

## PSALM 85, VERSES 10-13: MEETING, FIGHTING, AND COMING TOGETHER

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### Abstract

The final stanza of Psalm 85 admits of inconsistent translations and interpretations. Major translations choose “kiss” to translate the Hebrew verb in verse 10b, but the *textus receptus* implies “fight.” “Fight” works better for several reasons. First, the relationship between YHWH and Israel is not consistently harmonious. Second, the shift from “kiss” to “fight” allows the interpretation to ascribe qualities noted in the verses to both YHWH and Israel. Third, the verb “meet” in 10a implies both positive and negative elements, and “fight” therefore is consistent with the Hebrew verb translated “meet.” Fourth, Psalm 85 resides in Book III of the Psalter, and “fight” is consonant with the struggle inherent in this book. Ultimately, differing translations and interpretations understand restoration as that which arises from the dynamic coming together of (1) *hesed* and faithfulness and (2) justice and peace. This paper suggests that the dynamic coming together is best understood as having elements of both harmony and struggle.

**Key Words:** Struggle, restoration, meet, kiss, fight, justice, *hesed*

### INTRODUCTION

Psalm 85 resides toward the end of Book III of the Psalter. It is separated from the darkest psalms of the Psalter, Psalms 88 and 89, by only the combined 24 verses of Psalms 86 and 87. Psalm 85 thus stands in the darkest book of the Psalter and is located quite close to the darkest psalms therein. However, Psalm 85 does not have a wholly dark feel. It is certainly the case that YHWH’s anger is a central feature of the first seven verses of the psalm, but the final six verses have a focus on salvation; and, the final four verses, verses 10 through 13,

delineate the overall unfolding of this salvation.<sup>1</sup> We should not be led to think, though, that the initial verses of Psalm 85 present historical instances of resolutions to YHWH's anger through forgiveness *and* that these verses are followed simply by restoration in the later verses; such an understanding would imply that the later verses of the psalm lack any sense of struggle, but struggle is present even in the final four verses, despite their focus on the unfolding of salvation. Most interpretations seem not to bring out the struggle in these final verses, but considering the overall feel of Book III and the surrounding psalms, the element of struggle is to be expected. Thus, the following is advanced. The final four verses of Psalm 85, though they delineate the unfolding of salvation (forgiveness and restoration), maintain the element of struggle that characterizes Book III in general and the psalms therein; further, understanding the verses in this way makes for a better fit between these verses, the entire psalm and their location in Book III of the Psalter. Prior to considering verses 10 through 13 as an individual stanza with a distinct meaning, it will be helpful first to consider briefly the background and overall message of Psalm 85 as a whole.

### **PSALM 85 AS A WHOLE**

Johan Coetzee characterizes Psalm 85 as a community complaint from the post-exilic era.<sup>2</sup> While Hossfeld and Zenger agree with Coetzee on the post-exilic dating of the psalm, they classify the psalm as “prophetic liturgy” that is best understood as a “prayerful assurance of YHWH’s mighty promises of salvation.”<sup>3</sup> Sticking closely to the content of the

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1. It should be noted herein that the psalm’s superscription is not being taken as a verse. Thus, the psalm is understood as 13 verses, not 14 (as in Hossfeld and Zenger, for example).

2. Johan H. Coetzee, “Psalm 85: Yearning for the Restoration of the Whole Body,” *Old Testament Essays (OTE)* 22, no. 3 (2009): 554.

3. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 362-363.

psalm, Robert Wallace characterizes the psalm as a prayer that petitions for a cessation of YHWH's anger.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, deClaissse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner characterize the psalm as a "prayer for God to act now as God has acted in the past."<sup>5</sup> All four characterizations seem accurate, and, though not identical, they are consistent with one another. We shall use Wallace as a starting point in order to see this and as a basis for a general characterization of the psalm that synthesizes the above four characterizations.

As noted Wallace's characterization sticks closely to the content of the psalm. Verses 1 through 3 of Psalm 85 focus on YHWH's historical turning back of His anger, and verses 4 through 7 constitute a petition or prayer for YHWH to turn back His current anger; indeed, the psalmist petitions YHWH specifically for His *hesed* and salvation in verse 7. Verses 8 through 13 then focus on the salvation that will arise from YHWH turning back his anger. Thus, characterizing the psalm as a petition for YHWH to end his anger is certainly accurate. It is indeed the case that the first stanza of the psalm references YHWH's turning back of His anger in the past, and the final stanza references the result of YHWH turning back His anger; but, from the psalmist's perspective, the overall psalm must be, as Wallace puts it, a prayer for the end of YHWH's anger. This points to the characterization put forth by deClaissse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, for, as noted, the psalmist opens the psalm with a historical reference to YHWH's prior turning back of His anger and follows with a request for the same in the present. deClaissse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, then, provide the same characterization as Wallace but include the reference to YHWH's past actions and do not specifically include the term "anger."

