Psalm 74 and social identity

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Abstract
The identity of the enemies in psalms has been a perennial focus in scholarship. The pervasive language and shifting perspectives of psalms has led to a variety of proposals, though only a handful of scholars have focused on the positive function of the role of enemies for the development of identity. The language of enmity and function of enemy images in Ps. 74 are explained by means of social identity theory, focusing on the way the description of the enemies emphasizes important aspects of Judean corporate identity in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE.

Keywords
Psalm 74, Babylonian exile, enemy images, social scientific approaches, collective identity

Introduction
Within the Hebrew Psalter, language referring to enemies abounds. The word אָוִיב/אֵיב itself is mentioned 74 times in the Psalter (Croft, 1987, 18). But these antagonists are present in many psalms, even if this title is not (Rogerson, 2004, 115). There is a long history of scholarly work focused on determining the identity or significance of the enemies in the Psalter. However, few have elaborated on the actual function of these enemy images for the worshipping community of ancient Israel.

1. Pss. 3.8; 6.11; 7.6; 8.3; 9.4, 7; 13.3, 5; 17.9; 18.1, 4, 18, 38, 41, 49; 21.9; 25.2, 19; 27.2, 6; 30.2; 31.9, 16; 35.19; 37.20; 38.20; 41.3, 6, 12; 42.10; 43.2; 44.17; 45.6; 54.9; 55.4, 13; 56.10; 59.2; 61.4; 64.2; 66.3; 68.2, 22, 24; 69.5, 19; 71.10; 72.9; 74.3, 10, 18; 78.53; 83.3; 89.11, 23, 43, 52; 92.10; 102.9; 106.10, 42; 110.1–2; 119.98; 127.5; 132.18; 138.7; 139.22; 143.3, 9, 12.

2. Birkeland (1955); Kraus (1986, 125–37); Keel, (1978, 78–109) Croft (1987, 15–47); Hobbs and Jackson (1991); Sheppard (1991); (2004); Eidevall (2005); Miller (2012); Janowski (2013, 97–127); Tucker (2004). See also the summary of primarily German works in van Rooy (2009, 41–47).

3. I am aware of many sensitivities in relation to referring to the worshipping community as Israel, including the different histories of the unique countries. However, Israel is the preferred

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Birkeland (1955, 17) argues that the enemies in the Psalter are presented according to a sociological pattern; in other words, the symbol(s) of the enemy existed in the conceptual worldview of those who wrote, heard, and used the Psalms. Birkeland’s purpose, as has been the case with many other scholars from the modern era, is ultimately to determine the identity of the enemies in the context of particular psalms. Thus, for Birkland, because the enemies are used in a stereotypical way throughout the Psalter, it is possible to use clear references to specific enemies (or a specific category of enemies) to understand other instances of enemies in psalms that do not have an explicit referent. As a result, he argues that (nearly) every time the plural use of the term “wicked”/רְשָׁעִים appears, it designates gentile enemies (Birkeland, 1955, 57). Though Birkeland’s view has merit, rarely, if ever, do patterns actually work out so neatly, which is hardly surprising given the long history of the composition and compilation of the Book of Psalms.

Kraus (1986, 125) strongly cautions that applying any rigid schema to the interpretation of the enemy powers in the Psalter is liable to result in overinterpretation (cf. Anderson, 1965, 27–28). Kraus is surely correct that the context of a particular psalm must take precedent over identifying a pattern. In fact, at times the attempt to identify the “enemy” in the Psalms complicates the use of a psalm, as it is the ambiguous background nature of many psalms that allow them to be meaningful for individuals and communities in many different contexts. At the same time, Birkeland shows that the presentation of the enemy in the Psalms is not based exclusively on personal experiences of the author(s) but on a collective understanding of enemies. This may not help identify every enemy in the Psalter, but it does suggest that enemies within the Psalter are employed with common, stereotypical features. This aspect of Birkeland’s argument allowed others to make further suggestions toward understanding the function of the enemy in the Psalter within the community.

Hobbs and Jackson (1991, 26) expand on Birkeland’s sociological understanding of the enemy as stereotypical language, suggesting that enemy images in the Psalms belong to the category of propaganda. The role of propaganda in the case of the Psalms enhances the “sense of belonging” within a group and clarifies the boundary lines of a community (Hobbs and Jackson, 1991, 27). For Hobbs and Jackson, reading the enemy images in psalms as propaganda begins to clarify that these enemy images have a distinct social function that influences group identity. Hobbs and Jackson suggest that one way to understand the enemy language in the Psalter is to focus on how these images functioned in the community rather than attempting to understand the specific identity of the enemies in each psalm.

