

THE PSALMS:
OUR COMPANIONS
FOR EVERY DAY AND SEASON

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Foreword

Fr. Kenneth Charles Hein, O.S.B. was born in 1938. He became a Benedictine monk at Holy Cross Abbey in Canyon City, CO in 1962. He served as abbot there, 1997-2002. . When that monastery closed he transferred to the Monastery of the Ascension, where he was Prior 2009-2016. His term as prior ended when his memory began to fail.

Fr. Kenneth studied at Sant' Anselmo in Rome and earned his Doctorate in Theology from the University of Tübingen with a thesis on *Eucharist and Excommunication: A Study in Early Christian Doctrine and Discipline* (Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang, 1973), under the direction of Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI).. He contributed a chapter on "The Disciplinary Measures in the Rule of Benedict," to *RB80: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English, with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), 415-436.

As man of many talents, Fr. Kenneth had very wide interests. His greatest love was for the Psalms of the Bible. In 1989 the Canon City Abbey published his translation, *Psalms for Praying*. He continued working on the Psalms as long as his health permitted and completed this present work. Charles Franz helped him with the final stages of the work and spent long hours formatting it in digital form. We are very grateful to him for his generosity to Fr. Kenneth.

In homage to his long years of work on the project, we at the Monastery of the Ascension are publishing it in a very limited edition, copies of which will be sent to several monastic libraries and shared with friends. We have also posted the entire work on our website. We do this knowing that our monastery also is going to close. We do not want Fr. Kenneth's work to be lost.

Although we have copyrighted this work, anyone is free to download the text (or we will send a digital file free of charge). If anyone cites the work in a publicized we ask that they give credit. User might also say a prayer for its author.

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Preface

This present work is directed to those who desire a deeper insight into and appreciation of the psalms for their better understanding and spiritual growth. The “Introduction” will be especially useful to those who have not had an extensive course in the history of Israel and the history of its writings.

The guiding principles for this translation are: 1) accurate restatement in English of the Hebrew text, 2) attention to the poetic character of the psalms in determining the meaning of difficult passages, 3) tasteful reproduction in English of many poetic devices employed by the Hebrew poets, 4) benefit of the doubt given to the Septuagint (LXX) translation or to St. Jerome’s translation (*Psalterium juxta Hebraeos*) when a Hebrew passage is otherwise too obscure to be translated with certitude, and 5) attention to the postexilic influence on the psalms. Technical terminology has been generally avoided or else defined as deemed helpful to the reader.

Close attention has been given to the translations found in the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) or the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) of the Bible and in the *New American Bible* (NAB). The translation and commentary from Mitchel Dahood, S.J., in volumes 16, 17, and 17A of the *Anchor Bible Series* are often noted. Unless otherwise indicated, any reference to Dahood is to be understood as a reference to the respective volume from the *Anchor Bible Series* that treats the psalm in question. Although Dahood’s contributions have become less valued in recent years in spite of the enthusiastic reception that his work initially enjoyed, credit must be given where credit is due. Dahood’s work set a standard for subsequent research on the psalms.

The more recent work of Robert Alter (*The Book of Psalms*, 2007) has proved beneficial in this present translation. The LXX was always consulted and noted as needed, and St. Jerome’s translation of the psalms provides an excellent insight into the psalms and the meaning of many words and expressions. He was well-trained in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin and stands between the Septuagint (LXX) and the Masoretic Text (MT). The superscriptions of the psalms and the divisions according to psalm number and versification follow those found in the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).

Finally, I dare to make a special dedication of this translation and commentary to all my teachers throughout my formal years of education—from Sister Mary Mercy, O.S.F., in the First Grade, to Professor Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), who was my *Doktorvater* (thesis director) at the University of Tübingen, Germany, shortly after the conclusion of Vatican Council II. May all the unnamed ones in between be assured of my full appreciation of their efforts to educate me. I am thankful to my confreres of the Order of St. Benedict, and especially from the Monastery of the Ascension, Jerome, Idaho, who have provided me with the opportunity and time to produce this translation of the psalms. And above all, I am thankful to God whose Holy Spirit inspired the psalms and guided me to them and to discover a deeper love for Christ and all God’s people through praying, singing, and studying the psalms.

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Introduction

The Psalms of the Hebrew Scriptures come to us by way of three main sources, which can be noted only briefly here. The first source is the work of the community of Jews who gathered the material of the Hebrew Scriptures following their enslavement in the Babylonian Exile, 586-538 B.C.E. These mostly unnamed persons selected, redacted, and arranged the material of what they considered to be their sacred writings. Their work eventually came to the Jews who had fled to Egypt so as not to be taken into the Babylonian Exile. These Jews were concentrated in Alexandria, and they translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek during the third century B.C.E. Their work is generally known as the Septuagint (LXX), which is our second major source of our legacy of biblical material. But it is a source only in the sense of its being a translation that became widely used for several centuries. The third source is the Hebrew text of the Hebrew Scriptures that Jews, known as the Masoretes, produced during the 10th and 11th centuries of Christian times. The Masoretic Text (MT) is not a source of new material. But it is accepted as the final stage in the formation of a unified text of the Hebrew Scriptures that came from the Jewish scribes after the Babylonian Exile.

Political History of Israel:

For our immediate purposes, we may summarize the history of Israel accordingly, beginning with Abraham. The stories about Abraham place him in the late Stone Age or early Bronze Age (ca. 1800 B.C.E.). Up until the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, we can refer to the ancestors of the Israelites as “Hebrews”, a term that connotes their wandering, nomadic way of life.

After the liberation of a part of these wandering peoples from slavery under the leadership of Moses (ca. 1270 B.C.E.) and until the Babylonian Exile (586–538 B.C.E.), we can speak of “the Israelites”, a people organized into twelve tribes, politically ruled by kings, and religiously oriented to Yahweh as their God. In 1000 B.C.E., the Israelite leader and king, David of the tribe of Judah, conquered the Jebusite city of Jerusalem and made it into the capital city of the land of Israel. David united the Israelite tribes into a single nation. But after the death of his son, King Solomon (who built the temple), the nation split into two kingdoms (920 B.C.E.): the House of Judah in the south, and the House of Israel to the north.

In 721 B.C.E., the ten northern tribes of Israel were overrun by the Assyrians to become a thoroughly mixed, inter-racial people. Only the tribe of Judah and remnants of the other tribes remained. In 586 B.C.E., the

Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, taking much of its population into exile and slavery in Babylon. At this time, many Israelites fled to Egypt to escape the Babylonians. In 539 B.C.E., Persia (present-day Iran) under Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon and, in the following year, allowed the people of Israel to return to their homeland. We may now refer to them as “Jews”, since they were mostly from the tribe of Judah. It was these postexilic Jews who compiled their sacred writings, including the psalms, into the Hebrew Scriptures. We must now turn our attention to the history of writing in Israel, so that we may better understand how the psalms fit into the big picture of Holy Scripture.

History of Israel’s Writings:

If Moses knew how to read and write (cf. Ex 17:14), then that would have been according to the Egyptian language and script (hieroglyphics) of his time and according to his education in Pharaoh’s court. Writing with an alphabet originated in the area of the world to which the Hebrew slaves fled under the leadership of Moses. The first two-hundred years of Israel’s history after the Exodus were spent in the Israelite conquest of the Canaanite lands. Only after Israel had settled in peace in the “promised land” could literacy come to the Israelites. Thus it is no surprise that David supposedly wrote a letter to Joab, instructing Joab to allow the unfortunate Uriah to be cut down in battle. Cf. 2 Sam 11:14. With the coming of literacy to Israel, that is, to a small part of the people—to the “scribes” especially, the stories and accounts of Israel could be committed to writing. The earliest writers are generally known as the Yahwist school of writers (or simply “J”) and followed upon David’s time. Next were the Elohist writers (E), who represented especially the religious traditions of the northern tribes after Solomon’s reign. For some time thereafter, we may refer to the “Deuteronomist writers” (D), who were Israel’s “historians”, giving us the Book of Deuteronomy, the Books of Samuel (1 and 2) as well as the Books of Kings (1 and 2), and other material. During and after the Babylonian Exile, the priests of Israel produced a great deal of material, the “priestly writings” (P). These various writers collectively produced the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible that were assembled after the Babylonian Exile.

Almost contemporary with the P writings are the writings of the Levitical factions, found mainly in 1 and 2 Chronicles, in which the postexilic Levites present their view of the restored kingdom as a liturgical project (cf. *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire: A Theological Commentary on 1-2 Chronicles*, by Scott W. Hahn, Baker Academic, 2012) and make their case for

admission into service in the temple built to replace the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Accompanying all of these writings were the writings of and about the prophets and the writings of exilic and postexilic Jews in addition to the priestly writings. In postexilic times, the psalms were gathered into five collections and finally into one collection, the Book of Psalms, called *ʾhillim* (“praises”). The arrangement of the psalms is attributed to the postexilic community. But it must also be kept in mind that the editorial work of this community often modified some psalms to make them conform to a setting or purpose that does not correspond to the original setting or purpose.

The postexilic Jews, now speaking Aramaic (i.e., a Syriac-influenced dialect of Hebrew) and writing Hebrew and Aramaic with the Syriac form of the alphabet, were ultimately the ones who gathered and arranged all of their sacred writings into the “Hebrew Scriptures” (by and large, the “Old Testament”), leaving their “signature” in many places in these writings. For instance, the final verses of “the Song of Moses and the Israelites” recorded in Ex 15:1-18, an account of the crossing of the sea and generally considered to be the oldest composition in the Hebrew Scriptures, refer to the arrival of the Israelites in the land of Canaan and to “the sanctuary” of the **LORD** (YHWH), that is, to Mount Zion and the temple—which, of course, cannot be part of the story of the Israelites still standing on the sea’s shore at the beginning of the Exodus from Egypt. But the postexilic Jews, comparing themselves to the Israelites in the Exodus and wanting to rebuild the temple on Mount Zion, had their good reasons for adding these final verses to this ancient composition. Their writings and much material about them are found especially in the latter half of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Those chapters came from an unnamed prophet now commonly referred to as “Deutero-Isaiah” or “Second Isaiah”. Some biblical scholars also distinguish a “Trito-Isaiah” (“Third Isaiah”) in the final chapters of the Book of Isaiah. A student of the Bible and especially of the psalms must constantly be aware of the conditions and challenges that the exilic and postexilic Jews faced in returning to their homeland and in gathering, composing, and redacting the material for the Hebrew Scriptures. To this end, acquaintance with the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah is essential.

In assembling the material for the Book of Psalms, the postexilic scribes first gathered the material into subgroups and then into five larger collections or “books” that reflect a progression of historical and doctrinal themes. This progression is very well presented by Ulrich Berges in the article, *Die Knechte im Psalter* (“The Servants in the Psalter”), in *Biblica*, vol. 81, fasc. 2, 2000, pp. 153-178. In brief, this progression can be given as follows: **Book I** (Pss 1-41) begins with the beatitude, “Blessed (Happy) is the man who does not follow the counsel of the wicked . . .” This is sapiential (wisdom) teaching that invites the reader to view the entire Psalter as instruction in the way of wisdom that leads to the total praise of God that is presented in the ten

praises of Ps 150, the final psalm of the Psalter. David is the ideal figure in Book I. **Book II** (Pss 42-72) focuses on the political sovereignty of the Davidic kings over other lands. Book II concludes with a psalm ascribed to Solomon, whose death also marked the end of the united monarchy that David had created. **Book III** (Pss 73-89) is concerned with laments regarding the Davidic kings that Yahweh had rejected. Thus Book III ends with Ps 89, “a lament over God’s promise to David” that leaves the reader standing amidst the rubble of the defunct Davidic/Solomonic dynasty. **Book IV** (Pss 90-106) thus begins with a psalm ascribed to Moses, since the Babylonian Exile that is especially featured in Book IV is seen as a repeat of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt and as a time when Israel was formed in the desert. Israel is now given to understand that its future lies in its return to the faith of Moses which preceded the time of the monarchs. Book IV ends with the plea, “Save us, **LORD** our God; gather us from among the nations that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in praising you” (Ps 106:47, NAB). This conclusion to Book IV hints at and anticipates the conclusion to Book V with its Great Hallel (Ps 150). **Book V** (Pss 107-150) begins with an exhortation for the redeemed exiles to thank God for their deliverance and to be “wise” and “ponder the merciful deeds of the Lord”. Emphasis is placed on the worthlessness of all gods except Yahweh. All are his servants, who are to proclaim the **LORD**’s greatness to all nations rather than seeking to rule over other nations.

At first sight, Ps 149 with its violent message may seem to contradict this statement. However, its thrust is to grant royal rights to all of God’s people who are to bind themselves to doing the will of God rather than to pursuing their own interests. God’s will is to receive praise from the entire universe and especially from “everything that breathes” (Ps 150:6). Only when all are united in praise to God will they also be united in peace. Praise of God means to join oneself to the assembly of the righteous and thus to act in the fullness of wisdom. This is the spirit that the postexilic scribes built into the Psalter through their arrangement and redaction of the psalms, and this is the spirit with which the psalms and all of the Hebrew Scriptures went forth to all recipients of the work of the postexilic community.

The Jews who fled to Egypt at the time of the Babylonian Exile and whose descendants lived mostly in Alexandria were asked by a successor of Alexander the Great, probably Ptolemy II, to translate their sacred writings into Greek. This translation is known as the Septuagint, meaning “seventy” and symbolized by LXX. The writers of the New Testament utilized especially the LXX in their work. The consequence was that the Jews after Jesus’ day disregarded the LXX as inspired Scripture. It survived mostly in the writings of Christians and is not a completely unified work. The LXX, as we now know it, has been reconstructed from a variety of sources and manuscripts, and the student of the Bible would do well to consult an article on the Septuagint in a work such as *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, if for no

other reason than to let himself/herself be overwhelmed by the complexity of the origins and history of the LXX and of the Bible in general.

In their own way, the writers, copyists and “citors” of the LXX have a more pronounced messianic sense than the exiles from Babylon. They put their own turn on much of the material that they translated from Hebrew into Greek, also adding some new material to the LXX, such as the Book of Wisdom. As an example of their “messianic sense”, we can refer to Is 7:14, the “Emmanuel prophecy”. A literal translation of the Hebrew text reads, “Consequently, the maiden being with child will bear a son and name him Emmanuel”. That the mother will name the child is an indication that the father (King Ahaz) will be, at the time of the child’s birth, away at war or possibly even dead. Thus, Isaiah’s words to Ahaz are really a threat. However, the LXX reads, “Behold, **the virgin will be** with child and bear a son, and **they shall name him** Emmanuel.” Isaiah’s threat is now a promise. It is in this spirit that the Gospel of Matthew (1:23) quotes this passage—not as a threat, but as a promise that the messiah would some day come in spite of Israel’s sterile status (i.e., lack of a king) when the LXX was produced about 200 B.C.E.

The Alexandrian translators had access to and translated the material that had been produced by the postexilic Jews from Babylon some 200 years earlier. Thus the early Christians had a double legacy of scripture—the Hebrew and the Greek scriptures, with both versions being influenced by the struggles and hopes that accompany a community’s being either refugees in Egypt or exiles from Babylon. This “pilgrim predisposition” is basic to Christianity from its beginnings and to this day; for “our citizenship is in Heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20). When one reads or prays the psalms with an eye on the Egyptian and the Babylonian communities of the late Old Testament period, the sufferings, hopes, sorrows and joys of those past generations come alive again in our own times and lives. But the saga of the writing of the Hebrew Scriptures does not end simply with the writing of the New Testament.

During the 10th and 11th centuries of Christian times, the Jewish communities and synagogues throughout the known world were visited by the Masoretes (“correctors”), who gathered up the synagogues’ scriptural material with an aim to producing a single, unified text of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Masoretes performed a monumental task, and the result of their work is known as the Masoretic Text (MT). Unfortunately (or possibly, fortunately) the Masoretes destroyed the materials they had gathered so that their own text would prevail as the “official” text of Sacred Scripture. That is one reason why finds such as the one at Qumran in 1977 C.E. are so significant, since they provide scriptural texts that predate the Masoretes. But it also needs to be noted that the MT is not a fully uniform text. The work of the Masoretes was copied and recopied

throughout history. The Leipzig and the Leningrad manuscripts of the MT are the most significant still in existence. But they are not the original Masoretic text as such, if there ever was a single, Masoretic text. Some variations in what we know as the Masoretic Text appear in the footnotes of critical editions of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Although the Masoretes were not translators, they still had to make interpretive choices regarding the textual material they had to work with. It appears that some of the manuscripts that they had at hand were partially destroyed or otherwise corrupt. Sometimes one letter (handwritten, of course) could be confused with another similar looking letter. At other times, terminology in an old manuscript might have no longer been understood or its meaning had changed in the course of time. Also, the division of words, which was not by way of spaces between words, but often only by way of diacritical marks such as accents, was not certain. As an example in English, we can say, “Not all black birds are blackbirds”. The space or lack of a space between “black” and “birds” results in a difference of meaning. Likewise, the vowel sounds (which were not part of the original Hebrew alphabet) to be pronounced with the consonants of a word could be uncertain (e.g., in English, the consonant group, “sng”, could be taken as “sing”, “sang”, “sung”, “song”, “snug”, “snag”, or “singe”).

All of the foregoing is but a small peek into the history of Israel and its writings, and into the problems and choices that the Masoretes had to consider. Their work is considered quite reliable, and modern translations of the Bible have recourse to the work of the Masoretes. Yet it remains just a bit ironical that “the last (the MT) shall be first (the supposed original)”. But it is also the best that we have to work with in our day. The translation of the psalms in this present work has been made from the MT as given in the *Biblia Hebraica*, edited by Rudolf Kittel, who was from Leipzig, Germany, and thus most associated with the Leipzig manuscript of the MT.

Hebrew Poetry:

A summary of the major poetic devices found in the Hebrew Scriptures will suffice for a good introduction to Hebrew poetry.

1. **Parallelism** occurs when two lines state a single concept in somewhat different terms:

You have rebuked the nations;
you have destroyed the wicked. (Ps 9:5)

Parallelism can occur in several forms in addition to the above example.

2. **Chiasmus** occurs in parallelisms when the order of the statement in the first line is reversed in the second line:

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
may my right hand wither away;

let my tongue cleave to my palate,

if I do not remember you. (Ps 137:5)

3. **Intensification or extension** is a form of parallelism in which the succeeding line adds an idea to the previous line:

Bid me do it, and I shall assign **the nations**
to *your inheritance*,
and put **the ends of the earth**
in *your possession*. (Ps 2:8).

4. **Alliteration** is the repetition of consonants, especially in accented syllables, so as to produce a special sound effect:

Brawny bulls from Bashan bear down on me.
(Ps 22:12b).

The repetition of “Bs” imitates the bellowing of the bulls from Bashan and is present in the Hebrew text.

5. **Assonance** is like alliteration, but through the use of vowel sounds:

Incline your **ear**, **O Lord**, and **answer me**;
for **I am indigent and needy** (Ps 86:1).

The Hebrew words of these lines sound very much like “Ay, ay, ay! Oh, Why me? Why me?”

6. **Picturesque or figurative language**:

If I take up the wings of the dawn,
and come down on the sea's farthest edge,
even there your left hand would precede me,
and your right hand would follow upon me (Ps 139:9-10). Note also the parallelism in lines 3 and 4.

7. **Personification** occurs when non-living or non-human things are described as if they were living:

The waters saw you, O God;
the waters saw you and lashed about (Ps 77:17).

This verse also includes intensification.

8. **Near-rhyme and rhyme**. Rhyming of words is not a prominent device in Hebrew poetry. But it does occur occasionally. More often, “near rhyme” is used so that similar sounding words might impart or reinforce similar meanings in each other. E.g., in Ps 77:19, the Hebrew poet describes the reflection of the setting sun on the water as the brilliant train of God’s robe trailing behind God so that his footsteps remain unseen. The Hebrew poet uses the words for “train” and “trail” in this passage in such a way that the two terms define each other. In Hebrew, and coincidentally also in English, the two terms look similar to each other and can have more or less the same meaning as in the statement, “The **train** of the bride’s gown **trails** across the floor.”

9. **Paronomasia (Wordplay, Pun)**. This is a real favorite with the Hebrew poets, often including near-rhyme. The poet’s puns, however, are not meant to be funny, but to make one think twice about some matter:

If they profane my statutes,
and do not keep my commandments,
then I will punish their transgressions

with a rod. (Ps 89:31-32)

In this passage, the Hebrew word for “commandment” is *shepet*, and the word for “rod” is *shebet*. Thus the wordplay between these two terms is intended to make the reader “think twice” about breaking one of God’s commandments; for breaking a *shepet* (“commandment”) will end with one’s being punished by the *shebet* (“rod”). This passage is also an example of “near-rhyme”.

10. **Metonymy** is referring to a part to mean the whole.

He rejected the **tent** of Joseph. (Ps 78:67)

Here, “tent” means the entire tribe of Joseph.

11. **Synecdoche** is using a term to mean something that is only analogous to the term used.

Strike all my foes across the face,

and break the teeth of the wicked. (Ps 57:4)

In this example, “face” is metonymy, and “**teeth**” is synecdoche, meaning the **weapons** of the wicked. It is easy to see arrows, swords, and spears as being analogous to teeth.

12. **Rhythm** in Hebrew poetry is still very much under research. The problem is that it is not yet clear what devices produce rhythm in Hebrew poetry. Is it the number of syllables in a line? Is it the number of phrases in a line? Is it the number of accents in a line? Or is it a combination of these possibilities? Or is it still something else or something more? Or is ancient Hebrew poetry something that changed from place to place or from one time to another? These factors are still much debated among scholars.

Reconstructing the Original Text of Scripture:

As a final point in this “general introduction”, some remarks need to be made about what it means or does not mean “to recover the original text” of an ancient composition. The first question to ask in this case is, “Was there ever an ‘original text’ of the material in question to begin with?” If a work is a composite work produced by a number of persons researching and writing on their own and who are drawing on other written and oral material and adding their own touches and ideas to the material they are producing as a group, then which product or “draft” is “original” or “final”? Moreover, when texts have an active life of development and redaction over a period of centuries, as is the case with the psalms, then at what point in the history of a particular composition’s development, redaction, and use is the “original”? A written text may accurately reflect a tradition that is assumed to be the original version of a story; although, another version of the same basic story is much older, but may survive only orally—as folklore.

As regards biblical material, no original manuscript of any part of the Bible still exists. All manuscripts are “copies of copies” and contain variations due to scribal

errors or redactions. Many manuscripts are only partially intact, and the “holes” have to be filled in from other sources—e.g., from some ancient writer who claims to be quoting from some other writer or writing. All the material of the Bible as we now have the Bible **is the product of “editorial choice” and tradition on the part of the postexilic scribes.** By comparing various manuscripts, a degree of certitude can be achieved regarding “the original text”. But there can never be complete certitude; for there is always a possibility that another, “more original” manuscript might be discovered somewhere, somehow, in some form or another. And all of the foregoing statements in this introduction still have little or nothing to say about what ancient writings are to be accepted as “the Bible”. This raises questions about “canonicity” and “church” and “authority” that must be passed over in silence here. All of this must lead one at least to the conclusion that the “fundamentalist” Christian, who claims to believe only what the Bible teaches (a doctrine that is not found in the Bible to begin with), is simply one who is unaware of the issues treated in this introduction. But this matter is beyond the scope of this introduction, and it must be left at this point.

Transliteration of Hebrew

Due to the limits of electronic publishing and e-readers, it is necessary to transcribe Hebrew words in the Latin alphabet that is used by most modern western languages. While it is not possible to represent all of the characters employed in Hebrew with the Latin alphabet, one who knows some Hebrew will be able to reproduce the terms in their original form.

Abbreviations

References to the books of the Bible are given as found in the RSV.

B.C.E. = Before the Common Era, i.e, “Before Christ”.

CBQ = Catholic Biblical Quarterly

Cf. and cf. = confer, see.

Dahood = Mitchel Dahood’s work in *The Anchor Bible*, vols. 16, 17, and 17A

ibid. = *ibidem* = “same reference” (according to the corresponding volume as needed).

ICEL = International Commission on English in the Liturgy

JBL = Journal of Biblical Literature

KJ = King James Version of the Bible

LXX = Septuagint or Septuaginta

MT = Masoretic Text

NAB = New American Bible.

NIV = New International Version

NRSV = New Revised Standard Version

NT = New Testament

OT = Old Testament

RSV = Revised Standard Version

St. Jerome = *Psalterium Juxta Hebraeos*, in: *Collectanea Biblica Latina*, vol. xi.

Stuhlmueller = *Psalms 1* or *Psalms 2*, vol. 21 or vol. 22, in the series, *Old Testament Message*, publ. by Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983

v. or vv. = verse or verses.

BOOK I: Psalms 1 – 41

Psalm 1

Psalm 1 functions as a “tone-setting” preface for the entire Psalter and appears to date from the late, postexilic period, when hope for a messiah and the sapiential themes of “the two ways” and Torah (“the law”) were prominent. Early Christians saw Jesus as the Christ in the parallel between Adam, the first human being in Holy Scripture, and “the man”, the first human being in the psalms. Jesus is accordingly the new Adam in whom the new creation has been inaugurated: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). John’s Gospel depicts Pilate unwittingly declaring Jesus’ messianic role in the statement, “Behold the man” (Jn 19:5). The words of the Creed, “he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man”, also reinforce the Adam-Christ parallel. In liturgical use, “man” often indicates not only humankind, but also the unity of the human race in its origins and its history.

- 1 **Blessed is the man who walks not in the council
of the wicked,
nor stands in the company of sinners,
nor sits in the assembly of scoffers,**
- 2 **but who delights in the law of the LORD,
and reflects on his law day and night.**
- 3 **Thus, he is like a tree,
transplanted to the banks of a brook
brimming with water,
that produces fruit in due season,
and whose leaves shall never fade.
Indeed, everything he does shall prosper.**
- 4 **Not so are the wicked, not so!
For they are like chaff, which the wind carries away.**
- 5 **Therefore, the wicked will not stand
when the judgment takes place;
and sinners will not stand in the assembly of the just.**
- 6 **For the LORD safeguards the assembly of the just;
but the assembly of the wicked shall perish.**

Notes

1. *Blessed is the man.* Psalm 1 appropriately begins with aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet—repeated seven times within this verse, and with a flourish of alliteration and assonance: *’Ashre ha-’ish ’asher lo-halak ba-’atsat r^eshiyim*. The psalm’s last word, *t’obed* (“perish”), begins with tau, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The Jewish rabbis interpreted the tree and water of the psalm as metaphors for Paradise and symbols of the Torah-observant person. Cf. Rev 22:1-2, 14, 19; *Traditions of the Bible*, by James L. Kugel, Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 137-139.

the council . . . company. In Hebrew, as in English, “council” is strongly related to “counsel” in meaning. Likewise, just as “walks”, “stands”, and “sits” are parallel concepts, so too are “council”, “company” (*derek*, “way”, stands here in parallel to “council”), and “assembly” (*moshav* means “seat”). These poetic figures of speech serve to emphasize the message that God wills blessings and happiness on those who “reflect on” (i.e., live by) wisdom (namely, the Torah), shun evil, and seek righteousness. The use of “walks”, “stands”, and “sits” is the poet’s way of saying “under all circumstances, at all times”. The MT has no definite articles in v. 6—a poetic device that marks the verse as a proverb. Cf. *Le psaume*

1 - *Une analyse structurale*, by Rémi Lack, in *Biblica*, vol. 57, fasc. 2, 1976, p. 156.

The structural form of Psalm 1 is “chiasmic”, i.e., the latter half “replays” the first half in reverse order. The outline given here is based on *A Structural Analysis of Ps 1*, by Walter Vogels, in *Biblica*, vol. 60, fasc. 3, 1979, pp. 410-416:

A The just man does not stand with the wicked,

but walks in the law.

B *Analogy*: The watered tree bears fruit.

C In all that the just man does, he prospers.

C’ Those who act wickedly do not prosper.

B’ *Analogy*: Dry chaff is blown away

A’ The wicked do not stand (with the just),
but will perish.

Psalm 2

The postexilic arrangement of the Psalter made Ps 2 into a “diptych” with Ps 149 in regard to vengeance. In Ps 2, God’s prerogative of vengeance is given to the king, and, in Ps 149, to “the humble”. Cf. *Les Psaumes 75-76 en Rapport a la Rédaction du Psautier et a celle du Livre d’Isaïe*, by Bernard Gosse, in *Bibbia e Oriente*, vol. 198, 1998, pp. 219-228, esp. p. 223. Some ancient manuscripts count this psalm as “the first psalm”, thus giving force to the view that Ps 1 was composed to be a preface. The psalm’s references to Israel’s king place its origin in pre-exilic times. The extent of post-exilic redaction is uncertain.

- 1 **Why are the nations raging,
and the peoples plotting destruction?**
- 2 **Why are the kings of the earth
marshaling their troops,
and the rulers conspiring against the LORD
and against his Anointed?**
- 3 **“Let us break their bonds; let us cast off their yoke.”**
- 4 **He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD laughs
them to scorn.**
- 5 **Then he will rebuke them in his rage;
in his wrath he will berate them.**
- 6 **“It is I who have established my king on Zion,
my holy mountain.”**
- 7 **I must announce a decree:
The LORD said to me: “You are my Son.
It is I who have begotten you this day.**
- 8 **Bid me do it, and I shall assign the nations
to your inheritance,
and put the ends of the earth in your possession.**
- 9 **With an iron rod you will shatter them;
like a potter’s jar you will smash them.”**
- 10 **Now, O kings, be sensible;
take this advice, judges of the earth:**
- 11 **Serve the LORD with fear, and be glad just to tremble.
Pledge your full allegiance to the son,
lest he grow angry and you perish directly;
for his wrath is easily set ablaze.
How blessed are all who take refuge in him!**

Notes

1. *raging . . . conspiring*. With four parallel expressions that more or less define each other, the psalmist deftly describes the world's opposition to the **LORD** and Israel's king. The repetition of "against" (*al*) adds emphasis: "against the **LORD** and *especially* against his Anointed".

5b. *berate them*. The military tenor of v. 2 suggests "rout them" for *y^ebahalemow* (root: *bahal*, "disquiet", "hasten") in v. 5b. But when *y^edabber* of v. 5a is taken as "rebuke", then "berate" or "curse" best fits v. 5b. Cf. *BHL in Ps 2:5 and its Etymology*, by James VanderKam, in *CBQ*, vol. 39, no. 2, April, 1977, pp. 245-250, which presents a good case for "speak passionately" as the basic concept of *bahal*.

9. *with a rod of iron*. A play on the root for "iron rod" (*shbt*) in v. 9 and "judges" (*shft*) in v. 10 results a bit of sarcasm as if to say: "Take my advice, you 'big sticks', lest I strike you with my stick."

11. *Pledge your full allegiance to the son*. The LXX, taking *bar* to mean *παῖς* ("child" or "son"), employs *παιδεία* ("education", "discipline") to read *δραξασθε παιδείας* ("take hold of discipline"). But St. Jerome takes *bar* to mean "sincere" and renders the verse with *adulate pure ne forte irascatur* ("pay homage [to the **LORD**] sincerely, lest he be angered"). The rendering given here takes the MT *nashquw-bar* to mean "kiss ye the son". However, the psalmist may have chosen *bar* rather than *ben* for "son" (cf. v. 7) in order to pair the term with *yib'ar* ("set ablaze") for auditory effect and to infer "sincere" with *bar*.

According to Liudger Sabottka in his article, *Ps 2,12: "Küsst den Sohn!"?*, in *Biblica*, vol. 87, fasc. 1, 2006, pp. 96-97, the kings of the land are admonished to be sincere in disarming themselves (from *nashaq* II,

meaning "to arm oneself", and the "privative Pi'el" form thus meaning "to be disarmed"—similar to the use of "stone" as a verb in English in the sense of "destone" as in, "to stone a field", meaning, "to remove stones from a field"). It is Sabottka's thesis that "kiss the son" makes no sense and that "disarm" rather than "kiss" is the sole correct meaning of *nashaq* in Ps 2:11. Indeed, the allegiance that is to be given to the new king could include disarmament. But one can maintain that the poet plays on *nashaq* in order to infer both "kiss" and "disarm", since the consonantal root is the same for both terms (cf. the comments regarding Ps 83:16 for another example of "extended wordplay"). Finally, there is no real reason to maintain that reference to a kiss is meaningless in Ps 2, when in fact "kiss the son" does make sense in the context of the psalm and its cultural setting.

The custom of a "kiss of peace", as it might be called, was certainly accepted and expected in "Old Testament times" as a sign of alliance. In 1 Sam 10:1, Samuel kisses and anoints Saul as the king of Israel; and in 2 Sam 15:5, Absalom kisses an array of men to win their support for his self-proclaimed kingship. Joab gives the rebellious Amasa a deceitful kiss even as he disembowels Amasa (cf. 2 Sam 20:9-10). Prov 27:6 states "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are profuse". In short, Ps 2:11 asks the kings to offer sincere allegiance, lest the **LORD** slay them at once. Here *derek* ("way", given here as "directly") is seen as an adverb and in the sense of "on the spot" or "straight way".

In the NT, Luke applies this psalm to Jesus, "the son" and Messiah, in Acts 4:25-26. Cf. also Mt 3:17 and Heb 1:5. Appropriately, Luke 22:48 has Jesus say, "Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" This may indicate that Luke senses the nuance regarding sincerity contained in the psalm.

Psalm 3

A Psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom.

Psalm 3, a lament, continues the theme of rebellion from Ps 2, but at a more personal and individual level. In its being ascribed to David (as are 72 other psalms) and his trials, the psalm is given a profound national flavor and, for early Christians, an added messianic sense.

- 1 How many are my foes, O LORD!
How many are rising up against me!
- 2 How many are saying about me:
"There is no help for him in God."
- 3 But you, LORD, are a shield about me,
my Glory, and the one that lifts up my head.
- 4 I cry aloud to the LORD.
He answers from his holy mountain.

- 5 I lie down to rest and I sleep.
I awake, for the LORD upholds me.
- 6 I will not fear even thousands of people,
who line up on every side against me.
- 7 Arise, LORD; save me, my God.
Strike all my foes across the face,
and break the teeth of the wicked!
- 8 Salvation belongs to the LORD.
May your blessing be upon your people.

Notes

5. *I sleep . . . I awake.* The terminology of this verse appears to indicate that the psalmist (the king?) has slept in the temple and has been assured of God's support against foes who may have once been friends or allies. Cf. *A Touch of Support: Ps 3,6 and the Psalmist's Experience*, by Ruth Fidler, in *Biblica*, vol 86, fasc. 2, 2005, pp. 193-212.

7. *break the teeth.* "Teeth" is a reference to the foes' weapons rather than to their dentures.

8. *Salvation belongs.* Very likely there is a play on words in these lines, depending on the way a reader of

the Hebrew text would have pronounced YHWH, the sacred name of God. By using the pointing (vowels) from 'adonay ("Lord"), "YHWH" would probably be pronounced "Yehowah" or written as such—as became the case with the postexilic Jews. When this is followed by *yeshuw'ah* ("salvation"), as happens twice in these lines, the two words, similar in sound, become virtually identical in meaning. The effect is similar to saying, "O Yehowah (LORD), your essence is *Yeshuw'ah*." One readily hears in this, "You shall call his name *Yeshuw'ah* ('Yahweh saves'), for *yowshi'a* ('he will save') his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21; cf. also Rev 7:10).

Psalm 4

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

This prayer at night continues the theme of confidence in God from the previous psalm, a morning prayer. The psalmist is eager to show idol worshipers that "my Glory", i.e., the **LORD**, is the one who gives "good things" (*towb*), perhaps a synonym for rain (v. 6) in a drought-laden land (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, pp. 22-27). Idolaters are chided for turning to their idols and soothsayers for help and prosperity. One can almost hear the poet say *ha-Ba'aliym habaliym*: "the Baals are vapors". Cf. Jer 10:8. These "vapors" are "vanities", i.e., idols. Cf. Isa 57:13; Deut 32:21; 1Kings 16:13 and 26. In Eph 4:17, pagan worship is "vanity of mind".

- 1 When I call, answer me, O God, my vindication.
From my distress set me free.
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!
- 2 O men, how long must my Glory suffer insult?
How long will you befriend worthless idols
and consult lying oracles?
- 3 Know that the LORD works wonders
for the one devoted to him.
The LORD hears me whenever I call him.
- 4 Tremble, and sin no more.
Examine your heart upon retiring, and weep bitterly.
- 5 Offer righteous sacrifices, and trust in the LORD.
- 6 Many are asking:
"Who will let us see prosperous times?"
Let the light of your face come upon us, O LORD.

- 7 Put greater joy into my heart,
than when their grain and grapes abounded.**
- 8 I will lie down in peace, and sleep comes at once;
for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.**

Notes

2. *lying oracles*. The Hebrew expression, *baqash kazab*, translates literally as “seek lying”. However, *baqash* refers especially to consulting with necromancers and soothsayers. Cf. e.g., 1 Sam 28:7.

4. *Tremble . . . retiring*. With a note of “sacred sarcasm”, the psalmist tells the idolaters to examine their consciences and then weep for their wrong doing in not trusting in the **LORD**. The rendering, “upon retiring”, interprets the psalmist’s words, “upon your beds”. The bed is located in the inmost part of the house, where one may go to grieve and weep in private. Cf. Ps. 6:6; 1 Kings 21:4; 2 Kings 20:1-3. The common reading, “and be still” (for “weep bitterly”) cannot be well defended in the light of more recent research. Cf. *A Note on Psalm 4,5*, by John S. Kselmann, in *Biblica*, vol. 68, fasc. 1, 1987, pp. 103-105.

“Bitter weeping” is found in Isa 33:7, Ezek 27:30-31, and Jer 31:15. Bitter tasting tears were thought to be the result of the heart’s becoming weak and watery. Cf. *The Physiology of Tears in the Old Testament*, by T.

Collins, in *CBQ*, vol. 33, no. 33, 1971, pp. 18-38; 185-197.

7. *Put greater joy*. The psalmist is asking that his or her joy at being vindicated (i.e., proven right that only the **LORD** is the giver of good things) be greater than the joy that the psalmist’s opponents experienced from their bounteous harvests in past times. This joy contrasts with the bitter weeping of v. 4, and it is “God-given” joy. Bonaventure Zerr thus translates this verse with, “Give joy to my heart, greater than men have from their gods of grain and wine” (*The Psalms: A New Translation*, Paulist Press, 1979, p. 8). The Ebla tablets refer to *likhim*, the Canaanite god of grain, who was worshipped at *bet-lekhem* (Bethlehem), “the temple of Likhim”. Besides Bethlehem of Judah, there is also a Bethlehem of Zebulun, now known as Beit Lahm, about seven miles NWW of Nazareth.

8. This verse contrasts with the trembling and weeping associated with retiring to one’s bed in v. 4. With firm faith in the **LORD**, the psalmist can rest in tranquility; for the **LORD** grants firmness of standing to those who stand firm in the **LORD**. Cf. Isa 7:2-4.

Psalm 5

To the leader: for the flutes. A Psalm of David.

Psalm 5 is a morning prayer in preparation for entering into worship in the temple. Acceptable worship of God begins with *metanoia*, the rejection of evil, and the pursuit of righteousness. The psalm is also a lament and a plea for God’s help against lying accusers, who appear to be idolaters. The modern person, burdened with personal problems and the indifference or hostility of world, can well empathize with the psalmist.

- 1 To my words give ear, O LORD;
give heed to my thoughts.**
- 2 Attend to the sound of my cries,
my King and my God;
for I pray unto you, O LORD.**
- 3 In the morning, hear my voice.
In the morning, I plead my cause and watch for you.**
- 4 You are not a god who loves evil;
no sinner shall abide with you.**
- 5 Boasters shall have no place in your presence.
You hate all who do evil; (6) you destroy all who lie.
The LORD detests the murderer and liar.**
- 7 But I, through your great love, will enter your house.
Out of reverence for you,**

- I will bow low before your holy temple.
- 8 Lead me, LORD, in your righteousness,
because of my enemies.
Make straight your path before me.
- 9 Nothing reliable comes from this one's mouth.
That one's ambition is destruction.
Their throat is a wide-open grave.
They make their tongues smooth.
- 10 Pronounce them "guilty", O God.
Let them fall by their own intrigues.
For their many transgressions, cast them out;
for they have rebelled against you.
- 11 All who take refuge in you shall be glad;
forever they will shout for joy.
You shelter them.
In you they rejoice, those who love your name.
- 12 You will bless the righteous one, O LORD.
Your favor is a shield surrounding him.

Notes

2. *my King and my God*. Cf. *The Enthronement of Yhwh and David: The Abiding Theological Significance of the Kingship Language of the Psalms*, by J.J.M. Roberts, in: *CBQ*, vol. 64, no. 4, October, 2002, pp. 675-686.

6. *murderer and liar*. In the NT, these are the sins that characterize the devil. Cf. Jn 8:44; Rev 21:8.

9. *That one's ambition is destruction . . . their throat is a . . . grave*. Gratuitous changing from the singular to the plural, or vice versa, is relatively common in the psalms. However, the change in this case is purposeful and produces a forceful depiction of the situation: "This one does this, that one does that. These are like this, those are like that". The psalmist asks God to turn the

tables on the foes by letting them "fall" (i.e., into the grave), which is the design they have in mind for the psalmist.

tongues smooth. A smooth tongue is deceitful and full of flattery. Here, the term calls up the image of lying tongues that serve as slippery slides into the throat, i.e., the "wide-open grave".

10. *cast them out*. The psalmist completes the imagery of the smooth tongue by indicating that the flattery and lies of the foe will lead to their own undoing. The term, *nadakh* ("cast out"), means especially to be cast out into the darkness, like the wedding guest without a wedding garment. "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth'" (Mt 22:13).

***Psalms* 6**

**To the leader: with stringed instruments; according to The Sheminith.
A Psalm of David.**

The rather serene confidence of the just person ("David") in the previous psalms is now suddenly and harshly terminated. The psalmist's illness and troubles are taken as expressions of God's anger. Nevertheless, the psalm, a night prayer and the first of the seven "penitential psalms" (Pss 6, 32, 51, 102, 130, 143), calls seven times upon the Lord and concludes with a note of confidence. One can readily understand how this psalm might have been prayed by the exiles in Babylon. "How long, O Lord?" is more than a rhetorical question. It is a plea to God to reveal the duration of the situation; for knowing in advance how long some unpleasant situation will last may bring some comfort and hope for perseverance to the sufferer. The term, *Sheminith*, is used again in the title for Ps 12. Its meaning is uncertain; but it may refer to the number 8, perhaps meaning "in the 8th key or mode" to be used with the kind of lament found here and again in Ps 12.

- 1 LORD, do not punish me in your anger;
do not reprove me in your rage.
- 2 Pity me, LORD; I have no strength left.
Heal me, LORD; my bones are in torment.
- 3 My soul is very troubled.
But you, O LORD, how long will it last?
- 4 Come back, O LORD, and save my soul.
Save me, LORD, as befits your loving kindness.
- 5 For in death no one remembers you.
Who can sing your praises from the grave?
- 6 I am exhausted with my groaning.
I bathe my bed throughout the night;
with my tears I dissolve my couch.
- 7 In grief my eyes waste away.
My heart has grown feeble from all its woes.
- 8 Away from me, all you evildoers;
for the LORD has heard my weeping.
- 9 The LORD will accept my prayer.
- 10 In confusion my foes will retreat.
They will fall back, humbled in an instant.

Notes

2-3. *bones . . . soul*. The conclusion of v. 2 and the first line of v. 3 are parallel. But “bones” represent intense physical pain, and “soul” corresponds to mental and emotional anguish. It could also be translated as “breath”, which would also contrast with and complement “bones” to express completeness of the pain that the psalmist feels.

8. *evildoers*. After lamenting his/her somatic and psychic pains, the psalmist notes the pain caused by

others. The evildoers are especially those who ignore the Torah. Cf. Ps 119:115. But they may also be “men of blood”, murderers. Cf. Ps 139:19. Very probably, the psalmist means all categories of sinners who are a threat to one’s physical and/or spiritual life.

10. in an instant. The operative word here is *ragah*, which can also mean “rest”, including “being laid to rest”. Cf. Ps 30:5 and commentary. Thus the line could well read, “shamed unto death”.

Psalm 7

A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjaminite.

The psalmist appears to have taken refuge in the temple in order to evade persecutors. With patience worn thin by false accusations, the poet protests with a *shiggaion* (supposedly from *shagah*, “to reel”, “to go astray”), a reference to deep emotions or passions. It is not certain who “Cush, a Benjaminite” might be. The term, “concerning”, may not indicate hostility, but only “that Cush’s words provided the impulse for the composition of the psalm”. Cf. *Cush*, in the *ABD*, vol. 1, article by Siegfried S. Johnson, p. 1219.

- 1 O LORD, my God, I take refuge in you.
Save me from all who pursue me, and deliver me;
- 2 lest someone lash out like a lion rending my neck,
and no one is there to deliver me.

- 3 LORD, my God, if I have done wrong,
if there is iniquity in my hands,
- 4 if I have repaid my ally with evil,
or betrayed my rival without due cause,
- 5 then let the foe give chase and beset me!
Let him trample my life into the earth,
and make my honor abide in the dust.
- 6 Arise, O LORD, in your anger!
Rise up against the fury of my foes.
Enact for me the judgment you decreed,
- 7 and gather the host of nations around you,
and once again return on high over it.
- 8 Let the LORD judge the nations.
Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness,
and according to the integrity within me.
- 9 Yes, let an evil end be the end of the wicked!
And may you let the just person stand firm—
you who probe the heart and reins, O just God.
- 10 My defense is there with God,
who saves the upright of heart.
- 11 God is a righteous judge,
and God renders verdicts every day.
- 12 If someone does not repent, he sharpens his sword,
and bends his bow and strings it.
- 13 For that fellow he prepares his lethal weapons;
he makes his arrows into fiery shafts.
- 14 Even so, here is one who is espoused to iniquity,
who conceives mischief, and gives birth to lies.
- 15 He dug a trench; but it entrenched him.
He plunged into the pit that he had prepared.
- 16 His mischief comes down upon his head,
and his violence descends upon his skull.
- 17 I will thank the LORD for his justice.
I will sing psalms to the name
of the LORD Most High.

Notes

10. *My defense . . . with God.* With this statement, the poet resorts to the metaphor of the court room and the battle field. “My shield is upon God” is the literal reading of this line. The image and metaphor is that of God in the role of a soldier’s armor bearer. In battle, the armor bearer carried the shield in front so as to allow the warrior to have his hands free for fighting. Analogously, the defense attorney is the shield for the accused. The NT takes up this metaphor in regard to Christ and the Holy Spirit. Cf. Jn 14:16.

11-13. *God is a righteous judge.* These six lines have been rendered with great variety (not to say, “imagination”) by various translators. However, when one keeps in mind that the scene presented here is that of

God as both judge and executioner, everything falls neatly into place. God uses the cosmic elements as his instruments, and his arrows are bolts of lightning. The image is of God bending the bow so as to place a string on it before he draws back the taut string to shoot an arrow.

14-16. These three verses are laden with subtle wordplay in the Hebrew text that is not readily reproduced in English. The verbs “plunged” (*yippol*) and “made” (*yip‘al*), being similar in sound, are intended to be similar in meaning, as they would be if the line were rendered as “He sank into the pit he had sunk”. These Hebrew words also play on the word for “iniquity” (*‘amal*) that occurs a few lines earlier and forms an inclusion in the next line of the psalm, thus defining the

iniquity as “digging a trench or pit to entrap the psalmist”. Moreover, there is another implied pun in the word *‘amal*, which can also mean “labor”, as in giving birth, or “work”, as in digging a trench or pit. Finally, the Hebrew word for “entrenched” has the root *khapar*,

which means first of all “to dig” and secondly “to be ashamed”. Cf. Luke 16:3—“To dig I am not able; to beg I am ashamed”. We can capture the sense and implied wordplay of this statement with, “I am too indignant to dig, and I find it too undignified to beg”.

Psalm 8

To the leader: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.

God's creation is deemed “good”, and the children of Adam are exalted above the gods and given dominion over all that is on the land, in the air, or in the sea. Infants are signs of God's creative power, celebrated in the autumn festival. The union of the themes of creation and children is a feature of prophetic literature (cf. e.g., Isa 11:8). Children “embody” creation and newness. In the creator's act of overcoming primordial chaos—they become God's “force”. Heb 2:5-8 gives the messianic understanding of this psalm as it was applied by Christians to Jesus Christ. *Gittith* may refer to the Philistine city of Gath, where David once took refuge while fleeing from Saul. Cf. 1 Sam 21:10.

- 1 O LORD, our Lord!**
How noble is your name through all the earth;
for you spread your splendor above the heavens!
- 2 From the mouth of infants and nurslings,**
you raised a force to respond to your foes,
to vanquish the enemy and the avenger.
- 3 When I see the heavens, the work of your hands,**
the moon and the stars which you established,
- 4 what is man that you should keep him in mind,**
the son of Adam that you should care for him?
- 5 Yet you have made him lacking less than the gods;**
with glory and honor you crowned him.
- 6 You made him ruler over the works of your hand;**
you put all things under his feet:
- 7 All of them—sheep and oxen,**
yes, even the wild beasts of the field,
- 8 the birds of the air and the fish of the sea,**
and whatever makes its way through the waters.
- 9 How noble is your name, O LORD our Lord,**
through all the earth!

Notes

2. *From the mouth of infants*. Although this expression has become proverbial, its meaning remains a virtual mystery. However, some of the mystery may be resolved by a closer examination of the use of “mouth” (*peh*) in Hebrew. The terms, *l^epiy* and *k^epiy*, mean “according to”, “in keeping with”, “in proportion to”, etc. (cf., e.g., Ex 16:21; Lev 25:52; Num 6:21). In these expressions, “mouth” assumes the meaning of “measure” as in “mouthful”. The term, *m^epiy* or *mippiy* is found elsewhere in the OT with the meaning of “words from

one's mouth” (e.g., Jer 36:4 and 32). In Isa 59:21, *mippiy* assumes the additional meaning of “from among future generations”: “. . . and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the **LORD**” (NRSV, cf. also Deut 31:21). Thus, with the expression, *m^epiy* (“from the mouth”), the psalmist may be saying, in effect, “from out of the number of infants and nurslings, God has raised a force to match and overpower his foes”. In any case, the poet makes a connection between children and creation and God's strength in overcoming “his foes”.

The term, ‘oz, rendered here as “force”, also means “strength”, “bulwark”, “palace”, and “temple”. It is difficult to determine if or to what extent the poet intends these various meanings in ‘oz. But it is characteristic of Hebrew poetry to use a word with several meanings for the sake of allowing a single word to convey several different concepts that complement and supplement each other. By using *mēpi*, the poet can play on the compound preposition, *lēma’an* (from ‘*anah*, “answer”), meaning “because of”, “in answer to”, and given here as “to respond to”. In military idiom and with a similar wordplay in English, one might say, “God heard the report (i.e., the sound of weapons and fighting) of the foe, and he responded with ‘infantry’—the force that

God has at hand for his on-going work of creation: “My Father is still working, and I also am working” (Jn 5:17).

5. For the poet of this psalm, which repeats the theology of Gen 1-2:4a, there is nothing heterodox with saying that humankind is, in fact, greater than the gods. For God (addressed as *Yahweh-’Adonay* in this psalm) has defeated the gods with a force of mere infants and has given humankind dominion over all of God’s handiwork. Psalm 82:6 addresses human beings as “gods, offspring of the Most High”, and is quoted in Jn 10:34. Cf. Psalm 82:6 and notes.

6. *made him ruler*. The root meaning and form of “to grant rule” (*mashal*) means also “represent” and “be an image of”. Our psalmist is fully imbued with the theology of Gen 1-2:4a.

Psalm 9

To the leader: according to Muthlabben. A Psalm of David.

Psalms 9 and 10 (Psalm 9 in the LXX numbering) form a single, acrostic psalm, albeit the acrostic is incomplete and some letters of the alphabet are in reverse order. This may indicate that the acrostic structure was a later imposition upon the psalm or that postexilic “surgery” on the psalm disturbed the acrostic structure. The mixed genres in Pss 9-10 speak for the thesis that the acrostic structure is an original feature of the psalm, since mixed themes characterize acrostic poems. For some unknown reason, the Hebrew text divides this psalm into Pss 9 and 10. In many places, the MT shows evidence that some lines and verses were “patched in” from other psalms and sources, while other lines were transcribed in faulty form due to scribal blunder or deterioration of the source manuscripts. Ps 9 begins as a thanksgiving hymn and then becomes a lament and a prayer against enemy nations and evildoers. Justice for the poor is very much the psalmist’s concern.

- 1 I will thank you, LORD, with all my heart;
I will tell of all your wondrous works.
- 2 I will exult in you and be glad,
and sing psalms to your name, O Most High.
- 3 When my enemies turned back,
they stumbled and perished at your presence.
- 4 For you upheld the justice of my cause;
you occupied the throne of the just judge.
- 5 You have rebuked the nations;
you have destroyed the wicked.
You have blotted out their name for eternity.
- 6 The foe is forever reduced to ruins.
You plucked up their cities;
even their memory has perished.
- 7 But the LORD is enthroned forever.
He has set up his throne for judgment.
- 8 He will judge the world with justice;
he will judge the peoples with his truth.
- 9 Truly the LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed,

- a stronghold in times of distress.
- 10 Those who know your name will trust in you.
You, O LORD , never forsake those who seek you.
- 11 Sing psalms to the LORD who dwells on Zion.
Tell of his mighty deeds among the peoples;
- 12 for the Avenger of blood keeps them in mind.
He has not forgotten the cry of the poor.
- 13 Have pity on me, O LORD.
See the affliction that my enemies bring upon me,
you who bear me up from the Gates of Death,
- 14 that I may declare your praise
at the Gates of the Daughter of Zion,
and rejoice in your saving help.
- 15 The nations have fallen into the pit
which they have made,
their foot caught in the net
which they have concealed.
- 16 The LORD has revealed himself;
he has rendered judgment:
“The wicked person shall be trapped by the deeds
of his own hands.”
- 17 Let the wicked return to Sheol,
all the nations that forget God.
- 18 For no one in need will ever be forgotten;
nor shall the hope of the poor vanish forever.
- 19 Rise up, O LORD.
Do not let mortals boast of their power.
Let the peoples be judged in your presence.
- 20 Cover them, O LORD, with terror.
Let the nations know they are mere mortals.

Notes

6. *plucked up their cities*. The Hebrew word for “cities” (*‘ariym*) in this passage has also the meaning of “gods”. The psalmist intends both meanings. The root

meaning of the term in question has to do with protection and protectors—cities being places of protection under the protectorship of a god or gods. One may think of Athens and Athena, or “Artemis of the Ephesians”. Cf. Acts 19:24ff.

Psalm 10

The arrogant, scornful wickedness of idolaters and God's apparent failure to respond are the concerns of the psalmist, who has learned that loyalty to God can mean suffering for one's fidelity. The “dark night of the soul” is a common experience of faithful, religious persons who feel the absence more than the presence of God in their lives, especially in view of their suffering in contrast to the apparent success of the wicked.

- 1 Why, LORD, do you stand aloof?
Why do you hide yourself in times of distress?
- 2 Arrogantly, the wicked ardently pursue the poor.

- Let them be caught in the schemes
which they have concocted.
- 3 For the wicked man boasts of his soul's desires;
and the greedy thief kneels.
He mocks the LORD.
- 4 As befits his haughty regard,
the wicked man regards no one:
"There is no God!"
That is the sum of his conceits.
- 5 His ways are wily at all times.
Far beyond his concern are your decrees.
Even as he enrages his rivals, (6) he says in his heart:
"Never shall I falter;
never shall misfortune be my lot."
- 7 His mouth is full of cursing, deceit and oppression.
Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.
- 8 He sets up an ambush near the villages,
and covertly kills the innocent.
He keeps an eye open for the poor,
- 9 and lurks in hiding like a lion in its lair.
He lies in ambush to catch the poor.
He pounces on the poor, dragging him into his net.
- 10 Crushed and bowed down,
the hapless fellow falls into his trap.
- 11 In his heart he claims:
"God has forgotten; he has hidden his face.
He never looks."
- 12 Rise up, O LORD!
O God, lift up your hand!
Do not forget the afflicted.
- 13 How can the wicked man despise God
and say in his heart:
"He does not call anyone to account"?
- 14 Now that you have seen distress,
and grief you have noticed,
so as to take them into your hand,
the weak cast themselves upon you.
You are the helper of the orphans.
- 15 Break the arm of the wicked sinner,
Scrutinize his wickedness, until you find no more.
- 16 The LORD is king forever and ever.
Let the heathen perish from his land.
- 17 If you hear the cry of the poor,
if you strengthen their heart, O LORD ,
- 18 if you respond by decreeing justice
for the orphan and the oppressed,
then the proud can no longer tyrannize anyone
upon the earth.

Notes

3. *his soul's desires . . . the greedy thief kneels*. There is virtually no agreement among translators regarding these two lines of verse. The "soul's desires" probably refers to lustful desires in regard to fertility cults (cf. Ps 73:7 and notes). But the more difficult issue centers on the meaning of "the greedy thief kneels". The verb, "kneel" (*barak*) can also mean "bless". The designation, "greedy thief" (*botze'a*, "the covetous"), is perhaps better expressed in our modern jargon with "hypocrite", "con-artist", "profiteer", "scammer", or "bilker". The picture is of someone kneeling in worship of his ill-gotten goods. St. Jerome translates the passage with *et avarus*

adplaudens sibi blasphemavit Dominum ("and the avaricious man, applauding himself, has blasphemed the Lord").

4. "*There is no God*." Commentators agree that this statement is not a matter of philosophical atheism, but a claim that God does not care and allows the wicked to succeed. Cf. Pss 37 and 73.

15. *Break the arm of the wicked sinner*. This statement may be understood in several ways: "Destroy the sinner's power", "Destroy the sinner's weapons", or, literally, "Break the sinner's arm". This last possibility may be the one that the poet intends; for "the wicked sinner" appears to be a thief.

Psalm 11

To the leader: Of David.

Psalm 11 probably dates from the late, pre-exilic period before the destruction of the temple, but when Judah's political power was very much in decline and corruption on the increase. The psalmist's cohorts, like Job's "friends", offer unacceptable advice. Instead, the psalmist proclaims full confidence in God.

- 1 In the LORD I have taken refuge.
How can you say to me,
"Flee to your mountain, little bird"?
- 2 "See how the wicked are drawing the bow.
They nock their arrows onto the bowstring,
and shoot from ambush at the upright of heart."
- 3 "When the foundations are destroyed,
what can The Just One do?"
- 4 The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD's throne is in the heavens.
His eyes are watching carefully;
his gaze assays the sons of Adam.
- 5 The LORD, the Just One, weighs the wicked.
His very being hates the wicked lover of violence.
- 6 He rains down blazing hot coals on the wicked;
brimstone and scorching wind will be their lot.
- 7 For the LORD, the Just One, loves justice.
The upright shall look upon his face.

Notes

1. *Flee to your mountain, little bird!* The term, *tsipor* ("bird", especially a sparrow), is offensive to the psalmist. The expression, "your mountain", could be a scornful reference to the temple; but it is more probable that the meaning of the statement is akin to saying, "Head for the hills, you little twit!"

3. "*what can The Just One do?*" "The Just One" more probably refers to the LORD than to the poet. The doubt about God's ability to set things right comes, not

from the psalmist, but from the psalmist's would-be-advisors, who believe God is helpless. The remainder of the psalm is the psalmist's rebuttal.

4. *The LORD is in his holy temple*. As recognized and reported by many students of the Bible, the temple was adorned to depict the earth and the heavens and to serve as God's "resting place" on earth. The temple thus ushers in a new creation and a new Sabbath. Cf. The

Psalm 12

To the leader: according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.

As with Ps 6, this *Sheminith* is a “robust” (a possible meaning of the term) lament over the power of falsehearted oppressors within one’s own family and fellows to the vanquishment of the virtuous.

- 1 Help, O LORD; for the godly are gone,
and the virtuous have vanished
from the sons of Adam.**
- 2 One neighbor tells lies to another;
they speak with lying lips and double hearts.**
- 3 May the LORD cut off all lying lips,
the tongue that boasts of impressive feats,
those who say: “We shall prevail with our tongues.
Our lips are our own.
Who is a master over us?”**
- 5 “Because the poor must cry, because the needy groan,
I shall now arise,” says the LORD.
“I shall act in defense for the one who longs for it.”**
- 6 The words of the LORD are pure,
like silver seven times refined in an earthen furnace.**
- 7 You, LORD, you will keep them!
You will always save him from this generation.**
- 8 The wicked wander about freely,
bringing ruin to the sons of Adam.**

Notes

4. *tongues . . . lips*. Lips and tongues represent the whole person as a boastful liar. This is a good example of synecdoche—“a part for the whole”. But the exact meaning and translation of the statement remain uncertain. It may be that “lips are our own” should read, “our lips are our weapon”—a very possible translation, since the term, *’ittanu* (“with us”, given here as “ours”) can, with a slight difference in the MT pointing, also be rendered as “our axe” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 73). If Dahood is correct, then the image of cutting off lips in v. 3 becomes more meaningful and would then equate with “muzzle them”—an expression found also in Pss 39:1, 107:42, and 141:3. However, the meaning of “our lips

are with us” would seem to be, “our lips as well”—i.e., “Our lips say the same thing as our tongue.”

5. *act in defense*. Literally, the MT states, “I will put in safety”. The imagery appears to present God as the just person’s judge or defense attorney. Cf. also Ps 7:10.

7. *will keep them*. The antecedent of “them” is not clear. I could be either the poor or, more probably, the **LORD**’s words, since the next line refers to a single individual—the poor and just person.

8. *bringing ruin*. St. Jerome provides, *cum exaltati fuerint vilissimi filiorum hominum* (“when the vilest of the sons of men were exalted”).

Psalm 13

To the leader: A Psalm of David.

Schadenfreude (taking pleasure in someone's suffering or misfortune) is a common characteristic of human beings. Here, the psalmist asks to be delivered from the *Schadenfreude* of enemies. On other occasions, the psalmist does not hesitate to ask God to strike down the foe and thereby grant the psalmist a moment of delectable *Schadenfreude*.

- 1 **How long, O LORD?**
Do you intend to forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
- 2 **How long must I suffer piercing pains in my soul,**
this aching grief in my heart all the day?
How long will my enemy be exultant over me?
- 3 **Look, O LORD, my God!**
Answer me!
Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep the death;
- 4 **lest my enemy say:**
"I have prevailed against him!"
My foes will rejoice because I have faltered.
- 5 **But I rely on your mercy.**
Let my heart rejoice in your salvation.
- 6 **I will sing unto the LORD; for he has been good to me.**

Notes

2. *piercing pains* . . . *aching grief*. The psalmist speaks of "woods in my soul"—"wood" being a poetic expression for a thorn, splinter, or stake—hence, "piercing pains". Furthermore, "soul" (*nepesh*) also means "throat" and is parallel to "heart" in this verse. This is a fine example of the subtleties of Hebrew poetry and language.

5-6. The shift to confidence in these lines may indicate that the psalm was altered for liturgical use. The theme of the psalm certainly resonated with the exiles and the postexilic community; but there is no real evidence that the psalm originated from that era of Israel's history—except that v. 5b reflects possible exilic/postexilic redaction in the expression, "rejoice in your salvation". (cf. Pss 7:14, 19:14, and notes).

Psalm 14

To the leader: Of David.

Psalm 14 occurs again as Psalm 53, where, however, YHWH ("Lord") is replaced by *'elohiym* ("God")—an indication of later, perhaps, postexilic redaction of this psalm to become Psalm 53. In the biblical view, a person with "noble" and virtuous qualities is the antithesis of the fool. The fool, then, is the ignoble, non-virtuous person who doesn't bother to think about God seriously and who makes the quick judgment that God's existence is a matter of indifference. Such persons, like the judge in Luke 18:2, live in an all-embracing apathy and contempt, fearing neither God nor man. When reliance on God is abandoned, it is only a matter of time until honesty and charity are also abandoned, and "the poor get poorer and the rich get richer." Cf. Lk 18:4. Ironically, the fool's practical (not philosophical) denial of God has the effect of bringing the psalmist a step closer to the monotheism of the postexilic community. Psalms 14 and 53 may be classified as sapiential, but with a strong admixture of lament.

- 1 **The fool says in his heart,**
"There is no God." They have become corrupt.
They do detestable deeds;

- no one does any good thing.
- 2 From heaven the LORD looks down upon the children of Adam,
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.
 - 3 All have gone astray; all alike are corrupt.
None of them does any good thing,
not a single one of them.
 - 4 Do not all these transgressors think,
that, in devouring my people,
they are eating bread?
They never acknowledged the LORD.
 - 5 There they feared to show reverence;
for God dwells in the household of the just.
 - 6 You might belittle the council of the poor;
but the LORD is his refuge.
 - 7 If only Israel's salvation would come from Zion!
When the LORD restores the prosperity of his people,
then will Jacob rejoice and Israel delight.

Notes

1. *fool*. The “fool” is not a “convinced atheist”, but one who ignores the wisdom of the Torah.

4. *transgressors think . . . eating bread?* This verse is particularly puzzling. However, when *yad^euw* is taken in the sense of “they have the opinion” rather than “they know”, and when the statement is treated as a rhetorical question to which the expected answer is “Yes, indeed!”, then the puzzle pieces fall into place. By ignoring the law and worship of God, these oppressors of the poor have become so insensitive that destroying the poor means no more to them than eating a piece of bread. Cf. Am 2:6f.

5. Literally, the psalmist says “there they feared fear”, which could mean “there they were filled with fear”. However, that is clearly not the case with these evildoers, who are so proud in opposing God that they

are fully disinclined to show any reverence to God. Instead, they show total disrespect toward God by turning their backs to God. The term, *pakhad* (“fear”), also exists as a homonym meaning “thigh” or “rump” (cf. Job 40:17). The psalmist is thus resorting to a subtle wordplay.

6-7. *council . . . refuge*. In Hebrew as in English, the same dualism of meaning exists between the terms “council” and “counsel”. In the context here, “council” is preferred, since it is parallel to “household”—with both terms signifying an assembly of persons as well as the conduct and decisions of the assembly. The image of God as refuge is not a mere abstraction. It recalls God as a fortress in battle and as one's defense attorney in the courtroom. The references to “the poor” in this verse and “salvation” in v. 7 appear to be the editorial work of the exilic or postexilic community.

Psalm 15

A Psalm of David.

This psalm, sapiential in content, may have served as an “Entrance Liturgy” and specifies various moral conditions for one's entry into the temple, which is called “tent” here as a reflection on the “Tent Tradition”. Cf. 2 Sam 7:4ff. Prophetic elements are also present in the psalm, especially in the call to treat others well. Psalm 15 can well serve as a meditation on “the Golden Rule” and love of God and neighbor. Cf. Luke 10:27.

- 1 LORD, who shall be a guest in your tent?
Who shall stay on your holy mountain?
- 2 It is the one who walks blamelessly,
whose deeds are according to your will,

- the one whose heart speaks the truth,
3 whose tongue utters no slander;
 who does not offend a friend, nor naysay a neighbor;
4 in whose eyes the godless are held in contempt,
 but who honors those who fear the LORD;
 who keeps his word,
 even though it may cause him harm;
5 who does not exact usury for his silver,
 nor take a bribe against the innocent.
 Whoever does these things will never be undone.

Notes

3. *offend a friend, nor naysay a neighbor*. This rendering imitates the “echo effect” of the Hebrew text, which uses words with recurring sounds for poetic effect and to add emphasis to the statements.

4. *cause him harm*. A straight, forward translation of the MT reads, “He swore to doing evil and will not change.” This statement can hardly apply to the just person. Perhaps the psalmist means “swear off doing any wrong” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 84; Isa 54:9). The LXX and other ancient sources read the Hebrew text as *lere'eihuw* (“to his fellow man”, meaning: “When he swears a promise to his fellow man, he does not revoke it”) in place of *lehara'* (“to do evil”). This modification requires a reversal of the consonants in the Hebrew term in question—a possible scribal error. The question is, however, “Was the inversion made in *lehara'* by or before the ancient sources, or by the Masoretes in

lere'eihuw, or by some other source in the psalm’s long history of transmission and transcription?” In any case, the basic idea is that the righteous person does not swear falsely so as to avoid unpleasant consequences for him/herself.

5. *never be undone*. The just person will never be “undone” (MT, *l'o yimmot*, “not be moved”), since God will never be “outdone” in doing good and bestowing blessings. Walking (living) according to the will of God is all that counts. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me” (Jn 4:34). Stumbling on the other hand, means to go apart from the law and God’s will. Cf. Acts 1:18 regarding Judas’ “falling headlong”. The psalmist’s choice of *yimmot* (root, *mowt*) may possibly be an implied wordplay on the Hebrew for “die” and “death” (*muwth*), which may be reflected in Jesus’ words shortly before raising Lazarus from the dead: “Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:26).

Psalm 16

A Miktam of David.

This is a short psalm with a long message: The **Lord** alone is the God of salvation and “a jealous God.” The terminology, grammar, and style of this psalm point to northern Israel as its place of origin. The author appears to be a Levite who is confronted by fellow Levites who have given themselves over to idolatry and superstition. Cf. Stuhlmueller, pp.115-119. Syncretism of paganism and Yahwistic religion became widespread in the north after it seceded from Judah following the death of Solomon about 922 B.C.E.. The golden calves enshrined at Dan and Bethel were probably intended as symbols of Yahweh (cf. 1 Kings 12:28-30) that quickly gave way to pagan practices that became even more pronounced with the Assyrian conquest of the north in 721 B.C.E. The psalm’s opening verses may well be the prayer of every generation, struggling to remain founded in the **Lord** and to keep its religion and motives pure.

The term, “miktam”, in the superscription of several psalms may come from the Akkadian root, “to cover”, perhaps denoting a degree of obscurity and twisting of words.

- 1** Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in you.
2 I say to the LORD: “You are my LORD.
 Does not my happiness rest upon you?”
3 As for those “holy ones” in the land,

- they and the “noble ones” used to be all my delight.
- 4 Those who lust after another god will increase their sorrows.
I will not pour out libations to them from my hands;
I will not take their names upon my lips.
- 5 You, O LORD, are my portion and cup.
You are the one who sustains my lot.
- 6 The stakes have been put down for me
in pleasant places.
Yes, I have a delightful legacy.
- 7 I will bless the LORD, who counsels me.
Even at night my heart directs me.
- 8 I keep the LORD ever in my sight.
Now that he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
- 9 And so my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices.
Even my body shall dwell in safety;
- 10 for you will not abandon me to Sheol,
nor will you consign your devoted one to the Pit.
- 11 You will show me the path of life.
There is fullness of joy in your presence;
at your right hand, happiness forever.

Notes

2. *You are my Lord. ... happiness rest upon you.* These lines are uncertain. *Adonay* (translated here and elsewhere as “Lord”) may bear the meaning of “foundation”, since the root of this term means “column base” or “foundation”, which fits the tenor of the psalm quite well. The Hebrew text in the second half of this verse seems to say “my good does *not* rest upon you”. However, if the negative *bal* (possibly a wordplay on “Baal”) is used to construct a rhetorical question (“Does not my happiness . . . ?”), the sense becomes clear. “Happiness” (*towb*) contrasts the sorrows of those who worship false gods (sarcastically called the “holy ones” and the “noble ones”) with the joy that the psalmist has found in Yahweh.

4. *lust after another god* The Hebrew terminology recalls Gen 3:16—“I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing . . . ; yet your desire shall be for your husband” (NRSV). Lusting after other gods fits the context well, since worship of them included “sacred prostitution”.

libations to them . . . Most translations speak of “their libations of blood”. However, there is a parallel to be made with “my lips” and *midam* (“from blood”). But *midam* probably should be pointed to read *middem* (“from my hands”) as a parallel to “my lips” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 88). Taking the names of gods on one’s lips includes drinking to their names.

5-6. These verses further define the psalmist’s “lot”. The term for “stakes” (i.e., boundary markers) is usually rendered “lines” as in “boundary lines”. But “stakes” may also refer to a shepherd’s staff (cf. Zech 11:7, 14) and to the idea of one’s being shepherded by the LORD. The key term in these verses, however, is “lot”. The Levites had no territory of their own, but they were allotted various cities among the other tribes of Israel (cf. Josh 18:7, 21:41; Deut 10:8-9). The Levite-psalmist thus proclaims delight in his lot, having and serving YHWH as his God and “delightful legacy”. Judges 17 relates the religiously syncretistic story of Micah in the hill country of Ephraim (northern Israel) who had a silver idol and employed a Levite from Bethlehem of Judah to serve as a priest in his household. “Then Micah said, ‘Now I know the LORD will prosper me, because the Levite has become my priest’” (Judg 17:13).

7. *bless the Lord*. This expression means offering a “sacrifice of praise” (cf. Jer 33:11; Heb 13:15).

8. *I shall not be moved*. The psalmist seems to say that he or she will not evade the LORD’s guidance.

9-11. *dwell in safety*. These verses are cited in Acts 2:24-32 according to the LXX as prophecy and proof that Jesus was raised from the dead. Where the MT reads “in safety” (*labetah*), the LXX reads ἐλπίδι (“in hope”). The Judaism and rabbinical interpretation of Scriptures in Jesus’ day did indeed view the Scriptures as prophecy to be fulfilled in

and by the coming of the Messiah. However, such interpretation did not necessarily include any notion of resurrection from the dead in regard to the Messiah. Rather, it was left to the writers of the NT to make this “connection” as they applied rabbinical methods of scriptural interpretation to the person, life, and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

Nevertheless, the LXX translation of Ps 16 (15) reflects an openness to resurrection of the dead, and by Jesus’ day, the question of resurrection had become official doctrine for the Pharisees, but not for the Sadducees and temple priests. For the writer of Ps 16, life in its fullness is in taking refuge in the **LORD** (v. 1).

Psalm 17

A Prayer of David.

Even though the psalmist (perhaps the same as in Ps 16) declares his innocence and justice, he also finds the need to call confidently upon God to deliver him from his enemies. It is possible that the psalmist is passing the night in the sanctuary and hopes to experience God’s presence upon waking in the morning. Psalms 11:7 and 27:4 use similar language to express one’s experience of God in the temple. The psalmist’s enemies supposedly have the **LORD**’s sword (v. 14). Thus they are probably those who have authority to serve the **LORD**, but who have become unfaithful to their service and seek to oppress the psalmist instead. They once “walked” in the way of the **LORD**; but now they are “stumbling” (i.e., sinning). “Straight are the paths of the **LORD**, in them the just walk; but sinners stumble in them” (Hos 14:10).

- 1 Hear, O LORD, a righteous plea.
Attend to my cry.
Give ear to my prayer; to lips without deceit.**
- 2 Let my cause come before you.
Let your eyes discern what is right.**
- 3 Search my heart; visit me at night.
Test me with fire.
You will not find me conniving.
Nor will my mouth speak rudely.**
- 4 As for the works of humankind,
I, by the word of your lips,
have avoided the rugged roads.**
- 5 My course remained fixed in your footprints,
so that my footsteps might not stumble.**
- 6 I called upon you. Please answer me, O God.
Turn your ear to me. Hear my prayer.**
- 7 Show your wonderful mercies,
O savior of those who seek refuge from the rebels
at your right hand.**
- 8 Guard me as the apple of your eye.
Hide me in the shadow of your wings,**
- 9 from the sight of the wicked,
from those who are out to destroy me,
from my enemies who press in on me.**
- 10 They are stuffed full of fat;
their flabby maws speak boastfully.**
- 11 Whenever we go anywhere, they have us surrounded.
They slink with their eyes low to the earth,**
- 12 like a lion on the prowl for prey,
like a young lion crouched in hiding.**

- 13 Rise up, O LORD!**
Confront him! Subdue him!
- 14 Snatch my life from the wicked;**
wrest your sword from the enemies of your hand,
O LORD,
from mortals of the present age,
whose portion is in this life.
Then when you fill the bellies of your cherished ones,
they will abound with children
to whom they leave their wealth.
- 15 But when I am vindicated, I shall behold your face.**
When I awake, I shall be filled with your likeness.

