

**PSALM 48:
ZION HYMN**

Text

There are some textual uncertainties, especially in vv. 2-3, 9, and 15, but they do not affect greatly our analysis.

Structure

	MT	RSV
I. Superscription	1	—
II. Communal praise	2-4	1-3
A. Hymnic Shout	2	1
B. Hymn to the Holy Mount	3	2
C. Affirmation of confidence	4	3
III. Account of battle and victory	5-8	4-7
IV. Affirmation of confidence	9	8
A. Formula of corroboration	9a-c	8a-c
B. Affirmation of confidence	9d	8d
V. Communal praise	10-12	9-11
A. Description of worship	10	9
B. Praise of Yahweh	11	10
C. Summons to praise	12	11
VI. Summons to procession	13-14	12-13
VII. Communal confession	15	14

Double designations of a psalm (*šîr*; *mizmôr*; “song,” or synonyms) occur frequently in psalm headings (Psalms 30; 45; 65–68; 75–76; 83; 87; 92; 108), but we do not know the differences between the terms. V. 1 occurs elsewhere only within the superscription to Psalm 88, a totally different psalm belonging also to the Korahite collection.

The first part of the hymn (vv. 2-4) is not homogeneous. A very formulaic HYMNIC SHOUT (v. 2a = Pss 96:4a; 145:3a) is adapted somewhat awkwardly to the Zion hymn in v. 3. Should we divide v. 2b, including “in the city of our

God" in this acclamation and "his Holy Mount" in v. 3 (thus Gunkel; H. Schmidt, *Psalmen*; et al.)? Or should we adhere to the traditional verse division (thus Weiser, *Psalmes*; *NEB*; et al.)? Possibly "in the city of our God"—because of its stylistic and substantial incongruence with the preceding acclamation—is a redactional or liturgical addition (see v. 9c). A shout like that in v. 2a must have been used widely in ancient worship (see Pss 86:10; 99:2-3; 135:5; 147:5; T. Klauser, *RAC* 1, 216-33) and in fact is still being used (cf. "Allah is great" in the Moslem tradition). On the other hand, the words "his Holy Mount" in v. 2c make good sense in conjunction with v. 3, where they demonstrate a perfect balance:

His Holy Mount is a beautiful hill, joy of all the earth;
Mount Zion, the northern slope, is the seat of the greatest king.

Virtually all exegetes agree that these affirmations have something to do with the Canaanite mythical mountain "in the far north" (Morgenstern; Robinson; W. H. Schmidt, *Königtum*, 23ff.). Albright even suspects that v. 3 is a copy of a Canaanite hymn ("HUCA 16-18 [Review]," *JBL* 64 [1945] 285-86; see *RSP* I, ch. 2, no. 479; II, ch. 8, no. 89 = pp. 318-24 with texts, bibliography, discussion; III, ch. 4, no. 25; the material scrutinized in *RSP* established many links to Ugaritic literature but no prototype hymn). In the OT itself, mostly in later texts, we find some impressive references to this mythical abode of the gods, including mocking dirges to foreign tyrants (Ezek 28:14, 16; Isa 14:13), eschatological visions of peace (Isa 2:2; 25:6-7), and liturgical songs (Pss 2:6; 15:1; 24:3; 68:16-17 [RSV 15-16]; 87:1-2; 99:9; 132:13-14). It seems, then, as if in Psalm 48 an acclamation to Yahweh, functionally equivalent to a summons to praise, has been joined to a true *Zion hymn* (v. 3), which probably was sung by the community. The connecting link would be the expression "in the city of our God."

The psalm obviously uses Canaanite concepts, identifying Mount Zion with Mount *Zaphon* (Ugaritic and Hebrew for "northern"). Robinson (p. 119) suggests that perhaps "holy mountains were customarily called Zaphon." The appearance in the OT, however, of a "holy city" (Pss 46:5-6 [RSV 4-5]; 79:1; Isa 48:2; 52:1; Neh 11:1, 18; A. R. Hulst, *THAT* II, 268-72) and the surge of rebellious nations (→ Psalms 46 and 76; see vv. 5-8; Stoiz, *Strukturen*; Jeremias) are matters of debate. The issue is whether we have "historization of myth in Israel" or "continuation of Canaanite concepts" even in the historical realm.

V. 4 continues to praise but focuses again on God instead of the mount (note the shift in v. 2 from *Yahweh* to 'ēlohîm). In sharp contrast to Amos 2:5; 3:9-15; 6:8; Jer 17:27, the hymn credits the palaces of the metropolis with being invincible (see Ps 46:3 [RSV 2]; J. H. Hayes, "Tradition" [see listing at Psalm 46]). Formally, v. 4 consists of two simple nominal clauses. First, "God is inside her palaces" (v. 4a); that is, he is in solidarity with the citizens and their living place and power structure (cf. Yahweh's solidarity with the wandering people, e.g.,

Gen 28:20-21; Exod 13:21-22; V. Maag, *Kultur, Kulturkontakt und Religion* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1980] 256-99). The advance of sedentary, bourgeois faith in the presence of the Lord can be seen, e.g., in Mic 3:11-12; Jer 14:9; Isa 12:6; Zeph 3:17; Pss 46:6 (RSV 5); 122:7. The theological problem is clearly recognized in 1 Kgs 8:27 (Dtr). We have an AFFIRMATION OF CONFIDENCE, then, that surpasses the "God is with us" confession of Ps 46:8, 12 (RSV 7, 11). Second, this affirmation is augmented by an outward-directed statement of challenge: "He is known as a protector" (v. 4b; see Pss 9:17 [RSV 16]; 76:2 [RSV 1]; Isa 66:14).

