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LOYALTY, DEPENDENCY AND STATUS WITH YHWH: THE USE OF 'BD IN THE PSALMS

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The term עבד can have a variety of metaphorical meanings in the Hebrew Bible.¹ One commonly noted metaphorical meaning is 'worship': as a verb, 'to worship'²; and as a noun, 'worshipper' (e.g. for individuals). This meaning occurs frequently in Psalms (e.g. Pss 27:9; 79:2; 105:15[14];³ 116:16; 119 *passim*).⁴ However, little study has been done in the context of the use of עבד in Psalms. As a result, meanings for the term are determined that do not adequately reflect the context of use. For example, the lexica simply list references that they best understand to match a meaning. Zimmerli and Jeremias inadequately refer to Psalms in their study on עבד. Goldingay in his commentary determines a meaning for עבד in Ps 86:2-4 and then applies that meaning when the term appears in other psalms.⁵ Another result is that nuances of meanings for the term that arise from the context of use are missed. For example, only occasionally do scholars comment that עבד is found in the context of supplication and so could take on the meaning, 'supplicant' (e.g. 143:11-12; also Ex 4:10; Num 11:11; Dt 3:24).⁶

This study seeks to redress this lack of study of עבד in Psalms by studying all metaphorical uses of עבד, with a focus on the context of each use of the term. Both verb and noun forms will be covered. For the former, the subject and object will be covered and from that, how the verb is used. For the latter, the study will cover whether the term is used in the singular or plural, applied to named people, other people or things, Israel or to the speaking voice in the psalm; and the speaking context.

The noun form of עבד appears 56 times in Psalms: 18:1[ET: title]; 19:12 [11], 14[13]; 27:9; 31:17[16]; 34:23[22]; 35:27; 36:1[ET: title]; 69:18[17]; 69:37[36]; 78:70; 79:02, 10; 86:2, 4, 16; 89:4[3], 21[20], 40[39], 51[50]; 90:13, 16; 102:15[14], 29[28]; 105:6, 17, 25, 26, 42; 109:28; 113:1; 116:16; 119:17, 23, 38, 49, 65, 76, 84, 91, 122, 124, 125, 135, 140, 176; 123:2;

¹ F. Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, W. Gesenius, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, 1979 [1907]), pp. 712-715; W. Zimmerli, J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (SBT; transs. H. Knight, J. Jeremias and others; London, 1965), pp. 11-36. C.f. W.C. Kaiser, "עבד ('abad), work, serve", in R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke (eds), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, 1980), p. 639; and Haas, C.H., "Slave, Slavery", in T.D. Alexander, D.W. Baker (eds), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Leicester, 2003), p. 779.

² Noted by C.C. Broyles, *Psalms* (NIBC; Peabody, 1999), p. 386; c.f. p.393.

³ All references will follow the Masoretic Text. Where the English text differs, this will be noted with square brackets.

⁴ For lexical and dictionary type articles, see, e.g. Brown et al, pp. 714; Zimmerli and Jeremias, pp. 15, 18; Haas, 779; Kaiser, 639; K.H. Rengstorff, "Δούλος, κτλ", in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. 2* (trans., G.W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, 1964), pp. 261-280.

Many other scholars also note this meaning for עבד: see, e.g. M.J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (NSBT; Leicester, 1999), p. 173 (following Zimmerli and Jeremias); B.G. Wright, "Ebed/Doulos: Terms and Social Status in the Meeting of Hebrew Biblical and Hellenistic Roman Culture", *Semeia* 83/84 (1998), p. 86; D.E. Callender Jr., "Servants of God(s), and Servants of Kings in Israel and the Ancient Near East", *Semeia* 83/84 (1998), p. 73; S. Schultz, *Gott ist kein Sklavenhalter, Die Geschichte einer verspäteten Revolution* (Zürich and Hamburg, 1972), cited in M. Barth, H. Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon* ECC (Grand Rapids, 2000), p. 69, fn. 193; A.A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (NCBC; London, 1972), p. 286.

⁵ Zimmerli and Jeremias, 15-19; J. Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 2: Psalms 42-89* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids, 2007), pp. 619-621, 513, 521, 662, 689.

⁶ E.g. Jeremias and Zimmerli, p. 16; c.f. Harris, p. 174; Kaiser, p. 639.

LITERAL USE OF עֲבַד IN PSALMS

In Psalms, all uses of עֲבַד are metaphoric, except for Pss 105:17 and 123:2.⁸ In Ps 105:17, as part of a review of Israel's history, Joseph is mentioned as having been sold as a slave. In Ps 123:2, the practice of slaves watching for their master or mistress' hand signals is used as an illustration for the plural speaking voice in the psalm. Yet the illustration is itself a metaphor (technically, a simile). Even though the imagery of slaves trained to watch for the smallest gesture that means some task to do reflects 'the abject dependency of the slave to his master',⁹ the psalmist uses it for a positive image of trust that YHWH will intervene in a bad situation (vv.3-4).¹⁰ The master and mistress' *hand* in v.2 has become a hand of benefaction,¹¹ of graciousness. However, it still connotes loyalty and submission to YHWH¹²: the worshippers have to 'watch' YHWH intently and wait for YHWH to be gracious to them. This metaphoric use of the illustration in Ps 123:2 encapsulates much of the metaphoric use of עֲבַד in Psalms: it is often a term of deference to YHWH and implies loyalty to him, yet at the same time, trust in YHWH is implied.