Notes

3-5. The Hebrew text of these lines is obscure and perhaps corrupt. This rendering follows closely the LXX. However, the statement, "(I) have avoided the rugged roads", remains obscure inasmuch as the Greek word, ἐφίλαξα, translated here as "I have avoided", means first of all "I have guarded", i.e., perhaps, "I have held to the your word even though it is difficult to follow". But "rugged" or "uneven" ways are generally considered to be ways that cause one to stumble into difficulties or wrongdoing and thus are to be avoided. The MT reads "ways of the violent" (*arkhowt pariyts*), which St. Jerome translates as *vias latronis* ("ways of the robber"). Such ways would be dangerous, and the psalmist recognizes that "the word of your lips" (the Torah) has been his guide in avoiding or in passing over these ways safely as noted in v. 5. "Walking" versus "stumbling" is a sapiential variant of "the two ways".

9. *sight of the wicked*. This expression (literally, "from the face of the wicked") may also be translated as "from the wrath of" However, the emphasis is on being out of the sight of the enemy. The psalmist refers to the wicked with the emphatic, relative pronoun, *zu*. English does not have a similar pronoun, but must resort to an expression such as, "those characters". The poet is building up to a sort of climax in imagery which becomes clear in v. 12, when the enemy is compared to lions.

10. *stuffed . . . flabby maws*. The MT literally reads, "They have shut tight their fat; their flabby maws". The statement is obscure; but it implies that obesity is a sign of pride and moral apathy. Cf. Ps 73:7f; Jer 5:28; Deut 32:15. The image that the psalmist is drawing is that of well-fed lions, and the double chins of the enemy look like a lion's mane

dangling loosely like dewlaps from the animal's maw.

14. *snatch my life . . . wrest your sword*. In the MT, *kharbbeka* ("your sword") appears out of place and is usually translated as "an accusative of means" (i.e., "save my life with your sword"). However, the LXX treats the term as a direct object of the verb, *pall^etah* ("deliver", rendered here as "snatch" and "wrest"), and parallel to "my life". This verse is most obscure and possibly corrupt and disordered.

The second half of the verse could also be translated as follows: *With your goods, fill their bellies, teeming with children, to whom they leave their wealth*. This would be contrary to the usual idea that one's goods and children are the blessings that God bestows only upon the just. But it is also possible to understand "wealth" as a sarcastic term, such as "just deserts" and the psalmist as saying something like, "May God fill the wicked with what they deserve, so that even their many children will inherit the undesirable consequences." Another possible way of translating this statement would be "Let their bellies be filled with goods enough to leave to their children; but as for me, I will look upon your face . . ."

15. This verse appears to be a confession of faith in the resurrection of the dead or at least in life after death. Most likely, however, it refers to a recovery of health or security that brings a sense of new life and the opportunity to experience and praise God anew. Perhaps the psalmist is taking comfort in noting that, although the wicked may be filled with an abundance of everything, the psalmist has God as his or her heritage and will be filled with God's "likeness", i.e., with the presence and glory of God. The LXX sees a reference to life after death in this verse and adds to it, "in the vision of your glory".

Psalm 18

To the leader. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:

The extended heading to this psalm gives a strong, personal and national sense to the psalm. The last statement of the psalm indicates that it was composed or redacted to proclaim the victories of the descendant kings in the line of David. The mention of "temple" in v. 6 may refer to God's heavenly dwelling rather than the temple in Jerusalem, which was not built by David, but by his son, Solomon. The "Song of Thanksgiving" found in 2 Sam 22 is a parallel text to this psalm and probably closer to the original (David's?) composition.

- 1 I love you, O LORD, my strength.**
- 2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress.**
My deliverer is my God,
my mountain in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield, my mighty savior,
my stronghold worthy of praise.
- 3 I call on the LORD and I am saved from my foes.**
- 4 The snares of Death wrapped around me;**
the bonds of Belial strangled me;
- 5 the tethers of Sheol coiled about me;**
the nets of Death entangled me.
- 6 In my distress I called on the LORD;**
I cried out to my God.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry to him came to his ears.
- 7 Then the earth shuddered and shook,**
and the foundations of the mountains trembled;
they shuddered because he was angry.
- 8 Smoke arose from his nostrils;**
a devouring fire flashed from his mouth,
setting coals ablaze with its heat.
- 9 He bent down the heavens and descended,**
a dark cloud under his feet.
- 10 He mounted a cherub and flew;**
he soared on the wings of the wind.
- 11 He made darkness his cover around him,**
his tent the dark, dense rain clouds of the sky.
- 12 Out of the brightness before him,**
his clouds raged with hail and fire.
- 13 The LORD thundered in the heavens;**
the Most High sent forth his voice,
hail and fiery coals.
- 14 He shot his arrows and scattered them;**
then he hurled his thunderbolts and routed them.
- 15 Next the troughs of the ocean appeared,**
and the foundations of the world were laid bare,
at the roar of your reproach, O LORD,
at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

- 16 He reached down from on high and held me;
he saved me from the boundless waters.
- 17 He rescued me from my powerful foes,
and from those who hate me;
for they were stronger than I.
- 18 They attacked me in the day of my distress;
but the LORD was my support.
- 19 He led me forth to freedom.
He saved me because he was pleased with me.
- 20 The LORD rewarded me according
to my righteousness.
He restored me, because my hands were undefiled;
- 21 for I have kept the ways of the LORD ,
and I have not deserted my God.
- 22 For his judgments are all before me,
and I have not disregarded his commands.
- 23 I have been without fault before him,
and I have kept myself from evil.
- 24 The LORD has restored me
according to my righteousness,
according to the purity of my hands in his sight.
- 25 You are faithful toward the faithful.
With the honest, you are honest.
- 26 With the sincere, you are sincere;
but with the cunning, you are cunning.
- 27 For you, indeed, save the humble,
and humble the eyes of the proud.
- 28 For you, O LORD, light my lamp.
My God illumines my darkness.
- 29 With you I can run up embankments.
With my God I can leap over walls.
- 30 God's way is faultless;
reliable is the word of the LORD.
He is a shield to all who flee to him.
- 31 For who is God except the LORD?
And who is a rock except our God?
- 32 He is the God who girds me with strength,
and has made my way secure.
- 33 He has given me the fleet legs of the deer,
and has set me with firm foot on the heights.
- 34 He has trained my hands for battle,
so that my arms can bend a bow of brass.
- 35 You have given me your shield of victory,
and your right hand has upheld me.
Your anthem has bolstered me.
- 36 You have increased the length of my stride,
and my ankles have not weakened.
- 37 I pursued my enemies and overtook them,
and I did not halt until they were wiped out.
- 38 I shattered them so they could not rise;

they fell beneath my feet.
39 You endowed me with strength for war;
 you made the rebels fall beneath me.
40 You gave me the nape of my enemies,
 and I slew those who hated me.
41 They cried out for help;
 but no one came to the rescue.
 They called upon the LORD;
 but he did not answer them.
42 I ground them like dust driven by the wind.
 I tossed them out like dirt from the street.
43 You delivered me from the feuds of the people;
 You appointed me as the head of nations.
 A foreign people served me.
44 The moment they heard my voice, they obeyed me.
45 These foreigners lost heart
 and came trembling from their strongholds.
 The strangers recoiled at my presence.
46 Long live the LORD!
 Praised be my rock;
 and exalted be the God of my salvation:
47 the God that gives me victory,
 and subdues peoples under me!
48 He is the one who delivered me from my enemies.
 Yes, you let me prevail over those
 who rebelled against me.
 You let me escape from the man of violence.
49 Therefore, I will give you thanks among the nations, O LORD.
 I will sing psalms to your name.
50 He has given mighty victories to his king;
 he has dealt graciously with his anointed,
 with David and his descendants forever.

Notes

1. The root, *rkhm* (“love”, “womb”), is used here. But since the term is otherwise never used with the **LORD** as the object, it may be that the line was added by a postexilic scribe, letting the assembly speak in the first person singular of their singular love for the **LORD**, whose strength has upheld them.

4-6. These verses are an example of personification and mythic imagery. The repetition of sounds, concepts, imagery and words in the psalms is effective, but sometimes difficult to parse and translate. The Hebrew term *nakhal*, which means usually a small stream of water or wadi, includes the idea of rushing water. The four lines of vv. 4 and 5 are parallel statements in the Hebrew text. Thus each line should repeat the image of the first line. It is plausible that *nakhal* is to be treated here much as we do in English when we derive the word “streamer” from “stream” to refer to a ribbon or something that can be used like a cord. Also, death and the grave are personified in the Hebrew text, and so it is

appropriate to maintain *Belial* as a proper name when, otherwise, it is a common noun indicating futility or wickedness. Finally, the rendering here uses “strangled” for the Hebrew *ba’ath*, which means, first of all, “to be terrified”. However, the parallel verbs in the other three lines have to do with the imagery of cords and entanglement. The image of being strangled by the streams (bonds) of death is fitting in this context.

12-15. These lines present a theophany that recalls and reenacts the clash between chaos and God’s creative power and action. But the terminology is often as cloudy and chaotic as the imagery being employed. That may be due to the psalmist’s efforts to use not only descriptive language, but also to use language descriptively. For instance, one can hear the staccato sound of hail in ‘*abayw* ‘*ab^eruw barad* (“his clouds raged with hail and fire”). The stormy theophany ends with “the blast of breath from your nostrils”, which forms an inclusion with the hail and fiery coals raging out of the dense clouds.

16-19. In view of the imagery of these verses, one cannot help but think of Moses, “drawn” from the waters of the Nile, and the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery and the cult of death in Egypt, the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, the stormy theophany at Sinai, and freedom in the Land of Promise. The psalmist, moved by a raging thunderstorm, has turned the “experience of a people” in the Exodus into the personal, religious experience of an individual, namely of David.

There remains a question as to the proper meaning and translation of v. 19a: “He led me forth to freedom”. Literally, the MT states, “He led me out to the broad place”. The underlying idea is that of deliverance from death into life; for God’s love overpowers the power of death.

25-26. The root *khsd* (*khesed*) describes God’s love, mercy, kindness, faithfulness, etc. The rendering with “faithful” maintains the parallel with “honest” and “sincere”, the opposite of “cunning”.

27. The “humble” are *‘aniy* and the “eyes” are *‘eynayim*. In their Hebrew letters, these words are very similar in appearance and sound, thus making the play on the word “humble” possible and in keeping with the psalmist’s imagery. The Hebrew terminology plays also on the concept of oppression: “You save the oppressed, and you oppress the eyes of the proud.”

28-30. The rendering, “embankments”, is based on its being parallel to “wall” and the fact that the Hebrew term, *g^eduwd*, can mean “clod”. The walls of a fortification or city were often surrounded by embankments (*glacis*) made of rubble and piled stones. Even plowed strips of land could serve to make a running attack on the ramparts impossible. The words translated here as “embankments” and “walls” are singular in the Hebrew text, giving us examples of synecdoche—using a part for the whole. Psalm 65:11, describing the effects of rain on cultivated ground, uses the plural of *g^eduwd* (i.e., *g^eduwdeah*), rendered appropriately as “ridges” or “furrows” by most translators. Yet, they generally translate *g^eduwd* as “troop” or other related military term in this psalm. Although *g^eduwd* can mean “troop”, its being paired

with “wall” (*shuwr*) suggests that *g^eduwd* in this context is also inanimate and similar in function to a defense wall. Moreover, just as a defense wall is not the whole city or fortification, so too is a clod of dirt is not the entire embankment or *glacis*. Yet both terms can very well stand for the whole that they respectively represent. The parallelism, the use of synecdoche, plus the fact that the verb *’arets* (“I will run through” or “over”) is appropriately similar to the Hebrew word for “earth” in this case and is the *qal* form (meaning “run” rather than “cause to run away”) indicate that “clod”, not “troop”, is the psalmist’s intended meaning for *g^eduwd*. This rendering further results in the proper sequence of actions of “running” and then “leaping over”, making it quite clear that *g^eduwd* must be translated with a term that calls attention to embankments rather than to military personnel.

35. *Your anthem has bolstered me*. The root word given here for “anthem” is *‘anah*, which has a wide range of meanings, mostly having to do with humility or singing or a cry of either victory or defeat (cf. Ex 32:18). Ex 15:21 uses the term in reference to Miriam’s song of victory. Perhaps the psalmist infers that such a cry includes the name YHWH so as to strike fear into the enemy. Isa 42:13 speaks of the warrior, who shall cry and roar to prevail over the enemy. Cf. also 1 Sam 17:20, Job 39:25, Am 1:14, Josh 6:20.

The Hebrew term translated here as “bolstered” is *tarbbeniy* (from *rabah*), which also has a wide range of meanings in regard to greatness and increase in number. However, the term can also refer to a bowman or archer as in Gen 21:20: “God was with the boy [Ishmael] as he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert bowman” (*robeh qashat*, literally, “one shooting the bow”). If “bowman” or “archer” is meant here, then *‘anah* might bear the meaning of “instructions” or “training”.

40. *nape of my enemies*. This expression may refer to the practice the victor’s placing his foot on the necks of the enemy captives or of riding a chariot wheel over their necks. Cf. Ps 66:12.

50. This verse was added in order to recall the covenant relationship between God and David’s dynasty.

Psalm 19

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

The first half of this psalm muses on the marvels of the heavens that meet one’s eye and present a “natural theology.” The second half of the psalm considers God’s laws (the Torah) as the marvelous revelation of God that meets one’s heart and presents a course through life that is as certain and safe as the sun’s course through the sky. The use of “God” (*‘elohiyim*) in the psalm’s first part and “Lord” (*YHWH*) in the second part may indicate a non-Israelite source for the first part. Nevertheless, the OT often views the phenomena of nature as manifestations of the Lord. But the Torah is God’s most outstanding and perfect revelation.

- 1 The heavens proclaim the glory of God;
the vault of the sky keeps telling:
“This is the work of his hands.”
- 2 Day unto day relates the story,
and night unto night makes known the message.
- 3 There is no speech, no word;
nor can their voice be heard.
- 4 Yet their decree goes out through all the earth,
and their words reach the ends of the world.
There he has placed a tent for the sun,
- 5 which comes forth
like a bridegroom from his chamber,
rejoicing like a champion running a race.
- 6 Its starting line is at one end of the sky,
and its course is to the other end.
Nothing is hidden from its heat.
- 7 The Torah of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.
The guidance of the LORD is firm,
giving wisdom to the simple.
- 8 The precepts of the LORD are upright,
giving joy to the heart.
The command of the LORD is lucid,
giving light to the eyes.
- 9 The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are upright,
every one of them just.
- 10 They are more desirable than gold,
even the purest gold.
They are sweeter than honey
dripping from the comb.
- 11 Above all, your servant is enlightened by them;
great is the reward for keeping them.
- 12 But who can discern one’s own errors?
Purge me from hidden faults.
- 13 Especially preserve your servant from presumptions,
and do not let them rule over me.
Then shall I be without fault,
innocent of grave transgression.
- 14 May the words of my mouth
and the thoughts of my heart
find favor in your sight, O LORD,
my rock and my redeemer.

Notes

3-4. *Yet their decree*. The precise meaning of *qawwam* (literally, “their measuring line”, rendered here as “their decree”) is debated. However, the similarity of sound and the parallelism between *qolam* (“their voice”) and *qawwam* would indicate that *qawwam* has a meaning

similar to *qolam*. The LXX translates with *φογγος*, which refers to the singing voices of men and birds and to the strings and sounds of the lyre. In Plato’s *Laws* 812 *D* (referenced in Liddel-Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon*), we find the expression, *φογγος λυρας* (“voice of the lyre”). A lyre and other string instruments have strings

that are cut and stretched to specified lengths. This may be the idea that the poet has attached to *qawwam*. The term, “chorus” or “poetry”, could also be used. Cf. Ps 49:4—“On the lyre, I will resolve my riddle”.

However, when we prescind from the LXX and consider a possible, metaphorical meaning for *qaw* (“measuring line”), we may well have the same thematic and semantic nuances in Hebrew as we have in English for the terms, “measure” and “ruler”. A ruler can be used to measure or, as a person, to establish norms and make laws—which may also be called “measures” or “orders”. We find *qaw* used with these meanings in Isa 28:10—“For it is precept (*tsaw*) upon precept, precept upon precept, line (*qaw*) upon line, line upon line” (NRSV). The NAB and NIV use “rule” instead of “line”. That *qaw* should mean “decree” or “order” in this psalm is further supported by the thematic/semantic connection that both “decree”, “rule”, and “order” have with something that is voiced in words and presented as a law. Also not to be overlooked is the use of “line” as in “line of thought” or “line of text” or “production line”—all of which tie in very well with the second half of this psalm’s eloquent attention to the Torah. The German term, *Ordnung*, captures very well the meaning of *qaw* in this psalm: God has decreed the order of the heavens, which, in turn, impart order to all the earth. This ordering reaches its zenith in the Torah.

The Aramaisms found in this psalm reveal the redacting hand of the postexilic community and the significant role of the psalm in re-establishing religious “law and order” within the postexilic community. Cf. *Ps 19 und sein altorientalischer Hintergrund*, by Christoph Dohmen, in *Biblica*, vol. 64, fasc. 4, 1983, pp. 501-517.

8-9. *lucid . . . pure*. The terms, *barah* (“lucid”) and *t^ehowrah* (“pure”), having almost the same sound as *Torah* (“Law”), serve poetically to reinforce the purpose and effect of Torah.

fear of the Lord is pure. At first sight, it appears that “fear” does not fit the sequence of synonyms for “Torah” in v. 7. However, as noted above, the poet’s use of *t^ehowrah* (“pure”) effects a play on the word, “Torah”, and invokes the proverbial statement (cf. Ps 111:10) that “the fear of the **LORD** is the beginning of wisdom”. In Ps 111:10, “fear of the **LORD**” is equivalent to doing the commands of God. With the term, *t^ehowrah*, and the resulting wordplay with “Torah”, the psalmist indicates that “fear of the **LORD**” has a purifying effect that the individual and community have through their observance of the Torah. The purity in question has to do with freedom from all physical, moral, and legal blemishes that might exclude one from the worshipping assembly.

11. *your servant is enlightened*. At least one or more factions of the postexilic community liked very much referring to David as the “servant” [of God]. The intent of the postexilic community was to demote royalty and promote democratization, with all of the exiles being the ‘*ebed YHWH* (“servant of the Lord”) that is so

prominent in Deutero-Isaiah. Cf., e.g., Isa 24:1-2, 41:8-9, 42:1-7. By making David into the model servant, he is also made to be the model of the Torah-Wisdom-spirituality that the postexilic community embraced. Cf. *David as Exemplar of Spirituality: The Redactional Function of Psalm 19*, by Lelie C. Allen, in *Biblica*, vol. 67, fasc. 5, 1986, pp 544-546.

enlightened. The Hebrew term, *zhr*, can mean either “shine” or “warn”. While most current translations prefer the second meaning, it is more likely that the poet intended, at least primarily, the first meaning. “To shine” relates well to “giving light to the eyes” in v. 8 and “the purest [glittering?] gold” of v. 10. To this “internal evidence” for the use of “enlightened” can be added the “external evidence” from the Ebla tablets that Dahood noted in a brief article published in the year of his unexpected death: *An Ebla Personal Name and the Metaphor in Psalm 19,11-12*, in *Biblica*, vol. 63, fasc. 2, 1982, pp. 260-263.

14. *my redeemer*. In the Hebrew scriptures, *gow’el* (“redeemer”) bears such meanings as “avenger”, “liberator”, “ransomer”, etc. In ancient Israel, the first born son in a family was to be dedicated to the Lord. In some instances, this could mean that the boy is to be sacrificed to God. The account of Abraham’s attempt to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22) may have been originally intended to be a way of putting a stop to human sacrifice among the Israelites, since it is God’s angel who prevents Abraham from completing the sacrifice and allows him to substitute a ram in the place of Isaac in the sacrifice.

The concept of redemption of the first-born male is continued in the Exodus Passover account (cf. Ex 12 and 13:11-16). In Ex 32:29, the service of the sons of Levi is given redemptive status. What this means is more explicitly stated in Num 3:44-45—“Then the **LORD** spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Accept the Levites as substitutes for all the firstborn . . .; and the Levites shall be mine.’” The *gow’el* has duties to his kinsmen (cf. Lev 25:25; Num 35:19). To address God as “my redeemer” is a statement of special kinship.

In this psalm, the poet may have “the sins of my youth” (Ps 25:7) in mind, and acknowledges that the **LORD** does not hold these sins against him/her. The “grave transgression” would be idolatry. There is nothing in the psalm to suggest that the psalmist was ever guilty of this sin. But the **LORD**’s self-revelation in the wonders of the heavens and in the Torah is that which defines the Lord as “my redeemer, the one who *preserves* me from sin and idolatry.” The concept of redemption as preservation from wrongdoing or preservation in innocence is expressed also in Pss 26:11, 34:22, 44:26, 72:14.

Finally, let it be noted that Luke’s account of Jesus’ Presentation in the temple unites the Old Testament’s redemptive sacrifice (cf. Ex 13:2,12) with the postexilic Jews’ hope for eschatological redemption (cf. Isa 35:9-10, 52:3-9) that the Messiah was to bring about: “At that moment, she [the prophetess Anna] came and began to

praise God and to speak about him [Jesus] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). Eventually, the terms, “redemption” and “salvation”, became virtually synonymous. However,

this was not entirely a *novum*; for the postexilic community also spoke of redemption and salvation in the same breath (cf. e.g., Isa 52:9-10).

Psalm 20

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

Verses 1-6 constitute a prayer of blessing for the king, who is engaged in warfare. The remaining verses appear to be the king's response, expressing full confidence in God in contrast to confidence in mere cavalry and weapons of war. If v. 7 further infers that Israel does not yet possess chariots, then the original psalm would pre-date Solomon's time, since Solomon appears to be the first Israelite to have chariots. Cf. 1 Kings 9:22. But the use of “sanctuary” in v. 2 and “holocaust” in v. 3 may indicate that the temple has been constructed and that Israel would therefore also have chariots. Still, trust in God's *name*, i.e., God's presence, is to be the king's real weapon at hand in time of warfare. Protection of his people from enemies is the king's sacred, “God-given” duty.

- 1 May the LORD answer you in the day of distress.
May the name of the God of Jacob keep you safe.**
- 2 May he send help to you from the sanctuary.
From Zion, may he bear you up.**
- 3 May he remember all your offerings,
and may your holocaust be pleasing.**
- 4 May he grant you your heart's desire,
and fulfill every one of your plans.**
- 5 May we shout for joy at your victory,
and plant our banners in the name of our God.
May the LORD grant all your prayers.**
- 6 Now I know that the LORD will give victory
to his anointed,
and answer him from his holy heavens,
with victories wrought by his right hand.**
- 7 Some by chariots, others by horses;
but it is by the name of the LORD our God
that we swear.**
- 8 They are bowed down and falling;
but we rose up and stood erect.**
- 9 Give victory to your king, O LORD;
answer us in the day we call on you.**

Notes

3. *may your holocaust be pleasing*. The expression “be pleasing” is literally “find fat”. Fat was highly prized and signified the best of something, e.g., “the fat of wheat.” In connection with a holocaust, the term refers to the ashes of the victim. Consequently, a holocaust that “finds fat” is one that is fully burned and fully acceptable to God. The sacrifices mentioned here would be consultatory rituals that include invoking God's name in the form of an oath. In turn, the one swearing the oath is

bound by various obligations to be fulfilled according to the prescriptions of the oath.

7. *we swear*. Willem F. Smelik has amply shown that *hazkyr*, the hiphil form of *zkr* (“mention”, “remember”), means “swear” (an oath) in this psalm and several other loci in the Hebrew scriptures and in the Qumran texts. Cf. *The Use of [kzyr bshem] in Classical Hebrew*: Josh 23:7; Isa 48:1; Amos 6:10; Ps 20:8; 4Q504 iii 4; 1QS 6:27, in *JBL*, vol. 118, no. 2, Summer, 1999, pp. 321-332. The terms, “chariots” and “horses” in

v. 7a are a hendiadys for “horse drawn chariots”. In this case, however, the poet intends a kind of separation or distinction, since the enemies’ swearing was not “by” horses and chariots, but by the gods represented in the emblems on the accouterments of the horses and chariots. Yet, by using this hendiadys, the poet can imply that the gods of the enemies are mere horses and chariots and of no match to Israel’s God.

St. Jerome correctly sensed that the root of *hazkyr* means “be mindful of” (*nos autem nominis Domini Dei*

nostri recordabimur). However, the term being examined relates to “remember” and “swear” much like the terms “evoke” and “invoke” relate as cognate forms in English. Robert Alter (*The Book of Psalms*, p. 67) aptly translates with “invoke”. However, “invoke” does not quite measure up to the force and religious sense of “swear” as inferred in the sacrifices of v. 4. Of course, swearing an oath in the name of God was not to be taken lightly. The practice was eventually replaced with “the safer” swearing by the temple or by the gold in the temple or by heaven (cf. Matt 23:16-22).

Psalm 21

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

This song of joy is a fitting sequel to the preceding psalm and thanks God for granting victory to the king. The second half of the psalm seems to be addressed to both the king and to the LORD; for the king’s enemies are first and foremost the enemies of the LORD. The structure of the psalm and its hyperbolic expressions regarding life forever for the king and the total destruction of enemies resemble similar statements made to the rulers of Egypt and about Baal. Cf. *La vie du roi dans le Psaume 21*, by Werner Quintens, in *Biblica*, vol. 59, fasc. 4, 1978, pp. 516-541. But it should be noted that such language is typical also of Israel’s psalms of enthronement and psalms used to recall the king’s enthronement in annual celebration.

- 1 O LORD, the king delights in your conquest;
How greatly he rejoices in your victory.**
- 2 You fulfilled the desire of his heart;
the request of his lips you have not refused.**
- 3 For you have brought him the blessings of prosperity;
you have put a crown of pure gold on his head.**
- 4 He asked you for long life;
you have extended his days forever and ever.**
- 5 Great is the glory he takes in your victory;
splendor and majesty you have bestowed upon him.**
- 6 For you will grant him blessings forever;
you will elate him with your presence.**
- 7 The king puts his trust in the LORD;
and through the mercy of the Most High,
he shall not waver.**
- 8 Your left hand will find all your enemies;
your right hand will find those who hate you.**
- 9 You will make them blaze like a furnace,
when your fury is aroused.
In his anger, the LORD swallows them,
and his fire consumes them.**
- 10 You will destroy their fruit from the earth,
and their seed from the sons of Adam.**
- 11 Though they plot evil and scheme against you,
they will not prevail.**

- 12 For you will make them turn their backs,
when you aim your arrows at their faces.
13 O LORD, take pleasure in your conquest.
We will sing psalms to your victory.

Notes

3. *crown of pure gold*. Gold is “the divine metal” and symbolizes “life forever”, i.e., for the king’s lineage. Cf. Nathan’s prophecy to David in 2 Sam 7:16. Ps 21, probably a liturgy of enthronement or a commemoration of enthronement, is essentially a royal ideology presenting the king, the representative of God, as the bearer of salvation, i.e., bringing victory over enemies and prosperity to his people.

9-10. *when your fury is roused*. This line states literally, “at the season of your face” (*l’eth paneyka*), which seems to mean “when you appear”. However, the LORD’s face, i.e., presence, is favorable or unfavorable, depending on circumstances. The translation here agrees

with Dahood that the psalmist has the LORD’s “fury” in mind (*ibid.*, p.133). This interpretation is supported by the chiasmic structure of the preceding verse with the verse immediately following, which speaks of the LORD’s anger as the parallel concept, just as the consuming fire is parallel to the blazing furnace.

13. *to your victory*. Throughout the psalm, the LORD rather than the king is given credit for the victory and for all saving events, including the destruction of the king’s enemies; for any enemy of the king is also the enemy of the LORD. Here and in v. 1, the term, ‘oz has been translated as “conquest”. It is usually given as “strength”, and that meaning is not to be excluded. But here the term is parallel to “victory”.

Psalm 22

To the leader: according to The Deer of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.

The NT places the opening words of this psalm on the lips of the Crucified (cf. Mt 27:46). The psalm is thus made to serve several purposes: 1) as an expression of the horror of crucifixion and the suffering and shame that Jesus endured, 2) as a presentation of the psalm’s prophetic character in regard to the Messiah as the ‘*Ebed Yahweh*’ (“Suffering Servant of the LORD”), 3) as a “format” for describing the crucifixion event, and 4) as a summation of Israel’s history and hopes being transferred to Jesus and the Church. Jesus’ final prayer, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46), corresponds to the hope-filled conclusion of the psalm. The psalm’s language (e.g., “worm”, v. 6; Isa 41:14) and its laments mark it as a psalm of the exiles.

- 1 O God, my God, why have you forsaken me—
so remote from my rescue,
from the words of my wailing?
- 2 O my God, I call out by day, but you do not answer;
also at night—and there is no respite for me.
- 3 But you are the Holy One,
presiding over the praises of Israel.
- 4 In you our fathers confided.
They confided in you, and you delivered them.
- 5 Unto you they called out, and they escaped.
In you they confided and were not ashamed
- 6 But I am a worm and not a man,
the reproach of the world and the despised
of the people.
- 7 All who see me ridicule me.

- They sneer with their lips; they wag with their heads:
- 8 "Let him turn to the LORD!
He will deliver him.
He will rescue him, since he is so pleased with him."
- 9 Yes, it was you that took me from the womb,
and entrusted me to my mother's breasts.
- 10 To you I was committed from the womb;
from my mother's midst, you have been my God.
- 11 Do not stay far from me;
for the foe has drawn near, and no one offers help.
- 12 A big herd of bulls circles around me;
brawny bulls from Bashan bear down on me.
- 13 Open-mouthed they bellow at me,
like a raging, roaring lion.
- 14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are pulled apart.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted inside of me.
- 15 My vigor has dried up like fired clay,
and my tongue cleaves to my palate.
You may lay me low in the dust of death.
- 16 Indeed, dogs have encircled me.
A gang of evildoers has surrounded me.
Yes, they have bound my hands and feet!
- 17 I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat at me;
- 18 they divide my clothes among themselves,
and cast lots for my garments.
- 19 But as for you, O LORD, do not remain aloof.
O my Strength, hasten to help me.
- 20 Save my neck from the sword,
my life from the attack of these dogs.
- 21 Snatch me from the lion's mouth;
and let me escape from the horns of wild oxen.
- 22 I will proclaim your name to my kinsmen;
in the midst of the assembly, I will extol you:
- 23 "Praise the LORD, you that fear him.
All you descendants of Jacob, glorify him;
fear him, all you offspring of Israel.
- 24 For he has never despised or scorned the poverty
of the poor person.
Nor has he turned his face away from him.
When he cries out, he listens to him."
- 25 In the grand assembly, my praise is of you.
In the presence of those who fear him,
I will make the offerings that I vowed.
- 26 The hungry will eat and be filled.
Those who seek the LORD shall praise him.
May your hearts live forever.
- 27 All the ends of the earth shall heed the LORD

- and turn to him.
 Every tribe of every nation shall bow low before you.
 28 For the LORD is indeed the King,
 and he is Ruler over the nations.
 29 All the stout ones of the earth have eaten
 and bowed down.
 All those who go down to the dust,
 anyone whose life he has not sustained,
 shall bow before him.
 30 Posterity shall serve him.
 They shall tell of the LORD for coming generations.
 31 They will come and proclaim his justice to a nation yet to be born,
 that he has taken action.

Notes

2b. This half of v. 2 remains uncertain. But it appears that the psalmist intends a bit of irony, saying, “You, God, are silent toward me, even though I am not silent toward you.”

3. *presiding over the praises of Israel*. Most translations make reference to God’s enthronement “on the praises of Israel” (NRSV). The idea of “enthronement” is not incorrect; but it fails to grasp the poet’s full perspective. The term in question here is *yowsheb*, a present participle from *yashab*, meaning “sit”, “dwell”, or “inhabit”. In turn, *yashab* has its root in *yesh*, meaning “being” or “existence”. The poet has brought these concepts into play: God, the Holy One and Israel’s redeemer, resides in and presides over the praises of Israel, i.e., Israel’s liturgies. Cf. Isa 41:14, 43:14-15, 49:7.

The poet wants the exiles to know that God’s real dwelling place is in the praying community. “A psalm of David” cannot really be a psalm about the temple and God’s presence there. Only from the perspective of the exiles, who have no temple, but are still fervent in prayer, can one truly appreciate this psalm and the pathos it expresses. It also brings to mind the words, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst” (Mt 18:20), and the exhortation to “pray always” (Lk 21:36). Likewise, the faithful are temples of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17).

9-10. *womb*. This term (which may also be translated as “belly” or “midst”) and the verb, “entrusted me”, are almost identical words in Hebrew (*beten*, *batakh*). In v. 10, an alternate word for “womb” (*rakhem*) is used. This word can also mean “maiden.” In using these words, the psalmist emphasizes God’s motherly nurturing, tenderness, and compassion.

12. The alliteration of “Bs”, imitating the bellowing of the bulls, is present in the Hebrew text.

14. *My heart . . . has melted*. As noted in regard to Ps 4:4b, anguish can supposedly cause one’s heart to become watery (cf. also Lam 2:19; Ezek 21:7). The flow of blood and water from Jesus’ side (cf. Jn 19:34) may be

the Fourth Gospel’s application of this passage to Jesus as the Christ. Cf. also 1 Jn 5:6—“This is he who came by water and blood”.

16. *bound my hands and feet*. Early Christians (but not in the NT), relying on the LXX’s rendering, “they have dug my hands and feet”, saw in this verse the piercing of the hands and feet of the Crucified. St. Jerome, however, translates the passage with *vinxerunt manus meas et pede meos* (“they bound my hands and my feet”). The Hebrew word rendered as “(they) bound” (*ka’ari*) is uncertain. It appears to say “like a lion”. But one expects a verb at this point. If the verb is to be applied to “dogs”, then it may well come from “pluck” (*’arah*), as found in Ps 80:12, where *’arah* refers to picking grapes. But anyone who has ever harvested grapes knows that grape clusters are not simply “plucked”. Instead, the clusters must be twisted and yanked loose, or else cut from the vine as pictured in Rev 14:18. Thus *ka’ari* might then be taken as *’aru* and rendered as “they tear at”, introduced by an emphatic *kiy* in parallel with the emphatic *kiy* (“Indeed”) at the beginning of the verse.

The rendering here is based on St. Jerome’s *vinxerunt* as the most probable and most meaningful, and takes the original term to be *’ussaruw*, (*’asar*, “to bind”), with an introductory *kiy emphaticum* (“Yes!”). A slave’s master could well bind or shackle a slave, and shackles could very well dig into one’s wrists and ankles as suggested by the LXX. But a slave-owner would hardly want to mutilate a slave’s hands and feet and thus render the slave useless and of no economic value. However, St. Jerome could have opted for *vinxerunt* because of the references to Jesus’ being bound after his arrest. Cf., e.g., Mt 27:2. Moreover, the metaphorical imagery of these verses is that of death, and the binding of hands and feet describes the preparation of a corpse for burial.

17-18. *count all my bones . . . cast lots*. These words may indicate the psalmist’s feeling of distress at the hands of God. Cf. Isa 38:13, Lam 3:4. But more probably, this is the complaint of a hungry slave looking at the well-fed masters of v. 29. It is also possible to consider “all my bones” as an accusative of means (i.e.,

“I can use my bones for counting”) with a view to “cast lots”, an action accomplished with bones in ancient times. Dice are often referred to as “bones” to this day.

21-26. *escape from*. The Hebrew text reads, “You answered me”. This is best understood as a precative perfect, meaning “let me prevail over”, or “escape from”. This meaning is found again in Ps 60:8—“save with your right hand and answer me” (*wa’aneniw*, i.e., “let me prevail”, or “let me escape”).

The phrase, “the poverty of the poor” (*‘enowt ‘aniy*), can also be rendered “the song of the poor”. We cannot rule out that the psalmist intends both meanings. A similar term (*‘aniytaniy*) is used in v. 22 in regard to escaping from the horns of the wild oxen. The psalmist appears to be massaging the basic meaning of “cry out”, continuing the wordplay and finally stating that, when

the poor person cries out (*shaww^e‘ow*), God listens (*shame‘a*), with the result that “The hungry will eat and be filled” (*yishba‘uw*). “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied” (Mt 5:6).

29. *All the stout ones*, literally, “All the fat ones”. The context suggests that all the “high and mighty” of the earth also must die and, ironically, come to bow like slaves before the **LORD**. Apparently, a comparison or contrast is being made between “the hungry that will eat and be filled” and “the powerful of the earth” that “have eaten and bowed down”, that is, have lived well and still have died, because “he (the **LORD**) has not sustained” their life. A slave must die unless his/her life is sustained by the master. The **LORD** is the giver and sustainer of life, the master over all, receiving homage from all.

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

The literary genre of this much loved psalm of trust and tenderness is rather indefinite. The image of a shepherd leader was widespread in the ancient near-east and the Greco-Roman world. The meal-setting in v. 5 may, in personal prayer, remind one of “the heavenly banquet” that has come to prevail in much of our imagery of salvation. Lady Wisdom in the OT was one who kept a fine table as part of her abilities and utmost hospitality. Cf. Prov 9:1-5. Isa 25:6-8 and 55:1-2 also employ the banquet theme.

- 1 **The LORD is my shepherd; nothing shall I want.**
- 2 **In fresh, green meadows he gives me rest.**
Beside peaceful waters he leads me;
(3) he refreshes my soul.
He guides me on straight paths
for the sake of his name.
- 4 **Even though I walk in the Valley of the Shadow**
of Death,
I shall not fear any evil;
for with me come your rod and staff.
Oh, how they guide me along!
- 5 **You prepare a table before me in the sight of my foes.**
You anoint my head with oil; my cup is overflowing.
- 6 **Surely goodness and kindness shall pursue me,**
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD,
for as long as I live.

Notes

2-3. Conceptually, “straight paths” is parallel to “peaceful waters”, just as “leads me” is conceptually

parallel to “guides me”. The “straight paths” may also be translated as “pathways of justice”.

4. *in the Valley of the Shadow of Death*. The Hebrew term for this descriptive expression is *b^ege tsalmawet*. The latter word is derived from *tsalal* and *tsel* (which have to do with growing dark or being a shadow) and *mot* (“death”). A Hebrew-speaking person would also hear *tselem* (“carved image”) in this statement and be reminded of idols and idolaters—the evil “foes” that are the concern of the psalmist.

come your rod and staff. The rod (*shebet*) usually means the “rod of punishment and authority” symbolized by a royal scepter. However, it can also mean a club, spear or lance that the shepherd uses against predators. The staff (*sha’an*) with its crook serves mainly to retrieve sheep from danger or harm. As a metaphor, it indicates trust. It is also a reminder that the shepherd is totally dependent on God just as the sheep are dependent on the shepherd. For the psalmist, the rod and staff represent the Torah and the Covenant that provide guidance and safety for God’s people.

5. *You prepare . . . You anoint*. At festive banquets, perfumed olive oil was placed on the foreheads of the guests as a special mark of honor and to delight the senses and add to the joy of the occasion. Dahood sees in this line a reversal of the Canaanite practice of preparing “the table for the Canaanite gods Fortune and Destiny”, a practice that Isa 65:11 condemns. This also contrasts Baal’s fear of *Mot* (“Death”) in UT, 67:II:6-7 and the

psalmist’s “I shall not fear any evil” (i.e., “death”) in v. 4. Dahood renders *y^enakhamuniy* as “they [rod and staff] will lead me” (*ibid.*, p. 147). Later, he translates it as “they guide my destiny”, deriving *muniy* from *minnah* (“destine”)—an allusion to the above-named gods. Cf. *Stichometry and Destiny in Psalm 23,4*, by Dahood, in *Biblica*, vol. 60, fasc. 3, 1979, p. 419.

The practice of feasting to Fortune and Destiny condemned in Isa 65:11, i.e., in a text from exilic or postexilic times, may indicate that this psalm is also from that period of Israel’s history. If so, the wish to reside in the “house of the **LORD**” would imply that the temple has been rebuilt.

6. *pursue*. The psalmist uses a very forceful word here, *radaph*, which generally refers to pursuit and persecution. Consequently, the psalmist asks that the Lord’s goodness and kindness accompany him always and everywhere throughout life.

dwell. The original reading of this verb in Hebrew was probably *shabtiy* (“I will return”) and made as a wishful statement at the end of the banquet. Later, the postexilic Jews read the verb as *shabtiy* (“I will dwell”), with a view of dwelling again in the Promised Land. Cf. Stuhlmüller, *ibid.*, p. 153. For pilgrims visiting in the temple, both meanings of the verb could well apply and may have been intended.

Psalm 24

A Psalm of David.

Psalm 24 is often identified as a hymn for a processional with the Ark of the Covenant into the temple. The king is included as the **LORD**’s representative. The shift in imagery in the second half of the psalm may indicate that two psalms have merged into one. The psalm’s *Sitz im Leben* (use in Israel’s life) is not clear. It may have been influenced by a Canaanite “ritual of descent” in which some hero or god struggles with the netherworld and Death. Cf. *Ps 24:7-10: Mythology and Exegesis*, by Alan Cooper, in *JBL*, vol. 102, no. 1, March, 1983, pp. 37-60. This psalm’s theme is that the **LORD** is indeed the creator and **Lord** of all. The theme of descent to the realm of the dead is retained in the creedal statement, “He [Jesus crucified] descended into Hell.” In the early centuries of Christian times, this psalm was fully applied to Jesus Christ and variously interpreted as his incarnation and descent to earth as well as descent into the netherworld and his conquest over it, and to his Ascension into Heaven and enthronement. Cf. Ps 138:15; *The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9*, by William Bales, in: *CBQ*, vol. 72, no. 1, January, 2010, pp. 84-100.

- 1 **The LORD’s is the earth and its fullness,
the world and all that dwell in it.**
- 2 **For it was he that set it on the seas,
and established it over the depths.**
- 3 **Who shall climb the mountain of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?**
- 4 **The one with clean hands and pure heart,
who has not raised his neck to vanity,**

- those who have not sworn to that which is false.
- 5 They shall receive blessings from the LORD,
and favors from the God of their salvation.
 - 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,
of those who seek the face of the God of Jacob.
 - 7 “Lift up your heads, O gates!
Be exalted, O ancient doors,
that the King of Glory may enter.”
 - 8 “Who is this King of Glory?”
“The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, valiant in war!”
 - 9 “Lift high your heads, O gates!
O ancient doors, rise up,
and the King of Glory will enter.”
 - 10 “Who is he, this King of Glory?”
“The LORD of Hosts!
He is the King of Glory.”

Notes

4-6. *to vanity*. This may be a reference to idolatry, since idols were considered “vain and empty.” The MT of v. 6b reads, “of those who seek your face, O Jacob”, which does not yield proper sense in this context. The rendering given here follows the LXX.

7-10. These verses constitute an exchange of words between the gates (i.e., gatekeepers) and those in the procession. In the reenactment of the scene of the King of Glory’s entry through the gates to the netherworld, the gatekeepers are asked to rouse themselves and open the gates. In turn, it is their duty to ask who is seeking

passage (v. 8). If they do not receive an answer to their satisfaction, then they are to challenge the response. After further exchange, the gatekeepers learn that the King of Glory is a valiant warrior—indeed, “*the Lord of Hosts*”. Thus the King of Glory is not to be identified with Baal, but with Israel’s God. According to the data provided by Cooper (cf., *ibid.*), the theme of gates to the netherworld and of the need for one to give the correct responses to the gatekeepers is ancient and was widespread in the middle east and beyond, not to mention our present day jesting about the “Gates to Eternity”, and St. Peter as the gatekeeper at “the Pearly Gates”, or Satan at the “Gates of Hell”.

Psalm 25

Of David.

The theme, “lift high”, from the previous psalm provides a link to this psalm of lament. The final line of the psalm makes the plea of an individual become a prayer for the nation. In the Hebrew text, each verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet (an acrostic); but an additional verse beginning with *pe* is placed at the end. The middle letter is *lamed*. Thus the first, middle, the last letters form the root *alp*, the name of the first letter of the alphabet and the root for “learn” or “teach”. While this tactic might help one memorize the psalm and treat it as a lesson in wisdom, it also introduces some ambiguous terminology and thought.

- 1 To you, LORD, I lift up my soul.
- 2 In you, my God, I place my trust.
Do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult at me.
- 3 Instead, let all who hope in you not be put to shame.
But shamed be those

- who are thoughtless and treacherous.
- 4 LORD, make me know your ways;
teach me your paths.
 - 5 Make me walk in your truth and teach me;
for you are the God of my salvation.
For you I hope all day long.
 - 6 Remember your great mercy, O LORD,
and your loving kindness; for these are from of old.
 - 7 Remember not the sins of my youth
and my transgressions.
As befits your kindness remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.
 - 8 Good and upright is the LORD.
Thus he guides sinners on his way.
 - 9 He leads the humble in justice;
and he teaches the poor his way.
 - 10 All the ways of the LORD are mercy and truth,
for those who keep his covenant and counsel.
 - 11 For the sake of your name, O LORD,
remove my guilt ever so great.
 - 12 Who then is the man that fears the LORD?
He will teach him to choose the right way.
 - 13 His soul will abide in prosperity,
and his descendants will inherit the earth.
 - 14 The LORD's allegiance is for those who fear him;
to them he makes known his covenant.
 - 15 My eyes are always upon the LORD;
for he will free my feet from the snare.
 - 16 Look kindly upon me and be gracious to me;
for I am alone and in need.
 - 17 The sorrows of my heart have increased.
Free me from my suffering.
 - 18 Look at my affliction and anguish,
and forgive all my sins.
 - 19 Look at my enemies,
and see how they have multiplied,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
 - 20 Guard me and rescue my life.
Do not let me be put to shame;
for I take refuge in you.
 - 21 May honesty and truth preserve me;
for I place my hope in you.
 - 22 Redeem Israel, O God, from all its distress.

Notes

14. *allegiance*. The Hebrew term used here is *sod*. Its meaning is uncertain. But since it is parallel to "covenant", its meaning should be somewhat the same as "covenant".

16. The psalmist, with a play on words, virtually identifies himself with the essence of being alone and poor: '*aniy* ' *aniy* ("poor am I").

Psalm 26

Of David.

We turn from the previous psalm's acknowledgement of personal sin to a proclamation of personal innocence. While this may sound presumptuous, the psalmist accepts total dependence on God for moral integrity. The "tone" of this lament implies that the poet is of the priestly or Levitical caste or at least quite at home in the temple, where he is taking sanctuary from evil-doers who are threatening his life (vv. 8-10).

- 1 Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked with integrity.
I confided in the LORD, and I have not wavered.**
- 2 Probe me, O LORD, and try me;
examine the thoughts of my heart.**
- 3 For your kindness is before my eyes,
and I walk in your truth.**
- 4 I do not keep company with liars,
nor do I consort with deceivers.**
- 5 I detest the gatherings of evildoers,
and I do not sit among the wicked.**
- 6 I wash my hands in innocence,
and process around your altar, O LORD,**
- 7 giving thanks with loud acclaim,
and recounting all your wonders.**
- 8 O LORD, I love the sanctuary of your house,
the dwelling place of your glory.**
- 9 Do not gather up my soul with sinners,
nor my life with bloodthirsty men,
in whose hands are evil plots,**
- 10 whose right hands are full of bribes.**
- 11 For my part, I walk with integrity.
Redeem me and be gracious to me.**
- 12 My foot is standing on level ground;
I will praise the LORD in the great assembly.**

Notes

8. *sanctuary*. The psalmist speaks of "the abode of your house". Thus "sanctuary" is used here to indicate a place where one feels secure and at home. But the term is also a synonym for "the dwelling place of your glory" in the next line.

12. It is possible that *level ground* means: 1. the temple area, and 2. "in uprightness" or "among the righteous", which would be an appropriate parallel to "the great assembly", or "in the choruses", or "in the gatherings"—which hearkens back to the gatherings of evildoers in v. 5.

Psalm 27

Of David.

This psalm's words and themes of trust in God resonate throughout the New Testament in reference to Jesus: "Fear not", "I am with you all days", "I am the light of the world", "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?", "In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places", etc. The psalmist longs to

dwell in the House of the **LORD**. However, this expresses a desire to participate in liturgy and worship rather than a longing to be with the **LORD** after death as St. Paul states it in 2 Cor 5:6-8—"So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the **LORD**; for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the **LORD**" (NRSV). Even though abandoned by father and mother, the psalmist is comforted by the **LORD**.

- 1 The LORD is my light and my salvation.
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life.
Of whom shall I be afraid?**
- 2 When the evildoers draw near to devour my flesh,
my adversaries and foes are the ones
to stumble and fall.**
- 3 If an army is encamped against me,
my heart will not fear.
If an armed force rises up against me,
even then I will remain confident.**
- 4 I asked the LORD for one thing; it is all that I want:
to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days
of my life;
to look upon the beauty of the LORD,
to take delight in his temple.**
- 5 For he will hide me in his sanctuary in the day of evil.
He will conceal me deep within his tent;
on a rock he will set me high.**
- 6 And now my head is lifted high above the enemies around me,
and I will offer sacrifice in his tent
with loud cries of joy.
I will sing and make music for the LORD .**
- 7 Hear my voice, O LORD, when I pray:
"Be kind to me, and answer me."**
- 8 My heart says to you:
"Look kindly upon my face."
Your face, O LORD, I long to see.**
- 9 No longer hide your face from me.
In your anger, do not turn your servant away.
Be my helper.
Do not abandon or forsake me,
O God of my salvation.**
- 10 Though father and mother have forsaken me,
the LORD will take me in.**
- 11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path because of my opponents.**
- 12 Do not surrender me to my voracious oppressors.
For lying witnesses have testified against me;
and each one is breathing out threats.**
- 13 I am confident
that I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.**

14 Wait for the LORD.

Be strong and take heart, and wait for the LORD.

Notes

3. Although the LXX and most modern translations render “an armed force” as “war”, the concept of war rising up against an individual is not found elsewhere in the Bible. Also, in view of the parallelism in these two verses, it should be noted that “an armed force” is parallel to “an army”, while “war” is not as good a parallel. Often, as is the case here, the second part of a parallel structure not only restates the first part, but also intensifies or clarifies it. The “armed force” could be mutineers or traitors.

4. Once again, the psalmist indulges in double meaning within a play on the words, “the **LORD** is my light” in v. 1. “I want” (*’abaqqesh*) and “to take delight” (*l^ebaqqer*) play first of all on the concept of “ask” or “inquire”, with *l^ebaqqer* adding the concept of “morning light” to allude to one’s looking with pleasure at the beauty of the temple and praying there at “daybreak”, which is precisely the root meaning of “morning” or “dawn” (*boqer*) in Hebrew. If the English word “delight” could also be treated as if it were etymologically rooted in the words for “inquire” (as in “to shed light on”) as well as “the light of morning” as in “it dawned on me”, then we could form a wordplay that mimics the imagery of this verse.

11-12. Again the psalmist teases the reader/listener with a play on words and concepts: “my opponents” (*shorray*) are likewise “my oppressors” (*tsaray*) whose hostility leads them to be “lying witnesses”, or literally, ‘*edey sheqer*’ (“witnesses of falsehood”) who really give witness to their own lies. Those who have testified (*qamuw*) have spoken with threats of violence (*khamas*). Proverbs 14:5 and Acts 9:1 are examples of the expression and concept of breathing out threats and violence.

13. This final note of confidence from an individual (“I”) captive was adopted by the community in exile as it looked forward to and hoped for the end of their captivity in Babylon. Ezekiel, in his vision of “the dry bones”, proclaims the oracle, “Then you shall know that I am the **LORD**, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the **LORD**. I have promised, and I shall do it, says the **LORD**” (Ezek 17:13-14; NAB). The land of exile is a grave, the land of the dead. But when the captives are free to return to Israel, they are returning to “the land of the living”.

14. This verse is an oracle, probably added to an earlier stage of the psalm and spoken by a priest presiding over the assembly while still in exile.

Psalm 28

Of David.

Psalm 28 begins as a lament that is expressive of pre-exilic times; but it ends with thanks and a strong note of confidence, which Stuhlmüller and others view as a postexilic composition “when God was their shepherd (Isa 40:11). This final verse manifests a tendency towards ‘democratization’, giving to all the people what once was a special relation between the king and God” (*ibid.*, p. 167).

- 1 O LORD, I call out to you.
My Rock, do not be deaf to me.
If you are mute toward me,
I will be like those who have descended into the Pit.
- 2 Hear the voice of my pleading as I cry out to you,
as I lift up my hands to your holy sanctuary.
- 3 Do not drag me away with the wicked,
nor with the doers of iniquity,
who say “Shalom!” to their hosts,
but with hostility in their hearts.
- 4 Reward them according to their deeds,
according to the evil of their actions,

- Repay them in kind for the work of their hands.
Give them back what they deserve.
- 5 Because they pay no heed to the works of the LORD,
nor to the work of his hands,
he will tear them down and not rebuild them.
- 6 Blessed be the LORD,
for he has heard the voice of my pleading.
- 7 The LORD is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him.
I received help, and my heart exults;
I will thank him with my song.
- 8 The LORD is the strength of his people;
a stronghold for his anointed one is he.
- 9 Save your nation and bless your inheritance.
Shepherd them and shoulder them forever.

Notes

1. *deaf . . . mute*. The poet begins at once with a wordplay: *tekherash* (“deaf”) and *tekhesheh* (“mute”, “hold your peace”). The concept of the pun is that God cannot answer, if he is deaf; and if he cannot answer, then the poet is doomed to die and remain forever silent with all the other dead.

2. The *holy sanctuary* can also be the “Holy of Holies”—from which God speaks and gives commands. Thus the MT refers to it as the holy *d^ebir* (from *dabar*, “word”), i.e., “chancel” or “pulpit”.

3. *hosts . . . hostility*. In this verse the psalmist presents an interesting wordplay between “their hosts” (*re’eyhem*, which more properly means “their companions”) and hostility (*ra’ah*). Coincidentally, the wordplay can be almost exactly replicated in English. Both in Hebrew and in English, “host” can have virtually opposite meanings, depending on the context. A host can be one who offers hospitality. But a host can also be the “enemy host”, one who offers hostility.

7b. Instead of “I received help”, the LXX reads, “my flesh has revived”. This may indicate some idea about bodily resurrection on the part of the LXX. But it may also refer simply to recovery from illness.

8-9a. *people . . . nation*. The psalmist’s use of enjambment (running two words into one) has caused some problems for translators. The Hebrew term, *lamo*, can mean “to them” as well as “to the people” or “to the nation”. The LXX clearly understood the enjambment and reads τῷ λαῷ (“to the people”), which was also accepted by the Vulgate, *plebi suae . . . populum tuum* (“his subjects . . . your people”).

9b. *shepherd them . . . shoulder them*. The Hebrew *r^eam* (“shepherd them”) comes from the same root as the word for “host”. Thus the psalm ends with an inclusion. The word “shoulder” is used in the translation here for the Hebrew verb *nasa*, i.e., “carry”. However, “*nasa* is predicated of divinity” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 173) and denotes especially the action of carrying on the shoulders.

Psalm 29

A Psalm of David.

Psalm 29, often taken as a “rewrite” of a Canaanite poem in praise of Baal, has the voice of God thundering over the waters, over the forests, and over the desert. But Baal, the god of fertility and weather, was not **Lord** of the desert. Cf. *Ist Ps 29 die Bearbeitung eines Baal-Hymnus?*, by Andreas Wagner, in *Biblica*, vol. 77, fasc. 4, 1996, pp. 538-539. Thus Ps 29 only at most employs elements from Canaanite religion, but presents them so as to show that Yahweh rather than Baal is **LORD** of all—of the weather (sky), of the sea, and of the land—be the land bearing or barren. Such an adaptation of Canaanite material does not constitute an endorsement of the Canaanite religion, with Yahweh being simply put in the place of Baal. Nevertheless, Ps 29 provides us with a “panoramic view” of its genesis and development from Canaanite-Ugaritic mythology and “from the earliest pre-Davidic age to the late postexilic age of eschatological interests” (Stuhlmüller, *ibid.*, p. 170). To what extent the Hebrew poet accepted the poem’s

original polytheism is unclear. The Israelites were to have no other gods besides Yahweh. But even David kept a life-size household god (cf. 1 Sam 19:12). Firm belief that there is but one God comes only toward the end of the Babylonian Exile. Cf., e.g., Isa 45:5.

- 1 Give glory to the LORD, O sons of gods;
give the LORD glory and power.
- 2 Give the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in his holy splendor.
- 3 The LORD's voice is upon the waters:
The God of Glory thunders.
The LORD thunders over the mighty waters:
- 4 the LORD's voice full of power,
the LORD's voice mighty in majesty.
- 5 The LORD's voice snaps the cedars,
the LORD's voice shatters the cedars of Lebanon,
- 6 making them caper like a calf,
Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild-ox.
- 7 The LORD's voice flashes with flames of fire.
- 8 The LORD's voice rumbles through the barren terrain;
the LORD makes the Desert of Kadesh convulse
with pain.
- 9 The LORD's voice splinters the hardwood trees,
stripping the forest of its foliage;
and everything in his court shows forth his glory.
- 10 The LORD is enthroned over the flood;
as king forever the LORD is enthroned.
- 11 The LORD will give strength to his people;
the LORD will bless his people with peace.

Notes

1. *sons of the gods*. The term for “gods” in this instance is *'elyim* rather than *'elohiym*. St. Jerome's translation treats “sons” as the direct object of *adferte* (“offer”, “sacrifice”) and reads *'eyliym* (“rams”) in place of *'elyim* (“gods”): *Adferte domino filios arietum* (“Offer to the LORD the sons of rams”). But the LXX reads υἱοι του θεου (“sons of God”) and not κριοι (“rams”).

2-3. The LORD's “holy splendor” is the storm of lightning, thunder, and rain, understood as a manifestation of God—a theophany. The “waters” in the next line is probably a reference to the Mediterranean Sea. However, the imagery and language recall Gen 1:2b as well.

After the opening doxology, the psalmist describes a storm and defines the thunder as “the LORD's voice” (*qol Yahweh*). The seven repetitions of *qol Yahweh* are intensified with other similar sounding words: *khil* (pain), *qadesh* (awesome, holy), *hekal* (court), *kholel* (pangs). These words mimic the sounds of a storm as it passes overhead. The thunder rolls off into the distance, and all ends in “Peace!”

8. *Desert of Kadesh*. This phrase occurs in Ugaritic literature with the meaning of the “holy” or “awesome wilderness”—*kadesh* being a common semitic term for “holy”. As a proper name, this wilderness becomes Kadesh Barnea of the Exodus (cf. Num 32:8). The storm “completes its circuit around the promised land. Kadesh enabled Israel to join the Mosaic traditions from Kadesh with Canaanite mythology” (Stuhlmüller, *ibid.*, p. 172-173).

9. This verse is often translated with reference to the deer being frightened into giving premature birth. However, the Hebrew text throughout this section is unclear and can refer to the bending of oak trees or hardwood trees as a class of trees distinct from the pines and cedars. The NRSV renders the line as, “The voice of the LORD makes the oaks to whirl”. Also, the whole context is that of the effect of the storm on the land and its trees. One would expect a repeat of *qol Yahweh* as an introduction to the thunder's stripping away foliage, if the previous line were not a parallel concept. But the splintering of trees is parallel to the stripping away of foliage. The “court” of Heaven and its occupants, i.e., “the sons of gods”, are recalled in this verse so as to form an inclusion with verse one.

11. The Hebrew text speaks of “*the* peace”, which could be rendered as “real peace” or “lasting peace”, perhaps with reference to “messianic peace” (cf. Jn 14:27 and 20:19-21), depending on the mindset of the poet. The “strength” (‘oz) that God gives to his people is the “power” (‘oz) that is ascribed to God in the psalm’s opening verse. Moreover, since ‘oz is parallel to *shalom* in this verse, the two words define each other to some extent. *Shalom* also means “success and prosperity”, “joy and long life”, and much more. The psalm began with asking the “sons of gods” to grant the **LORD** glory and power and now concludes with the declaration that the **LORD** is the one to grant power and peace.

Excursus: On Psalm 29 and the Exilic Community

It was the postexilic community that assigned the superscription, “Of David”, to this psalm. But the psalm itself appears to have had its origin from a time before the Exile when the temple was operative. In the power of a storm of wind, rain, and lightning, the psalmist sees the work and an epiphany of God in what “scientifically” is a commonplace occurrence in nature. But Israel found the presence of God in all aspects of nature (e.g., Ps 19), even in a tiny breeze—or in “sheer silence” according to the NRSV (cf. 1 Kings 19:9-13). The distinctive character of this psalm may not be from the Babylonian exiles, but from those who had fled to Egypt to escape being taken into the Babylonian Exile. Mutual exchange of Exodus-Exile themes and merging of the two exilic communities would be a natural outcome of the end of

the Exile, when the Jews of the Diaspora could again meet in their homeland.

The Alexandrian Jews produced the LXX (Septuagint) about 250 B.C.E., i.e., after the return of the Babylonian Exiles to Israel and the building of the second temple. Psalm 29’s references to the crushing of the trees of Lebanon are also applied by the LXX to the calf of v. 6. The cedars of Lebanon are thus taken as a symbol of arrogance (cf. Isa 2:13) that is applied especially to Egypt (cf. Ezek 31:15), and the calf becomes the “golden calf” that Moses ground to dust and poured upon the water (cf. Ex 32:20). The **LORD**’s voice “over the mighty waters” plays well into the Exodus theme of crossing through the sea as well as into the theme of God’s conquest over chaos in the creation of the world.

The reference to “Sirion” in v. 6 seems to have been read as *yeshurun* by the LXX translators and thus rendered as ὁ ἠγαπημενος (“the beloved”). Jeshurun is early Israel’s name (cf. Deut 32:15, Isa 44:2), and the LXX uses the name very much in the sense of “the beloved” as an expression of Israel’s being chosen as the beloved of God. (The NT applies this term, “beloved”, to Christ. Cf. Mt 3:17; Eph 1:6). In short, those Alexandrian Jews who translated the psalms for the LXX have translated the Hebrew text of Psalm 29 as a poetic paraphrase of the Exodus story, with the proud cedars of Lebanon symbolizing Egypt, and other elements corresponding very much to Ex 15. Cf. *Gewollt dunkle Wiedergaben in LXX? Am Beispiel von Ps 28 (29)*, 6, by Adrian Schenker, in *Biblica*, vol. 75, fasc. 3, 1994, pp. 146-148.

Psalm 30

A Psalm. A song of dedication of the temple. Of David.

The psalmist’s hymn of praise gives thanks to the **LORD** for delivery from some life-threatening situation or illness and compares this action to being drawn up from the grave. The imagery is somewhat obscured by the poet’s use of problematic grammar. It is not clear if the psalmist claims to have been healed just on the brink of dying, or if he or she only felt “as good as dead”, but then was brought back to life as an exception to all others who have died and remain dead. Early Christian commentators readily applied this psalm to Christ’s resurrection. However, the NT makes no specific reference to this psalm. Although the psalm’s superscription reads “of David”, the “song of dedication” probably refers to the postexilic temple.

- 1 I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up,
and have not let my enemies rejoice over me.**
- 2 O LORD, my God,
I cried to you, and you have healed me.**
- 3 O LORD, you raised me up from Sheol;
you restored me to life from those plunged
into the Pit.**
- 4 Make music for the LORD, you his saints.**

- Give thanks to his holy name.
- 5 For death is in his anger; but life is found in his favor.
Tears may come to you at night;
but at dawn come shouts of joy.
- 6 I said to myself in my good fortune:
“I shall never be disturbed.”
- 7 In your kindness, O LORD,
you made me as firm as a mighty mountain.
Then you hid your face, and I was terrified.
- 8 To you, O LORD, I cried.
Thus unto the LORD I made appeal:
- 9 “What is to be gained by my blood,
by my sinking into the grave?
Will the dust give you thanks;
will it testify to your truth?”
- 10 Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me!
LORD, be ever near, helping me!
- 11 “Turn my dirge into dancing.
Remove my sackcloth and clothe me with joy,
12 that my heart may sing to you and not remain silent.
O LORD, my God, I will thank you forever.”

Notes

5. This verse literally states, “For rest (is) in his anger, and life (is) in his favor.” Due to the antithetical parallel of “rest” with “life”, it is clear that “rest” means “death”, as in “rest in peace”. Likewise, “favor” is the antithetical parallel to “anger”. However, “anger” does not have a clear antonym in English, and “favor” only partially expresses what the psalmist is saying here. The Hebrew text presents a wordplay on “rest” (*rega*’), “favor” (*ratsah*), and “shouting” (*rigah*) from the next verse.

8b. The shift from the second person to the third person seems unwarranted, even though such shifts occur in poetry. Dahood seeks to explain the matter by making the line’s introductory *waw* (“and”) to be a “vocative

waw” and the presumed preposition, *el* (“to”), to be a name or title for God. He then translates the line as, “O El my LORD, I plead for mercy”. (Cf. *Vocative waw in Psalm 30,9*, in *Biblica*, vol. 58, fasc. 2, 1977, p. 218). However, if the *waw* is taken simply as “thus” or “then” and the statement as an introduction to the psalmist’s self-quotation that follows to the end of the psalm, thus and then the line reads quite well as it stands in the MT.

10-11. In v. 10 the psalmist provides us with a witty play on God’s name, “Yahweh,” to define and emphasize the meaning of the name as “present to help” (*Yahweh heyeh’ozet*). In the following lines, another wordplay contrasts “sackcloth” (*shaqi*) with “joy” (*shimkhah*) to draw extra attention to God’s action in replacing weeping and sadness with, we might say, “leaping and gladness”.

Psalm 31

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

This poem is a potpourri of the psalmist’s concerns, confidence, anxieties, hopes, joys, thanks, etc. It differs from similar psalms mainly by the frequent shifting of emphasis from the negative to the positive. Apparently the psalmist was near death (“my adversary”) due to illness and stress. The psalmist quotes from other psalms and from Jeremiah. But Jeremiah’s statements could hardly have been circulated until postexilic times. The psalmist laments being an outcast. This would mean also being excluded from all public worship. Jesus is shown quoting v. 5 (“Into your hands, I entrust my spirit”) as he dies. Cf. Luke 23:26.

- 1 In you, O LORD, I take refuge.

- Never let me be disgraced.
In your righteousness deliver me.
- 2 Incline your ear to me; quickly deliver me.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a most secure fortress to save me.
- 3 For you are my rock, my fortress;
and for the sake of your name,
you will lead me and guide me.
- 4 You will free me from the net they have hidden
for me.
For you are my stronghold.
- 5 Into your hands I entrust my spirit.
Redeem me, O LORD, faithful God.
- 6 I abhor those who worship vain idols.
However, it is in the LORD that I confide.
- 7 I will rejoice in your mercy and be glad.
When you saw my affliction,
you took note of my adversary.
- 8 You did not hand me over to my enemy;
you steered my feet into the open.
- 9 Be gracious to me, O LORD,
for distress has come over me.
My eyes have grown dim with grief;
my throat and my body are sore.
- 10 For my life has been swallowed by sorrow,
and my years are exhausted with groaning.
My strength is sapped in my anguish,
and my bones have become fragile.
- 11 I am an object of derision to all my adversaries;
and even more so, a reproach to my neighbors.
I have become abhorrent to my acquaintances;
and when I go about on the street,
those who see me flee away from me.
- 12 Like someone dead,
I have been put out of mind and forgotten.
I am like a vessel, broken and thrown away.
- 13 Yes, I hear whispering crowds.
Terror is all around.
When they conspire together against me,
they plot to take my life.
- 14 But to you, O LORD, I have entrusted myself.
I said: "You are my God."
- 15 My years are in your hands;
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,
and from those who pursue me.
- 16 Let your face shine upon your servant.
Save me in your kindness.
- 17 O LORD, let me not be ashamed when I call upon you.
Let the wicked be shamed;
let them be silenced by Sheol.

- 18 Let lying lips grow dumb,
which speak against the righteous,
arrogantly in pride and contempt.
- 19 How great is your goodness,
which you keep in store for those who fear you;
which you fashion for those who flee to you,
rather than to the sons of man.
- 20 You hide them securely in your presence
from the allegations of man.
You shelter them in your sanctuary,
away from accusing tongues.
- 21 Blessed be the LORD;
for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love
for me, when I was in a city under siege.
- 22 In my dread, I exclaimed:
“I have been cut off from your sight!”
But when I cried out to you,
you heard my plea and prayer.
- 23 Love the LORD, all you his saints.
The LORD upholds his faithful,
but roundly rebukes the arrogant.
- 24 Be strong, all you that hope in the LORD;
and let your heart take courage.

Notes

2. *a most secure fortress*. The Hebrew text employs a rather peculiar expression here: literally, “for a house of fortresses”. The plural form is readily understood as an expression of excellence, while “house” recalls a place of safety and solitude.

4. *from the net*. The switch from military to hunting metaphor seems contrived. However, we see especially in v. 13 that the psalmist is threatened by insidious, plotting enemies. The term, “net”, has the metaphorical sense of “conspiracy” or “plot” (cf. Prov 29:5).

7-8. The “adversary” and “enemy” is death at the hands of the psalmist’s personal enemies. But the **LORD** has guided the psalmist out of the danger: literally, “you set my feet in the large place”, which recalls being freed

“from the net”. It also recalls God’s covenant promise to the faithful: “And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev 26:12).

13. It is uncertain if this verse is the psalmist’s own words or those of the “whispering crowds”. If the latter is the case, then the context suggests that these words could be understood as a sarcastic, belittling statement such as, “Old Terror himself is on the loose!” The expression is very similar to Jer 20:10a, where it is taken to be the words of “the many.”

21-24. *city under siege*. Most modern translators prefer “from the fortified city”. However, the Hebrew word *tsor* can refer to a siege and, in this case, fits quite well with the lines that follow. Verses 23 and 24 stand out as postexilic “add-ons”.

Psalm 32

Of David. A Maskil.

A *maskil* is a didactic poem. Psalms of this genre further define the term as “teaching”, “words”, “parable”, and “sayings”. Psalm 32 draws lessons from Israel’s history, and, as is characteristic of didactic Hebrew poetry, it is replete with irony. Wordplay serves to “pack” as much meaning and imagery as possible into just as few words as possible. The psalmist has learned from personal experience that an honest and full confession of one’s guilt is “good medicine”; for the **LORD** responds with ready forgiveness and instruction that bring health to mind, body, and soul. This is the second of the seven penitential psalms.

- 1 What blessings there are
when one's transgression is forgiven,
when sin is blotted out.
- 2 What blessings for the one to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,
in whose spirit there is no guile.
- 3 When I held myself to silence,
my bones ached as I groaned all day long.
- 4 For both day and night,
your hand was heavy upon me.
My vigor was sapped away as in the summer drought.
- 5 Then I confessed my sin to you;
no longer did I hide my guilt.
I said: "I will confess my sins to you, LORD,
Most High!"
And you have forgiven my sin and guilt.
- 6 Therefore, let every upright person pray to you
in time of need.
The mounting waters of the flood shall certainly not reach him.
- 7 You are my hiding place;
from distress you deliver me.
You surround me with reassurance:
- 8 "I will instruct you and teach you the way to go;
I will give you counsel and keep watch over you.
- 9 Be not like the horse or mule,
which has no understanding,
but must be trained with a bridle and bit in its mouth,
before it learns to come to you."
- 10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked.
But love and mercy surround the one who trusts
in the LORD.
- 11 Be glad and rejoice in the LORD,
you that are righteous.
Shout for joy, all you upright of heart.

Notes

1-2. These impersonal, generalized statements serve well as a refrain throughout the psalm. Next, the poet proceeds to explain matters in view of his or her own history. The poet employs four terms for his/her offenses: *pasha'* ("transgression", "rebellion"), *khata'ah* (sin as "wandering"), *'awon* ("crookedness", "deceit"), and *ramah* ("beguile").

4. *vigor was sapped away*. This expression is suggested by the Hebrew word *lashad*, meaning "juice" or "moisture" or, metaphorically, "vigor". The image is

that of perspiring and becoming dehydrated and exhausted in the summer's heat.

6-7. *in time of need*. The Hebrew text employs an obscure term here, *m^etso'*, literally, "at a season of finding". The LXX reads "at a fitting time". The word appears to be clarified by the similar sounding *mi-tsar* ("from distress") in the text which follows.

Psalm 33

Some special occasion, perhaps the autumn festival which celebrated

creation and the covenant, has moved the poet to compose “a new song” to the LORD in praise of God’s sovereignty over nations and history. The lack of any reference to a supposed psalmist (the LXX ascribes the psalm to David) or to a specific event adds to the universal application of the psalm in daily life. It is a song of praise that may be among Israel’s earliest psalms. “Stylistic features link it with ancient Semitic poetry”. Cf. Stuhlmueller, *ibid.*, p. 188.

- 1 Exalt in the LORD, O you just.
Praise is fitting for the upright.
- 2 Give thanks to the LORD with the harp,
with a ten-stringed lyre sing him songs.
- 3 Sing a new song unto him.
Play a pleasant song with joyful lyrics.
- 4 For upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.
- 5 The LORD loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is filled with his great kindness.
- 6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
by the breath of his mouth all the stars.
- 7 He gathers together the waters of the sea;
he keeps the ocean depths in his storehouses.
- 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all who dwell in the world revere him.
- 9 For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it sprang forth,
- 10 The overrules the decrees of the nations;
he thwarts the designs of the peoples.
But the decrees of the LORD stand forever;
- 11 the designs of his heart endure age after age.
- 12 Happy the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people he has chosen as his very own.
- 13 From the heavens the LORD looks down;
he sees all the offspring of the earth.
- 14 From the court where he presides,
he looks upon all who dwell on earth,
- 15 he who fashions their hearts
and discerns all their works.
- 16 No king is saved by the greatness of his army;
no warrior is delivered by force of strength.
- 17 The horse is but deceptive hope for safety;
even with all its power it cannot escape.
- 18 Behold, the LORD’s eye is upon those who revere him,
upon those who hope in his great love,
- 19 to deliver them from death,
and to keep them alive in time of famine.
- 20 Our soul waits for the LORD.
He alone is our help and our shield.
- 21 Indeed, our heart rejoices in him;
for we trust in his holy name.
- 22 Let your mercy be upon us, O LORD;
for we continue to hope in you.

Notes

4. *trustworthy*. The MT reads *be-emuwnah* (“in truth”), which is a chiasmic parallel to “with joyful lyrics” of the previous line. In Hebrew, “truth” is primarily a matter of trustworthiness.

7. *gathers together*. The MT reads *kones kaned* (“gathering as a heap”, cf. Ex 15:8; or possibly, “as (in) a jar”; cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 201). However, given the similarity of sound in these two words, one may rightly conclude that the psalmist uses *kones* to qualify *kaned* as if *kaned* and *kones* were cognate terms just as “gather” and “together” are truly cognate words in English.

Psalm 34

Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.

Psalm 34 is an acrostic with the same structure and peculiarities as Ps 25. The superscription refers to the account in 1 Sam 21:14; although, the king there is Achish and not Abimelech. David as a madman may have come to the mind of a postexilic editor in the proverb cited in v. 19: “Many are the afflictions of the just man”. The genre of the psalm moves from a hymn of thanksgiving to sapiential instruction.

- 1 I will bless the LORD at all times,
his praise always in my mouth.
- 2 My soul shall glory in the LORD;
the humble shall hear and be glad.
- 3 O magnify the LORD with me;
together let us exalt his name.
- 4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
from all my fears he set me free.
- 5 Those who look to him shall be radiant;
their faces will never be dismayed.
- 6 This poor person called, and the LORD was listening,
and saved him from every distress.
- 7 The angel of the LORD is stationed around those
who fear him,
and he will deliver them.
- 8 Taste and see that the LORD is good.
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.
- 9 Fear the LORD, you his holy ones;
for those who fear him shall not want.
- 10 The young lions suffer want and go hungry;
but those who seek the LORD lack no blessing.
- 11 Come, children, and listen to me.
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- 12 Who is the man that desires life?
and yearns to see prosperous times?
- 13 Guard your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
- 14 Leave evil aside and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.
- 15 The eyes of the LORD are upon the just,
and his ears are attentive to their cry.

- 16 The LORD's face is turned against the wicked,
to abolish their memory from the earth.
- 17 The just cried out, and the LORD was listening.
He rescued them from all their distress.
- 18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
those whose spirit is crushed he will save.
- 19 Many are the afflictions of the just man;
but the LORD will save him from them all.
- 20 He will protect all of his bones;
not one of them shall he broken.
- 21 Evil will bring death to the wicked,
and those who hate the just are doomed to die.
- 22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants.
No one who flees to him shall be condemned.

