GOD AND ZION:
FORM AND MEANING IN PSALM 48

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One of the gains achieved by form-criticism has been the study and classification of the psalms by Gattungen or "types". Such categorization leaves as an open question the central message of individual psalms even within the sameGattung. While designated a "Zion hymn" or "Canticle of Zion", Psalm 48 has been described by some scholars as praising Zion and by others as extolling God. Still others offer a synthesis of these two views. In A. Weiser's view, praise of Zion cannot be separated from the glorification of God. Similarly M. Dahood calls Psalm 48 a hymn celebrating "the beauty and impregnability of Zion as well as the kingship of God who resides in Zion". The formulation of Weiser and Dahood capture the double character of praise in Psalm 48. The purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate how the poetics of the psalm clarify and contribute to the praise of God and Zion.

The strophic structure of Psalm 48 has been worked out by R. Kittel, J. Calèes, E. Podechard, and, in the greatest detail, L. Krinetzski. The poem is divided into two halves, vv. 2-9 and 10-15, and each of these two halves has parts, thus forming four strophes of nearly equal length: vv. 2-4, 5-9, 10-12 and 13-15. Verse 1 is extra-metrical. Verse 9, at the very heart of the poem, varies metrically from the rest of the psalm. Furthermore, verse 9 stands at the center of a large chiastic structure, specifically a "concentric pentacolon". This chiastic arrangement is formed largely by particles. Together these particles also create an alliterative effect as most of them begin with the letter kaph:

A' kî (v. 5)
B hemma ... kên (v. 6)
C ka'asher ... kên (v. 9)
B' kê- ... kên (v. 11)
A' kî (v. 15)
The basic message of verse 9 is that the city attests to God’s power. Throughout Psalm 48 the experience of God through the city is conveyed by the many verbs describing perceptions of, and reactions to, the divine presence in the city. The verbs reveal the many ways by which God’s people and enemies experience divine salvation: praising God who is in his city (v. 2); knowing God in Zion as a refuge (v. 3); seeing and marvelling at the construction of Zion (v. 6); trembling before Zion and the God who dwells within its walls (vv. 6-7); hearing and seeing God’s act of old in establishing Zion (v. 9); contemplating God’s steadfast love, ḥasdēkā (v. 10); rejoicing because of God’s judgements, miṣpāṭēkā (v. 12); going about Zion and counting the towers (v. 13); and, finally, being led by God (v. 15). These diverse modes of experience point to the twin themes of Psalm 48: (1) God established Zion forever as his power dwells within her, freely guaranteeing her ongoing existence (vv. 2, 9); and (2) Zion’s physical continuation witnesses to God’s protective care for Israel (vv. 6-7, 13-14). These two themes are by no means unrelated. Specifically, “we” in the city have heard of God’s great deeds in the past, and these include God’s protection of the city. The city’s ongoing life is a witness in the present time to God’s faithfulness in past times of crisis. A number of poetic techniques link these themes together in Psalm 48 in such a way that these themes become mutually reinforcing.

I

Chiasms are especially evident in Psalm 48. Some conspicuous examples include: ‘īr, “city” (v. 2) : melek, “king” (v. 3) :: hammēlākim, “the kings” (v. 5) : ‘īr (v. 9); ʿōlām, “forever” (v. 9) : siprū, “count” (masc. pl. impv.; v. 13) :: tēsappērū, “you may recount” (v. 14) : ʿōlām (v. 15); har šiyyōn, “mount Zion” (v. 3) : melek (v. 3) :: hammēlākim (v. 5) : har šiyyōn (v. 12); šedeq, “righteousness” (v. 11) : har šiyyōn (v. 12) :: bēnōt yēhūdāh, “daughters of Judah” (v. 12) : miṣpāṭēkā (v. 12). The words Ēlōhim and Ēlōhēnū figure in a multitude of chiasms. Ēlōhim and Ēlōhēnū in vv. 2 and 15 constitute the outside terms of chiasms with har (vv. 2, 3), melek and hammēlākim (vv. 3, 5), siprū and tēsappērū (vv. 13, 14), šiyyōn (vv. 3, 12, 13), ʾarmēnōtēhā, “its (her) palaces” (vv. 4, 14) and ʿōlām (vv. 9, 14). Ēlōhim and Ēlōhēnū in vv. 9 and 10 serve as the inside elements of chiasms with šiyyōn (vv. 3, 12, 13), har (vv. 2, 15) and ʾarmēnōtēhā (vv. 4, 14). One result
of the many chiasms with 'ělōhīm and 'ělōhēnū is to identify Zion, the mountain and its palaces with God. The chiasms formed by 'ělōhīm and 'ělōhēnū as the inside terms in vv. 9 and 10, especially suggest that God resides in Zion. Correspondingly, the chiasms with 'ělōhīm and 'ělōhēnū as the outside terms set God around Zion, the mountain and her palaces. The rhetorical impact of these chiasms is to assert that God's protective care surrounds Zion, and that his presence dwells within the city. These chiasms recapitulate the double themes of Psalm 48: Zion is a physical witness to God's protection and God is present in the city.

