

GOD'S DESIRE IN THE PSALMS: A SEMANTIC STUDY OF THE *HMD* AND '*WH* WORD FIELDS IN PS 68:17 AND PS 132:13-14

Samo SKRALOVNIK

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of theology
Poljanska cesta 4, SI – 1 000 Ljubljana
samo.skralovnik@teof.uni-lj.si

Summary

The verb forms of the lexical roots *hmd* and '*wh* reflect the dynamics of desire which take place in human beings, but also the dynamics of desire which take place in God. Although the verbs can function as synonyms, when the subject is a human being, the verb *hmd* in Ps 68:17 and the verb '*wh* in Ps 132:13–14 do not act as synonyms with no discernible semantic distinctions. Corpus-based semantic analysis (with special focus on the Psalms) showed that the psalmists chose the verbs very carefully and thus did not understand both as synonyms.

Keywords: desire, God's desire, root *hmd*, root '*wh*, Ps 68, Ps 132.

The verb forms of the lexical roots *hmd* and '*wh* reflect the dynamics of desire which take place in a human being, but also, in a certain sense, the dynamics of desire which take place in God. When the subject (of desire) is a human being, the verbs can synonymously (interchangeably) denote a greedy nature on the part of the human. Since God's desire is described with the same terminology, there is a fundamental consensus among scholars that the verbs can also synonymously denote God's desire in Ps 132:13-14 ('*wh*) and Ps 68:17 (*hmd*). The aim of this article¹ is to challenge that belief from the results of a corpus-

¹ This article has been proofread by dr. sc. Michael Tait.

based analysis (a semantic study with a special focus on the Psalms) of all the biblical passages where the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* appears.²

1. The main characteristics of the dynamics (when a human is the subject of desire)³

The verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* is found in the Hebrew Bible (BHS) 21 times. It appears 16 times in Qal (Ps 39:12; 68:17; Prov 1:22; 6:25; 12:12; Mic 2:2; Isa 1:29; 44:9; 53:2; Exod 20:17 (twice); 34:24; Deut 5:21; 7:25; Josh 7:21; Job 20:20), 4 times in Nifal (Gen 2:9; 3:6; Prov 21:20; Ps 19:11) and once in Piel (Song 2:3). The Qal and Piel stems describe the dynamism of desire with(in) an active subject, while the Nifal stem (in its participial conjugation) and various noun forms characterize the desired object.⁴

The kind of desire depends (in part) on the context. For example, sitting in the shadow of a tree and testing its fruits, which is a metaphor for the physical union of fiancée and fiancé, reveals that the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* here must (by way of exception) be understood as an intense passionate desire (Song 2:3), while, in Ps 19:11, it underlines the immense value of God's laws and does not denote a dynamism of desire (for God).

In most other cases, however, the lexical root *ḥmd* denotes the psychological process of greed which is triggered by the external visual impression and / or value of an object (or person).⁵ Although the causes (initial moments) and

² For precise semantic analysis of individual passages, see the author's doctoral dissertation entitled »The meaning and interpretation of desire in the Tenth Commandment (Exod 20:17): the semantic study of *ḥmd* and '*wh* word field« (Ljubljana, 2015). This dissertation is written in Slovenian.

³ Paragraph number 1 is a modified summary of a part of the author's article in *Vetus Testamentum* entitled »The dynamism of desire: the root *ḥmd* in relation to the root '*wh*« (accepted for publication in January 2016).

⁴ Only the presence of other details in the context, such as the connotations of the subject and / or object, determine a positive or negative moral connotation. A positive moral connotation occurs when the desire is oriented toward a positive object, for example, toward the shadow of a beloved fiancé in Song 2:3. Further, when desire refers generally to material goods, and the subject of this desire is a wise man (Prov 21:20) or a prayer (Ps 39:12), it can have a neutral moral evaluation. A negative connotation is evident when: a) the subject of desire is a wicked man (Prov 12:12), a mocker (Prov 1:22) the godless (Job 20:5,20), or those who plan iniquity and evil (Mic 2:1-2); b) the object of desire is a false idol (Isa 1:29; 44:9); c) when the desire is followed by appropriation (Josh 7:21; Mic 2:2; Deut 7:25) or when the verb root is used in the context of prohibition (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21; Prov 6:25).

