

Book 2 and the Sons of Korah

Book 2 of Psalms and the Sons of Korah

Introduction to Book 2

Psalms 42-72 form the second part of the book of Psalms. This book has two features that distinguish it from Book 1: authorship, and vocabulary.

The only *author* mentioned in Book 1 is David. Book 2 does have 21 Psalms by David, but it also has eight by the sons of Korah, one by Asaph, and one by Solomon (Figure 1, chart).

In *vocabulary*, the second book prefers the name “God” יהוה אלהים over “Jehovah” יהוה that dominates the first book (Figure 2, chart). Robertson suggests that this reflects a different focus for this book.

- Book 1, Pss 1-41, describes the **Confrontation** between Israel’s Messianic king and his opposition. In psalms of lamentation, David, the prototypical king, calls to God for help against his enemies (historically, Saul and Absalom).
- Book 2, Pss 42-72, deals with the **Communication** of Messiah’s claims to the Gentiles, and thus favors the general name of God יהוה אלהים over the covenant name יהוה. David is again in the forefront, as the king who expanded Israel’s reach to other nations. The final psalm, 72, envisions the rule of God’s king over all the earth.

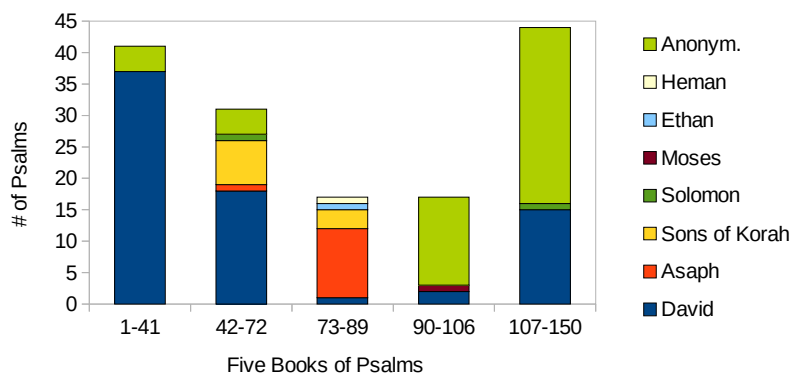


Figure 1: Authors by Book

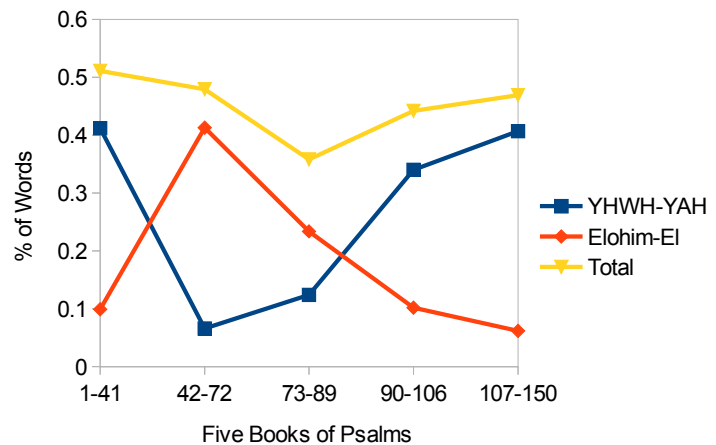


Figure 2: Divine Names in the Five Books

Figure 3 (chart) shows the overall structure of the book, adapted from Robertson. We will no doubt modify this as we work our way through. The psalms by different authors are grouped together: eight by the sons of Korah, one by Asaph, 19 by David, and one by Solomon. They are organized into seven sequential groups, which develop a coherent story.

The first two groups come from Korah.

The first three Psalms (two when we recognize 42-43 as a single Psalm) are introductory, painting a picture of despair and defeat. The rest of Book 2 presents the solution to this problem.

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First is the founding of Messiah's dynasty in 45, supported by God in 46-48.

The next group (49-52) has three authors. Two Psalms by Levites, 49 by the sons of Korah and 50 by Asaph, summon people to appear before God in judgment. Then David introduces the defendants: first himself representing Israel (Psalm 51), and then Doeg the Edomite, a Gentile (52). Extending the example of Doeg, Psalms 53-60 detail a series of enemies who have threatened the king.

In 61-68, the Messiah cries out in the face of his enemies, and the Lord responds.

In 69-71 three laments record the ongoing struggle between the king and his enemies. These three Psalms contain numerous imprecations, as the King casts his case on the Lord and asks him to intervene on his behalf.

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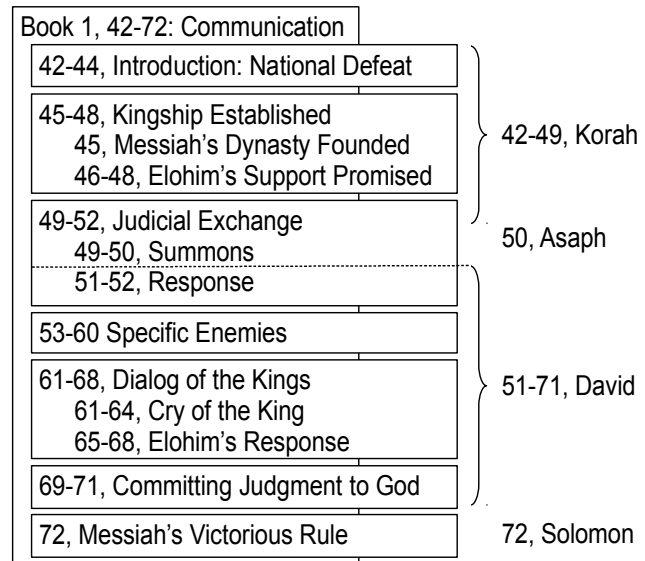


Figure 3: Analysis of Book 2

Introduction to the Sons of Korah (Psalms 42-49; 84-89)

This is the first of two groups of Psalms attributed to the Sons of Korah.

Korah was a Levite who led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron during the Exodus:

Num 16:1 Now **Korah**, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: 2 And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: 3 And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?

The Lord brought a severe judgment on these rebels.

Num 16:31 And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: 32 And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto **Korah**, and all their goods. 33 They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.

All of the families of Dathan and Abiram perished, but Moses notes,

Num 26:11 Notwithstanding the **children of Korah** died not.

Delivered from the pit, they gratefully served in the sanctuary:

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1Ch 9:19 And Shallum the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the **son of Korah**, and his brethren, of the house of his father, the Korahites, were over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle: and their fathers, being over the host of the LORD, were keepers of the entry.

The expression “work of the service” מלאכה עבודה appears often in Leviticus and Numbers to describe the “servile work” from which people were to abstain on holy days. These sons of Korah were doorkeepers, and also did whatever was needed. Their Psalms show them as men of devotion. We have not only the Psalms of David, but also the Psalms of the janitors.

