Encouraging Babylonian Jews to Return, Psalm 114 Tells a Unique Exodus Story

Psalm 114, a late psalm, is exceptional in its structure and content.  These tightly structured eight verses, which reflect several non-Torah traditions, use Egypt symbolically, to encourage the exiles to return from Babylonia.

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Psalm 114 of Hallel, Kaufmann Haggadah (MS A 422), 14th century. Wikimedia.

Psalm 114 is the second psalm in the Jewish *Hallel* (“praise”) service.[1] The brief psalm is ostensibly about the exodus from Egypt, and is comprised of eight verses,[2] split evenly between four sections:

A) With the exodus, Israel becomes God’s holy dominion

קיד:א בְּצֵ֣את יִ֭שְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָ֑יִם בֵּ֥ית יַ֝עֲקֹ֗ב מֵעַ֥ם לֹעֵֽז[3]׃ קיד:ב הָיְתָ֣ה יְהוּדָ֣ה לְקָדְשׁ֑וֹ יִ֝שְׂרָאֵ֗ל מַמְשְׁלוֹתָֽיו׃

114:1 When Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech, 114:2Judah became His holy one, Israel, His dominion.

B) Sea, rivers, mountain and hills react

קיד:ג הַיָּ֣ם רָ֭אָה וַיָּנֹ֑ס הַ֝יַּרְדֵּ֗ן יִסֹּ֥ב לְאָחֽוֹר׃ קיד:ד הֶֽ֭הָרִים רָקְד֣וּ כְאֵילִ֑ים גְּ֝בָע֗וֹת כִּבְנֵי־צֹֽאן׃

114:3 The sea saw them and fled, Jordan ran backward, 114:4mountains skipped like rams, hills like sheep.

C) A question to these geographical entities

קיד:ה מַה־לְּךָ֣ הַ֭יָּם כִּ֣י תָנ֑וּס הַ֝יַּרְדֵּ֗ן תִּסֹּ֥ב לְאָחֽוֹר׃ קיד:ו הֶֽ֭הָרִים תִּרְקְד֣וּ כְאֵילִ֑ים גְּ֝בָע֗וֹת כִּבְנֵי־צֹֽאן׃

114:5 What alarmed you, O sea, that you fled, Jordan, that you ran backward, 114:6mountains, that you skipped like rams, hills, like sheep?

D) A further command to these entities

קיד:ז מִלִּפְנֵ֣י אָ֭דוֹן ח֣וּלִי אָ֑רֶץ מִ֝לִּפְנֵ֗י אֱל֣וֹהַּ יַעֲקֹֽב׃ קיד:ח הַהֹפְכִ֣י הַצּ֣וּר אֲגַם־מָ֑יִם חַ֝לָּמִ֗ישׁ לְמַעְיְנוֹ־מָֽיִם[4]׃

114:7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, 114:8 who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flinty rock into a fountain.

A Tightly Structured Psalm

The structure of the poem is very simple: Each unit is made of two verses—none longer, and none shorter. They are tied together through the repetition between vv. 3–4 and 5–6, where the latter turn the former into a question.

Moreover, the four central verses (vv. 3–6) describing the natural world are surrounded by two verses concerning Israel (1–2) and two concerning God (7–8), elegantly bringing together God, the natural world that He controls, and His people, Israel.

Poetic Structure

The psalm’s poetic structure is also very simple, even monotonous. *Every* line is a bicolon (a two-part verse) where each half is of similar length, and the parallelism throughout is synonymous (the second half of the verse more or less restates the first half). Verse 4 illustrates the typical structure of most verses in this psalm:

הֶֽ֭הָרִים רָקְד֣וּ כְאֵילִ֑ים  
גְּ֝בָע֗וֹת כִּבְנֵי־צֹֽאן׃

Mountains skipped like rams,  
Hills like sheep.

The verb in the first part (רָקְד֣וּ, “skipped”) is not given a parallel in the second, and to compensate, a two-word phrase (בְנֵי־צֹֽאן, “sheep”) parallels the one-word subject from first part (אֵילִ֑ים, “rams”). Most of the psalm follows this pattern.

