

# Selah

## Introduction

Please note: properly speaking this article belongs under the banner “Old Testament.” Because a large number of files are located there, it’s parked under the current one (Essays of the Early Church). In other words, it’s simply a matter of space.

A lot of people are familiar with the Psalms, actually are in love with them for obvious reasons. However, an overlooked word which remains untranslated pops up here and there, often in italics, usually at the end of a verse.<sup>1</sup> Some may find its presence incidental, a kind of “foreign” insertion simply to be ignored. That word happens to be *selah*, subject of the document at hand. The common consensus is that it’s a technical term having to do with the style of music or recitation of the psalm. Virtually every source dealing with its definition inserts the word “probably” or “most likely” which boils down to the fact that nobody can pin down the precise meaning of *selah*.

This document doesn’t speculate about the meaning of *selah*. Instead, it lists all sixty-two references in the Psalter for the purpose of tying it in with the practice of *lectio divina*. In addition to the Psalter references, three are found in Habakkuk and are included at the end of this list.

**On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** by Gregory of Nyssa helped give birth to this list of *selah* and is included in this home page. As he states in his treatise, *diapsalma* is the Greek translation of *selah*. “We must not proceed further without considering the term *diapsalma* (This term means a pause. It is equivalent to the Hebrew *selah*, a musical or liturgical direction marking a division of the psalm). Our predecessors take it either as a change in understanding, appearance or activity....The Psalter provides us with an interval when the Holy Spirit speaks at such times for silence (interpreters call this interval *diapsalma*).<sup>2</sup>”

Some of the insertions of *selah* within a given psalm appear random and devoid of any pattern. That may be true, but from *lectio divina*’s point of view this is not so. *Selah* is taken generally as an invitation to pause in our reading of that verse. This, of course, is within the context of the entire psalm in which it’s found.

The primary function of *lectio divina* is that it’s geared solely for disposing a person to be

<sup>1</sup>The only exception is Ps 57.3 where it occurs in between two sentences comprising this verse.

<sup>2</sup>*Diapsalma* consists of the root *psalma*, a tune for a stringed instrument with the preposition *dia* or through prefaced to it. Thus we could say that it is an interlude...a *dia*...where we’re at a point in the psalm verse which gives insight into a larger picture of what’s going on.

in God's presence. While that may last for more or less a short time, the length is irrelevant. A person does return to the text...the *lectio* of the text...and moves on slowly but deliberately until the urge to leave the text once again emerges spontaneously. And so *selah* may be considered as one half of that alternation between our reading of a given text or part of one. It's a pause not so much as to reflect upon what we've just read but to rest in a suspension of reflection after which we return to the text.

Experience shows that because of the poetic nature of the psalms, *selah* offers during our reading of them intervals to sit back, relax and to savor what's being communicated. In sum, *selah* represents a source of joy at knowing we've come across something essential to our spiritual growth, that invariably spilling over upon our religious heritage and culture. By their nature, secondary sources about the Psalter lack the ability to endow us with this special type of pleasure and rest, rest as *selah*. Such rest, of course, is the fruit of *lectio divina*.

In light of this unique alternation between *lectio* and *selah*, the notations offered here falls in line with the overall approach taken throughout this home page. For example, there are numerous "expansion" texts on various books of the Bible. Such a spirit of "expansion" is valid again from the vantage point of *lectio divina*. Without that orientation, the whole enterprise is quite useless. Once such text is entitled **Notations on the Psalter**, "notations" in this instance used before the other expansion texts were composed. Some of the material from that document pertaining to *selah* is inserted here.

The Psalm verses are from **The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (RSV)**, New York, 1973. Also the **NIV Study Bible** (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1984) is consulted.

## Selah in the Psalter

### 3.2: Many are saying of me, there is no help for him in God. *Selah*..

The context of this verse is when David fled his son Absalom who had risen up in an attempt to become king, for he "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" [2Sam 15.6]. This caused David to flee Jerusalem and perhaps was the lowest point in his life. In the meanwhile those on the side of Absalom are spreading rumors about David's desperate situation, that he's at the end of his rope. Such are those who in the first verse are the "many foes who are rising up against me." Their claim is that David lacks help or *yeshuah*, this also being the proper name Jesus.

The *selah* here is reminiscent of that brief moment when David must have paused in flight or when he "had passed a little beyond the summit" [2Sam 16.1] of the Mount of Olives and gave a quick, longing glance at Jerusalem down below. Despite its briefness, from this *selah* David got sufficient insight to continue his flight and eventually round up

sufficient resources to defeat Absalom, his own son.

### **3.4: I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy hill. *Selah*.**

This verse as well as vs 8 just below represent the same desperate context of David's flight from his very own son noted above. The noun *qol* in the Hebrew reads as "my voice to the Lord I cry," the verb being *qara'* which means to utter a loud sound. This *qol* may be associated with David being at that bend on the Mount of Olives as he looks down upon Jerusalem and directs his *qara'* to the ark of the Lord there.

The conjunctive *v-* ('and') suggests that as soon as David's *qara'* reached the ark of the Lord, it descending the Mount to the ark, the Lord responds at once, *hanah* also meaning to respond. He does so from his "holy hill" which is Mount Zion, the *hanah* going from down to up, that is up to David. Nothing is said about the content of this *hanah*. It sets the stage for a *selah* which despite lasting a fraction of a second, was sufficient to give David the courage to take that turn in the bend and lose sight of Jerusalem with the assurance that he will return even if the details about it are lacking.