Though they lived among the northern tribes,¹ they were among those who early recognized David as the Lord’s anointed, and joined with him while he was fleeing Saul.

1Ch 12:1 Now these are they that came to David to Ziklag, while he yet kept himself close because of Saul the son of Kish: and they were among the mighty men, helpers of the war. 2 They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow, even of Saul's brethren of Benjamin. ... 6 Elkanah, and Jesiah, and Azareel, and Joezer, and Jashobeam, **the Korhites**,

42-44, Introductory Psalms: Despair

Both 42-43 and 44 are laments, and both depict the poet and his associates in a state of despair.

Psalm 42-43, Returning to the House of God

Like Psalms 9-10, these two Psalms were probably written originally as a single composition, and appear as such in many Hebrew mss. There are two signs of their unity.

1. 43 has a title but no closing dedication. This is not rare (51x), but 42 has a dedication to the chief musician, but no title, which is rare (only 9x, including 10 and 43). But if we unite them, the overall Psalm has both a title and a dedication, which is very common (45x).
2. The two Psalms share a common refrain. Compare 42:5, 42:11, and 43:5. This gives the overall structure shown in Figure 4 (chart).

The three stanzas present a progression. The first expresses the longing of someone who is far from the tabernacle to join in the public worship. The second declares his confidence that the Lord can deliver him. The third turns to the Lord to

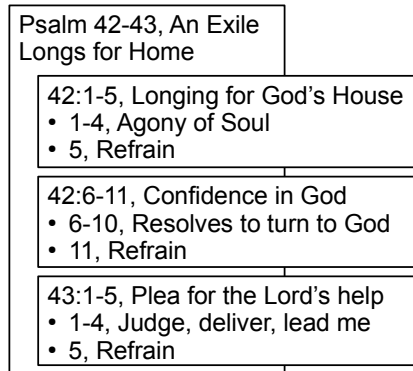


Figure 4: Structure of Psalm 42-43

	42:1-4	42:6-10	43:1-4
Prayer to God	1	6, 9	1,2,3,4
Soul depressed	2	6	
Questioning God	2	9	2
“Day and Night”	3 (tears)	8 (blessing)	
Enemies: “where is thy God?”	3	10	
Reference to sanctuary	4		3, 4

Table 1: Repeated elements in Psalm 42-43

¹ Mitchell, JSOT 30:3 (2006) 365-384, note 19: “Elkanah (1 Sam 11) shares the genealogy of a Korahite of the same name over seven generations from Zuph to Joel ben Samuel (1 Chron 6 18-20 [33-35]; cf w 11-13 [26-28], 1 Sam 8 2). Elkanah then was a Korahite, as rabbinic tradition recognizes (Meg 14a, Num R 18 8), but, living among Ephraim, he was called an Ephraimite.”

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ask for his intervention. Numerous features tie the three stanzas together (Table 1, with color coding to match the text below).

42:1 Maschil, for the sons of Korah.--This is the second *maschil* Psalm (after 32), of 13 in all. The word means “instruction,” and these Psalms are particularly suited to public instruction—in this case, exhorting people to trust in God in time of trouble.

The Psalm describes someone on the east bank of Jordan (v. 6), exiled from the sanctuary, and pursued by enemies, which is David’s situation when fleeing Absalom. Delitzsch suggests,

... that Ps. xlii. is the poem of a Korahitic Levite, who found himself in exile beyond the Jordan among the attendants of David, his exiled king.

The Korahites were loyal to David when he fled from Saul (1 Chr 12:6), and now they support him under Absalom’s rebellion.

42:1-5, Longing for the House of God

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. 2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?--Imagine a deer, pursued by hunters, that longs for a drink of water. The Psalmist, fleeing Absalom’s army and excluded from the sanctuary that he has long served, longs for God. Verse 1 is the only time in the first stanza that he directly addresses the Lord.

3 My tears have been my meat day and night,--Recall David’s complaint in Psalm 6, in the midst of a cluster of Psalms describing his nighttime flight from Absalom:

Psa 6:6 I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.

while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?--Compare the accusation of his enemies during his flight from Absalom,

Psa 3:2 Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.

In particular, Shimei claimed that David’s exile was judgment from the Lord:

2Sa 16:7 And thus said Shimei when he cursed, ... 8 The LORD hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the LORD hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: ...

These words anticipate our Savior’s adversaries at the cross,

Mat 27:43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

4 When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.--He longs for the times of joyful worship with God’s people.²

5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?--The LXX *ἵνα τι περιλυπος ει ψυχη* lies behind the words of our Lord in Gethsemane, Matt 26:38³

2 “House of God” does not make this Psalm post-Davidic; throughout Judges it describes the tabernacle.

3 Compare also 42:6 with John 12:27, *ψυχη* with *ταρασσω*

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Mat 26:38 Then saith he unto them, **My soul is exceeding sorrowful** περιλυπος εστιν η ψυχη μου, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. (also Mark 13:34)

These are the only places that περιλυπος and ψυχη come together. Having just left the temple, driven away by the animosity of those who sought his life, our Lord found expression for his grief in the words that the sons of Korah composed for David under similar circumstances.

hope thou in God:--The key to dealing with depression is getting our focus off of ourselves and onto the Lord. Remember David's theme,

Psa 16:8 I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.--“Help” ישועות is plural, “salvations” or “saving acts.” The singer anticipates multiple interventions, perhaps based on his previous experience, both personally in serving David since the days of Saul, and in light of his family history, how the sons of Korah were delivered from judgment in the days of Moses.

These saving acts are attributed here to God's countenance, his face, following a repeated theme in the OT that the sons of Korah would remember from their long residence at the tabernacle:⁴

Num 6:26 The LORD lift up **his countenance** upon thee, and give thee peace.

The Lord's favorable look brings peace to his people. We find this theme often in the Psalms:

Psa 4:6 There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of **thy countenance** upon us.

Psa 44:3 For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and **the light of thy countenance**, because thou hadst a favour unto them.

Psa 89:15 Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in **the light of thy countenance**.

42:6-11, Confidence in the Lord

We can see progress at several points, compared with the first stanza.

6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.--The allusions to the east side of Jordan reinforce the association of the Psalm with David's flight from Absalom and refuge at Mahanaim on the Jabbok. The Psalmist is now speaking to God, not complaining about him.

7 Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. 8 Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.--As in the first stanza, he refers to day and night, but now these periods are occupied, not with weeping, but with expectation of God's care and praise to him.

9 I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? 10 As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?--He resolves to bring his complaint directly

4 Is there a link here to v. 2, אֲרָאָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, 2.

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to the Lord. Here is the same accusation of his enemies that we heard in v. 3. But there, the accusation simply led him to weep. Now, he brings the problem to the Lord.⁵

11 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.--This and the final refrain differ slightly from the first.⁶ There, we had the subjective genitive, “the help of his countenance,” the salvations brought by his favorable regard. Here and in 43:5, it is the objective genitive “the salvations of my countenance.” A person’s face reflects their reaction to the events around them.⁷ The Psalmist’s focus is not just on the change in his circumstances, but what that will mean to his mental health. As Hengstenberg observes, “The salvation goes forth from the friendly countenance of God [v. 5], and upon the afflicted countenance of the Psalmist. The light of the countenance of God illuminates the darkness of his countenance.”