In the time since Hobbs and Jackson wrote their article, a significant amount of sociological and sociopsychological scholarship has focused on the subject of collective

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4. Miller (1986, 23) suggests that the inability to confirm the setting of many psalms is what allows them to be so powerful; that is, the universal nature of the Psalms allow for them to be valuable to individuals in so many contexts throughout history. See also Grant (2010, 4).

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48x versus 10x for Judah, several of which are paralleled with the name Israel or are celebrated as the location of Mt. Zion), especially in Book 3, in which Ps. 74 falls (16x versus 2x for Judah). Throughout this paper, I will use Israel to refer to the worshipping community represented in the Psalter and Judah as the nation that was devastated in 587/586 BCE.
identity, including research specifically on how enemy images function within collective identity formation. This recent research can further illuminate the function of enemy images in the Psalms. This paper demonstrates the positive function of the language of the enemy in the Psalms, particularly for the worshipping community after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Here we view the enemy images in the Psalter through the lens of modern social scientific research regarding the role of enemy images in collective identity formation. In doing so, this paper argues that the enemy images in Ps. 74 function to clarify the boundaries of an Israelite identity by defining the enemies as Yahweh’s enemies and by contrasting the enemies with the community. In doing so, they emphasize the importance of the Temple and the close relationship between the Israelites and Yahweh as part of an Israelite identity.

**Social Function of Enemies**

Enemy images are particularly powerful symbols for the development or maintenance of a group identity (Gerő et al., 2017, 18). Enemy images are a specific type of collectively held negative stereotype of another group in which enmity is a defining factor (Oppenheimer, 2006, 269–70). These enemy images develop through “beliefs about individuals or groups that are codetermined by internal individual variables, external societal contexts, and ingroup–outgroup dynamics” (Oppenheimer, 2006, 271). As with all identity boundaries, they are largely dependent on contextual influences (David and Bar-Tal, 2009, 369). As these enemy images develop, the concept of enemy continues to take shape to dehumanize the other (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, 244; Gerő et al., 2017, 17).

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5. van Rooy (2009, 46) notes that the evaluation of enemy language by scholars is commonly quite negative, which biases the interpretation of the significance of this language in the Psalms.

6. While this time period has classically been referred to as the “exilic” period, much recent scholarship has shown the difficulty with such a term. Lipschits (2005, 261–62 and passim), for example, has shown that while occupation in the land continued throughout this period, the city of Jerusalem itself encountered a significant drop in population. Because this paper focuses on the violence against Jerusalem, I will use the term “exilic” to refer to a literary perspective rather than a historical reality. For the time period, I most often use some variant of the designation “Templeless Period” following Middlemas (2005).

7. In this paper, I use “group” and “collective” interchangeably because both fit the situation of ancient Israel, though there is a technical difference between groups (defined from within) and collectives (defined from without), as noted by Jenkins (2014, 85). All groups are collectives, but not all collectives are groups. David and Bar-Tal (2009, 361–66) mention that there are 6 characteristics of a collective identity: 1) a sense of common fate; 2) sense of the unique quality of the collective against other groups; 3) coordinated activities; 4) common beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values; 5) concern for the continuation of the group and willingness to participate in promoting its longevity; and 6) an understanding of continuity in the past, present, and future. It is not required that all of these be equally important for a collective identity to develop, but they will all be present when a group identity exists. There is not room to identify all of these components of identity in relationship to exilic Israel. Rather, this second point is the primary focus of this paper.
Additionally, collective enemy images have the advantage of sustaining a group, as there are strong emotions connected with enemy images (Gerő et al., 2017, 18).

Defining enemy images in a group has the potential to influence or even create a group identity because they are “precisely the opposite of ‘Us’” (Gerő et al., 2017, 18). Though some outgroups share common features with an ingroup’s self-identity, a group’s imagined enemy (whether it exists in reality or not), “is, simply, the negation of all that makes up the being of those who imagine it” (Bowman, 2014, 157). Enemy images develop in greater clarity and scope in situations in which violent conflict has taken place, further fostering a dehumanized version of enemies (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, 255; Bowman, 2014, 155; Hancock, 2014, 446). The collective is defined by the violent conflict in part because enemy images are made clear through the actions against the group (Jacoby, 2015, 516). Enemy images thus function as one way to define a clear boundary of what a collective is not, especially in light of violent conflict.

With this background established, I turn to address the significance of the Psalms for their potential influence on identity in general before turning to Ps. 74.