METAPHORIC USE OF עֲבַד IN PSALMS

Verb form of עֲבַד

Despite only eight uses of the verb form of עֲבַד in the Psalms, all uses are metaphorical and there is a large combination of subjects and objects for the verb. The subject can be foreign kings/rulers (2:11; 18:44[43]; 72:11), foreigners (102:23[22]), worshippers of idols (97:7), or Israel (100:2; 106:36). The object can be YHWH (2:11; 22:31[30]; 100:2; 102:23[22]), idols (97:7; 106:36) or the Israelite king (18:44[43]; 72:11).

The meaning of the verb form is tied to its object. In the context of deity, עֲבַד means 'to worship' (2:11; 22:32[31]; 97:7; 100:2; 102:23[22]; 106:36), and in the context of kings, עֲבַד means 'to be subject to, as a vassal' (18:44[43]; 72:11). The latter meaning occurs elsewhere in the Bible (e.g. Judg 3:14; 2 Sam 10:19; 2 Kgs 10:8; 18:7), but in Psalms the focus is on the nations submitting to the Israelite king, not Israelites to foreign kings. The former meaning, 'to worship', occurs frequently in relation to God or to idols (e.g. Ex 4:23; Josh 24:14; 1 Kgs 9:9; Ezek 20:40). This meaning for עֲבַד is established in references such as 1 Kgs 9:9 and Ps 97:7, where עֲבַד is paralleled with the root, שָׁחָה, 'to bow down, do obeisance'. However, even שָׁחָה is sometimes translated as 'to worship',¹³ which also helps to establish עֲבַד as carrying

⁷ L. Lisowsky (ed.), *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart, 1958), pp. 1009-1018; S. Mandelkern, et al., *Concordance on the Bible* (New York, 1955), pp. 809-815.

⁸ However, M. Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 17b; Garden City, 1970), p. 131 argues, for Pss 113:1; 134:1 and 135:1, that עֲבַדֵי יְהוָה in the MT should be repointed to read *the works of the LORD*; that is עֲבַדֵי should carry the literal meaning of 'works' in these three psalms.

⁹ R. Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York, 2007), p. 441.

¹⁰ Anderson, p. 858; D. Kidner, *Psalms* (TOTC; Leicester, 1973, 1975), p. 435. O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Trans. T.J. Hallett; New York, 1978), p. 320, neatly illustrates the thought of Ps 123:2 with a picture of Assyrian captives watching the hands of an overseer for their rations.

¹¹ Dahood, 1970, p. 209

¹² Kidner, p. 435; Anderson, p. 858.

¹³ So NASB, NIV, also R. Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 320.

lent.’

However, the meaning of עבד can be fluid, even in the same psalm. In Ps 2:11, עבד could mean either ‘to be subject, as a vassal’ or ‘to worship’. This is because the ‘service’ that foreign rulers (from v.10) are to perform is וגילו ברעדה נשקו־בר (NRSV: *with trembling [v.12] kiss the feet*), the language of submission to an overlord. Despite major translation, interpretational, and textual issues with this clause,¹⁵ the sense is clear enough: the nations’ rulers are called to submit to YHWH’s king in Israel. Behind this is the thought, as the kings are to be subject to YHWH’s king, they therefore are to be subject to YHWH too. But translating the clause to mean worshipping YHWH as a deity in his own right is also possible.¹⁶ Even in Ps 97:7, עבד and שחה could be swapped without loss of meaning. If this was done, עבד would have the sense, ‘to be subject to’, but שחה could retain its meaning of ‘to bow down, do obeisance’. A comparison of the call to worship in Ps 100:2 with Pss 95:6 and 96:9 indicates further that עבד is in effect a synonym to שחה (95:6; 96:9) and two other terms, כרע (‘to bow down’) and ברך (‘to kneel’) (95:6). These parallel calls to worship, with their different terms, allow עבד in 100:2 to take the meaning, ‘to submit’. The issue behind this discussion is that of increasing metaphorical use: the metaphorical meaning of עבד as ‘to give allegiance, to submit as to an overlord’ is moved to the yet more metaphorical realm of worship and allegiance to a deity.

To summarise, the verb form of עבד in Psalms is used only with the metaphorical meanings of ‘to be subject to’ and ‘to worship’. Both these meanings map from the literal meaning, ‘to serve’. The former meaning, however, is used with the Israelite kings as receiving ‘service’ from the nations; therefore they are in high status. The latter meaning is similar to the meaning of a number of other Hebrew terms for the worship of deity, either of YHWH or idols.

Noun form of עבד

The metaphorical use of the noun form of עבד in Psalms is complex. First, there are six categories of ‘slaves/servants’, all of which relate to YHWH: creation (119:91 – *By your appointment they stand today, for all things are your servants* [עבדיך] [NRSV]); Israel as a nation (עבדיך [79:2; 102:15[14]]; עבדיו – *his servants* [105:25; 135:14]; לִישְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדוּ – *to his servant Israel* [136:22]); named individuals (Pss 18:1[title]; 36:1[title]; 78:70; 89:4[3], 21[20], 40[39]; 105:6, 26, 42; 132:10; 144:10); other peoples (102:29[28]); worshippers as a group (עבדיו – *his servants* [34:23[22]; 69:37[36]]; עֲבָדֵי יְהוָה – *servants of the LORD* [113:1; 134:1; 135:1]¹⁷); and the speaker in the psalm. Second, עבד, when used in connection with the speaker in the psalm, is used in two contexts: supplication and claims of loyalty to YHWH.

