

# WHO STANDS BEHIND THE רשע IN PSALM 50:16A? THE ETHICAL TESTIMONY OF PSALM 50:16–22

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## *Introduction: Questions*

Though the text of Ps 50:16 explicitly defines a distinct addressee for the divine speech of vv. 16–22, namely the רשע, the critical research of Ps 50 is certainly right in assuming a diversionary tactic applied by the redaction:<sup>2</sup> the extremely harsh criticism of the divine words is deflected from Israel (for whom it was originally intended<sup>3</sup>) towards the special group of the רשעים, often encompassing non-Israelites or enemies of the YHWH-religion.<sup>4</sup> But strictly speaking, Israel, YHWH's people, stands accused. I would like to pose the question: Does the text of vv. 16–22 disclose some distinct signals as to who really stands behind the רשע? In other words, what persons, groups<sup>5</sup> or destinations are really addressed

1. Professor T. Seidl visited the Department of Old Testament Studies (University of Pretoria) as a research associate of Professor A. Groenewald.

2. Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT 1/15; Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 208: "Die spätere Bearbeitung relativiert die Anklage und lenkt sie auf den 'Gottlosen' ab." In the same sense, cf. Bernhard Duhm, *Die Psalmen* (2d ed.; KHC 14; Tübingen: Mohr, 1922), 208, and Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (4th ed.; GHK 2/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929), 220.

3. Duhm, *Psalmen*, 208: "...gar nicht an den Gottlosen, sondern an das ganze Volk gerichtet."

4. Seybold, *Psalmen*, 208: "...eine Adversativbezeichnung der späten Psalmenfrömmigkeit für den Ungläubigen und Unfrommen...der kaum zur Gemeinde gezählt wurde."

5. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1–50* (2d ed.; WBC 19; Colombia: Nelson, 2004), 364, 366, who characterizes Ps 50 as "a liturgy," suggests that "v16a may be a liturgical rubric of some kind, indicating that a different group of persons was to be addressed." He thinks "that in liturgy, a group of people were set on side to symbolize the wicked and that these words...in the form of a divine oracle, were addressed to them." In my opinion Ps 50:16–22 should not be restricted to liturgy, it has relevance for Israel society as a whole.

by that criticism? Are the word-combinations and formulas of the sentences in vv. 16–22 open to interpretation, leading to a more accurate identification of the real addressee? The questions dealt with in the present study are still more distinct. I want to ask: Who is criticized, who criticizes, and finally, what is criticized? Further, what are the ethical results and the moral value of that criticism? Or which group in Israel is to be protected by those open words?

I will systematically present the results of my examination of word-combinations and formulas,<sup>6</sup> especially in vv. 16–17 and 21–22 (in the first part), and afterwards I will try to draw the implications for a more precise identification of the addressee and the speaker of the critical divine speech.

The question is whether we can disclose the speaker, the addressed group and the content of this speech in a more accurate way. Where are they placed in the literary and social context of Israel? Some research was done with similar methods,<sup>7</sup> but usually former attempts were limited to vv. 18–20 and their obvious connections to the Decalogue.<sup>8</sup>

### *Analysis: Word Combinations and Formulas*

I will go through the text, sentence by sentence, discussing some noticeable connections of words.

6. The methodological basis is Wolfgang Richter, *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1971), 99–103; cf. also my own studies in that subject: Theodor Seidl, *Formen und Formeln in Jer 27–29* (ATS 5; St. Ottilien: EOS, 1978).

7. Cf. Marina Mannati, “Les Accusations de Psaume L 18–20,” *VT* 25 (1975): 659–69; Hartmut Gese, “Psalm 50 und das alttestamentliche Gesetzesverständnis,” in *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann* (ed. J. Friedrich et al.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1976), 57–77 (73–76); Johanna W. H. Bos, “Oh, When the Saints: A Consideration of the Meaning of Psalm 50,” *JSOT* 24 (1982): 65–77 (69); Frank L. Hossfeld, “Ps 50 und die Verkündigung des Gottesrechts,” in *Ein Gott eine Offenbarung: Festschrift für Notker Füglistner* (ed. F. V. Reiterer; Würzburg: Echter, 1991), 83–101 (96–98). The strange results of Mannati are rightly criticized by Gese, “Gesetzesverständnis,” 77, and by Jacques Vermeylen, “Le Psaume 50 et son histoire littéraire,” *Tsafon* 40 (2000): 52–75 (64).

8. This connection is discussed in detail by many authors; cf., e.g., Gese, “Gesetzesverständnis,” 69, 74–75; Hossfeld, “Gottesrecht,” 97–100; Frank-L. Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen I: Psalm 1–50* (NEB 29; Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 315–16; Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 208, Stephen B. Reid, “Psalm 50: Prophetic Speech and God’s Performative Utterances” in *Prophets and Paradigms: Essays in Honour of G. M. Tucker* (ed. S. B. Reid; JSOTSup 229; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 217–30 (229); Vermeylen, *Psaume 50*, 62, 64, 67, 74.

Verse 16b: *מה לך/כּם*<sup>9</sup> + subordinate clause (*Inf.*, *בי*, *PC*)

The short interrogative sentence *מה לך/כּם* in its isolated form (without a subordinate clause) can be an exclamation of surprise or of reproach (especially in the combination *מה לי ולך*,<sup>10</sup> e.g. 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 3:13), but more frequently it is a polite question such as “how are you?” or “why do you come to meet me?” or “what is your request?”<sup>11</sup>

However, if a subordinate clause follows *מה לך*, as in Ps 50:16b, bI, the phrase will clearly express a reproach, a criticism, or even an accusation. The concrete contents of such reproaches or accusations are included in the subordinate clause. We find such combinations of clauses in an everyday context in Judg 18:23,<sup>12</sup> where the Danites rebuke the man Micah for having gathered military troops. We also find a comparable syntactic feature in a mythological context in Ps 114:5, where the sea and the Jordan River are ironically<sup>13</sup> scolded for having fled from Israel and her God: *מה לך הים כי תנוס הירדן תסב לאחור*.

