

## TRUSTING GOD'S REDEMPTION ON PSALM 130: A LITERARY-STRUCTURE APPROACHED

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### Abstract

*The pressures of life that cause suffering are real things in life. The same thing happened to the psalmist recorded in Psalm 130:1-8. There are two big possibilities when someone faces a problem, they will move away from God or draw closer to God. In the narrative of Psalm 130:1-8, the psalmist draws closer to God. When the psalmist trusting God's redemption generates the attitude to wait upon the Lord. Although God has not heard my prayer yet, I want to trust the Lord that he will deliver me despite I do not know when he will release me. I want to live in trust to the Lord because I believe that my faith will help me to endure in my problems, to still wait upon the Lord. I want to remember his characters so that I do not want to lose my faith in the midst of my suffering. This Psalm is begun with petition to the Lord and it is ended up by describing God's characteristic.*

**Keywords:** *Trusting God's, Redemption, God's Characteristic*

Psalm 130 is one of the superscriptions  
of Psalms 120-134 and identified as

“A Song of the Ascents” (שיר המעלות).<sup>1</sup>  
Psalm 130 is the eleventh of fifteen

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<sup>1</sup> There are three views regarding to “ascents”. First, the verbal root of “ascents” is go up. The frequent references to Jerusalem and Zion in this collection of psalms (122:3, 6; 125:1, 128:5; 129:5; 132:13; 133:3; 134:3) may account for their ascriptions. Since Jerusalem sits on a hill, no matter where one comes from, one always “goes up” to Jerusalem. In 1 Kgs. 12:28, for instance, Jeroboam says to Israelites, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough.” Isa. 2:3 and Mic. 4:2 envision a time when “Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.’”. Although these fifteen psalms most likely come from a variety of times and places in ancient Israel, the message of the collection as a whole is that Jerusalem is the place for the coming together of the people of God for celebrations and commemorations and for acknowledging the goodness and help of the God of

the Israelites. Some speculate that the “ascents” referred to in Psalms 120-134 are the steps of the temple, which Ezekiel calls “ascents”. In Ezek. 40:6, the prophet sees a man going to the gateway of the temple, “going up its steps. The Mishnah states, “fifteen songs of the steps in the Psalms, and upon them the Levites used to sing.” See Hebert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), m. Mid. 2:5. Other scholars suggest that the title “Songs of the Ascents” is a reflection of the very structure of the collection’s psalms. Within each psalm, and often as an inclusion around the verses of each psalm, the Songs of the Ascents contain verbal “step” connections that move the reciter through cola and stanzas of the psalm. See Loren D. Crow, *The Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134): Their Place in Israelite History and*

Songs of the Ascents, songs that pilgrims sang as they made their way to Jerusalem to celebrate a number of annual religious festivals, including Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>2</sup>

Psalm 130 depicts a single petitioner is crying to Yahweh from great distress,<sup>3</sup> also a model that shows that an individual pious person takes his place with his prayer in the reality of the community that surrounds him.<sup>4</sup> This psalm is also full of neat patterns of parallelism (1-2, 5, 6), repetition (6) and ellipse (5, 6).

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will attempt to prove the topic, *trusting God's redemption generates the attitude to wait upon the Lord*, and literary structure, *in chiastic structure*, of this passage. This structure is based on three situations of the psalmist in Psalm 130.

First, when the psalmist cries to God and ask his request to be listened (1-2). Then, he decides that he will wait for the Lord (5-6). At the end, he closes his

psalmist by invitation to people of Israel to wait upon Yahweh (7).

In these situations, we find that there is escalation from one situation to other condition. Consequently, this psalm begins with the worst situation (1-2), moves to a better condition (5-6) and ends up at the best condition (7).

The passage provides the reason (God's characteristic) of this escalation (3-4) and this reason also ends this Psalm (7b-8). Therefore, this Psalm is begun with petition to the Lord and it is ended up by describing God's characteristic (one of the reasons in this passage).