**Psalms and Identity Formation**

Marc Zvi Brettler (2017, 288), using social psychological categories relating to identity, finds several elements present in the literature of Books 4–5 of the Psalter that clearly relate to important aspects of a collective identity. These include as “Jerusalem as the center of Yehud; Yahweh’s incomparability and exclusivity; insisting on a particular version of past sacred history/myth; the place of Torah; social issues; and theological issues.” Interestingly for the purposes of this discussion, Brettler notes in passing that the presence of enemies in Ps. 92 may be understood in light of the role others have on identity formation (Brettler, 2017, 298). That is, Brettler points out that the enemy images found within Psalm 92 can be formative for a collective identity due to the influence of other identities on group identity. The primary focus of Brettler’s essay is to note the language in the Psalter that relates to the modern categories of identity and he only touches briefly on the need for further research into the enemy images in the Psalter.

W. Dennis Tucker, Jr. also explores the function of psalms for identity formation in Persian Period Yehud, focusing on the anti-imperial language in Book 5 of the Psalter (Tucker, 2014, esp. 165–85). The psalms in Book 5 of the Psalter reverse imperial imagery, establishing an alternative identity in light of the imperial ideology during the Achaemenid Empire (Tucker, 2014, 165). These psalms offer an argument for establishing the group identity of the Yahweh worshippers in Yehud by emphasizing Yahweh’s cosmic reign, rejecting human powers, and identifying the self with the poor on whose behalf Yahweh acts (Tucker, 2014, 167–75). Book 5 of the Psalter, as Tucker argues, is a literary attempt to define an internal group identity in light of the external realities. Again, like Brettler, Tucker shows that the Psalms contain examples of language that directly relates to group identity. In particular, Tucker points out that in certain psalms, the description of the “other” (in this case, also enemy nations), is a means by which an identity is established for a people.

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8. Bowman, “Violence Before Identity,” 157.
9. These markers are identified from the summaries in David and Bar-Tel (2009, 361–66).
Both of these examples highlight identity formation using the Psalms at an admittedly later date than what is in view here. However, the content of these later Psalms indicates that the community is engaged in negotiation of a collective identity through the Psalms. This can also be seen in psalms from an earlier date, as will be shown in Ps. 74 (part of Book 3) below. Brettler and Tucker also show that the content of these psalms had the potential to influence the community’s viewpoint regarding who it was, affording an opportunity to study the concept of collective identity in psalms from a particular period.\(^{10}\) Their work shows that at particular times, certain psalms reveal critical reflection on and negotiation of the collective identity of the worshipping community. The potential for a psalm to influence identity through its identity-shaping language will also be shown in relation to Ps. 74 below.

**Date and Referential History of Psalm 74**

While the dating of psalms is notoriously difficult (Grant, 2010, 5–7), Ps. 74 does contain several elements that point toward the likelihood of a date during the sixth century BCE, after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and before it had been rebuilt, reflecting the referential history of the exile. Before turning to the reasons for accepting an exilic date of composition, alternative views for dating the psalm will be considered.

Most scholars have argued that a historic event inspired the Temple lament found in Ps. 74. Folker Willesen (1952, 289) appears to be the one exception, arguing that Ps. 74 has “no relation whatsoever to any historic occurrence,” but rather derives from a temple destruction liturgy. Willesen (1952, 296) sees a connection between Ps. 74 and Akkadian temple purity rituals, making the claim that Ps. 74 fits more clearly in a similar ritual context than to the Temple destructions or desecrations throughout Israel’s history. For Willesen a date of authorship is impossible to determine and unnecessary for understanding Ps. 74. However, other scholars have pointed out that Willesen’s view does not account for the vivid imagery of Temple destruction and the placement of the psalm in a canonical setting in which exile is specifically in view (Buchanan, 1989, 38; Hossfeld and Zenger, 2005, 243; Whitman, 2010, 132). The psalm makes more sense in light of the historical events that are evidenced elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible than as a constructed cultic event otherwise unreferenced in any form of history from Israel, either in psalms or other literature (Tate, 1990, 247). Ps. 74 is simply too closely paralleled by historic events for it to be unconnected to one of these events.

The Targums suggest that Antiochus Epiphanes lies behind the reference to the enemy in Ps. 74, placing the possible date of authorship in the Maccabean period, around 168/167 BCE (Hossfeld and Zenger, 2007, 243). This view is partly influenced by the