### **3.8: Deliverance belongs to the Lord; your blessing be upon your people! *Selah*.**

The confidence David receives as noted in the last excerpt makes him exclaim that the Lord gives deliverance or *yeshuah* as noted with regard to 3.2, salvation. The preposition *l-* or "to" is prefaced to the Lord reading literally, "deliverance is to the Lord," conveying a more direct and personal connection.

*Berakah* is the noun for blessing which literally is "upon (*hal-*) your people," those people stuck in Jerusalem who are at the mercy of Absalom. Then follows *selah*, the last brief pause David takes with Jerusalem gone from his sight but not from his heart.

### **4.4: Be angry, but sin not; commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*.**

Any harmonization between *ragaz* and *chata'* seems improbable, the former almost always leading invariably to the latter. Not just that, but it seems to occur within a nanosecond. *Ragaz* means to be quick tempered as well as agitated. When that mental condition is allowed to stew in one's mind, it's bound to be released with some violence. Yet the psalmist<sup>3</sup> is bidding his readers to consider his *ragaz* and pause...*selah*...pause before acting upon it which would be committing sin, *chata'* in the original sense of missing the mark as one would do in target practice.

<sup>3</sup>The traditional author of the Psalter is King David. Whether or not this is true for any or all psalms, his authorship will be maintained since he is so important in Israel's political and religious heritage. After all, this is a document dealing with *lectio divina*, nothing else.

So instead of *ragaz-resulting-in-chata'*, the psalmist proposes communing or the common verb *'amar* (to say, to speak) not outwardly which would be disastrous but within the heart, *lev* applicable to mind, memory or in essence, one's whole being. "Beds" suggests this *'amar* takes place at night; the daily siesta time during the heat of the day also may apply. Whether one, the other or both, we are to be silent or *damah* which also means to come to a rest or an end. Thus it seems that *damah* is akin to *selah*, the very word which follows it in this verse.

**9.16: The Lord has made himself known, he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. Higgsaion. Selah.**

*Yadah* is the verb to know (also as to notice, understand) and generally applies to intimate knowledge as here which can be taken as an invitation by the Lord for such *yadah*. It's presented is through the execution of judgment which automatically makes one hesitate about such implied intimacy. *Mishpat* is the noun suggesting that a decision has been made, and that applies to those who are wicked or *rashah* also meaning guilty. Such guilt is self-induced, if you will, causing the wicked to be snared in their own devices, the verb being *lakad* which suggests being trapped as in a net.

This verse is followed by *higgsaion* which is a musical sign, denoting probably a pause in the instrumental interlude. It's found two more times: 19:14 rendered "meditation" and 92:3 as the murmuring tone of the harp. Then we have *selah*.

**9.20: Put them in fear, O Lord! Let the nations know that they are but men! Selah.**

This verse comes at the end of the psalm where *selah* gives space to reflect on its entire content. Two sentences assume the form of an exclamation from the heart. The first is David's desire to have his adversaries which vs 20 calls "nations" not just to be afraid but to be put in fear; the verb being *shyth* or to be put (permanently) in *mora'*. However, this *mora'* isn't specified meaning that answer may lay in the second sentence.

David's adversaries not defined per se are now identified as nations, *goy* being applicable to all peoples who are not Israelites (and that includes the rest of the world). They are to know or have *yadah* or intimate knowledge noted in the previous section that they are mortal and not endowed with any type of divinity. Such a realization should be sufficient reason to give pause or *selah* for reflection.

**20.3: May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! Selah.**

*Zakar* or remember, call to mind, suggests a wish for something to be completed. It's more than recalling something but of allowing a memory or recollection to sink deep within oneself. When *zakar* is applied to God, it means this recollection will last a long

time, that is, offerings or *minchah*, which also means a gift or present.

*Dasah* conveys the same divine force as *zakar*, fundamentally as to be fat, satisfied abundantly. The objects are *holah*, sacrifices which are burned wholly. The two verbs as a sincere wish from the psalmist directed to God give the person for whom both are invoked pause or *selah*. That is, that he may show gratitude first to God and then to the one imploring divine favor on his behalf.

**21.2: You have given him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips. *Selah*.**

*Ta'avah* or desire connotes craving given by God to the heart or *lev* (cf 4.4) of king (David) which in the context of this psalm is his enemies. The request or *'aresheth* at hand (the only use of this word in the Bible) is simultaneous with *ta'avah*, joined with it by the conjunctive *v-*, "and." It is not withheld or *manah*, also as to refuse and is on the king's lips meaning vocal prayer compared with the inward *ta'avah* of the heart. In other words, we have an alteration between what is interior and what is exterior, giving rise to a *selah*.

**24.6: Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*.**

*Zeh* or "such" also means "this," most likely referring to the generation or *dor* contemporary with King David who is uttering these words in their praise. Such praise is attributed to their seeking, *darash* fundamentally as to trample or to tread which intimates the eagerness of their search.

The verb *baqash* is used a second time and conveys the sense of touch as well as entreating. It fits in well with the divine face or *panym* not just of God but the God of Jacob. Although "God of Jacob" is a common phrase in the Bible, in the context at hand it can refer to both his dream at Bethel (the ladder with the angels) and his wrestling with the unidentified man. The second ties in with *panym*: "For I have seen God face to face" [Gen 32. 30] which is why he named the place Peniel.

