

Kerygmatic Centrality and Unity in the First Testament? (II): Evidence from the Deuterocanon of West and East, Including the Scriptures of Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity¹

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Abstract

This article seeks modestly to cite three (and perhaps as many as six) additional books containing an eight-member narrative “form” I first detected in the Tanakh² of the Hebrew Bible (HB) over 20 years ago.³ In so doing, I extend the range of its integrative reach to include the (1) Hellenized Judaism of the Deuterocanon and (2) the prejudicially-labeled “Pseudepigrapha.” Both (1) and (2) belong to the wider scope of Mediterranean Judaism and Christianity, including that of Africa.

Introduction

In my contribution to the *Festschrift* for James A. Sanders, I argued that the following components of a mini-recital lace the HB: (1) God (2) promised / swore (3)

1 This includes the Church of Eritrea. The deuterocanonical books cited below appear in both the Greek Bible of the East and Latin Vulgate of the West.

2 It is not altogether clear how far back the traditional designation of Torah (“instruction”), *Nevi'im* (“prophets”), and *Ketuvim* (“writings”) goes. The medieval “complete” manuscripts use them—the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex. Both lay the foundation for critical reconstruction of the HB.

3 Eugene E. Lemcio, “*Kerygmatic Centrality and Unity in the First Testament?*,” in *The Quest for Context & Meaning: Studies in Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. C. Evans and S. Talmon (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 357–73. I had defined “kerygma” as the proclamation of a narrative about God’s salvation (pp. 359–61). The article can be accessed on my Academia.edu postings. Lest someone object that the application of the term is artificial, I note that a form of *κηρυχ* appears at the head of two newly-identified instances of the pattern, the first in 2 Supplements 20. King Iosaphat “proclaimed (*ἐκήρυξεν*) a fast in all Ioudas” (v. 3). During his prayer, he acknowledged the (1) Lord who (2) gave (3) the land (4) to the seed of Abraam, his beloved—(7) Israel, who had (6) come out of (8) the land of Egypt. (5) God had prevented them from proceeding through the lands of Ammon, Moab, and Seir (vv. 7, 10). A shorter version—with an implied (2)—occurs ten chapters later (30:5–9), this time in the promise of a Second Exodus, as it were. King Hezekias passed a message (*κήρυγμα*) via couriers throughout all of Israel and Ioudas urging them to turn to the (1) God of (4) Abraam and Isaak and Israel so that (5) they would (6) return to (3) the land (7) the captives taken by (8) Assour [Assyria].

land⁴ / covenant fidelity to (4) Abraham, Isaac, Jacob / ancestors (individually or collectively). (5) God (6) delivered / led up / led out (7) his people / our ancestors (8) from Egypt. This two-phased primal story provided the foundation for Israel's communal responses in worship and ethics. Since the sequence of these categories differs throughout the literature (a function of genre, style, and context?), it constitutes an "informal formality." In modern terms, they might be viewed as talking points whose main categories could be noted upon eight fingers and adapted to diverse audiences and circumstances.

Rather than claiming that a single topic permeates Tanakh as the unifying and central element (the quest of most OT theologians),⁵ I made the case that this proto-narrative enables several themes to be integrated by a foundational story. I contended for the validity of my proposal because the "form" that I identified is internal rather than externally-imposed by confession or ideology (therefore relatively more objective than subjective), natural rather than artificial, concrete rather than abstract, textual rather than transtextual, detected rather than reconstructed, and compact rather than requiring assembly from large swaths of text.