Unifying Language

Other elements unify this psalm:

Epithets of Israel—v. 1 יִ֭שְׂרָאֵל Israel, בֵּ֥ית יַ֝עֲקֹ֗ב the house of Jacob; v. 2 יְהוּדָ֣ה Judah, יִ֝שְׂרָאֵ֗ל Israel; v. 7 יַעֲקֹֽב Jacob.

General and specific geographical terms—v. 3 הַיָּ֣ם the sea, הַ֝יַּרְדֵּ֗ן the Jordan; v. 4 הֶֽ֭הָרִים mountains, גְּבָע֗וֹת hills; v. 5 הַ֭יָּם the sea, הַיַּרְדֵּ֗ן the Jordan; v.6 הֶֽהָרִים mountains, גְּבָע֗וֹת hills; v. 7 אָ֑רֶץ earth; v. 8 הַצּ֣וּרthe rock [but also mountain], אֲגַם־מָ֑יִם pool of water, לְמַעְיְנוֹ־מָֽיִם fountain.

Water imagery—v. 3 הַיָּ֣ם the sea, הַ֝יַּרְדֵּ֗ן the Jordan; v. 5 הַ֭יָּם the sea, הַיַּרְדֵּ֗ן the Jordan; v. 8 אֲגַם־מָ֑יִם pool of water, לְמַעְיְנוֹ־מָֽיִם fountain.

Miracles—Most significantly, unnatural changes are a pervasive theme in this psalm: bodies of water dry up, mountains dance, and flint yields water. This may suggest that Israel becoming God’s dominion is another unnatural transformation.

The psalm’s very tight structure is atypical; it certainly is not shared with the surrounding *Hallel*psalms. We cannot know why the psalm’s author wrote this way; perhaps he—unlike the author of many psalms—liked such structures, or was writing for a (simple?) audience who would especially appreciate it.

The Psalm and the Torah

As the psalm is about the exodus from Egypt, many readers naturally attempt to understand it in accordance with the Torah’s telling of the story. This is a typical canonical reading—for after all, Psalms is in *Ketuvim* (Writings), which follows *Nevi’im*(Prophets), which follows the Torah. Furthermore, according to the predominant tradition that David, who lived after Moses, wrote Psalms, he certainly knew the Torah! Yet, an unbiased look at Psalm 114 shows several ways that it differs from the Torah and other sections of the Bible.

Israel Becomes a Nation

When did Israel become God’s nation? Genesis strongly suggests that Abraham was the first Israelite, and with him, or with the branching out of the tribes through the children of Jacob, Israel was formed. Indeed, one of the names of Jacob is Israel, and his twelve sons become the twelve tribes in Exodus, marking the genealogical beginning of Israel.

The book of Exodus may also suggest that Israel was formed through its covenant with YHWH at Mount Sinai (Horeb), as we read:

שמות יט:ה וְעַתָּ֗ה אִם־שָׁמ֤וֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ֙ בְּקֹלִ֔י וּשְׁמַרְתֶּ֖ם אֶת־בְּרִיתִ֑י וִהְיִ֨יתֶם לִ֤י סְגֻלָּה֙ מִכָּל־הָ֣עַמִּ֔ים כִּי־לִ֖י כָּל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ יט:ו וְאַתֶּ֧ם תִּהְיוּ־לִ֛י מַמְלֶ֥כֶת כֹּהֲנִ֖ים וְג֣וֹי קָד֑וֹשׁ[5]...

Exod 19:5Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, 19:6 but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

Our psalm, however, offers a third possibility—an outlier—that Israel was formed as a nation during the exodus.[6]

An Exodus Without God?

Oddly, God is missing here as the agent who brought Israel out of Egypt. Even though our psalmist employs one of the typical verbs used for the exodus, יצא, that verb is typically found in the Torah in the context of the exodus in the *hifʿil* or causative form—it is God who *brings* Israel out of Egypt, as in the introduction to the Decalogue (Exod 20:2; Cf. Deut 5:6),

אָֽנֹכִ֖י֙ יְ־הוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֑֔יךָ אֲשֶׁ֧ר הוֹצֵאתִ֛יךָ מֵאֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרַ֖יִם מִבֵּ֣֥ית עֲבָדִֽ֑ים׃

I YHWH am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.

