

Testamentum Imperium
An International Theological Journal

www.PreciousHeart.net/ti

Volume 1 – 2007

The Psalms: Eternal Security and Perseverance

Harold R. Holmyard III – Editor and Translator
*Holman Christian Standard Bible*¹

Chapter 1 – Perspectives on Eternal Security

Testamentum Imperium's First Collection

Editors Ke Vaughn Mattis and Kirk R. MacGreggor,

Foreword by Michael G. Maness (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock,² c2008)

Introduction
Eternal Security
Perseverance

The Psalms speak directly to issues regarding the eternal security and perseverance of believers in just a small portion of their material. Both these doctrines pertain to eternal life, and the psalmists' overwhelming concern was the present life. But many additional passages have suggestive value for these doctrines.

Eternal security teaches that “a person truly saved will never be lost, either by sinning or by ceasing to believe.” The maintenance of eternal security is grounded in the perseverance of God. “Perseverance of the saints” is the “teaching that the saints will definitely persevere in the faith, both in belief and in action.”³ God expects a person to persevere or endure to the end if that person is to be saved (Matt 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Jas 5:11). What follows is a

¹ See <http://hcsb.broadmanholman.com/crossmain.asp>; the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* was translated Bible by 100 international translators for the Holman Bible Publishers, the oldest in America. Holmyard is also the author of three articles for *Bibliotheca Sacra* and other articles.

² See <http://wipfandstock.com>.

³ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, “Perseverance,” <<http://www.ariel.org/qapersev.html>>, accessed 12 April 2008.

study of psalmic texts that bear directly or indirectly on the doctrines of the believer's eternal security and perseverance.

Eternal Security

The approach taken to eternal security will involve a maximization of the possibilities of meaning inherent in the Psalms' wording, given the recognized belief of Israelites in a general resurrection. This belief is apparent not only in OT passages like Dan 12:2–3, Isa 25:7–8, and Isa 26:19, but in the NT record of OT faith in places like Heb 11:13–22. Accordingly, a method of canonical interpretation sympathetic to belief in resurrection is warranted. When Jesus argued for the reality of resurrection with Sadducees, he derived the doctrine from the words, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exod 3:6). The Sadducees might have rejected resurrection because it was not mentioned in the Pentateuch.⁴ So Jesus extracted it from the fact that God was not a God of the dead but the living (Matt 22:23–32). Christians have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), and God the Father and the Holy Spirit can illuminate the implications of Scripture for them (Eph 1:17–18). Readers can obviously apply some Psalms to the topic of eternal security. Other passages are debatable, but the effort will be to observe texts that encourage such a hope.

David wrote Psalm 2 about a future king of Israel ruling over the entire world (v. 8; cf. Acts 4:25). The NT indicates that he wrote with conscious knowledge of a mighty descendant who would follow him and rise from the dead (Acts 2:25–31). Jesus explained that David viewed this Messianic king as his Lord, something not really possible unless they were contemporaries (Matt 22:42–45; Ps 110:1). David may have prophesied of that one here, promising that everyone trusting in him would be blessed (Ps 2:12). If that king would rise from the dead, his subjects like David evidently would too. The NT quotes Ps 2:9 in just such a context (Rev 2:27).

Psalm 4:3 offers the comforting thoughts that the Lord has set apart the godly person for himself and will hear when such a person prays. So he can have peace, trusting in the Lord (vv. 8, 5). The psalm may not look beyond this life, but it is suggestive in that God is likely to preserve what he sets aside for himself.

⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.1.4.

Psalm 5 speaks of God’s destruction of the wicked (vv. 4–6, 10) but, in contrast, prays confidently about believers (vv. 11–12):

But let all who take refuge in You rejoice;
let them shout for joy forever.
May You shelter them,
and may those who love Your name boast about You.
For You, Lord, bless the righteous one;
You surround him with favor like a shield (HCSB).

Again, the psalm’s horizon may be this world, but it describes God’s enduring care.

Psalm 6:5 states, “For there is no remembrance of You in death; in Sheol who will praise You?”⁵ “In Sheol, persons were believed to exist in a form of semi-life, at rest, yet not in joy, for they had not the fullness of life which made possible the richness of relationship with the living God.”⁶ The Jews put their hope in the general resurrection, not in the intermediate state.

Psalm 9 is confident that God will defeat David’s enemies (v. 3), uphold David’s cause (v. 4), and destroy the wicked (vv. 5–6, 15–17). God is a refuge for the oppressed and does not forsake those who trust in him (vv. 9–10). He will judge the world in righteousness (v. 8) so that the wicked retreat to Sheol and the needy are not forgotten forever (vv. 17–18). These ideas may not require a final judgment but are quite compatible with one.

Psalm 16 is significant for eternal security. While the psalm might concern David’s temporal well-being, the apostle Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, said that David, being a prophet and knowing that God by oath had sworn to him about seating a descendant on his throne, looked ahead and spoke concerning the resurrection of Christ, that he was neither abandoned to Hades nor did his flesh see corruption (Acts 2:30–31). Peter began by saying that David spoke about Christ: “I saw the Lord before me always” (Acts 2:25; Ps 16:8). Does Peter mean that the “I” is David and “the Lord” is Christ? Or

⁵ Sheol was the underworld of the dead and was closely associated with the grave. A transliteration of the OT Greek rendering of the word is “Hades.”

⁶ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Vol. 19 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word, 1983), 93.

does he mean that the “I” is Christ and “the Lord” is the Father? It seems possible that in the original context the “I” was David, who saw the Christ as the “Holy One” of verse 10.⁷ Jesus explained that David used “my Lord” in Psalm 110:1 of the Christ (Mark 12:36–37). Because the Holy One would not suffer decay, David would not be abandoned to Sheol (Acts 2:27; Ps 16:10). But when Peter applied the words to Christ (Acts 2:31), he referred both clauses of Ps 16:10 to Christ, because of course Christ was neither abandoned to Sheol nor did he suffer corruption.⁸ Other prophets spoke about the death and resurrection of Christ (1 Pet 1:11), but the first-person form of Psalm 16 suggests that David saw the implications it held regarding his own future state. It seems that David identified his fate with that of his descendant, holding that his descendant’s victory over death implied his own. So David did not just have a short-term deliverance from Sheol in mind, but a permanent one. David knew that the Lord upheld his destiny (v. 5). His body rested securely, knowing that God would not leave him in the grave (vv. 9–10). David concluded this psalm with the idea that God had revealed to him the way of life (rather than death). He expected that God would fill him with joy in the divine presence, and with eternal pleasures at God’s right hand (v. 11).