Notes

8-10. *taste and see*. This expression contrasts with the hunger of “the young lions”, i.e., persons who are wicked and violent—cf. Pss 35:17, 58:6; Jer 2:15; Ezek 19:2, 6; Nah 2:11, 13; Zeph 11:3. “Hunger”, in turn, contrasts with the blessings that the LORD gives to those who fear him.

The LXX translates *kēpiyriym* (“young lions”) with πλουσιοι (“rich men”). It may be that the psalmist expects the reader to think of *kēpiyriym* as a metaphor for *kabbiyriym* (“magnates”). Luke 1:53 echoes the

LXX: και πλουτουοντας εξαπεστελειν κενους (“and he sent the rich away empty”).

20. Jn 19:36 notes that no bones were broken at Jesus' death “that the scripture might be fulfilled.”

21. *doomed to die*. The Hebrew text reads “shall be guilty”, i.e., from the perspective of being found guilty and sentenced to death. This “intensified” meaning of “shall be guilty” is derived from its being placed as a parallel concept to “bring death” from the previous line. These lines form a chiasmus.

22. *shall be condemned*. The MT reads “shall be guilty”, i.e., “found guilty and sentenced to death”.

Psalm 35

Of David.

The psalmist has been betrayed by former friends, who now seek to repay good with evil. This is a frequent theme in the OT (cf. Gen 44:4; 1 Sam 25:21; Pss 38:30, 41:10; 109:5; Prov 17:13) and in the everyday life of everyday people. The psalm is best taken as “a personal lament” that, for unknown reasons, became “public property” in Israel's psalmody. The poet begins with military imagery which gives way to the matter of legal battles. Our present, litigious age affirms the adage that “history repeats itself”.

- 1 Indict, O LORD, those who indict me.
Fight against those who fight against me.
- 2 Take up buckler and shield, and rise up to help me.
- 3 Draw your javelin and spear to oppose my pursuers.
Say to my soul, “I am your victory.”
- 4 Let them be shamed and disgraced,
those who lurk for my life.
Let them be repulsed and humiliated,
those who plot evil against me.
- 5 Let them be like chaff before the wind,

- with the Lord's angel hurling them down.
- 6 Let their path be slippery and dark,
with the LORD's angel pursuing them.
- 7 Without cause, they have concealed a pitfall for me;
for no reason, they have dug it deep to take my life.
- 8 Let ruin come upon them by surprise;
let them be caught in the net they have hidden;
let them fall in unto their own destruction.
- 9 Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD;
then it will take pleasure in his victory.
- 10 My every bone shall say:
"LORD, who can compare with you?
You save the weak from those who overpower them,
the poor and the needy from those
who would despoil them."
- 11 Lying witnesses take the stand.
Matters which are unknown to me,
they charge against me.
- 12 They repay me evil for good,
leaving my soul bereaved.
- 13 But I, when they were ill, wore sackcloth.
I subdued my soul with fasting,
and my prayer returned to my bosom.
- 14 I grieved as though for a friend or brother,
as one bowed down in mourning,
weeping for my mother.
- 15 But when I stumbled,
they rejoiced and gathered together.
They gathered together against me.
Those chastisers! And I did not know it.
They lashed at me. And they did not let up.
- 16 Like contemptuous beggars for bread,
they gnash their teeth at me.
- 17 O my LORD, how much longer will you look away?
Rescue my neck from their scheming,
my very self from these young lions.
- 18 I will thank you in the great assembly;
in the midst of a mighty throng, I will praise you.
- 19 Do not let my lying foes rejoice over me;
do not let those who hate me unjustly wink eyes
at each other.
- 20 They do not speak of peace.
Rather, they devise deceitful plots to oppress
the meek of the earth.
- 21 They open wide their mouths against me.
They say: "Ah, yes! Yes, indeed!
We saw it with our own eyes."
- 22 O LORD, you saw what really happened.
Do not remain silent, O my LORD.
Do not be far from me.

- 23 Awaken and rise up to my defense,
O my God and my LORD—to my cause.
- 24 Judge me according to your righteousness,
O LORD, my God;
and do not let them rejoice over me.
- 25 Do not let them say in their hearts:
“Well done! Here’s to us!”
Do not let them proclaim: “We have devoured him.”
- 26 Let shame and disgrace come upon those
who take delight in my misfortune.
Let those who gloat over me
be clothed with shame and dishonor.
- 27 Those who delight in my innocence shall cheer for joy and be glad.
They shall forever say:
“Praised be the LORD,
who takes delight in his servant’s success.”
- 28 My tongue shall proclaim your justice,
and publish your praise all day long.

Notes

1. *Indict . . . Fight*. The poet begins with two terms that set the stage for what is to come—namely, imagery from the courtroom, from the battlefield, and, briefly, from the hunt. The courtroom scenario dominates, suggesting that the poet’s battles are of a legal nature.

3. *javelin and spear*. The imagery of this verse is clear, but not the terminology. The problem centers on the term, *s^egor*, which can mean “to close” or, as a noun, “seal” or “haft”—the area of attachment between a blade and its handle or shaft, as evidenced by the term’s use in *1 Qumran Milkhamah*, 5:7. A javelin has a narrow, elongated head; and holding it at the haft would mean taking it near the middle of its full length so as to form a barricade across someone’s path and still have it ready for full, offensive use.

5-6. *The Lord’s angel* or messenger is not exclusively a heavenly being. Any person, event, or natural element that accomplishes God’s will can serve as his “angel”. Cf. Ps 104:4.

11-12. The Hebrew text presents a chiasmus that “ties” these verses together with two similar sounding words: *yishaluniy* (“they charge against me”) and *y^eshall^emuniy* (“they repay me”). Since similar sounding words imply similar meanings when used in the same context, the poet says in effect: “My reward for doing good is in being falsely charged with evils that I never heard of, leaving me devastated.”

13-14. Much of the terminology and imagery in these verses is obscure. The uncertainty of translation is due to the word, *bakhalotam* (“in their illness?”). The root of the word could be *kh^lh* (“sick”, or “appease”), *kh^li* (sickness), *kh^lil* (“flute”), or *kh^ll* (“play the pipe”, “pierce”, or “defile”). These terms may also be used metaphorically. Perhaps the poet has “sickness”, “pipe

playing, and “appeasement” in mind. These concepts may well underline Jesus’ citing of a proverb to compare his compatriots to children in the marketplaces calling to their playmates, “We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn” (Mt 11:16f; Lk 7:31f). The context of this psalm suggests that the psalmist has done everything possible to appease the opposition by wearing sackcloth and maintaining a mournful disposition. The terseness of the statement may be due to the poet’s making an oblique reference to the proverb regarding children piping and playing. We might say analogously, “Yes, he has a little learning; and that’s the problem!”, inferring that, “A little learning is a dangerous thing”, which further infers the rest of the proverb, “Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring. There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again”, which infers the “muses” (the Pierian spring), which also infers Alexander Pope, the “muse” who coined this oft but only partially quoted statement.

The rendering, “I subdued my soul”, apparently refers to calming one’s feelings. The psalmist’s feelings were probably those of anger. The meaning of “my prayer returned to my bosom” is uncertain. If the Hebrew conjunction *waw*, which introduces this line, is to be understood as meaning “and”, then the line appears to be an extension of the concept of subdued feelings of anger. Thus the expression would mean that the psalmist also subdued his desire for revenge, with the result that he found some consolation in spite of his troubles. However, if the conjunction is to be understood to mean “but”, then the line must have an oppositive meaning to the previous line. That could be the case here, since the poet is complaining, “I act kindly; but they respond unkindly”.

15-16. Was the psalmist unaware of what was happening to him? Or did he not know who the chastisers (LXX, μαστιγες, i.e., those who chastise with whips) were? The lashing was probably with the tongue, since *they did not let up* is, in the Hebrew text, “they were not silent”. The rendering, “beggars for bread”, is only a conjecture as to what the Hebrew *la’agey ma’owg* (“mockers for something baked”) might mean. The term, *ma’owg* (its root, ‘wg, means “bake”), is found only here

and again in 1 Kings 17:12, which is the widow’s response to Elijah’s request for “a morsel of bread” (*pat-lekhem*). “And she said, ‘I have nothing baked (*’imyeshliy ma’owg*).’” (NRSV).

25. It is difficult to provide an adequate and accurate translation for the Hebrew *henakh napshenuw* (literally “Aha! Our soul!”). But it is clearly a self-congratulatory expression.

Psalm 36

To the leader. Of David, the servant of the LORD.

This Psalm’s terminology is often obscure, and the translation given here is “a best effort” to produce a reasonably readable text. The psalm’s underlying dynamic is a dialectic movement of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The thesis is that wicked person deceives himself and finds evil to be his “natural element”. But against so much evil, God’s goodness and love are antithetically presented as even more immense and fully reliable. The synthesis is in the eventual defeat of the wicked. Psalm 36 is of mixed genre: lament, sapiential, hymn of praise, and didactic.

- 1 The transgression of the wicked person tells my heart:
“There is no fear of God before his eyes”.**
- 2 For in finding his offense to be spitefulness is,
in his own eyes, a compliment.**
- 3 The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit.
He no longer even knows how to do good.**
- 4 He dreams up evil schemes while lying in bed.
He is bent on following the way to no good.
He refuses to cease from doing evil.**
- 5 LORD, your unfailing love descends from the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches as high as the sky.**
- 6 Your righteousness is like the highest of mountains.
Your judgments are as deep as the Sea.
You uphold both man and beast, O LORD.**
- 7 How precious is your love, O God!
And the descendants of Adam fly to the shadow
of your wings.**
- 8 They are filled with the riches of your house;
and you give them drink from your river in Paradise.**
- 9 For the fountain of life springs from you,
and in your light we see light.**
- 10 Continue your kindness to those who confess you;
render your righteousness to the upright of heart.**
- 11 Do not let me be defeated by the foot of the proud,
or banished by the hand of the wicked.**
- 12 Finally! The evil-doers have fallen.
They have been cast down never to rise again.**

Notes

1. *tells my heart*. The term, *n^eum*, is used for one speaking in a prophetic state. Cf. Ps 110:1; 1 Sam 2:30. Thus, by ascribing the psalm to David, “the servant of the **LORD**”, the post-exilic scribe presents the text as a prophetic statement from the mouth of David.

2. *in his own eyes, a compliment*. The MT reads in literal translation, “he flattered himself (*hekheliyq* *’elayw*) in his own eyes (*b^eeinaiw*) to find his iniquity to hate”. The “double infinitive”, “to find . . . to hate”, is difficult to interpret and leads all translations, ancient and modern, to interpolate some extra or modified content for the sake of clarity. The root, *khlq*, means “to flatter” as well as “to be false”, and “to be false in or with one’s own eyes” seems to mean “fail to see” or “overlook”. In a graphic way, the poet wants to state through this second reference to the eyes of the wicked that sin is self-deception that leads to “eye-problems” (i.e., inability to see one’s wickedness for what it is) and

also to “I-problems” (i.e., conceit, arrogance, and self-flattery), often ascribed to arrogant idolaters. In Hebrew, “eyes” is *’eniy*, and “I” is *’aniy*. The psalmist is not explicit with this pun (*’aniy* does not appear here as an independent pronoun); but the wordplay is “functionally” and, perhaps even intentionally, present.

8-9. “Eden” (Paradise) connotes a garden of delight with an abundance of flowing water (cf. Gen 2) that brings life to the earth. In v. 9, the psalmist alludes to the water and recognizes that God is the true source of life. The life of God is “life-giving”, and the light of God is “light-giving.” In fact, “light” and “life” are often synonymous or complementary terms. Cf., e.g., Job 3:20, Ps 27:1, Prov 6:23, Jn 1:4, 8:12. Eventually these two verses were given a messianic interpretation by rabbis and early Christians.

12. This final verse gives at least a partial reply to the problem that is raised when the wicked prosper.

Psalm 37

Of David.

In Psalm 37, the psalmist effectually says that it is easier for the wicked to be convinced of their ways than it is for the virtuous to be convinced of the way of virtue. In turn, the psalmist offers many reasons and examples for holding to the way of righteousness. The Hebrew text is obscure in some places, partially due to its acrostic character, resulting in a loose sequence of thought and unconventional use of terms. Double meaning is prevalent. The psalm’s theology reflects postexilic interest in the Deuteronomic theme of reward for virtue and punishment for sin. Cf. Stuhlmüller, *ibid.*, p. 202.

Aleph

- 1 Do not be distressed because of the devious;
do not be envious of evildoers.**

- 2 For they fade away as quickly as grass,
like tender green grass they wither away.**

Beth

- 3 Trust in the LORD and do good.
Dwell in the land and eat of its bounty.**

- 4 Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you your heart’s desire.**

Gimel

- 5 Entrust your ways to the LORD.
Place confidence in him, and he will help you.**

- 6 He will let your righteousness shine forth,
and your upright cause be like the noonday sun.**

Daleth

- 7 Give heed to the LORD and wait for him.
Do not be distressed at those who prosper,
nor at the man who succeeds in doing evil.**

He

- 8 Let your anger be soothed and your wrath forgotten.
Do not let your resentment only lead you to evil.**

- 9 For those who act wickedly will be cut down.**

But those who wait for the LORD are the ones
who will inherit the earth.

Waw

10 Soon the wicked will be no more.
If you look around for them,
you will find their place deserted.

11 But the meek shall inherit the earth,
and take delight in abundant prosperity.

Zayin

12 The wicked plot against the just;
they grate their teeth at the righteous.

13 But the LORD laughs at the wicked;
for he sees that their doom is coming.

Kheth

14 The wicked have drawn their swords;
they have bent their bows,
hoping to bring down the poor and the needy,
and to slaughter the upright of character.

15 May their swords impale their own hearts,
and their bows be broken in two.

Teth

16 Better is the modest portion of the righteous
than the great gains of the many wicked.

17 For the weapons of the wicked shall be broken,
while the LORD gives support to the just.

Yodh

18 The LORD knows the days of the virtuous;
and their inheritance shall endure forever.

19 They are not chagrined by a season of drought,
and during times of famine, they have their fill.

Kaph

20 But the wicked shall perish;
and the LORD's enemies will be consumed like ravines set on fire.
They shall vanish more quickly than smoke.

Lamedh

21 The wicked borrow and do not repay;
but the just one is gracious and gives freely.

22 Those blessed by him shall inherit the earth;
but those cursed by him shall be cut off.

Mem

23 The LORD directs the steps of the stalwart,
and he makes their journeys pleasant.

24 Though they may come under attack,
they shall not be cast down;
for the LORD will take them by the hand.

Nun

25 I was once young, and now I am an old man.
But I have yet to see the virtuous forsaken,
or their children begging for bread.

26 The just man is always generous and willing to lend,

- and his children become a blessing.
Samekh
- 27 Turn away from evil and do good,
and you will live forever.
- 28 For the LORD loves just judgment,
and he will not desert his disciples.
(Ayin)
They will be preserved forever.
But the seed of the wicked will be cut down.
- 29 The just shall inherit the earth,
and dwell upon it forever.
Pe
- 30 The mouth of the just man teaches wisdom,
and his tongue proclaims justice.
- 31 The law of God is in his heart;
his steps will never slip.
Tsadhe
- 32 The wicked man watches for the upright,
and looks for ways to kill him.
- 33 The LORD will not leave him in his hands,
nor will he be condemned when he is judged.
Qoph
- 34 Wait for the LORD and be true to his way.
Then he will raise you up to inherit the land,
when you see the wicked being cut down.
Resh
- 35 I have seen the violent and wicked man
flourish like a thriving, native tree.
- 36 Then he passed away.
Indeed, he was no more.
I searched about for him;
but he was nowhere to be found.
Shin
- 37 Take note of the innocent and mark the upright.
There is posterity for the man of peace!
- 38 But sinners will be destroyed one and all;
the posterity of the wicked will be cut off.
Taw
- 39 The salvation of the just comes from the LORD.
He is their stronghold in times of distress.
- 40 The LORD helps them and delivers them.
He will save them from the wicked.
He will deliver them, because they take refuge in him.

Notes

3. *bounty*. The poet begins an extended “definition” of what it means to trust in God. First of all, it means to dwell with confidence in the land, cultivating it and living from its flocks and produce, *’emuwnah*, and to delight in the **LORD**. In *’emuwnah* are “amen” and

“mammon”, faithfulness and trust, and all that has been entrusted to us: “If you have not been faithful (“amen”) with mammon, who will entrust (“amen”) you with true riches?” (Lk 16:11). The underlying sense is that the **LORD** has shown that he is trustworthy by giving his people “trustworthy” land.

7. *give heed*. The Hebrew text uses a word (*dwm*) which has the root, *dmm*, and can mean either “to groan” or “to be silent”. The LXX appears to be aware of the two meanings and chooses to translate with ὑποταγήθι (“submit”). The rendering, “give heed to”, seems to come closer to the poet’s intent than the expression, “be still before the **LORD**”, since *dwm* can also mean “groan”. This passage should not be confused with Ps 46:10 and the usual rendering, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

11. *The meek*, the *‘anawiyim*, are the poor, who cannot bequeath anything to their children. Inheritance meant “life in abundance” to the people of the OT. When Jesus says that “the meek shall inherit the earth” (cf. Mt 5:5), he is speaking of their heritage in the messianic kingdom. That is basically the same for “the poor in spirit” (Mt 5:3), even though “you will always have the poor with you” (Mt 26:11). Similarly, when Jesus tells John the Baptist’s disciples, “the poor have the good news preached to them” (Mt 11:5), he is offering “proof” that he is the Messiah and that the Kingdom of God is available to the *‘anawiyim*.

16. *modest portion . . . great gains*. The rendering of this verse follows the usual versions. However, it is possible to translate the passage in the following manner: “Better is the straight arrow of the just person than an abundance of the crooked arrows of the wicked”. There are several reasons why this rendering may be correct or at least included in the poet’s manner of expression. The immediate context is not about wealth, but about the weapons and treachery of the wicked and the **LORD**’s protection of the just person.

The final word in v. 16 is *rabbiym* (“many”), which is the masculine, plural substantive of the root, *rbb*, meaning “to shoot”. In Job 16:13, the term, *rabbayw*, clearly refers to archers or arrows. Cf. also Jer 50:29. In this context, *m^e‘at* (“a little”, but also meaning “smooth”, i.e., “straight” or “sharpened” [cf. Ezek 21:20]), could refer to the straightness of the arrow and the resulting straightness of the course the arrow takes in being shot—all of this being symbolic of the “straightness” of the just person’s life and behavior and of the **LORD** as the only “arrow” that a just person needs. The term for “arrow” is indicated by the final word (*rabbiym*) of the colon. In the next line, “the crooked arrows” may also be rendered as “the wicked arrows”, or as “the arrows of the wicked”. The term *risha‘iyim* (“wicked”) may well be a reference to the wickedness of the antagonists *and* to the “wickedness” (i.e., crookedness) of their arrows—all as a symbol of the crooked ways and false gods of the evil persons. Also, it seems likely that *rabbiym*, which can mean “many” or “multitude” as well as “arrows”, is used to underline the abundance of the wicked and their “arrows”. The psalmist’s use of terms with multiple meanings may not be considered “kosher” in the formal literature of our times. However, it is abundantly present in the Hebrew

scriptures and is used in our day as well: e.g., the roadway sign, “Give ‘em a brake”.

17. The writer of this psalm continues as a master of multiple meanings. The rendering, “the weapons” (*z^erow‘owt*), may refer also to the arms of the body as well as to one’s children, which are compared to “arrows in the hand of a warrior” in Ps 127:3-5. The imagery of children as arrows may be further underlined in the use of the term “shall be broken” (*tishabarnah*). There may be an allusion in this term to the miscarriage of the children of the wicked and the safe delivery of children for the just, since *shabar* can also refer to the “breaking through” of the child at birth (cf. Isa 66:8f).

20. The rendering, “will be consumed like ravines set on fire” (*kiyqar kariym kaluw*), the NAB gives as “Like the beauty of the meadows they vanish”. Although the beauty of the meadows vanishes in the summer’s heat, the imagery here is that of smoke; and “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire”. The term, *kiyqar* has to do with burning (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 230; Job 30:17 and 30, and Prov 29:8). The meaning of *kariym* is disputed. It could be derived from *karah*, “dig” or “hollow out” and would then be equivalent to “a hollow”, i.e., “ravine”. It is parallel to “valleys” (*‘amaqiym*) in Ps 65:14. Therefore, *kariym* should be somewhat synonymous with *‘amaqiym*. It should also be noted that the term could be read as *kerem* (vineyard), and vineyards are best planted on slopes as one would have in a ravine or hollow. A fire in a ravine or a dry vineyard would likely burn more rapidly and hotter than a fire on an open meadow.

22. *blessed by him*. Although some versions (e.g., NAB and NRSV) read “blessed by the **LORD**”, the term, “**LORD**”, does not appear in the text, which says “blessed by him”, which refers to “the just one”—which could mean God. However, “the just” throughout this psalm is always a reference to the just person in contrast to the wicked person. The just person’s blessing or curse is effective because he is faithful to God who is preeminently faithful (cf. Gen 12:3 concerning Abraham and blessings and curses).

23. “Stride” is a good parallel to “steps”; but a “journey” includes many steps. Elijah’s journey to Mount Horeb is referred to as a *derek* in 1 Kings 19:4 and 7. It was also a journey made relatively pleasant by God’s ministering angel. The verb, “makes pleasant” (*yekhpats*) also means “stretches out straight” (cf. Job 40:17). It takes no stretch of the imagination to understand that a journey on a straight way is an easy and pleasant journey. “A voice cries out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way (*derek*) of the **Lord**; in the desert make straight a highway for our God’” (Isa 40:3).

24. The psalmist continues the theme of the just person on a journey. Even though the way may be straight, the traveler might still be attacked by brigands. The Hebrew verb *yippol* does not mean simply “fall”, but is to be associated with “to fall upon” and “to attack”. Again the psalmist engages in a bit of wordplay, though somewhat more strained than usual. The root form of

yippol is *npl*, which embraces the meanings of “fall”, “fall upon”, and “attack”. All of these nuances bear upon the meaning and imagery of this passage. Also, *yippol* is paired with *yutal*, which has similar meanings to *yippol*, but adds to them the image of tottering and of being “cut down”.

25-26. These two verses present a very optimistic view of matters. Elsewhere (cf. Pss 37:7, 73:3), the psalmist recognizes that the wicked prosper and questions God about that fact (cf. Jer 5:28, 12:1). The last line of v. 26 could also mean, “his arm is for

blessing” (i.e., *z’ro’o* in place of the MT *zar’o*, i.e., “seed”). This could possibly be still another example of the psalmist’s penchant to use double . However, “children” as a blessing is most likely meant and balances well with “children” as beggars several lines earlier.

37-38. One’s children are readily seen as a prolongation of one’s own life beyond death. To die without posterity is to die absolutely and to be definitively cut off from the Land of the Living.

Psalm 38

A Psalm of David, for the memorial offering.

While it is common to find a prayer that acknowledges the sins of the nation and God’s righteous punishment (cf., e.g., Dan 3:26-45), it is less common that an individual should acknowledge in prayer that one’s sickness and distress are one’s own fault (v. 18). This is the distinctive aspect of the third of the “seven penitential psalms”. The concept of illness as recompense for sin is taken up by St. Paul, following rabbinical tradition in 1 Cor 11:29-30—“For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason, many of you are weak and ill, and some have died”. However, the Gospel according to John (9:2-3), written and “published” well after Paul’s death, is far more reserved in such judgment: “His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s work might be revealed in him’”. That Jesus is addressed here as “Rabbi” instead of the more usual “**LORD**” in the Fourth Gospel may well indicate Jesus’ (and John’s) intentional departure from the contemporary, rabbinical interpretation of illness as divine punishment for sin. The “mystery of suffering” remains a mystery that both challenges faith and increases faith, which, indeed, is the effect of John 9:2-3.

- 1 LORD, do not chastise me in your anger;
do not rebuke me in your wrath.**
- 2 For your arrows have pierced me through,
and your hand has come down upon me.**
- 3 There is no strength in my flesh
because of your indignation;
there is no rest for my bones because of my offense.**
- 4 For my iniquities mount higher than my head;
like an enormous burden,
they are much too heavy for me.**
- 5 My wounds are foul and festering
because of my foolishness.**
- 6 I am bent over and fully bowed down.
All day long I walk about weeping.**
- 7 A burning fever fills my loins;
there is no soundness in my flesh.**
- 8 I am benumbed and greatly dejected.
I have roared louder than the growling of my heart.**
- 9 O LORD, all my suffering is before you;
my groaning is not hidden from you.**

- 10 My heart quivers; my strength fails me.
The very light of my eyes has left me.
- 11 My family and friends avoid my affliction,
and my neighbors stay far away.
- 12 Those who seek my life have set out their snares;
and those who seek my ruin predict my demise.
They contemplate deceit all day long.
- 13 But I am like the deaf and cannot hear,
like the dumb man who cannot open his mouth.
- 14 I am like a man who hears nothing,
in whose mouth are found no replies.
- 15 So I must wait for you, O LORD.
It is you, O LORD my God, who will answer.
- 16 For I have prayed: “Do not let them gloat over me.
If my foot happens to slip,
do not let them boast over me.”
- 17 For I am about to collapse,
and my pain is always present.
- 18 Yes, I acknowledge my guilt.
I am filled with remorse because of my sin.
- 19 My familiar foes are powerful;
many are those who wrongfully hate me.
- 20 And those who repay me evil for good
attack me because I seek what is right.
- 21 Do not forsake me, O LORD.
My God, do not be far from me.
- 22 Make haste to help me, O LORD of my salvation.

Notes

7. In this verse, the psalmist provides us with a paronomasia on “loins” (*kasal*), which can also mean “foolishness” (cf. v. 5), thus drawing further attention to the foolish deed or deeds that have apparently brought the contempt of others and a severe illness to the repentant person. The psalmist’s description of his ailment suggests that he has been “diagnosed” as a leper, as one who is shunned and scorned by all and can do no more than wait for the LORD’s mercy (v. 15). The psalmist suffers as much from social and religious isolation as he does from physical torment.

8b. *roared . . . growling*. These two words in Hebrew refer especially to a lion as it roars in bringing down its prey and then growls as it feeds on the catch.

The psalmist is saying, in effect, that he is no longer satisfied with suffering quietly.

19. The enemies in this psalm are the psalmist’s own acquaintances and kinfolk. Thus the Hebrew *’oybay khayyim* (literally, “my enemies of life”) is rendered here as *familiar foes*. The root, *khy*, can also refer to one’s extended family or clan. Cf. 1 Sam 18:18.

Psalm 39

To the leader: to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

The psalmist has learned “the hard way” that “silence is golden”—or at least the prudent “action” to take when certain parties are present. Having had some time “to think things over” in silence, the poet proceeds to muse on the brevity and general futility of life and asks only that God not remain silent, but grant

"some joy before I depart to be no more." Psalm 39 is readily classified as a lament, but of uncertain date. There are several traditions regarding Jeduthun, either as a singer and/or gatekeeper—roles jealously guarded by the postexilic Levites. To these roles, 2 Chr 35:15 adds that of seer: "The singers, the descendants of Asaph, were in their place according to the command of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and the king's seer Jeduthun. The gatekeepers were at each gate; they did not need to interrupt their service, for their kindred the Levites made preparations for them" (NRSV). This passage witnesses to the postexilic linking of musicianship and Jeduthun with prophecy (cf. 1 Chr 25:1), a step toward interpreting David as the composer of all the psalms and as "the prophet"—e.g. *Rule of St. Benedict*, 2,9 (ca. 500 C.E.).

- 1 I said:
"I will watch my ways so as not to be tripped up
by my tongue.
I will keep my mouth muzzled
when an impious person is present."
- 2 I was speechless, silent; I did not speak even of good.
But my pain grew more intense;
(3) My heart was burning within me.
Steeped in my thoughts, the fire grew more intense.
I spoke with my tongue:
- 4 "LORD, let me know my end and the sum of my days."
Let me know how much I am lacking.
- 5 Behold, you have given me but a handful of days,
and my life's span amounts to nothing in your sight.
Alas, only a breath is every erect mortal.
- 6 Alas, merely in a shadow does a man go forth.
Alas, it is to no avail that they grumble.
A person may amass great riches,
but never know who will acquire them.
- 7 And now, what can I expect, O LORD?
My hope is in you alone.
- 8 Free me from all my sins.
Do not let the reproach of fools beset me.
- 9 I was silent and did not open my mouth;
for you are the one who did this.
- 10 Take your scourge away from me;
at the blows of your hand I perish.
- 11 With rebukes you chastise a man for sinning.
Like a moth, you consume his cherished goods.
Alas! Every mortal is a mere breath.
- 12 Hear my prayer, O LORD, and to my cry give heed.
To my weeping be not silent.
For I am a wanderer in your midst,
a brief visitor like all my ancestors.
- 13 Turn your angry eyes away from me,
that I may find some joy before I depart
to be no more.

Notes

4. *the sum of my days*. This statement may not be a request for knowledge about one's life expectancy. Rather, the psalmist is asking to know how much longer his illness will last, since life is fragile (*khadel*, "lacking") and so brief. The concept that God sets the term for one's tribulations was common among the ancient near-eastern cultures. Cf. *What Does the Psalmist Ask For in Psalms 39:5 and 90:12?*, by Richard

J. Clifford, in *JBL*, vol. 119, no. 1, Spring, 2000, pp. 59-66.

7-9. One may recall, in these verses, Job's response to God's challenge to Job for arguing with the Almighty: "Behold, I am vile. What shall I answer you? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yes, twice; but I will proceed no further" (Job 40:4f).

Psalm 40

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

This psalm begins with praise for some recent work of God that prompts the psalmist to sing "a new song" (v. 3), which means to praise God for a "new" act of salvation. The psalm's composite nature (thanksgiving in the first part and lament in the second part, vv. 13-17) and the fact that its final section equates to Ps 70 indicate a long history of composition followed by redaction for varying uses in individual prayer and public liturgy. Consequently, it has in it "a bit of everything for everybody".

- 1 I waited and waited for the LORD;
and he bent down to me and heard my cry.**
- 2 He brought me up from the yowling pit,
from the miry clay.
He set my feet upon a rock,
and gave me a firm footing.**
- 3 He put a new song into my mouth,
one of praise to our God.
Many shall see and marvel,
and place their hope in the LORD.**
- 4 O what blessings come to the one who trusts
in the LORD and does not turn to the arrogant,
nor to those who turn to lying.**
- 5 You have performed mighty deeds, O LORD my God.
Many are your works,
and wondrous your labors on our behalf.
You are beyond all compare.
When I try to speak and tell about them,
they become too numerous to recount.**
- 6 You delight in neither sacrifice nor oblation.
Instead you have opened up my ears.
You ask for neither holocaust nor sin offering.**
- 7 Instead, I replied: "Behold, I have come."
In the text of the scroll it is written of me:**
- 8 "I delight in doing your pleasure, O my God;
and your Torah lies deep within me."**
- 9 I have brought the good tidings
of your righteousness to the great assembly.
You know well, O LORD, that I did not close my lips.**
- 10 I have not kept your justice hidden deep in my heart.**

- Your faithfulness and your salvation
I have proclaimed.
I have not concealed your kindness and your truth from the great assembly.**
- 11 You, O LORD, did not withhold your tender mercies from me.
Your love and your truth constantly sustain me.**
- 12 Now, more evils than can be numbered have fallen upon me.
My sins so overwhelm me that I am unable to see.
Their numbers are far greater than the hairs
of my head,
and my heart has deserted me.**
- 13 Hurry, O LORD, to save me.
O LORD, to my help make haste.**
- 14 May all those who try to destroy me be put to shame and confusion.
May those who delight in my harm be turned back and disgraced.**
- 15 May those who chant “Aha! Aha!” at me
be overwhelmed by their own shame.**
- 16 Let all who seek you be joyful and find delight in you.
Let those who love your salvation continually say:
“Great is the LORD.”**
- 17 Though I am poor and needy,
the LORD will remember me.
You are my savior, my help.
O my God, do not delay.**

Notes

2. *the yowling pit*. Possibly the psalmist has in mind that God has heard his or her prayer above the “din of Death” and responded by rescuing the psalmist from the grave. The Hebrew root used here, *sh’ah*, implies “crashing into destruction”.

4. *the arrogant*. The Hebrew text uses a very uncertain word, *rahabiym*, the masculine plural of *rahab*. In Psalm 89:10-11, Rahab appears as a mythological sea monster that causes storms. Cf. also Isa 51:9, Job 9:13 (which speaks of “the helpers of Rahab”, i.e., ‘*oz^erey rahab*), Job 26:12, and notes on Psalm 89:11). The context of Psalm 40 suggests that the *rahabiym* are idolaters or false deities. “Those who turn to lying” could then be understood as those who resort to soothsayers and oracles.

6. *opened up my ears*. Ears that have been “opened up” are “obedient ears”. This accurately reflects the meaning of the Hebrew idiom used here, “you have dug ears for me”, which refers to God’s creative action, but also implies obedience, which is preferable to sacrifice. Cf. 1 Sam 15:22. The image of ears being dug recalls the practice of piercing a slave’s earlobe with an awl, if the slave preferred to remain with his master rather than accept freedom. Cf. Ex 21:5-6. In this practice is also the concept of “circumcised ears”, i.e., ears that hear and obey. Cf. Jer 6:10 and 9:25.

8. *your Torah*. Although the psalmist might well say to God, “Your wish is my command”, the term,

Torah, (“Law”) refers to “guidance” and “counsel” rather than to “orders” and “commands”. For this reason, Israel rejoices in the Torah and feels privileged to have it. Cf. Psalm 147:19-20.

11. *tender mercies*. The term, *rakhameyka* (“your tender mercies”), builds on *rekhem* (“womb”). Compassionate love is thereby emphasized.

12. *my heart has deserted me*. The psalmist implies that weeping for his/her sins has resulted in impaired vision; for tears come from a liquefied heart. Cf. the notes for Ps 4:4, and *A Note on LR’WT in Ps 40,13*, by John S. Kselman, in *Biblica*, vol. 63, fasc. 4, 1982, pp. 552-554.

13. *Hurry*. The MT and the LXX both attest to “be pleased” (*r^etseh*) rather than “hurry”. However, with adjusted pointing, the Hebrew term, *r^etseh*, becomes *ruwtsah*, i.e., “run”, “hurry”. Very probably, “hurry” was intended by the psalmist, since it is clearly paired with “hasten” (*khuwshah*) in chiasmic form, with the two terms, *ruwtsah* and *khuwshah*, being similar in sound as well as meaning, as is characteristic of chiasmus and Hebrew poetry. It may be that the LXX and the MT preferred “be pleased” so as to diminish the anthropomorphic tone of the expression. Cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 247. But it should be noted that St. Jerome also read *r^etseh* and translated with *placeat tibi, Domine* (“may it please you, O LORD”).

Psalm 41

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

In this final psalm of Book I of the Psalter, early Christians saw a prophetic testament to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. St. Augustine also took the psalm as a prediction of the persecution and martyrdom of Christians and of the antagonism that developed between Jews and Christians by his day. Psalm 41:1 aptly forms a “grand inclusion” with Ps 1:1 regarding one who is “blessed”. Both psalms are sapiential.

- 1 Blessed the one who cares for the needy,
the LORD will save him in the day of evil.**
- 2 The LORD will preserve him and give him life.
He will be blessed upon the earth,
and you will not give him over to his greedy foes.**
- 3 The LORD will raise him up from his bed of pain.
In his infirmity,
you put an end to his being bedridden.**
- 4 I said: “LORD, have pity on me.
Heal my soul; for I have sinned against you.”**
- 5 My enemies say ruthless things about me:
“How long will it take for him to die
and his name to be forgotten?”**
- 6 When someone comes to visit,
he speaks only empty words.
He fills his heart with iniquity;
he leaves and spreads rumors.**
- 7 All who hate me whisper together against me.
They reckon with only the worst for me:**
- 8 “Pour a deadly poison into him;
and once he has been laid low,
he will not be able to rise again.”**
- 9 Even my most trusted friend,
who used to eat my bread,
has raised up his heel against me.**
- 10 But you, O LORD, have pity on me and raise me up.
Then I will be able to repay them.**
- 11 By this I will know you are pleased with me:
that my foe cannot shout in triumph over me.**
- 12 In my being a person of upright character,
uphold me and set me in your presence forever.**
- 13 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from eternity to eternity.
Amen and amen!**

Notes

2. *his greedy foes*. Literally, the MT reads, “and you did not give him into the throat of his enemies”. In this

psalm, the poet’s enemies are sickness, pain, and death as well as fellow countrymen.

3. *his being bedridden*. The MT reads, “All his lying down you reversed in his infirmity”. The imagery is quite

clear, and it fits well with the previous statement regarding being “raised up”.

8. *poison*. The MT reads *debar-beliyyal‘al yatsuwwq bow*. When the verb is taken as a precativ perfect, the rendering then becomes “pour something deadly into him”. Usually, *dabar* means “word” or “thing”. But since this “deadly thing” can be poured, it can be defined as “poison”. The tenor of this psalm and the language that it employs indicate that the psalmist’s acquaintances are quite willing actively to seek his death. But the psalmist

seems to be indulging in hyperbole, for he “protests too much”.

9. The Fourth Gospel (cf. Jn 13:18) cites this verse as prophetic of Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Jesus. Due to the similarity between “heel” (*‘aqeb*) and “malign” (*‘aq^ebah*) in Hebrew, the psalmist resorts to an implied wordplay. The imagery of raising up one’s heel means “to malign” rather than physically or figuratively kick someone. The psalmist’s enemies appear to be former comrades who have become his “worthy opponents”, but not foes that would necessarily do him physical harm.

BOOK II: Psalms 42-72

Psalm 42

To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites.

This psalm and the next were probably a single psalm which was divided into two psalms for uncertain reasons. The mention of Hermon and Mizar (locations uncertain) plus canyons and cataracts may place the psalmist in Jordan or Lebanon in the midst of intriguing scenery. However, the psalmist appears to be religiously ostracized and in some state of social isolation and may be too homesick and too intent on seeing the face of God (i.e., to worship in the temple) to appreciate the physical setting that most people would find attractive. For the modern reader, the image of a deer and flowing streams is attractive, and the longing that the psalmist's lament evokes is both tender and poignant.

- 1 As the doe yearns for flowing waters,
so my soul yearns for you, O God.**
- 2 My soul is thirsting for God, the living God.
When shall I come and see the face of God?**
- 3 My tears have become my bread both day and night,
imploing of me: "Where is your God?"**
- 4 These things I remember:
how I poured out my soul as I processed
with the crowd;
how I went with them into the house of God,
to the clamor of loud thanksgiving,
a throng on pilgrimage.**
- 5 Why are you bowed down, O my soul;
why are you so grieved within me?
Hope in God!
Someday I will again be able to thank him,
to thank my God for his life-giving presence.**
- 6 My God, my soul is bowed down within me.
So my thoughts will dwell on you from the land
of Jordan,
and from the mountains of Hermon and Mizar.**
- 7 When canyon is calling unto canyon,
with the resounding crash of the cataracts,
all you waves and torrents sweep over me.**
- 8 By day the LORD sends his merciful love;
and by night his song is within me—
a prayer to the God of my life.**
- 9 I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go on grieving,
thanks to the tyranny of the enemy?"**
- 10 With jeers that shatter my very bones.
My enemies say to me all day long:
"Now then! Where is your God?"**
- 11 Why are you bowed down, O my soul;
why are you so grieved within me?
Hope in God! For I will again thank him,**

my God, the salvation of my face.

Notes

1. There seems to be no common word in English that could properly translate the Hebrew word, *'arag*, for the yearning of the deer. Sheep “bleat”, dogs “bark”, etc. But what common name is there in English for the vocal sound that a deer makes? The Hebrew word may well be an onomatopoeia (a word that imitates a sound) that has acquired the added meaning of “desire” or “yearn”.

2-3. “To see the face of God” can mean to undergo death. But the psalmist is particularly keen about longing for the House of God. Thus, “to see the face of God” probably refers to ministering in the recently rebuilt temple and especially to tending to the “showbread”, “the bread of the face of God” (*lekhem ha panyim 'elohyim*). In the postexilic, Levitical work, 1 Chr 9:32, the Korahites and their brethren, the Kohathites, have the privilege and the responsibility of caring for the showbread. Cf. e.g., Ex 25:30; Num 4:7; 1 Sam 21:6; 1 Kgs 7:48. In v. 3, the psalmist compares his tears to bread, an allusion to the showbread, even as he asks when he can “come and see the face of God”. It is

noteworthy that the psalmist employs the term “God” (*'elohyim*) rather than YHWH, an indication that the psalm is postexilic in origin or that it underwent thorough postexilic redaction. Psalms 42-83 constitute the “Elohistic Psalter” in which *'elohyim* is consistently used for “God”.

5b. *his life-giving presence*. At this point, the psalmist speaks of “the salvation of his face”, i.e., the face of God. This implies that the showbread is a kind of theophany, and it fits well with the practice of displaying the bread to the pilgrims (cf. v. 4: “a throng on pilgrimage”) coming to the temple for the great feasts. On these occasions, the priests would bring the showbread from the sanctuary for public view and proclaim, “Behold the love of God for you”. In the covenant with his people, God's life is one of love. Cf. *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, by Brant Pitre, Doubleday, 2011, p. 94.

11. *the salvation of my face*. Cf. the final note of Ps 43.

Psalm 43

In this half of the diptych formed by Pss 42-43, the poet focuses less on himself and more on God. But he also reveals himself as a Levite, very probably a Korahite (as indicated for Ps 42), who has the privilege of serving at the altar and playing the harp for temple services. A musician bereft or deliberately deprived of the opportunity to play his instrument could indeed liken himself to a deer yearning for flowing water as imaged in Ps 42. The poet's foes may be of his own status and rank.

- 1 **Defend me, O God,
and plead my cause against an unholy people.
Deliver me from a deceitful and wicked man.**
- 2 **Since you are the God of my refuge,
why have you rejected me?
Why must I mourn and tread under the burden
of my foe?**
- 3 **Send forth your light and your truth.
Let them guide me aright.
Let them bring me to your holy mountain,
to the site of your dwelling place.**
- 4 **Then I will proceed to the altar of God,
to God, the source of my joy.
I will sing praise to you upon the harp,
O God, my God.**
- 5 **Why are you bowed down, O my soul;
why are you so grieved within me?
Hope in God!**

**Someday I will again thank him,
my God, the salvation of my face.**

Notes

1. *An unholy people*. This expression designates a nation that does not worship the **LORD**. The lands “to the north” were especially considered to be *miggowy* (“among the pagans”).

5. *the salvation of my face*. The MT reads “my face” (*panay*). But some manuscripts and the Aramaic Targum use *panayw* (“his face”). However, both the LXX and St. Jerome have “my face”, which pairs with God's face (presence), as if saying, “We see each other face to face”. In this context, “my face” takes on the meaning of “my very existence”. Perhaps an idiomatic expression is at play here, somewhat akin to our expression, “to save face”, meaning to be saved from embarrassment and ridicule. This could well be the case for the psalmist in

view of the ascription of Pss 42-43 to “the sons of Korah”. As noted by Stuhlmueller (*ibid.*, pp. 226-227), the Korahites (a family line of Levites) had been demoted in rank. The story of Korah's rebellion against Moses is related in Num 16, a work produced by the priestly writers (P) during the Babylonian Exile or shortly thereafter. Perhaps the story of Korah's rebellion reflects a clash between the Korahites and the priestly caste before or during the time of the exile. Pss 42-43 may then be a lament on the part of the Korahites as they sought to regain some status in the assembly of worshipers and again in the rebuilt temple. Then the Korahite psalmist can indeed sing and play the harp and “proceed to the altar of God” (v. 4). In the meantime, the psalmist lives in hope. Cf. Pss 84-88 and notes.

Psalm 44

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Maskil

The historical setting for this “national lament” and “national dark night of the soul” may be the Babylonian Exile. But other occasions in Israel's history also qualify. The opening verses of the psalm look back on “better times”. The psalmist's complaint is really a protest against the conventional wisdom that God remains faithful to the righteous (cf., e.g., Ps 37) and punishes those who do not follow in God's way. In Ps 44, God is accused of abandoning his people and of even aiding the enemy. Cf. *Psalm 44: The Powers of Protest*, by Dalit Rom-Shiloni, in: *CBQ*, vol. 70, No. 4, October, 2008, pp. 683-698.

- 1 O God, we have heard it with our ears;
our elders have described it to us:
how you secured success in their day,
in the days of old.**
- 2 With your own hand you uprooted the nations,
and planted your own instead.
You brought ruin upon the inhabitants,
but allowed your own to prosper.**
- 3 Indeed, it was not through their own sword
that they took possession of the land;
nor was it their own arm that saved them.
Instead, it was your right hand,
your arm and the light of your face;
for you took delight in them.**
- 4 You alone are my king, O God.
Grant your victories to Jacob again.**
- 5 Through you we can fend off our foes;
in your name we can trample down those
who rise up against us.**
- 6 For I place no faith in my bow,
and it will not be my sword that saves me.**

- 7 Indeed, you once saved us from our foes,
and you put to shame those who hated us.
- 8 In God alone we boasted all day long,
and we will give thanks to your name forever.
- 9 But now you have disowned us.
You have disgraced us and refuse to march
with our armies.
- 10 You have made us retreat from the foe,
and those who hate us take the spoils.
- 11 You treat us like sheep to be butchered,
and among the nations you scatter us.
- 12 You sell your people for a pittance,
and reap no profit on the price.
- 13 You make us the taunt of our neighbors,
the target for mockery and derision
to those around us.
- 14 You make a cliché of us among the nations,
a wag of the head among the peoples.
- 15 All day long my disgrace is before me;
and the shame of my face covers me
- 16 at the taunting of the scoffer,
at the blasphemies of the enemy and avenger.
- 17 This has all befallen us,
even though we have not forgotten you;
nor have we been false to your covenant.
- 18 Our heart has not defected;
nor have our steps strayed from your path,
- 19 so that you should crush us in the den of jackals,
or shroud us in the darkness of death.
- 20 If we had forgotten the name of our God,
or held out our hands to a strange god,
- 21 would God not have noticed this,
since he knows the secrets of the heart?
- 22 But we are slain daily for your sake.
We are treated like sheep for slaughter.
- 23 Arise! Why do you sleep, O LORD?
Awake! Do not spurn us forever.
- 24 Why hide your face?
Are you going to forget our affliction and misery?
- 25 Behold, our neck is bowed down to the dust;
our bodies lie prone upon the earth.
- 26 Arise, and come to our help!
Out of your kindness, deliver us!

Notes

1. The sequential doubling of terms and similar sounds in these lines underlines the “better times”: *po-’al pa’alha biymehem biyme kedem*, literally, “a work you worked in their days, in the days of yore”

25. *our neck*. The Hebrew *napshenu*, often translated as “our soul” or “our life”, is rendered here as “neck” and as a parallel to “bodies”. The imagery is taken from the treatment of prisoners of war, whose necks are forced to the ground to be broken as a chariot wheel passes over them. Cf. Ps 18:40.

Psalm 45

To the leader: according to the Lilies. Of the Korahites. A Maskil. A love song.

Out of the affliction and misery of the previous psalm we come to celebrate a royal wedding in the words of the king's "poet laureate". St. Augustine views this psalm as an allegory depicting God's love for his people and, consequently, Christ's love for the Church. The "fathers" in v. 16 are, allegorically, the Apostles, now replaced by the bishops (the "sons" that have been engendered by the Church). While modern scholars and commentators do not interpret this psalm metaphorically, its inclusion in Israel's collection of sacred songs indicates that it was eventually interpreted symbolically and messianically by the postexilic community.

- 1 My heart overflows with a joyful strain.
I address my poem to the king.
My tongue becomes the pen of an able scribe:**
- 2 You are the most handsome of our race,
and charm has been poured upon your lips.
Thus God has blessed you forevermore.**
- 3 Fasten your sword upon your thigh, O valiant one,
as becomes your state and majesty;
and may Your Majesty prosper.**
- 4 Ride forth to uphold truth, humility and justice;
and let your right hand guide you
through daring deeds.**
- 5 Your whetted arrows will fall,
as nations will fall under you,
into the heart of the king's enemies.**
- 6 Your throne, O God, is everlasting.
A scepter of justice is the scepter of your kingdom.**
- 7 You have loved justice and hated evil.
Therefore, God your God has anointed you
with the oil of gladness,
exalting you beyond your colleges.**
- 8 All your garments are fragrant
with myrrh, basal, and cinnamon.
Stringed instruments from the ivory palaces
delight you.**
- 9 The daughters of kings are among your ladies
of honor.
At your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.**
- 10 Listen, O daughter, and understand;
and attend with your ear:
Think no more about your homeland and your father's house.**
- 11 Your beauty beguiles the king.
Since he is your LORD, pay homage to him.**
- 12 The citizens of Tyre present gifts to you.
The wealthiest of the people seek your favor.**
- 13 All beautiful is the daughter of the king**

- in every respect:
 Her garments are woven with gold.
 14 In embroidered robes she is brought to the king.
 Her maids in attendance are brought before you.
 15 Amid gladness and joy, they enter the palace
 of the king.
 16 Your sons shall take the place of your fathers.
 You will make them princes over all the earth;
 17 and I will make your name known to all ages.
 Therefore nations shall praise you from age to age.

Notes

1. *an able scribe*. Only in this psalm does the psalmist claim to be a skilled poet, even returning to a self-reference in the psalm's final verse. The poem very well exemplifies the nature of Hebrew poetry, characterized by rhythm of accent, balance of expression and imagery, and compactness of statement. Cf. "A Love Song": *Psalm 45 in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Marriage Texts*, by Christoph Schroeder, in CBQ, vol. 53, no. 3, July, 1996, pp. 417-432,

5. *into the heart of the king's enemies*. It is not immediately evident what the psalmist intends with this expression. The NAB renders the passage with, "the king's enemies will lose heart." But in view of the psalmist's style of expression throughout the poem, the intent of the statement could well be: "Just as the nations will fall beneath you, so too will your sharp arrows fall into the heart of the king's enemies." Thus, the one verb, "they will fall", positioned exactly between the two halves of the expression in the Hebrew text, applies to both parts of the statement.

6. *Your throne, O God, is everlasting*. This line could also be rendered, "Your throne is the everlasting God", i.e., God is the king's divine support in battle and judgment. As a result, justice is the means by which the king rules. Or, if we abide by the parallel implications in this verse, then we could render the passage as, "Your throne is God's everlasting throne". However, Isa 9:6 grants the title of "the mighty God" to the newborn King Hezekiah, the "Immanuel" of Isa 7:14. Indeed, the ancient, near-eastern concept of kingship readily ascribed limited or even full divinity to a sovereign whose role was to bring life and well-being to the people and to subdue their enemies. Cf. Quintens, *ibid.*, p. 527. Hebr 1:8 quotes this verse, using the vocative form, "O God", as in the LXX, to affirm the divine nature of Christ.

8. *from the ivory palaces*. Amos 3:15 speaks of "houses of ivory", and archeological findings in Samaria have produced ivory inlay used in a palace's paneling and furnishings. Nevertheless, one must ask what "harps from the ivory palaces" really means. One would expect the psalmist to refer, not to the provenance of the instruments, but to their being constructed from ivory. One may then understand the term, *mnn*, not as the preposition, "from", but as *meniym*, "stringed

instruments"—especially lutes in this case, since lutes have resonating chambers of considerable size and date from ancient times (cf. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie, Macmillan, 1980, vol. 11, pp. 342-345; cf. also Sir 39:14f, which mentions sweet odors and music from the lute). The term, *heykal*, usually refers to a temple or palace. But could it also refer to the sound chamber or frame structure of a string instrument? The passage would then read, "Lutes—those with ivory chambers—such lutes delight you". This rendering sees the poet as employing a double genitive construct: "harps of sound chambers of ivory", which is in keeping with the psalmist's manner of expression in the previous verses. We can then paraphrase: "Your throne is the throne of God, the scepter of justice is the scepter of your kingdom, and ivory harps are the harps that delight you." The embellishment of lutes and other musical instruments with ivory and mother-of-pearl appears to be concurrent with the history of their development.

The LXX speaks of βαρεων ελεφαντινων ("heavy ivories"). St. Jerome says nothing about harps or music. Instead, he ascribes the perfumed garments to houses of ivory: *zmyrna et stacte et cassia in cunctis vestimentis tuis de domibus eburneis quibus laetificaverunt te*. ("aloes and myrrh and cassia in all your garments from ivory houses by means of which they delighted you"). St. Jerome's version is fully possible and perhaps even correct. Who "they" might be is not clear. St. Jerome seems to say that "they" are *filiae regum in honore tuo* ("the daughters of kings in your honor"). The rendering "From ivory palaces, stringed instruments make you glad" (NRSV), repeats the Vulgate, *e domibus eburneis chordae delectant te*, which correctly interprets the Hebrew, *mnn*, as *chordae* ("stringed instruments"), but perhaps incorrectly defines their provenance as "ivory houses", unless *e domibus eburneis* is synonymous with stringed instruments equipped with sound chambers made from or with ivory.

9. *the queen*. This probably refers to the queen mother, whose role is to give the bride (her daughter-in-law) instructions for her duties as wife.

12. *citizens*. The MT reads "the daughter of Tyre" so as to play on the word "daughter" to mean "citizens" and the princess addressed as "daughter". It appears that the

bride is from Tyre and that good relations then existed between Tyre and Israel.

seek your favor. Literally, this phrase reads, “seek your face”. It is possible that the poet intends both the literal and metaphorical meanings of this phrase, since the next verses imply that the princess is not yet present among the guests.

16. *Your sons*. These words, a promise of posterity, are addressed to the king. The offspring of the king and his new bride “shall take the place of your fathers” not only in the sense of replacement, but even more so in the sense of accomplishments and valor.

Excursus: On Psalm 45:13

The poet’s use of the adverb, *p^eniymah* (“within”), in absolute form (i.e., without an apparent referent) at the end of the clause poses a problem. All other uses of this term refer to a building’s interior. Thus the NRSV translates with, “The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes.” But the context indicates that the bride is not in her chamber! Rather, the action of the moment has to do with coming into the king’s presence. The NAB takes this into account with its rendering: “All glorious is the king’s daughter as she enters”. R. Kittel’s *Biblia Hebraica* notes that the term should probably be read as *p^eniniym*, “pearls”. But neither the LXX (translating with εσωθεν) nor St. Jerome (with *intrinsecus*) saw any “pearls” in the text. The poet’s choice of *p^eniymah*, (from *paneḥ*, “face”), may imply that the princess is veiled (cf. Gen 24:65; 38:14 regarding a woman’s veil). If being veiled includes one’s body, then *p^eniymah* may include the bride’s wedding

gown. Dahood comes close to this understanding with the rendering, “All her robes are royal garb, inside brocaded with gold” (*ibid.*, p. 270).

According to Schroeder (*ibid.*, p. 429) *p^eniymah* indicates a litter with canopy within which the princess is brought to the groom-king. Cf. Song 3:6-10. Joel 2:16 proclaims, “Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy” (NRSV). But if the bride is “within”, then there is a question regarding how she and her clothing can be the subject of description. Of course, it may be assumed that the poet is projecting an image of the bride from known customs. But it appears that *p^eniymah* has another meaning or function, one that may be indicated in the expression, *beyt hamelek p^eniymah* (“the king’s household”), from 2 Kings 7:11, which reads literally, “and they [the gatekeepers] told it to the house of the king within”, i.e., to all of the king’s household. In itself, *bayith*, “house”, suffices to mean “household”. Thus, in this passage, *p^eniymah* only “intensifies” the meaning of *beyt hamelek*. Inasmuch as *p^eniymah* means “within” or “interiorly”, it may well express the same etymological kinship that “interior” has with “entire” in English by way of the Latin terms, *inter* (“between”) and *intra* (“within”).

Several other uses of *p^eniymah* confirm that the term sometimes provides an added sense of thoroughness or completeness. For instance, 1 Kings 6:30 states that “he [Solomon] overlaid with gold the floor of the house *inside and outside*” (*lip^eniymeh w^elakhitsown*). Since a floor has only one side that can be overlaid with gold, the sense of “inside and outside” must mean “completely”.

Psalm 46

To the leader. Of the Korahites. According to ‘Alamoth. A song.

This song of confidence contrasts the calm joy of the “City of God” with the social and political chaos elsewhere, described as natural disasters. God has overcome chaos in creating all things. Thus the psalm concludes with an oracle from God and the assurance that “all’s well that ends well”. The term, ‘*Alamoth*, in the psalm’s superscription means “Unto Death”. It may have been a directive regarding the chanting of the psalm according to some melody or instrumentation.

- 1 God is refuge and strength for us,
an unyielding help found in times of distress.
- 2 Therefore we are not afraid even when the earth quakes,
and the mountains tumble into the depths of the sea,
- 3 though its waters fume and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its fury.
- 4 The streams of a river give joy to the City of God,

- the sacred place where the Most High dwells.
- 5 God is in her midst; she cannot be shaken.
God will help her, when daybreak arrives.
- 6 The nations are in turmoil; the kingdoms are tottering.
He lets his voice sound forth; the earth melts away.
- 7 The LORD of armies is with us;
a fortress for us is the God of Jacob.
- 8 Come, witness the works of the LORD:
He brings desolations throughout the land,
- 9 abolishing wars unto the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
the chariots he puts to the fire.
- 10 “Be still and know that I am God,
exalted over the nations, exalted over the earth.
- 11 The LORD of armies is with us;
a fortress for us is the God of Jacob.

Notes

1. *strength*. It is difficult to project the feeling and full meaning of the small but mighty term, ‘*oz*’, usually translated as “strength”. It calls to mind the English lyrics of Martin Luther’s composition, “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.” The psalmist breathes with the spirit of Isa 14:31-32. But the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587 B.C.E. compelled the postexilic community to interpret the psalm as a herald of the new Jerusalem and the rebuilt temple.

4. Water for Jerusalem was supplied by a rather small spring, the *Gihon*, that cannot rightly be called a

river except by way of “poetic license”. Water from the *Gihon*, which is also the name of the second river in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 2:13), flowed down the side of Mount Zion and into the Kidron valley. Its water had to be channeled into collecting pools inside the city walls.

5. “Daybreak” appropriately translates *boqer*. It is usually rendered as “morning”; but its root meaning is “to plow” or “to break”.

10. *be still*. The term, *rapah*, means “be still” in the sense of “relax one’s grip” or “still one’s thoughts and emotions”. Jesus’ words to Mary Magdalene, “Do not cling to me”, reflect this concept (cf. Jn 20:17).

Psalm 47

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

This short psalm, with its strong military/political flavor, appears to be a processional song for ascent to the temple. In proclaiming the LORD to be the God of all nations, the psalm expresses the universal spirit that is found in the postexilic community. The ascription of this psalm to “the Sons of Korah” (cf. Ex 6:21-24) indicates that the postexilic Levites made this psalm “their own” in their efforts to regain status in the services of the rebuilt temple. The Church applies this psalm to the Ascension of Christ and as a statement of hope.

- 1 All peoples, clap your hands!
Shout to God with cries of gladness.
- 2 For the LORD Most High is to be feared,
a great king over all the earth.
- 3 He has subdued the peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.
- 4 He chose an inheritance for us:
the finest territory of Jacob, whom he loves.
- 5 God has ascended amid loud acclaim;

**the LORD has mounted on high to the voice
of the shophar.**

- 6 Sing psalms to God, sing praises.
Sing psalms to our king, sing praises.**
- 7 For God is king of all the earth;
sing him a fitting song.**
- 8 God reigns over the nations;
God rules from the throne of his holiness.**
- 9 The princes of the peoples gather together,
together with the people of Abraham's God.
For the lords of the earth belong to God.
Greatly has he been exalted.**

Notes

3. These two lines in Hebrew form a rhyming couplet: *yad^eber 'ammiym takhteynuw / wul^e'emmiym takhat ragleynuw*. "Under us" is rhymed with "under our feet", which gives poetic emphasis and definition to the concept of subjection. We can come close to the idea and effect in English with the following paraphrase: Before us he made the peoples retreat, / and brought the nations under our feet.

5. The shophar is a ram's horn, hollowed out and blown like a trumpet for special occasions.

8. *throne of his holiness*. This expression was applied especially to the Ark of the Covenant. Thus the original use of Ps 47 appears to have been for a procession with the Ark. However, the postexilic community no longer had the Ark and would have had to process without it.

9. *princes . . . Lords*. *Maginey* means "shields". But since it is used in parallel with similar sounding *n^edibey* ("princes"), it assumes the same meaning as "princes". Here it could be translated as "war lords".

Psalm 48

A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites.

Psalm 48 begins where the previous psalm left off, namely, with the theme of God's greatness. Next, God's city, Jerusalem, is exalted above the earth itself. Seven epithets are applied to the holy city, virtually a "sacrament" of the **Lord's** presence. (Cf. *The Seven Epithets of Zion in Ps 48,2-3*, by Michael L. Barré, in *Biblica*, vol. 69, fasc. 4, 1988, pp. 557-563, esp. p. 557, ftn 1). Mount Zion is synonymous with the sacred Egyptian city of Memphis to the south (cf., e.g., Isa 19:13), and with Mount Zaphon to the north from Jerusalem. *Zaphon* is the name of Baal's abode in Canaanite mythology. By using this imagery, the poet claims Mount Zion as the true abode of God, centered between Memphis and Zaphon. Thus the towns ("the daughters") of Judah (v. 11) have reason to rejoice; for God will be their guide "even unto death", i.e., always (v. 14). Throughout these opening verses, the poet moves from the local to the universal. "This serves to emphasize the universal importance of Zion and, at the same time, the universal dominion of Yahweh" (Barré, *ibid.*, p. 563).

- 1 Great is the LORD,
and great is the praise due to him in the City
of Our God,**
- 2 His Holy Mountain, Beautiful Memphis,
Joy of All the Earth.
Mount Zion, Hallowed Heights of Zaphon,
the Great King's City!**
- 3 God within her citadels is her famed tower of defense.**

- 4 Yes, indeed!
The lords of war assembled.
They advanced as one body.
- 5 They looked; they were astounded;
they beat a hasty retreat.
- 6 Then and there, delirium seized them,
like the pangs of a woman in labor.
- 7 With an east wind you smashed the ships of Tarshish.
- 8 It is indeed just as we have heard;
and we have seen like things in the city of the LORD
of hosts,
in the city of our God.
God will preserve it forever.
- 9 We remember your love, O God, within your temple.
- 10 As it is with your name, O God,
so it is with your praise unto the ends of the earth.
Your right hand is filled with justice;
- 11 let Mount Zion rejoice!
Let the daughters of Judah rejoice
because of your judgments.
- 12 Walk a complete circuit about Zion,
note the number of her towers,
- 13 make a review of her ramparts,
search out her citadels,
that you may tell the next generation:
- 14 “Yes, God is truly our God forever.
He will guide us even unto death.”

Notes

4-7. *lords of war*. Verse 4 recalls the scene from Psalm 2. No historical events or dates, if any, can be determined for these verses. Although Tarshish has usually been taken as a city in Spain, more recent studies indicate that it refers to metal refineries in Sardinia, i.e., to the west. Thus, with the mention of the east wind, the poet has now encompassed all of the directions in his/her work. Tarshish “may originally have been a common noun signifying ‘metal refinery’” (Dahood, *ibid.*, pp. 291-292).

12-14. These lines invite one to join a procession to review the security measures for the city. These fortifications were always significant in Jerusalem’s Israelite history. This would be especially true of the postexilic community, which faced many difficulties in restoring Jerusalem. The redundant language of v. 14, “God is truly our God”, appears to be a postexilic emendation to avoid the use of the sacred name, YHWH. The expression, “unto death”, may well mean “beyond death” and indicate a sense of everlasting life that evolved in postexilic times.

Psalm 49

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

Here is Wisdom in the spirit of Qoheleth. Death is the great “equalizer”. No amount of wealth can redeem a person from the grave. The psalmist announces a riddle in v. 4. Part of the riddle is in determining what the riddle is from the answer that is given in vv. 10-11. In seeking to answer the riddle, the psalmist ends by inferring that life itself is the riddle that has no satisfactory solution, since for man and beast all ends with and in death. Yet, some hope is given in v. 15—that God can ransom one. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,

and to give his life as ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). The riddle is made possible in Hebrew due to the similarity between *baqar* ("ox", "cattle") and *biyqar* ("wealthy man"). Cf. *The Riddles of Psalm 49*, by Leo G. Perdue, in *JBL*, vol. 93, no. 4, December, 1974, pp. 533-542.

- 1 Now hear this, all peoples!
Pay attention, all citizens of this age!
- 2 O children of Adam and offspring of mortals,
rich and poor alike!
- 3 My mouth will speak words of wisdom;
my heart will whisper words of discretion.
- 4 I turn my attention to a proverb;
on the lyre, I will resolve my riddle:
- 5 Why should I be anxious about evil days,
even if my foes surround me with malice?
- 6 They trust in their wealth,
and boast of the abundance of their riches.
- 7 No brother can redeem another;
nor does one pay ransom to God.
- 8 The redemption of one's life is costly;
it will never be sufficient (9) that one might live forever,
and never see the grave.
- 10 Yes, one can see that even the wise must die;
both fool and oaf must perish
and leave their wealth to others.
- 11 Their graves will be their homes forever,
their dwelling places from age to age.
They lay claim with their names over their own grave sites.
- 12 But mortals cannot live on fame and fortune.
They are like brute beasts destined to die.
- 13 Such is the way of complacent fools;
the end of those who flatter themselves!
- 14 Like sheep they are herded into Sheol.
Death will be their shepherd.
By tomorrow, the just will rule over them,
and their remains will be consumed by Sheol,
their final destination.
- 15 God, however, will redeem my soul from the grasp
of Sheol;
for he will take me to himself.
- 16 Do not lose courage when someone grows rich,
or the wealth of someone's house increases.
- 17 For no one can possess anything in death;
no one's fame and fortune will follow along.
- 18 Though they flatter themselves in life,
and praise you when you do well for yourself,
- 19 they will join the generation of their ancestors;
never will they see light again.
- 20 Man learns nothing through fame and fortune.
They are like brute beasts destined to die.

Notes

7. It was readily accepted that a man could ransom his own brother, be it from slavery or death, by offering his own life either in service or in being put to death, thus allowing his brother to go free and live. However, the psalmist notes that there is no lasting ransom from the grave. One whose life has been ransomed must still die sooner or later. The psalmist may be scrutinizing the postexilic interpretation of sin as fiscal debt and virtue as credit or merit. Cf. *Redeem Your Sins by the Giving of Alms: Sin, Debt, and the "Treasury of Merit" in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition*, by Gary A. Anderson, in: *Letter & Spirit*, Vol. 3, 2007, pp. 39-69, published by St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology.

11. *their graves . . . grave sites*. Instead of "their graves", the MT reads "their inward" (*qir^ebam*), which does not yield much immediate sense. The LXX, however, reads "their graves" (οἱ τάφοι αὐτῶν). The difference in the Hebrew words is a reversal of two letters: *qereb* ("inward") and *qeber* ("grave"). It must be noted, however, that St. Jerome reads *qereb* and translates with, *interiora sua domus suas in saeculo* ("their interiors are their homes forever"). However, *interiora* can also mean "the depths" and be synonymous with *inferiora* ("the lower regions"). It thus appears that *qereb* and *interiora* mean the same as "graves", a meaning of *qereb* that the LXX understood and rendered in explicit terms since the Greek, in this instance, cannot make the same wordplay on the Hebrew text that the Latin can make with *interiora*. It is possible that the poet intentionally chose *qereb* ("inward") to mean "grave"

and to be a reference to the smallness of the grave and its "downward" location in the earth.

The rendering, "grave sites", is "their lands" (*'adamowt*) in the MT and is given as τῶν γαίων αὐτῶν ("their small lands") in the LXX, an expression that refers particularly to heaps of earth or "bits of dirt". Since *'adamowt* is the third member of a triad after "graves" and "dwelling places", it clearly bears the same meaning as the first two members, i.e., "grave sites". The poet, in using the verb, *qar'a* ("speak aloud", rendered here as "lay claim"), also adds a bit more wordplay on *qereb* and a great deal more irony to the passage by indicating that, in view of death, the most and best that riches can ultimately do is let one lay claim to a little mound of dirt with one's name on it.

15. By means of contrasting the word for "brother" (*'akh*) in v. 7 and the emphatic word for "but" (*'ak*), given here as "however", the psalmist draws attention to an exception regarding the non-redemption of all living beings: namely, God can redeem a person. While it is unlikely that the psalmist has immortality in mind, early Christians readily interpreted this psalm as a hope that is fulfilled in and through Christ; for his death is redemptive for all people, past, present, and future. The expression in the "Apostles' Creed", "He descended into Hell", refers to Christ's universal redemption as it applies even to those in the realm of the dead. Cf. 1 Pet 3:18-19 and the introductory comments for Ps 24.

20. *learns nothing*. Except for this verb, this verse is the same as v. 12, with which it forms an inclusion and further stresses the futility of riches; for they teach us nothing of real value.

Psalms 50

A Psalm of Asaph.

This "Psalm of Asaph" complements the preceding psalm by proclaiming that sacrifices and the ability to recite the commandments are of no avail, if one's life is not also "a sacrifice of thanksgiving", a keeping of one's vows, and a turning to God in one's straits. In a reenactment of the scene of fire and tempest on Mount Sinai, God is presented here as coming again to judge his people. According to 1 Chr 25:1-2, Asaph was not only a musician but also favored by David as a prophet. Unlike the descendants of Korah, the sons of Asaph maintained a high, Levitical status even into postexilic times. Psalm 50 combines elements of prophetic oracle with the sapiential theme of "the two ways"—the way of the just versus the way of the wicked.

- 1 The God of gods, the LORD, has spoken.
He has summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.
- 2 God shines forth from Zion's perfect beauty.
- 3 Our God is coming, and he will not be silent.
A devouring fire goes before him;
a mighty tempest rages about him.

- 4 From on high,
he calls upon the heavens and the earth
to judge his people:
- 5 “Gather my faithful people before me,
those who sealed my covenant with sacrifice.”
- 6 The heavens proclaimed his justice;
for God himself is the judge:
- 7 “Hear, O my people, and I will speak.
O Israel, I must warn you:
I am God, your God.
- 8 I do not reproach you because of your sacrifices.
Your burnt offerings are always before me.
- 9 I do not demand a bull from your farms,
or a male goat from your herds.
- 10 For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.
- 11 I know everything that flies in the mountains;
and the insects in the fields are in my sight.
- 12 “If I were hungry, I would not tell you;
for to me belong the world and its fullness.
- 13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?
- 14 Make a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God,
and fulfill your vows to the Most High.
- 15 Then call upon me in the day of distress.
I will save you, and you will glorify me.”
- 16 But God says to the sinner:
“What right have you to repeat my commandments,
or to place my covenant in your mouth?
- 17 You reject discipline and cast my words behind you.
- 18 If you see a thief, you show him your approval;
and you add to the number of adulterers.
- 19 You allow your mouth to speak evil,
and your tongue to devise deceit.
- 20 When seated, you speak evil against your brother;
against your own mother’s son you make accusations.
- 21 “You have done these things, and I have been silent.
You may think that I am one of your kind.
But now I must rebuke you,
and lay my case before your eyes.
- 22 Take note of this, you that forget God,
lest I rip you apart, and no one is there to save you.
- 23 Whoever offers a sacrifice of praise gives glory to me.
To those who follow the right way,
I will show the salvation of God.”

Notes

11. Richard Whitekettle (cf. *Bugs, Bunny, or Boar? Identifying the Ziz Animals of Psalms 50 and 80*, in *CBQ*, 17, 2, April, 2005, pp. 250-264), in his study of biological taxonomy according to Hebrew thought, identifies the *ziyz* of this psalm and again in Psalm 80:13

as “worms and bugs”. The psalmist makes it clear that all creatures, great and small, belong to God and are seen by God. The term, *ziyz*, imitates the sound of buzzing insects.

13-14. Since these verses downplay animal sacrifice and promote “spiritual sacrifice”, we may well be

witnessing in them a postexilic power struggle between the priestly caste, charged with offering animal sacrifices, and the Levitical families, perhaps especially the family of Asaph. The Levites could lead the worshipping assembly in prayer and song and help skin the animals for sacrifice, but they could not themselves offer the sacrifices, even though “the Levites were more

conscientious than the priests in sanctifying themselves”. Cf. 2 Chr 29:30-34.

20. *When seated . . . your own mother’s son.* The poet views accusations made in court against one’s full sibling to be particularly reprehensible. This is to reenact the story of Cain and Abel.

23. *salvation of God.* This expression, *yesha’ ’elohiym*, connotes ultimate and final salvation.

Psalm 51

To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan went to him, after he went to Bathsheba.

The heading to this psalm, which counts as two verses in the MT, states that David composed it as a result of his adultery with Bathsheba (cf. 2 Sam 12). However, David, who reigned from 1000 – 961 B.C.E. in Jerusalem, could not have composed the psalm’s reference to the need to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (v. 18), which remained intact until the time of the Babylonian Exile (586 – 538 B.C.E.). Thus this is a “postexilic” ascription to David to give the psalm David’s authority and to move the community to repentance. The postexilic composer, almost certainly a priest, expresses a common theme of postexilic times: namely, that the evils that have fallen upon God’s people are due to their own transgressions. Thus the psalmist looks forward to the day when the walls of Jerusalem and the temple are rebuilt and especially to the restoration of sacrifice in the temple, so that appropriate sin offerings can be made. The psalm’s superscription contains a wordplay in the use of “went to” (as in the German *eingehen*, sometimes meaning sexual intercourse), first in regard to Nathan, and then in regard to David’s adultery with Bathsheba. The psalm’s penitential tenor is valued by both Jews and Christians in their liturgical prayer.

- 1 Have pity on me, O God, according to your mercy.
According to your great compassion,
blot out my offenses.
- 2 Wash me completely from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 I am truly aware of my offenses,
and my sin is constantly before me.
- 4 Against you alone have I sinned,
and I have done evil in your eyes.
Thus you are justified in passing sentence.
You are righteous in your judgment.
- 5 Behold, in guilt was I brought forth;
and in sin my mother conceived me.
- 6 Behold, you love truth in the dark depths;
so, in my hidden depths, teach me wisdom.
- 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear rejoicing and gladness;
let the bones you have shattered rejoice.
- 9 Turn your face away from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 A pure heart create for me, O God,
and renew a resolute spirit within me.
- 11 Do not hurl me from your presence,

nor snatch your holy spirit from me.
**12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain me with a willing spirit.**
**13 Let me teach your ways to wrongdoers;
then sinners will return to you.**
**14 Free me from the guilt of blood, O God,
the God of my salvation.**
Let my tongue shout forth your justice.
**15 O LORD, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.**
16 For you do not delight in sacrifice.
If I offered a holocaust, you would not be appeased.
17 A humble spirit is the most excellent sacrifice.
**A broken and contrite heart, O God,
you will not despise.**
**18 In your kindness, do good to Zion:
Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.**
**19 Then you will take delight in upright sacrifices:
burnt offerings and whole offerings.**
Then they will offer bulls on your altar.

Notes

5. Although St. Augustine and others thought this verse referred to “Original Sin”, that is not the mind of the psalmist. Nor is the psalmist implying “an out-of-wedlock birth.” Rather, it is a statement that refers to the overall sinful condition of people and their need for forgiveness. The Christian doctrine of “Original Sin” is taken primarily from Rom 5:12-17.

6. The imagery presented in this verse “re-presents” the ancient theme of bringing light out of darkness (cf. Gen 1:1-5). In Isa 45:3, God says to Cyrus, “I will give you treasures out of darkness and riches that have been hidden away”. For the NT, this revelation comes through Jesus Christ: “Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the **LORD** comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (1 Cor 4:5).

9-10. God’s forgiveness of sin is an essential aspect of his wisdom. The NT presents this forgiveness as the very mission of the Messiah (cf. Jn 12:47; 18:37; and esp. 1 Tim 1:15). Use of the words “create” (*bara*) and “spirit” (*ruwakh*) calls to mind the opening verses of

Genesis. The psalmist sees God’s forgiveness as an act of creation.

14. The *guilt of blood* refers not only to murder, but also to one’s duty to invite sinners to return to God and thus avoid death. It is noteworthy that it is the priest-prophet Ezekiel who explains this matter in detail. Cf. Ezek 33:7-16. Thus the postexilic priests found an ally in Ezekiel in defending their insistence on the importance of animal sacrifice for sin offerings.

