admit", and it was even applied to the intimate relationship between the sexes.<sup>95</sup> The fact that one finds a Hifil here with its causative implications tends to bring out this element of involvement and interrelationship even more. This is why subject and object ought to be considered together. Yahweh not just informs Moses as to where

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<sup>93</sup> G.K., p.316.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.316.

<sup>95</sup> B.D.B., p.394.

he should go, He also causes him to follow His directions. To know in the case of the object of the Hifil means "to acknowledge". "It is thus respectful and obedient acknowledgment of the power and grace and demand of God."<sup>96</sup>

There are several instances where the verb yde is employed in similar fashion, occurring in a context related to Yahweh's gracious act of redemption. A similarity of content and structure to Ps. 103:7 can be found in Ps. 25:4; 98:2; 105:1; 106:8; 143:8, and in a negative sense even in Ps. 147:20.

The term drkyw stands first of all here, for Yahweh's course of action in the past, in a particular situation. It is justified to read drk in a comprehensive way as "course of action" or "total way of life" if the context allows it. With such a reading one can apply this term in the broad sense of an overall response of life along the lines of the covenant. Many passages seem to support this kind of an interpretation in either a positive or negative sense. This can be seen, e.g., in Deut. 10:12; 11:22; Josh. 22:4; 1 Sam. 18:14; 1 Kings 8:39; Is. 57:18; Hos. 4:9; Prov. 10:9; 14:2; 19:16; and 21:29. If one thinks of drk as a covenantal way of action, it applies as well to the covenant God and this can be seen clearly in a passage such as Deut. 32:4.

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<sup>96</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. I, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Erdmans Publ. Co., 1965, p.698.

The fact that the name Moses is found here is bound to make the reader think of the Exodus and the wilderness journey. There are other pointed references in the psalms to Moses in the same historical setting, as can be seen in Ps. 77: 21; 105:26 and especially in Ps. 106.

In Ps. 106:16-23 with its description of Israel's faithlessness to the covenant, Moses is mentioned as the one upon whose plea Yahweh turned away His wrath and restored covenant fellowship. The content of this passage along with what is found in Ex. 32:7-14 could be conceived of as providing the historical background to the verse now under discussion. In Ex. 33:3 and 5, Yahweh declares that He is no longer willing to accompany Israel. It is this declaration which forms the occasion for Moses' request hwd<sup>c</sup>ny n' drkk, in Ex. 33:13. The writer believes that the passages mentioned can serve as a key to a better understanding of the colon now under discussion.

The reference to Moses in vs. 7 is not made in isolation from the community in which he lived. His own experience was bound up with that of his people. The fact that one verb is employed to modify both of these cola underscores this factor while aiding the integral unity of the poem. A similar feature is found in Ps. 103:1, although the inverted parallel phrases of vs. 7 make the emphasis on unity of

experience here more pronounced. Psalm 103:7 can serve as an outstanding example of a chiasmus.

The term lbny ysr'l as such does not warrant any discussion. But the way in which it is used, in regard also to the content of the verses 3-5 is important. The poet, having related his personal experience, now ties it in with what has been reality in the life of Israel in its history, and it is to this covenant community that the poet belongs. This is one more indication of the intricate unity of the poem which prevents one from dividing it into separate sections.

The final term of this colon, šlylwtyw, shows a marked progression from its parallel drkyw and warrants some further discussion. šlylh stands for a deed or action which has an overtone of harshness and severity, giving the implication of wilfulness or wantonness.<sup>97</sup> In the case of human behaviour the way in which this word is used in the Old Testament seems to substantiate this particular emphasis. Yet when one considers the 8 times that this noun is applied to divine action, one gets a somewhat different impression. The emphasis in these cases appears to fall on "thoroughness" or "repetition", rather than on "harshness" or "wilfulness". The noun then must be seen as derived from šll in its primary sense of "to drink again" or "to repeat" an action with more

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<sup>97</sup> B.D.B., p.759, 760.

thoroughness, or "to glean" a field, so that nothing is left.<sup>98</sup> In Jer. 32:19, one notices this element of renewed or repeated action. Jeremiah is surprised that Yahweh will again act on behalf of His people.

In Is. 12:4; Ps. 9:12 and 105:1 this word is found in the context of an exhortation to praise and in that sense is related to Ps. 103. The emphasis in the passages cited appears to fall on the greatness and miraculous character of Yahweh's deeds rather than on their severity.

In Ps. 66:5 the singular עֲלִיָּה is modified by the Nifal participle of יָרָא, and this verb requires to be read as "dreaded, terrible, inspiring fear, awe."<sup>99</sup> Here it seems that one cannot soften the reading of "harsh" or "terrible" deed for עֲלִיָּה.

There are two other occurrences in Ps. 77:13 and Ps. 78:11 which provide a similar setting to this word as is found in Ps. 103. With parallels next to it, such as פִּלְקָא and נִפְלְאוֹתָיו one cannot question the fact that the emphasis falls on the miraculous character of Yahweh's deeds. This is also true for עֲלִיָּלוֹתָיו in Ps. 103:7 since it is intricately bound up with גִּמְלוֹתָיו in Ps. 103:2. It seems justified to read vs. 7 as follows, "He used to make known His ways to Moses and to the sons of Israel His miraculous deeds".

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<sup>98</sup> Ges., p.DCXXXIII; K.B., p.708; B.D.B., p.760.

<sup>99</sup> K.B., p.400.

The verses 8, 9 and 10 do appear to introduce a new element or thought unit. By means of its terminology, the verses 4 and 8 are closely bound to each other. This prevents one from reading the 3 verses, 8, 9 and 10 in isolation. The structure of verse 8 makes the full weight of stress to fall upon wrb-hsd. This colon has the appearance of a cultic phrase in which Yahweh is the one described. The fact that there is no verb in this colon tends to make the statement more forceful.

It should be noted that rhwm and hnwn are found side by side and linked to each other by the waw-conjunctive. Only in a few places are these two words not found together, in Ex. 22:26; Deut. 4:31; Ps. 78:38 and Ps. 116:5, which can not be counted really, since hnwn stands parallel to the Piel participle of rhm. The two qualities of Yahweh stated here obviously have been thought of as belonging together.

There is only one instance, in Ps. 112:4, where either of these two words is applied to men. Even here those to whom the above concepts are referred are called "the blessed ones of Yahweh" in Ps. 112:1. One living in such a close covenant fellowship with Yahweh seems to be thought of as reflecting that relationship in his character so that he in turn becomes merciful and is filled with compassion as he walks the straight way of life.

The verb hnn means "to be affected with an intense emotion of grief or joy",<sup>100</sup> or "to feel desire or commiseration towards anyone".<sup>101</sup> From this original meaning it appears warranted to stress the element of feeling and personal involvement with every occurrence of hnwn.

In Ex. 34:6 and Ps. 85:15, one finds the same statement with precisely the same word order as in Ps. 103:8, rhwm whnwn 'rk 'pym wrb-hsd. The pronounced covenant perspective of these passages has already been mentioned.

In Jonah 4:2; Ps. 145:8, with the exception of wgd1, and Neh. 9:17 rhwm and hnwn are found in reverse order but otherwise the statement is identical and covenant implications are clearly there. The aspect of the covenant dominates also in Joel 2:13; Ps. 111:4; Neh. 9:31; and 2 Chron. 30:9 where hnwn wrhwm describes the character of Yahweh.

The next two words, 'rk 'pym, cannot be separated, since idiomatically they belong together. Only three times is this term applied to man, in Prov. 14:29; 15:18 and 16:32. In every other instance it indicates God's forbearance in covenant love. Seven times out of nine it occurs alongside rhwm and hnwn in places already referred to. In Numbers 14:18 it precedes wrb-hsd as in Ps. 103:8 and is intimately related with the forgiveness of sin as well as the promise of

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<sup>100</sup> K.B., p.316.

<sup>101</sup> Ges., p.ccxcii.

covenant renewal. In Nahum 1:3 one finds the expression used in a negative sense apparently, in the context of the judgment over Nineveh. Yahweh's longsuffering, or the holding back of His anger could also have been a reference to the judgment once averted due to a repentant response. But this single instance of the expression, possibly to be considered negatively, does not invalidate the fact that 'rk 'pym conveys the picture of Yahweh ready to bind up His anger and accept His sinful people anew in grace and with compassion.

In the closing term of this colon hsd deserves special attention for its purposeful repetition and its emphatic prefix wrb. In vs. 4 hsd along with rhym as the combined object of the verb ctr and here the stress falls on the glorious character of the word. In vs. 8, the stress falls upon greatness and this is a notable shift of emphasis. There are two other occurrences of hsd, in vs. 11 and 17 each with its own inflection.

Fourteen times in the Old Testament does one find rb joined to hsd in this way, always in a covenantal setting. The combined terms are found three times in a personal prayer for a continuation of covenant fellowship and needed protection, in Ps. 5:8; 69:14 and Neh. 13:22. In Lam. 3:32 the term is employed in a very positive sense to express the hope of a covenant renewal and restoration. This expression also occurs

in Ps. 106:7, 45. In vs. 7, Israel is pictured as faithless and forgetful of this great covenant love, whereas in vs. 45 the overwhelming greatness of hsd is demonstrated in the fact that Yahweh remembers His bryt, and because of the greatness of hsd, restores fellowship. Each time this expression is found it demands special attention due to its emphatic character as well as its climatic position in the surrounding context. In Ps. 103:8, the prominence of rb-hsd is seen to dominate the following two verses.

The verses 9 and 10 present the reader with a detailed picture of Yahweh's hsd in operation. One of the most outstanding features at this point is the fact that four successive negatives appear in the next four cola. The very position of l', wl', before each new progressive idea is quite novel and arouses the attention of the reader. Under normal circumstances one would expect some kind of an emphatic prohibition to follow this four times repeated negative particle. Yet, because of the operation of hsd one is confronted with something quite different. It would be hard to conceive of any negative statement with such positive implications as those found in these four cola. Obviously l' is employed here "to express the definite expectation that something will not happen".<sup>102</sup> The poet in this unique way brings out the greatness of Yahweh's hsd, on account of which He does not deal

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<sup>102</sup> G.K., p.317.

with sinners as He could have been expected to. There is hardly another incident in the Old Testament where such a vivid illustration is drawn in such a peculiar fashion as in Ps. 103:9, 10.

In Is. 57:16 there is something similar in construction and content to Ps. 103:9. This verse is introduced by the emphatic particle ky, which will be discussed in connection with Ps. 103:11. The particle ky linguistically serves first of all as an attention getter. In Is. 57:16, it reduces somewhat the surprise effect of the emphatic negative l'. The sentence structure, both here and in Ps. 103:9, 10 seems to be intentionally irregular. "As a rule l' stands immediately before the verb, but sometimes is separated from it [frequently to bring into special prominence another word which follows it]."<sup>103</sup> The poet attempts to stress the fact that the eternal God seems to limit Himself by stopping judgement and doing away with His wrath. The unspoken question left in Is. 57:16 and Ps. 103:9, 10 concerns divine judgement upon sin. Normally sinners stood no chance when brought to trial in Yahweh's court. This question concerning divine judgement upon sin does pose a problem. The very grammatical construction of Is. 57:16 and Ps. 103:9, 10 seems to suggest that there is an element of tension in Yahweh between mercy and justice;

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<sup>103</sup> G.K., p.479.

wrath and love. Ps. 103:9 and 10 provides only a partial answer to this unspoken question. The poet gives a more complete and positive answer to this question in verses 11 and 12.

This element of tension can also be detected in Pss. 85 and 130. In Job 23:6, both the question and the answer are stated, although in a less pronounced fashion, hbrb-kh yryb cmdy; as the question, and, l' 'k-hw' ysm by as the answer. The fact that the question is not stated in Is. 57:16 and Ps. 103:9, 10 makes the answer which is stated more thought-provoking and prominent.

The term lnsh has the meaning of lastingness and finality. In Is. 25:8 it is employed to describe the complete and final victory over death. Some of the psalmists use the term to give expression to their fear of Yahweh dealing with them in final judgement rather than remembering them in His hsd. This is done in the form of prayer and complaint as is seen in Ps. 13:2; 77:9; 79:5 and 89:47. In Ps. 16:11 lnsh is used positively in the context of lasting life, yet it has the same ring of finality in it.