Psalm 17:14–15 ends with a powerful contrast between two types of satisfaction:

With Your hand, Lord, [save me] from men, from men of the world, whose portion is in this life: You fill their bellies with what You have in store, their sons are satisfied, and they leave their surplus to their children. But I will see Your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be satisfied with Your presence (HCSB).

The term “awake” may refer to waking after death (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; Eph 5:14; *cf.* Job 14:12; Jer 51:39, 57). David’s enemies have their portion in this life and in material well-being. But David’s desire is to see the Lord, even after death. The expectation of seeing God is sometimes an after-death or eschatological expectation (Job 19:26–

⁷ The demons later called Christ the “holy one” (Luke 4:34). The equivalent term in Hebrew can be applied to other human beings (Deut 33:8; Ps 89:19).

⁸ It is hard to believe David intended that a psalm of his, speaking in the first person without a clear reference to a Messianic figure, should have no reference at all to David himself.

27; 1 John 3:2). David's portion is the Lord, and it will last beyond this life.

Psalm 18 is about God saving David from his enemies, yet the language is so absolute that for a man with hopes of life after death, the words could be suggestive. David shows such hopes in Psalms 16–17 and here calls God his fortress and deliverer, the horn, or strength, of his salvation (v. 2), who rescues him from sorrows of death and hell (vv. 4–5). God moves heaven and earth to secure safety for one who trusts in him. God shows mercy to his anointed forever, to David and his offspring (v. 50).

Eternal hopes might be present in David's Psalm 21:

Life he asked of You; You have given it to him,
length of days forever and ever. . . .
For You bestow on him blessings forever;
You make him rejoice with gladness in

Your presence (vv. 4, 6).

David's Psalm 22 has been considered a prophecy of the Messiah through heightened expressions that surpassed David's experience and through his identification with the coming One.⁹ Hebrews 2:12 applies Psalm 22:22 to the resurrected Christ. Could Psalm 22 concern death and resurrection? The psalm begins with the words Jesus cited from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" (Mark 15:34), and verses 8 (*cf.* Mt 27:43), 18 (*cf.* Jn 19:23), and others seem prophetic of his death. The person in 22:1–21 is in mortal danger yet is restored to almost idyllic conditions in 22:22–31. The afflicted eat and are satisfied. The psalmist tells them to let their hearts live forever (v. 26). The entire earth will turn to the Lord as a result of what happened to this figure (v. 27). All who are perishing, who cannot keep themselves alive, will bow before the Lord (v. 29). Since the NT invites us to read the psalm of the resurrected Christ, it certainly could have been the Spirit's intent to speak of the ultimate blessedness of believers in Ps 22:22–31, possibly in the millennium after the first resurrection.

⁹ Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 3 vols. in 1, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1:306–7.

Psalm 23, traditionally the most popular psalm, has given multitudes comfort concerning this life, but it certainly seems to hint beyond this life. If God will be with believers in the “darkest valley,” isn’t the darkest valley the approach of death (v. 4)? If they will be with God for the length of their days, will that fellowship cease forever when they die (v. 6)? Since God is a loving Shepherd (v. 1), hope arises that death will not be the end.

Psalm 24 presents God as the One who founded and established the earth (vv. 1–2), whose fellowship is to be sought by the believer, with the result of blessing and “vindication from God his Savior” (vv. 3–5). Such a person is among “the generation of those who seek Him.” Next the city gates are described as “ancient doors” that should open to let in the “King of glory,” who is evidently coming in, perhaps to Jerusalem. The psalm draws a contrast between the life of believers and the God of generations who enters the ancient city gates. If this everlasting God is the believer’s Savior, might that salvation not extend beyond this brief life?

Psalm 25 could describe this life only, but verse 3 claims, “No one who hopes in You will be put to shame.” Paul took up these words in his hope that he would not be put to shame in anything, but that Christ would be magnified in his body, whether by life or death (Phil 1:20). Isn’t it the confidence of resurrection that gives a person certainty that neither life nor death can permanently put him to shame? Christ despised the shame of his death for the joy that was set before him (Heb 12:2). The psalmist fixes his hope on God (vv. 3, 5, 21). God is his merciful and loving Savior (vv. 5–6). He entreats God to forgive his sin, guide him, guard his life, and redeem Israel from all its troubles. God confides in those who fear him, and reveals his covenant to them. The existence of such an atmosphere of trust renders it incongruous for its promises to cease forever at death.

David in Psalm 28:9 asks God to save his people, bless his inheritance, be their Shepherd, and carry them forever. Again, while the words could regard just this present life, they can be suggestive of hope beyond this life. Psalm 29 presents God as awesomely powerful, One who sat enthroned at the Flood and sits enthroned forever. Everyone in God’s temple cries, “Glory!” God strengthens his people and blesses them with peace (vv. 9–11). If God is to sit forever as

King over his people and they are to be more than a passing show, his power must strengthen them beyond this life.

The Davidic Psalm 30, for the dedication of the temple, is a hopeful personal testimony of deliverance. It ends, “O Lord, my God, I will praise You forever” (v. 12). The word “forever” (*olam*) could mean the foreseeable future, the rest of one’s life, but it could suggest limitless time as well. David in Psalm 31:5 wrote words that Jesus cited as he was about to die: “Into Your hand I commit my spirit.” Jesus certainly felt David’s words had implications beyond the time of death. Such absolute consigning of oneself to God will be rewarded at death by God keeping one’s spirit. Psalm 31 is about divine rescue from enemies, and 1 Cor 15:26 assures that the last enemy to be destroyed is death. “The Lord preserves faithful ones” (Ps 31:23).

