

# Psalms 84-89

## Psalms 84-89, Restoration and Final Lament

### Overview

The parallelism of Books 2 and 3 continues (Figure 1, chart), with visions of restoration echoing the dialog of the kings in Book 2, but the negative conclusion contrast with Psalm 72.

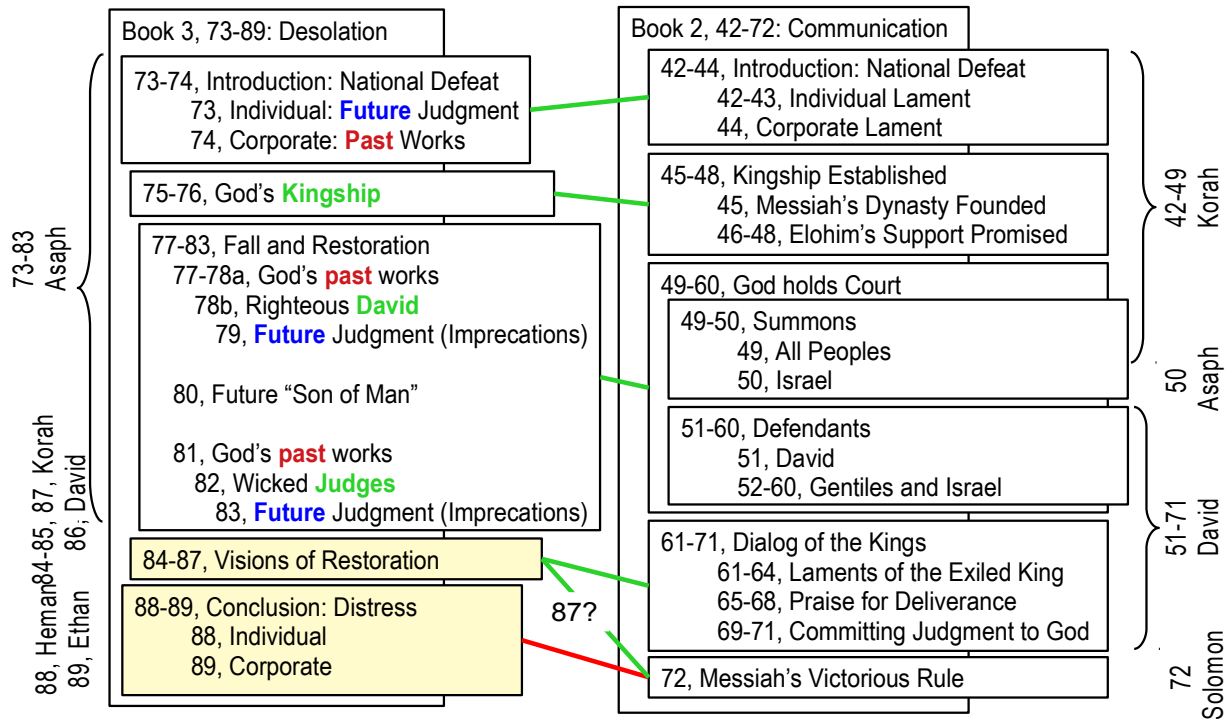


Figure 1: Structure of Books 2 and 3

### Psalms 84-87, Visions of Restoration

Except for Psalm 86 by David, all these Psalms are by the sons of Korah, who opened book 2, and reflect their zeal as Levites for the house of God.

The focus of this section on restoration is clear from the divine names. Elohim dominates in both books 2 and 3 (Figure 2, chart)—in book 2 to reach Gentiles, who do not know God as YHWH, and in book 3 because of discipline for sin. The transition back to YHWH begins with Psalm 84 (Figure 4), anticipating God’s deliverance of his people.

These four Psalms develop a common theme.

84: While being in God’s house is a blessing, what really counts is trust in the One who dwells there.

See notes on Ps 25 for **בטח** and related vocabulary and relation to **אמן**.

85: In the same way, physical return to the land after exile misses the point if our hearts do not turn back to the Lord.

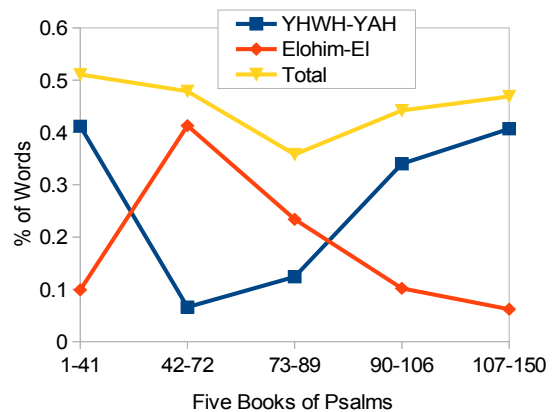


Figure 2: Divine Names in Psalms

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86: David's example shows that this trust that God desires of his people implies submission to him.

87: God offers this relationship not just to Israel, but to Gentiles as well.

### Psalm 84, Seeking Blessing

A Psalm **מזמור** for the sons of Korah.

The Selahs at vv. 4 and 8 suggest three stanzas (Figure 3, chart), each with a blessing: first from the house of God (v. 4), then from the pilgrimage to it (v. 5), and most of all from trusting in the Lord who dwells there (v. 12). The reference to God's Anointed recalls Psalm 80, as does the expression "Lord of Hosts."

#### 1-4, The Blessing of God's House

**How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! 2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.**--As in the first Psalm of the sons of Korah (42-43), the poet, perhaps excluded by fleeing from Absalom, longs for the Lord's house.

Psa 42:4 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. ... 43:3 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.

**3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. 4 Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.**--The first blessing is to dwell in God's house, a privilege belonging to the priests and Levites whose courses are active.

#### 5-8, The Blessing of Pilgrimage

**5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.**--"Ways" are the highways to Zion. AV's "of them" refers to the courts of v. 2. We have moved from the joy of being in the house of the Lord, to dealing with the trials along the way.<sup>1</sup>

**6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools blessings.**--"Valley of Baca" refers to a place of difficulty.<sup>2</sup> The word בָּכָה is either a homonym

1 The number shifts between 5a ("the man") and "whose [pl] heart." 5a gives the principle for a representative person. 5b-7a are plural, the mass of pilgrims. 7b returns to the singular, each individual pilgrim or Levite.  
2 Cf. the transformation in Hos 2:5 of the valley of Achor (trouble); and Ps 23:4 "valley of the shadow of death."

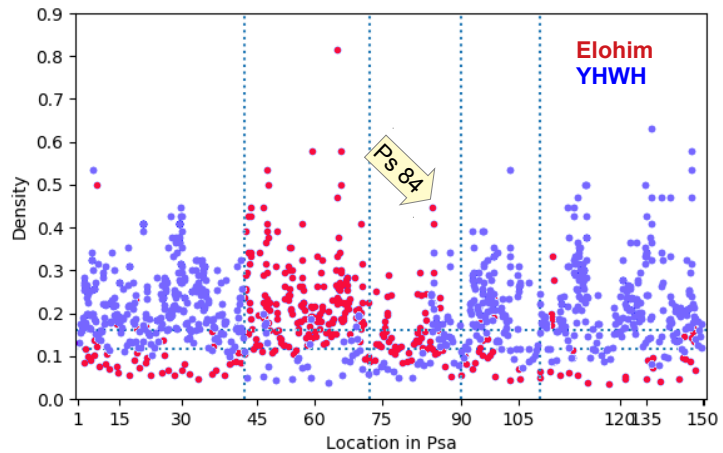


Figure 4: Shift in divine names at Psalm 84

Psalm 84, Seeking Blessing	
1-4, God's House	4a, <b>Blessed</b> ... 4b, <b>Selah</b>
5-8, Pilgrimage	5, <b>Blessed</b> ... 8, <b>Selah</b>
9-12, God's Presence	12, <b>Blessed</b> ...

