

Psalms of the Sons of Korah

Korah was a grandson of Levi, the priestly tribe of Israel (I Chronicles 6:22). He is remembered as the instigator of the rebellion against Moses, which cost him and his accomplices, Dathan, Abiram and On, and 250 others, their lives. This resulted in many in Israel taking a stand against Moses, which resulted in heavenly fire destroying many more (Numbers 16). It is recorded, however, that the family line of Korah, unlike those of the others involved in the rebellion, was not deleted from the register of Israel (Numbers 26:11), so their family could continue to serve, even though their father lost his life in the rebellion. These sons of Korah became dedicated tabernacle servants, several of whom became authors of psalms.

Why were the sons of Korah not part of the rebellion? Korah was probably much older than Dathan, Abiram and On, each of whom had young families. His sons were probably already serving in their course as Levites of the clan of Kohath, who had charge of the inner furnishings of the tabernacle. Their descendants continued in that role through the years of Solomon's Temple, and likely through the Exile into Babylon and their return under Zerubbabel and Ezra. We are not given many clues as to which generation of the sons of Korah wrote the psalms that we are studying. It may well have been many generations, separated by hundreds of years. Some clues in their psalms might lead us to believe their clan was stationed in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and that the enemies were their concurrent priests of Baal, and that the devastation referred to was that of Sennacherib, when he destroyed the northern capital city of Samaria, and took most of the Israelites captive to Assyrian territories. That would best set the stage for psalms 42 – 44.

Their joy in serving in the Temple is evident in the language of their psalms, so their father's rebellion was not likely shared by the sons.

Psalms 42 -43:

The refrain that is repeated twice in Psalm 42 and again to end Psalm 43, ties these two psalms together. This Korahite is struggling, for he thirsts for God, as a stag thirsts for water after being chased by a predator, and yet he does not seem to find God where he is looking. He reflects in Psalm 42:5 and 11, and again in 43:5:

*Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*

He remembers the "good old days, " when he was in the leading group of people marching to the tabernacle to celebrate a feast and to offer the animals prescribed for each worshipful submission. He remembers the places where he met God in the past – on the highest mountain, in the roar of the waterfalls, in the love of God that

directed his days and the songs of the night. But still, he wonders why God has forgotten him in his present need, and he describes his feelings of mourning and oppression, as well as the taunts of his enemies. All day long he struggles with his feelings of depression about his lack of answers from the Living God, and he pleads for vindication – that God would plead his cause against an ungodly nation, that He would rescue him from deceitful and wicked men. After all, God was supposed to be his stronghold. He asks God in 43:3:

*Send forth your light and your truth,
Let them guide me;
Let them bring me to your holy mountain,
To the place where you dwell.*

If only he could reach the sacred mountain of God again, he would be able to go to the altar of God in joy and delight, and he would once more be able to praise Him with the harp.

Psalm 44:

The author is in the midst of total devastation, as he says in verses 9 – 14, where he laments the desperate situation he and his people are in.

*But now you have rejected and humbled us;
You no longer go out with our armies.
You make us retreat before the enemy,
And our adversaries have plundered us.
You gave us up to be devoured like sheep
And have scattered us among the nations.
You sold your people for a pittance,
Gaining nothing from their sale.*

He continues his lament with a vivid description of the reproach, scorn and derision they are facing, and the disgrace they feel, as they face the taunts of those who reproach and revile them. At this point the psalmist goes from the “we” and “us” mode to the “I” mode, as these feelings are deeply personal.

Inner reflection makes the author question why God would have allowed all this to happen. He seems to have lost sight of the fact that there were many more of the prophets of Baal in the country than there were priests of the tribe of Levi, and, that, even though he and his clan had been faithfully serving the Lord where they were, their pagan compatriots had become a stench in the Lord’s nostrils. There had not been a king in the whole time of their separation from the southern tribes

of Judah and Benjamin, who had done what God wanted. Therefore, God was judging the nation, as He had told them He would in Deuteronomy 28:63ff.