The verb ryb has definite legal implications. It can mean "to be actually engaged in a fight", but usually such a fight appears to be a battle of words. The exact rendering of the verb seems to be that of "pressing a legal case before a court of law".<sup>104</sup> Yahweh, who is the God of mšpt, forgoes

<sup>104</sup> Ges., p.DCCLXVII; B.D.B., p.936; K.B., p.888.

His right to keep on pressing charges forever. He has this right, but, because of rb-ḥsdw, He closes the case.

The same thought is developed with greater emphasis in the second half of this verse, where the stress falls on l'wlm. This term is frequently used to express the everlasting or eternal existence of God. The increased emphasis shows that the matter at stake is one of lasting or eternal significance.

The verb ntr employed here reveals a marked progression in thought. It is possible to conceive of a person pressing legal charges against someone, without being emotionally involved. But such a possibility is ruled out with a verb such as ntr. It is not a very common verb and is found in its various forms only about 14 times in the Old Testament. Only in Cant. 1:6 and 8:11 can one interpret this verb in a positive sense as "to tend to" or "to care for" and in these instances it seems to refer to the cultivation of a spice garden.

Jer. 3:5, 12 is closely related to Ps. 103:9. The style is parallel, with the question posed in Jer. 3:5 and the answer ringing back in vs. 12. The cola of vs. 12 are quite emphatic, ky-ḥsyd 'eny n'm-yhwh l' 'ṭwr l wlm. Yahweh will not go on forever to nourish or tend to the emotion of anger, because He practices covenant love. It seems quite correct to supply "anger" in the translation here as is done

in the A.V. and R.S.V. in Jer. 3:5, 12 and Ps. 103:9. Nahum 1:2 sheds some light on it. Here the first half of the verse, nqm yhwh lšryw is joined conclusively to the other half wnwtr hw' l'ybyw. This parallel construction demands the reading, "keeping" or "preserving wrath". This verb is applied to men in Amos 1:11 and requires a similar rendering. It is translated here as "And he kept his anger perpetually".<sup>105</sup> In Lev. 19:18 the negative command l'-tqm wl'-ttr 't-bny <mk must be treated in a similar fashion. It seems to be rendered correctly in the A.V. and R.S.V. as "to bear a grudge". This passage brings out the peculiar flavour of the verb, for the anger spoken of is the kind of feeling that has been tended to and nourished carefully. In the case then of ntr the word "anger" must be supplied when the context demands it.<sup>106</sup>

From the discussion above it is clear that one deals here with a concept more intense and personal than that found in the first half of the colon. The poet appears to be saying, "Yahweh has many reasons to stay angry forever and let His fury burn like a fire against me on account of my sin: Yet this will not go on for ever because hsd operates and the fire is quenched."

The fact that the imperfect tense is used in these

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<sup>105</sup> B.D.B., p.643.

<sup>106</sup> Ges., p.DXLVII.

colac tends to make the statement somewhat indefinite. In the next verse there is a shift to the perfect tense and this warrants attention. This seems to be another step in progressive development. Moreover in vs. 9 there is no expressed object and intransitive verbs are employed; in this way the indefinite character of the previous verse comes out. But in vs. 10, one can in fact speak of a double object since both the suffix and the personal pronoun function in that way. One should also note that the usual word order according to grammatical rules is not followed here. By priority of position, the emphasis falls on kht'ynw and k#wntynw.<sup>107</sup>

It is remarkable how sins and sinners are tied together grammatically through the use of the suffix interrelated in turn with the oblique personal pronoun, the form of a preposition with a suffix. The emphasis no longer falls on a single person. The poet retains the communal aspect which he brought in already in the verses 6 and 7 in a historical perspective. The emphasis now falls on the personal element in a wider sense. The experience of the poet described in the verses 3-5 is about to be elucidated further in the light of the experience of Yahweh's people. The sins of the poet as well as the sins of the covenant community implicate them and call for Yahweh's action. Yet because He is rb-hsd, this action does not take place.

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<sup>107</sup> G.K., p.456.

The discussion of the noun ḥt' will have to be restricted in this paper. Dealing with the different concepts involved and the various terms employed to express the notion of sin is an adequate topic for a separate study. ḥt' and other related nouns are derived from the verb ḥt'. The basic meaning of this verb is "to miss the mark",<sup>108</sup> and as such it has a rather broad and inclusive significance. One could well use ḥt' as a general denominator for all kinds of sinful action.

Only two references will be discussed here. The first one is found in Is. 38:17, in Hezekiah's prayer. The same thought is expressed here as is found in Ps. 103:10. No action is taken against sin in that case, but sins are completely put aside as described in the words ky ḥšlkt 'hry gwk kl-ḥt'y. The poet of Ps. 103 states the same idea in vs. 10 with his negative answer to an unspoken question and emphasizes the personal involvement with "our sins". Another reference relevant to the discussion of Ps. 103:10 is Is. 53:12. Here the stress falls on action that is taken and the specific action mentioned is related to sin as such. That in Ps. 103:9, 10 Yahweh does not act as was to be expected can only be explained in the light of atonement. This topic can legitimately be mentioned here since it is introduced already in the verses

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<sup>108</sup> K.B., p.288, 289; B.D.B., p.306, 307; Ges., p. CCLXXI.

3 and 4 of this psalm. The writer directs the attention to Is. 53:12 as a case in point where the charge is pressed home and the fury of God's anger is unleashed into action: whw' ht' rbym nš'. This point can be clarified further from what is found in Is. 53:4-6. There are additional passages that could be mentioned to show the presence of the doctrine of atonement in the Old Testament. Again there is no opportunity to do such a study in this paper. Nevertheless, expiation is an essential concept for the proper interpretation of hšd, the dominating feature of this psalm.

šh is used here in the perfect tense. This verb does not warrant a lengthy discussion since it has already been considered briefly in vs. 6. There is a definite stress on action as is expressed clearly when one translates, "Not according to our sins has He acted with respect to us".

The last half of the colon does show a further development of ideas. This is seen in the use of the noun šwn, already discussed under verse 3. This word is rather weighty with its threefold meaning. Its employment here prevents one from thinking of sin as inadvertent action, since the stress falls on the intentional character of the offence. This is a definite progression beyond ht' found in the first half of the verse.

Also the verb gml found here is quite significant.

In every instance where this verb occurs it seems to have a sense of finality concerning the action which it describes. This is why its first meaning is given as "to deal fully with" or "to finish". This notion of finality is quite outstanding.<sup>109</sup>

The verb was used to describe the weaning of a child. This was considered to be a very important event in the ancient near eastern world. The child had progressed beyond the stage of being an infant and the first chapter of his life was closed. See Gen. 21:8; 1 Sam. 1:23; 1 Kings 11:20; Is. 11:8; 28:9; Hos. 1:8 and Ps. 131:2 for this usage.

In Numbers 17:23 the verb is employed to relate the yielding of almonds on Aaron's rod, and this meant more than just the finished result of the blossom, it brought also an end to a heated dispute.

Wherever the verb is used for reward or repayment, there seems to be a reference to what went on before. It is found three times in Joel 4:4, and could be rendered here, "pay back in full that which is due". The notion of reward or repayment is present also in, 2 Sam. 19:37; 22:21; Ps. 13:6; 18:21 and Prov. 31:12. In Deut. 32:6 the verb occurs with the same meaning in the context of a covenant renewal. A shift of emphasis to a reward of grace in the context of redemption can be noticed in Ps. 116:7; 119:17 and 142:8.

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<sup>109</sup> K.B., p.188; B.D.B., p.168.

One could read Ps. 103:10 as follows, "He does not pay us back in full" or "give us the final reward due on account of our sins".

A parallel development can be traced in the successive positions of the prepositions in verse 10. There is a notable difference between l in the first half and ʿl in the second half of this verse. As a rule l introduces the remoter object.<sup>110</sup> Thus one could translate, "He has not done, or acted, according to our sins with us". The preposition ʿl is much more intense and has wider implications. It has the meaning of "above" in the sense of "against". As such it contains the expression of overpowering weight.<sup>111</sup> The original idea of ʿl as "against", "starts from the view that the assailant endeavours to take up his position over the person attacked, so as to reach him from above, or to overpower him".<sup>112</sup> This preposition is quite weighty; being used in the negative sense here it adds stress to the degree of finality and the ultimate character of the payment for sin. Note also how the same preposition recurs in vs. 11, 13 and 17 in a positive sense.

In the verses 9 and 10 it is depicted how what was expected to happen did not take place due to the abundance of Yahweh's hsd. Following the progressive development of the last three verses one begins to sense the rising tension of an

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<sup>110</sup> G.K., p.381.

<sup>111</sup> K.B., p.704.

<sup>112</sup> G.K., p.383, 384.

approaching climax. This will become clear in the discussion of the next few verses. In the verses 11-13 the positive answer to the implied question of vs. 9 and 10 is given. In fact these verses form the positive counterpart of the verses 9 and 10 expressing what Yahweh really does with sin and sinners.

The peculiar construction with the negative l' introducing each progressive thought has the immediate effect of arousing the reader's curiosity. This device alerts one as to the importance of what is to follow. The four negative answers given to an implied question stating what Yahweh does not do drive home the question, "But what does Yahweh do?" In the verses 11 and 12 a specific reply is given. It is this positive answer which appears to make up the high point of the entire poem. There are biblical scholars who also are convinced that the climax of Ps. 103 is found in the verses 11 and 12.<sup>113</sup>

The small particle ky at the beginning of vs. 11 is really eye-catching. It "has an asseverative quality denoting the absolute certainty with which a result is to be expected".<sup>114</sup> This little word definitely has a demonstrative force!<sup>115</sup> It is well suited to introduce what could be regarded as the

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<sup>113</sup> Bittenwieser, *The Psalms*, p.679; Weiser, *The Psalms*, p.662.

<sup>114</sup> G.K., p.498.

<sup>115</sup> K.B., p.431.

apex of the poem.

Yet the demonstrative quality of ky does not exhaust the function of this vital particle. Holman makes a remark on the use of ky in Ps. 139:13 that is worthy of note. He says that ky "can also be emphatic with the connotation of a motive".<sup>116</sup> If this can be suggested for Ps. 139:13, where Yahweh's care for the yet undeveloped life is pictured, it can with as much certainty be applied to Ps. 103:11-13. It is in these verses, now to be discussed, that the operation of Yahweh's hsd is displayed as the sole motive for the complete removal of sin portrayed in these verses.

There is another reason for ky here. The four preceding cola consisted of four successive negatives. In such a case ky is bound to follow and can be rendered as "on the contrary".<sup>117</sup> ky introduces an adversative clause which follows the preceding negative sentences since the negative idea was expressed in the form "of conditions which are to be regarded as not having been fulfilled".<sup>118</sup> This pregnant construction of ky is hardly considered by translators. Dahood states that the "emphatic ky finds no response in the versions".<sup>119</sup>

The writer proposes to consider the possibility of

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<sup>116</sup> J. Holman, "Analysis of the Text of Psalm 139", *Biblische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 14, 1970, p.151.

<sup>117</sup> K.B., p.431.

<sup>118</sup> G.K., p.500.

<sup>119</sup> Dahood, *Psalms III*, p.xxix.

regarding the second half of vs. 11 as the main climax of the entire psalm. Attention has been drawn to the development of the term hsd and its growing importance. It is this term which forms the core of the clause just mentioned. It is with this in mind that the writer wishes to discuss gbr hsdw sl-yr'yw.

It seems possible to regard the second half of vs. 11 as a clause that parallels the last clause of the next verse rather than to consider it as the second half of the comparison introduced by ky in vs. 11. At the same time, the clause of vs. 11b does seem to modify or at least influence both vs. 11a and vs. 12a. The writer is inclined to regard vs. 11b not just as the climax of the entire poem, but also as the very basis of the double comparison, expressing distance in vertical and horizontal fashion. To just think of gbr hsdw sl-yr'yw as the counterpart of the comparison in vs. 11a, ky kgbh šmym sl-h'rs, does not seem to be warranted. The verb gbr in vs. 11b does not at all convey the meaning of distance which is required by the first colon of this verse.