⁵ In most passages, the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* is either focused on material objects with the motive of appropriation (Exod 20:17 (twice); 34:24; Josh 7:21; Deut 5:21; 7:25; Job 20:20; Mic 2:2; Prov 1:22 (indirectly); 12,12) or itself indicates (the value of) material possessions (Ps 39:12; Prov 21:20; Isa 44,9).

intensity of the desire can vary in different contexts, the dynamism most often denotes the premeditated⁶ psychological process of greed. The verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* (as a general rule) denotes an excessive desire oriented on valuables with the intention of appropriating something that is not associated with the basic necessities of life. Though all the passages where the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* occurs do not reflect the dynamics of greed, a fairly consistent pattern is still discernible: it suggests that the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* is used to express the desire for appropriation, although it may exceptionally occur in the sphere of physical needs (passionate desire in Song 2:3 and Prov 6:25; desire for food in Gen 2:9). An act of possession represents the final stage, the culmination of the dynamics, as an inner urge leads to its execution, but this is designated by another verb.

Focusing now on the root *'wh*, the verb form of the lexical root *'wh* is found in the Hebrew Bible (BHS) 27 times. It appears 11 times in Piel (Ps 132:13-14; Mic 7:1; Deut 12:20; 14:26; 1 Sam 2:16; 2 Sam 3:21; 1 Kgs 11:37; Prov 21:10; Isa 26:9; Job 23:13) and 16 times in Hitpael (Prov 13:4; 21:26; 23:3; 23:6; 24:1; Jer 17:16; Num 11:4; 11:34; 34:10; Eccl 6:2; 2 Sam 23:15; Ps 45:12; 106:14; 1 Chr 11:17; Amos 5:18; Deut 5:21), without indicating a difference in meaning between both conjugations.

The semantic range of the lexical root *'wh* is fairly wide and corresponds to the diversity of the needs and desires of human beings. The root (whether as verb or as noun) almost always occurs combined with the term *nepēš*, which indicates that the root *'wh* and *nepēš* have a particular semantic relationship. The term *nepēš* defines human existence with all its needs, i.e. the totality of human life. Therefore, the desire expressed by the lexical root *'wh* can be defined as the vital need for survival (in a multiplicity of forms) which is characteristic of a living being.⁷ The verb (combined with the term *nepēš*) expresses vital dynamism (need) and intuitive reaction, independent of rational examination, i.e. the intention for self-preservation, but not an act of satisfaction itself.⁸ It is

⁶ Cf. The fact that the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* indicates the premeditated and planned process (of greed) is furthermore supported by another fact, namely, that all the synonyms (e.g. *bāḥar*, *'āhab*, *ḥāšab*), which, together with the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd*, form a common lexical paradigm, are also characterized by a conscious process of thinking, planning, decision-making and by a pragmatic character.

⁷ Cf. Germana STROLA, *Alcuni elementi di lessicografia per lo studio del desiderio di Dio nella Bibbia Ebraica*, in: *Rivista biblica*, 47 (1999.) 362–363.

⁸ Cf. This is furthermore supported by another fact, namely, that the verb form of the lexical root *'wh* occurs in the context of verbs that describe the consumption of food and drink: *'ākal* (Deut 12:20; 14:26; Mic 7:1); *lāḥam* (Prov 23:6); *šāqāh* (»give« to drink 2 Sam 23:15; 1 Chr 11:17).

important to note that not in a single case throughout the whole Bible, with the exception of Deut 5:21 and Prov 24:1, is the dynamism of desire triggered by external appearance and / or the value of the object itself, but always by the desire for (pleasure of) consumption.