More frequently, also, we find this kind of question in prophetic contexts: in Isa 3:15<sup>14</sup> the prophet blames the elders and the officers of Jerusalem for “crushing the people and grinding the faces of the poor.” In Isa 22:16,<sup>15</sup> Isaiah himself casts the blame on Shebna, the controller of the royal household, who carved a splendid grave in the rock (*מה לך פה* + *כי*<sup>16</sup>). In Jer 2:18, we have a prophetic accusation against Jerusalem and

9. The subdivision of the verses in different sentences (e.g. vv. 16b, 16c etc.) corresponds to the edition of Wolfgang Richter, *Biblia Hebraica transcripta (BH<sup>T</sup>)* (ATS 33.1–16; St. Ottilien: EOS, 1991–93).

10. Cf. Irene Lande, *Formelhafte Wendungen der Umgangssprache im Alten Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1949), 99: “Eine Formel der ablehnenden Abgrenzung gegen Andere”; see also Winfried Thiel, *Könige* (BK 9/2,1; Neukirchen–Vluy: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000), 71.

11. E.g. Gen 21:17; Josh 15; 18; 2 Sam 14:5; 1 Kgs 1:16; 2 Kgs 6:28; Esth 5:3, etc.

12. Cf. the analysis of Judg 18 in Theodor Seidl, *Vermittler von Weisung und Erkenntnis* (ATS 81; St. Ottilien: EOS, 2006), 3–65 (54–56).

13. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen*, vol. 2 (3d ed.; BK 15/2; Neukirchen–Vluy: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), 783, presumes the prophetic background of the formula even in the poetic context.

14. Cf. Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja 1–12* (BK 10/1; Neukirchen–Vluy: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), 131–34 (131); Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 115; Emmanuel Lemana, *Qu’avez-vous à opprimer mon peuple? (Is 3,15): Étude linguistique et exégétique d’Isaïe 3,1–4,1* (FzB 108; Würzburg: Echter, 2005), 259–63.

15. Cf. also Isa 22:1.

16. Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja 13–27* (BK 10/2; Neukirchen–Vluy: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 838, comments on this special word combination, “Eine For-

Judah due to its political contacts and their coalitions with Egypt and Assur<sup>17</sup> (לשתות מי שחור/מי נהר. ... מה לך + Inf.: a direct syntactic parallel: ... מה לך). Finally, in Ezek 18:2 we find a famous prophetic blaming of Israel since people still use the proverb “the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”<sup>18</sup> (מה לכם + Ptc.). Thus, we can conclude that the divine speech in our psalm starts with a formula of blaming and scolding which is frequently used in prophetic announcements.

*Verse 16b1: לספר חקי*

The root ספר (D) is used almost exclusively in the Psalms for hymnal praise of the miracles and powerful actions of YHWH. The particular objects for ספר (D)—meaning “to enumerate the marvelous deeds of God”—are: מפלאות, מאשים, שם, צדקה etc.<sup>19</sup> Two references in the Psalms use a different object for ספר, namely, חק יהוה, in Ps 2:7 and משפטי פיך in Ps 119:13; in that respect they come relatively close to our context.

According to Ps 2:7, the king proclaims the decision of YHWH to appoint him as king (“*Königsprotokoll*”<sup>20</sup>). According to Ps 119:13,<sup>21</sup> the wise and pious prayer takes pride in knowing by heart and enumerating

mulierung, die sonst nicht zu belegen ist, aber ebendarum besonderes Gewicht besitzt,” and interprets the sentence, “Du hast ja niemanden..., mit dem du das Recht, hier eine prunkvolle Grabstätte zu errichten, rechtfertigen könntest.” See also Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2007), 274–75.

17. Siegfried Herrmann, *Jeremia* (BK 12/2; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 132–36, gives a detailed explanation of the metaphor “to drink someone’s water”: “(Es) handelt sich dabei um das Eingehen eines Abhängigkeitsverhältnisses, mindestens um die Herstellung einer engeren Beziehung zweier Partner.” Cf. also Maria Häusl, *Bilder der Not* (HBS 37; Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 330.

18. Walther Zimmerli, *Ezechiel 1* (BK 13/1; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 402, describes it as a “Wort zynischen Aufbegehrens... deutlich ist darin auf jeden Fall der Hohn über eine göttliche ‘Gerechtigkeit’ zu vernehmen, welche die Schuld der Väter bei den Kindern einkassiert.” See also Franz Sedlmeier, *Das Buch Ezechiel: Kapitel 1–24* (NSK 21/1; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2002), 241–44; and Gilbert N. Alaribe, *Ezekiel 18 and the Ethics of Responsibility* (ATS 77; St. Ottilien; EOS, 2006).

19. Cf. Pss 9:2, 15; 22:23; 26:7; 66:16; 71:15; 75:2; 78:4; 79:13; 102:22; 107:22; 118:17; 145:6.

20. The term is explained by Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen*, vol. 1 (3d ed.; BK 15/1; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), 17–19; and by Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 53–54.

