

# Journal for the Study of the Old Testament

<http://jot.sagepub.com/>

---

## **'God Will Redeem My Soul from Sheol': The Psalms of the Sons of Korah**

David C. Mitchell

*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 2006 30: 365

DOI: 10.1177/0309089206063437

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://jot.sagepub.com/content/30/3/365>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://jot.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://jot.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>



## **‘God Will Redeem My Soul from Sheol’: The Psalms of the Sons of Korah**

DAVID C. MITCHELL

Av. Maurice César 62, 1970 Wezembeek-Oppem, Belgium

### **Abstract**

After defining the Korah collection, this study shows that biblical tradition about the Korahites is marked by the theme of redemption from Sheol. This theme is discussed, particularly in regard to the resurrection of the dead. Then an examination of the Korah Psalms shows that the theme appears there also. Moreover, some of these psalms seem to feature the related idea of the righteous being caught up in the air when the earth opens. These ideas occur in later literature with proof-texts from the Korah Psalms, which would appear to be their source. Correspondences are drawn between these traits of the Korah Psalms and the author’s proposed eschatological programme in the Psalter.

In 1997 I published *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*.<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for the kind reception it found, and particularly to those who have built fruitfully upon it. However some suggested that the work was incomplete until it covered all the Psalms. This article on the Korah Psalms therefore takes one more step toward completing this work.

1. *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOTSup, 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

## 1. The Psalms of the Sons of Korah

Eleven psalms bear the heading לַבְנֵי־קֹרַח, 'Of/For the sons of Korah'. They are set in two groups. The first group forms an almost complete sequence from Psalms 42 to 49. Only Psalm 43 has no heading, but it can be taken as a Korah psalm because of its affinity with Psalm 42; they seem, in fact, to be one psalm which has been deliberately split, perhaps to bring the Korah Psalms up to the talismanic twelve.<sup>2</sup> The second Korah group also forms a sequence from Psalms 84 to 88, but is divided by David Psalm 86. Then Psalm 89 comes immediately after the Korah collection to close the third book of Psalms. So Psalms 86 and 89, because of their editorial placement, and because they share—as we shall see—other Korahite traits, should be considered affiliates of the group.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, including Psalm 43, there are twelve Korah psalms and two further psalms which fall within their orbit, Psalms 86 and 89.

The Korah collection opens Book II of the Psalms and, with coda Psalm 89, closes Book III. Moreover, the first group of Korah psalms opens the Elohist Psalter—that is, the group of Psalms 42 to 83, in which *elohim* predominates—while the second Korah group re-opens the

2. There are three reasons why this is so. First, they form one psalm in many Hebrew MSS (P.C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983], p. 325). Second, they share a refrain (42.6, 12 [5, 11]; 43.5). Third, Ps. 43's lack of heading, unusual in Psalms Books II and III (only Ps. 71 shares the feature), suggests that the heading of Ps. 42 applies also to Ps. 43, in line with the tradition that unnamed psalms are ascribed to the last named writer. The tradition is particularly applied to the Moses heading of Pss. 90–100, as seen from the *Midrash on Psalms* 90.3, and by the early Christian Hebraists Jerome (*Ep. 140 ad Cyprianum*) and Origen, the latter citing as a Jewish tradition, 'Those psalms which have no title, or which have a title but not the name of the writer, belong to the author whose name stands at the head of the last preceding Psalm that has a title' (R.B. Tollinton, *Selections from the Commentaries and Homilies of Origen* [London: SPCK, 1929], pp. 96–97; for the Greek, see C.H.E. Lommatsch, *Origenis Opera Omnia* [25 vols.; Berlin, 1831–48], XI, pp. 352–54). G.H. Wilson also notes that lack of heading indicates a tradition of combination both in the Psalms and in other ancient Semitic hymnic texts (*The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* [SBLDS, 76; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985]), p. 199.

3. E. Hengstenberg, *Commentar über die Psalmen* (Berlin, 2nd edn, 1849–52), pp. 484–85, proposes that Pss. 88 and 89 are two parts of one long psalm, both under the common heading 'Song. Of the sons of Korah' (88.1). This would make Ps. 89 a full member of the Korah set. M.D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (JSOTSup, 20; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982) also notes Ps. 89's 'special relationship' to the Korah psalms (p. 211).

YHWH psalms.<sup>4</sup> The two Korah groups are separated by a tranche of Asaph and David psalms, Psalms 50–83.

## 2. The Korah Heading

Although there are several Korahs in the Bible—Edomites (Gen. 36.5, 16), a Levite (Exod. 6.16–21; Num. 16.1; 1 Chron. 6.7 [22]), and perhaps clans of Judahites (1 Chron. 2.43) and Benjamites (2 Chron. 12.6)—the Korah of the heading is usually identified with the Levite.<sup>5</sup> This is because the Bible's only mention of *the sons of Korah* refers to this clan (Num. 26.11); Korah the Levite is the only Korah whose story is told in detail; the Korahite Levites were musicians and singers in the temple cult; and the Korah Psalms actually refer to their functions as singers and

4. The Elohist Psalter (Pss. 42–83) is distinguished by the preponderance of the term *elohim*, which occurs 210 times in absolute state, whereas YHWH occurs only 44 times. This contrasts with the rest of the Psalter in which YHWH predominates. In Pss. 1–41 YHWH occurs 278 times and *elohim* 15 in absolute form; in Pss. 84–89 YHWH occurs 31 times and *elohim* 7 in absolute form; and in Pss. 90–150 YHWH occurs 339 times and *elohim* 6 in absolute form, discounting references to foreign gods. I have shown elsewhere that the redactor crafted the Elohist Psalter in accord with his hidden purpose, which was unrelated to tetragrammaton reverence (Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 69–73). For a more recent study with similar conclusions, see F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, 'The So-Called Elohist Psalter: A New Solution for an Old Problem', in B.A. Strawn and N.R. Bowen (eds.), *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), pp. 35–52.

5. Korah of 1 Chron. 2.43 is a son of Hebron, son of Caleb, a Judahite. But the issue is complicated by the fact that there is also a Kohathite Levite patriarch called Hebron (the uncle of Levite Korah), while other Kohathites (Aaronite priests) lived in the city of Hebron in Caleb's territory (1 Chron. 6.3–7 [18–22], 22–23 [37–38], 39–40 [54–55]). Of course, Judahites and Levites living nearby may have intermarried and traded names. But a Levite Korahite, Elkanah, is elsewhere called an Ephraimite, because of the tribe among which he lived (cf. n. 19 below); another Levite is 'from the family of Judah' (Judg. 17.7); the Levites Heman and Ethan-Jeduthun seem to be the same men as Heman and Ethan the Judahite Zerahites (Hengstenberg, *Commentar*, pp. 489–91); and even Elijah is called a Tishbite from Tishbe although he may have been a priest (cf. n. 29 below). It may be then that these Judahite Korahites were Levites who lived in the territory of Judah. J.M. Miller, 'The Korahites of Southern Judah', *CBQ* 32 (1970), pp. 58–68, thinks the Korahites of 2 Chron. 12.6 are included in the Benjamites of vv. 2–5 (p. 66). However, it is equally likely that they are supplemental to rather than included in the list, and so are not Benjamites. He also states that the 'Edomite, Calebite, Benjaminite, and Levitical Korahites... were probably all representatives of the same tribal group' (p. 67), but offers no supporting evidence.

gatekeepers.<sup>6</sup> As Levite musicians would both compose and sing, the question of whether these psalms are *of* or *for* the sons of Korah does not really arise. The heading is probably best taken as simply denoting psalms from the collection of the sons of Korah.