2. Roots ḥmd and 'wh as synonyms

The verb forms of the lexical roots ḥmd and 'wh reflect the dynamics of desire which take place in human beings, but also (in a certain sense) the dynamics of desire which take place in God. When the subject (of desire) is a human being the verbs can synonymously (interchangeably) denote a human greedy nature – compare the meaning of 'wh in Prov 21:10 and 21:26 and the meaning of ḥmd in Prov 12:12. Furthermore, semantic analysis also revealed that 'wh is never oriented towards material object(s) with the motive of appropriation, with the exception of Prov 24:1 where it indicates the dynamic of desire that is characteristic of ḥmd. The verb form of 'wh, therefore works here as the synonym of a verb form of ḥmd, something unique to the book of Proverbs.

When the subject (of desire) is God, in Ps 132:13-14 and Ps 68:17, scholars believe that the verbs synonymously denote God's »appropriation« (choice) of Sinai.⁹ Mayer argues in TDOT I:

»'avah is synonymous with chamadh, 'to desire.' This is supported by more than simply the parallelism in Gen. 3:6. Even more convincing are Prov. 6:25 and Ps 68:17(16), where chamadh appears in the same connection as 'avah does in Ps. 45:12(11) and 132:13f. Also the linguistic usage of the Tannaïtes, who use these two verbs in parallelism (Aboth vi.5), seems to lead to the conclusion that these two ideas were understood as synonyms.«¹⁰

Semantic analysis of all the biblical passages where the verb forms of the lexical root ḥmd and 'wh appear showed that both roots (in Ps 132:13-14 and Ps 68:17) were not simply understood as synonyms, but rather chosen intentionally and with great care. In order to be able to explain this assertion we

⁹ Cf. Germana STROLA, *Alcuni elementi di lessicografia per lo studio del desiderio di Dio nella Bibbia Ebraica. II*, in: *Rivista biblica*, 48 (2000.) 314; Germana STROLA, *Alcuni elementi di lessicografia per lo studio del desiderio di Dio nella Bibbia Ebraica*, 366; David BAKER, *Tight Fists or Open Hands?: Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law*, Grand Rapids (Michigan) – Cambridge, 2009, 17.

¹⁰ Johannes BOTTERWECK – Helmer RINGGREN (ed.), *TDOT (Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament)*, I, Grand Rapids, 1983, 135.

will compare the meaning of *'wh* in Ps 132:13-14 and the meaning of *ḥmd* in Ps 68,17 in detail in the following sections.

3. The interpretation of God's desire (*'wh*) in Ps 132:13-14

Psalms 132 has the elements of a Royal Psalm, as it justifies the royal dynasty with reference to the prophecy of Nathan in 2 Sam 7 (Ps 132:10-12). Since David's election was connected with the election of Zion, the psalmist in vv. 13-14 turns toward Zion which was chosen by God for his residence and resting place.¹¹

In Ps 132:13, the verb form of the lexical root *'wh* appears in parallel with the verb form of the lexical root *bḥr*.¹² This parallelism between *'wh* and *bḥr* in Ps 132:13 is the key for the correct interpretation of the meaning of *'wh*, while there is a deep semantic connection between *'wh* and *bḥr*.¹³ In some cases it is even possible to express the dynamism of desire with the (synonymous) verb »to choose« (*bḥr*). In Gen 6:2, *bḥr* acts as a synonym of the verb *'wh*, since the sons of God choose wives on the basis of their human beauty, i.e. they choose on the basis of desire (lust):¹⁴

»The passage Gen 6:1-4 speaks of the guilt of the 'sons of God' who saw »that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.' (Gen 6:2) The 'sons of God', whom the text does not define more precisely, are charged with a triple fault: firstly, intervention in the area beyond their borders, i.e. the degradation of their own species; secondly, the exploitation of a higher position in arbitrarily selecting wives through the impulses of desire; and, thirdly, violence.

The 'sons of God' have succumbed to lust and laid hands on the human daughters...«¹⁵

¹¹ Cf. Heinrich GROSS – Heinz REINELT, *Psalmi: besedilo in razlaga*, Celje, 1989; 488–489; Geoffrey GROGAN, *Psalms The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary*, Grand Rapids (Michigan) – Cambridge, 2008, 209.