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10. Both Brettler and Tucker also reference Newsom, (2004) to provide an example of how prayers can be formative in a community. Newsom studies the *Hodayot* (1QHa), to understand the way that these prayers functioned to form identity in the Qumran community, which, again, is much later in date than Ps. 74. Newsom’s full argument cannot be dealt with here in detail, but her most important contribution for our purposes is the suggestion that identity is formed through prayers for a community, in that its prayers were always partly in response to claims regarding its identity made by others. These prayers construct symbolic or figured worlds that provide a locus for identity to be shaped and formed.
reference in Maccabees to the absence of prophets, similar to that of Ps. 74:9 (1 Macc. 4.46; 9.27). However, in the context of the psalm, the claim is not necessarily that there were no prophets who existed at the time. Instead, the psalmist declares that there are no prophets who can reliably determine the length of time that the Temple will remain leveled and that Yahweh will not act. Indeed, this sentiment is shared by an exilic contemporary in Lam. 2.9 (Hossfeld and Zenger, 2005, 243; Tate, 1990, 247), which reads, “her [Zion’s] prophets no longer find visions from Yahweh.” This passage references the existence of prophets but suggests that the prophets no longer function in the way they did before.11 Hossfeld and Zenger (2005, 243) show that given this connection and others with clearly exilic passages of Scripture, Ps. 74 has more in common theologically with material dating from the Temple-less period than material from the Maccabean period. That Book 3 of the Psalter was compiled around the same time also makes a date in the Maccabean period highly unlikely (Weber, 2000, 521). It is most likely that the collection of Asaph psalms was assembled around 150 BCE at the latest (Flint, 1997, 145). Though this does not completely disprove the possibility that Ps. 74 could have been written at this time, the nearness of time does make a date in the Maccabean period significantly less likely. Furthermore, and perhaps most persuasively, the destruction of the Temple mentioned in Ps. 74 does not reflect the events that happened in the second century (Hossfeld and Zenger, 2005, 243). Thus, a Maccabean date ultimately is itself unlikely, and better alternatives exist.

Because Ps. 74 focuses on a total destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, there are two primary candidates for the historical referent of the psalm, namely, the destruction of the first Jerusalem Temple in 586/587 BCE by the Babylonians and the destruction of the second Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE by the Romans. George Wesley Buchanan (1989) appears to be the most recent proponent of the view that the psalm was written in response to the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE. He argues that this date is a possibility due to the similarities between the psalm and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE described by Josephus. Buchanan also notes that there is no consensus on when the Septuagint was translated and so it could have been after this time. Moreover, Ps. 74 is absent from among the Dead Sea Scrolls (Buchanan, 1989, 40–41). However, a date this late is not a strong possibility, as most scholars agree that the composition of Books 1–3 of the Psalter predated the Qumran community.12 The absence of Ps. 74 among the Dead Sea Scrolls is easily explainable; sections near the beginning of a scroll, which were more commonly on the outside of a scroll, deteriorated more quickly, as they were

11. Roberts (1977, 480) argues that this reflects a distrust of the prophetic voices that were contemporary; though both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were active during this time, Roberts suggests this does not indicate the authors of these texts were familiar with them. This seems to address a question that does not exist in the text. As a literary device, this statement emphasizes the temporal aspect of waiting for Yahweh to act—the voices advocating for a quick return are shown to have been incorrect.

12. Flint, (1997, 139–45) shows that the Qumran manuscripts reflecting the Masoretic order of Books I-III agree a majority of the time (including Book III, which agrees 100%) and commend a date of 150 BCE for the order of Book III. Wilson (2000), though advocating for a first century CE date for the final redaction of the Psalter, states that Books I-III likely came together in the fourth century BCE (102) or the second century at the latest (109).
closer to elements that could cause damage.\textsuperscript{13} Because of the strong evidence and scholarly consensus regarding the date of the inclusion of Ps. 74 as part of the Asaphite collection, a date of composition in the Common Era should no longer be considered likely (Hossfeld and Zenger, 2005, 244).

Beat Weber (2000) argues that Ps. 74 was written in response to the Assyrian attacks between 722 and 701, lamenting the destruction of a Bethel sanctuary.\textsuperscript{14} His argument is based on two assumptions: (1) that the psalms in the Asaphite collection (Pss. 50, 73–83) primarily date from the time of the Assyrian antagonism and (2) the possibility that the text of Ps. 74 was amended to include an explicit reference to Jerusalem (Weber, 2000, 522–23). Armed with these two assumptions, Weber (2000, 526–27) shows linguistic and thematic connections between biblical references to the Assyrians and Ps. 74, suggesting that this evidence is just as strong as the evidence for a date of the Babylonian destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

Instead of making an argument against dating the Psalm to the sixth century, Weber argues that an eighth century date is also a possibility. However, understanding Ps. 74 as a response to the Babylonian destruction does not require an emendation of the text. Moreover, even if the psalm was originally composed in response to the destruction of a temple in Bethel, this does not preclude the possibility that it had been appropriated for use in the exilic period by those lamenting the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

Indeed, the substance of the psalm relates the destruction of a temple in vivid imagery, making a date following the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 the primary candidate. Finally, whether it was originally a lament for the Jerusalem Temple or not, it seems clear that Ps. 74 was used at a time when the Jerusalem Temple no longer existed.\textsuperscript{15} A date closely following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple seems probable.