Still, this son of Korah dares to pray to the God who allowed such destruction of his people and their property, that He will (verses 23 – 26:

*Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us for ever.
Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?
We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground.
Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love.*

It should be observed that the psalmist's point of view is that of the typical Old Testament saint, who considered God to be a national hero, and the surrounding nations to be heathen, because they served other gods, such as Baal or heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon, planets or stars.

Psalm 45:

We do not know in which generation of the "sons of Korah" this was written. In Hebrew thinking, sons, grandsons, etc., all come under the same general title. This psalm is the wedding song of a prince and princess, so it might have been written in the days of David or Solomon. Because it is a wedding song, it bears some resemblance to Song of Solomon thematically. As in Song of Songs, the author declares this to be a noble theme that stirs the heart. He then goes on to describe the groom, as seen by the bride, and then vice-versa, as does Solomon in his writings about his wedding night. The language is superlative, just as it is in the Song of Songs. This wedding will have international and generational import.

Psalm 46:

The sons of Korah wax eloquent in this psalm, praising God for His protection in all types of troubles. I once wrote an anthem based on the words of this psalm; it moved me to compose something one of my school choirs could sing.

Whether it is the seeming falling-apart of the world around us, or a senseless war, God is there to settle things for us.

In the midst of all the uncertainty and fear that surrounds us saints, God provides the deep, quiet river of gladness for us. His opening statement and the chorus in the middle represent that security perfectly (vss. 1, 7, 11):

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

The Lord Almighty is with us;

The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Psalm 47:

God's sovereignty and man's free will are here juxtaposed quite freely. It is difficult under the circumstances of the war between Russia and Ukraine, and the impotency of NATO countries to intervene, for me to read this psalm at face value. It doesn't seem that God is completely in control of either of the nations involved, and He certainly doesn't seem to be in charge of any of our NATO nations, either. Still, it is the inspired Word of God, and accept it I must.

I am asked to celebrate God's power over the nations by clapping my hands in glee, and shouting with cries of joy at the awesomeness of our God, the Lord Most High, the king over all the earth. With a deep lump in my throat, I weakly whisper 'AMEN.'

I then read of what God had done for Israel in establishing them in the Promised Land, and how He had subdued all the heathen tribes that were living in the land before them. He concludes with verses 7 – 9:

*For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.
God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.
The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham,
For the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.*

Psalm 48:

In the Old Testament, Israelites thought that God's blessings on them meant economic prosperity, many children, and territorial security. I guess we haven't progressed much further, even though we New Testament saints sort of know that our blessings are more spiritual than temporal.

The son of Korah that wrote this psalm must have walked around Jerusalem and seen it from many vantage points, admiring its beauty and its impregnability. The Holy City was set on a rugged crag, with walls to protect it from invasion, and towers from which to spot and nullify enemy attackers. He felt safe and secure in this citadel. He was also a leader in the worship of the Temple, and as he performed his duties, he meditated on the beauty of his surroundings, and the power of his God to protect and prosper him.

In his visions, which may be simply daydreams, but very real in his mind, the psalmist sees his city as totally impregnable by any forces that might come against it. He rejoices in the fact that armies are dismayed at the strength of the city against attack. In his reverie he sees them fleeing in terror, destroyed as ships in a

violent sea storm. His reverie continues with visions of the glories within the Temple in which he serves. The name of his God has gone around the world, and every mountain and village rejoices in the mighty God that rules his nation.

He opens with:

Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

And he closes with:

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

Psalm 49:

The author must have gotten together with Asaph on this one. The topic of seeing those who gained great wealth while they are wallowing in poverty is once again addressed.

This son of Korah takes on the pose of a seer, sitting with his harp, so that he can sing the wisdom he is about to expound. This was typical of such utterances in the day. The inner fear of being swallowed up in poverty was the driving force for this psalm. He sees that evil days may lie ahead, but he puts his trust in God to keep him, in contrast to the rich man who trusts in his riches to get him through. No one has been able to take his riches with him into the next life, so this Korahite takes comfort in the thought that the rich lie throughout eternity in their graves without either life or wealth to comfort them. He encourages his fellow humans to not put their trust in riches, and not to be overawed when someone else does get rich.