¹² »He has desired it [...]: this is parallel to '[...] has chosen', but it places more emphasis upon the subjective element«, Arnold A. ANDERSON, *The Book of Psalms*, New Century Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids – London, 1985, 884.

¹³ Cf. Gerhard WALLIS, *chāmadh*, in: *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, IV, Grand Rapids – Michigan, 1983, 453.

¹⁴ Cf. Jože KRAŠOVEC, *Nagrada, kazen in odpuščanje: mišljenje in verovanje starega Izraela v luči grških in sodobnih pogledov*, Ljubljana, 1999, 77.

¹⁵ Jože KRAŠOVEC, *Nagrada, kazen in odpuščanje*, 77 and 93.

In theological terms, the root *bḥr* (to choose) does not merely denote God's decision but, in fact, denotes the realization of the decision (God's plan). Horst Seebass argues: »In the OT the choice is always the action of God, of his grace.«¹⁶ The relationship between God's desire on the one hand and the presence of God on Zion, on the other hand, is so close, that the action itself (the verb of the realization, as is the case in Job 23:13) is not even mentioned. This is the main reason why most scholars have understood the verb form of the lexical root 'wh (and parallel *bḥr*) in Ps 132:13(14) as a synonym of action (God's presence on Zion). When God is the subject of desire, there is no difference between desire and its realization, claim some scholars.¹⁷ The verb does not only reflect the desires but also God's plans, which are (becoming) a reality (cf. Joel 4:17).

The terms which reflect and define the object of desire are: the nouns *môšāb* (place of sitting, seat, residence) and *mānûḥā^h* (resting-place) and the verb 'āšāb (sit down, dwell, live, be inhabited). The fulfilling of desires is described in terms that emphasize God's presence in Zion, but with a clear emphasis on God's own initiative. Despite the fact that the Davidic dynasty clearly benefits from God's presence in Zion – the stability and sustainability of David's dynasty were founded on God's choice of Zion – it is God, not David, who chose Zion. The election of Zion is not based on God's faithfulness to man, but is grounded on the free will of God.¹⁸ The repetition of the verb 'wh in Ps 132:14 further confirms that God's decision is based on his absolute sovereignty, as a deep inner impulse, and is an expression of God's plans.

3.1. *God as Saviour in Ps 132:13-14*

Semantic analysis has revealed that when a human being is a subject of desire (in relation to God), 'wh reflects (beside physical needs) the deepest human need: God. Apparently, 'wh denotes »the same kind of need« when God is the subject of desire (in relation to humans). The fulfilment of this desire is not triggered by any external cause(s), but is derived from God as a deep inner impulse, as some kind of divine need (derived from God's »everlasting love«,

¹⁶ Horst SEEBASS, *bāchar*, in: *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, II, Grand Rapids (Michigan) 1983, 87.

¹⁷ Cf. Alexander ROFÉ, *The Tenth Commandment in the Light of Four Deuteronomic Laws*, in: Ben-Zion SEGAL – Gershon LEVI (ed.), *The Ten Commandments and History and Tradition*, Jerusalem, 1990., 53; Germana STROLA, *Alcuni elementi di lessicografia per lo studio del desiderio di Dio nella Bibbia Ebraica*, 368.

¹⁸ Cf. Artur WEISER, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, London, 1986; 782. Heinrich GROSS – Heinz REINELT, *Psalmi: besedilo in razlaga*, 488.

»unfailing kindness« toward human beings [Jer 31:3]). As mentioned, this is stressed with a double repetition of the verb, something which is a unique phenomenon on the level of the entire Bible. Additionally, to avoid any doubt, the root *'wh* in 2 Sam 3:21 (can) express the calculated desire of a masterful politician, David.¹⁹ However, in Ps 132:13-14, the focus is on God's own initiative, based on his free will.

