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Psalm 95

Phase 1: ORAL



Step 1: Listen

Listening to a guide translation and versions of the psalm

Listen well to the poem (notice content, emotions and interesting use of language). There are two guide translations in Appendix A:

1. **Hebrew-mirror** - copied from the Exegetical Layout and adjusted for minimal readability,
2. **Guide translation** - the literal, type 1 corresponding (but more readable) translation, exegetically the same as Hebrew-mirror.

Activity: Read the Hebrew-mirror and the Hebrew tight version in Appendix A. One reader per translation or one reader for all translations (as skills permit). Others to listen with closed books. Consider 'how to listen' – posture? With responses? In silence?



Step 2: Familiarise

Explaining and discussing the meaning and beauty of the psalm

Get an overview of the poem (the big picture) - what's the main message? Who is involved? A poem must be understood as 'a whole' (unlike a story).

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PSALM

Listen to guide translation one.

- What do you like about the psalm?
- What do you find difficult?

Listen to guide translation two.

- Is there anything in this psalm that sounds familiar?
- Is there anything about this psalm that surprises you?

Listen to guide translation three.





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- What does this psalm tell us about the LORD? What is the LORD like?
- How does the psalm end? Is there any promise or reassurance? How do you feel about that?
- Why do you think the psalmist stops here? *We'll come back to that later, but good to get first reactions. It's fine to say they don't like it, or are uncomfortable with it.*

ENGAGING WITH THE WHOLE PSALM

Facilitator: address the following topics:

- *The participants in the psalm, the different “speakers” and “audiences”*
- *The historical background and the context of the psalm, the story behind the psalm, if relevant*
- *The theme of the psalm*
- *The flow of the psalm*
- *The potential big picture obstacles*
- *Emotion map*
- *The peak or peaks of the psalm*
- *The genre and purpose of the psalm*
- *Highly important poetic device(s) related to understanding the big picture*
- *How does the psalm point to Christ?*

Activity 1: what belongs to God?

This helps the psalmists engage with the thematic unity of the psalm.

Read the psalm aloud and ask the psalmists to note how many things (or people) in the psalm are stated as *belonging to God*, in different ways:

- *depths of the earth, mountain peaks, v4*
- *the sea and the dry land, v5*
- *we do: the people of his pasture, the flock of his hand, v7*
- *his voice v7, his deeds v9, his ways v10*
- *his anger, his rest v11*

Activity 2: voices in the psalm

This activity engages both kinaesthetic and auditory memory to understand and retain the switches between different speakers/audiences in the psalm.

Ask the group to **stand up**, divide the group into five, and give each group one of the following pronouns/pronoun groups to listen out for:

- we/our/us
- you (pl)
- he/his
- I/me
- They



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During the first reading, they are welcome to interrupt and to clarify any doubtful cases. The second time through, they should not talk, but just clap their hands gently when 'their' pronoun is mentioned.

What did they notice? **Who is speaking** in the psalm, and who are they speaking to?

Find out if anyone noticed that there is not just one shift, from the first half of the psalm to the second, but two shifts:

- v1-7c: we/us/our, he/his
- v7d: you pl, his (*the psalmist shifts from full identification with the group to addressing them*)
- v8-11 I/me, you pl, they.

Who is speaking, and to whom: *the voice of the psalmist, calling his hearers to worship along with him (we/us); the psalmist, calling his hearers to listen to the Lord (you pl, his); the voice of the Lord, speaking to the hearers of the psalm.*

Activity 3: is it one psalm, or two stitched together?

This activity shows the participants that the dramatic change in the middle of the psalm is essential to its theme: that worship without obedience is hateful to the Lord.

The psalmists have seen that there is a dramatic change in the middle of v7, with a shift from the voice of the psalmist to the voice of the Lord. (Repeat this if there has been a break.) Some people have even claimed that it's two separate psalms, or bits of psalms, stuck together. (See [Appendix D](#), notes to the facilitator.)

Ask what impression they have of the two different halves.

- What emotions are expressed in each half? What is the mood?
- What are the worshippers told to do in the first half?
- Where are the worshippers at the beginning of the psalm, physically?
- What are they just about to do when the Lord's voice bursts in on them in 7b? *Enter his presence, bowing down in worship.*
- What two things does the Lord say the Israelites did wrong? *Despite the miracles the Lord had done to bring them out of Egypt, referred to in the psalm as 'my deeds' – the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea – they constantly doubted him; and they refused to follow his ways, to obey him.*
- At the end of the psalm, what are the worshippers left thinking about?

UNLOCKING SOME OF THE BIG PICTURE OBSTACLES TO THE PSALM

Massah, Meribah, and 40 years in the desert

Read aloud verses 8-11 again:

- Does anyone know the story that this is relating to? Explain that the two quotes refer to different stories.



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Activity: Read the following stories aloud from a LWC Bible. Only the reader should have the text. The Numbers story is long, two chapters, and is divided into 7 shorter extracts from those chapters, see below. A better option would be that the story, or part of the story, is **retold orally by heart**, either by one of the psalmists, or by the facilitator. An aid for the oral re-telling of the story can be found in [Appendix F](#).

This explains the OT allusions and quotes in the second half of the psalm.

Massah and Meribah

Exodus 17:1-7:

There is no water, and the Israelites are ready to stone Moses. The Lord tells him to strike a rock and water will come out; this happens, and Moses calls the place 'Massah and Meribah', because the Israelites challenged the Lord (see v7). The two names mean 'testing' and 'quarrelling'.

40 years in the desert

Numbers 13-14: give out slips saying Numbers **13:1, 17-20, 27-28, 14:1-4, 6-11, 26-32, 34-35**

These two chapters tell how the Israelites sent out spies into the land, and they came back reporting that the land was fruitful but the people were numerous and very strong, and they would not be able to conquer it. The Lord is very angry with them, but Moses persuades him not to kill them all off with a plague. Instead, the Lord says 'no one who has treated me with contempt will ever see [the promised land].' Specifically, in v34, he says that they will wander in the desert for 40 years, one year for each day that the spies spent exploring the land.

Discuss: What is the connection?

- What do the two stories have in common?
- The Lord doesn't refer in Numbers to the water-from-the-rock incident, but how does he describe the Israelites? *Ch14: v11 treating him with contempt, v11 refusing to believe him, v22 disobedient, v22 testing him, v27 grumbling, v27 wicked, v33 unfaithful.*
- The Meribah incident is an example of this kind of behaviour; there were many others, some of which have probably not been recorded
- The punishment is not to enter the promised land for 40 years, by which time most of that generation of adults would have died *14: v30, 33, 34*

Does the psalmist really keep saying 'come'?

This activity generates good contextualised translations for the key exhortations in this psalm, which form the structure of and convey the movement in the psalm; this is a slightly technical translation exercise for step 2, but it is worth doing at this point so that these local language expressions are part of the way the participants think about this psalm before creating the song, as well as the oral translation. However, the individual verbs can be done in step 5, orientation for oral translation, or step 7, the exegetical check, if preferred.

Note for Portuguese contexts: v2, usually translated in English 'come into his presence', does not use the verb 'come', so it can be missed out.



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INSIGHT: The translation confusion of ‘come’ in Ps 95

The repeated verb ‘come’ in Ps95 presents translation difficulties for a number of contrasting reasons:

- in v1 and v6 the word translated Come! in almost all translations, is not the same word in Hebrew in the two verses, and the one in v1 does not mean ‘come’ in English.
- v2 has some version of ‘come’, eg ‘come into his presence’, in almost all English translations (not in Portuguese, see above); the Hebrew word does not mean ‘come’.
- v11 *does* have the Hebrew word ‘come’, as in v6, but here it is translated ‘enter’ in virtually all English and Portuguese translations.

Activity: Write up the first two columns ONLY on a whiteboard, leaving space at the end:

v 1	הלך <i>halach</i>	To go, walk; Let’s go! Come and....
v 2	קדם <i>kidem</i>	To approach, come before Let’s come into his presence...
v 6	בוא <i>Bo’</i>	To come, enter Come on, come let’s..
v 11	בוא <i>Bo’</i>	To come, enter They shall never enter...

We will take these one by one and find out the most natural way of translating it in the local language.

Discuss and put suggestions for translations up on the board in the fourth column:

v1:

The very first word in the psalm is from הלך *halach*; the literal meaning of this is ‘walk!’, but here it is something more like ‘let’s get going’.

‘Come on’ is the common expression in English for getting people going, which is why ‘come’ has been used here. Many languages say ‘let’s go’.

What verb or particle would be used in this language to get a group of people going, on a journey or an activity?



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v2:

Some version of ‘come into his presence’ is used by almost all English translations, but again, there is no ‘come’ in the Hebrew. (*Ignore this in Portuguese contexts.*)

The verb used here is from the root קדם *qadam*, which means go in front, meet, confront – ‘let’s go and meet’

What verb would be used in this language for when a person is moving forwards into the presence of a chief, or a VIP?

v6:

This verse has the first appearance of the actual Hebrew verb בוא *bo’* ‘come!’. It also means Enter! The context is of going into the temple and starting a three-fold process of bowing and kneeling before the presence of the Lord.