One could conceive of vs. 11b as a kind of double duty modifier, lodged properly between the two clauses, vs. 11a and 12a, which it rules. This would indeed highlight the progressive importance of the term hsd. It would, moreover, prevent a stereotyped reading of the double comparison involved

while at the same time serving as an excellent interlocking device. There happens to be such a function of the double duty modifier, although it appears to be quite novel to think of a verbal clause functioning in that way. Dahood draws attention to the double duty modifier in his article "A New Metrical Pattern in Biblical Poetry".<sup>120</sup> He points out how suffixes, prepositions, names, interrogations and even phrases can function in this manner, suspended as it were between the two clauses or phrases modified. He cites several occurrences of this phenomenon. It is true that no verbal clause is mentioned which is employed in such a way. Yet the fact that there apparently was such a poetic technique might give some credence to the idea that it might have had an even wider application than has been established, so that it can be suggested that in Ps. 103:11b one finds a verbal clause used for the same purpose.

In Ps. 4:2 there is an instance quite close to what is found in Ps. 103:11 and 12. The verbal clause bsr hrhbt ly seems to suggest the very basis on which the two-fold prayer request rests and may probably be considered as a double duty modifier. It as well is lodged between two clauses which appear to be influenced by it. This example might help to illustrate the point under discussion. It is quite important

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<sup>120</sup> *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, 1967, p.574-579.

to realize

the value for exegesis of a knowledge of the poetic technique, [.....], the 'breakup of stereotype phrases'. The biblical poets habitually separate compound linguistic stereotypes, into their components, placing one in the first half of the verse and the other in the second, with the result that both halves become more tightly interlocked.<sup>121</sup>

The arranging of vs. 11 and 12 in this peculiar way could well have been done to prevent a stereotyped reading of these climatic cola.

Another reason for thinking of vs 11b as modifying both kgbh šmym ʿl-h'rs and krhq mzrh mmrb is that the positive ground of this double comparison is the k prefix attached to both infinitives. k is used as a particle of comparison,<sup>122</sup> while retaining the function of the preposition "as",<sup>123</sup> and denotes resemblance. The two infinitives which are introduced by k seem to function as verbal nouns, describing a state.<sup>124</sup> In Ps. 103:11, 12 both these infinitives are concerned with distance, expressing conformity of measure and the particle k is properly used to introduce the two comparative clauses.<sup>125</sup> The fact that the infinitive construct of the verbs gbh and rhq is nowhere else in the Old Testament found

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<sup>121</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I*, The Anchor Bible, New York, Doubleday & Company Inc., 1966, p.xxxiv.

<sup>122</sup> G.K., p.298.

<sup>123</sup> Ges., p.cccclxxviii.

<sup>124</sup> G.K., p.375, 376.

<sup>125</sup> K.B., p.417.

with the k prefix draws further attention to the unique construction encountered in the verses 11 and 12.

In Is. 55:9 the verb gbh is employed in a way similar to Ps. 103:11. Here it describes the distance between heaven and earth in comparison with the ways and thoughts of God in regard to those of men. Notice how here the second half of the comparison consists of two different ideas joined to the same comparative clause by kn, "thus", which is employed to bring out the degree of similarity with emphasis since it has an element of demonstrative force.<sup>126</sup> In Ps. 103:11, 12 one finds a reversed situation with two different concepts of distance that seem to make up the first part of the comparison.

There are 14 instances of the verb gbh, describing physical distance in the vertical sense and in each case there is an allusion to excessive height. A verb like this one serves well to describe the notion of self-exaltation or pride. About 19 times it seems to have this implication. In Is. 5:16 and Ps. 113:5 the verb portrays Yahweh as the only exalted One. In Is. 52:13 Yahweh's servants are presented as lifted up on high. Job 36:7 mentions the righteous in a similar fashion with an added reference to eternal life. From references such as these it appears that the notion of vertical distance is the idea presented in vs. 11a. Excessive height is a definite connotation of this verb.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> G.K., p.296.

<sup>127</sup> B.D.B., p.146, 147; K.B., p.164.

Having thus seen how vs. 11a might be considered as making up one-half of the first section of a comparison together with vs. 12a, the discussion will now be continued with vs. 12a, krh<sub>q</sub> mzrh<sub>h</sub> mm<sub>l</sub>rb. rh<sub>q</sub> expresses distance in horizontal fashion. With this verb the same notion of extravagance can be detected that seems to be present with gbh. The meaning is clearly "to go away a great distance", including even the idea "of utter absence or non existence".<sup>128</sup> Fourteen times it indicates a great tangible distance. Twelve times it describes distance in the moral sense. rh<sub>q</sub> is applied four times to distance with respect to God. There is only one occurrence in Eccles. 12:6 where the translation presents any kind of problem.

The other terms found in this half of the comparison in vs. 11a and 12a, š<sub>h</sub>mym; ʾrs<sub>h</sub>; mzrh<sub>h</sub> and m<sub>l</sub>rb need no further elaboration here. The factor of exceptional distance in the vertical or horizontal sense must be kept in mind in evaluating vs. 12b. This clause will be treated here as the counterpart of both vs. 11a and 12a, which have stated the positive degree of the comparison. In the clause: hrh<sub>q</sub> mmnw ʾt-pš<sub>h</sub>cy<sub>nw</sub> the second degree of comparison is expressed. It is surprising to note that mn functions to designate the second degree of a comparison.<sup>129</sup> This little word is well suited since it

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<sup>128</sup> B.D.B., p.934.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.582.

originally also "represents both the idea of distance, separation, or remoteness from something, and that of motion away from something",<sup>130</sup> ideas which are applicable in the case of Ps. 103:11 and 12. This is again an example of the skilful selection of words demonstrated by the poet.

The second half of vs. 12, just quoted, shows the astounding character of forgiveness. The personal element becomes more pronounced at this point. In vs. 11b Yahweh is represented by means of the suffix in hsdw and yr'yw. The tension increases through the use of the finite verb which has Yahweh as its subject and the personal suffix added to mn and pšc. The fact that the causative stem of the Hifil is employed adds another vivid touch. Yahweh Himself is the cause of the removal of sins. It is significant to note that pšc describes "sin" here. It signifies "wilful rebellious conduct". It is important to note that pšc depicts the breaking of a covenant, as can be seen in 2 Kings 3:5, 7.<sup>131</sup> That at this climactic point hsd can be considered as the basis of such forgiveness deserves all the attention. Only covenant love of Yahweh can do away with the sin of covenant breakers. The last word of this colon 't-pšcynw focuses full attention upon gbr hsdw l-yr'yw of the previous verse. The miraculous power of hsd prevails.

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<sup>130</sup> G.K., p.382.

<sup>131</sup> Ges., p.dcxlv; B.D.B., p.833; K.B., p.785.

Forgiveness of sin is not a novel concept in the Old Testament. Passages such as Numb. 14:18; Is. 53:5, 8; Micah 7:18; Ps. 32:1, 5; 51:3 and 65:4 show this clearly. Yet the way in which the poet of Ps. 103 describes Yahweh's act of forgiveness has its own unique beauty.

Micah 7:18, 19 has many close affinities of thought and structure to Ps. 103:11, 12. It deals with the same topic, the removal of sins, but in a different fashion. The two verses mentioned seem to be a short poem. In these verses too, h<sub>sd</sub> stands out by its climactic position. The clause ky-h<sub>ps</sub> h<sub>sd</sub> hw' forms the apex of this little poem and structurally this clause seems to modify the three clauses on each side of it. That Yahweh is pleased or delighted in the exercise of His covenant love is the dominant factor here. This is the sole reason why sin disappears from sight and memory with utter finality. The structural pattern of these two verses is quite like that found in Ps. 103:11, 12 and seems to be a conscious display of poetic skill with the definite purpose to show how Yahweh's h<sub>sd</sub> operates.

The clause of vs. 11b gbr h<sub>sdw</sub> 'l-yr'yw, the writer is inclined to treat as the basis of the entire comparative structural unit found in Ps. 103:11, 12. This clause needs to be evaluated now. All the standard translations treat it as the second degree of a comparison and the counterpart to the

the positive degree expressed in vs. 11a. There appears to be a lack of textual evidence, however, to substantiate the generally accepted translation. This probably is why the footnotes in Biblica Hebraica suggest an alteration of the text at this point and read gbh instead of gbr. If one considers that there is a textual problem, it does not seem to solve anything to find such an easy way out.

As was already pointed out on p.84, Is. 55:9 states the same idea of vertical distance but in a different perspective. gbh as used there fits the context and conveys the only possible meaning. To appeal to this text as an evidence for a possible change of Ps. 103:11 seems highly questionable. Were one to change gbr to gbh it would alter the meaning of the text significantly and destroy its harmony. The immediate object of the verb is hsdw, an attribute of Yahweh to which the idea of distance expressed in vs. 11a, cannot very well be applied.

The key concept in the understanding of the verb gbr, is "power". It does not just mean "to be strong" but "to excell in strength", so that it can be rendered correctly as "to prevail".<sup>132</sup>

The above meaning is conclusively born out by its usage. This can be seen, e.g., in Gen. 7:18, 19, 20, and 24

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<sup>132</sup> B.D.B., p.149; Ges., p.CLVI; K.B., p.167, 168.

where the overwhelming force of the great flood is pictured. The mighty waters swept everything away to destruction. In order to express the extent of this flood in terms of measure, other verbs, such as rbh and ksh are employed alongside gbr in vs. 18, 19 and 20. This illustrates the point that gbr is not suited to express the concept of distance.

In the context of a battle or conflict, gbr comes to indicate the victor. The element of prevailing power is projected in no uncertain terms. See for this particular use, 2 Sam. 1:23; 11:23; Jer. 9:2; Zach. 10:6, 12; Ps. 12:5; Job 15:25; and even in Dan. 9:27, since the covenant mentioned there can be interpreted as an agreement forced on someone. In Is. 43:13, gbr depicts the exercise of Yahweh's victorious power upon His enemies. All the passages cited do seem to demonstrate the element of excessive and overpowering strength.

In Ps. 65:4 the overbearing character of sin is described in terms of this verb, gbrw mny pš'ynw. Yet it is found in the context of forgiveness as is seen from what follows, 'th tkprm. The impression is left here, that in spite of sin having such a destructive and prevailing power in life, the healing power of Yahweh's atoning grace exceeds it. When one looks at Ps. 65:4 with this in mind, the relationship of thought with Ps. 103:11, 12 becomes clearly evident.

Psalms 117 is another passage that warrants some further

discussion. Besides similarity of thought, one finds also a construction which parallels Ps. 103:11, 12. It is conceivable to think of the clause, ky gbr elynw h<sub>1</sub>sdw, as the central climax around which this brief poem is arranged. Both its opening challenge and closing exhortation are based on the clause quoted. One could well regard the emphatic central clause as modifying this entire poem; which consists of a brief outburst of praise. The device of inclusio is employed here as seen in the opening note, hllw 't-yhwh, parallel to its emphatic closing, hllw-yh. Also the preposition el is identical to Ps. 103:11 be it here with the suffix attached to it. In Ps. 103:11 the suffix is found in the word joined to el. Ps. 117 seems to be another instance where a peculiarity of construction reminds one of the possibility that clauses such as the one quoted and found also in Ps. 103:11b may function in a sense as modifiers shaping the immediate parallel clauses or phrases on both sides.

The personal involvement of Yahweh is made prominent in Ps. 103:11b by means of the personal suffix. His covenant love, h<sub>1</sub>sdw, is so extremely powerful, that it provides the positive answer to the unstated question of vs. 9 and 10, filling out in a wonderful way the negative explanation found in the verses 9 and 10.

The preposition el is most frequently applied in a

negative sense. This can be seen to a certain extent in vs. 10. Yet it is developed in vs. 11, and carries a profound positive implication. This preposition occasionally occurs with words that express a surpassing degree of excellence. This is why it seems naturally suited here, as the indirect object of a verb such as gbr. This preposition is also frequently found in connection with the verb kpr, "to make atonement, to cover". Such a use is related to the basic meaning of על, "on behalf".<sup>133</sup> The preposition על enables this clause to function as a bridge between vs. 10b and its positive parallel clause in vs. 12b, thus emphasizing the integral unity of the poem.

The term yr'yw needs to be discussed before proceeding to vs. 13. This participle with the suffix reveals the intimate relationship between Yahweh and His covenant people. At the same time this word also brings out the community concept. Progressively the poet has brought out the fact that forgiveness of sin is not just an isolated individual experience. He has shown that there is a community of people who are involved in such a happening. At this point the poet begins to rephrase his thought bringing in the element of a subjective response.