17. *most excellent sacrifice*. Literally: “sacrifice of God”, meaning, “the best of all sacrifices”.

19. “Bulls” (*pariyim*) are singled out by the psalmist, since *pariyim* are the animals specified for sin offerings (cf. esp. Lev 16:6-11). The restoration of sacrifice would be of special interest to the priests. In view of the psalmist’s downplaying of animal sacrifice in Ps 50, we may well ask if the placement of Ps 51 is not intended as a “priestly rebuttal” to Ps 50 so as to say, “Indeed, a sin sacrifice must be accompanied by true compunction of heart; but that does not negate the purpose of the physical sacrifice.”

Psalm 52

To the leader. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, “David has come to the house of Ahimelech.”

This psalm’s superscription (cf. 1 Sam 21-22) memorializes events from David’s life as “moments to remember” and to apply within one’s own life. Key to appreciating this lament is its castigation of the deceitful tongue. Doeg, in his deceit, led Saul to kill Ahimelech and others who had harbored David against

Saul. Psalm 52 reflects some internecine conflict among the priestly classes in pre-exilic times. Cf. Hos 4:4-6; Jer 28; Am 7:10-17. Postexilic times had similar problems. Cf. Neh 13:4-14.

- 1 **Why do you take pride in evil ways, O tyrant?**
The kindness of God lasts all day long.
- 2 **You plan destruction.**
Like a sharpened razor, your tongue fashions deceit.
- 3 **You love evil more than good,**
falsehood more than forthright speech.
- 4 **You love any statement that destroys,**
O tongue of deceit.
- 5 **But God will destroy you forever.**
He will seize you and tear you from your tent.
He will uproot you from the land of the living.
- 6 **The righteous will see and fear.**
They will laugh and say:
- 7 **“Look, there’s the one who would not take God**
as a refuge,
who trusted only in the abundance of his wealth;
whose only strength is in destructive deeds.”
- 8 **But I am like an olive tree,**
growing in the house of God.
I will trust in God’s goodness forever.
- 9 **I will thank you at all times; for you have done this.**
I will hope in your name.
What a blessing it is for your faithful!

Notes

1. The translation given here follows most closely upon St. Jerome and the MT. Perhaps the meaning in regard to God’s kindness is that the victims will have God’s protection against the wicked person.

7. *whose only strength*. Throughout the psalms, God is often referred to as “strength”. Cf., e.g., Ps 59:17. To rely on one’s own strength is tantamount to worshipping a false god. In this case, the false god is one’s own crimes and wealth.

Psalm 53

To the leader: according to Makhalath. A Maskil of David.

Psalm 53 is virtually the same Psalm 14. It differs mainly in the use of “God” for “**Lord**”. This difference may indicate that this psalm was collected a second time into the Psalter in an area of Israel or after the time where and/or when it became the religious rule not to pronounce the sacred name of God. The term, *Makhalath*, is found only here and again in the title for Ps 88. Its root, *khlh*, may refer to sickness, adornment, or entreating a favor. Its meaning in the psalm’s title is unclear. It may be a “catchword in a song”, giving rise to the name of a tune. Cf. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by Francis Brown *et alii*.

- 1 **The fool says in his heart: “There is no God.”**
They are corrupt and perform detestable deeds.
No one does anything that is good.

- 2 From the heavens God looks down upon the children
of the earth,
to see if any are wise, if there are any who seek God.
- 3 All have strayed away together;
they have become repugnant.
No one does anything that is good;
no, not a single one.
- 4 Do these evildoers have any sense,
who swallow my people as easily as they eat bread?
They never call upon God.
- 5 But they will be filled with fear;
where never before there was fear.
For God will scatter the bones of those who assail you.
You will put them to shame;
for God has rejected them.
- 6 May salvation for Israel come from Zion!
When God ends the captivity of his people,
then Jacob will exult and Israel rejoice.

Notes

5. This verse, which is not found in Ps 14, begins with an emphatic *sham*, rendered here with “But . . . where”. The second half of the verse in the MT simply states, “not was fear”, and its meaning is not certain. The statement seems to be parenthetical, explaining that the evil doers have no fear of God or any other fear. But they will experience fear finally when God confronts them.

for God will scatter ... has rejected them. These lines are somewhat clearer than the parallel text of Ps 14.

This may indicate that Ps 53 is a redaction of Ps 14 in an effort to shed light on the obscurities found in Psalm 14. But in both psalms, the grammar of this verse is problematic.

6. This verse is the prayer of an exile or of a praying community of exiles. The psalmist uses both names, “Jacob” and “Israel” for emphasis and for poetic effect that forms a carefully constructed parallelism in a single line.

Psalm 54

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites went and told Saul, “David is hiding among us.”

The psalmist desperately needs God's help against those who want him dead. The psalm's heading identifies them as the men of the Judean town of Ziph, who betrayed David (1 Sam 23:19). Verse one begins with '*Elohiym b^eshimka*' (“O God, by your name”), and v. 2 mimics the sound with '*Elohiym sh^ema*' (“O God, hear”). Being able to call upon “the name” means to call upon the essential nature of the deity. In this psalm, God is addressed as '*Elohiym*', as '*Adonay*', and finally and most significantly as *Yahweh*, “the One who is present”.

- 1 O God, save me by your name;
by your power, defend my cause.
- 2 O God, hear my prayer;
listen to the words of my mouth.
- 3 For rebels have risen up against me;
and tyrants are seeking my life.
They pay no attention to God.
- 4 Indeed, God is my helper,

- the Lord among those who uphold my life.
- 5 He repaid evil to those who betrayed me:
In your faithfulness, silence them!
- 6 A freewill offering I will sacrifice to you;
I will give thanks to your name, O LORD;
for it is good.
- 7 Yes, it has freed me from all distress;
and my eye looks down upon my foes.

Notes

3. The term, *zariym*, is most often translated as “strangers”. However, “rebels” is preferred here since *zariym* also carries with it the sense of “estranged persons”.

4b. *Lord among those*. This may be a Hebraism expressing the essence of God as “the one who sustains my life”. This ties in well with vv. 1 and 6 with their emphasis on the name “LORD” (YHWH), meaning “I am who am (with you)”, Immanuel!

5. By “silence them”, the psalmist directs a prayer to God to destroy the enemy. The verb, *tsamat*, (“to

silence”) also means “exterminate”. Regarding YHWH as the destroyer of enemies, cf. notes for Ps 83:16.

6. This verse forms an inclusion with the opening statement, “O God, by your name”.

7b. *my eye looks down*. We might prefer to say in English, “my eyes” rather than “my eye”. However, and coincidentally, both in the English and the Hebrew, the sound of “eye” is equivalent to the sound and meaning of “I”. In Hebrew, “my eye” is *’eniy*, and “I” is *’aniy*. Perhaps the psalmist is intentionally playing with these two Hebrew words in mind.

Psalm 55

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David.

A former friend is now the psalmist’s foe, turning others and the entire city against the psalmist. His distress and desire to dissolve into the wilderness is understandable. This psalm is filled with Aramaisms that indicate redaction in the late, postexilic age. It breathes the sad spirit of Jeremiah, betrayed by family (Jer 12:6) and persecuted by a fellow priest (Jer 20:2). The NT applies this psalm to Judas’ treachery in Jn 13:18.

- 1 Give ear to my prayer, O God;
do not turn away from my pleading.
- 2 Attend to me, and answer me.
I find no rest from my complaints;
- 3 and I am upset at the threat of the enemy,
at the oppression from the wicked.
For they bring evil upon me,
and angrily show hatred toward me.
- 4 My heart sinks within me;
the dread of death falls upon me.
- 5 Fear and trembling overcome me,
and terror overwhelms me.
- 6 Then I said:
“If only I had the wings of a dove,
I’d fly away and find refuge!
- 7 Yes, I’d flee far away;
I would take refuge in the wilderness.

- 8 I would soon find shelter from the raging wind
and storm.”
- 9 O LORD, swallow up their cloven tongues.
For I see violence and strife in the city.
- 10 Day and night they prowl about its walls,
while evil and infamy are in its midst.
- 11 Treachery is in its midst,
and oppression and deceit will not leave the forum.
- 12 It is not just any foe that opposes me.
That I could bear.
It is not just any adversary that has rebelled against me.
I could well hide from that.
- 13 But it is you, my equal,
my acquaintance, my friend!
- 14 We used to delight in each other’s company.
Side by side, we went with the throng into the House
of God.
- 15 May death steal upon them.
May they descend alive into Sheol;
for wicked ways abide with them,
right in the midst of them.
- 16 As for me, I call upon God;
and the LORD will rescue me.
- 17 Evening, morning, and noon, I grieve and groan;
and he gives heed to me.
- 18 He will fully ransom my soul from the war
I must wage;
for many are arrayed against me.
- 19 God, who is enthroned from of old,
will find them out and pay them back.
Such people never change, and they have no fear
of God.
- 20 He put forth his hand against those who were at peace with him,
thereby desecrating his own covenant.
- 21 The words of his mouth were softer than butter;
but his heart was at war.
His remarks were smoother than oil;
but in fact they were drawn swords.
- 22 Cast your concerns upon the LORD,
and he will sustain you.
He will never allow a just person to stumble.
- 23 But you, O God, will bring them down to the foul Pit.
Those who lie and murder shall not live out half their days.
But I will place my trust in you.

Notes

2. No satisfactory explanation has yet been found for the MT’s use of *’arid*, given here as “I find no rest”. The context indicates some kind of disturbance. St. Jerome translates with *humiliatus sum*, and the LXX uses *ἐλυπηθην* (“I am distressed”). Cf. *Psalm 55: Problems*

and Proposals, by John S. Kselman and Michael L. Barre, in *CBQ*, vol. 69, no. 3, July, 1998, pp. 440-462.

9. The first line of this verse is somewhat obscure in meaning. The LXX and the MT both say, “Swallow, O LORD; divide their tongues”. It appears that the psalmist is more intent on the sounds for “swallow up” and

“cleave” (*bal-la . . . pal-lag*) than on the precise meanings of the words. Nevertheless, the intended meaning of the expression is sufficiently clear. We might compare this to the expressions, “Shake ‘n’ bake”, or, “Hit ‘n’ run”, which are meaningful only within their cultural context.

15. Again it appears that the psalmist is resorting to an expression (*bimguram b^ekirbbam*, “in their sojourning in their midst”) that is obscure in wording, but not in meaning: Death should overtake the foes so suddenly that they go alive into the grave, taking their evils with them to burden them in death.

18. Here, *b^eshalowm* is translated with “fully” rather than the usual “in peace”. The primary meaning of the root, *shlm*, is “completeness” or “successfulness”. Only secondarily is the meaning that of “tranquility”. But we need to note that the use of *b^eshalowm* in this verse enables the psalmist to play again on the term in v. 20, where *shalowm* is central to the concept of “covenant”.

22. *stumble*. Not being left to stumble means to have the protection and guidance that God gave to the Israelites in the exodus from Egypt—with no one stumbling in the escape. Cf. Isa 63:13.

23. *foul Pit*—or “Pit of destruction”. The Hebrew term, *shakhath* (“grave”), implies putrefaction.

Psalm 56

**To the leader: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths. Of David.
A Miktam, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.**

The heading to this lament invites one to empathize with David's trials and tribulations. Cf. 1 Sam 21:12ff. But it is first of all the psalmist's way of identifying his trials with those of David. David was persecuted by Saul; the psalmist is persecuted by someone seeking his ruin. The psalm is “too personal and private” to find a date or historical occasion for its composition. Postexilic redaction may be seen in the shift from one enemy to many. The psalmist's choice of poetic terms and expressions is more for the sensation of sound than for soundness of sense. Perhaps that is simply the character and nature of a *mikdam*.

- 1 Be gracious to me, O God;
for someone is set on crushing me.
All day long he fights and attacks me.
- 2 Those who want me dead hound me all day long;
for many fight against me.
- 3 O Most High,
whenever I am afraid, I put my trust in you,
- 4 in God, whose word I praise.
I trust in God and will not fear.
What can mere mortals do to me?
- 5 All day long they twist my words.
All their thoughts are against me for evil.
- 6 They gather together; they conceal themselves.
They track my footprints, as they lurk for my life.
- 7 Let their delivery be unto ruin.
Bring down the rebels in your wrath, O God.
- 8 You have kept count of my battles.
Save up my tears in your bottle.
Are they not also in your book?
- 9 Then, on the day I call, my enemies will turn back.
I am sure of this: that God is on my side.
- 10 It is in God, whose word I praise,
in the LORD, whose word I praise.

- 11 It is in God that I place my trust.
I shall have no fear.
What can anyone do to me?**
- 12 My vows to you bind me, O God:
I will make thank offerings to you;**
- 13 for you have kept my soul from death
and my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before God in the light of the living.**

Notes

1. *someone is set on crushing me*. This statement can be translated literally as either “a man has panted for me” (i.e., “someone wants to take my life”) or “a man has trampled on me”. In some ways, the rendering given here is an attempt “to have it both ways”. But it also appears to be an appropriate way to translate the passage in view of vv. 5 and 6, which depict the psalmist’s enemies in the process of scheming. Likewise, “those who want me dead” is literally “those who have panted for me”. The resulting sound of the words of the opening verses, when read aloud in Hebrew, is quite dramatic—a reminder that the psalms were written for public recitation and intended more for the “listenership” than for the “readership”. The refrain “all day long” (*kal-hayowm*) adds to the drama of the psalmist’s sufferings.

7. *delivery be unto ruin*. The psalmist employs the noun, *palet*, which ordinarily means “escape” (from distress). But the word can also refer to “delivery” as in “giving birth” (cf. Job 21:10). If the psalmist is indeed

intent on the imagery of giving birth, then the idea would be “May they and their plans miscarry”.

Bring down the rebels. Perhaps the psalmist employs ‘*ammiym*’ (“peoples”), translated here as “rebels”, to emphasize that his opponents are many and of his own countrymen.

8. The pairing of “battles” with “bottle” is in imitation of the Hebrew use of *nowd* (“wandering”) and *n’od* (“flask”). St. Jerome translates *nod* with *secretoria*, i.e., one’s “secret places”. In modern terms, we might say, “private life” or “inner struggles”. The term “book” (*seper*, i.e., “scroll”) at the end of the verse is a reminder that writing was used largely for record keeping (hence, “bookkeeping”) in the ancient world. It (*seper*) also plays on the word *sapar*, “to count”.

11. This verse completes the inclusion that began in v. 4 with “What can mere mortals do to me?” It is also the conclusion of the lamentation. The psalmist now gives thanks to God for deliverance from death.

Psalm 57

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.

Verses 7-11 of this personal lament are repeated in Ps 108:1-5. Perhaps Ps 57 was originally two psalms “structurally unified around covenant and temple” (cf. Stuhlmüller, *ibid.*, p. 271). The psalmist’s access to the temple and claims to musicianship mark him as a Levite, who is further marked for persecution and even death by an opponent and his cronies. With the psalm’s being taken into the Psalter of the postexilic community, the superscription was added as an invitation to the worshipper to follow David’s trails and trials (cf. 1 Sam 22:1, 24:4) so as to arrive at full faith in God and to become the recipient of God’s *khesed*.

- 1 Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious;
for my soul takes refuge in you.
In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
until these calamities pass by.**
- 2 I call out to God the Most High,
to God who accomplishes all things for me.**
- 3 He will send forth from heaven and save me,
and disgrace the one who desires my death.
God will send forth his love and his truth.**

- 4 My soul must lodge with lions,
with those enraged at the sons of Adam.
Their teeth are spears and arrows;
their tongues are keen-edged swords.
- 5 May you be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory spread out above all the earth.
- 6 They have set a trap for my feet,
a noose to ensnare my neck.
They have dug a pit in my path.
Let them be the ones to fall in.
- 7 My heart is confident, O God; my heart is confident.
I will sing; I will sing your praises.
- 8 Awake, O my heart!
Awake, my harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn!
- 9 I will thank you, O LORD, among the peoples.
I will sing your praises among the nations.
For greater than the heavens is your kindness;
higher than the clouds is your truth.
May you be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory spread out above all the earth.

Notes

4. *Their teeth*. Weapons may be referred to as “teeth” (cf. Ps 58:6). Here, the meaning may be a metaphorical reference to the statements made by the psalmist’s foes. But it may also mean real weapons.

5. This verse is an unexpected doxology and appears to be a later insertion by some copyist. It occurs again at the conclusion of the psalm, where its placement is more appropriate.

8. *O my heart*. The MT reads *k^ebowdiy*, which is readily translated as “my glory” (thus the LXX and St.

Jerome). Modern translators tend to use terms such as “spirit” (NRSV) or “soul” (NAB). The basic meaning of *kabowd* is “weightiness”. Most often, it means “glory” or “splendor”. But it can also mean “liver”, that being the body’s heaviest internal organ and the supposed seat of one’s passions and feelings. Thus, to say, “Awake, my liver”, is equivalent to our modern expression, “Awake, my heart”. In his or her fervor, the psalmist figuratively takes up musical instruments to thank to God for deliverance from foes.

Psalm 58

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam.

In tones bordering on profanity and vulgarity, the psalmist brings a case of libel before the accusing “gods” (judges), who are supposedly evil from birth just as others (prophets) are called by God from their birth. But once the psalmist has poured out his bile and vented his spleen, he recollects himself enough to acknowledge that justice is ultimately done on the earth. Psalm 58 appears to be a personal lament and curse that, once taken into the Psalter, becomes encouragement to the community to abide in hope.

- 1 Indeed?
Do you mute things speak of justice?
Do you judge the sons of Adam fairly?
- 2 Oh, indeed!

- You perpetrate evil deeds in your hearts.
Throughout the land, you weigh out the injustices
of your hands.**
- 3 The wicked have been aliens from the moment
of birth.
They issued from the womb already telling lies.**
- 4 They are as deadly as venomous vipers:
deaf as an adder that stops up its ears,
5 that cannot hear the voice of charmers,
nor the spells of a skilled sorcerer.**
- 6 O God, break the teeth in their mouths.
Extract the fangs of the young lions, O LORD.**
- 7 Let them flow away like running water.
Let him launch his arrows like withered twigs,
8 or like a snail melting as it moves along,
or like a woman's stillbirths that never see the sun.**
- 9 Before your thorns can become a thicket,
be they green or ready to enkindle,
may a tempest waft them away.**
- 10 May the just rejoice in seeing such vengeance;
may they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked.**
- 11 Then people will say:
"Yes, the righteous are rewarded.
Yes, there are gods who judge on the earth."**

Notes

1. *mute things*. The psalmist opens with an explosive tirade, *ha-'emnam 'elem*. The sound is similar to a gruff "Hmm, hmm, hmm!" The term, *'elem*, has a root meaning of "bind" as well as "silence", and carries with it an inference to idols, which are only deaf and dumb figures that are silent by nature and not by choice (cf. Ps 115:5-7). Moreover, the psalmist's rhetorical questions add to the sarcasm and irony of the deaf-mute scenario: "Really, you dummies! How can you speak of justice?"

2. With a simple *'ap* (an emphatic, sarcastic "Yes!" or "Oh, indeed!"), the psalmist suggests that the evil-doers do in fact treat everyone with equity—that is, with equal injustice. The image of hands and the weighing out of injustices can be likened to the scales on a balance, with one hand filled with bribes and the other with evil schemes (cf. Ps 26:10). The slang expression, "dish out", would fit well at this point.

3. *aliens*. The much disputed term, *zoruw*, implies alienation, weirdness, repugnance, etc. Again, only a slang expression such as "crazy" can express the psalmist's intent here. The term is parallel to *ta'uw*, (meaning, "they went astray", given here as "they issued from"). The poet's terminology implies that the enemies are equivalent to gods that are totally foreign to Israel and opposed to real justice.

7b-9. The vocabulary of these verses is very difficult to grasp. The translation offered here stays as close as possible to the MT, while making "educated assumptions" about the meaning of some words or phrases. The rendering, "withered twigs", is uncertain. Yet, it seems that the psalmist is making a comparison between arrows and some things or persons that are withered or cut in pieces. The last three lines of this passage are also uncertain. The word, *siriyim*, is usually translated as "pots". But the Hebrew word, *sir*, can also mean a "thorn" or "hook". *'Atad* at the end of the phrase refers to the European blackthorn. Thus it is possible that the psalmist is "playing" with the idea that thorn bushes (one's enemies) can quickly form a thicket of brambles (a syndicate or family of enemies). St. Jerome translates the colon with *antequam crescant spinae vestrae in ramnum quasi viventes quasi in ira tempestas rapiet eas* ("before your thorns may grow into a thicket, may a tempest carry them away alive, in a rage"). Thorn bushes were not welcome around a dwelling, not only because they could prove painful, but also because they are a fire hazard (cf. Judg 9:15), especially in a storm of lightning and wind or when cooking is done over an open fire. Since thorns burned easily and provided good heat, they made good fuel. But a gust of wind could carry away the blazing thorns. Similarly, the psalmist would like to see his foes ablaze and carried away as if in a raging flood of water as suggested in v. 7. The language and imagery of the

psalmist are similar to Ex 15:7—"In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries; you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble" (NRSV). The Targum (manuscript in Paris and cited by Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 2nd ed., p. 261, col. 2, *k^emah*) renders Ex 15:7b with "just as fire ignites straw". This is a metaphor of fire and water bringing destruction to the foe. The imagery of a storm's rain and lightning fits well into the scenario of wind, water, and fire. Regarding the imagery of "water", supposedly from Eblaite *mawu*, in this psalm, cf. *Ps 58,10 in the Light of Ebla*, by R. Althann, in *Biblica*, vol. 64, fasc. 1, 1983, pp. 122-124. Our rendering finds it

likely that the psalmist is implying a wordplay between *k^emow* ("just like") and *k^emawuw* ("like water").

11. With a final, searing sarcasm, the psalmist proclaims that the righteous are rewarded in seeing the downfall of the "mute things" of v. 1. The use of "gods" in v. 11 is part of the sarcasm: Whatever calamity befalls the wicked may be counted as a god that gives the unjust their just deserts. In v. 6, the poet uses *'elohiym* to mean "God" and applies the term to the **LORD** (*Yahweh*) as the one who enacts justice on the wicked judges. Although *'elohiym* in this verse means "gods", it also includes earthly judges.

Psalm 59

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when Saul ordered his house to be watched in order to kill him.

This psalm's superscription references the story found in 1 Sam 19:11-24. On this occasion, David's wife, Michal, made David's escape good by letting him down through a window and by putting the household idol in David's bed. Saul's henchmen thought David was ill and returned to Saul without David. Saul sent other messengers to arrest David. But they fell into a "prophetic state" and were unable to carry out their assignment. Again, we note that this is an "historicizing" adaptation of a psalm to give it a more significant place in the prayer of the postexilic community. By ascribing the psalm to David, an individual lament thereby becomes a royal lament with which the individual worshipper and the community can identify.

- 1 **Deliver me from my foes, O my God.
Above those who rise against me raise me up.**
- 2 **Rescue me from these sinners;
from these assassins save me.**
- 3 **Look at how they lurk in ambush for me.
Brutal men band together against me.
For no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD,**
- 4 **for no wrongdoing of mine,
they advance and stand ready.
Wake up to join me and stand watch,**
- 5 **O LORD, God of Hosts, God of Israel!
Awake to rebuke all the nations.
Show no pity to any of these evil traitors.**
- 6 **When they return in the evening,
they howl like dogs prowling about the city.**
- 7 **Behold how they froth at their mouths,
fiercely snarling in their jowls,
as if no one could hear them.**
- 8 **But you, O LORD, will laugh at them;
you will scoff at all the nations.**
- 9 **"I will watch for his protection over you";
for God is my fortress.**
- 10 **The God of my allegiance will come to my aid.**

**God will let me look down upon those who spy
on me.**

- 11 Will you not slay them, lest my nation forget?
Rout them by your might;
bring them down in defeat,
our Master and Shield.**
- 12 Because of their sinful mouths and lying lips,
let them be ensnared by their own pride;
for they speak only with curses and lies.**
- 13 Consume them, consume them in wrath!
Let them be no more.
Let them know that God rules over Jacob
to the ends of the earth.**
- 14 When they return in the evening,
they howl like dogs prowling about the city.**
- 15 They stray about,
looking for whatever they can devour.
They refuse to go away, if they are not satiated.**
- 16 But I will sing of your strength;
in the morning, I will exult in your allegiance.
For you are my stronghold,
a refuge in the day of my distress.**
- 17 I will sing psalms to you, O My Strength.
For God, who is my stronghold,
is the God of my allegiance.**

Notes

3. The psalmist resorts to military language and imagery to describe the action of the enemy as having formed an armed group, i.e., a phalanx—the ancient world’s “armored tank”, bristling with weaponry.

7. The MT has “swords” in place of “fiercely snarling”. Such sounds may be called “swords”. Cf. the metaphorical use of “sword” as in Luke 2:35: “. . . and a sword will pierce your own soul too”. Cf. also Job 5:15; Ps 55:21; Isa 49:2 and Rev 1:16 in which words are metaphorically called swords from one’s mouth. The phrase, “as if no one could hear them”, is a difficult passage to grasp and translate. But St. Jerome understood it correctly by translating with, *quasi nemo audiat* (“as if no one might hear”). If the reference to hearing were absent, one could well understand the “swords” to be fangs—and vice versa, real swords could be called “fangs”. The psalmist takes fangs as swords and swords as unpleasant sounds.

9. Rather than change “his protection” to “my strength” (as some ancient and most modern translators have done), the MT can be taken “as is”, once the statement is understood as self-deliberation in which the speaker uses both “I” and “you” in referring to him/herself. Such self-deliberation is infrequent, but not

unknown. E.g., St. Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480-543), in the chapter regarding the prior of the monastery, presents the prior as saying to himself, “After all, you were made prior by the same men who made the abbot” (*Rule of Benedict* 65:6).

10. Throughout this psalm, *khesed* is translated as “allegiance” since it is intended to apply to God’s covenant as a military alliance with his people. Cf. Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 206.

11a. *Will you not slay them . . . ?* Most translations, including the LXX and St. Jerome, render the Hebrew *’al* as “not” and read, “Do not slay them, lest my people forget”. But this is clearly not the mind of the psalmist, who emphatically asks for the enemy’s destruction in v. 13. Dahood repoints *’al* to be read as *’el*, that is, “O God, slay them” (cf. *ibid.*, p. 71). However, that is not necessary, when the sentence is taken as a rhetorical question in negative form. The psalmist is concerned that the people will forget that God is their “Master and Shield” as long as God permits the enemy to go unchallenged.

14-15. Again, the psalmist refers to the foes as “dogs”. These animals were not household pets, but vicious beasts. Male prostitutes were referred to as “dogs” (cf. Deut. 23:18) and may well be inferred here.

Psalm 60

To the leader: according to the Lily of the Covenant. A Miktam of David; for instruction; when he struggled with Aramnaharaim and with Aramzobah, and when Joab on his return killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

Although the superscription of this psalm references several victories of David (cf. 2 Sam 8; 2 Sam 10:15-19), it is, in fact, a lament over a defeat that the people have experienced. The final eight verses of the psalm are found again at the conclusion of Psalm 108. In the context of Ps 60, these verses allow the psalm to end with a sense of hope and ultimate victory. The superscription was intended to inspire the same sense of hope in liturgical use by the exilic/postexilic community. The psalm begins as a national lament and then moves to a divine oracle in which God reclaims the land as in the days of the united monarchy, and ends with the king's prayer for God's assistance in warfare.

- 1 O God, you have cast us off.
You have torn us down.
You have become angry.
Will you ever restore us?**
- 2 You have made the earth tremble.
You have split it open.
Mend its fissures; for it is quaking.**
- 3 You have made your people face hardship;
you made us drink a wine that induces stupor.**
- 4 For those who fear you,
you have provided a banner to be unfurled
beyond the bow's range.**
- 5 That your loved ones may be rescued,
grant salvation with your right hand, and listen to me.**
- 6 God has proclaimed from his sanctuary:
"I shall rejoice as I portion out Shechem,
and measure off the Valley of Succoth.**
- 7 Gilead belongs to me; Manasseh belongs to me.
Ephraim is the helmet on my head;
Judah is my scepter.**
- 8 Moab is my washbowl.
On Edom I hurl down my shoe.
Over Philistia I shout in triumph."**
- 9 Who will bring me to the besieged city?
Who will lead me against Edom?**
- 10 Have you not, O God, cast us off?
Do you, O God, no longer march with our armies?**
- 11 Grant us deliverance from siege;
for help from anyone else is futile,**
- 12 With God we will do mighty deeds;
and he will trample down our foes.**

Notes

4. This verse is not entirely clear. However, there is a play on the words for "hardship" (*qashah*) and "bow"

(*qoshet*). The psalmist thus depicts the hardship (namely, being subjected to the archers of the enemy) that the people had to see and, at the same time, contrasts that

with God's providence in providing a banner (*nes*) to mark a place of refuge (*nuws*) beyond bowshot. The more literal rendering would be, "a banner to be displayed away from the face of the bow". It should be noted, however, that the play on the words "banner" (*nes*) and "refuge" (*nuws*) is only implied by the context of the text.

9. *the besieged city*. It is not certain if the city is Jerusalem (perhaps under siege at the time) or some other city. It is possible that the psalmist has Engedi in mind. It was one of the places to which David fled when pursued by Saul (cf. 1 Sam 24:1ff). Also nearby Masada, with buildings and cisterns, could serve as a place of refuge "beyond the bow's range".

Psalm 61

To the leader: with stringed instruments. Of David.

Several leading words tie this psalm to the preceding psalm: stone, refuge, a tower away from the enemy. The origin of the psalm with its prayer by and for the king is pre-exilic. Throughout this short psalm, there is a playing with the words "flee", "refuge," and "mercy", all of which have similar Hebrew roots.

- 1 O God, hear my refrain!
Give heed to my prayer.**
- 2 From the end of the earth,
I cry to you, when my heart is heavy.
Set me high upon a rock.**
- 3 For you are my refuge,
a tower of strength in the face of my foes.**
- 4 I will dwell forever in your tent.
I will flee to the shelter of your wings.**
- 5 Indeed , O God!
Would that you might hear my prayers!
Grant the request of those who fear your name.**
- 6 Double the days of the king.
May his years last through many generations.**
- 7 May he occupy his throne forever in the presence
of God.
Command mercy and truth to guard him.
Then I will sing your praises forever,
fulfilling my vows day after day.**

Notes

2. *end of the earth*. This expression may refer to a distant place or perhaps to the nearness of death.

4. *shelter of your wings*. This may mean the Ark of the Covenant with its two large cherubim figures.

5. Using polite forms of speech, the king asks God to hear his prayers. The term, "request", is "inheritance" in the Hebrew text. But its being parallel to "prayers" gives the term approximately the same meaning. In English, we could say that one's "bequest" is one's "request", or vice versa.

Psalm 62

To the leader: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

Although the general tone of Ps 62 is tranquil confidence in God, it begins with a forceful, attention grabbing 'ak ("Only!") that also introduces v. 2. The tone

then shifts to lament and again to confidence in God. One may recall St. Paul's words at this juncture: "Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor 12:10). Finally, the psalmist, in vv. 9-12, takes on the role of a wisdom teacher somewhat in the mode of Qohelet, but with a bit more optimism, since one's good works are not ultimately in vain.

- 1 Only in God is my life at peace!
From him comes my salvation.
- 2 He alone is my rock and my salvation—
my place of refuge.
I shall not falter in the least.
- 3 How long will you go on attacking a person?
Are all of you poised to kill,
like a leaning wall or rickety fence?
- 4 They connive to defame one's character.
They take pleasure in their lies.
Though their mouths speak blessings,
they utter curses in their hearts.
- 5 Only in God, my soul, may you be at peace.
For my hope comes from him.
- 6 He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my place of refuge.
I shall not falter.
- 7 From God are my safekeeping and glory.
The rock of my strength, my refuge, is in God.
- 8 O people, trust in him at all times;
pour out your hearts before him.
God is our refuge!
- 9 Only a breath are the sons of Adam;
mere delusions are the sons of man.
On a balance, their side rises;
for they prove even lighter than a breath.
- 10 Do not trust in oppression or vainly hope in robbery.
If riches begin to increase,
do not set your heart on them.
- 11 God spoke once, and I heard two things:
"Power belongs unto God,"
- 12 and "Mercy belongs to you, O LORD";
for you repay a man according to his deeds.

Notes

3. *falter*. The many obscurities of this psalm are partially explained by the psalmist's interweaving of related concepts. Thus, when the poet claims not to falter (*l'o 'emmowt*), a comparison is made with those who are "poised to kill like a leaning wall or rickety fence". The root, *mwt*, has to do with metaphorical tottering and

slipping that can lead to stumbling into the grave and death (*mawet*).

4. *defame one's character*. Most probably "one's" refers to the psalmist. Here, *nas'a* is rendered as "character" in the sense of one's good reputation. Cf. 2 Kings 5:1.

Psalm 63

A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

The first line of the poem speaks of “early longing”, which means longing “at dawn” as well as “earnest yearning”, i.e.: “As soon as I arise in the morning, I find myself longing for God.” The psalm is a “royal lament” that places the worshipper in the presence of King David in the desert, where physical thirst becomes an experienced metaphor for thirsting for God.

- 1 O God, my God, for you I long at dawn.
So weary, without water, my soul thirsts for you.
In a waterless land, my flesh yearns for you.**
- 2 So let me behold you in your sanctuary;
let me see your strength and glory.**
- 3 Because your mercy is better than life,
my lips will sing your praises.**
- 4 So I will bless you all my life;
in your name I will lift up my hands.**
- 5 My soul is sated as with a sumptuous banquet;
and my lips joyfully proclaim your praises.**
- 6 Whenever on my bed, I remember you.
Through the watches of the night, I think of you;**
- 7 for you have been my help,
and I rejoice in the shadow of your wings.**
- 8 My soul clings to you; your right hand holds me fast.**
- 9 Let those who seek to destroy my life
sink to the lowest depths of the earth.**
- 10 Let them be delivered to the power of the sword.
Let them become fare for the jackals.**
- 11 But the king will rejoice in God.
All who swear by him will glory;
for the mouth of liars shall be stifled.**

Notes

3. *your mercy is better than life*. Since Yahweh is the God and Giver of Life (cf., e.g., Deut 5:26), and a life of *shalom* is already God’s mercy and great gift, one may ask, “How can God’s mercy be *better than life*?” This question is treated by Martin Leuenberger in his

article, “*Deine Gnade ist besser als Leben*” (Ps 63,4), *Ausformungen der Grundkonstellation von Leben und Tod im alten Israel*, in *Biblica*, vol. 86, fasc. 3, 2005, pp. 342-368. Psalm 63:4 gives evidence of Israel’s growing awareness of God’s dominion over death and of his *khesed* in the “afterlife”. Cf. 2 Macc 7:36.

Psalm 64

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David

This work is a lament of an individual persecuted by enemies, who appear to be using religion for selfish motives and to attack those whom they dislike. The style of the psalm is both prophetic and sapiential, and the imagery of ambush is palpable. The heading is a reminder of “David and his many woes” (cf. Ps 132).

- 1 Hear, O God, the voice of my complaint;
preserve my life from the terror of the enemy.
- 2 Hide me from the council of the wicked,
from the designs of the evildoers,
- 3 who hone their tongues like swords,
and launch their bitter words like arrows,
- 4 to shoot from hiding at the innocent.
They shoot without warning or worry.
- 5 They encourage each other with evil words.
They devise ways to hide snares.
They ask, "Who will see them?"
- 6 They strive to realize their most evil ambition:
"We have concocted the perfect crime."
Oh, how deep and dark a man's mind and heart!
- 7 But God will let fly at them an arrow,
and sudden will be their wounds.
- 8 Their tongues will trip over their own intrigues.
Anyone who sees them will flee away appalled,
- 9 Let everyone fear.
Let them declare the deeds of God,
and come to know his works.
- 10 Let the righteous be glad in the LORD
and take refuge in him.
Let all the upright of heart rejoice.

Notes

3b. *bitter words like arrows*. With this reference to bitterness, the psalmist equates vile words with poisonous arrows. Cf. Job 6:4. The metaphor of bitterness, poison, and death is frequent in the OT and is found in the NT (Mk 16:18; Rom 3:13-14; Jas 3:8; Rev 8:11).

5. "*Who will see them?*". The antecedent of "them" is ambiguous. However, the reference to the hiding of snares suggests that "them" refers to the snares.

6. *most evil ambition*. The MT reads, "They will search out iniquities". It appears, however, that "iniquities" is to be taken as a plural form expressing a very high degree of something—thus, "their most evil ambition", which is to be able to say, "*We have concocted the perfect crime.*"

Psalm 65

To the leader: A Psalm of David. A song.

In general, this psalm has "loose structure and grammar" since it is, by and large, a series of awe-struck acclamations, proclaiming God and the wonders of God. However, it does have "movement" from hearing (v. 2) to answering (v. 5) to God's caring for the earth (v. 9). This psalm in praise of God's creation and merciful love takes us through the seasons of the year, concluding with the harvest festival, and proclaims the God of the Covenant to be the one who re-creates and rejuvenates the earth on a regular cycle. The songs of the harvesters become the voices of the mountain pastures and the valleys of wheat laughing and singing.

- 1 To you, O God, on Zion, profound praise is due.
To you vows must be paid.

- 2 To you, the one who hears our prayers,
all flesh must bring its iniquities.
- 3 When our transgressions overwhelm me,
you are the one to grant forgiveness.
- 4 Blessed the one you choose, to whom you draw near.
He will dwell in your courts.
Let us be filled with the goodness of your house,
with the holiness of your temple.
- 5 With wondrous deeds and in righteousness,
you will answer us, O God of our salvation,
hope of all the earth's frontiers
and its most distant seas.
- 6 Clothed with power,
you uphold the mountains in your strength,
- 7 silencing the storms of the seas,
the bashing of their billows,
and the uproar of the peoples.
- 8 Because of your wonders,
those who dwell even at the ends of the earth
are filled with awe.
You make the morning and evening stars
shout for joy.
- 9 You attend to the earth and make it fruitful;
you fill it with fertile fields.
Your great river is filled with water.
You ready the earth for their grain.
Indeed, this is the way you prepare her:
- 10 You water her furrows, leveling her lumpy soil.
You soften the ground with showers,
and bless its budding shoots.
- 11 You crown the year with your copious rain,
and your pastures produce abundant growth.
- 12 The wild meadows bud and bloom,
and the hills are wrapped with rejoicing.
- 13 The mountain pastures are shrouded with sheep,
and the valleys are veiled with wheat.
They ring out with laughter; yes, they sing out for joy.

Notes

1. *profound praise*. The Hebrew text reads *dummiyyah t^ehillah*, with *t^ehillah* ("praise") being paired with *t^efillah* ("prayer") in the next verse. In English, we can come very close to the meaning and feeling of the Hebrew text with the rendering, "An awesome 'Halleluiahs' is owed to you on Zion, O God." The root of *dummiyyah* (*dmm*) bears two direct but disparate meanings: "to become silent" (as in "awestruck") as well as "to groan". Thus, "profound praise" is an attempt to

reproduce some of the "feeling" as well as the meaning of the Hebrew text.

9. "Fertile fields" is often translated simply as "fill with riches". However, the use of "their grain" in the next colon makes it clear that the psalmist is referring to fields in which grain is to be planted. "Your great river" is literally, "The river of God", wherein "God" (*'elohiym*) is a modifier expressing "greatness".

12. In wrapping or girding oneself, a person encircles the waist with a belt or band. The poetic imagery here pertains to wearing an exceptionally colorful sash to rival the beauty of spring flowers.

To the leader. A Song. A Psalm.

The sounds of joy from the previous psalm's conclusion reverberate in the opening line of Ps 66, which praises God for acting in history to save his people. These saving acts are not merely restated. Rather, they are relived in the liturgical life of the worshipping community and in one's prayers.

- 1 Shout with joy to God, all the earth!**
- 2 Sing of the glory of his name.
Tell of the glory of his praise.**
- 3 Say to God: "How awesome are your works!
At the greatness of your strength,
your enemies cringe before you.**
- 4 All on earth bow before you.
They sing psalms to you;
they sing psalms to your name."**
- 5 Come and see the works of God,
his mighty deeds among the descendants of Adam.**
- 6 He turned the sea into dry land;
they crossed the river on foot.
So let us rejoice in him,
(7) who rules forever by his might.
His eyes probe the peoples.
Let the rebels not be exalted.**
- 8 O you peoples, bless our God
and let his praises be loudly proclaimed.**
- 9 He sustains us in life and keeps our feet
from faltering.**
- 10 How you have tested us, O God!
You have refined us as silver is refined.**
- 11 You led us astray; you burdened our backs.**
- 12 You let others ride over our heads.
We had to trek through fire and water.
Only then did you lead us forth to a land of plenty.**
- 13 I will go to your house with burnt offerings.
I will fulfill my vows to you,**
- 14 which my lips proclaimed and my mouth spoke
when I was in distress.**
- 15 I will offer you holocausts of fatlings,
with the fragrant smoke of rams.
I will offer young bulls together with male goats.**
- 16 Come, all you that fear God.
Listen, and I will proclaim what he has done for me:**
- 17 With my mouth, I called to him;
and praise was upon my tongue.**
- 18 If I had harbored any evil in my heart,
my LORD would not have listened.**
- 19 But God did listen;
he has heard the voice of my pleading.**

20 Blessed be God.

He has not ignored my prayer nor turned his kindness away from me.

Notes

2. *Tell*. The poet uses *seymuw* (from *siym*, “to place”) as a parallel term to “Sing” (*zamm^eruw*) and as a play on “his name” (*sh^emuw*). Thus, “Place the glory of . . .” is equivalent to “Tell of the glory of . . .”

9. Here and elsewhere in the Psalms, the term *mowt*, translated here as “faltering”, carries the meaning of “grave” or “death”. To stumble or fall can mean to die because of one’s own actions. In Acts 1:18, Luke states that Judas “acquired a field with the reward of his

wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.” This statement is not an historical description of how Judas died. Rather, it is an affirmation that Judas died due to his wicked “stumbling”.

12. *ride over our heads*. This is a bit of hyperbole and a reference to the general plight of exiles suffering at the hands of their masters. Cf. Ps 18:40.

land of plenty. The Hebrew reads literally, “to a saturation”. The terminology infers a place of refreshing drink and abundance.

Psalm 67

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song.

Some commentators classify this as a “harvest song”. But it is also a prayer asking for the blessings of a good harvest. In postexilic times, a strong connection was made between bountiful harvests and the appearance of the messiah. The Feast of Tabernacles, a harvest festival, is the background to the story of Jesus’ transfiguration and Peter’s suggestion to build three tents on the mountain (cf. Mt 17:1-4).

- 1 **May God be gracious to us and bless us.
May he let his face shine upon us.**
- 2 **May your way be known upon the earth,
among all the nations your saving help.**
- 3 **Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples give you thanks.**
- 4 **The nations are glad and rejoice;
for you lead the peoples uprightly,
and the nations on earth in fairness.**
- 5 **Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples give you thanks.**
- 6 **The earth has brought forth its grain.
May God, our God, bless us.**
- 7 **May God bless us,
and all the ends of the earth fear him.**

Notes

1. *face shine*. The metaphor of God’s face as shining light re-enforces the concept of blessing. Light means life, and life is God’s blessing and the ultimate

manifestation of his creative power and tender, saving love. In the subsequent verses, God’s blessings are extended to all the earth and all peoples. This concept is not only “universal” but also “messianic” and indicative of the late, postexilic community.

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm. A Song.

This is a notoriously difficult psalm to translate. However, biblical studies since 1950 have revealed the ancient Ugaritic-Phoenician influence on the imagery and grammar of this psalm. It does not ask that God arise and disperse the enemy. Rather, it describes how the enemy reacts to a theophany—a self-manifestation of God as on Mount Sinai or in storms and fire and earthquakes. Psalm 68 celebrates God's saving power as manifested in his victories for his people. No specific date or event can be assigned to the psalm.

- 1 When God appears, his foes scatter;
and those who hate him flee from his presence.**
- 2 Like smoke that is dispersed, may they be dispersed.
Like wax melting before a fire,
may the wicked perish before God.**
- 3 But let the righteous rejoice.
Let them exult in God's presence;
let them rejoice and be glad.**
- 4 Sing to God, sing psalms to his name!
Prepare the way for the Rider of the Clouds!
In Yah be set, and rejoice at his presence!**
- 5 "Father of Orphans" and "Defender of Widows"
is God from his holy dwelling.**
- 6 God lets the forsaken have a home,
leading forth prisoners in joyful song.
Only the obstinate became denizens
in a desolate land.**
- 7 O God, when you marched forth leading your people,
when you advanced through the desert,
(8) the earth trembled;
and the heavens rained down at the presence of God, the God of Sinai;
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.**
- 9 Distribute your rains far and wide, O God.
Restore your heritage during drought.**
- 10 Let your creatures continue to dwell there.
Through your bounteous rain,
refresh your poor people, O God.**
- 11 Let the LORD decree the message;
those women who bear the tidings are a vast host:**
- 12 "Kings and armies are in retreat".
They are fleeing hastily away,
and housewives will divvy up the spoils.**
- 13 Even if you are sleeping amid the cattle pens,
you will be overlaid with silver like the wings
of a dove,
whose plumage shimmers with green and gold.**
- 14 When the Almighty scatters kings,
then it is like drifting snow on Zalmon.**
- 15 That mighty mountain, that mountain of Bashan,**

- a lofty range of peaks, the mountain range of Bashan.
- 16 Why gaze with envy, you rugged range,
on the mountain which God chose for his dwelling?
Yes, the LORD will dwell there forever.
- 17 The chariots of God are twice ten thousand,
thousands upon thousands more.
The LORD is in their midst;
Sinai stands in the holy place.
- 18 You have ascended the height,
making captivity your captive.
taking the obstinate to their doom, O LORD God.
- 19 May the LORD be blessed day after day.
He bears our burdens, God our salvation.
- 20 Our God is the God of deliverance.
To the LORD our LORD are ascribed
escapes from death.
- 21 But God will smite the head of his enemies,
the woolly scalp of one
who persists in walking the way of guilt.
- 22 The LORD has said: "From Bashan I will lead the way;
I will lead from the depths of the sea,
- 23 that you may dip your feet in blood,
while the tongues of your dogs get their share
of the foes."
- 24 They watch your procession, O God,
the procession of my God and King to the sanctuary:
- 25 the singers leading the way, the musicians last,
girls in the middle tapping tambourines.
- 26 In the choruses, bless God, the LORD beyond the fountain of Israel.
- 27 There is little Benjamin leading them;
then the princes of Judah and their contingent;
the princes of Zebulun; the princes of Naphtali.
- 28 Your God has summoned forth your strength.
Strengthen, O God,
whatever you have wrought for us.
- 29 Descending from your temple in Jerusalem,
kings will come bringing gifts to you.
- 30 Rebuke the beasts of the reeds,
the herd of bulls with its calves
trampling over the peoples in its tyranny for silver.
Scatter the peoples who delight in war.
- 31 Let bronze merchants come from Egypt.
Let Cush hasten to offer its wares to God.
- 32 O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God.
Sing psalms to the LORD,
- 33 who rides on the clouds of the ancient heavens.
Behold, he will thunder with his voice,
his almighty voice:
- 34 "Give praise to the power of God.
His majesty is upon Israel;

his power is in the heavens.”
 35 You are more awesome, O God,
 than any of your sanctuaries.
 He is the God of Israel;
 the one who gives strength and might to his people.
 Blessed be God!

Notes

4a. *Rider of the Clouds*. Some translations render ‘*arabowt*’ as “deserts”, and others render it as “clouds”. ‘*Arabah*’ means “desert”; but it can also refer to something dark, as in its derivative, ‘*ereb*’, meaning “evening”. The ambiguity regarding “clouds” and “deserts”, however, is eliminated when we keep in mind that distant clouds in a desert, be they storm clouds or dust clouds, appear to arise from the surface of the desert due to the earth’s curvature. Clouds of dust can be raised in a desert not only by storm winds, but also by the marching of army hosts and, as depicted in this psalm, by those who marched in the Exodus from Egypt. This theophanic imagery of clouds and armies becomes apocalyptic imagery in the NT: “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mt 24:29f). This view further elucidates Jesus’ statement to the high priest Caiaphas: “Henceforth, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64f and pars; Jn 5:18). The messianic image of preparing the way for the Rider of the Arabah is a theme that the Gospels also associate with John the Baptist. Cf. Mt 3:3 and pars.; also Isa 40:3.

4b. *In Yah be set*. The name or title *Yah* (an abbreviated form of the name, “Yahweh”) plays upon the etymology for the Hebrew verb “to be” as presented in Ex 3:14. However, the Israelite concept of God is not a philosophical dissertation on “absolute being”, but a practical, active, and concrete view of God as the “absolute sovereign” who is present to help. The psalmist underscores the meaning of *Yah* with the commands, “In Yah be set” (i.e., “put yourselves in the presence of the LORD”) and “rejoice at his presence”. This rendering requires a repointing of the MT *shēmow* (“his name”) to become *samuw* (“be set”, from the Hebrew verb, *sum*), which carries with it the idea of “trust” (cf. Ps 78:7).

6. *became denizens*. The Hebrew, *shakan*, means “to dwell” or “settle down”. The term is associated with the dead in their graves in Isa. 22:16 and 26:19 and Job 26:5. Thus the term, “denizens”, is given here with the nuance that the stubborn Egyptians and/or the rebellious Israelites in the Exodus were left behind to occupy the great tombs (pyramids) of Egypt.

8. *The God of Sinai* (*zeh Sinai*, literally, “the One of Sinai”) is an epithet for God who established Mount Zion as his sanctuary (cf. v. 18). The “Song of Deborah” (cf. esp. Judg 5:5) repeats this epithet and is similar in language and content to this psalm. The imagery being presented is that of an awesome theophany that causes

the earth to tremble with fear and the sky to “sweat” with rain at the suddenness and force of God’s appearance. The poet’s brief statements and repeated words mimic thunder.

10. *creatures*. Some translators prefer “flock” or “clan” for *khayateka* (literally, “your living ones”), which refers to all living beings—thus, “creatures”.

bounteous rain. In the poetry of the psalms, “goodness” comes in the form of rain. In the context of this psalm, “goodness” means “rain” to sustain the life of “the poor of the land”, the ‘*anawiyim*’.

13. This verse is very difficult to parse. Possibly a bit of the original text is missing, making it necessary to assume that “you” from “you are sleeping” is also to be applied to “will be overlaid”.

14. The location of Zalmon (the name means “sparkling”) is not certain.

17. These four lines present more imagery than meaning. The clouds are God’s chariots and ever so numerous. Apparently, with these short descriptions, the psalmist is selecting the stage props and setting the scene for what follows, which, alas, does not yield much meaning either. Most likely the psalmist is alluding to God’s actions in the Sinai wilderness. Cf. Deut 33:2f. However, much of the language and imagery could just as well be applied to Mount Zion. This view is consistent with the understanding that this psalm describes the Covenant Festival which reenacted the procession of God from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion and the temple. “Sinai stands in the holy place” thus presents the image of both Mount Sinai and of “the One of Sinai” (i.e., God; cf. vv. 7-10) as now having come to Mount Zion and the temple.

18. This verse is extraordinarily difficult to translate, but, in some respects, sublimely simple. With short, staccato-like statements, the psalmist, in rather cryptic terms, makes reference to four of God’s actions, which reflect the contents of vv. 4-6. “The obstinate” are those who rebelled against Moses. “Their doom” was that they were left “to dwell” (i.e., “in death”) in the desert. Cf. v. 6, Ex 32:28, Num 16:1ff, Deut 11:6, Ps 106:17. The poet concludes this portion of the psalm by addressing God as *Yah*, rendered here with **LORD**, which thus forms an inclusion with v. 4.

20. *escapes from death*. This is a reference to the escape of the Israelites from Egypt and again from Pharaoh’s armies at the Sea of Reeds.

22-23. These lines seem to announce further the treatment that the **LORD**’s enemies will receive.

However, in the context of the psalm's petition for rain, the psalmist may be depicting God's "return from Bashan" (a grain producing area with ample water in ancient times) and from the sea to bring rain to an area of drought. The added image of dipping one's feet in blood (the Hebrew word, *makats*, can also mean "wash") may be a reference to "the blood of the grape" and wine-making. Thus, the correct translation of Gen 49:11 would be, "Of wine he washes his garments, his robes of the blood of grapes" (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 63). Perhaps this image of cleansing from blood was eventually interpreted as "in blood" (cf. LXX, Ps 67:24, ἐν αἵματι), thus leading the writer of Rev 7:14 to make the unusual statement: "These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." If these lines (vv. 23 and 24) are references to rain and crops (rather than the treatment of enemies), then the "foes" ('*oybiym* refers to "hate") may be a reference to leavings from the harvest and hunt that are eaten by the dogs.

26. *the Lord beyond the fountain of Israel*. This expression occurs only here, and its meaning is uncertain. The "fountain of Israel" could very well mean the Jordan River, whose headwaters lie north of Israel. Thus, God is **LORD** even beyond Israel.

29. The Hebrew, *meheykaleka*, means "from your temple", indicating that the kings bearing the gifts descend from the temple mount to present their gifts.

30. The psalmist's description of the procession and action now makes reference to Israel's struggles against Egypt and other foes. The "beasts of the reeds" are possibly the Pharaohs, the "bulls" being the army generals, and the "calves" being the fighting troops. Cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

31. Some translators take "bronze merchants" to mean "bronze artifacts" or "blue cloth". Others, following the LXX πρεσβεις, translate with "envoys" or "ambassadors". Perhaps the psalmist has anticipated our modern English expression of "top brass", meaning the chief principals or representatives of a company. The Hebrew text is clearly too well balanced in sound and style to assert that the text is corrupt and in need of revision. If the first line has to do with merchants or merchandise, then the action of Cush (Ethiopia in the LXX) probably refers to the offering of its wares to God. Thus, Egypt would be the bringer of bronze objects, and Cush (possibly identified with Havilah, a land where gold is found— cf. Gen 2:13; 10:7) would be the bringer of gold objects. That *yadah* ("hands") can mean "wares" is somewhat supported by the psalmist's use of the plural *yadah* rather than the dual form *yadayim*.

Psalm 69

To the leader: according to Lilies. Of David.

Although Psalm 69 is ascribed it to David, the psalmist's prayer for the rebuilding of the cities of Judah (vv. 35-36) speaks for a later date of composition, namely, from the time of Jeremiah and the Babylonian Exile. The writers of the New Testament made extensive use of this psalm, the lament of an individual, in presenting the life and sufferings of Jesus as the messiah and thus as the fulfillment of scripture. To what extent, if any, the idea of a "suffering messiah" preceded the writers of the NT is much debated.

- 1 Save me, O God;
for the waters have come up to my neck.**
- 2 I have sunk into the mire of the Deep,
and there is no firm footing.
I have come into bottomless Depths,
and the River rushes over me.**
- 3 I am worn out with calling;
my throat has become hoarse.
My eyes are weary from watching, O my God.**
- 4 More numerous than the hairs on my head
are those who hate me without cause.
Mighty are those deceitful enemies
who would put an end to me.
How can I restore what I did not steal?**

- 5 O God, you know my folly;
and my sins are not concealed from you.
- 6 O Master and LORD of Hosts,
do not on my account let shame come upon those
who hope in you.
Do not on my account let disgrace overtake those
who seek you,
O God of Israel.
- 7 Indeed, for your sake I have accepted reproach;
dishonor has covered my face.
- 8 I have become a stranger to my brothers,
an outcast to my mother's sons.
- 9 Zeal for your House has consumed me;
and on me fall the insults of those who insult you.
- 10 When I subdued my soul with fasting,
it was made a taunt against me.
- 11 And when I put on sackcloth for my clothing,
I became a proverb to them.
- 12 Dawdlers at the city gate gossip about me,
and drunkards invent silly songs about me.
- 13 But I direct my prayer to you, O LORD,
at an acceptable time.
In your great kindness, O God, answer me.
- 14 With your faithful aid, rescue me.
Free me from the mire, and do not let me drown.
Free me from those who hate me and from the fathomless Depths.
- 15 Do not let the River rush over me,
nor allow the Deep to engulf me.
Do not let the Pit close its mouth upon me.
- 16 Answer me, O LORD; for your love is kind.
As becomes your manifold mercies,
turn to look favorably upon me;
- 17 and do not hide your face from your servant.
Because I am in distress, answer me quickly.
- 18 Draw near to me, and ransom my soul.
Because of my enemies, redeem me.
- 19 You must know of my reproach,
of my shame and my dishonor.
All my adversaries stand before you.
- 20 Insults have broken my heart;
and I have become frail.
I looked for consolers, and there was no one;
for sympathizers, but I found nobody.
- 21 Instead, they gave me venom for food;
and in my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.
- 22 Let their table be a trap for them,
and their colleagues a snare.
- 23 Let their eyes grow too dim to see,
and make their thighs steadily shake.
- 24 Pour out your rage upon them,

and let your wrath overtake them.
 25 May their encampment lie desolate,
 and their tents be without inhabitants.
 26 For they persecute the one you have struck,
 and repeat the pain of the one you have wounded.
 27 Heap guilt upon their guilt,
 and do not let them enter into your righteousness.
 28 May they be erased from the book of life,
 and not be inscribed with the righteous.
 29 I am lowly and ill.
 Let your help, O God, restore me.
 30 I will praise God's name in song;
 I will glorify him in thanksgiving.
 31 May that be more acceptable to the LORD
 than an ox or bull with horns and hoofs.
 32 The lowly will see it and rejoice;
 and you that seek God will be heartened.
 33 For the LORD hears the needy,
 and does not despise his captives.
 34 Let heaven and earth proclaim him,
 the seas and all that moves within them.
 35 For God will save Zion,
 and rebuild the cities of Judah;
 and those who were its exiles will return to it.
 36 The children of his servants will inherit it,
 and those who love his name dwell in it.

Notes

2. *the Deep . . . Depths. . . River*. With three terms, the psalmist personifies death. The term, “River” (*shibboleth*), is of particular interest. Besides being a test of one’s dialect, (“failing” the test could result in one’s death, cf. Judges 12:6) and also meaning “ears of grain”, the connection between “river” and “death” was retained in various mythologies such as the River Styx in Greek mythology.

3. *from watching, O my God*. This line could be translated “from watching for my God”. However, the rendering given here is also possible and preferable; for it forms an inclusion with the opening line of the psalm and maintains the stylistic form of “direct address” that is found throughout the psalm.

8. The Israelite practice of polygamy meant that one’s “brothers” could be half-brothers and/or cousins—a manner of speaking that was perpetuated into New Testament times. Thus, the expression “my mother’s sons” would mean one’s full siblings.

9. The Fourth Gospel cites this passage in regard to Jesus’ “cleansing of the temple” and adds that the

relevant scriptures were not recalled until after Jesus was raised from the dead. Cf. Jn 2:17-22.

12. *Dawdlers . . . drunkards*. City gates were elaborate structures, often with roof and upper story and a nearby marketplace. These locations would be common gathering places for loiterers of all ranks.

15. *the Pit*. To the triad of terms mentioned in v. 2, the poet now adds a fourth term, “the Pit”, the premier term for death and the nether world.

21. *venom*. The LXX uses *χολη* (“bile” or “gall”), and St. Jerome uses *fel*, meaning “bile” or “gall”.

26. *the one*. The psalmist, speaking in terms of self-reference in the third person form, sees the hand of God in this time of distress: “For they persecute me, whom you have struck”.

33. *his captives*. The psalmist makes reference to the Israelites living in exile or who had lived in exile. The temple and the city walls have been rebuilt (cf. vv. 9 and 12). But much reconstruction remains to be done, and some exiles have not yet returned. It is not at all clear, if this psalm is exilic or postexilic. There may be a reference to the concept of “covenant” in the term, “captives”—literally, “the bound ones”.

Psalm 70

To the leader. Of David, for the memorial offering.

Psalm 70, the lament of an individual, is nearly identical with Psalm 40:14-18 and bears the introductory remark that it is a psalm "for the memorial offering". Here and in Ps 38, this may be a note to remind the speaker or reader of the sufferings one may encounter in bringing one's pleas to God's attention.

- 1 O God, come to my rescue;
O LORD, make haste to help me!**
- 2 Let those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion.**
- 3 Let those who rejoice in my harm be forced to retreat.
Let those who say "Aha, aha!" turn tail in disgrace.**
- 4 May all who seek you be glad and rejoice in you.
Let those who love your salvation declare at all times:
"God is great!" (5) But I am needy and poor.
Hasten to me, O God; be my help and savior.
O LORD, do not delay.**

Notes

3. *turn tail*. The literal translation of this expression is "be turned upon the heel". By context and "extension",

it comes to mean "be exposed on one's rear". In 2 Sam 10:4, Hanan sends David's servants in disgrace back to David. Cf. also Isa 20:4.

Psalm 71

The psalmist appears to be a rather wealthy, elderly person whose foes are resorting to extortion. Consequently, an offering of a large sacrificial animal is being made, for which the psalmist hopes to have God's favor in return. There may be a hint of "spiritual bribery" here in the psalmist's promise to sing God's praises in return for favors given. That the psalmist is prepared to sing and play the harp and lyre and to address the assembly indicates that he is very likely a Levite. Parts of the psalm are obscure and escape precise translation, leading some commentators to think of the psalm as a collection of bits of other psalms.

- 1 In you, O LORD, I take refuge.
Never let me be put to shame.**
- 2 In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;
incline your ear to me and save me.**
- 3 Ever be my rock of refuge.
Ordain to save me;
for you are my stronghold, my fortress.**
- 4 O God, free me from the hand of the foe,
from the grasp of the unjust and ruthless.**
- 5 For you, my LORD, are my hope;
from my youth, O LORD, you have been my trust.**
- 6 I have relied on you from birth;
from my mother's womb,
you have been my assurance.
My praise of you is constant.**

- 7 I have been like a target for archers;
but you are my refuge and strength.
- 8 My mouth is filled with your praise,
with your renown all day long.
- 9 Do not cast me out when I am old;
do not forsake me when my strength fails me.
- 10 For my enemies plot against me;
those who spy on me have conspired together.
- 11 They say: "God has abandoned him!
Go after him and seize him;
for there is no one to save him."
- 12 O God, do not be far from me!
Hasten to my help, O my God!
- 13 Let those who oppose me be shamed and utterly humbled.
Let those who seek my ruin be covered with disgrace and dishonor.
- 14 Then I will evermore be hopeful;
I will praise you more and more.
- 15 My mouth will declare your righteousness,
your saving deeds all day long,
even though I know not their number.
- 16 I will go in the great strength of my sovereign LORD.
I will proclaim your righteousness,
which alone is yours.
- 17 O God, you have taught me since my youth,
and to this day, I speak of your marvels.
- 18 Therefore, when I am old and gray, O God,
do not forsake me,
until I have told of your mighty arm to the assembly,
of your power to all who enter.
- 19 Your justice, O God, reaches the heavens.
What great things you have done!
Who can rival you, O God?
- 20 Though you have subjected me to much distress and trouble,
you will relent and give me life.
You will once more raise me from the depths
of the earth.
- 21 You will increase my prosperity,
and you will embrace and comfort me.
- 22 Then I will sing praise to you with the harp;
with the lyre, I will sing psalms of your fidelity,
O my God, to you, O Holy One of Israel.
- 23 My lips will shout for joy;
for I will sing psalms to you.
My soul, which you have redeemed, will sing.
- 24 Once more my tongue will expound on your justice all day long.
For they have been put to shame!
For they have been put to confusion,
those who seek my ruin.

Notes

6. *my assurance*. It is not certain what the psalmist means by *goziy*. The similar statement in Psalm 22:10 employs the term, *gokhiy*, which, unfortunately, is equally obscure. The LXX and Latin versions use terms meaning “protector”. This seems to indicate that they read *goziy*, since *gokhiy* has to do with being “cast forth”

and could be translated as “you brought me forth”, i.e., “from my mother’s womb”.

7. *like a target for archers*. Though the usual rendering of this phrase is “I have been as a portent to many” (thus NRSV, LXX), it is now recognized that *rabbiym* can mean “archers” (cf. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by Francis Brown *et alii*).

Psalm 72

Of Solomon.

Although ascribed to Solomon, Ps 72’s origin may be the enthronement of Hezekiah, king of Judah, in 715 B.C.E. But its ascription to Solomon implies that Solomon represents ideal kingship. The idyllic imagery of the king and his upright character were taken up by early Christians as a picture of messianic times. Ps 72 may be termed “messianic” in that it critiques the failings of the past and presents an idealized vision of the future. Cf. *Le Ps 72 est-il un psaume messianique?*, by J.-M. Carriere, in *Biblica*, vol. 72, fasc. 1, 1991, pp. 49-69.

- 1 O God, endow the king with your judgment,
and the king’s son with your righteousness.**
- 2 Let him judge your people with fairness,
and your poor and lowly with justice.**
- 3 May the mountains bear peace to the people,
and the hills justice.**
- 4 Let him defend the defenseless of the people;
may he save the children of the poor and repress the oppressor.**
- 5 May they revere you as long as the sun,
and until the moon wanes at the end of the ages.**
- 6 May he descend like rain upon the stubble,
like showers upon the parched earth.**
- 7 Let the just man flourish in his day,
and peace abound until the moon ceases.**
- 8 May his dominion extend from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.**
- 9 The desert nomads will pay homage to him,
and his enemies shall lick the dust.**
- 10 The kings of Tarshish and the seacoasts will bring tribute.
The kings of Sheba and Seba will approach,
bearing gifts.**
- 11 May all kings bow down to him;
may all nations serve him.**
- 12 For he will show pity to the beggar who cries out,
and be a helper to the poor and the helpless.**
- 13 He will bestow mercy upon the poor and the needy,
and rescue the lives of the destitute.**
- 14 He will redeem their lives from oppression and violence,
and their blood will be precious in his sight.**
- 15 Long may he live!
May the gold of Sheba be given to him!**

May prayer be offered for him at all times.
 May he be blessed all the day long.
 16 Let there be abundant grain in the land.
 On the mountain tops, let it wave;
 let its crops rustle like Lebanon.
 May inhabitants of the city thrive
 like the grass of the earth.
 17 May his dynasty endure forever!
 May his fame spread beneath the sun!
 May all nations be blessed in him!
 May all peoples call him “Blessed”!
 18 Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
 who alone does wondrous deeds.
 19 And blessed be his glorious name forever.
 Let his glory fill the entire earth.
 Amen and amen!
 The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.

Notes

2. *the poor and lowly*. These are the ‘*anawiyim*, bereft of wealth and status—victims of injustice.

16. *like Lebanon*. The psalmist imagines that the wind in the ripe ears of grain will sound like the wind in the great cedars of Lebanon.

May inhabitants. This statement presents a number of textual difficulties. Here, the “benefit of the doubt” has been given to the LXX.

17. The terms, “dynasty” and “fame”, are given in the MT with the one term, *sh^emo* (“his name”). Likewise, the one term, *goyim* (the non-Israelite peoples), is given but once in the MT. But since *goyim* is strategically placed in the middle of the statement, it goes with both verbs.

BOOK III: Psalms 73 – 89

Psalm 73

A Psalm of Asaph.

Psalms 73-83 form a grouping of “Asaph Psalms”. In 1 Chr 25:1f, 6-9, Asaph and the “sons of Asaph” are temple musicians. Most of the psalms in Book III are ascribed to Levitical groups. Psalm 73 squarely faces the “problem of theodicy” (God’s justice in allowing the wicked to prosper and innocent people to suffer), and has a strong, sapiential tenor. Yet it is ultimately a psalm in which the psalmist claims innocence—tempted, yes; but unyielding in faith and innocent of yielding to wicked ways.

- 1 How good God is to Israel,
to those who are pure of heart.
- 2 Yet my feet nearly slipped; my legs almost gave way,
- 3 when I became envious of the arrogant,
and saw the success of the wicked.
- 4 For they need not worry about the snares of death;
and their strength is in full vigor.
- 5 They are not burdened like others;
and they are not afflicted like mortals.
- 6 Thus pride has become their necklace;
violence covers them like a robe.
- 7 Their greedy eye picks out what is fat.
Lustful desires flood their heart.
- 8 They scoff and talk with malice;
from on high they promise oppression.
- 9 They have set their mouth in the heavens;
and their tongue darts about on the earth.
- 10 As a result, his people turn hither,
and great waves are spewed out upon them.
- 11 They ask: “How can God know?
Can there be any knowledge in the Most High?”
- 12 Indeed, such are the wicked!
See how they are always at ease and increase their wealth!
- 13 Was it in vain then that I kept my heart pure,
that I washed my hands in innocence,
- 14 although I was attacked all day long,
and then chastised at the break of day?
- 15 If I had said, “Let me talk like that”,
then I would have betrayed the whole of your offspring.
- 16 When I tried to fathom this,
how troublesome it was in my eyes!
- 17 But when I went unto the sanctuary of God,
I came to understand what happens to them:
- 18 Clearly you set them on a slippery course;
you let them fall into oblivion.
- 19 How quickly they come to annihilation,
brought to their end by the Terrors of the night.

20 Like a dream when one awakes, O LORD,
 you will dismiss these Delusions when you awake.
 21 Yes, my heart grew embittered,
 and my reins were pierced.
 22 I was a brute and did not know it.
 I was like a beast in your sight.
 23 Yet I was always in your presence:
 you held me by my right hand.
 24 You will guide me by your counsel;
 and then you will take me up in glory.
 25 Who takes up my cause in the heavens?
 On the earth, I have no joy except in you.
 26 Though my heart and my flesh are consumed,
 God is ever my portion and the altar of my heart.
 27 Truly, those who stay far from you will perish.
 You will banish all whoremongers from you.
 28 But as for me, God's nearness is delightful.
 I have made my refuge in the LORD my LORD,
 to tell of all your wonderful works.

Notes

4. This verse is particularly difficult to translate, and yet its meaning is not particularly difficult to extract. The idea is that the wicked enjoy success, riches, and good health, while others are plagued by a litany of illnesses and worries. St. Jerome captured the concept very well: *quod non recogitaverint de morte sua et firma sint vestibula eorum*. ("For they do not have to worry about their death, and their hearths are secure"). In regard to "full vigor", the Hebrew says literally, "their strength is fat", i.e., "they are in tip-top physical shape." Regarding the cords and snares of death, cf. 2 Sam 22:6 and Ps 18:5.

7. *Their greedy eye*. In this verse, the psalmist plays upon the meaning of "fat" as "that which is best" and actual fat that fills the face of the wicked person. The rendering, "picks out" (*yatsa*'), means first of all "has gone out", thus giving rise to the image of eyes that protrude from one's face. However, the term can be repointed to the hiphil form, *yotse'*, which can mean "to exact" (cf. 2 Kings 15:20). An eye that "picks out what is fat" seems to refer to the concept of a "gluttonous" or "greedy eye" seeking the best of everything, and the root, *'yn*, meaning "eye", can also form a verb meaning "to view with envy". It is likely that the psalmist wants the reader or hearer to associate greed with "eye" as in the rendering here. The underlying theme regarding the "eye" becomes patent in the verses which follow and which describe the wicked as a great reptile. The "greedy" or "protruding" eye fits very well with the imagery of a crocodile's eyes, as they protrude above the water in search of prey.

Double meaning is also present in the next line. The term *maskiyyot* ("lustful desires") carries within its root, *shakah* and/or *sakah*, a number of inferences that have

application in the context of this psalm. Among these inferences are "imagination", "disregard", "lascivious wandering" (cf., Jer 5:7f), "rooster", and the male genitalia in reference to fertility cults, lechery, and idolatry. The slang expression, "Cocky notions fill their heart", presents fairly well what the psalmist wants to convey. Verse 27 further indicates that the psalmist's foes are very much involved in fertility cults and "sacred prostitution".

9. *darts about*. The Hebrew term here is *halak*, which means almost any form of forward motion in addition to walking. The psalmist, summoning up images of Leviathan (cf. Job 41:1) and Behemoth (cf. Job 40:17), presents a highly picturesque description of the wicked as a mythical monster or reptile with its head reared high in the sky (cf. Job 20:6 and 20:12-16), ready to attack, and its tongue darting out upon the earth. We encounter this reptile again in Rev 12, where the dragon pursues the woman, symbolic of the Church, and disgorge a flood of water from its mouth in an attempt to destroy her.

10. *his people turn hither*. Unless one considers the apocalyptic imagery of v. 9, this verse would be fully unintelligible. Apparently, God's people ("*his people*") "turn hither", i.e., listen to the arrogant, who ask troubling questions about God and God's justice (theodicy). The imagery is similar to that of the "Great Flood" in Gen 6-9. Cf. esp. Gen 7:10f—"And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth. . . the fountains of the great deep burst forth." Also, "great waves" or "deep waters" can imply one's difficulties and afflictions. E.g., Ps 69:11f. It is also used metaphorically for one's supposed words of wisdom: "The words of the mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream" (Prov 18:4). The picture being presented

here shows the wicked disgorging the evil contents of their innards. As a result, God's people are taken in and overwhelmed by the claims (the "great waves" or "tsunamis") of the wicked who enjoy great prosperity. This imagery is ingeniously used by the author of the *Book of Revelation*. The river of water that the dragon disgorges is swallowed up by an opening in the earth (Rev. 12:16). This may be likened to a tsunami's being swallowed up by an opening in the earth that was caused by an earthquake which, in turn, had caused the tsunami.

14. *break of day?* These lines could also be read in the indicative mood: "It was in vain . . ." The interrogative form, however, better expresses the doubts that have entered the psalmist's mind as judgment and punishment are meted out to him/her in the morning. Cf. Ex 18:13 and Jer 21:12.

15. The imagery is that of gods assembled around El; but the reference is to the Israelites as God's offspring or posterity.

19. *Terrors of the night*. While the MT simply has "terrors" (*ballahowt*), the psalmist's use of the term as well as the context indicate that *ballahowt* is the personified equivalent of "nightmares" and synonymous with "dream" and "delusions" in the next verse.

20. The expression, "when you awake" or "upon awaking" (*ba'iyar*) can also be rendered "in the city" (i.e., "of phantoms", cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 187). The Latin Vulgate, following the LXX text, reads, *Veluti somnium exsurgentis, Domine, in civitate tua imaginem illorum ad nihilum rediges* ("Like a dream upon awaking, LORD, you will reduce their image to nothing in your city"). It

seems best to retain the rendering, "when you awake" or "upon awaking", since the expression in reference to God is relatively common in the Hebrew scriptures. Cf. e.g., Pss 35:23, 44:23, 59:5, 78:65, and Isa 51:9.

21. *my reins were pierced*. The kidneys were thought to be the seat of emotions. Envy is the emotion that the psalmist has in mind.

24. Although St. Augustine and others believed that this psalm speaks of resurrection and life after death, the NT does not cite or refer to this psalm. Nevertheless, this verse may indicate that the psalmist had some leanings in favor of resurrection or at least of a life with God beyond death.

26. *altar of my heart*. The Hebrew term, *tsuwr*, refers to a rock that is smooth and flat and can serve as an altar. Cf. Judg 6:21 and 13:19. The term includes the meaning of "support and refuge" (thus, "rock of my heart") as well as "hill" or "high place" (cf. Psalm 61:2). In Deut 32:31 and Deut 32:37, *tsuwr* is used to refer to God as well as gods.

The root for "heart" (*lbb*) can also mean "to bake a cake". Cakes could be used as an offering. Cf. e.g., Ex 29:23. Perhaps the psalmist is playing also upon this idea, saying in effect, "God, rather than the Baals, is the altar upon which I make my offerings."

27. *whoremongers*. This strong language is used in regard to the worshippers of the Ba'alim, the gods of the fertility cults. Cf. Ex 34:15f, Deut 31:16, etc. In v. 28, the psalmist proclaims that the LORD God is the ultimate source of happiness. This final verse forms an inclusion with the first verse of the psalm.

Psalm 74

A Maskil of Asaph.

Psalm 74 is a lament of the nation following widespread destruction wrought by the Babylonians at the time of the Babylonian Exile, or by the Edomites, ca. 485 B.C.E., or possibly much earlier by the Assyrians, when they conquered the northern tribes in 722 B.C.E., or when Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. (cf. *Zur Datierung der Asaph-Psalmen 74 und 79*, by Beat Weber, in *Biblica*, vol. 81, fasc. 4, 2000, pp. 521-532). The text is difficult to translate, and the "patchwork" character and ambiguous, historical referents of the text may be due to the redaction that the psalm underwent in postexilic times so as to give the psalm exilic and postexilic relevance. The poet uses "inflated" images and terms ("forever", "endless", mythic beasts, etc.) so as to emphasize and dramatize the widespread destruction that the psalm addresses.