In many languages the translation will vary depending on whether the image is of a speaker who is with the people when he speaks, or whether the speaker is already standing in the temple and calling them *to* him. The psalm does not tell us that, but since most of the verbs are in the cohortative, *let us...*, rather than the imperative, it is reasonable to assume that the speaker is standing with the group of people, possibly at the front.

What word would be used by the leader who is with a group of people, urging them to move on forwards with him into a building? *Come? Enter?*

v 11:

‘they shall not enter into my rest’ is literally ‘they shall not *come* into my rest’, using the same verb בוא *bo’*. God is speaking, already in that place of rest, but he has passed sentence on the people, saying they shall not enter the place of rest where he is.

What would be the right verb for someone to use, for example sitting in their own house, saying that another person would not be allowed to *enter/come into* their house?

Get the group to *call out* these imperatives to each other, see if they sound right for the contexts.

Make sure they are all well internalised and remembered before the group moves on.





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SEGMENTATION OF THE PSALM

There are various ways of presenting this. For this psalm, it works well to give the segmentation outline orally here in step 2, and to ask the group to give the reasons for the calls/warning.

Stanza one vv 1-5

v 1-2 call to praise with jubilant song

v 3-5 because YHWH is the Creator God

Stanza two: vv 6-7a

v 6 call to bow down and kneel in worship

v 7a because YHWH is our maker and shepherd

Stanza three: vv 7b-11

v 7b-9 warning to listen to his voice with obedient hearts

v 10-11 because the rebellious cannot enter YHWH's rest

Reasons for segmentation:

These reasons do not need to be shared with the group unless it would be helpful to do so.

The three stanzas are have a structural similarity:

- 1-5: 1-2 **call:** to worship
 3-5 **reason:** our Creator God
- 6-7a: 6: **call:** to kneel and bow down
 7a **reason:** God is our covenant shepherd
- 7b-11: 7b-8: **warning:** to listen and not harden our hearts
 8b-11: **reason:** example of those who did that and who failed to enter God's rest.

The crucial stanza break is between 7a and 7b: this is the 'hinge' of the psalm, on which the message of the psalm depends. A stanza segmentation that does not divide the psalm at this point, eg ESV 1-5, 6-11, is not recommended.

A break in the v1-5 block of verses is also made by some translations, eg NIV, 1-2, 3-5, although 6-7a is kept intact. This obscures the patterning of call & reason, call & reason.

For more detail see [Appendix E](#), segmentation: alternative approaches.

FINAL SUMMING UP

To summarise the Psalm, discuss the following questions:



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- What is the main point or message of the psalm?
- What does this Psalm teach you about the LORD?
- How can you or your church use this psalm?
- What heading or title would the group suggest for this psalm?



Step 3: Internalise

Absorbing the big picture of the psalm

‘Get the poem inside yourself’ (feel the emotions and be able to recall the main ideas).

Look at the whole psalm so that you can experience it and retell the message. This is not an attempt to memorize the psalm, but to be able to understand the whole message and to express it in the target language. Aim to do at least the first two activities.

CREATIVE RESPONSES

First, do Internalisation Activities 1-5 as a whole group

Internalisation Activity: **Listen** to Psalm X being read again. Note all the words you hear which speak of God’s power, or which are very intense/extreme language.

Internalisation Activity: **Say each line of the psalm in the right order, as a group.** Use your own words; there’s no need to have it precisely right. Then let one or two persons say each line of the psalm, again in the right order

Internalisation Activity: **Then, as a group, make gestures** for each line and again say all the lines in order, but this time with gestures. Use mime/gestures to show the emotion and action.

Internalisation Activity: **Lastly, as a whole group, use the popcorn method.** Each line, in the right order, is said by a different person. Do this a second time to further reinforce.

Internalisation Activity (optional): **The storyboard method:** draw pictures of each event in the psalm as they unfold.

Then divide the group into two or three groups

Internalisation Activity: **Skits**—act out what’s happening in each of the lines. Make a little drama. Encourage them to use facial expressions, body language, motions, and movement to try to experience the emotions and the sequence of events. This psalm lends itself well to a skit.

Internalisation Activity: Memory song, chant or memory aid to help remember the psalm. Consider making a short poem of the song in the local language or Language of Wider Communication to help you remember the different actions in order. This song is only to help everyone remember each stanza in sequence (and the lines in sequence if it is a short psalm)





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Other drama option

Activity: drama: worshipping, bowing down, and kneeling

The purpose of this activity is to internalise the sequence of events in v6, using culturally appropriate vocabulary.

Ask the psalmists to demonstrate as an impromptu drama the physical actions of a group of people in their own culture entering the presence of a great chief or king (choose someone to represent the king, drape a throne for them). Put up all the different verbs for actions and postures in the drama on the whiteboard, as the psalmists act them out.

Make sure you don't eliminate any suggestions at this point because participants think 'this wasn't done in the Bible': the explanations may change their minds. Note that some of the actions may relate to *petition* rather than *respect*, make sure those are not included in the words considered for the psalm.

Now discuss the three verbs meaning *bow down*, *kneel down* and *kneel* that we find in Psalm 95. There are examples below in the text box from elsewhere in the OT, which may be useful if questions arise. For Bible-literate groups, see how much of each OT reference can be provided by them, with prompts, rather than telling them. We are not given all the specifics of the action that each verb describes, and so it is perfectly legitimate to use what we *are* given to find a culturally appropriate action.

The first verb נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה *nishtachaveh* is usually translated 'let us bow down', often with the face right to the ground; there are lots of examples of this verb in the OT. They all refer to showing deep respect.

Example: in the sense of worshipping a god - Exodus 20:5, the second of the 10 commandments, says you shall not make an image of anything and you shall not **bow down** to them and serve them.

Example: this verb is used three times in 2 Kings 5:18, where the healed Naaman asks Elisha for permission to continue to accompany his master the king into the temple of Rimmon and to **bow down** there, with the king on his arm.

But it can just mean to show very deep respect, for example to a king, or someone else:

Example: In 1 Samuel 25:23 a rich and foolish man, Nabal, had just treated David and his men with deep disrespect and ingratitude, which was about to bring down David's anger on the whole household. His wife Abigail rushed out to meet David, and before she even said anything she '**bowed down**', wanting to show that she was not doing the same thing as her husband, wanting to demonstrate unmistakably her deep respect.

The second verb נִכְרַעַה *nichra'ah* means to 'bend the knee', and comes from the word for the lower legs. It is usually used in a context of respect, or worship, but it can just literally refer to the action of bending the knees:



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Example: in the book of Esther, her uncle Mordecai enrages their enemy Haman, as the king orders everyone to **kneel down** and pay Haman honour, but Mordecai refuses to do so.

Example: checking which of Gideon's men were lapping water like a dog, and which were **kneeling** to drink, Judges 7:5

It can even mean the involuntary action of sliding onto one's knees:

Example: when King Joram was shot with an arrow riding in a chariot and **collapsed onto his knees**, 2 Kg 9:24.

The third, **נִבְרַחַח** *nivrechah* is a rare verb and is used both for Solomon **kneeling down** in prayer, 2 Chr 6:13, and for where Abraham's servant makes his camels **kneel down**, Gen 24:11.

Discuss how that sequence of bowing down, kneeling down, and kneeling would look. The third may be more static than the second – the state of kneeling; so that the worshippers are in this position when they listen to the Lord's voice.



Step 4: Explore and compose

Explore the Hebrew and local poetry and compose a song

EXPLORING HEBREW AND LOCAL POETRY

For the facilitator: in this step, address the following topics to explore in Hebrew poetry:

- 1) *Repetition of words, images, and sounds*
- 2) *Handling the Hebrew parallelisms*
- 3) *Figures of speech, like metaphors, personification*
- 4) *Rhythm, verse length, beat*
- 5) *Word order, clause order*
- 6) *Poetic devices that emphasize and mark something as important*

Once the artist-translators have sufficiently internalised and drafted the psalm in the workshop setting, compose a song, poem, rap, chant, or prayer to capture as much of the psalm as possible.

1. Poetic devices- repetitions of words, images, and sounds

Activity: Trace all the words that are repeated. Then all the concepts/images.

2. Poetic devices - main Images or metaphors of the Psalm





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- Metaphors, metonyms, similes, personifications, hyperboles, merisms,

Activity: Can you identify any images, similes or metaphors?

3. Rhythm

Activity: Listen to the psalm again and in groups, and get a feel for the rhythm. Are the lines short or long?

4. Irregular word order

- Fronting of nouns before the verbs in Hebrew is particularly in focus here

Activity: Look at the Flower Garden or the Hebrew-mirror, and identify all the verses that have irregular word order, mostly (in English) nouns put before the verbs.

5. Highlighting poetic devices

Activity: Look at the Flower Garden in Appendix C or the Hebrew-mirror in Appendix A, and identify all the verses that have highlighting devices.