¹⁴ Broyles, p. 386.

¹⁵ Noted by many commentators; e.g. Anderson, pp. 69-70; Kidner, pp. 52-53; Davidson, p. 18; J.H. Eaton, *The Psalms* (London, 2003), p. 66; Goldingay, J., *Psalms Volume 1: Psalms 1-41* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids, 2006), pp. 93-94 [list of scholars]. There are two issues: the combination of וגילו with ברעדה; and the meaning of נשקו־בר. For the former, the NRSV follows a common emendation that ignores or translates וגילו as ‘tremble’ (also Anderson, Davidson; c.f. Brown et al, p. 162) but a number of recent commentators (e.g. Goldingay, Alter, Broyles, Eaton), accept the MT (*rejoice with trembling*). For the latter, scholars accept the NRSV translation; suggest *kiss the son*; or suggest *do sincere homage* (following ancient commentators).

¹⁶ So Eaton, 2003, pp. 64-66.

¹⁷ See fn. 8 for Dahood’s interpretation of עבד in these verses.

he use of עבד for foreigners' actions in 102:23[22] encourages the interpretation that עבדיך in v.29[28] also has the peoples of the world in mind, though of course including Israel/Judah.

In regards to עבד denoting worshippers as a group, it could be argued that עבדיו in Pss 34:23[22] and 69:37[36] could be a form of deference of the speaking voice to YHWH, but the way the text in which the term occurs changes in both psalms argues against this.²² The placing of עבדיו in Ps 34 immediately with *those who take refuge in him* in v.23[22] and more widely, *the righteous* (vv.16[15]-20[19]), and in Ps 69 with *those who love his name* in v.37[36], indicates עבדיו is a descriptor for YHWH's faithful worshippers. In Pss 113:1; 134:1 and 135:1, עבדי יהוה is connected with a 'you' in the psalm, given its use with the imperative, *praise or bless the LORD*. That is, the audience of these psalms are the עבדי יהוה. Nearly all commentators for the three psalms understand עבדי יהוה to be the worshipping congregation, helped by Ps 135:19-20, which indicates that עבדי יהוה in 135:1 covers the priests, Levites and those who *fear the LORD*.

עבד AS A TERM OF DEFERENCE BEFORE YHWH

The occurrence of עבד in connection with the voice in the psalms is the most frequent use and usually as a form of deference before YHWH. There are two types of use.

¹⁸ C.f. Eaton, 2003, p. 287, Davidson, p. 260, Kidner, p. 286, and Anderson, p. 577, all who imply that the psalmist refers to Israel. Goldingay, 2007, pp. 521-522 is more explicit: עבדיך refers to the people of Israel. In contrast is A. Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. H. Hartwell; London, 1962), p. 544: the psalmist refers to the worshipping community (i.e. the pious) only.

¹⁹ Most recent commentators, e.g. Eaton, 2003, p. 287; Broyles, p. 327; Alter, p. 281; Davidson, p. 260 (suggested rather than affirmed); Goldingay, 2007, pp. 519 (preferred); also Anderson, p. 577; Kidner, p. 286. Many commentators link Ps 79 with Ps 74 (e.g. Davidson, Eaton, Goldingay).

²⁰ So Anderson, pp. 286, 708; Weiser, pp. 653, 654;

²¹ Implied in Davidson, p. 332, in his understanding that 'the psalmist sees, mirrored in his own suffering, the plight of the community'; also Eaton, 2003, p. 355, in which he understands the individual in the psalm to represent the community. Alter, p. 355, simply assumes עבדיך refers to the nation.

²² Ps 34:16[15]-23[22] is a teaching segment that does not involve the 'I' voice of the psalm; Ps 69:35[34]-37[36] is recognised to be a song of, or exhortation to, praise that focuses on the restoration of Zion, not the deliverance of the voice in the psalm. See, e.g. Broyles, pp. 168, 288; Eaton, 2003, p. 155; Kidner, pp. 141, 245; Davidson, p. 221; Anderson, p. 499.

The first type of use is the more typical (26 times [13 times in Ps 119]). This is the singular עבדך (*your servant*) in connection with an individual ('I') voice in a psalm, for example:

*Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all day long.
Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. (Ps 86:2-4; NRSV)*

*Even though princes sit plotting against me,
Your servant will meditate on your statutes. (Ps 119:23; NRSV)*

The second type of use is the plural, עבדיך (*your servants*) in connection with a plural voice ('we') (four times: Pss 79:10; 89:51[50]²³; 90:13, 16), for example:

*Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"
Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants
Be known among the nations before our eyes. (79:10; NRSV)*

The connection of עבדך and עבדיך with the voice in the psalm allows for the interpretation of עבד as a term of deference before YHWH. In most cases, the connection is close, as in Ps 86:2, *Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you* (also 86:4, 16; 19:14[13]; 27:9; 35:27; 69:18[17]; 79:10; 90:13, 16; 109:28; 143:2; and especially in Ps 119). In effect, עבדך is a circumlocution for 'I' and עבדיך is a circumlocution for 'we'.

In three cases, however, the connection between the speaker in the psalm and עבד is explicit:

*O LORD, I am your servant (אנה יהוה כִּי־אני עבדך),
I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. (אני עבדך כִּי־אמתך).
You have loosed my bonds (Ps 116:16, NRSV)*

*I am your servant (עבדך־אני); give me understanding,
so that I may know of your decrees. (Ps 119:125, NRSV)*

*In you steadfast love cut off my enemies,
and destroy all my adversaries,
for I am your servant (כי אנה עבדך). (Ps 143:12, NRSV)*

This explicit connection of 'I' with עבד (עבדך is used as a predicate to 'I') not only shows that עבד is a term of deference before YHWH, but can be a substitute for 'I'.