**32.4: For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*.**

The reason for such a weight (*kavad*; verbal root of *kavod*, glory) is that the psalmist failed to disclose his sin as noted in the previous verse. Despite the affliction, he's aware of the privilege that the divine hand is paying him so much attention both day and night.

This weight or *kavad* dries up the psalmist's strength, the **RSV** noting this verb as "obscure." That verb is *haphak* meaning to turn, turn around and applies to the psalmist's

strength, *leshad* meaning vital moisture or vigor. The only other biblical reference is Num 11.8: “and the taste of it (manna) was like the taste of cakes baked with oil.” In the verse at hand *qayts* is the noun for summer heat which also means the harvest or fruits. In light of this, one can almost hear a groan substituting for *selah*.

**32.5: I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord;” then you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*.**

This verse follows upon the heels of the previous one which intimates that sin caused the divine hand to rest unceasingly upon the psalmist. Here he comes right out and says that sin indeed is the source of all his woes, *chata’th* fundamentally as missing the mark as well as to slip. The verb *yadah* (cf 9.20) means to have intimate knowledge of someone or something, and indeed this is the case at hand. The hiphil is used, that is, it’s causative making *yadah* read something as “I caused to make known” which can intimate something deep within the psalmist rousing him to speak in such a fashion.

Simultaneous with this causing-to-make-known is not hiding personal iniquity. *Kasah* is the verb meaning to cover over, and *haon* the noun for iniquity or any depraved action. With these two in the psalmist’s favor—his *yadah* and no *kasah*— he feels free to blurt right out to the Lord his confession of transgressions. *Yadah* is the verb (final *-h* is the letter *he*, not *-hayin* as with *yadah* or to know) to confession, also as to praise or celebrate. *Peshah* also means a defection or rebellion. In between the verb and noun is *haley*, literally as “upon me” having the verse run literally as “I will confession upon me my transgressions.”

**39.5: Behold, you have made my days a few hand breadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely every man stands as a mere breath! *Selah*.**

*Hineh* or behold, a way the psalmist wishes to get the Lord’s attention to his plight. That is to say, the Lord is responsible for making (*natan*, the common verb to give) his days passing or *tophach*, the width of a hand or very small. The psalmist adds that his lifetime is as nothing before (*neged* or in the presence of) him. An alternate meaning of “lifetime” or *cheled* is world as in Ps 49.2: “Give ear, all inhabitants of the world.”

*’Ak* or “surely” is not unlike *hineh*, a way for the psalmist to say both to the Lord and to others that everyone (*kal-* or all) is a *kal-* or mere breath, *nitsav* being a verb meaning to stand, to establish. Here *selah* may be taken as a moment the psalmist gives to the Lord for consideration and hopefully to take action on his behalf.

**39.11: When you chasten man with rebukes for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely every man is a mere breath! *Selah*.**

*Yatsar* as to chasten also means to correct or to exhort, so it can have a positive sense.

Here *yatsar* ties in with *tokachath* or rebuke, correction. This noun is associated with *havon*, “rebukes for sin,” also as depravity or perversity which is a worse form of offense than mere sin.

Along with *yatsar* is the verb *masah* which is more than consuming; it’s more a melting or dissolving into nothing which is what a moth does to cloth. The object of this total consumption is everything which is *chamad*, a participle meaning to desire or to take pleasure in, that being intimated as *tokachath*. Thus the totality of both *yatsar* and *masah* result, again like a moth, in nothingness which may be put in terms of a mere breath or *hevel*, also as vapor as well as vanity. “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” [Eccl 1.2]. In this instance *selah* is a pause to reflect upon sudden dissolution not do so much as to death but as to sin and the resulting vanity (*hevel*).

**46.3: Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Selah*.**

This verse is part of an extended one beginning in vs 2 which reads as follows: “Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea.” All in all three instances “though” doesn’t have a Hebrew equivalent.

The verse at hand speaks of the sea roaring and foaming, *hamah* and *chamar*. The former more specifically means to hum as with bees and used to express internal emotion. The latter means to swell up, to ferment and suggests a lengthy period of gestation. As for the mountains, they tremble with tumult, *rahash* and *ge’oth* to shake and pride, arrogance. *Selah* as a pause stands in really stark contrast to the violence depicted in the two verses of this psalm.

**46.7: The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*.**

This verse also appears at the end of the psalm along with *selah*, the two providing a kind of refrain.

**47.4: He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. *Selah*.**

Hosts or *tsava’* is a military term referring to an army and here is applied to the Lord’s heavenly entourage. Although the native land of *tsava’* is in heaven, the psalmist says that the Lord or commander of it—the heavenly army—is with us which is reminiscent of Immanuel: “Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel” (that is, ‘God with us’) [Is 7.14].

In addition, God is identified with Jacob as in Ex 3.15 when the Lord spoke with Moses: “The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you,” this after the Lord revealed himself as “I am who am” in the

previous verse. So while the Lord of hosts may be with Israel, the God of Jacob is their refuge, *misgav* more as a fortress or high point within that fortress.

**48.8: As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God, which God establishes forever. *Selah*.**

This verse hinges upon *ka'asher* and *ken*, “so-as.” The first part (*ka'asher*) deals with hearing and the second part (*ken*) with seeing. Both are tied in with the city of the Lord of hosts or *tsava'* (cf 46.7), most likely Jerusalem. First comes reports of having heard what transpired there, this not being specified but most likely pertains to activities related to the temple. After hearing of them comes seeing for oneself, the two being the same. This city the Lord establishes forever, the verb *kun* also meaning to be steadfast, to endure and to be complete.