The Davidic Psalm 32:1–2, quoted in Romans 4:7–8, says that a person is blessed if one’s transgression is forgiven, one’s sin is covered, and the Lord will not count iniquity against that one. Might this not be a great comfort even for an OT saint? Death was the punishment for sin (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23), but if God had forgiven one’s sin, perhaps death was not to be feared. Paul in Romans 4 applies Psalm 32:1–2 in a context of eternal justification from sin.

Psalm 33 opens the way Psalm 32 closes, with the righteous rejoicing in the Lord for his unfailing love (vv. 1, 5). The Lord’s counsel stands forever, his purposes through all generations, and that means the people he chose for his inheritance are blessed (vv. 11–12). While the horizon could be this life, a God who cares that much and has unfailing love may want to preserve his inheritance longer than this life only.

David’s Psalm 34 closes with pregnant words: “The Lord redeems the life of His servants, and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned” (v. 22). Romans 8:1 teaches that “there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus,” who redeemed us to God by his blood (Rev 5:9). David did not know those details but expressed full confidence in God by the Spirit. God would deliver him from all his troubles (v. 19). Peter cites Psalm 34:8 with regard to the NT saint, who in Christ has tasted that the Lord is good (1 Pet 2:3).

David shows expansive optimism in Psalm 36:5–9. God’s lovingkindness extends to heaven, his faithfulness to the skies. Thus people find refuge in God and drink fully from the wealth of his house

and the river of his pleasures. The fountain of life is with God, and they see light in his light. The OT believer is encouraged to think that God will do everything for him that can possibly be done.

In Psalm 37 David contrasts the destinies of the righteous and the wicked. Amid many comforting words David five times repeats that the righteous will inherit the land (vv. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34) while the wicked are cut off (v. 38). The wicked have no future like the righteous do (vv. 37–38). The inheritance of the blameless will endure forever (v. 18); twice David says they will dwell in the land forever (vv. 27, 29). The word translated “land” can also be rendered “earth,” and that is how Jesus used it in the Beatitudes, citing Psalm 37:11 in the context of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:5). The Beatitudes look beyond this life, so Jesus suggests that gentle souls will inherit eternal life. It is hard to know whether David thought in those terms, but the expression “forever” certainly allows it. Was there any cognitive dissonance about Psalm 37 that might point the OT saint beyond this life? Were the wicked always cut off (Ps 37:34)? The prophets describe wicked men ruling the land, as does Ecclesiastes (Eccl 3:16). Doubtless there were evil old men (Ezek 9:6). But in the context of eternity all transgressors will be destroyed (Ps 37:38), and the gentle will inherit the earth.

David, oppressed by enemies and by sin in Psalm 39, speaks of the fleeting quality of life, his days being a mere handbreadth. The span of his years is as nothing before God. His life is a breath, and he himself a phantom (vv. 4–6). Immediately he adds, “So now, Lord, for what do I hope? My hope is for You.” But if David’s present life is so little, how can he hope much in God unless that hope extends beyond this life? David later repeats that he is a breath and reminds God that he lives with God as a stranger, an alien, like all his forefathers (vv. 11–12). This language goes back to Abraham (Gen 23:4), who lived with God as an alien in Canaan. The Book of Hebrews explains that all the patriarchs lived this way, having a hope for a permanent home in heaven beyond this life (Heb 11:9–16). It seems natural to expect that David had this hope, too.

In Psalm 41 David prays for healing from sickness in order to requite the enemies that slander him, betray him, and hope for his death (vv. 2–10). He trusts that God will support him because of his integrity and establish him in the divine presence forever (v. 12). The

word “forever” (*olam*) might signify “continually,” but David uses it again in the next sentence where it describes the Lord as blessed from *olam* to *olam*, “everlasting to everlasting” (v. 13). There is a definite article before it in verse 13 which might change the connotation, but the reader cannot miss the close connection.

Psalms 42–43 can be read together as a single psalm describing David under affliction and away from the temple, longing for God’s presence. God was the health of his countenance and his God (42:5, 11; 43:5). He prayed to the God of his life (Ps 42:8). Would God cease to be his God at the time of death?

Psalms 46 might suggest God would not, in its double assurance that “the Lord of armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Ps 46:7, 11). Believers would not fear if the earth changed and the mountains tumbled into the sea. Their quiet confidence was this reality: Yahweh is God (v. 10).

Psalms 49 teaches that the believer can be fearless in days of calamity when the wickedness of his foes surrounds him (v. 5). Their wealth cannot redeem them so that they live forever and do not see the Pit. The price is too high, and they should not even think of buying their way out of God’s justice (vv. 8–9). The wise as well as the foolish die, leaving their wealth to others (v. 10). Their grave is their home forever (v. 11). Despite their riches, they are like animals that perish (v. 12). Those who have confidence in themselves, and others who trust in them, are destined for Sheol like sheep; death will be their shepherd (vv. 13–14). In contrast, the believer’s confidence is his hope of an afterlife. When the psalmist says the upright will rule over such self-confident ones in the morning (v. 14), morning may refer to the resurrection, since the OT describes resurrection as awakening from sleep (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). While the worldly will molder in the grave, far from their earthly mansions, the believer has One who is willing and able to redeem his life from the power of Sheol, for God will take him (vv. 14–15). The word “take” or “receive” points to God’s reception of the soul in heaven. Genesis 5:24 states that Enoch walked with God and then no longer existed on earth because God took him. Hebrews 11:5 explains that Enoch was removed so that he would not experience death, because he pleased God. Elijah was “taken” to heaven in a chariot, not seeing death. Both Elijah and the prophetic disciples knew before it happened that God

would “take” him (2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 9). So being taken by God symbolized being welcomed into his fellowship after this life. We are not to be in awe when a man becomes rich, for he will take none of his wealth with him at his death (Ps 49:16–17). People praise others during this life for doing well, but worldly people eventually go where their dead ancestors are. They will never see the light (vv. 18–19). People without understanding are like the animals that perish (v. 20). The psalmist contrasted himself with such people. He had understanding to put his trust in the Lord. Since God would redeem him, he was not like the animals. When animals die, that is the end for them, but death would not be the end for the psalmist.