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4. Robert E. Wallace, "The Narrative Effect of Psalms 84-89," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures 11*, no. 10 (2011): 9.

5. Nancy deClaissse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdsman Publishing Co., 2014), 655.

Coetzee, it will be recalled, classifies the psalm generally as a complaint. If we understand the psalmist here as a complainant formally lodging a complaint, then we see that the psalmist is making his or her case for the cessation of anger (second stanza) based upon YHWH's past actions (first stanza) and with an eye to what YHWH's address of the complaint will look like (third stanza), namely salvation in the form of forgiveness and restoration. Lastly, then, we turn to Hossfeld and Zenger's characterization.

Hossfeld and Zenger's characterization of "prophetic liturgy" certainly looks to the last stanza of the psalm, and the "prayerful assurance of salvation" is certainly also what Coetzee's psalmist is seeking; and, deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner's notion of asking now for what the past has demonstrated is likewise none other than assurance of salvation. Further, Hossfeld and Zenger's "prayerful assurance of salvation" simply anticipates the salvation that is implicit in Wallace's understanding of a prayer for the end of YHWH's anger. How, then, might we synthesize these four takes succinctly? Perhaps the following is workable: Psalm 85 can be understood as a prayerful request by a complainant for the remission of YHWH's anger and the resulting salvation, the basis of which is YHWH's *hesed* and past action. This is certainly lengthy, but it seems to capture in explicit terms what all four of the above characterizations are putting forth both explicitly and implicitly.

## **COMMON TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION OF PSALM 85:10-13**

The ten Bible translations of verses 10 through 13 reviewed for the present work all translate the language of the verses in a fundamentally consistent manner. These versions are as follows: KJV, NKJV, NIV, ESV, NASB, NSV, NRSV, NET, ASV and the Vulgate. There are indeed some differences in tense, e.g. the NIV and the ESV use a present tense verb in verse 10b whereas most other translations use a perfect, but these differences in tense do not result in a significant

semantic shift that warrants differing interpretations. For the below subsections, the NIV's translation will be used and understood as consistent with, for example, the NKJV, the NRSV, the NASB and the ESV. In some sense, then, a common translation could be claimed simply on the basis of the consistency of these translations. However, with the NIV herein as the model of major translations, we will consider several scholarly translations as well. The combination of scholarly and major Bible translations, and the resulting scholarly interpretations, will provide us with a common translation and a common interpretation. However, it should be stated here that the goal of the following translation section is not to provide a fully revised translation but, rather, to consider those terms of the verses that will be translated and understood differently in the subsequent sections that are focused on a proposed translation and interpretation.

### **Common Translation**

Much of the difference between the proposed translation and interpretation versus the common translation and interpretation is a function of verse 10. However, verses 11 and 13 are also affected by the differing translation. Now, the NIV translates the Hebrew verb in verse 10a as "meet" and the Hebrew verb in verse 10b as "kiss." Further, the NIV translates the Hebrew noun pair in verse 10b as "righteousness" and "peace." The use of "righteousness" is repeated in verses 11b and 13a. This is consistent, again, with nearly all major translations. Thus, verse 10 reads as follows, "Love and Faithfulness meet together. Righteousness and peace have kissed."<sup>6</sup> "Righteousness" then, in English, begins verse 13a and follows the conjunction that begins verse 11b. This too is consistent with nearly all major translations. Scholars seem largely to agree with the translation of the verbal forms, but there is a variance in the noun used to translate the Hebrew word for which the NIV chooses

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6. *Psalms* 85:10 (New International Version).

“Righteousness.” We shall first consider scholarly takes on the verbal forms.