The poetic effects with the word 'ělōhīm extend beyond chiastic structures. In vv. 14–15 the audience is asked:

šīṭū libbēkem lēhēlāh
passēgū 'ārmēnōtēhā
lēma'ān tēsappērū lēdōr 'āḥārōn
kī zeh 'ělōhīm
'ělōhēnū 'ōlām wā'ed

Set your heart on her rampart
Divide her citadels
So that you may recount to another generation
That this is God,
Our God forever and ever.

The immediate antecedents of zeh, "this"\textsuperscript{18}, are 'ārmēnōtēhā, "her citadels" and hēlāh, "her rampart", which are to witness to the next generation about God. Dahood\textsuperscript{19} translates zeh ūlōhīm as "This is God's", based on the supposed analogy with zeh sinay, "the one of Sinai", in Judg. 5:5\textsuperscript{20}. This analogy is, however, imprecise since, according to Dahood's own translation, zeh ūlōhīm does not constitute a construct phrase. Of greater difficulty, zeh sinay contains a place name, while no place name occurs in zeh ūlōhīm. Most commentators assume that ūlōhīm always means "God" in Psalm 48, and this would apply apparently in the case of zeh ūlōhīm. The following phrase ūlōhēnū ūlām wā'ed, "our God forever and ever", would seem to require of zeh ūlōhīm the translation "this is God". Otherwise, an inexplicable change in subject would result. Still, the translation, "this is God", is awkward for Biblical Hebrew, and another translation may be indicated. As zeh refers to God's palaces and ramparts, ūlōhīm in v. 15 may be translated "divine"\textsuperscript{21}. This meaning is known elsewhere in the
Bible and may apply in this instance. Whether 'elōhîm in Ps. 48:15 is to be translated by "God" or "divine", the phrase zeh 'elōhîm, in referring to Zion, strengthens the identification of Zion with God. The divine name here points back to the physical structures of the city, and thereby highlights the interrelationship of God and Zion. Zion is the continual sign of God's care for Israel.

The identification of a mountain as the home of a deity is not uncommon in the Canaanite world. Mount Saphon of Ugaritic lore, the abode of the god Baal, especially invites comparison with Zion in Psalm 48, since this psalm calls Zion yarkētē ṣāpōn. The similarities by no means end there. In the Ugaritic story of King Keret, Mount Saphon laments the ailing monarch:

\[
\begin{align*}
tbkyk & 3\text{ab} \gr b^c1 \\
\& 3\text{any} \%lm & 3\text{adr} \\
\& hl & r\%b \text{mknpt}
\end{align*}
\]

The mountain of Baal weeps for you, father,
Saphon, the holy precinct,
The mighty precinct groans,
The precinct, wide of span.

First of all, this passage, like Psalm 48, uses the Northwest Semitic word, 'hl, "rampart". Perhaps by way of synecdoche, 'hl refers not only to the ramparts around the city, but also to the area inside them. Secondly, the picture of Mount Saphon lamenting the illness of King Keret serves as an apt foil to the description of Zion in Psalm 48. Just as Mount Saphon weeps for the life of one king, Zion rejoices in the power of a second king, namely God. Finally, much as Mount Saphon is called 3'il, "divine", in Ugaritic (CTA 3.3.26, 3.4.63), so 'elōhîm is applied perhaps to Zion in Psalm 48.