The assertion “and my God” answers the repeated accusation, “Where is thy God?”

43:1-5, Petition to the Lord

43:1 Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.--Finally, he has risen above focusing on his suffering, to asking for the Lord’s intervention.

2 For thou art the God of my strength [מַעוֹן Strong 4581]:--The noun actually means “strong refuge,” reminiscent of the common verb for trust חָסָה Strong 2620 “take refuge.” In the second stanza he was seeking physical refuge to the east of Jordan. Now he find his refuge in God.

why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? 3 O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. 4 Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.--Note the transition within these verses: from being cast off to coming to God’s holy hill; from mourning to songs of praise.

What makes the difference is “thy light and thy truth.” The usual expression is “lovingkindness and truth” חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת (which occurs 13x⁸ in the OT), but the Psalmist is recalling his appeal for God’s countenance, which is often described as shedding light on God’s people (“the light of thy countenance” or “cause thy face to shine”).⁹ As he turns his attention from his own discouragement to a desire for God and his teaching, the cloud lifts.

5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.--So here is the antidote for depression: praise God, and your burden will lift.

To the chief Musician.--As Levites, the sons of Korah and Asaph dedicate more Psalms to the sanctuary (5/10 and 7/12 respectively) than do others (42/128).

5 His intent may reflect Moses’ spirit in Exod 32:12, recognizing that his suffering reflects badly on the Lord.

6 Such variation is common with refrains in the Psalms. Rawlinson (Pulpit Commentary) compares 24:8 with 24:10; 49:12 with 49:20; 56:4 with 56:11.

7 Hamilton, TWOT: “A “shining” face is evidence of joy (Job 29:24). A “shamed” face points to defeat, frustration, humiliation (2Sam 19:5). A “flaming” face is one convulsed by terror (Isa 13:8). An “evil” face is a face marked by distress and anxiety (Gen 40:7). A “fallen” face stems from very strong anger or displeasure (Gen 4:5).”

8 Gen. 24:49; 47:29; Ex. 34:6; Jos. 2:14; 2 Sam. 2:6; 15:20; Ps. 25:10; 61:8; 85:11; 86:15; 89:15; Pr. 3:3; 20:28

9 Ps. 4:7; 31:17; 44:4; 80:4, 8, 20; 89:16; Dan. 9:17

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Psalm 44, Plea for God’s Mercy on an Innocent Nation

The lament of a single person (“I”) in Psalm 42-43 expands into the lament of the nation (“we”).

44:1 for the sons of Korah, Maschil.

The Psalm is a lament (Figure 5, chart), and begins and ends with references to the exodus and conquest. Its lesson is that when we are in distress, we should recall the Lord’s past care for us.

1-8, Confidence

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. 2 How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out [sent them out].--They take comfort from God’s deliverance in the Exodus.¹⁰ “Them” twice in v. 2 refers to the fathers, not the heathen. “Plant” recalls (chart)

Exo 15:17 Thou shalt bring them in, and **plant them** in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. [echoed also in 80:8, by Asaph]

“Cast them out” (שלח "send," Strong 7971) refers to Israel, not the Canaanites:

Exo 4:21 see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not **let the people go**.

3 For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.-- “Light of thy countenance” recalls 42:5; 43:3.

4 Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.--This verse moves from the past to the future, and stands out from the rest of vv. 1-8 in two ways:

- The singular (vv. 4, 6, 15) contrasts with the plural that dominates the rest of the Psalm, and is the voice of the king who represents the people,¹¹ anticipating Isaiah’s Servant of the Lord. The first word we hear from this king is a confession that he himself is under the kingship of God.
- It is the only imperative before the plea in 23-26.¹² The author has put the plea last so that he can build his case before the Lord, but the burden he feels is so great that it bursts out early, in his expression of confidence.

10 Bullinger (“The Names and Order of the Books of the Old Testament,” *Things to Come* Vol 1-2, 1984-1896, pp. 190-191, <https://archive.org/details/TheNamesAndTheOrderOfTheBooksOfTheOldTestament>): in Book 1, “All the figures and illustrations are taken from Genesis,” while in Book 2, “the figures and illustrations are from Exodus,” reinforcing the Jewish tradition that the five books of Psalms reflect the structure of the Pentateuch.

11 Craigie. The sons of Korah may have composed this Psalm as a responsive reading between king and nation.

12 Most modern versions (followed by Craigie) follow the LXX in moving the final ך from אלהים to צוה, reading the first as “my God” and the second as a participle, and removing this anomaly. The antiquity of the change shows the unexpectedness of the imperative at this point, but for that very reason MT is the *lectio difficilior*.

Psalm 44, Lament of an Innocent Nation (“we”)
1-8, Confidence from Exodus & Conquest
• 1-3, Past
• 4-6, Future
• 4, Individual (“I”; anticipatory plea)
• 5, Corporate
• 6, Individual (“I”)
• 7, Past
9-16, Complaint
• 9-14, Corporate (“we”)
• 15-16, Individual (“I”)
17-22, Assertion of Innocence
23-26, Plea echoing Egyptian Bondage

Figure 5: Structure of Psalm 44

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The intercession of the king on behalf of his people anticipates the intercession of our Lord for us now, during the tribulations we suffer during this present evil world, in line with Paul's quotation of the Psalm in Romans 8 (which also mentions Christ's intercession in v. 34).

5 Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. 6 For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.--Because our Fathers did not rely on their own strength (v. 3), neither shall I. Again the king speaks out.

7 But For thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. 8 In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah.--Finally the Psalmist moves back again to God's deliverance in the past. The conjunction ו is here not adversative, but causal ("for, because"): "We will triumph in the future, because of your past deliverance."

9-16, Complaint

To this optimistic review of Israel's past history, the Psalmist juxtaposes the nation's current disaster. Again we hear both the voice of the nation, and (in 15-16) the comment of the king.

9 But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies. 10 Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves. 11 Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen. 12 Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price. 13 Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. 14 Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people.--We don't know what disaster this was. It could be as early as the time of David, when the Edomites appear to have invaded Judah (see Delitzsch and Hengstenberg), or as late as the time of the Maccabees. In either case, the nation felt abandoned by God.

15 My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me, 16 For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth; by reason of the enemy and avenger.--The king now expresses the personal burden he feels due to the disaster.

17-22, Assertion of Innocence

Sometimes disaster is God's punishment for sin, but the people are not aware of any violation.

17 All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. 18 Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; 19 Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death.--They insist that their obedience to the Lord has not flagged.

