

HANDOUTS

Women's Ways of Blessing YHWH: A Speech Act Analysis of Poetic Blessings in the Hebrew Bible

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Judges 5:2-9, BHS ¹	v	Author's formal translation	Notes
בְּפָרַע פָּרַעוּת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהִתְנַדֵּב עִם בְּרַכּוּ יְהוָה:	2	When men fully dedicate themselves in Israel, ² When people offer themselves willingly, Bless YHWH!	<i>Piel</i> imperative call to bless YHWH. Phonetic repetition of בָּ.
שִׁמְעוּ מַלְכִים הֶאֱזִינוּ רוֹגִים אֲנֹכִי לַיהוָה אֲנֹכִי אֲשִׁירָה אֲזַמְּרָה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	3	Hear, kings! Give ear, rulers! I, to YHWH, I will sing. I will hymn to YHWH, the God of Israel.	First bicolon contains two parallel lines with imperative (<i>Qal</i> and <i>Hiphil</i>) calls to hear. The second bicolon contains two parallel lines praising YHWH in 1cs.
יְהוָה בְּצֵאתְךָ מִשֵּׁיר בְּצִעְדְךָ מִשְׂדֵּה אֲדוֹם אֶרֶץ רָעָשָׁה גַּם שָׁמַיִם נָטְפוּ גַּם יָעָבוּ גִטְפוּ מַיִם:	4	YHWH, when you went out from Seir When you marched out from the fields of Edom land trembled, also heavens dropped, also clouds dropped water.	A Phonetic and verbal repetition. B C C'
הָרִים נָזְלוּ מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה זֶה סִינַי מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	5	Mountain quaked before YHWH, even Sinai, before YHWH, the God of Israel.	B' A'
בִּימֵי שִׁמְגָר בֶּן־עֲנַת בִּימֵי יַעֲלֵל חָדְלוּ אֲרָחוֹת וְהַלְכֵי נְחִיבוֹת לָבוּ אֲרָחוֹת עֲקֻלְקוֹלֹת:	6	In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael roads were abandoned, and the walkers of paths walked on crooked roads.	Peak of verbal repetition.
חָדְלוּ פְּרוּזֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל חָדְלוּ עַד שִׁקְמַתִּי דְבוּרָה שִׁקְמַתִּי אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:	7	Villagers abandoned in Israel, abandoned, until I arose, Deborah, I arose, a mother in Israel. ³	Incremental repetition of in Israel mark the rise of Deborah.
יִבְחַר אֱלֹהִים חֲדָשִׁים אִז לָחֵם שִׁעָרִים מִגֹּז אִם־יִרְאָה וְרִמָּה בְּאַרְבָּעִים אֶלֶף בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:	8	God chose new men, ⁴ then war was in the gates. Was a shield seen and a spear among forty thousand in Israel?	
לִבִּי לְחֻזְקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִמְתַּנְּדָבִים בְּעַם בְּרַכּוּ יְהוָה:	9	My heart is with the commanders of Israel, those who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless YHWH!	<i>Piel</i> imperative call to bless YHWH. Repetition of נָדַב and עָם from verse 2.

Figure 1, Poetic Analysis: The yellow markings indicate the *inclusio* that frames this portion of the Song of Deborah. Phonetic repetition marked with red. Repeated words within close proximity marked with green.

¹ Vrije Universiteit Werkgroep Informatica, ed., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: With Werkgroep Informatica, Vrije Universiteit Morphology* (Bellingham, Wash.: Logos Bible Software, 2006), Jdg 5:2–9.

² Craigie, “Note on Judges 5,” 397–99.

³ C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges, with Introduction and Notes*, Reprint (New York: KTAV Pub. House, 1970), 171–76; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 195. Some scholars interpret this as an archaic second person feminine singular ending. This is plausible, however, the argumentation regarding the absence of אָנִי and the connection to verse 12 where Deborah is addressed in third person feminine singular are not considered sufficient arguments for reinterpreting what appears to be a first common singular ending. To translate the verb as “I arose” is also in line with the first person singular suffix in verse 9 and the first person singular verbs of verse 3. For further analysis, see Burney and Webb.