Figure 3: Structure of Psalm 84

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for בכה "weeping,"<sup>3</sup> or a reference to a tree that “weeps” when cut. God replaces these tears with blessings. The road to Zion is not easy, but those who persevere in it find God’s blessing.

**7 They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.**--The experience of those who submit to this discipline is to grow in strength.

**8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.**--The Psalmist prays for God’s strength in his journey.

### 9-12, The Blessing of God’s Presence

**9 Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.**--The focus shifts yet again, from the journey to one particular person who draws the Psalmist onward. The temple does not merit this laborious journey in itself, but only because it is the seat of God’s anointed. This prayer may reflect David’s exile under Absalom.

**10 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. 12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee. To the chief Musician**—The greatest blessing is not being in the house, or even the experience of God’s care along the way, but trusting in the Lord and his Messiah.

### *Psalm 85, Asking and Hearing*

**A Psalm מזמור for the sons of Korah.**

The heart of this Psalm is a prayer by the Psalmist (4-7), growing out of God’s past acts (1-3). His resolve to wait to hear the answer (8) is rewarded (9-13) (Figure 5, chart).

This Psalm is the peak of the word “turn” (שוב, Strong 7725) in Psalms (Figure 6, red in the text below). The next highest peaks are Psalm 78 (which tells how Israel repeatedly sinned against the Lord, then turned back to him), and 80, with its four refrains. In 80 the Psalmist asks three times that God would turn his people from their sin:

Psa 80:3 Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.  
(cf. vv. 7, 19)

Once, he prays that God would himself turn back to his people:

Psa 80:14 Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine;

Psalm 85, Asking and Hearing  
 1-3, **God’s** Past Acts  
 4-8, The **Psalmist** Speaks  
     4-7, Request for Revival  
     8, Resolve to Listen  
 9-13, **God’s** Future Blessing

Figure 5: Structure of Psalm 85

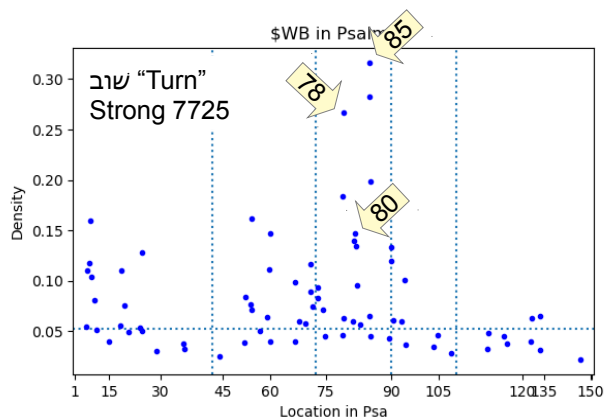


Figure 6: Density of שׁוּב in Psalms

3 So the Massorettes and the versions; see Hengstenberg.

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This Psalm echoes these refrains, but in a striking way: God has returned to his people, yet they still need to turn to him.

The Psalm also begins a peak of the word **חסד** (Figure 7). The only previous instance in Book 3 was at the start of the judgment section,

Psa 77:8 Is his **mercy** clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?

In answer to this question, the word appears throughout the rest of Book 3. Like the name YHWH, it is preparing us for the more positive outlook in Book 4.

**LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back שׁוּב the captivity of Jacob. 2 Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah. 3 Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.**--This Psalm appears to date to the return from captivity in 536 BC. God has turned himself (v. 3), in response to Psa 80:14, but something is still wrong.

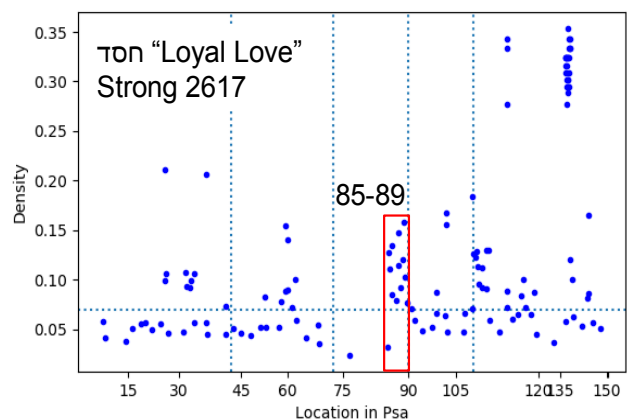


Figure 7: Density of **חסד** in Psalms

**4 Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. 5 Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? 6 Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?**--If God has turned back to them, why do they need to turn back? The answer is in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Zerubbabel, heir to the king Jehoiachin (1 Chr 3:17), led the return and began the reconstruction of the temple in 536. Nearly 80 years later (458 BC), Ezra returned and found wide corruption, with Jews intermarrying with the people of the land (Ezr 9-10). When Nehemiah returned 25 years later in 433, he found Jews enslaving their brethren (Neh 5) and violating the Sabbath (Neh 13). God had turned back to them, but their hearts were still far from turning to the Lord.

This Psalm emphasizes the lesson of Psalm 84. As delightful as the house of God may be, what matters is our relation to the one who dwells there, our dedication to the Messianic king, and apart from that, the work is unfinished.

**7 Shew us thy mercy חסדך, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.**--The Psalmist asks for God to turn his people based on his loyal love. We do not have strength in ourselves to turn to the Lord, but he can graciously turn our hearts.

**8 I will hear what God the LORD will speak:**--Having prayed for God to complete spiritually what he has begun physically, the Psalmist now waits to see what God will say.

**for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.**--God will bless his people, if only they will not turn away (as they did in 78:41).

**9 Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. 10 Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. 11 Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.**--He asked for God's mercy in v. 7, and now he is assured that God will grant it.

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These are the basic characteristics of Messiah’s rule,<sup>4</sup> which they will enjoy if they only follow after him (chart).

Psa 89:14 **Justice** [righteousness] and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: **mercy** and **truth** shall go before thy face.

Isa 16:5 And in **mercy** shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in **truth** in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting **righteousness**.

**12 Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. 13 Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.**--If their hearts are right toward him, he will enable them to grow in godliness—just as in 84:7, the pilgrims go from strength to strength.

### **Psalm 86, Faith of God’s Servant**

**A Prayer תפלה of David.**--Most Psalms are prayers, but only four bear the title “a prayer.” This is the first; the other three are 90 (by Moses), 142 (by David), and 102 (no author listed).

The Psalm is organized chiastically around a confession of God’s unique greatness (v. 10, Table 1, chart). After the links of the last two Psalms to the judgment Psalms 78 and 80, we expect similar connections here. The motive for including this Psalm appears to be the Messianic promises of Psalm 80: restoration must include the Messianic king. The Psalm is responding to the Levitical prayer in 84:9 for God’s blessing on the anointed king. In keeping with the spirit of Psalm 80 and the apparent exile of 84, the king here is needy and dependent on the Lord.

Like Psalm 85, this Psalm has distinctive vocabulary. It is the peak of the word אדון "Lord, Master" (Figure 8, highlighted in the text below), which also peaks near the ends of books 1 and 2. The word describes one who must be obeyed. At the end of Book 1, it peaks in Psalms 35 and 38, two of the Psalms of the Sufferer, showing David’s submission to the will of the divine Master in difficulty. In Psalm 68, at the center of the Dialog of the Kings, it shows David’s submission as he describes the conquest of Zion and dedication of the temple. Now, at the end of the book of Desolation, the editor wants once more to remind us of the Messianic king’s submission to the Father’s will in all things.