In Psalm 52 David contrasts himself with Doeg the Edomite, who represents evil persons. God will tear down forever someone who boasts of evil, uprooting him from the land of the living (vv. 1, 5). David, on the other hand, is like a green olive tree in the house of God. He will trust in the Lord’s lovingkindness forever and ever (v. 8). He will praise the Lord’s name forever for what God has done and will hope in that name (v. 9). The psalm could speak of this life only, but the contrast between everlasting ruin and praising the Lord’s name forever certainly hints at a permanent distinction in destiny between the evil man and one who trusts in the Lord. The olive tree can live for two thousand years and so could be a symbol of permanence.¹⁰

Psalm 56, composed when David was held by the Philistines in Gath, calls upon God to save him from enemies, particularly the nations. While he has utmost confidence that God will preserve his life, one wonders whether the psalm goes further. Delitzsch felt that the hope of walking before God in the “light of life” in verse 13, contrasted with death and perhaps the darkness of Hades, spoke of more than this present life.¹¹ Part of the refrain (vv. 4, 11) is: “What can mortal man do to me?”

Psalm 61 seems to peer beyond this life in its last five verses. David desired to dwell in God’s tent for ages, to take refuge in the shelter of his wings (v. 4). For God had heard his vows and had given

¹⁰ As agriculturist Geoff Lawton points out, “Individual olive trees have seen not only generations, but entire kingdoms, come and go on the earth’s surface” (“About Olives,” <<http://www.permaculture.org.au/topics/olives.php?page=2>>, accessed 12 April 2008).

¹¹ Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2:171.

him the heritage of those who fear his name (v. 5). David asked that God add days to his life, increasing his years to span generation after generation (v. 6). He wished to sit before God forever and asked God to appoint lovingkindness and truth to guard him (v. 7). Then he would sing praise to God's name forever, paying his vows day by day (v. 8). What this heritage comprised is uncertain, and one can think of the land of Israel, since David wrote "from the ends of the earth" (v. 2). But possibly David considered his God-fearing forefathers, who were heirs of eternal promises (Heb 11:8–16, 39–40). Christians are heirs of God, too, the expectation being eternal glorification (Rom 8:17). Such a state would enable David to sit before God forever (Ps 61:7).

Psalm 62 has a refrain that only in God is there rest for David's soul, for his salvation and hope come from him (vv. 1, 5). "He alone is my rock and salvation. He is my fortress; I will not be greatly shaken" (v. 2; *cf.* v. 6). David asserts that people are only a breath and that one should not set one's heart on riches (vv. 9–10). God will reward a person according to his work (v. 12). Since in this life we do not necessarily see everyone rewarded this way, one thinks of an equitable judgment beyond this life.

In Psalm 63:3 David asserts that God's love is better than life. But isn't God's love a part of his life? So how can David make this distinction unless he can separate God's love from life? David could do that if he envisioned God's love for him continuing after the end of his physical life.

Psalm 71 is keenly aware of the issues of aging. The psalmist still requires protection from enemies and depends on the Lord. He asks God not to cast him away at the time of old age or abandon him when his strength is gone (v. 9). Though he realizes that death must come (v. 18), he will "continually have hope" and will praise God more and more, telling of his righteousness and salvation, though he does not know the sum of them (vv. 14–15). God will bring him up again from the depths of the earth (v. 20). This person, whom God has redeemed, will sing for joy (v. 23). The author may have spoken of earthly troubles and rescue in verse 20. But since he was cognizant of eventual death, perhaps his hope extended so far as to be brought up from the earth's depths. He may have mentioned not knowing the full

measure of God's salvation (vv. 14–15) partly because he believed there was more to it than his experience in this life.

Psalm 73:16–28 is one of the clear passages about the believer's confidence of eternal life. The psalmist began with his envy of the prosperity of the wicked (vv. 3–12). By comparison, he felt his godliness had no reward (vv. 13–15). Yet in God's sanctuary he realized that wicked people had no future except ruin (vv. 16–20). Fortunately, he was always with the Lord, despite his senseless attitude (vv. 21–23). God guided him with his counsel, and "afterward you will take me into glory" (v. 24, NIV). Or one might read the last words as "take me up in glory" (HCSB). The Hebrew can also be understood as "and after glory You will take me," but the Masoretic reading tradition, which may date to the first centuries C.E., isolates "afterward" and joins "glory" with the verb. So "glory" must function adverbially as the place to which (NIV), or the manner in which (HCSB), God would take the man. And "afterward" must contrast with this present life, in which God guided the psalmist with his counsel. We have seen at Psalm 17 that God's taking a person can involve receiving him into fellowship after this life. The psalmist had no one in heaven but God and desired no one on earth besides him (Ps 73:25). This thought can distinguish heaven and earth as different places where he could be. His heart and flesh might fail, but God would be the strength of his heart and his portion forever (v. 26). The stark juxtaposition of his heart failing but God nonetheless being its strength implies a wordplay. The heart was not only the physical organ but the central part of a human. God would be the strength of his being after its physical end. The psalmist evidently looked beyond his earthly life to an eternal destiny, or portion, with God. The author closed by distinguishing two destinies: inevitable destruction for those far away from and unfaithful to God versus goodness experienced by one close to God who had made God his refuge (v. 27). The contrast shows that all believers will not perish since they have a refuge from destruction.

Psalms 49 and 73 seem to be plain expressions of an assurance of life beyond the grave for one who trusts in God. These explicit affirmations indicate the presence of this hope within worshipping Israel. In view of all that Scripture communicates, they do not seem isolated convictions. Therefore, many other psalms that may not deal

with this subject directly might allude to it less directly or assume it. In other words, it was probably a shared hope among OT believers even if we find only scattered direct expressions of it.

Psalm 86:12b–13 contains a typical but ambiguous expression:

I will honor Your name forever,
for Your lovingkindness towards me is great,
and You have delivered my life from Sheol beneath.

Does the psalmist by “forever” simply refer to the rest of his life? Does the deliverance from Sheol only indicate a temporal rescue from imminent death? One response is that the trust of the writer in God is so absolute that it does not seem to find death as a looming end to everything.