I showed that the 15 separate instances of the bifocal narrative (which I display according to a stylized format in Figure 1) can be found in all of Tanakh's traditional major and minor canonical sub-units: Torah (where the concentration is heaviest⁶), prophets (former and latter ["major and minor"]), and writings. In the Septuagint (LXX), the contents of the HB are distributed and integrated among "legal," "historical," "poetic," and "prophetic" divisions. Furthermore, the recital is dispersed within "every major era of Israel's salvation history: ancestral call and wanderings, liberation from Egypt, wilderness dereliction, conquest and settlement, monarchy (united and divided, north and south), exile, and restoration."⁷ The skeletal story was fleshed out with muscles, vessels, and organs in any number of ways—according to the kind of literature and according to an author's / redactor's point of view. This provided dual benefits: both stability and adaptability. With perhaps a belabored use of alliteration, I also related this "kerygma" to covenant, commandment, code, cultus, calendar, kingship, charisma, cosmic myth, and canon-behind-the-canon.⁸

4 Nothing is said regarding the governance of the promised territory. The royal-political element is conspicuously absent.

5 See the somewhat dated but still useful survey and analysis by Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology. Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

6 It is significant that this recital occurs in the great Shema: "Hear, O Israel. . ." (Deut 6:4–9). Three more instances of the pattern appear in 9:26–28, 11:8–12, and 26:3–9 (at the beginning, middle, and end of the work). Gerhard von Rad asserted the last of these to be "most important . . . and of great antiquity." See Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 121–22. I focused on the scope of its occurrence rather than on its age, arguing that its range testified to its significance.

7 Lemcio, "Kerygmatic Centrality and Unity," 362.

8 Lemcio, "Kerygmatic Centrality and Unity," 369–73.

However, instead of reconstructing a history of Israelite religion or a history of its kerygma and creeds in the manner adopted by von Rad (who focused on the Deuteronomistic theology),⁹ I stressed the end-product of *Traditionsgeschichte*: the “final” written products of the canon:¹⁰ those that shaped (and shape) the faith and life of the Synagogue and Church. Before setting forth an additional three (and six?) examples—which broaden the ecumenical scope of my investigations—let me register my disappointment that so many scholars continue to employ the prejudicial language of “apocrypha” and “pseudepigrapha” to these and other works. It is obvious that the Roman, Eastern, and African Christian traditions (both Coptic¹¹ and Ethiopian Orthodox) do not regard the first of the following instances as such; nor do the latter think of the second as anything but scriptural.¹²

2 Maccabees 1 (Figure 1, III)

The recital occurs at the opening chapter of this work (v. 2) and towards its end (vv. 24–29), thus setting the stage for what follows. A few of its elements are repeated. Addressed are Jerusalemites, Judeans, and those in Egypt. “May (1) God . . . (2) remember his (3) covenant with (4) Abraam, Isaak, and Iakob.” (5) “[May the] Lord . . . (6) [g]ather together (7) our scattered people; (6) set free those (7) who are slaves (8) among the nations . . . (6) Plant (7) your people in (3) your holy place.” This brings us right up to the Common Era, so far as time of composition is concerned. Furthermore, the drama of salvation history draws near to its apogee in Jesus (according to Christians).

The Wisdom of Solomon¹³ (Figure 1, IV)

This work appears integrated by genre within the “poetic literature” of the OT canons in the Roman Catholic West and Orthodox East—including the Orthodox Churches of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Eritrea.¹⁴ Finding a home among the authoritative documents of Hellenistic Judaism and Christianity, it does several things. It expands the body of sapiential literature, and it enlarges the works attributed to

9 Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 105–28.

10 These are most evident in the great codices of the mid-4th and mid-5th centuries CE: Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Alexandrinus—which lay the foundations for a reconstructed text of Greek Bible in its entirety.

11 <http://www.coptic.org/language/bible/bible.htm>

12 <https://ethiopianorthodoxbible.wordpress.com/ethiopian-orthodox-canon-of-scripture/>

13 There are no appreciable differences between the two major critical texts in the passage cited: Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Sapientia Salomonis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963) and Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta*, vol. 2, 7th ed. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1962).

14 Such integration by genre is also true of the other documents belonging to the Deuterocanon. Only with the Reformation of the 16th century did Protestants remove, collect, and insert them between the “protocanonicals” of the HB and the New Testament (NT), being pejoratively regarded as “apocrypha.”