\textbf{Interpretation of Psalm 74}

Psalm 74 can be divided into three sections: (1) lament for the Temple (1–11); (2) praise of Yahweh for defeating the mythical creatures and for creation (12–17); and (3) request for Yahweh to act (18–23).\textsuperscript{16} Verses 1–11 provide the clearest focus on Israel’s enemies in

\textsuperscript{13} Though Psalm 74 is missing from the extant records, this is likely due to the deterioration of psalms placed at the beginning or end of scrolls, which would be nearer the outside (Flint, 1998, 455).

\textsuperscript{14} This is also the view of Goulder (1996, 64–650), though Goulder does not provide nearly as much detail for this argument as Weber.

\textsuperscript{15} McCann (1993b, 95–98) argues that the entirety of Book III was shaped by the experience of exile, as a significant number of the psalms from this book include explicit connections to the destruction of the temple or the experience of the exile (Pss. 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, and 89) in addition to the strong communally-oriented nature of many of the psalms within the corpus. While this does not indicate date directly, it does clearly show that the exile is in view in terms of the referential history of this collection.

\textsuperscript{16} DeClaissé-Walford et al. (2014, 594) divide verses 1–11 into four distinct sections, suggesting that each provides an appeal for God to act. However, these subsections share significantly more content with each other than the following sections including a focus on the enemy, the language of permanence, the description of destruction, and the theme of rejection. Thus, I will maintain the tripartite structure of the psalm.
Ps. 74, though their presence is constant throughout the psalm, except for verses 12–17, which focus on praise of Yahweh through mythopoetic language. The enemy is denoted with several terms in Ps. 74: “enemy”/איב (3, 10, 18); “adversary”/צרר (4, 10, 23); “fool”/נבל (18, 22); and “those who rise against”/קפץ (23). Despite these various titles, the enemies in Ps. 74 are clearly national enemies who destroyed the Temple (Croft, 1987, 34).

Verse 1 begins with the complaint: “God, why have you rejected us forever?”17 The psalm continues to question why Yahweh’s anger is against “the sheep of your flock” (74.1) and reminds Yahweh of his past actions, which designated Israel as his people by referring to them as his “inheritance” and those he “redeemed.” Verses 2 and 3 move from a general question to the specific setting: the rejection and forgetting of Yahweh’s people is evidenced by the fact that Mount Zion or “the sanctuary” now lies in perpetual ruin. The theme of the ostensibly unending desolation of the Temple is alluded to in the first line and continues throughout the psalm.18 The first three verses thus establish a close relationship between Yahweh and his people, highlighting the location of the Temple as a significant component of their relationship. Verses 4–8 focus on a description of the enemies’ destruction and desecration of the Temple. Here, the psalm details the actions of the enemy: they set up alien symbols in the Temple, they smash the wooden panels, and they burn the Temple down. The Temple is referred to as both “your meeting place”/מוֹעֲד (Ps. 74.4) and the “dwelling place of your name”/מִשְׁכַּן־שְׁמֶ (74.7), further indicating the significance of the Temple for the relationship between Yahweh and his people. Verses 9–11 focus the lament on Yahweh’s perceived inaction. Verses 10–11 clarify that God’s reputation is at stake in his failure to act on behalf of his people (DeClaissé-Walford et al., 2014, 599). There is a rhetorical plea here for the psalmist to show God that the destruction of the Temple is an affront to the people. Throughout Ps. 74, the enemies who destroy the Temple and the city are God’s enemies. Ultimately, Yahweh’s name is scorned by the enemies because they have destroyed the place that signifies Yahweh’s presence (Mays, 1994, 246).

Verses 12–17 shift the focus of Ps. 74 from the Temple destruction to creation imagery and the destruction of the Leviathan. It may seem odd for a psalm lamenting the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem to include the language of Chaoskampf, with Yahweh defeating Leviathan and establishing the created order.19 Verses 12–17 have a self-contained structure, and verses 11 and 18 share close lexical ties, thus suggesting this portion of the text is a later addition to the psalm (Greene, 2017, 86–98). However, because the psalm interrogates the legitimacy of Yahweh’s reign, the answer fits quite nicely within the structure of the overall poem. It is possible that the psalmist is appealing to

17. The Hebrew does not supply the direct object in the first line, but in context the community is in view. However, the lack of an explicit mention of the community here potentially increases the focus on Yahweh’s failure to act for his own reputation, as will be seen below.

18. Temporal language in Ps 74 appears through the use of “perpetuity”/נֶצַּח (1, 3, 10, 19) “of old”/קֶדֶם (2, 12) “how long”/עַד־מָה, (9, 10) “all day”/כָל־היּוֹם (22) and “continually”/תָמִיד (23).