Semantic analysis permits the conclusion that the desire for God and the desire of God are described by the same terminology of existential attraction that drives both man and God to fulfil their vital aspirations, i.e. to fulfil their essence. The verb form of the lexical root *'wh* indicates a deepest (ontological) force which forces a human being into a »dialogue« with God. And also *vice versa*: the verb form of the lexical root *'wh* in Ps 132 denotes an inner impulse which »forces« God into a »dialogue« with human beings. This force is God himself, his primary essence – love (cf. 1 John 4:7), as stressed by the Lord himself: »I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness« (Jer 31:3). Since God is depicted in Psalm 132 as a Saviour, we can reasonably conclude that *'wh* here denotes (so to speak) God's »need« (search) for human beings with the motive of salvation. Strola argues that the fulfilment of desire (desire and its fulfilment are one and the same when God is the subject) is God's gift of his presence among people (kenosis).

4. The interpretation of God's desire (*hmd*) in Ps 68:17

Psalm 68 belongs to the category of Hymns, which are an expression of praise and glorification without (selfish) requests of prayer. They are directed to God, to Zion and the temple or to the king. Psalm 68 glorifies Jerusalem and its temple. God has chosen Zion for his resting place. Hence God reveals himself in the sanctuary, as in Sinai, because »Sinai is now in the sanctuary« (Ps 68:18 ESV).

The object of desire is Mount Sinai, which is not special from the geographical point of view, that is, because it has the highest elevation in the region, but because of the theological point of view of God's choice.²⁰ The terms which reflect and define the object of desire are the verbs *'āšab* (sit down,

¹⁹ Cf. Horst SEEBASS, nepěš, in: *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, IX, Grand Rapids (Michigan) 1983, 507.

²⁰ »It is possible that the Psalmist is rejecting the rival claims of a sanctuary in the North, but equally well he may have been aware of the fact that Mount Zion was not the highest mountain in Canaan, and therefore its claim to be the mountain of God *par excellence*, and thus the 'highest' mountain, rested upon Yahweh's choice and not on its actual elevation«, Arnold A. ANDERSON, *The Book of Psalms*, 491.

dwell, live, be inhabited) and *šākan* (settle [temporarily], stay, stop [at a place], dwell). The fulfilling of desires is described with terms that depict God's presence in Zion, i.e. His presence among the people. There is no difference between this desire, on the one hand, and its realization on the other.²¹ There is a general consensus among scholars that the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* in Ps 68:17 denotes an action, i.e. a realization of desire (cf. J. Herrmann, J. J. Stamm, E. Nielsen, Walter J. Harrelson, M. L. Chaney, William L. Moran, B. S. Jackson, David L. Baker).

Both contexts described so far (in Ps 68 and in Ps 132) are very similar. At this point, therefore, the question arises: are the *ḥmd* in Ps 68:17 and *'wh* in Ps 132:13–14 due to the similar context and does the somehow similar idea behind both roots really cause them to function as synonyms with no discernible semantic distinction?

Let's take a step back and take a look at the wider context. The verb form of the lexical root *'wh* reflects (beside physical needs) the deepest human need for God, while the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* denotes the desire to acquire material wealth and possessions beyond basic needs. By contrast, the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* is never oriented towards God, i.e. towards the most basic human need. In fact, a desire expressed by the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* indicates something diametrically opposite to longing for God, i.e. it denotes the objectification of God. For example, in Isa 1:29, it indicates the idolatry of sacred trees and worshipping various deities. The object of desire is a material of special value, not the personal God. This is confirmed in Isa 44:9 where the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* is personified and indicates false idols. It literally denotes materialized desire, i.e. objects of idolatry made of iron and wood. Finally, in Deut 7:25, the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* also denotes a desire for the gold and silver on the graven images of idols. Greed and the worship of God are mutually exclusive: »[] greedy person [] is an idolater« (Eph 5:5). There is not a single passage in the entire Hebrew Bible where the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* denotes human desire for God.

This statement above must be corrected, at least partly, since the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* can also be found in Ps 19:11 where it denotes a desire for God *sui generis*. The verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* in Ps 19:11 indicates a desire for the Torah (judgments of God). Although the Torah is not a basic necessity, it can be equated with God. Strola argues that, on the level of simple syntax, that means that desire for the Torah can be equated with longing for God.

²¹ Cf. Alexander ROFÉ, *The Tenth Commandment in the Light of Four Deuteronomic Laws*, 53.