II

Like 'elōhîm, 'ōlām is a word applied to both God and Zion in Psalm 48, and thereby magnifies the relationship between the two. As commentators have noted for a long time, 'ōlām closes both vv. 9 and 15, which correspond to the ends of Psalm 48's two halves. In v. 9 God is said to have established her, that is Zion, 'ad- 'ōlām, "forever". In v. 15, God is called 'elōhēnū 'ōlām wā'ed, "our God forever and ever". The attribution of 'ōlām to both God and Zion is
further strengthened by the chiasm formed by 'lm and 'd in vv. 9 and 15, namely 'ad: 'oläm :: 'oläm : wā'ed. Zion's eternity is founded on God's own eternity. Confidence in the city's eternity rests on God's own nature, and conversely, the city's presence through the ages points to God's own eternal care for Israel.

III

Psalm 48 contains additional means of linking Zion with God. One way involves the image of God as the speaker's refuge, frequently found in the Psalms. In Ps. 48:4 God is described not only as a "refuge" (mišgāḇ) in general terms, but specifically it is God in Zion's palaces who is known as a refuge. Zion is known as the place whose safety is guaranteed by God. A similar effect is achieved in Ps. 48:2: gādōl yhwh ūmḥullāl mēqōd, "great is Yhwh and greatly praised". This phrase occurs in other psalms, but with the difference that Ps. 48:2, bē'ir 'ēlōhēnū, "in the city of our God", connects it with God's city. Whereas this phrase is not tied to a locale elsewhere in the Psalms, Ps. 48:2 is specific in defining God's city as the place where God is especially recognized. God thereby provides both security against external threats (vv. 5-8), and safe contemplation within Zion's walls (v. 10) (which may be liturgical in character in vv. 13-14). The modification of the images of God as a "refuge" in v. 4 and "great and greatly praised" in v. 2 intensifies the message that God's very presence resides within the city and protects it. Wordplay with the root *gdl occasions yet another means of identifying God with Zion. The word gādōl in v. 1 refers to God's greatness, whereas migdālēhā in v. 13 are "her", i.e. Zion's "towers". This wordplay draws attention to God's magnitude as the basis for Zion's towers which in turn witness to God's omnipotence. Similarly, the wordplays between šām, "there" (v. 7), namely Jerusalem, and šimkā, "your name" (v. 11), that is, God's name, and between counting (siprū) towers (v. 13) and recounting (tēsappērū) to another generation that "this is God" (zeh 'ēlōhīm) (vv. 14-15) contribute to the interrelating of praises of God and Zion.

In conclusion, Psalm 48 contains numerous chiasms, wordplays, and attributions of similar traits to both God and Zion to show how the qualities of God form the basis of, and are demonstrated by, the ongoing existence of Zion. The "divinity", eternity and safety of Zion all hinge on God's own nature as divine, eternal and caring. God is the basis of Zion's continuation, and concomitantly, Zion is the concrete sign to each generation that God has bestowed blessings to
the people. The praises of God and Zion magnify one another in Psalm 48.