Apart from the heading, the Korah psalms are fairly diverse. Yet they do share common features, two of which are relevant to our subject. The collection, which including Psalms 86 and 89 is less than 10 per cent of the book of Psalms, features six of the Psalter's seven occurrences of *YHWH of hosts*—three each in the *elohim* and *YHWH* sets.<sup>7</sup> The underworld also features prominently in the collection, as we shall see.

### 3. Pre-Monarchic Korahite Tradition

Korah ben Izhar ben Kohath was a prominent Levite and a cousin of Moses—their fathers Izhar and Amram were brothers (Exod. 6.18-21; Num. 27.58-59; 1 Chron. 6.18-22 [33-37]; 23.12-13). Eminent among the people and wealthy, he resented Moses giving the headship of the Kohathite clan to a lesser relative, Elizaphan (Num. 3.30).<sup>8</sup> So he led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, together with some Reubenites—Dathan, Abiram and On—and 250 Levites (Num. 16.1). The dramatic narrative tells how the Lord defended his chosen leaders. Dathan and Abiram perished with their tents and households when *YHWH* brought about 'something new...the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them...and they went down alive into Sheol' (Num. 16.30-33).<sup>9</sup> Korah's possessions and

6. Singers: cf. 1 Chron. 6.16-23 (31-38); 25.4-31; 2 Chron. 20.19 with Pss. 42.5 (4); 43.4; 45.2 (1); 47.6-8 (5-7); 49.3 (4); 84.5 (4); 87.8 (7); 89.2 (1). Gatekeepers: cf. 1 Chron. 9.17-23; 26.1, 19 with Ps. 84.11 (10).

7. Korah Pss. 46.8 (7), 12 (11); 48.9 (8); 84.2 (1), 4 (3), 13 (12). The other occurrence is at Ps. 24.10.

8. Korah's eminence and the grounds for his resentment are not explicit in the Bible, as in rabbinic literature. But both may be fairly deduced from his kinship to Moses and the fact that Elizaphan was the son of the youngest son of Kohath, Uzziel (Exod. 6.18). Korah is said to have been eminent not only on account of his lineage, but also on account of his great wealth which, according to the Talmud, resulted from his having been Pharaoh's treasurer, or alternatively from having discovered Joseph's treasures in Egypt (*Pes.* 119a; *Sanh.* 110a; *PRE* [ed. Friedlander] 398; *Est. R.* 7.4; *Exod. R.* 31.3; *Eccl. R.* to 5.12; for Korah's wealth, see also Josephus, *Ant.* 4.2.4; *Midr. Ps.* on 49.7-8, 17; Koran, *Sura* 28.76-82).

9. According to *Sanh.* 109b, On was saved by his wife. She got him drunk and sat at the tent entrance with her hair loose so that all who came to summon him withdrew, it being indecent to look on a married woman's loosened hair. Korah's wife, on the other

serving-men were swallowed up. Korah too perished, either swallowed by the earth or burned with the 250, who were consumed with divine fire.<sup>10</sup> The tale continues in Numbers 26 where more details emerge. First, unlike the children of Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Korah did not die (Num. 26.11). Apparently, unlike the Reubenite boys (Num. 16.27), they did not stand by their father at the showdown.<sup>11</sup> Second, we read in Num. 26.10 that 'They became a sign (סִמָּן)'. Whether this refers only to the 250 devoured by fire or to all the cast of the rebellion, including the sons of Korah, is not clear.<sup>12</sup> But the phrase is significant. The Korah event is a sign pointing, presumably, to things to come.

The sons of Korah then were redeemed from Sheol. The Reubenites, their children and households, their own father's household, and perhaps their father too, fell alive into the underworld. But the sons of Korah, who might have expected the same fate, survived.<sup>13</sup> They bore this memory high on their heart, recalling it in their names. Korah's own sons were Elkanah ('Whom God Redeemed' or even 'Jealous God', Exod. 6.24; 1 Chron. 6.8-12 [23-27]; cf. 19-22 [34-37]);<sup>14</sup> Assir ('Captive', Exod.

hand, kindled her husband's rebellion by listing the exactions of the sons of Amram, and so brought destruction upon both herself and her husband. Therefore, being respectively wise and foolish, Prov. 14.1 is applied to them.

10. Num. 16.16-19, 35 suggest that Korah was burned with the 250 Levites, an interpretation finding support in Ps. 106.17 and the Samaritan Pentateuch which mention only Dathan and Abiram being swallowed up. However, Num. 26.10 seems to suggest that Korah too was swallowed by the earth. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.3.3-4 states that Korah was consumed by fire, while Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up. Rabbinic sources have Korah both burned and buried alive (*Sanh.* 110a; *Num. R.* 18.19; *Midr. Tanhuma*, Korah, 23; Rashi says that first his soul was burnt, but the body remained intact; then the body was swallowed up). Early Christian writers tend to have only Dathan and Abiram swallowed up (Clement, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 4.12, Ignatius, *Magn.* 3; *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.1).

11. One view is that they repented when they saw the sanctity of Moses and the perils of their rebellion (Rashi on Ps. 42.1; *Yalkut Shimoni* 752).

12. *Midrash Psalms* takes the latter position (46.8; 49.16).

13. Rabbinic literature is unanimous that the sons of Korah were saved, but differs as to how it happened. Perhaps most common is the view that when Sheol opened they were caught up in the air (*Sanh.* 92b; *Midr. Ps.* on 46.3; 49.16). Another view is that a place was set apart for them in Gehenna and there they sat or stood and sang praises (*Meg.* 14a; *Sanh.* 110a). Similarly Rashi says God provided a place within the earth, high above the flames of purgatory, where they composed these psalms.

14. *El qanah*, as spelt, means '[Whom] God Redeemed or Acquired'. But it was probably aurally indistinguishable from *El qana* and the ambiguity with such a central tradition as Exod. 20.5 could hardly have been accidental. Punning upon names (*midrash shem*) was a stock-in-trade of Hebrew literature from biblical times; see M. Garsiel,

6.24; 1 Chron. 8 [23], 22 [37]; cf. Ps. 88.9 [8]); and Aviasaph ('Father of Ingathering' or even paronomastically, 'He gathered in my father', Exod. 6.24; 1 Chron. 6.22 [37]).<sup>15</sup> And their descendants were Naḥath ('Gone Down', known also as Toaḥ: 'Low Down', 1 Chron. 6.11 [26], 19 [34]); Zuph ('Overwhelm', 1 Chron. 6.20 [35]);<sup>16</sup> Aḥimoth ('Brother of Death', known also as Maḥath: 'Taken Away', 1 Chron. 6.10 [25], 20 [35]); and Taḥath ('Underworld', 1 Chron. 6.9 [24], 22 [37]).