This is borne out in the psalm references just noted for the close connection of עבד with 'I': each occurrence of עבדך could be substituted with the personal pronoun 'me'. That is, not only is עבד a term of deference before YHWH, it can also be used as a circumlocution for the voice in the psalm, 'I' or 'we'. It is this phenomenon that עבד can be substituted for 'I' or 'we' that makes it a term of deference before YHWH. Many commentators miss this connection of עבד with the voice of the psalm even when they recognise when עבדך and עבדיך

²³ There is a textual issue with עבדיך in Ps 89:51[50]. The MT, LXX and Jerome read the plural עבדיך, but the Syriac and other mss read the singular עבדך (see Anderson, p. 647). The NRSV and many commentators follow the Syriac, to make עבדך fit the 'I' voice speaking in the psalm in the verse (e.g. Davidson, p. 297; Broyles, p. 357; Kidner, p. 325). However, the plural also works, as it can refer back to the momentary change of voice to 'we' in vv.18[17]-19[18] (c.f. Goldingay, 2007, 689). That is, even though the 'I' speaks in v.51[50], it recognises that the congregation is also affected by the disaster it recounts. See Dahood, 1968, p. 320 for another interpretation.

CONTEXT OF USE OF עֲבַד AS A TERM OF DEFERENCE BEFORE YHWH

The use of עֲבַד as a term of deference before YHWH relates to a second aspect of the complexity of the use of the noun form of עֲבַד in Psalms: the context in which עֲבַד as a term of deference before YHWH appears. Two contexts are apparent: supplication and statements of loyalty or obedience to YHWH.

In regards to עֲבַד as used as a term of deference before YHWH in the context of supplication, the supplications are of three types: requests for protection or deliverance (15 times [four times in Ps 119], requests for help to be loyal to YHWH (13 times [eight times in Ps 119]), and general requests for YHWH's mercy or favour (17 times [six times in Ps 119]).

The category, 'requests for deliverance or protection', covers those supplications that use the language of human opposition or hostility to the voice in the psalm, e.g.

*Do not hide your face from your servant,
For I am in distress – make haste to answer me.
Draw near to me, to redeem me,
set me free because of my enemies.* (Ps 69:18-19[17-18] [NRSV])

*How long must your servant endure?
When will you judge those who persecute me?
The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me;
they flout your laws* (Ps 119:84-85 [NRSV])

In all cases, the use of עֲבַד as a term of deference before YHWH occurs only in the singular form (עֲבַדְךָ) and is connected with an individual (singular) voice in the psalm. That is, when עֲבַד as a circumlocution for 'I' appears in a context of supplication to YHWH about 'enemies', only the situation of the individual is contemplated.

The category, 'request for help to obey or be loyal to YHWH', covers those uses of עֲבַד as a term of deference before YHWH when a need for assistance to be loyal is expressed by the speaker, e.g.

*Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes,
and I will observe it to the end.
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
And observe it with my whole heart.
Lead me in the path of commandments,
for I delight in it.
Turn my heart to your decrees,
and not to selfish gain.
Turn my eyes from looking at vanities;
give me life in your ways.*

²⁴ Anderson, p. 225 (c.f. p.614), is an exception: he argues that all appearances in the Psalms of *your servant* (singular), are circumlocutions of 'I' (e.g. 19:12, 14[11, 13]; 27:9; 31:17[16]; 35:27; 69:18[17]; 86:4). Brown et al, p. 714, also recognises this to occur.

²⁵ E.g. Davidson, pp. 284, 382, 400; Goldingay, 2007, pp. 513, 521, 619-621, 669, 689. C.f. J.H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (SBT 32; London, 1976), p. 149.

²⁶ Davidson, p. 284; Goldingay, 2007, pp. 619-621; c.f. Eaton, 2003, p. 310; Kidner, p. 311.

*Confirm to your servant your promise,
which is for those who fear you. (Ps 119:33-38 [NRSV])*

This use of עבד as a term of deference before YHWH occurs only in the singular form (עבדך) and is also connected with an individual (singular) voice of the psalm. That is, when עבד as a circumlocution for ‘I’ appears in a context of supplication to YHWH about assistance to be loyal to YHWH, only the situation of the individual is contemplated, like for when עבד appears in connection with requests for protection or deliverance.

The category, ‘requests for YHWH’s mercy or favour’, covers those requests in which some favour or positive response is sought from YHWH, usually in a general way, e.g.

*Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.
Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper the work of our hands –
O prosper the work of our hands! (Ps 90:16-17 [NRSV])*

*Let your steadfast love become my comfort
according to your promise to your servant (Ps 119:76 [NRSV])*

When supplication for YHWH’s favour is coupled with other supplications, the ‘favour’ is sometimes specified: forgiveness (Ps 119:176; 143:2), freedom from sin (Ps 19:12[11]; 119:133-134), or YHWH not to be angry (Ps 27:9).

In contrast to the supplication contexts of protection or deliverance from human-caused problems and assistance to be loyal to YHWH, the context of supplication for YHWH’s favour includes עבד as a term of deference before YHWH in connection with the plural voice (Pss 79, 89, 90). In these psalms, motifs such as Israel’s defeat by foreign armies (Pss 79, 89), or Israel’s sinfulness and the people’s human mortality before YHWH (Ps 90) are present. In effect, the ‘we’ voice prays on behalf of the nation and asks YHWH to forgive and restore the nation.