Robert Alter, in his 2007 translation entitled *The Book of Psalms*, translates the verbal forms as “met” and “kissed.”<sup>7</sup> deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner use the same English verbs but alter the tense to the future; thus, the authors render the verbs as “will meet” and “will kiss.”<sup>8</sup> David Zucker, in his proposed restructuring of Psalm 85, uses yet a different tense but the same verbs; he translates the verbs in the present as “meet” and “kiss.”<sup>9</sup> Coetzee uses the same verbs and the same tenses as Zucker, namely “meet” and “kiss.”<sup>10</sup> Lastly, Michael Floyd, when considering biblical perspectives on peace, also uses the same verbs but translates them in the perfect, i.e. “have met” and “have kissed.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, though there is no consistency between tenses when considering major Bible translations and scholarly authors’ translations or chosen usages, there is consistency in verbal usage. This verbal usage, as will be seen, affects interpretation.

As noted, there is some variance in how the first noun of the noun pair in verse 10b is translated. All major Bible translations render the word as “righteousness.” However, scholarly translations vary. Alter translates the word as “justice.”<sup>12</sup> Zucker also translates the word as “justice.”<sup>13</sup> All other authors noted thus far render the word

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7. Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007), 85.

8. deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 657.

9. David J. Zucker, “Restructuring Psalm 85,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2007): 48.

10. Coetzee, “Psalm 85,” 561.

11. Michael Floyd, “Peace in Its Fullness: Biblical Perspectives on Aspects of Peace,” *Global Virtue Ethics Review* 7, no. 1 (2016): 46.

12. Alter, *The Psalms*, 301.

13. Zucker, “Restructuring,” 48.

consistently with the major Bible translations; they use “righteousness.”<sup>14</sup> As will be seen, this word choice also influences interpretation.

### **Common Interpretation**

Translation of course influences interpretation.<sup>15</sup> The translation of verses 10 through 13 thus affects how we interpret the stanza in isolation, and ultimately it affects how we understand the verses in their context in the psalm and in Book III. Tremper Longman, though he does not in his Psalms commentary indicate how he translates the verbal form commonly rendered as “kiss,” provides a succinct understanding of verse 10 that betrays the fact that he, like the others above, does indeed render the word as “kiss.” Longman notes that verse 10 provides an image that pulls together the two noun pairs in verses 10a and 10b in the “person” of YHWH.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for Longman, love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace all come together in YHWH. Further, the verbs “meet” in 10a and “kiss” in 10b indicate that the qualities embrace in YHWH.<sup>17</sup> Floyd takes “embrace” a bit further and imagines, metaphorically of course, a “passionate, deep kiss.”<sup>18</sup> Alter notes that the embrace provides the sense of these qualities of YHWH “in perfect, loving harmony.”<sup>19</sup> Verses 11 and 12 then affirm, given the embrace of the noun pairs above in YHWH, that the land returns to balance.<sup>20</sup> YHWH has blessed the land, and this is

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14. Hossfeld and Zenger provide both “justice” and “righteousness” as possibilities.

15. One might also make the reverse case, as per Gadamer, namely that interpretation always affects translation through fore-meanings.

16. Tremper Longman III, *Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 314.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Floyd, “Peace,” 46.

19. Alter, *The Book of the Psalms*, 301.

the point of the prayer (the psalm).<sup>21</sup> With the land in balance, righteousness (in verse 13) prepares the path for YHWH to walk the earth.<sup>22</sup> Zucker understands that for which righteousness (or “justice” for Zucker) prepares the way to be YHWH’s “divine mission,” as opposed to a literal traversing of the earth; but, “divine mission” leaves open the possibility that this mission is indeed a traversing of the earth.<sup>23</sup>

In summary, then, verses 10 through 13, according to the common interpretation of the stanza, unite love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace in YHWH and the embrace produces a restorative balance in the land; in other words, YHWH, through this embrace, bestows a blessing on the land and the people and prepares to traverse the path laid out by righteousness/justice. Thus, this stanza connects to the first stanza of the psalm through YHWH again favoring the land and to the middle stanza of the psalm by delineating the salvation that follows on the breaking off of YHWH’s anger. Unfortunately, interpreting verses 10 through 13 in this manner leaves the psalm, though intelligible in isolation, difficult to understand in terms of the overall themes of estrangement, struggle and human lack of understanding that seem so prevalent in Book III.

### **PROPOSED TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION OF PSALM 85:10-13**

As noted, the above interpretation of verses 10 through 13 creates an overall intelligible psalm when the psalm is considered in isolation, and the translation choices of key words help the interpretation work. However, the overall interpretation of the psalm does not seem to fit its greater context. In order for a sound fit in the greater context of Book

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20. deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 658.