When Israel entered the Land, the Korahites, like all non-priestly Kohathites, settled among the northern Joseph tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.<sup>17</sup> In this they resembled their psalmist cousins, the Gershonite Asaphites, who also lived under Ephraimite dominance among Issachar, Asher, Naphthali and trans-Jordanian Manasseh.<sup>18</sup> Living among Ephraimites, the Korahites identified themselves with them. For instance, Elkanah the father of Samuel, though a Korahite, is called an Ephraimite (1 Sam. 1.1).<sup>19</sup> The Korahites' northern habitation appears in other references in their psalms. There is the hind running free of Ps. 42.2, the symbol of Naphthali in the game-rich Galilean Mountains and the foothills of the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Ranges (Gen. 49.21). There is the pilgrim way to Zion through the Valley of Baca, north-west of Lake Galilee, a route possible only for travellers from the north (Ps. 84.7 [6]). There is Mt Tabor, south-west of Lake Galilee, placed in the south, requiring a northern perspective (Ps. 89.13 [12]). There is Mt Hermon (Ps. 42.7 [6];

*Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1991); J.J. Glück, 'Paronomasia in Biblical Literature', *Semitica* 1 (1970), pp. 50-78.

15. 'Ingather' (*asaph*) is a frequent euphemism for death (2 Kgs 22.20; Isa. 57.1; Chron. 34.28).

16. Zuph frequently means 'honeycomb' (Ps. 19.11; Prov. 16.24) but the root meaning 'overflow' (Deut. 11.4; Ezek. 32.6; Lam. 3.54) is appropriate for an overflowing of divine wrath like waves, floods and billows (Pss. 42.8 [7]; 88.8 [7], 18 [17]).

17. They were, in fact, originally allotted land in Ephraim, Manasseh and Dan (Josh. 21.5, 20-26). But the restless Danites soon moved to the fringe of Israelite life (Judg. 18.27-31), and the Chronicler records Korahite settlement only among Ephraim and Manasseh (1 Chron. 6.46, 53-55 [61, 67-70]). Goulder, *Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, pp. 12-22, also notes the northern traits of the Korah psalms, which lead him to conclude that they originated from the cult of Tel-Dan.

18. Josh. 21.6; 1 Chron. 6.56-61 (71-76). See further Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 100-101.

19. Elkanah (1 Sam. 1.1) shares the genealogy of a Korahite of the same name over seven generations from Zuph to Joel ben Samuel (1 Chron. 6.18-20 [33-35]; cf. vv. 11-13 [26-28]; 1 Sam. 8.2). Elkanah then was a Korahite, as rabbinic tradition recognizes (*Meg.* 14a; *Num. R.* 18.8), but, living among Ephraim, he was called an Ephraimite. The same usage is seen among Levites elsewhere (cf. n. 5 above).

89.13 [12]). Elsewhere in the Psalms it represents the northern kingdom re-uniting with Judah, represented in merismus by Zion (Ps. 133.3);<sup>20</sup> or, as Sirion, it is the young wild ox of Joseph-Ephraim skipping across the heights of the north (Ps. 29.6; Deut. 33.17). Finally, the language about goring enemies in Korah Ps. 44.6, with the verb קָנַן, derives from Ephraimite military ideology which made much of the Josephite ox of Deut. 33.17 goring the nations.<sup>21</sup>

After the settlement of the land, the familiar Korahite themes surface again in Hannah and Samuel. Hannah was a Korahite, perhaps by birth, certainly by marriage to Korahite Elkanah. Most of all she is a Korahite in spirit. For, in the prayer recording her first spoken words, she becomes the first person in the Bible to utter that most Korahite name, YHWH Tsevaot (1 Sam. 1.11). Like her Korahite forebears, she speaks of redemption from Sheol: 'The Lord kills and makes live; he brings down to Sheol and raises up' (1 Sam. 2.6). Indeed her words were fulfilled in her son, who was the first dead person in the Bible to come up, albeit temporarily, from Sheol (1 Sam. 25.1; 28.13-19).

#### 4. Redeemed from Sheol

Redemption from Sheol is, then, a dominant theme of Korahite tradition. But what might such an idea have meant to its writers? Clearly there is a range of possibilities. At one extreme it could be simply figurative language for rescue from the threat of death, as in some Psalms (18.6 [5]; 116.3). At the other extreme it could indicate resurrection of the dead. Somewhere in between we might allow for a limited resurrection, either in duration—like Samuel—or limited only to a few individuals.

Our view on such issues should surely be influenced by what we know of Israel's cultural milieu. Some form of resurrection belief was widespread in the Near East from early times. In Old Kingdom Egypt Pharaoh was to rise to happy immortality in the Elysian 'field of rushes'.<sup>22</sup> Nearer

20. Cf. Mitchell, *Message*, p. 124.

21. See particularly 1 Kgs 22.11; 2 Chron. 18.10 where Zedekiah's iron horns, his use of קָנַן, and his talk of the destruction of the nations, all allude to Deut. 33.17. (Elsewhere in the Bible קָנַן is rare, appearing only in legal [Exod. 21.28-32] and post-exilic prophetic texts [Ezek. 34.21; Dan. 8.4; 11.40]). See too the boast of the Ephraimite military about their re-conquest of the Transjordanian city of Karnaim: 'Have we not by our might taken to ourselves horns?' (Amos 6.13; cf. 2 Kgs 14.25).

22. See J. Assmann, 'Resurrection in Ancient Egypt', in T. Peters *et al.* (eds.), *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002),



Israel, resurrection was familiar among the Canaanites in the second millennium BCE. At the Ugaritic New Year Festival, Baal and his retinue of *rpʾum*—deified royal ancestors—appeared from the underworld on chariots as the stars of heaven and the ‘warriors of Baal and Anat’.<sup>23</sup> They were known also as the cohorts of ‘Resheph of the host’ (*ršp šbʾi*), since Resheph, the god of plague, war and fire, was associated with their revivification.<sup>24</sup>

Israel of course was only too aware of Canaanite belief. Yet while the prophets of YHWH rejected many practices of Baal worship, it is not clear that they rejected the idea of resurrection.<sup>25</sup> Spronk suggests, in fact, that Canaanite ideas about the afterlife are deliberately adduced in some northern Israelite texts. Hosea 6.2-3, with its resurrection after three days, parallels Baal’s three-day journey from the underworld to his upperworld palace.<sup>26</sup> Elijah and Elisha with their fiery chariots evoke Baal’s chariot-riding *rpʾum*.<sup>27</sup> Only they, in the book of Kings, use the name ‘YHWH of hosts’, recalling the starry host of Resheph and Baal. Does this shed light on the Korahite propensity for ‘YHWH of hosts’? If the name denotes YHWH as the one who raises the *rpʾim* from Sheol like stars in his train—

pp. 124-35. In the Old Kingdom, afterlife was the prerogative of royalty, as in the following spell from a funerary text of the late fifth or early sixth dynasty (first half of third millennium BCE): ‘Nu has commended the King to Atum, the Open-Armed has commended the King to Shu, that he may cause yonder doors of the sky to be opened for the King, barring (ordinary) folk who have no name’ (R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Pyramid Texts* [Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1969], p. 117). But later the lower classes increasingly expected a part in the afterlife, as is evident throughout the *Book of the Dead* (R.O. Faulkner, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* [San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994], *passim*).