7 Kittel, Die Psalmen (KAT XIII), Leipzig-Erlangen 1922, 177.


9 Podechard, Le Psautier, 1.213.


11 The first half of the poem is demarcated by the inclusions of yhwh, "Yahweh", and bē'ir 'ēlōhēnū, "in the city of our God", in
vv. 2 and 9. ʿElōhīm, "God", opens and closes both halves of the poem in vv. 2, 9, 10 and 15. The larger chiastic structures of the poem and the use of ʿōlām, "forever", and ʿed, "ever" in vv. 9 and 15 confirm this division. (On the larger chiasm involving ʿōlām and ʿed, see below). The outstanding poetic features of the first stanza, vv. 2-4, include (besides those examined below): chiasms, ʿir ʿēlōhēnū : har qodṣō, "his holy mountain" :: har šiyyōn, "mt Zion" : qiryat melek rāb, "in the city of the Great King"; and, bē-ʿir : ʿēlōhēnū :: ʿēlōhīm : bēʿarmēnōtēhā, "her palaces"; assonance, ʿa and ʿā in gādōl, šāpōn; ē and ʿā/ā in mēʿōd, "greatly", ʿēlōhēnū, ʿēlōhīm, bēʿarmēnōtēhā; ʿā/ā in nōḏaʿ, "is known"; nōp, "height", mēšōš, "joy", kol, "every", šiyyōn, qodṣō, alliteration, r and y in haR šiYōn YaRkētē Ṣāpōn qiRYat melek Rāb. The choice of rāb instead of gādōl is evidently due to considerations of alliteration and meter. (On melek gādōl and melek rāb corresponding to Akkadian šarru rabū in 2 Kgs. 18:18, 29; Isa. 36:4, 13; Ps. 47:3; Eccles. 9:14; Mal. 1:14; see J.J.M. Roberts, Zion in the Theology of the David-Solomonic Empire, in T. Ishida [ed.], Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays, Winona Lake, Ind. 1982, 94; A. Malamat, A Political Look at the Kingdom of David and Solomon and its Relations with Egypt: Studies in the Period of David and Solomon, 197). The -ū assonance is especially strong in vv. 5-9, as is the -kā/-ēkā assonance-consonance in vv. 10-12. For further poetic features, see Krinetzki: BZ, 4 (1960), 77-97, esp. 77-79; Palmer: Biblica, 46 (1965), 357-58.


13 For a "concentric pentacolon" in another Song of Zion, see n. 28 To the major chiastic structure of Psalm 48, one might add bē- in vv. 8 and 10, which would cast doubt on the emendation of bērūḥaḥ to *kērūḥaḥ proposed by many commentators. One may also note that ʿēlōhīm in vv. 4 and 15 and ʿēlōhēnū in vv. 2 and 15 form a further chiasm with the chiastic structure of particles. If one were to add the wordplay of šām (v. 7) and šīmkā (v. 11), a larger chiastic arrangement may be perceived:

A ʿēlōhēnū (v. 2)
B ki (v. 5)
C hēmāmāḥ ... kēn (v. 6)
D šām (v. 7)
E bē- (v. 8)
F k- ... kēn (and ʿēlōhēnū = A and A') (v. 9)
E' bē- (v. 10)
D' šīmkā (v. 11)
C' kē- ... kēn (v. 11)
B' ki (v. 15)
A' 'ēlōhēnu (v. 15)

On the poetic alliteration of k- in this chiastic structure, see Krinetzki: BZ, 4 (1960), 78.

Reading 3 fem. sg. suf., with LXX τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῆς, "in its strength" and Peshitta ḥaylāh, "her strength". So Duhm, Die Psalmen, 136; Gunkel, Die Psalmen, 208; Kraus, Psalmen, 356 and many other commentators. P. Jouon, Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique, Rome 1923, §94h, offers the grammatical explanation that the mappiq in the suffix has been omitted, as happens before the bgdkpt letters. The fem. absolute form, ḥēlāh, as preserved by MT, is otherwise unattested in BH. The masc. forms ḥēl and ḥēl appear nine times in BH. See TDOT 4: 268-69, and n. 27 below.

14 See Ps. 145: 1-2.
15 Reading 3 fem. sg. suf., with LXX τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῆς, "in its strength" and Peshitta ḥaylāh, "her strength". So Duhm, Die Psalmen, 136; Gunkel, Die Psalmen, 208; Kraus, Psalmen, 356 and many other commentators. P. Jouon, Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique, Rome 1923, §94h, offers the grammatical explanation that the mappiq in the suffix has been omitted, as happens before the bgdkpt letters. The fem. absolute form, ḥēlāh, as preserved by MT, is otherwise unattested in BH. The masc. forms ḥēl and ḥēl appear nine times in BH. See TDOT 4: 268-69, and n. 27 below.