19. Tsumura (2015, 555) suggests that there is no creation theme visible here, as the most similar ancient Near Eastern background relates to temple destruction liturgies rather than Chaoskampf or creation accounts. Instead, it is focused on war imagery. However, as Greene (2017, 91) has shown, Tsumara does not explain all of the elements in Ps 74.15–17 that explicitly refer to creation.
an older story to establish the power of Yahweh—God reigned from before Jerusalem was founded and reigns beyond Jerusalem’s borders (Jones, 2014, 78–79). Additionally, Greene (2015, 98–101) has recently shown that Baal’s defeat of the mythical waters and building of a temple in the Ugaritic Baal cycle has likely influenced the connection between Yahweh’s defeat of the mythical beasts and the Temple lament in Ps. 74. According to Greene, this “interruption” of the psalm’s narrative of temple destruction is an intentional literary feature that connects the lament not just with an ancient tradition of the destruction of mythical foes but also with the establishment of a temple itself. According to this view, this section shows that Yahweh has destroyed the ancient enemies, and this is what is needed now to establish the Temple again. While this may be possible, the purpose here is not to identity the sources of the psalm. Instead, it is sufficient to state that the theological purpose of this mythopoetic language is to establish the identity of Yahweh as the creating king who is sufficiently powerful to defeat the ancient enemies and create a new reality. It is an appeal for Yahweh, who destroyed the mythical enemies in the past, to destroy his enemies in the present and reestablish the close connection with his people.

Verses 18–23 contain an extended plea for Yahweh to act against the enemies on behalf of Yahweh’s people and, as a result, on behalf of his reputation. There are several positive imperatives for Yahweh to act on behalf of his people or against the enemies: “remember” (74.18); “regard” (74.20); and “arise,” “contend,” and “remember” (74.22). These alternate with negative entreaties (אַל+jussive) regarding the relationship between Yahweh and his people: “do not deliver over,” “do not forget” (74.19); “do not let them retreat” (74.21); “do not forget” (74.23). These verses (18–23) focus on the derision that the enemies are permitted to indulge in as a result of the Temple remaining in ruins. The enemies—also called “foolish people”/עָנִי here—are said to mock and scorn Yahweh’s name (74.18 cf. 74.22), causing their uproar to continually go up against Yahweh (74.23). The psalm implies that the name of Yahweh cannot be praised while the Temple remains destroyed, and so the taunt of the enemies continually rises while Yahweh does not act. This section also further solidifies the identification with Yahweh and his people. While the enemies are Yahweh’s enemies, the victims of the violent actions of the enemies are Yahweh’s people.

Throughout this section, the people of Yahweh are designated as those in need: “poor”/עָנִי (19, 21), “oppressed”/ךְ ַּדּ (21), and “needy”/אֶבְיוֹן (21). Through this language, the very lives of the people of Yahweh are dependent on Yahweh’s decision to act (Tate, 1985, 253). From the perspective of the psalmist, Yahweh’s action against his enemies will result in the poor and needy praising him (Ps. 74:21). Both the identity of the people of Yahweh and the identity of Yahweh depend on his actions to save them so they can praise him in the Temple. The contrast between the enemies and the people is made clear here as well. They are portrayed in a stereotypical light, with the enemies serving as the

20. Tucker (2004, 432, 436–437) suggests that the poverty language in Ps. 74 signifies that they are “destitute” in an economic sense. However, it seems more likely in the context of the violence of Ps. 74 that these poverty symbols generally refer to “affliction,” which implies their situation is the result of actions against them (431). It is unlikely here that they are being used as a metaphor for righteousness, but in a way that further motivates Yahweh to act.
enemies of God and those who oppress the community. Verse 19, for example, portrays the enemies as “wild beasts”/חַּית and contrasts this with the portrayal of Israel as an innocent dove.\(^{21}\) In light of the contrast between the people and the enemies, the final two verses call on Yahweh to act through a repetition of the verb “rise up”/קום (Goldingay, 2007, 435–36). As Goldingay notes, by rising against his enemies, Yahweh would act against those who themselves arise against Yahweh (74.23), resulting in the liberation of his oppressed people. Yahweh’s reputation is on the line, and, in the entirety of the psalm, this reputation is intrinsically related to the existence of the Temple and the ability of his people to worship him.

