

Conceptualization of God in the Book of Psalm: A Study of Metaphor Based on Cognitive Theory

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Abstract

This study is aimed to describe how God is conceptualized through metaphors in *The Book of*

Psalms by adopting the theory of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). After identifying all metaphorical verses of the *Psalms*, they can be classified into four main metaphors functioning to portray the image of God: (1) GOD IS REFUGE, (2) GOD IS SHEPHERD, (3) GOD IS SAVIOR and (4) GOD IS KING. Mapping and Blending methods are applied to reveal the meaning of those metaphors, provided with cultural and socio-historical context existing in the source domain.

Findings from this study are (1) metaphors in the *Psalms* have function as religious language to express spiritual experience in relation with transcendent or divine reality. (2) Through metaphors God as target domain is conceptualized by means of real things as source domain.

Keywords: Conceptual metaphor, Target domain, Source domain

1. Introduction

The Book of Psalm (BP), written about the fifth and the tenth century B.C., is considered as one of the ancient translation texts. Initially BP was written in Hebrew and Aramaic, then translated in Greek, and Latin, and so spread to various languages in the world. BP is categorized as literary work (genre) in the Scriptures because it contains a collection of songs, prayers, praises, and lamentations using poetic and metaphorical expressions. BP functions to inherit or teach deep spiritual experiences about human encounters with the Divine (God) through worship or ritual. The encounter with transcendent and abstract divine realities is difficult to express through denotative or objective language. Otto (1943) named such a spiritual experience as *mysterium tremendum et facinascum* - something that was both amazing and frightening - and found in every religion.

This research is to identify dominant metaphors functioning to portray God in BP, then to reveal their meanings through analysis with mapping and blending methods by presenting context or background both culturally and socially related to the source domain. Thus, this study is aimed to describe how God is conceptualized through metaphor in BP. Data are taken from The Masoretic Text - originally in Hebrew - has been translated into English.

2. Theoretical Framework

Cognitive linguistic theory related to metaphor was pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who argued that the conventional utterances we use everyday are actually in the form of mapping patterns in which one domain (target domain) is delivered in conjunction with another domain (source domain). Metaphor is the way we conceptualize experience and knowledge through language. The metaphor patterned in this cognition is called the Conceptual Metaphor (CM). Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) distinguish the existence of three types of CM: (1) *The structural metaphor* is CM structured from one concept to another. One concept is understood through other concepts that have been understood such as LIFE IS JOURNEY. Knowledge and concrete experiences about JOURNEY are used to understand and discuss concepts about LIFE that are more complicated or abstract. (2) *Oriental metaphor* is CM which does not structure one concept with another concept, but determines the whole conceptual system through a spatial orientation influenced by the functioning of the human body in facing the environment. For example, the CM UP-DOWN which subsequently becomes GOOD IS UP, BAD IS DOWN, HAPPY IS UP and SAD IS DOWN. This metaphorical orientation comes from the body's

concrete experience in relation to space, place, and motion. (3) *Ontological metaphors* are derived from human experience with objects as a basis for understanding - more than orientation. Experience and understanding through objects are drawn as more general entities or beings such as ontological metaphor CONTAINER. Humans are bodied creatures, the relationship between humans and the world is limited by the surface of the skin. In other words, humans experience the world as "outside" of their bodies. The experience as objects in space (containers) also forms this metaphor. For example, *We're out of trouble now, he fell into a depression, she fell in love with him.*

3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive-interpretative method involving in depth investigation. The philosophical foundation is phenomenology by seeing things as experience that realizes themselves (Sugiarto, 1996; Grix, 2004). Language is the way we as humans understand what we call experience, the way reality is present and meaningful to us, or the way that reality reveals itself (Kaelan, 2002). In connection with phenomenological research, data, behavior, images, and other phenomena, only meaningful if given an accurate interpretation by researchers (Sudarwan, 2002).

The data are collected from all metaphorical verses functioning to image God in BP. Then, they are classified into some dominant metaphors based on their source domains. Furthermore, these metaphors are elaborated with the CM theory and analyzed by mapping method (Gong, 2009) and blending method (Fauconier, Gilles, & Turner, 2002), as well as hermeneutic touches by presenting the source domain context to build meaning.