23. K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), pp. 196, 205, 235, 261; *KTU* 1.43.2-3; 1.19.IV.24-25; 1.22.I.8-9.

24. *KTU* 1.91.15. For a description of the god Resheph and his traits, see J.H. Choi, ‘Resheph and Yhwh *Sebaʾot*’, *VT* 54 (2004), pp. 17-28.

25. They did reject idolatry (Hos. 4.17; 8.4-6; 11.2; 13.1-2; Amos 4.4; Mic. 1.7), human sacrifice (Jer. 32.35; Hos. 13.2), cult prostitution (Hos. 4.10-18; 5.4; 6.10; Amos 2.7-8; Mic. 1.7), and the *marzeah* bacchanal (Jer. 16.5; Amos 6.7).

26. The lines of *KTU* 1.21.7 ‘are very interesting, because they indicate that Baal’s journey from the netherworld to the place of the festival, i.e., the journey from death to life, takes three days. The same is said in *KTU* 1.20.II.5-7 of the journey of the *rpʾum*, which is in line with the fact that they were believed to follow Baal (cf. *KTU* 1.17.VI.28.29). This period of three days occurs within the same framework of the hope for revivification in Hos. 6.2. It is very likely that *KTU* 1.21 helps us to understand the Canaanite background of this Old Testament text’ (Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, p. 170).

27. 2 Kgs 2.12; 6.17; 13.14; *KTU* 1.20.II.2-4. See Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 260-61.

as later in Zech. 14.5 and Dan. 12.2-3—their sympathy for the term becomes clear.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed one might think that Elijah and Elisha look rather like Korahites themselves, with their 'YHWH of hosts' and raising of the dead (1 Kgs 17.17-23; 2 Kgs 4.20-37; 13.21). But both are tantalizingly scant of genealogy. Elijah we know only as a Tishbite from Tishbe (1 Kgs 17.1) though rabbinic tradition speaks of his priestly descent.<sup>29</sup> Elisha is only ben Shaphat, son of a landowner from Abel Meholah (1 Kgs 19.16).

Is the trail cold? Perhaps not. We turn to the story of the small boys of Bethel who jeered Elisha (2 Kgs 2.23-24). It is a strange tale. One always feels like one is missing the point. Is it only to tell us that Elisha had a bald patch? Or is it to show, as some say, that Israel's prophets were tonsured? But that idea is uncorroborated elsewhere and seems hardly relevant here. Perhaps something has been overlooked.

Korah basically means 'bald'. The small boys' taunt of 'Baldhead' is כְּרֵהָ—pronounced Kereah or perhaps even Koreah (כֹּרֵהָ, Jer. 40.8)—while 'Korah' is כֹּרֵהָ. Both words are identical in derivation—from כָּרַח, 'to make bald' or 'bare'—identical in unpointed script, and similar in sound. Derisory puns on names are as old as the confusion of tongues,<sup>30</sup> and one would imagine that Koreah–Kereah would have been an obvious and familiar insult for Korahites, popular with urchins.<sup>31</sup>

28. For the 'holy ones' of Zech 14.5 as the risen dead, see Mitchell, *Message*, p. 265. See too *Ruth R.* Proem §2; *Eccl. R.* 1.11.1; *Song R.* 4.11.1. Zechariah is another worthy proponent of the *Tsevaot* title.

29. At, e.g., Targum *Pseudo-Jonathan* on Exod. 6.18 (cf. *Yalkut* 1.245b, last two lines, col. c.), 40.10 and Deut. 30.4 (cf. also Exod. 4.13); *Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah* 18 (pp. 97-98); *Pirkei Hekhalot Rabbati* 40.2 (S.A. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot* [2 vols.; Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 1952-55; repr., Jerusalem: Ktav ve-Sepher, 1968], I, p. 134). The idea is also found in patristic literature (Epiphanius, *Haeres* 55.3). His priestly descent is also implied in the common idea that he is identical with Phinehas ben Aaron (e.g. Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 48.1-2; *PRE* §29.6, §47.3; Targum *Yerushalmi* on Num. 25.12; Origen, *Patrologia Graeca* (Migne's edn), XIV, p. 225; cf. G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927-30], II, p. 358 n). In *Sefer Zerubbabel* he is called 'Elijah ben Eleazar' (cited in Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 317, 341). However, other opinions regard him as a Benjamite (*Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah* 18; cf. 1 Chron. 8.27) or a Gadite (*Gen. R.* 71), or from Tishbe in Naphtali (Tob. 1.2; cf. Kimhi on 1 Kgs 17.1).

30. Gen. 11.9's 'translation' of Babel is derisory. The Aramaic rendering means 'Gate of God.'

31. James Joyce tells how Protestant boys of Dublin used to shout after Catholics (Cat'lics), 'Lick the cat!' Of course a bald head is an ever-popular subject for puns, as in German 'Fliegehaufen'.

So let us imagine for a moment that Elisha was a Korahite, and known as such by reputation or appearance. He comes to Bethel, the metropolis of Jeroboam's bull-cult (Amos 7.13). As an orthodox prophet of YHWH he would have been a strange bird there, an immediate figure of fun to the spawn of the city. So they begin their catcalls: "Go up [to worship at our shrine], *Ḳereah!*"<sup>32</sup> It must have been a great joke—even better if Elisha had a receding hairline—like shouting "Bald one!" after a bald man called Baldwin, but with an added *frisson* of religious and tribal derision.

Therefore, if *Ḳereah* was a jibe against Korahite Elisha, everything clicks into place. The elusive point of the story appears. It is another showdown between the prophets of YHWH and idolatrous Israel. Elisha's harsh reaction is explained, for they were not laughing at his shiny pate, but at the second commandment and his tribal loyalty to it. The hypothesis is confirmed by there being 42 boys mauled by the bears. For, in the Psalms at least, 42 is the Korahite number. The first Korah psalm is Psalm 42, introducing the first Korah group and the Elohist Psalter; and then, 42 psalms later, Psalm 84 introduces the second Korah group and the second YHWH collection. There even appears to have been a Hebrew tradition associating this very passage with the Korah Psalms.<sup>33</sup> So it rather looks like the writer of 2 Kgs 2.23-24 is telling us, in his cryptic way, that the innominate ben Shaphat is a Korahite incognito.