Prayer of God’s Servant	1-4 (2, 4)		16-17 (16)
Confidence in God’s Loyal Love חסד	5-6 (5)		15
Opposition	7		14
Goal: glorify God’s name	8-9 (9)		11-13 (12)
Focus: God is Great	10		

Table 1: Structure of Psalm 86

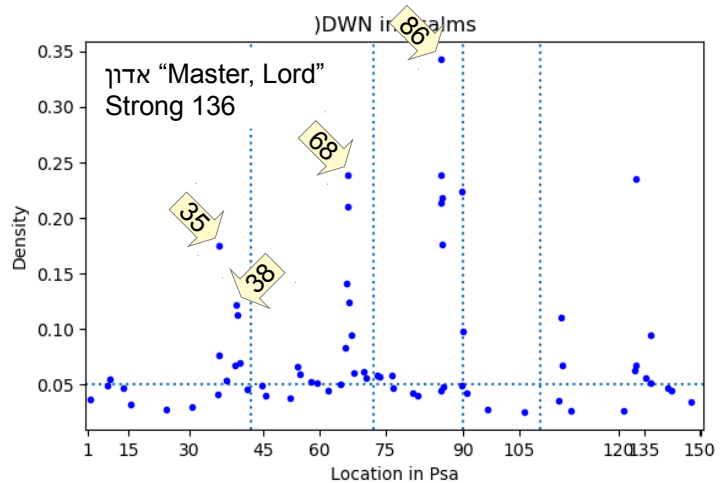


Figure 8: Density of אדון in Psalms

4 Calvin: “mercy, truth, peace, and righteousness, will form the grand and ennobling distinction of the kingdom of Christ.”

## Psalms 84-89

In the context of Psalms 84-87, this Psalm illustrates for us the trust in God that brings the great blessing. It is a trust that not only recognizes God's supremacy (v. 10 at the center), but also submits to him as sovereign master.

**Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy. 2 Preserve my soul; for I am holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee. 3 Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily. 4 Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.**--Three times (twice here and once in 16), David calls himself God's servant. There are seven scattered reference to God's servant in book 1, and only one in book 2, but it is clustered in book 3. The title introduces David in 78,

Psa 78:70 He chose David also **his servant**, and took him from the sheepfolds:

Next we have it here, and finally three times in Psalm 89, lamenting the fall of the dynasty in the captivity. The title anticipates Isaiah's use of the servant of the Lord to describe the Messiah.

The first time the Psalter calls David God's servant is in the title to Psalm 18,

Psa 18:1 A Psalm of David, **the servant of the LORD**, who spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul: And he said, I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.

That was a triumphant Psalm. This Psalm emphasizes the servant's weakness and need, in keeping with the picture of the trampled vineyard in Psalm 80

**5 For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. 6 Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications.**--The only hope for God's needy servant lies in God's loyal love.

**7 In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.**--We are reminded again of David's need.

**8 Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works. 9 All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.**-- In contrast to his need stand's God's superiority over all nations, who will be one day submit to him—a stark contrast to Gentile threats of Psalms 74 and 83. We've seen this theme in the judgment section:

Psa 82:8 Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

**10 For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone.**--In the midst of oppression by his enemies, David confesses God's unique greatness. The spirit of this Psalm is very much in line with Isaiah 2:

Isa 2:17 And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. (cf. Isa 2:11)

**11 Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. 12 I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. 13 For great is thy mercy קסדק toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.**--Not only all nations, but David himself will glorify the Lord.

**14 O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them.**--Again, David faces opposition.

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**15 But thou, O Lord,** art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.--But once again, he turns to God's loyal love, this time cited in the full context of Exod 34:6.

**16 O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.**--David's final plea echoes Psalm 80 in two ways: first, by calling for God to turn to him, and then by asking for God's strength, recalling the son whom God "made strong for thyself" in 80:15, 17.<sup>5</sup> "made strong" (but עז here, not אָמַץ).

**17 Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.**

### **Psalm 87, Citizens of Zion**

A Psalm or Song מְזוֹר שִׁיר for the sons of Korah.

The two instances of Selah suggest three sections to the poem, describing Zion's significance to God and to people, and finally recalling the celebration when David brought the ark to the city.

In spite of the national disasters anticipated in earlier Psalms of Book 3 (74, 79, 83), we have seen glimpses of a coming time when all nations will be subject to the Lord:

Psa 82:8 Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

Ps 86:9 All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.

Psalm 87 amplifies this theme. Like Psalm 72 at the end of Book 2, it looks forward to a coming time of God's universal dominion. The nations that have been chastening God's people will one day bow before him. Isaiah may well have this Psalm in mind when he writes:

Isa 2:2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

First, Zion is precious to God.

**His foundation is in the holy mountains.**--"His foundation" is the city that he (God) has founded. Though David conquered it, it is God's doing, as David emphasized in Psalm 68.

**2 The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. 3 Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.**--He prefers it above any of the cities that belong to the tribes. Jerusalem is on the border between Judah and Benjamin, but appears to be assigned to both tribes,<sup>6</sup> probably because neither was able to hold it. It remained under Jebusite control until the time of David. So Israel ("Jacob") has no national claim on it; it is the personal possession of the Messianic king, properly "the city of God" (cf. Ps 48:2), where God chose to put his name (1 Ki 11:36; 14:21), and thus the home for all nations who obey him.

5 The link is weak, because the word used here is the more generic עז here, not אָמַץ as in Psalm 80.

6 Jos 15:8 names it as a point on the border between Judah and Benjamin. 15:63 assumes that it belongs to Judah, though they could not subdue it, though they burned it at one point (Jud 1:8), but 18:28 describes it as part of Benjamin's territory.

Psalm 87, Citizens of Zion

1-3, Zion's significance to God  
Selah

4-6, Zion's significance to the Nations  
Selah

7, Bringing the Ark to Zion

Figure 9: Structure of Psalm 87

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**4 I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. 5 And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. 6 The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah.**--The nations listed here were all at one time or another enemies of God's people, but will one day be counted citizens of God's city. "Rahab" is a poetic title for Egypt (Isa 51:9-10; 30:7 (Hebrew)).

**7 As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there:**--Better, "singers ... dancers." These two forms of praise were common in Israel's celebrations, for example (chart):

1Sa 18:6 And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick.

In particular, these modes of worship were combined when David brought the ark into Jerusalem, a likely occasion for this Psalm that celebrates Zion as the "city of God":

1Ch 15:27 And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers: David also had upon him an ephod of linen. 28 Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps. 29 And it came to pass, as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul looking out at a window saw king David dancing and playing: and she despised him in her heart.

**all my springs are in thee.**--This may be what the singers declare. In an arid land, the most important feature of a city was its water source. Psalm 46 celebrated Jerusalem's Gihon spring,

Psa 46:4 There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.

And when Ezekiel describes the millennial Jerusalem, its centerpiece is the river of life flowing out of the temple (Ezekiel 47).

**A Song or Psalm for the sons of Korah,**--Remarkably, the authorship heading is repeated after the Psalm, perhaps because this Psalm is the last of the two great Levitical collections (by Asaph, and the sons of Korah) in the Psalter.

**to the chief Musician upon Mahalath Leannoth,**--Dancings, shoutings<sup>7</sup> (see Thirtle), reflecting the two forms of praise in v. 7.

## Psalms 88-89, Final Laments

If the editor had ended Book 3 with Psalm 87, he would have set up a perfect parallel with Book 2, ending with Psalm 72. But he chose to close with an individual and a corporate lament, echoing the opening of the book in Psalms 73-74, reinforcing the theme of desolation.