**The Social and Literary Function of the Enemies in Psalm 74**

For those who experienced the destruction of Jerusalem, their enemies were very real. The Babylonians literally deported many individuals and destroyed their city and Temple (cf. 2 Kgs 25, Jer. 52). Judah became the victim of actual violence perpetrated by the Babylonians. The historical antecedent for the enemy images in Ps. 74 is the Babylonian army that literally took part in the destruction of the Temple. However, enemy images are not simply a historical fact but a sociological marker. They are a particular form of stereotypical imagery in which a group, rather than an individual, fills the space of an enemy of the collective, which often results in the continual dehumanization of the enemies. The negative language used to identify the enemies, as well as their presentation as enemies of Yahweh and oppressors of the people, suggests that these may be formal enemy images for the community, which can serve the function of defining the collective identity.

The historical background to this psalm is evidence that the portrayal of the enemy in Ps. 74 can be classified as enemy images. As noted above, when a group is a victim of violent actions, this can serve to clarify the enemy images of the group that perpetrated the violence and to create greater solidarity among the group. In this context, it is understandable that the enemies are described so clearly relate to a specific historical event.\(^{22}\) The background of literal violence often leads to the development of the enemy images, and these images are simply reflected in the text of Ps. 74.

Identity also shifts based on the situations and contexts of a collective. In the context of the Temple destruction and the removal of the Judeans from the land, there is a

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21. Janowski (2013, 114) notes that enemies in the Psalms are compared often to animals, but never domesticated animals; they are always wild beasts of some sort. Goldingay (2007, 433) suggests this metaphor points to the helplessness of a dove. Brueggemann and Bellinger (2014, 323) mention that the comparison of Israel with the dove also suggests a connection with the offering of the poor. It is not only a comparison of power but also of a “clean” versus an “unclean” animal, reflecting innocence. Richard Hess (2007, 188–89) notes also that the animals that were considered clean had the longest history of being domesticated by Israel. They were also the animals they were most acquainted with and the animals that they viewed themselves as most like.

22. This also makes use of the exceptionally violent imagery at the end of Ps. 137.8–9.
significant opportunity for potential shifts in identity. Not only were the Judeans victims of the physical destruction of the city and deportation of their leaders, but they lost a key element of their constructed collective identity when the Temple was destroyed.

The Temple was a central symbol for the Israelites, a place where Yahweh met with them and therefore a significant part of their collective identity. The enemies in Ps. 74 are presented as those who cause a rift between Yahweh and his people by destroying the Temple. In this way, the enemy images function to highlight other important aspects of their self-identity. This loss would have created the need to reevaluate the importance of the lost symbol, and Ps. 74 reiterates that they need the Temple because that is where Yahweh will meet with his people. Ps. 74 addresses this shift in context by reaffirming the importance of the presence of Yahweh and the Temple as part of the identity of the Israelite community. This is shown in the language of lament and the description of the longing for the people to be rescued by Yahweh, but it is made especially powerful through the description of the enemies as those who destroy the Temple. Enemy images represent the exact opposite of the collective. In describing the enemies destroying the Temple, the psalmist highlights the importance of the Temple for the community by indicating that those who are against the group demonstrate this in the act of destroying the Temple. This is an ultimate offense against Yahweh’s people, as it separated them from their God. Again, this is formative for their identity as a people who are connected to the Temple.

By describing the enemies of the people as Yahweh’s enemies, Ps. 74 also makes the identification between Yahweh and the worshipping community clear. The entire psalm calls into question Yahweh’s reputation, but this reputation is bound up with the presence of a Temple and the ability of the community to worship him. As long as the Temple remained destroyed, the enemies of Yahweh (and thereby the enemies of the people) would continue to hold their power over the Israelites’ heads. It is in the lament against God’s enemies that the community is identified with Yahweh. The identity of the Israelite community was so wrapped up in its identification with Yahweh as mediated through worship at the Temple, that the defining component of its collective identity was called into question.

Another feature of enemy images is that they represent the exact opposite of the collective that describes these enemies. The enemies are contrasted with the voices in this psalm in many ways. Whereas the enemy “mocks” Yahweh, and the fool “scorns,” (74.7, 10, 18, 22–23), the people of Yahweh praise him (74.21). In many cases, the enemy is described highlighting its military might (74.4–8, 20), but the community is described in terms of great need or poverty (74.19, 21). The enemies are also referred to with

23. Eder (2009, 431–32) and David and Bar-Tal (2009, 356) note the importance of central symbols for a collective identity. These symbols serve to form a group’s internal narrative and focus their purpose and goal.