To most people the term "fear" has the connotation of "fright", prompting withdrawal. An examination of the biblical

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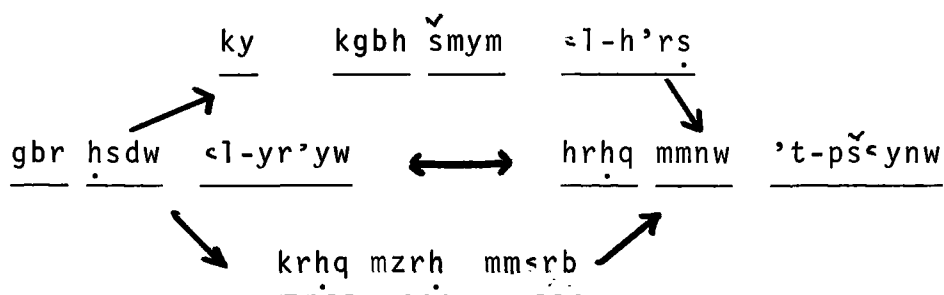
<sup>133</sup> B.D.B., p.754.

use of yr' is quite surprising since there are only nine instances where it has such an overtone of dread. It is found in such a way only when referring to men or some particular trouble. At least fifty times this word is applied to God or His will and never in a negative sense. It is striking to note how often this term occurs in the vocabulary of praise. In the Psalms it is found 28 times. In Ps. 90:11 at first sight one might give it a different interpretation, but a case could be made here as well for the more positive meaning by reading it as an antonym or opposite. This would also apply to Ps. 85:4, 10.

Apparently the term yr'yw was used as a collective for the community of Yahweh's covenant people. It appears with the third person masculine suffix as an indication of Yahweh in Ps. 22:26; 25:14; 33:18; 34:8, 10; 60:6; 85:10; 103:11, 13, 17; 111:5; 145:19; 147:11; and many other places. Every time when this word is found there seems to be a definite indication of a subjective response to Yahweh's covenant love. This element of reciprocal feeling seems to be present and may not be overlooked. Ps. 85:10, where lyr'yw stands parallel to hsydyw in vs. 9, the context illustrates this perspective. Even within Ps. 103, by means of its repeated use this element of responsiveness is brought into a clearer focus. One could properly translate this term with, "those who reverently love

Him".

Verse 11b has been discussed last in order to illustrate the point of the double comparison better. The following rearrangement of those fourcola in vs. 11 and 12 might make it more clear:



It seems evident that "The text does not imply merely a comparison of height, 'As heaven o'er earth, high mercy o'er them lean' (Kable), but such a prevailing flood of mercy that where sin abounded grace does now more abound".<sup>134</sup>

Verse 13 introduces a new element with the infinitive of rh̄m preceded by the comparative prefix k. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is this done. This suggests intentional stress by the poet. It seems correct to regard k as the Kaph veritatus, employed for the purpose of emphasis in addition to its comparative function.<sup>135</sup> The poet draws attention to the peculiar nature of Yahweh's action with respect to His covenant people. Following the vivid description of the complete removal of sin, depicted in the verses 11 and 12, Yahweh, the holy One, can now truly reveal Himself as the compassionate One.

<sup>134</sup> King, *The Psalms*, p.429.

<sup>135</sup> G.K., p.376.

The poet brings this out by means of an anthropomorphic expression. He draws a line of comparison between an earthly father, who cares for, pities and loves his children with deep feeling, and Yahweh in the continued exercise of His great deeds toward His people.

The infinitive construct is well suited for this purpose. It functions as a finite verb while stressing a particular action as an event. For this reason the writer proposes the vocalization in Biblica Hebraica from riḥam in the second half of this verse to rahēm and read both occurrences as an infinitive construct. Such a change does not alter the consonantal text. This would strengthen the force of the comparison and be consistent with the meaning of the context. If Yahweh acts surprisingly like an earthly father in exercising His compassion, it seems appropriate to retain the same grammatical stress for the second half of the comparison.

The verb rh̄m stresses an element of feeling, akin to the human sentiment of pity and loving concern. Only once is rh̄m used to depict man's love for Yahweh, in Ps. 18:2. As a rule it is associated with the feeling just described. In I Kings 3:26, this verb demonstrates vividly what such a feeling is like. Is. 49:15 is another instance. A mother is described here, full of loving compassion for her baby, yet Yahweh's compassionate love is shown to be much more stable and lasting.

The words gm-’lh tškhnh w’nky l’škhk, present a clear picture of this sentiment and this expression is closely related in thought to what is found in Ps. 103:13.

Whenever this verb is applied to Yahweh it stands in the context of His loving compassion toward His people in their specific need. There are definite social implications associated with this verb. In Hos. 14:4 rh̄m is used with ytwm "the fatherless" as its object. Helplessness, dependency or a state of weakness are often bound up with the exercise of the emotional activity described in this verb.

When Yahweh is its subject, the verb is commonly found in the context of redemption, forgiveness or a covenant renewal. This can be seen in, Ex. 33:19; Is. 49:10, 13, 15; 54:8, 10; 55:7; Jer. 31:20; Ps. 102:14 and 116:5. Jer. 31:20 deserves a closer examination. The Piel infinitive construct here precedes the imperfect with the suffix, expressing the same father-child relationship as in Ps. 103:13. Such a use of an infinitive before a finite verb draws attention to the subject of the verb, while emphasizing continued action. The clause referred to in Jer. 31:20 is parallel to the one which precedes where the same use of the infinitive occurs before the imperfect of zkr. The flavour of this passage differs in this respect that the order here is reversed. Yahweh is pictured as relating His feeling toward His child Ephraim. Yet the affinity

of the overall content of this verse is very close to Ps. 103:13.

There are various opinions regarding the Fatherhood of God as found here in Ps. 103:13. N.H. Parker appears to over-emphasize its prominence to a degree by saying that "The major premise in this psalm is that God is like a Father".<sup>136</sup>

Buttenweiser discusses the notion of God's Fatherhood in connection with Ps. 103:13 and says that it is not a rare utterance at all, but expresses a familiar thought of the Old Testament.<sup>137</sup> The writer believes that Buttenweiser's point is well taken. It is not uncommon for the Old Testament writers to think of God as a Father. There are more or less direct references to God in this way in Ex. 4:22; Deut. 32:6; Is. 9:6; 63:16; 64:7; Jer. 3:4; 31:9, 20; Hos. 11:1 and Ps. 68:6. The majority of these references are found in the setting of a covenant renewal. At the same time it must be said that usually God is spoken of in this way only indirectly. The term "Father" as a mode of address is scarcely ever employed. This could be due to the fact that the term had "too strong a flavour of nature-religion", to be used on a regular basis.<sup>138</sup>

The setting of Ps. 103:13 is quite clear and does not need further elaboration. The fact that the reference to God

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<sup>136</sup> *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. I, 1955, p.192.

<sup>137</sup> Buttenweiser, *Psalms*, p.682.

<sup>138</sup> Cheyne, *The Origin and Religious Content of the Psalms*, p.305.

as Father goes hand in hand with a restoration of covenant fellowship in so many cases is rather important. The application of this fatherhood concept often seems to be directed to evoke a new childlike response. This comes out also in the colon under discussion. The first cl-bnym of the positive degree stands parallel to the emphatic counterpart cl-yr'yw at the close of the colon. It has already been pointed out that this term has subjective implications. It serves very well in its position to express the positive result of the exercise of Yahweh's fatherly compassion.

In the next colon, vs. 14, the poet places in marvellous perspective the reason why Yahweh does regard His people as His children, dealing with them in love and compassion. The emphatic ky at the opening of this colon functions to point out this specific reason. The amazing act of Yahweh exercising loving compassion is conspicuously carried over into this colon by means of the personal pronoun hw', attached to the emphatic particle ky.

The perfect of yd<sup>c</sup> follows the subject hw' on which the full stress falls due to its position in the sentence. One does not have to consider this verb as speaking here of what happened in the past. In fact, normally, even when referring to a past event, the perfect indicates that its influence extends into the present.<sup>139</sup> The verb yd<sup>c</sup>, which is concerned with a state of

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<sup>139</sup> G.K., p.311.

the mind, can only be rendered by the present in English, since present knowledge is the result of previous perception or experience.<sup>140</sup> This verb has a strong element of feeling in it and places a renewed stress on the personal involvement of Yahweh with His people. It is employed for God, especially where His care for men is concerned. This can be seen in Ex. 33:12; Numb. 18:17; Jer. 1:5; Hos. 13:5; Amos 3:2; Ps. 144:3 and Neh. 1:7. This element of loving concern is appropriate here. Generally "to know", "can have the connotation of an anxious concern about something, whether in relation to God or man".<sup>141</sup> The "element of will in ydc emerges with particular emphasis when it is used of God, whose knowing establishes the significance of what is known".<sup>142</sup>

The next word, yšrnw, determines the scope and direction of Yahweh's knowing. The noun yšr is found only nine times in the Old Testament. In Gen. 6:5; 8:21 and Deut. 31:21 it is employed to illustrate what man has become as a result of sin. It is noteworthy that the verbal root occurs in the portrayal of the act of the creation of man. It is linked up with the noun εpr also used in Ps. 103:14. The verb yšr is concerned with premeditated human or divine activity. It is figuratively applied to the "framing, fashioning, pre-ordaining, planning (in divine purpose) of a situation", as is supported

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. I, p.698.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

by lexicographical evidence. The noun ysr means not only "from" but also "imagination, device", or "purpose".<sup>143</sup>

The latter meaning is clearly evident in Gen. 8:21 and its evaluation will aid the understanding of Ps. 103:14. The clause ky ysr lb h'dm rb mn'ryw, stands in the context of the newly initiated covenant between God and sinful man. The emphasis appears to fall on the very way in which man shapes his life. "Imagination" or "purpose" seems to be the correct translation of ysr here. God in coming to man with His covenant, figures, so to speak, with his sinful nature. What is found in Gen. 8:21 is similar to what is seen in Ps. 103:14. After depicting the miracle of the removal of sin the poet goes on to describe Yahweh's loving compassion for His covenant children in their sinful and finite existence. Like an earthly father who knows the limitation of his children so Yahweh is aware of the purposes and the thought life of His people.

In 1 Chron. 29:18 this word occurs in a recorded prayer of David, but with a different perspective. Yahweh is here asked and expected to take a hand, by way of speaking, in the fashioning or reshaping of the new life of His covenant people. This perspective seems to be present also in Ps. 103:14 and is developed further as the poem progresses.

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<sup>143</sup> B.D.B., p.427.

The second half of the verse continues along the same line. The verb zkr can be expected to have a favourable content here. Yahweh does remember particular persons. That the stress falls on the individuals concerned is evident from the use of 'nhnw, "we", as the object of zkr. This form of the personal pronoun always carries a special emphasis as is evident in Gen. 13:18; 19:13; 29:4; 37:7; Deut. 1:41; 2 Kings 10:4; Is. 20:6; Ps. 100:3 and 103:14. The deep personal involvement of Yahweh with His people is stressed. One may well speak of Yahweh as remembering His people with covenant kindness, granting their requests, protecting and delivering them in their affliction.<sup>144</sup> Jer. 31:20 can serve as a standard example of this kind of remembrance.

Yahweh does not just know what man is like in the shaping of his life, as stated in vs. 14a; He also knows how weak and frail man is. And who would remember better what he is like, than the very God who formed him from εpr, "the dust"? The position of εpr in the portrayal of a covenant people, shown in their need for God, as a compassionate Father, is remarkable. There appears to be a kind of link here between creation and covenant renewal, as was also pointed out in the discussion of vs. 4.

The noun εpr gives a fitting description of man in his limitation. It is employed to illustrate man in his weakness

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p.270.

and lowliness as an object in need of Yahweh's constant care. This can be seen in 1 Sam. 2:8; 1 Kings 16:2; Ps. 7:6; 22:16, 30; 44:26; 113:7; 119:25; and Lam. 3:29. Moreover, the use of εpr to indicate the basic element of man's physical existence aptly demonstrates his limitation and dependency. Many references employ this word in connection with man's primary beginning in creation and his end in death. The following passages clearly show this, Gen. 2:7; 3:17; Job 10:9; 17:16; 34:15; Eccles. 3:20 and 12:7. On no other occasion, however, is εpr made as vividly personal as in Ps. 103:14, by means of its link to the emphatic personal pronoun. The selection of this word highlights the intense need of Yahweh's people for such a Father's care. Yahweh in covenant love cares for the very people which He had fashioned from the dust.