Psalms 88-89 are written by Heman and Ethan, respectively. Given the prominence of Asaph's prominence earlier in Book 3, it is tempting to identify these with Asaph's levitical colleagues on the worship team (Figure 10, chart):

7 NET Bible's emendation of מְעִינֵי כָל-מְעִינֵי "they all sang" would align very well with this, but there is no textual or versional evidence.

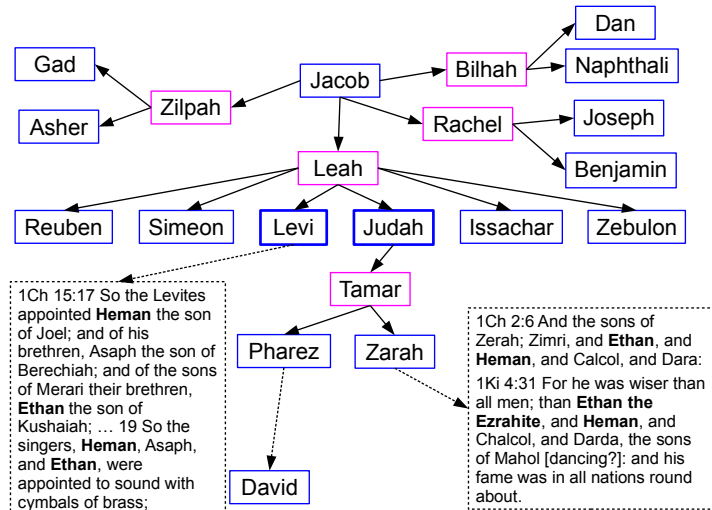


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1Ch 15:17 So the Levites appointed **Heman** the son of Joel; and of his brethren, **Asaph** the son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari their brethren, **Ethan** the son of Kushaiah; ... 19 So the singers, **Heman, Asaph, and Ethan**, were appointed to sound with cymbals of brass;

But these men are called Ezrahites. This term appears elsewhere only in a list of wise men with whom Solomon is compared, including Ethan and Heman:

1Ki 4:31 For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.



*Figure 10: Options for Heman and Ethan*

In Chronicles, at least three<sup>8</sup> of these men are identified as descendants of Judah through Tamar:

1Ch 2:6 And the sons of Zerah; Zimri, and Ethan, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Dara:

The term “Ezrahite” may come from the name “Zerah.” Then the authors of these two Psalms would not be Levites, but Judahites, an appropriate origin for people who lament the misfortunes of David’s dynasty. This is certainly the role of Psalm 89, and 88 might describe the despair of an individual king (such as Rehoboam) who sees the kingdom falling apart.

Both Psalms are labeled “Maschil,” indicating their purpose for public instruction. God wants us to learn from the discouragement of saints who have gone before.

### **Psalm 88, Unanswered Questions**

#### **Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite.**

This is the most negative Psalm in the Psalter. Jewish tradition assigns it to the captives in Babylon. But dealing with calamity is the burden of God’s people in every age. This Psalm resembles the end of Psalm 89, and may describe the personal attitude of the king at that time of the calamity described there.<sup>9</sup> If Psalm 89 describes the dissolution of the kingdom under Rehoboam, 88 might be a lament written for Rehoboam, as 42-43 probably are for David.

The major divisions of the Psalm are marked by the three descriptions of his cry to God in vv. 1, 9, and 13, each with a time reference. The first and third sections summarize the complaint in very similar language, while the central section asks God a series of questions (Table 2, chart). Both complaints mention the psychological stress he feels, the fear of death, the awareness of God’s wrath like an overwhelming flood, and the separation from his friends. We’ll consider both complaints together, and then turn to the questions.

<sup>8</sup> Dara and Darda may well be alternate forms of the same name, and in some mss they are identical.

<sup>9</sup> Delitzsch, observing many parallels with the book of Job, speculates that Heman might actually be the author of Job. But I would rather focus on possible editorial motives within Psalms.

## Psalms 84-89

### 1-8, 13-18, Complaint

**O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried צעק day and night before thee: 2 Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry;**--The one bright point in the Psalm is the opening address, which is the final instance in Psalms of the common

expression, "God of my salvation" (see

notes). But this instance differs from the others in two ways (chart): addition of the covenant title "LORD" to "God," and the noun "salvation," which here is ישועה Strong 3444, but there ישע Strong 3468.

- The basic title indicates that in spite of his troubles, he is confident that God is the one who will save him.
- By adding "LORD," he claims God's covenant relation to him. Each petition (1, 9, 13) emphasizes this precious title.
- The use of the distinct title for salvation comes from Deuteronomy 32,

Deut. 32:15 But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed **the Rock of his salvation.**

Deuteronomy 32 is Moses' Rib against the children of Israel, predicting their sin against the Lord. In spite of their sin, God will save them. Heman is laying hold on this hope, that whatever his faults may be, in the end God will save him.

There is progression in his three pleas. The verbs in the outer members suggest shouting (v. 1) or repeated screams (v. 13), but in the center, the verb is much more bland, "to call."<sup>10</sup> If we read from the ends toward the center, he is calming down.

Notice the different facets of his troubles.

**3 For my soul is full of troubles: ... 15 while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. 16 ... thy terrors have cut me off.**--The first feature of his misery, and the major threat of any suffering, is psychological stress (the very word means "soul-based").

**and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. 4 I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: 5 Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. 6 Thou**

<sup>10</sup> See notes

Complaint	1 <b>LORD</b> ... I have <b>cried day and night</b> before thee	13 unto thee have I <b>cried</b> , O <b>LORD</b> ... <b>in the morning</b>
	3 For <b>my soul is full of troubles</b> : and <b>my life draweth nigh unto the grave. 4 I am counted with them that go down into the pit</b> : I am as a man that hath no strength: 5 <b>Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave</b> , whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. 6 Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. 7 <b>Thy wrath</b> lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with <b>all thy waves</b> . Selah. 8 <b>Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me</b> ; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.	15 I am afflicted and <b>ready to die</b> from my youth up: while I <b>suffer thy terrors</b> I am distracted. 16 <b>Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors</b> have cut me off. 17 They came round about me daily <b>like water</b> ; they compassed me about together. 18 <b>Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.</b>
Questions	9 <b>LORD</b> , I have <b>called daily</b> upon thee	
	10-12 Four Questions	

*Table 2: Structure of Psalm 88*

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**hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. ... 15 I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up:**--The second feature is his fear of death, which from his perspective is permanent and without remedy. This becomes the focus of his questions in the center section.

**7 Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. ... 16 Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. 17 They came round about me daily like water;**--The third feature is God's wrath, which he compares to the waters of a raging sea crashing over him. Like Job, he is not aware of any reason for God's wrath (v. 14 "LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?"). This is what makes the threat of death so awful to him. The believer enjoys a perspective that is rare in the OT:

1Co 15:55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? 56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The believer can now say, as Heman could not, "For me to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

**8 Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. ... 18 Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.**--The final feature is perhaps the most terrible: he is shut off from his friends and acquaintances, alone in his suffering.<sup>11</sup>

### 9-12, Questions

**9 Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called אקא daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.**--In the center, Heman moves from complaint to four questions that note the incompatibility of death with God's character. They recall Abraham's dialog with God in Genesis 18, when the Lord told him of the coming destruction of Sodom.

Gen 18:23 And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24 Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? 25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Abraham's argument was not, "I love my nephew; you can't slay him." Rather, it takes God's perspective. The conversation forces him to view the impending disaster from God's point of view. Similarly, Heman's questions focus not on his comfort ("God, how can you treat me this way?"), but on God's glory. His disaster leads him to meditate on God's purposes.