4. Discussion

From the results of the identification of the data, it is found four conceptual metaphors that serve to portray God, namely: GOD IS REFUGE, GOD IS SHEPHERD, GOD IS SAVOUR and GOD IS KING.

The analysis of mapping and blending are adopted to reveal the meaning of each metaphor as follows.

1) God Is Refuge (Place of Protection)

Metaphor GOD IS REFUGE has source domain such as shields, rock mountains, fortress, and shade of wings. God is conceptualized and imaged as a place or object that gives a sense of security and protection. The objects used as source domain have been very well known both geographically and culturally in the Palestinian environment at that time. For people who are experiencing the suffering or threat of the enemy, God guarantees protection for those who believe.

Table 1. Mapping of *Psalm 59:10: For God is my fortress*

	Source Domain: Fortress	Target Domain: God
Characteristics:	sturdy, strong, secure	Trustworthy, reliable, security guarantee
Function:	To provide a comfortable and safe shelter/ protection.	A place of refuge and self-reliance when someone is facing life's difficulties.

King David built the city of Jerusalem on a high rock hill so that it became a fortress which was difficult for the enemy to capture because it was also fenced with high and strong stone walls (Pariera, 2008: 242). Thus, the fortress served as a place of refuge for the people when enemy attacked, and it guaranteed a sense of security and provided all the necessities of life. As a place of refuge, it was difficult for enemy to access so that it became a safe place when there was an enemy attack (Basson, 2005: 13; Hardy, 2006). This metaphor conceptualizes God as a place of refuge which gives security and all living needs at the times of difficulties.

2) God Is Shepherd

Human relation with God is like the relationship between sheep and shepherd. The life and safety of sheep depends totally on the shepherd. This dependence is used as source domain to describe human-God relation. The image of being a shepherd means that God will risk everything to protect and save people. In turn, man must obey His commandments and His laws, willing to be guided in the course of his life. The nation of Israel at that time was a nomadic tribe so its life was very dependent on the flock of sheep it had. A shepherd had a responsibility and an important role to keep herds of sheep as the main wealth of family or clan. Besides, as writer of Psalm, David is a shepherd so he experiences the role of his job. With this context of source domain, shepherd is used to conceptualize God as target domain through metaphor.

Table 2. Blending of *Psalm 23: 1: God is my shepherd, I will not lack.*

Source Domain Input Space 1 (Sheep)	Generic Space	Target Domain Input Space 2 (Israel-God)
A shepherd herds the sheep into the meadow.	The shepherd is responsible for fulfilling the needs of the sheep.	God guarantees the needs of the Israelites for life.
The sheep obey the command of the shepherd.	If want to survive, the sheep must obey the command of the shepherd.	Israelites must obey God's commands as a guide of life.
The shepherd leads the sheep into calm water	The shepherd knows what his sheep want.	God will guide the journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land.
The sheep will be satisfied their thirst.	The sheep are guaranteed their life as long as they want to follow the path shown by the shepherd.	Israelites will find their purpose of life if they follow His guidance.
Shepherd guards and protects sheep from wild animal attacks.	The shepherd will protect the sheep from all threatening dangers.	God will protect Israelites from danger and its enemies.

The sheep recognize the shepherd's voice.	The sheep fully trust the shepherd.	Israelites must depend fully on God's will.
Shepherd seeks out lost sheep and cares for the sick.	The shepherd cares for and loves his sheep.	God loves and cares for the people of Israel.

Blending Space:

Relationship Israelites with God is like sheep and their shepherd. The survival and safety of the sheep depend entirely on the shepherd. This kind of dependence and trust also happened between Israel and God. By obeying all of His commandments, they will be assured of their life, are protected, and led to the real purpose of life. As the shepherd sacrifices his whole life for the sheep, God loves Israelites totally.

Blending method is adopted for this metaphor because it is a complicated one meaning that there is implicitly another metaphor, namely HUMAN ARE SHEEP. Therefore, this metaphor functions to express the relationship between human and God.