21. The parallelism between Ps 50:1b and Ps 119:13 was already mentioned by Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 518.

all constitutions and orders of his God.<sup>22</sup> Thus, he considers himself a specialist in the Law of God, either as a judge or as a teacher of wisdom in Israel. The reproach and blame against the addressee expressed in our first sentence might be that the accused is only theoretically able to list the laws but there are no consequences in his life.<sup>23</sup> However, the blame is continued in the parallel colon of 16c:

*Verse 16c:* ותשא (נשא) בריתי עלי פִּיךְ

Here we have the full form of the word-combination נשא + object in the meaning “to raise the voice,” “to speak.” Usually, the verb נשא is connected with a direct object expressed by a noun such as משל, קנה, תפלה, תפלה in the meaning “to give an oracle” (Balaam in Num 23:7, 28; 24:3, 15, 20–21, 23; משל), “to sing a song of mockery” (Isa 14:4: משל), “a song of mourning,” as frequently in prophetic books (cf. Jer 7:29; Ezek 19:1; 26:17: קנה), or “to pray” (Jer 7:16: תפלה). Only in Ps 50:16 and in Ps 16:4<sup>24</sup> do we find an additional statement after the object telling us where the word viz. the speech is raised: עלי פי, “into the mouth,” or as in Ps 16:4, על שפתי, “on my lips.” The meaning of the full sentence נשא\* עלי פִּי will be “to identify oneself with the contents of the word I speak”; “the word, the prayer, the declaration is a part of mine.” Thus, our sentence נשא בריתי עלי פי, parallel to ספר חק,<sup>25</sup> expresses the conviction to stand in loyalty to a treaty, to know the different rules of the treaty and to accept them in loyalty and confidence.

But we know that the word combination נשא + object is also used in the Decalogue where the wrong use of God’s name is forbidden: לא תשא לא תשא את שם יהוה אלהיך לשוא (Exod 20:7 par.).<sup>26</sup> Therefore, we might assume that our addressee in Ps 50 is charged with using words and rules of a treaty or a covenant only in an external sense but not standing to the

22. Kraus, *Psalmen* 2, 824, presents the assumption “13 könnte auf einen Gestus anspielen.”

23. Cf. Bos, “Saints,” 69: “The subject of the people’s lip-service is God’s laws, also called ‘my covenant’, which in reality they hate and despise, for they refuse to let the words of God be an actual discipline in their lives.”

24. Hossfeld’s remark (“Gottesrecht,” 96), “Der Vers betont mit teils singulären Wendungen den Sprechakt,” probably refers to these two references, otherwise the word combination with נשא + object like משל is quite common.

25. Hossfeld, “Gottesrecht,” 96, emphasizes: “Sowohl der Parallelismus membrorum als auch die Parallelen Ps 105:10f... und Jes 24:5 legen ein synonymes Verständnis der Termini *hōq* und *b’rīt* nahe.”

26. Reference can be made to the detailed monograph of Thomas R. Elssner, *Das Namensmißbrauchsverbot (Ex 20,7 / Dtn 5,11)* (ETS 75; Erfurt: Benno-Verlag, 1999).

covenant in loyalty or not identifying himself with the covenant. This assumption gains some further support when we consider a *Sfire* text describing an Old Aramaic treaty. We find here parts of our word combination amidst the curses at the end of the treaty formula (*KAI* 224.14–15<sup>27</sup>):

והן יצק על לבבך	If it comes to your heart
וחשא על ש(15)פתיך	and you raise (the plan) to your lips
להמיתחי (16) שקרתם	(= you realize the plan) to kill me, you may break the treaty.

If we look at our sentence in v. 16c in this wider context, and if we realize that the sentence is still subordinated to the prophetic blame-formula מה לך, we may assume that the prophetic speaker blames his addressee for following the obligations of the divine covenant only by words and by external declarations on the lips, but without backing the covenant and without completely identifying with the covenant.<sup>28</sup> In that respect one can understand this sentence as an accusation of being in breach of contract.<sup>29</sup>

The reproach of all three sentences in v. 16b–c can be summarized as follows: on the one side the addressee knows the wording of the divine laws and rules as well as the wording of the paragraphs of the covenant exactly—thus he might even be an expert of the law, but on the other side he demonstrates this knowledge only outwardly. As a person he does not back the obligations of the covenant, furthermore he even disregards them, as shown in vv. 18–20, and he breaks them notwithstanding his mental knowledge.

#### *Verse 17a: שנא מוסר*

I will first examine the use of the noun מוסר and afterwards its verbal connections. The highest frequency of the noun מוסר is found in Proverbs (thirty from fifty references).<sup>30</sup> There is a double semantic meaning: מוסר can be understood as a synonym of תורה, חכמה, דעת, מצוה, thus it has the

27. Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, vol. 1 (5th ed.; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 56–57; for explanation and comment cf. vol. 2 (3d ed; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973), 264–74.

28. Cf. the accurate translation of NEB: “you make so free with the words of my covenant.”

29. Cf. Jer 31:32: הפרו את בריתי.

30. See the statistics in the article of Magnus Saebø, “*jsr—züchtigen*,” *THAT I*: 738–42 (738) (Munich: Kaiser, 1971), who notices the highest frequency of the noun in the collections Prov 1–9 and 10:1–22:16.

meaning of doctrine, wisdom, recognition/insight, and commandment. מוסר is also a synonym of תוכחה<sup>31</sup> and means correction, discipline, or even punishment.<sup>32</sup> According to the doctrine of Proverbs, man on the one side can despise (בזה,<sup>33</sup> מאס,<sup>34</sup> פרע<sup>35</sup>) מוסר, or hate (שנא: 5:12; 12:1) or spurn (נאץ: 5:12) מוסר. On the other side he should love (אהב<sup>36</sup>), accept (לקח<sup>37</sup>: often), acquire (קנא<sup>38</sup>), follow (שמר<sup>39</sup>), hear/listen to (שמע<sup>40</sup>), and stay in (חזק<sup>41</sup>) מוסר.