20 If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; 21 Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.--They are so confident of their innocence that they invite the Lord to judge them. Compare 7:3.

22 Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.--The only explanation they can find for their suffering is their association with the Lord, and people's hatred for him. The NT saints experienced the same dynamic:

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Mat 5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Phi 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;

Thus it is natural for Paul to cite this verse when reflecting on the difficulties that believers face:

Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

These correspond to the sufferings described by the Psalmist in 44:9-16. Paul continues:

8:36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

But in the light of the cross and the empty tomb, he can see beyond the disaster:

Rom 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul resolves the dilemma by drawing our attention to God's love for us in Christ, just as the editor follows this Psalm with 45, describing Messiah's love for his people.

23-26, Plea

23 Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever.--The question recalls the questions of 42:9 and 43:2, and anticipates Mark 4:38.

24 Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?--The words recall the Egyptian bondage:

Deut 26:6 And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: 7 And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and **looked on our affliction**, and our labour, and our **oppression**: 8 And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders:¹³

25 For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth. 26 Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake.

To the chief Musician, upon Shoshannim,--The other Shoshannim Psalm is 68, which is much more positive. Thirtle relates both to Spring, the time of lilies, as Passover Psalms.

45-48, Royal Psalms: The Hope of Deliverance

After two Psalms (42-43, 44) of defeat and discouragement, the editor points to the answer, Messiah's love for his bride (as in Rom 8:37-39) (Figure 3). Psalm 45 presents the Messianic king and his bride, and 46-48 promise the Lord's rule over all nations and his capital in Zion.

¹³ Thirtle notes Ex 3:7, 9, with the same affliction, oppression, and divine awareness, but not as compactly

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Psalm 45, Founding Messiah's Dynasty

45:1 for the sons of Korah, Maschil, A Song of loves.--This Psalm is a wedding song. The Psalmist opens and closes; between, he addresses the king and the royal bride (Figure 6, chart).

Scholars have sought for a possible marriage during the history of the kings of Israel and Judah that could have been the occasion for this Psalm.¹⁴ But Heb 1:8-9 cites vv. 6-7 as describing the Messiah, a tradition that was widely known among the Jews. The Aramaic Targum, a Jewish rendering used in synagogues, paraphrases v. 2 (chart),

Your beauty, **O King Messiah**, is greater than the sons of men; the spirit of prophecy has been placed on your lips; because of this the LORD has blessed you forever.

And when v. 10 addresses the bride, the Targum interprets it of the nation:

11 Hear, **O congregation of Israel**, the Torah of his mouth, and see the wonders of his deeds, and incline your ear to the words of Torah, and you will forget the evil deeds of the wicked of your people, and the place of idols that you worshipped in the house of your father. 12 And then the king will desire your beauty; for he is your master and you will bow down to him.

Likely¹⁵ the Psalm is not based in any historical event, but from the first was intended as an allegory describing the relation between the Messianic king and his people. This makes it even more appropriate at this point in the Psalter, after the king (in 42-43) and then the people (44) have lamented their condition. This Psalm promises that this time of suffering will turn into joy.

Psalm 44 teaches us to look back to God's past faithfulness in times of discouragement. Psalm 45 teaches us to look forward as well, to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9), probably a reference to the millennial kingdom described in the following chapter. Our bridegroom will return for us, and deliver us from this present evil world.

My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.--The Psalmist declares his purpose. He takes great joy in meditating on the glory of the king and telling others about him. This should be our attitude as we meet together to bring our praises to him. God loves it when his people speak to each other of him (cf. Mal 3:16-17).

First he speaks to the king. He begins and ends describing his glory and splendor, then in the center describes how he conquers his enemies and rules his people.

2 Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.--The king did not produce his own beauty and grace. The verb

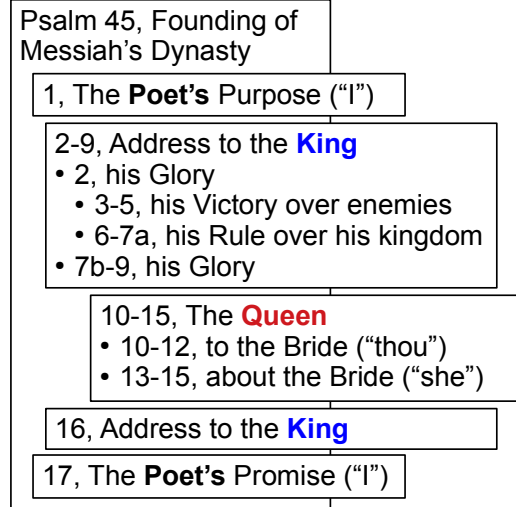


Figure 6: Structure of Psalm 45

14 Constraints are that the bride comes from another people (v. 10) and Tyre is among the guests (v. 12). Kirkpatrick in the *Cambridge Bible* summarizes some of the options, including Ahab and Jezebel or Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom, and Jehoram-Athaliah and Solomon with his Egyptian bride in the south.

15 Rawlinson in the Pulpit Commentary, and Hengstenberg

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“poured” is passive: gracious speech is a gift that has been given him. We should understand “therefore” as referring, not to the blessing of God, but to the Psalmist’s recognition of this blessing: “therefore [one may conclude that] God hath blessed thee,” a reading reinforced by the past tense. The blessings in view here are not those of the future as in vv. 5, 16, but those already received. A reason for the blessing itself is in v. 7, which matches this one chiasmically.

3 Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. 4 And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. 5 Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.--As we move from his description to his actions, we read first of his promised victory over his enemies. “People” is plural, referring to pagan nations, as anticipated in Psalm 2.

6 Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. 7 Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness:--He not only conquers, but also rules, and when he does, he does so righteously and justly.

The first clause addresses the king as “God,” and is indisputably the most straightforward reading of the Hebrew, followed by all the ancient versions. The writer to Hebrew cites this verse to prove that the Messiah is God, and thus of higher standing than the angels:

Heb 1:8 But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. 9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

Given his polemic objective, he must have known that this reading would not be disputed by the Jews. In fact, the Targum renders, “The throne of your glory, O LORD, lasts forever and ever.”

therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.--“God, thy God” is the Elohist version of “the Lord thy God,” and presents the paradox that though the king is “God” (v. 6), yet he is under “God” (v. 7). This pair of verses is one of the glimpses of the relation between the Father and the Son that we see in the OT, and increasingly commonly in later books.

8 All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. 9 Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.--Now he returns to praising the beauty of the king. The “therefore” in the middle of v. 7 completes the causal chain seen in v. 2. There, the Psalmist concluded from the King’s exceptional beauty and grace that he was blessed of God, and now he traces that blessing of adornment back to the king’s righteous rule.