- 1 O God, have you cast us off forever?
Why does your anger smolder against the sheep
in your care?
- 2 Remember the flock that you made your own
from of old.
Redeem the offspring of your domain,

- this Mount Zion where you used to dwell.
- 3 Wend your way through the endless ruins,
all the damage that the enemy has done within your sanctuary.
- 4 Your foes have roared in the midst of your assembly.
They have set up hundreds of emblems.
- 5 See how their axes have been laid to the upper,
ornate woodwork,
- 6 and then how they have destroyed the carved panels
with their hammers and hatchets!
- 7 They set fire to your sanctuary;
they destroyed and desecrated the dwelling place
of your name.
- 8 In their hearts they gave the order:
“Let us be rid of them altogether!”
They burned down all of God’s shrines
throughout the land.
- 9 Our signs we have not seen; there is still no prophet.
And no one with us knows “How long?”
- 10 How long, O God, will the enemy go on scoffing?
Will the foe blaspheme your name forever?
- 11 Why do you restrain your left hand,
and let your right hand lie limp in your lap,
- 12 since you are God, my king at all times,
working wonders throughout the earth?
- 13 You, in your might, subdued the Sea.
You shattered the skulls of the Tannin,
the most perilous monsters upon the waters.
- 14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
doled him out as food to the denizens of the desert.
- 15 You made channels for the springs and streams.
You dried up the ever-flowing rivers.
- 16 To you belongs the day.
The night belongs to you as well.
You set sun and moon in their places;
- 17 you established all the boundaries of the earth.
You were the one to form summer and winter.
- 18 Remember how the enemy has mocked you, O LORD,
and how a depraved people has scorned your name.
- 19 Do not hand over to the wild beast the life
of your dove.
The life of those who cry out to you do not forget forever.
- 20 Give heed to your Covenant;
for every dark corner of our land,
every open field, is filled with violence.
- 21 Do not let the oppressed person return filled
with shame.
Let the poor and the needy have reason
to praise your name.
- 22 Arise, O God, and defend your cause!
Remember the daily insults of the fool.

**23 Do not forget the chidings of the foe,
the continuous clamor of those who rise up against you.**

Notes

1-3. The imagery of these verses is quite stark and concrete. The term for “anger” carries with it the meaning and vivid imagery of “nostrils” flaring and fuming. The expression, “the offspring of your domain”, literally reads “the staff of your inheritance”. The term, “staff”, may also mean “tribe”. We can approach the concept in English with the terms “offshoot” or “stem”. Thus the people “stemming from” Mount Zion are God’s inheritance. But now, following the destruction of the temple, it appears that God has forsaken his Mount and his people. So the psalmist asks God to return and walk through “the endless ruins”. The scenario reminds one of Jesus’ words: “Not one stone shall be left upon another” (Mt 24:2).

4-6. The verb used for “roar” (*sha’ag*) is predicated of lions and also applied to God and to thunder as the voice of God. Cf. Jer 25:30; Hos 11:10; Joel 3:16; Am 1:2; 3:4; Jn 12:29. Its precise meaning in v. 4 is unclear. However, 1 Kings 6:7 is an interpolation that notes that the stones used in building the temple “were dressed at the quarry, so that no hammer, axe, or iron tool was to be heard in the temple during its construction”. The “roar” of the foe could thus refer to the destruction of the temple amidst the shouts of the enemy and the sound of their hammers and axes. The expression, “hundreds of emblems”, is readily derived from the consonantal Hebrew text. Cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 201f. Likewise, “ornate woodwork” makes good sense in the context. The Hebrew term, *sabak*, refers most often to a thicket of brushwood or to something that is interwoven, hence, “ornate” wood or woodwork. Cf. Ex 35:33; 1 Kings 6:18ff. In v. 5, the psalmist invites one to “see” (literally, “let note be taken of”) the massive destruction in the temple.

8. *Let us be rid of them.* Taking a different approach, Dahood (*ibid.*, p. 202) sees *niynam* as the masculine, plural of *niyn* (and not as *yanah*—“to oppress”, given here as “be rid of”), meaning “offspring” or “posterity”, and as the subject of the verb, *surapuw*, “to be burned”. In the masculine plural form, *niyn* would refer to the young men who would be gathered at these shrines or “assembly places” and who would soon become warriors. Thus the enemy would be intent on destroying the shrines and the young men to prevent future reprisals. If these lines refer to the Assyrian assault on northern Israel (Samaria), then the destruction and placement of emblems described in 2 Kings 17:29-33 would apply

here. Roberts proposes “the early exilic period” for this psalm, since at that time prophecy was discredited as a failure and due to the lack of prophets publicly acknowledged as “reliable” (cf. *Of Signs, Prophets, and Time Limits: A Note on Ps 74:9*, by J.J.M. Roberts, in *CBQ*, vol. 39, no. 4, October, 1977, p. 481).

9. The lament, “How long?”, in 9c is a common cry in times of distress in the “Psalms of Asaph”. God is asked not only to reveal how long the hard times will last, but also to give a sign through a prophet. “This idea that there were predetermined limits to the periods of divine wrath which the gods might reveal through omens or oracles was wide-spread in the ancient Near East” (cf. Roberts, *ibid.*, p. 478).

13. *subdued the Sea.* God’s mastery over the Sea includes the waters at creation (Gen 1:2), the drying up of the waters of the Deluge (Gen 8), the division of the sea at the time of the Exodus (Ex 14-15), as well as God’s accomplishments given in the next verse. Throughout this “litany”, the psalmist employs the emphatic “you” (*’attah*) seven times in addressing God, so as to match the number of heads on Leviathan (cf. Rev 7:3). In all, there are ten uses of “you”, just as Gen 1-2:4a counts ten creative acts in the course of seven days. Mt 8:24-26 depicts Christ’s subduing of the sea. Cf. also Ps 107:23-35.

19. *the life of your dove.* Although the MT can be interpreted to read, “. . . the life of your dove to the hawk” (or, more accurately, “to the wild beast”), the LXX reads: “. . . the soul of one praising you”. The Hebrew, *towreka*, (apparently taken as *towdeka*, i.e., “those who praise you”, by the LXX) could also be vocalized as *tuwreka*, i.e., “those taught by you”. St. Jerome saw “torah” (“instruction”) in the word and translates, *ne tradas bestiis animam eruditam lege tua* (“Do not hand over to the beasts the soul taught by your law”). Nevertheless, in early Christianity, the audio-visual similarity between the Hebrew terms for “your dove” (*towreka*) and “instruction” or “law” (*torah*) may have given rise to some conceptual connection between the terms that St. Jerome explicitly expressed in his translation.

In view of the psalmist’s statements concerning God’s mastery over the waters and sea-monsters, the term, “dove”, is employed in the rendering here. In that context, “dove” may well refer to the dove sent forth over waters by Noah (Gen 8:8-11) and also serve as a symbol for the people of Israel, a scenario reflected in the baptism of Jesus (cf. Mt 3:16 and parallel texts).

Psalms 75

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

This composition is of mixed genres and presents several oracles as the words of God. The main focus is to give praise to God by invoking or alluding to the names of God. The complex relationship of this psalm to the psalms around it is explored by Joseph H. Jensen in his article, *Psalm 75: Its Poetic Context and Structure*, in *CBQ*, vol. 63, no. 3, July, 2001, pp. 416-429. Jensen notes on p. 418: "In its present position in the Psalter, Psalm 75 serves as a transition between Pss 74 and 76. Together, in sequence, the three psalms develop the progression in the preceding Ps 73 that begins with a reflection upon the apparent prosperity of the wicked and concludes as a meditation on their disastrous fate". Psalm 75 thus develops the theme of God's punishment of the wicked, while Ps 76 depicts the fearsomeness of God toward the earth's rulers.

- 1 We thank you, O God, we thank you;
and near is your name.
Your wonderful works have revealed it.**
- 2 "When I choose a time to hold court,
I will give unbiased judgment.**
- 3 When the earth and all its folk tottered,
I Am The One who steadied its pillars.**
- 4 I said to the braggarts, 'Do not boast';
and to the wicked,
(5) 'Do not make your arrogance so obvious.
Do not raise your horn against the Exalted One.
Do not speak against the Rock of Ages.'"**
- 6 Behold! Neither from the east nor from the west,
nor from the desert will asylum come.**
- 7 Behold! God is judge.
He lays one person low while raising up another.**
- 8 Behold! A cup is in the LORD's hand,
and the bowl is filled with wine.
He draws from it and portions it out,
till its very dregs have been drained.
The wicked of the world must drink every bitter bit of it."**
- 9 But I will praise the Eternal One;
I will sing psalms to the God of Jacob.**
- 10 "And I will bring down the conceit of the sinful.
The rule of the Righteous One will be exalted."**

Notes

1. *near is your name*. It is possible that "near" should be written as "Near", i.e., as a name for God. In postexilic times, the term, "name" (*shem*), could itself be used as a reference to God. Cf., e.g., Ps 66:2. Additional names of God or allusions to God's names are found throughout this psalm and are marked as proper names. In Isa 56:1, the **LORD** proclaims, "My salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed" (KJ). The nearness of salvation and righteousness is the theme of this psalm. The emphasis is on the fact that God will act directly in lieu of Israel's failed kingship. The psalm is a response to Ps 74:21 (cf. Gosse, *Les Psaumes 75-76*, *ibid.*, pp. 227-228), which reads:

Do not let the oppressed person return,
filled with shame.

Let the poor and the needy have reason
to praise your name.

It is also possible that "your name" in Ps 75:1 as a case of double and Janus parallelism, in which a word or phrase does "double duty". Thus "your name" (*sh^emeke*) would also mean "your heavens" (*shameke*). The verse would then read: "We thank you, O God, we thank you; and near is *your name*. *Your heavens* have revealed your wonderful works". Cf. *Janus Parallelism in Psalm 72:2*, by John S. Kselman, in *JBL*, vol. 121, no. 3, Fall, 2002, pp. 431-532.

2. *choose a time to hold court*. The usual translations for this expression speak of keeping "the appointed time". However, the setting is that of judgment; and *mowed* ("appointed time") refers also to

an assembly as well as the place of assembly, which is precisely the meaning of “to hold court”.

6. *asylum*. The psalmist is intent on presenting variations on the root, *rwm*, having to do with height, lifting up, and haughtiness. The result is that some uses of the term are stretched beyond conventional meaning. The rendering, “asylum”, is offered here for the Hebrew term, *hariym*, which means “heights” or “mountains”. Psalm 11:1 treats the mountains as a place of asylum from danger; for the mountains not only make travel difficult, but also provide many hiding places for one who wishes to be concealed. But when God is the judge, there is no concealing oneself. The psalmist places *hariym* (“asylum”) in parallel to *yariym* (“he raises up”) as if to say, “There are no mountains to which one can flee from God’s sight and judgment; and in God alone, who is ‘The Mountain’, is there refuge.”

8. *the bowl*. In characteristic fashion, the poet continues to “play” with words and images that convey sense and feeling to one steeped in the poet’s time and culture. But no translation can convey the same to another time and place. The Hebrew root, *khmr*, can refer

to fermentation, foaming, wine, clay, measure, redness, and more—most of which meanings compliment each other in the context of this psalm and the translation, “the bowl”. The rendering of this verse follows closely the parsing and reasoning of Dahood (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 214f). He proposes the repointing of several terms so as to preserve the poetic structure and meter of the cola. Once that adjustment is in place, the parallel and chiasmic structures become obvious and allow the proper meaning and imagery to be revealed. “Cup” and “bowl” are parallel terms, and the action of filling the cup from the bowl and portioning out even the dregs to the wicked is a logical sequence employed by the psalmist. The expression, “every bitter bit of it”, is simply *kol* (“all”) in the Hebrew text. However, when taken as an absolute term rather than as a term modifying “the wicked”, then *kol* includes the drinking of the (bitter) dregs to the last drop. The poet’s terminology implies that the wine is drugged or poisoned—and “bitterness” can be associated with such wine. Cf. Ps 69:21; Mk 15:36.

10. *conceit . . . rule*. In Hebrew, these two terms are given as “horns”, which can symbolize exaltation, haughtiness, power, weapons, etc.

Psalm 76

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

God is viewed as “the Lion of Judah” as well as a thunderbolt (“flaming arrows”) hurling deity in this psalm. The present psalm also continues the emphasis on God’s name and titles and may be one of the Psalter’s earliest psalms from the time of the united monarchy. Cf. also Ps 75’s introduction.

- 1 God is known in Judah; in Israel, “Great” is his name.**
- 2 In Salem is his retreat; and his lair is on Zion.**
- 3 It was there with his flaming arrows**
that he shattered the bows,
the shields and swords, and the weapons of war.
- 4 O Resplendent One!**
You alone are the Mighty One from the Mountains of Prey.
- 5 Once the strong hearts were despoiled,**
they slept their last sleep.
All those mighty men proved powerless.
- 6 At your roar, O God of Jacob,**
chariot and horse froze in terror.
- 7 You are the Fearsome One! You alone!**
Who can stand before your face,
when your wrath is roused?
- 8 From the heavens you made your judgment resound.**
The earth trembled and fell silent,
(9) when God arose in judgment
to save all the poor of the land.

- 10 Because the fury of man becomes praise unto you,
you gird yourself with all other furies.**
- 11 Make and keep your vows to the LORD your God.
Let everyone everywhere pay tribute
to the Fearsome One.**
- 12 He cuts down the pride of princes;
he is fearsome to the kings of the earth.**

Notes

3. *with his flaming arrows*. Thunderbolts are God's "flaming arrows". The "weapons of war" may be the chariots mentioned in v. 6. However, the MT has only "battle" (*milkhamah*), which can be taken as metonymy (e.g., "teeth" for "weapons") or as an emphatic summation of the shattering of "the bows . . . and the battle itself". The use of "Salem" for "Jerusalem" in v. 2 indicates the peace that followed upon the destruction of the weapons in v. 3 and the restoration of Mount Zion as God's dwelling place.

4-6. The choice to translate 'addiyar as "the Mighty One" (the term also expresses nobility and majesty) is due to the term's being similar to and parallel with "the strong (*abbiyrey*) hearts". The rendering, "the Mighty One from the Mountains of Prey", could also be translated as "the one mightier than the Mountains of Prey". However, St. Jerome translates the statement with *lumen tu es Magnifice a montibus captivitatis* ("You are the light, O Magnificent One, from the mountains of captivity"). Thus God is the resplendent one who, like a lion from the mountains, comes to destroy the enemy's weapons as well as the enemy. The LXX reads ἀπο ὀρεων αἰωνιων ("from the everlasting mountains"), apparently interpreting the Hebrew *terep* ("prey", "victim") as a synonym for 'ad, which can mean either "prey" or "perpetuity". The historical event may be the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib. Cf. 2 Kings 18 and 19.

5. *proved powerless*. Literally, "did not find their hands".

7. *when your wrath is roused*. The Hebrew text reads, "from when your anger" (*me'az 'apeka*), which is rather obscure. St. Jerome's *ex tunc ira tua* ("from then your anger") is equally obscure. The LXX uses ἀπο τότε⁹. The *Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon* gives ἐκ τότε as "since then". Some Latin manuscripts

provide *in ira tua* ("in your wrath"), which appears to be the meaning of the Hebrew text.

10. *Because the fury of man . . . all other furies*. This entire verse lends itself to several possible translations and interpretations. Its first word, *kiy*, can mean either "because" or "indeed". The LXX and St. Jerome both take it to mean "because". The problem of translation is further compounded by the psalmist's apparent intermingling of several images and concepts throughout the verse and through the use of double . "Man" ('*adam*) can also be pointed to become "Edom". The term (and name), "Adam", bears with it the meaning of "red" in reference to red earth, which also gives Edom its name. Perhaps the psalmist means "Edom's fury", either specifically or as representative of humanity's hostility.

The rendering, "all other furies" (literally, "the remainder of furies"), can be pointed to read, "the remnants of Hamath". Although Hamath (spelled with "hard" 'h', *kheth*) is of uncertain etymology, *khemeth* can refer to a water skin, and *khemah* can mean "poison", "rage", or "heat". In the context of this psalm, it appears that the psalmist is employing a play on the word and meaning of "fury" as applied to Edom (or "man") and Hamath (or "furies"). Also, since Hamath is to Israel's north and Edom to the south, the psalmist may be alluding to the fury of all humanity, ironically declaring it to be praise unto God, especially in comparison to God's wrath. St. Paul employs a similar ironic comparison in claiming that God's strength is made perfect in weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:19). It is also possible that the poet had Edom and Hamath directly in mind, while later generations (including the LXX, St. Jerome, and the MT) chose to see "man" ('*adam*) and "furies" (*khemeth*) in the verse since Edom and Hamath had passed from history and significance. Thus later generations did not perceive any double meaning in these terms.

Psalm 77

To the leader: according to Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A Psalm.

The psalmist laments a national crisis that is taken very personally. The language is archaic and strained and suggests a northern Israelite origin for the psalm, which further suggests that the crisis concerns the lamentable state of affairs that prevailed in the north after it seceded from the Davidic dynasty

following Solomon's death about 922 B.C.E. The psalmist ponders God's works in the Exodus and in overcoming chaos through the work of creation. Concerning Jeduthun in the ascription, cf. Ps 39.

- 1 With my voice I cried out to God—
with my voice—unto God; and he gave ear to me.
- 2 In the day of my distress, I sought out my LORD.
My hand was stretched out ceaselessly
throughout the night;
my soul refused to be comforted.
- 3 I remember God, and I groan.
I ponder, and my breath grows faint:
- 4 “You have kept my eyes from looking up.
I am deeply troubled and cannot speak.”
- 5 I thought about the days of old, the bygone years.
- 6 I recalled my song throughout the night.
I meditate in my heart, and my breath inquires:
- 7 “Will the LORD disown me forever?
Will he never again show me his favor?
- 8 Has his kindness run out forever?
Has his word come to an end for all generations?
- 9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Or has he withheld his love in anger?”
- 10 Then I said, “This is what grieves me:
the wavering of the Most High’s right hand.
- 11 Let me recount the deeds of the LORD.”
Yes, I remember your wondrous works of old.
- 12 I think of all that you have done;
and on your deeds I reflect.
- 13 O God, how holy is your way!
What deity is as great as God?
- 14 You alone are the wonder-working God!
You showed your power among the nations.
- 15 With your arm, you redeemed your people,
the children of Jacob and Joseph.
- 16 When the waters saw you, O God,
when the waters saw you, they shook.
Even the depths were shaken.
- 17 Dark clouds let their waters pour down;
the heavens sent out their voice,
and your arrows flew forth.
- 18 Your thundering voice echoed in the firmament;
lightning illuminated the world.
The earth quaked and quivered.
- 19 Your way led through the sea,
and your trail was on the mighty waters.
But your footsteps remained unseen.
- 20 You led your people like sheep by the hand
of Moses and Aaron.

Notes

1. *With my voice . . . ear to me.* The poet begins with a wordplay on 'Elohiym ("God"), 'el ("to"), and 'eli ("to me"), but similar to 'Eliy, "my God") that evokes a pleading and crying out: 'Eliy, 'Eliy, lamah 'azab^etaniy ("My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?", cf. Ps 22:1; Mt 27:46). A rare form of parallelism is found in this verse that accounts for the unusual manner in which the verse is translated and presented here. Cf. *Synonymous-Sequential Parallelism in the Psalms*, by Patrick D. Miller, Jr., in *Biblica*, vol. 61, fasc. 2, 1980, p. 257.

2. *I sought out . . . stretched out.* The Hebrew term used here, *darashtiy*, includes both "seek" and "consult"—as one might seek out another for advice. With "stretched out", the psalmist provides an image of a hand "flowing", perhaps in a gesture of entreating the LORD. One may also envision an arm "flowing" with perspiration due to fatigue and anxiety. This image may be seen in Lk 22:44: "In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like big drops of blood falling down on the ground." Some ancient sources for Luke do not include Lk 22:43-44.

4. The sudden injection of the second person in this verse is best explained as "self-deliberation".

5–6. These verses rephrase the thoughts and words that the psalmist just expressed. Also, "my breath inquires" introduces more self-deliberation, this time in the form of questions followed by a response as a conclusion to the apparent dialogue with oneself. The poet then speaks directly to God and recalls God's saving acts, especially in the Exodus from Egypt.

10. *the wavering.* The Hebrew root, *shnh*, can mean "change" (thus LXX and St. Jerome), "year", "repeat", and "shine". The psalmist is implying more than one meaning of this word, saying in effect: "I am grieved that the Most High's power has lessened with time; for his arm has grown old and unsteady."

12. *your deeds.* The Hebrew term, *ma'alal*, used in v. 11 and here, refers especially to wanton or harsh and punishing deeds.

13. *how holy.* The Hebrew text states "in the holy is your way". The text can also read "in holiness is your way". But by right of the emphatic position that *baqodesh* ("in the holy") has in the statement, it is equivalent to "how holy!" This rendering preserves the chiasmic structure of the verse, with both lines presenting a rhetorical question.

19. *the mighty waters.* The "waters" are not only the sea mentioned in the *Book of Exodus*, but also the primal sea at creation. By walking on the sea, God proves to be greater and more powerful than all else. God's "path" on the waters (possibly a reference to light reflected by the water) may also be viewed as the trailing train of God's robe; for God is "robed in light" from the beginning of creation (cf. Ps 104:2). God's long, flowing robe with its train of light prevents the footsteps (literally, "heels") from being seen as God walks across the waters and away from the viewer. The Hebrew words for "trail" and "train" are very similar visually and semantically (and, coincidentally, also in English), allowing the use of one to evoke the image of the other, as appears to be the case here.

The theme of God walking on the water calls to mind the spirit of God hovering over the waters of creation (cf. Gen 1:1) as well as Jesus' walking on water (cf. Mk 6:49-50). Jesus' disciples thought they were seeing a ghost. Apparently, this was Mark's way of saying that the disciples had not yet properly grasped the divine nature of Jesus. Cf. *A Ghost on the Water? Understanding an Absurdity in Mark 6:49-50*, by Jason Robert Combs, in *JBL*, vol. 127, no. 2, Summer, 2008, pp. 345-358.

20. The inclusion of creation imagery with Moses and Aaron may seem abrupt. However, the Exodus was readily seen as a new act of creation. The reference to "Moses and Aaron" is a way of indicating that Israel's leaders are to embody the qualities of these two men. Also, the mention made of them may have encouraged the later idea that there would be two messiahs: a royal messiah for civil reform and a priestly messiah for religious reform. Cf. E.A. Wcela, *The Messiah(s) of Qumran*, in *CBQ* 26, 1964, pp. 340-349.

Psalm 78

A Maskil of Asaph.

In the context of this didactic poem, the enigmas (v. 2) that the psalmist recalls concern why God rejected Israel for a time and then chose David and Jerusalem. The first eight verses provide a preface to the rest of the psalm and emphasize the need to pass on to subsequent generations the lengthy but vital lessons and historical information contained in the psalm. Cf. *Deuteronomy and Psalms: Evoking a Biblical Conversation*, by Patrick D. Miller, in *JBL*, vol. 118, no. 1, Spring, 1999, pp. 3-18.

- 1 Give heed to my teaching, O my people.
Turn your ear to the words of my mouth.
- 2 I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will pass on enigmas from of old,
- 3 things we have heard and learned,
the things our forebears announced to us.
- 4 We will not keep them from their descendants,
but pass them on to following generations,
by proclaiming the praises of the LORD,
by extolling his might and the marvels he has done.
- 5 He made it a decree in Jacob,
he established it as law in Israel,
he ordered our ancestors to teach them
to their children,
- 6 so that the next generation would know,
so that the children to be born would live
to tell them to their children.
- 7 Thus they shall place their trust in God,
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments.
- 8 Then they will not be like their forebears,
a disobedient and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not loyal,
whose spirit was not faithful to God.
- 9 The sons of Ephraim, treacherous with the bow,
turned traitorous in the day of battle.
- 10 They did not hold to God's covenant,
and they refused to follow his law.
- 11 Instead they forgot his deeds
and the wondrous works he had shown them.
- 12 In the presence of their forebears,
he performed a marvelous deed in the land of Egypt,
in the plains of Zoan.
- 13 He sundered the sea and let them escape.
He made the waters stand like a mound.
- 14 He led them with a cloud by day,
and all through the night with light from a fire.
- 15 He split open the rocks in the desert,
and watered the vast and sandy waste.
- 16 He made springs gush from the rock,
and let water surge forth like rivers.
- 17 But even then they continued to sin against him,
rebellious against the Most High
while still in the desert.
- 18 Furthermore, they tested God in their hearts,
demanding food for their greedy gullets.
- 19 They even spoke out against God and asked:
"Can God prepare a table in the desert?"
- 20 Indeed, he smote the rock,

and water gushed out till the streams overflowed.
But can he also produce bread or provide meat
for his people?"

- 21 Upon hearing this, the LORD became angry;
and a fire was kindled against Jacob.
His anger lashed out at Israel;
22 for they refused to put faith in God,
and did not trust in his salvation.
23 Yet he gave orders to the clouds above,
and opened the gates of the heavens:
24 He showered them with manna to eat;
yes, he gave them grain directly from heaven.
25 The weak ate the bread of the strong.
He sent them an abundance of food:
26 He caused the east wind to blow across the heavens;
then in his might he led forth the south wind,
27 and showered meat upon them like dust,
winged fowl like the sand of the seas.
28 He made them fall directly into the camp,
right around his tabernacle.
29 So they ate until they were fully satisfied.
He brought them what they were craving.
30 But they did not give up their complaining,
not even with the food still in their mouths.
31 So the anger of God flared up against them,
and he slew the strongest among them.
The young men of Israel he cut down.
32 Despite all this, they continued to sin,
and refused to trust in his wondrous works.
33 So he wiped out their days in a breath,
and their years with a terrified gasp.
34 Whenever he would slay them,
they would beseech him.
They would be converted and earnestly seek God.
35 Then they would remember that God was their Rock,
and that God the Most High was their Redeemer.
36 But they merely sought to flatter him
with their mouths,
and they lied to him with their tongues;
37 for their hearts were not firmly fixed on him,
and they did not remain true to his covenant.
38 But he, the Compassionate One,
dispels iniquity and does not destroy.
Again and again he restrains his anger,
and does not unleash the fullness of his fury.
39 So he remembered that they were flesh,
a fleeting breath that never returns.
40 How often they would rebel against him
in the wilderness,
causing him grief out in the desert!

41 They even went so far as to test God again.
 Thus they grieved the Holy One of Israel.
 42 They forgot what his hand had achieved,
 the day when he saved them from the foe,
 43 that it was he who worked his signs in Egypt,
 and his wonders in the plains of Zoan.
 44 He turned their rivers into blood,
 and they could not drink from their streams.
 45 He sent swarms of flies that consumed them,
 and frogs that wreaked havoc upon them.
 46 He consigned their crops to caterpillars,
 and the results of their labor to locusts.
 47 He let hail devastate their vineyards,
 and frost destroy their sycamores.
 48 He killed even the cattle with the hail,
 and the flocks with the bolts of lightning.
 49 He sent against them the heat of his raging wrath,
 his indignation and destructive power,
 a commission of pestilent angels
 (50) to smooth the way for his anger.
 He did not spare their souls from death.
 Instead, he delivered their lives to the plague.
 51 Finally, he struck down every first-born in Egypt,
 the sturdiest of the men in the tents of Ham.
 52 Then he led forth his people like sheep,
 and guided them like a flock into the desert.
 53 He led them safely, quite unafraid,
 while the sea covered their enemies.
 54 He brought them unto his holy place,
 that mountain which his right hand had won.
 55 He drove out the nations before them,
 and assigned them to territorial legacies.
 He let the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents.
 56 Still they put God the Most High to the test
 and rebelled against him.
 They refused to keep his decrees.
 57 Like their predecessors, they rose up in revolt.
 They went astray as if shot from a twisted bow.
 58 With their high places, they provoked him to anger;
 and they made him jealous with their graven images.
 59 God heard and was overcome with rage:
 He utterly disavowed Israel
 (60) and deserted the tabernacle of Shiloh,
 the tent he had pitched among mortals.
 61 He surrendered his strength to captivity,
 and his splendor into the hands of the foe.
 62 He delivered his people to the sword,
 and vented his anger against his heritage.
 63 Fire devoured their young men,
 and their maidens heard no wedding songs.

- 64 Their priests fell by the sword,
and their widows sang no dirges.
65 Then the LORD awoke as if from sleep,
like a rowdy warrior after drinking wine.
66 He attacked his enemies from the rear,
and brought them everlasting shame.
67 He rejected the tent of Joseph,
and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim.
68 Rather, he chose the tribe of Judah,
the mountain of Zion which he loved.
69 There, as the highest of heights, he built his sanctuary;
like the earth, he established it forever.
70 Then he chose David his servant,
and took him from the sheepfolds.
71 From the nursing ewes he brought him:
to shepherd Jacob his people and Israel his patrimony.
72 He shepherded them with a sincere heart,
and with careful hands he guided them.

Notes

9. *treacherous . . . traitorous*. The psalmist plays on the word *ramah*, meaning both “to shoot” (an arrow) and “to betray”. History has not recorded the Ephraimite debacle cited here. But the poet uses it as the “centerpiece” of the theme of Israel’s rebellions against God. Cf. *Psalm 78: A Contribution to the Theology of Tenth Century Israel*, by Anthony F. Cambell, S.J., in: *CBQ*, vol. 41, no. 1, 1979, pp. 51-79.

15-16. *watered the . . . waste*. Most translations of this line state, in effect, that God “gave them drink abundantly as from the deep” (NRSV). However, the verb, *wayyashq*, (“watered”, or “caused to drink”) is transitive and has “sandy waste”, *ṭhomowt*, as its object. The poet thus emphasizes the abundance and effectiveness of the water by omitting “them” and making “sandy waste” the object. Also, the force of God’s action in splitting open the rocks is given prominence in the poet’s use of the verb, *baqaʿ* (“split open”), which is the same verb that is used in v. 13 for dividing the sea.

18. *greedy gullets*. The “operative” word here is *nepesh*, which means “throat”, “belly”, “breath”, “soul”, “life”, “spirit”, “desire”, “craving”, etc.

24. *grain directly from heaven*. This verse is quoted in Jn 6:31 in regard to the Eucharist. Both here and in Jn 6, the context has to do with rebellion in return for God’s graciousness.

25. *weak . . . strong*. The MT states, “Man ate the bread of the mighty ones” (“angels”, in LXX). The MT poetically contrasts “man” (*ʾish*) with “the mighty ones” (*ʾabiriyim*). Thus, “man” could be rendered as “the lowly” or “the weak” in this context. Since “the mighty ones” may also mean “leaders”, the passage can also be

rendered as, “peasants ate the bread of princes”, i.e. to say, “God gave them a royal banquet.”

28. *his tabernacle*. The MT reads “his tents”. The plural form may express “grandness” and is appropriate for God’s tabernacle, which may have been several adjoined tents or a large tent divided into compartments. Also, the entire camp of Israel with its tents is God’s dwelling place in the Exodus.

30. *their complaining*. The psalmist implies a clever pun in the Hebrew for “their complaining” (*taʾawatam*), a term that also bears the meaning of “their craving” (cf. v. 29). In other words, “Complaining was their real craving, and so it was what they desired most.”

33. *breath . . . terrified gasp*. In Hebrew, “in a breath” is *bahebel* and “with a terrified gasp” is *babehalah*. The latter term conveys both swiftness and terror. It is also parallel to “breath”, and thus shares in the meaning of “breath”. For this reason, it is rendered here as “terrified gasp”. Moreover, since the two words are nearly palindromes (reverse spellings) of each other, they provide the psalmist with the grist for a complex paronomasia (pun). An analogous example in English might be a play on the words “live” and “evil” (palindromes) and the name “Levi”, a quasi-palindrome to “live”. One can thus construct an extended pun by saying, “*Levi* lived an *evil* life and was a *devil* for as long as *Levi* lived.”

36. The MT bears the marginal note at this verse: *khatsiy ha-sepher* (“half of the book”). Thus we may ask, “Was Ps 78 purposely placed here by the postexilic *soperiym* (“book/scroll makers”, i.e., scribes), and, if so, why?” The “short answer” is that, with Ps 78, the reader, through repeated recitation, can look back at the Torah and the prophets and forward to praise God’s great acts in creation and history. Cf. *Psalm 78 als “Mitte” des*

Psalters?—ein Versuch, by Beat Weber, in *Biblica*, vol. 88, fasc. 1, 2007, pp. 305-325.

47. *frost . . . sycamores*. These trees, whatever their botanical genre, were pruned and shaped to give support to the vines and to form windbreaks around the vineyards. The prophet Amos described himself as a shepherd and “a dresser of sycamore trees” (Am 7:14). Their destruction is mentioned as an indication of the thoroughness of the ruin brought by the ravages of hail and cold. The term, *khanamal*, occurs only here, and the meaning, “frost”, is conjectural and assumed from the context.

51. *the sturdiest men*. The Hebrew text states literally, “the beginning of manly strengths”, which is parallel to and means the same as “every first-born”, i.e., first-born male. The eldest son of a family was supposedly endowed with greater strength, virility, and responsibility (military and priestly) than other members of the family. Thus the death of the first-born in “the tents of Ham” (i.e., in the houses of the Egyptians) is tantamount to ending the family’s socio-religious status and existence.

54. *mountain*. The mountain is Mount Zion rather than Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb. Thus the psalmist takes the narrative from the crossing of the sea directly to the land of Israel, with no mention of Mount Sinai and

the Decalogue. This is also the sequence of events as given in Ex 15:1-18.

55. *territorial legacies*. The language used here in regard to real estate property indicates that the land is fully measured, staked out, and designated as one’s rightful inheritance as presented in Jos 13-22.

59-64. These verses recount the destruction of Shiloh, the **LORD**’s shrine during the period of the judges. The Ark of the Covenant, which was captured at that time, is probably inferred in the terms “strength” and “splendor” in v. 61.

65. Again, the psalmist presents a reversal of action. The **LORD** begins to restore his people, but not as of old. Election now falls on Judah, Zion, and David.

68. *he chose the tribe of Judah*. With this statement, the psalmist is placed fully in the camp of those supporting David’s dynasty and his centralization of government and religious practice in Jerusalem. Also, the psalmist places emphasis on David’s being called from shepherding sheep to shepherding the people. The image of shepherd-king was very much at home in the ancient Near East.

69. *as the highest of heights*. The “high places” or “heights” were places for the cult of idols and gods. Thus Mount Zion, “as the highest of heights”, is deemed superior to all other places of worship.

Psalm 79

A Psalm of Asaph.

This national lament is tied to the previous psalm through the *Leitmotif* (“leading theme”) of “patrimony”. The historical setting is most likely Jerusalem’s destruction by the Babylonians and Edomites in 586 B.C.E. But it is not clear if v. 1c belongs to the original composition, or if it is a later addition from the exilic/postexilic community. The question is raised in view of v. 3, which specifies that blood was shed *around* (not “in”) Jerusalem. Such a scene could describe the devastation of the northern tribes by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E.—as depicted in regard to Samaria in Mic 1:6 (cf. Weber, *ibid.*, pp. 529-532).

- 1 O God, the nations have encroached upon your patrimony.
They have defiled your holy temple.
They have turned Jerusalem into a heap of ruins.**
- 2 They have made carrion of your servants
for the vultures of the air.
the flesh of your saints for the beasts of the earth.**
- 3 They have spilled their blood like water around Jerusalem;
and no one was left to do the burying.**
- 4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors,
a derision and ridicule to those around us.**
- 5 How long will this continue, O LORD?
Will you let your anger last forever?
Will you let your jealous wrath rage like fire?**
- 6 Pour out your wrath upon the nations**

- that do not acknowledge you,
upon the kingdoms that do not call on your name.
- 7 For they have devoured Jacob;
his homeland they have laid waste.
- 8 Do not ascribe to us the sins of our ancestors.
Let your tender mercies come upon us without delay;
for we have been duly humiliated.
- 9 Help us, O God, our salvation,
for the glory of your name.
Save us, and purge away our sins for the sake of your name.
- 10 Why let the nations say, "Where is their God?"
Show the nations before our eyes
vengeance for the blood of your servants.
- 11 Let the sighing of the prisoners
come to your attention.
As befits the great power of your arm,
rescue those who are doomed to die.
- 12 Into the bosom of our neighbors,
pay back sevenfold, O LORD,
the taunts with which they taunted you.
- 13 Then we your people and the sheep of your pasture
will thank you forever.
We will declare your praise from age to age.

Notes

5-8. In these four verses, the psalmist asks rather rhetorically about the duration of God's fury. Then, as if to say to God, "I have a better idea", the psalmist suggests that God remove his wrath from Israel and pour it out upon other nations who deserve it because they do not know God.

8. *Do not ascribe*. The imagery of these lines is that of God in the role of scribe or recorder. Cf. Ps 109:14 and Job 13:26.

10. *your servants*. This is the postexilic community's reference to itself. Cf. notes to Pss 19:11; 90:13.

Psalm 80

To the leader: on Lilies, a Covenant. Of Asaph. A Psalm.

Since Ps 80, a national lament, mentions Joseph, Ephraim, Benjamin (though usually associated with the south), and Manasseh, it might have been composed shortly after the Assyrian destruction of the northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C.E. In referring to God's "cherubim throne" (v. 1), the psalmist, perhaps a Levite, appears to be in the temple at the time of the offering of incense and, like Isaiah (cf. Isa 6:1-4), is overwhelmed by the liturgy.

- 1 O Shepherd of Israel,
kindly listen as you lead Joseph like a flock.
- 2 O One enthroned upon the Cherubim,
shine your light upon Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might and come to save us.
- 3 O God, take us back, and let your face shine!
Then we shall be saved.

- 4 O LORD, God of hosts,
how long will you smolder in anger
at the prayers of your people?
- 5 You made them swallow tears in place of bread.
You made them drink a triple sum of tears.
- 6 You set us at odds with our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh to themselves.
- 7 O God of Hosts, take us back, and let your face shine!
Then we shall be saved.
- 8 You uprooted a vine from Egypt;
expelled the nations and planted it.
- 9 You cleared out the native peoples;
made it take root and fill the land.
- 10 The mountains were covered with its shadow,
and with its tendrils the stalwart cedars.
- 11 You stretched its boughs to the Sea
and its shoots to the River.
- 12 Why, then, have you torn down its fences,
so that every wayfarer can pluck it?
- 13 The wild boars from the forest uproot it,
and the insects of the field graze on it.
- 14 O God of hosts, please come back!
Look down from the heavens and see.
- 15 Tend to this vine,
this stock which your right hand had planted,
and the son that you strengthened for yourself.
- 16 Burnt with fire, cut to pieces,
they perish at the rebuke of your mouth.
- 17 Let your blessing be upon the man of your right hand,
upon the son of man
whom you have strengthened for yourself.
- 18 Then we will never forsake you!
Restore us to life, and we will call upon your name.
- 19 O LORD God of Hosts, take us back.
Let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

Notes

3. *take us back*. Both senses, i.e., “accept us again” and “lead us back”, are operative in this statement.

10-13. *the stalwart cedars*. In the MT, the cedars of Lebanon are called “the cedars of God” (*’arzey-’el*). Regarding the *insects*, cf. Ps 50:11. The term, “graze”

(*ra’ah*), plays on the word, “pluck” (*’arah*), and may imply that the insects are like herds of large cattle. Joel 1:4 depicts Israel’s destruction by various insects. Cf. also Nahum 3:15-17 and Rev 9:3-10.

15-17. In v. 15, “the son” is probably King Hoshea, the last king of the House of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 17).

Psalm 81

To the leader: according to The Gittith. Of Asaph.

Psalm 81 was probably composed as a hymn to commemorate the Passover or, more probably, the Feast of Tabernacles as indicated by the blowing of the shophar in v. 3. The reference to “Jehoseph” (Joseph) in v. 5 identifies this psalm

as a composition originally from the northern Israelites. But the rendering of "Joseph" as "Jehoseph" appears to be the work of postexilic redactors who interpreted the name as a Yahwistic theophor in accord with their dialect of Aramaic. This spelling of the name often appears in post-biblical texts from ca. 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. Cf. *Jehoseph in Ps 81,6*, by Scott C. Layton, in *Biblica*, vol. 69, fasc. 3, 1988, pp. 406-411. Beginning at v. 6b, God reminds the Israelites that they were once a people in slavery, but now free to enjoy divine protection, provided that they obey God's statutes. It is not always clear who is speaking in the psalm or who is the proper antecedent of a pronoun. A "gittith" is of unknown significance; but its root appears to be *gath*, a "wine press". This would fit well with a harvest festival.

- 1 Shout with joy to God our Refuge!
Shout to the God of Jacob.**
- 2 Make up a melody and take up the tambour,
the sweet-sounding harp and the lute.**
- 3 Sound the shophar at the time of new moon;
at the full moon which marks our festive day.**
- 4 For this is Israel's law,
an edict from the God of Jacob.**
- 5 He made it a lasting decree for Jehoseph,
when he went forth from the land of Egypt.
I heard a speech that I did not know:**
- 6 "I freed his shoulder from the burden;
his hands left the basket behind.**
- 7 In distress you called upon me,
and I came to your rescue.
From the hiding place of the thunder, I answered you.
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.**
- 8 Give heed, O my people, and I will counsel you,
if you will but listen to me, O Israel:**
- 9 Let no strange god be found among you;
and you are not to bow down to any such god.**
- 10 I am the LORD your God,
who led you out of the land of Egypt.
Open wide your mouth, and I will fill it.**
- 11 But my people did not heed my voice,
and Israel would not obey me.**
- 12 So I let them go in the hardness of their hearts;
they walked according to their own way of thinking.**
- 13 If only my people would listen to me!
If Israel would only walk in my ways,**
- 14 at once I would subdue their enemies,
and I would turn my hand against their foes."**
- 15 Those who hate the LORD will cower before him,
and that will be their lot forever.**
- 16 He would feed him with the finest of wheat.
And with honey from the Rock I would fill you.**

Notes

1. *our Refuge*. This expression could also be translated as “our strength”. But “Refuge” better fits the theme of the psalm’s concluding line, which speaks of God as “Rock”.

3. *the full moon*. While most ancient and modern translators render the Hebrew *bakeseh* as “at the full moon”, one may note that *keseh* means “cover” or “conceal” and so reasonably claim that the term means “at the covering over of the moon”, i.e., that the term also means “new moon”. The lunar month begins with the first light after the complete waning of the moon. But one may also think of the moon’s being “clothed with light”, which would denote the full moon. The LXX translates with ἐν εὐσημῷ ἡμέρᾳ (“on the portentous day”), thus circumventing the question, “New moon, or full moon?”

5. The phrase, “*from the land*”, is ‘*al-’erets* in the MT, which would usually mean “upon the land”. However, the ancient versions render the preposition, ‘*al*, as “from”, and ‘*al* was sometimes used to mean “from” in the Northwest Semitic dialect. Cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 264. Nevertheless, the psalmist may have been thinking of Joseph’s days of travel to oversee the affairs of Egypt. Gen 41:46 uses the same terminology for Joseph’s travels “through all the land of Egypt” (NRSV). According to Ex 13:19, it was not Joseph, but only his bones, that left Egypt. The rabbinical interpretation applied this passage to Joseph as an individual and saw it as Joseph’s elevation to power for his supposed knowledge of seventy languages. Cf. *Traditions of the Bible*, by James L. Kugel, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 458.

I heard a speech. The MT has “I heard” (‘*eshma*’), and St. Jerome translates the line with *labium quod nesciebam audivi* (“I heard a lip [i.e., speech, voice] which I did not know”). However, the LXX has “He heard a tongue [language] which I did not know”.

6. The basket was used for carrying bricks and mortar. Here it is representative of all of enslaved Israel’s

burdens. The oracle is in the style of the prophets who recounted God’s saving actions as an introduction to their remonstrations with the people for being unmindful of God’s past favors. Cf. *The Background of the Oracle in Psalm 81*, by Th. Booij, in *Biblica*, vol. 65, fasc. 4, 1984, pp. 465-475.

7b. *hiding place of the thunder*. This may be an allusion to Mount Sinai, since vv. 9-10 restate the opening lines of the Decalogue. The “Horeb tradition” treats the mountain as a volcano, while the “Sinai tradition” views the mountain as covered with stormy clouds. The Canaanite sky-god also spoke in thunder and used lightning as a weapon.

7c. *I tested you*. One may object that it was the people who tested God at Meribah. But the psalmist may be contending that the people’s testing of God turned out to be God’s testing of the people. The meaning of the name, Meribah, is probably “quarrel” or “contention”, and the LXX, the Vulgate, and St. Jerome understand the term in this sense rather than as a proper name. Num 20:13 (cf. also Ex 17:7) clearly treats the name, Meribah, as meaning “quarrel”: “These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled [*rabuw*] with the LORD, and by which he showed his holiness” (NRSV).

16. *He would feed him*. There is some question about “honey from the rock”, sometimes interpreted as “wild honey” in view of Deut 32:13. But since it is parallel to “the finest of wheat” (literally, “the fat of wheat”), it must mean, in effect, “the sweetest of honey”. God’s word was thought of as being sweet as honey (cf. Ezek 3:3). The expression, “the finest of wheat”, is a reference to the manna, which supposedly “tasted like wafers made with honey” (cf. Ex 16:31). Thus the psalmist may be using metaphor to refer to God as the Rock (cf., e.g., Ps 18:3) and God’s words and statutes as “honey”. Perhaps v. 10c and this verse allude to “a sacred meal at the sanctuary” (cf. StuhlmueLLer, *Psalms* 2, p. 39). If Ps 81 is indeed a harvest song for the Feast of Tabernacles, then such an allusion to real, festive dining is entirely suitable.

Psalm 82

A Psalm of Asaph.

In the previous psalm, the people are taken to task for their disobedience toward God. Now the psalmist, drawing upon the mythological image of God standing and judging in the circle of gods and earthly rulers, addresses the people and calls them to task for their corruption and their failure to enact justice for the poor. Thus Israel’s God intervenes to create order out of the cosmic chaos that these “gods” have wrought.

1 God, standing in the divine assembly, in the midst of the gods, passes judgment:

- 2 “How long will you go on judging unfairly,
and granting favors to the wicked?
- 3 Defend the helpless and the orphan;
win justice for the poor and needy.
- 4 Deliver the helpless and destitute;
save them from the hand of the wicked.
- 5 They neither know nor understand.
They walk about in darkness.
All the foundations of the earth are shaken.”
- 6 I once contended, “You are gods,
and all of you the offspring of the Most High.”
- 7 But in fact, you will die like any mortal;
you will fall like any prince.
- 8 Arise, O God; judge the earth.
Indeed, you alone should preside over all the nations.

Notes

5. *know . . . understand*. The psalmist reinforces this statement by using similar sounding words for “know” (*yad^euw*) and “understand” (*yabinuw*), similar to saying, “They know nothing and understand even less”, or, “They neither apprehend nor comprehend anything”. The psalmist wants to point out that “simple folk” and those who are “down and out” have the added disadvantage of being vulnerable to those who would take advantage of their “darkness”, i.e., their lack of knowledge and understanding. Since God rules the world through righteousness, the unjust judgments from these “gods” result in the destabilization of the earth itself (cf. Ps 11:3). The poet (or perhaps it is God who is still speaking in v. 6), in turn, denounces them and reminds them that ultimately they are as mortal as anyone else.

6. *You are gods*. The rabbinical interpretation of this verse applied the term “gods” to the Israelites who had accepted God’s word, the Torah, at Sinai. Thus, in the explanation from Jn 10:34-36, the term, “God”, ought to apply all the more to Jesus, the living Word of God! Cf. Jn 1:1, 14; also *I Said “You Are Gods”*, by Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J., in *JBL*, vol. 108, no. 4, Winter, 1989, pp. 647-663.

8. *you alone should preside*. This rendering fits the meaning of the statement well, but still leaves unsaid the underlying meaning of the Hebrew term, *tinkhal* (“preside”) which includes the concept of inherited property—i.e., property that one rightfully and fully owns. With this statement, the psalmist respectfully says in so many words, “You, O God, certainly don’t need to rely on these other gods to enact fair judgment, for all nations are yours to begin with and yours alone.”

Psalm 83

A song. A Psalm of Asaph.

The psalmist, in the spirit of Ps 82, prays that the **LORD** will protect Israel against any number of nations conspiring together. Historians cannot identify a time when the nations listed in the psalm might have formed an alliance against Israel. However, the “historical psalms” were not meant simply to recount historical events. Rather, they were intended to be liturgical songs extolling the great deeds of God. Psalm 83 thus concludes and climaxes the psalms of Asaph by taking “a postexilic view” of Israel’s enemies and by anticipating their ultimate destruction as they come to realize and experience that the name, “YHWH”, presages their demise. To this end, the psalmist states in v. 16, “and let them search your name, ‘**LORD**’”. This is an invitation to the reader to “research”, i.e., to examine the meanings of the **LORD**’s name and the three Hebrew words of this statement and see in them a depth of meaning that only the Hebrew speaking person can appreciate. In the excursus following the notes below, an extended explanation “unpacks” the psalmist’s intricate, threefold wordplay found in v. 16.

1 O God, do not be silent!

- Do not remain mute or keep still any longer, O God.
- 2 Indeed, look at how your foes are fuming,
and how those who hate you hold up their heads!
 - 3 They cleverly conspire against your people,
and they scheme against those whom you harbor.
 - 4 They have declared:
“Come! Let us destroy their status as a nation.
Let the name of Israel be remembered no more.”
 - 5 Indeed, they conspire with one mind;
against you they have made a pact:
 - 6 the tents of Edom, and the Ishmaelites,
Moab, and the Hagarites,
 - 7 Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek,
Philistia, and the citizens of Tyre.
 - 8 Even Assyria has allied itself with them,
having become the strong arm of the sons of Lot.
 - 9 Treat them like Midian and Sisera,
like Jabin at the Wadi of Kishon.
 - 10 They were destroyed at Endor;
they became dung for the field.
 - 11 Make their leaders like Oreb and Zeeb,
all their rulers like Zebah and Zalmunnah,
(12) who said:
“Let us add their finest fields to our inheritance.”
 - 13 My God, hurl them forth like filth,
like rubbish before the wind.
 - 14 As a fire that burns a forest,
or a flame that sets the mountains on fire,
 - 15 so you will pursue them with your tempest;
with your hurricane you will rout them.
 - 16 Cover their faces with shame;
and let them consult your name, “LORD”.
 - 17 May they forever be shamed and dismayed.
Let them perish in disgrace.
 - 18 Let them know that it is only you
whose name is “LORD”,
the Most High above all the Earth!”

Notes

3. *those whom you harbor*. The Hebrew term, *tsapan*, refers to hidden things such as a treasure. Since it is paired with “your people”, it should have about the same meaning. The LXX renders it as “against your holy ones”. The Vulgate states, *eos quos abscondisti tibi* (“those whom you have hidden [as a treasure] for yourself”).

8. The mention of Assyria as part of the coalition indicates an early date in Israel’s history. For Assyria, in later times, was a dominant power that was more intent on crushing coalitions than on joining them.

10. Endor is identified as a city of Manasseh in Jos. 17:11. The judge, Barak, urged on by Deborah, defeated

Sisera at Mount Tabor (Jgs 4:1ff; cf. also 1 Sam 12:11 and Heb 11:32ff). It is not clear if Endor is to be identified with the site of Sisera’s defeat. The psalmist is playing on words and names and makes an auditory connection between “Midian” and “dung for the field” (*domen la-’adamah*). The name, Endor, is parallel to “the field” (*’adamah*, meaning “earth”). The psalmist may be parsing the name into its root meanings: *’en* (from *’ayin*) meaning “eye” or “font” or even “surface” (of the earth, as in Ex 10:5 and 15; Zech 9:1), and *dor*, meaning “habitation” or “generation” as well as “tent camp”. To be “destroyed at Endor” could imply eradication from the earth to become dung for the earth. Cf. Dahood, *ibid.*,

pp. 275f. Clearly, the psalmist is intent on “dissecting” names, including the name “YHWH”.

12. *their finest fields*. The MT reads, “the fields of God”, meaning not only “the best and most productive land”, but also Israel’s inalienable inheritance from God. Cf. *L’Aggressione contro Dio, Studio del Salmo 83*, by Bruna Costacurta, in *Biblica*, vol. 64, fasc. 4, 1983, pp. 518-541, esp. pp. 525-527.

13. *like filth, like rubbish*. With the terms, *kagalgal* *k^eqash*, the poet has resorted to highly graphic language that conveys feeling, imagery, and meaning. While *galgal*, as it is used here, implies a whirlwind, the simple term, *gel*, means “dung”. The term, *k^eqash*, rendered here as “rubbish”, refers especially to straw and chaff—material that readily burns, but which also served the sanitation needs of stable and privy. From the context (cf. v. 10 and comment) and the tone of the poet’s acrimony, it seems safe to conclude that the casting of foul and disease ridden waste into the whirling wind is the image that the poet wishes to apply to these enemies. With v. 12 “sandwiched” between verses pertaining to dung, the poet’s satirical sense might even include seeing the enemies become the dung and compost that further fertilizes “the fields of God”. The remainder of the psalm continues the diatribe unrelentingly.

Excursus: On “the Name” in Psalm 83:16-18

It is not immediately clear what the expression, “consult your name, ‘LORD’ (or, O LORD)”, should mean. The significant term here is *baqash*, usually rendered as “seek”, “investigate” (e.g., Esther 2:23), “search” or “consult”. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. II, p. 256 (ed. by David J.A. Clines, Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), treats the Hebrew root, *bqsh*, as a homonym, meaning “magnify” or “make much of” and translates vs. 16 as “fill their faces with shame, so that they may magnify your name”. However, both the LXX and St. Jerome abide by “seek” in Greek and Latin respectively. But it is more probable that *baqash* bears the meaning of “research” or “investigate” in vs. 16. In Dn 9:3, the LXX translates the term with εὑρεῖν (*heurein*: “find out about”, “discover”, “uncover”). The expression, “search your name”, is used nowhere else in scripture and appears to have no equivalent in cultures that do not practice divination or shamanism. But ancient Israel practiced divination by means of the Urim (cf. Num 27:21 and related passages). Thus, in this context, *baqash* would have the sense of “investigate” by way of consulting the Urim or of resorting to other similar means.

The pre-exilic prophet, Hosea, was active in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam, who led his people into rebellion and secession from the kingdom that David had established. In Hos 5:3, the prophet announces that “the people of Israel shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or household idols; then the

people of Israel shall turn back and seek (*biqshuw*) YHWH their God, and David, their king”. By this, Hosea means that the rebellious northern kingdom lacked the means and methods for consulting the LORD and would eventually reunite with the southern kingdom of Judah and thus once again be able to consult YHWH by way of the pillar, etc., i.e., by means that could be considered forms of divination. Likewise the prophet, Amos, active in Bethel and contemporary with Hosea, prophesies against the northern kingdom of Israel: “They shall run to and fro to seek (*l^ebaqesh*) the word of YHWH, and shall not find it”. And finally, Malachi 2:7, referring to the mandate that the priest is to give glory to the LORD’s name, proclaims: “For the priest’s lips should guard knowledge, and they [the people] should seek (*y^ebaqshuw*) the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of YHWH of hosts”. If the priest fails on his part, “then I [the LORD] will send a curse upon you [the priest] and your blessing I will make a curse” (Mal 2:2). It is this spirit of blessing and curse to be found “in the Lord’s name” that Ps 83 employs in regard to Israel’s enemies.

It is clear from the context that Ps 83:16 is not an admonition that the enemy should turn to the LORD in *supplication* or be shamed into honoring the LORD as many translations state or infer. Rather, vs. 16 is an *imprecation* that these enemies of Israel might call down upon themselves the malice that the name, “Yahweh”, supposedly effects when subjected to the shamanistic divination that *baqash* infers in Ps 83 and elsewhere. A threefold wordplay is contained in these verses, saying in effect: “Let them feel shame, let them be shame, let their inquiry bring shameful calamity upon them”. The reader is not to think of “YHWH” as a derivative of the verb “to be” (*hayah*, cf. Ex 3:14) in this instance. Instead, YHWH is to be read as “Yahowah” and interpreted as “Yah” (the short form of the LORD’s name) plus *howah*, meaning “calamity”, “destruction”, “ruin”, etc. In other words, “Yah will be their undoing”.

Lev 19:31 commands the Israelites: “Do not turn to mediums and wizards; do not seek them out (*l^ebaqshuw*), to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God” (NRSV). Here, *baqash* refers to consultations with soothsayers and conjurers in the practice of augury and divination as seen in Ps 4:2 – “How long will you befriend worthless idols and consult (*l^ebaqshuw*) lying oracles?” When these uses of *baqash* are employed in Ps 83:16, we can rephrase the verse as: “Let them divine your name, ‘yhwh’, and then experience what that name means for them.” In this use of *baqash*, the psalmist implies *baqqesh*, “to avenge”, to infer that Israel’s enemies are to experience the LORD’s vengeance that these verses describe (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 277). How this inference plays into the picture is explained below, after further investigation of the uses of *baqash*.

In 1 Sam 28:6ff, Saul, in the face of a large force of Philistines, consults the LORD, but gets no reply, “either by dreams or by the Urim or by the prophets”. He then commands his servants, “Seek out for me (*biqshuw-liy*) a

woman who is a medium, so that I may go to her and inquire of her" (v. 7). The medium conjures up the spirit of Samuel, who is not pleased and forecasts the doom of Saul: "By tomorrow, you and your sons will be with me, and the **LORD** will have delivered the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines" (v. 19b). And indeed Saul and his sons end up as dung (Compare to v. 10 above), being made into ashes and having their bones buried "under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh" (1 Sam 31:13).

In view of these accounts using *baqash*, one must conclude that the psalmist sees something in the name "**LORD**" (i.e., *Yahweh*) besides *hayah* ("to be", or "to become"). Instead, the psalmist, in a characteristic wordplay, sees *howah* in the name, *Yahweh*, as in "Jehovah". The term, *howah*, includes "ruin", "destruction", "calamity", "disaster" (cf. e.g., Ps 57:1; Prov 19:13). Although not even Webster's unabridged dictionary recognizes the term, "nomenology" (having to do with seeking the "inner meaning" of names), the practice is recounted on the pages of Scriptures (cf. e.g., Gen 25:26 and Gen 27:36—in regard to the name, "Jacob"; Mt 1:21—"you are to name him 'Jesus', for he will save his people from their sins"; Mt. 16:18 in regard to "Peter"). What A. F. Kirkpatrick states in *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge, 1903), p. 741, in regard to Ps 122:6-9 and the name, "Jerusalem", also applies here: "The Psalmist presumes that the *nomen* may be an *omen*".

When the sacred name, *Yahweh*, is pointed or vocalized with the vowels from 'adonay or 'elohiyim, as became the practice toward the end of Old Testament times, then the vocal and visual connection between *howah* and *y^ehowah* becomes patent. But even apart from the practice of saying "Adonai" or "Elohim" in the place of YHWH, the psalmist could readily see *hwh* ("calamity") in *yhwh* ("Yah is calamity") simply from the "visual statement" that the consonantal matrix, YHWH, presents. Such an explicit application of God's name would hardly become prominent in Israel's cult, but it certainly could come into play in regard to the numerous imprecations that the ancient psalmists made against Israel's enemies or against Israel itself for serving foreign gods.

In the wordplay on the **LORD**'s name in Ps 83:16, the psalmist is not alone or unique in associating the idea of "disaster" with the **LORD**'s name. It is also found in an oracle against Israel in Ezek 7:26-27—"Disaster comes upon disaster (*howah* 'al-*howah*), rumor upon rumor; they shall keep seeking (*biqshuw*) a vision from the prophet; instruction shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders. The king shall mourn, the prince shall be wrapped in despair, and the hands of the people of the land shall tremble. According to their way I will deal with them; according to their own judgments I will judge them. And they shall know that I am the **LORD**" (NRSV). Ezek 7:5 is parallel to 7:26, using *ra'ah* instead of *howah* to mean "disaster". But it is noteworthy that the passage in Ezek 7:26-27 not only restates Ezek 7:5, but also expands on it and includes the statement about

"seeking (*biqshuw*) a vision from a prophet"—more or less the equivalent of consulting an oracle or soothsayer. Isaiah 47:13 and context describe this process and express the same sentiments as Ps. 83.

Psalms 83's composer is able to make an additional wordplay based on the inferred wordplay with *baqash* ("search") and *baqqesh* ("avenge"; cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 277) and the implied semantic connection between *howah* and the **LORD**'s name. This wordplay involves the terms, *shem*, meaning "name", and *shamem*, meaning "desolated", or "devastated". This results in an ensemble of wordplays or an "extended wordplay" in reference to the name, "Yahweh". In the passages from Ezekiel, "desolation", "waste", and "ruins" take their root from *shamem* ("desolated", "devastated"). In Dan 9:18 we find a wordplay on "desolation" and "name": "Incline your ear, O my God, and hear; open your eyes and look at our desolation (*shom^e moteynuw*) and the city that bears your name (*shimka*)". In vv. 16-18, the psalmist wants to convey both concepts in the term *shimka* ("your name"). This wordplay with "name" and "destruction" is also present in Dan 9:18—" . . . look at our desolation (*shom^e moteynuw*) and the city that bears your name (*shimka*)".

In conclusion, the psalmist takes the statement, *baqshuw shimka YHWH* ("let them search your name, YHWH"—pointed throughout the MT to read "Yahowah"), and construes each word so as to declare that the enemies' investigation into the name of the **LORD** will bring down destruction (*howah*) upon themselves to their everlasting shame. Psalms 35:4-5 and 40:14-15 attest to the idea that shame is the ultimate calamity that can come upon one's enemies. In Psalm 83, any use of the name of the **LORD** made by Israel's enemies is tantamount to a misuse of the sacred name. "Thou shalt not take the name of the **LORD** thy God in vain" is a commandment that carried the penalty of death with it. "For the **LORD** will not acquit anyone who misuses his name" (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11; cf. also Lev 24:10-16 and 1 Kings 21:10). In Ps 74:10, the psalmist asks God: "Will the foe blaspheme your name forever?" Next, in v. 18, God is asked to remember "how a depraved people has scorned your name". These statements and the above examples provide for the clear meaning of Psalm 83:16 and its imprecations upon Israel's enemies for their use or misuse of God's name. The dual nature of God's actions is clearly set forth by Deutero-Isaiah: "I am YHWH and there is no other; I form light and create the darkness; I make weal and create woe; I YHWH do all these things" (Isa 45:7). Psalm 83:16 sees this duality as something intrinsic to and announced in God's very name, YHWH. Due to the uncertain historical circumstances bearing on Ps 83, one can only speculate about the psalmist's originality or about the sources for the psalmist's interpretation of God's sacred name. The ascription of the psalm to Asaph suggests an exilic or post-exilic time for its composition and thus more or less contemporary with Deutero-Isaiah.

Psalm 84

To the leader: according to The Gittith. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

This charming psalm defies placement in any one period of Israel's history or any one genre. The prayer for the king ("your anointed") in v. 9 indicates a pre-exilic origin. But the reference to God as "my King" in v. 3 suggests a postexilic provenience, when Israel could not return to its own monarchical rule and proclaimed God as its king instead. Likewise, the plural forms of vv. 1-3 imply that the psalm was composed before the construction of Solomon's temple; but the references to God's house in vv. 4 and 10 imply the existence of the temple. The ascription of the psalm to the Korahites, the "sacred pilgrimages" of v. 5, and the general tone of the psalm indicate that it was recited as a psalm of pilgrimage to the rebuilt temple in postexilic times.

- 1 How lovely are your dwellings, O LORD of Hosts!**
- 2 My soul longs and yearns for your courts, O LORD.
My heart and my flesh sing out to the living God.**
- 3 Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow has her nest to hold
her young next to your altars,
O LORD of Hosts, my King and my God.**
- 4 Blessed are they who dwell in your house:
They sing your perpetual praise.**
- 5 Blessed is the one whose strength is in you,
those whose hearts are set on sacred pilgrimages.**
- 6 As they pass through the Baca Valley,
they make it appear like a flowing spring:
as if the early rains had clothed it with blessings.**
- 7 They will walk from strength to strength
to appear before the God of gods on Zion.**
- 8 O LORD God of Hosts, hear my prayer.
Listen intently, O God of Jacob.**
- 9 O God, our protector, behold!
Look upon the face of your anointed.**
- 10 Yes, a single day in your courts
is better than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather stand at the threshold of the house
of my God
than to be at home in the tents of the wicked.**
- 11 For the LORD God is both sun and shield.
The LORD will give both grace and glory.
He will not withhold his blessing
from those who walk in integrity.**
- 12 O LORD of hosts!
Blessed the one who trusts in you.**

Notes

1-3. The triad of plural forms, "dwellings", "courts", and "altars", may refer to and emphasize the importance of the temple. However, the image of nesting

birds evokes open places that were once shrines to the **LORD**, and "sacred pilgrimages" may recall earlier pilgrimages to the shrines that the temple replaced and where one could "behold the God of gods on Zion".

6. It is uncertain where the “Baca Valley” is to be located. “Baca” may refer to a tree or shrub such as the balsam tree (thus NRSV) or the mastic tree (thus NAB). “Baca” probably identifies both the balsam and the mastic, since both produce droplets of aromatic sap. It is this characteristic that the term, *baca*, describes. In Arabic, the term refers to the meager droplets of milk from a camel. St. Jerome takes the word as *bakeh*, meaning “tears” or “weeping”, and offers the translation, *in valle fletus* (“in the valley of tears”). It may be that the psalmist intends a wordplay on “tears” as well as the name of the valley’s vegetation. The use of *‘emeq* (a deep or dark valley) recalls the imagery of the gloomy valley in Ps 23:4.

7. *from strength to strength*. This expression can also mean “from rampart to rampart”; and this could

further mean “from village to village”. Thus the image is that of pilgrims who, while processing toward Jerusalem and the temple, encounter others who join the pilgrim group to increase its numbers and size as it goes “from village to village” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, pp. 278 and 281). Consequently, when they pass through the Baca Valley, they make it look like a river of people streaming toward Jerusalem.

10. *elsewhere. I would rather stand at the threshold*. Rhythmically, *bakhartiy* (rendered here as “I would rather stand”; literally, “I have chosen [to be]”) appears to belong to the preceding phrase and to be parallel to “your courts”. The poet’s readiness to be a doorkeeper fits well with the postexilic effort of the Korahites in their bid to regain status following their demotion. Cf. notes for Pss 42 and 43.

Psalm 85

To the leader: Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

Although some commentators claim that this psalm refers to the years soon after the end of the Babylonian Exile when there was a time of drought, there is nothing in the psalm, a lament mixed with other genres, that compels one to this conclusion. The community is suffering much, be it from drought or some other calamity. But whatever the original *Sitz im Leben* of this psalm may have been, one can easily see how the Korahites would have interpreted it or applied it in their postexilic struggle to reclaim positions of honor in the restoration of Israel and the temple.

- 1 O LORD, you were gracious to your land:
You restored the prosperity of Jacob,
- 2 and removed the guilt of your people.
You pardoned all their sins
(3) and held off all your anger.
You turned back from your fiery wrath.
- 4 Restore us again, O God, our Savior;
and revoke your resentment toward us.
- 5 Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you protract your wrath from age to age?
- 6 Will you not turn and give us life,
and let your people rejoice in you?
- 7 O LORD, let us see your kindness
and grant us your salvation.
- 8 Let me hear what the LORD God has to say;
for he will say “Peace!” to his people
and to his faithful,
and not let them turn to folly.
- 9 Truly his help is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Mercy and Truth have united;
Justice and Peace have embraced.

- 11 Truth will spring from the earth,
and Justice will look down from the sky.
- 12 The LORD will again grant prosperity,
and our land will yield its fruit.
- 13 Justice will go before him
and clear the way for his footsteps.

Notes

8. With this verse, there is a shift to prophetic envisioning of God's actions on behalf of the people. The peace that is announced will bring healing; for it will be united with justice. This reflects the theme of Isa 52:7 ("How beautiful upon the mountains . . . announcing

peace . . .") and reminds us that peace without justice is not true peace.

11. *Justice will look down from the sky.* Dahood (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 285-290) interprets this psalm as a prayer for rain. In Joel 2:23, God manifests his justice as fidelity to his promise to send rain in due season. Joel plays upon the words *moreh* ("teacher") and *yoreh* ("early rain").

Psalm 86

A Prayer of David.

The "servant" in this psalm and lamentation is supposedly the king. However, this alleged "prayer of David" stands out in the midst of a series of Korahite psalms and strategically advances the Korahite agenda and struggle to find acceptance as law-abiding Levites in and for the postexilic community. Thus stress is placed not only on the psalmist's purity of religion (vv. 8 and 11), but also on his purity of race (v. 16). It is noteworthy that Korah, mentioned in the Levitical works of 1 and 2 Chr, gets no mention in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah—works that demanded purity of religion and race for the reinstatement of postexilic Levites.

- 1 Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me;
for I am indigent and needy.
- 2 Preserve my life; for I am faithful.
Save your servant, O you, my God;
he entrusts himself to you.
- 3 Be gracious to me, my LORD;
for I call upon you all the day.
- 4 Gladden the soul of your servant;
for I lift up my soul to you, O LORD.
- 5 You, O LORD, are truly good and forgiving,
and full of mercy toward all who cry to you.
- 6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
attend to the voice of my plea.
- 7 In the day of my distress, I call to you;
for you will answer me.
- 8 There is not one like you among the gods, O LORD;
and not even one of their works is like yours.
- 9 All the peoples that you have made will come,
and they will bow before you, O LORD,
and they will give glory to your name.
- 10 How great you are, doing marvelous deeds!
You, O God, you alone!
- 11 Teach me your way, O LORD,

- that I may walk in your truth.
 Direct my heart to fear your name.
- 12 I will thank you, O LORD, my God, with all my heart,
 and I will glorify your name forever.
- 13 How great is your mercy toward me!
 For you saved me from the deep grave.
- 14 O God, the proud have risen against me,
 and a band of tyrants seeks my life.
 They pay no regard to you.
- 15 But you, O LORD, are a merciful and gracious God,
 slow to anger and rich in kindness and truth.
- 16 Turn to me and show me your favor.
 Give your strength to your servant,
 and save the son of your handmaid.
- 17 Work a wonder of your goodness for me.
 Then those who hate me will see and be shamed.
 O LORD, you truly help and comfort me.

Notes

1. The poet introduces the psalm with several words that mimic the wailing sound of the first person, singular pronoun, “I” (*’aniy*), and which, coincidentally with English, mean “I” (*’aniy*) or suggest the wailing of “ay, ay, ay” (*’aniy*, *’aniy*, *’aniy*).

11. *walk in your truth*. Truth, for the psalmist, is not a mere abstraction or the acknowledgement of facts. Rather, it is a matter of reliability and fidelity. We can get some feeling for this when we use the expression, “a true friend”. When we keep this in mind, the meaning of

Jesus’ statement, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6), is more easily appreciated.

13. *deep grave*. This probably refers to the psalmist’s time in exile.

16. *your servant . . . son of your handmaid*. As explained in the comments above, *’emet* includes reliability and fidelity. The psalmist takes the similarity in spelling and sound between *’emet* and *’amah* also as a similarity in meaning. Thus God’s handmaid (*’amah*) is the embodiment of faithfulness (*’emet*). This is the psalmist’s way of declaring that he, a Korahite and Levite, has a pure blood line.

Psalm 87

1 Of the Korahites. A Psalm. A Song: “She, Founded by Him on the Holy Mountains”.

The psalmist, very probably a Korahite as the superscription states, throws open the gates of Zion to all the world in an unexpected gesture of universalism. Again, in view of the Korahite agenda as explained above, this universalism serves a purpose—namely, since God is accepting of all people regardless of their race or religion, then all the more should a Korahite whose past might be religiously and/or racially tainted be accepted back into the ranks of all other Levites. Obviously, the Korahites did eventually find some recognition and status, since they were able to influence the compilation and redaction of Scripture (perhaps especially in the psalms) that emerged from postexilic times.

Generally, scholars consider this psalm to be quite disordered and laconic. However, if the word, *y^esudatow* (literally, “she, founded by him”), in v. 1 is taken as part of the psalm’s title as well as the first word of the psalm itself, then the following verses are more easily managed. The introduction or heading then reads, “To the sons of Korah, a psalm, a song: ‘she, founded by him on the holy mountains’.” The rendering given here thus begins with verse two and interprets *y^esudatow* from the psalm’s heading as the beginning of the psalm and first of a series of parallel terms that describe Jerusalem and the temple.

- 2 The LORD loves the Gates of Zion
more than all the Dwellings of Jacob.
- 3 Wonderful things are spoken about you,
O City of God:
- 4 "I will claim Rahab and Babylon among those
who know me.
Yes, O Philistia, Tyre and Ethiopia:
This man was born there."
- 5 And of Zion shall it be proclaimed:
"Everyone and everybody was born in her;
and the Most High himself will keep her secure."
- 6 As he registers the peoples, the LORD will write:
"This person was born there."
- 7 Then they will sing in chorus:
"All my origins are in you."

Notes

7. *sing in chorus*. The rendering of this verse closely follows St. Jerome's translation: *et cantabunt quasi in choris omnes fontes mei in te* ("and they will sing as in

dances, 'all my origins are in you'"). The psalmist's salient point is that the Korahites rightfully belong to the "chorus" of those who claim Zion as their origin and birthplace.

Psalm 88

A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites. To the leader: according to Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

Even Job at his lowest cannot compare to the depression of the temple singer, "Heman the Ezrahite" (cf. 1 Kings 4:31; 1 Chr 6:33). With this "psalm of the Korahites", we are presented with a climactic conclusion to the unfolding melodrama of the Korahites as they try anxiously to reinstate themselves in the good graces of the priests and the postexilic community.

- 1 O LORD, my God, my Savior!
By day I cry out; at night I stand before you.
- 2 Let my prayer come into your presence.
Incline your ear to my supplication;
- 3 for my soul is sated with sorrow,
and my life looms close to Sheol.
- 4 I have been counted with those
who go down into the Pit.
I am like a warrior bereft of strength,
- 5 left alone among the dead;
like the fallen who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more;
like those who have been cut off from your care.
- 6 You have laid me down in the lowest part of the Pit,
in the darkest darkness, in the deepest depths!
- 7 Your wrath weighs hard upon me.
All your waves overwhelm me.

- 8 You have steered my friends far away from me,
and have made me an abomination to them.
I have become a captive, and cannot escape.
- 9 My sight has grown weak, owing to my plight.
I call on you, O LORD, all the day;
to you I spread out my hands.
- 10 Will you work wonders for the Dead?
Will the Rephaim arise and offer you praise?
- 11 Will your mercy be declared in the Grave,
or your faithfulness in that Place of Perdition?
- 12 Is your greatness known in the Darkness,
or your goodness in the Land of Forgetfulness?
- 13 So I cry out to you, O LORD.
In the morning, my prayer will come before you.
- 14 Why then, O LORD, do you continue to reject me
and turn your face from me?
- 15 Downcast and dying since my youth,
I have borne your terrors; I am filled with fear.
- 16 Your wrath has come over me;
your assaults have cut me down.
- 17 All day long they cover me like a flood.
From every direction they flow over me.
- 18 You have taken friend and neighbor far away
from me,
leaving only Darkness to be my companion.

Notes

4. *warrior bereft of strength*. The poet envisions the plight of warrior paralyzed from his injuries and left lying for dead on the field of battle.

6. The poet uses plural forms to express the fullest degree of the conditions being described.

10. *the Rephaim*. With this term (essentially meaning “ancestors”), the poet calls forth volumes of imagery that only a compatriot would appreciate. It includes all of the pre-Israelite peoples of the Land of Canaan, including the Ezrahites (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 302) and the mythical giants of old (cf. Gen 6:4 and Num 13:33). The term also came to designate “the shades”,

“the abandoned”, i.e., the inhabitants of Sheol. Thus *Rephaim* also reinforces the imagery of v. 4 so as to say that the abandoned warrior must go the way of the ancestors and the giants of old, who can no longer give praise to God in spite of their former prominence and strength. These are “the twice dead”—dead as individuals and dead as a race. Extinct!

15. *Downcast and dying*. As in Ps 86:1, here also the poet, apparently suffering from chronic, poor health, employs the cry of ‘*aniy*, ‘*aniy*, which may well be rendered “Poor me!” or “Why me, LORD?”