The wisdom doctrine of Proverbs calls those who despise מוסר the אִוִּילִים the foolish people viz. the fool—but those who love מוסר are described as wise, intelligent and pious men. Proverbs 12:1<sup>42</sup> may be an instructive parallel to Ps 50:17:

אהב מוסר אהב דעת	He who loves correction loves knowledge,
ושונא תוכחה בער	he who hates reproof is a mere brute. <sup>43</sup>

The common characteristic of Jeremiah's prophetic reproaches is the complaint that Jerusalem and the people of Judah do not accept and did not adopt מוסר (discipline, correction):

Jer 2:30:	מוסר לא לקחו	They took no correction. <sup>44</sup>
Jer 7:28:	ולא לקחו מוסר	...did not accept discipline.
Jer 35:13:	הלוא תקחו מוסר	Will you not receive instruction (and listen to my words?)
Zeph 3:2:	לא לקחה מוסר	(The city of Jerusalem) accepts no correction. <sup>45</sup>

31. Saebø, "jsr," 740: "Das wichtigste Synonym zu *mūsar* ist in Spr das Subst. *tōkahat*—'Zurechtweisung, Warnung, Rüge.'"

32. Seybold, *Psalmen*, 208: "Disziplin und Verpflichtung."

33. E.g. Prov 1:7.

34. E.g. Prov 3:11.

35. E.g. Prov 8:33.

36. E.g. Prov 12:1.

37. The favorite verb, e.g. Prov 1:3.

38. E.g. Prov 23:23.

39. E.g. Prov 10:17.

40. E.g. Prov 1:8.

41. E.g. Prov 4:13.

42. Otto Plöger, *Sprüche Salomons* (BK 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 148, declares that מוסר "beschreibt eine Einordnung um eines Zieles willen," and he underlines the strong antithesis—אהבדעת—בער: "Die Ablehnung der Erkenntnis setzt den Menschen auf die Stufe des Tieres."

43. Translation according to the NEB.

44. The following translations come from the RSV.

45. Hubert Irsigler, *Zefania* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 328 discusses the differences to the narrow parallel in Jer 7:28, especially the different way to express the relation to God.

This continuous refusal on Israel's/Judah's part is the reason why the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea) use מוסר in a kind of a word-play for divine punishment and condemnation.<sup>46</sup> See Hos 5:2: <sup>47</sup>אני מוסר לבלם: "I will chastise all of them."

References in both wisdom and prophetic literature yield a clear result. Thus, we arrive at the following conclusion regarding Ps 50:17a: in a more sapiential reading, the sentence blames a fool who continuously refuses to accept education, wisdom or correction in order to attain a better way of life. In a more prophetic understanding, the addressee joins the position of Judah or Jerusalem and their people who deliberately repulsed the prophetic admonitions and caused the collapse of the whole nation by their failures. The next blaming sentence in our psalm has a prophetic background, too.

*Verse 17b:* שלך (H) דברי אחרִיךְ

The rather familiar deuteronomic "formula of rejection"<sup>48</sup> is a word connection with שלך (H) and a divine subject: יהוה השליך את ישראל מן על פניו.<sup>49</sup>

In a different theological context we also find a formula with YHWH as subject: השלכת אחרי גוך כל חטאי (Isa 38:17). In the prayer of Hezekiah, YHWH is addressed as a God who throws the sins of men behind his back like a heavy burden.<sup>50</sup> The same formation שלך (H) אחרי גו exists, but with a human subject and a divine object, twice in a prophetic context and once in a prayer, but also with prophetic connections. These prophetic references are very close to our psalm-sentence,<sup>51</sup> since they also

46. Cf. Saebø, "jsr," 741: "Im Rahmen der prophetischen Gerichtsrede meint *jsr/mūsar*...durchgehend Gottes strafendes Gerichtshandeln angesichts seines Volkes..."

47. The Hebrew text is uncertain. See the different evaluations of Hans Walter Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 1. Hosea* (BK 14/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965), 120, and Jörg Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea* (ATD 24/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 73.

48. In correspondence with Winfried Thiel, "ŠLK," *ThWAT* 8:90–91 (Stuttgart; Kohlhammer, 1995): "Alle diese Texte sind nach 587 v. Chr. formuliert und sprechen aus der Rückschau."

49. Cf. 2 Kgs 13:23; 17:20; 24:20 (par.); Jer 7:15; 52:3; 2 Chr 7:20.

50. Cf. also Mic 7:19. Hans-Josef Klauck, "Heil ohne Heilung?," in *Sünde und Erlösung im Neuen Testament* (ed. H. Frankemölle; QD 161; Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 18–52 (48–49) examines the metaphors for sin and forgiveness in the New Testament and considers the Old Testament traditions too.

51. There are grounds for the assumption of Thiel, "ŠLK," 90, that in Ps 50,17 "wohl eine Verkürzung der Wendung 'hinter seinen Rücken werfen vor(liegt).'"



belong to a divine speech. In 1 Kgs 14:9<sup>52</sup> the prophet Ahijah blames King Jeroboam for having adored foreign gods—and thereafter the contrast: *ואתי השלכת אחרי גוך*, “But me (YHWH) you have thrown behind your back.” In Ezek 23:35<sup>53</sup> the sister Oholibah (Judah) is blamed by the prophet for being polluted by foreign gods and cults—and again in contrast: *ותשליכי אותי אחרי גוך*. The prophetic criticism is formulated in both cases within a divine speech. YHWH feels neglected and forgotten by his people viz. his worshipers. He feels thrown away like a useless object. In the prayer of Nehemiah (Neh 9:26<sup>54</sup>), a prayer of repentance, Nehemiah confesses: *וישלכו את תורתך אחרי גום ואת נביאיך הרגו*.