The crown of his beauty is the queen, robed in the finest gold, and to her he now turns his attention. First, he addresses her directly:

10 Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;--“Forget thine own people” suggests that she is a foreigner. In the physical weddings of the kings of Israel, these cross-cultural marriages were disasters: Solomon’s wives turned away his heart, and Jezebel of Tyre promoted the worship of Baal and sought to wipe out the prophets of God. But in the light of Messiah’s worldwide dominion (Psalm 2), a pagan bride makes excellent sense.

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11 So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him. 12 And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour.--The bride must focus all her attention on her husband.

13 The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. 14 She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. 15 With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace.--Having exhorted the bride, he now describes her beauty.

16 Instead of thy [masculine] fathers shall be thy children,--The pronoun are masculine, indicating that the poet has turned his attention back to the king. His union with his Gentile bride will be blessed with offspring. Compare Isaiah 53,

Isa 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.--These children will rule with him, establishing a true dynasty of righteousness.

2Ti 2:11 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: 12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

17 I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.--Finally, the Psalmist once again mentions himself, in promising to commemorate the king and his glory.

To the chief Musician, 46:1 for the sons of Korah, upon Alamoth.--As in Ps 87, another Psalm of Korah, the authorship assignment is repeated. Prepositional phrase are routinely included with the dedication to the musician. This one (“Alamoth”) means “virgins,” and indicates that this wedding song was to be sung by young women.

46-48, God's Deliverance

The Psalmist now anticipates the triumph of the reign of the King in Psalm 45, further exploring his mysterious relation with God. These three Psalms describe a victory over an enemy led by multiple kings (46:6; 48:4), probably inspired by Jehoshaphat's encounter with the kings of Moab and Ammon recorded in 2 Chronicles 20 (Table 2, chart; see notes).

Psalm 46, The Divine Refuge and Physical City

46:1 A Song.--Common before hymns of praise.

The Psalm has three stanzas, marked by *Selah* (Figure 7, chart). The refrain of the second and third celebrates God's presence and refuge, using the expression “with us” עִמָּנוּ that becomes Isaiah's title for Messiah, Immanu-el (Isa 7:14; 8:8).

Psalm 46, Immanuel is our Refuge
1-3, Refuge from Physical Disaster <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1, God is our refuge ... a very present help• 2-3, Description of deliverance• 3b, Selah
4-7, Refuge from Political Disaster <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4-6, Description of deliverance• 7, the LORD is with us ... God is our refuge• 7b, Selah
8-11, Exhortations to Faith <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8-9, from People: Come, behold• 10, from God: Be still.• 11, the LORD is with us ... God is our refuge• 11b, Selah

Figure 7: Structure of Psalm 46

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2 Chronicles 20	Psalms 46-48
1 It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.	46:6 the kingdoms ... 48:4 the kings ...
2-13 (Jehoshaphat leads the nation in prayer)	
14-18 (Jahaziel predicts victory)	
19 And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.	Psalm 46, Preparation for Battle
20-22 (Judah marches out singing)	
22-25 (the kings destroy themselves)	
26 And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day.	Psalm 47, Celebration of Victory
27 Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies. 28 And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the LORD.	Psalm 48, Praise in Zion
35 And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, ... 36 ... to make ships to go to Tarshish:... 37 Then Eliezer ... prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.	48:7 Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.

Table 2: 2 Chronicles 20 as Context for Psalms 46-48

The first stanza begins by expressing the same two truths in different words.

The first two stanzas describe God’s deliverance, first from natural disasters (vv. 1-3), then from political defeat (vv. 4-7). The last contains two exhortations: from the Psalmist (vv. 8-9) to behold God’s works, then from God himself (v. 10) to be still, in light of his victory both “among the heathen” (4-7) and “in the earth” (1-3). This Psalm could be one of the songs that the sons of Korah raised up in 2 Chr 20:19 to praise God in response to Jahaziel’s oracle. We can imagine them singing it on their way out to the wilderness to meet the enemy.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.--Israel lies in a very unstable area geologically, at the border between the Arabian and the African plates (Figure 8; numbers show net movement in mm/year). The result is frequent and often severe earthquakes, which are fearful demonstrations of the impotence of humans. Sinai shook when the Lord came to give the law (Exod 19:18/ Ps 68:8; 77:18). There was one in the days of Saul (1 Sam 14:15), another greeted Elijah when he fled Jezebel (1 Kings 19:11), and a particularly intense

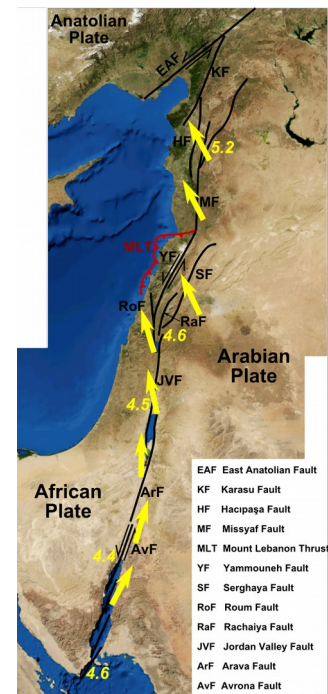


Figure 8: The Dead Sea Transform (Rift Valley)

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one in the days of Jeroboam of Israel and Uzziah king of Judah (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5, about 760 BC), which from archaeological evidence appears to have been between 7.8 and 8.2 on the Richter scale. The sons of Korah, remembering how the earth opened to swallow their ancestors, would be particularly interested in such phenomena.

The second stanza turns from physical exhibits of God's power to geopolitical ones, and affirms that the city of God, the seat of his sanctuary, will be secure in the face of pagan opposition.

4 There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.--From the raging waters of the sea and the shaking mountains, the Psalmist turns to the peaceful river of God. The physical reference is to the spring Gihon, which originally sent its peaceful but steady overflow down the Kidron valley until Hezekiah diverted its waters to a tunnel leading to the pool of Siloam around the year 700.

This spring and its waters have much symbolism. The name recalls one of the four branches of the river that came out of Eden in Gen 2:10-14; the implication is that Jerusalem's main water supply flows directly from the garden of God.¹⁶ Solomon was crowned there (1 Kings 1:33), associating the flow with the Messianic line. Isaiah used this spring and its steady waters as an image for God's protection, and a reminder of the Messiah (chart):¹⁷

Isa 8:6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth **the waters of Shiloah** that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; 7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: 8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, **O Immanuel.**

As the singing army of Jehoshaphat marches out of Jerusalem toward the southeast, they would cross this stream, and be reminded of God's faithful care for them.

5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. 6 The heathen raged **המה, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. 7 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.**--The plural "kingdoms" reflects the setting of 2 Chronicles 20. The entire stanza, with its gentile opposition and the triumph of Zion, recalls Psalm 2,

Psa 2:1 Why do the heathen rage **רגז**, and the people imagine a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. 6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

The third stanza has two exhortations, one by the Psalmist, another by God. Each recalls the two categories of God's dominion in the first two stanzas (Table 3, chart).

