

A Word Fitly Spoken

Poetic Artistry in the
First Four Acrostics
of the Hebrew Psalter

LES D. MALONEY

A Word Fitly Spoken explores significant poetic devices within the four alphabetic acrostic psalms found in Book I of the Psalter. The majority of scholarly opinion has been that these acrostics are poetically and artistically deficient due to the writers' and editors' preoccupation with the alphabetic pattern. In contrast to this view, *A Word Fitly Spoken* proposes that the acrostic pattern contributes to, rather than detracts from, the poetic artistry of these psalms. In an effort to promote a holistic, canonical reading of the four acrostic poems within Book I of the Psalter, this study also examines the linguistic and grammatical connections within the text. Such a close reading repeatedly demonstrates the emotive power and the imagination of this literature in contradiction to its supposedly stiff, wooden nature. *A Word Fitly Spoken* is attuned to the frequent plays on word and sound that occur throughout these four poems and as such would be useful in graduate courses on biblical interpretation, Hebrew poetry, or the Psalms.

LES D. MALONEY is currently serving as a U.S. Army Reserve chaplain at Fort Hood, Texas, ministering to the families of soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. A graduate of Harding University Graduate School of Religion and Lubbock Christian University, Chaplain Maloney received his Ph.D. from Baylor University. He is the author of several articles that have appeared in *Restoration Quarterly* as well as a series of articles on the U.S. Army chaplaincy in Iraq (2003-2004) in *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

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ADVANCE PRAISE FOR

A Word Fitly Spoken

“It is a new day in Psalms study, with significant contributions on canonical approaches and on Hebrew poetry. Les Maloney’s study centers on a close reading of the poetry of the acrostics in Book I of the Hebrew Psalter and so reflects the contemporary emphasis on the poetic dimension of the Psalms. Maloney argues for the poetic artistry of these psalms, a very different approach than that of previous scholarly generations. *A Word Fitly Spoken* also raises the intriguing question of the placement of four alphabetic acrostics in Book I and four in Book V of the canonical Psalter. Those engaged in contemporary Psalms scholarship will find much to digest here.”

*W. H. Bellinger, Jr., Chair, Department of Religion,
W. Marshall and Lulie Craig Chairholder in Bible, Baylor University*

“Les Maloney’s work on the acrostic psalms and the poetic figurations they contain should put to rest in their favor any debate on their artistic and theological value. Maloney has employed a critically informed imagination to demonstrate the significance of these fascinating psalms and how their literary features unfold their meanings in new and often surprising ways. I doubt that interested readers will ever read them again the same way.”

James M. Kennedy, Associate Professor of Religion, Baylor University

A Word Fitly Spoken

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Hemchand Gossai
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To my wonderful wife, Margaret
defender of Faith,
partner in Hope,
unsurpassed example of selfless Love
פִּיהַּ פִּתְחָהּ בַּחֲכָמָה וְתוֹרַת־חֶסֶד עַל־לְשׁוֹנָהּ
Proverbs 31:26

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SIGNS

<i>Alleg. Interp.</i> 1, 2, 3	<i>Allegorical Interpretation</i> 1, 2, 3
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
Ant.	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992.
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AOTS	Augsburg Old Testament Studies
BBE	Bible in Basic English
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Oxford, 1907.
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, 1983.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BJS	Biblical and Judaic Studies
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BRS	Biblical Resource Series
BS	Biblical Series
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>

BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentaries
<i>Contempl. Life</i>	<i>On the Contemplative Life</i>
Deut	Deuteronomy
<i>Dreams</i> 1, 2	<i>On Dreams</i> 1,2
Exod	Exodus
Ezek	Ezekiel
FC	Fathers of the Church. Washington, D.C., 1947–
FMSS	Foundations of Modern Sociology Series
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
Gen	Genesis
Hab	Habakkuk
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. Study edition. 2 vol. Leiden, 2001.
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Isa	Isaiah
JB	<i>Jerusalem Bible: The Holy Scriptures</i> . Revised and edited by Harold Fisch. Jerusalem, 1997.
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

Jer	Jeremiah
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
Josh	Joshua
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
Judg	Judges
KBL	Koehler, L., and W. Baumgartner. <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros 2d ed. Leiden, 1958.</i>
1-2 Kgs	1-2 Kings
KJV	King James Version
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
Lam	Lamentations
LBS	Library of Biblical Studies
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
Lev	Leviticus
MT	Masoretic Text (of the OT)
Moses 1, 2	<i>On the Life of Moses 1, 2</i>
Names	<i>On the Change of Names</i>
NAB	New American Bible
Nah	Nahum
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NAU	New American Standard (updated)
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Num	Numbers
Obad	Obadiah
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis

OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OrTra</i>	<i>Oral Tradition</i>
OT	Old Testament
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	<i>Oudtestamentische Studien</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia graeca</i> . Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886.
PL	<i>Patrologia latina</i> . Edited by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864.
Ps/Pss	Psalms
<i>Posterity</i>	<i>On the Posterity of Cain</i>
Prov	Proverbs
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RNS 2	Recherches Nouvelle Série–2
RSV	Revised Standard Version
1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSem	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Supplement Series
Sir	Sirach
<i>Sobriety</i>	<i>On Sobriety</i>
SOTI	Studies in Old Testament Interpretation
ST	<i>Studia theologica</i>
<i>StudBib</i>	<i>Studia Biblica</i>
StBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
TBS	The Biblical Seminar

TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.</i> Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976.
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: 1974–
ThViat	<i>Theologia viatorum</i>
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from Claus Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA, 1997.
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr. 2 vols. Chicago, 1980.
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
Worse	<i>That the Worse Attacks the Better</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
::	in contrast to
//	parallel to
→	consequently, leading to