But Psalm 88 might seem to contradict any limitless confidence. Heman finds himself near Sheol (v. 3). He is regarded as one soon to go to the Pit (v. 4). He is like the slain in the grave “whom You no longer remember and who are cut off from Your strength” (v. 5). Heman bemoans his afflicted state, saying (vv. 10–12):

Will you do wonders for the dead?
Will the shades arise to praise You? Selah
Will Your lovingkindness be recounted in the grave,
or Your faithfulness in Abaddon?¹²
Will Your wonders be known in the darkness,
or Your righteousness in a land of oblivion?

Heman pleads that he not die, and his words represent a typical perspective on Sheol. It seems that the state of the righteous dead was different before the cross. Jesus described them as being in Abraham’s bosom, which may have been a compartment of Sheol (Luke 16:22).¹³ But the hope of the OT saint was resurrection. Although the dead were temporarily inactive and even insignificant, this would not always be the case. The righteous dead would wake up

¹² The Hebrew word transliterated as Abaddon means “destruction” and was another name for the realm of the dead.

¹³ W. R. F. Browning, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. “Abraham’s Bosom.”

from their sleep. So Heman's downcast words throw no doubt on the hopeful expectations of so many psalms.

Psalm 89, written by Ethan, uses "forever" twice within two verses in a way suggesting the meaning might be the same in both.¹⁴ We have seen David's hope in an afterlife. Verse 28 quotes God saying that he will maintain his love to David forever; his covenant with David is sure. The Lord adds that he will establish David's line forever, his throne as long as heaven endures (v. 29). God distinguishes between David and his line. If David's line will literally be established forever, then perhaps God will literally maintain his lovingkindness to David personally forever.

Psalm 92 compares the fate of evildoers with that of the righteous. The brutish man does not understand that the wicked spring up like grass only to be destroyed forever, while God is exalted forever (vv. 6–8). God's enemies will perish (v. 9), but he will exalt the psalmist's horn, that is, increase his power (v. 10). The same root word for "exalt" is used of God and the psalmist. The righteous, in contrast to the wicked, will spring up like a palm tree or cedar (v. 12). Transitory grass is unlike the enduring palm or cedar. The righteous will bear fruit even in old age to show that the Lord is upright. The circumstances could pertain only to this life, but the eternal perishing of the wicked hints at an eternal flourishing for the righteous.

The first part of Psalm 103 (vv. 1–9) recounts all the Lord's benefits as a motive for blessing him. The first listed is forgiveness of iniquities. He redeems lives from destruction and crowns them with lovingkindness and mercy (vv. 3–4). David returns to the initial benefit to explain that the Lord has not compensated believers according to their sins and iniquities, for his mercy to them is as great as heaven is high above the earth (vv. 10–11). The transgressions are as far removed from them as the east is from the west (v. 12). David next speaks of the Lord's fatherly pity for those who fear him, based on his knowledge of our bodies, that they are dust (vv. 13–14). Dust connotes perishing because the curse on sin was that as humanity came from the dust, so humanity would return to it (Gen 3:19). Each human flourishes like grass or a flower. A wind passes over it, and it is gone (Ps 103:15–16). Grass is another familiar image for a human's

¹⁴ The terms for "forever" in the two verses are different but synonymous.

short-lived existence (Pss 90:5; 92:7; 129:6; Isa 40:6–7). Against these images of fleeting life, David says that God’s lovingkindness is from everlasting to everlasting towards those who fear him, and to children’s children (Ps 103:17). David might only contrast God’s everlasting kindness with the brief lives of human beings. Yet his stress on the removal of sin and its consequences (vv. 3–4, 10–12), the greatness of God’s mercies, the impermanent nature of this present life, and the promise of everlasting lovingkindness for those who fear God encourages hope that he may ultimately set aside death as sin’s punishment for forgiven believers.

Jesus’ interpretation of Psalm 110:1 reveals complex meanings in OT prophecy, suggesting the complexity that may lie beneath the surface elsewhere. Jesus said that here David by the Spirit called the Messiah his Lord (Matt 22:43–45; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44):

The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand
Until I make your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

David saw a human figure in heaven and called him his Lord. Psalm 110:4 adds that the LORD had sworn that this person would be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. We know that the fulfillment is in Jesus Christ, who is a priest forever (Heb 7:11–28). The apostle Peter showed from Psalm 16:8–11 (Acts 2:25–31) and Psalm 132:11 (Acts 2:30) that David had supernatural revelation about the future and the Messiah. Peter continued by citing Psalm 110:1 as speech about the ascension of Christ (Acts 2:34). It seems natural to conclude that David took such revelation as a partial basis for confidence that the LORD would not abandon him to the grave (Ps 16:10).

The first four verses of Psalm 118, and the last verse, repeat that the love of the Lord endures forever. Israel was to give thanks to God because he was good and his love endured forever. This inspires all the more thanksgiving if eternal love is relevant for individuals, which the NT proves to be the case. The OT saints could have rejoiced in this fact by faith.

The last two verses of Psalm 121 (vv. 7–8) suggest such rejoicing:

The Lord will guard you from all evil; He will guard your life.

The Lord will guard your going out and coming in,
from now until forever.

Psalm 133:3 also suggests such rejoicing. In speaking of Mount Zion, the psalmist asserts: “For there the Lord commanded His blessing, life forevermore.”

The phrase “His love is forever” occurs 34 times in the Psalms, 26 times in Psalm 136 alone. It would be an important idea for earth even if life ended in the grave, but it is so much more powerful in the reality that life continues beyond the grave. The believers in Israel were to sing Psalm 136 because the eternal love of God was very pertinent to them, a matter for rejoicing.

David in the last verse of Psalm 138 (v. 8) certainly applies to himself the words about the Lord’s love being eternal:

The Lord will fulfill [His purpose] for me.
Lord, Your lovingkindness is forever;
Do not forsake the work of Your hands.

On the basis of God’s eternal love, David pleads with the Lord not to forsake him.

The last verse of Psalm 139 (v. 24) evokes similar thoughts. David pleads:

See if there is any offensive way in me,
And guide me in the everlasting way.

David uses comparable language in Psalm 145:1–2:

I will exalt You, My God the King,
And I will bless Your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless You
And praise Your name forever and ever.

David goes on to say that God’s kingdom is an everlasting one (v. 13), and he stresses God’s love and care for each believer (vv. 18–20). David closes the psalm by exhorting every creature to praise his holy name forever and ever (v. 21). In light of NT truth, it is best not

to limit these many expressions to hyperbolic affirmations of merely temporal care. The one who trusts God should do so on the basis of the fact that his love endures forever and so will not leave the believer even at the time of death.