This is the next parallel to our reference in Ps 50, since the object of *שֶׁלַח* (H) is an abstract noun: *תורה* in Nehemiah, *דבר* in Ps 50, both in relation to YHWH—YHWH’s *תורה*, YHWH’s *דבר*, which means doctrine, instruction or directive of YHWH.<sup>55</sup> The second colon of Nehemiah’s prayer clearly shows that Israel has thrown away or neglected the prophetic word, the Torah given and taught by prophets. Therefore we are surely correct to assume that the sentence in v. 17b in our psalm also alludes to the contempt and rejection of the prophetic word by our addressee. By means of this statement we could argue with good reason that the *רשע* of v. 16a is a member of Israel,<sup>56</sup> to whom the prophetic word is first given. And we also recognize at that point that the speaker of those blaming words is a person with a prophetic background. We can also conclude that the four nouns<sup>57</sup> used as objects of the sentence stand in relationship to YHWH and describe different elements and specifications of the divine revelation to Israel:

52. Volkmar Fritz, *Das erste Buch der Könige* (ZBK 10/1; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1996), 144–47; and Martin Noth, *Könige*, vol. 1 (BK 9/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 315, claim the deuteronomistic background of this text.

53. Cf. Zimmerli, *Ezechiel 1*, 553, and Sedlmeier, *Ezechiel*, 320–21.

54. See the interpretation of this section in Klaus-Dieter Schunck, *Nehemia* (BK 23/2,4; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006), 279. Vermeylen, “Psaume 50,” 67, dates Ps 50 in the period of Nehemiah, but for different reasons.

55. Schunck, *Nehemia*, 279, points to v. 29, where one finds a summary of legal terminology: *תורה, מצות, משפטים*; he connects them with *תורה* in v. 26 and gives the interpretation: “So bedeutet, dem Gesetz den Rücken zu kehren (v. 26), Jahwe den Rücken zu kehren, gegen seine Gebote und Rechtsbestimmungen zu sündigen.”

56. On the basis of diachronic analysis Vermeylen, “Psaume 50,” 60, 72–74 distinguishes two addressees of the psalm: Israel as a whole (vv. 3–4, 6–11, 16\*–21) and the specific groups of the *חסידים* and the *רשעים* in Israel.

57. Hossfeld, “Gottesrecht,” 96, identifies this summary with the deuteronomistic concept of the identification of *ברית יהוה* with the single commandments and words; cf. also Gese, “Gesetzesverständnis,” 74 with n. 43.

חק	the written law (v. 16b1)
ברית	the covenant and its obligations (v. 16c)
מוסר	the doctrine and the discipline (v. 17a)
דבר	the prophetic word (v. 17b)

The harsh accusation of these four sentences is that Israel has rejected and thrown away the most important divine powers that keep the people alive.

The literary and ethical background of the three sentences in v. 18 has been recognized for a long time and could be found in the short prohibitives of the seventh and sixth commandment of the Decalogue (Exod 20:15, 14 par.).<sup>58</sup> Verse 19 might contain an allusion to the eighth commandment (Exod 20:16 par.),<sup>59</sup> if we are allowed to interpret the nouns *לשון* and *מרמה* in that manner. Otherwise, v. 19a, b are syntactically ambiguous: it is not clear if the address in the second person is still retained or not.<sup>60</sup> Apart from that, no formulas or word connections exist in vv. 19 and 20 that show more references. I examined all of them but with no suitable result. It should be mentioned that the rare verb *צמד*,<sup>61</sup> with agricultural background, has references in Num 25:3, 5 and Ps 106:28 (N), where the cultic connections of Israel to Baal Peor are criticized. Therefore, Mannati<sup>62</sup> thought that v. 19b would accuse Israel of idolatry. That is certainly not correct.<sup>63</sup> Therefore I continue with my search in the sentences of v. 21e, f, where the speaker is reflecting<sup>64</sup> his consequences and measures against the heavily charged addressee in the

58. As proof cf. the titles in n. 8.

59. In consensus with Hossfeld, "Gottesrecht," 97–98, 99, and Gese, "Gesetzesverständnis," 75; "Trug wird zum Movens des Redens," *ibid.*, 60; cf. Mannati, "Accusations," 659–61. E. S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part I* (2d ed.; FOTL 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 209, however, underlines the difference: "vv. 19–20 speak about slander in a different way than does Exod 20:16."

60. Cf. the translations: "You charge your mouth with wickedness and harness your tongue to slander," NEB; "You give your mouth free rein for evil and your tongue frames deceit," RSV; "Deinen Mund hast du mit Bosheit entsandt, und deine Zunge spannt Trug vor," (Gese, "Gesetzesverständnis," 59; see also his survey of the discussions of the syntactical problem, *ibid.*, 60).

61. See the proposals for derivation and meaning in Walter Baumgartner et al., *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden; Brill, 1983), 967, and Mannati, "Accusations," 662–63.

62. Cf. Mannati, "Accusations," 661–44.

63. In consensus with Gese, "Gesetzesverständnis," 77; Hossfeld, "Gottesrecht," 97. Vermeylen, "Psaume 50," 64, who misses the connection to the Decalogue, respectively criticizes the individual interpretation of Mannati.