21. Wallace, “The Narrative Effect,” 9.

22. Both Longman and Alter see the verse this way, though Alter uses “justice” in place of “righteousness.”

23. Zucker, “Restructuring,” 53.

III, the key words considered above, namely “kiss” and “righteousness” must be translated differently. As will be seen, the Hebrew in fact supports different translations of the words. These different translations, coupled with a different understanding of the relations of the two noun pairs, result in an interpretation of the psalm that both works in isolation and in the greater context of Book III. First, then, we shall consider how “kiss” and “righteousness” might be translated differently while remaining faithful to the Hebrew terms that give rise to these translations.

### **Proposed Translation**

Hossfeld and Zenger point out that the Hebrew verb commonly translated as “kiss” in verse 10b can also be translated as “fight.”<sup>24</sup> Jurgen Ebach notes, in fact, that to translate the Hebrew as “kiss” and think in terms of righteousness (or justice) and peace kissing one another, we must translate the verb reflexively, as the clause contains two subjects and no object; however, to translate the verb reflexively requires an emendation to the *textus receptus*.<sup>25</sup> If we translate the verb as “fight,” no emendation is required. Sigrid Eder also indicates that we must alter the text in order to translate the term as “kiss” as opposed to “fight,” and, further, he notes that the Hebrew verb in question (if emended and translated as “kiss”) does not, contra Floyd, refer to a passionate kiss but, rather, to a manner of greeting between relatives.<sup>26</sup> Thus, two distinct issues arise in regard to the common translation of the verb as “kiss.” First, as noted above, the text, as received, does not support the translation. Despite this fact, the verb is commonly

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24. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 359-361.

25. Jurgen Ebach, “Gerechtigkeit und Frieden küssen sich,’ oder: ‘Gerechtigkeit und Frieden kämpfen’ (Ps. 85:11): Über eine biblische Grundwertedebatte,” in Ulrike Bail und Rentae Jost, eds., *Gott an den Randern: Sozialgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf die Bibel* (Gutersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1996), 42.

26. Sigrid Eder, “Do Justice and Peace Really Kiss Each Other?” *Vetus Testamentum* 67 (2017): 397.

translated both in major Bible translations and by scholars in this way. Second, in the case that it is translated as “kiss,” the semantic range needed to cover a translation along the lines of “deep or passionate kiss” is not present. It is difficult, then, other than in order to support a predetermined interpretation, to find a reason to translate the verb other than as “fight.” Further, the verb in 10a translated as “meet” may imply either a positive or negative meeting (and perhaps implies elements of both), but in either case a dynamic coming together is what is validly implied.<sup>27</sup> Thus, there is no contradiction in the verbal meanings in 10a and 10b when we translate the verb in 10b as “fight.” We shall thus consider the noun pairs in verse 10.

As noted prior, verse 10a contains a noun pair and verse 10b contains a second noun pair. The noun pair in verse 10a is commonly translated as “steadfast love” and “faithfulness.” However, some translators retain the Hebrew term *hesed* in place of “steadfast love,” and some translators choose “truth” in place of “faithfulness.” Most major Bible translations use “faithfulness,” though the NKJV and the Vulgate (*veritas*) use “truth.” Scholarly translators tend toward “faithfulness,” and we will follow their lead herein. The noun pair in verse 10b is translated as “righteousness” and “peace” in all major Bible translations. As regards “peace,” few deviations can be found.<sup>28</sup> Scholars follow suit for the most part. However, both Zucker and Hossfeld and Zenger use “justice” in place of “righteousness,” and this translation, as will be seen, works better when “kiss” is replaced by “fight.” Thus, the two noun pairs will be taken herein to be “steadfast love” and “faithfulness” in verse 10a and “justice” and “peace” in verse 10b. “Justice” then replaces “righteousness” in verses 11b and 13a as well. The resulting translation of verses 10 through 13 therefore looks much like Hossfeld and Zenger’s translation without the translation options shown with forward slashes. Given the translation below, we shall consider the interpretation.

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27. Ebach, “Gerechtigkeit,” 43.

28. See Zucker for a different translation, namely “well-being.”

- 10 Steadfast love and faithfulness have met.  
Justice and peace have fought each other.*
- 11 Faithfulness springs up from the earth,  
and justice looks down from heaven*
- 12 Indeed, YHWH gives what is good,  
and our land yields its increase.*
- 13 Justice goes before His face  
and makes the path for his steps.*

### **Proposed Interpretation**

As noted prior, translation impacts interpretation. The proposed translation differs from most translations in two ways: the verbal form in 10b is translated differently and the first noun of the second noun pair in 10b is likewise translated differently. As will be seen, these changes force significant changes in interpretation. We shall proceed verse by verse.