Perseverance

The ancient Israelites did not grapple with exactly the same theological issues that concern us. The NT speaks of every believer's need to "stand firm" or "endure" in their faith throughout life (e.g. Matt 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:3; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 3:10). The OT may not frame a requirement in the same terms, but OT saints would have understood that they could never outlive the obligation to love the Lord with all their heart, mind, and strength (Deut 6:5). Their duty was to serve Yahweh. Many delighted in the prospect, declaring their heart's loyalty to God.

The Psalms record their various life challenges and display their tenacious faith in counting on God to answer prayer, rescue them, and provide for them. While the Psalms may not declare explicitly that God's people will maintain their faith until the day they die, the psalmists' attitudes and their trust in the Lord exhibit a faith that the worst trials were unable to eradicate. The Psalms show that those who truly trust God will do so no matter what problems they face.

Psalm 1 does not amount to a general statement of perseverance but underscores that the blessed person is defined by particular actions. Somebody who does not avoid wickedness (v. 1) or delight in God's word (v. 2) cannot take assurance from the psalm. But one with those qualities can be sure of persevering. His leaf will not wither (v. 3), unlike the ungodly, who are like chaff driven by the wind (v. 4). Chaff is associated with divine judgment in the Bible.¹⁵ Although the ungodly will perish, God knows the righteous, who by implication will not perish (v. 6). Being known by God is a characteristic of the saved as opposed to the lost.¹⁶

Unfortunately, many psalms do not express convictions about believers in general. Often David or somebody else expresses what he trusts God will do for him personally. God answers according to one's

¹⁵ Job 21:18; Ps 35:5; Isa 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; 33:11; 41:15; Dan 2:35; Hos 13:3; Zeph 2:2; Matt 3:12.

¹⁶ Gen 18:19; Exod 33:17; Matt 7:23; 25:12; Luke 13:25, 27; 2 Tim 2:19.

faith (Matt 9:29), yet since he does not show partiality (Jas 3:17; Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11), any Israelite of like faith could potentially have counted on the same divine help as David hoped to receive.

Psalm 3, though written by David, expresses many thoughts that any Israelite could have experienced. It asserts (v. 8):

Salvation belongs to the Lord; Your blessing is
upon Your people.

The context concerns temporal danger and rescue, and the NT concept of spiritual salvation evidently developed from this practical use of the term “salvation.” David calls God a shield, sustainer, and deliverer, who answers prayer. The psalmists attribute many such qualities to God, which naturally suggest that the believer will stand his ground throughout this life. Although in NT terms they had to “endure,” Israelite psalmists did not consider doing this in their own strength but depended on the presence and power of Yahweh.

David in Psalm 6 asks God not to rebuke or discipline him in divine anger and wrath but to be gracious. He trusts that God will answer his supplication and save him because of his unfailing love (vv. 1–2, 4, 9–10). So his consciousness of sin did not dampen his confidence in God.

David claims that God saves those whose hearts are upright (Ps 7:10) and judges the wicked (vv. 11–16). The king prays for God to save him (7:1) and expects God to judge him according to his righteousness and integrity (7:8). David saw perseverance as a matter involving full participation by the believer.

Psalm 10 describes the evil man in detail, giving assurance that God is aware of him and will ultimately judge him. He hears and strengthens the humble (v. 17). Such sentiments encourage believers to persevere, since God will be with them.

Psalm 11:7 promises that the Lord keeps his eye on the upright person. Verses 1 and 7 together suggest that one perseveres in the face of threat by trusting God to see and come to one’s aid. Intervening verses describe God’s ultimate defeat of the enemy.

Psalm 12 promises divine protection to godly persons when oppressed by enemies. God sets them in safety from foes (v. 5), keeping and preserving them (v. 7). David counts on God’s mercy and

salvation despite his foes (Ps 13:4–5), confident that God will deal well with him (13:6). For God is with the righteous as a refuge for the afflicted (Ps 14:5–6).

Psalm 15 gives a list of things a righteous person does. Such a person will never be shaken in life (Ps 15:5). David in Psalm 16:1 asks God to keep him safe on the basis that he takes refuge in God. Conversely, he trusted that because God was at his right hand, he would never be shaken (v. 8).

Psalm 17:4–5 suggests that the believer's confidence in persevering will be steady as he applies God's word to his life. It is by this word that David kept watch to avoid the ways of the violent. So his steps held to God's paths; his feet did not slip. Psalm 18 likewise shows that one keeps the Lord's ways by attention to his laws and decrees (vv. 21–23), and that God rewards such faithfulness with faithfulness on his part (vv. 24–26). Believers call for God's help (v. 6) when enemies are too powerful (v. 17), and the Lord saves those who humbly trust him (v. 27). It is he who gives them strength to fight life's battles (vv. 32–42).

Psalm 19:7–11 stresses the same value of God's word for the believer's perseverance in the faith, recounting how it revives and instructs, bringing joy and light. It creates a reverence towards God that lasts forever, and it is full of truth and righteousness. It is the most precious and sweet commodity, giving warning to God's servants. Obedience is richly rewarded.

Psalm 20:7–8 claims that those who trust in this world will be brought to their knees and fall, while those who trust in the Lord will rise and stand firm. Psalm 22 is a testimony that God does not abandon his own in the worst of circumstances. He does not disdain a believer's suffering or hide from him but responds to his cry for help (v. 24). Psalm 23 indicates that the Lord is with the trusting one in the darkest circumstances; she or he will always dwell with the Lord (vv. 4, 6).

Psalm 25, written by someone struggling with sin (vv. 7, 18), nevertheless declares that the person who fears the Lord will spend days in prosperity (vv. 12–13). The author's confidence of persevering is based on the Lord's goodness, which leads God personally to instruct sinners (vv. 8, 12), guiding the humble in his ways, which are loving and faithful for those who keep them (vv. 9–

10). Psalm 26 shows that perseverance involves an active obedience on the part of the believer.