**49.13: This is the fate of those who have foolish confidence, the end of those who are pleased with their portion. *Selah*.**

“Fate” is absent in the Hebrew text. *Derek* or way is used with *kesel* which means folly as well as confidence. The conjunctive *v-* as “and” is prefaced to *'achery* or end or that which is after. Such an end or after-ness applies to persons who take pleasure or *ratsah* in *peh* which literally means mouth and suggests taking pleasure in what they are saying. Reference is to pomp in the previous verse, *yeqar* also meaning honor or that which is precious.

**49.15: But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. *Selah*.**

This verse begins with *'ak* or “but,” indicative of something which makes the psalmist utter what he does here. The previous two verses set the context, namely, those with foolish confidence and who are pleased with their portion as noted in the section immediately above.

*Padah* as to ransom also means to reimburse, to pay back with regard to the psalmist's soul or *nephesh*. It is in danger of being under the subjugation or power (*yad* or hand) of Sheol. This a place of darkness to which all the dead go, both the righteous and the unrighteous, regardless of the moral choices made in life, a place of stillness and darkness cut off from life and from God. With *yad* applied to Sheol, it's as though the underworld were laying in wait to snatch the psalmist. Instead, God will receive him, *laqach* being the common verb to take, that is, with his *yad*. Although not mentioned, it can be implied.

**50.6: The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge! *Selah*.**

*Nagad* or to declare also means to propose or to announce which here is divine *tsedeq* or



righteousness, this word meaning that which is straight. It's done by the heavens or sky above which contains the heavenly luminaries as well as God as judge, the participle *shaphat*. This verse is reminiscent of Ps 19:1: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims (*nagad*) his handiwork."

**52.3: You love evil more than good and lying more than speaking the truth. *Selah*.**

The preposition *min* or "from" sets the tone for this verse. That is to say, it's prefaced to two words, the adjective *tov* or good and the verb *davar* or to speak: "from good" and "from speaking." The verb *'ahav* or to love (it connotes breathing after) governs this, preferring *rah* and *tsedeq* or evil and truth, the latter connoting righteousness as in the section above.

**52.5: But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah*.**

Here four verbs of a similar stripe are used for the "deceitful tongue" of the previous verse, all taking place in the unspecified future:

- 1) *Natats* also means to pull down which here is done by God and is destined to last forever or in perpetuity, *netsach*.
- 2) *Chatah* or snatch as to take burning coals from a fire.
- 3) *Natsach* or to tear from, pluck out. This and *chatah* are used in reference to the tent of the person with "deceitful tongue."
- 4) *Sheresh* or uproot from, this being the verbal root for a shoot or root, here with regard to the "land of the living," *'erets* often applied to the nation of Israel.

**54.3: For insolent men have risen against me, ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before them. *Selah*.**

This verse begins with *ky* or "for" indicating that it's in the context of the psalmist asking God to hear his prayer (cf vs 2).

Two types of men are presented, insolent and ruthless, or *zar* and *haryts*. The former more specifically translates as stranger in the sense of an enemy whereas the latter is suggestive of awe-inspiring in the bad sense as well as trembling. *Zar* = *qum* or to rise up and *haryts* = *baqash* (cf 24.6) or to seek. Both *zar* and *haryts* fail to set God before them, *sum* being the verb which applies to making firm and permanent. I.e., both fail with regard to making this lasting.

**55.7: Yes, I would wander afar, I would lodge in the wilderness. *Selah*.**

This verse forms part of a larger sentence, that is, vs 6: "And I say, 'O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.'"

*Hineh* (cf 39.5) or “yes” usually is rendered as “behold, lo” and reflects the psalmist’s wish to be able to fly away as a dove. This flying is rendered by two verbs, *rachaq* and *nadad*, wandering far and fleeing.

*Lun* is the verb to lodge in the sense of pass the night and doesn’t mean the taking up of a permanent dwelling which here is in the *midbar* or desert. This noun means a sterile, sandy place as well as a pasture. In other words, such *lun* would give sufficient time for the psalmist to *selah*, take a pause from his flight, reconsider and eventually return to society. An example of this is Jesus in the wilderness after he had been baptized by John.

**55.19: God will give ear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old; because they keep no law, and do not fear God. *Selah*.**

The context of this psalm consists of personal enemies, the most recent ones being those who “are arrayed against me” in the previous verse. God will first *shamah* followed by *hanah* (cf 3.4) or hear and humble, the latter having several different meanings. He will do this at some future time which goes unspecified; same applies to the distance, if you will, between them. Such hearing/humbling comes from God on his throne or as it reads literally, “and sits from before,” *qedem* also pertaining to ancient times.

The reason for taking action against the psalmist’s personal enemies are twofold, this paralleling the twofold giving hear and humbling:

- 1) They are not keeping any law which reads literally, “they do not change” or *chalaph* which reflects the unwillingness to *shamah*.
- 2) They do not fear God, *yare*’ implying respect.