A close look at vs. 15 and 16 reveals that these verses are so intimately joined that they must be read as in one breath. These four cola can be regarded as a further explanation of the nature of man. Looking back to vs. 8 one finds that in that verse a description of Yahweh is given, regarding His nature. In the following six verses, vs. 9-14, there is a skilful portrayal of Yahweh in His acts with respect to His sinful and finite people. In the verses 15 and 16 related to vs. 8 by way of an interlocking thought-pattern, a vivid description is given of what man is like at his best.

One gets the impression that the poet has deliberately arranged his thoughts so that they express related ideas on both sides of the apex. Reading vs. 8 and the verses 15 and 16 as opposites standing over against each other, there appears to be a pattern of interlocking concepts. Looking at it in such a fashion seems to enhance a deeper appreciation of the beauty of this poem. In vs. 8, Yahweh is pictured in the astounding glory of His gracious character while in contrast in verses 15 and 16, man is displayed in the fading glory of his finite existence. Such an interdependency of opposites is recognized by J. Holman in his study of Psalm 139. "This stylistic device of expressing a totality by the opposition of antonyms, i.e., merismus, is of special importance in Ps. 139".<sup>145</sup> In Ps. 103 a similar kind of interrelationship seems to exist as can be seen here and will be pointed out as the discussion of the second half of this psalm proceeds.

Charles Briggs remarks on 'nwš, the first word in vs. 15, that it is "emphatic in position, because a characteristic of humanity is to be mentioned".<sup>146</sup> Elmer Leslie is aware of internal thought-development in regard to 'nwš and remarks that the psalmist thinks of

Divine Providence in ever widening concentric circles. He begins with his own life [vss. 3-5] and addresses his own soul as though it

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<sup>145</sup> *Biblische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 14, 1970, p.40.

<sup>146</sup> Briggs, *The Psalms*, p.326, 327.

were a separate person. Then he broadens his thought to include God's dealings with Israel, His people as a whole [vss. 6-14]. Finally taking a still greater sweep of God's benefits into his survey, he includes all mankind [vss. 15-18], the key word here being 'man' [vs. 15].<sup>147</sup>

Lexicographical evidence bears out that 'nws refers to man in general or to mankind. It is treated as a collective noun.<sup>148</sup>

In addition to this element of collectivity, one finds 'nws employed for man, in confrontation with, in contrast to, or, in relationship with God. This particular use is found twice in Isaiah, 7 times in the Psalms, 13 times in Job and also in Dan. 2:10, 38 and 2 Chron. 14:10. Each time that it is thus found, man's sin, weakness and limitation appears to be an underlying factor. Even in man to man relationships 'nws has the implication of weakness. Only in Jer. 20:10 and Ps. 50:14 does the context seem to allow for its interpretation as "friend" or "acquaintance". From the general application of the term in the Old Testament, it appears that 'nws was the most suitable word available to the poet for his purpose of contrasting man with God.

In Ps. 8:5 and 144:3 there is a marked similarity to Ps. 103:15. In the passages cited 'nws and 'dm are used side by side, but the element of contrasting God in His infinite greatness to man in his fleeting beauty and utter frailty is found here as well as in Ps. 103. One can conclude that the

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<sup>147</sup> Leslie, *The Psalms*, p.46, 47.

<sup>148</sup> B.D.B., p.60; Ges., p.lxxviii; K.B., p.68.

poet's choice of words suited his purpose.

There are some biblical scholars who seem to have the notion that as soon as a thought is expressed, found also elsewhere in the Old Testament, there must of necessity be a lack of originality in what is thought to be the latest text. This involves one at once in the matter of dating or a consideration of what is the primary text. That such an approach can have a destructive influence on honest textual criticism can be seen in regard to Ps. 103 in Briggs' and Bittenweiser's evaluation of this psalm.<sup>149</sup>

Is. 40:6, 8 and Ps. 90:5 are often mentioned in connection with Ps. 103:15, 16. There is of course no harm but merit in comparing passages discussing a common theme. Yet one ought to allow for the fact that a familiar topic can be developed in various settings and at different times by several authors. It is essential to keep this in mind, especially in the evaluation of poetry.

A poem is an indivisible entity which cannot be divided into matter and form and which should not be used to prove anything outside itself; the critic's only approach is to study the different stylistic procedures as so many levels of articulation all simultaneously present and dynamically interactive within the poem.<sup>150</sup>

This paragraph can serve as an introduction of the image of the

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<sup>149</sup> Briggs, *The Psalms*, p.326, 327; Bittenweiser, *The Psalms*, p.680.

<sup>150</sup> J. Blenkinsopp, "Stylistics of Old Testament Poetry", *Biblica*, Vol. 44, 1963, p.353.

grass and fieldflower in verses 15 and 16 applied as fitting similes to man in his beauty as well as his frailty.

It is profitable to look at Is. 40:6-8 where the same theme is discussed as in Ps. 103:15, 16 and in even a related fashion. A careful analysis will show, however, that both passages have their own peculiar style and emphasis. In Is. 40:6, wk1-hsdw ksys h<sup>s</sup>dh, appears to have an important bearing upon the correct translation of the entire passage. One does not just find here a picture of man's physical beauty and frailty, but also a portrayal of his behaviour at the moral and emotional level. Man's h<sup>s</sup>d, or covenantal response, which includes his total way of life in relation to his covenant God, is thrown into the comparative scale as well. When one takes this into account, the clause of vs. 8b, wdbr-'lhy<sup>n</sup>w yqwm l<sup>c</sup>wlm, as an antonym to the clause from verse 6 quoted above, appears to stand in a special light. The intimate connection between these two contrasting clauses can easily be detected. The "goodliness" of the A.V. and "beauty" of the R.S.V. can hardly be considered an adequate rendering of h<sup>s</sup>d in vs. 6. Man's uncertain covenant love is placed over against God's enduring word.

In Ps. 103:8 the emphasis on h<sup>s</sup>d is very pronounced and applied to Yahweh. This aspect is not referred to, however, in the description of man found in vs. 15 and 16. That

the thought of man's response to Yahweh's hsd was in the mind of the poet is evident in vs. 17 and what follows. Yet in these four cola there is a different emphasis. The fact that Ps. 103:15, 16 presents a differently oriented and briefer construction does seem to give credence to the view that, if one could speak of an earlier model employed by a later writer, Ps. 103:15, 16 could be considered as such. In Is. 40:6-8 the idea of human response in covenant love is interwoven into the whole framework of man's beautiful but perishable existence as expressed in terms of the grass and fieldflower. Such an intricate development is not noticeable in Ps. 103:15, 16.

The term hsyr is not found very often. It clearly stands for plain "grass" or "green shrubs". Passages such as 1 Kings 18:5; 2 Kings 19:26 and Ps. 147:8 show this. Whether it appears on the rooftops, mountain slopes or in the valleys, the grass described by hsyr functions as a fitting simile of the beauty and freshness as well as the frailty and brevity of human life. This can be seen in Is. 37:27; Ps. 90:5, 6; 129:6 and to a degree also in Ps. 37:7. Occurrences of this term in Is. 34:13 and Ps. 58:8 seem to be questionable and cannot be discussed in this paper.

In the opinion of the writer, the picture found in the verses 15 and 16 fits very well in the locality of the Judaeian desert. After the rainy season for a short while this

arid soil is carpeted with greenery. Man's life has a similar fresh but short-lived vigour. This thought is continued in the second simile of the kšyṣ hšdh. The primary notion of this word is to convey a picture of beauty. It is not correct to think of it just in negative terms. The verb swṣ from which it is derived has definite positive connotations. It means "to blossom, shine, sparkle, flourish", and in the Hifil often is employed in figurative sense. The verb is used with grass in Ps. 72:16; 90:6 and 92:8.<sup>151</sup> The noun syṣ is used to describe the ornaments made for the tabernacle and temple; see e.g., Ex. 28:36; 39:30; Lev. 8:9; and 1 Kings 6:18, 29, 32, 35. The crown of holiness or the golden plate worn by the high priest is also described with this term. This application to the realm of the sacred seems to prove that remarkable beauty was associated with this flower. In Sirach 40:4, it is translated as "crown".<sup>152</sup> In Sirach 43:19, it is obviously applied to "hoar frost" in its exquisite but fragile appearance.<sup>153</sup>

From the passages cited, it appears that the poet selected this word in order to express the charming beauty of man as well as his sheer frailty and mortality. In Job 14:2 and Is. 40:6-8, this term conveys the same picture of man. In Ps. 103:15, one finds a sketch of man's shortlived vigour and brittle beauty but the main emphasis is left for the next

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<sup>151</sup> B.D.B., p.847; K.B., p.798.

<sup>152</sup> Goodspeed, *The Apocrypha*, p.301.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p.309.

verse.

Verse 16 begins with the emphatic ky, thereby indicating where the stress falls. Man is indeed beautiful and full of promise, yet this beauty and life is an endowment from the God of grace. The covenantal life response in man illustrated in the figures of grass and flower is itself the result of the creative operation of God's spirit.

The importance of rwh stands out in vs. 16, due to its position in the sentence following ky and before the verb. Frequently rwh expresses the creative power of God, as can be seen, e.g., in Gen. 1 and Ps. 33:6. While keeping this in mind, one may not overlook the fact that this noun does also simply mean "wind". Yet one can detect a subtle play on rwh here, which makes for vivid reading.

In Is. 40:7, there occurs a similar construction. Also, this clause begins with ky and rwh precedes the verb. But here the name of Yahweh is added, which is not found in Ps. 103:16. Yet considering the whole context and the prominence of rwh in the sentence, it appears to be justified to think of a wind of special significance here.

The writer ventures to state as his opinion that one could conceivably think of a sirocco in this case. Such a scorching wind when it passes brings an end to the greenery and beauty of a blooming desert. In Is. 40:7, the verb nšb

is used in the Kal, meaning "to blow", and one does not get the same impression as in Ps. 103:16, where the verb ḥbr is employed. The same artist which drew such a fine picture of man's fragile beauty in vs. 15, now makes one listen to the passing of the hot desert wind which abruptly changes the scenery in vs. 16 to that of a barren waste, with not a trace of the colourful splendour left behind.

The word which follows seems to spell out the emptiness which remained. When 'yn with the pronominal suffix is found in this fashion, it has verbal significance.<sup>154</sup> For a similar use of 'yn with the nun energicum, compare Gen. 5:24; Is. 19:7; Jer. 49:10; Ps. 37:10; Job 3:21; 23:8; 24:24; 27:19 and Prov. 23:5. From the context and the references cited, the stress clearly falls on the action which is taking place.

Yet the abrupt change from colourful beauty to barren death seems hard to imagine. The poet therefore takes the reader back for a closer look in the last clause of this colon, wl'-ykyrnw mqwmw. The negative particle l' dominates this clause. The verb nkr is well suited to give one the impression of what the desert wind has accomplished. It does imply an eager interest on the part of the subject in the person or object sought for. It means "to investigate, take notice; inspect".<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> G.K., p.296.

<sup>155</sup> B.D.B., p.648; K.B., p.617, 618.

The use of ewd as the adverb of duration, following the verb with the negative, gets the point across. The flowers were there, but they last no longer. They had no enduring quality in themselves. No trace of them can be found, not even the place where once they stood. The poet in this manner has drawn the full force of his attention to man as such. He too is full of vigour and sparkles in one moment and is forgotten the next. Such is man contrasted with Yahweh in vs. 8. It is this man who Yahweh in His hsd remembers. The interlocking relationship between this clause and rb-hsd in vs. 8 as its opposite, further illustrates this point.

The next two verses, 17 and 18, however, place man again in relation to Yahweh. Although man amounts to so little, Yahweh's hsd makes all the difference. Over against the finality of human mortality stands the hope of new life flowing from the covenant God. The awareness of the interrelationship of verse 8 with verses 15 and 16 opens the door to the further development of thought found in verses 17 and 18.