Solomon—more sage than political-military figure: the king who meets the royal ideal set forth in Deut 17:14–20. He is not to be preoccupied by acquiring women (wives and concubines), wealth, and horses (for chariot warfare); rather, he is to be steeped in the Book of the Law acquired from the priest and committed to its obedience.¹⁵ This standard, rendered in Greek as well as in Hebrew, thus became available not only to the Jewish Diaspora but also to the Greco-Roman *oikoumene*.

Although full of advice for a life of piety, the book (at 10:5, 10, and 18–19) is nevertheless firmly rooted in the eight-membered elemental story so central to the “Protocanonical” literature that I had adduced. The “form” stands embedded within a slightly longer but succinct narrative.¹⁶ It opens with the creation of the first human (πρωτόπλαστος πάτηρ κόσμου), extends to the first fratricide, and includes deliverance from the flood under Noah. (1) “She also [the Wisdom of God] . . . (2) recognized (3) the righteous man [Abraham according to the context].” (1) She [Wisdom again] (2) “showed (3) him [Jacob, according to context] (4) the kingdom of God.”¹⁷ (6) “A holy people and a blameless race (5) she [Wisdom] (7) rescued (8) from a nation of oppressors.” Verses 18–19 expand upon items 5–8. An account of wilderness wanderings follows in chapter 11.

The Book of Jubilees (Figure 1, IV)

Jubilees (and Enoch) appear between 2 Chronicles and Ezra in the Ethiopian Orthodox OT.¹⁸ Before its incorporation therein, the Covenantors at Qumran had held this work in high regard. Peter W. Flint reports that, composed ca. 160 BCE, Jubilees currently survives in approximately 15 fragmentary Hebrew copies, the texts ranging in age from ca. 125 BCE to 50 CE. They are exceeded in the number of scrolls only by Deuteronomy, Psalms, Genesis, and Isaiah. Such figures testify the extent to which these “sectarian” Jews valued Jubilees during the Second Temple era.¹⁹ Latin and Ethiopic translations have been judged to be literalistic, on the whole.²⁰ None of the Greek version has survived.

15 Proverbs 1:8 shows both king and queen instructing the royal son in wisdom.

16 Narrative, though occasionally found in sapiential literature, is not typical of it—thereby making this recital all the more noteworthy.

17 At this point, I am departing from the *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS), ed. Albert Pietersma (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). The translator renders βασιλείαν θεοῦ as “a divine kingdom.”

18 See n. 12 above.

19 James C. VanderKam writes, “[W]e have explicit evidence that *Jubilees* was regarded as authoritative both in Jewish and Christian circles.” See his “Questions of Canon Viewed Through the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee M. McDonald and James M. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 106. According to William Adler (“The Pseudepigrapha in the Early Church” in the same volume), “Jubilees was not especially well known in the early church before the fourth century. After that time, however, it seems to have come into its own. A measure of the popularity of this work is the matter-of-fact way in which some later Christian commentators quote from the work” (228).

20 Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013), 85–86.

In the composition itself, the “form” appears in two prominent places, both at the outset and towards the conclusion—thereby providing “bookends” to the work. Jubilees begins with a reference to time²¹: “In the first year of (6) the Exodus (7) of the children of Israel (8) from Egypt” (1:1). Verse 7 (see v. 21) speaks of (5) God’s bringing them into the (3) land which (1) he (2) had sworn (4) “to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give to your seed a land flowing with milk and honey.’”