**57.3: He will send from heaven and save me, he will put to shame those who trample upon me. *Selah*. God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness!**

This verse consists of two sentences and is the only instance where *selah* occurs in the middle of one verse, separating the two sentences. The first sentence consists of three actions which the psalmist knows which God will do on his behalf:

- 1) The sending (*shalach*) from heaven isn’t specified.
- 2) Saving or *yashah* which means to be ample, broad or spacious. Also it’s the verbal root for the proper name Jesus.
- 3) Put to shame or *charaph* which also means to reproach or to scorn. *Shalach*, *yashah* and *charaph* are directed toward those trampling the psalmist, *sha’aph* also as to breathe hard or to pant after.

The second sentence has the second mention of *shalach* or to send two personal emissaries, if you will: *chesed* and *’emeth* or steadfast love and faithfulness. The former is usually considered untranslatable, not unlike the Greek *agape*. The latter connotes

stability and perpetuity. So to insert *selah* in between the two sentences suggests that the psalmist knows of God's actions towards him, that the three *shalach*, *yashah* and *charaph* will become two, that is, *chesed* and *'emeth*.

**57.6: They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves. *Selah*.**

This verse contains two sentences and two types of traps, both set by those attempting to trample the psalmist. As noted in the previous section, they could be likened to the lions of vs 4 among which he is living.

The first trap is *resheth* or a net which means the psalmist's enemies wish to take him alive. Apparently he had foreknowledge of this which cast down his soul, *kaphaph* meaning to bend. The second trap consists of a pit or *shychah*, also to capture the psalmist. However, those who have dug it have fallen into it *betok* as in its very midst. Now the tables are turned; the psalmist has his enemies trapped alive.

**59.5: You, Lord God of hosts, are God of Israel. Awake to punish all the nations spare none of those who treacherously plot evil. *Selah*.**

Here the psalmist speaks in a very direct way to the Lord beginning with "you" and to reenforce his urgency, calls the Lord by two formal titles often found throughout the Bible.

He speaks of a contrast between Israel and nations, *goy* meaning all those who are not of Israel and thus not acknowledging the Lord. The psalmist includes no specific *goy* but them all whom he wishes the Lord first to awake or *qots* and then to punish or *paqad*. An alternate meaning of *qots* is to cut up which could apply here. *Paqad* has military connotations as to muster and is not dissimilar to the sense of *qots*.

Finally the psalmist ask...commands...the Lord not to spare or *chanan* which also means to be gracious, with regard to those not just plotting evil, *bagad* as to act in a fraudulent manner but with the added *'aven* or emptiness, vanity. "Those" could be a more specific group of nations among the *goy* compared to them all.

**59.13: Consume them in your wrath, consume them till they are no more, that men may know that God rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth. *Selah*.**

This verse forms a larger sentence begun with the previous one: "For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips, let them be trapped in their pride. For the cursing and lies which they utter." As with the previous section, this one involves the *goy* mentioned in vs 8, "all the nations."

The verb *kalah* or to consume implies bringing to a full end and is used twice. The first one is with wrath or *chemah* which implies heat, this fitting in with the disappearance of the psalmist's foes. The apparent wish for all *goy* to be destroyed is an exaggeration, to be sure, for there some have to be some left. These will know or *yadah* (cf 32.5) involving intimate knowledge that God both rules (*mashal*) literally "in (*b-*) Jacob from which he extends this *mashal* or dominion to earth's ends, *'ephes* also as extremities.

**60.4: You have set up a banner for those who fear you, to rally to it from the bow. Selah.**

The common verb *natan* (to give) is used with *nes* or banner which has military connotations, a signal that can be seen at a distance as upon a hill. "So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole" [Num 21.8]. Only those who fear (*yare'*, cf 55.19) will be able to see it implying that enemies of the Lord will not be blind to it. The purpose of this *nes* is to rally such persons from the bow,

The second part of this verse reads in Hebrew, "that it (the banner) may be displayed because of the truth." The only other instance of *qeshet* is Prov 22.21: "that you may give a true answer to those who sent you." In the psalm, this banner is displayed or *nasas*, the verbal root for *nes*, banner, already mentioned.

**61.4: Let me dwell in your tent forever! Oh to be safe under the shelter of your wings! Selah.**

*Gur* is the verb, more dwelling as an alien or in a temporary fashion, and is in the future tense making it more a request than an actuality. *'Ohel* as tent is suggestive of this temporary status. Note that while these two terms relate to of such temporary-ness, "forever" is the opposite. Such opposites are reconciled because the psalmist has in mind the tent of meeting as in the Book of Exodus which eventually became permanent in the Jerusalem temple.

*Chasah* is the verb in the second sentence, similarly in the future tense, and means to flee, take refuge. Let's say the psalmist already is in the tent (of meeting). From there he takes refuge further in, that is to say, in the *seter* or secret place under the divine wings. Such wings belong to God...not that they are part of him...but belong to his cherubim. "The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces one to another" [Ex 37.9].

**62.4: They only plan to thrust him down from his eminence. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths but inwardly they curse. Selah.**

This verse begins with *'ak* or "only" which can express certainty and acts as a kind of exclamation to reveal the psalmist's distress. His enemies may be speaking of David on his throne, *se'eth* also as dignity or rising. *Nadach* means to thrust down as well as to cast

out, the latter sense also applicable here.

Those engaged in this conspiracy find pleasure in lies, *ratsah* also meaning to please along with *kazav* implying deceit. While this is their real intent, two things are going on: they bless but curse inwards or *qerev* as the interior or midst of anything. The two verbs are *barak* and *qalal*, the meaning to be of little account.