Unbelievers arrogantly assume, like Eve in the garden, that they have a right to understand everything. Suffering is one tool God uses to show us that there are "secret things" (Deut 29:29).

**10 Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead?**--First, God delights to show his wonders to his creatures. Compare the purpose of the proclamation of the gospel:

Eph 3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

If God wants to show his great power, he needs living witnesses, not dead corpses.

<sup>11</sup> Some see a reference to leprosy, and thus perhaps Uzziah, but it could be a poetic expression of Rehoboam's sense of rejection by the northern tribes.

## Psalms 84-89

**shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah.**--Second, God wants to receive praise. This was part of the prayer of the suffering one in Psalm 22 as well:

Psa 22:3 But thou art holy, O thou that **inhabitest the praises** of Israel.

Not only can the dead not see God's great works, they can't praise him for them.

**11 Shall thy lovingkindness חסד be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness אמינה in destruction?**--Third, God is characterized by lovingkindness חסד and truth אמת (Ex 34:6) toward his people. Abandoning them to death would violate these fundamental attributes of God.

**12 Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?**--This appears to be a summary of the first three questions. The first two deal with God's desire to be praised for his wonders, while the third deals with his fundamental righteous character. Both are incompatible with the grave.

Sometimes God's answers are slow in coming. The judge of all the earth did do right toward Abraham: he spared righteous Lot, while justly judging the wicked. But there is no indication that Abraham knew this outcome during his life. Similarly, in the light of later revelation, we know the answer to Heman's questions. Death is not the end. Our Savior has brought life and immortality to life through the gospel, and though Heman may not have known this during his life of suffering, he will one day share in the triumph of the resurrection.

In fact, we can view his suffering as God's way of forcing him to meditate on God's purposes and record them. Heman's experience and questions are an early pointer to the resurrection, recorded for the encouragement of later generations.

There are no atheists in times of disaster. Everyone calls on God, but not every one calls with questions that seek to understand God, as Heman does. Some people curse God for allowing them to suffer. Satan's objective in tormenting Job was to lead him to curse God:

Job 1:11 But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will **curse** thee to thy face. ... 2:5 But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will **curse** thee to thy face.

Ultimately, even Job's wife became Satan's messenger:

Job 2:9 Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? **curse God**, and die.

Isaiah predicts that Israel in captivity would respond this way:

Isa 8:21 And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and **curse their king and their God**, and look upward.

And during the torments of the bowl judgments, we read,

Rev 16:8 And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and **blasphemed the name of God**, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. 10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, 11 And **blasphemed the God of heaven** because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. ... 21 And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and

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men **blasphemed God** because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

Both believers and unbelievers will suffer in this life, and both will in the end talk to God about their problems. The difference is whether they blame and criticize him for their pain, or seek a deeper understanding of his character through the experience.

What lessons do we learn from Heman's example?

- God's people are not exempt from suffering.
- Whatever happens to us, we should start where Heman is, with the assurance of the "LORD God of my salvation." Our God is the covenant Lord who is committed to our salvation. This we must never question.
- But we can and should question him about our dilemma, as long as our focus is on God's purposes and glory rather than our own comfort. In fact, one reason for him to bring suffering is to lead us to contemplate him more deeply. As we probe God's purposes more deeply, suffering becomes a means by which he reveals himself to us.
- Remember the threefold refrain. We should cast all our care upon him, at any time of day.

### ***Psalm 89, The Sure Mercies of David***

**Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite.**--Like Psalm 88, this Psalm is intended to instruct the reader.

This Psalm is rooted in God's promised covenant with David, recorded in 2 Samuel 7 (chart). It picks up on two concepts laid down in that passage: loyal love, and long duration.

2Sa 7:12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom **for ever עַד עוֹלָם**. 14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: 15 But my **mercy חַסֵּד** shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. 16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established **for ever עַד עוֹלָם** before thee: thy throne shall be established **for ever עַד עוֹלָם**.

Hebrew has other ways to say "for ever." David's response uses a more common expression:

2Sa 7:28 And now, O Lord GOD, thou art that God, and thy words be **true אֱמֶת**, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: 29 Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue **for ever לְעוֹלָם** before thee: for thou, O Lord GOD, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed **for ever לְעוֹלָם**.

Other ways to say "forever" include לעד (in 1 Chr 28:9) and the noun עולם (Strong 5769) used adverbially. A fifth expression, לְנֵצַח, literally means "unto completion," and commonly describes negative events (e.g., God will destroy them utterly). Psalm 89 uses all five of these idioms to describe God's covenant with David. It is the only chapter in the entire Bible to use all of them.

The other concept is God's loyal love (חסד). Psalm 89 participates in the high concentration of this term that begins in Psalm 85 (Figure 7). It is only one of four Psalms that peak in both חסד

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and references to “forever” (Figure 11, chart).<sup>12</sup> Psalm 89 asks whether God’s promise of everlasting mercy to David holds true. Psalms 103, 118, and especially 136 answer boldly:

Psa 103:17 But **the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting** **עד-עולם** upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

Psa 118, 136 (often) **his mercy endureth forever.**

Like 88:11, this Psalm rests on Ex 34:6: God is “abundant in mercy חסד and truth אמת.” Throughout the Psalm, God’s חסד is paired repeatedly with one of three related Hebrew words describing truth, trustworthiness, steadfastness, faithfulness (Table 3, chart). The Lord does not use any of these words in 2 Samuel 7, but David does, in his prayer of thanksgiving.

Table 3 shows several interesting patterns. *First*, the first and last instances of חסד are plural, setting off the entire Psalm.<sup>13</sup>

*Second*, חסד is paired with different forms of the root אמן, including אמת (Strong 571 “truth”), the

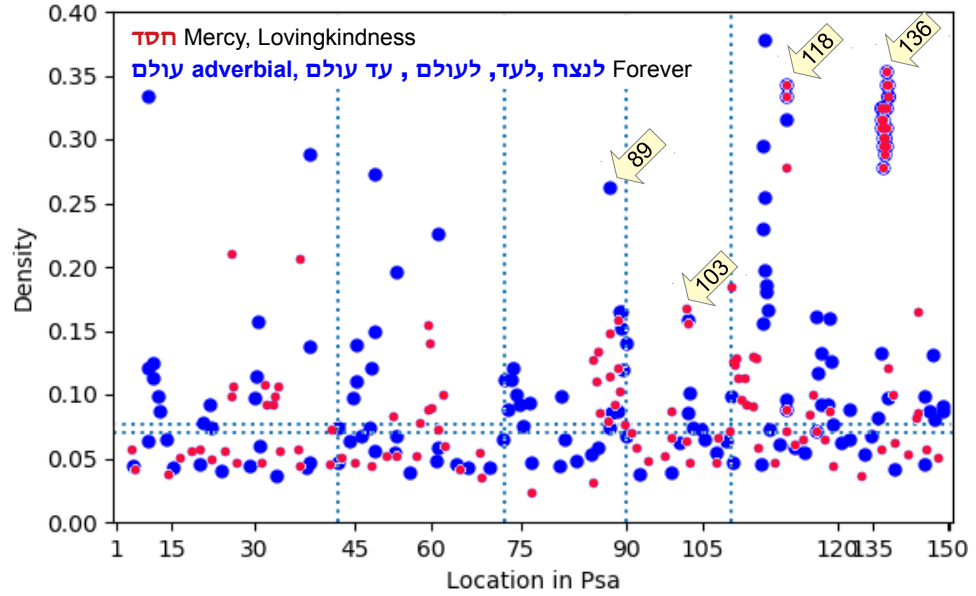


Figure 11: References to חסד and various terms for “Forever” in Psalms.