64. Hossfeld, "Gottesrecht," 98, and Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 208, agree: "V. 21 faßt die Anklage zusammen."

first person. These sentences can help to recognize the identity of the speaker more clearly and to answer the question “who speaks.”

*Verse 21e: יכח (H) + Divine Subject*

The legal meaning of יכח (H) is out of the question.<sup>65</sup> If a human being is the subject, the meaning will be “to rebuke” (Gen 21:25: Abraham rebukes Abimelech) or “to blame” (Lev 19:17: the Israelite should blame his brother), and also “to accuse” somebody before the court.<sup>66</sup> If YHWH/אלהים is the subject—as in our example—this verb will mean to “punish” or “condemn,” as we can reason from the prayers in Pss 6:2; 38:2, among others: יהוה תוכיחני אל באפך תוכיחני (יהוה), or from the famous proverb in Prov 3:12, את אשר יאהב יהוה יוכיח, for those whom he loves the Lord reproves.<sup>67</sup>

In Job, as in some prophetic books, יכח (H) with divine subject can announce an accusation by God, as we read in Job 13:10,<sup>68</sup> הוכח יוכיח אתכם, where Job announces the divine trial against his friends, or Hos 4:4, ואל יוכח איש, where יכח (H) is parallel to ריב (H).<sup>69</sup> The divine trial against the priests is declared here.<sup>70</sup> In the same way we can understand the reference in Ps 50:21e: having listed the various points of evildoing, YHWH announces the formal accusation of the addressee before the divine court<sup>71</sup> by using the general and “technical” term יכח (H). In other words, he summarizes his preceding accusations in vv. 16–21a by means of this generally legal verb. The divine condemnation of the addressee is inevitable.

*Verse 21f: ערך לעיניך*

ערך expresses the everyday acts of laying-down, of setting or putting something down.<sup>72</sup> The verb is often used in a cultic context with the

65. See Gerd Liedke, “יכח *jkḥ* hi. feststellen, was recht ist,” *THAT* 1: 730–2 (Munich: Kaiser, 1971): “Die Wurzel gehört ursprünglich wohl in den Bereich des Gerichtsverfahrens”; in the same sense G. Mayer, “*ykḥ*,” *ThWAT* 3:620–67 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982): “Forensischer Gebrauch.”

66. Cf. Isa 11:3, 4; see also the noun מוכיח, “judge,” in Isa 29:21; Amos 5:10; Ps 50:8.

67. Translation according to NEB. For the interpretation of this reference, see Plöger, *Sprüche*, 35.

68. Cf. Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT 16; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), 249.

69. Cf. the analysis of Hos 4:4–10 in Seidl, *Vermittler*, 136–52 (with literature, esp. 144).

70. For the reasons for the trial against the priests, see *ibid.*, 149–52.

71. See Gese, “Gesetzesverständnis,” 75: “V.21 kommt in einem großen dreistichigen Vers zum Anklageergebnis, zum Urteil.”

72. Cf. E. Firmage and Jacob Milgrom, “*arak*,” *ThWAT* 6:380–84 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989).

following objects: to lay down the breads (e.g. לַחֵם פָּנִים<sup>73</sup>), to prepare fire and light, or to set the table (שִׁלְחֵן) for the offerings.<sup>74</sup> In a military context, עָרַךְ is frequently connected with the object מִלְחָמָה connoting “to arm for war or for battle.”<sup>75</sup> Sometimes a soldier is qualified as עָרוּךְ מִלְחָמָה, “prepared, armed for the battle.”<sup>76</sup> There are also some references for a legal use of עָרַךְ<sup>77</sup> in Job and Deutero-Isaiah. This usage is immediately appropriate for our context in Ps 50. In Job 13:18; 23:4,<sup>78</sup> the object is עָרַךְ מִשְׁפָּט: in his lawsuit with God Job will present his case before God, he will prove his justice by laying open the whole legal complex:<sup>79</sup> אַעֲרֹכָה לִפְנֵי מִשְׁפָּט (Job 23:4). According to Isa 44:7, a virtual other god is asked to prove his adequateness compared to YHWH: לִי וְיִגְדָה וְיִעֲרֹכָה לִי<sup>80</sup> “who is like me? ...show me (its) evidence”<sup>81</sup>.

I propose that in v. 21f עָרַךְ is used in the same legal meaning as in Job 23:4,<sup>82</sup> despite the lack of a direct object: at the end of the various accusations in our psalm, YHWH decides personally to present the case before the addressee (לְעֵינַיךְ).<sup>83</sup> He himself will uncover the guilt of the culprit, thus making the following condemnation understandable. In both parallel sentences of v. 21e, f, the judicial aspect of YHWH’s acting is

73. E.g. Exod 40:23; Lev 24:8.

74. Exod 27:21; 40:4; Lev 1:7; 6:5; 24:3, 4; Isa 21:5; 30:33.

75. Cf. Judg 20:20, 22, 30, 33; 1 Sam 17:2, 8.

76. See Jer 6:23; 50:42; Joel 2:5.

77. Firmage and Milgrom, “*arak*,” 381: “So wird das Verb im rechtlichen Kontext gebraucht, um die Darstellung eines Rechtskasus zu bezeichnen.”

78. Cf. the interpretation of the two references in Fohrer, *Hiob*, 251–365; see also Friedrich Horst, *Hiob* (BK 16/1; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 202, “Ein Beispiel für die nicht ungewohnte Verwendung militärischer Ausdrücke in der Rechtssprache,” and in the same sense Hans Strauss, *Hiob* (BK 16/2; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000), 76–77.

79. Firmage and Milgrom, “*arak*,” 381 explain the use of עָרַךְ + an object like “word,” “remark”: “Das Ausbreiten von Worten... meint ein gesondertes Vorbringen von Worten in geordneter Reihenfolge (geschlossene Argumentation).”