Therefore let us suppose, for now at least, that resurrection was not an unfamiliar idea in the kingdom of Ephraim, especially in Korahite circles, and proceed on that basis back to the Ephraimite Psalms of Korah.<sup>34</sup>

## 5. Redemption from Sheol in the Psalms of Korah

The theme of redemption from Sheol, so prominent in Korahite tradition, appears in the Korah psalms. Psalm 49, the last psalm of the first Korah group, is a manifesto of the Sheol theme. It refers to Sheol three times whereas no other psalm mentions it more than once. It contrasts the destiny of the faithful psalmist with the self-contented wealthy, such as Korah (vv. 6-7 [5-6]). Their wealth is worthless for no-one can ransom a life; all die and go down to the Pit and leave their wealth behind (vv. 8-11

32. *עלה* was a standard expression for going up to a shrine to worship and make sacrifice (cf., e.g., 1 Kgs 12.33 [Bethel]; Lev. 14.20; 2 Kgs 20.5, 8; Isa. 60.7).

33. See Jerome's commentary on Ps. 81, cited at the end of this study, which is almost certainly of Hebrew origin.

34. Other writers note resurrection belief in biblical texts. See particularly J.F.A. Sawyer, 'Hebrew Words for the Resurrection of the Dead', *VT* 23 (1973), pp. 218-34.

[7-10]). As for the wicked: 'Like sheep dragged to Sheol, death shall graze on them; the upright shall rule them in the morning; their form shall decay in Sheol, far from their mansion' (v. 15 [14]). The psalmist, however, fully expects God to bring him back up—in some sense—from Sheol: 'But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; he will surely take me' (v. 16 [15]). The verb (יִקְחֵנִי) recalls Enoch who 'was not for God took (לִקַּח) him' (Gen. 5.24) and Elijah, whom the Lord *took* (לִקַּח) into heaven (2 Kgs 3.3-10). The plain understanding is that the psalmist expects God to take him up out of Sheol. Could this be simply a metaphor for deliverance in time of peril, as Rashi suggests? Perhaps. But the psalm does not altogether read that way. Although the psalmist is beset by the 'iniquity of tricksters' (v. 6 [5]), there is no mention of impending military threat or mortal sickness, as in other such psalms (18.6 [5]; 86.13; 116.3). Rather, the psalm is a meditation on Sheol, where all inevitably go and cannot be redeemed even by wealth or wisdom. In the context, 'He will take me' (v. 16 [15]) seems to refer to being taken from Sheol.

Psalm 88, being the last Korah psalm of the second group, is parallel to Psalm 49. The psalmist cries like one falling into Sheol: 'My soul has come to Sheol' (v. 4 [3]);<sup>35</sup> 'I am reckoned with those that descend to the Pit...like a helpless champion' (v. 5 [4]); 'adrift among the dead, like the pierced-through who lie in the grave' (v. 6 [5]); 'You have laid me in the Pit below, in darkness, in the depths' (v. 7 [6]). He is crushed beneath YHWH's wrath; overwhelmed and drowning in deep water (v. 8 [7], 17-18 [16-17]). He is separated from his companions, has become an abomination, is imprisoned with no escape (v. 9 [8], 19 [18]). He is among the dead, with the shades (*rp'im*), in the grave, in Abaddon, in darkness, in the land of oblivion (vv. 11-13 [10-12]). His only consolation is to call on YHWH, the author of his horrors, in hope that he will redeem him (vv. 14-19 [13-18]). And so, if YHWH can save even out of Sheol, the question of v. 11 [10]—'Shall the shades arise and praise you?'<sup>36</sup>—which might initially seem to demand a 'no', ultimately hints at a 'yes'.<sup>37</sup>

35. Hebrew קָרַב, regularly rendered 'approach' or 'draw near', usually means to approach to the point of contact or entry (Gen. 47.29; Isa. 8.3; Ezek. 36.8); it can even mean to *approach to oneself* (Isa. 65.5), that is, to keep entirely to oneself.

36. Sawyer suggests that קָרַב signifies resurrection here, as well as in Isa. 26.14, 19; Hos. 6.2; Pss. 1.5; Job 14.12 ('Hebrew Words', pp. 230-34).

37. Goulder, *Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, p. 203, also emphasizes the hope in the psalm: YHWH is 'the God of my salvation' (v. 2 [1]), a God of loyalty, faithfulness,

Sheol language occurs also in the two satellite psalms: 'You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol' (Ps. 86.13); and the question, 'What man shall live and not see death, but shall deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?' (Ps. 89.49 [48]). Similarly, Psalm 44 speaks of deadly horrors: 'you have crushed us in the abode of monsters and covered us with the shadow of death...our soul is bowed down to the dust, our belly cleaves to the earth' (vv. 20, 26 [19, 25]). Psalm 42 anticipates Psalm 88's overwhelming waters: 'All your waves and breakers have gone over me' (42.8 [7]).

A few statistics confirm the Korah Psalms' obsession with the underworld. Although the collection, including Psalms 86 and 89, is less than 10 per cent of the Psalter, it contains more than a third of Psalms references to Sheol.<sup>38</sup> It has two-thirds of Psalms references to the grave and over a quarter of the references to the dungeon-pit.<sup>39</sup> It has the only two references to the psalmist being overwhelmed by YHWH's waves (משבר יד).<sup>40</sup> It has the only Psalms occurrence of the 'shades' (*rp'im*, Ps. 88.11 [10]), the 'depths' (מצלות, 88.7 [6]) and 'Abaddon' (88.12 [11]), and the only biblical occurrence of 'land of oblivion' (88.13 [12]).

Finally we note that Sheol language is not distributed evenly throughout the collection. Rather it is concentrated in the closural psalms of each Korah group (Pss. 49 and 88) and in the quasi-Korah Psalms 86 and 89 at the end of the collection. This closural positioning gives particular force to these psalms and their imagery. Each Korah group proceeds toward Sheol, and the collection closes with accumulated Sheol imagery. There is also some lesser Sheol-imagery at the beginning of the collection, in Psalms 42 to 44.

wonders and righteousness (vv. 12-13 [11-12]), who will hear the psalmist's prayer in the morning (v. 14 [13]). He thinks the psalm reflects the ritual humiliation and entombment of the Dan priest as the community's sin-bearer (p. 206), who was then raised back to 'life' (pp. 206-208). He suggests a link between these events and the Joseph narrative, and cites linguistic parallels with Ps. 22, Lam. 3, and Isa. 52.13-53.12 (pp. 205-10).

38. That is, 6 references out of 16, or 37.5 per cent. These are Korah Pss. 49.15 (14) (twice), 16 (15); 86.13; 88.4 (3); 89.49 (48). The other references are Pss. 6.6 (5); 9.18 (17); 16.10; 18.6 (5); 30.4 (3); 31.18 (17); 55.16 (15); 116.3; 139.8; 141.7.

39. Two out of three references to קבר ('grave'): Korah Pss. 88.6 (5), 12 (11) and Ps. 5.10 (9). Two out of seven references to בור ('dungeon-pit'): Korah Pss. 88.5 (4), 7 (6) and Pss. 7.16 (15); 28.1; 30.4 (3); 40.3 (2); 143.7.