However, the verb form of the lexical root *hmd* in passage Ps 19:11 underlines the sacred value of the object by comparing it with the most precious material – gold. That means that the root *hmd* here does not denote desire for God (the verb appears in the Nifal participle), i.e. as an internal need of the *nepes̄* (*una spinta interiore della nepes̄*), but its employment in a comparison with a precious material simply serves to underline the immense value of the desired object.²²

Therefore, could it be that *hmd* in Ps 68:17 denotes the same reality as '*wh*' in Ps 132 – God's essence, love, and its necessary consequence, the »need« for human beings?

4.1. God as Warrior in Ps 68:17

The verb form of the lexical root *hmd* reflects the presence of God in Zion as a result of a victorious military campaign. While God is depicted in Psalm 132 as Saviour (vv. 15-16), in Psalm 68, he is depicted as a Warrior, as the initiator and main actor of the Conquest:²³

»As in Judg. 5, the psalm contains two pictures borrowed from the cultic tradition of the 'wars of Yahweh'; they present the beginning and the end of the collision of God's power with earthly power, namely the flight of the enemy and the dividing of the spoil after the homecoming of the warriors.«²⁴

²² Cf. Germana STROLA, *Alcuni elementi di lessicografia per lo studio del desiderio di Dio nella Bibbia Ebraica*. II, 315. This interpretation is confirmed by Ps 39:12, the last passage where *hmd* can be found within the Psalms, where the verb form of the lexical root *hmd* denotes (material) goods in general (without negative moral meaning). The lexical root *hmd* here appears in Qal passive participle which has a similar role to the aforementioned Nifal participle (Ps 19:11). In fact, in some of Hebrew manuscripts we have here a noun (instead of the verb), and in the Septuagint the term is also translated as noun »(his) life« (τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ). Most scholars, therefore, translate or understand *hmd* in passage Ps 39:12 as a noun (»treasure«), which in a very general way refers to material goods or material prosperity (valued as ethically neutral).

²³ Cf. Erik HAGLUND, *Historical Motifs in the Psalms*, Uppsala, 1984, 105: »This is the second most frequent historical motif (the Conquest) in the Book of Psalms... (Ps. 44:2b-4; 68:10f; 78:54; 80:9b-12; 105:44; 107:35-38; 111:6b; 114:3b, 5b; 135:10-12; 136:17-22). In Pss. 44 and 111 the Conquest is the only historical motif; in Pss. 68, 78, 80, 105, 114, 135 and 136 it is linked with the Exodus and possibly also with other themes; in Ps. 107 it is associated with the return from Exile.« Haglund does not recognize the historical motif of the Conquest in Ps 132! See also: Martin KLINGBEIL, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography*, Fribourg – Göttingen, 1999.

²⁴ Artur WEISER, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, 486–487.

A number of verbal forms in vv. 15-22 express the warrior metaphor and denote war imagery: *pāraś* (to scatter; v. 15), *šāba^h* (take captive; v. 19), *māhas* (beat to pieces, smite; v. 22).²⁵ Although the fulfilment of desire is described in terms that emphasize God's presence, the dynamics of desire are triggered by external cause(s), aimed at ensuring the equality of Zion and Sinai in the history of salvation:²⁶

»As Israel has moved from the wilderness into the Promised Land, God moves from the mountain of the Exodus, i.e. Mt. Sinai, toward his sanctuary which is located on Mt. Zion.«²⁷

As a general rule, the root *ḥmd* denotes a desire to acquire material wealth and possessions, but, in fact, can denote appropriation *sui generis*, i.e. the occupation of the Promised Land in Exod 34:24. The subject of desire in Exod 34:24 are the nations which (previously) lived in the land of Israel, and could (again) represent a military threat (the possibility of military reoccupation). Especially so at a time when people of Israel have to »appear before the LORD«. The dynamics of desire are triggered by the (political) possibility of the reoccupation of a land without defenders. There is a general consensus among scholars that the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* in Ex 34:24 denotes an action, i.e. the seizure of the territory (J. Herrmann, J. J. Stamm, E. Nielsen, Walter J. Harrelson, M. L. Chaney, William L. Moran, B. S. Jackson, David L. Baker, J. P. Hyatt). Bearing in mind the broader context of (the fulfilment of) God's promise, God's words in Exod 34:24 must probably be understood as a guarantee of territorial integrity. While God is guaranteeing territorial integrity, the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* is (probably) expressing the military mission.