David in Psalm 27 expresses confidence no matter what foes he may face (vv. 2–3, 6):

For he will conceal me in His shelter in the day of adversity;
He will hide me under the cover of his tent;
He will set me high on a rock (v. 5, HCSB).

Yet he continually prays to God that this be true in his case (vv. 4, 7–9, 11–12). In Psalm 28 he says that his heart trusts in the Lord, and he is helped, adding that the Lord is the strength of his people (vv. 7–8). Psalm 29 glorifies the Lord’s power and closes by repeating this idea that the Lord gives strength to his people (v. 11).

Psalm 30 is a testimony of God’s deliverance that invites all saints to praise God because his anger lasts only for a moment but his favor for a lifetime (vv. 4–5). The implication is that all saints can hope for such deliverance and ability to persevere when they call on God.

Psalm 31 is like Psalm 27 in its prayerful confidence of deliverance despite difficult circumstances. David believes that God will hide him in his shelter from human troubles (31:20; 27:5). Persevering is often tough, but God preserves the faithful (Ps 31:23).

Psalm 32 again describes God as a hiding place for David, protecting him from adversity, surrounding him with songs of deliverance (v. 7). God’s unfailing love surrounds the person who trusts in him, inspiring the righteous to rejoice (vv. 10–11). Sin should not prevent one from persevering, since the Lord is willing to forgive it (vv. 1–5).

Psalm 33 teaches that God considers everything earthlings do (v. 15), and that his eyes are on those who fear him and hope in his unfailing love to deliver them from death and preserve them in famine (vv. 18–19). So perseverance entails waiting on the Lord, the believer’s help and shield (v. 20). Psalm 34 also shows the Lord’s eyes on the righteous (v. 15). The psalm assures them that they will persevere because of all God will do for them. He answers prayer; he delivers from fear, a crushed spirit, trouble, and enemies; and he gives joy, food, and every good thing.

Psalm 35 is clear that human enemies cannot prevent the saints' perseverance because God will defeat enemies and rescue the poor from those too strong for them. The psalm is a prayer for such deliverance. Psalm 36 speaks of God's love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice as essentially limitless and as preserving humanity. God's unfailing love is precious (vv. 5–7). Since his love reaches heaven and is unfailing, there is no situation where it will not reach his people.

Psalm 37 promises that for those who trust him, God will make righteousness and justice shine as bright as the noonday sun (vv. 5–6). The Lord upholds the righteous (v. 17). They will not be put to shame in times of adversity (v. 19). The Lord steadies the steps of those with whom he is pleased. Such people will not fall, for God holds their hands (vv. 23–24). He loves the upright and will not forsake those faithful to him (v. 28). He helps them and delivers them (v. 40). The whole psalm involves such assurances.

Psalm 38 concerns David troubled by sin and guilt (vv. 4, 18), yet he is certain that God will answer his prayer (v. 15). He has faith to pray to the Lord even when being disciplined for sin (vv. 8–9). For according to Psalm 40, a person who trusts in the Lord is blessed (v. 4), despite trouble due to sin (v. 12). Notwithstanding David's sin (Ps 41:4), God upheld him because of his integrity (v. 12). Even when David feels rejected by God under adversity (Pss 42:7, 9; 43:2), he trusts that he will again be able to praise God as his Savior (Pss 42:5, 8, 11; 43:3–5).

God made a striking promise regarding perseverance in Psalm 50:15, telling OT believers that they should call on him in a day of trouble and he would deliver them. As a result, they would honor him in the testimony of their deliverance.

Psalm 51:17 declares, "You will not despise a broken and crushed heart, God." David has faith that God will receive his repentance and forgive him. David had committed terrible sin in adultery (Ps 51 superscription) but still had this assurance, so there is no reason why sin should prevent believers from persevering.

Psalm 52 shows that David, who is an example, intends to trust in the Lord's lovingkindness forever and ever (v. 8). Someone with that attitude will persevere. Psalm 53 implies that victory will eventually come to God's people. David asserted that surely God was his help;

the Lord was the One who sustained him (Ps 54:4). Every believer can have this confidence.

In Psalm 55:22 David writes out of much experience in being rescued by God. He tells the righteous person to fling his burden on the Lord because God will sustain him. God will never allow the righteous person to be shaken. “Shaken” here implies a disastrous instability bringing collapse. David, taken captive by an enemy (Ps 56 superscription), three times repeats that he trusts, or will trust, in the Lord (Ps 56:3–4, 11). Similarly, when on the run from Saul (Ps 57 superscription), David’s heart was steadfast (v. 7) because he knew that the Lord worked on his behalf (v. 2). When Saul’s men tried to kill him (Ps 59 superscription), David watched for the Lord to act and considered God his strength, fortress, and shield (vv. 9, 11, 16–17). Facing enemies in Psalm 62, David shows a spirit of perseverance by repeating four times that God is the source of his salvation (vv. 1–2, 6–7).

David regularly praises God and expects that at the end of his ordeal he will praise God further, rejoice, and sing to his name (Ps 63:3–7, 11). Another concept assisting perseverance is deep appreciation of God’s grandeur and his provision of what humanity needs (Psalm 65). The testimonies of those God has rescued are an encouragement (Ps 66:5–6, 9–20). So is a conviction of his sovereignty (Ps 67:4).

Psalm 68 conveys an overwhelming sense of God’s victorious greatness operative on behalf of his people. The final verse intones that “the God of Israel gives power and strength to His people” (v. 35). With such a God on one’s side, defeat seems out of the question, for God listens to the needy (Ps 69:33).

Psalm 70:4 is a typical psalmic sentiment: “May all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You. May those who love Your salvation continually say, ‘Let God be exalted.’” So prevalent are ideas like this that one feels they are the true expectation for saints. This is what God intends and what believers should anticipate.

Characteristic of persevering believers is their faith that God will bring them out of trouble. The psalmist says (Ps 71:20):

Although You have shown me many
and bitter troubles,

You will again revive me,
And from the depths of the earth
You will again bring me up.