15c. *filled with fear*. The Hebrew term used here is a *hapax legoumenon* (a one-time use of a term), and its meaning must be taken from the context.

Psalm 89

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

After hearing from Heman the Ezrahite, it is Ethan the Ezrahite's turn to speak up for the cause of the postexilic Levites. In 1 Kg 4:31, Solomon is declared to be even wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite; and 1 Chr 2 places Ethan among the wise men that were appointed by David to be singers and directors of song in the temple that David had planned but left to his successor to build. Perhaps this psalm's focus on David was a reason for ascribing its composition to Ethan the Ezrahite, supposedly the brother of Heman the Ezrahite (cf. 1 Chr 2:6; Ps 88). Also, just as Book II of the Psalter (Pss 42-72) ends with a Davidic psalm,

so does Book III (Pss 73-89) conclude with a psalm that centers on the Davidic dynasty. The theme of Ps 89 is God's faithfulness to the covenant with David. In this regard, the Ezraite-Levitical cause is given greater status and force; for, according to 1 and 2 Chronicles (Levitical redactions of the books of Samuel and Kings), David supposedly planned all the details, including the various Levitical assignments, for the temple that Solomon would build.

- 1 I will sing of your love, O LORD, forever
From one generation to the next,
I will loudly proclaim your faithfulness.**
- 2 I have indeed declared:
“Forever will your kindness endure.
You have founded the heavens;
your faithful pledge is in them.”**
- 3 “I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:**
- 4 ‘I will establish your lineage forever.
Age after age, I will uphold your throne.’”**
- 5 The heavens extol your wonder, O LORD.
Yes! And your faithfulness in the assembly
of the saints!**
- 6 Who in the heavens can compare to the LORD?
Who is like the LORD among the offspring
of the gods?**
- 7 He is the God
that is feared in the council of the saints,
mighty and more to be feared than all others
around him.**
- 8 O LORD, God of Hosts!
Who is like you, O LORD of Might?
How your faithfulness surrounds you!**
- 9 You alone prevail over the pride of the sea.
You alone subdue the surging of its surf.**
- 10 You alone crushed Rahab like a reed.
By the strength of your arm,
you have scattered your enemies.**
- 11 Yours are the heavens; the earth is yours as well,
the world and all within it.
You alone have established them.**
- 12 You alone created North and South.
Tabor and Hermon joyfully shout unto your name.**
- 13 Your arm is full of power;
your left hand is unyielding;
your right hand is held ready.**
- 14 Justice and righteousness are the dais of your throne.
Mercy and truth go before you.**
- 15 Happy the people who hear the jubilant sounds.
They will walk in the light of your face, O LORD.**
- 16 All day long they rejoice in your name.
They exult in your righteousness.**
- 17 Truly you are their glory and strength;**

- and by your good pleasure, our might is exalted.
- 18 For to the LORD belongs our prince;
to the Holy One of Israel our king.
- 19 Once you spoke in a vision to your devoted disciple,
and you said:
“I have placed a boy above a warrior.
I have raised up one chosen from the people.
- 20 I have found David my servant.
With my holy oil I have anointed him.
- 21 It is with him that my hand shall remain.
Indeed, the one that my arm will strengthen.
- 22 No enemy shall exact tribute from him;
no wicked son shall ever depose him.
- 23 I will strike down his foes before him,
and I will smite those who hate him.
- 24 My faithfulness and unfailing love will be with him,
and in my name shall his might be exalted.
- 25 I will place his left hand on the seas
and his right hand on the rivers.
- 26 He will say to me: ‘You are my Father,
my God and the rock of my salvation.’
- 27 Yes, I will indeed make him my first born,
the highest among the kings of the earth.
- 28 I will forever show him my love,
and my covenant will remain firm for him.
- 29 I will preserve his dynasty forever,
and his throne will endure as long as the heavens.
- 30 If his sons forsake my directions,
and do not walk according to my law,
- 31 if they profane my statutes,
and do not keep my commandments,
- 32 then I will punish their transgressions with a rod,
and their iniquities with heavy blows.
- 33 But I will not retract my kindness toward him;
nor will I be untrue in my faithfulness.
- 34 I will never annul my covenant;
nor undo what has passed from my lips.
- 35 By my holiness I once solemnly pledged:
‘I will never lie to David.
- 36 His dynasty shall last forever,
and his throne be like the sun before me.
- 37 Like the moon, it will endure forever:
a perpetual witness in the sky.’”
- 38 But in fact you rejected and disowned your anointed one.
You have become angry with him,
- 39 and have spurned the covenant with your servant.
You have desecrated his crown unto the earth,
- 40 and have broken down all his walls,
making ruins of his fortifications.
- 41 All those who have passed by have plundered him.

He has become a reproach to his neighbors.
 42 You have raised up the right hand of his foes;
 you have filled all his enemies with joy.
 43 Yes, you blunted the tip of his sword,
 and have not sustained him in war.
 44 You have taken away his scepter,
 and have thrust his throne to the earth.
 45 You have diminished the days of his youthful vigor,
 and have shrouded him with shame.
 46 How long, O LORD?
 Will you hide yourself forever?
 Will your anger continue to burn like a fire?
 47 Remember the brevity of my life.
 Have you created all the children of Adam
 for nothing?
 48 What person shall live and not see death?
 Can anyone save his soul from the grip of the grave?
 49 Where are your former mercies, Lord,
 which you swore to David in your faithfulness?
 50 Remember, Lord, how your servants are ridiculed,
 how I must bear all manner of insults
 from many nations.
 51 With these your enemies have taunted me, O Lord,
 in order to ridicule the steps of your anointed one.
 52 Blessed be the LORD forever.
 Amen. Amen.

Notes

2. *your faithful pledge is in them*. The Hebrew term, *'emet*, translated here with “faithful pledge”, is more often rendered as “faithfulness” or “fidelity”. But in view of the rest of the psalm, “pledge” appears to be a more adequate term, and it includes a promise of fidelity.

The term, *bahem* (“in them”) refers to “the heavens”. The preposition, *ba* (“in”), can also be employed to introduce a comparison. The passage can read “established in them” (as rendered here), or “established as firmly as the heavens”, or “established more firmly than the heavens”. The last possibility may be preferable inasmuch as the heavenly bodies were considered more stable and orderly than the things of the Earth. The psalmist wants to point out that God’s word (pledge, covenant) should be considered to be as secure as the heavens since the heavens were fully in God’s command and could serve as a sign of God’s unswerving faithfulness. Mt 24:35 applies this concept to Jesus’ words as being even more stable than the heavens: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”.

5. *extol your wonder*. In these lines, the psalmist employs a wordplay to re-enforce the point being made, namely, in v. 4 “your throne” (*kisaka*) is also “your wonder” (*pilaka*) that the heavens extol in v. 5. These are

metaphors for the Davidic covenant of everlasting kingship.

8. *your faithfulness surrounds you*. In view of the context as well as the psalmist’s use of “faithfulness” as a reference to God’s promise to David, it seems best to understand “your faithfulness surrounds you” as a reference to God’s promises and covenants.

9-10. *pride . . . Rahab . . . reed*. The expression, “pride of the sea”, refers to the swelling of the sea at high tide or as the sea appears “mounded up”, especially when viewed from land. The concept of “pride” plays into the reference to “Rahab”, meaning “arrogant” and “boisterous”.

Some translations render *kekhalal* as “like a carcass”. However, there is little justification for taking the term to mean “carcass”. The expression, “crushing a carcass”, does not produce a fitting image. The root meaning of *khll* refers to something pierced or wounded. As a verb, it means “to bore” or “pierce”. As an adjective, it refers to something profane and contemptible (cf., e.g., Ezek 21:30). God’s crushing of Rahab (the primeval monster of chaos and the sea) “like a reed” thus seems to be the image that the psalmist wishes to convey. Cf. 1 Kings 14:15, 2 Kings 18:21, Isa 36:6, and Mt 11:7.

12. This verse recalls several sacred mountains which provided a sense of geographical direction. “North” (*tsapon*) was a sacred mountain of Baal located to the north of Israel. Its name became synonymous with “north”.

15. *hear the jubilant sounds*. The Hebrew term, *l’ruw’ah*, means, first of all, “the shouting”. It also includes blasts from a horn (shophar) and cries of distress or, in this psalm, of triumph.

18. *our prince*. The MT uses the term, “our shield”. But the metaphor of “shield” applies to various forms of protection. In view of the parallelism in the two lines of this verse, “our shield” acquires a meaning that is the equivalent of “our king”. The psalmist’s interest is in king David and the temple posts that David supposedly granted to the Levites.

19. *placed a boy above*. The term, ‘ezer, translated here as “a boy”, usually means “help” or “helper”. However, ‘ezer may be equated with the Ugaritic *gʒr*, meaning “lad” or “hero” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 316). But even without this connection, the use of ‘ezer (“helper”) is fitting when taken in the sense of *aide-de-camp* (“field assistant”), which is a good designation for David as Saul’s armor bearer (cf. 1 Sam 16:21). Also, ‘ezer is used as a parallel term to ‘abdiy (“my servant”, in v. 20). Thus there is no need to modify ‘ezer to nezer, “crown” (NRSV). Perhaps the poet sees a kinship between ‘ezer and the term, ‘ezrahīy (“Ezrahite”), in the psalm’s superscription so as to associate Ethan more closely with David.

22. *exact tribute . . . wicked son*. The poet has the advantage of being able to look back upon the past and can safely point out that David never became a vassal to any other potentate, nor was his son, Absalom, successful in his attempt to overthrow his father. Cf. 2 Sam 18.

31-32. The psalmist is keen to present a wordplay between *shepet* (“commandment” or “judgment”) and *shebet* (“rod”) in the imagery that is presented in these lines.

37. This verse forms an inclusion with v. 3 and sets the stage for the complaint that the poet lays out in detail

in the remaining verses. The heavenly luminaries, especially the sun and/or the moon, were often called upon to be witnesses to royal grants in the ancient world. Now the throne of David itself is to be the witness. Since it is to last forever, it has the divine quality of immortality, and it is a “re-presentation” of the throne of God as in Ps 45:6. Cf. *Once Again the Heavenly Witness of Ps 89:38*, by Paul G. Mosca, in *JBL*, vol. 105, no. 1, March, 1986, pp. 27-37.

43. *tip of his sword*. The poet employs the unusual expression, “flint of his sword”. Perhaps this is an archaism, recalling a time when swords were made of flint stone. Since a broken stone sword would be useless, the poet’s pathos is that much more intense as he recalls the Babylonian deconstruction of the Davidic dynasty and the world’s return to chaos.

44. *scepter*. The Hebrew text of this verse reads, “You have taken away his cleanness”. However, the concept, parallel to “throne”, must apply to some object such as a “scepter” (thus the NRSV) or “crown” that represents power. A sacrificial offering may also be implied by “cleanness”—in which case, the image would be that of God’s rejection of the king’s prayers and sacrifices for success in war.

50. *your servants*. The MT uses the plural form of “servant”, which may be taken as a “plural of majesty” (e.g., “your very own servant”). However, vv. 49-52 bear the clear marks of postexilic redactors who applied “servants” in a democratic sense. Also, vv. 49-51 use *adonai* (Lord) rather than YHWH (**LORD**), which is a further indication of a postexilic date for the psalm’s redaction.

52. Most commentators maintain that at least this verse has been added to the psalm by the ancient scribe to provide a clear conclusion to the collection of psalms that constitute Book III. However, v. 52 forms an inclusion with v. 1. Thus v. 52 may come from the original poet. Cf. *Alcune osservazioni sulla conclusione del Salmo 89* (vv. 47-53), by Gianni Barbiero, in *Biblica*, vol. 88, fasc. 4, 2007, pp. 536-545.

BOOK IV: Psalms 90 - 106

Psalm 90

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Psalm 90 dwells on God's timelessness in contrast to the brevity of human life. It is uniquely ascribed to Moses, perhaps as the poet's way of acknowledging that even Moses' 120 years of life (cf. Deut 34:7) were but a brief moment in God's time. The psalmist does not lament so much the brevity of life as the fact that this short life is filled with so much grief. Cf. *Psalm 90 und die "Vergänglichkeit des Menschen"*, by Thomas Krüger, in *Biblica*, vol. 75, fasc. 2, 1994, pp. 191-219.

- 1 O LORD, you have been our haven from age to age.**
- 2 Before the mountains were born;**
before you brought forth the earth and its vastness,
from eternity to eternity you are God.
- 3 You turn man back to dust and say:**
"Return, you children of Adam."
- 4 For a thousand years in your eyes pass by**
like yesterday,
like a watch in the night.
- 5 You grant them offspring while they sleep:**
By morning it sprouts like grass,
- 6 in the morning it flourishes and flowers,**
by evening it is cut down and dries up.
- 7 Similarly we are ravaged by your wrath,**
and by your anger are we tormented.
- 8 You have set our iniquities in front of you,**
our secret sins in the light of your face.
- 9 Alas, all our days pass away in your anger.**
We expend our years with a moan.
- 10 Our lifespan may come to seventy years,**
or, God willing, even to eighty years.
But even the best of these are only so much grieving
and emptiness;
for life passes swiftly, and we are no more.
- 11 Who knows the full force of your anger?**
Even your timidity is like your wrath.
- 12 Teach us how to calculate our days;**
then we will acquire hearts of wisdom.
- 13 When will you return, O LORD?**
Show pity to your servants!
- 14 Fill us with your kindness in the morning,**
and let us rejoice and be glad all our days,
- 15 Make us glad for as many days as you humbled us,**
for as many years as we have seen only sorrow.
- 16 Let your work be seen by your servants,**
and your majesty be upon their children.
- 17 And may the sweetness of the LORD our God**

be upon us,
and may he bring us success
for the work of our hands.
May you indeed give success
to the work of our hands.

Notes

3. *You turn. . . to dust.* The wordplay on “turn” and “return” also plays on the idea of “repent” (cf. vv.8 and 13). The term, *dak’a*, generally translated as “dust”, refers to that which has been crushed. Here it applies to the enslavement of the exiles. Also it recalls the creation of Adam from dust (Gen 2:7).

5. *it sprouts.* I.e., “they (children) sprout”.

10. *God willing.* This is the sense of *bigburot*, which refers to the strength of God rather than to human effort or one’s health and strength. Cf. *Erwägungen zur Struktur des 90. Psalms*, by Stefan Schreiner, in *Biblica*, vol. 59, fasc.1, 1978, pp. 80-90, specifically p. 85. Our contemporary idiom is “with luck”.

12. *calculate our days.* The days to be calculated are not the days of one’s life, but the duration of God’s wrath. Knowing the term of God’s wrath is to participate in God’s wisdom.

16-17. This plea concludes the psalm’s climax that begins with v. 13. In effect, the poet asks that God might “return” (“repent”) and bless our labors so as to give them and our lives some relief and meaning.

Excursus: On Psalm 90:5-10

In these verses, a single 24-hour-day is envisioned as the life-span of a human being—conceived at night (cf. Ps 127:2), born in the morning, and cut down by nightfall. This scenario is likened to the sowing and growth of grass in the desert conditions well-known to the people of the middle-eastern lands and especially to the exiles in Babylon. The key to unraveling these difficult verses is in the double meanings of the term, *zaram* (“to flood”, “to pour down rain”, and given here as “grant offspring”) and in the twofold use and implied double meaning of *boqer* (“morning”), further explained below.

The term, *zaram*, refers especially to an effusion either of water or of male semen. The psalmist, without endorsing the fertility cults of the times, employs both concepts, which, for the psalmist, are really a single concept: Insemination and conception of offspring in nature and in human beings is God’s doing; for God is the creator and father of all. It was common “wisdom” among ancient peoples that rain, Father Sky’s semen, brings forth produce when sown in Mother Earth. Since a downpour of rain or a flood of water (i.e., irrigation, which was well-known to the exiles—cf. Ps 137:1) causes seed in the ground to germinate, the psalmist applies this imagery to God in giving offspring to man, beast, and field (cf. Deut 7:12-14). Yet, just as grass

sprouts and flourishes quickly upon being watered, and then dries up and dies from the “wrath” of the day’s heat, so too is the “lived-experience” of humankind in general and particularly of the enslaved exiles, who compare themselves to their enslaved ancestors in Egypt. Thus the poet or “poet-redactor” ascribes the psalm to Moses, the “man of God” who prays for the people in spite of and because of their rebelliousness (cf. Deut 9:24-29). The psalmist explains that the people are in exile because “You [God] have set our iniquities before you”. This sense of divine punishment for sin is characteristic of the Deuteronomic writers and of the exilic and postexilic communities.

Verses 5 and 6 are strongly linked by the use of “morning” in each verse. The consonantal matrix of morning is *bqr*, which, with slightly different vowel pointing, can also refer to plowing and to cattle. The two meanings are really not unrelated. Just as the plow opens the earth, so too does dawn open the day—the “field” of human labor. The poet’s double use of *baboqer* (“in the morning”) is not a scribal error. Rather, it implies the field work and labor of the exiles as they compare themselves to oxen plowing the fields of their masters. In plowing, the seed which was scattered on the ground is turned under. With water, it sprouts and grows. But the plants are eventually “cut down” to wither and die—and the cycle begins again. In the morning plowing, the grass is planted; and during the morning it sprouts—but only to be cut down and die in the evening.

There may also be a remote possibility that the psalmist sees and hears a similarity in meaning between *zaram* (in the sense of “inseminate”) and *zara’* (“to sow seed”, “to fructify”). In any case, both the LXX (“their contempt will be years”) and St. Jerome (“when you strike them, they will sleep”) saw some of this meaning in this psalm and tried to mollify the implied sexual imagery.

This excursus is the result of the present writer’s reading of the material noted below. But the interpretation of the material may not necessarily be something with which the authors agree.

- Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 324, states that “sleep” is “an accusative of time”—thus, “while they sleep”.

- Charles Whitley, *The Text of Psalm 90,5*, in *Biblica*, vol. 63, fasc. 4, 1982, pp. 555-557, in reference to *zirmatam* “their offspring” (p. 556).

- Th. Booij, *Psalm 90,5-6: Junction of Two Traditional Motifs*, in *Biblica*, vol. 68, fasc. 3, 1987, pp. 393-396, clarifies some of the connection between sleep and helplessness or death.

Psalm 91

This psalm's first line functions also as a title—much in the way that people in our day may refer to the *Lord's Prayer* as “The Our Father”. Who is speaking and who is being addressed is not always clear due to the alternation between third and second person forms. Along with other psalms of Books IV and V, Ps 91 extends the “existential problem” (the experience of life's difficulties and brevity from Ps 90) into a lengthened experience of an individual rather than of a community. Cf. Krüger, *ibid.*, pp. 213-219.

- 1 May he who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
remain in the shadow of the Almighty,**
- 2 saying to the LORD:
“My refuge and my stronghold!
My God in whom I trust!”**
- 3 Yes, he will free you from the snare of the fowler,
and from the destructive plague.**
- 4 With his feathers, he will shield you;
under his wings you will take refuge,
his truth serving as buckler and shield.**
- 5 You will fear neither the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,**
- 6 nor the plague that stalks in the darkness,
nor the infirmity that strikes at noon.**
- 7 Though a thousand may fall at your left,
and ten thousand at your right hand,
it will not come near to you.**
- 8 If you will but look with your eyes,
then you will see how the wicked are repaid.**
- 9 Because you made the LORD your refuge,
the Most High to be your dwelling place,**
- 10 no harm shall befall you,
and no plague approach your tent.**
- 11 For he entrusts his angels to you,
to watch over you in all your ways.**
- 12 They will raise you up on their hands,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.**
- 13 You shall tread on the lion and the asp;
upon the young lion and the viper you shall trample.**
- 14 If he puts his love in me, I will rescue him.
I will lead him to safety,
if he acknowledges my Name.**
- 15 Let him call on me, and I will answer him.
I will be with him in distress,
and I will rescue him and glorify him.**
- 16 I will fill him with the fullness of life,
and let him see my saving power.**

Notes

5. It may be that “the terror of the night” is a reference to packs of wild dogs (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 331; Ps 59:15). This understanding fits the context well.

A pack of dogs and an arrow are visible objects that move invisibly, and a plague and an infirmity are invisible except in their effects.

10. *no plague approach your tent*. The poet's use of "tent" preserves the archaic flavor of the poem, and the passage calls to mind the "passing over" of the Angel of Death in Ex 12:21ff. The smearing of a lamb's blood on the tent posts appears to be an ancient practice of the nomadic ancestors of the Israelites that was undertaken when the flocks were to be moved from winter quarters to summer pastures. The smeared blood was intended to ward off evil spirits (considered to be the cause of illness), so that one's tent would be free of all harm after the move to summer pastures. The Exodus account gives the practice cultic meaning. Cf. "Passover" in, *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. By John L. McKenzie, S.J., 1965.

13. The animals named, although real enough to the ancient traveler, are also symbolic of enemies and trials. Such imagery casts light on Mk 16:17f, ". . . by using my name they will cast out demons; . . . they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them" (NRSV).

16. *fullness of life*. This verse answers the question about the brevity of life that Ps 90 raises. The answer is that the just person calls upon God and God responds with protection and life. This perception is presented at the beginning of this psalm, whose initial verses form a statement of welcome to the pilgrim upon entering the temple and finding shelter "in the shadow of the Almighty"—a possible reference to the two Cherubim with spread wings over the Ark of the Covenant.

Psalm 92

A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath Day.

Various commentators note that the seven references to "LORD" in this psalm may be the reason why it is entitled "A Song for the Sabbath Day". It is a song of praise with a sapiential savor, extolling God's works in creation and in "the redemptive acts in the history of the covenant" (Stuhlmueeller, *ibid.*, p. 75).

- 1 It is good to praise the LORD ,
and to sing to your name, Elyon,**
- 2 to manifest your mercy in the morning,
and your truth during the vigils of the night,**
- 3 with music from the lute and the lyre,
with a meditation from the harp.**
- 4 Because you have given me reason to rejoice,
O LORD ,
I will praise you aloud for the works of your hands.**
- 5 How great are your works, O LORD !
How very deep are your thoughts!**
- 6 A senseless person cannot know this,
and a fool cannot understand,**
- 7 that even though the wicked thrive like grass,
and all the evildoers seem to flourish,
they are destined for eternal damnation.**
- 8 But you, O LORD , are eternally exalted.**
- 9 Ah, look at your enemies, O LORD !
Oh, see how your enemies expire!
All those scoundrels will be scattered.**
- 10 But you have bolstered my vigor
like that of the wild ox.
I have been anointed with fresh oil.**
- 11 My eye looks down upon those who despise me,
upon those who rise up against me.
My ears overhear their evil schemes.**

- 12 The just will flourish like the palm tree,
and grow like the cedars of Lebanon.
13 Those who are planted in the house of the LORD
will flourish in the courts of our God.
14 They will thrive even in old age,
and remain strong and supple, declaring:
15 “How upright is the LORD my rock,
in whom there is no deceit!”

Notes

2. *vigils of the night*. The Hebrew text reads “nights”. The plural form, however, is best understood as a reference to the night watches.

6. The senseless and fools are not necessarily unintelligent people; but they are ignorant of true wisdom. Otherwise, they would realize that the ways of the wicked do not lead to true life.

10b. Fresh oil would be oil that is “full-strength”, imparting its power to the newly anointed king.

Psalm 93

This brief psalm celebrates the LORD’s conquest over chaos. The imagery is drawn largely from ancient Ugaritic and Phoenician mythologies. Psalm 93 “belongs to the long tradition, reaching back most probably to the reign of Solomon when it absorbed many Canaanite expressions and motifs and yet was much at home in the exile and postexilic age when an archaizing tendency revived many of these same expressions” (cf. Stuhlmueller, *ibid.*, p. 79). The psalm was very probably used in the autumn festival, which focused on God’s creative acts and power to order all things for the benefit of humankind.

- 1 The LORD reigns; he is robed with majesty.
The Lord is robed; he is girded with power.
As surely as the world was set in place,
never to pass away,
2 so your throne was set in place from of old.
You are eternal.
3 The rivers have resounded, O LORD .
The storms have thundered their cry.
The oceans have raised an uproar.
4 More impressive than the wailing of many waters,
more fascinating than the billows of the sea,
is the LORD, magnificent on high.
5 Your adornment is most becoming;
holiness enhances your house, O LORD,
forever and ever more.

Notes

1. In keeping with ancient cosmology, the psalmist sees the world as permanently fixed in place and time. The NT views Jesus’ words as even more lasting than the Law or heaven and earth. Cf. Mt 24:35.

3. In view of this psalm’s recasting of the LORD’s victory over the primordial forces of chaos, these three lines recall the three sources of water in Israel’s depiction of the Great Deluge. Cf. Gen 7:11-17.

4-5. These verses depict the result of the LORD’s conquest of the *n^eharowt* (the flood waters). The main focus is on the magnificence of the heavens—the place of God’s enthronement. The proper understanding of the text demands careful attention to the psalmist’s wordplay in regard to the use of *’addiyar* (“excellent”, “magnificent”) and the root, *’dh*, which is given here as “adornment” rather than “decrees”. The psalmist does not hesitate to make use of the *’dh* to speak of God’s magnificence in the beauty of the heavens surrounding

God's throne. The account may apply secondarily to the temple in Jerusalem.

Psalm 94

The first half of Ps 94 is a national lament. The second half amounts to practical application of principles in individual lives, giving the psalm a sapiential turn. But there is no single literary genre in the psalm. Its main theme is stated in the first line: God repays sinners their just deserts. The psalmist asks how much longer will the wicked prevail. The enumeration of their crimes and the kinds of crimes committed point to the conditions in northern Israel that the prophets such as Hosea had to confront after Solomon's death.

- 1 The God of retribution, the LORD,
the God of retribution blazed forth!**
- 2 O judge of the earth, arise!
Repay the proud their just reward.**
- 3 How long will the wicked, O LORD,
how much longer will the wicked rejoice?**
- 4 How much longer will they prattle
and speak arrogantly?
How much longer will all these evildoers congratulate themselves?**
- 5 They oppress your people, O LORD;
and they harm your inheritance.**
- 6 They waylay the widow and the wayfarer,
and they massacre mere orphans.**
- 7 Then they declare:
“The LORD takes no note of this,
and the God of Jacob pays no heed.”**
- 8 Think, you most thoughtless of people!
You dullards, when will you understand?**
- 9 Is the one who planted the ear unable to hear?
If he also designed the eye, is he unable to see?**
- 10 Should the one who chastises nations not mete out punishment?
The one who teaches man, the LORD,**
- 11 knows that man's thinking amounts to nothing.**
- 12 How blessed is the one whom you discipline, O LORD,
the one whom you instruct according to your Law,**
- 13 to whom you grant serenity during times of evil,
while a pit is dug for the sinner.**
- 14 Surely the LORD will not cast off his people;
nor will he let his legacy come to naught.**
- 15 Instead, fair judgment together
with all righteous hearts will return once more.**
- 16 Who stood up for me against the wicked?
Who defended me against the sinners?**
- 17 If the LORD had not been for me,
my soul would have quickly come to dwell in silence.**
- 18 When I thought, “My foothold is failing,”
your great love sustained me, O LORD.**

- 19 When my inmost concerns became too many,
your comfort gave joy to my soul.
- 20 Can the throne of injustice be allied with you,
doing its damage by condoning an unjust law?
- 21 They banded together against the life of the just,
and they condemned the blood of the innocent.
- 22 But the LORD was with me as a haven,
and God became my rock of refuge.
- 23 He brought their evil back upon them,
and he cut them off in their sins.
The LORD our God cut them off.

Notes

1. *blazed forth*. With support from several ancient renderings, some modern translations emend the MT to make the verb into an imperative form. But the LXX does not support this emendation, and the alternation between third and second person in the verbs is frequent in the psalms. “Blazed forth” or “shone forth” may indicate lightning as an epiphany of God. In any case, the past tense form indicates that the psalm is not purely lamentation. God has acted, and the psalmist gives thanks.

17. *dwell in silence*. This expression employs the difficult term *duwmah*, usually translated as “silence” and indicating the finality of death, much as we might use the expression, “in the grip of the grave”.

20. *an unjust law*. The term, “doing” (*yotser*), has the same root as “protect”. Thus the translation here includes both nuances with the rendering, “doing . . . by condoning”. The rendering for *‘amal* (“damage”) is given as *laborem* (“work”) by St. Jerome. When the Hebrew root, *‘ml*, is pointed to read *‘omal*, it may mean

“work” or “worker”. In view of the psalmist’s use of terms with multiple meanings, the slang expression, “dirty work”, very aptly conveys the meaning and feeling of the Hebrew text.

The expression, “an unjust law”, is usually translated with “by statute” (NRSV) or “in the name of law” (NAB) or similar wording. The colon ends with the term, *khoq* (“law” or “statute”), preceded by the term, *‘aley*, which is usually taken as a preposition meaning “by means of”. However, the root, *‘lh*, from which *‘aley* is derived, has the basic meaning of “height” and “ascend” as well as “injustice”. Hebrew has compound terms, especially when combined with a negative term, that intensify the concept. Thus *‘aley-khok* is more than a simple prepositional phrase meaning “by means of law”. Rather, it states in itself that the statute or precept is an unjust law. The psalmist’s use of *yotser ‘amal* is deliberate since it forms an inclusion with v. 9, which notes that God “designed the eye” (*yotser ‘ayin*). Thus God, who does marvels and protects the psalmist, is contrasted with the doers of injustice who seek to undo the psalmist.

Psalm 95

This is a processional psalm to the temple and into the sanctuary. It is modeled on the “procession” of the Israelites in the Exodus. The psalm contains elements from the Deuteronomic (northern) tradition and from Second Isaiah (Isa 40-55), that is, from the exile experience. The LORD is king and supreme over all the earth. These portrayals mark the psalm as postexilic, and its abrupt ending was intended to stir up fervent commitment to Sabbath observance within the postexilic community. Cf. Heb 10:25. Using the same approach and Exodus schema, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews in the NT confronted the problem of declining zeal among the addressees to stir up fervor for “church attendance” among the discouraged and persecuted Christian recipients of the letter. Cf. Heb 4.

- 1 Come, let us sing out with joy to the LORD!
Let us hail the Rock of our salvation!
- 2 Let us come before him with praise.
With songs of praise, let us greet him.
- 3 For the LORD is a mighty God,
a mighty king above all gods.

- 4 The earth's foundations are in his hands;
and the lofty mountains belong to him.
- 5 To him alone belongs the sea;
for he was the one to create it,
and his were the hands that shaped the dry land.
- 6 Enter now and let us bow down and adore.
Let us kneel before the LORD who made us.
- 7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock of his fold.
If today you hear his voice,
(8) do not harden your hearts as at Meribah,
as on that day at Massah in the desert,
(9) when your fathers tried me,
when they tested me even after they saw my work.
- 10 For forty years I was disgusted with that generation,
and I said:
"They are a nation whose heart has gone astray,
and they are unaware of my ways."
- 11 Because of this, I swore in my anger,
"Never will they enter my rest!"

Notes

1. The "rock" mentioned here probably refers both to God and to the rock from which the Israelites were able to drink during the Exodus. But "rock" also recalls the temple itself. In 1 Cor 10:4, St. Paul interprets the rock as Christ, to whom all saving acts, past, present, and future, are ascribed.

4-5. These two verses form a "nested chiasmus". As translated and written here, 4a and 5c form the outer chiasmus, while 4b and 5a and 5b form the inner or nested chiasmus.

7. *of his fold*. The more usual translation, "the sheep of his hand", is lacking in clear meaning. The word, *yod* ("hand"), can also refer to a specific place or area (*Bereich* in German) as well as "care" as in "a caring hand". The English pastoral term, "fold", covers most of the imagery that the Hebrew text conveys. The image of a flock within its fold is further exploited in the next line, since a shepherd did not drive the sheep out of the fold, but rather called them forth from the fold to lead them to pasture.

8. *Meribah . . . Massah*. These two names for the same place and event (cf. Ex 17:7) reflect two traditions:

"strife" (Priestly) and "testing" (Deuteronomic). The psalmist emphasizes the Deuteronomic tradition to admonish against hardening one's heart and testing God "today", i.e., in the Exile. Cf. *Psalm 95: Text, Context, and Intertext*, by W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., in *Biblica*, vol. 81, fasc. 4, 2000, pp. 533-541.

10-11. *swore in my anger . . . my rest*. Here we have the image of an unruly flock that has departed from "the beaten path" (the Torah) and continues on its carefree way, not even aware that its shepherd has left them to their own devices and to suffer the consequences. The poet uses a most appropriate term in stating that God "swore" (*nishabba'tiy*), i.e., made a binding oath. The terms, "swear" *shaba'* and *shabbat* have very similar roots and are "related" by way of the number "seven" (*sheba'*); for an oath means to bind oneself sevenfold. Since resting on the seventh day is also the prescription of the Torah, *shabbat* comes also to mean "observance" as well as "rest". The term, "my rest" (*m^enukhtiy*), refers to "the promised land" as the fold of God's flock. With these terms, the poet presents the force and meaning of Sabbath observance in its relationship to Israel's occupation of the Promised Land.

Psalm 96

When the house was built after the captivity (*thus the LXX*)

This psalm's opening statement asks us to sing "a new song" to the LORD, which means to celebrate a saving event, such as a recent victory over an

enemy. However, no specific event is ascribed to this psalm, which is cited in 1 Chr 16:23-33 in regard to David's bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The writers of 1 and 2 Chr are generally considered to be postexilic Levites, who would see the procession with the Ark as an analog of the return of the exiles to Israel. This is the reason for "a new song" (cf. Isa 42:10). The invitation, "Bring an offering and come to his courts" (v. 8b), would indicate that the temple has been reconstructed after the exile, as noted in the superscription. The psalmist, mindful of the idols that at times had found a place in the former temple, is especially sharp in putting down the gods of the pagans, lest the new temple again be polluted by their presence. This is the mindset behind the returned exiles' refusal to let the Samaritans help with the reconstruction of the temple and in Ezra's denunciation of mixed marriages (cf. Ezra 4 and 9-10).

- 1 Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.**
- 2 Sing to the LORD, bless his name.
Day after day, spread the news of his salvation.**
- 3 Proclaim his glory among the nations,
to all the peoples his wondrous works.**
- 4 Yes, the LORD is great and highly to be praised.
He is to be feared beyond all gods.**
- 5 For all the gods of the peoples are mere dummies.
But the LORD created the heavens.**
- 6 Glory and majesty are before his face,
strength and splendor in his holy place.**
- 7 Give to the LORD, you families of the nations,
give to the LORD glory and power.**
- 8 Give to the LORD the glory of his name.
Bring an offering and come to his courts.**
- 9 In holy splendor, bow down to the LORD.
Stand in awe before him, all the earth.**
- 10 Say to the nations: "The LORD reigns."
As surely as the earth is established,
so as not to be moved,
he will judge the peoples impartially.**
- 11 Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad.
Let the sea thunder, and its fullness.
Let the field exult, and all within it.**
- 12 Then shall every tree in the forest shout for joy
at the presence of the LORD.**
- 13 For he is coming; and he will come to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in justice,
and the peoples with his truth.**

Notes

5. *mere dummies*. It is difficult to match the expression and feeling of the Hebrew text of these lines. The psalmist plays on the words, *'elohiym* (gods) and *'eliliym*, translated here as "mere dummies". The term, *'eliliym*, is usually translated as "idols" or "nothings". The term's etymology and actual meaning remain unsure. But a likely etymology is *'ellem* ("dumb", "mute"). The term, *'eliliym*, is clearly derogatory, and

"dummies" in its various meanings coincides well with *'eliliym*. St. Jerome translates it with *sculptilia* ("carved figurines", "knickknacks"), a denigrating diminutive in place of the highly regarded *sculptura*. The LXX translates with *δαίμονια* ("demons"). By referencing God as the creator of all, the psalmist affirms God's superiority over the idols of the nations. Cf. also Ps 115; 1 Cor 8.

6. *his holy place*. The **LORD**'s "holy place" or "sanctuary" is, first of all, the heavens with their luminous array in attendance.

9. *in holy splendor*. The glory and splendor of the heavens are God's robe. The **LORD**'s courts are the

heavens, and his garment is brocaded with the celestial luminaries. The furnishings of the temple were intended to assist the worshipper experience God's celestial glory. Cf. Ezek 10; Ps 29:2b; Ps 104.

Psalm 97

This picturesque, postexilic psalm draws much from Second Isaiah and other psalms and portrays God according to Canaanite mythology—surrounded in fire and hurling thunderbolts at the earth. God's justice (where the previous psalm left off) is center stage and brings joy and peace. The first half of the psalm is a theophany, and the second half depicts the results of the theophany for all, the good and the wicked.

- 1 The LORD rules; let the earth rejoice.
Let the countless coastlands be glad.**
- 2 Clouds and darkness surround him.
Justice and right are the foundation of his throne.**
- 3 Fire advances before his face,
setting fire to his foes on all sides.**
- 4 His lightning illuminates the world.
The earth sees it and is terrified.**
- 5 The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
before the master of all the earth.**
- 6 The heavens reveal his justice,
and all peoples see his glory.**
- 7 Let everyone enslaved to a carved image,
all who boast in their dumb idols, blush for shame.
All you gods, bow down to him.**
- 8 Zion hears and rejoices.
The daughters of Judah delight in your judgments,
O LORD.**
- 9 For you, O LORD, are most high above all the earth,
highly exalted above all the gods.**
- 10 The LORD, who loves those who hate evil,
who saves the lives of his holy ones,
will free them from the grasp of the wicked.**
- 11 Light is sown for the righteous,
and gladness for the upright of heart.**
- 12 Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous ones;
give thanks to his holy name.**

Notes

7. *dumb idols*. Cf. the notes for the previous psalm, v. 5. The poet is not so much intent on denying the existence of gods as he/she is intent on showing their ineffectiveness. Cf. Stulmueller, *ibid.*, p. 88.

11. *Light is sown*. In this verse, "light" is parallel to "gladness", indicating that "light" has virtually the same

meaning as "gladness". In Esther 8:15f, Mordechai is dressed in royal finery, "while the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced", and "for the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honor". The image of light being sown like seed is sown fits well with the Hebrew *boqer* (morning) and the concept of plowing. Cf. Ps 46:5 and note.

Psalm 98

A Psalm.

No particular event is associated with this psalm of praise; but the redaction of the postexilic community is evident in the theme of judgment. Verses 1-3 announce God's saving action (liberation of the exiles), which is festively and liturgically celebrated in vv. 4-6. Throughout the psalms and the Hebrew Scriptures, "victory" over enemies and "salvation" are virtually synonymous. The eschatological victory over death is God's ultimate and most decisive act of salvation. Cf. Isa 28:8; 1 Cor 15:54.

- 1 Sing to the LORD a new song;
for he has done wondrous works!
His right hand and his holy arm have brought him victory.**
- 2 The LORD has revealed his saving power.
He has manifested his righteousness in the sight
of the nations.**
- 3 He has remembered his love and fidelity
for the House of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation
of our God.**
- 4 Shout to the LORD, all the earth.
Break into song and shout for joy.**
- 5 With the harp sing psalms to the LORD,
with voice raised in song and with the harp.**
- 6 With trumpets and the sound of the horn,
rejoice in the presence of the King, the LORD.**
- 7 Let the sea and all within it thunder;
the world and its inhabitants.**
- 8 Let the rivers clap their hands.
In unison let the mountains shout for joy
(9) at the presence of the LORD;
for he is coming to judge the earth.**
- 10 He will judge the world with justice
and the peoples with righteousness.**

Notes

6. *King, the Lord.* This is particularly interesting in that the **LORD** is now proclaimed as Israel's king. This recalls the time when Samuel tried to discourage the establishment of a king (1 Sam 8:7; cf. also 1 Sam 12:12). With the demise of the Davidic dynasty due to the exile, the postexilic community is moved, at least in part, to enthrone the **LORD** as their only true king and ruler.

7-10. The festive liturgy of the previous verses now expands to include the most outstanding features of the natural world. Their joy is that the **LORD** is coming to judge the world with justice—the very quality that was

almost always absent in the kings of pre-exilic times. The postexilic scribe is again looking at Samuel. His mother, Hannah, brings the child to the temple and prophetically proclaims: "The adversaries of the **LORD** shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the **LORD** shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed" (1 Sam 2:10). The psalmist has adopted this passage to the extent that it speaks of the **LORD** as judge who will come to reclaim that role. Early Christians viewed this passage and this psalm as messianic: "and he (Jesus Christ) will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead" (Nicene Creed).

The opening lines of this psalm are replete with subtleties that cannot be well expressed aside from the Hebrew text and an appreciation of the mindset of the Hebrew people. The psalmist uses the term, '*ammiym*' ("peoples"), so as to include its various possible meanings: "the peoples", "the nations", "the strong ones", and "the hidden ones". Moreover, since ancient nations identified themselves by means of their gods, these renderings are virtually synonymous with "the gods", especially when the psalmist either verbally or conceptually makes a wordplay on '*ammiym*' and '*elohiym*', as is the case in Ps 97. Thus, "Let the peoples tremble" also means, "Let the gods tremble". It is the holiness of the **LORD** at which the gods and nations must tremble. This holiness extends to the very name of the **LORD** (Yahweh) and even to his "footstool" (i.e., Mount Zion and/or the Ark of the Covenant); "for holy is the **LORD** our God."

- 1 The LORD reigns! Let the peoples tremble.
He is enthroned upon the cherubim.
Let the earth quake.**
- 2 The LORD is without equal in Zion.
He is superior to all the nations.**
- 3 Let them praise your name,
ever so great and awesome, ever so holy!**
- 4 A mighty king, lover of justice!
You have indeed established integrity.
You have secured right and justice in Jacob.**
- 5 Give praise to the LORD our God.
Bow down by his footstool, ever so holy!**
- 6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests;
and Samuel was among those who invoked his name.
They called unto the LORD,
and he himself answered them.**
- 7 From the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them.
They were true to his commandments,
and kept the law which he gave them.**
- 8 O LORD our God, you yourself answered them.
You were a forgiving God to them,
yet dealing sternly with their misdeeds.**
- 9 Praise the LORD our God!
Bow down upon his holy mountain.
For holy is the LORD our God.**

Notes

1-2. The **LORD**'s enthronement "upon the cherubim" is a reference to God's reign from the heavens (with the clouds serving as the cherubim) as well as his presence over the cherubim figures in the Holy of Holies. Consequently, the imagery that is presented here is that of heaven and earth trembling and quaking at the **LORD**'s superiority over all. The usual translation of the next line states that "the **LORD** is great in Zion". However, the Hebrew text is working with a comparative structure here, and *gadol*, when rendered simply as "great", lacks

the proper force—namely, that the **LORD** "is without equal in Zion" and "superior to all the nations", i.e., "superior to all the gods" as well.

6. *Moses and Aaron . . . and Samuel*. The postexilic scribe-psalmist appears to be a priest and is intent on advancing "Moses as priest" over "Moses as prophet". Samuel thus becomes the prophet *par excellence*, even being included among those to whom God spoke "from the pillar of the cloud". The **LORD** alone is king (v. 4) and sets the priests to be "first among equals".

Psalm 100

A Psalm of Thanksgiving.

This is another psalm in this series of royal psalms proclaiming the **LORD** as king. As in Ps 95, it is the shepherd-king that is recalled. This prepares the way for the next psalm, ascribed to David, the shepherd-king. Psalm 100 is probably a pre-exilic text that “inspired” the writing of Ps 95 in exilic times when “the psalmist felt he could no longer make such absolute statements as the psalmist in Ps 100[:5] once did”. Cf. *Psalm 95: Text, Context, and Intertext*, by W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., in *Biblica*, vol. 81, fasc. 4, 2000, p. 537.

- 1 Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.**
- 2 Serve the LORD with gladness.**
Come into his presence singing for joy.
- 3 Know that the LORD is God.**
He made us, and we belong to him.
We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
- 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving,**
his courts with songs of praise.
Give thanks to him and bless his name.
- 5 For the LORD is good.**
His mercy is forever,
and his faithfulness from age to age.

Notes

3. The MT of the rendering, “and we belong to him”, reads *w^lo’ ’anakhnuw* (literally, “and we not”). The difference depends on the spelling and pointing of the vocalization of *lo*, either as *l’o* (*lamed-aleph*, “not”) or as *low* (*lamed-waw*, “to him”). Given this clear difference in spelling and in meaning, it is difficult to

believe that the Masoretes misread or ignored the texts that they consulted. Thus, the line may very well mean, “and we did not make ourselves”, or “and we are nothing in ourselves”, or “when we were nothing”—any one of which connects very well with the rest of the text. The rendering of *low* as “to him” follows the manner in which St. Jerome and other ancient and modern sources render the passage.

Psalm 101

Of David. A Psalm.

Psalm 101 has several affinities with Psalm 18, in which the speaker proclaims innocence and faithfulness to God. In Pss 18, 72, and 101, the king's innocence pertains to his qualifications for upholding the covenant. “The royal theology contained in Psalm 101 draws upon the sacred covenant tradition on which Israel was founded and the inherited sapiential tradition that flourished and was nurtured by the scribes attached to the royal court”. Cf. *Code of Conduct for a King: Psalm 101*, by Helen Ann Kenik, O.P., in *JBL*, vol. 93, no. 3, September, 1976, p. 403. The psalm may have served both as an enthronement psalm at the time of the king's coronation and again at the anniversary celebrations of the king's enthronement.

- 1 I will sing of mercy and justice.**
To you, O LORD, I will sing my songs.
- 2 I will inquire into the way of innocence.**
When will you come to me?
I have walked with blameless heart

- in the midst of my house.
- 3 I have not set anything base before my eyes.
I have detested the designing way of apostates.
It shall never appeal to me.
 - 4 Let a perverse heart turn away from me.
Let me not befriend an evil person.
 - 5 I silence anyone
who has secretly slandered a neighbor.
I do not allow anyone to be haughty-eyed
or proud-hearted.
 - 6 My eyes look for the faithful of the earth,
to be the ones to reside with me.
The one who walks on the way of innocence
will be the one who ministers to me.
 - 7 No one guilty of deceit shall dwell within my house;
the fabricator of lies will not stand before my eyes.
 - 8 At dawn I cut off all the wicked in the land,
so as to banish all evildoers from the city of the LORD.

Notes

2. *inquire into*. The verb, *sakal*, meaning “act wisely” or “ponder” (rendered here as “inquire into”), may also be synonymous with “sing” in view of its parallel association with “sing” in v. 1. Cf. Dahood, *Anchor Bible*, vol. 17A, p. 3. Moreover, a number of psalms are identified as a *maskil* (a “didactic poem”), which instruct the hearers by asking relevant questions.

3. *anything base*. This expression may refer to idols, and “apostates” may well be idolaters—“those who have turned away” (*setiym*) from the LORD to return to the worship of idols.

6. Walking “the way of innocence” forms an inclusion with v. 2 and reinforces the claim that one cannot lead a moral life without the LORD.

Psalm 102

A prayer of one afflicted, when faint and pleading before the LORD.

Psalm 102, the lament of an exiled Israelite suffering from grave illness, is the fifth of the seven penitential psalms. As in Ps 90, the psalmist contrasts the brevity of life with the permanence of God. By the end of the psalm, even the heavens, analogous to God's robes, wear out and are discarded. But because children are yet to be born, the psalm concludes in hope for humanity. Verses 1-12 and 23-27 are the lament of an individual, while verses 13-22 and 28 could well be postexilic additions to the psalm.

- 1 O LORD, hear my prayer, and let my cry come to you.
- 2 Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress.
Incline your ear to me.
On the day I call, promptly answer me.
- 3 For my days are consumed in smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.
- 4 Withered like grass, so parched is my heart
that I even forget to eat my bread.
- 5 As a result of my loud groaning,
I have become skin and bone.
- 6 I have become like a pelican in the wilderness,

like the fledgling bird in the desert.

7 I am unable to sleep;
and I have become like a sparrow,
a twittering bird on the rooftop.

8 All day long, my enemies mock me.
Those exulting over me have placed a curse upon me:

9 that I should eat ashes like bread,
and mingle my drink with tears.

10 Because of your fury and anger,
you have first exalted me
and then have cast me down.

11 My days are like a gaunt shadow,
and I dry up like the grass.

12 But you, O LORD, will reign forever,
and your renown will last age after age.

13 You will arise and show mercy to Zion.
For it is the season to be tender to her.
Indeed, the favorable moment has arrived.

14 For your servants love her very stones;
even her dust they cherish dearly.

15 The nations will fear your name, O LORD,
and all the kings of the earth your glory.

16 When the LORD builds Zion anew,
he will appear in his glory.

17 He will regard the prayer of the needy;
and he will not disparage their pleading.

18 Let this be recorded for a future generation;
so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD!

19 "He has looked down from his high and holy sanctuary.
From heaven to earth, the LORD has looked down
(20) to hear the sighing of the prisoners,
to set free the children doomed to death,

21 that they may announce the name of the LORD on Zion,
and declare his praise in Jerusalem,

22 when the peoples gather together,
and the kingdoms serve the LORD."

23 He has sapped my strength in mid-course.
He has shortened my days.

24 I say: "My God,
do not take me away in the midst of my days.
Your years endure for all generations.

25 You founded the earth long ago,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

26 They will perish, while you continue to endure.
They will all grow old like a garment.
You will discard them like clothing,
and they will be discarded.

27 But you remain the same,
and your years are without end.

28 The children of your servants will dwell in safety,

**and their descendants will stand secure
in your presence.”**

Notes

5. *even forget*. The psalmist's complaints indicate that he/she is suffering from an intense fever. A prolonged fever can easily desiccate a person to the extent that eating and swallowing become difficult and even repulsive.

6. *pelican*. Although the traditional rendering, “pelican” (cf. LXX, πελικανί), can be debated, it is an apt figure of speech. Naturalists have long observed that pelicans may nest near a body of water that dries up after the rainy season. The late hatchlings are then abandoned and left to die in the searing sun. St. Augustine notes in regard to this psalm that the pelican “is born in the isolated regions, especially of the Nile River in Egypt” (*nascitur in solitudinibus, maxime Nili fluminis, in Aegypto*). Any rendering of the Hebrew term *kows*, as “an owl” or “a little owl” may be better understood as a reference to the abandoned pelican chick. Moreover, *kows* also means “cup”, and its cognate term, *kiys*, means “bag” or “purse”—terms that aptly describe the pelican's unusual beak. The bird or birds mentioned by the psalmist here are listed with a number of “unclean” water birds in Lev 11:17f and Deut 14:16f. Thus, the use of “the fledgling bird” as a reference to a young pelican left to die in the desert appropriately completes both the verbal and the conceptual parallelisms employed by the psalmist to describe his/her severe illness.

7-9. The “twittering bird” is also a lone bird. The Hebrew root, *bdd*, describes both. The foes who are “exulting over me” mockingly (the root, *hll*, can also

mean “make a fool of”) and “have placed a curse upon me” (*shaba'*, “swear”) are also ones who gorge on (*saba'*) the psalmist (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 15).

In the “mingling” of tears with drink is the implication that the psalmist “draws” or “pours” the tears from a vessel filled with his/her own tears (cf. Ps 75:9). Finally, there is a wordplay on *nishba'uw* (“they swear”; from *shaba'*) and *w^eshikuway* (“drink”; from *shak'ah*). The several ambivalences that these lines contain are intended by the psalmist for rhetorical purposes consonant with Hebrew poetry. Such twists and turns of language compel the reader or attentive listener to think and rethink the poetic message. This way of thinking contributed much to the rabbinical and early Christian treatment of the poetic message as also a prophetic message for all times and seasons.

10-12. In a rather acrimonious tone, the psalmist implies that the **LORD** has mistreated the psalmist, whose life is limited while the **LORD's** life is everlasting.

14-15. These lines indicate postexilic composition or redaction.

16-18. The psalmist, conscious of the similarity between “b” and “p” in sound and occasionally even in meaning, plays here with the words, *banah* (“build anew”) and *panah* (“regard”). Included in the auditory effect of this wordplay are also *nir'ah* (“appear”), *bazah* (“disparage” or “disregard”), and *nibra'* (“to be created”), bringing the sound of “ah” to a climax with *hallel-YAH* (“praise the **LORD!**”).

Psalm 103

Of David.

Psalm 103 contrasts God's eternal being with the transient nature of the individual, of the community, and of all the world. But the **LORD's** *khesed* (“mercy”, “kindness”) is everlasting and beyond measure. The psalmist's optimism toward God's steadfast love for the weak and the sinner brings to mind St. Paul's optimism regarding “a thorn given to me in the flesh”: “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me . . . ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:9-10).

- 1 Bless the **LORD**, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.
- 2 Bless the **LORD**, O my soul,
and do not forget all his favors:
- 3 He pardons all your iniquities;
he heals all your infirmities.
- 4 He redeems your life from the grave,
and crowns you with love and compassion.
- 5 He fills your home with prosperity,

- renewing your youth like an eagle's.
- 6 The LORD secures right and justice for all those who are oppressed.
 - 7 He made known his ways to Moses, to the children of Israel his deeds.
 - 8 Merciful and compassionate is the LORD, slow to anger and rich in kindness.
 - 9 He will not be belligerent forever, and he will not store up anger unto eternity.
 - 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor does he repay us according to our iniquities.
 - 11 For as high as heaven is above the earth, so great has been his loving kindness to those who fear him.
 - 12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
 - 13 As a father has compassion on his children, the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.
 - 14 For he knows how we are made; he remembers that we are dust.
 - 15 As for man, his life is like grass. It blossoms like a flower of the field.
 - 16 Then the wind passes over it, and it is no more; and its place never sees it again.
 - 17 Yet the LORD's love is from eternity, and extends unto eternity upon those who fear him. His righteousness passes on to the children of the children,
 - 18 to those who keep his covenant, and to those who remember to observe his precepts.
 - 19 The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and he extends his dominion over all.
 - 20 Bless the LORD, you his angels, mighty in power, fulfilling his word, obedient to the voice of his word.
 - 21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his servants who do his will.
 - 22 Bless the LORD, all his works, in every place where he rules. Bless the , O my soul.

Notes

5. *fills your home*. The Hebrew term, *'adah*, rendered here as "home", can also mean ornamentation, congregation, accouterments, etc. St. Jerome translates with *qui replet bonis ornamentum tuum* ("who fills your ornament with good things"). The imagery being presented is similar to Pss 127 and 128, which speak of the blessings that come from a good spouse and family. In this context, one's "ornament" is all that one holds "near and dear". This includes one's spouse and family, one's possessions, honor, sphere of influence, and

ultimately one's very life and existence. Parents extend their lives and are "renewed" indefinitely through their children. Thus they are "renewed" in their children just as the mythological phoenix bird is reborn from its own ashes, or like a bird that grows new plumage after undergoing a molt.

The Hebrew term, *batowb*, is rendered here as "with prosperity". But "posterity" is included in the wordplay between "ornament" and "youth" that may be read as, "He fills your posterity with prosperity".

20. *angels*. *Mal'akah* denotes heavenly beings that are at God's service and which the NT places at Jesus' service. Cf., e.g., Mk 1:13; Mt 26:53.

Psalm 104

This "Pearl of the Psalter", as Ps 104 is sometimes called, is an appropriate sequel to the previous psalm, moving from the **LORD's** merciful treatment of creation to the creatures sustained by God. In wisdom God created all and cares for all without the need to do great battle with chaos. The scene is serene and idyllic, but also picturesque and powerful. The poem has a prominent place in Jewish liturgy and in Orthodox and Catholic prayer. The poet is a "well-read" person, who draws upon the imagery, stories, and culture of the entire "fertile crescent" stretching from Egypt, through Mesopotamia, to Persia.

- 1 Bless the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, how wonderful you are!
You are clothed with glory and majesty.**
- 2 You enfold yourself in light as in a robe,
and unfold the heavens like a tent-cloth.**
- 3 You placed on the waters the beams
for your chambers,
and use the clouds for your chariot.
You walk upon the wings of the wind,**
- 4 and make the winds to be your angels,
and flashing fire to be your servants.**
- 5 You fixed the earth upon its base,
so that it would never be moved.**
- 6 With the sea you covered it like a mantle;
higher than the mountain peaks stood the waters.**
- 7 From your rebuking roar they fled;
from your thundering voice they flew,**
- 8 ascending up from the mountains,
descending down to the canyons,
to places you assigned to them.**
- 9 You set boundaries that they were not to cross,
lest they should return to envelop the earth.**
- 10 You send springs into brooks.
Between mountains they flow.**
- 11 They give drink to all beasts of the field;
wild asses slake their thirst.**
- 12 On their banks dwell the birds of the sky,
chirping amidst the shrubs.**
- 13 You water the mountains from your stores;
the fruit of your work has filled the land.**
- 14 You provide grass for the cattle
and hay for beasts that work the fields,
to bring forth grain from the ground,
(15) and wine to cheer one's heart;
to make one's face bright with oil,
to strengthen one's heart with bread.**

16 Well attended are the trees of the LORD,
 the cedars of Lebanon, which you planted,
 17 in which the birds can build their nests.
 The fir trees are shelter for the stork;
 18 the mountain heights are for the wild goats;
 the rocky crags are refuge for badgers.
 19 You made the moon to mark the seasons;
 the sun knows when it is time to set.
 20 You bring forth darkness, and it becomes night,
 when all the beasts of the forest prowl forth.
 21 The young lions roar for their prey,
 thus invoking God for their food.
 22 When the sun rises, they retreat,
 going to their dens to lie down.
 23 Man goes forth to his labor and toil till evening.
 24 How abundant are your works, O LORD!
 In wisdom you fashioned them all.
 The earth is filled with your creatures.
 25 There is also the sea, a vast and wide expanse,
 wherein countless creatures, small and great,
 move about.
 26 That's where ships sail about.
 You formed Leviathan to sport about in it.
 27 All of these look to you to give them food in season.
 28 You give to them; they gather up.
 You open your hand; they are filled with goods.
 29 You hide your face; they are dismayed.
 You take away their breath; they die and turn to dust.
 30 You send forth your spirit; they are recreated,
 and you refresh the face of the earth.
 31 May the LORD's glory last forever.
 May the LORD take delight in his works.
 32 He looks upon the earth, and it quakes.
 He touches the mountains, and they smoke.
 33 I will sing to the LORD, while I have life.
 I will chant to my God, while I have being.
 34 Let my song be pleasing to him.
 Then I shall rejoice in the LORD.
 35 Let sinners depart from the earth
 and the wicked exist no more.
 Bless the LORD, O my soul.

Notes

2. The terms, "enfold" and "unfold" form a fine rhyme with assonance in Hebrew: *'oteh, nowteh*.

3. *the waters*. These are the waters above the earth. The imagery is on a cosmic scale, with God fully "at home" and in control of all the elements.

6. The Hebrew term for "sea" here is *t^ehowm* (cf. Gen 1:2). The imagery of the following lines is that of

the separation of the waters above the heavens from the waters on and under the earth. Cf. Gen 1:6-10.

26. *Leviathan*. Regarding this mythical monster, cf. Pss 73:9 and 74:13f. The scenario that the psalmist presents here depicts Leviathan as God's "toy" or "pet" rather than as God's adversary in creation.

Of special interest is the mention of ships in the midst of the list of living creatures. Christoph Uehlinger (*Leviathan und die Schiffe in Ps 104,25-26*, in *Biblica*,

vol. 71, fasc. 4, 1990, pp. 499-526) notes that ships and a subdued Leviathan appear earliest in Phoenician lands some 400 years earlier than in this psalm (p. 520). The Phoenician merchants and sailors made offerings to Baal to obtain safe travel across the sea. Thus the psalmist now ascribes sovereignty over the sea and its creatures to the **LORD** (*ibid.*, p. 521-522). Moreover, the ships, with animals (especially the horse or the eagle) carved or depicted on their prows and sterns were readily identified with the animals that they represented, and a ship's sinking in a storm was referred to as its "dying" (*ibid.*, p. 524).

29-30. The psalmist informs us of the association between God, creation, and life. The "breathing, living rhythm" of God's life is shared by all living creatures. "Then the **LORD** God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). In the NT, this image of God's spirit is taken to the level of supernatural life—the new creation and new life that flows from God's redeeming *khesed*: "Jesus said to [his disciples] again, 'Peace be with you'. . . When he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (Jn 20:21-23).

Psalm 105

With this psalm, the poet turns from God's acts of creation to God's acts of salvation in freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and bestowing upon them the Promised Land. As in "The Song of Moses and the Israelites" (Ex 15:1-18), so also in this psalm, no mention is made of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. The psalm's "lateness is shown by the fact that a leisurely review of sacred history has replaced the report of a single saving event" (cf. *Style and Purpose in Psalm 105*, by Richard J. Clifford, in *Biblica*, vol. 60, fasc. 3, 1979, p. 421). Clifford sees Ps 105 "as sixth century" B.C.E. (*ibid.*, p. 427), i.e., as exilic and/or postexilic.

- 1 Halleluiah!**
Give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name.
Make known his deeds among the nations.
- 2 Sing to him; chant to him.**
Muse over all his wondrous works.
- 3 Exult in his holy name.**
Let hearts rejoice that seek the LORD.
- 4 Have recourse to the LORD and his strength.**
Seek his face at all times.
- 5 Remember the marvelous deeds he has done:**
his portents and the judgments of his mouth.
- 6 O seed of Abraham, his servant!**
You sons of Jacob, his chosen one!
- 7 He is the LORD; he is our God!**
His decrees are found in all the earth.
- 8 He keeps his promise ever in mind,**
the covenant he commanded
for a thousand generations,
- 9 which he made with Abraham,**
the oath he swore to Isaac.
- 10 Then he made it a decree for Jacob,**
a lasting covenant for Israel when he said,
- 11 "I am giving you the land.**
Canaan will be your inherited lot."
- 12 When they were a tiny band**
and nomads within the land,

13 wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another,
14 he allowed no one to oppress them,
and he cautioned kings because of them:
15 “Do not touch my anointed.
Do not injure my prophets.”
16 Then he called forth hunger to the land;
he broke in two every staff of bread.
17 He sent a man before them,
Joseph, procured as a slave.
18 They bound his feet with fetters;
his neck was placed in irons,
19 until the moment his word came true.
The LORD’s promise proved him pure as gold.
20 The king sent orders and then released him;
the ruler of the peoples set him free.
21 He made him master over his house,
and guardian over all his goods,
22 letting him instruct his princes in person,
and educate his counselors in wisdom.
23 Then Israel migrated to Egypt,
and Jacob settled in the Land of Ham.
24 The Almighty made his people prolific,
and he made them stronger than their enemies.
25 He turned their hearts to hate his people,
and to deal falsely with his servants.
26 He sent Moses as his servant,
and Aaron, whom he chose, with him.
27 They displayed his ominous deeds among them,
and revealed his portents in the Land of Ham.
28 He sent darkness, and it became dark;
and they could not undo his command.
29 He turned their waters to blood,
and he brought death to their fish.
30 Their land brought forth myriads of frogs,
even within the halls of their kings.
31 He commanded, and swarms of flies came,
and lice unto all their borders.
32 He turned their rain into hail.
He sent lightning through their land.
33 Then he struck their vines and figs,
and broke their border of trees.
34 He commanded, and the locusts came,
and the grasshoppers beyond all count.
35 They devoured every blade in the land,
and consumed the produce of the earth.
36 Next he smote every first-born in their land,
the first fruit of all their vigor.
37 Then he led them out with silver and gold;
and no one among his tribes stumbled.

**38 The Egyptians rejoiced when they left;
 for fear had fallen upon them.**
**39 He spread a cloud to be a cover,
 and fire to shed its light at night.**
**40 They asked, and he brought in quail,
 and filled them with bread from heaven.**
**41 He opened the rock, and water gushed forth,
 flowing like a river out upon the desert.**
**42 Thus he kept his sacred promise
 to Abraham his servant.**
**43 Next he led his people amidst songs of joy,
 amidst shouts of gladness his chosen ones.**
**44 Then he gave them the lands of the heathen;
 and they acquired the wealth of the peoples,**
**45 so that they might keep his laws
 and hold to his decrees.**
Halleluiah!

Notes

3-4. *recourse to the Lord*. This expression means to “resort to” or “inquire of” (the **LORD**). The Hebrew verb is *darash*, and is here paired with *baqash* (“to seek”, or “consult”) in “Seek his face”. The term, *baqash*, emphasizes the concept of “consult” or “augur”. Either term may refer to a ritual offering in the temple or, especially with *baqash*, to some form of oracular consultation. In 1 Sam 28:6, the Urim are given as one of the ways in which one should consult the **LORD**; and in 1 Sam 28:7, Saul asks to seek (*baqash*) counsel from a medium. The Urim and Thummin were apparently kept in a pocket of the Ephod. The precise nature or composition of these three items is uncertain; but they were used in oracular processes. Cf. Ps 83:16 and notes.

19b. *pure as gold*. The term “gold” is not present in the MT; but the language refers to the refinement of gold. Thus Joseph is figuratively assayed and then refined by God to pure gold. This imagery is prominent in the OT: “And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the **LORD** an offering in righteousness” (Mal 3:3). The concept of refining is included Heb 5:8f: “Though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all who obey him.” This theme is further developed in Heb 12:5-8, which quotes from Prov 3:11f.

22. This is one irony among others in this psalm: The Egyptians were supposedly a wise and learned people; yet Joseph, a slave in irons, is set over them to instruct them in wisdom. Cf. *A Poetic Analysis of Ps 105*, by Anthony R. Ceresko, in *Biblica*, vol. 64, fasc. 1, 1983, pp. 20-46, specifically pp. 34-35.

28. *could not undo his command*. The proper translation of *maruw* (from *marah*, usually given as “rebel against”) is much debated. The basic meaning of

marah is “dispute with” or “contend with”. Close in meaning would also be “refute”. Thus, in the context of this psalm, “undo” stands out as the logical meaning of the term in conjunction with “command” (*dabar*, meaning both “word” and “deed”).

30. *halls of their kings*. The psalmist emphasizes the greatness of God’s works by contrasting the fruitfulness of the Israelites with the “fruitfulness” of the land of Egypt in its producing swarms of frogs rather than people. The expression, “halls (or ‘chambers’) of their kings”, has puzzled translators, since Moses dealt only with one pharaoh. However, the plural form could also include those of princely rank or be an emphatic form to indicate the ubiquitous presence of the frogs.

31. *lice*. It is not known if *kiniyn* (often rendered as “gnats”) refers to a specific kind of small creature or insect, or if it is a more generic term—somewhat similar to “cooties”. Since flies are insects that “come down on” a person, it is probable that *kiniyn* are insects (such as lice, fleas, or maggots) that “crawl up on” a person. Thus one could not go anywhere indoors or outdoors to escape the plague of insects.

33. The “border of trees” (or, “trees of their border”) may refer to a hedge that is planted around a vineyard to protect it. There are many tomb paintings from ancient Egypt that depict the harvesting of grapes and the making of wine. Isa 5:2-5, Mt 21:33, and Mk 12:1 indicate that planting a hedge around a vineyard was common practice in the ancient Near East.

36. *first fruit of all their vigor*. This statement not only suggests that the first-born child is the strongest child of a family, it also refers to the socio-political prominence of the first child as the next in line to rule and the one to inherit “the family business”. The death of the first-born means social and political turmoil.

37. *with silver and gold*. Joseph was weighed down with iron fetters (v. 18). Ironically the Israelites are now

weighed down with the silver and gold of the Egyptians.
These sorts of reversals occur throughout the psalm.

Ceresko (*ibid.* p. 20) refers to them as examples of
“distant parallelism”.

Psalm 106

Thematically, this psalm is a sequel to the preceding psalm. But now Israel's failures and need of forgiveness are stressed. The psalmist offers a personal prayer that gives thanks for God's goodness. The lamentable history of the people then follows. “While Ps 105 views Israel's history from *God's* point of view of promise and everlasting covenant, Ps 106 surveys the same history from the *human* point of view of sin plus an abiding sense of Yahweh's enduring covenant” (cf. Stuhlmueeller, *ibid.*, p. 118).

- 1 Halleluiah!**
Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his love is everlasting.
- 2 Who can describe the LORD's might?**
Who can make known all his praise?
- 3 Blessed are they who do what is right,**
acting justly at all times.
- 4 Be mindful of me, O LORD,**
when favoring your people.
Visit me with your saving power,
- 5 that I may see the prosperity of your elect,**
rejoice in your nation's joy and glory in your legacy.
- 6 We have done wrong like our fathers.**
We have been impious; we have been devious.
- 7 Our fathers, when still in Egypt,**
did not regard your wondrous works,
nor recall your great compassion;
and they railed against the Most High
upon reaching the Sea of Reeds.
- 8 Yet he saved them for his name's sake,**
to make his power manifest.
- 9 He rebuked the sea, and the reeds dried up.**
He led them through the Deep as if through the desert.
- 10 He saved them from the hand of the enemy,**
and redeemed them from the hand of the foe,
- 11 while the waters poured over their pursuers.**
Not even one of them was spared.
- 12 Then they believed in his word;**
then they intoned his praises.
- 13 They were quick to forget his works.**
They would not wait for his counsel.
- 14 They made demand after demand in the desert,**
and they put God to the test in the wilderness.
- 15 Then he granted them whatever they desired;**
but he also gave them a seditious mind.
- 16 Thus they envied Moses in the camp,**
and Aaron, the LORD's holy one.

17 The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan,
 and it closed in over Abiram's faction.
 18 Then a fire broke out in their company;
 flames consumed the wicked.
 19 They erected a bull calf at Horeb,
 and bowed down to the molten image.
 20 They traded in the One who was their Glory
 for a figurine of an ox eating grass!
 21 They forgot the God who saved them,
 who did great wonders in Egypt,
 22 marvelous deeds in the land of Ham,
 amazing things at the Sea of Reeds.
 23 So he decided to destroy them.
 But Moses, his chosen one,
 stood in the breach before him,
 to turn aside his destructive wrath.
 24 After this, they scoffed at the coveted land.
 They refused to believe in his word,
 25 and turned to murmuring in their tents.
 They would not listen to the voice of the LORD.
 26 So he raised his hand against them
 to make them fall in the desert,
 27 to let their seed fall among the nations,
 and to scatter them throughout the lands.
 28 Then they joined themselves to Baal of Peor,
 and ate sacrifices offered to the dead.
 29 They provoked him to anger with their actions,
 and the plague broke out and raged among them.
 30 Then Phinehas stood up and intervened,
 and the plague was checked.
 31 This was ascribed to him for his righteousness
 from one age to another forever.
 32 But they angered him at the springs of Meribah;
 which caused Moses to act wrongly because of them.
 33 For they embittered his spirit,
 and he uttered careless words with his lips.
 34 They failed to destroy the peoples:
 something that the LORD had told them to do.
 35 Instead they intermarried with the nations.
 36 They learned their customs and served their idols,
 which became a snare for them.
 37 They offered their sons and daughters
 to those demons.
 38 They spilled the blameless blood of their sons
 and daughters,
 sacrificed to the idols of Canaan.
 The land was polluted with the blood,
 39 and they were defiled in their works.
 In their actions, they carried on like harlots;
 40 and the Lord's wrath was roused against his people.

Then he detested his inheritance,
 41 and placed them in the hand of the nations.
 Those who hated them ruled over them,
 42 and their enemies oppressed them.
 They were subdued beneath their hand.
 43 Again and again he would deliver them.
 But they were embittered in their thinking,
 and so they languished in their iniquity.
 44 Then he looked upon them in their anguish,
 as he listened to their lamentation.
 45 He remembered his covenant with them.
 Then he relented in his great mercy,
 46 and he granted them his tender kindness
 in the sight of all who held them captive.
 47 Save us, O LORD our God,
 and gather us in from the nations,
 that we may give thanks to your holy name,
 and exult in giving you praise.
 48 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
 from eternity to eternity.
 Then let all the people say, "Amen".
 Halleluiah!

Notes

7. Translators generally agree that the MT text, *'al-yam* ("at the sea"), needs to be repointed to read *'eliym* ("the Most High"). Cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 69. The sense is that the Israelites, upon reaching the Sea of Reeds (or "Red Sea"), were frightened to see the Egyptian pursuers about to entrap them against the sea. Then they cried out to the **LORD** and complained to Moses (cf. Ex 14:10f). The outcome is that the sea entraps the pursuers, as indicated in the next lines.

9. Most translations read, "He rebuked the Sea of Reeds, and it dried up". However, when the metric character of the lines is taken into consideration, the terms, "sea" and "reeds" are separated so as to suggest that the reeds dried up to allow the Israelites to escape by walking on a mat of reeds and relatively dry ground that could be crossed on foot, but could not support heavy chariots. This view is consistent with the Yahwist (J) account (cf. Ex 14, vv. 21, 22a, 23, 25), which states that the Egyptians were unable to pursue the Israelites since their chariot wheels became clogged with mud.

15. The expression, "a seditious mind", is literally "a leanness in their souls" in the Hebrew text. The LXX reads, "He cast satiety into their souls". St. Jerome translates with *et misit tenuitatem in animam eorum* ("and he sent thinness into their soul"). The context suggests a psychological malady that resulted in jealousy towards Moses and Aaron. The expression, "narrow-minded", appears to be close to what the psalmist wishes to convey. The Exodus account emphasizes God's control of the situation, even to the hardening of

Pharaoh's heart (cf. Ex 4:21). This is the situation in this psalm as well when God gives the rebellious Israelites "a narrowness of mind".

17. It may be noted that Korah, a leader in the uprising (cf. Num 16), is not mentioned here. Perhaps the poet did not want any connection to be made between Korah the rebel and "the sons of Korah", to whom ten Psalms are ascribed.

20. The phrase, "the One who was their Glory", is simply "their glory" (*k^ebowdam*) in the Hebrew text. However, it is preceded by the *signum accusativum*, *'eth*, which is used especially, though not exclusively, to designate a person as the object—in this case, "the **LORD**". The effect of the statement is similar to saying, "to go from *riches* to rags", instead of saying "to go from *rags* to riches".

26-27. The psalmist's choice of word for "let fall" also evokes the imagery of miscarriage. For both words have the common root, *npl*. The psalmist implies a wordplay to emphasize the destruction that the **LORD** is about to bring upon his unfaithful people. The image of God's raised hand is not that of a hand raised to strike, but that of a hand raised to swear an oath. Cf. Deut 32:40

29. *broke out and raged*. In the Hebrew text, this expression is just one verb, *parats*, meaning "break out forcefully", a concept that is better expressed in English with the two verbs as given here.

30. Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron and son of the priest Eleazar (Ex 6:25; 1 Chr 5:30, 6:35), was an

ancestor to Ezra (Ezra 7:5) and acclaimed by the Levites as their chief (1 Chr 9:20).

33. *embittered*. The Hebrew root, *mrh*, can refer to strife or to bitterness. Apparently, the psalmist knows of a tradition about Moses that is found in Num 20:1-13, but is not repeated elsewhere in the Exodus story. Meribah (the name possibly means “strife”, but the allusion may also be to bitter water as in Ex 15:23), sometimes identified with Kadesh, is the place where Moses drew water from the rock. Rabbinical tradition interpreted this action as a sign of doubt on the part of Moses, since he struck the rock, not once, but twice with his staff. Cf. Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, pp. 383-85.

43. *embittered in their thinking*. Again, the Hebrew text uses the root term, *mrh* (cf. previous note). The term can also mean “rebellious”, and it is possible that the psalmist intends both meanings to be operative.

46. God’s “tender kindness” (*rakham*) is an aspect of his “great mercy” (*khesed*), but also to be distinguished from *khesed*. The root, *rkhm*, means “womb”. God’s *rakham* is thus “a mother’s love” for her child—“unconditional, compassionate love”.

47-48. The fourth book of Psalms concludes with a prayer of the postexilic community. The final “Halleluiah” forms an inclusion with the opening “Halleluiah” and also functions as part of the people’s response. The psalmist’s plea, “gather us in from the nations (*goyim*)”, may include those who had fled to Egypt at the time of the Exile. It is possible that the returning refugees from Egypt, then also a part of the Persian Empire, are reflected in the psalm’s focus on Moses and the Exodus. Ps 106 appears in a medley of psalms in 1 Chr 16. This places the composition or redaction of the psalm in postexilic times.