As mentioned, the kind of desire depends (in part) on the context and the nature of the subject. It is of great importance to notice that, immediately after the use of *ḥmd* in v. 17, the psalmist mentions God's military expedition (v. 18). By contrast: in Ps 132, immediately after the use of *'wh* in vv. 13-14, the psalmist mentions salvation and depicts God as Saviour. In Ps 68, God is surrounded by a heavenly army, entering and conquering the Promised Land in order to dwell in his sanctuary: »The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary. When you ascended on high, you took many captives; you received gifts from

²⁵ Cf. Martin KLINGBEIL, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 126, 129, 133.

²⁶ Cf. Heinrich GROSS – Heinz REINELT, *Psalmi: besedilo in razlaga*, 239.

²⁷ Martin KLINGBEIL, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 133.

people, even from the rebellious – that you, LORD God, might dwell there« (Ps 68:18-19; see the parallel motif in Deut 33:2).

This is a theological event, argues R. de Vaux, since it first glorifies God's work for Israel.²⁸ It must be understood primarily in its theological dimensions. However, we should not exclude its historical value. The Psalmist here is emphasising God's might and power, not the military power of Israel forces, probably in order to ensure equality between Zion and Sinai, because »Sinai is now in the sanctuary« (Ps 68:18 ESV).²⁹ As God has accompanied the people of Israel throughout their wanderings in the wilderness, he moves with them into the Promised Land and transfers the attributes of Sinai to Zion.³⁰ Since God is depicted in Psalm 68 as a Warrior, we can reasonably conclude that *ḥmd* here does not denote the primary nature of God's essence, but describes how (in what way) God has desired and »appropriated« Sinai. God realizes his desire by the military campaign, i.e. by the occupation of the Promised Land.

5. God's desire in the Psalms (with a focus on Ps 68:17 and Ps 132:13-14)

By examining the dynamics of both roots and their interrelationship, semantic analysis revealed that the original purpose (intended use) of each root is clear. When the subject is a human being, the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* is used to express the desire for appropriation, while the verb form of the lexical root *'wh* applies in cases in which the desire is an expression of basic physical needs or other instinctive tendencies. The verb form of the lexical root *'wh*, therefore, refers to a desire that arises from basic (ontological) needs, whereas the verb form of the lexical root *ḥmd* denotes a desire that stems from external cause(s). Semantic analysis (in this paper) further revealed that the said pattern also applies when the subject of desire is God – although the scope of our research is limited to the Psalms.

In Ps 132:13-14, the desire is not triggered by external cause(s), but is derived from God as a deep inner impulse. This is emphasized by the double repetition of the verb, something which points to an existential attitude, not just to a sort of response to a specific external stimulus. When a human being is a subject of desire, the dynamics of *'wh* reflect the human Godlike nature (searching and longing for God) (cf. Isa 26:9, Jer 17:16, Amos 5:18). When God is the subject of desire, the dynamics of *'wh* similarly denote the »humanlike«

²⁸ Cf. Heinrich GROSS – Heinz REINELT, *Psalmi: besedilo in razlaga*, 238.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 239.

³⁰ Cf. Martin KLINGBEIL, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 134–135.

nature of God's essence. This is confirmed by the context of Psalm 132, which praises God the Saviour.

This is further confirmed by Job 23:13, the only other passage where God (as experiencer) is the subject of desire using the verb *'wh*. In Job 23:13, as in Ps 132:13, the verb form of the lexical root *'wh* appears in parallel with the verb form of the lexical root *bḥr*. *'wh* here expresses God's plans, the fate that God has ordained for his creation and every individual within, including Job (Job 23:14). Whybray argues that the verb form of the lexical root *'wh* in Job 23:13 represents God's all-embracing freedom of choice.³¹ God's will is not a reflection of personal whim – as Job understood his own destiny – but a broader redeeming divine plan for every person and all creation.