The idea behind a request for help or deliverance from human caused-problems (enemies, accusers, etc) is easy enough to understand: the voice in the psalm is in trouble and asks YHWH to deliver him from that trouble. However, the reason why עבדך is used as an substitute for the ‘I’ in this context is not immediately apparent. Anderson suggests that the use of עבדך ‘is a more polite way of saying ‘me’’, recognised also by Brown et al.²⁷ That this is true is evidenced from, for example, ANE letters in which lesser status people use ‘servant’ as a term of deference to higher status or superior persons.²⁸ However, Anderson has not established a connection for the application of the term before deity. A better suggestion is that the language reflects the common ANE practice of people calling themselves a ‘servant’ of a deity, examples of which are found in the seal inscriptions of kings, temple staff (male and female), people of unknown status, and in literary (religious) texts.²⁹ This could be built

²⁷ Anderson, p. 225; Brown et al, 714, (עבד #6).

²⁸ E.g. H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago, 1948), p. 254 (Assyrian); F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, J.J.M. Roberts, C.L. Seow, R.E. Whitaker, *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven, London, 2005), pp. 306, 358-359 (Hebrew); B. Porten (ed. and trans.), *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans on Syene: Aramaic Texts with Translations* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 80-81, 83, 90 (Jews writing in Aramaic, in Egypt); A.E.-M. Bakir, *Slavery in Pharaonic Egypt* (ASALE Supp 18; Cairo, 1952), p. 21 (Egyptian).

²⁹ See, e.g. for seals, W.W. Hallo, “Seal Inscriptions”, in B. Buchanan (ed., *Early Near Eastern Seals in the Yale Babylonian Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 445, 455-462 [Babylonian seals]; B. Teisser, *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 336-337 [also Babylonian seals]; and N. Avigad, “The Contribution of Hebrew Seals to an Understanding of Israelite Religion

The problem with using power relations as the vehicle is that it is already metaphorical language, as discussed above for the verb form of עבד. עבד as ‘obedience’ or ‘worship’ is itself the tenor of a metaphor (to ‘serve’ YHWH or a king), of which a service or work relationship is the vehicle. It is certainly possible for one metaphor to be used as a vehicle for another metaphor (e.g. the existence of dead metaphors and conceptual metaphors indicate that metaphorical speech can become ‘literal’ over time), but the use of עבד in the second supplication context, request for help to be loyal to YHWH, suggests that the psalmists have gone back to the literal meanings of עבד to provide the vehicle for the עבדך metaphor. In this context, the request for help to be loyal is itself a statement of loyalty (the speaker wants to be loyal), but it also indicates a dependency on YHWH in order to do so. Both relate to the slave relationship with the master: slaves depend on their master just to be alive, and they are expected to serve the master. That is, the slave relationship is the vehicle for the tenor (relationship with YHWH).

It is also noteworthy that in the recognised ‘enthronement’ or ‘YHWH as heavenly king’ psalms (Pss 47, 93, 96-99), עבד does not appear. When the YHWH as king theme is applied to the worshipping congregation (in Pss 95, 100; not usually recognised as ‘heavenly king’ psalms³¹), imagery of *sheep*, *heritage*, and God as *Maker* are used. All these images connote ownership and control by YHWH (especially *heritage*; but *sheep* also alludes to a recognised ANE image of the monarch as *shepherd*³²), all of which match with the ownership implication in servant language. *Maker* alludes also to a recognised ANE motif in religious texts that the gods have created the individual worshipper who uses the text³³ and itself may carry the connotation of service to the gods, given that a number of Mesopotamian creation myths have humans created for the sole reason to serve the deities.³⁴

and Society”, in P.D. Miller Jr, P.D. Hanson, S.D. McBride (eds), *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 197-198 [Hebrew seal]. For religious texts, see the collection of texts in J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern texts relating to the Old Testament* 3rd Ed (Princeton, 1969), and articles such as W.G. Lambert, “Dingir.sa.dib.ba Incantations”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33 (1974), p. 279.

³⁰ See, e.g. Frankfort, pp. 6, 52-53, 60, 251; A.K. Grayson, “Assyrian Civilisation”, in *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. III, Part 2* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 196, 205; M.A. Dandamaev, “Neo-Babylonian Society and Economy”, in *The Cambridge Ancient History Volume vol III, Part 2* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 253; S. Smith, “The Practice of Kingship in Early Semitic Kingdoms”, in *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*, (ed., S.H. Hooke; Oxford, 1958), p. 24. See also E. Bridge, “Enslaved to an Artifice: a Study into the Truth behind the Title of Deference, ‘Slave/Servant’, as used in the Ancient Near East before the Time of Alexander The Great”, *Humanity* 2 (2008), (www.humanities.mq.edu.au/humanity/; forthcoming).

³¹ For Ps 95 as a ‘heavenly king’ psalm: C.H. Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (EBS; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), pp. 188, 195; S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship, in 2 Volumes* (trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), I, pp. 122, 156. For Ps 100 as a ‘heavenly king’ psalm: M. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 17; Garden City, 1968), p. 370. Both psalms are related to Pss 93, 96-99; e.g. YHWH is described as a king in Ps 95:3; the call to worship in Ps 100:1-2 (c.f. 98:4-6); and the ‘entrance’ theme in Ps 100:4 (c.f. 96:8) (c.f. D.M. Howard Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93-100* [BJS 5; Winona Lake, 1997], pp. 96-97, 180-181).