	Loyal Love חסד	אמת, אמונה, אמן Truth	Power
Ex 34:6	Abundant in <b>mercy</b>	and truth <b>אמת</b>	
Ps 89:1	The <b>mercies</b> of the Lord (pl)	thy <b>faithfulness אמונה</b>	
Ps 89:2	<b>Mercy</b> shall be built up	thy <b>faithfulness אמונה</b>	
Ps 89:5		thy <b>faithfulness אמונה</b>	Thy wonders ...
Ps 89:8		thy <b>faithfulness אמונה</b>	A strong LORD ...
Ps 89:14	<b>Mercy</b>	and truth <b>אמת</b>	
Ps 89:24	... and my <b>mercy</b>	my <b>faithfulness אמונה</b> ...	
Ps 89:28	My <b>mercy</b>	... shall <b>stand fast אמן</b>	
Ps 89:33	My <b>lovingkindness</b>	my <b>faithfulness אמונה</b>	
Ps 89:49	Thy <b>lovingkindnesses</b> (pl)	thy <b>truth אמונה</b>	

Table 3: God’s חסד ואמת in Psalm 89

12 Other peaks that look close are in different Psalms: 36 and 37; 59 and 61.

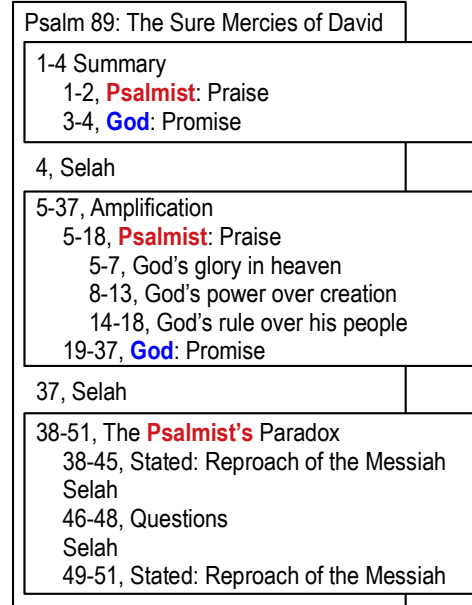
13 These references probably inspired Isa 55:3, “the sure אמן mercies חסדים of David.”

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actual word in Exo 34:6, in v. 14, and the verb אמן (Strong 539 “be firm, trustworthy”) in v. 28, but five times with אמונה (Strong 530 “faithfulness”), in vv. 1, 2, 24, 33, and 49.

*Third*, אמונה is also paired with two expressions for God’s power in vv. 5 and 8. Given the usual pairing with חסד, these pairings attract our attention. We’ll see their structural importance shortly.

The structure of the Psalm is marked by Selah and changes in speaker (Figure 12, chart). Vv. 1-4 summarize 5-37: Ethan praises God for his goodness, then the Lord promises David an everlasting throne. But 38-51 present a paradox: the promise appears to be void. As in Psalm 88, his wrestling is chiasmic, with statements of the dilemma surrounding questions that probe the nature of God.



### 1-4, Summary Introduction

**I will sing of the mercies חסד of the LORD for ever עולם: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness אמונה to all generations. 2 For I have said, Mercy חסד shall be built up for ever עולם: thy faithfulness אמונה shalt thou establish in the very heavens.**--Ethan lays down the keywords that we noted: the theme from Ex 34:6, “abundant in mercy חסד and truth אמת ,” and the claim that God’s promises are “for ever.”

**3 I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, 4 Thy seed will I establish for ever עולם, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.**--Now God responds with the specific promise to which these attributes of mercy and truth apply: his covenant with David, documented in 2 Samuel 7.

### 5-18, Amplification: Praise

When Ethan amplifies his praise from vv. 1-2, he plays with the pairing of faithfulness אמונה. Twice he pairs it with descriptions of God’s power, while the third time we find the expected pairing with a word for truth. The three paragraphs thus marked differ in their focus. 5-7 deal with the heavenly council, while 8-13 concern God’s power on earth (recall that “LORD God of Hosts,” v. 8, is a reference to the tribes of Israel, not the heavenly host), and 14-18 concern his dealings with his people. The pairings emphasize this. While God is true, firm, trustworthy in all his dealings, only his dealings with his people show his loyal love.

**5 And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness אמונה also in the congregation of the saints. 6 For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty [29:1] can be likened unto the LORD? 7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.**--God is steadfast in his wonders, which surpass those of any other supernatural beings. The “the sons of the mighty” בני אלים (literally “sons of the gods,” the same expression used in 29:1) shows that we are dealing with angelic beings in the heavenly council. Job 1 also describes the angels as “the sons of God בני־האלהים .”

*Figure 12: Structure of Psalm 89*

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The “congregation” or “assembly of the saints” might refer to humans, but “saints” קדושים (Strong 6918) can also describe angelic beings (Zech 14:5; Dan 8:13). Ethan leverages this ambiguity: if the angels continuously praise God, how much more should we?

**8 O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness אמונה round about thee?**--The focus now moves from heaven down to earth. God is steadfast in his might, demonstrated in his power over the earthly creation. Ethan cites two examples:

**9 Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. 10 Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm.**--God demonstrated his power over the sea in Genesis 1. Rahab, already introduced in Ps 87:4 as a name for Egypt, suggests that he is thinking of the parting of the Red Sea at the Exodus, which would also explain the reference to his enemies.

**11 The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. 12 The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.**--More generally, God has created the entire world (v. 11). North and South, with Tabor on the west of Jordan and Hermon on the east, frame Israel (v. 12).

**13 Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand.**--This verse summarizes the second paragraph, about the steadfastness of God’s strength.

**14 Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy חסד and truth אמת shall go before thy face.**--God is steadfast in his wonders beyond all other heavenly beings, and in his power over creation, but neither of these manifests his loyal love. We are reminded of Elijah on Mount Horeb, who found God, not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but in the still small voice (1 Ki 19:11-12). God’s blessings to his people rest not just on a legalistic fulfilling of his promises, but also on his deep love for us. The word “truth” here is the same as in Ex 34:6.

**15 Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. 16 In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. 17 For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. 18 For ~~the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king~~ our shield belongs to the LORD, and our king to the Holy One of Israel.**<sup>14</sup>--In response, the people who are the objects of his loyal love rejoice to walk before him. V. 18, like 17, refers to the Messiah, who is sponsored and protected by the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

### 19-37, Amplification: Promise to David

In support of these last two verses, the Lord now designates his anointed ruler over his people.

**19 Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one,**--The noun is actually plural, “holy ones.” Through Nathan, God announced his choice of David not only to David, but to the entire nation.

**and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.**--The law (Dt 17:15) requires that a king be “from among thy brethren,” not a stranger.

**20 I have found David my servant;**--A favorite title for David.<sup>16</sup>

14 Ward argues, based on meter, that vv. 15-18 are a transition between the hymn of 5-14 and the oracle of 19-37.

15 It is curious that the KJV translators reject the more literal rendering of both GNV and BSP (preserved in a note) in favor of a text identifying God himself as the king.

16 Used by God to address David through Nathan in making the covenant in 2 Sa 7:8.



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**with my holy oil have I anointed him: 21 With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him.**--The verb form “strengthen” (אָמַץ D) appears in the Psalms only here and in the Messianic references in 80:15, 17 (chart),

Psa 80:14 Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; 15 And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and **the branch [son] that thou madest strong for thyself.** 16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. 17 Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon **the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.**

This Psalm, like 80, combines God’s choice of the king with the suffering that God allows.