The chapters that follow largely expand and expound the “history” of the main protagonists of the recital: the patriarchs (11–45) and Moses (47–50). At 48:8, the narrator states, “(1) And the Lord (2) did everything on account of Israel and according to his (3) covenant, which he made with (4) Abraham . . .” In the near context, Moses speaks of a joint agency in the Exodus rescue. “And I stood between the Egyptians and Israel, and (5) we (6) delivered (7) Israel (8) from his [Pharaoh’s, under the influence of Mastema²²] hand and from the hand of his people. And the Lord brought them out through the midst of the sea as through dry land” (v. 13).²³

Excursus

Ecclesiasticus / Sirach

Of course, finding smaller instances of the pattern (either with the patriarchal components [1–4] or the Mosaic ones [5–8]) is easier than locating the full, eight-membered mini-narrative. Therefore, it is with even more caution that I set forth three more individual books, each of them reliant at points on inferences from the context. All belong to the Deuterocanon. The first comes from the Wisdom or “Poetic” material: Ecclesiasticus or Sirach 44:19 through 45:1–5.24 (1) God (2) gave to (4) Abraam’s offspring [Isaak and Yakob being cited] (3) an inheritance from sea to sea. That (5) Moyses (6) led out his (7) people from (8) Egypt is implied in the author’s claim that God had made him great, a terror to his enemies, and a worker of miracles. Glorified in the presence of kings, he subsequently received God’s Law. The darkness (γνόφος) into which God led him (45:5) could be a reference both to the darkness of Mt. Sina (Deut 20:21) and to the deep darkness (σκότος

21 The translation is by O. S. Wintermute, “Jubilees. A New Translation and Introduction,” in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 52. It concurs at these points with James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018).

22 Sometimes, this figure appears as Satan’s chief demon—at others, as Satan himself.

23 Wintermute, “Jubilees,” 139–40.

24 I am relying on NETS, for spellings and terminology. Ecclesiasticus / Sirach 44–50 provides the longest, continuous (i.e., uninterrupted) meta-narrative in all of scripture (six chapters and 164 verses). It ranges from Enoch (Adam being mentioned later in the account at 49:16) to Simon son of Onias (220–195 BCE) emerging from the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement in all of his high-priestly splendor.

καὶ γνόφος) that separated the Israelites from the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Deut 14:20).

Ioudith

The second tentative example (also fleshed out in part by context) occurs in Ioudith (which is found among “Historical Books”). Achior, the Ammonite leader, gives to Assour’s (Assyria’s) field marshal Olophernes an account of the Israelite legacy in the land (5:1–14). After originating in Chaldea and sojourning (*παροικεῖν*) in Mesopotamia, under (1) God’s (2) direction (4) their ancestors (3) settled (*κατοικεῖν*) in Canaan where they became extremely wealthy.²⁵ Because of famine, they sojourned (*παροικεῖν*) in Egypt where they were oppressed, having become numerous. After Israel’s (5) God had struck Egypt with plagues, the inhabitants (6) drove (7) them out [of the previously-mentioned (8) Egypt], God leading them through the Red Sea into Sina. It is at least interesting dramatically that the author puts this recital on the lips of one of Israel’s local pagan enemies for the benefit of its more serious aggressor.

Esther

It is the Greek Old Testament (GOT) that contains the so-called “Additions to Esther” or “The Rest of Esther.” Among the textual witnesses to 4:16 (= Addition C, vv. 8–9), are four manuscripts that testify to a version of the full, eight-member form (the Old Greek mentioning not more than seven of the eight). They are most clearly set forth in the Göttingen edition²⁶ and translated under “ALPHA” in NETS alongside of the LXX. The prayer of Mardocheaios reads, “And now, O Lord, (1) you who (2) covenanted (*ὁ διαθέμενος*) with (4) Abraam,” regarding (3) “. . . the inheritance that has been yours from the beginning. Do not neglect (7) your portion, which (5) you (6) redeemed (8) out of the land of Egypt.” That “inheritance” might do double duty: both as a reference to Canaan—an implied (3)—as well as to God’s people. But this is not certain. It would not be politic for the speaker to belabor the territorial particulars of the Abrahamic Covenant since the land of promise at that time belonged among the one hundred twenty-seven nations under Persian rule (1:1). More suggestive is the set of eight reinforcing items found in the last chapter (10:58 = Addition F, v. 9): All the people blessed the (1) Lord who (2) “remember[ed] (*ὁ μνησθεῖς*) the (3) covenants [sic] made with