40. Korah Pss. 42.8 (7); 88.8 (7).

## 6. When the Earth Moves

Apart from references to Sheol, the Korah psalms recall the ancestral experience with the bowels of the earth in other ways, particularly in Psalms 46 and 48. The two psalms are very much a pair. Standing astride Psalm 47's subject kings, they celebrate the deliverance which crushed these foreign foes. In Psalm 46 the enemies are thrown into confusion and fall, their weapons shattered and burned amid desolations (vv. 7-10 [6-9]). In Psalm 48 the alliance of invading (עֲבָרוּ, v. 5 [4]) kings see and flee, and are destroyed and shattered (vv. 5-8 [4-7]). In Psalm 46 the deliverance seems to be by an earthquake, for the earth is convulsed and swallows even the hills. It melts, or becomes fluid (תִּמְאָה, v. 7 [6]), the same verb as at Amos 9.5, where the earth rises and sinks like the Nile (Amos 8.8), as in the huge quake of Uzziah's reign in c. 800 BCE (Amos 1.1). Likewise Psalm 48 tells how the invaders are seized upon by 'trembling', that is, by analogy with Psalm 46, the trembling of the earth (48.7 [6]).<sup>41</sup> Amid this cataclysm Jerusalem stands unshaken (46.5-6 [4-5]; 48.4, 9 [3, 8]), which makes known the name of God to the ends of the earth (46.11 [10]; 48.11 [10]).

Israel was of course familiar with earthquakes, seeing them as acts of divine judgment. Earthquake imagery is associated with the Exodus and other deliverances (Pss. 75.4 [3]; 77.19-20 [18-19]; 114.3-7; Judg. 5.4). The quake of Uzziah's day was so great that it was recalled centuries later by Zechariah (Amos 1.1; 9.1; Zech. 14.5). Josephus tells of a quake in 31 BCE which claimed 10,000 lives (*Ant.* 15.5.2). More recently, powerful quakes in 1837 and 1927 resulted in much loss of life. Such quakes frequently devastated cities throughout the region, including Samaria; but Jerusalem, on its rocky foundation, always escaped damage.<sup>42</sup>

The prophets drew on these events to foretell a great quake for Israel's deliverance on the day of YHWH.<sup>43</sup> Amos's quake (8.8; 9.1) is the prelude to the restoration of the house of David, the fruitfulness of earth and the gathering of Israel (9.11-15). Joel's roar of YHWH, which shakes heaven and earth (4.16 [3.16]), results in destruction of a foreign invasion and in Israel's salvation, gathering, fruitfulness and forgiveness (4.14-21

41. Note likewise Ezek. 38.19-20 where the inhabitants of earth tremble at YHWH's earthquake.

42. E. Ariele, 'Earthquake', in *EncJud*, VI, pp. 340-42. For the destruction of Samaria by earthquake see Isa. 17.3 and perhaps 26.5.

43. For the day of YHWH in the passages cited, see Isa. 24.21; Ezek. 38.10, 14, 18; 39.8, 13, 22; Joel 2.1; Zech. 14.1.

[3.14-21]). Isaiah 24–27, whose author may have witnessed the quake of Uzziah's time (Isa. 1.1), foresees a future opening of the earth, where kings and peoples will be forcefully 'gathered' into pits (פִּחִת, 24.17-18; בּוֹר, 24.22) before the resurrection of the dead (26.19-21);<sup>44</sup> then Israel will gather in Jerusalem, the strong city not shaken, to worship YHWH (26.1-5; 27.12-13). Ezekiel, after his matchless vision of resurrection, tells how Gog's invasion will be shattered by earthquake, plague, blood, rain, hail, fire and sulphur, gushing presumably from the split earth; then his horde will be buried in the Valley of Hamon Gog and YHWH will be glorified among Israel and the nations (Ezek. 37.12-13; 38.19-20; 39.11, 21-29). Zechariah tells of the destruction of an invading alliance by an earthquake like that of Uzziah's time, which shall split the Mount of Olives, and by plague (14.4-5, 12); thereafter all nations shall worship YHWH.<sup>45</sup> Similar scenarios occur in post-biblical works. In *1 En.* 56.5-8 Sheol opens its jaws to devour the invading kings. In *Sib. Or.* 3.663-720 the shaken earth and opened abyss put paid to the kings, while the great God protects Jerusalem like a wall of fire; thereafter the nations send to the temple to learn the law of God.

It is just such an event that Psalms 46–48 seems to anticipate. As in Korah's rebellion of old, the fluid earth will convulse and reveal the gaping underworld of Sheol; rebels will fall alive into the depths but the righteous will be redeemed (46.3, 7 [2, 6]).<sup>46</sup> Then the survivors will worship YHWH at the Jerusalem throne (Ps. 47). Because of this deliverance God will be praised to the ends of the earth (Ps. 48.11 [10]).

But just how do the Korah psalms envisage this redemption? Here we turn to the puzzling conclusion of Psalm 48 (v. 15 [14]). The text is tricky. Translators often side with LXX's εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, probably derived from reading MT's על-מִוֶּת as על-מִוֶּת. That gives 'He will be our guide for ever' (RSV; cf. CEV). But על-מִוֶּת is to be preferred, if only as the

44. Sawyer calls this 'a reference to the resurrection of the dead which no-one but a Sadducee, ancient or modern, could possibly misconstrue' ('Hebrew Words', p. 234).

45. Post-biblical tradition regards the resurrection of the dead as taking place at the splitting of the Mount at YHWH's coming; see the Codex Reuchlinianus text of *Targ. Zech.* 14.4; *Targ. Song* 8.5; Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 148-49, 213.

46. Craigie, *Psalms*, p. 343, speaks of Ps. 46's affinities with the Exodus Song of the Sea in (1) YHWH's strength and protection (Exod. 15.2; Ps. 46.2, 8, 12 [1, 7, 11]); (2) YHWH's subjugation of the chaos waters (Exod. 15.4-10; Ps. 46.3-4 [2-3]); (3) YHWH's securing of a dwelling by his victory (Exod. 15.17; Ps. 46.5 [4]). Certainly the conceptual parallel of being saved through fluid chaos is clear enough, but the linguistic parallels are weak and should not be overstated.



*lectio difficilior*. Yet translators who follow it produce such renderings as 'He will be our guide even to death'.<sup>47</sup> These stretch the semantic field of על beyond limits, and make an oddly personal closure for a national psalm, unless the psalmist is thinking of the death of the Israelite nation, which is unlikely.<sup>48</sup> But there is a simple solution. That is to render it, as does the Midrash, 'He will lead us above Death'; that is, he will carry us over Sheol.<sup>49</sup> The על preposition sits nicely; the jarring reference to individual death is replaced by all faithful Israel redeemed from Sheol. In light of Korahite tradition and the convulsed earth of Psalms 46 and 48, such an interpretation seems not unlikely.

This reading is confirmed by the contiguity of Ps. 49.16 (15). Psalms 48 and 49 therefore mutually confirm the 'plucking-up' theme. The context of nationalistic Psalm 48 allows the individual voice of Psalm 49 to be heard as the corporate voice of Israel, while Psalm 49's redemption of the faithful from Sheol, and destruction of the faithless in it, make an apt closure to the entire first Korah group. The two psalms respond as a pair to the convulsion of the earth in Psalm 46. How will the righteous be redeemed when the earth is convulsed and Sheol opens its mouth? Both those on earth (48.15 [14]) and in Sheol (49.16 [15])—like the sons of Korah and Samuel—will be caught up into the air by God and carried over the gaping Death-Pit.