COMPOSING A SONG

For the facilitator: several considerations, like the big question when to start doing the song

- 1) *When to start composing a song? The guide writer and facilitator have some freedom when. Either at the end of step 4, or after step 5. There are pro's and con's to each option. One advantage of doing it in Step 4 (before the detailed exegesis) is that the team starts to think about poetry. They only start to think about poetry once they start composing a song. The risk is that when they compose something early, before step 5, that they settle on a melody they like, but need to change it or even abandon it after getting the more detailed exegetical insights. The advantage*
- 2) *Some other considerations: what about memory aid, the poem or song made at the end of Step 3?*
- 3) *Another option is to only compose a nice tune and song on one stanza with not any serious exegetical issues. That tune can then be used for the rest of the psalm at the end of Step 5. Experience with shorter sections, like one or two stanzas at a time, to compose.*
- 4) *The team needs to learn some song-writing skills.*
- 5) *It is not necessary to use the same tune for every stanza. Sometimes 3-4 tunes can be used for long psalms.*



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Note the poetic devices used in the Hebrew mirror or in the Flower Garden (Appendix C). What is the psalmist trying to achieve? Consider what poetic devices are used in the local language to achieve the same functions.

Activity: NOW, COMPOSE A SONG! Participants are to choose a style or genre that is relevant for the psalm, and to set the whole psalm or sections to a rhythm or music. The song needs to cover all the main stanzas, but doesn't need to be correct in every detail (that comes later in Step 5)

Activity: Make a recording of the composition(s).

SUGGESTIONS

The psalmists should create a song, poem, chant or prayer to capture as much of the essence of the psalm as possible. For this psalm in particular, **both halves need to be represented and not just the praise of the first half.**

Remind them of the multiple voices in the first half, in jubilant noise, and the quieter single voices that follow: the psalmist's call to worship, and the Lord breaking in with a warning. How will they represent those?

Which verses/concepts would work best for a children's song? A suggestion might be to briefly describe the Israelites' bad behaviour & punishment, and follow up with a determination not to do the same – for some reason the bad behaviour of others is very appealing to small children, particularly when an appropriate punishment is seen to be meted out.



Step 5: Draft

Translating stanza-by-stanza

Listen to the poem again. Orally create stanza-by-stanza a first draft of the psalm in the target language, trying to capture the poetic elements and essential details of the meaning. To take full advantage of the oral form, avoid reverting to written Biblical text at this point.

Activity: Divide into smaller groups and let one in each group read through guide translation #2: Hebrew-tight (or play a recording) while others translate. The oral draft can at that point be recorded and/or immediately written down (Step 6 merged with Step 5).

Psalm 95 and the quotes in Hebrews

Psalm 95 may be familiar to participants already. That could be because it forms part of the church **liturgy** in both the Catholic and Anglican churches, where it is often called the 'Venite' (Latin for 'come'). But in any case, the second half is likely to be familiar from Hebrews in the NT.



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There are some differences between Psalm 95 and the quotes in Hebrews, for which see [Appendix G](#), Intertextuality.

The argument in Hebrews is quite complex and it is probably better not to get bogged down in it. Some description of how Ps 95 is used in Hebrews may be useful, however.

What is quoted in Hebrews?

Only the second half of the psalm is quoted in Hebrews, but it is quoted repeatedly throughout a specific argument.

- Ps 95:7-11 is quoted in full in Hebrews 3:7-11
- Ps 95: 7b *today, if you hear his voice* is repeated twice, in 3:7c-8a and 4:7
- v11, *they shall not enter my rest* is quoted in 4:3 and 5.

Why is Ps 95 quoted in Hebrews?

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews quotes from Ps 95 to underline to his readers that they must stay faithful to the end, if they want to enter God's rest. It is possible to hear the gospel preached, but to fail through the disobedience of hardened hearts to hold on till the end, that is, till we reach 'God's rest'.

How does this relate to translation?

It is important to note that the writer to the Hebrews only quotes the second half, and may be using it for a different purpose from that of the original psalm writer.

Our task is to understand and translate the whole psalm as written by the psalmist, where the purpose is the *combination* of first and second half, the challenge to humble and obedient worship; the enjoyment of joyful praise, backed up by an awareness of the need for faith and obedience and the consequences of failure; this is related, but not the same.

STANZA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Often it speeds the work to have different groups do different stanzas. If you do this, make sure you all hear the psalm from top to bottom and to make suggestions to other groups when you come together...

Stanza 1: Verses 1-5

1 Go, let us sing for joy to YHWH
let us shout joyfully to rock of our
salvation,
2 let us approach his presence with
thanksgiving
with songs we shout joyfully to him,
3 for great god, YHWH,
and great king above all gods.

1 Come on! Let us sing aloud to YHWH,
let us give a shout of joy to the rock of
our salvation.
2 Let us go to meet him with thanksgiving,
we will shout with joy to him in song.
3 For YHWH is a great god,
and a great king above all gods.
4 For in his hand are the depths of the earth,



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4 That in his hand depths of earth,
and peaks of mountains to him,
5 that to him the sea and he made it
and dry-land his hands formed.

and the mountain peaks are his.
5 For the sea is his, and he made it,
and his hands shaped the dry land.

Verses 1 & 2: cry and shout for joy

Rejoicing, or crying out, comes three times in the first two verses. The second two are the same verb, although they are often translated differently. None of the verbs is the regular word for sing. The normal word for sing is found in many places in the psalms, including:

- Ps 96:1, which uses just the verb 'sing': שִׁירָו 'sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord, all the earth', see also the identical opening to Ps 98:1.

The first verb here in Ps95, *sing aloud*, is also used quite commonly in the psalms; it means to let out a series of cries of jubilation, to proclaim praise out loud, even to rejoice over fallen enemies; it is also used for crying aloud, for crying with longing, as in 84:3, where the psalmist says his heart and flesh 'cry out' for the living God. In the African context, 'ululate' might work well.

However, the second verb in 1b, *Let us give a shout of joy*, the same verb as in 2b, is not usually used for singing. A good example of it is in the context of the battle of Jericho, in Joshua 6:5; **ask**, does anyone remember Joshua's instructions? These were: when they hear a long blast sounded on the trumpets, then the whole army should raise a loud shout, and the walls would collapse. The verb here for 'shout joyfully to the Lord' in Ps 95:2 is the same as the verb יִרְעֻוּ that is used for the army shouting and then the walls collapsing. In other words, it's very loud. It can be heard a long way away!

Verses 4 & 5: two merisms

Merisms are when the psalmist takes a word pair with opposite meanings and uses them to give the sense of a whole, for example *day and night* gives us *all the time*. In these two verses we have two sets of merisms (see if the psalmists can identify the second from the psalm, if you give them the first):

- v 4: depths of the earth.... mountain peaks
- v 5: the sea.... dry land/ground

'Dry' is an important aspect of this single word in Hebrew, dry-ground, so do not just substitute 'earth' or 'ground' – the contrast with the sea is important. Avoid a long descriptive phrase, though.

Note that there is some debate about the specific vocabulary in the v 4 merism, see footnotes to the Hebrew text in [Appendix B](#), but the sense is clear.

Verse 5: formed

This is not just *he made*, but that God's hands *formed* or *shaped*, as a potter does. See footnotes to the Hebrew text, in [Appendix B](#).

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.



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Stanza 2: Verses 6-7a

6 Come let us bow down and let us kneel down,
let us kneel at his presence YHWH our
maker,
7 for he our God
and we, people of his pasture
and flock of his hand.

6 Come, let us bow down, let us kneel down,
let us kneel before YHWH our Maker.
7 For he is our God,
we are the people of his pasture
and the flock of his hand.

v6: bowing down, kneeling down, kneeling

The psalmists should recall the vocabulary that they came up with in [Activity 3.2](#), and use that in the oral translation.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 3: Verses 7b-11

The day [= today] if at his voice you hear
8 do not harden your hearts as Meribah
as day Massah in the wilderness,
9 that tested me your fathers
tried me, though seen my work.
10 Forty years I was disgusted with generation
and I said,
people going astray of heart they,
and they do not know my ways.
11 That I swore in my anger
Not they will come into my rest.

Today, if only you would listen to his voice!
8 Do not harden your hearts like Meribah,
like that day at Massah, in the
wilderness,
9 For there your fathers challenged me and put
me to the test,
though they had seen my deeds.
10 For forty years that generation disgusted
me, and I said,
“They are people whose hearts go
astray,
and they do not know my ways.”
11 For I swore in my anger,
“They will not come to my resting-
place.”

v 8: do not harden your hearts

The expression ‘harden your hearts’ describes the stubborn and rebellious choice not to trust the Lord and not to obey him. This expression and other synonyms are used of those who have clearly seen what the Lord has done, but who reject him anyway: cf Deut 10:16, *do not be stiffnecked any more*.

v 11: they will not enter my rest



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See the optional **word study** for 'rest' from Genesis to Revelation in [Appendix D](#), notes to the facilitator, section C.4. This would work well as homework for a motivated and Bible-literate group.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Activities:

- 1) Listen again to the recordings of each verse or section.
- 2) Think about how to include relevant parts from previous steps and to use ideas from the previous creative activities.
- 3) Put everything together to make a poetic oral representation of the complete psalm, and then record it.



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Phase 2: TEXT



Step 6: Transcribe

Make a written draft

Activity: Transcribe the recording/s of the oral draft onto paper or a computer.

Before moving on to the checking steps, check the transcribed draft for the following. This should be done as a whole group, looking at the psalm projected onto a screen or wall. Doing this now will help the exegetical and poetical checks that follow to stay focused on essential matters.