¹⁶ The others were Pison, Hiddekel (the Tigris), and the Euphrates. Isaiah's contrast of the waters of Gihon and the Euphrates is intriguing in the light of this common origin. Later, the image informs Ezekiel's vision of the new Jerusalem in Ezekiel 47, and the river of the water of life in Revelation 22.

¹⁷ See notes; this is one argument for assigning these Psalms to the Assyrian crisis, though Isaiah could just as well be alluding to existing Psalms.

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8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. 9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.--First, the Psalmist encourages the army, on the basis of God's past performance.

	1-3, Sovereign over the Earth	4-7, Sovereign over the Nations
6-9, Exhortation from the Psalmist	8, what desolations he hath made in the earth	9, He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.
10, Exhortation from God	10c, I will be exalted in the earth.	10b, I will be exalted among the heathen

Table 3: 46:8-10 as Summary of vv. 1-7

10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.--Now the Lord himself speaks, confirming his future support.

11 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

To the chief Musician,

Psalm 47, God is King over All the Earth

47:1 A Psalm מְזֻמֵּר for the sons of Korah.

The Psalm consists of two stanzas, each with a call to praise followed by the cause for praise. Between them, and thus the focus of our attention, is the announcement of v. 5 (Figure 9, chart). The first stanza focuses on the victory that God has given Israel, while the second reflects on his rule from his heavenly throne. The Psalm would be appropriate as part of the celebration in the Valley of Berechah in 2 Chr 20:26, after the victory.

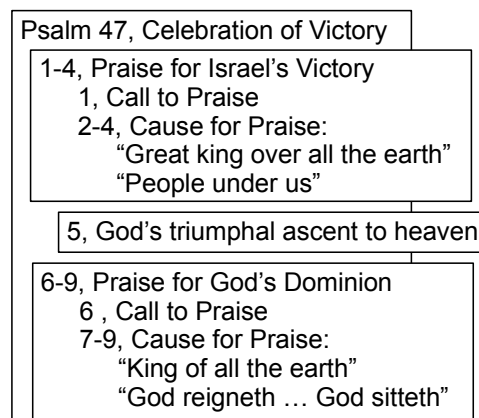


Figure 9: Structure of Psalm 47

This psalm emphasizes God's universal rule. Repeated references to the peopleS (plural, underscored in the text below) emphasize that not only Israel, but all nations, shall join in worshiping him (v. 1, and ultimately be known as his people (v. 9). In addition, this Psalm and 48 repeatedly refer to the king and his reign (Figure 10), linking them closely to Psalm 45.

O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.-- In the call to praise, "people" is plural. The Psalmist expects the conquered heathen to join in the worship of Israel after the battle.

2 For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.--The reason for universal praise is God's universal kingship "over all the earth." This theme is the central message of the Psalm, and is repeated in v. 7.

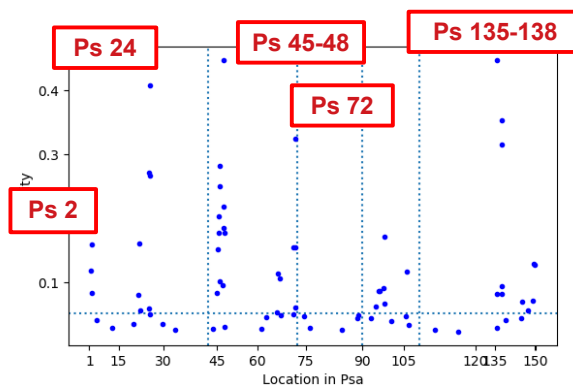


Figure 10: "King" Strong 4428 and "Reign" 4427 (מֶלֶךְ) in Psalms

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Ps 45:6 taught that the Messianic king is God. This Psalm, using the unambiguous title LORD, declares that God is the king (cf. vv. 6, 7), recalling the King of Glory in Psalm 24.

3 He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.--Again, “people” is plural. Note the focus on Israel’s primacy, given to them by God.

4 He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.--The victory assures them of their security in the land that God has given them.

5 God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.--Between the two sections is a description of God’s ascension. It’s a common figure that when God completes work that he comes to do on earth, he ascends back to heaven.¹⁸ He did this after completing his covenant with Abraham:

Gen 17:22 And he left off talking with him, and God **went up** from Abraham.

He also returned to heaven after announcing the birth of Samson:

Jdg 13:19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. 20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD **ascended** in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.

Our Savior’s ascension after his death and resurrection fits this same pattern. His work of deliverance is accomplished, and he returns to his heavenly dwelling.¹⁹

6 Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. 7 For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.--The commands to praise are multiplied. Again, God is declared to be king.

8 God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.--In contrast to Psalms 46 and 48, which emphasize God’s earthly city Jerusalem, the reference here must be to his heavenly throne, to which he has ascended. Recall Psalm 29, in the midst of other royal dwellingplace Psalms: his true sanctuary is in heaven, and dominates all earthly locations.

This is the God we need—outside and above our world, but able to step into it to deliver us.

9 The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields²⁰ of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.--Once more, the first instance of “people” is actually plural. This remarkable statement claims that the many people of the earth will be identified with the people (singular) of the God of Abraham, anticipating the NT teaching:

Gal 3:7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. 9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

¹⁸ See notes for alternative interpretations assuming that the ark went into battle and is now returning to Zion.

¹⁹ Recall the conclusion of episodes of the Lone Ranger. After saving people from bad guys, he would ride off into the sunset. Someone would ask, “Who was that masked man?” And someone would reply, “That was the Lone Ranger.” The human heart longs for a powerful deliverer who is outside of our world, but appears when we need him, then majestically withdraws. Our God, unseen in our daily lives, steps in when we need him.

²⁰ A metaphor for rulers, who protect their people, cf. Hos 4:18.

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Psalm 48, The Divine King in Zion

48:1 A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah.

The Psalm falls into three divisions. The first and last focus on Zion, while the central one recalls the great victory over the coalition (Figure 11, chart).

The first and last stanzas contain two of only three references to “palaces” ארמונות (Strong 759) in Psalms (the other being 122:7). The first looks back to God as the refuge who protected them from the kings; the last looks forward to his future guidance.

It is natural to associate this Psalm with the joyful return of the army to Jerusalem in 2 Chr 20:27-28.

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. 2 Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.--As the army returns to Jerusalem, they rejoice in how God has protected it from the invading armies. It is his city, under his protection.

Once more we read of the “great king,” the Lord’s title from 47:2.

3 God is known in her palaces for a refuge מִשְׁגֹּב.-- “Refuge” here is the same as in 46:7, 10, “the God of Jacob is our refuge.” He has proven what that Psalm promised. This verse sets the focus of the first section of the Psalm on the past, the protection that God has already given them.

Now he turns his attention to the victory they have just witnessed.

4 For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. 5 They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. 6 Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail.--Again, we are reminded of the multiple kings that joined against Judah, and how completely they were disheartened under the Lord’s onslaught.