3) God Is Savior

Based on historical background, the Israelites must continue to fight against the Palestinian tribes inhabiting Canaan. They also experienced tragic defeats from stronger nations such as the two tragedies of exile to Assyria and Babylon. This condition makes them miss the reliable figure of savior. Such historical contexts were used by the author of the Psalms as source domain to conceptualize God as the figure of a hero or liberator for the nation of Israel. In addition, the figure of Moses as the savior of Israel from slavery in Egypt has become a collective memory of an ideal liberator. Such kind of resource is used by Psalmist to portray the image of God.

Table 3. Mapping of *Psalm 54: 6: Verily, God is my savior, the Lord supports me.*

	Source Domain: SAVIOR	Target Domain: GOD
Characteristics:	-Having more strength and ability. -Ready to sacrifice for other people or the nation. -Appearing when there are difficulties and acts as a hero	-The strongest comparing other powers. - having compassion for humans. -acting as a hero in Israel history
Function:	To save others from any difficulty or suffering.	-keeping His promises to save Israelites.

From above mapping, God is portrayed as the liberator figure that is believed to have and will liberate the Israelites from all difficulties. Significant events in the past are interpreted as acts

of God that have once liberated the nation from difficult times so that when they are experiencing more difficult times in the present time, the hope is also directed at God as the Savior. Thus, the metaphor of GOD IS SAVIOR may be as a hope or trust (faith) on God.

4) God Is King

The interpretation made by Bart and Pareira (1997) on the concept of king in the Psalms is based on the following four hypotheses to give a more complete context in revealing the meaning of the King metaphor. First, the Mowinckel's hypothesis conveys that the metaphor of the King is a hymn (praise) in the rite of God's rapture as the King of Israel, commemorated as the New Year feast for Israel (cf. Exodus 23). This kind of party is influenced by the Babylonian culture in the procession and the worship of the god Marduk into the temple. Second, the Krauss' hypothesis states that the use of the King metaphor is performed at a ceremony commemorating the city of Jerusalem as the place of His residence. This feast was held at the Feast of Tabernacles by holding the Ark of the Covenant, and was later proclaimed in the Temple. Third, the Weiser's hypothesis rejects the notion that the King metaphor influenced the Babylonian culture because it was actually the metaphor of the King that had appeared older than in Babylon. According to the Weiser, the scenes of God ascending His throne are part of the celebration of the Feast of the Renewal of the Covenant on Mount Sinai which is celebrated every single fall of the fall. Fourth, the Westermann's hypothesis which states that the metaphor of the King is the hope of the coming of the kingdom of God over all nations in the future. Thus, these four hypotheses can provide a cultural and historical context for the formation of the metaphor of the GOD IS KING

Table 4. Mapping of *Psalm.146: 10: God is King for ever. Your God, Zion, through generations.*

	Source Domain: KING	Target Domain: GOD
Characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -have full control over the people. -be fair and wise. -highest social status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -have absolute power over humans and the universe. - source of wisdom
Function:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to rule -to judge -to protect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -ruling the Israelites with His commands and laws. -rewarding those who obey His commands and punish those who violate His commands.

To see king as source domain for this metaphor, the results of research on kingship in the ancient Middle East region conducted by Smith (1982) can be applied. According to him, there are three main components regarding the king: (1) the king is the ruler of the world, (2) the king is a war hero, and (3) the king is a just judge. From the result of the mapping it is concluded that God is the creator and ruler of the universe, who always protects Israel from its enemies, and upholds justice according to His laws. In real life, even though the Israelites have a wordly king, what is considered as a real king is God called Yahweh.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions that can be drawn from above discussion are:

- 1) There are four main metaphors functioning to portray the image of God in *The Book of Psalms*, namely: GOD IS REFUGE, GOD IS SHEPHERD, GOD IS SAVIOR and GOD IS KING. All other metaphors and metaphorical expressions are derived from those four metaphors acting as conceptual metaphors.
- 2) In *The Book of Psalms*, metaphors serve as religious language (Harrison, 2007) to communicate divine or spiritual experience which is difficult to express in denotative language. Thus, such experience of God may be inherited to next generations.
- 3) Conceptualizing the transcendent and abstract God through metaphors needs source domains which are real and profane things and worldly experience in daily life. The image of God is constructed by common reality which is familiar in life.

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