1. **Versification:** put the verse numbers into the psalm.
2. Check that the number of the psalm, and any **superscription**, are in place at the top. (Superscriptions are often left out completely according to team policy, but they are recommended to be put in the written text but not the song.)
3. Put in the **stanza breaks** (blank lines usually).
4. Correct the **punctuation**, in particular finding out where the sentences should end. Different groups use different approaches. Our recommendation is to use capital letters only for the beginning of sentences, not for the beginning of each poetic line.
5. Correct the **spelling**. You may find that there is a lot of discussion over this. The group needs to have consistency but also needs to abide by any government guidelines.
6. Raise any questions you have about the **back translation** at this point. The back translation just needs to be comprehensible; it does not need spell checks etc. You, the facilitator, are the only person who needs it. However, without a good back translation you cannot understand what is going on. As a bonus, at least a couple of exegetical questions you've prepared usually turn out to be unnecessary after this step.
7. Check the **line divisions** (this refers to how the power is broken up into lines and where to make those breaks).



Step 7: Contents Check

Checking exegetical faithfulness

Check the exegesis of the oral translation. Consider whether the correct meaning has been translated and if the wording used can be improved. The purpose of this step is to check the content of your draft for faithfulness and trustworthiness.



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Activity: Review the draft translation in detail, using the oral recording of Step 5 or the transcription of Step 6. Do an exegetical check by comparing the draft with the guide translations given in Appendix A and the exegetical layout in Appendix B and adjust the text as necessary.

EXEGETICAL CHECKLIST

Select which of these would be useful; not all of them will be needed.

Preliminary: checking the input from step 5

Before going on to introduce any new checks, make sure that the points raised in step 5 were handled correctly in the oral translation.

v 1: the Rock of our salvation

The word used here for 'rock', *tsur*, is the same as in Exodus 17, where the Lord tells Moses he will 'stand by the rock' so that when Moses strikes it, water will come out for the people in the desert to drink. The use of *tsur* in this opening verse is very appropriate name, given the reference later in the psalm to that event and the ingratitude of the people. Translate here with a term that would also be appropriate for the rock in the desert, so that the connection is intuitive.

v3, v7: 'for'

In the segmentation we saw that the first and second stanzas each have a section giving the reasons why firstly, we should shout joyfully in worship, and secondly, why we should kneel and bow down. Both of these reasons start with the same Hebrew word *ki*, so try to use parallel constructions in the translation, even if it is not a connective but something else, an exclamation, for example, that is repeated.

What would be the natural link in the local language between a command, and the reason why it should be done?

v4 *asher* 'that'

The first words in both v4 and v5 in Hebrew are the connective אֲשֶׁר, *that*. They are difficult to translate in English, and are usually missed out. In English, *who* is an option:

God is a great god...

That/who in his hand are the depths of the earth...

That/who the sea is his....

It may be that there is a construction in the local language that could show the connection between these two statements of the greatness of God, even if a connective is not used. This might be an unusual word order, or verbal construction. Play around with the concept.

v 5: emphatic pronoun *he*

As with many languages (but not English), the Hebrew verb indicates person and number, so 'he made it' is already clear from the verb. The independent pronoun 'he' has been added for emphasis.



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Do this if possible in the translation. As English cannot do this, most translations add emphasis with the word ‘for’ – ‘for he made it’ – or opt for redundancy: ‘it is he who made it...’. This is not in the Hebrew, which simply says: the sea is his, HE made it.

(Note that the independent pronouns in v7, *he* and *we*, are not the same, as those are verbless clauses in Hebrew, and the subject needs to be indicated independently.)

v7: flock or sheep?

Verse 7 describes us as ‘the people of his pasture’ (pastures being areas of grass where animals graze) and ‘the flock of his hand’ – תְּסוּן, *tsun*. The word ‘sheep’ is not actually used. The psalmist may prefer to use the word ‘flock’ as it is a collective noun, and so represents well the people of Israel, and in fact this is the normal terminology for the metaphor of ‘sheep’ in Hebrew poetry; see the well-known Ps 100:3 ‘the sheep of his pasture’ and Isaiah 53:6 ‘we all like sheep have gone astray’; in both of these the word is actually ‘flock’ תְּסוּן in Hebrew.

Here in Psalm 95, if there is no good word for flock, it is fine to use sheep, as in the third guide translation, as that is clearly the image in the psalmist’s mind, but it is worth trying out different options in the local language.

v 7: optative or conditional?

It is not necessary to raise this issue if the psalmists are happy with the guide translations.

Is it ‘today, if only you would listen to his voice’, expressing a wish, or ‘today, if you hear his voice, do not...’, expressing a simple condition? This guide prefers the optative, although psalmists may be more familiar with the conditional, following the Septuagint in Hebrews 3 & 4. See the guide translations and the discussion in [Appendix D](#), notes to the facilitator.

v 8: Today

It is only necessary to discuss this if the participants cannot meaningfully find a way of translating ‘Today...’.

The reference to ‘today’ is a stylistic device used frequently by Moses in Deuteronomy, not only in reference to the ‘commands I am giving you this day’ (4:40, 6:6; 7:11) but also stating that the covenant made at Horeb was not with their fathers but with ‘all of us who are alive here today’ (Deut 5:3).

Using it here in Ps95 establishes the link with the past, but creates an urgency about the present. ‘Now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation’, 2 Cor 6:2. This was true for the singers of David’s psalm, for the readers of Hebrews, and for us ‘today’. Make sure that the translation can (at least in poetry) express this breadth of meaning.

V 8-11: voices in the psalm how to show when God is speaking

Ask the group where God’s speech actually starts – verse 8; the introduction is in verse 7b. The pronoun ‘I’ indicating that God is the speaker does not come in till v9, but as that verse is grammatically dependent on v8, there is general agreement that God’s speech begins in v8.



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
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What is the best way of marking this in the text? We do not want (*contra* Translator's Handbook) to insert anything into the middle of the psalm, such as a subheading or a lengthy speech introducer, but ask what speech introducers they might have in their language that would indicate a switch here to direct speech. This is important for oral recordings, where the listeners cannot hear the speech marks that they would see if they were reading the text.

For example, in Shimakonde (Mozambique), there is a speech introducer *kushidoni* which can be reduced to *kudoni*, *kudo*, or *doni*, or just *do*. A short speech introducer like *do* would work very well following 'if you hear his voice'.

In the written text, God's two distinct speeches in v10 and v11 obviously need quotes. However, in addition the participants might want to add quotes around the whole of 8-11, to indicate that it is God speaking, although many translations do not do this. This may depend on whether or not a succinct speech introducer has been found. In any case, if quotes around 8-11 are used, make sure to close off with double quotes at the end of v11.

v10 loathing, disgust

For forty years I was disgusted with, I loathed that generation: this is the only place where the verb  is used with YHWH as the subject. Most other references are to people loathing their own sins or another's, see:

Ps 119:158: I [*the psalmist*] look at the faithless with disgust/loathing

Ezek 6:9: They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done/ And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed,

Ezek 20:43: you will loathe yourselves for all the evil you have done.

This is not the same thing as *anger*, although later in v11 the Lord does refer to his *anger*, using a different word. Here it is loathing or disgust, and should not be translated 'I was angry with'... (*contra* NIV, NLT).



Step 8: Poetry Check

Compare and weigh the poetic features

Check if the Hebrew poetry is all accounted for in the translation through equivalent poetic features in the target language. Consider if the poetry of the translation can be improved, for example, look at the length of lines and the use of rhythm and ideophones.

Activity: Consider the poetic features of your translation. Do they reflect the purpose of the Hebrew poetic features, drawing attention to the correct parts? Experiment a bit with different word-orders and see what sounds the most beautiful, the most poetic.





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POETIC CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- Rhythm and pulse
- Eliminating wordiness: are all the connectives, pronouns and verbs necessary?
- Word order
- Metaphors and similes
- Exclamations and ideophones. Note that psalmists may be reluctant to add ideophones because they are not in the guide translations: explain why they are not there. If ideophones are used, make sure any redundant verbs are removed.
- Verbs: discuss whether any 'stripped down' verb forms can be used.
- Breaking the rules: discuss which language rules might need to be observed, for example placement of vocatives, and where – and for what purpose – in poetry, rules can sometimes be broken.
- Feel free to raise and discuss other poetic features during checking, especially line length, repetition, chiasms, ellipsis, enjambment or anything you have observed in their own poetry.



Step 9: Finalise

Preparing the final version of an authenticated translation

Prepare the final version which will serve as an authorized translation, that in turn will serve as the basis for performing the psalm in the community (audio, visual and written).

Activity: Re-check the spelling of your transcription, the punctuation, in-setting, and the layout of paragraphs to represent stanza segmentation.

Activity: Re-check the essential accuracy of the back translation (not worrying about spelling).

Activity: In AVTT, ensure that the final text of your psalm is uploaded with a back translation, check that the recordings from different steps are in the correct place, and do a final audio recording.

Activity: If possible, copy the final written text into Paratext.



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Phase 3: PERFORMANCE



Step 10: Perform

Performing the psalm in your community

Convert text into performance (dramatic reading/song/chant) to both perform and share this psalm, ensuring the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible).

You now want to convert your written translation into a performance (song or chant) so that you can share it with your community. You need to make sure that the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible). The genre - lament or praise or thanksgiving or other - should be similar to songs of the same genre in your culture.

Psalm-specific ideas:

- ...