The common interpretation of verse 10 posits all four nouns as qualities of YHWH. However, leaving open the character of the meeting of steadfast love and faithfulness in 10a makes positing both of these references to YHWH potentially questionable. Further, placing Justice and peace in 10b in the context of a contentious meeting makes positing both references to YHWH largely untenable. Thus, we must locate different referents for at least two of the terms, one in each pair.

It seems that the reasonable choice of a second referent for two of the terms is found in Israel. Coetzee pursues a similar line and posits “faithfulness” in 10a and “peace” in 10b as references to Israel.<sup>29</sup> He thus attributes “steadfast love” and “justice” to YHWH.<sup>30</sup> The terms, and how they come together, then flesh out the relationship between YHWH and the people/land, and it is fitting that the references to

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29. Coetzee, “Psalm 85,” 561.

30. Ibid. Note that Coetzee uses “righteousness” in place of “justice.”

YHWH begin each verse. More specifically, the terms then signify “a relationship of unity and wholeness” between YHWH and the people.<sup>31</sup> However, Coetzee understands the coming together of the terms as a wholly positive encounter, as he sees “meet” only in positive terms and he translates the verb in 10b as “kiss.”<sup>32</sup> Our revised understanding of the verbs does not allow this, but neither does the historical relationship between YHWH and Israel justify this. It is proposed herein that Israel’s changing response to YHWH’s love indicates that the verb “meet” in verse 10a must be understood in both a positive sense and a negative sense. YHWH’s love is not met with consistent faithfulness. The meeting of YHWH’s love and the people’s faithfulness is at times a positive encounter and at times results in rejection on the people’s part. Likewise, as Israel’s history teaches, YHWH’s justice and the people’s response to His justice fight their way to peace in the land.

Considering the above, the reinterpretation of verse 10 allows us to look at the terms in a relational way between YHWH and Israel, and the altered understanding of the verbal forms allows us to ground this understanding in Israel’s history. Further, verse 11 supports this relational understanding. As verse 11 notes, faithfulness springs from the earth (from the land and from the people); YHWH’s love, by implication, meets it, but also is the ground for it. As verse 11 continues, justice looks down from heaven. Again, by implication, it meets peace on earth, but, also again, it is the foundation for this peace. The meetings are contentious, as acceptance on Israel’s part is neither automatic nor complete and consistent. Verses 12 and 13 make clear the results of the coming together of YHWH’s steadfast love and justice with, respectively, Israel’s faithfulness and earthly peace; and, as Eder notes, “the essential aspect is that they come together.”<sup>33</sup>

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31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Eder, “Justice and Peace,” 399.

In summary, then, verses 10 through 13 display a relational dynamic between YHWH and the people. These relations are delineated by the noun pairs and by the choice of verbs in verse 10. The results of the relational dynamic are clearly displayed in terms of YHWH's following actions, the people's hearts and the land's status. Steadfast love, faithfulness, justice and peace all come together, but not in the manner in which the common interpretation posits.<sup>34</sup> However, it must be noted that, despite the fact that the interpretation takes into account the general nature of Israel's history, the interpretation up to this point understands the verses in isolation from the remainder of the psalm and from Book III in which the psalm resides.

### **PROPOSED INTERPRETATION, FIRST TWO STANZAS AND OVERALL PSALM MESSAGE**

It will be recalled that Psalm 85 was prior characterized as a prayerful request by a complainant for the remission of YHWH's anger and the resulting salvation, the basis of which is YHWH's *hesed* and past action. This characterization points to how the proposed interpretation of verses 10 through 13 (with verses 8 and 9 added) fits with the other two stanzas and with the psalm as a whole.<sup>35</sup> To facilitate this understanding, we shall distill each stanza into a central message in order to see how each follows on the next and thus fits the overall

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34. Interestingly, deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner also understand the coming together as that which ends the estrangement and separation between YHWH and Israel. Specifically, they understand the coming together of the terms in YHWH to be the foundation of the coming together of YHWH and the people (658). The authors therefore do not understand YHWH as the referent of two terms and Israel (the land/people) as the referent of the other two; rather, they identify a simile between the coming together of the terms in YHWH and the coming together of YHWH and Israel (658).