16 Calès (Le livre des Psaumes, 488) renders passēgū as "divide", i.e. to "consider piece by piece". Kittel (Die Psalmen, 177) reads piqqēdū for passēgū. G.R. Driver (Notes on Psalms I, 1-72 : JTS, 43 [1947], 155) translates passēgū by "bestride her palaces". Driver took as cognates the Arb. root *psq "to part the legs" and Akk. pussuk / qū, "to travel" (cf. AHw, 839). Dahood (The Language and Date, 17) proposes to take psgw as the particle p-"and", plus sūgū, G masc. pl. impv. of sūg, "to fence in". The root psg is hapax legomenon in BH, but occurs in post-BH and Aramaic in the meanings, "to divide, branch off; cut one's way through" (M. Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature, London-New York 1903, 1.1191-92, see BDB, 819. Cf. LXX καταδιέλεσθε, "divide", Vulgate separate and Peshitta qwrw, "pull down" (see F.E. Greenspahn, Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew. A Study of the Phenomenon and Its Treatment Since Antiquity with Special Reference to Verbal Forms [SBLDS 74], Chico, Cal. 1984, 57 n. 48, 72, 151). The choice of such a rare word may have been inspired in part by the alliteration it creates with the root *spr in vv. 14-15: siprū ... passēgū ... tēsappērū (note also the final -ū in all three verbs).

17 On this word, see S.E. Loewenstamm, Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literature (AOAT 204), Kevelaer-Neukirchen-Vluyn 1980, 3-5.
19 Dahood, Psalms, 1.289.
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21 Or is 'êlôhim 'êlôhênu an Elohistic recension of yhwh 'êlôhênu, as has been detected in Ps. 45:8 (so R.E. Murphy, Psalms, in R.E. Brown-J.A. Fitzmyer-R.E. Murphy [eds], The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1968, 1.584)? Cf. GKC, 126aa; Levenson, Theology of the Program, 23 n. 47. It is possible also to translate v. 15: 'that it is he, God, our God forever and ever, it is he who leads us'. See GKC, 136d.

22 See D.W. Thomas, A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew: VT, 3 (1953), 210-19; and Some Further Remarks on Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew: VT, 18 (1968), 120-21; Murphy, Psalms, 584; TDOT 1:282.

23 See Clifford, The Cosmic Mountain.


25 See especially Clifford, The Cosmic Mountain, 143, n. 63. The piling up of epithets of Zion in Ps. 48:2-3 is especially comparable to CTA 3.3. 27-28 for both content and style.

26 For text, notes and translation, see H.L. Ginsberg, The Legend of King Keret (BASOR suppl. series 2-3), New Haven, Conn. 1946, 44; Tou, 550-51; MLC, 308.

27 Noted by J.F.A. Sawyer-J. Strange, Notes on the Keret-Text: IEJ, 14 (1964), 96-98. Most commentators posit an etymological relationship between BH ḥêl/hêl (ḥêlāh) and the general Semitic root *ḥy/wl, "to go around" (see BDB, 196; HAL, 199). An exception is C. Rabin (Hittite Words in Hebrew: Or., 32 [19631, 299). For further discussion of Ugaritic ḥl, see Ginsberg, The Legend of King Keret, 44; M. Dietrich-O. Loretz-J. Sanmartin, Zur ugaritischen Lexicographie III, Vormauer, Vorwerke: UF, 7 (1975), 159, 161; P. Marrassini, Formazione del lessico dell'edilizia militare nel semitico di Siria (QuSem 3), Firenze 1971, 56-63; J.C. de Moor-K. Spronk, Problematical Passages in the Legend of Kirtu (II): UF, 14 (1982), 181. See also n. 15 above. Ugaritic ḥl occurs in cultic texts which might lend credence to an
interpretation of Ps. 48:13f. as a cultic procession to the city walls (see n. 31 below). The pertinent Ugaritic texts do not refer, however, to processions (as far as the texts reveal), but to rituals for royal purification (see J.-M. de Tarragon, _Le culte à Ugarit_ [Cahiers de la RB 19], Paris 1980, 82-83). On the motif of the lamenting wall in BH, see Lam 2: 13-19.

28 The theme of God's establishing Zion occurs in the center of another Song of Zion, Ps. 87:5. There the phrase _wēhū_ ṣyēkōnēnēhā 'elyôn, "for the Most High himself will establish her" (RSV), follows _bah_ "in her", a word at the middle of an A B C B' A' chiasm (_bāk_ [v. 3] :: _šām_ [v. 6] : _bāk_ [v. 7]).