Activity: Identify any relevant genres or styles or performance and put the psalm to music. You can put the whole psalm to music, word-for-word, or you can use creative licence to adapt the psalm for the performance.

Activity: Complete a transcript and back translation for the lyrics of any song created by the team to be checked before recording.

FINAL CHECKLIST

In the end of each psalm, there should ideally be four products:

1. Transcription: An authorized, authenticated, or officially written draft in AVTT and Paratext.
2. Dramatic Reading: A recording of a dramatic reading or recitation of the whole psalm, using the authenticated version word-for-word, recorded in AVTT.
3. Whole Psalm Performance: A recording of a performance of the whole psalm, using the entire authenticated version but with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance, including poetic and dramatic features beyond the authenticated version, recorded in AVTT.
4. Song or Hymn: A recording of a performance of part of the psalm including the main idea of the psalm, in the form of a song, hymn or chorus, with or without drama, with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance and to make it easy to sing and remember, recorded in AVTT. An improved version of the Step 4 composition could be used here.



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Appendix A: Guide Translations

Guide Translation #1 (Hebrew-mirror)	Guide Translation #2 (Hebrew-tight)
<p>1 Go, let us sing for joy to YHWH let us shout joyfully to rock of our salvation,</p> <p>2 let us approach his presence with thanksgiving with songs we shout joyfully to him,</p> <p>3 for great god, YHWH, and great king above all gods.</p> <p>4 That in his hand depths of earth, and peaks of mountains to him,</p> <p>5 that to him the sea and he made it and dry-land his hands formed.</p> <p>6 Come let us bow down and let us kneel down, let us kneel at his presence YHWH our maker,</p> <p>7 for he our God and we, people of his pasture and flock of his hand.</p> <p>The day [= today] if at his voice you hear</p> <p>8 do not harden your hearts as Meribah as day Massah in the wilderness,</p> <p>9 that tested me your fathers tried me, though seen my work.</p> <p>10 Forty years I was disgusted with generation and I said, people going astray of heart they, and they do not know my ways.</p> <p>11 That I swore in my anger Not they will come into my rest.</p>	<p>1 Come on! Let us sing aloud to YHWH, let us give a shout of joy to the rock of our salvation.</p> <p>2 Let us go to meet him with thanksgiving, we will shout with joy to him in song.</p> <p>3 For YHWH is a great god, and a great king above all gods.</p> <p>4 For in his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks are his.</p> <p>5 For the sea is his, and he made it, and his hands shaped the dry land.</p> <p>6 Come, let us bow down, let us kneel down, let us kneel before YHWH our Maker.</p> <p>7 For he is our God, we are the people of his pasture and the flock of his hand.</p> <p>Today, if only you would listen to his voice!</p> <p>8 Do not harden your hearts like Meribah, like that day at Massah, in the wilderness,</p> <p>9 For there your fathers challenged me and put me to the test, though they had seen my deeds.</p> <p>10 For forty years that generation disgusted me, and I said, “They are people whose hearts go astray, and they do not know my ways.”</p> <p>11 For I swore in my anger, “They will not come to my resting-place.”</p>



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Appendix B: Exegetical Layout

...

SUGGESTED HEADING

...

Coding for TAM Verbs and Hebrew features:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qatal perfective = blue • Yiqtol imperfective = red | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infinitive construct = purple • Wayyiqtol waw+imperfective = pink • Jussive/cohortative = light brown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imperative = brown • Participle = green • Weqatal = navy |
|--|---|--|

לְכוּ נְרַנְּנָה לַיהוָה	1 ^{1,2} go ^{3,4} let.us.sing.for.joy ⁵ to. YHWH
--------------------------	--

¹ Superscription: the MT has no superscription. However, in Hebrews 4:7 it says, in relation to God's giving of this psalm, 'when..he spoke through David', ἐν Δαυειδ. This is almost certainly derived from the LXX, which has a superscription reading "A praise song for David.", τῷ Δαυιδ. Earlier there is also a reference to the authorship of the Holy Spirit, see Heb 3:7: 'So, as the Holy Spirit says, Today, if you hear his voice...',.

² Ps95 has a long tradition of being read aloud at the beginning of liturgical services. It opens the daily service in formal Catholic and Anglican traditions, and is also the first in a series of psalms (through to Ps99 or Ps100) which is read in Jewish liturgy to welcome the Sabbath.

³ Often translated idiomatically as Come! in English translations, this is actually the imperative of הֵלֵךְ, to walk, or go. See [step 2, obstacles to translation](#).

⁴ The imperative separates the speaker from the group, unlike the cohortatives. There is one other imperative in the psalm, the first word in v6.

⁵ רַנְּן in the pi'el means to rejoice, to let out a series of cries of jubilation. Ps96:13 uses this, also in the pi'el, for 'let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth'. In African contexts, 'ululate', might be appropriate.



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נְרִיעָה לְצֹר יִשְׁעֵנוּ:	let.us.shout.joyfully ⁶ to.rock ⁷ .of salvation.our ⁸
נִקְדָּמָה פָּנֵינוּ בְּתוֹדָה	2 let.us.approach ⁹ his.presence with.thanksgiving ¹⁰
בְּזִמְרוֹת נְרִיעַ לוֹ:	with.songs let.us.shout.joyfully ¹¹ to.him
כִּי אֵל גָּדוֹל יְהוָה	3 for ¹² god great YHWH
וּמֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל עַל־כָּל־אֱלֹהִים:	and.king great above-all-gods
אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ מְחַקְרֵי־אָרֶץ	4 ¹³ that in.his.hand ¹⁴ depths ¹⁵ .of-earth

⁶ The two uses of רוע in 1b and 2b are virtually the same in meaning, both hifil, although the first is a cohortative and the second a straight 1st pl imperfect: the worshippers are urged to ‘shout with joy, raise a shout of joy’.

⁷ The same word, צור, is also used in Exodus 17, where Moses is commanded to strike the rock and water will come out. This divine name is appropriate, given the reference to this same event in v 8-9, and provides evidence of the unity of the psalm.

⁸ The metaphor for God as ‘Rock of [our] salvation’ is also found in Moses’ song, Deuteronomy 32:15, and in Ps 89:26.

⁹ Approach or meet.

¹⁰ The word תודה refers to a sacrifice with accompanying praise, see Psalm 50:14, where there is an accompanying verb to *sacrifice*. It also refers to the songs themselves; here it is likely to be the latter. The praise of תודה is a particular type of praise - one which testifies to the circumstances of the author with gratitude (hence English “thanksgiving”), so a translation with the idea of ‘testimony’ would also work.

¹¹ See the note in 1b on the meaning of רוע.

¹² Note the כִּי here which opens the first ‘reason’ section, is repeated at the beginning of the second ‘reason’ section, v7.

¹³ The same conjunction אֲשֶׁר opens verses 4, 5, 9 and 11, giving the psalm a repeated structure. Unfortunately these are almost impossible to translate identically (or at all) in most languages.

¹⁴ Note the repeated vocabulary, linking ‘in his hand’ v 4 and ‘his hands formed’ in v 5. Try to maintain this in translation if possible. Note that in v7 we also have ‘the flock of his hand’. This is harder to translate literally, but it helps the unity and flow of the psalm if that repetition is maintained. All three examples occur in ‘reason’ sections of the psalm (see [Segmentation, step 2](#)).

¹⁵ The *depths* is מְחַקְרֵי, found only here, although a related word is found in Job 38:16 meaning the depths of the sea or the abyss. Here it seems clear it is part of a merism, complementing the mountain peaks in v 4b, and indicating the totality of height and depth.



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וְתוֹעֲפֹת הַרִים לוֹ:	and.peaks ¹⁶ .of mountains ¹⁷ to.him
אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ הַיָּם וְהוּא עָשָׂהוּ	5 that-to.him the.sea and.he ¹⁸ made.it
וַיְבַשֵּׁת יַדָּיו יַצְרוֹ:	and.dry-land ¹⁹ his.hands ²⁰ formed ^{21,22} .
בָּאוּ נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִכְרַעַה	6 come ^{23,24,25} let.us.bow down and.let.us.kneel down
נִבְרָכָה לְפָנֵי-יְהוָה עַשְׂנוּ:	let.us.kneel at.presence.his- YHWH maker.our
כִּי הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ	7 for ²⁶ he God.our

¹⁶ The mountain *peaks* is also problematic, as **תוֹעֲפֹת**, the rare word used, is used elsewhere with different meanings: in Numbers 23:22 and 24:8 it refers (in Balaam's prophecy) to the *strength* of a wild ox, and in Job 22:25 to the *best quality* silver. Most translators rely on the merism and translate it as mountain peaks, strong mountains, or mountain heights.

¹⁷ The depths and the peaks are not just geographical opposites, but have a spiritual dimension: the depths of the earth was where the powers of death reside, and the mountain peaks was where the 'gods' were thought to have their assemblies.

¹⁸ Independent pronoun **הוא** *he*, used for prominence.

¹⁹ **יַבְשֶׁת** *dry land* is also used in Exodus 4:9, where the Lord tells Moses to pour water from the Nile on the 'dry ground' and it will turn into blood. It is closely related to the more common word for 'dry land' used in Gen 1:9 and ff, **יַבְשָׁה**.

²⁰ 'hands', see note for v 4.