### Situation 1: Crying for God's Help

The Request of Psalmist (1-2)

The Reasons of Psalmist (3-4)

### Situation 2: Waiting upon God

The Commitment of Psalmist (5-6)

### Situation 3: Trusting God's Redemption

The Request of Psalmist (7a)

The Reasons of Psalmist (7b-8)

### Content

This psalm is a penitential psalm, focusing not on the evil of Israel's enemies, as does Psalm 129, but on the wrongs Israel

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*Religion* (SBLDS 148; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 15-18.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Declaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 926.

<sup>3</sup> No details concerning the fate of this petitioner are revealed to us.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, translated by. Hilton C. Oswald, *Psalms 60-150*, (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 465

has done. It resembles Psalm 129 in beginning with a first person singular that turns into the expression of a collective plea, as the last two verses make clear.<sup>5</sup>

### Translation

1 Song of the Ascents

From the depths, I cried to you, **O Yahweh**

2 **My Lord**

Please hear<sup>6</sup> to my voice

Please let<sup>7</sup> your ears be attentive to voice of my supplication for favor

3 If **you**, keep iniquities, **O Yahweh My Lord**, who will stand

4 But **with you**, there is forgiveness  
So that you might be revered

5 I wait (hope) for **Yahweh**

My soul wait (hope)

And to **his word**,

I wait for (hope for).

6 My soul waits (hope) to **the Lord**

More than those who watch for the morning

*More than* those who watch for the morning

7 Wait (hope) for the **Lord**, O Israel  
Because **with Lord** is kindness (רַחֲמִים)

And many ransom with him

8 And **He is**, he will ransom Israel from all of his iniquities

### Situation 1: Crying for God's Help

The Request of Psalmist (1-2)

Verse 1 In figurative way, the Psalmist reveals his situation but not in detail. He is in the depths. מְעַמְקִים appears 5 times in the

Old Testament and 3 times in Psalms. These verses present that the 'depths' referred to are else where always qualified as being 'deep waters', and often considered a place of watery chaos in ancient Israelite thought.

Also an image of realm of death.<sup>8</sup> Targumic Aramaic also uses תְּהוֹם for 'the depths' and it means abyss, flood or sea. Therefore, this word tells that the Psalmist is in danger, chaos and threatened situation. In relation to Psalm 129, this 'depths' indicates the objective fact of being engulfed in a 'sea of troubles' because of the attacks of enemies.<sup>9</sup> From the darkness of profound despair, on the verge of death, he calls out to God.

The psalmist describes his pleas in *threeways* such as in perfect form, imperative and jussive mood. These ways present the richness and variety plea of the Psalmist. These pleas reveal that the psalmist is in a big need to be helped by God.

Verse 2

The object of the prayer is addressed in *three* ways, to you, O Yahweh (the divine name) and my God (generic name). This pattern, divine name is followed by generic

<sup>5</sup> Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 455.

<sup>6</sup> An energetic ending emphasizes the imperative.

<sup>7</sup> This jussive is using energetic ending too.

<sup>8</sup> William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002),

105-34, Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 455.

<sup>9</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Rev. ed. Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson, 2002).

name, is repeated in verse 3-4 and verse 5-6. Only in verse 7-8 is the divine name YHWH used twice.  $\text{יְהוָה}$  is in masculine plural construct suffix 1st person singular. Some of English Bible translation, ESV, NAS, NET and NIV, do not translate the suffix.

Septuagint translates  $\text{יְהוָה}$  as vocative (O Lord) and Targumic Aramaic uses “יהוה” again. However, I am inclined to translate the suffix as possessive or my Lord. Some verses in OT have that construction as well and it is translated as my Lord.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Hebrew expresses possession by adding possessive suffixes to the end of nouns.<sup>11</sup> Therefore this suffix has a function to denote the intimate relationship between the psalmist and Yahweh.

In verse 2, the first sentence is not only parallel to the next sentence but also explained more detail in the second sentence.

	First Sentence	Second Sentence
1. The Activity	Listen	Your ears be attentive / Listen carefully / attentively

2. The Voice	My voice	Voice of my supplication for favor
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The word translated *showing favor* is the self-declarative attributes of God given to Moses in Exodus 34:6, in which God declares, according to the NRSV: “The Lord, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”<sup>12</sup> In this passage, the psalm-singer calls on God to be attentive to the singer’s cry “to be shown favor” by God by appealing to a basic characteristic of God and it leads to discussion in verse 3-4.