But in Psalm 114, Israel simply *goes out* (in the *qal* or simple form), leaving without any divine help. The lack of divine mention here is odd and hardly accidental—YHWH is present in this psalm implicitly from the beginning, but is only mentioned explicitly in the psalm’s final section, in v. 7.

The Reed Sea and the Jordan River

The prose account of the splitting of the Reed Sea in Exodus 14 describes the water standing as a wall to the right and the left of the Israelites, allowing them to pass through (Ex 14:22, 29) before drowning the Egyptians.[7] God also drowns the attacking soldiers in the sea in Exodus 15 (see vv. 8, 10). But none of this appears in our Psalm, which instead simply states the sea “fled” (v. 3—וַיָּנֹ֑ס; cf. v. 5). Of course, this can be seen as a poetic expression of the Torah account, but adopting this poetic solution is not prudent; in other words, the psalm is likely saying that the sea actually fled!

Verse 3b (cf. 5b) suggests that the Jordan River follows the example of the Reed Sea and flows backwards during the exodus, which is not found in the Torah’s account. Moreover, by adding in the Jordan River fleeing, something that would be unnecessary in the Torah’s narrative context—the Israelites simply need to escape from Egypt, the Jordan River is nowhere near them—it implies a very different understanding of the story than what we find in the Torah. The miracles here are not about Israel escaping but about the natural world reacting to the appearance of YHWH on earth.

Dancing Mountains

Verse 4, in stereotypical synonymous parallelism, suggests that during the exodus the hills and mountains danced. A particular mountain—Sinai/Horeb according to some traditions, quaked during God’s revelation on Mount Sinai (see esp. Exod 19:18, וַיֶּחֱרַ֥ד כָּל־הָהָ֖ר מְאֹֽד, “and the whole mountain trembled violently”), but that is *one* mountain that *quaked*, and did not *dance*, and it did so *after* the exodus.

Water from Flint

The Torah contains several traditions about water in the wilderness. In Exodus 17:1-7, Moses strikes a rock (צור —the same word used in Ps 114) and water pours forth. In Numbers 20:1-13 Moses (inappropriately) strikes a rock (סלע). These traditions use the more generic Hebrew rock terms צור and סלע; none uses חַלָּמִישׁ, flint (or some other hard stone) found in Psalm 114.[8] And in Numbers 20, for example, water comes out of the rock that Moses strikes, rather than flinty rock turned into water, which is precisely what this psalm states in its final verse: הַהֹפְכִ֣י הַצּ֣וּר אֲגַם־מָ֑יִם חַ֝לָּמִ֗ישׁ לְמַעְיְנוֹ־מָֽיִם, “who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flinty rock into a fountain.”

Finally, in the context of the other miracles, this does not seem like a reference to a miracle that took place later in the wilderness because the Israelites were thirsty, but again, the reaction of the natural world to God’s presence is to undo the natural order: Rivers flow backwards, mountains tremble, and stone turns to water.

An Alternative Tradition?

Why does the author of Psalm 114 tell the story so differently than Exodus? I believe that the psalmist did not believe that the Torah is the only correct collection of ancient Israel’s past, and its current legal obligations. This deviation from traditions found in the Torah is found in other psalms as well.

Such differences are especially evident in Psalms 78 and 105, which contain a plague narrative with some overlaps with the account in Exodus, but are quite different from it, including a different number of plagues in a different order.[9] Scholars generally assume that these psalms are independent of the redacted Torah text, likely predating it.[10] Yet, such an argument does not work for Psalm 114.

Dating Biblical Texts

Scholars date biblical texts based on the evolution of ideas,[11] external references in the text,[12] and by the chronological dating of biblical texts based on linguistic criteria.[13]

Linguistic criteria are especially useful—just as the English of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and today’s newspapers is very different in terms of grammar and vocabulary, the language of the ancient Israelites developed over time, especially before and after the period of the Babylonian exile, when it came into direct, everyday contact with Aramaic.