The fact that vs. 17 begins with the waw copulative warrants some discussion. "Frequently the language employs merely the simple connexion by Waw, even to introduce an anti-thesis".<sup>156</sup> Reading verse 17, one finds the idea expressed to be notably different from what was found in the previous four cola. That of necessity an intimate connection with the

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<sup>156</sup> G.K., p.485.

preceding verses must be maintained is brought out by the fact that through w, they are bound up with hsd, which must be considered as the key concept of the entire poem. In one way the description of man in verses 15 and 16 is accurate, yet one is not allowed to forget that there is also a different dimension. By means of the waw copulative the poet deliberately joins man as described in vs. 15 and 16 to hsd yhwh. Man by himself has little worth, but bound to Yahweh by His covenant love he becomes significant and finds a place in history.

It is this aspect of history which seems to provide a link between the verses 6 and 7 and the next two verses to be discussed, the verses 17 and 18. In the first two verses, Yahweh is seen as involved in the process of history by giving a place and a name to His people. He showed His ways to Moses and His great deeds to Israel. In verses 17 and 18, Yahweh's abiding covenant love is revealed as the link binding together generations of men who are brittle and disappear, giving a purpose to their lives and historical reality to their existence.

Looking back to verses 15 and 16 the contrast between the perishable and that which lasts is striking. The use of mewlm wed-cwlm is very emphatic and can mean nothing less here than continuous existence, everlasting life and an unending future.<sup>157</sup> The thought of lasting life introduced in vs. 5 at

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<sup>157</sup> B.D.B., p.762.

the individual level now reappears on a broader scale in the context of the covenant. Yahweh's hsd guarantees man's continuing existence.

The endurance of covenant love has, Good believes, eschatological overtones ad expressed in the formula used in relation to the Exodus tradition 'for his hesed endures forever' [Ps. 136. See also 1 Chron. 16:34. 41; 2 Chron. 5:13; 7:3, 6; 20:21; Ezra 3: 11; Ps. 100:5, etc.].<sup>158</sup>

In Ps. 103:17, one finds a more emphatic expression of the same idea. The fact that it is linked up with the verses 6 and 7 and joined to the preceding two verses by means of the w draws out the striking stress upon the continuation of life in the verses 17 and 18.

The purposeful repetition of cl-yr'yw focusses attention on man's responsive action. This was pointed out already in the discussion of the verses 11 and 13. Relating the verses 17 and 18 back to the verses 6 and 7 it can be seen that in those two verses the stress falls on Yahweh's acts and guidance. The verses 17 and 18 express an opposite idea that has a parallel relationship. In verses 6 and 7, He caused them to know His ways and works and here, His people are presented as walking in them and acting according to their covenant obligation. The poet reminds his readers of the fact that hsd is reciprocal in character. Those who are the objects of hsd must also practice it, bound as they are to keep the bryt.

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<sup>158</sup> Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, p.32.

The component part of the general concept hesed, in which the interpretation of hesed as procedures or performances corresponding to a mutually obligatory relationship, are principally: reciprocity, mutual assistance, sincerity, friendliness, brotherliness, duty, loyalty and love.<sup>159</sup>

It is this aspect of mutuality and reciprocity which the poet brings out in the verses 17 and 18. The fact that the term bryt is found in connection with the actions of the covenant people as they are described, illustrates this point.

The relationship between vs. 6 and vs. 17 is so close that one could label it as an inclusio. Compare, e.g., sdqwt in vs. 17, with sdqwt in vs. 6. Verse 17 consists of a noun clause made up of three phrases and if they are considered as linked up with vs. 6, the verbal significance of the participle esh seems to transmit itself to vs. 17, and especially the last phrase, wsdqtw lbny bnym. Here the children of ongoing generations have replaced Moses and Israel of vs. 6. This concept involving future generations broadens the scope of this psalm.

Ordinarily when bny bnym is found in a family setting, it refers to grandchildren. In the discussion of this text, however, one can hardly render it this way. The verses 15 and 16 present the picture of generic man, man by himself, liable to perish in a moment. Here man is shown in a different perspective. Here the new man is shown, changed by the touch

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55.

of Yahweh's covenant love. In both instances, man is discussed as a specific type of being, and not in his family situation. This is why it is more appropriate to translate lbny bnym as "ongoing generations" rather than with the familiar "grandchildren".

If one considers sdqtw to be related by means of inclusio to sdqwt in vs. 6, the shift of emphasis as well as the development of thought is apparent. Yahweh's righteous acts of deliverance in vs. 6 can be thought of in an objective sense where in vs. 17, Yahweh's righteousness has subjective implications involving a change in the life of those endowed with it. This idea is further disclosed in vs. 18. A similar notion seems to be present in Is. 46:12, 13. In vs. 12, there is a description of those who lack sdqh in their conduct, while in vs. 13, Yahweh appears, imparting His righteousness in a saving way. The R.S.V. translation of Is. 46:12, 13 seems to go against the actual sense of the text. Somehow it succeeds in divorcing sdqh from conduct altogether. The element of a change of life or life-style seems to be quite evident in this Isaiah passage. There are other texts where the same subjective involvement can be detected, such as Is. 54:14; Ps. 22:32 and 24:5, 6, for example. In Ps. 103:17, it is made plain that Yahweh imparts His hsd and sdqw, on a lasting basis. This is nothing but full salvation. The

operation of Yahweh's h<sub>sd</sub> constitutes an essential change in the condition of man. The tie between these two verses and the verses 15 and 16 underlines this factor.

In the first half of vs. 18, the term bryt is found for the first time. The poet could hardly have selected a better word to express the covenantal response of those endowed with Yahweh's h<sub>sd</sub> and sdqh. When Yahweh initiates His bryt the results are inevitable. In Deut. 4:13, where Yahweh makes His bryt known the rules for covenantal conduct immediately follow. In Deut. 4:23 the Nifal of šmr is applied to keeping oneself in the way of the covenant. The same verb is used in connection with bryt in Ps. 103:18. Also in Is. 59:21 there is a definite implication of renewal of life expressed in conduct, bound up with the making of Yahweh's covenant. Jer. 32:40 states Yahweh's h<sub>sd</sub> šwl<sub>m</sub> at the occasion of the establishment of His covenant and continues with a conclusion: 'wtm w't-yr'ty 'tn blbbm lblty swr mšly, leaving no doubt as to the impact of Yahweh's h<sub>sd</sub> in the lives of His people. A beautiful description of Yahweh operating in this fashion is also found in Jer. 31:31-33. The above references are sufficient to show the point under discussion. Yahweh did make His ways and acts known to His people, but the people of His covenant community also actively respond, as can be seen here.

With the use of the Kal active participle of šmr in vs. 18 one encounters an important shift of emphasis. Yahweh

the agent of the participle ◀šh in vs. 6, is here replaced with His people, lšmry, who became the partners to His bryt. They are presented here as actively responding by taking their covenant obligations seriously.

The verb šmr, "to wait upon, attend to, observe, keep", is well suited to express covenantal relationships. It is frequently found in such a background.<sup>160</sup> Certain responsibilities and duties bound up with bryt are set down in the form of prescriptions. That the verb šmr is employed for such an observance of covenant rules can be seen, for example, in Gen. 17:9, 10 and Deut. 29:8 in addition to Ps. 103:18. The words of the covenant must not only be preserved but also translated into action. The emphatic position of the Infinitive absolute of ◀šh, at the close of these four cola, presses this thought home.

The participle of zkr stands side by side with its predicate pqdyw and needs to be regarded as a single thought unit. The noun pqwd itself is a Kal passive participle of the verb pqd, which means "to look after, commit, charge to the care of".<sup>161</sup> Under the influence of the passive it is applied to one who is "charged" or "commissioned" with something. From this reading the meaning "precept" or "commandment" is derived. One could, however, regard such a rendering as some-

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<sup>160</sup> K.B., p.993.

<sup>161</sup> Ges., p. DCLXXXVI.

what too narrow. The term seems to carry the connotation of a life commitment. The personal involvement of such a wider interpretation is more pronounced and can be detected in studying the usage of this term. The 21 times that it is found in Ps. 119 provide a clear example of this. Ps. 19:9 carries a prominent note of personal involvement and could be translated "The charges of Yahweh are bringers of joy to the hearts of those who receive them and carry them out". This element is quite evident as well in Ps. 111:7b and 8b. These parallel clauses could be translated, "All His [Yahweh's] charges are worthy of being taken seriously", verse 7b, and "They are being carried out [practiced] in faithfulness and uprightness", vs. 8b. In Ps. 103:18 wlzkry pqdyw is a continued parallel of lšmry brytw and together these comprehensive terms answer to šdqwt yhwh wmšp̄tym found in verse 6. But in verses 17 and 18 the poet draws attention to the active response of covenant partners commissioned by Yahweh in answer to His deeds of grace.

The verb zkr aptly drives home this call to action. It occurs approximately 165 times in the Old Testament. In various forms it is found 43 times in the Psalms, showing its importance as a cultic term. It seems to have been practiced in connection with the oath. The basic meaning of zkr is simply "to remember" or "bring to mind".<sup>162</sup> In verses 6 and 7

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<sup>162</sup> K.B., p.255, 256.

one views Yahweh remembering His people and showing this in the acts He performed on their behalf. In verses 17 and 18 the people who were thus in Yahweh's mind are shown as remembering what He has done for them and accepting their commission to respond in covenant love.

The psalmist reveals his artistic skill in the manner in which he manipulates the preposition l, intertwining his thought patterns and enhancing the structural unity of the poem, continuing what was begun with the waw conjunctive at the beginning of vs. 17. The l occurs three times in vs. 18, with the participles of šmr and zkr and the infinitive construct of eśh. In this way, continuation of the kind of action just described is stressed. "The original meaning of the l is most plainly seen in those infinitives which expressly state a purpose [hence as the equivalent of a final clause],".<sup>163</sup> In this case the position of l<śwtm at the end of these two cola makes clear the finality of purpose just expressed. The employment of the infinitive construct here seems to be a case in point where "the infinitive with l<sup>e</sup> depends on the idea of obligation".<sup>164</sup> Because of its conspicuous occurrence in vs. 18, l could well be functioning in different ways.

Hebrew lexicons and grammars have lumped together four different morphemes under the preposition l<sup>e</sup> 'to, for, from', but the four-

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<sup>163</sup> G.K., p.348.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p.349.

fold Ugaritic distinction into the preposition l, emphatic lamedh, vocative lamedh, and negative lamedh -- all of them orthographically identical -- also obtains for Biblical Hebrew -- so that today the Bible translator must weigh four or five semantic possibilities when he encounters a simple le.<sup>165</sup>

This quotation is given to focus attention on the importance of l, here used four times in succession. The poet through this preposition keeps the different objects of the noun clause in vs. 17 together. With each re-occurrence, from lbny on, there is a noticeable progression. One of the functions of this preposition is to introduce a specific object in a unique fashion.<sup>166</sup> The amazing consequence of Yahweh's hsd and sdqtw at work in His people is thus placed in proper perspective. The interlocking relationship of verses 17 and 18 with verses 6 and 7 by way of inclusion and complementation of ideas, seems to make the purpose of the poet clear.

The responsive activity of Yahweh's people as recipients of His hsd is depicted in the verses 17 and 18. From this perspective it seems not warranted to regard vs. 18 as a gloss and a "limitation from a legalistic point of view".<sup>167</sup> When one evaluates the verses 19-22 alongside the verses 1-5 and notices the many ways in which the beginning and ending of this poem interlock with each other, there seems to be no

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<sup>165</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II, The Anchor Bible*, New York, Doubleday & Company Inc., 1968, p.xvi.

<sup>166</sup> G.K., p.366.

<sup>167</sup> Briggs, *The Psalms*, p.328.

ground at all for saying that the four last verses of Ps. 103 are "doubtless a final liturgical glossary".<sup>168</sup>

There are many indications of interrelation between the opening and closing verses of this psalm. In the verses 1-5, as well as in 19-22, the great works of Yahweh are set forth, as the basis for the challenge to praise and adoration which is a dominating feature in the psalm. There is an obvious shift of emphasis from the intensely personal in verses 1-5 to the universal in verses 19-22. Such an arrangement pleads for the authenticity of this closing rather than militate against it. By means of this intricate thought relationship, personal experience is firmly anchored in the universal context of history.

