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Abstract for short paper
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The application of speech-act theory to prayer in the Old Testament

Abstract

A speech-act analysis of Ps. 137 shows how central memory is to this difficult psalm. By applying the linguistic pragmatics of Austin and Searle to this text two particular conclusions are reached: that petitionary and motivational clauses are inextricably linked, and that God's remembering and Israel's remembering are closely intertwined. A summary glance at other psalm prayers where *zkr* appears in the imperative as a petition also indicates that a similar analysis of other psalms beseeching God to remember may function in a similar way.

Yet a further way of testing this hypothesis will be to consider other prayers where *zkr* occurs not as an imperative in the petition, but as an indicative. Is it functioning in the same way? I will therefore examine other texts such as Pss. 77 and 143, using the tools of speech-act theory. It will be seen that language of the speaker remembering also functions implicitly as a call to God to remember, thus harmonizing with the analysis of Ps. 137. My analysis therefore will also shed light on the use of speech-act theory in the study of the Psalms, as well as offering fresh readings of selected OT prayer texts. It will also point to a future reading of the Psalms where petition and motivation cannot be as clearly delineated as form critics might wish, and where petitionary clauses may be implied despite the absence of the explicit grammar of petition through imperative or cohortative forms.