Psalm 73:1 testifies that God is good to those who are pure in heart. In their troubles believers remember that their God is the mighty Creator of the world (Ps 74:16–17). They rejoice that his name, which implies God himself, is near (Ps 75:1). God promises that the horns of the righteous will be lifted up (Ps 75:10), which implies being victorious. God is a mighty warrior on his people’s behalf (Psalm 76). In their distress they remember his long history of acting for their deliverance (Pss 77:5–20; 83:9–12). They take warning from the many who have failed to believe despite God’s marvels (Ps 78). They note that tribulation is often God’s discipline (Pss 79–82, 89–90).

Psalm 84 expresses the faith of a persevering believer who considers a person “blessed” “whose strength is in You,” and “who trusts in You” (vv. 5, 12). He characterizes God as a “sun and a shield” who “grants favor and honor” and withholds nothing good from those who live with integrity” (v. 11). Psalm 85 adds that “He promises peace to his people” (v. 8), and “His salvation is near to those who fear Him” (v. 9). Also associated with God are love, faithfulness, and righteousness (v. 10).

The Lord declared his character to Moses (Exod 34:6), and the psalmist describes God in exactly the same terms, having learned from experience that he is “a compassionate and gracious God, longsuffering and abounding in love and truth” (Ps 86:15).

Psalm 91 gives assurance to one struggling to persevere. The psalmist had learned that God protects his people and elevates them to ultimate success. Many statements reflect God’s actions or promises to believers according to the Mosaic covenant.¹⁷ The repeatedly

¹⁷ Cf. God as a refuge (Ps 91:2; Deut 33:27); God’s sheltering wings (Ps 91:4; Exod 19:4); protection from hostile weapons (Ps 91:5; Lev 26:6); not being afraid (Ps 91:5; Lev 26:5); freedom from disease (Ps 91:6; Deut 7:15); one overcoming a thousand (Ps 91:7; Deut 32:30); no plague (Ps 91:10; Exod 12:13); angels guarding in the way (Ps 91:11; Exod 23:20); protection from wild beasts (Ps 91:13; Lev 26:6); God setting believers on high (Ps 91:14; Deut 28:1); God delivering believers (Ps 91:15; Deut 23:14); provision of long life (Ps 91:16; Deut 5:33).

assuring promises resemble even stronger new covenant promises of God's unfailing love (*e.g.* Rom 8:28–39).

Psalm 92:12–15 expects the righteous to persevere, flourishing like a palm tree or cedar, still bearing bear fruit in old age, fresh and green. They will magnify the Lord. They have a vision of the majestic, eternal God (Ps 93), of the God who avenges wickedness to rescue his people (Ps 94). They realize he is the Creator who must be obeyed (Ps 95), the one true God and Judge over all the earth (Ps 96). Other gods are idols, while Yahweh controls all the forces of nature and guards his faithful ones (Ps 97). All creation should sing to One who reveals his salvation and righteousness (Ps 98). The nations should worship the One who is holy (Ps 99:3, 5, 9), loving, and good (Ps 100).

Psalm 101, though from a king's perspective, outlines a lifestyle that will honor the Lord. A genuine believer does not completely despair, no matter how destitute he or his nation may be (Ps 102). He counts his blessings, naming them one by one, remembering to praise the Lord (Ps 103). The believer meditates on God's revelation of himself in all aspects of the natural world he created (Ps 104).

Psalms 105–106 show the heart of the Israelite faith. It was fixed on a God who had worked among a chosen people through the centuries. Psalm 107 expands the range of his care to all humanity. David focuses on this universal God in Psalm 108, only at the end mentioning Israel's military defeats. When David does concentrate on his predicament, it is with serene confidence that the Lord will punish murderous enemies and rescue the needy righteous (Ps 109:29, 31).

Psalm 110 is a prophetic psalm about God's empowerment of his king, whom the NT identifies as Christ Jesus (Mark 12:35–37; Acts 2:34–35; Heb 1:13). So the springs of David's faith ran deep into mysteries of the future.

Each statement of Psalm 111 magnifies some aspect of the Lord. Each statement of Psalm 112 depicts some blessing that comes to a righteous man who trusts in the Lord. God stoops from heaven to assist the lowliest people (Ps 113). His care for Israel shook nature (Ps 114). This people praised the God who constituted its help and shield (Ps 115).

The testimony of one person whom God has helped can encourage all his people (Ps 116). Israel praises a God of mercy and

truth (Ps 117). Psalm 118, another personal testimony of divine deliverance, stresses that God works through his people and that trust in God is better than any human source of help (Ps 118:8–9).

Psalm 119 contains 176 verses in honor of God and his word. Almost every verse mentions God’s word in some way. This psalm displays the importance of meditating on divine revelation. The psalmist felt it was vital to his life.

Psalms 120–134 are “songs of ascent,” generally short, that worshipers might sing on their way to Zion for the annual religious festivals. God rescues his own from those who destructively speak evil (Ps 120). He watches to guard them from all harm (Ps 121). Jerusalem symbolized God’s presence (Ps 122), which is now always with Christians (John 4:21–24). Believers constantly look to Yahweh for mercy (Ps 123), for he is a God of deliverances (Ps 124), surrounding his people with protection (Ps 125). He brings joy out of sorrow (Ps 126), enables one to build a meaningful life (Ps 127), and blesses those who fear him (Ps 128). He judges those who assault believers (Ps 129); our hope should be in him (Ps 130). Even one who is a king can have a childlike faith (Ps 131). Associated with Jerusalem are the Davidic promises, which God will keep, as he keeps all his promises (Ps 132). He unites believers (Ps 133) and blesses his servants (Ps 134).

Psalm 135 encourages the faithful of every generation to praise the Lord for his goodness and greatness (vv. 3–5). He vindicates his people and has compassion on his servants (v. 14). Psalm 136 enumerates the many facets of his eternal love, and Psalm 137 conveys the sad loss of blessing under judgment. Psalms 138 and 139 are respectively David’s personal testimony of God’s praiseworthiness and his acknowledgement of God’s sovereign supervision over his life.

The persevering saint has confidence that God will protect him from evil men (Pss 140, 142–44) and evil temptations (Ps 141). Psalms 145–50 call for praise of the Lord and catalogue many reasons for it. The attitude of the psalmists is almost uniformly one of active trust in God’s love and saving power. This belief in a living relationship with God is met by proofs of God’s deliverance, so the Psalter calls all believers to have the same attitude.