**62.8: Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. *Selah*.**

The psalmist is addressing the people, possibly assembled for a liturgical function in the temple. *Batach* or to trust means to have confidence in God; note the similarity between the three letter words “people” and “times,” *ham* and *heth*.

*Batach* or trust leads to pouring out of the heart (*lev*, cf 21.2), *shaphak* which also means to heap into a mound. The before-ness of God to which the people’s hearts are poured out does this to him as a refuge or *machaseh* which derives from the verbal root *chasah* as in 61.4.

**66.4: All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you; sing praises to your name. *Selah*.**

*‘Erets* also means a country as well as the physical earth which the psalmist bids to worship God, the verb *shachah* with the preposition *L*, literally as “to you.” Fundamentally *shachah* means to bow down.

“They” refers to the inhabitants of *‘erets* who are to sing praises both to the Lord and to his name, *shem* as representation or sign of the Lord. The verb *zamar* as to sing fundamentally means to prune a vine and thus intimates plucking as on an instrument.

**66.7: Who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations—let not the rebellious exalt themselves. *Selah*.**

*Mashal* as to rule suggests the giving or maintaining of order which is done by divine might, *gevorah* being a military term implying fortitude. By keeping watch on the nations (*goy* or those other than Israel; cf 59.13) the Lord’s eyes is a means of exercising *mashal* through *tsaphah* as to observe carefully. By invoking divine *mashal* and *tsaphah*, the psalmist warns the rebellious not to exalt themselves, *sarar* (to be stubborn) and *rum* being the two verbs.

**66.15: I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats. *Selah*.**

A description of the *holah* or offering of vs. 13: “I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows:”

1) Fatlings or *meach* more specifically a sheep; from the verbal root *machach*, to be fat. “Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins” [Is 5.17].

2) Rams or *ayl*; can also mean stag as in Sg 2.9: “My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.”

3) Bulls or *baqar*. “Take a bull calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, both without blemish, and offer them before the Lord” [Lev 9.2].

### **67.1: May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. *Selah*.**

A psalm for a good harvest similar to Num 6.25: “The Lord make his face to shine (*’or*) upon you and be gracious to you.” The theme wished by the psalmist is three-fold:

1) For God to be gracious, *chanan* (cf 59.5); the object of this verb may be taken as Israel.

2) To bless or *barak* (Israel; cf 62.4).

3) For him to make his face shine, *’or*. “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.” The verse at hand is specific with regard to this light, namely, that it comes from God’s face, *paney*.

### **67.4: Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge with equity and guide the nations upon earth. *Selah*.**

Here *ham* (cf 62.8) is the noun for nations, a generic term for races opposed to Israel. This more encompassing group is urged to be glad (*samach*) and sing for joy (*ranan*, they resulting from God’s judgment, *shaphat* (verb, cf 50.6). *Shaphat* has two qualities:

1) Equity or *mishur*, from *yashar*, implying straightness.

2) Guide or *nachah* which can also imply a return. Such *nachah* is in conjunction with the nations which are lead back to God.

### **68.7: O God, when you went forth before your people, when you marched through the wilderness. *Selah*.**

This verse continues into the next one and is punctuated by *selah* to get attention to divine intervention. Vs 8 runs as follows: “the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God; Sinai quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel.”

The verse at hand is a clear reference to the Exodus with emphasis on before or *lipney*, for example, Ex 14.19: “Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.” Not only does the psalmist recall this decisive event, he is mindful that God

marched (*tsahad*) with the Israelites in the person of Moses. “Then Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea” [Ex 15.22]. Cf Ps 18.36: “You gave a wide place for my steps under me.” These steps imply a road or path in the wilderness, *yeshymon*, a word only found here as well as in Pss 78.39 and 106.13.

**68.19: Blessed be the Lord who daily bears us up; God is our salvation. *Selah*.**

In light of God having ascended the high mount, this bearing up or *hamas* may be said to take place there. The verb implies the carrying of a load: “These things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary beasts” [Is 46.1]. Consider this amplified notion of *hamas* in light of God as salvation, *yeshuhah* which can be rendered pretty much as or “Jesus.”

Daily or *yom yom* (literally as day day) represents extension of divine presence within the human sphere; this expression may be taken as a *kairos* or special event.

**68.32: Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord. *Selah*.**

Note mention of kingdoms after the more specific nations of vs 31. The verse at hand contains two types of singing, *shyr* and *zamar*; for references on these verbs, cf Ps 21.13 respectively: “We will sing and praise your power.” Vs 32 contains two titles of the divinity: God or *’elohym* and Lord or *’adonay*. The drama of God taking vengeance upon his foes and the acknowledgment of God by nations from vs 20 through vs 32 requires a pause or *selah* for consideration.

**75.3: When the earth totters and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep steady its pillars. *Selah*.**

The tottering (*mog*) implies an earthquake and can be associated with a time of judgment. The pillars or *hamod* (singular) were thought to be the foundation of the earth on the chaos of those waters mentioned in Genesis. I.e., such pillars are based on the unstable base of primeval waters. Also *hamod* is used in reference to God’s presence: “The pillar of the cloud went from before them” [Ex 14.19].

**76.3: There he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword and the weapons of war. *Selah*.**

There (*shamah*) can refer to the two divine presences in vs 2, abode and dwelling place in Zion. This verse speaks of a siege either of a historical or eschatological nature.