²¹ 'formed', **יַצַּר**, means to shape, or form; the word 'potter' **יוֹצֵר** comes from this verb. It is used in Gen 2:7 for God forming man and Gen 2:19 for forming all the animals and birds 'out of the ground', cf Gen 1 where **בְּרָא** is used.

²² v 4-5: before the call to bow down and worship YHWH in v6, the psalmist reminds us that none of these natural features – mountains, sea – should be worshipped; they are not only *made* by the creator, v5, but sustained by him and under his control, *in his hand*, v4.

²³ Depending on the receptor language, this action, probably of moving into the temple with the speaker, may need to be translated with a different verb. See [step 2, obstacles to translation](#).

²⁴ This is the second imperative in the psalm, see footnote for v1.

²⁵ The use of the verb **בוא** in this verse and in the final verse 11 serves to tie the two halves of the psalm together.

²⁶ Note the **כִּי** that opens this second 'reason' section, repeating the opening of the first 'reason' section in v3.



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וְאִנְחָנוּ עִם מְרֻעֵיתוֹ	and.we people.of pasture.his ²⁷
וְצֹאן יָדוֹ	and.flock.of hand ²⁸ .his
הַיּוֹם אִם־בִּקְלוֹ תִשְׁמָעוּ:	²⁹ the.day [today] ³⁰ if ³¹ -at.voice.his you ³² .hear
אֶל־תִּקְשׁוּ לִבְבְּכֶם כַּמְרִיבָה	8 do.not-you.harden heart ³³³⁴ .your ³⁵ as.Meribah ³⁶
כִּיּוֹם מָסָה בַּמִּדְבָּר:	as.day.of Massah ³⁷ in.the.wilderness
אֲשֶׁר נִסּוּנִי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם	9 that ³⁸ tested.me. fathers. your ³⁹

²⁷ Ps100:3 and Isaiah 40:11-12 also combine this motif of Creator of the world-Shepherd of his people.

²⁸ 'hand', repeated vocabulary, see notes for v4 & v5.

²⁹ 7d, with its 3rd person ref to God, 'his voice', and 2nd pl ref to the worshippers, is still the speaker of the psalm in v 1-7c, but here he creates a distinction between himself and the group to which he belongs. It was not at all unusual for prophets to introduce an oracle or warning in their own voices before moving on to the divine 'I', in YHWH's voice. Cf the movement in Ps 81:5c-6a.

³⁰ Today הַיּוֹם was frequently used by Moses in Deuteronomy, eg Deut 4:40; 26:17, 18; 27:10

³¹ אִם means either 'if' or 'if only' here. There is discussion as to whether it should be understood as *conditional* or *optative*, see [Appendix D](#), section C.3. Compare the different use of אִם in the footnote to v11.

³² All uses of the second person 'you' in this psalm (which start here) are 2nd person plural, likewise the possessive 'your'.

³³ Note that 'heart' is singular, although 'you' is plural. In Hebrew it is a standard idiom that a group of people can share a single heart.

³⁴ To harden one's heart is a Hebrew idiom, but the use of the word 'heart' is repeated in v10, hearts that go astray, so if possible keep that link in the translation.

³⁵ Amos 5:18-25 and Isaiah 1:11-17 also both speak of the importance of rightness of heart when coming to worship, in even stronger language than we have here.

³⁶ Meribah is referred to in both stories of getting water out of a rock, Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:2-13. The word is derived from ריב, to contend, thus *contention*, *quarrel*, *strife* or *faultfinding*.

³⁷ Massah is referred to in the story in Exodus 17:1-7; the word is derived from נסה, so *testing* or *tempting*.

³⁸ v 9 is grammatically dependent on v 8, and so YHWH's speech is understood to start in v8.

³⁹ Some translations, such as GNB and NTLH (Port), move *your ancestors* from v9 up into v8, to make the participant reference clearer. This is not advised for several reasons, the most important being that it creates an undesirable separation between the worshippers and the warning, while the you pl in v8 is doing the opposite, creating a link.



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בְּחִנּוּנַי גַּם־רָאוּ פְעֻלָּי:	tried.me. though-(they)saw deed.my
אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה אֶקְוֶה בְּדוֹר וָאָמָר	10 forty years I.was.disgusted ⁴⁰ with.generation and.I.said
עַם תֵּעִי לִבָּב הֵם	people going astray.of heart ⁴¹ they ⁴²
וְהֵם לֹא־יָדְעוּ דַרְכָּי:	and.they ⁴³ not-know. ways.my
אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי בְּאַפִּי	11 that ⁴⁴ -I.swore in.anger.my
אִם־יָבֹאוּ אֶל־מְנוּחָתִי:	⁴⁵ not ⁴⁶ -(they).will.come ^{47,48} into-rest(ing.place).my

⁴⁰ The verb קוֹט is used to express a strong sense of disgust or loathing in reaction to sin, see Ps119:158, Ezek 20:43.

⁴¹ See the footnote to v8: here a different idiom is used, but repeating the word ‘heart’ (singular, in this verse), emphasizing the faithlessness of Israel – hard of heart, wayward of heart.

⁴² The uses of the independent pronoun הֵם they in this verse are prominence features, not required by the grammar, as the subject of the (singular) participle תֵּעִי going astray has already been given, עַם, people, see the footnote to v5; for additional emphasis, the two uses of the word in 10b and 10c form a type of tail-head device.

⁴³ See footnote above on the tail-head device.

⁴⁴ See also the footnote to verse 4 on the opening word. This subordinates to v8, as does v9 above.

⁴⁵ This punishment is set out in Numbers 14:22-34, after the spies have returned from Canaan but the people refuse to enter the land.

⁴⁶ This less common use of אִם as ‘not’ is also found in Ps 89:35 ‘I will not lie to David’ (a future, as here). Cf the ‘if, if only’ use in v7 above.

⁴⁷ In the receptor language this verb ‘come, enter’ may need to be changed to reflect that the speaker is already in the place that he is refusing the others entry to.

⁴⁸ This is the 2nd use of the verb בּוֹא in this psalm, the other being in v6, tying together the two halves of the psalm. The first is to come into God’s presence in worship, the second is to enter his rest, make one’s home in his presence.



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Appendix D: Notes to the Facilitator

1. IS THE PSALM A UNIFIED WHOLE, OR TWO SEPARATE HALVES?

There is such a dramatic change of tone in the middle of the psalm, at the end of verse 7, from rapturous praise to stern admonition, that some commentators have suggested that it is really two psalms, poorly pasted together.

The integrity of the psalm can be supported in a number of different ways. Firstly, this is not the only psalm to follow this pattern. Psalm 50 and Psalm 81 (both Asaph psalms) do something similar: all three start with a call to worship YHWH, and then the second section calls Israel to hear and obey, in somewhat stern terms.

Psalm 50	1-6 YHWH appears and calls together heavens and earth to judge his people	7 announcement by YHWH of his divine testimony against Israel 8-23 YHWH testifies against Israel that he receives their sacrifices but they do not bring thank offerings or call upon him; he accuses the wicked of religious hypocrisy joined to wicked behaviour.
Psalm 81	1-5 call to festival, and comment on its ordinance	5b introduction of divine discourse by 3 rd person (identity obscure) 6-16 call by YHWH to worship him only, with historical references
Psalm 95	1-7a call to worship YHWH, both as creator 3-5 and as their covenant shepherd and maker 5-7a	7b introduction of divine discourse by 3 rd person 8-11 admonitory discourse by YHWH, warning from history about hardness of heart

There is also the argument of shared vocabulary/allusions, bridging the two ‘halves’, for example:

עַם ‘people’ in verses 7a and 10, בּוֹא ‘come’ in verses 6 and 11, and צִוֶּר in verse 1, linking with the Massah/Meribah event in v8. The last is the only one of these that is not common vocabulary in the psalms, however.

The most compelling argument is probably that of intention: that the change in tone, even the tensions between the two halves, is itself a deliberate teaching device on the part of the psalmist. It is his intention that the listener, about to enjoy some cheerful worship, is brought suddenly to a point of serious heartsearching and reflection.





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2. SEGMENTATION: ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

It is the view taken in this guide that the psalm is structured in three sections: two invitations and a warning, each followed by reasons:

- v 1-5: an invitation to worship in jubilation, because the Lord is the creator God
- v 6-7a: an invitation to worship in humility, because the Lord is our maker and our shepherd
- v 7b-11 a warning not to be hardhearted and disobedient, otherwise we will incur God's anger and we will not enter into his rest.

There may also be a sense of physical movement between sections one and two, as worshippers are called to move towards the Temple, with shouts of joy, and then having entered the temple, they are called to kneel in submission and worship. This is their physical posture as they listen to the warning and examine their hearts.

Translations vary quite widely in their segmentation of this psalm. There are a number of translations that never put stanza breaks into psalms (such as the LEB, NET, and the Portuguese ARA and NTLH). However, of those that do, there are four different ways to divide up Psalm 95:

Two stanzas: with breaks between v7a and 7b 'Today' eg KJV, Beth Tanner in NICOT

Two stanzas: with breaks between v5 and v6, 'Come and worship' eg ESV, NASB, NLT, GNB

Three stanzas: 1-5, 6-7a, 7b-11, eg NRSV, NCV, Portuguese NVI

Four stanzas: 1-2, 3-5, 6-7a, 7b-11 eg NIV, CEV

The third is the view taken in this guide.