7 Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.--This verse is surprising. What do large ocean-going ships have to do with a battle in the desert of Judaea?

It’s possible that this is simply imagery of God’s great power, as in Isa 2:16, where one of the emblems of power that fall before the Lord, along with the cedars of Lebanon, the high mountains, and the high towers of fortified cities, are the ships of Tarshish. Perhaps, recalling the raging of the ocean from Psalm 46, the Psalmist is saying that the kings have been destroyed just as God destroys these great vessels.

But something more may be implied. Immediately after reporting the return of Jehoshaphat the the people to Jerusalem, the Chronicler reports Jehoshaphat’s abortive joint venture with the northern kingdom:

2Ch 20:36 And he [Jehoshaphat] joined himself with him [Ahaziah] to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Eziongeber. 37 Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken,...

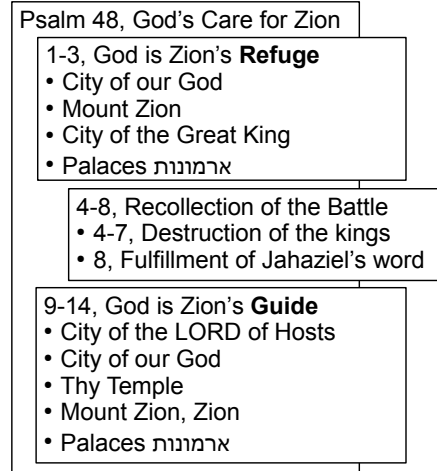


Figure 11: Structure of Psalm 48

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In Psalm 48, the verbs shift from past tense in vv. 4-6 to a present-future in v. 7. Perhaps Jehoshaphat's plans were known to the sons of Korah when they wrote this Psalm, and they, sharing the premonition against evil associations that Eliezer had, are reminding the king that God is able to overcome all who set themselves against him, whether pagan or Jewish.

8 As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah.--The recollection of what "we have heard" is to the prophecy of Jahaziel in 2 Chr 20:14-18, when the nation first learned of the impending attack and came before God in prayer. He promised,

2Ch 20:17 Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem:

He commanded, "See the salvation of the LORD," and they report, "as we have heard, so have we seen." This is the testimony of God's people in every age: his promises are true.

Now he returns to the praise of God, with a focus again on the city that he has chosen and protects.

9 We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.--The focus is on God's covenant faithfulness, his loyal love.

The vocatives "O God" here and in v. 10 recall the previous instance of this vocative to the Messianic king, in 45:6, "thy throne, O God." The God revealed in these three Psalms not only guarantees the rule of the Messiah from Psalm 45, but he is in fact one with that Messiah, delivering his people.

10 According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth:--Recalling Psalm 47, not only Israel, but all the earth will praise the Lord.

thy right hand is full of righteousness. 11 Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments.--This great God who has delivered them from military opposition will also rule them justly.

12 Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. 13 Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. 14 For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.--In the first paragraph of the Psalm, the concluding note was that God is our refuge, recalling his past deliverance. Confident in that experience, the people now look forward to his direction in the future as their guide.

The uncertainty and despair of Psalms 42-43 and 44 vanishes in the light of this glorious provision.

To the chief Musician,

Summary of Psalms 45-48

These four Psalms summarize the answer to the individual and corporate despair of Psalms 42-43 and 44. God will establish Messiah on his throne, joined intimately to his people (Psalm 45), whom he will protect and defend as he did Israel in the days of Jehoshaphat (Psalms 46-48).

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Notes

על-X: “for the sake of X” (44:22)

This is the explanation that the Psalmist offers for the nation’s suffering: עלֵיךְ הִרְגָנוּ, “for thy sake we are slain.”

David uses the expression in a very similar context, which may suggest that the sons of Korah are borrowing from him:

Psa 69:5 O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee. 6 Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. 7 Because **for thy sake I have borne reproach**; shame hath covered my face.

Jeremiah also uses the expression, probably quoting Psalm 69:

Jer 15:15 O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that **for thy sake I have suffered rebuke**.

But precisely what does it mean? He could have said something else. The AV translates two other expressions with “for the sake of xxx”:

בעבור

This idiom appears 49x in the OT.

Gen 3:17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground **for thy sake בעבורך**; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

Gen 12:13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me **for thy sake בעבורך**; and my soul shall live because of thee.

עבור appears once in the sense of “produce,”

Jos 5:11 And they did eat of the **old corn עבור** of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day.

But most instances are in the idiom בעבור governing a noun or pronoun, including some in Psalms that have the same explanatory force, “because,” that we see with על:

Psa 106:32 it went ill with Moses **for their sakes**

Psa 132:10 **For thy servant David's sake** turn not away the face of thine anointed.

When בעבור governs a verbal form, it looks forward, “in order that,” for example,

Psa 105:44 they inherited the labour of the people; 45 **That** they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws.

The possibility of using it as a conjunction suggests that it emphasizes a relation between events, and when used with a noun or pronoun, perhaps it focuses our attention on the actions of the

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person in question, as in Gen 3:17 or Psa 106:32. The use with Sarai may be with reference to her making the statement that Abram has given her. It appears frequently in God's promises to spare Sodom "for the sake of" various numbers of righteous people who might be found there, again emphasizing the verbal relation.

בגלל

This is much less common, 10x in the OT

Gen 30:27 And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me **for thy sake** בגללך.

Remarkably, this appears alongside בעבור in the account of Sarai and Pharaoh:

Gen 12:13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live **because of thee** בגללך.

In every other instance (as in 30:27), the expression explains a divine action of blessing or cursing, and that probably explains its use here: Sarai's statement will cause בעבור Abram's well-being, but the life of his soul will be a divine blessing in response to Sarai's obedience.

על once more

על־כן appears 149x in the generic sense "because." The preposition appears to be the unmarked causal connector, not restricted to motives for divine action (like בגלל), and not focusing on specific actions of somebody else (like בעבור). Consider

Gen 21:10-11 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. 11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight **because of על** his son.

Moses is emphasizing that Abraham's grief is not focused on the action of Sarah, but rather on the fact that the incident involves Ishmael, whom he loves.

Gen 21:25 And Abraham reproved Abimelech **because of על** a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away.

Again, the focus is on the thing that is involved, not the events. But it is a matter of focus; the event is not far away, particularly when על governs a noun describing an action, or a nominal verb form:

Jer 1:16 And I will utter my judgments against them **touching על** all their wickedness,

Exo 17:7 And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, **because of על** the chiding of the children of Israel, and **because על** they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?

Job 32:2 Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because על he justified himself rather than God.

Where על governs a verbal noun, one could not use בעבור, which in this context would then become a conjunction looking forward, "in order that."