**76.9: When God arose to establish judgment to save all the oppressed of the earth. *Selah*.**

This verse is part of the previous one which runs as follows: “From the heavens you uttered judgment; the earth feared and wills still.” Its purpose is to show the reason why

the earth became still or *shaqat* also as to be at rest.

Note that God (in the Hebrew) “arises to judgment” (*mishpat*, cf 9.16), the same judgment he uttered from heaven in vs 8; thus there is a gap between its utterance and fulfilment of its execution. The image is one of a judge or lawyer standing up to pronounce a verdict. As for this verdict, it’s in favor of the oppressed or *hanawym* who are special objects of *mishpat* as saving, the verbal root for the proper name Jesus or *yashah* (cf 57.3). At this instance a *selah* is appropriate with respect to the verb arise or *qum* (cf 54.3), for it suggests anticipation.

**77.3: I think of God, and I moan; I mediate, and my spirit faints. *Selah*.**

The verb for think is *zakar* (cf 20.3), to remember (that is, better times) which, in turn, causes moaning, *hamah* (cf 46.3). “My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me” [Sg 5.4].

The second part of vs 3 deals with the psalmist’s spirit or *ruach* (also means breath) which faints (*hataph*): “From the end of the earth I call you when my heart is faint” [Ps 61.2]. Such collapse follows upon meditating (*syach*) which basically means to talk and in this instance, to talk with oneself aloud. Although Ps 77 is for personal deliverance, *selah* can be taken as having a certain public character. Perhaps the psalmist may be taken as representative of Israel as a whole where the individuality of a person was not distinct from the larger social grouping.

**77.15: You redeemed with your arm your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*.**

Here the psalmist is pointing more explicitly to Israel’s defining moment of redemption, the Exodus from Egypt. *Ga’al* for to redeem (cf Ps 74.2) identifies God’s people with the persons of Jacob (cf Gen 32.13+; also his blessing in 48 suggests Israel’s new life after leaving Egypt) and Joseph; the latter requested that his bones be brought from Egypt: “And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for Joseph had solemnly sworn the people of Israel saying, ‘God will visit you; then you must carry my bones with you from here’” [Ex 13.19].

**81.7: In distress you called, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. *Selah*.**

The first part of this verse calls to mind Ex 3.7-8: “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt...and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land.” The verb *chalats* is used for to deliver. “Deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love” [Ps 6.4].

The “secret place of thunder” (*seter*) as in “The secret places of the stairs” [Sg 2.14]. In



the verse at hand, *seter* alludes to Mt. Sinai: “And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder” [Ex 19.19].

The third part of vs 7 refers to Ex 17.7, temporally prior to the “secret place of thunder:” “And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah because of the fault finding of the children of Israel and because they put the Lord to the proof.”

**82.2: How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah*.**

The first of two occasions when God speaks (to vs 4 and again, vss. 6-7). Here the gods may be the object of question with regards to unjust judgment (*shaphat*, cf 67.4) or an audience on his behalf. The second part of this verse may read in Hebrew, “and accept the persons of the wicked.” These opening harsh words intended to strike fear and respect are emphasized by *selah*.

**83.8: Assyria also has joined them; they are the strong arm of the children of Lot. *Selah*.**

This verse begins with the previous one, thereby forming one continuous sentence: “Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre.” An alliance of these three had been formed when Assyria comes on board, this against Israel, *lavah* meaning to adhere as well as to receive a loan.

Now with all four allied, they have become the *zeruah* of Lot’s children. One reference to this is Gn 19.36-38 shortly after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or when Lot’s wife turned into a pillar of stone and he was left with his two daughters: “Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The first born bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites to this day.”

**84.4: Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! *Selah*.**

A statement which can be viewed in light of the sparrow and swallow of vs 3; here reference is to those who dwell or *yashav* in God’s byth, house (like the sparrow). Such a person is *’ashry* as in Ps.1.1, that is, constantly striving forward. Ever or *hod* also means again implying repetition with regard to *halal*, praise, but a repetition which is ever evolving and not the same. The *selah* here can serve to make a connection between the sparrow and dweller vis-a-vis God’s house.

**84.8: Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*.**

Two requests to two different titles concerning God: hear (*shamah*, cf 76.3) with regard to prayer and give ear (*’azan*). This two-fold petition can be put on the lips of those passing through the valley of Baca noted in vs 6. The *selah* can represent the waiting of a

response from God.

**87.3: Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. *Selah*.**

*Kavod* (cf 32.4) is the noun for glorious, as though the speaking at hand had radiated outwards from Zion to all Israel. The *selah* gives pause to consider the praises sung of this city. For a New Testament fulfillment of this earthly city, cf Rev 22.5: “And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light.”

**87.6: The Lord records as he registers the peoples, “This one was born there.” *Selah*.**

The person uttering the quote can be either the Lord or someone helping him to pick out the peoples already mentioned. God both records (*saphar*) and registers (*katav*), two verbs denoting the act of writing. The former suggests numbering and the latter a writing down of this number. “They (Eldad and Medad) were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp” [Num 11.26].

**88.7: Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. *Selah*.**

Such divine wrath (*chemah*, cf 59.13) presses down the psalmist, *samak*; note the alternate meaning of this verb as in Is 48.2: “And stay themselves on the God of Israel.” Also, God’s waves overwhelm the psalmist, *hanah*, a verb with multiple meanings as noted in 55.19.