24. David and Bar-Tal (2009, 356) note the particular significance of homeland for a national identity, suggesting that the homeland is “the only place where the nation members can fully articulate their unique identity.” The importance of homeland can be seen in the Israelite religious corpus as well, such as in Gen 12.1–3, Ex. 6.2–8, and throughout Joshua. The entrance into the land is portrayed in the literature as a significant symbol of Israelite belonging, as is, ironically, the removal of Israel from the land.
animalistic imagery as wild beasts in Ps. 74.19, whereas Israel is referred to as doves. The sense is clear that the development of these enemy images does not contain any positive attributes and even includes a dehumanizing element. Though the primary level of conflict is between Yahweh and his enemies, this again makes explicit that those who rely on Yahweh are bystanders in the conflict between Yahweh and the enemies. Psalm 74 makes it clear that those who worship Yahweh and describe themselves as the afflicted people are in need of his help in contrast to the enemies, who have created the problem in the first place. As in the *Hodayot*, “The very fact that the speaker is attacked by enemies of God gives [the psalmist] identity with God” (Newsom, 2004, 241). Similarly, the enemies in Ps. 74 function for the community to reaffirm their identity as the people who are favored by Yahweh, as Yahweh’s enemies and their enemies are one and the same.

The enemy images in Ps. 74 serve to clarify a boundary regarding Israelite identity after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, a topic that is well known to scholarship. Psalm 74 does not contain the clear polemic to rebuild the Temple seen in later texts (e.g., Isa. 44.28; Ezr 1– 6; Zech. 1.16). Rather, the focus is mainly on the reality of the destroyed Temple. Further, the destruction of the Temple in Ps. 74 is regarded as the work of the enemies of God rather than as the judgement of Yahweh. The Temple is not often directly mentioned in these passages of Yahweh’s judgement, though in Lam. 2.6–7, God is the one who destroyed the Temple. Even here, though, it is Yahweh’s action through the enemies of the people (Lam. 2:17). The contention that Yahweh orchestrated the events of the downfall of Jerusalem does not negate the sociological reality behind Ps. 74. Psalm 74 does not offer a clear glimpse of the community for whom or from which the text arose beyond the need for identity negotiation. Rather, it can only clearly be said that it came from a community that experienced the violent conflict and the loss of the Temple and had begun to imagine a Templeless faith.

The reality of the Temple destruction created a situation wherein Israel had to reform its identity in light of its removal from the land (for some) and destruction of the very place where Yahweh had met with his people. If there is no Temple, there is no relationship with Yahweh.

Using the enemy images to establish the enemy as the one who opposes Yahweh, while also defining the people of the worshipping community as the ones whom Yahweh cares for, the psalm highlights certain aspects of their Israelite identity. Even if these enemy images were not tied to a specific group, or became associated with other events (see the options for dating above), the images of the enemy still served to develop the same components of identity. Thus, as may be seen above the social reality of enemies is

25. For example, Dalit Rom-Shiloni (2013) traces the development of boundary lines between those who remained in the land (who later became labeled as “foreigners”) and the exiled elites who went to Babylon. See also Bedford (2001, 48).
26. On the destruction of Jerusalem by Yahweh’s command, see, e.g., 2 Kgs 24.20; Ezek. 11.7–12; 21; Lam. 1–2.
27. This topic comes up in other psalms with an exilic focus as well, such as Psalm 137: “How can we sing Yahweh’s songs in a foreign land?” Without the temple, while the Israelites (or at least some Israelites) lived outside the land, they could not worship Yahweh at all. Perhaps it is because there were those who wanted to bridge the gap between an Israelite identity and other nations that these psalms were written.
assumed and rhetorically emphasized make a theological claim regarding this question. Even while the symbol of Yahweh’s presence is absent, and Yahweh’s inaction seems clear, the people still reach out in an attempt to identify themselves with this God. The belief that Yahweh was sovereign over the enemy nations continued to be an important component of the identity for those who worshipped him.

Conclusion

Using sociological and sociopsychological understandings of enemy images reveals that Ps. 74’s focus on the Temple is an exercise in identity negotiation. In Ps. 74, the description of the enemy as against Yahweh serves to identify the people of Israel who participate in the worship through this Psalm, as those who are identified with Yahweh. In the context of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and the loss of a central symbol of their identity, the psalmist grapples with the reality of what it means to be part of the worshipping community. Through identifying the enemies as Yahweh’s enemies, and by contrasting these enemies with the people of Yahweh, the psalm highlights the essential role of the Temple and the relationship between Yahweh and his people as part of their collective identity. This continues even after the Templeless age, as the identity negotiation affirms the presence of God and its ambiguity. The various dates given for Ps. 74 reflect the fact that many psalms lack a reference to a specific enemy. While the most likely setting is the first destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, the lack of specificity allows for the various interpretations of enemies to continue and for the psalm to be used and reused in new situations. Responding to the situation of Israel without the Temple, the psalmist makes a clear and determined, as well as timely and timeless, statement: we are still the people of Yahweh, and he is still powerful over the earth.

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