Scholars call pre-exilic biblical Hebrew Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH), while the later dialect, developed in the exile and beyond is called Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH). (Some of the earliest biblical poetry is called Archaic Biblical Poetry, ABH.) A late text can use early language—it can archaize—but an early text cannot use late language; authentic Shakespeare cannot, e.g., refer to something as bingeable, a word that entered the dictionaries in 2018.

The Late Biblical Hebrew of Palm 114

Given that the Book of Psalms, in one of its early editions, ended with Psalm 72:20, כָּלּ֥וּ תְפִלּ֑וֹת דָּ֝וִ֗ד בֶּן־יִשָֽׁי, “End of the prayers of David son of Jesse,” it is logical that psalms later in the book may be additions from later periods. And, in fact, the language of Psalm 114 shows several signs of LBH:

יִשְׂרָאֵל/יַעֲקֹב —The order of “Israel” followed by “Jacob” (v. 1) is unusual in biblical poetry; typically in early sources, Jacob precedes (see e.g. Ps 22:24). The order found here appears mostly in material that is known to be late (e.g. Lam 2:3; 1 Chr 16:13).

לְאָחוֹר—Verses 3 and 5 contain the word לְאָחוֹר, translated “backward,” used only in late texts (e.g., [Deutero-]Isaiah 41:23, 42:23), a usage well-attested in Aramaic.[14] CBH typically expresses backward with אָחוֹר, without any preposition (or locative).

מִלִּפְנֵי—Verse 7 expresses “at the presence of” using מִלִּפְנֵי, a common usage in clearly late texts. CBH uses מִפְּנֵי. The change in preference is demonstrated in how the late book of Chronicles rewrote the earlier Psalm 96:

דברי הימים א טז:ל חִילוּ מִלְּפָנָיו כָּל הָאָרֶץ

1 Chr 16:30 Tremble in his presence all the earth

תהלים צו:ט חִילוּ מִפָּנָיו כָּל הָאָרֶץ

Ps 96:9 Tremble in his presence all the earth

Qumran documents use מלפניו very commonly.[15]

אָדוֹן—Verse 7 uses the Hebrew אָדוֹן (with no suffix) for YHWH. This is unique in the Bible, but is found in rabbinic literature and (likely, depending on restorations) in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

אֱלוֹהַּ יַעֲקֹב—Verse 7 expresses “the God of Jacob” through the Hebrew אֱלוֹהַּ יַעֲקֹב. CBH would render the same expression as אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב. The form found in our psalm is found only in late, clearly post-exilic texts (Neh 9:17; 2 Chr 32:15; Dan 11:38, 39), and is well-attested among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

הַהֹפְכִי—Verse 8 uses the form הַהֹפְכִי, with both an initial definite article (הַ) and a suffix (ִי); this goes against basic rules of Hebrew grammar. The psalm’s author used this final *yod* to make his writing look old and authentic, but erred, thus showing his hand—just like one of us might use “spake” or “mine” incorrectly in an attempt to sound Shakespearean.[16] In other words, this use here is archaistic (pretending to be ancient) rather that archaic (genuinely ancient).

Retelling the Exodus Differently

Although some of these points are more compelling than others, taken as a whole, they show that Psalm 114 is post-exilic. By this time-period, the author would likely have known the Pentateuchal story of the exodus. Why, then, did he retell the story in such a different way?

It is possible to imagine that the author of this psalm was unusually creative, and that Psalm 114 is simply meant to be a poetic rendering of the exodus story in the Torah. I believe, however, that it is more likely that he is asserting the truth of his own (and his community’s) understanding of these events against what the Torah stated.

This explains why he uses traditions that are known from the Torah, but presents them differently: God did not fashion Israel through Abraham or at Sinai, but during the Exodus. Moses did not strike a rock causing water to issue forth, but God turned flint into water. God did not bring Israel out of Egypt, but met them when they left Egypt, and that is when Israel became his people.[17]

The Psalm’s Main Function: Encouraging the Exilic Community

Whether polemicizing against the Torah’s version of Israel’s history or merely creatively rewriting it, what is the point of the psalm? The dating of the psalm is particularly important for answering this question.