BOOK V: Psalms 107 – 150

Psalm 107

Book Five of the Psalms invites those whom the **LORD** has rescued from various sins and dangers to join in praising the **LORD**. The universal character of Psalm 107 gives it a Gospel-like appeal. Verses 23-30 are recast in Jesus' calming of the sea. Cf. Mt 8:23-27 and Jn 6:16-21. The structure of the psalm is obvious, beginning with a call to all the **LORD's** redeemed to give thanks, followed by descriptions of four distinct classes of people in life threatening dangers (aimless wandering in the desert, imprisonment, illness, and being caught in a storm at sea) that arise from willful sinning and from which they are saved by the **LORD** when they call upon him, and concluding with a "word to the wise" to give heed to the **LORD's** steadfast love. The psalmist is clearly from the postexilic (Persian) period and intends the psalm to be an encouragement to the postexilic community. In 2 Cor 11:23-30, St. Paul gives a list of perils to his life—weaknesses that are his glory.

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.
For his mercy endures forever.**
- 2 Let the LORD's redeemed speak out,
those whom he redeemed from the hand of the enemy,**
- 3 and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and the west,
from the north and from the sea.**

I

- 4 Some wandered in the wilderness, out in the desert.
They found no way to an inhabited city.**
- 5 Hungry and ever so thirsty,
their spirit fainted within them.**
- 6 Then they cried to the LORD in their distress;
and he rescued them from their affliction.**
- 7 Then he guided them by a direct route
leading to an inhabited city.**
- 8 To the LORD let them confess his merciful love,
his marvelous works to the sons of men.**
- 9 For he satisfies the thirsting throat,
and the hungry throat he fills with food.**

II

- 10 As for those who sat in darkness and gloom,
bound by torture and chains,**
- 11 because they had decried the decrees of God,
and derided the dictates of the Most High,**
- 12 he subdued their heart with hard labor.
They stumbled, and with no one to help!**
- 13 Then they cried to the LORD in their distress;
and he rescued them from their affliction.**
- 14 He brought them out of darkness and gloom,
and broke their bonds asunder.**
- 15 Let them thank the LORD for his merciful love,
for his marvelous deeds to the sons of men.**
- 16 For he broke the doors of bronze
and demolished the iron bars.**

III

- 17 Fools because of their sinful ways,
and afflicted because of their iniquities,
18 any food whatever gagged their throats,
and they drew near to the portals of Death.
19 Then they cried to the LORD in their distress;
and he rescued them from their affliction.
20 He sent his word and healed them,
and he saved them from their plight.
21 Let them thank the LORD for his merciful love,
for his marvelous deeds to the sons of men.
22 Let them offer sacrifices of praise,
and declare his works with joyful song.

IV

- 23 Those who go down to the sea in ships,
those who ply their trade upon the high seas,
24 they have seen the works of the LORD,
and his awesome deeds in the Deep.
25 Then he gave the command and made a gale arise.
It tossed up its waves;
26 they climbed to the skies;
they sank to the depths.
Their breathing grew faint from their fear.
27 They reeled and lurched like drunken men;
and all their skill was swallowed up.
28 Then they cried to the LORD in their distress;
and he rescued them from their suffering.
29 He replaced the storm with stillness;
and the roaring waves turned tranquil.
30 They rejoiced when everything grew calm;
and he led them to their destined port.
31 Let them thank the LORD for his merciful love,
for his marvelous deeds to the sons of men.
32 Let them praise him in the assembly of the people;
in the council of the elders, let them extol him.

V

- 33 He changed rivers into desert,
springs of water into dry ground,
34 and fruitful land into a salty waste
because of the sins of its occupants.
35 He changed desert into pools of water,
and dry land into fountains of water.
36 He made the hungry ones settle there;
and they built a city to live in.
37 They sowed fields and planted vineyards
which yielded fruit in abundance.
38 He blessed them, and they increased greatly;
and he did not let their cattle decrease.
39 But even when they were still diminished
and bowed with burdens, evil, and sorrow,

- 40 he who pours contempt upon princes
and makes them wander astray
in an uncharted wasteland,
41 then raised up the poor from being bowed down,
and made his clans abound like flocks.
42 Let the upright see and rejoice
and all evil muzzle its mouth.
43 Let whoever is wise observe these things,
and consider the kindnesses of the LORD.

Notes

3. *the sea*. The Gulf of Aqaba lies about 175 miles to the south of Jerusalem. Thus some commentators substitute “south” for “sea”. Also only a slight modification is needed to rewrite *umiyam* (“and from the sea”) to *umiyamin*, which can be understood to mean “and from the south” or, more literally, “and from the right hand”. The left hand was associated with the north and the right hand with the south. However, John Jarick convincingly contends that “the sea” is correct and means the Mediterranean Sea, even though it is to the west of Israel and “the west” is already mentioned in the verse. Cf. *The Four Corners of Psalm 107*, in *CBQ*, vol. 59, no. 2, April, 1997, pp. 270-287. The east (*I*: desert), the west (*II*: darkness), the north (*III*: illness), and the sea (*IV*: perils from storms at sea) correspond to the major stanzas of the psalm, which extols the LORD’s power to rescue from all of these life-threatening circumstances. Verses 1-3 constitute the psalm’s preamble, and verses 33-43 (stanza V) form the epilogue.

9. *thirsting throat*. The term, *shoqeqah*, rendered here as “thirsting”, has to do with leaping and running. Perhaps a throat throbbing with thirst is the imagery that the poet intends. Those wandering in the wilderness and desert correspond to those to the east of Israel, which is the great Arabian Desert and the provenance of the *sharab* (sirocco, the hot east-wind).

10-15. *darkness and gloom*. The west, into which the sun sets, means darkness, especially of sin, suffering, prison, and death, from which there is no escape except in crying out repentantly to the LORD.

16. *bronze*. According to Herodotus (Greek historian, 5th century B.C.E.), Babylon’s walls had 100 bronze gates. Cf. A.A. Anderson, *Psalms (73-150)*, p. 753.

17-22. These verses, corresponding to “the north”, appear to describe a plague. Evils of this sort as well as the enemies of Israel are readily seen as coming from the north. Cf., e.g., Jer 6. Jerusalem has natural protection on all sides except the north. Thus enemies and evils are depicted as coming from the north.

20. The term, *shakhath*, is rendered here as “plight”. However, it has a wide range of meanings and associations: decay, corruption, grave. In sound, the word is also similar to *shakhat* (“slaughter”).

23. *go down*. For the psalmist, one ascends not only to Jerusalem, but also to the north. Thus, the descent to the Mediterranean Sea is taken as the opposing direction to the north. The sea represents the greatest, chronic danger of all. Only God, who was victorious over the monsters opposed to the orderly work of creation, can overcome the wiles of the winds and waves.

26. By “they”, the psalmist may mean either the waves or the men or, given the psalmist’s predilection to be inclusive, both; for the men can only go as the waves go.

27. The imagery of the Hebrew text is fairly inclusive: trembling throats, loss of courage, failing breath; fainting sailors. Likewise, *b^era’ah*, (literally, “in evil”), is rendered here with “in their fear”, with “fear” being both the subjective fear of the men and the real, objective danger faced by the sailors and merchants. The root, *r*“ (*resh*, *ayin*, *ayin*), further alludes to the roar (*re’a*) of the storm, the difficult (*ro’a*) and evil (*ra’ah*) situation faced by the men, as well as the breaking up (*ro’ah*) of the ship. The term, “predicament”, best conveys the ideas being presented here. The Hebrew, *khokmah*, means “wisdom” or “training” as well as “skill”, and it is an especially forceful term in this context.

30. *destined port*. The Hebrew text reads “haven of their delight”. The expression, “destined port”, fits well, since a port with its associated market-place is the merchants’ destination.

39-41. The Hebrew text of these convoluted verses presents several difficulties. The first difficulty arises from the failure of the MT to specify a clear subject for “were still diminished”. St. Jerome has *inminuta sunt* (“they were diminished”) modify *pecora* (“cattle”). However, both the people and the cattle are probably intended. Another difficulty is found in the term, *sopek*, a present participle (“pouring”) rather than a finite verb. The MT bears an inverted *nun* in the margin at v. 40, apparently to indicate some difficulty with the passage. Robert Alter thus reverses the order of vv. 39 and 40 (cf. *The Book of Psalms*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 2007, p. 388).

40. *princes*. The term, “princes”, refers to the land’s indigenous people who left their cities and fields to the invading Israelites, identified as “the poor”. The contrast between “princes” and “the poor” emphasizes God’s free

choice of a people that is of no account in itself. Cf. Job 21:24.

43. wise. Psalm 107 concludes in the spirit of Proverbs and Wisdom literature. Sinners are “fools” (v. 17). The just are “wise” and learn from the **LORD**’s “kindnesses” (i.e., from the four examples of God’s mercy displayed in the four stanzas of the psalm) and that to sin is to suffer many consequences. However, the symbolic geography of the psalm’s four “directions”

teaches the reader that God’s mercy is universal and draws all people from all corners of the earth to come to praise the **LORD** for the salvation that the **LORD** brings to those who repent. Moreover, repentance not only brings God’s merciful forgiveness, it becomes the moment when God creates the repentant person anew. Cf. *Salmo 107: Unidad, Organización y Teología*, by I. Carbajosa, in *Estudios Bíblicos*, vol. 59, 2001, pp. 451-485, specifically p. 454. Carbajosa views Ps 107 as a carefully structured, unified composition.

Psalm 108

A Song. A Psalm of David.

Psalms 108-110 are ascribed to David. In Ps 108, he is presented “as the wise man who gives heed to the cautions of Ps 107:39-42 and relies on Yahweh’s steadfast love (Pss 107:1 and 43; 108:4)”. Cf. *David as Exemplar of Spirituality: The Redactional Function of Psalm 19*, by Leslie C. Allen, in *Biblica*, vol. 67, fasc. 5, 1986, p. 544. Psalm 108 combines material from Pss 57 and 60. “This uprooting of verses from their original setting shows that in ancient times biblical interpretation was not confined to historical studies but was primarily a pastoral undertaking to meet new expectations and demands”. Cf. Stuhlmueller, *ibid.*, p. 125.

- 1 My heart is firmly resolved, O God.
I will sing, and I will chant psalms
with my very being.**
- 2 Awake, O Harp and Lyre! I will awake the Dawn.**
- 3 I will thank you, O LORD, among the peoples.
I will sing psalms to you among the nations.**
- 4 For your love reaches beyond the heavens,
and your truth extends beyond the skies.**
- 5 Be exalted beyond the heavens, O God;
and over all the earth be your glory.**
- 6 O that your dear one might be set free!
Save with your right hand and hear my plea!**
- 7 From his sanctuary, God announced:
“I will exult; I will partition Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Succoth.**
- 8 Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine.
Ephraim is my helmet, and Judah my scepter.**
- 9 Moab will be my washbasin.
I will place my boot upon Edom.
I will shout in triumph over Philistia.”**
- 10 Who will bring me to the walled city?
Who will lead me forth against Edom?**
- 11 Surely, O God, you would not reject us,
or fail to march, O God, with our armies?**
- 12 Give us deliverance from the assailant;
for salvation from anyone else is useless.**
- 13 With God we shall attain success;
and he will trample down our foes.**

Notes

1. *with my very being*. The MT reads 'ap-k^ebowdiy ("also my glory"). Although most modern translators observe some alteration of the MT and thus restate the phrase as "Awake, my soul" (so the NRSV), it appears best to remain close to the MT. The Hebrew root, *kbd*, often translated as "glory", refers to "weightiness". In an oblique use of the term, it means the "innards", or, more specifically, the "liver", the heaviest organ of the body and identified with one's life and being. Cf. Prov 7:23 and Lam 2:11. The rendering given here also corresponds

fully to the poetic structure of the cola, placing "my very being" (or, "my liver") in a chiasmic parallel with "my heart".

10. The "walled city" may be Sela (i.e., Petra), surrounded by lofty canyon walls that gave fortification to the city. Recent archeology has determined that ancient Petra was a funerary city, not a military force (cf. notes for Ps 141). Nevertheless, the postexilic psalmist may have viewed Petra as a formidable fortress characterizing the great damage that the Edomites brought to Israel (cf. notes for Ps 137).

Psalm 109

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

The psalm is ascribed to David to remind the reader that David faced and overcame many hardships because of his faithfulness to God. There is some question as to who is speaking in much of the psalm—the psalmist, or the enemy? The curses of this psalm are reminiscent of Jer 18:21-22, and v. 1 is similar to Jer 17:14. That God should not be silent means, "May God not be like the dumb idols of the pagans". Cf. Ps 115.

- 1 O God of my praise, do not be silent,**
- 2 now that the wicked mouth,**
and the deceitful mouth, have opened against me.
- 3 They beset me with their lying tongues,**
and with spiteful words they besiege me.
They fight against me for no reason.
- 4 In return for being their friend,**
they have become my accusers.
I, however, turn to prayer.
- 5 Yet they heap evil upon me in return for the good that I do,**
and spiteful words for my friendship:
- 6 "Appoint an evil man against him;**
and let Satan stand at his right hand.
- 7 Whenever he comes forward to be judged,**
let him come out with the verdict, 'guilty';
and let even his appeal be a crime.
- 8 May his days be quite limited,**
and another take his station.
- 9 Let his children be orphans, and his wife be a widow.**
- 10 Let his children wander about begging,**
evicted from their miserable haunts.
- 11 May creditors seize all that he owns,**
and strangers take spoils from his labors.
- 12 Let no one give him any mercy,**
or show compassion to his children.
- 13 May his posterity be cut short,**
and his name blotted out hereafter.
- 14 Let the guilt of his fathers be recorded for the LORD,**

- and his mother's sin never blotted out.
- 15 Let these always be present to the LORD,
who will purge their memory from the earth.
- 16 For he never thought to act kindly,
but pursued the poor and the needy,
and hounded the heartbroken to death.
- 17 He has befriended cursing; so let it come upon him.
He did not delight in blessing;
so let it remain far from him.
- 18 Also, he put on cursing as his cloak;
let it soak into him like water,
and like oil into his bones.
- 19 Let it be unto him like a cloak
that he uses to cover himself,
or like the sash he always wears.”
- 20 Let all this be the wages from the LORD for my critics,
and for those who speak evil against me.
- 21 But you, O LORD, my sovereign,
do with me as befits your name.
Because of your goodness and mercy, save me!
- 22 For I am poor and needy;
and my heart is pierced within me.
- 23 I have become as gaunt as a shadow.
I have been shaken off like a locust.
- 24 My knees quake from fasting,
and my flesh is no longer sound.
- 25 I have become a grievance to them.
When they look at me, they shake their heads.
- 26 Help me, O LORD, my God.
Save me as befits your kindness.
- 27 Let them know that this is your hand.
You, O LORD, have done it!
- 28 Let them curse, while you bless.
Let them arise just to be shamed.
But let your servant rejoice.
- 29 Let my critics be clothed with dismay;
let their shame cover them like a cloak.
- 30 I will earnestly thank the LORD with my mouth;
and amidst the multitudes, I will praise him.
- 31 For he stands at the right hand of the poor,
to save his life from those who pass judgment.

Notes

6. *Satan*. This term could be translated as “adversary” or “prosecuting attorney”; but St. Jerome retains it as “Satan”, and the LXX gives it as διαβολος. The “evil man” probably refers to the trial judge.

20. The poet has ceased quoting the enemies and now seeks to turn the tables on them by turning to the **LORD** and praying that the hate-filled statements of the enemy befall them rather than the psalmist. The Hebrew

term, *z’ot*, given here as “all this”, is an emphatic, demonstrative pronoun that often expresses contempt. Here, it could be rendered as, “all this stuff!” In the context of the psalm, *z’ot* is contrasted with *w^e’attah* (“But you”) of the next line and again with *wa’aniy* (“But I”) in v. 25.

The psalmist presents several subtleties in these lines. On the one hand, the **LORD** (Yahweh) is to treat the psalmist’s critics “as befits your name” (v. 21). This may

well mean taking “Yahweh” as “Yah-howah”, “Yahweh is calamity”. But as for the psalmist, Yahweh is to act according to the root word, *hayah*, meaning, “to be present”, especially to help (cf. notes for Psalm 83:16f). This imagery is extended by the psalmist’s multiple use of *kiy* (“because”; “for”; “indeed”; “like”) in the lines that follow. The use of *kiy* in this context is equivalent to saying “in keeping with your goodness and mercy, and in keeping with my being needy and poor, and in keeping with . . .”, etc. Moreover, the sharp, staccato brevity of *kiy* adds a “sonic punch” to these lines when read in Hebrew.

31. In a final scene, the psalmist envisions the place of judgment where the critics will stand up to make their accusations. But they find dishonor instead. For the **LORD** is the defense attorney of the poor. We can readily

23-24. The image of being shaken off (or “tossed up and down”) like a locust does not occur anywhere else in the OT, and it is inconsistent with the psalmist’s contention that he/she is emotionally and physically near death. A locust that is “shaken off” can still look forward to “a normal life”. The two verses, as they are presently divided, lack rhythmic balance. If “like a locust” (*ka’arbeh*) is placed at the beginning of the next verse, then balance is restored and the sense may then be a reference to the way locusts produce sound by rubbing their “knees” (hind legs) against their wings (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 108).

relate this to Jesus’ words: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever” (Jn 14:15f)

Psalm 110

Of David. A Psalm.

Although the text appears intact, Ps 110 has many uncertainties in regard to translation and interpretation. The structure and imagery of verses 1-3 are somewhat repeated in verses 4-6. It is one of the Psalter’s oldest psalms and one of the most quoted in the NT. The Gospels (cf. Mt 22:41-45; Mk 12:35-37, Lk 20:41-43) use this psalm to uphold Jesus as the messiah. It is a royal psalm, intended to celebrate some Davidic king’s enthronement or victory over enemies. The psalm is composed in the form of an oracle that sounds much like a “toast” (German, *Trinkspruch*) to the king. The setting might be the temple; but some other ceremonial building is more probable (cf. 1 Kings 7:1-12; 10:1-11). The king’s throne was not kept in the temple, but atop six steps in the Hall of the Throne. The Hall of Judgment was also used for ceremonies and may be the physical setting for the ceremony described in this psalm.

- 1 The LORD said to my lord:
“Sit at my right,
while I set your foes as a stool for your feet.”**
- 2 The scepter of your strength will the LORD send forth from Zion.
Rule in the midst of your enemies!**
- 3 Your troops rally on the day of your march.
In holiest splendor, from the womb of the dawn,
to you comes the dew of your youth.**
- 4 The LORD has sworn an oath, and he will not repent:
“You are a priest forever”,
his lawful king by sworn oath.**
- 5 The Lord at your right hand will shatter kings
in the day of his wrath.**
- 6 He will bring judgment upon the nations.
He has heaped up corpses.
He has struck down rulers far and wide over the earth.”**
- 7 From the fountain near the entryway,
let him take a ritual drink.
After that, he shall hold his head erect.**

Notes

1-2. The NT uses the opening line of this psalm to present a defense for Jesus' divinity (cf. Mt 22:44; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:42f; Acts 2:34f) by employing the rabbinical, hermeneutical methods of the time. The nuances of the Hebrew and the Greek texts need to be considered. The opening line states, "The **LORD** (i.e., YHWH) declared to my lord" ('*adonay*, i.e., the king), with "my lord" being a polite form of address in the third person. When '*adonay* or κυριος (LXX) replaced YHWH, the text then came to read: "The **LORD** (κυριος) declared to my lord (κυριω)".

at my right. The king is called "the man of your [the **LORD**'s] right hand" in Ps 80:17, and the king's throne is God's own throne in Ps 45:6. Archeological finds show images of Middle Eastern potentates resting their feet upon their captured subjects. One addressed such rulers by declaring "I am the footstool of his (i.e., your) feet". Solomon's throne (1 Kings 10:19) atop six steps represented hegemony over the earth from the earth's center (cf. Ezek 5:5), as was also the claim made by other Near Eastern monarchies. Cf. *Psalm 110 und das sakrale Königtum in Israel*, by Geo Widengren, *Zur Neueren Psalmenforschung*, publ. by Peter H.A. Neumann, Darmstadt, 1976, pp. 184-216, esp. pp. 191-192.

3. *In holiest splendor.* Due to the psalmist's ornate expressions of high praise, this verse is extraordinarily difficult to translate. The LXX provides εν ταῖς λαμπροτησιν ("in the adornments") rather than "holy mountains" that other translators provide for the obscure Hebrew of this verse. The last three lines may present the sunrise as an epiphany of God. The uncertain imagery seems to say that the king is divinely conceived and comes forth like the dew and rain that renew the earth (cf. Widengren, *ibid.*, pp. 194-196; Isa 14:12; Ps 90:5; esp. Ps 72:6). It should be noted that vv. 1-3 contain four rhyming words, beginning with "your foes" ('*oybeyka*), then "your feet" (*ragleyka*), followed by "your troops" ('*ammika*), and concluding with "your march" (*kheyleka*). This last term has to do with raising and rallying an army. The **LORD** bestows "youth" upon the king, since the king is "a priest forever". This alludes to the royal priesthood's association with God's eternal being, and "holiest splendor" refers to the king's priestly garments. Dawn and dew are symbolic of youth and God's power to refresh those who invoke the Almighty (cf. Isa 26:19). As God's vicar, the king is to give life to his land and people.

4. *his lawful king.* The rendering, "according to the order of Melchizedek" (LXX, NT, St. Jerome, Vulgate, most modern translations), is entirely possible. But "Melchizedek" can also be taken as a statement meaning, "the rightful king by my decree" (thus ICEL). The poet may have had both of these possibilities in mind as a wordplay on the name, "Melchizedek". The kings of Judah offered sacrifices (cf. 1 Kings 8:62-64), even though they were not of the priestly lines of Levi and

Aaron. Their action was explained by their being "a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek" (cf. Gen 14:18-20 and Heb 7).

5-6. *Lord.* The *Biblica Hebraica*, edited by R. Kittel, reads '*adonay* ("Lord") in v. 5. However, the relevant annotation notes that many manuscripts read YHWH ("**LORD**") instead. If '*adonay* is the proper reading, then it appears that the poet addresses the king in the third person ("polite") form in this passage. The alternation between "you" and "he" may cause some difficulty regarding who is speaking to or about whom. Cf. *Psalm 110 (109)*, 5-7, by M. Gilbert and S. Pisano, in *Biblica*, vol. 61, fasc. 3, 1980, pp. 343-356. However, the effect that the psalmist wishes to convey comes through "loud and clear": The king's successes are to be foremost and always ascribed to God. We are left with the image of the king standing on the floor at the entrance of the building, listening to the words in praise of God for the king's achievements. Next, the king is directed to take a festive, ceremonial drink. The term, *yishteh*, means to drink in a festive manner and thus also "to feast" or "to banquet".

7. These final two sentences appear to be "stage directions". Admittedly, both the rendering given here and the rendering from the NRSV ("He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore he will lift up his head"), do not yield much meaning, and the verse appears disconnected from the preceding verses. Widengren (*ibid.*, p. 214), in citing 1 Kings 1 in regard to Solomon's anointing as king at the Gihon stream, notes: *Wir haben jedoch nicht nachweisen können, dass das Wasser als solches eine rituelle Rolle bei der Krönung gespielt hat* ("We have not, however, been able to prove that the water as such played any ritual role in the coronation"). The water of the Gihon is defined as "the waters of life" in Zech 14:8 (cf. also Rev 22:1 and Jn 4:14). This view fits Ps 110 very well. The drinking of the water in Ps 110:7 seems to symbolize the "dew" of the king's youth (v. 3) and to follow from the ritual washing of the body and the rinsing of the mouth with water and beer that Widengren cites from Assyro-Babylonian sources that describe enthronement rituals and mention the lifting up of the head (*ibid.*, pp. 214-216).

The first problem to be clarified in Ps 110:7 is the source of the water used in ceremony. Jerusalem's source of water was the Gihon, a spring that flowed into the Kidron valley. It is unlikely that the king would descend to the Kidron brook to drink its water. But water from the brook may have been strategically placed for use in the ritual.

In Ps 110:7, the water is *minnakhal*, i.e., "from the wadi" or "from the valley", and not necessarily "from the brook". The term, *nakhal* ("wadi", "valley", "torrent", "brook"), as used in v. 7, appears to refer to some fountain or vessel with water located in or near a building's entrance. In the court at the southeast corner of the temple, Solomon had placed a large bronze basin called "the molten sea" or simply "the sea" (1Kings 7:24,

2 Kings 16:17). It, along with ten other basins, played a role in the rites of ablution indicated in 2 Chr 4:2-6 and Ps 26:6—"I wash my hands in innocence, and process around your altar, O **LORD**". Rites of ablution were common in the ancient world and remain so in many religious rites of today. The ritual ablution is prominent in Islam, and Muhammed prescribed a thorough ablution with water (or, in its absence, with sand) before engaging in some religious rites (cf. Sura 5:6).

In *Tabari's History* (of Muhammed), translated by W.M. Watt, published by Suny, N.Y., vol. 6, pp. 107-113, al-Tabari (838? – 923 A.D.) gives an account of the "Satanic Verses" (originally found in "The Star", Sura 53:19-22, of the Qur'an, but later replaced with another text) and notes that al-Walid b. al-Mughirah was too old to prostrate in approval of Muhammed's words; "but he took a handful of soil from the valley [*nahar*, which others translate as "river"] in his hand and bowed over that". The term, *nahar*, (Hebrew and Arabic for "river") in the context of Tabari's account refers not to a natural valley or river, but to the area of dry ground beside the Ka'bah, where this scene supposedly took place. Thus we may conclude that *nakhal* in Ps 110:7 refers to an area near or inside the throne hall or Hall of Judgment, perhaps near the entrance and at a level lower than the area where the jubilating "guests-of-honor" might sit or recline. In modern terms, we might refer to the area near the entrance as the "vestibule", or "atrium", or "entrance way". Thus the proper rendering could be, "from the fountain near the entryway".

The term, *derek*, often rendered as "path" or "way", has to do with treading (in contrast to *halak*, "to walk") as well as with the place upon which one can tread. Since the setting of this psalm appears to be an indoor celebration of an enthronement or victory, *derek* may well refer to a dais or a flight of steps ascending to the throne and near which the king takes a festive drink (a

"religious toast"?) and then ascends to his place on the throne—with his head erect, i.e., exalted above everyone else's head and ready to receive the crown, if not already bearing the crown. The translation, "from the fountain near the entryway" is only a "theory". But al-Tabari's account may shed some light on this obscure passage.

The second problem to be clarified in vv. 6-7 is the meaning or significance of the statement, "he shall hold his head erect". The literal translation of v. 6 ("He has struck down rulers") reads: "He has wounded the head". Apparently, the Hebrew poet wants to dwell on the word "head" (*rosh*). In the first instance, the *rosh* (headship) "over all the earth" has been struck down by God. Now, in the second instance, the head (*rosh*) of the new king is raised up to symbolize his headship "over all the earth". Dahood (cf. *ibid*, p. 120) rightly notes the parallel and contrast that the king's upright head in this verse makes with the king's enemies serving as his footstool in v. 1. The parallel between "head" in v. 6 and "head" in v. 7 is further emphasized in the poet's use of *rosh* without article or the referent "his", which is supplied in the rendering given here for the sake of clarity and easy reading in English. In view of the messianic character given to the Hebrew Scriptures in post-exilic times, one can readily see the interest of the NT in applying this psalm to Jesus as the messiah and ruler over all that the scriptures foretold. In view of the messianic interpretation given to the Hebrew Scriptures in post-exilic times, one can readily understand the interest of the NT in applying this psalm to Jesus as the messiah that the scriptures foretold. The Letter to the Hebrews 1:13 quotes Ps 110:1 in reference to Jesus, and Heb 10:12-13 speak of Christ's enthronement at God's right hand and waiting "until his enemies are made his footstool". Finally Christ as king in the spirit of Ps 110 reaches its climax in Rev 17:14, where the Lamb, standing on his throne (cf. Rev. 5:6) is proclaimed as "the **LORD** of lords and the King of kings".

Psalms 111

This and the next psalm are acrostics and probably from the same poet. The "works of the **LORD**" (v. 2) are creation and the **LORD**'s saving actions in the course of history. In view of the acrostic form and the reference to wisdom in the final verse, this psalm may be classified as "Wisdom literature"; but it is mostly a song of praise from the postexilic community at a time when sapiential writing was ascendant. Verse 5 appears to recall the manna in the desert and the Passover Covenant.

- 1 Halleluiah!**
I will thank the LORD with all my heart,
in the council of the upright and in the congregation.
- 2 The works of the LORD are great,**
desired by all who delight in them.
- 3 Glory and majesty are his doing,**
and his justice stands forever.

- 4 He has made a memorial unto his wondrous works.
The LORD is gracious and merciful.
- 5 He gives food to those who fear him;
he will remember his covenant forever.
- 6 He has shown his people the might of his works,
by giving them the birthright of the nations.
- 7 Truth and justice are the works of his hands.
All his precepts are steadfast,
- 8 established forever and ever,
made in uprightness and truth.
- 9 He sent deliverance to his people,
and established his covenant forever.
His name is holy and awesome.
- 10 The beginning of wisdom is fear of the LORD.
Sound judgment comes to all who do this.
His praise stands firm forever.

Notes

3. The poetic construction of the Hebrew text infers that “doing” and “justice” are synonyms. Thus, “justice”, carries with it the meanings of achievement, feat, decree, bounty, and generosity. In the following lines, “memorial” is the same root as “remember” and is synonymous with “covenant”.

10. The rendering, “who do this”, translates the Hebrew, “who do them” (*‘osheyhem*). While the LXX

and other ancient translations render “them” with the feminine singular form so as to refer to “wisdom”, St. Jerome keeps the plural form and uses the neuter plural, *ea*. In this particular case, it appears best to see the plural form as an all-embracing expression, covering all instances of one’s “fear of the LORD”. “Sound judgment” (*sekel towb*) is thus a manifestation of wisdom and provides a proper parallel to “fear of the LORD” in the chiasmic structure that the poet employs here.

Psalms 112

Like the previous psalm, Ps 112 is also an acrostic and, considerably more so than Ps 111, sapiential, especially in its treatment of the upright person, who delights in God’s wisdom manifested in law. Its kinship with Ps 1 is remarkable, even though commentators make no specific remark about the similarities. Like Ps 1, Ps 112, extending the theme of fear of the LORD from Ps 111, first notes the qualities and blessings of the just person; then the lot of the wicked is described. Other similarities in language and structure can be easily seen when the two psalms are viewed synoptically.

- 1 Halleluiah!
How blessed the man who fears the LORD,
who takes great delight in his precepts.
- 2 His offspring will be powerful in the land.
The offspring of the just shall be blessed.
- 3 Wealth and riches are in his house,
and his goodness will stand forever.
- 4 A light shines in the darkness for the upright:
It is gracious, merciful, and just.
- 5 The good man is gracious and generous:
He conducts his affairs prudently.
- 6 He will never be shaken;
the righteous one will be ever remembered.
- 7 He will not be afraid of evil rumors:

- His heart remains firm, trusting in the LORD.**
- 8 With steadfast heart he will not fear,
even when he confronts his foes.**
- 9 He readily shares and gives to the needy;
his righteousness will endure forever.
His horn will be exalted in glory.**
- 10 The wicked will see and be distressed;
he will gnash his teeth and waste away.
The likes of the wicked will perish.**

Notes

4. Since this is a sapiential psalm, “light” is best understood as “wisdom”, the “effulgence of God”, rather than God as such. The psalmist presents the offspring of the just as those who receive the light of wisdom and act accordingly.

10. The Hebrew text uses *ta’awat* (usually translated as “desire”) for the rendering of “likes”, which, admittedly, is rather “slangy”. But it presents the concept quite well in this instance. The Hebrew term has a wide range of meanings in addition to “desire”: “dwelling”, “lust”, “memorial”, etc. “The likes of the wicked” is a contrasting parallel to “the offspring of the just” in verse two.

Psalm 113

Psalms 113-118 form a group that gives God praise extending beyond heaven and earth. These psalms are referred to as “the Egyptian Hallel”, because they were chanted for the feast of Passover while the Passover lamb was being immolated and again in the family gathered for the Passover meal. The postexilic community of the poor and faithful replaces the defunct Davidic-Solomonic monarchy in governing, in bringing the covenants into effect, and in universalizing the name of the LORD, not by conquest, but by witness and proclamation. Cf. *Die Knechte im Psalter*, by Ulrich Berges, in *Biblica*, vol. 81, fasc. 2, 2000, pp. 156-157. In the “suffering servant” poems (e.g., Isa 42:1-4) from Deutero-Isaiah, Israel in exile is summed up as the *‘ebed Yahweh*, the “servant of the LORD”. In a “democratizing spirit”, Ps 113 addresses the postexilic community as the “servants of the LORD” and calls upon them to offer praise throughout the day; for the LORD has brought them back from the dust and dung of exile and bareness to restore the family of Israel.

- 1 Halleluiah!
Praise, O servants of the LORD;
praise the name of the LORD!**
- 2 Blessed be the name of the LORD both now
and forever.**
- 3 From the rising of the sun to its setting,
praised be the name of the LORD.**
- 4 The LORD is exalted over all nations;
above the heavens is his glory.**
- 5 Is anyone like the LORD our God, who dwells on high,
6 who bends over to look upon heaven and earth?
7 He raises the lowly from the dust
and lifts the poor from the dung heap,
8 to seat him with princes, with the rulers of his people.
9 He gives the childless woman a home,
making her the delighted mother of a family.
Halleluiah!**

Notes

3. The psalmist employs a wordplay between “name” (*shem*) and “sun” (*shemesh*) in this verse. The

sun’s course may be taken either as temporal (“all day long”) or geographical (“everywhere”). Of course, given the psalmist’s love of double meaning, both possibilities may be intended here.

Psalm 114

Psalm 114 is what an ideal psalm is supposed to be—masterfully sculptured, finely proportioned, imaginatively picturesque, and, like a good homily, to the point and brief! Its composition reflects a time during the united monarchy. The placement of the psalm, however, reveals its significance for the exiles upon their liberation and return to their homeland. For these people, their return is the equivalent of the liberation of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. But it is not only a matter of rejoicing. Nor is it only a matter of reclaiming their country and property. Instead, what really matters is the return of the **LORD**, the God of Jacob, to the land.

- 1 When Israel went forth from Egypt,
the House of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue,**
- 2 Judah became his sanctuary, Israel his kingdom.**
- 3 The sea looked and fled;
the Jordan reversed its course.**
- 4 The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like young sheep.**
- 5 What was it, O Sea, that caused you to retreat?
O Jordan, that made you turn back?**
- 6 Mountains, that you skipped like rams?
Hills, like the young of a ewe?**
- 7 O Earth, tremble at the presence of the LORD,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,**
- 8 who changed the rock into a pool of water,
the flint into a spring of water.**

Notes

5-6. The psalmist presents a play on contrasts and similarities so as to emphasize the universal nature of God’s works: The sea is large as compared to the Jordan River; but both have a similar reaction. Likewise, mountains, like rams, are large, while hills, like “young sheep” (lambs), are small; but both have a similar

reaction to God’s presence. All of creation is as astonished at the Exodus and God’s might as is the House of Jacob upon leaving Egypt. Yet the battle to overcome chaos that other psalms depict in the crossing of the sea is presented here, in the spirit of Second Isaiah (cf. Isa 41:18b, 43:20, 44:3-4), as something that is readily and even playfully accomplished. Cf. Sthulmueller, *ibid.*, p. 137-138.

Psalm 115

This psalm pits the **LORD**’s glory and greatness against that of the pagan gods. The opening lines ask the **LORD** to glorify his name, not for the sake of the people, but for the **LORD**’s own sake so that the nations might realize that the **LORD** is God. If Ps 115 is to be dated before the exile, then its composition could be as early as Solomon’s time, when pagan worship was making inroads into Israel as a result of Solomon’s foreign wives. Cf. 1 Kings 11:1-8. However, most commentators see this as a postexilic psalm, intent upon keeping the postexilic community from clinging to or reverting to pagan cults in the restoration of the land. The mention of the House of Aaron in v. 10 would have re-enforced this

purpose and may indicate that the poet was a priest.

- 1 Not for us, O LORD, not for us,
but for your name's sake give glory,
for the sake of your love and truth.**
- 2 Why do the nations ask:
"Where, pray tell, is their God?"**
- 3 But our God is in the heavens;
he does whatever delights him.**
- 4 Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.**
- 5 They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes they have, but do not see;**
- 6 they have ears, but do not hear;
a nose belongs to them; but they cannot smell.**
- 7 They cannot feel with their hands.
They have feet, but cannot walk.
With their throat, they can't even grunt!**
- 8 Just like them their makers shall be—
everyone who trusts in them.**
- 9 O Israel, trust in the LORD.
He is their help and their shield.**
- 10 O House of Aaron, trust in the LORD.
He is their help and their shield.**
- 11 You that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD.
He is their help and their shield.**
- 12 The LORD has remembered us;
may he grant blessings.
May he bless the House of Israel.
May he bless the House of Aaron.**
- 13 May he bless those who fear the LORD,
both the small and the great.**
- 14 May the LORD grant you increase,
to you and to your children.**
- 15 May you be blessed by the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.**
- 16 Even the highest of the heavens belongs to the LORD;
but the earth he has given to the children of Adam.**
- 17 Neither the dead praise the LORD,
nor those who descend into the silence.**
- 18 But we will bless the LORD both now and forever.
Halleluiah!**

Notes

7-8. The psalmist has cleverly crafted the description of idols by means of an inclusion, beginning with mouths that cannot speak and ending with throats that cannot even be cleared by a grunt or gurgle (*hagah*, an onomatopoeia). These poetic devices add more force to the conclusion that the makers and worshippers of

idols are as helpless and useless as their idols. And even though the idols may be made of gold and silver, no one can really trust in them. Thus Israel is now admonished to trust only in the **LORD**. This directive is given additional emphasis by the repeated command to "trust" and by the antiphonal character of the response in the next several lines.

9-15. These verses present a dialog between the presiding priest(s) and the worshippers. Three groups receive blessings: a. the House of Israel (all Israelites), b. the House of Aaron (the priests—Ps 135:20 adds the House of Levi), and c. “those who fear the **LORD**”. The

expression, “those who fear the **LORD**”, eventually became a designation “for proselytes or for those gentiles who believed in Yahweh but did not accept circumcision and Jewish dietary laws” (cf. Stuhlmüller, *ibid.*, p. 140; Acts 10:2, 22; 13:26).

Psalm 116

Psalm 116 (Pss 114-115 in the LXX) is a song of thanksgiving for escape from death—perhaps from the enemy's hands or from serious illness, similar to Hezekiah's thanksgiving in Isa 38. In personal prayer and meditation, this psalm serves well to rekindle one's spirits after a time of struggle with any situation that might have left one exhausted physically, psychologically, or spiritually. The Aramaic elements in the psalm (vv. 7 and 12) place its composition or at least its present form late in the postexilic age.

- 1 Let me proclaim my love;
for the LORD has heard my voice, my pleading.**
- 2 Yes, he inclined his ear to me;
and then I called out.**
- 3 The tethers of death were strangling me;
and the narrow grave was about to claim me.
I met Sorrow and Distress.**
- 4 Then I called on the LORD's name:
“I implore you, O LORD: Save my life!”**
- 5 Gracious is the LORD, and just.
And our God is merciful.**
- 6 Protector of the lowly is the LORD.
I was brought down; but he was my Savior.**
- 7 Return to your rest, O my soul;
for the LORD has rewarded you:**
- 8 He has delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears and my feet from faltering.**
- 9 Let me walk before the LORD into the lands
of the living.**
- 10 I was certain when I proclaimed:
“I have been thoroughly exploited.”**
- 11 I declared without hesitation: “Everyone is a liar!”**
- 12 What shall I give back to the LORD
for all his goodness to me?**
- 13 I will take up the cup of salvation
and call upon the name of the LORD.**
- 14 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.**
- 15 Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death
of his devout people.**
- 16 I implore you, O LORD;
for I am your servant, your subject,
the child of a mother who served you.
You have freed me from my bonds.**
- 17 I will offer you a sacrifice of praise**

and call on the name of the LORD.
18 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the House of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Halleluiah!

Notes

1. *Let me proclaim my love.* Usually, this first line is rendered, “I love you, O LORD.” However, this departs significantly from the MT and the ancient sources. More appropriately, *’ahabtiy* (“I have loved”) should be understood in an absolute sense (i.e., without a direct object) and could read, “I love that YHWH hears the cry of my supplications”. Cf. *Psalm 116,10-11*, by Th. Booij, in *Biblica*, vol. 76, fasc. 3, 1995, pp. 388-395, specifically p. 389. Most commentators believe that the psalmist had been ill and is now praising the LORD for recovery from illness. However, the setting is not entirely clear, and the reference to “the cup of salvation” in v. 13 may imply that the psalm is in celebration of a military escape (possibly even from captivity) and/or victory. The speaker appears to be the king.

2. *and then I called out.* The poet presents an interesting picture here: The LORD is ready to hear even before “I called out” (*’eqira*). The verb is in the “imperfect” tense, which expresses an action that is future to the speaker’s point of reference—i.e., to the LORD’s past inclining of the ear.

6. *Protector of the lowly.* The “lowly” (*p^eta’iyim*) are those who are “devoid of discernment and understanding”—“unsuspecting” and “likely to be foolish” (cf. Booij, *ibid.*, p. 389).

8-9. *he has delivered my soul.* The MT reads, “you have delivered my soul”, as if addressing the LORD. The LXX and St. Jerome read, “he has delivered my soul”. The poet, having now experienced God’s saving help, is eager to return to an active life and service to God.

The psalmist’s choice of words with the sounds of “bee”, “shee”, “mee”, “nee”, “lee”, and especially “kee” (as pronounced in English) gives this passage with its references to the speaker’s bodily members a poetic, almost magical, spell that is lost in translation. We are tempted to call it an “out-of-the-body experience”. However, any reference to “life after death” is certainly

beyond the psalmist’s purview. Rather, the poet is ever so thankful just to be alive. The “lands of the living” means the “here and now”. The future tense in the Hebrew verb, *’ethalek* (“I will walk”), is future in regard to the poet’s having been delivered from death, and can be accurately expressed as “let me walk . . .”

10. Emphatically, the psalmist laments, *’aniy ’aniytiy m^e’od* (“I have been thoroughly exploited”). The term, “exploited”, is suggested by the reference to *p^eta’iyim* (v. 6) and his/her identifying with them.

11-13. *without hesitation . . . cup of salvation.* The MT states “in my haste”, given here as “without hesitation”. It is not clear why the speaker considered everyone to be a liar. Perhaps the psalmist is intent on contrasting his/her former gullibility with the newfound realization that he/she has been repeatedly duped by virtually everyone. Also, since Hebrew verbs often imply the use of “would” or “could”, the psalmist may be saying, “In haste, I could have declared that all men are liars”.

The reference to fulfilling vows “in the presence of all the people” may be an indication that the psalmist has regained confidence and is ready to show others that he/she is no longer one who can be easily deceived. The context indicates that the “vows” to be fulfilled included the offering of a thanksgiving sacrifice, and it may be that the libation of wine symbolized such a sacrifice.

15. The “devout people” (*khasidiym*), whose death is herewith acknowledged, may well be soldiers who had died in battle. Death is considered of value by the LORD when it serves a noble purpose on behalf of God’s people and the Law, as in the death of Samson (Judg 16:30f) and, in later times, in 2 Maccabees. It should be noted, however, that 2 Macc evaluates the death of martyrs and soldiers positively in view of the hope of resurrection of the dead (cf. 2 Macc 7 and 12; 1 Cor 15:29). Early Christians took this psalm as a lesson on resurrection and everlasting life.

Psalm 117

This, the most brief of all psalms and shortest chapter in the Bible, is filled with theology and a few problems. No other psalm is so direct and insistent that all nations should praise the LORD, Israel’s God.

- 1 Praise the LORD, all you nations.**
Praise him, all you peoples.
- 2 For steadfast has been his love toward us,**

**and the LORD's faithfulness is forever.
Halleluiah!**

Notes

1a. The usual translation of this line is, "All you peoples, praise the LORD"; But that presents a problem. The Hebrew term rendered as "peoples" (*ha'emmim*) is ambiguous. Its root means "mother" or "handmaid" (cf. Ps 116:16). But here the word has a masculine, plural ending. Dahood (*ibid.*, p. 152) argues that it means "frightful ones", i.e., "gods". The root can also mean

"earth" or "nation". Inasmuch as the nations and their gods are virtually synonymous with each other, it may well be that the psalmist wants both meanings to be operative in this word. Thus the duty of giving praise to YHWH falls not only on the foreign peoples, but also on their gods. This does not necessarily mean that the psalmist believes that other gods exist. Rather, he/she only wants to make an all-inclusive statement as one might do in saying "ye gods and little fishes".

Psalm 118

Psalm 118 appears to have had a long history of use as an entrance ritual both in pre-exilic and postexilic times, resulting in a final form that is complex and replete with sudden changes of "scenery". The "litany style" suggests that the psalm was chanted antiphonally between a vocalist or chorus and the people. The reference to "the tents of the just" in v. 15 may, according to some commentators, indicate that the psalm was or came to be associated with the Feast of Tabernacles. This psalm, recited for the Feast of Passover, concludes the "Egyptian Hallel". Cf. Ps 113.

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his mercy abides forever.**
- 2 Indeed, let Israel proclaim:
"His mercy abides forever!"**
- 3 Let the House of Aaron say:
"His mercy abides forever!"**
- 4 Let those who fear the LORD say:
"His mercy abides forever!"**
- 5 From that impasse, I called on the LORD.
The LORD answered me at great length.**
- 6 The LORD was for me; I feared nothing!
What could anyone do to me?**
- 7 The LORD was for me, with those who helped me.
I jeered at those who opposed me.**
- 8 It is better to trust in the LORD than to confide in man.**
- 9 It is better to trust in the LORD
than to confide in princes.**
- 10 Those infidels surrounded me;
but I cut them off in the LORD's name.**
- 11 They surrounded me on all sides;
but I cut them off in the LORD's name.**
- 12 They swarmed over me like bees;
they were unquenchable like fire among thorns;
but I cut them off in the LORD's name.**
- 13 They kept on pressing me so that I would fall;
but the LORD kept on supporting me.**
- 14 The LORD is my strength and my song;**

- he has become my savior.
- 15 The sound of rejoicing and victory is in the tents
of the just.
- 16 The right hand of the LORD rules with might.
The right hand of the LORD is raised on high.
The right hand of the LORD rules with power.
- 17 I did not die.
Instead I am alive and declare the works of the LORD.
- 18 The LORD has thoroughly chastened me;
but he did not hand me over to death.
- 19 Open the Gates of Righteousness for me;
I will go in through them;
I will give praise to the LORD.
- 20 This is the gate of the LORD.
The righteous will enter by this way.
- 21 I will give thanks to you;
for you have heard me, and you were savior to me.
- 22 The stone that the builders rejected
has become the “cornerstone.”
- 23 By the LORD has this been done.
It has become a marvel in our eyes.
- 24 This is the day when the LORD took action.
Let us exult and rejoice in him.
- 25 I implore you, O LORD: Be pleased to grant salvation!
I implore you, O LORD:
Be pleased to grant prosperity!
- 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD,
We will bless you from the House of the LORD.
- 27 The LORD is God, and he has given us light.
Go in procession with leafy boughs.
Adorn the horns of the altar.
- 28 My God are you, and I will offer thanks to you.
I will extol you, O my God.
- 29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.
His mercy abides forever.

Notes

5. *that impasse*. The speaker (the king?) uses the term, *hammetsar*, to describe his plight in battle. This is the only use of the term in Hebrew scriptures. Thus its exact meaning is not clear. However, the root has to do with enemies and confinement, and the use of the definite article (*ha*) would indicate that the speaker has a specific event and place in mind. The term may refer to an ambush as described in vv. 10-12. The scene of ambush, battle, and escape from death recalls the military exchange between King Abijah of Judah and King Jeroboam of the rebellious “House of Israel”. Cf. 2 Chr 13; 1 Kings 15:1-8.

at great length. In response to the king’s prayer, the LORD answers *bammerkhab* (literally, “in the large place”). This expression is obscure; but its imagery and

contrast with “*impasse*” are clear. It may be an adverbial expression, as rendered here; or it may be a reference to the king’s being released from some sort of confinement; or it may refer to God’s unbounded heavens.

6-7. *feared . . . jeered*. Hebrew poetry often plays on the words for “fear” (*yare*) and “see” (*ra’ah*), when “see” implies “look down on” or, as is the case here, “gloat over” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 157). The wordplay is imitated here with “feared” and “jeered”. Using the “historical present form”, the speaker further describes the struggle of the recent past as if present. However, for the sake of clarity and the modern reader, these lines are rendered in the past tense according to the requirements of English usage.

12-13. The speaker describes the overthrow of the enemy with “cut off”, a technical term for circumcision.

With this, the speaker further defines “I jeered at” (cf. also 1 Sam 18:25-27).

19-20. The “gates of righteousness” may mean the gates to Jerusalem, while “This is the gate” (singular, v. 20) may refer to the temple gate. Also, “righteousness” and “the righteous” may mean “victory” and “victors” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 159). However, Jerusalem appears to be denominated here as the “City of Righteousness for the Righteous”, and the “gates of righteousness” refers to the city gates. On the other hand, the temple gate functioned to allow entry only to the pious faithful (cf. v. 26) who met the required canons of purity for entry into the temple. Cf. “*Les portes de justice*” et “*la porte de YHWH*” dans le *Psaume 118*, 19-20, by David Hamidovic, in *Biblica*, vol. 81, fasc. 4, 2000, pp. 542-550.

22. This verse may be an ancient proverb, similar to the story of “The Ugly Duckling”.

24. *This is the day when.* The usual translation of this verse is “This is the day that the **LORD** has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (thus the NRSV and NAB). However, “this the day” (*ze-hayyom*) is adverbial in sense and function. The emphasis is on the time of the **LORD**’s action, and not the object of the **LORD**’s action. Cf. *Psalm 118:24*, by Adele Berlin, in *JBL*, vol. 96, no. 4, Dec., 1977, pp. 567-568.

26. *Blessed is he who comes.* At this juncture, it appears that a chorus of singers welcomes the pilgrims or the victorious king and his entourage into the temple precincts.

27b. *Go in procession.* One may ask if this statement is really part of the psalm. This may be a “rubric” to be set off in brackets, and may indicate earlier times when the laity could approach close to the altar.

Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is an acrostic psalm of twenty-two stanzas of eight verses each. The verses within each stanza begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet, with the stanzas proceeding successively through each letter of the alphabet. The all-embracing theme of this psalm is that of one traveling through life’s stages, with God’s Law as guide, path, and sustenance. In spite of its acrostic structure, there is a well-stated progression of thought in this psalm. The psalmist was not always enthusiastic about the Law of the **LORD**. But with time, experience, and maturity, the poet is no longer led astray or tempted to do so by those who have only scorn for the Law and the psalmist. The poet’s use of *torah* throughout this psalm is usually rendered here as “law”; but “teaching” and other synonyms would also be appropriate. But since the poet never quotes from the Priestly Tradition (P), which “lays down the Law of Moses”, it is not entirely clear or definable what the psalmist means by “law”. According to Stuhlmueller (cf. *ibid.* p. 154), “it is a keen sensitivity to oral traditions as these transmit the ideals, the sorrows, and the struggles of Israel’s ordinary folk; it is personal dedication to what one perceives to be the best”. For the psalmist, “law” means “to seek the **LORD** your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (cf. Deut 6:5). Given the psalmist’s personal reflections on and interest in the law as given in Deuteronomic literature and in view of his not quoting from the Priestly sources, it appears that Ps 119 is late pre-exilic. Perhaps the psalmist was moved, directly or indirectly, to compose this psalm as a result of the discovery of the “Book of the Law” (most probably an early version of the Book of Deuteronomy) in the temple archives during King Josiah’s reform (640-609 B.C.E.). Cf. 2 Kings 22:8ff.

Aleph

- 1 How blessed are those whose way is upright,
who walk in the Law of the LORD.**
- 2 How blessed are they who keep his commands,
who seek him with all their hearts,**
- 3 who also do no evil, but walk in his ways.**
- 4 You have given a decree:
Even your least commands must be obeyed.**
- 5 If only my ways were steadfast
in following your statutes,**
- 6 then I would have no misgivings**

- when considering all your precepts.
- 7 I will thank you with a sincere heart,
as I study your trustworthy decisions.
- 8 I will obey your decrees.
Never in the least forsake me.
Beth
- 9 How can a lad keep his path pure?
By setting his course upon your word.
- 10 I have sought you with all my heart;
let me not stray from your commands.
- 11 In my heart, I secured your word,
that I might not sin against you.
- 12 May you be blessed, O LORD.
Teach me your statutes.
- 13 With my lips I profess every word of your mouth.
- 14 I delight in the way of your commands
even more than in all riches.
- 15 I ponder your precepts and will observe your ways.
- 16 I delight in your statutes
and will not forget your word.

Notes: vv. 1-16

1. This verse recalls Ps 1:1, but applies blessedness to all who are upright.

8. It appears that the psalmist intended to draw a parallel and an inclusion with v. 4, which ends with *m^e’od*, as does v.8. Thus “even your least” (v. 4) and “in the least” (v. 8) in the translation here are rather imperfect renderings of the emphatic Hebrew adverb,

m^e’od, meaning “exceedingly” or “completely”. This mode of expression is repeated in the NT in regard to the law. Cf., e.g., Mt 5:18f.

9. It is possible to render this entire verse as a single question to read, “How can a lad purify his path so as to keep it according your word?” Cf. *The Question of Psalm 119:9*, by William Michael Soll, in *JBL*, vol. 106, no. 4, December, 1987, pp. 687-688.

Gimel

- 17 Be of good will to your servant:
let me live and obey your word.
- 18 Open my eyes
that I may behold the marvels of your Law.
- 19 I am a pilgrim upon the earth.
Do not hide your commandments from me.
- 20 My soul is pining away, ever hungry for your law.
- 21 You have rebuked the proud, the accursed,
who strayed away from your commandments.
- 22 Turn scorn and contempt away from me;
for I have kept your testimonies.
- 23 Though tyrants meet to denounce me,
your servant holds fast to your statutes.
- 24 Also, your decrees are my delight,
the members of my council.
Daleth
- 25 My soul clings to the dust.
Give me life from your word.
- 26 I have made known my ways,

- and you have answered me.
 Teach me your statutes.
 27 Help me to understand the way of your precepts.
 Then let me contemplate your marvels.
 28 My soul sags with sorrow.
 Uphold me with your word.
 29 Keep from me the way of falsehood,
 and graciously grant me your Law.
 30 I have chosen the way of truth;
 I have obeyed your precepts.
 31 I have clung to your statutes.
 O LORD, do not put me to shame.
 32 I will run the way of your commands,
 if you will but open wide my heart.

Notes: vv. 17-32

17. The term, “servant”, occurs 13 times in Ps 119. The true servant of God is true to the Torah.

20. The psalmist makes use of the multiple meanings of *nepesh* (“soul”, “life”, and, in particular, “throat”, or even “belly”; cf. Ps 44:25f) to present God’s commands as food for life’s sojourn.

25. Again the psalmist implies the various meanings of *nepesh*, so that several images emerge (cf. vv. 25 and

28). On the one hand, the image is that of a person lying exhausted and dying in the dust (*‘apar*). But the use of *‘apar* also brings to mind that we are made from dust into which God breathes *nepesh* (cf. Gen 2:7). Thus the psalmist is able to convey the image of a person who desires, in our modern expression, “to keep body and soul together” by asking for God’s life-giving commandments.

He

- 33 Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees;
 and I will observe it in detail.
 34 Give me understanding, and I will keep your Law.
 I will guard it with all my heart.
 35 Guide me in the path of your commandments;
 for I take delight in it.
 36 Make my heart eager for your precepts,
 and not for corrupt profits.
 37 Make my eyes blind to vanities.
 Through your guidance give me life.
 38 For your servant, fulfill the promise
 which is for those who revere you.
 39 Remove the reproach which I fear;
 for your decrees are befitting.
 40 Behold, I long for your precepts.
 In your righteousness, give me life.
 Waw
 41 Let your mercy come upon me, O LORD,
 your salvation according to your word.
 42 Then, to the one who reproaches me,
 I will return a word of reproach;
 for I will place my trust in your word.
 43 Never ever take the word of truth from my mouth;
 for I place my hope in your decrees.
 44 I will always rely on your law, now and forever.

- 45 Let me walk in freedom; for I seek your precepts.
 46 I have defended your testimonies in the presence
 of kings,
 and I was not ashamed.
 47 Let me delight in your commandments;
 these I have loved.
 48 Let me lift my hands to your commandments;
 these I have loved.
 Then I will meditate upon your statutes.

Notes: vv. 33-48

33. *in detail*. The MT employs ‘*eqeb* (“heel”) either in the meaning of “to the end” or “in detail”. St. Jerome reads *per vestigium*, “through footprint”, which seems to mean “in detail” or “to the last vestige”. The expression is parallel to “with all my heart” in v. 34.

37b. The rendering, “through your guidance”, represents an attempt to convey the multiple meanings implied by the Hebrew term, *bid^erakeka*, which means, first of all, “in your way”, and then, by extension, “commandments”, “dominion”, and “power”.

Zayin

- 49 Remember the word to your servant,
 through which you let me hope.
 50 This is my comfort in my affliction:
 that your word has sustained my life.
 51 The proud have mocked me unceasingly;
 but I have not wavered from your law.
 52 I recall your decrees of old, LORD;
 and I feel comforted.
 53 Ardent zeal overwhelms me;
 for the wicked forsake your law.
 54 Your statutes have become my songs
 in the course of my journey.
 55 At night I think of your name, LORD;
 and keep watch over your law.
 56 This has been my recompense;
 for I have upheld your precepts.
Kheth
 57 For my part, O LORD, I promise:
 I shall obey your directives.
 58 I implore your favor with all my heart:
 Be kind to me according to your word.
 59 I reconsidered my ways;
 then I turned my steps to your testimonies.
 60 I acted without delay,
 and did not hesitate to heed your commands.
 61 The snares of the wicked entangled me;
 but I did not forget your law.
 62 I arise when half the night is spent,
 to give you thanks for your just decrees.
 63 An ally am I to all who fear you,
 and to those who keep your precepts.
 64 Your mercy, O LORD, has filled the earth.
 Teach me your statutes.

Notes: vv. 49-64

56. *recompense*. It is possible that the psalmist uses a bit of sarcasm in the term, *z'oth*, rendered here as "recompense", as if to say, "I have obeyed your laws, but scorn is what I get for doing so". Elsewhere, however, the psalmist considers God and God's laws to be

rewarding and a delight to obey. Thus it appears best to view the verse in a fully positive manner.

57. *For my part*. This rendering can be questioned. It is best understood as a conjunctive expression, tying together the concepts that God's laws are gifts and that the psalmist's obedience is the right way to reciprocate.

Teth

**65 You have treated your servant well, O LORD,
according to your promise.**

**66 Teach me to judge well and understand;
for I believe in your commandments.**

**67 Before I was humbled, I had gone astray;
but now I am obedient to your word.**

**68 How good you are, doing good things!
Teach me your statutes.**

**69 Against me the proud have forged a lie;
I observe your laws with my whole heart.**

**70 Their hearts are filled with pride;
I take delight in your law.**

**71 How good for me to have been humbled,
so that I might learn your statutes!**

**72 How good for me is the law of your mouth,
better than thousands in gold and silver!
Yod**

**73 Your hands have fashioned me and formed me.
Give me insight and let me learn your statutes.**

**74 Let those who fear you see me and rejoice;
for I have relied upon your word.**

**75 LORD, I know that your decrees are just;
and in your faithfulness you humbled me.**

**76 Let your mercy, I implore, be my comfort,
according to your promise to your servant.**

**77 Let your mercies come to me that I may live;
for your law is the greatest of my delights.**

**78 Let the proud be shamed for misleading me
with their lie.**

But as for me, let me ponder your precepts.

**79 Let them turn to me: those who fear you,
and those who know your testimonies.**

**80 Let my heart be blameless in your decrees;
then I shall never need to be ashamed.**

Notes: vv. 65-80

67. *Before I was humbled*. The term, '*anah*', has a wide range of meanings: "humbled", "afflicted", "answerable". It appears that the psalmist is referring to his or her early life (i.e., "before the age of reason" or

before reaching maturity), which was marked by unintentional offenses against God's law.

77. *the greatest of my delights*. The expression, "the greatest of", is not in the Hebrew text. Instead, the plural form, "my delights", is used as the "definition" (predicate nominative) of "your law".

Kaph

- 81 My soul yearns for your salvation;
I wait for your word.
- 82 My eyes have grown weary for your word,
asking, “When will you console me?”
- 83 Although I am like a skin flask, ashen from smoke,
I have not forgotten your statutes.
- 84 How many are the days of your servant?
When will you pronounce judgment against those
who persecute me?
- 85 The proud have dug pitfalls for me,
quite contrary to your law.
- 86 All your commandments are faithful.
With falsehood they persecute me. Help me!
- 87 They nearly ended my life on earth;
but I did not forsake your precepts.
- 88 As befits your kindness, preserve my life;
and I will heed the commands of your mouth.
Lamed
- 89 Forever, O LORD,
your word has command of the heavens.
- 90 From age to age is your faithfulness.
You established the earth, and it stands firm.
- 91 At your decrees, they stand to this day;
for they all are your servants.
- 92 If your law had not been my great delight,
I would have perished in my distress.
- 93 I will never forget your precepts;
for through them you have sustained my life.
- 94 Save me, I belong to you;
for I have sought your precepts.
- 95 The wicked waited for me to destroy me;
let me contemplate your testimonies.
- 96 I have seen the extent of all that is finite;
but your command is truly all-embracing.

Notes: vv. 81-96

83. The MT states, “I am like a bottle in smoke”. The image is that of a flagon made of skin that has become parched and ashen due to exposure to smoke (*qatar*). The psalmist appears to be an old person with stiff joints and gray hair. In the LXX, “smoke” is given as *παχυνή* (“hoarfrost”). St. Jerome rendered it as “pruina”, which also means “hoarfrost”.

89. *your word has command*. The MT uses *natsab* (“stand”). Here it means “take a stand”, “officiate”. Cf. *Psalms 119,89-91*, by Th. Booij, in *Biblica*, vol.79, fasc. 4, 1998, pp. 539-541.

91. *they*. This term includes “your word” and “your faithfulness”, and “the earth” and all within it.

Mem

- 97 How, indeed, I love your law!
It is what I ponder all day long.
- 98 Through your precept,
you make me wiser than my enemies.
Indeed, it is forever mine.

- 99 I have greater knowledge than all my teachers;
for your commandments are my meditation.
- 100 I have more insight than the elders;
for I have obeyed your precepts.
- 101 I have kept my feet from every evil path,
so that I might observe your word instead.
- 102 I have not wandered from your judgments;
for you were the one to instruct me.
- 103 How sweet are your words to my palate,
more than honey to my mouth!
- 104 Through your precepts, I gain understanding;
therefore, I hate every deceitful path.

Nun

- 105 Your word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a shining light unto my path.
- 106 I made a vow, and pledged to obey your just decrees.
- 107 I am utterly cast down, O LORD.
Give me life according to your word.
- 108 With the prayer of my mouth be pleased—
I implore you, O LORD;
and teach me your decrees.
- 109 My life is always in my hand;
thus I do not forget your law.
- 110 The wicked have set a trap for me;
but I have not strayed from your precepts.
- 111 Your testimonies are my lasting heritage;
for they are the joy of my heart.
- 112 This is the resolve of my heart:
forever to obey your statutes perfectly.

Notes: vv. 97-112

108-109. The Hebrew term, *n^edabah* (“prayer”), has to do with the words and actions of one’s free will. The

term may be a reference to the vow or oath sworn by the psalmist in v. 106. Likewise, the cryptic expression in v. 109a may be a further reference to the vow—pledged through one’s raised hand.

Samekh

- 113 I hate hypocrites; but I love your law.
- 114 You are my shelter and my shield.
I wait for your word.
- 115 Depart from me, you evildoers;
and let me heed the commands of my God.
- 116 Uphold me according to your promise,
that I may live;
and let me not be humiliated because of my hope.
- 117 Uphold me and I shall be saved;
and I will ever heed your laws.
- 118 You have cast aside all who stray from your laws;
for nothing but lies are their deceitful ways.
- 119 Like dross you have discarded all the wicked
of the land.
Therefore, I love your testimonies!

- 120 My flesh quivers from dread of you,
and from my fear of your judgments.
Ayin
- 121 I have done what is right and just.
Do not forsake me to my foes.
- 122 Reassure your servant of your goodness.
Do not let the arrogant oppress me.
- 123 My eyes pined for your salvation,
and for the promise of your justice.
- 124 Deal with your servant according to your mercy,
and instruct me in your commandments.
- 125 I am your servant; give me insight.
Then I will comprehend your testimonies.
- 126 The time has come to act, O LORD.
They have contradicted your law!
- 127 Therefore, I love your commandments
more than gold,
even the purest of gold.
- 128 And so I steadily keep all the precepts.
I detest every devious path.

Notes: vv. 113-128

126. It is possible to translate this verse with “The time has come for the **LORD** to act” (LXX). The context, however, is in the second person, singular. Thus the particle, *l^e*, in Hebrew may also be understood as an indicator of the vocative form. St. Jerome understood it

in this way and translated with *tempus est ut facias Domine*. (“It is time that you act, O **LORD**”). The passage may also be taken as a direct address in the formal, court style using the third person form. Perhaps the statement was proverbial, just as one might say directly to a monarch, “Long live the king!”

Pe

- 129 Your instructions are wonderful;
therefore my soul has guarded them.
- 130 The opening of your word gives light,
enabling the simple to understand.
- 131 I open my mouth and pant;
for I crave your commandments.
- 132 Turn to me and be gracious,
as is fitting for those who love your name.
- 133 Place my steps firmly on your word,
and let no evil rule over me.
- 134 Keep me from the oppression of men,
that I may then keep your precepts.
- 135 Let your face shine on your servant,
and teach me your statutes.
- 136 Torrents of tears stream from my eyes;
for they have not kept your law.
- Tsade
- 137 You are righteous, O LORD,
and upright are your judgments.
- 138 You decreed the righteousness of your testimonies,
and their absolute faithfulness.

- 139 My ardent fervor was undoing me;
for my oppressors ignored your words.
140 Your word is fully refined, and your servant loves it.
141 I may be lowly and despised,
but I have not forgotten your statutes.
142 Your justice remains forever just,
and your law is truth itself.
143 Anguish and distress have found me;
but your commands are my delight.
144 Your precepts are always just.
Instruct me, and I shall live.

Notes: vv. 129-144

130. The psalmist employs a clever wordplay, *patakh* ("opening") and *p^etah* ("simple"), as if to say, "Opening God's word opens one's mind".

Qoph

- 145 I have called with all my heart.
Answer me, O LORD; let me keep your statutes.
146 I have called out to you.
Save me, that I may keep your decrees.
147 I look eastward at dawn and cry out.
I wait expectantly for your word.
148 My eyes keep watch during the night vigils
in order to meditate on your word.
149 Hear my voice in your mercy, LORD.
In your justice, preserve my life.
150 Those who chase after evil draw near.
They have fled far away from your law.
151 But nearer are you, O LORD,
and all your commands are truth.
152 Long ago I learned from your testimonies,
because you have made them to stand forever.

Resh

- 153 Behold my affliction and save me;
for I have not forgotten your law.
154 Plead my cause and redeem me;
through your promise, preserve my life.
155 Far from the wicked be your salvation;
for they do not observe your commandments.
156 Many are your tender mercies, O LORD.
Give me life according to your decrees.
157 Many are my tormentors and oppressors;
but I have not swerved from your testimonies.
158 I beheld the offenders, and I was grieved;
for they do not heed your word.
159 But behold how I love your precepts!
O LORD, in your mercy give me life.
160 The core of your word is truth,
and eternal are all your just judgments.

Notes: vv. 145-160

In v. 147, the psalmist faces the rising sun to pray. At the same time, the rising sun becomes a sign of God's nearness, so much so that the terms, "near" (*qarowb*, in v. 151, rendered here as "nearer", since it is compared to "draw near" in v. 150) and "east" or "eastward" (*qedem*,

rendered as "Long ago" in v. 152, cf. next note) are "near titles" for the **LORD**.

152. Again the psalmist employs a subtle play on words and concepts: "Long ago" can be rendered "O Orient" or "*O Oriens*" ("Rising Sun", i.e., the **LORD**) as in the "O" antiphons of Advent.

Shin

- 161 Princes have pursued me in vain.
Yet my heart trembles at your word.**
**162 I rejoice over your word,
like someone uncovering great spoils.**
**163 It is falsehood that I hate and abhor;
but it is your law that I love.**
**164 I praise you seven times a day,
because of your righteous judgments.**
**165 Great peace to those who love your law!
For them there is no stumbling block.**
**166 I hope for your salvation, LORD;
and I have kept your commandments.**
**167 My soul has obeyed your testimonies,
and I have cherished them ever so much.**
**168 I have kept your precepts and testimonies;
because all my ways are present to you.**

Tau

- 169 Let my plea come to you, O LORD;
give me insight as you promised.**
**170 Let my prayer come before you;
save me according to your word.**
**171 Let my lips bubble with praise;
for you teach me your statutes.**
**172 Let my tongue testify to your word;
for all your commandments are righteous.**
**173 Let your hand stretch forth to help me;
for I have chosen your precepts.**
**174 I yearn for your salvation, O LORD;
and your law is my greatest delight.**
**175 Let my soul live and praise you;
and may your judgments help me.**
**176 Though I strayed like a lost lamb, seek your servant;
for I have not forgotten your commandments.**

Notes: vv. 161-176

161. The term, "princes", may refer to corrupt persons or powerful persons. One cannot help but think of the adage, "Power corrupts", in this case. Also, the expression, "in vain", is more often rendered as "without cause". However, the Hebrew term (*khinnam*) has the primary meaning of "graciousness". In extended application, it comes to mean "gratuitous" as well as "in vain". The rendering, "without cause", could also be

"without effect", even though "without cause" is to be included. The point is that God's word is a greater source of awe and fear than one's persecutors.

174. *greatest*. The Hebrew text employs the plural form for "delight" (*sha'ashu'ay*). Hebrew does not have comparative and superlative forms as such. Thus the plural form is often used as a superlative form.

176. The psalmist's choice of "lamb" (*seh*) rather than "sheep" (*ts'on*) in the psalm's final verse suggests that the psalmist is looking back to his or her youth (and

to v. 9: "How can a young person remain pure?") when God's commandments were taken less seriously.

Psalm 120

A Song of Ascents.

Psalms 120-134 form a collection with each psalm being entitled "A Song of Ascents". The action of ascending means to move upward, and it was commonplace to speak of "going up" to Jerusalem. The ascent that these psalms present is not only a geographical, upward movement, but also a psychological and spiritual ascent of an individual from the depths of the exile to the heights of Jerusalem and to life in the community of the **LORD**, "one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all".

The postexilic scribes were intent on presenting the temple as "the meeting point between the human (concrete) world and the divine (mythological) world. Jerusalem becomes the centre of the universe To 'ascend' is to be close to Yahweh, to experience life. To 'descend' is to sink down into the Deep, the realm of death. To be 'far' from the temple amounts to being far from YHWH, to be 'near' the temple is to experience YHWH's presence". Cf. *The Role of Space in the [Songs of Ascent] (Psalms 120-134)*, by Gert T.M. Prinsloo, in *Biblica*, vol. 86, fasc. 4, 2005, pp. 457-477, specifically p. 461. Cf. also the notes for Ps 134.

The Psalms of Ascent are parallel to much of the Book of Isaiah and to Ex 15:1-18—moving from slavery to liberation through the **LORD**'s mercy and ascending to the **LORD**'s holy mountain. Cf. *Ex 15, Ps 120-134 et le Livre d'Isaie, le Salut d'Israel et celui du Psalmiste (I) and (II)*, by Bernard Gosse, in *Bibbia e Oriente*, 213, 2002, XLIV Anno, pp. 129-159, and 214, 2002, XLIV Anno, pp. 193-206.

Psalm 120 is a lament, but unusual in that it is an "answered lament". In the opening lines, the psalmist may be recalling past times when God answered "in my distress". Now the psalmist is calling upon the **LORD** in a new situation. This would explain the shifting of tenses.

- 1 In my distress, I called unto the LORD;
and he answered me.**
- 2 LORD, save my life from lips that lie
and from tongues that beguile.**
- 3 What shall he give you?
And what more shall he add to you,
you deceitful tongue?**
- 4 The sharpened arrows of a warrior,
and the glowing coals of the broom tree?**
- 5 Woe to me, that I must sojourn in Meshech,
or dwell among the tents of Kedar!**
- 6 Too long has my soul been made to dwell
with those who hate peace!**
- 7 I advocate peace.
But when I speak out, they advocate war.**

Notes

3-4. It is not clear if "he" in v. 3 is a reference to God or to a "someone". Verse 4 is also unclear: Are the "sharpened arrows" and "glowing coals" answers to the question, or additional questions?

5-7. Meshech and Kedar (cf. Gen 10:2; 25:13) represent hostile lands far removed from Jerusalem. It is not clear what Meshech and Kedar might have meant to the psalmist, who seems to be one of the exiles and equates his/her situation with living in far-off places to

the northeast and southeast that show only hostility—so contrary to the peace that the name of Jerusalem evokes.

In postexilic times, the names of Meshech and Kedar appear to have become associated with Gog and Magog in an apocalyptic context. Cf. Gen 10:2 and 1 Chr

1:5, 29; Ezek 38:2-3, 16. In Rev 20:7, Satan will be released at the end of the thousand years, “and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog” (v. 8). Perhaps Meshech and Kedar, in being associated with Gog and Magog, represent the enemies of Israel from the past and for the future.

Psalm 121

A Song of Ascents.

This “song of ascents” presents a remarkable picture of God as Israel’s protector day and night. It may be that the term, “the mountains” (*hehariym*), should be understood as a “plural of majesty”, referring to God in this instance as “the Mountain” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 200). Stuhlmueeller (cf., *ibid.*, p. 159) thinks this psalm may be “a priestly blessing of confidence as the pilgrim is about to depart on the hazardous journey home”. The mountains symbolize the various hazards of the journey to and from Jerusalem.

- 1 I lift my eyes to the mountains.
Whence shall help come to me?**
- 2 My help comes from the LORD,
the maker of the heavens and the earth.**
- 3 He will not let your foot falter;
nor will your Watchman slumber.**
- 4 Lo, he neither sleeps nor slumbers,
he that watches over Israel.**
- 5 The LORD is your Watchman;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.**
- 6 By day the sun shall not strike you,
nor the moon in the night.**
- 7 The LORD will guard you from all harm;
he will guard your life.**
- 8 The LORD will guard your going and coming,
both now and forever.**

Notes

5. The meaning of “your shade at your right hand” is unclear. The term, “shade”, can mean “shield”. A warrior’s shield is not only protection in battle, it is also protection from the sun, as the next verse indicates.

“Watching” and “guarding” are the leading concepts in these verses.

8. *going and coming*. This expression indicates that the psalmist is “on the move”, and the next psalm takes the psalmist to Jerusalem, the goal of “going and coming.”

Psalm 122

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

This psalm’s *Sitz im Leben* is in Jerusalem and the reconstructed (second) temple. But it recalls and relives former times when Davidic kingship ruled over Israel’s twelve tribes. Jer 31:1-14 speaks of going up to Zion, and Ex 23:17, embedded in a priestly passage from postexilic times, prescribes: “Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the **LORD** God”. This pilgrimage

scenario is the setting for Luke 2:41-45 regarding Jesus' journey to Jerusalem at the age of twelve and also obliquely for his journey to Calvary.

- 1 I rejoiced when they said to me:
“Let us go to the house of the LORD.”**
- 2 Our feet were standing within your gates,
Jerusalem—**
- 3 Jerusalem was built as a city,
one that is secure and united.**
- 4 To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD.
It is a decree to Israel:
to give thanks to the LORD’s name.**
- 5 For there they have placed the thrones of judgment,
the thrones of the house of David.**
- 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
May those who love you prosper.**
- 7 Let there be peace within your walls,
and prosperity within your towers.**
- 8 For the sake of my confreres and friends, I will say:
“Peace be with you.”**
- 9 For the sake of the House of the LORD our God,
I will ask for your good.**

Notes

3. There are many uncertainties about this verse. The psalmist wants to convey several concepts in the term, *kheber*, which cannot be translated with a single term in English and is rendered here as “secure and united”. The underlying concepts include especially the idea of “a community” of buildings that presents a beautiful and welcoming sight to the pilgrim.

4. *decree*. The decree that the psalmist has in mind may be that an adult male is to “appear before the LORD God” three times a year (Ex 23:17).