The reasons for these choices are fairly self-explanatory, but it is worth spending a moment on the implications of having a v6-11 single stanza, as chosen by the ESV, NLT and others, rather than a v7b-11 final stanza.

The 'hinge' of the psalm is the transition from 7a-7b, where the warning breaks in, *Today*, in God's voice, expressing his anger. This is a crucial moment in the psalm and should not be buried in a stanza lasting from v6-11. Possibly the rationale for doing so may be to ensure that the 'hinge' of warning in 7b is not seen as dividing the psalm in two, compromising the integrity of the psalm, as historically some commentators have suggested that in effect the psalm is two different halves pasted together, see above. However, rather than bury the crucial hinge, it is better to ensure that that unity of the psalm is understood, while the flow and movement of the psalm are maintained.

3. EXEGETICAL CHOICE: V7C: OPTATIVE OR CONDITIONAL

The translation choice is whether to translate the clause in Ps 95:7d as **optative**:

Today, if only you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts....

Or as **conditional**:

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts....



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If the latter, then the protasis, *if you hear his voice*, is grammatically linked to the apodosis in 8a: ‘if you hear his voice, (then) do not harden your hearts...’.

In terms of meaning, there is a small but significant difference. In both of them, the psalmist is clearly expressing his desire for the worshippers to pay attention to what God is saying. The optative however focusses more on the possibility that the singers of the psalm will hear, but decide not to listen (a decision demonstrating a hardness of heart), whereas technically at least the conditional includes the possibility that the singers of the psalm may not hear the voice at all, but when/if they do, they should not harden their hearts. The Hebrew permits either interpretation.

Commentators prefer the optative, see Marvin Tate, Beth Tanner, Bratcher, Hossfeld & Zenger, as better reflecting the mood of the psalm. Translations are divided, with at least one choosing a halfway, ‘best of both’ position, ‘if you would hear his voice, do not harden...’ and others ignoring the ‘if’ completely and turning the phrase into an imperative, ‘Listen to his voice!’

Optative	Conditional	Best of both	Imperative
NIV 2011	NIV 1984	NASB	NCV
NRSV	LEB		CEV
NET	KJV		GNB
NLT	ESV		NLH (Port)
	Almeida RA (Port)		
	NVI (Port)		

It is likely that some at least of the translations that have opted for the straight conditional have done so because they have been influenced by the letter to the Hebrews. There, in the quote from the Septuagint, the writer to the Hebrews uses a conditional, and repeats it three times, in Heb 3:7, 15 and 4:7:

Heb 3:7 Today, if you hear his voice,

⁸ do not harden your hearts.

Note that if the workshop participants are very Bible-literate and familiar with this passage, that may unintentionally influence their translation, but the guide translations all use the optative.

4. TEXT BOX ON GOD’S REST

Understanding **God’s rest**: from Genesis to Revelation

This word study can be used as homework for a competent, motivated Bible-literate group, either overnight or over a weekend. The references below should be handed out to individuals, who will come back and tell the group what they’ve learnt from that quote about God’s rest. Then put the references in Bible order up on a whiteboard, and discuss the picture that builds up through all of the texts together.



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The noun *menuchah* מְנוּחָה closes Psalm 95, on the sombre note of ‘they shall not enter my rest’. What did this mean for the singers of the psalm?

Deuteronomy: the promised land: settled and at peace

The primary meaning of ‘God’s rest’ for the people of Israel was probably the future hope of the promised land: that is, the ‘rest’ of being at home in the promised land, at ‘rest’ from wandering and fighting with enemies. See Deut 12:9-10, for example, which refers to the land as the people’s ‘rest’ מְנוּחָה and their inheritance, and goes on to say that the Lord will **give his people rest** from all their enemies there [hifil perfect of the related verb *nuach* נוּחַ].

Genesis: rest in the Garden of Eden; protection from divine punishment

However, the concept of God’s rest is found very much earlier: God’s rest, and our inclusion in that rest, bridges the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. In Genesis 2:1-4a, we read that after creating the world, God rested on the seventh day and instituted the sabbath rest; in the Genesis account that is the *shabbat* word for rest, not the *nuach* one in Ps 95. However, when this event is retold in Exodus 20:11, the fourth of the ten commandments, instituting the observance of the Sabbath, it says that God **rested** on the seventh day, using the *nuach* verb.

Nuach is however used in Genesis, when the Lord placed Adam in the Garden of Eden; in Gen 2:15 the word is for placing him there is וַיַּנְחֵהוּ, he ‘**caused him to rest**’ there [hifil wayyiqtol of נוּחַ]—a rest that did not preclude work, as he was placed there in order to work in the garden and to take care of it.

There is also an interesting and somewhat similar usage in Gen 19:16, where the two angels seized Lot and his wife and daughters by the hand, and brought them out of the city, and וַיַּנְחֵהוּ [hifil wayyiqtol of נוּחַ] ‘**gave them rest**’, ie settled them safely, outside the city (although at that point Lot bargained for settling in a small town on the plain, rather than running directly to the hills as instructed).

Note that the aspect of *safety* is unstated but is very prominent in the text, as in v24 the rest given to Lot is protection from the divine punishment of sulphur and fire that wipes out the other inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Numbers: in the desert: rest for the Ark, the Lord, the people

Still before arriving at the promised land, there is an added dimension of spiritual significance in ‘resting’, see the double use in Num. 10:33-36. Firstly, in Num 10:33, the Ark goes ahead of the people to find *them* ‘rest’, or a **place of rest** - מְנוּחָה, as in Ps 95:11. But then in 10:36, it is the ark itself that comes ‘**to rest**’ after leading the people throughout the day, and Moses refers to that rest (also in v36) as the Lord ‘returning’ to his people.



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Chronicles: in the promised land: rest from enemies, the place of God's rest

Once Israel has settled in the promised land, which is the fulfilment of one promised aspect of 'rest', the concept of 'rest' from enemies continues. In 1 Chr 22:9, the Lord speaks to David about his son Solomon, who would follow him: 'I will **give him rest** [hifil perfect of נָוַח] from all his enemies on every side.'

In 2 Chr 6:41, we see something rather different happening: the temple becomes God's 'place of rest'. At the end of Solomon's long prayer of dedication for the temple, he invites the Lord to '**come to your resting place**, [related word: נָוַח, rest, resting-place:] you and the ark of your might.' (See also virtually identical phrasing in Ps132:8). So here we see the reciprocity of the term 'rest': God's people find their rest, but we also see God finding his rest among his people.

Hebrews, Revelation: God's 'rest' still lies ahead of us

In Hebrews 4:1, after extensively quoting Ps95, the author says that God's 'rest' is seen as a promise that is still unfulfilled: 'since the promise of entering his **rest** still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it' – explaining that if God's rest were limited to the 'rest' of the promised land, then referring to it as still in the future in Psalm 95 would be meaningless.

He then concludes in Hebrews 4:9: 'There remains, then, a **Sabbath-rest** for the people of God'. He urges his readers to 'make every effort to **enter that rest**, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.' So this rest is a fulfilment of the prophecies of redemption.

The original rest, then, was the rest in the garden of Eden with the Lord, a rest that mankind lost when Adam sinned, and we will not see that rest again until all is restored, as it says in Rev 14:13:

¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit, "**they will rest** from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

What does God's rest mean in Psalm 95?

So what would the original singers of Psalm 95 have understood from the concept of 'entering into God's rest'?

By the time of the psalmists, it no longer meant entry into the promised land; that had happened centuries before. And they could not have had the full eschatological hope that is given to believers nowadays throughout the New Testament. But they would have understood that – as in Eden, as with the Ark, as for Solomon – it meant dwelling in security with the Lord: the presence of the Lord dwelling with them, and the blessings of peace that come with that.



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Appendix E: Portuguese guide translations