### The Reasons of Psalmist (3-4)

Verse 3 is begun with conditional clause because of particle  $\text{אם}$  which simply introduce simple suppositions (which may or may not occur). The word ‘keep’ in this context has the particular sense of ‘keep track of’. The psalmist imagines if God imputes iniquities, the result, then, is no one will stand before God.<sup>13</sup> Interrogative pronoun here ‘ $\text{מַה}$ ’ has a function as a rhetorical question. Particle  $\text{וְ}$  begins verse

<sup>10</sup> For example, Genesis 23:6, 11, 15 and 24:12.

<sup>11</sup> Mark D. Futato, *Beginning Hebrew Grammar* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 95.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Declaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 928.

<sup>13</sup> The word “iniquities” occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament and is the primary word

used to describe human sin and guilt in the prophetic writings. Rolf Knierim suggests that its root meaning is “to bend, curve, turn aside or twist”, thus providing a concrete image for a definition of “iniquity” as “an act, or mistake, which is not right or unjust”. See E. Jenni and C. Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 2:863, HALOT, 2:800.

4 and it serves as concessive for a few reasons. First, verse 2 already indicates the characteristic of Yahweh as gracious Lord. Moreover, verse 8 states that God will ransom Israel from all of his iniquities.

It means that God will not keep our sins. Also, the reality, that many people, including the psalmist, still stand before Him, denotes that Yahweh does not keep iniquities. The psalmist continues describing the characteristic of God that forgiveness is with Yahweh.

Psalms 130 describes forgiveness as an entity that is with God (v. 7), perhaps a play on words with verse 3, linking the two verses to contrast human iniquity with God's forgiveness.<sup>14</sup> God is just and righteous. On the other hand, human, including the psalmist, is a sinner. Psalmist realizes that he is unworthy before God and deserves to receive punishment.

When Yahweh shows his mercy to people and forgive them, they should revere Him. This fear of or reverence for God is not sheer terror but a response of awe to a deity who is both all-powerful and compassionately forgive.<sup>15</sup> God's forgiveness brings out reverence to him.

Verse 3 and 4 are parallel in negative positive idea.

	Negative (Verse 3)	Positive (Verse 4)
1 Regarding to the sin	If you keep iniquities	But with you, <i>there is</i> forgiveness
2 Regarding to people	Who will stand? (No One)	You might be revered / People will be there to revere you.

### Situation 2: Waiting upon God

The Commitment of Psalmist (5-6)

Verse 5 only has three verbs and all have a meaning of wait or hope. Also, the psalmist uses two different words, but still in semantic range, to give an idea of waiting. These evidences reveal the importance of waiting in this passage (occurs 5 times), in particular in this verse (3 times).

First word of waiting is קוה. HALOT distinguishes the meaning of *Qal* and *Piel* of קוה. In *Qal*, it has a meaning of general hope. For *Piel*, hope is directed towards a target or alternatively hope inserted within a sequence of expectation and fulfilment.

In this verse, psalmist uses *Piel* form. The psalmist discloses in the target of hope

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Declaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 928.

<sup>15</sup> To be revered here has fear as a literal meaning. קָרַא encompasses a larger meaning of "awe, reverent respect, honor". It appears in the Hebrew bible as a synonym for "love" (Deut. 10:12); "cling

to" (Deut. 10:20); and "serve" (Deut. 6:13; Josh. 24:14). At its root, the word denotes obedience to the divine will. The result of "reverencing" the Lord is a good understanding. Nancy Declaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 841 and Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 455.

/ waiting who is Yahweh. יְהוָה has a simple meaning which is hope. The word 'his word' could be interpreted as the whole word of God or the word of redemption.

However, the awaited word from God is presumably a word of forgiveness. Verse 6 denotes the imagery of the watchmen sitting through the last of the three watches of the night, peering into the darkness for the first sign of dawn, cannot equal his intense expectancy for God's redeeming word to come to him in his dark night of the soul. Verse 5 informs the object of hope or waiting, Yahweh and his word. On the other hand, verse 6 pictures the personal action of psalmist when he is waiting. He uses the imagery of watcher who is waiting for the morning. There are three interpretation of morning.