6. *Sha’aluw sh^elom Y^eruwshalaim yishlayuw ’ohabayik* (“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May those

who love you prosper”). Besides the “sound effect” of this line, the “semantic effect” is the reciprocal “defining” of these similar sounding words; that is, Jerusalem is virtually synonymous with peace, prayer, and prosperity—*nomen est omen*. Cf. *Salmo 122: Canto al nombre Jerusalén*, by Luis Alonso Schökel and Andrzej Strus, in *Biblica*, vol. 61, fasc. 2, pp. 234-249. “There is a contrast between the unbearable experience of being alone in exile (Psalm 120) and the joyful experience of being at home in the presence of YHWH and one’s companions in Jerusalem (Psalm 122).” Cf. Prinsloo, *ibid.*, p. 465.

Psalm 123

A Song of Ascents.

This brief psalm takes up the theme of Ps 120 regarding unfriendly people. But the poet now looks, not to the mountains as in Ps 121, but to “you that dwell in the heavens”—above the mountains. With the persistent confidence of a servant, the psalmist watches for God’s help and compassion. The psalm’s abrupt, forceful conclusion only adds to the force of the lament that the psalmist places before the LORD.

- 1 To you I lift up my eyes,
you that dwell in the heavens.**
- 2 Just as the eyes of servants are on the hands
of their lords,**

or as the eyes of a maid are on the hand of her lady,
so our eyes are on the LORD our God,
until he show us his compassion.

- 3 Pity us, O LORD, have pity;
for we are glutted with contempt.
- 4 Too long has our soul been seething with the scorn
of the complacent,
with the scoffing of the haughty.

Notes

2-3. *until he show us his compassion . . . glutted with contempt.* The entire psalm, and especially these phrases

seem to indicate that the psalmist was a member of the community in exile, who, in view of the liberation noted in Ps 124:7, survived into the postexilic time to compose this psalm.

Psalm 124

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

The psalm opens with a communal prayer which makes it clear that Israel's God, the **LORD** (Yahweh), rather than some other god or power, is the one who delivered Israel from being overwhelmed "when men rose against us". The ascending and descending "stair-like" structure of the psalms of ascents is very pronounced in this psalm.

- 1 "If it had not been the LORD that was for us",
let Israel resolutely repeat this.
- 2 If it had not been the LORD that was for us,
when men rose against us,
- 3 then they would have swallowed us alive,
when their anger raged against us.
- 4 Then the waters would have poured over us,
like a torrent surging over our neck;
- 5 and the rising waters would have engulfed our life.
- 6 Blessed be the LORD,
who did not surrender us to be prey for their teeth.
- 7 Our life, like a bird,
has been set free from the fowler's snare.
The snare has been broken, and we have been set free.
- 8 Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made the heavens and the earth.

Notes

4. The psalmist uses *nepesh* repeatedly in its several senses ("neck", "us", "life", "soul", etc.) to add force to the ascending effect, climaxing with "would have engulfed our life". The "waters" refers to the nether world and death which "would have swallowed us alive" had not the **LORD**, who dwells in the heavens (Ps 123:1), intervened to free "us" from the exile where "we" were as helpless as a bird caught in a snare.

8. The community thus ends the prayer with the confession that the **LORD**, the maker of all things, is their help—a statement repeated from Ps 121:2, where, however, it is the statement of an individual. Thus the

Psalms of Ascents have now moved fully from the privacy of one's thoughts and emotions to "the public arena." In ascribing the psalm to David (but absent in the LXX), the community is assured that it, like David in the midst of his trials (cf. Ps 132:1), has been and will continue to be protected by the **LORD** and brought up from the depths of exile to exalt in the freedom of Jerusalem. "This time, however, the journey is not merely from exile to Jerusalem, but from death to life" (cf. Prinsloo, *ibid.*, p. 466). Thus the next Psalm of Ascents (Ps 125) graphically illustrates the life-sustaining protection with which "the **LORD** surrounds his people now and forever" (Ps 125:2).

Psalm 125

A Song of Ascents.

For the psalmist, Zion is the center from which God's righteousness goes out to all the world. Consequently, according to the mind of many biblical writers and interpreters, the "fate" of Zion is the "fate" of the world. The Roman destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E. was followed by a strong expectation among Jews and Christians alike that the world itself was about to end. Mt 10:22 reflects this expectation, while Mt 24:6-14 moderates this view: "The end is not yet".

- 1 Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,
never to be shaken, always to be inhabited.**
- 2 Jerusalem! The mountains surround her;
and the LORD surrounds his people now and forever.**
- 3 For the wicked rod shall not rest upon the realm
of the righteous,
so that the righteous might not turn their hands
to doing wrong.**
- 4 Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,
to those who are upright of heart.**
- 5 But those who follow crooked ways,
the LORD will take away with the wrongdoers.
Peace be upon Israel!**

Notes

3. *shall not rest*. It appears that some of Israel's territory in postexilic times was still occupied by an

enemy, perhaps the Samaritans. Or this may be a reference to the continued Persian rule over Israel following the end of the exile. In either case, the "wicked rod" involves compromising religious purity.

Psalm 126

A Song of Ascents.

Psalm 126 was generally understood as a postexilic psalm celebrating the end of the Babylonian Exile. However, "fortunes" in place of the usual "captives" in v. 1 is the more recent understanding, but leaves the original historical setting of the psalm in question. Cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 218. As a "Song of Ascents", however, the psalm's *Sitz im Leben* in the cultic setting of postexilic times is more certain. The postexilic scribe who included Ps 126 in the Psalms of Ascents could very well see the double meaning in the key word, *shibat* (meaning either "captives" or "fortunes"). The term, *shabah*, relates to the concept of "captive" as an action of "being carried off" rather than of "being entrapped". When Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., not only were the citizens of Judah carried off, but also the temple's finery, which was restored to the rebuilt temple by the Persian King Darius (cf. Ezra 6:5). Thus the term in question probably refers to both "captives" and "fortunes" in the mind of the postexilic community. As a pre-exilic composition, if such was the case, and again in its postexilic use, Ps 126 appears to be a psalm for pilgrims to Jerusalem. In its postexilic *Sitz im Leben*, it looks back on the past and forward to more of God's saving works as implied by "restore our fortunes", i.e., "all that was/were carried off". The fortunes of Zion have been restored, and now the former exiles pray that their personal fortunes might be restored. Upon going into exile, their homes and lands were destroyed or occupied by their countrymen who had not been

taken into captivity, and their personal belongings had been carried off or destroyed. It fell especially to Nehemiah to bring order out of this chaos regarding personal property and real estate. Cf. Neh 5. The postexilic scribe placed this psalm in the “Songs of Ascents” since a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the rebuilt temple should be an experience parallel to the return of the exiles when they were free to leave Babylon in 538 B.C.E.

- 1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we became like dreamers.**
- 2 Then our mouths were filled with laughter,
and our tongues were shouting for joy.
Then it was rumored among the nations:
“The LORD has done great things for them!”**
- 3 The LORD performed marvels for us.
We were overjoyed.**
- 4 LORD, restore our fortunes like the brooks
in the Negeb.**
- 5 May those who sow with tears,
bring in the harvest with shouts of joy.**
- 6 One who goes forth weeping,
carrying his sack of seed,
shall come back rejoicing, carrying his sheaves.**

Notes

1. *like dreamers*. While this is the traditional rendering of *k^ekhol^emiym*, the term may also be pointed to read “like the sands of the sea” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 218), which fits well with the context and ancient Israel’s view of posterity as God’s covenant blessing (cf. Gen 17:1-6). A similar text is found in Job 29:18b—“I shall

multiply my days as the sand” (RSV; “ . . . like the phoenix” in the NRSV).

4. *Negeb*. This term means “dry south country” and refers to the arid land with its intermittent brooks south of the Judean hill country.

5-6. The language of sowing and harvesting in the second half of the psalm may indicate that it was originally a harvest song. But the image presented may be metaphorical for times of sorrow and joy.

Psalm 127

A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.

This house blessing is ascribed to Solomon, perhaps due to its sapiential flavor. The opening line may well be an oblique reference to Solomon as the builder of the temple. Solomon is the builder *par excellence* for his reliance on the LORD. Cf. 1 Kings 3:5-15. Thus his example is to be followed in the individual’s building of a family. As a “Song of Ascents”, it is applicable to Jerusalem and the temple and to one’s home and family.

- 1 If the LORD does not build the house,
in vain do the builders labor.
If the LORD does not guard the city,
in vain does the guard keep watch.**
- 2 Vain is your early rising, and your staying up late,
eating the bread of travail.
Rather, he grants sleep to his beloved.**
- 3 Indeed, children are the LORD’s legacy;
a reward is the fruit of the womb.**
- 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the offspring**

of one's youth.

- 5 **How blessed is the husband
who has filled his quiver with these arrows!
He will not face disgrace;
for he will fend off his foes,
when they appear at the gate.**

Notes

2. St. Jerome translates “the bread of travail” as “the bread of idols” (*panem idolorum*). The rendering given here follows the LXX, since “bread of travail” is quite

congruent with the theme of sowing in sorrow from the previous psalm.

sleep. It is possible to understand “sleep” as “an accusative of time”, i.e., God’s blessings, especially of children, come even as one sleeps.

Psalm 128

A Song of Ascents.

Psalm 128 expands on the theme from the previous psalm regarding the individual's need to rely on the **LORD**. It is the third psalm in a series of three psalms that “describe the experiences of individuals going about their daily business of sowing and reaping (Psalm 126), working and raising families (Psalm 127), and expecting the fruit of their labor (Psalm 128) . . . The poems illustrate the truth expressed in Ps 125,1-2—YHWH surrounds his people!” (cf. Prinsloo, *ibid.*, p. 469).

- 1 **How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways.**
2 **Of the labor of your own hands you will surely eat.
May blessings and prosperity be upon you.**
3 **May your wife be like a productive vine in the heart
of your home.
May your children be like olive seedlings around your table.**
4 **Indeed, such is the blessing of the husband
who fears the LORD.**
5 **May the LORD bless you from Zion,
and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.
May you see your children's children.**
6 **Peace upon Israel!**

Notes

3. The rendering, “in the heart of”, brings with it in the Hebrew text a sense of the sacred, of the “Holy of

Holies” in the inmost part of the temple, just as Pss 126-128 form the heart of Psalms of Ascents.

Psalm 129

A Song of Ascents.

The first several verses of this national lament describe Israel's plight since “youth”, i.e., beginning with Israel in Egypt. The second portion of the psalm is a prayer for deliverance from enemies. The imagery of harvest ends with a blessing dialog (cf. Ruth 2:4) that is to be denied to the wicked. No date can be

determined for the original composition of this psalm. But as a Psalm of Ascents, it takes up the theme of Ps 125—that without the protective presence of YHWH, Israel would be destroyed by its enemies. But because “the **LORD** is just”, the enemies will not prevail nor be blessed even by one who is merely passing by.

- 1 “Greatly have they oppressed me since my youth”:
Let Israel repeat this, I pray.**
- 2 Greatly have they oppressed me since my youth;
but they could not prevail over me.**
- 3 Upon my back the plowmen plowed,
making long furrows upon it.**
- 4 The LORD is just;
he has cut through the ropes of the wicked.**
- 5 Let all who hate Zion be humiliated and repulsed.**
- 6 May they be like the grass on the roof:
It withers before it can mature.**
- 7 The reaper cannot glean a handful of it;
nor can the sheave binder fill his lap with it.**
- 8 May those who pass by not say:
“The blessing of the LORD be upon you.
We bless you in the name of the LORD.”**

Notes

1-3. The psalmist, speaking in the first person, singular, alludes to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt as the beginning of the nation of Israel in hard labor and physical suffering. The ancient Assyrians were known for treating slaves in the manner described here.

4. Israel’s liberation from slavery is herewith accredited to the **LORD**, not only for Israel’s time in Egypt, but also for Israel’s enslavement in Babylon.

5-8. The focus is now on Zion, the location of the temple and the goal of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The journey to Jerusalem was a journey through Israel’s history of dealings with hostile nations with whom no blessings could be exchanged.

Psalm 130

A Song of Ascents.

This Psalm of Ascents, the *De Profundis*, is possibly the most prominent of “the penitential psalms”. The expression, “If you keep watch” in v. 3 announces the theme of watching that is found in the psalm’s subsequent verses. “Watching” means an intense yearning for redemption—which only God can give (cf. Mt 25:1-13), and which gives one a new life, thanks to God’s forgiveness. The poem presents a parallel between the experience of exile, slavery, and liberation with the experience of sin in the life of the individual and of the nation, followed by liberation through the **LORD**’s forgiveness. The psalmist acknowledges that personal and national guilt have rendered him/her and Israel so completely helpless that the only option is to wait patiently for the **LORD**’s *padah*, i.e. “redemption”, “payment of ransom” to free a slave or one condemned to death.

- 1 Out of the depths, I cry to you, O LORD.**
- 2 LORD, hear my voice.
Let your ear be attentive to the voice of my pleading.**
- 3 If you keep watch for wrongs, O LORD,
LORD, who will be able to survive?**
- 4 But with you is forgiveness;
therefore, you shall be feared.**
- 5 I have waited for the LORD.**

- My soul has waited, and I find hope in his word.**
- 6 My soul has watched for the LORD,
more than watchmen before dawn
watch for the morning.**
- 7 Let Israel hope for the LORD;
for with the LORD there is mercy.
With him there is redemption in abundance.**
- 8 He will redeem Israel from all its guilt.**

Notes

4. *feared*. The MT says, “therefore you shall be feared”. The LXX reads, “For the sake of your name, I have waited for you, **LORD**”. St. Jerome is somewhat similar: *cum terribilis sis, sustinui Dominum* (“since you are awesome, I have waited for the **LORD**”). But if we abide by the MT, then we need to explain the connection between God’s forgiveness and “fear of the **LORD**”.

If the psalmist is looking forward to being forgiven for a specific offense or even in terms of the universal (existential) need that humans have for forgiveness, then fearing the **LORD** or the name of the **LORD** yields some sense. But is that what the psalmist or the postexilic redactor has in mind?

Psalm 128 speaks of “fear of the **LORD**” in vv 1 and 4; so the theme is not out of place here in Ps 130:4. Also the use of *p^eduwt* (“redemption”) in v. 7 indicates that

the psalm has shifted from the individual to the community, since “redemption” is used in regard to Israel and not the individual. Verses 7 and 8 were most likely added in postexilic times to transform the psalm from a lament into a psalm of trust in God; for it is only from the **LORD** that forgiveness is forthcoming. It is in forgiving that YHWH lets himself “be feared” (revered). Thus to live in the fear of the **LORD** is to live as a new person who has been made new by YHWH. Cf. “*Bei dir, da ist die Vergebung, damit du gefürchtet werdest*”. *Überlegungen zu Psalm 130*, by Franz Sedlmeier, in *Biblica*, vol. 73, fasc. 4, 1992, pp. 473-495, specifically, p. 488. “Through forgiveness YHWH leads the praying person out of his prison to that new way of life which the psalmist calls ‘fear of God’” (*ibid.*, p. 490, translation by K. Hein). This fear is not *Angst*, but a matter of living in hope that is directed to God and open to God’s word, and looks to encountering God in his word.

Psalm 131

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

As a Song of Ascents ascribed to David, this poem recalls Ps 51 and the forgiveness that David experienced from the **LORD**, when David acknowledged his guilt upon realizing how his sins harmed others. Cf. 2 Sam 12:1-13; 2 Sam 24:10-17; 1 Chr 21:7-17. Psalm 131 seeks to assure the postexilic community that the **LORD**’s forgiveness brings comfort and restores one to the innocence of an infant. The psalm gives no clue as to the situation or event that prompted its composition. But in its postexilic usage, it fits well in the present series of “psalms of trust”, while also serving notice to future potentates that there are limits to the “great things” that might invite their attention to their own undoing.

- 1 LORD, my heart has not been proud,
nor have my eyes been raised up.
I have not pursued great things,
nor wonders far beyond me.**
- 2 Instead, I have calmed and quieted my soul:
like a weaned child upon its mother,
like a weaned child is my soul upon me.**
- 3 O Israel, hope in the LORD both now and forever.**

Notes

1-2. The psalmist, perhaps a woman (cf. *A Woman at Prayer: A Critical Note on Psalm 131:2b*, by Melody D. Knowles, in *JBL*, vol. 125, no. 2, 2006, pp. 385-389),

displays a calm trust in the **LORD** and compares it to the calm of a weaned child in its mother’s arms. An unweaned child would not remain calm, if it is hungry and expects to be breast fed. It is especially interesting to

note how the psalmist pictures his/her “soul” (one’s “sense of self”) as a child and as a way of saying, “I am at peace with myself.” But “soul” (*nepesh*) can also apply to the throat and, by extension, to one’s voice. It may be that the psalmist includes the voice of the infant—being calmed and quieted. Cf. *Form and Meaning in Psalm 131*, by Bernard P. Robinson, in *Biblica*, vol.79, fasc. 2, 1998, pp. 180-197.

3. Placing one’s hope in the **LORD** requires that one be humble. Humility is an admirable as well as a royal virtue and serves the good of all. Thus the true pilgrim to the heights of Zion must remain as humble as a child (cf. Mt 18:3), “hoping and trusting in God” (cf. Robinson, *ibid.*, p. 196).

Psalm 132

A Song of Ascents.

This psalm’s archaic characteristics may indicate an early date of composition, perhaps shortly after the 200 years of land conquest—which could well be the case, if it celebrates the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to its “resting place” in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 6:13-19). Mention of the Ark in later times served to recall the founding of the temple on Zion and the history of Israel. Gianni Barbiero (*Psalm 132: A Prayer of “Solomon”*, in *CBQ*, vol. 75, No. 2, April 2013, pp. 239-258) views Ps 132 as a post-exilic composition imbued with messianic hope. Psalms 132-134 journey from the depths to the heavens—“an ascent into the arms of YHWH” (Prinsloo, *ibid.*, p. 473).

- 1 Remember, O LORD, in regard to David,
all the burdens he had to bear:**
- 2 How he swore to the LORD;
how he vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:**
- 3 “I shall not retire to the bedroom of my house,
or recline upon the cushions of my bed,**
- 4 or give sleep to my eyes and close my eyelids
in slumber,**
- 5 before I have found a place for the LORD,
a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob.”**
- 6 Indeed, we heard this in Ephrathah;
we learned of it in the Fields of Jaar.**
- 7 Let us go to his dwelling and worship at his footstool.**
- 8 Come up, O LORD, to your resting place,
you and the Ark of your strength.**
- 9 May your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and your holy people shout for joy.**
- 10 For the sake of David, your servant,
do not look away from your anointed one.**
- 11 The LORD swore an oath to David;
he will not go back on it:
“The offspring of your loins I will set on your throne.**
- 12 If your sons keep my covenant and the decrees
that I teach them,
then their sons too will ever sit on your throne.”**
- 13 For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has preferred it for his dwelling.**
- 14 “This is my everlasting retreat.
It is here I will dwell; for I have chosen it.**
- 15 I will richly bless its game animals,
and I will indulge its poor with bread.**

- 16 I will clothe its priests with salvation,
and its holy people will shout and sing for joy.**
17 There I shall make a horn sprout for David.
I will make ready a lamp for my anointed.
18 His foes I will clothe with shame;
but upon him shall shine his crown”.

Notes

1. *in regard to David*. The MT reads *l'dawid* (“to David”), followed by *'eth*, marking the direct object of “remember” as “all the burdens” rather than “David”.

3-6. In the MT, the rendering, “bedroom”, is given as “tent”, a possible reference to a canopy. In any case, we have a parallel and a progression between “bedroom of my house” and “cushions of my bed”. Also, the **LORD**’s “resting place” is a tent (cf. 2 Sam 6:17). David’s vow not to take any rest becomes known even in Ephrathah and Jaar—of uncertain location, but representing the remote places of Israel.

9-10. *priests . . . anointed one*. These terms indicate the postexilic growth of messianic hope for a priestly-Davidic messiah—one “in the order of Melchizedek” (cf. LXX, Ps 109:4b). In 2 Chr 6, the priestly-messianic figure is even more prominent. Cf. *Ex 15, Ps 120-134 et le Livre d’Isaie (II)*, by Bernard Gosse, in *Bibbia e Oriente*, 214/2002/XLIV Anno, p. 199.

15. The rendering, “game animals”, is uncertain. Some ancient Greek manuscripts and the Vulgate speak of “its widows”, which would be an appropriate parallel to “its poor”. The LXX uses θηρα (i.e., wild animals that can be hunted), which can also be interpreted meaningfully as “meat and bread for the poor” and as an allusion to the quail and the manna of the Exodus. The Hebrew text uses the term, *tsayid*, which has to do with hunting game animals (*tsuwd*, “to hunt”; *tsayyad*, “hunter”). By increasing these animals, God cares for the poor.

16-18. Only here and in 2 Chr 6:41 do we find “priests (clothed) with salvation” (*yesh‘a*), i.e., “victory (over enemies)” —to be effected by the priests through their liturgical role. Verse 17 is a parallelism: “David” and “anointed” // “horn” and “lamp”—i.e., David’s successor (cf. Dan 7:7-8; Lk 1:69). Both he and the priests will function messianically.

Psalm 133

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

Appropriately for a “Psalm of Ascents”, this wisdom psalm places emphasis on family unity and harmony just as the nation itself is a family. The translation provided here retains the Hebrew term, “brothers” (*‘akhiym*), even though the term certainly includes “sisters” and could be rendered “family”. However, the biblical writers are aware that brothers, more than sisters, readily compete with and oppose each other: e.g., Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. The poet’s use of the participle, “dwelling”, emphasizes the specific, actual need for brothers to get on well with each other for the sake of all the people. Lack of fraternal harmony can destroy dynasties and nations. Also, the benefit of fraternal peace is emphasized especially by the similarity of sound between the words, “brothers” (*‘akhiym*) at the beginning of the psalm, and “life” (*khayyim*) at the conclusion of the psalm, as if to say: “Brothers dwelling together without strife / are brothers bestowing the blessing of life”. In the context of a “song of ascents”, Ps 133 reminded the pilgrims that their journey is to be marked by the unity of a family; for we are all brothers and sisters in the **LORD**. “For . . . we who are many are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another” (Rom 12:5).

- 1 Behold how good and how pleasant it is,
when brothers are dwelling in unity!**
**2 It is like precious oil upon one’s head,
trickling down the beard,
down the beard of Aaron,
which descends to the collar of his robe.**

**3 It is like the dew of Hermon,
that descends on the mountains of Zion.
There it is indeed that the LORD
bestows his blessing of life forever.**

Notes

2. The fullness of Aaron's beard is emphasized as a symbol of maturity and wisdom. Fragrant oil was used for the anointing of priests and as a symbol of God's strength and authority. There is a question as to what flowed to the robe's collar: oil?, or the beard? The rendering here holds that it is Aaron's beard. The simile of dew on Mount Hermon corresponds to "oil upon one's head". That is clear. But it is not obvious that it is the beard rather than the oil that flows down to the collar of the robe. Perhaps the psalmist was not really too concerned about the question. After all, if the beard does not flow to the collar of the robe, then the oil will also

not reach the collar of the robe. For further discussion of the "oil versus beard" issue, cf. *The Hidden Simile in Psalm 133*, by Wilfred G.E. Watson, in *Biblica*, vol. 60, fasc., 1, 1979, pp. 108-109; and *Sorties in Psalm 133,2-3a*, by David T. Tsumura, in *Biblica*, vol. 61, fasc. 3, 1980, pp. 416-417.

3. *on the mountains of Zion*. The term, "mountains", may be a "plural of majesty", referring only to Mount Zion itself. But it may be that *tsiyon* (Zion) should be emended to *tsiyah* ("parched land") in reference to the dry hill-country of Judea. Cf. R. Alter, *ibid.*, p. 463. However, both the LXX and St. Jerome saw *tsiyon* (Zion) in the Hebrew text.

Psalm 134

A Song of Ascents.

This brief psalm concludes the series of the "Psalms of Ascents". Psalm 134 thus appropriately ends with a nocturnal blessing of the pilgrims (v. 3), which recalls that the LORD, and not some other god or gods, made the heavens and the earth. The temple itself, in its layout and adornment, was a visual reminder of the LORD and Creator of all.

- 1 Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
who watch through the night in the House
of the Lord.**
- 2 Lift your hands toward the sanctuary,
and bless the Lord.**
- 3 May the Lord bless you from Zion,
he who made the heavens and the earth.**

Notes

1. *all you servants of the Lord*. The entire psalm and especially this statement provide an appropriate and telling conclusion to the Psalms of Ascents. Prinsloo (*ibid.*, pp. 476-477) notes that this group of psalms "existed as a collection prior to the final redaction of Book V. In this context a group of people calling themselves the 'servants', the 'poor', people who 'fear YHWH', YHWH's 'saints' are met several times throughout Book V. . . They have been identified as a group of Levites who has been expelled from their privileged position in the temple by the postexilic temple aristocracy late in the Persian period (beginning 4th

century B.C.E). The presence of these terms in the [Songs of Ascents] indicates that these are the songs of a political and religious marginalized community, under constant pressure . . . from the aristocracy in Jerusalem . . . and long for the eschatological intervention of YHWH".

2. *your hands toward the sanctuary*. Most translations prefer "in" rather than "toward". However, St. Jerome translates the passage with *ad sanctum* ("toward the holy"), thus treating "holy" (*qodesh*) as an accusative of direction. The LXX renders the passage with "unto the holies" (i.e., "the Holy of Holies" or "the sanctuary"), which also is an accusative of direction. Cf. Dahood (*ibid.*, p. 254f).

Psalm 135

Perhaps due to the similarities of theme and language, some Hebrew manuscripts join this psalm with Ps 134, which, in its brevity, functions well as an introduction to Ps 135. We may place this psalm's composition late in the postexilic period, since it pieces together material from other psalms and biblical writings. It is first in the postexilic period that we find scripture quoting scripture. Psalm 135 dwells on the LORD's election of Israel as an example among others of his doing whatever pleases him.

- 1 Halleluiah!**
Praise the name of the LORD.
Praise, O servants of the LORD,
- 2 you that stand in the house of the LORD,**
in the courts of the House of our God.
- 3 Praise the LORD; for the LORD is good.**
Sing psalms to his name; for it is delightful.
- 4 Indeed, the LORD chose Jacob for his own,**
Israel as his very special treasure.
- 5 How well I know that the LORD is great!**
Our LORD is greater than all gods!
- 6 The LORD does whatever pleases him,**
be it in the heavens or on the earth,
on the seas or in all the depths.
- 7 He brings up clouds from the horizons of the earth.**
He makes thunderbolts for the rain,
and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.
- 8 He struck down the first-born of Egypt,**
man and beast alike.
- 9 He sent signs and wonders into the midst of Egypt,**
upon Pharaoh and all his subjects.
- 10 He struck down many nations**
and slew powerful kings:
- 11 Sihon, the king of the Amorites,**
Og, the king of Bashan, and all the kings of Canaan.
- 12 Then he gave away their land, their heritage,**
as a heritage to Israel, his own people.
- 13 LORD, your name is eternal.**
Your renown lasts from age to age, O LORD.
- 14 Indeed, the LORD will judge his people;**
and to his servants he will bring comfort.
- 15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold,**
the product of human hands.
- 16 They have mouths, but do not speak;**
they have eyes, but do not see;
- 17 they have ears, but do not hear;**
nary a breath is in their mouths.
- 18 Their makers will become like them,**
and everyone who trusts in them!
- 19 O House of Israel, bless the LORD**
O House of Aaron, bless the LORD!

20 O House of Levi, bless the LORD!
You that fear the LORD, bless the LORD!
21 Blessed is the LORD from Zion,
who dwells in Jerusalem.
Halleluiah!

Notes

3. It is not clear if “delightful” is to be attributed to the **LORD**, or to “his name”, or to the action of singing. Given the frequent use of double and “double duty” usage of words in Hebrew poetry, it is possible that the poet wants to include all of the possibilities.

5. *Our Lord*. The difference between *’adoneynuw* (“our **LORD**”, “our master”) and *YHWH* (“Yahweh”) is significant here. The psalmist wants to make it clear that YHWH is the **LORD** and master who has been and always will be active in Israel’s history.

10-12. After the flight from Egypt, the focus is on the life of the Israelites in the settlement of the promised land. The kings, Sihon and Og, are mentioned in Numbers and Deuteronomy.

15-21. These verses are nearly the same as Ps 115:4-15. Perhaps different scribes were responsible for selecting and redacting psalms for Book V, and the same psalm was selected twice for inclusion in two different locations within the book. Or perhaps the same psalm found a place in two separate liturgical functions. A third possibility is that these verses were originally a separate composition that eventually became attached to Pss 115 and 135 for postexilic reasons of “politics and religion”.

Psalm 136

In this psalm, “the Great Hallel”, sung at Passover and noted as the “Easter Hymn” in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, we have a hymn in litany form that begins with a threefold “Give thanks” and extols God’s greatness in creation and history. The opening statement that the **LORD** “is good” is a proclamation of the **LORD**’s kindness to Israel. The refrain, *for his mercy endures forever*, became popular in the postexilic age. Cf. Pss 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29. The litany style is unique to the psalm, even though it is found in Ugaritic literature of much earlier times. Psalm 136 seeks to emphasize that all of the works of the **LORD** for the benefit of Israel are works of *khesed*, with its wide range of meanings and nuances: loving mercy, kindness, strength, devotedness, etc. But the term’s special significance is in its relationship to the covenant that the **LORD** has made freely and in *khesed* in choosing Israel as his people. Cf. Hos 2:21-25. 1 Pet 2:10 quotes from this psalm.

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his mercy endures forever.**
- 2 Give thanks to the God of gods;
for his mercy endures forever.**
- 3 Give thanks to the LORD of Lords,
for his mercy endures forever;**
- 4 to him who alone does great wonders,
for his mercy endures forever;**
- 5 to him who wisely made the heavens,
for his mercy endures forever;**
- 6 to him who spread the earth upon the waters,
for his mercy endures forever;**
- 7 to him who made the great lights,
for his mercy endures forever;**
- 8 the sun to rule in the day,
for his mercy endures forever;**
- 9 the moon and the stars to govern the night,
for his mercy endures forever;**

- 10 to him who struck down Egypt's first-born,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 11 and led forth Israel from their midst,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 12 with a mighty hand and outstretched arm,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 13 to him who split in two the Sea of Reeds,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 14 and made Israel pass through its midst,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 15 but cast Pharaoh and his army into the Sea of Reeds,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 16 to him who led his people through the desert,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 17 to him who struck down mighty kings,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 18 and slew magnificent kings,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 19 even Sihon, the king of the Amorites,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 20 and also Og, the king of Bashan,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 21 and gave over their land as an inheritance,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 22 to be an inheritance for Israel his servant,
for his mercy endures forever.
- 23 He remembered us in our humble state,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 24 and he freed us from our oppressors,
for his mercy endures forever;
- 25 and gave bread to all creatures,
for his mercy endures forever.
- 26 Give thanks to the God of the heavens,
for his mercy endures forever.

Notes

2. *God of gods*. This expression is to be understood as “the greatest God”. Monotheism enters Israel’s theology toward the end of the Babylonian Exile. Cf., e.g., Isa 45:5.

6. *spread the earth*. The term, *raqa’*, means “to spread out by tamping down” rather than “to scatter”.

15. The Hebrew term for “cast” (*ni’er*) is formed from the consonants that also means “male child”. It may be that its use here is an allusion to Pharaoh’s command that the male infants of the Hebrews were to be cast into the Nile (cf. Ex 1:22). Now this action is applied to Pharaoh and his army at the crossing of the sea. The verb also means “shake”, giving rise to the image of God shaking Pharaoh’s forces off into the sea as easily as one might shake crumbs off a table cloth.

Psalms 137

No author is named for this “song of exile”, which stirs up a variety of sentiments from compassion to outrage and horror. Obviously, *Lex Talionis* (“an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”) is very much on the psalmist’s mind in a world where this “law of revenge” was everywhere “the law of the land”. The

psalmist's curses were mollified by the interpretation given to them in early Christianity, where "newborn" was interpreted as one's evil thoughts which were to be nipped in the bud, that is, dashed against the Rock (Christ), before they could mature into evil deeds.

- 1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat,
weeping woefully, remembering Zion.**
- 2 Upon the willows there, in the midst of the land,
we hung up our harps.**
- 3 For it was there that our captors asked us for the lyrics of a song,
and our tormentors for joyful tunes:
"Sing us a song from Zion!"**
- 4 How are we to sing a song of the LORD on alien soil?**
- 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
may my right hand wither away.**
- 6 Let my tongue cleave to my palate,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not exalt Jerusalem as the first of my joys.**
- 7 Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom,
the day of Jerusalem, when they were saying:
"Strip her! Strip her bare,
down to her very foundations!"**
- 8 O Daughter Babylon, destined for destruction!
Blessed be the one who doles out to you
what you deserve for what you doled out to us.**
- 9 Blessed be the one who takes your newborn
and dashes them against the rock!**

Notes

1-3. *rivers*. These are the irrigation canals that the captive Judeans dug and attended. There may be a wordplay on the name "Zion", meaning "dry land" (cf. Isa 25:5), in contrast to "rivers". Cf. *Psalm 137: Complex Communal Laments*, by John Ahn, in *JBL*, vol. 124, no. 2, Summer, 2008, pp. 267-289.

3. *Sing for us*. Ezra 2:41 mentions singers among those returning from exile. Perhaps the psalm can be taken as the song that the Israelites did indeed sing for their captors, who, not knowing Hebrew, were thereby given to listen to a song that cursed them.

6. *if I do not exalt Jerusalem as the first of my joys*. "Jerusalem" recalls terms such as "peace" and "prosperity" (cf. Ps 122:6f).

7. Edom is taken to task for its role in pillaging Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian Exile, "the day

of Jerusalem". Jerusalem is pictured as a woman being stripped of her clothing and left with her buttocks bare in humiliation (cf. 2 Sam 10:4; Isa 20:4). The Hebrew term for "foundations" also means "buttocks".

8-9. Psalm 137 was probably composed shortly after Babylon had been conquered by Persia. Thus Babylon was no longer the devastator, but the devastated. With that, the psalmist pours out bitter recriminations upon Babylon and hopes for its total demise once its "newborn" (the future generations) have been destroyed. The exiles had witnessed the destruction of their own children in the same fashion at the second deportation to Babylon in 586 or 587 B.C.E. The alliteration with "d" in the rendering given here is in lieu of the alliteration with "sh" found in the Hebrew text. The psalmist may be implying a pun with the term, "rock" (*sela*), as a reference to Sela (more commonly called "Petra"), an Edomite city.

Psalm 138

Of David.

The speaker appears to be the king. The language and grammar place the time of composition early in Israel's history, though not as early as David himself since the psalmist makes reference to the temple. But it is possible that the psalm

was composed during Solomon's reign or shortly thereafter.

- 1 I thank you with all my heart.
In the presence of the gods, I sing my praises to you.
- 2 I bow toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name,
as befits your love and your truth.
For you have magnified your word,
as befits your every name.
- 3 On the day I called, you answered me.
You gave strength to my breath.
- 4 All the kings of the earth will praise you, O LORD,
when they hear the words of your mouth;
- 5 and they will sing of the LORD's ways:
"How great is the glory of the LORD!"
- 6 Although the LORD is the Exalted One,
he also sees the lowly one;
and the One On High knows from afar.
- 7 Even as I walk in the midst of danger,
you will preserve my life.
You put forth your left hand against the anger
of my enemies,
and your right hand gives me victory.
- 8 The LORD will accomplish this in my time.
LORD, your mercy endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Notes

1. *In the presence of the gods.* According to the biblical accounts, Solomon established "chief officers" throughout his kingdom and attracted the attention of foreign kings for his wisdom (cf. 1 Kings 4 and 5; Ps 72:10). The foreign envoys of royalty could be called "gods", since they represent their various local gods. Solomon's sins recorded in 1 Kings 11 indicate that he still had polytheistic sympathies.

2b-3. The king believes that God has extended his (God's) word (promise) beyond all expectation and even beyond all the names and titles bestowed upon Yahweh. The rendering, "breath", for *nepesh*, could very well be given as "voice" in v. 3, since the psalmist is writing about singing and giving praise and thanks and calling upon God by name. One's voice is often a good indicator or one's soul, i.e., "inner state". The psalmist wants to have a strong voice so as to sing and bring "the words of your mouth" to "the kings of the earth" so that they too might praise the LORD and sing of his "ways".

6b. The NRSV translates v. 6b with, "but the haughty he perceives from far away". However, "the One

On High" or "the Lofty One" occurs in rabbinical literature as a title for God. Moreover, in v. 2b, the poet expressly speaks of God's "every name" to be praised. Thus we might very well expect that some of these divine titles should occur in this psalm. Some translators would change the MT *kal-shimka* ("your every name") to *kal-shameyka* ("all your heavens"). However, this is not found in the ancient translations.

8. *in my time.* Here the psalmist employs a term, *ba'adiy*, that contains several connotations. The root, *'adah*, means "to pass by" or "to pass away". Thus, we could translate with, "in my passing by", meaning, "in my lifetime". The connotation of passing or walking also relates to v. 7 in regard to walking in danger, a depiction that is reminiscent of Ps 23:4—"Even when I walk in the valley of darkness . . ."

The rendering, "work", is plural in the MT. It may be "a plural of majesty referring to the king" (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 282). If so, then "the work of your hands", as a parallel to "the lowly one" and the antithesis of "the One On High" (v. 6), would mean the king in the presence of "the One On High".

Psalm 139

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

This remarkable and appealing psalm in praise of God's providence and omniscience continues the previous psalm's theme of knowing "from afar". The psalmist appears to have been accused of idolatry or to be surrounded by apostate compatriots still in the Diaspora. God is invited to conduct an examination of the psalmist; for God knows and sees all, and escape from God is impossible. The poem ends as a wisdom psalm and presents very much the scene that is found in 1 Kings 3:5-15 regarding Solomon's dream in which he asks God for "an understanding heart" so that he can "govern this vast people of yours" (v. 9). Upon waking from the dream, Solomon went to Jerusalem and "stood before the Ark of the Covenant of the **LORD**" (v. 15). Standing in the presence of God and keeping the covenant, that is "the stuff of kings". In the history and stories of Israel's kings, David stands out as the king who remained faithful to God and the covenant, whereas Solomon failed to a large extent in both (cf. 1 Kings 11). Perhaps this is why the psalm is ascribed to David rather than to Solomon. The psalm's Aramaisms place its composition in the late postexilic period.

- 1 Oh, that you would examine me, LORD,
and scrutinize me yourself.**
- 2 You know when I sit and when I stand;
you understand my thoughts from afar.**
- 3 You appraise my rising and my resting;
you oversee all my ways.**
- 4 Even before a word is on my tongue,
you, O LORD, already know it.**
- 5 From the back and from the front, you encompass me.
You lay your hand upon me.**
- 6 Too wonderful for me is this knowledge.
It is placed too high; I am not able to reach it.**
- 7 Where can I escape your spirit,
or where can I flee from your face?**
- 8 If I climb to the heavens, you are there.
If I make Sheol my bed, you are there.**
- 9 If I take up the wings of the dawn,
and come down on the sea's farthest edge,**
- 10 even there your left hand would precede me,
and your right hand would follow upon me.**
- 11 Then I thought: "Surely darkness can cover me!"
But the night became light around me.**
- 12 Even darkness is not dark for you,
and the night is as bright as the day.
It is as if darkness were daylight.**
- 13 You yourself fashioned my inmost organs,
laced me together in my mother's womb.**
- 14 I will give you thanks,
for I have been wondrously made in such awesome ways.
Awesome are your works; as my soul well knows.**
- 15 My bones were not concealed from you,
when I was molded in secret,
when I was tatted together in the deepest depths
of the earth.**

- 16 Your eyes beheld my developing frame;
and written in your scroll were all my days,
even before they were created,
or any one of them existed.
- 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How overwhelming the number of them!
- 18 If I counted them,
their total would be greater than the sand.
If I persevered to the end, I would still be with you.
- 19 When, O God, will you slay the wicked?
You bloodthirsty men, depart from me!
- 20 This fellow speaks deceitfully of you.
Your enemies raise their hands in perjury.
- 21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
Am I not repulsed by those who rebel against you?
- 22 I utterly and completely abhor them.
They are truly my enemies.
- 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart.
Try me, and know my thoughts.
- 24 See if there is any false way within me;
then guide me along the everlasting way.

Notes

3. This verse contains the obscure term, *zeriyta*, which may be related either to the root, *zrh* (scatter, winnow—thus St. Jerome), or, *zrt* (span—thus Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 287). The rendering, “appraise”, fits well with the psalmist’s use of “know”, “understand”, and “oversee”. In the MT, “my resting” is “my lying down”. In earlier Hebrew, this term meant bestiality. But in Aramaic, it means simply to recline. Thus we may ascribe this psalm to late postexilic times, when Aramaic was the more common language.

7-15. In reflecting on God’s universal presence, the poet employs the images of “the heavens” (up) and “Sheol” (down), of “dawn” (the east) and the “sea’s farthest edge” (the west), of “your left hand” (the north) and “your right hand” (the south). The psalmist describes God’s omniscience and creative power for all times and places, both in the womb of one’s mother as well as in the womb (“depths”) of the earth.

14. *as my soul well knows*. The MT pointing of “know” (*yoda’at*, a participle) makes “my soul” the subject of the sentence. However, the term can also be pointed to read “you know” or “you have known” (*yada’ta*), which is proposed by Dahood (*ibid.*, p. 293) and better reflects the tenor of the poem, which extols God’s knowledge rather than poet’s knowledge, and forms a fitting bridge to the next lines of the psalm. But again, the ancient translations do not support this modification.

18. The latter half of this verse is difficult to render. Most translations derive the term, *heqiytsotiy* (rendered

here as “persevered to the end”), from *quwts*, “to awaken”. However, that does not fit the context or the concept of counting the earth’s grains of sand. It is more likely that the term is to be derived from *qatsah* (“end”, “margin”). This term addresses the limits of space (the areas covered by sand) and time (the ages it would take to count the grains of sand). Thus the psalmist completes the image of counting the grains of sand with a restatement of the psalm’s main theme—the omnipresence of God throughout all time and space. The poet is contrasting “awaken” in the sense of “arise” with the action that he/she asks God to bring against the wicked, i.e., to bring them down in death.

19-20. With v. 19, the psalmist introduces a sudden change of mood. The **LORD** was initially asked to investigate the poet. Now, the **LORD**, addressed as “God” (*’elowah*, a poetic term that could be rendered as “judge” in the context of this psalm), is asked to bring the ultimate sentence upon “the wicked”, i.e., the principal accuser or the prosecuting attorney (“this fellow”) for the “bloodthirsty men” who are bringing false charges against the poet. The MT does not provide an object for the verb, “raise”. Thus the object, “their hands”, must be supplied from the context of the courtroom scene employed by the psalmist.

22-24. The poet is clear that “any enemy of God is also my enemy”. The postexilic ascription of this psalm to David makes the words of the psalm to be David’s own words, as it were. A king’s duty is not only in subduing the enemy, but also in securing the kingdom and in leading and judging justly.

Psalm 140

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

The descriptions of reward and punishment in this psalm of lament and curse are not the psalmist's theology of Heaven and Hell, but the psalmist's theology of justice regarding God's treatment of the upright. The psalmist is the victim of liars. In turn, he/she asks only that they become the victims of their own machinations, but with greater consequences than the psalmist has experienced. The psalm's personal nature does not supply enough information to discern the circumstances and date of composition.

- 1 Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man.
From the man of violence preserve me.**
- 2 They plot evil in their hearts; all day long,
they stir up strife.**
- 3 They sharpen their tongues like a serpent;
under their lips, a viper's venom.**
- 4 Save me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked.
From the man of violence preserve me.
These men have conspired to trip up my steps.**
- 5 The haughty have hidden a trap for me.
With cords they have spread out a net;
by the wayside, they set up snares for me.**
- 6 I said to the LORD, "You are my God!
Hear, O LORD, the voice of my pleading.**
- 7 O LORD, my Lord, my safety, my stronghold.
May you cover my head in the day of battle!**
- 8 O LORD, do not grant the desires of the wicked.
Do not further their purpose, nor let them exult."**
- 9 The venom of my assailants—
the iniquity of their lips—
let it overwhelm them.**
- 10 Let fiery coals fall upon them.
May they be plunged into pools, never to emerge.**
- 11 Let the lying man not be established upon the earth.
As for the vicious man,
let violence hunt him to bring him down.**
- 12 I know the LORD will sustain the cause
of the afflicted,
the rights of the destitute.**
- 13 Yes, the just will give thanks to your name;
the upright shall dwell before your face.**

Notes

3. *a viper's venom*. The precise meaning of 'akshuw^b is uncertain. According to some ancient manuscripts, it could be translated as "spider".

9. *venom of my assailants*. Though some commentators claim that the Hebrew text of this verse is defective, close attention to the poetic structure of the passage shows that the consonantal matrix is fully intact and yields good sense. However, the poet employs some

very subtle wordplay that cannot be readily rendered in English. The verse begins with *r'osh*, which has the primary meaning of "head". But here it is used to play on *rasha'* ("the wicked") from the previous verse so as to add force and meaning to "venom". Also, the meaning of "head" is included inasmuch as a viper's head is wicked and venomous. The reptilian imagery is carried forth in the term, *m^esibbay*, rendered here as "assailants". The

term includes the serpentine imagery of “turning against” and “encircling”.

10. *fiery coals*. This terminology continues the imagery of the striking serpent whose venom stings and burns like fire. It is reminiscent of the fiery serpents that once plagued the Israelites. Cf. Num 21:6.

plunged into pools. With the contrast between fire and water, the poet emphasizes the extent of the punishment of the wicked. The pools that are meant here are pit-like pools such as natural sinkholes.

Psalm 141

A Psalm of David.

From its language, grammar, and content, this psalm “of David”, the lament of an individual, appears to be set in northern Israel sometime after the fall of the north to Assyria in 721 B.C.E. The poet proclaims faithfulness to Yahweh amidst the pagan rites then in vogue. Rather than participate in the sacrifices of the official rites, the psalmist prays that his/her raising of the hands be accepted in lieu of the sacrifices.

- 1 O LORD, I call to you.
Hasten to me!
Give ear to my pleading, when I call to you!**
- 2 Let my prayer be incense before you—
the raising of my hands an evening oblation.**
- 3 LORD, place a muzzle on my mouth.
Secure the doorway to my lips.**
- 4 Do not incline my heart to evil acts,
to dally in wicked rituals with wrongdoers.
Do not let me indulge in their delicacies.**
- 5 If the just person strikes me, it is kindness itself.
And if he rebukes me, it is bitter ointment.
It will not harm my head.
Instead, let my prayer negate their evil deeds.**
- 6 Let their judges be cast into Petra’s chorus.
Then let them hear my lyrics, ever so pleasant:**
- 7 “Like water furrowing and burrowing in the earth,
so our bones are strewn at the mouth of Sheol.”**
- 8 Yes, O LORD, my LORD, my eyes are upon you.
On you I depend.
Do not leave me naked!**
- 9 Keep me from the claws of the trap they have set
for me,
and from the snares of the wicked.**
- 10 Let the deviants fall as one into their own nets
just as I walk by.**

Notes

4. This verse is a single, long statement in the Hebrew text, with the nouns and verbs interrelated so as to complement and define each other. The “evil” that is meant here are the religious rituals of the poet’s apostate neighbors, whose fine banquets in honor of their gods are a poignant temptation to the poet. These ritual banquets

would have also included fertility rites and sacred prostitution (cf., e.g., Ex 32:1-6) as well as rituals honoring the spirits of the dead as alluded to in the reference to the funerary city of Petra in v. 6 (cf. also Ps 106:19ff). Thus the poet asks the **LORD** to keep him/her from rituals that deal “in wickedness” (one could read “witchcraft” or “spiritualism” here). The expression, “dally in” is an attempt to reproduce the Hebrew text’s

l^ehith'owlel 'alilowth (“to practice practices”), which connotes doing evil or wrong things capriciously.

5. *bitter ointment*. In another extended sentence, the poet indulges in wordplay that cannot be accurately translated into English. Scented oil was used to anoint the heads of participants at the ritual banquets. As a sort of antidote, the poet directs his/her own “ritual” (“my prayer”) to undo the evil rites that he/she witnesses. To convey these concepts in just a few words, the psalmist resorts to a play on the word, *r'osh*, which means “head”, “first”, “principal” (as well as “principle”), “beginning”, “fine”, “best” (as in “first fruits”, i.e., “the best fruits”), and the homonym, “poison”, as seen in the Ps 140:9. Thus, the psalmist’s expression, “bitter ointment” bears with it various nuances: “scented oil for one’s head at a banquet”, “oil of wickedness”, and “poison”. St. Jerome, correctly perceiving the various meanings of *r'osh*, translates with *oleum amaritudinis*, i.e., “oil of bitterness”. A scented oil could also be bitter to the taste and perceived as poisonous.

6. Recent archeology has confirmed what the poet knew long ago—that Petra (Hebrew, *Sela*, meaning “rock” or “crag”), located in a rock gorge, provided professional funeral services and rites of the dead. The poet sees Petra as Sheol, the realm of the dead. Thus, he/she prays that the leaders (*shopteyhem*, from *shapat*, “to judge”) of the wicked be “cast” (*shamat*) into Petra to become members of the *yadah*, the “chorus” of the dead. This term, *yadah*, can also mean “cast down”, and so it

appears that we have here another play on words and concepts: the judges should be cast to death upon or from the “rock” (Petra) as well as “cast down” into Petra’s “cast” or “chorus”, where they will have to listen to (*shama'*) a song, sarcastically proclaimed to be “pleasant” (though perhaps truly pleasant to the poet). Since the lyrics speak of “our bones” (in both the LXX and the MT), it appears that the chorus is singing the song or listening to the poet recite/sing the words in mockery of the chorus.

7. *furrowing and burrowing*. The rhyming of these two terms is also in the Hebrew text: *pole-akh wuboqe'a*. The MT and pointing are quite acceptable “as is”. The term, *k^emow*, of v. 7, usually translated simply with “as”, is best understood as “like water”, from *kiy* and *may* (“water”, usually given in the dual form, *mayim*). Cf. *Psalm 58,10 in the Light of Ebla*, by R. Althann, in *Biblica*, vol. 64, fasc. 1, 1983, pp. 123-124. Our rendering presents a scenario of graves being washed open by flooding water that scatters about the bones of the interred. Petra had an elaborate and efficient system for collecting and distributing water. But some flooding may have occasionally occurred. The use of *mow* in Ps 58:9(10) indicates that the water is from a violent rain storm.

10. *walk by*. The poet prays not so much for “escape” as for the joy (*Schadenfreude*) of seeing the wicked come to destruction by means of their own devices—the ultimate in “poetic justice”.

Psalms 142

A Maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A Prayer.

It is not certain which cave is “the cave” (cf. 1 Sam 22 and 24). However, this ascription was added at a late date so as to give this lament “historical interest” and to help one identify with David and his times of distress. The psalmist appears to be someone faced with the prospect of death. It is not clear, if the threat of death is due to actual enemies, or if the prospect of death itself is the enemy.

- 1 With my voice I cry to the LORD.
With my voice I entreat the LORD.
- 2 Before him I pour out my complaints;
I describe my distress unto him:
- 3 “Though my spirit grows faint within me,
you remain familiar with my course.
In the path that I must follow,
they have hidden a trap for me.
- 4 Look to my right and see:
There is no one who knows me.
Retreat has fled from me.
No one cares about me.”
- 5 I cried out to you, O LORD.
I said: “You are my refuge,

- my portion in the land of the living.
- 6 Attend to my cry; for I am wholly exhausted.**
Save me from my pursuers;
for they are stronger than I.
- 7 Deliver my life from prison,**
that I might give thanks to your name.
May the just gather around me;
for you will richly repay me.”

Notes

7. It is not likely that the psalmist is literally in prison, since ancient Israel did not have prisons for the

long-term confinement of convicted parties. It is more probable that the psalmist is praying to be delivered from being condemned and punished for some alleged wrongdoing.

Psalm 143

A Psalm of David.

This is the last of the “penitential psalms”. Its language suggests that “your servant” is the king. Thus it would date from pre-exilic times. However, this does not rule out postexilic redaction or even postexilic composition, especially in view of the many allusions to other psalms incorporated within this psalm, the lament of an individual.

- 1 LORD, hear my prayer! Listen to my plea!**
In your faithfulness, answer me;
answer me in your righteousness!
- 2 Do not enter into judgment with your servant;**
for no living creature is just in your presence.
- 3 The enemy has pursued my soul;**
he has crushed my life to the ground.
He has made me dwell in darkness,
like the dead from times long ago.
- 4 My spirit has grown faint within me,**
and my heart has withered in my breast.
- 5 I recalled the days of long ago;**
I meditated on all your deeds.
I pondered on the works of your hands.
- 6 I reach out with my hands unto you;**
my soul is like earth thirsting for you.
- 7 Make haste to answer me, O LORD.**
My breath has become exhausted.
Do not hide your face from me,
else I will become like those gone down to the grave.
- 8 Let me hear of your love at dawn;**
for I place my trust in you.
Make me know the path I am to follow;
for I have lifted up my soul to you.
- 9 Rescue me from my enemies.**
O LORD, I take refuge in you.
- 10 Teach me to do your bidding; for you are my God.**

- Let your kind spirit guide me on level ground.
- 11 For the sake of your name, O LORD, give me life.**
In your justice, may you deliver my soul
from adversity;
- 12 and in your mercy, may you abolish my enemies**
and destroy all my oppressors;
for I am your servant.

Notes

1b. This passage shaped St. Paul's teaching on faith and justification. Cf. Rom 3:9-26. The psalm makes it clear that faithfulness and righteousness are inherent in God's nature. God's justice counteracts human unfaithfulness. Cf. *Psalm 43 and the Logic of Romans 3*, by Richard B. Hays, in *JBL*, vol. 99, no. 1, March, 1980, pp. 107-115.

9. *I take refuge in you.* The MT of this verse is not entirely clear. It reads, "unto you I have covered". The use of the preposition, "unto" ('*el*), may imply the image of God as a rock of refuge upon which one can find

cover. St. Jerome renders the passage with *Domine, a te protectus sum* ("LORD, I have been covered by you"). Perhaps the LXX offers the best solution with its use of the preposition, *προς*, which does not have an equivalent in English, but functions like *chez* in French: *chez moi*, literally, "with me", but also meaning "at my place" or "in my home".

10. *level ground.* While the mountains offered refuge, the Israelites preferred the plains for day-to-day life. There it was possible to raise crops without the problems that contoured land presents to agriculture. "Level ground" is thus synonymous with "prosperous life".

Psalm 144

Of David.

The Hebrew text ascribes this psalm to David, and the LXX adds a subsequent interpretation that it is "against Goliath". Commentators generally consign the psalm to the late pre-exilic period or to the postexilic (Persian) period of Israel's history. The first part of the psalm, vv. 1-11, repeats a number of statements from other psalms. This fact favors the postexilic period for the composition of this psalm. The second half of the poem contains expressions found in Aramaic, and the final verse adds a sapiential touch to the psalm.

- 1 Blessed be the LORD, my Rock,**
who trains my hands for war
and my fingers for battle.
- 2 He is my faithful friend and fortress,**
my refuge and my savior,
my shield and the one in whom I trust,
who puts nations at my feet.
- 3 O LORD what is man that you care for him,**
the son of man that you should think of him?
- 4 Man is like a puff of air; his days, a fleeting shadow.**
- 5 LORD, lower your heavens and come down.**
Touch the mountains and let them fume.
- 6 Flash forth lightning and shatter them.**
Shoot your arrows and scatter them.
- 7 Stretch forth your hands from on high;**
snatch me up and rescue me from the deep waters,
from the hands of aliens,
(8) whose mouths speak falsely,
and whose right hands are hands that perjure.

- 9 I will sing, O God, a new song to you;
on a ten-stringed harp, I will play for you,
10 who gave victory to your king
and rescued David your servant.
11 From the malicious sword rescue me,
and free me from the hands of aliens,
whose mouths speak falsely,
and whose right hands are hands that perjure.
12 Let our sons be blessed from youth,
to grow like flourishing trees.
May our daughters be like pillars,
finely carved as for a palace.
13 May our granaries be filled with crops of every kind,
our sheep increasing by thousands,
and bearing ten thousands in our fields.
14 May our cattle be robust and suffer no injuries.
May there be no exile, nor wailing in our streets.
15 Happy the people with such blessings!
How blessed the people for whom the LORD is God!

Notes

1. *my fingers*. While some translate “fingers” as “arms”, it is better to retain “fingers”. The expression, “to train hands for war”, means to be trained in archery, which includes strengthening and training of the fingers, “where the action is”. As anyone who has tried his/her hand at archery can testify, it is no simple matter to retrieve an arrow from the quiver, nock it (i.e., set its notch) on the string, pull back the string to flex the bow, and then release the string properly so as to make the arrow fly straight and without wobble—all in rapid succession as required in warfare, and all of which requires strong and well-trained fingers.

2. *faithful friend*. The root, *khsd*, usually rendered as “love” or “mercy” (*khesed*), contains a note of strength. A *khasid* is a person who is loyal and kind—a “faithful friend”. To emphasize the strong qualities of God, the psalmist has chosen a set of three well-arranged pairs, one member being an impersonal term that symbolizes the personal or special character of the other member of the pair: faithful friend & fortress; refuge & savior; shield & one who is trustworthy.

3-4. Again, the poet employs wordplay and a three-fold progression regarding the generations of humanity in these verses: *'adam* (Adam, unified humanity), *ben 'enosh* (“son of man” or “Enosh”, diversified humanity), and *hebel* (Abel, “a puff of air”, fragile humanity).

14. *cattle*. The term, “cattle” refers especially to animals of burden and labor, such as oxen. The Hebrew text supposes that these animals are “laden” (*sabel*, meaning to bear or carry). The context suggests being “heavy with young” or “sturdy and strong”. The latter concept is chosen here since oxen, strictly speaking, are not fertile. The rendering, “injuries” (*perets*, meaning “to breach”, or “to break” as in “break out”, “break down”, or “collapse”) is uncertain. It is not clear if the term applies to the cattle or is an independent statement asking that there be no breaching of the city walls by invaders. But since the poet’s statements at this point are formulated in pairs (sons and daughters, granaries and crops, etc.), it would appear best to translate *perets* in reference to the cattle and as a statement asking that the cattle either not collapse with injuries under their loads or not wander astray.

Psalm 145

Praise. Of David.

Psalm 145 is the last of the psalms to be ascribed to David. Its acrostic form gives the composition a place with sapiential literature. Even though the acrostic form is a rigid format that can hinder creativity and brilliance, Ps 145 exhibits some impressive and original features that are treated in the notes below. This psalm has had a great impact on Jewish and Christian liturgy. The Babylonian Talmud (Berakoth, 4b) advocates the psalm’s recitation three times a day to assure one a place in “the world to come”. Verse 2 is incorporated in the ancient

Christian hymn, the *Te Deum*. The psalm's acrostic arrangement, its late Hebrew vocabulary, and its use of other psalm material place its composition in the late postexilic age.

Aleph

- 1 I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will bless your name forever and ever.**

Beth

- 2 I will bless you day after day,
and praise your name forever.**

Gimel

- 3 Great is the LORD and worthy of great praise;
and there is no end to his greatness.**

Daleth

- 4 Age to age will acclaim your works
and tell of your mighty deeds.**

He

- 5 On the majesty of your glory and splendor,
and on your wonderful works I will meditate.**

Waw

- 6 They will declare the might of your awesome works,
and I shall proclaim your greatness.**

Zayin

- 7 They will tell the story of your great goodness,
and joyfully sing of your justice.**

Kheth

- 8 Gracious and merciful is the LORD,
slow to anger and rich in mercy.**

Teth

- 9 The LORD is good to all,
and his compassion extends to all his works.**

Yodh

- 10 All your creatures will thank you, O LORD;
and your devoted ones will bless you.**

Kaph

- 11 They will tell the glory of your reign,
and they will proclaim your power,**

Lamedh

- 12 to make known to the children of men your mighty deeds,
and the glorious majesty of your reign.**

Mem

- 13 Your kingdom is a kingdom for all time;
your rule extends to all generations.**

[Nun]

*The Lord is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.*

Samekh

- 14 The LORD sustains all who fall,
and raises all who are bowed down.**

Ayin

- 15 The eyes of all look with hope to you;**

- and you give them food in due season,
Pe
- 16 opening your hand
and filling every creature with delights.
Tsade
- 17 Just is the LORD in all his ways,
and merciful in all his works.
Qoph
- 18 The LORD is near to all who call him,
to all who call on him sincerely.
Resh
- 19 He will grant the prayer of those who fear him.
He will hear their cry and save them.
Shin
- 20 The LORD protects all who love him;
but all the wicked he will destroy.
Tau
- 21 My mouth will proclaim the praise of the LORD;
and all flesh will bless his holy name forever.

Notes

1. The psalm begins with “I” and then moves to the “covenant partners” and ends with *kol basar* (“all flesh”) acknowledging and praising the LORD as king. For a detailed analysis of this psalm, cf. *Psalm 145: All Flesh Will Bless God’s Holy Name*, by Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, in *CBQ*, vol. 74, no. 1 (Jan. 2012), pp. 55-66.

11-13a. These lines are a “reverse acrostic” on the root, *mlk* (“king”, “kingship”). The poet thus concentrates on the concept of kingship in these lines in an A B B A, chiasmic pattern—much too complex to do more with than mention here. However, the resulting alliteration of *m*, *l*, and *k* and chiasmic parallelisms add emphasis to the poet’s goal of extolling God’s kingship

over all time and space. Cf. *Reversed Rootplay in Ps 145*, by Wilfred G.E. Watson, in *Biblica*, vol. 62, fasc. 1, 1981, pp. 101-102.

13b. *Nun*. In the MT, there is no verse beginning with the letter “nun”. In this translation, it is supplied from the LXX and other ancient sources and is given here in cursive script. There can be little doubt that these lines belong to the original composition. Perhaps they were overlooked by some scribe in the course of this psalm’s transmission in Hebrew. It should be noted that St. Jerome’s translation likewise has no corresponding verse. This may indicate that the verse was “lost” sometime after the LXX translation in Greek and before St. Jerome’s translation in Latin.

Psalm 146

This is the first of the five “Halleluiahs” which conclude the Psalter and were in the daily morning service of the synagogue. Although the MT does not ascribe the psalm to anyone, the LXX ascribes it and the next two psalms to the postexilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. This psalm and others from the postexilic era quote from earlier psalms and biblical material. In the manner of sapiential admonition, the psalm of praise passes over the high and mighty and reaches down to the poor and lowly.

- 1 Halleluiah!
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
- 2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing psalms to my God, while I have being.
- 3 Place no trust in princes, in any son of man,
in whom there is no help.
- 4 When his spirit expires, he returns to his place.

- On that day, his plans come to nothing.
- 5 How blessed is the one whose help is the God
of Jacob,
whose hope is the LORD our God,
- 6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea and everything in them,
who is faithful forever,
- 7 and decrees justice for the oppressed,
who gives bread to the hungry.
The LORD sets the prisoners free.
- 8 The LORD opens the eyes of the blind;
the LORD raises those who are bent over;
the LORD loves the just;
- 9 the LORD protects the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow;
but he thwarts the way of the wicked.
- 10 The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, from age to age!
Halleluiah!

Notes

2. *being*. The Hebrew, *b^eowdiy*, means “while I still (am)”. The term, “being”, should not be taken in any philosophical sense here, but only in the sense of “being alive”.

4. *to his place*. For “place”, the MT reads *’adam*, i.e., “earth” or “land”. Acts 1:25 “. . . that he [Judas] might go to his own place” (*eis ton topon idion*), i.e., “his grave”. This is also the imagery of Ps 49:11.

6. *faithful forever*. The term, *l^eowlam* (“forever”), can just as well be read as *l^ewuliyim*, meaning, “to the wronged” (cf. Dahood, *ibid.*, p. 342). If that is the psalmist’s intent, then the term is an obvious parallel to “the oppressed” and “the hungry”. However, this interpretation is not supported by the ancient translations, and the *textus receptus* serves as a proper introduction to the subsequent list of God’s works.

Psalm 147 (146)

The Septuagint and the Vulgate divide this psalm into two psalms. Although there is some continuity of thought between the two parts, internal evidence from style and syntax indicates that the LXX and the Vulgate are correct in treating this psalm as psalms Pss 146 and 147. But taken as a whole, Ps 147 may be a song for the Feast of Tabernacles in view of the attention given to creation, crops, and cattle.

- 1 Halleluiah!
Acclaim the LORD; for that is good.
Sing to our God; for that is right.
Praise is fitting.
- 2 The LORD is rebuilding Jerusalem;
he will reassemble Israel’s exiles.
- 3 He heals the broken-hearted,
and he takes care of their wounds.
- 4 He sets the number of the stars,
and gives a name to each of them.
- 5 How great is our LORD, and matchless his might!
His cunning cannot be measured.

- 6 The LORD sustains the humble.
He casts the proud down to earth.
- 7 Sing in thanksgiving to the LORD;
with the harp, sing psalms to our God!
- 8 He veils the heavens with clouds,
and brings rain upon the earth.
He makes the mountains sprout with grass,
- 9 and gives forage to the cattle
and to the young ravens that cry.
- 10 Not in the horse's strength does he delight,
nor is he pleased by a man's swift legs.
- 11 The LORD is pleased with those who fear him,
with those who place hope in his mercy.
(147)
- 12 Praise the LORD, Jerusalem!
O Zion, acclaim your God!
- 13 He fortifies the bars of your gates.
He blesses the children in your midst,
- 14 and he brings his peace to your frontiers.
He fills you with the finest wheat.
- 15 He sends his command to the earth;
his thunder runs swiftly along.
- 16 He scatters snow like wool; he hurls sleet like ashes.
- 17 He flings hailstones like crumbs.
Who can withstand his cold?
- 18 He sends forth his word and melts them.
He wafts the wind; the waters flow.
- 19 He makes his word known to Jacob,
his laws and decrees to Israel.
- 20 He has not done this for other nations;
and they do not know his decrees.
Halleluiah!

Notes

1. *Acclaim the Lord; for that is good.* As the second in the series of the “Halleluiah Psalms”, this psalm begins with “Halleluiah”, as expected, but also as a “double duty” expression that forms the main clause of a compound sentence. Therefore, in this rendering, the initial “Halleluiah” is repeated as “Acclaim the **LORD**”, so as to lead to the second part of the sentence, “for that is good”. It is also possible to allow the initial “Halleluiah” to stand as an independent statement and to translate *kiy* (“for”) as an exclamatory expression: “How good it is” (thus the NAB).

4. That the **LORD** determines the number and names of the stars is “proof” that he is “**LORD** of lords and God of gods” over all creation. In naming the animals, Adam is given dominion over them. Cf. Gn 2:19.

10. The expression, “swift legs”, is not entirely certain. The Hebrew term, *showq*, refers especially to the thigh, the most muscular part of the leg. Since it stands in parallel here with “horse’s strength”, it is probable that

the psalmist wants to emphasize the strength and swiftness of a man’s (*ha-’ish* means a male person) legs. The concept of swiftness is further affirmed in v. 15b, which speaks of God’s word (thunder) running swiftly along—far more swiftly than any man can run. The implication is that God is pleased with the swiftness and power of his word rather than with the swiftness and strength of one’s legs.

15. God’s word (*dabar*) is rendered here as “thunder”, a meaning that is clearly set forth in Job 26:14. Also, Ps 29 identifies thunder as “the **LORD**’s voice”. Cf. also Jn 12:29. The association of God’s word with thunder also implies rain and life-giving water (cf. Jn 4:7-15). The poetic form is a chiasmus with a word association play between “his command” (*’imratow*) and “his thunder/word” (*d^ebarow*) and an assonant (sound) association play between “earth” (*’erets*) and “runs” (*yaruwts*). Cf. John S. Kselman, *Semantic-Sonant Chiasmus in Biblical Poetry*, in *Biblica*, vol. 58, fasc. 2, 1977, pp. 219-223.

Psalm 148

Psalm 148 presents the praise of God in three parts: the heavenly beings, the beings of earth, and the people of Israel. This order from the greatest (the heavens) to the least (Israel) is typical of Semitic narrative. Cf. e.g., Mt 13:9 (the Semitic form) and Mk 4:8 (the non-Semitic form) of the Parable of the Sower. Yet the least is the greatest by God's choice and favor. Cf. Mt 19:28; 25:40.

- 1 Halleluiah!**
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights.
- 2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host.**
- 3 Praise him, sun and moon; praise him,**
all you stars of light.
- 4 Praise him, you highest heavens;**
praise him, waters above the heavens.
- 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD;**
for he commanded, and they were created.
- 6 He founded them as a lasting decree;**
he decreed a limit that will never end.
- 7 Praise the LORD from the earth,**
you sea monsters and ocean depths,
fire and hail, (8) snow and smoke,
and you tempests that heed his command,
- 9 mountains and every hill, fruit trees and every cedar,**
- 10 wild beasts and all cattle,**
creeping things and birds in flight,
- 11 kings of the earth and all nations,**
princes and all judges of the earth,
- 12 young men and maidens also,**
old men as well as boys:
- 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD;**
for his name alone is most high.
His renown is above the earth and the heavens.
- 14 He exalts the strength of his people.**
He is the praise of all his saints,
of the children of Israel,
of the nation so near to him.
Halleluiah!

Notes

3b. The "stars of light" probably refers to the planets that constitute the "morning stars" and the "evening stars". Thus the heavenly lights give praise to God at all times, day and night, dusk and dawn.

6. *decreed a limit*. The poet employs the terms, *natan* ("gave") and *khaq*, which means both "statute" and "limit". The rendering given here translates "gave" as "decreed" so as to convey both concepts of "statute" and "limit". The imagery of the psalm portrays the LORD's primordial battle with mythic sea monsters of

the deep. God's word (*dabar*, "word", "deed") effects what it decrees. Cf. Gen 1:6-10.

7-12. These verses summon all creation to join in a hymn of praise to the Creator. This song of praise bears some resemblance and relationship to the hymnic literature of other cultures of pre-Israelite times, especially Egypt and Mesopotamia. Cf. *A Study of Psalm 148*, by Delbert R. Hillers, in *CBQ*, vol. 40, no. 3, July, 1978, pp 123-148. These verses influenced the Song of the Three Young men in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:52-90; RSV vv. 28-68).

Psalm 149

The psalmist celebrates what appears to be a recent victory. But the event itself is uncertain. The Exodus may be in the poet's mind. In the psalm's present form, it displays postexilic redaction or composition. As noted in regard to Ps 2, Ps 149 is the second half of the diptych formed by Pss 2 and 149 on the theme of vengeance. Cf. the introduction for Ps 2. The harshness of the last half of Ps 149 can be metaphorically interpreted as spiritual warfare against various evils. This would have been its use and application in the postexilic community, since it certainly was not looking to pick any fights with its neighbors. Nevertheless, the inception and expansion of messianic hope in the postexilic community may be seen in this psalm. In other respects, the psalm must be viewed strictly within the historical context of the ancient cultures of the world. St. Paul, with reference to the OT's reservations concerning vengeance (cf. Lev 19:18), tells the church at Rome that vengeance belongs to God and is not to be the Christian course of action. Cf. Rom 12:19; Deut 32:35.

- 1 Halleluiah!**
Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful!
- 2 Let Israel rejoice in its Maker,**
and the children of Zion exult in their King.
- 3 Let them praise his name in dance,**
and sing psalms to him with timbrel and harp.
- 4 For the LORD is pleased with his people;**
he will crown the humble with salvation.
- 5 Let the faithful exult in their Glory,**
and shout for joy upon their beds.
- 6 May exalted praises of God be in their throats,**
and two-edged swords in their hands,
- 7 to wield vengeance on the nations,**
and retribution upon the peoples;
- 8 to bind up their kings in chains,**
and their nobles with fetters of iron;
- 9 and to carry out on them the prescribed verdict.**
This is an honor for all his faithful.
Halleluiah!

Notes

5. Exegetes and translators are uncertain about this verse, some rendering "upon their beds" as "clan by clan". However, both the LXX and St. Jerome use terms that speak of "their beds" and which refer especially to the marriage bed. Ps 19:5 notes the joy of the bridegroom as he comes forth from the bed chamber, and Ho 7:14a reads "They do not cry to me from their heart, but they wail upon their beds" (NRSV). The bedroom was the inmost part of the home and the place where the deepest emotions of joy and sorrow were felt and expressed (cf. also Job 7:13; Ps 6:6; Amos 6:4).

exult in their Glory. Dahood (*ibid.*, p. 357) and others have shown convincingly that "glory" is best understood here as a name for God. A parallel of sorts exists between "Glory" and "their beds"—the bedroom

being a place for the expression of deep emotions just as the thought of God is cause for exultation. Cf. esp. Hos 7:14 and Ps 106:20. The contrast between "assembly" of v. 1 and "beds" in v. 5 is equivalent to saying "in public and in private". Cf. *Psalm 149: Poetry, Themes (Exodus and Conquest), and Social Function*, by Anthony R. Ceresko, in *Biblica*, vol. 67, fasc. 2, 1986, pp. 177-194, specifically, p. 186. The references to the "faithful" (*khasidiym*) in vv. 1, 5 and 9b point to postexilic times for the composition or redaction of this psalm. This is further supported by the similarities between this psalm and Sirach 36 (especially vv. 8-9 and 19), a postexilic composition.

6. *two-edged swords.* The Hebraism for a sword of two edges is "a sword of double mouths". Thus the poet resorts to a wordplay, i.e., exultation is in the throat (of the fighter) and in the "mouth" (sword).

7. *vengeance*. The ancient world and all too much of the modern world exalt vengeance as a virtue. Cultures that emphasize and identify with personal and family honor place great value on vengeance. But Christian culture should be guided by St. Paul's admonition in Rom 12:19-20, and quoting from OT sources: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God: for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,

says the **LORD**. No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this, you will heap burning coals on their heads'" (NRSV; cf. Prov 25:21-22). In other words, let kindness be one's version of "burning coals." Cf. the notes for Ps 2 regarding the relationship between Ps 2 and this psalm.

8. *nobles*. The psalmist uses *nikb^edeyhem* ("weighty ones") for "nobles" to imply that they were once weighty with honors and wealth, but now are weighed down by fetters and chains. Cf. Ceresko, *ibid.*, pp. 192-193. These kings and nobles are now subject to the humble and faithful. The violence that is expressed toward these former potentates may indicate a composition or, more

likely, a redaction of the psalm shortly after the Persian conquest of Babylon—at a time when the feelings for vengeance were still intense among the liberated exiles. Later postexilic times introduced a sense of mission to the nations. Cf., e.g., Ps 87:4—"I will claim Rahab and Babylon among those who know me. Yes, O Philistia, Tyre and Ethiopia: This man was born there."

Psalm 150

The entire *Book of Psalms*, the *t^ehilliym* ("songs of praise"), ends with The Great Hallel. Set between the beginning Halleluiah and the concluding Halleluiah, *hallel* ("give praise") is repeated ten times. The psalm ends with praise from all living creatures. In ancient Israelite thought, all and only living things breathe. Thus the Psalter concludes where the Book of Genesis begins—with the creation of all things and with living beings as the crown of creation. For the living give the highest praise to God, and life made in God's image and likeness (i.e., human beings, cf. Gen 1:27) is the supreme manifestation of God's creative power and glory. It should be noted that the Book of Revelation also "journeys to the beginning" (e.g., the Tree of Life in Rev 22:2). Such a "journey" may be also designated as a "journey back to the future".

- 1 **Halleluiah!**
Praise God in his holy place;
praise him in his vast expanse!
- 2 **Praise him for his mighty feats;**
praise him for his majesty!
- 3 **Praise him with the shophar's blast;**
praise him with the lute and lyre!
- 4 **Praise him with the drums and dance;**
praise him with the strings and pipes!
- 5 **Praise him with clashing cymbals;**
praise him with crashing cymbals!
- 6 **Let all that breathes give praise to Yah.**
Halleluiah!

Notes

1. *holy place*. This may be a reference to God's "place" in the heavens. But the temple sanctuary would not be excluded, since it was viewed as God's special place or footstool on earth.

2. *for his majesty*. This rendering is used here for the Hebrew expression, *kirob gudlow*, literally, "according to the multitude of his greatness." In its root meanings of "grandness" and "greatness", the term, "majesty" (from the Latin, *majus*, "greater"), is a good equivalent of the Hebrew expression.