## 7. The Righteous Caught Up

Perhaps some who suspended their disbelief regarding resurrection in monarchy-period texts will recoil at the suggestion that the same texts feature a 'catching-up' in the air. However, the ideas of 'catching-up' and resurrection are not different in essence. The issue is just how far the resurrected actually rise. For if the dead rise above the earth, like Baal's *rp'um*, then the living might presumably rise with them, like Elijah.

Certainly the prevalence of the idea among later writers suggests they thought its roots were biblical. It appears in *Sib. Or.* 2.165-66: 'The

47. NIV; cf. also, e.g., AV, Segond (French); Koren Jerusalem Bible.

48. Others wonder if the phrase may belong to the heading of Ps. 49, like Ps. 9's על־מוֹת לְבָן (A. Cohen, *Psalms* [Hindhead, Surrey: Soncino, 1945], p. 151; Craigie, *Psalms*, p. 352). But this is unlikely. For then על־מוֹת would precede לְמַנְצָה ('For the leader') of Ps. 49, whereas the על־rubrics invariably follow לְמַנְצָה where it exists.

49. *Midr. Ps.* on 48.15 (14). However the variety of opinions on the verse is found also in Jewish interpretation. The Targum and Rashi, for instance, render it as על־מוֹת ('youth, childhood'); that is, he will lead us as a father leads his little child.



catching up (συνάίρεσις) is near when some deceivers, in place of prophets, approach, speaking on earth'. It occurs in *Wisd. Sol.* 3.1-9 where the revisitation of the righteous from heaven to rule the nations implies their earlier removal from earth or underworld. Likewise 4 Ezra 6.26: 'The men who have been taken up, who have not tasted death from their birth, shall appear. Then shall the heart of the inhabitants [of the world] be changed and be converted to a different spirit'. It is found also in the New Testament where the dead and living faithful are caught up to meet the Messiah in the air (1 Thess. 4.16-17), where he gathers his elect from the *four winds* (Mt. 24.31), and where the two resurrected witnesses are caught up to heaven in a cloud (Rev. 11.12).

Nor can the idea be dismissed as a Christian interpolation into the Greek pseudepigrapha. For if it were, it would hardly have found its way into the Talmud, where it appears in *Sanh.* 92b with a proof-text, appropriately enough, from the Korah psalms.

And should you ask, in those years during which the Almighty will renew his world...what will the righteous do?—The Lord will make them wings like eagles', and they will fly above the water, as it is written, *Therefore we will not fear, when the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the heart of the sea* (Ps. 46.3).

The idea appears in the Midrash on Psalm 46 with the same proof-text:

*The Lord of hosts is with us* (Ps. 46.8). The sons of Korah said to the righteous: 'Fear not! We saw all the miracles which he wrought for us', as it is said, *And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households* (Num. 16.32). 'And where were we in that hour?—Aloft in space!' as it is said, *The sons of Korah did not die* (Num. 26.11)... The Holy One, blessed be he, made it possible for the sons of Korah to stand like a mast: They stood as a sign, for it is said, *When the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men, they became a sign* (Num. 26.10). Thus the sons of Korah said: 'You righteous, fear not the terror of the day of judgment, for you shall not be taken with the wicked, even as we were not taken with them'. Therefore it is said, *Therefore we will not fear, when the earth be removed* (Ps. 46.3).<sup>50</sup>

It appears also in the midrash on Ps. 48.4:

R. Nahman said: *The thing that has been is that which shall be* (Eccl. 1.9). Even as the Holy One, blessed be he, lifted up the children of Israel in clouds of glory, and wrapped them around and bore them up, as it is said, *And I bore you on eagles' wings* (Exod. 19.4), so will he do again, and it will be said, *Who are these that fly as a cloud* (Isa. 60.8).<sup>51</sup>

50. *Midr. Ps.* 46.3 on 46.8.

51. *Midr. Ps.* 48.4.

And finally, there is the midrash *Nistarot Rav Shimon ben Yoḥai*, dating from the late first millennium:<sup>52</sup>

The Holy One whistles, gathers all Israel, and takes them up, after which fire comes down from heaven and consumes Jerusalem to a depth of three cubits, removing uncircumcised foreigners and the impure from the midst of her. Then Jerusalem descends, built-up and shining, from the heavens.

These many versions of this remarkable idea surely derive from an authoritative common source. While New Testament and rabbinic writers might just have got it from the pseudepigrapha, its many forms even there suggest that the pseudepigraphists themselves looked to an earlier source, presumably the Bible. I would suggest that the primary sources for the idea are Korah Psalms 48 and 49. For, while a 'catching-up' occurs in the Enoch and Elijah narratives, these concern only individuals. But Psalms 48 and 49, functioning together, seem to depict a mass redemption on the day of YHWH.

## 8. The Korah Psalms and the Message of the Psalter

Within the context of the Psalter's eschatological programme, the Korah collection's Sheol theme works in different ways.<sup>53</sup> Low-key Sheol imagery first appears in Psalms 42 to 44, where it represents Israel's exile, from which they long and pray to be redeemed. Psalm 45 represents the coming of a bridegroom-king, the *mashiah* (v. 8 [7]).<sup>54</sup> With the opening of Psalm 46 we begin to hear the distinctive rumble of Korahite Sheol-imagery. It tells of a cataclysmic day when, as in the desert of old, the earth will convulse and open up, revealing the underworld. But the faithful will not fear; YHWH of hosts, raiser of the *rp'im*, is with them. They will be delivered, while the rebellious nations who advance against Jerusalem will fall alive into Sheol. In Psalm 47, after delivering Jerusalem amid cataclysms, the king receives the homage of the nations at his Jerusalem throne. Psalm 48 then returns to the Jerusalem deliverance; God will redeem his people and carry them over Death-Sheol. Finally, to close the first Korah group, Sheol language appears full-on in Psalm 49,

52. The text is in A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (6 vols. in 2; Leipzig: Vollrath, 1853–77; Photog. repr., Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967), III, pp. 78–82; Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 329–34 (Eng.); pp. 347–50 (Heb.).

53. For the eschatological reading of the Psalter, see Mitchell, *Message*, esp. pp. 82–87.

54. For the messianic interpretation of Ps. 45, see Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 245–50.

where the psalmist speaks for faithful Israel who will be redeemed from Sheol on that day.