⁴ Craigie, “Some Further Notes on the Song of Deborah,” 350–51. Some scholars interpret this passage as “they chose new gods,” indicating apostasy as the reason for the war against the Canaanites. That translation is however, not in accordance with the Hebrew or the context. As Craigie has argued, “God chose new men” is a better rendering of the Hebrew, and since there is nothing in the Song of Deborah or in the Deborah-Barak narrative that indicates apostasy as the reason for war, it is more probable that the meaning refers to God’s preparation for war.

v.	Judges 5:2-9, Author's formal translation	Speech act	Function
2ab	When the leaders took lead in Israel, When people offered themselves willingly,	Assertive Words to match world ☞ to match → ☞ ⁵	Description of context. Reasons for praise
c	Bless YHWH!	Directive (Primary) World to match words ☞ to match → ☞ Expressive/Commissive World ← match → Word ☞ ← match → ☞ World to match words ☞ to match → ☞	Call to praise as praise
3ab	Hear, kings! Give ear, rulers!	Directive World to match words ☞ to match → ☞	Call to listen
c, d	I, to YHWH, I will sing. I will hymn to YHWH, the God of Israel.	Expressive (Primary) World ← match → Word ☞ ← match → ☞ Directive/Commissive World to match words ☞ to match → ☞	Liturgical praise. Thiselton notes, "Thus the utterance " <i>I give thanks</i> to Thee, O Lord, with my whole heart" (Psalm 138:1) does not function to inform God about a state of mind, but has the force of an act of thanksgiving." ⁶ "Liturgy typically involves what Searle terms expressive illocutions and Austin, behabitive performatives." ⁷
9a	My heart is with the commanders of Israel,	Expressive World ← match → Word ☞ ← match → ☞	Expresses the speaker's psychological state. "The paradigms of expressive verbs are 'thank', 'congratulate', 'apologize', 'condole', 'deplere', and 'welcome'. ⁸
b	who offered themselves willingly among the people.	Assertive Words to match the world ☞ to match → ☞	Reasons for emotional expression.
c	Bless YHWH!	Directive (Primary) World to match words ☞ to match → ☞ Expressive/Commissive World ← match → Word ☞ ← match → ☞ World to match words ☞ to match → ☞	Call to praise as praise

Figure 2, Speech act analysis: For the sake of space, the speech act analysis is focused on verses 2–3 and 9. These verses are relevant for the current study given their focus on blessing YHWH.

⁵ These symbols are not standard in speech act theory. They are used here by the authors to help differentiate meaning, as world and word are similar in spelling and sound.

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 299.

⁷ Thiselton, 299.

⁸ Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 14.

Ruth 4:13–17, BHS ⁹	v.	Author's formal translation	
וַיִּקַּח בְּעֹז אֶת־רוּת	13a	Then Boaz took Ruth	A Narrative
וַתְּהִי־לֵוָּ לְאִשָּׁה וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ	b	and she became for him as a wife. And he entered in her.	
וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לָּהּ הַרְיוֹן	c	And YHWH gave to her a pregnancy,	
וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן:	d	and she bore a son	
וַתֹּאמְרֵנָה הַנָּשִׁים אֶל־נָעֳמִי	14a	Then the women said to Naomi,	B Women—blessing (poetic)
בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה	b	“Blessed be YHWH,	
אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָּךְ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם	c	who has not failed for you a redeemer this day	
וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:	c	And may his name be famous/proclaimed in Israel!	
וְהָיָה לָּךְ לְמַשִּׁיב נְפֹשׁ וּלְכֹלְכֵל אֶת־שִׁבְתְּךָ	15a	He will be for you a restorer of life and a sustainer (for) your old age.	B Women—blessing (poetic)
כִּי כָל־תֵּד אֶשְׂרָא־הַבְּתוּלָה יִלְדֶתוּ אֲשֶׁר־הִיא טוֹבָה לָּךְ מִשִּׁבְעָה בָּנִים:	b	For your daughter-in-law, who loves you, she bore him, she, who is better for you than seven sons.”	
וַתִּקַּח נָעֳמִי אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד	16a	Then Naomi took the child	A' Narrative
וַתִּשְׁתְּהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ	b	and placed him on her bosom	
וַתְּהִי־לֵוָּ לְאִמָּנָת:	c	and she became for him as a nurse/foster-mother.	
וַתִּקְרָאנָה לּוֹ הַשְּׂכָנֹת שֵׁם לְאָמֵר	17a	And the women of the neighborhood named him, saying,	B' Women—actions
יֶלֶד־בֵּן לְנָעֳמִי	b	“A son has been born to Naomi.”	
וַתִּקְרָאנָה שְׁמוֹ עֹבֵד	c	They called his name Obed.	
הוּא אָבִי־יֵשׁוּ אָבִי דָוִד: פ	d	He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.	