³² E.g. Frankfort, pp. 237, 238 (citing texts).

³³ Lambert, p. 279 (section I, line 79); H.G. Güterbock, “Hittite parallels”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33 (1974), pp. 323, 325 (CTH 374 text; Prayer of Kantuzzili, line 12 [also in Pritchard, pp. 400-401]).

³⁴ This is found in texts such as *Enuma Elish*; *Enki, Ninmakh, and the Creation of Mankind*; and *Epic of Atrahasis*. See, e.g. B.T. Arnold, B.E. Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East* (EBS; Grand Rapids, 2002), pp. 20, 21-25, 42-44. The question here is how much ancient Israelites knew of these myths, and at what point

When supplication for help to be loyal is combined with a request for protection or deliverance (Pss 27:9; 86; 119:134-135; 143:12) or with a request for YHWH's favour (Pss 27:9; Ps 86; Ps 119 passim; 143:2), the request for help to be loyal strengthens the other request. That is, the desire to be faithful to YHWH is tantamount to a declaration of loyalty to YHWH, and so the voice in the psalm deserves YHWH to favourably answer the other request. In this context, ANE power relationships could be a vehicle for the עבדך metaphor, suggested by an Egyptian painting in which a servant of the Egyptian king, Amenophis IV, does obeisance to his lord, and then is exalted by his peers, having been favoured by the king. Keel uses this to illustrate Pss 30:1; 118:28; 145:1 in combination with Pss 9:13 and 18:46³⁵ (see also Ps 145:14), all of which indicate that loyalty to YHWH results in favour.

However, that the primary vehicle for the עבדך metaphor is the social institution of slavery, not kingship, is made clear when עבד is used as a term of deference before YHWH in all three supplication contexts (Pss 27; 86; 119; 143); for example:

*Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.*

...

*O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians sees my life,
and they do not set you before them.*

...

*Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name*

...

*Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant;
save the child of your serving girl.
Show me a sign of your favor,
So that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame, ...*

(Ps 86:2ab, 11, 14, 16-17ab [NRSV])

The combination of all three supplication types gives a picture of utter dependence upon YHWH. This relates more closely to the situation of slavery, 'abject dependence' on the master,³⁶ than the common person in relation to the king. Ps 86:16 highlights this picture of utter dependence on YHWH by the use of *child of your serving girl* as a parallel for *your servant*. Here, using the image of the houseborn slave, the voice in the psalm imagines always having been 'owned' by YHWH. That is, his whole existence is dependent on YHWH and his reason for existence is emphasised as being solely for YHWH. In this we come back to Ps 123:2, in which the image of slaves who are trained to watch for the smallest gesture has become a statement of trust in YHWH's favour. This again indicates that when עבד is used as a term of deference for the voices in the psalms, plural or singular, in the context of supplication, the social institution of slavery is the vehicle to describe the relationship with YHWH with the metaphors, עבדך for the 'I' voice and עבדיך for the plural voice.

the Creation accounts in Gen 1-3 became commonly known. However, in Gen 2:15, עבד appears with the meaning 'to work', not for YHWH, but in the garden. Thus, even ancient Israelites recognised 'work' as something intrinsic to humanity's existence, but not for a deity as such.

³⁵ Keel, pp. 350, 352.

³⁶ Alter, p. 441, noted above.

Ps 86:2, with the comment, *for I am devoted to you*, indicates the second context for which עֶבֶד is used as a term of deference before YHWH: statements or claims of loyalty to YHWH, which occurs 19 times in total in Psalms. In Ps 86, the two contexts, supplication and statements of loyalty to YHWH, are placed together. This also occurs in Pss 19, 31, 69, and for all occurrences of עֶבֶד in Ps 119, except for v.38 (a total of 12 times).

Only once does עֶבֶד appear as a term of deference before YHWH in the context of a claim of loyalty to YHWH when there is no supplication expressed. This is in Ps 116:16, in which the voice (in the singular) gives thanks for YHWH having *already* answered a supplication (vv.1, 4). The effect, however, is the same as for those psalms in which statements of loyalty are connected with supplication: the speaker presents himself as a faithful worshipper of YHWH, helped also by the repetition of *I am your servant* and paralleling this with *the child of your handmaid*. The effect of making statements or claims of obedience in connection with supplication is the same as for making requests for help to obey YHWH in combination with other requests: the voice in the psalm claims loyalty and so deserves YHWH's favour. However, this is now brought out clearly; see especially Ps 119. In this context, the literal meaning of עֶבֶד, submission and dependency, remains apparent.

עֶבֶד USED OTHER THAN AS A TERM OF DEFERENCE BEFORE YHWH

In contrast to the use of עֶבֶד as a term of deference to YHWH, the other categories of the metaphorical use of the noun form of עֶבֶד are rarely used as an element in supplication. In Pss 105:25; 135:14 and 136:22, in which עֶבֶד is used of Israel as a title, the context is a review of Israel's history and עֶבֶד is a parallel term for *people*. However, in Pss 79:2 and 102:15[14], עֶבֶד appears in the context of supplication (both psalms are laments). However עֶבְדֶיךָ in 79:2 is not used directly to motivate YHWH to answer the supplication, though the parallelism with *your faithful* (הַסִּידִיךָ) in the context of death by warfare, is an appeal to emotions. Rather, the images that are used directly to motivate YHWH to answer the supplication are *prisoners* (79:11) and *flock* (79:13; in parallelism with *your people*). In contrast is Ps 102:15[14], in which עֶבְדֶיךָ does form a direct appeal for YHWH to answer the supplication. Here, עֶבְדֶיךָ are emotionally attached to the apparently ruined Zion, and ask that YHWH should also be the same (v.14[13]). There is also parallelism between vv.13-15[12-14] and vv.16-18[15-17], but with the latter anticipating YHWH's response, in which *prayer of the destitute* forms the parallel with *your servants hold its stones dear*. Here, as with the use of עֶבֶד as a term of deference before YHWH, עֶבֶד is used with the sense of loyalty and dependency.