**22 The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. 23 And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. 24 But my faithfulness אמונה and my mercy חסד<sup>17</sup> shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. 25 I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.**--From the Mediterranean to the Tigris and Euphrates in the East and North, down to the Nile in the south, the historic boundaries of the kingdom. This is another link to Psalm 80:

Psa 80:11 She sent out her boughs unto **the sea**, and her branches unto **the river**.

**26 He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. 27 Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.<sup>18</sup> 28 My mercy חסד will I keep for him for evermore לעולם, and my covenant shall stand fast אמן with him. 29 His seed also will I make to endure for ever לעד, and his throne as the days of heaven. 30 If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; 31 If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; 32 Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. 33 Nevertheless my lovingkindness חסד will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness אמונה to fail. 34 My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. 35 Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. 36 His seed shall endure for ever לעולם, and his throne as the sun before me. 37 It shall be established for ever עולם as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.**--Ethan emphasizes over and over the eternity of God’s promise to David.

### 38-51, Paradox

But things did not seem to go as God promised. Solomon departed from the Lord, in marrying Gentiles and tolerating their idols in Jerusalem, and as a result God brought judgment on the nation. The first blows, and probably the occasion for the Psalm, were the rebellion of the northern tribes under Rehoboam in 931 BC (1 Kings 12), and the invasion by Pharaoh Shishak<sup>19</sup> five years later (1 Kings 14). The Psalm would be meaningful to the captives in Babylon, and the editor uses it to conclude this section about national judgment.

The argument has three parts. First, Ethan describes the disaster that has befallen the royal line. Then, in a series of questions, he highlights the incompatibility of the disaster with God’s חסד ואמונה, the characteristics that have dominated the Psalm. Finally, he asks for God’s deliverance, motivated by a concern for God’s honor. As in Psalm 88, the focus is on God’s purposes.

17 In 2 Sam 7, חסד is in God’s promise in v. 15, while אמת is in David’s response in v. 28.

18 See notes for more details on vv. 26-27.

19 Jeroboam’s patron when he fled from Solomon, 1 Ki 10:40.

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**38 But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. 39 Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. 40 Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin. 41 All that pass by the way spoil him:**--Another reference to Psalm 80. After planting his chosen vine in the land, God then abandons it to thieves and beasts:

Psa 80:12 Why hast thou then **broken down her hedges**, so that **all they which pass by the way** do pluck her?

**he is a reproach to his neighbours. 42 Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice. 43 Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in the battle. 44 Thou hast made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground. 45 The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame. Selah.**

Now Ethan turns to questions, just as Heman did at the center of Psalm 88. His questions develop through three steps. The center section is puzzling; let's consider it last.

**46 How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever לנצח? shall thy wrath burn like fire?--**

First, he asks how long God's wrath will endure. He introduces the final expression for "forever," which means literally "to completion," and often emphasizes the thoroughness of God's judgment. Will God persist in his judgment until the dynasty is completely wiped out?

V. 49 is the natural petition to follow 46:

**49 Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses חסד, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth אמונה ?**--Ethan appeals to God's promise in v. 33. God promised that even if David's seed sinned and were chastised, God's חסד ואמונה would endure. Like Heman, Ethan focuses, not on his inconvenience, but on God's honor. Lord, you made a promise. What happened to it?

Now consider the intervening questions.

**47 Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? 48 What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.**--These questions seem out of place.<sup>20</sup> What does a general statement of human mortality have to do with whether God is going to keep his promise to David?

Perhaps Ethan is echoing Heman's concerns (Table 4, chart). Heman focused on the inconsistency of death with God's purposes, and particularly with his חסד ואמונה:

Psa 88:11 Shall thy **lovingkindness חסד** be declared in the grave? or thy **faithfulness אמונה** in destruction?

Ethan links the two paradoxes—the failure of God's promises to David, and the finality of death. Both violate God's nature as revealed in Ex 34:6. The consequences of sin both at the personal and the national level lead us to hunger for the restoration that only he can give.

**50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people; 51 Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.**--The final section, returning to "thine anointed" (v. 38) and "reproach" (v. 41), points out the real consequence of the disaster.

<sup>20</sup> Tate comments, "Plea to remember the finite nature of human beings are made in vv 48–49. These two verses seem rather strange in the context, since they introduce subject matter not mentioned before in the psalm"

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The enemies are reproaching God’s anointed, as described in Psalm 2:

Psa 2:2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed,

God must fulfill that Psalm and bring them to “kiss the Son” (v. 12).

### End of Book 3

**52 Blessed be the LORD for evermore לְעוֹלָם. Amen, and Amen.**--As in 41:13 and 72:18-19, and as we will see in 106:48 and the last five Psalms, the book ends with a blessing on the

Lord. Given the depressing contents of the Book of Devastation, this blessing is an amazing statement on the part of the editor. Whatever God may allow to come on his people, the editor insists that he is to be blessed. Perhaps he is able to do this because he knows that Books 4 and 5 are coming, telling first of God’s spiritual rule over all the earth, and then of the final consummation of his kingdom.

Theme	Psalm 88	Psalm 89
Kingdom		46 How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire?
Life	10 Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. 11 Shall thy <b>lovingkindness</b> be declared in the grave? or thy <b>faithfulness</b> in destruction? 12 Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?	47 Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? 48 What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.
Kingdom		49 Lord, where are thy former <b>lovingkindnesses</b> , which thou swarest unto David in thy <b>truth</b> ?

*Table 4: Two Sets of Questions*

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### Notes

#### **“LORD God of my Salvation”**

A common phrase. But elsewhere, “Salvation” is ישע Strong 3468, while here alone it is ישועה Strong 3444.

ישע is the rarer word, but much more common as genitive with personal suffix. We can distinguish the uses with “God” with those governed by another noun:

God: This is mostly in the Psalms

2 Sam. 22:47 The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be **the God of the rock of my salvation.** [from Ps 18]

1 Chr. 16:35 And say ye, Save us, **O God of our salvation,** and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to thy holy name, and glory in thy praise. [cf Ps 106:47]

Ps. 18:46 The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let **the God of my salvation** be exalted.

Ps. 24:5 He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from **the God of his salvation.**

Ps. 25:5 Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art **the God of my salvation;** on thee do I wait all the day.

Ps. 27:9 Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, **O God of my salvation.**

Ps. 65:5 By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, **O God of our salvation;** who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea:

Ps. 79:9 Help us, **O God of our salvation,** for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.

Ps. 85:4 Turn us, **O God of our salvation,** and cause thine anger toward us to cease.

Isa. 17:10 Because thou hast forgotten **the God of thy salvation,** and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips:

Mic. 7:7 Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for **the God of my salvation:** my God will hear me.

Hab. 3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in **the God of my salvation.**

Other:

2 Sam. 22:3 The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and **the horn of my salvation,** my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence.

## Psalms 84-89

2 Sam. 22:36 Thou hast also given me **the shield of thy salvation**: and thy gentleness hath made me great.

2 Sam. 22:47 The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be **the God of the rock of my salvation**.

Ps. 18:2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and **the horn of my salvation**, and my high tower.

Ps. 18:35 Thou hast also given me **the shield of thy salvation**: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great.

Ps. 51:12 Restore unto me **the joy of thy salvation**; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Ps. 69:13 But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O LORD, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in **the truth of thy salvation**.

Ps. 95:1 O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to **the rock of our salvation**.

ישועה is in general much more common, but much less common in this construction:

Deut. 32:15 But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed **the Rock of his salvation**.

