

# Alliance Theological Seminary

Course: OT642. OA Psalms (English Text) Online  
Professor: Dr. R. Russell Mack, Ph.D.  
Rev. Lois B. Stewart  
October 3, 2020

## Lesson 3. Essay: Psalms of Lament & Trust

Psalms 5 opens with a cry for help and quickly pulls one into “The Anatomy of a Psalm”. Just as the author cries out to his King and God, the psalm cries out to be defined based on what we have studied in lesson 2. James L. Mays<sup>1</sup> continually challenges one by asking the question “What is a Psalm” and although you thought that you knew, he causes you to go deeper into it. I never knew there were so many parts to the scriptures that I have read, studied and leaned on until Mays and David Noel Freedman<sup>2</sup> begins to structural dissect them. In the devotional reading of psalm 5 one may not view it as a lament, rather seeing it as what they may be experiencing at that time. As a prayer to God for help for relief for vindication, yes it is a prayer, but there are many forms, genres, of prayers, prayers can be praise, liturgy and instruction, Mays and Freedman’s challenge is to identify them.

A lament according to Freedman<sup>2</sup> is a cry or complaint to God in times of crisis, such as being surrounded by ones enemies, as in psalm 5 (pg. 5). In my discussion post for this week, I referenced the way in which the author cried out to God as one turning around and around, vacillating back and forth between complaint and praise. Mays, Freedman and other theologians recognize the psalms as poetry and as such they “can” have a distinct structure, parallelism, which can be defined as “The repetition of the same or related semantic content and/or grammatical structure in consecutive lines and verses”<sup>2</sup>, which I saw as the author in his distress repeating himself for emphasis because of his pain. The parallelism continues as the psalmist acknowledges praise and trust in God as he remembers who God is. Through parallelism we see the psalmist begins to list the attributes of God and as the praise and trust is lifted up, so is the confidence and assurance of the author.

In conclusion, as we see the graphic description of the author’s enemies, Mays<sup>1</sup> points out the very destructive, debilitating and humiliating nature of lies, he describes the enemies as “watchers”, and what they say is empty of facts, bears the stench of death and they lie with murderous intent (pg.57). He goes on to say, “Speech is distinctively human capacity, the interpreter of others and of all around us. It is also the cheapest, most common and inhuman means of causing trouble and anguish for others....

To use speech that is empty of truth about another is to practice the opposite of God’s will. ‘You shall not bear false witness’ “. In this I see Psalm 5 as having a dual identity<sup>1</sup> (pg. 36) not only as Lament & Trust but also as Instruction because it is also Scripture.

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1. James L. Mays, *Psalms (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)*, Louisville: WJK2011) ISBN:978-0664234393
2. David Noel Freedman et al., eds. *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, "Psalms", Parallelism" (New York: Doubleday 1992)