In the opening section, five times in succession a definite participle stands as an appellative of Yahweh, pictured in His saving action on behalf of the poet. The closing section, vs. 19-22, begins with yhwh in an emphatic position at the beginning of the verbal clause proper. Under normal circumstances the verb would precede the subject.<sup>169</sup> In vs. 19, Yahweh is emphatically stated as the subject of the verbal clause. The initial stress upon action in the first section of the poem through a series of participles is carried over into the closing section of the poem. The One who pardons,

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<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> G.K., p.455.

heals, ransoms, crowns and satisfies the individual is the same One who is enthroned in the heavens in His all-inclusive dominion. Yahweh, therefore, is fully qualified to function in such a fashion.

With bšmym standing before hkyn in the sentence, attention is drawn to the fact that Yahweh is the truly exalted One. This is an intentional arrangement, since grammatically bšmym could have been expected to come as the last word of the sentence.

The Hifil of the verb kwn means, "to make ready, prepare, make solid", or "stand immovable". Sixteen times it is best translated simply as "prepare". And of these, five times it concerns a material aspect, six times it applies to the selection of a place or person and five times it involves moral or religious conduct; such as, for example, the seeking of Yahweh. There are 12 occurrences, besides those spoken of, which are more closely related to Ps. 103:19 in that they speak of the establishment or setting up of a kingdom or throne.<sup>170</sup> Most of them refer to the Davidic throne. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is the verb kwn applied to Yahweh as establishing His own universal kingdom. A single occurrence here shows the intentional selection made by the poet for a specific purpose.

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<sup>170</sup> K.B., p.427, 428.

The noun ks' means "seat of honour" or "throne" and is symbolic of royal power.<sup>171</sup> It is applied to Yahweh's supreme rule, especially in theophanies, as can be seen in 1 Kings 22:19; Is. 6:1; Ez. 1:26; 10:1; and 2 Chron. 18:18. In Is. 66:1 and Ps. 11:4 it is used in a fashion almost identical to Ps. 103:19.

Yahweh, so emphatically introduced, also governs the second half of the verse by means of the pronominal suffix attached to the noun mlkwt. This term designates, "royal power, reign, dignity". It is found predominantly in the later books of the Old Testament, 22 times in Esther; 13 times in Daniel; 6 times in Ezra; 2 times in Nehemia; 11 times in I Chronicles and 27 times in II Chronicles. It does also occur 6 times in the Psalms and in a few other isolated texts scattered throughout the rest of the Old Testament.<sup>172</sup>

In Ps. 45:7 the noun is found in a reference identical to Ps. 103:19 and Yahweh is shown in His supreme power as sitting upon His throne. In Jer. 10:6, 7 the term is also applied to Yahweh in a pronounced universal setting, made inclusive by means of bk1, much like what is found in Ps. 103:19.

Ps. 145:10-13 seems even more closely related to Ps. 103:19. In vs. 10, all the works of Yahweh are urged to praise

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p.446.

<sup>172</sup> K.B., p.531.

Him and the people who respond to His covenant love are challenged to bless Him. The psalmist aims at the response of not just one individual or a group of people, but of that of the whole universe, ywdwk yhwk kl-mśyk wšydyk ybrkwkh. The poet of Ps. 103 in the closing verses develops the same theme in a different way as can be demonstrated in the verses that follow.

Buttenweiser takes the freedom to translate bkl as "universe".<sup>173</sup> Herkenne states that "this term refers to every created thing without exception in the universe of things".<sup>174</sup> kl is indeed an inclusive particle which is to be considered collectively<sup>175</sup> and it could be considered to stand for the whole of creation in a passage such as this one. A clause of Is. 44:24, 'nky yhwk śśh kl, is translated as "the Lord of the universe",<sup>176</sup> giving a similar interpretation. The poet of Ps. 103 seems to have used b to emphasize the object, bringing out at the same time the intimate connection between object and verb. From what has been stated, it seems to be justified to render bkl as "universe" or "all created things".

The verb mśl found at the close of this colon confirms this line of thought. It is often employed for the supreme

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<sup>173</sup> Buttenweiser, *The Psalms*, p.592.

<sup>174</sup> Herkenne, *Das Buch der Psalmen*, p.94.

<sup>175</sup> B.D.B., p.481.

<sup>176</sup> K.B., p.435.

rule of Yahweh. Gideon, for example, refuses the crown, as reported in Judg. 8:23 using this term, yhwh ymšl bkm. This universal aspect of divine rule dominates Ps. 59:14 and 66:7, 8. This can be seen also in Ps. 89:10, especially when this verse is read in the light of what is found in the verses 8-12. The purposeful intent of this passage seems to be identical to that of Ps. 103:19-22. In Is. 40:10, the universal rule of Yahweh, seems to be presented as the climactic theme of the brief poem found in the verses 9-11. In this passage the presence of Yahweh's saving work is another item of similarity in comparison with Ps. 103, if the opening and closing section are considered together.

Turning to Ps. 103:20, 21, the exercise of restraint is mandatory lest one become entangled in a study of angelology at this point. Such a topic would be worthwhile, but it deserves a separate treatment and can only be mentioned here in passing.

A factor which deserves special attention is that the opening words, brkw yhwh, are identical for the next three verses. The device of inclusio is employed here, comparing these three verses with the two introductory verses. That the plural is found in verses 20-22 shows the element of progression from the personal and individual being, to the universal and groups of beings. This distinction, however, makes the

element of inclusion to appear more prominently underscoring the poet's intent.

The beings challenged to adore Yahweh in vs. 20, are the ml'kyw, or "His messengers". The verb l'k seems to be the root of this noun and means, "to be sent, to wait on, to minister, to be sent as a messenger". This noun seems to be applied to messengers of a specific nature, such as extra-terrestrial or angelic beings.<sup>177</sup> Many passages could be cited as proof of this interpretation. In the singular, the term is often found next to 'lhym or yhwh. The beings referred to with this term seem to be regarded as God's intermediaries, sent to carry out a special task; see, e.g., Gen. 19:1, 15; 32:2 and Judg. 6:11f. They are also delivering a special message, as found for example in I Kings 13:18; 2 King 1:3, 15; Zech. 1:11-14; 2:2, 7; 3:1, 5, 6 and 4:1, 4, 5. There are a few instances where the term seems to apply to prophets as God's messengers, as seen in Is. 42:19; 44:26 and Mal. 1:1. Yet the word as a rule seems to indicate a special class of beings commonly spoken of as "angels".

The beings mentioned in Ps. 103:20 can hardly be thought of as simple messengers. The Kal active participle of śh, employed here, brings out the fact that they are active agents, eager to carry out Yahweh's will. Job 4:18 helps the understanding of ml'kyw. There they are mentioned in an ascend-

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<sup>177</sup> B.D.B., p.521; K.B., p.525, 526.

ing scale of parallelism and the term h'nwš<sup>✓</sup> is followed by b<bdyw and wbml'kyw as the final term indicating the highest order in this scale. Even within a different and rather negative context the fact remains that one is compelled to think here of beings superior to men. It should be remembered that also in Ps. 103:15, 'nws<sup>✓</sup> is found so that one can speak here too of progressive development.

The thought of superiority of being is brought out in a striking fashion in Ps. 103:20 through gbry kh as an added appellative. The angels, if one may call them thus, are presented here as "the mighty ones in strength". The participle ēšh emphasizes that they are being engaged in action, and are not mere messengers. They are continually busy executing Yahweh's dbrw, or carrying out His order. One can also speak of responsive action in this instance although, in distinction from that described in verses 17 and 18, on a broader universal scale.

One can safely think of the angels here as eagerly awaiting the first utterance of Yahweh's word. This aspect of eagerness comes out in the use of the infinitive construct of šme<sup>✓</sup>, with the preposition l [see the references on p.118, f.n. 163 and 164]. The angels appear to be standing at attention, ready to catch the sound of Yahweh's utterance. The position bqw before dbrw, makes this element of attentiveness more

prominent. The sound, indicated by qwl, precedes the clearly distinguished order to be carried out. The fact that b is employed to introduce the object is significant. This is the practice in the case of transitive verbs where mental action is represented as extended to someone or something. The verb Smc falls into this category when it is followed with b, "generally with the secondary idea of participation, or the pleasure with which one sees or hears anything".<sup>178</sup> The full picture presented in vs. 20 is that of heavenly beings always capable and ready to carry out the wishes of Yahweh with pleasure.

The thought pattern established in vs. 20 is carried over into the next verse, where the element of pleasure is expressly stated as a determining feature in the action described. A similar development is noticeable in verses 17 and 18, where those who fear Yahweh are pictured as responding to His covenant love in their actions. This element of active participation on the part of Yahweh's creatures in response to His own active involvement in the history of man and the existence of the universe stands out as a prominent characteristic of the closing section of this poem.

The key term of vs. 21 appears to be kl-šb'yw. The question arises whether or not šb'yw is completely synonymous with

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<sup>178</sup> G.K., p.379, 380.

ml'kyw. The verb sb' basically seems to be a military term. It means "to wage war, to enlist in the army; to go forth as a soldier against the enemy".<sup>179</sup> This is why the Hifil is translated as, "to muster". The noun is employed for an "army" or "host of soldiers". The term is also applied to "the host of angels that stand round the throne of God".<sup>180</sup> That it carried a peculiar idiom is apparent in several related passages. In Ps. 148:2 it is found in the singular, parallel to ml'kyw, in the same order as in Ps. 103:20, 21. These two psalms seem to have a close affinity. Although Ps. 148 is less covenantal in its orientation and not as intensely personal as Ps. 103, its pronounced exhortations to praise reveal the same purpose. In both psalms there is an emphasis on the universal extent of Yahweh's dominion. This element naturally is more prominent in Ps. 148 due to its different character and structural development. The extra-terrestrial aspect of Yahweh's rule, described in Ps. 148:1-6 corresponds to what is found in Ps. 103:19-21. Ps. 148:7-10 mentions all earthly creatures, which is stated in a different manner in Ps. 103:22. The closing section of Ps. 148, the verses 11-14, pictures man at various levels and in different conditions, driving home the challenge of praise. The poet of Ps. 103 achieves the same purpose in a

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<sup>179</sup> K.B., p.790.

<sup>180</sup> Ges., p.DCXCIX.

more emphatic way by the use of the inclusio, repeating the opening clause.

The so-called Micaiah passage, in I Kings 22:19 presents Yahweh as heaven's King, in words much like those found in Ps. 103:19-22. It is helpful in this connection to consider 2 Chron. 18:18 as well.

The term sb' frequently appears alongside either 'lhym or yhwh, especially in the prophetic writings. This word occurs 77 times in Jeremiah, 60 times in Isaiah, 53 times in Zachariah, 24 times in Malachi and 14 times in Haggai; showing the predominant use of this noun by the prophets. It is not possible to do any detailed study of this word in this paper, although it would contribute to a better understanding of Ps. 103:20, 21 because of its affinity. But such research, again, would involve one in speculation concerning the nature of angelic beings and as such obscure the overall emphasis of Ps. 103.

In considering sb'yw one needs to consider the parallel structure of this part of the poem. A careful look at the development of thought reveals a tendency to go from higher to lower. At this point a descending scale is apparent going from heaven back to earth and from the universal returning to the individual. In vs. 19, Yahweh is set forth in His heavenly splendour as the Ruler of the universe. In vs. 20 the angels

are presented surrounding Yahweh's throne and eager to carry out His will. Here in vs. 21 one gets the impression still to be face to face with superior beings, but in a less exalted state. They are pictured as seen at work as the executors of Yahweh's plan according to His pleasure. In verse 22, one appears to be at the bottom of the scale, for here one is back on earth, and all created works, or creatures, here below are challenged to join in the chorus of praise. With the final clause one is back at the point of departure and the marvellous circuit of this poem is completed with great poetic skill. This is why a downward development such as is found here does not mean growing less significant or less progressive. In fact the fine touch of the artist is detected here which prevents the reader of this poem from ending with a mere idealistic other worldly note. The poet descends from heaven to earth for very practical reasons.

A question related to this development would be the evaluation of ml'kyw and sb'yw in order to determine whether one deals here with two kinds of angelic beings of a different rank. On the basis of parallel structure along a descending scale a case could be made here for considering sb'yw, to be angels of a somewhat lower order than the ml'kyw. The writer is not prepared, however, to defend such a thesis at this stage, nor would it be proper to become involved into this type

of discussion in this paper.