**88.10: Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise you? *Selah*.**

*Pele’* for wonder refers to a miracle. “Terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders” [Ex 15.11]. In the verse at hand, the dead are equivalent to shades or *repha’ym*: “The earth shall cast out the dead” [Is 26.19]. Vs 10 calls to mind the sorceress summoning up the spirit of Samuel from the dead, cf 1 Sam 28.8-19. *Selah* is the second of two instances in this psalm, as if to give a pause amid all these questions put to God.

**89.37: Like the moon it shall be established forever; it shall stand firm while the skies endure. *Selah*.**

This is the last verse of praise and confidence in the Lord which begins the psalm. From vs 38 to practically the end the psalmist recounts how God had abandoned the king (David), throwing into question all that had come beforehand. Both *selah* in this instance and the conjunctive *v-* beginning vs 38 (‘but’) may be seen as at the very connection or place where this transition from praise to doubt occurs.

**89.45: You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame. *Selah*.**

This and the next excerpt are part of that doubt as to God's care for the king noted in the previous entry. *Qatsar* or cut short also means to harvest as well as to shorten and *hatah* can also mean to cloth. Thus *hatah* can intimate a more permanent covering of shame, certain reason to give pause or *selah*.

**89.48: What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? *Selah*.**

Two rhetorical questions which the psalmist exclaims. In the second he asks about deliverance from the power (*yad*, literally as hand) of Sheol which in 49.15 is expressed in a positive fashion. *Malat* is the verb for deliver and also means to slip away, thus connoting a slid out from underneath this hand of the underworld.

**140.3: They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the poison of vipers. *Selah*.**

*Nachash* is the noun for serpent, the verbal root of which means to divine; it implies a hissing sound. "Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed divine" [Gen 44.15]? A viper or *hakshuv*, the only other reference being in Is 59.5, this term defined as a spider: "They hatch adders' eggs, they weave the spider's web."

**140.5: Arrogant men have hidden a trap for me, and with cords they have spread a net, by the wayside they have set snares for me. *Selah*.**

*Ga'ah* is the verbal root for arrogant: "For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high" [Is 12.2]. *Pach* (trap) or more properly, a net. "A trap seizes him by the heel, a snare lays hold of him" [Job 18.9].

The second part of vs 5 reads in Hebrew, "they have spread cords as a net" (*resheth*): "And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare" [Ezk 12.13]. *Mahagal* for wayside implies a rut in which wheels go. "The tracks of your chariot drip with fatness" [Ps 65.12]. The third and last ambush laid for the psalmist are snares, *moqesh*. "The cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me" [Ps 18.6].

**140.8: Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked; do not further his evil plot! *Selah*.**

Desire (*ma'awaym*, used in plural, only here; derived from 'awah) is associated with the *rashah* or wicked (cf 9.16). *Zemam* for evil plot, the only instance in the Bible; from a verbal root meaning to purpose, both positive and negative. "She considers a field and buys it" [Prov 31.16].

**143.6: I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. *Selah*.**

*Paras* for stretch; fundamental meaning of this verb is to spread out in the sense of dispersing: “The morning spread upon the mountains” [Jl 2.2]. Applied to the psalmist’s hands, they are dispersed or extended to the utmost. This reflects his inner situation, that is, his *nephes* (cf 49.15; according to the Hebrew; “thirst” is lacking) “after you as a parched land.” *Hayeph* for parched; implies languishing: “Cold waters for a languishing soul” [Prov 25.25].

## Selah in Habakkuk

**Hab 3.3: God came from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. *Selah*.**

The first two verses from Habakkuk refer to the Exodus or Israel crossing the Red Sea although it’s not stated directly. The third verse can apply to Israel’s conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.

Two places and two names: God as associated with Teman and the Holy One (*Qadosh*) with Mount Paran. The former’s location is south of Judah and in Ezk 25.13 associated with Moab: “I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast; and I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword.”

Other biblical references reflect negatively upon this place from which God comes implying that after having dealt with it, he comes to deliver Israel. As for the latter, cf Dt 33.2 in conjunction with Moses’ blessing before he died: “The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran, he came from the ten thousands of holy ones with flaming fire at his right hand.” Thus both Teman and Paran may be associated with the Exodus.

In addition to the two places just noted and before mention of the second with the heavens and earth (*’erets*, cf Ps 66.4), the Hebrew text adds *selah* whereas the RSV has it at the end of this sentence. Above the former the glory of both God and the Holy One, that is, his *hod* suggesting majesty and beauty which does the covering, *kasah* (cf Ps 32.5). Such *hod* causes the earth to be filled (*male’*) with divine praise, *tehilah*, thereby uniting the two distinct realms.

**Hab 3.9: You stripped the sheath from your bow and put the arrows to the string. *Selah*.**

Another reference to the Exodus or more specifically, the Red Sea as by mention of rivers and the sea upon which the Lord rode in a chariot of victory (cf previous verse). Arrows may be taken as bolts of lightning as in Ps 18.14: “And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.”

**Hab 3.13: You went forth for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. *Selah*.**

*Yatsa'* or went forth applies to God with regard to the salvation of Israel as well as his anointed, *yeshah* being the proper name Jesus. Also *mashyach* or anointed can refer to the proper name Christ. As noted above, a footnote to the **NIV** suggests Canaan on the basis of vs 12: "you did trample the nations in anger." Also it could apply to the Lord leading the way from Egypt by a pillar of cloud and fire.

*Machats* or crush also means to agitate or to shake, the result of which is laying bear the wicked.

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