Although the fulfilment of *ḥmd* in Ps 68:17 is described with the same terminology that emphasizes God's presence in Sinai, the dynamics of desire are here triggered by external cause(s), aimed at ensuring the equality of Zion and Sinai in the history of salvation. The realization of this desire is described as appropriation (as *ḥmd* in Exod 34:24). In Ps 68:17, with his use of the verb *ḥmd* and war imagery, the Psalmist depicts a warlike conception (aspect) of God, not His primary essence. God realizes his desire by a military campaign, i.e. by the tangible occupation of the Promised Land. This is confirmed by the use of the root on the human level since a desire expressed by *ḥmd* denotes (or can denote) both the occupation of the land and the objectification of God, literally materialized desire.³² By contrast: *'wh* never denotes either seizure of land or the material aspect of God.

Conclusion

On the basis of all the arguments, we can reasonably conclude that *ḥmd* in Ps 68:17 and *'wh* in Ps 132:13-14 do not act as synonyms with no discernible semantic distinctions. Semantic analysis showed that the psalmists chose the verbs very carefully. In Ps 132, the *'wh* is chosen in order to suit the idea of God as a Saviour, i.e. to depict his deeds as a result of an inner salvific impulse, *inter alia*, to guarantee the Davidic line (Is 7:14). It is obvious that God is at work in his creation, but he himself never becomes tangible. In vv. 7-8, the psalmist makes a clear distinction between God himself and (his presence in) the Ark of the Covenant, which is merely his footstool. The Psalmist describes

³¹ Cf. Roger Norman WHYBRAY, *Job*, Sheffield, 2008, 116.

³² Ps 68:17 is the only passage where God acts as the subject of the verb *ḥmd*.

David as the true founder of the Jerusalem temple sanctuary, as the initiator of worship in Zion (vv. 1-5). However, David recognizes that God cannot dwell (materially) in the temple (cf. 1 Chr 28:2). This awareness is repeated by his son Solomon when the construction of the temple is finished (1 Kgs 8): »But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!« (1 Kgs 8:27). Therefore, I suggest that *'wh* in Ps 132 is chosen with great caution according to a (refined) concept of God from the time after the exile.

On the other hand, in Ps 68, the use of *hmd* is intended to suit the idea of God as a Warrior. Israel always desired that God would live among his people. This developed even to the extent that that desire (and belief) became corrupted. For example, just before the Fall of Jerusalem, many did not believe that the city could fall – because of the presence of God: »The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the peoples of the world, that enemies and foes could enter the gates of Jerusalem« (Lam 4:12). But, after the fall of Jerusalem, Israel realized that God is not bound to the temple. I suggest, therefore, that the use of *hmd* in Ps 68 points to a pre-Exilic concept of God.

Sažetak

BOŽJA ČEŽNJA U PSALMIMA: SEMANTIČKA STUDIJA POLJA RIJEČI HMD I 'WH U PS 68,17 I PS 132,13-14

Samo SKRALOVNIK

Univerza v Ljubljani, Teološka fakulteta
Poljanska cesta 4, SI – 1 000 Ljubljana
samo.skralovnik@teof.uni-lj.si

Oblici glagola leksičkih korijena hmd i 'wh reflektiraju dinamiku ljudske čežnje, ali isto tako i dinamiku Božje čežnje. Iako ovi glagoli mogu vršiti ulogu sinonima, u slučajevima kada je njihov subjekt čovjek, glagol hmd u Ps 68,17 i glagol 'wh u Ps 132,13-14 nisu sinonimi bez uočljive semantičke razlike. Semantička analiza korpusa (s posebnim fokusom na Psalmima) pokazala je da su psalmisti odabirali glagole vrlo pažljivo te ih, sukladno tome, nisu shvaćali kao sinonime.

Ključne riječi: čežnja, Božja čežnja, korijen hmd, korijen 'wh, Ps 68, Ps 132.