The early exilic prophet Deutero-Isaiah promised the Judeans in exile an effortless, miraculous return:

ישעיה מ:ד כָּל־גֶּיא֙ יִנָּשֵׂ֔א וְכָל־הַ֥ר וְגִבְעָ֖ה יִשְׁפָּ֑לוּ וְהָיָ֤ה הֶֽעָקֹב֙ לְמִישׁ֔וֹר וְהָרְכָסִ֖ים לְבִקְעָֽה.

Isa 40:4 Let every valley be raised, every hill and mount made low. Let the rugged ground become level, and the ridges become a plain.

And yet, this is not what transpired. Instead, the postexilic books of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Ezra-Nehemiah show that the period of the return was difficult. Relatively few returned from the security of Babylonia, and those who did come back were challenged by those already in the land, who had not been exiled.

I suggest that the goal of the psalm was not merely to rewrite history, but to convince the post-exilic Jewish community that the future holds great promise.[18] It does so by using a common trope of the return to the good old days, painting the exodus from Egypt as something that occurred with relative ease. Once God appears, even the mountains and the sea cannot withstand him. The implied message is that the return from Babylon, which transpired over a long time-period,[19] will also be as great as the exodus of long ago.[20]

Moreover, the fact that the psalm begins with Israel “leaving” Egypt—the *qal*form “to go out” rather than the *hifʿil* “(for YHWH) to bring out”—may also be pushing those in exile to take their own initiative and to leave Babylon for the Land of Israel, without waiting for YHWH to miraculously take them out. If only Israel/Judah will take the initiative, everything else will follow automatically.

In short, Psalm 114 is an oblique call for Israel to act on its own behalf, and, perhaps indirectly, for YHWH to help out. It declaims that the God of the exodus, who created Israel then, who made rivers turn around and mountains dance as all feared him, who turned rock to water—that God can certainly restore Israel’s glory, if only they will take the first step.

[View Footnotes](https://www.thetorah.com/article/encouraging-babylonian-jews-to-return-psalm-114-tells-a-unique-exodus-story)

1. This essay is the second of several articles on the individual psalms of the *Hallel*, made up of Psalms 113–118. For an analysis of the first psalm of *Hallel*, see Marc Zvi Brettler, [“A Woman's Voice in the Psalter: A New Understanding of Psalm 113,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/a-womens-voice-in-the-psalter-a-new-understanding-of-psalm-113) *TheTorah* (2019). I would like to thank Lara Haft, and the editors, for their helpful comments and suggestions. This article is based on my [“A Jewish Historical-Critical Commentary on Psalms: Psalm 114 as an Example,”](https://www.academia.edu/34589684/A_Jewish_Historical-Critical_Commentary_on_Psalms_Psalm_114_as_an_Example) *HBAI* 5 (2016): 401–434. Complete documentation may be found there, though notes to material not found in the original article have been added here.
2. The chapter numbers now found in the Bible were borrowed into Hebrew from the Vulgate, Jerome’s Latin translation of the Bible; they were introduced there in the thirteenth century by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury. But unlike other books of the Bible, which are divided into units that are shorter than the typical chapters, Hebrew manuscripts divide the Psalter into large units, typically demarcated by a skipped line in the manuscript. In most cases, these are identical with the later chapter divisions. (See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, third edition, revised and expanded [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012], 48–50, 199–200.) Surprisingly, in the best Hebrew manuscripts (e.g. the Aleppo Codex and Leningrad B19a), what we call Psalm 114 is combined with the following Psalm 115 as a single psalm. But nevertheless, it is prudent to treat Psalm 114 as its own entity—in part because its unusual structure differentiates it from what precedes and what follows.
3. This is the word that Rashi frequently uses when he glosses a biblical world with one form Old French. The frequent explanation that לעז in Rashi is an abbreviation of לשׁון עם זר is incorrect.
4. למעינו מים should be emended to the graphically similar, and more logical, למעיני מים.
5. Note the use of this same root in Ps 114:2.
6. Yet a fourth tradition sees Israel becoming God’s nation in the wilderness, without reference to any exodus from Egypt; see David Frankel, [“Exodus: Not the Only Tradition about Israel's Past,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/exodus-not-the-only-tradition-about-israels-past) *TheTorah* (2015); *idem*, [“The Song of the Sea and the History of Ancient Israel and Judah,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-song-of-the-sea-and-the-history-of-ancient-israel-and-judah) *TheTorah* (2016). A clear formulation of this idea appears in the latter part of Deuteronomy:

דברים כז:ט וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה וְהַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר הַסְכֵּת וּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִהְיֵיתָ לְעָם לַי־הוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

Deut 27:9 Moses and the levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying: Silence! Hear, O Israel! Today you have become the people of YHWH your God.

I thank Zvi Koenigsberg for reminding me of this verse.

1. I am describing the story here in the redacted version. From a source critical perspective, many scholars argue that the narrative in Exodus 14 is a compilation based on two different accounts: in the Priestly account, the sea is split and the Israelites cross it, but in the J account, the sea is blown back and then covers the Egyptians in a tidal wave. See discussion in, TABS Editors, ["What Really Happened at the Sea?”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/what-really-happened-at-the-sea) *TheTorah* (2015).
2. See however Deut 8:15 and 32:13.
3. For more on the description, see my discussion in, Marc Zvi Brettler, [“Some Biblical Perspectives on the Haggadah”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/some-biblical-perspectives-on-the-haggadah) *TheTorah*(2014).
4. It is difficult to explain these differences as reflecting only creative or poetic reinterpretation of Exodus. What poetic explanation would justify moving the plague of darkness from penultimate, as in Exodus, to first, as in Psalm 105:28?
5. For example, a text advocating pure monotheism is considered late. See discussion in Kenneth Seeskin, [“When Did the Bible Become Monotheistic?”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/when-did-the-bible-become-monotheistic) *TheTorah* (2019); Jonathan Ben-Dov, [“Are There Gods, Angels, and Demons in Deuteronomy?”](https://thetorah.com/are-there-gods-angels-and-demons-in-deuteronomy/) *TheTorah* (2018); Benjamin Sommer, [“Why Are There Demigods in a Monotheistic Torah?”](https://thetorah.com/why-are-there-demigods-in-a-monotheistic-torah/) *TheTorah* (2015).
6. References to the Persian King Cyrus in Isaiah 40-66, for example, are presumed to have been written during the reign of that king, and not during the earlier period of Isaiah son of Amoz.
7. This method was pioneered by Professor Avi Hurvitz of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Though disputed, it has been (explained and) defended trenchantly in Ronald Hendel and Jan Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible? A Linguistic, Textual, and Historical Study*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).
8. Aramaic began to influence Hebrew in a very significant way during the Babylonian exile.
9. In fact, Pesher Habakuk (1QpHab) 13:1 cites the biblical הס מפניו as הס מלפניו (Hab 2:20), the same transition into LBH from CBH we saw above in Chronicles.
10. This same attempt at archaizing with this form appears in Psalm 113. See my discussion in, Marc Zvi Brettler, [“A Woman's Voice in the Psalter: A New Understanding of Psalm 113,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/a-womens-voice-in-the-psalter-a-new-understanding-of-psalm-113) *TheTorah* (2019).
11. The completion and “publication” of “the” Torah did not immediately end circulation of other *torah*s, or of other documents that overlapped with the Torah and disagreed with it in significant ways. Psalm 114, which contains ideas that differ from the Torah should be interpreted in this context. As the acceptance of the Torah was likely not complete when this psalm was written, it is possible that the psalmist is consciously polemicizing with the Torah, stating that what other communities call *the* Torah is not the only proper collection of Jewish beliefs, traditions, and laws.
12. For a discussion of another post-exilic text offering a similar message, see Hava Shalom-Guy, [“Giving Israel Gold and Silver, Cyrus Improves on a Biblical Motif,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/giving-israel-gold-and-silver-cyrus-improves-on-a-biblical-motif) *TheTorah* (2020).
13. The book of Ezra-Nehemiah shows that the return from exile was a protracted and partial process.
14. It does not matter for this argument if the exodus is a historical event—just that people in the postexilic period viewed it as such.