The next section, vv. 5-8, could be part of a victory hymn (see the reporting lines in Judges 5 and Psalm 68). It depicts divine action against the enemies, not so much in historical as in mythical perspective (Hayes, "Tradition"; B. S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* [SBT 2/3; London: SCM, 1967]; differently, Morgenstern, 5ff.; et al.). Kraus (*Psalmen* I, 513) calls it a "historizing variant of the chaos battle myth." Parallel texts include Psalms 2; 74:12-17; 77:17-19 (RSV 16-18); 89:10-15 (RSV 9-14); 93; Isa 17:12-14; 29:5; 33:3; 51:9-15; 66:18; Nah 1:3-4; Hab 3:8-11, 15. Mention of ships in v. 8 proves perhaps the origin of the myth in the coastal regions of northern Syria. Introduced by "look!" (*hinnēh*), the report unfolds rapidly: uprising of the "kings" (v. 5; see Ps 2:2), immediate frustration of their attack (vv. 6-7), apparently by the dreadful appearance of the Lord (see Ps 68:2-3 [RSV 1-2]), and victory at sea (v. 8; see Ezek 27:25-26). In the MT this last line shifts to second-person style: "You, God, destroy by an east wind," as if it were the climactic close of the report (see Isa 13:4-8; 33:21; Deissler, "Charakter," 498-99).

The liturgy now returns to the congregation, as the clear "we" forms in vv. 9-10 indicate. CORROBORATION or vindication of tradition or hearsay is one of the basic goals of worship (Pss 44:2 [RSV 1]; 78:3; 132:6; Josh 2:10; 9:9; 2 Sam 7:22; 1 Kgs 20:31). In Job 28:22-24, a wisdom text, we find an interesting juxtaposition of hearing and seeing in order to verify the truth. In this sense v. 9 wants to ascertain the facts in order to confirm the protective presence of Yahweh (v. 9d thus draws on v. 4). Other "we see" statements are found in Gen 26:28; Num 13:33; Judg 18:9; Lam 2:16. In liturgical procedure this corroboration is verification and actualization of the fundamentals of faith.

Vv. 10-12 actually continue on this line, but they include DESCRIPTION OF WORSHIP and PRAISE, with the latter element becoming dominant (v. 12). "As your name, so your praise" (v. 11) echoes v. 9, and the basis for all the benevolent action is Yahweh's proven *sedeq*, "justice, solidarity" (v. 11c; see Pss 85:10-14 [RSV 9-13]; 97:6, 8; Isa 41:10; 42:6; 45:8; 51:5; 58:2). SUMMONS TO PRAISE in imperfect/jussive form is a variant of the imperative call (Gunkel and Begrich, 34; see Pss 5:12 [RSV 11]; 35:27; 40:17 [RSV 16]; 107:2; 118:3-4; 145:6, 11; 149:2. For the rejoicing of Jerusalem, see Isa 51:3; 52:7-10; 65:18-19; 66:10, 14; Joel 2:21-23).

The end of the hymn brings a SUMMONS TO PROCESSION in imperative form (vv. 13-14). Whether actual or figurative, the procession must have some

ritual custom behind it such as the one described in Neh 12:27-43. It is important, too, that the procession or its purpose and contents is to be reported to the descendants (v. 14c; see Pss 22:31-32 [RSV 30-31]; 45:18 [RSV 17]; 145:21). The CONFESSION in v. 15 is strictly communal. It includes a demonstrative pronoun pointing to God (as in Exod 15:2) and a strong expression of affiliation ("our God for ever"; see Deut 4:35; 6:4; Pss 18:32 [RSV 31]; 20:6, 8 [RSV 5, 7]; 50:3; 90:1-2; 95:7; 99:5, 8-9; 105:7; 135:5). He leads his people—note the image of wandering (as in Isa 49:10; 63:13-14). The very last words of the verse ('*al-mît*) are textually uncertain.

Genre

Overall, Psalm 48 is an obviously liturgical composition that by no means would have been confined to a mere literary existence (against Deissler's "anthological" interpretation). Praise and confidence are the prevailing moods. The performers or singers most likely were the members of the congregation (→ Psalms 46 and 76), so we may call it a COMMUNAL HYMN.

Setting

Theological concepts represent some of the most valid evidence for determining the original setting of a text. A full-fledged Zion ideology that makes Jerusalem the absolute center of the world, such as Psalm 48 exhibits, is not discernible in preexilic texts. Very probably it arose only after the Exile. Formal criteria such as the use of the "we" form (→ Psalm 46) also support the view that Psalm 48 was originally a hymn of early Jewish community worship.

Intention

As they did Psalm 46, worshipping reciters used Psalm 48 to pledge allegiance to Yahweh (v. 15), to give thanks and praise for the possibility to live in Jerusalem and for the protection received (cf. vv. 2-3; 10-12), and thus to test and actualize the old promises of God to his people.

Bibliography

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