Figure 3, Contextual Analysis: Narrative statements (A and A') surround the women's blessing of YHWH (B), and the text closes with the correlative action of the women (B').

⁹ Vrije Universiteit Werkgroep Informatica, ed., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: With Werkgroep Informatica, Vrije Universiteit Morphology* (Bellingham, Wash.: Logos Bible Software, 2006).

Ruth 4:14–15, BHS	v.	Author's formal translation	Notes
ותאמרנה הנשים אל-נעמי	14a	Then the women said to Naomi,	
ברוך יהוה אשר לא השבית לך גאל היום	b	“Blessed be YHWH, who has not left you without (failed/let cease for you) a redeemer this day.	<i>barukh</i> formula A
ויקרא שמו בישראל:	c	And may his name be famous/proclaimed in Israel!	A'
והיה לך למשיב נפש ולכלכל את שיבתך	15a	He will be for you a restorer of life and a sustainer for your old age.	B B'
כי כלתך אשר-אהבתך ילדתו אשר-היא טובה לך משבעה בנים:	b	For your daughter-in-law, who loves you, she bore him, she, who is better for you than seven sons.”	

Figure 4, Poetic Analysis 1: The phonological parallelism¹⁰ in parasonantic wordplay (see footnote 107) includes fourfold consonants *Shin* or *Sin* and *Bet* with the *Hireq* vowel three times (blue); the assonance of the *Kaf* and *Lamed* consonants (green); and the sixfold pulsating second feminine singular pronominal suffix (yellow), referring to Naomi.

Word	v.	Author's Translation	Subject correlation
השבית	14b	“...YHWH, who has not left you without (<i>failed/let cease</i> for you) a redeemer...	YHWH
למשיב	15a	He will be for you a restorer of life	Obed
שיבתך	15a	and a sustainer for your old age ...	Naomi
משבעה	15b	she who is better for you than <i>seven</i> sons.”	Ruth

Figure 5, Poetic Analysis 2: A fourfold parasonantic wordplay with the consonants *Shin* or *Sin* and *Bet* with the *Hireq* vowel three times highlight and unite Naomi's restoration that weaves together all four subjects in this poetic proclamation: YHWH, Obed, Naomi, Ruth. The conceptual pair of “restorer of life” and “sustainer for your old age” highlights the redeemer's role in v. 15a (green).

¹⁰ Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 103.

v.	Ruth 4:14–15, Author’s formal translation	Speech act	Function
14a	Then the women said to Naomi,		Narrative introduction
b	“Blessed be YHWH, who has not left you without (failed/let cease for you) a redeemer this day.	Expressive World ←match→ Word ☛ ←match→ ☜ Assertive Words to match the world ☛ to match→ ☜	Primarily praise as Expressive: “...express the psychological state specified in the sincerity conditioned about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content.” ¹¹ Rationale for praise of YHWH as Assertive: “...commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something’s being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition,” and can be assessed by true or false. ¹²
c	And may his name be famous/proclaimed in Israel!	Directive World to match words ☜ to match→ ☛	Interpersonal blessing in vocative/jussive (women to Obed) as Directive: “...are attempts (of varying degrees ...) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something.” ¹³
15a	He will be for you a restorer of life and a sustainer for your old age.	Declarative (Primary) World to match words ☜ to match→ ☛ Directive (Secondary) World to match words ☜ to match→ ☛	Hopeful, descriptive assessment as Declarative: “It is the defining characteristic of this class that the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality.” ¹⁴ Secondarily as Directive, encouraging Naomi.
b	For your daughter-in-law, who loves you, she bore him, she who is better for you than seven sons.”	Assertive Words to match the world ☛ to match→ ☜ Directive World to match words ☜ to match→ ☛ Declarative World to match words ☜ to match→ ☛ Expressive World ←match→ Word ☛ ←match→ ☜	Declarations of Ruth’s character as Assertive Encouragement to Naomi as Directive Declaration of Ruth’s contribution as Declarative Commending Ruth’s character as Expressive

Figure 6, Speech act analysis: An analysis of the women’s poetic proclamation demonstrates different illocutionary speech act categories. Due the limited scope of this examination with a focus on “expressives,” only short summaries of the other categories by Searle are included.

¹¹ Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 15.

¹² Searle, 12–13.

¹³ Searle, 13.

¹⁴ Searle, 16–17.