Primeiro guia de tradução, interlinear hebraico, ligeiramente modificado	Segundo guia de tradução, ainda perto do hebraico original
<p>¹ Vamos! Cantemos com alegria a YHWH, Gritemos com júbilo a Rocha da nossa salvação,</p> <p>² Aproximemos a presença dele com ações de graças, Em cânticos gritemos alegremente para ele,</p> <p>³ Pois grande deus, YHWH, E grande rei acima de todos deuses.</p> <p>⁴ Que na mão dele profundezas da terra E picos das montanhas dele</p> <p>⁵ Que dele o mar e ele o fez E as suas mãos moldaram terra-seca.</p> <p>⁶ Venham, adoremos e dobremos o joelho, Ajoelhemos na presença dele, YHWH nosso Criador.</p> <p>⁷ Pois ele – nosso Deus E nós, povo do seu pasto/ pastoreio, grazing E rebanho da sua mão.</p> <p>O dia [hoje] se a sua voz ouvirem</p> <p>⁸ Não endureçam vossos corações como Meribah, Como dia Massah no deserto,</p> <p>⁹ Que puseram-me à prova vossos pais Desafiaram-me apesar de terem visto minha obra. /não obstante, embora + subj</p> <p>¹⁰ Quaranta anos eu ficava enojado com geração e disse: povo de coração desviado, eles, E eles não conhecem os meus caminhos.</p> <p>¹¹ Que [= por isso] jurei na minha ira, Não entrarão no meu descanso.</p>	<p>¹ Venham! Cantaremos em voz alta a YHWH, Daremos um grito de alegria à Rocha da nossa salvação.</p> <p>² Vamos ao seu encontro com ações de graças, Gritaremos com alegria para ele com uma canção.</p> <p>³ Porque YHWH é um deus grande, E um grande rei acima de todos deuses.</p> <p>⁴ Pois na sua mão são as profundezas da terra, E os cumes dos montes são dele.</p> <p>⁵ Pois o mar é dele, e ele o fez, E as suas mãos formaram a terra seca.</p> <p>⁶ Venham, adoremos e curvemo-nos, Ajoelhemos diante do Senhor, nosso Criador.</p> <p>⁷ Pois ele é nosso Deus, Nós somos o povo do seu pastoreio E o rebanho da sua mão.</p> <p>Hoje, se vocês ouvirem a sua voz!</p> <p>⁸ Não endureçam vossos corações como Meribah, Como aquele dia a Massah no deserto,</p> <p>⁹ pois lá os vossos antepassados me tentaram, Pondo-me à prova, embora tivessem visto as minhas obras.</p> <p>¹⁰ Durante quaranta anos fiquei desgostado essa geração e disse, “Este povo tem corações desviados, ¹¹ E eles não conhecem meus caminhos.” Então jurei na minha ira, “Eles nunca entrarão no meu descanso”.</p>



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Appendix F: help for the oral storytelling

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The story quoted at the end of Psalm 95, Numbers 13-14, is a dramatic one that is easy to follow. It's divided below into scenes to make it easier to remember. With a little practice one of the participants, or the facilitator, could re-tell using the cues only.

Alternatively, it could be performed as a short drama.

Scene 1: Numbers 13:1

The Lord to Moses: One man from each of the 12 tribes should go and spy out Canaan, the promised land.

Cue: **go and spy**

Scene 2: Numbers 13:17-20

Moses gives instructions to the 12:

Go from the (Negev) desert to the hills.

Are the people: many/few? Strong/weak? Walled towns?

Is the land: Fertile/poor? Trees? Bring back fruit

Cue: **People how? Land how?**

Scene 3: Numbers 13:27-33

Return of the spies. Bunch of grapes so big it took 2 men to carry it.

The 10: GOOD: 'flowing with milk and honey'

BAD: the people are powerful, the cities are fortified

Caleb: We can do it

The 10: No we can't. We felt like grasshoppers compared with them. They thought so too.

Cue: **felt like grasshoppers**

Scene 4: Numbers 14:1-4

People: If only we'd died in the desert! We'll be killed and our wives and children taken as plunder. Let's go back to Egypt.

Cue: **back to Egypt**

Scene 5: Numbers 14: 6-11





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Joshua and Caleb: No! The land is great. The Lord will give it to us. Don't rebel against him, don't be afraid of the people, the Lord is with us not them.

Cue: **No! the Lord is with us**

Scene 6: Numbers 14:10-19, , 26-35

People: We're going to stone Moses.

The Lord: These people treat me with contempt and refuse to believe what I say. I'm going to kill them with a plague but make you, Moses, into a great nation.

Moses: Please don't do that. The Egyptians will hear about it and say despite all your promises you weren't able to do what you said. You said yourself you're slow to anger, abounding in love, forgiving sin and rebellion, so please forgive them.

The Lord: I do forgive them. But there is a punishment. Tell the Israelites, no one over 20 years old will enter the promised land except Caleb and Joshua. The rest of you will spend 40 years in the desert, and die there. Your children, the ones you said would be taken as plunder, will enter the land, but you wicked people who turned against me, none of you will enter the promised land.

Cue: **Stone – contempt – Egypt - they will not enter the promised land.**



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APP. A



APP. B



Appendix G: Intertextuality

PSALM 95 AND HEBREWS IN THE NT

There are several differences between the way in which Ps 95 is quoted in the book of Hebrews, and the Hebrew psalm.

1. Davidic authorship

In addition to first ascribing the authorship of the psalm to the Holy Spirit, in the present tense:

Heb 3:7 So, as the Holy Spirit says,

the psalm is also ascribed to God:

Heb 4:3 , just as God has said.

The psalm is then also ascribed to David, in:

Heb 4:7 when a long time later he spoke through David, ...

This is almost certainly because the LXX has a superscription to Ps95 which reads, “A praise song for David’, although the Greek is slightly different – τῷ Δαυιδ in the LXX superscription, and ἐν Δαυειδ in Hebrews.

2. Forty years

The period of forty years has been rephrased in Hebrews to apply not to the period of God’s anger in the wilderness, but to the previous clause, to the period during which the Israelites ‘saw what I did’. Compare:

Heb 3:9-10

where your fathers tested and tried me
and for forty years saw what I did.

- ¹⁰ That is why I was angry with that generation,
and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray,
and they have not known my ways.’

cf: Psalm 95:9-10

where your fathers tested and tried me,
though they had seen what I did.

- ¹⁰ For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways.”

Translations of Ps95 should not follow Hebrews here.



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APP. A



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3. Eschatology

Both 'Today' in Ps 95:8 and God's rest in Ps95:11 have been given a new interpretation by the writer to the Hebrews. In Heb 3:12-19 'today' is directly applied to the readers, in order to emphasize the limited period of time in which the decision to be faithful can be made. Heb 4:1-11 takes the final verse of the psalm, 'rest', and links it both to the Sabbath, established in Genesis (v4) and also to the final 'rest' for the people of God (v9-11). See notes above, [Appendix D](#).

PSALM 95 AND PSALMS 93-100

The group of psalms from 93-100 form a coherent group, with Psalm 95 forming a bridge from the first group, 93-94, which establish the royal rule, into 96-100, which establish the universal application of royal rule (see Hossfeld & Zenger, vol II). These are often known as the **יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ** 'the Lord is king' psalms.

Psalm 95 and Psalm 100 together form a frame for the second group, 96-99.

PSALM 94 AND PSALM 95

Despite extremely different themes and mood, Psalms 94 and 95 share a monitory or warning role, although these are not expressed in the same way (in Ps 95 it is the worshippers who are addressed, in Ps 94 it is the 'wicked' who are called to repent). The more obvious connection is the many links of shared vocabulary between Ps 94 and Ps 95, particularly between the end of Ps 94 and the beginning of Ps 95. The most striking of these is the use of **צֹר**, *rock*, to describe God, in 94:22 and 95:1; but see also **עַם**, *people*, found 3x in Ps 94 and twice in Ps95. God's dominion is seen over the world in 94:2, 'judge of the earth' and in 95:4, 'the depths of the earth..the mountain peaks...the sea...the dry land'. Both psalms use the verb **יָצַר**, for the *shaping* act of creation.

There is also shared vocabulary that is used contrastively in the two psalms, for example in 95:9 **פְּעֻלֵי** refers to the *deeds* of God, whereas the same word is used in 94:4 & 16 as **פְּעֻלֵי אֱוֹן**, *those doing evil*. In 94:10 the Lord **יָדַע** *knows* the thoughts of man, but in 95:10 the people **לֹא יָדְעוּ** *have not known* God's ways. In 94:15 we have the *upright in heart*, **יִשְׁרֵי-לֵב**, but in 95:10 the people have *wayward hearts*, **תַּעֲיֵי לֵבָב**.

PSALM 96 AND PSALM 95

Psalm 96 does not share the same amount of vocabulary with Psalm 95 as Psalm 94 does, but the calls for praise and rejoicing to the Lord, the creator and sustainer of all, are similar in theme, while expanded in content.



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APP. A



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Psalm 96 lacks the warnings of the second half of Psalm 95, but the final triumphant looking forward to judgment in 96:13 reminds us of much of Psalm 94 (4, 15, 23 and so on).

THE SPECIAL CASE OF Ps100

There are strong similarities between the first half of Ps 95, and Ps100. The latter is a less complex psalm, without the celebration of YHWH as Creator of the world, and without the warnings of the second half of Ps95. It closes off the group of psalms 93-100 with no complexity in its straightforward call to rejoice in and worship the Lord.

Interestingly, there are few or no repeated phrases between the two psalms (neither of which is given an author in the superscription) but there is a significant overlap in vocabulary and ideas.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN Ps 95 AND Ps 100:

Ps 95, Hebrew	Ps 95 ref	NIV 84	Ps 100 Heb	ref	NIV 84
נְרַנְנָה	1a	Let's sing for joy [רנן]	בְּרִנָּה	V2b	In joyful song (noun רננה)
נְרִיעָה	1b	Shout aloud [רוע]	הִרְיעוּ	1a opens psalm	Shout for joy [רוע]
בְּתוֹדָה	2a	with thanksgiving [תודה]	לְתוֹדָה, בְּתוֹדָה	Superscription, also 4a	(for) giving thanks; with thanksgiving [תודה]
יְהוָה עֲשָׂנוּ	6b	Lord our Maker [יהוה עשנו]	הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ	3b	It is he who made us
עַם מְרֻעֵיתוֹ וְצֹאן יָדוֹ	7b,c	People of his pasture and flock of his hand	עַמּוֹ וְצֹאן מְרֻעֵיתוֹ	3c	We are his people and the flock of his pasture