First, they long for morning to come, so that they can give in to sleep. Another interpretation is they are looking to the dawn with another kind of anticipation: they assume that these are ministers waiting for the time to offer the morning sacrifice, which comes with the dawn.

The last possibility is morning is the time when particular dangers of night are

over (121:30); the guard is relieved when morning comes because these are now past.<sup>16</sup> Based on the superscriptions Psalm 121:30, it strongly suggests that the last interpretation is more plausible than the others. Moreover, the context, Psalm 129 and Psalm 130:1, informs the dark situation of the psalmist. As a result, morning is seen as the time for deliverance from trouble and the psalmist is anticipating that divine forgiveness and a new beginning will come.<sup>17</sup>

### **Situation 3: Trusting God's Redemption**

Verse 7-8 refer to God twice, as do the other three stanzas in Psalm 130. But they use only the divine name YHWH, and no other, for God. While verse 5-6 words of trust may be considered the focus of the psalm, verse 7-8 are certainly the climax.

The psalmist calls upon God to hear and be attentive in verse 1-2 and goes on to express trust and hopeful expectation in the Lord. The response verse 7-8 assures the psalmist, by repeating connective words of the psalmist, that God has indeed heard and that God will deliver.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3 Psalms 90-150* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Baker Academic, 2006), 529.

<sup>17</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *Psalm 73-150* (Nashville, Abingdon, 2003), 249; and Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 2* (Grand Rapids,

Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 356.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Declaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms 929*.

### The Request of Psalmist (7a)

Verse 7 is similar with verse 1 because both of them have request and petition. The psalmist addresses to God in verse one, however, he directs to Israel. If the verse one pictures psalmist's desire to be helped, now his desire to ask Israel to wait for the Lord. There is a change of the psalmist, from frustration (1) to trusting the Lord even inviting Israel community to wait and hope for Yahweh (7a).

### The Reasons of Psalmist (7b-8)

The reason that Israel should wait expectantly is *because with* the Lord is kindness and ransom, acting to further tie the words of exhortation to the words of verse 4. Therefore, God will deliver Israel from all of its iniquities (verse 8), tying the words of exhortation further still to the words of verse 3. These reasons are parallel to verse 3-4.

	Verse 3-4	Verse 7b-8
<b>Iniquities</b>	If you, keep iniquities	He will ransom Israel from all of his iniquities
<b>With you</b>	Forgiveness	Kindness
		Many Ransom

Verse 3 starts with iniquities, then moves to forgiveness. Verse 7b opens with kindness, many ransom and closes with iniquities. Therefore, the psalmist begins and ends up

the characteristic of God, as the reasons, with iniquities.

### CONCLUSION

This psalm has chiastic structure and it begins with a plea that is dependent on divine mercy and calls for Yahweh to give heed to the prayer. It is also a confession of human frailty and sinfulness.

Then, he describes the characteristics of Yahweh as the reasons of his plea that there is a hope in the forgiveness of Yahweh and he will not forsake his people. These reasons bring him to the commitment to Yahweh that he will not frustrate anymore but waiting (hoping) to God.

Trusting God's redemption does not only generate the attitude to wait upon the Lord but also invoke his community, Israel, to wait to Yahweh as well. He gives the reasons to Israel why they should trust the Lord.

### Application

Most of the time, when I face problems in my life, I focus too much on my problems and situation instead of God's characters such as his faithfulness, kindness and forgiveness. I dictate myself based on my condition and it weakens my faith.

What I see is only fear, doubt and guilty. This passage reminds me to look upon God in the midst of our hard situation.

I need to remember his love and mercy instead of focusing on my troubles.

Although God has not heard my prayer yet, I want to trust the Lord that he will deliver me despite I do not know *when* he will release me. I want to live in trust to the Lord because I believe that my faith will help me to endure in my problems, to still wait upon the Lord. I want to remember his characters so that I do not want to lose my faith in the midst of my suffering.

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