80. The semantics of עָרַךְ is explained by Karl Elliger, *Deuterocesaja* (BK 11/1; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 403: (עָרַךְ) “bezieht sich... auf den wirksamen Aufbau... eines treffenden Beweises. Man könnte geradezu übersetzen: ‘Er bewaise es.’”

81. According to NEB.

82. Where this use is confirmed by Strauss, *Hiob*, 77.

83. Hossfeld, “Gottesrecht,” 98: (Jahwe) “will (sein Rügen) in geordneter Abfolge der Gedanken... auseinanderlegen”; he refers to the same use of עָרַךְ in Isa 44:7.

brought into focus, above all by the two verbs יכח (H) and ערך.<sup>84</sup> YHWH is the real prosecutor in the lawsuit against the so-called רשע.

*Verse 22aV:* שבחי אלוה

The final word combination of interest to us is the verb שבח in connection with god/YHWH as the respective object and with a human subject, mostly the Israelites or Israel. One must notice that the addressee of the divine speech in the vocative שבחי אלוה stands in plural in spite of the second person singular always being used previously.<sup>85</sup> We again discover the real addressee of the divine speech when considering the vocative: it is not the רשע as announced in 16a, it is the whole of Israel or special groups in Israel.<sup>86</sup>

The results of the usage of שבח את יהוה/אלוה are obvious. There are three sectors of using these combinations:

- In Deuteronomy<sup>87</sup> we find warnings (פן) or prohibitions (לא) for Israel never to forget YHWH, his Torah, or his covenant.
- In the prophetic books of Jeremiah,<sup>88</sup> Ezekiel,<sup>89</sup> and Hosea,<sup>90</sup> the word combination in question is often part of the prophetic complaints and accusations against Israel for having adored other gods alongside YHWH.
- In the Psalms,<sup>91</sup> the negated form of this combination often stands in a declaration or in an expression of firm intent never to forget YHWH or his commandments; eight times that confirmation is given within the wisdom prayer of Ps 119.<sup>92</sup>

In our context, this word combination summarizes all evil deeds of the addressee which were mentioned before. They are finally qualified as “forgetting YHWH”; thus, all these deeds are immediately directed against God.<sup>93</sup> Having presented and discussed the material made up by

84. The roots יכח (H) and ערך are both used in Job 23:4 in the same legal meaning.

85. Therefore Vermeylen, “Psaume 50,” 56–58, separates vv. 22–23 as additions to the original psalm, which ends in v. 21.

86. See Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 209, “The ‘wicked’ are potentially every member of the congregation who might deviate from the right path.”

87. Deut 4:9, 23, 31; 6:12; 8:11, 14; 9:7; 25:19; 26:13.

88. Jer 2:32; 3:21; 13:25; 18:15; 23:27.

89. Ezek 22:12; 23:35.

90. Hos 2:15; 4:6; 8:14; 13:6.

91. Pss 44:18, 21; 78:7, 11; 103:2; 106:13, 21.

92. Ps 119:16, 61, 83, 93, 109, 141, 153, 176.

93. Nevertheless Seybold, *Psalmen*, 209, thinks that v. 22 is only a threat, “die Raum lässt für ‘Einsicht’ und Besserung.” Gese, “Gesetzesverständnis,” 75–76,

formulas and word-combinations, I will now evaluate the material in order to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the present study.

### *Results: Evaluations and Answers*

My first questions were: Who is criticized? Who is the “you,” the addressee of the divine speech? After analyzing the literary material we can give a more detailed answer. Both Israel as a whole and some special groups in Israel in particular<sup>94</sup> are attacked by that criticism. Let me demonstrate this thesis by the material itself:

The prophetic rebuke of *מה לך* (v. 16b) is directed against Jerusalem or Israel as well as against the elders or the royal officials. The idiom *ספר (H) חק/דברים* etc. (v. 16b1) describes an action of the king, of the teachers of wisdom as well as of all Israelite believers who praise YHWH’s miracles in a cultic context. By means of the sentence *נשא ברית על פיך*, all those people in Israel are addressed and blamed who have special knowledge of treaties, contracts, laws, especially of religious commandments and regulations of the covenant. Addressed are those who on the one hand have at their disposal theoretical knowledge about laws and treaties, but who on the other hand do not act and decide according to the written rules.<sup>95</sup> By use of the formation *שנאת מוסר* (v. 17a), the group of stupid and foolish people are included, just as Wisdom literature distinguishes them from the wise and intelligent people. The reproach of v. 17b, *ותשלך דברי אחריך*, is announced against Israel and Jerusalem as a whole, especially against the king, but also against everyone in Israel who violates the Torah with all ethical consequences. The prayer of Nehemiah gives a definite example for the consequences of the violation of the *תורה*, namely, the murdering of prophets. In the reproaches of v. 18,<sup>96</sup> those people may be addressed

understands *שכח* as a counter concept to *בינו* in v. 22a. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 209, holds: “The style is typical of prophylactic preaching.” Reid, “Speech,” 222–25, 230, by adopting the speech-act theory, qualifies Ps 50 as an example of performative language.

94. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 209, draws the conclusion: “Potentially every member of the congregation who might deviate from the right path.”