At the end of Ps 102, the comment, *the children of your servants*, in reference to all peoples of the world (see discussion above), forms part of a statement of hope, typical in lament psalms.³⁷ It is part of a description of YHWH's people and their security in YHWH in contrast to the created world having an ending. In Ps 119:91, the once only use of עֶבְדֶיךָ in relation to something other than the voice in the psalm (*all [created] things*) indicates that YHWH has created the world and controls it. The supplication in the verse's context (vv.89-96) is carried by *I am yours* (v.94, לַיְיָ אֲנִי), which is similar in intent to *for I am your servant* in Ps 143:12. That is, the voice claims to be 'owned' by YHWH, therefore YHWH should look after his 'possession'.

Similar to the occurrences of עֶבֶד as a title for Israel, the use of the term for named individuals is mostly found in the context of a review of Israel's history (Pss 78:70; 89:4[3], 21[20],

³⁷ e.g. Bullock, p. 142; Broyles, pp. 16-17; Goldingay, 2006, 63; E.C. Lucas, *Exploring the Old Testament III: A Guide to the Psalms and Wisdom Literature* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), p. 3; L. Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning* (Alba House, 1974), pp. 215-264.

In Ps 132:10, עבד as a title for an individual (*your servant David* [דוד עבדך]) is also used in the context of supplication, but is differentiated from the voice in the psalm, a ‘we’ (vv.6-7).⁴³ Here, in contrast to Ps 144:10, but in similar fashion to the use of עבד as a term of deference in the context of supplication, the motivation for YHWH to favourably answer the supplication works on the implied loyalty and submission עבד carries, indicated in vv.1-5: a retelling of David’s desire to build YHWH a *dwelling place*.

When עבד is used to refer to worshippers as a group (Pss 34:23[22]; 69:37[36]⁴⁴; 113:1; 134:1; 135:1), it is used in the context that the worshippers are faithful to YHWH (see above). That is, עבד in this context is used with the sense of loyalty, like for when it is used for Israel and as a term of deference to YHWH for the speaker in the psalm.

To summarise, when עבד is not used as a term of deference to YHWH, it can carry the idea of status (for individuals, Israel, peoples). Otherwise it carries the idea of dependency and loyalty (worshippers as a group, created world, also Israel). These occurrences of עבד are not normally found in the context of supplication, but when this happens, עבד carries the

³⁸ Emphasised in Eaton, 1976, p. 149.

³⁹ See fn.27 above.

⁴⁰ Bridge “Enslaved”.

⁴¹ See, e.g. Hallo, p. 441, for Babylonian seals: ‘Rank is identified as a subordinate relationship to a higher authority, and determined by the level of that authority.’ ‘The relationship is normally expressed by “servant” (ĪR), or “maidservant” (GEMÉ); more rarely by “man” (LÚ)’; discussed also in Bridge “Enslaved”.

⁴² Broyles, p. 20 (contra p. 501); Mowinckel I, pp. 48, 225; Sabourin, pp. 336-337 (implied, but unsure); Dahood, 1970, p. 328 (as part of a composite psalm); S.J.L. Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* (JSOTSS 44; Sheffield, 1987), p. 105 (implied). However, Goldingay, 2006, p. 60, thinks Ps 144 is a ‘prayer of the congregation’, which means the voice is representative. Weiser, p.824, recognises that Ps 144 is the voice of the king, but that דוד עבדך refers literally to David, and is used to in the context that YHWH has given victory to all the kings from David onwards.

⁴³ Those scholars who attempt to identify the voice in Ps 132 suggest that vv.8-10 are spoken by a leader of the congregation (Dahood, 1970, p. 241), or a cultic prophet (Croft, pp. 102-103; A.R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* [Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967], p. 22). Otherwise the psalm is debated as to its genre and who the voice in the psalm best represents. That the king is referred to in vv.8-10 is beyond doubt; see, e.g. Mowinckel I, p. 48, Johnson, p. 19, and Croft, pp. 102-104, all who understand the psalm to have been written for a ritual that involves the king.

⁴⁴ The NRSV, following the Syriac version, adds עבדיו in v.36c[35c] to make it read, *and his servants shall live there and possess it*, where as the MT reads, *and they shall live there and possess it*.

CONCLUSIONS

The metaphorical use of עִבַּד in Psalms is built on the literal meaning of the term, ‘to serve’ (verb) and ‘slave/servant’ (noun). In most cases, the term carries the idea of dependency and loyalty. Yet the idea of status also appears, particularly when עִבַּד is used for named individuals and Israel. In the verb form, the nations are pictured as subject to the Israelite king, and worshippers are in effect subject to YHWH. In the noun form, it is commonly used as a term of deference by the voice in the psalm instead of ‘I’ and ‘we’. Most of these uses are in the context of supplication and many are connected with statements of loyalty to YHWH. The types of supplication to which עִבַּד is connected indicate that the term carries the meaning of submission and dependency such as a chattel slave owes his or her master. Loyalty to YHWH is also indicated, brought out well in Pss 86:2 and 123:2. In the former, the voice in the psalm clearly states it is devoted to YHWH. In the latter, ‘the abject dependency of the slave to his master’ has been transformed into an illustration of trust in YHWH to intervene in a situation of difficulty. Yet the illustration as a statement of trust works only because of the self-description of ‘abject dependency’.