35. Verses 8 and 9 technically compose a stanza of their own, but here we will take the two verses in conjunction with verses 10 through 13, for they too follow the petition of the second stanza and reference restoration.

message. We shall begin with the third stanza and work backwards to the first.

Zucker notes that verse 13 is a summary of the preceding three verses.<sup>36</sup> As a summary of the preceding three verses, it presents a vision of a restored relationship between YHWH and creation. deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner sum up the entire third stanza by calling it a “vision of the world restored.”<sup>37</sup> The restoration involved struggle, as we noted in the above interpretation, but it ended the estrangement; it is salvation through a renewed relationship. Such restoration, though, must follow on the heels of human petition, as the need for restoration is a function of human disobedience and rejection. Thus, preceding the third stanza we find a four-verse petition. deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner characterize the second stanza in just this way, as “petitions for God’s forgiveness now.”<sup>38</sup> The final stanza (with verses 8 and 9 included) therefore flows naturally from the second stanza. deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner characterize the first stanza as “God’s actions of forgiveness in the past.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, the first stanza provides a basis for believing that YHWH will be receptive to petition. Further, the first stanza, like the third, focuses on YHWH’s actions and the restored relationship that results from those actions. YHWH’s historical actions and the resulting restoration in the first stanza do not have the same level of detail as found in verses 10 through 13, but the struggle of verses 10 through 13 can be ferreted out of the clear disobedience and rejection alluded to in the historical references of the initial verses.

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36. Zucker, “Restructuring,” 53.

37. deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 655.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

### **FITTING THE PROPOSED INTERPRETATION WITH BOOK III**

Book III opens and closes with the question, “How long?” Psalms 74 and 89 pose this question directly.<sup>40</sup> The “how long” posed by the psalmist is, of course, in reference to YHWH’s anger. The psalm directly at the center of Book III, Psalm 81, provides the foundation for YHWH’s anger. In Psalm 81, Verses 9 through 13 present YHWH’s reasons for His anger, and verses 14 through 17 note what would transpire if YHWH’s anger were quelled by Israel’s rectification of its behavior. Now, it is certainly the case that other psalms in Book III ask how long YHWH will maintain His anger, and other psalms address the foundation of YHWH’s anger. In fact, the overall themes of YHWH’s anger and the psalmist’s question of “how long” His anger will persist are central themes of Book III. deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner note that the anger of YHWH, which dominates Book III, is a community concern.<sup>41</sup> Having been shaped by Israel’s exile, Book III thus takes a drastic turn from the “high note” of Psalm 72.<sup>42</sup>

How, then, does Psalm 85, as interpreted above, fit Book III? In short, Psalm 85 is a microcosm of Book III. YHWH’s anger and the petition for its cessation are central. How long YHWH’s anger will last is not known. More importantly herein, the reinterpreted verses 10 through 13 hearken back to Book II’s ending high point and look forward to Book IV’s intercession by connecting the steadfast love of YHWH with the people’s faithfulness and by connecting YHWH’s justice with the peace that the land will exhibit as a function of this justice. Further, the struggle that is inherent in verse 10’s verbs, when those verbs are understood as “meet” (without committing to a positive meaning) and “fight,” brings out the exilic character of Book III.

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40. Of course, Psalm 73, not Psalm 74, technically begins Book III.

41. deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 581.

42. Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

In verses 10 through 13, through forgiveness and restoration, Psalm 85 presents a future resolution to YHWH's anger in the initial verses. However, the later verses do not lack a sense of struggle, for struggle is present even in the final four verses that delineate the unfolding of salvation. In fact, struggle is a central theme of these verses, as the verbs "meet" (in a qualitatively ambiguous sense) and "fight" demonstrate. Further, the Hebrew of the *textus receptus* supports this understanding. Translating the verbs in this way requires that we ascribe two qualities referenced by the noun pairs in 10a and 10b to YHWH and two qualities to the people/land. Most interpretations do not bring out the struggle in these final verses, but, considering the overall feel of Book III and the surrounding psalms, struggle is to be expected and is in keeping with the psalm's placement. Thus, the proposed translation and interpretation, the resulting internal consistency of Psalm 85, the fit of the psalm in Book III and the received Hebrew text allow us to assert the thesis proposed at the outset: the final four verses of Psalm 85, though they delineate the unfolding of salvation (forgiveness and restoration), maintain the element of struggle that characterize Book III and the psalms therein; further, understanding the verses in this way make for a better fit between the particular verses, the entire psalm and their location in Book III of the Psalter.

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