95. Cf. Bos, “Saints,” 69; Tate, *Psalms*, 364, 366; Hossfeld, “Gottesrecht,” 97–98.

96. The closeness of vv. 18–20 to the Decalogue traditions is seen differently: while Gese, “Gesetzesverständnis,” 74–75, presupposes the Decalogue which is according to him radicalized by the author of Ps 50, Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 209, thinks the author only “draws on a Decalogue tradition of ethical and cultic norms.”

who are in charge of distributing property (in v. 19 teachers, educators, judges and lawyers, those who give evidence for the truth by their word, לִשְׁוֹן פִּי, (לִשְׁוֹן, פִּי). In v. 20 those who are responsible for the family law may be especially addressed (אֵח, דַּבֵּר, יֵשֶׁב). The vocative of v. 22aV summarizes and qualifies the various violators of the Torah and of the ethical roles of Israel as שִׁכְחֵי אֱלֹהִים, “those who forget God.” In sum, not only the רָשָׁע is affected by that criticism, but many groups and professions inside Israel.

My second question was: Who criticizes? Who is the speaker or the speaking group formulating the psalm? Who stands behind the “I” of the divine speech in vv. 16–22? My analysis, especially of the first sentences in vv. 16–17, has corroborated the thesis of Jörg Jeremias<sup>97</sup> that a prophetic speaker stands behind the ethical admonitions and reproaches of vv. 16–22. The idiomatic diction used in these parts is the vocabulary and the language of prophetic sermons. But in addition to this observation we could show that deuteronomistic interests are also present (נִשְׂאָ בְרִית, v. 16b), and that wisdom influence can also be perceived (מוֹסֵר, v. 17a).<sup>98</sup> In v. 21e, f, the legal verbs יָכַח (H) and עָרַךְ demonstrate that those responsible for law and justice finally get a chance to speak, an authority which takes care of justice in the name of YHWH. In sum, not only prophetic influence is present, but also deuteronomistic influence, traces of wisdom, and juridical language and interests. Behind the “I” of the psalm stand some representatives of the religious and legal authorities of the Israelite society, authorities who are responsible for ethics in Israel.

Thirdly, I asked: What is criticized? According to the psalm, there are many abnormalities, inappropriate behavior and a bad situation in the society of Israel. In the beginning (Ps 50:16, 17), the discrepancy between theoretical knowledge of law (תּוֹרָה and בְּרִית) and translating that knowledge into action is criticized. A breach of contract (v. 16c) results as a consequence of this declination. Israel has become an unreliable companion in the treaties and covenants with God. In those parts with Decalogue traditions, violations of property (v. 18a, c; חָלַק), collaboration

97. Cf. Jörg Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Gattung* (WMANT 10; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965), 132–33, 160, and *Kultprophetie und Gerichtsverkündigung in der späten Königszeit Israels* (WMANT 35; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), 125–27, 154.

98. Already seen by Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 220; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 309, talk about “(den) didaktischen Eros des Psalms”; Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 210, rejects the sapiential influence.

with criminals (v. 18b), and false testimony (vv. 19, 20) are condemned. With v. 20 we could cast a glance into family conflict, maybe with slander and false testimony against one's brother or inner members of the family;<sup>99</sup> but the text is difficult and not clear. The general reproach of having forgotten God in the vocative of v. 22aV may have a distinct commentary in v. 17b:<sup>100</sup> to throw YHWH's word behind the back may carry the connotation that other things, other themes, other interests have priority in Israelite society. Neither the word of God nor the Torah stands in the middle of life any more, but instead there are aspirations for profit, property, and self-projection. There is still theoretical knowledge about the word of God, but its influence diminishes more and more. This is the main point of criticism we find in our psalm.

It was asked at the beginning: Who (and what) in Israel is protected by this criticism? Or we could ask: What is the positive effect of those open words for ethics in Israel? What is the ethical value? At first the citizen in Israel and every Israelite is protected by the words of our psalm. He will be in danger of losing his orientation if the Israelite authorities are unable to translate the rules and laws of *ברית* and *תורה* into everyday life. Every man in Israel is in danger because those who are responsible in the country are no longer reliable, since they deceive and lie (to men). Thus, the rights of the free Israelite citizen are safeguarded, the rights in property (*חלק*), house and family (v. 20) and in the land. Also the family is protected (cf. the terms *אָה*, *עַם*, *בֵּן*, v. 20), above all its inner integrity and the confidence between its members. Last but not least, the religion in Israel is secured, that is the relationship between God and human beings. According to v. 21a–d, humankind is in danger of manipulating God, of making him a companion of his evil deeds.<sup>101</sup>

The end of our psalm (vv. 21e–22c) clearly delimits God from human beings. He remains distant from all human faults, moreover he acts as a strict judge (v. 21e, f) and condemns the various violations of the Torah. At this point, the end of our psalm is connected with the intention of its first part where the manipulation of God by cereal offerings is strictly

99. Seybold, *Psalmen*, 208, speaks of “Zerstörung der Familiensolidarität und ‘Brüderlichkeit,’ unter Verwendung...seltener...Ausdrücke.”

100. According to Gese, “Gesetzesverständnis,” 74: “Verachtende Ignorierung” (v. 17b) is identified with “Gott-Vergessen” (v. 22a).

101. *אָהיה במוך* in v. 21d might be interpreted as “to commit a crime in the name of God.” Gese, “Gesetzesverständnis,” 75, and Reid, “Speech,” 229, state that the divine speech would change from irony to “bitter sarcasm.”



rejected (50:8–15). Therefore the ethical intention of the second part agrees with the cultic and theological intentions of the first part, a further argument for the literary unity of Ps 50.<sup>102</sup>

102. The unity of Ps 50 is reasonably proved by Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen I*, 308, and also by Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 207–11 (“a liturgical session”), while, for example, Seybold, *Psalmen*, 205, and Vermeylen, “Psaume 50,” 56–60, 69–72, offer different diachronic concepts.