The second Korah group opens with Israel dwelling in the Land (Pss. 84–85). Sheol language appears in the interpolated David Psalm 86, but this time the one needing redeemed is David, that is, the *mashiah* himself. Surrounded by tyrants and in desperate need, he looks to the day when all nations will worship God (v. 9) and states his conviction—in the proleptic perfect of v. 13—that God will redeem him from Sheol. Psalm 87 then presents a vision of the thing foretold, all the peoples of the earth in festive worship in Zion.<sup>55</sup> Then comes the shocking reversal of Psalm 88. The Messiah has fallen pierced-through into Sheol and is confined there, howling amid its horrors.<sup>56</sup> In Psalm 89, those who lament his death ask if YHWH has broken his covenant with David and forsaken his Messiah (vv. 36–46 [35–45]).<sup>57</sup> Can a man (*geber*) be redeemed from Sheol (v. 49 [48])? The unanswered question finds a reply in Ps. 49.16 (15), at the close of the first Korah group: God will redeem the righteous from Sheol

55. Note how the same theme appears in the context of the suffering of the king at Ps. 22.27–30 (26–29), where the worshippers include ‘all they that go down to the dust and he that cannot preserve his own life’ (v. 30); that is, metaphorically at least, former inhabitants of Sheol.

56. That the sufferer of Ps. 88 is pierced through seems implied by the heading *מחלת לענות* (v. 1), by the *חללים* of v. 6 (5) and by Ps. 89’s ‘you have pierced (*חללת*) his glory to the ground’ (89.40 [39]). (I share with Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, p. 202, the view that *מחלת* can derive from *חלל* as easily as from *חלה*.) In this he resembles Josiah and Messiah ben Joseph (Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 254–56), the latter frequently being associated with the pierced one of Zech. 12.10 (*Suk.* 52a; *Targ. Tos.* to Zech. 12.10; *Targ.* to Zech. 12.11; *Asereth Melakhim* 4.14 [Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 321, 343]; *Midrash Wayyosha* 18.15 [Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (1853–77), I, p. 56]; *Nistarot Rav Shimon ben Yohai* 25 [Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 331, 348]; Saadia Gaon, *Kitab al amanat* VIII.5 [trans. S. Rosenblatt, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 303]; Rashi on *Suk.* 52a; Ibn Ezra on Zech. 12.10–11; Kimḥi on Zech. 12.10; Abravanel on Zech. 12.10; Alshekh, *Marot ha-Zove’ot* on Zech. 12.10; *Aggadat Mashiah* on Zech. 12.12 [Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 306, 335]) who is mourned with mourning like that for Josiah slain at Megiddo (2 Kgs 23.29–30; 2 Chron. 35.24–25; 1 Esd. 1.32). For more on Messiah ben Joseph traditions and their dating, see my articles ‘Rabbi Dosa and the Rabbis Differ: Messiah ben Joseph in the Babylonian Talmud’, *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 8 (2005), pp. 77–90; ‘The Fourth Deliverer: A Josephite Messiah in 4QTestimonia’, *Bib* 86.4 (2005), pp. 545–53. I have cited some Messiah ben Joseph traditions from *Midrash Tehillim* in ‘Les psaumes dans le Judaïsme rabbinique’, *RTL* 36.2 (2005), pp. 166–91.

57. For a fuller discussion of the interpretation of Ps. 89, see Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 253–58.

and take them up. It finds a reply too in Ps. 86.13: God will redeem his king from Sheol. And so the Korah collection as a whole holds forth a promise of resurrection before the crisis of the whole book of Psalms in Psalm 89.<sup>58</sup> This promise is later fulfilled in the Messiah's resurrection (Ps. 92) and his appearance from heaven (Ps. 110).<sup>59</sup>

### a. Conclusion

I have suggested that Korahite tradition and the Korah psalms feature the theme of redemption from Sheol. The Korah psalms apply this to all the faithful, but particularly to the quandary of the Messiah's death in Psalm 89. They also feature the related theme of the faithful being caught up in the air when the earth is convulsed. An appreciation of these themes may help in decoding the message of the Psalms.

In his commentary on Vulgate Psalm 80 (MT Ps. 81), Jerome remarks on the David, Asaph and Korah psalm-headings as follows:

The eighth [psalm] is [of] David, which is interpreted 'strong of hand'. First of course our victory involves battle and struggle: therefore it is said 'strong of hand David'. Second this present [psalm] is the eightieth, [of] Asaph. Now Asaph is interpreted *synagogue*. In the eighth therefore we conquer, and in the eightieth we are gathered with the Lord. Now the eighty-third [psalm is] of the sons of Korah. Korah is interpreted Calvary [bald place]: 'Go up, baldhead; go up baldhead' [2 Kgs 2.23]. Yes, this is what the boys said to Elisha, seeing as he suffered in the place of Calvary.<sup>60</sup>

Jerome lived thirty-five years in Bethlehem (386–420 CE), knew Hebrew, and studied under Jewish teachers. His teaching here, as elsewhere, can

58. That Ps. 89 is the 'covenant crisis' of the Psalter is noted by Wilson, *Editing*, pp. 213–15. See likewise G.T. Sheppard, 'Theology and the Book of Psalms', *Int* 46 (1992), pp. 143–55; J.C. McCann, 'Books I–III and the Editorial Purpose of the Hebrew Psalter', in *idem* (ed.), *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTSup, 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press), pp. 93–107.

59. For the above interpretation of these psalms, see Mitchell, *Message*, pp. 253–67, 281–84.

60. Octauus est Dauid, qui interpretatur fortis manu. Prima enim nostra uictoria pugnam habet atque luctam: propterea dicitur fortis manu Dauid. Secunda uero, hoc est in octogesimo, Asaph. Asaph autem interpretatur synagoga. In octauo ergo uincimus, et in octogesimo cum Domino congregamur. In octogesimo uero tertio, filiorum Chore. Chore interpretatur Caluaria. 'Ascende calue, ascende calue'. Hoc dicebant etiam pueri Helisaeo, quoniam passus fuerat in loco caluariae (*Tractatus de Psalmo LXXX,1* [CCSL LXXVIII.78]).

be explained only as a Hebrew tradition.<sup>61</sup> For the interpretation of David as *fortis manu* is from יד ('hand')—figuratively understood as the organ of action and control—derived from יידי by *gematria*.<sup>62</sup> The interpretation of Asaph as *synagoga* and 'gathered to the Lord' is from the Greek counterpart (συνάγω) of the Hebrew verb אסף ('gather'). (In this homily to a Palestinian congregation he leaves the familiar Greek word; elsewhere he renders it as Latin *congregans*.<sup>63</sup>) Finally his interpretation of the Korah-heading is based on the pun on Korah and bald, which he ties by a neat Latin pun to *calvarius* ('bald place').

Therefore Jerome seems to see in the Korah psalms the very themes I have suggested: that is, Elisha of the fiery chariots of *rp'um* and the raising of the dead from Sheol (2 Kgs 4.20-37; 13.21). And he associates these themes with the death of history's most celebrated messianic claimant. One is tempted to ask whether he perhaps possessed an old Hebrew teaching that the Korah psalms describe the Messiah's descent into Sheol and redemption from it.

61. Throughout *De Nominibus Hebraicis* Jerome gives the meaning of Hebrew names, often with midrashic derivations (PL XXIII.771-859).

62. That is, יד and יידי each have a numerical value of 14.

63. *De Nominibus Hebraicis* on Psalms (PL XXIII.827).