29 God is called a "refuge" under a variety of BH synonyms: (a) _miṣgāḇ_, Ps. 9:10; 18:3; 46:8, 12; 48:4; 59:10, 17, 18; 62:37; 94:2, 3; 144:2; (b) _mahseh_, _mahāseh_, Ps. 14:6; 46:2; 61:4; 62:8, 9; 71:7; 73:28; 91:2, 9; 94:22; 142:6; 142:6; 31:3, 5; 37:39; 43:2; 52:9; 60:9; 71:7; 108:9. The psalmist is often said "to take refuge (_λυω_) in God (Pss. 2:11, 20; 5:12; 7:2; 11:1; 16:1; 17:7; 18:3, 31; 25:20; 31:2, 19, 20; 34:9, 23; 36:8; 37:40; 52:2; 52:7; 61:5; 64:11; 71:1; 91:4; 118:8, 9; 141:8, 144:2). See the comments of Deissler, _Der anthologische Charakter_, 497.

30 Pss. 96:4; 145:3; see also 1 Chron. 16:25. See Deissler, _Der anthologische Charakter_, 495-96. The occurrence of this phrase in both Psalms 48 and 96 raises at least the issue of the relationship between "Songs of Zion" and "Enthronement Hymns". Note also the correspondence between Pss. 47:11 and 97:8, and the occurrence of _melek_ rāb in Ps. 48:3 compared with _melek_ gādōl in Ps. 47:3 (see n. 11; and G. Buccellati, _The Enthronement of the King and Capital City in Texts from Ancient Mesopotamia and Syria_, in _Studies Presented to A.L. Oppenheim_, Chicago 1964, 54-61, esp. 60-61).

31 See, for example, Duhm, _Die Psalmen_, 137; Gunkel, _Die Psalmen_, 207; Kittel, _Die Psalmen_, 177; Mowinckel, _The Psalms in Israel's Worship_, 1.7, 85, 87, 142, 151-52; Dahood, _Psalms_, 1.292; Weiser, _The Psalms_, 383. The alternative is non-liturgical. These verses may simply invoke the audience to consider the physical complex of the city as a sign of God's powerful deed in establishing Zion. One may compare Gilgamesh, Tablets I:16-19 and XI:305-308. In these passages, Gilgamesh tells Urshanabi to go up on the walls of Uruk which witness to the monumental labor of the seven sages (see ANET3, 73, 97; J. Tigay, _The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic_, Philadelphia 1982, 140, 146-149; D.J. Wiseman, _A Gilgamesh Epic Fragment from Nimrud: Iraq_, 37 [1975], 157-63).

32 For _šām_ as referring to Jerusalem, see Krinetzski: BZ, 4 (1960), 89; and R.J. Tournay, _Quand Dieu parle aux hommes la langue de l'amour_. _Études sur le Cantique des Cantiques_ (Cahiers de la RB
For a different grammatical interpretation of šām, see Buttenweiser, *The Psalms*, 108.

The wordplays, melek and hammēlākīm (vv. 3, 5) and nōdaʿ and nōʿādū (vv. 4, 5), contrast God with the enemy kings (see Dahood, *Psalms*, 1.291). The wordplay ūlāh and ḫīl (vv. 7, 14) links the defenses of Zion with the enemies' fearful reaction before Zion and the powerful God who dwells in the city. The pairs, nōdaʿ and nōʿādū, and ūlāh and ḫīl, form a number of semantic-sonant chiasms (on which, see J.S. Kselman, *Semantic-Sonant Biblical: Biblica*, 58 [1977], 219-23; and Watson, *Chiastic Patterns*, 132). Nōdaʿ and nōʿādū form semantic-sonant chiasmus with ūlōhîm (vv. 4, 7); bēʿīr ūlōhēnū (vv. 2, 9); hāʿārēṣ (v. 3) and ʿeres (v. 11); ṣiyyōn (vv. 3, 12). Ūlāh and ḫīl form semantic-sonant chiasmus with ūlōhîm (vv. 4, 14).