I must admit, I have daydreamed of winning the lottery and thinking of all the good things I could do for the Lord with the riches I would have at my disposal. I usually be aget reminded in my thoughts, though, that if I wanted to win a lottery, I should first have bought a ticket. . .

Psalm 84:

In Hebrew the prepositions for and of and to are not distinguished. Some psalm titles have one or the other of these designations, and the ones in this series follow such a pattern, being designated as "for" the Sons of Korah, but probably meaning "by" the Sons of Korah.

This author is completely fascinated by the feeling of God's presence in the Tabernacle or Temple. He finds strength in that place of worship, sensing the nearness of his God. Even the birds love to build their nests near the altar of the

Lord Almighty, sensing His protective presence. Those on pilgrimage to Zion also feel that presence, even the Valley of Weeping turns into a Valley of Springs. They go from strength to strength in their devotion to God and His dwelling place. It is here that prayers are heard. He ends with:

*Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere,
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the
tents of the wicked.
For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favour and honour;
No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.
O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.*

Psalm 85:

As most of the psalms by this group of writers, this one is addressed to the Director of Music, who would have been Asaph, or his descendants. It was meant to be sung, or perhaps better understood by us as chanted, to the accompaniment of various instruments, according to the theme being presented.

I take the theme of this psalm to be from verse 6:

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

The rest leads up to this earnest request, or expands what it might mean to be .revived by God.

Verses 1 – 3 tell of past times when God intervened and showed His favour to Korah's people, restoring their fortunes and forgiving their sins by turning from His fierce anger.

Verses 4 presages the request of verse 6:

Restore us again, O God our Saviour, and put away your displeasure toward us.

But the psalmist's inner feelings come out in verse 5:

*Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger through all generations?*

It seems that the problem of having to wait on God's working on his behalf is universal, for all the other psalmists seem to echo this sentiment quite often.

Verses 7 through 13 are the specific requests related to being revived that our Korah thinks are uppermost in his bucket list. They bear a strange resemblance to the list of things other psalmists also present to their Lord, and the requests I would make, as well. Desire is mixed with reflection, as it should be when I meditate on God's reviving Spirit.

Psalm 87:

The Son of Korah who wrote this psalm was totally captivated by the fact that their God had chosen Zion as His dwelling place, that He had set His foundation in that Holy Place. All the surrounding countries will acknowledge the God of Israel as the supreme Being. People will take pride in being able to say they were born in Zion, and the Lord's registry will record the fact that He has established this citadel as His own, and that those born in her will be especially blessed. "All my fountains (sources) are in you," concludes this short song of praise.

Psalm 88:

Korah is on his deathbed, and is suffering horribly, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally, as well, and he is certainly struggling spiritually. His passionate cry is for death to come quickly and as painlessly as possible.

Both my wife and I have been on "death watch" for the past three years, she having lost her mother, her brother, a brother-in-law, her father and her sister in that time. In each case, she was involved in around-the-clock care for the dying loved one, and in the case of her father, I got involved, too, even being there on my night shift, when Dad Wilkinson died. All of them had lost near friends, who had gone before them into that vast beyond, and they missed them greatly. Dad had lost his wife and a son, before he joined them. Korah also laments those that have gone before him, and are lost to him as companions. Jerry was present for her sister's passing. Both of us have learned the hard way, what it is like to go through those last weeks of the coming of the inevitable death.

In all the cases mentioned above, their trust for eternity was the Lord, and they rejoiced to join Him in their eternal home. Still, death is not our friend – it still has its sting – but the thought of what is coming becomes somewhat brightened by the knowledge that eternity with our Saviour waits for those that have trusted Him with their soul's salvation. Just as Korah, our loved ones stretched out their hands in faith in prayer to their Lord and Saviour for their bodily deterioration and spiritually dark moments, but in the end, he laments, "darkness is my closest friend."