The term mšrtyw, next to be considered, is related to "dominion" or "rule". The thrust of the verses 19-21 is to present a picture of Yahweh's rule as being supreme and active. The Piel participle employed here seems well suited to elucidate this purpose. The verb šrt means, "to serve, give service to, be in the ministry of someone who has authority". It is only found in the Piel and frequently indicates the cultic service in tabernacle or temple.<sup>181</sup> The term seems to be favoured for a select core of temple-servants engaged in the act of public worship. It was employed for priests and Levites in their sacred duty. Passages such as Deut. 10:8; 17:12 and 1 Sam. 2:11, 18, e.g., bear this out. It is quite important to read Ps. 61:6 in this connection, since all the people of Yahweh there seem to be regarded as His priestly servants. There are other instances where this word is applied to palace servants or those ministering to a king, as is seen in 1 Kings 10:5; Ps. 101:6; Prov. 29:12; Esther 2:2 and 6:3.

Only in one other place, Ps. 104:4, is this word found as a parallel to extra-terrestrial or angelic beings. This verse reads śh ml'kyw rwhwt, and is balanced by the next parallel mšrtyw 'š lht. Although the R.S.V. supplies the translation "who makest the winds thy messengers, fire and flame thy ministers", such a reading presents problems. It

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<sup>181</sup> K.B., p.1012, 1013.

seems justified to translate ml'kyw here as "His angels", as is done in Ps. 103:20. In Ps. 104 as well, Yahweh is presented as the exalted King of the universe. If He is a king, one can expect Him to have his attendants. It is hard to conceive of a more suitable term to describe those eager to carry out Yahweh's will than this word which was already coloured by its application to various kinds of religious and royal service. The poet fully appropriates this noun for his purpose.

Another outstanding feature here is the use of the participle of śh. As was pointed out earlier, in the discussion of vs. 17, there is an increasing emphasis in the second half of Ps. 103 on responsive action. Such action is also a reflection of the gmwlyw, the great deeds of Yahweh. The use of the participle in this closing section is to be compared with the predominance of this feature in the verses 3-5. There Yahweh is presented as the Actor, here one receives a view of responsive action on the other side. The readiness wherewith Yahweh's plan of action is carried out by ml'kyw around the throne and śb'yw throughout the universe, can be regarded as a fitting opposite linked by thought-relationship and inclusio to the opening section of the poem.

The appearance of ršwnw is quite significant here. In vs. 4, Yahweh's hsd and rhwm are shown as structuring the entire life of the poet. In vs. 21 ršwn is employed to describe

the motive power which shapes the actions of the angelic host in their eagerness to bring into reality what Yahweh, the King, has uttered. ršwnw can be treated as a parallel to dbrw at the close of the previous verse. At the same time vs. 20c, lšm< bql dbrw, can be related to vs. 4b, hm<trky ḥsd wrḥmym. The term ršwn brings out the full force of such a relationship.

There are many places where ršwn expresses the covenant relationship between Yahweh and His people. This is evident in; Deut. 33:16, 23; Is. 60:7, 10; Ps. 5:13; 30:6, 8; 51:20; 89:18 and 143:10. The last reference is found in a psalm which speaks of the reality of covenant love, see Ps. 143:8, showing that to do the pleasure of God is the proper response for His covenant people. Realizing this, the poet makes it an object of his prayer. The use of ršwnw in this context allows one to expect a similar kind of response from Yahweh's heavenly ministers. That this word is employed in Proverbs in relation to moral action, see Ch. 11:1, 20, 27; 12:22; 15:8, strengthens this expectation. If men touched by covenant love thus seek to please their Lord, a similar kind of behaviour can be looked for in Yahweh's heavenly ministers.

Verse 22 adds another dimension to what has been stated thus far. Every creature made by Yahweh is here challenged to give Him the credit in adoration. m<šyw by way of inclusion, can be regarded as parallel to gmwlyw in vs. 2.

In Ex. 34:10 one finds a similar parallel situation with m<sup>c</sup>śh and np1'wt as parallel members. gmwlyw in Ps. 103:2 brings into focus the great deeds of Yahweh, while np1'wt in Ex. 34:10 functions in like fashion, since it directly refers to the granting of pardon and forgiveness as is done also in Ps. 103:3-5. Another reference in Ex. 34:10. 't m<sup>c</sup>śh yhw, indicates the display of Yahweh's power in the realm of nature. Such a development away from the personal level of salvation to the more universal can be traced also in Is. 19:25.

That m<sup>c</sup>śh is employed to describe the saving work of Yahweh is evident in Is. 10:12; 60:21; Ps. 111:2, 6, 7; 118:17; 138:8 and 143:5. Yet there also are many instances where this word is applied to Yahweh's deeds in the realm of nature. Such passages when found in the Psalms are of special value in considering this term in Ps. 103:22. In Ps. 8:4, 7 the meaning of m<sup>c</sup>śy is quite definite. In vs. 4 one reads, "For as I look at your heavens the work of your fingers". Also in vs. 7, where man appears to be put in charge over all other creatures, the emphasis falls on the works of God in the realm of nature. Other texts such as, Ps. 19:2; 33:4; 102:26 and 107:24 use m<sup>c</sup>śh to describe what God does in the created world.

In this last verse the universal aspect of Yahweh's rule tends to be localized. The reader is brought back to earth. A word such as mqmwt is suited for such a purpose.

The universal stress is retained almost to the end through the repetition of bkl. It seems, however, that the part of the universe meant here, is the earth, in which man finds a place. One is not allowed to forget that the poet returns to himself in his exhortation to praise.

The noun mqmwt is derived from the verb qwm, "to stand" or "to rise". It can be translated as "place" or "standing place". It is employed for any ordinary place or spot, as well as for a home, region, country, space or even a place of worship or holy place.<sup>182</sup> This infinite variety of application makes it a word that underlines the inclusive character of Yahweh's rule over all the earth. Whatever creature may exist, whether animate or inanimate, wherever on earth, as the handiwork of the Creator, it is summoned to glorify its Maker.

The word mmšltw parallels mšlh in vs. 19, re-emphasizing the aspect of divine rule. The way in which those two terms are joined together puts the finishing touch to the picture of Yahweh's universal kingdom. The root of this noun is mšl, discussed in connection with vs. 19. The primary significance of the noun is that it describes royal authority or dominion. This is demonstrated in 1 Kings 9:19; 2 Kings 20:13; Is. 22:21; 39:2; Jer. 34:11; 51:28; Dan. 5:8; 2 Chron. 8:6 and 32:6. It is applied directly to the realm of nature

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<sup>182</sup> Ges., p.503; K.B. p.559.

in Gen. 1:16 and Ps. 136:8, 9.

In Ps. 114:2 it is bound up with Yahweh by means of the suffix, describing His merciful rule over His people. This aspect of gratuity one must keep in mind when evaluating this term in Ps. 103:22. The many intricate relationships within this psalm do not allow any isolated or one-sided interpretation.

Ps. 145:13 reveals affinity of content with Ps. 103. There are several points of comparison between these two psalms, see, e.g., Ps. 145:8 c.f. Ps. 103:8. For the discussion at this point the verses 9 through 13 seem to be important. In Ps. 145 the works of Yahweh in the natural world are brought to the reader's attention. Ps. 145:13 appears to reveal the high point or climax of this psalm. Looking at these cola,

mlkwtk mlkwt kl-clmym  
wmmšltk bkl-dwr wdwr

one finds a close affinity between this verse and Ps. 103:19 and 22. In both places the stress falls on the universal rule of Yahweh with bkl taking a prominent place. The poets of these psalms express that they are surrounded by Yahweh, who is in control of the universe in which they live.

In his closing thought the poet of Ps. 103 confesses that the whole world is under the absolute dominion of Yahweh. It is in such a world that the psalmist lives. The covenant God who delivered him as a person, along with all those who

fear Yahweh, is worthy of praise and adoration as the ruler of the universe. The term bkl-mqmwt gives expression to the poet's belief that Yahweh is in absolute control.

This final thought of Yahweh on the throne brings the poet to the renewed self-exhortation, with which he began his poem, brky npšy 't-yhwh. By means of this final inclusio, the poet rounds off his thoughts into a unified whole. He brings his own life in focus with the universal perspective of Yahweh's supreme dominion.

One can indeed say that the Psalm "turns back into itself and acquires the form of a converging circle".<sup>183</sup> Or as Artur Weiser stated so beautifully, "At this point the psalmist reverts to the beginning of his psalm and calls upon his soul to join in this world-wide chorale song to the praise of God. But now his song re-echoes with all the notes which he has struck in the psalm. He has been granted an insight into the heart of the majesty of God, and what he has found there is grace."<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, New York, Funk & Wagnalls, n.d., p.94.

<sup>184</sup> Weiser, *The Psalms*, p.663.

A concentrated word by word study of any poem is a useful exercise. It leads to a deeper appreciation of its actual meaning and basic thrust. It has been the aim of the writer to apply this method to the study of Psalm 103.

Such a word-study, however, does have certain drawbacks. There are occasions where one has to limit a discussion in order to stay within reasonable confines. This can create a feeling of dissatisfaction for not having done full justice to a particular concept. Several words found in Psalm 103 could have been discussed in more detail than has been done, bringing about a still better understanding of this Psalm. One thinks here of terms such as, hsd, twb, cdy, qdš, qrb, rp', šb<sup>c</sup> and others, including the terms employed to express the concept of sin. But certain restrictions become mandatory if one is to complete a project.

Attention has been drawn in this paper to some of the unusual grammatical constructions in this poem. An attempt has been made to come to grips with the psalmist's subtle and artistic use of language. Yet the writer feels that he has done only partial justice to the flexibility of style and variety of emphasis present in this Psalm. There is room for much more research in this area.

It would be profitable, for example, to trace the occurrence in the Old Testament of each participle with a

definite article prefixed to it. In that way, one would be able to reach a more definite conclusion as to the exact purpose of this feature.

One thinks here also of ky, which is a peculiar form of the pronominal suffix. A further investigation of each appearance of it in the Old Testament could prove to be helpful. It might shed more light on Ps. 103:1-5 and even bring out the value of an exception such as edyk in vs. 5.

The various meanings of the preposition el, whether used in the positive or negative sense, deserve a more exhaustive treatment than what could be given in this paper. A detailed study of this kind would enhance the value of the discussion since el in this poem is found in key-positions.

There are some special topics found in this poem, worthy of separate research, such as the question concerning eternal life; the scope and depth of hsd; the different notions of sin and the question about the existence of heavenly beings.

Another not fully developed feature concerns the various literary devices employed by the poet. Mention has been made of the inclusio and a number of skilfully applied grammatical exceptions. It was pointed out that this Psalm not only appears to have a central climax but also seems to display a unique equilibrium maintained by a clever arrangement

of opposites on both sides of the apex. This is an area wide open for more research. A better understanding of the literary devices which are used brings a deeper appreciation of the beauty and meaning of Hebrew poetry.

This Psalm has an outstanding beauty of structure and content. Its author has revealed the possession of marvellous poetic skill. It is striking that this skill is most evident at points within the poem that have deep theological significance. There does seem to be a definite correlation between art and faith on the part of the poet. The writer hopes to have contributed somewhat to a better understanding of the structure and meaning of Psalm 103.

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- p.6, second paragraph:  
Hans J. Kraus gives consideration to the headings, especially those that seem to contain biographical information and refer to definite situations. He discusses the psalms where *ldwd* is found.<sup>6</sup>
- p.6, no.6 cf. *Psalmen*, 2 Teilband, Neukirchen Kreis Moers, Neukirchener Verlag, 1961, p.xx.
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- p.10, no.16 N.H. Parker, "Psalm 103. God is Love", *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. I, 1955, p.193.
- p.21, no.34 insert: Parker (at beginning)
- p.34, no.51 add: and reference there to B.A. Bowen, "A Study of *hsd*" (Unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1938).
- p.39 omit "It is the plural of...compassion", and move number 60 to feeling".<sup>60</sup>
- p.44 *To Do and to Teach: Essays in Honor of Charles Lynn Pyatt*, ed. R.M. Pierson, Lexington, 1953, p.1, as quoted by Dahood, *Psalms III*, p.li.
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