Ps. 88:1 O **LORD God of my salvation**, I have cried day and night before thee:

Ps. 89:26 He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and **the rock of my salvation**.

Ps. 140:7 O GOD the Lord, **the strength of my salvation**, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.

This shift suggests that Heman is combining the common expression in Psalms (where “God” is the *nomen regens*) with the prediction of Israel’s sin from Deut 32:15. The more common expression in Psalms is always hopeful, and he lays hold on this, while acknowledging God’s judgment.

### **Selah in Psalm 88**

In general, Selah appears to mark a paragraph break, as Thirtle suggests. Our analysis suggests that this is often the case. But sometimes it falls in the middle of a section, or at the end of the entire Psalm, contrary to Thirtle’s view of it as *introducing* a section. Here is the data:

Psalm	Major Breaks	Minor Break	End of Psalm	Ends motto	Anomalous
3			8		2, 3
4					2, 4
7		5			
9			20		
20					3
21					4

## Psalms 84-89

Psalm	Major Breaks	Minor Break	End of Psalm	Ends motto	Anomalous
24	6		10		
32	4, 5, 7				
39				5, 11	
44	8				
46	3, 7		11		
47	4				
48	8				
49	15				13
50	6				
52	3, 5				
54	3 <sup>21</sup>				
55					7, 19
57		6			3
59	5, 13				
60		4			
61	4				
62	4, 8				
66		4, 7, 15			
67	4			1 <sup>22</sup>	
68		19			7, 32
75		3 →		3?	
76	3, 9				
77	9	3, 15			
81		7 <sup>23</sup>			
82				2?	← 2
83	8				
84	4, 8				
85					2
87	3, 6				
88					7, 10

21 Shift from complaint to confidence

22 Quotation of the Levitical blessing

23 Skewed structure: while speaker changes at 6, the theme shifts from feast to fast at 8. So this break might be felt as major—or perhaps the *Selah* is to ensure that the reader does not miss the skewed divisions.

## Psalms 84-89

Psalm	Major Breaks	Minor Break	End of Psalm	Ends motto	Anomalous
89	4, 37, 45				48 <sup>24</sup>
140	3, 5				8
143	6				
Hab 3					3, 9, 13

It's possible that many of the anomalous instances, like נאם יהוה in the prophets, mark a summary statement.<sup>25</sup>

### **Vocabulary for “Cry” in 88:1, 9, 13**

88:1 צעק G to shout. D is also attested (2 Ki 2:12), where Jenni suggests repeated crying.

88:9 קרא G, to call. A much more vanilla word.

88:13 שוע D, to call for help (Jenni suggests “utter a series of screams”). Commonly the second element in a parallel pair, with קרא (Ps 18:6 (H 7); Isa 58:9; Jon 2:2 (Hb 3)), צעק (Job 19:7), זעק (Lam 3:8; Hab 1:2 (first); Job 35:9), נעק (Job 24:12). TWOT notes that it appears 22 times in all, 10 in Ps and 8 in Job, and 13 of these instances are 1ps. Only in D.

### **Titles of Messiah in 89:26-27**

#### **What the Messiah calls God:**

**My Father:** The distinctive Messianic title, and example of the Messianic hourglass that we saw in Isaiah.

Originally of Israel: Exo 4:22 And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn:

Then central to the Messianic role, otherwise rare in the OT for individuals.<sup>26</sup>

- 2Sa 7:14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son.
- Psa 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Our Savior's favorite title for God, and one he taught us to use: “Our Father.”

He made us members of the household of God, Eph 2:19.

**My God:** There are two ways to say this in Hebrew, אלהי and אלי.<sup>27</sup> The first is rare, occurring only 10x in Ps, and three of these in Psalm 22. The other is much more common (45x), peaking in positive contexts, such as Psalm 18, or the hopeful refrain in 42-43, or the restoration Psalms

<sup>24</sup> Ends the group of two questions that allude to Heman's lament.

<sup>25</sup> See my study in Bergen, *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Dallas: SIL, 1994), 489-519.

<sup>26</sup> See notes to Eph 1:3, citing late exx in prophetic poetry, Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 2:27; 3:4,19; cf. Mal 1:6

<sup>27</sup> They are in parallel in 118:28.

## Psalms 84-89

84 and 86 (see plots below). The allusion here may be to the anguished cry of Psalm 22. He who came as the favored Son of God must suffer his wrath as the sin-bearer.

**The Rock of my Salvation:** This is the title from Deut 32:15 to which Heman alluded in 88:1,

Deu 32:15 But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.

It anticipates deliverance after judgment.

### What God calls the Messiah:

**My Firstborn:** The natural meaning is the eldest son, but it can be a title of honor. Key example:

Jer 31:9 They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and **Ephraim is my firstborn.**

Recall how Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph (who was the eleventh son of Jacob) became firstborn. Jacob elevated Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh to the status of Joseph's brothers, thus giving him a double portion and making him the firstborn. He also blessed Ephraim, the younger, over Manasseh (Gen 48:13-20). So here Messiah, though not the first man (that would be Adam), is accorded the position of firstborn.

**The Highest:** Not "higher than ...," which would be עליון מִנִּי. Rather (see BDB) "Highest to the kings of the earth," they will recognize him as עליון. In this setting, the word may be understood as a noun rather than the adjective "higher," and may be a reference to Messiah's deity, as in the divine title אל עליון "Most high God." This is the title of the God whom Melchizedek served. The only other instance is in 78:35, the account of Israel's repeated cycles of repentance and apostasy. It would be fitting if the Messiah, who is the answer to those cycles, were to bear this title

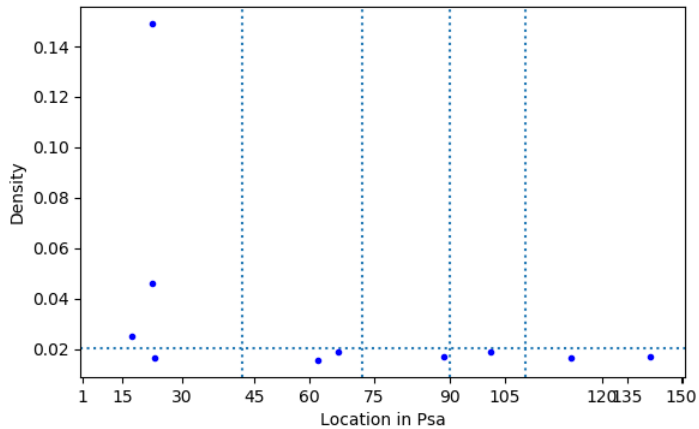


Figure 13: אלי in Psalms

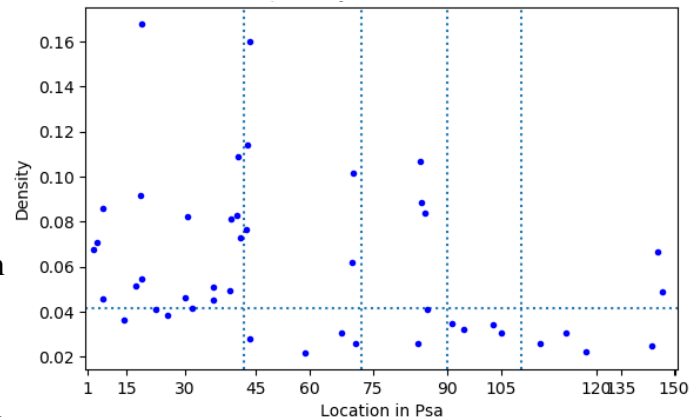


Figure 14: אלהי in Psalms