עִבַּד as indicating loyalty to YHWH is an emotional argument for YHWH to answer supplication, but the psalms in which עִבַּד appears do not emphasise any obligation for YHWH to answer favourably, except maybe in Pss 86:16 and 143:12. In both cases, ownership by YHWH of the voice in the psalm is implied, so the supplications work on the emotional logic of ‘care for your possession’. Along with this is the lack of use of עִבַּד in the context of the voice in the psalm being exalted or ‘lifted up’ by YHWH (Ps 27:6 may be an exception). That is, עִבַּד is not normally a term that indicates a reciprocal relationship with YHWH such as Goldingay and Eaton argue.⁴⁵ Some psalms do attempt to obligate YHWH to answer supplication, but this is done with concepts and images such as YHWH’s covenant with Israel, *your people*, and YHWH’s *love* (חסד) for them (c.f. Pss 94:23 and 99:5, 8, 9 [*the LORD our God*]; 106:45; 118:29; 121:3-5; 143:12), which is sometimes individualised (e.g. Pss 86:2, 121:3-5; 143:10).⁴⁶ These concepts and images refer to YHWH’s side of the relationship with the voices in the psalms, and so with the worshippers who use these psalms. Rarely are such terms as חסד, אהב, and כבד used for the human side of the relationship;⁴⁷ rather, love for, and loyalty and commitment to, YHWH are expressed in action (*I will praise ...; I will offer sacrifices ...*). The use of עִבַּד in the psalms as a title of deference before YHWH fits this

⁴⁵ See fn. 25 above. Eaton starts his section on עִבַּד in connection with ‘the ideal of the King’s Office in the Psalms’ with the comment, ‘When used as a pre-eminent servant of YHWH, it denotes one whom God has chosen for a position of intimacy and trust, with authority as his chief minister and the executive of his will’ (Eaton, 1976, p. 149 and fn. 30), following Zimmerli and Jeremias, p. 9.

⁴⁶ C.f. Goldingay, 2007, p. 621 for Ps 86:2. Note that the individualisation of the of the covenant relationship occurs in close connection to the use of עִבַּד in Pss 86 and 143, which is a further argument that עִבַּד is not the term that the psalmists used to obligate YHWH to answer the supplication.

⁴⁷ Highlighted well, for עִבַּד, by W.L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy”, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963), pp. 77-87; cited in S. Ackerman, “The personal is political: Covenantal and Affectionate Love (’āhēb, ’ahābâ), in the Hebrew Bible”, *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002), p. 437. See also S.M. Olyan, “Honor, Shame and Covenant Relationships in Ancient Israel and its Environment”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996), p. 204. Ackerman deals with אהב and Olyan deals with כבד. For example, despite all the expressions of devotion in the Psalms, only once is devotion to YHWH described by אהב (Ps 116:1), though Ackerman notes the use of אהב in Psalms in connection with YHWH’s house, the torah, YHWH’s name and so on (Ackerman, 446). Ackerman and Olyan note that the situation is the same in the rest of the Bible.

This study has remained within the biblical text. With regard to the voice in the psalms, observations so far indicate that there is a correlation of the use of עִבַּד as a term of deference before YHWH with the speaker in the psalms. When עִבַּד relates to an 'I' voice, it is done in connection with supplications that include requests for protection or deliverance, and the need for help to be loyal to YHWH. It is also found in connection with statements or claims of loyalty to YHWH. However, when עִבַּד relates to a 'we' voice, it is done only in connection with requests for YHWH's favour and there is no connection with statements or claims of loyalty to YHWH. With regard to the genre of psalms, a preliminary observation is that the use of עִבַּד as a term of deference before YHWH is found only in psalms classified as 'laments' or 'prayer psalms' and the two psalms, 19 and 119, both of which include elements of 'lament psalms', especially Ps 119.⁴⁸ What this means in regards to the question of the use of עִבַּד in the religious thought of ancient Israel is a matter for further study, especially in the light of discussion as to the identity of the voice in the psalms.

Abstract

An exploration of the use of 'bd in the Psalms shows that it is almost exclusively used metaphorically. As a verb, this study affirms translations such as 'to worship' in reference to deity, and 'to be subject to' in reference to human power. As a noun, it is used to describe a wide range of things or people, all in relation the YHWH. Of interest how 'bd is used as a metaphor ('bdk/'bdyk) for the voice in a number of psalms, effectively being a substitution for 'I' or 'we'. This use is always connected with supplication and or claims of loyalty to YHWH, and shows that 'bd indicates the relationship of the voice in the psalm to YHWH is that of dependency, submission and loyalty. When used to describe others outside of the voice in the psalm, the term can indicate status, but always derived status.

Keywords

Psalms, metaphor, servant, supplication

⁴⁸ C.f. J.L. Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987), pp. 6-7; using A. Deissler, *Psalm 119 (118), und seine Theologie* (MTS 1/2; Munich: Zink, 1955), 270-80.