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It appears that David and the sons of Korah are not blaming the Lord for their suffering; that would have required some sort of verbal noun, or בעבור. They are saying that he is the *casus belli* of their suffering. The enemy would not be opposing them if they were not associated with him. Perhaps this is an OT parallel to

Phi 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer **for his sake**;

Romans 8 and Psalms 44-45

Paul quotes Ps 44:22 in Rom 8:36, but the themes of this pair of Psalms extend much further throughout Romans 8. Like the writer of Psalm 44, he is preoccupied with the problem of the suffering of God's people:

Rom 8:18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

His concluding paragraph in particular follows the argument of these Psalms.

Rom 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?--44:1-8 recalls God's favor and deliverance in the Exodus, the central OT type of our redemption. Throughout Isaiah, the Exodus is the pattern for the expected future deliverance, and the use of redemption language that characterizes the gospel is rooted in the Exodus.

33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.--This is the claim of 44:20-21, appealing to God for justification.

34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.--Recall how the voice of the king (in the singular) breaks into the communal lament in Psalm 44. The first time this happens, it is to intercede with God for the people:

44:4 Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.

And in vv. 15-16, the king takes upon himself the suffering faced by his people.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?--The difficulties faced by the early Christians recall the list of afflictions reported in 44:9-14.

36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.--Here Paul shows us the source of his ideas, by quoting 44:22 directly.

37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.--His solution to this problem is the love of God in Christ, which is the promise of Psalm 45, as understood Messianically by the Jews.

45:11 So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.

He is our bridegroom, to whom we are betrothed unbreakably, and ultimately it is his love that ensures that he will deliver us.

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Ps 46:1

The expression על-עלמות resembles other prepositional phrases usually attached to the designation למנצה, and on this basis Thirtle assigns all but שיר to the end of Psalm 45.

Justifications:

- Psalm 87, another Psalm of Korah, also has a double authorship assignment, one at the beginning and one at the end.
- Assignment of Psalm 45, a wedding psalm, to a choir of virgins (עלמות) makes excellent sense.
- This leaves שיר alone at the start of Psalm 46, but this is not an unusual situation; 16 other Psalms (including 66 and 67 in Book 2) have a genre indication without authorship ascription, and in 13 of these cases it is שיר.

Occasion of Psalms 46-48

All of these Psalms celebrate the Lord's victory over Gentile nations. Two occasions have been suggested when they might have been written.

Jehoshaphat, 2 Chr 20 (Delitzsch, Hengstenberg)

These Psalms bear numerous signs that they celebrate the defeat of the coalition of Moab and Ammon against Judah under Jehoshaphat:

- Involvement of sons of Korah: after Jehaziel's oracle announcing the impending defeat of the coalition, we read,
2Ch 20:19 And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.
- Opposition by a plurality of kings and kingdoms (46:6; 48:4),
2Ch 20:1 It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.
- Hengstenberg relates the ascent of God in v. 5 to the service of celebration:
2Ch 20:26 And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day.
Others think it describes the ark returning to Jerusalem (if indeed it was present in the field, which is not stated in Chronicles):
27 Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies.
- The battle involved singing and praise:
2Ch 20:21 And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say,

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Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever. 22 And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.

2Ch 20:28 And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the LORD.

- The reference to the foundering ships of Tarshish, 48:7

2Ch 20:35 And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: 36 And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Eziongeber. 37 Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

Perhaps the most striking evidence is the alignment of these three Psalms with the prayer of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chr 20:5-12 when he first learns of the threat.

2Ch 20:5 And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, 6 And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven?--Answer: Yes. After delivering them, he ascends back, 47:5, to resume his holy throne, 47:8.

and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen?--Answer: Yes. This is the theme of Psalm 47: 2, 7, 8, 9.

and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?--Answer: Yes. The answer to this is the focus of Psalm 46. He is sovereign over the forces of nature and over the kingdoms of the earth.

7 Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?--Answer: yes, but Abraham's seed is broader than you can imagine, Psa 47:9.

8 And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, 9 If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.--Answer: This house is still precious to me: 46:4 "the tabernacles of the most High," 48:9 "thy temple."

10 And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; 11 Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit.--Answer: Psa 47:4.

12 O our God, wilt thou not judge them?--Answer: Yes, that judgment is sure. Psa 48:11.

for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.--Like his ancestor David, he has learned to "set the Lord always before me."

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Hezekiah, Isaiah 36-37 (Perowne, Alexander, MacLaren)

This position rests mostly on similarities in language with Isaiah.

- The disaster is described as swelling waters, 46:2-3

Isa 8:7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: 8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

- The peaceful river of God is celebrated, 46:4

Isa 8:6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son;

- The Psalm repeats the theme, “God is with us” אִמְנֵנוּ, in 46:7, 11.

Isa 8:10 Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us. אִמְנֵנוּ-אֵל

Analysis

The parallels with Jehoshaphat are to the circumstances of the event, while those to Hezekiah concern the language that Isaiah uses to describe the conflict. The latter sort of parallel could also arise if Isaiah were quoting Psalm 46, as he often quotes other Psalms. But some of the circumstances (e.g., a coalition of foreign foes; reference to the sons of Korah and the singing accompanying the battle) do not apply to Isaiah. I favor the parallel with 2 Chr 20.

The Ascent of God in 47:5

Different commentators interpret this in different ways:

Delitzsch, Hengstenberg: God ascending to heaven after his victory.

Gen 17:22 And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. *After God completes describing the covenant to Abraham*

Jdg 13:20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. *After Manoah and his wife make an offering*

Psa 7:6 Arise, O LORD, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies: and awake for me to the judgment that thou hast commanded. 7 So shall the congregation of the people compass thee about: for their sakes therefore return thou on high. *Same ambiguity as 47:5; is the ascent to heaven after he has finished the judgment, or to the judgment seat in order to give judgment?*

Psa 68:18 Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them. *But context suggests ascent to the hill of God*

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Kidner, Craigie: Return of the ark to Jerusalem

2Sa 6:15 So David and all the house of Israel **brought up** (עלה C) the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. *cf. Parallel in 1 Chr 15:28;*

Caveats:

- שופר בקול שופר also describes the sound of war, Amos 2:2; cf. Jer 4:19.
- There is no evidence that the ark was taken to the battle in 2 Chr 20. It was taken to the Battle of Aphek in Josh 4, with disastrous consequences. Saul contemplated bring it to battle but changed his mind, 1 Sam 14:18 (unless we read “ephod” with LXX), another less than auspicious occasion.

Boice: Lifting up of the pillar of cloud and fire

A sign that God is leading his people into action:

Exo 40:36 And when the cloud was **taken up** (עלה N) from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: 37 But if the cloud were not **taken up**, then they journeyed not till the day that it was **taken up**.

Num 10:35 And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, **Rise up** קום, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. 36 And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.

This is an attractive view, but as Boyce notes, the cloud was no longer with the nation, and a strict parallel with the Exodus marches would require that the ark accompany them into battle, of which there is no evidence.