25 The inheritance of land is not tied either to pre-or post-Egyptian occupation.

26 Also known as “Göttingen L,” its origin is disputed. Karen H. Jobes summarizes the alternatives thus: “(a) a revision of the o’ [Old Greek] text, (b) a second, independently made translation of the MT, (c) a translation of another Hebrew text of Esther of uncertain relationship to the MT, or (d) a midrashic re-write of the Esther story” (NETS, 424). See Robert Hanhart, ed., *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Scientiarum Göttingensis*, vol. 8.3: Esther (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966 & 1983).

our (4) fathers!”²⁷ In this instance, God did not deliver Israel from Egypt; rather, (5) the Lord (6) did signs and wonders [as he had done there] to rescue (7) his inheritance from (8) the dragon, Aman (10:53–57 = Addition F, vv. 1–9). The same reptilian imagery had been used against both the Egyptian Pharaoh and Babylonian Nebouchodonosor (LXX Iez 29:3 and 32:2, Ier 28:34, respectively).²⁸ It is as if the scribes in this tradition, knowing of the fuller form, made a deliberate effort to preserve the recital, both towards the beginning and at the end of the work, and to apply it to the Persian exile. We have here yet an additional example (if Ioudith be allowed) of Judah in captivity during another imperial era. This version of the GOT also provides a parallel witness to the form’s embeddedness.

Conclusions

Given the relative abundance of the instances in the HB I have cited, my three firm (plus three tentative) examples may be considered decidedly meager. However, altogether they accomplish a couple of things: (1) They show that we are dealing with a mini-narrative that can unite the OT Scriptures across a broader front than has been realized. (2) Furthermore, the presence of the newly-cited texts within the canons of both the Western and Eastern “lungs” of the Church, including the Orthodox Churches of Africa, is no mean consideration.²⁹ The implications for greater ecumenical dialog regarding the nature of biblical unity and authority ought to be explicated.

Two additional things might be said regarding Jubilees. Its importance for the stream of Judaism at Qumran needs to be given its due. Furthermore, its retention in one tradition of African Orthodoxy should be taken more seriously as a corroborative witness to the unifying center of the First Testament. Whatever might be concluded about the precise meaning and range of canon / Scripture, this much can be said: the foundational recital was preserved in literature that was recognized as authoritative for the faith and life of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity during the Greco-Roman era, including the northeast African Continent—and their Diasporas.³⁰

27 Covenant references here and below are absent in the LXX.

28 Two dragons appear in Mardocheios’ quasi-apocalyptic vision of the addition that precedes chapter 1 and in its allegorical interpretation at the end of the final chapter. One of them is the Seer himself. So, the dragon imagery is not entirely negative in this work.

29 See R. W. Cowley, “The Biblical Canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Today,” *Ostkirchliche Studien* 23 (1974): 318–23. The author cites varieties in earlier and contemporary canons within this tradition, where the definitions and boundaries are more fluid. Harold P. Scanlin opines that, in Eastern traditions, “use in the liturgy actually helps to define what is canonical.” See “The Old Testament Canon in the Orthodox Churches,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology. Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 310.

30 I do not mean to suggest that these are the only instances of the “form” that can be found in the body of literature cited. More might be identified by further research.

Figure 1. The Unifying Center of the First Testament II?³¹**I. Torah / Law / Pentateuch (LXX)³²**

Genesis (50:24–25)	Exodus (6:2–8; cf. 32:11–13)	Leviticus (26:42–45)	Numbers (32:9–11, 13)	Deuteronomy (6:10–12, etc.) ³³
1. God	"God Almighty"	God	God	Lord God
2. swore	gave	covenant promise	swore to give	swore, brought into
3. land	land of Canaan	land	land	land
4. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
5. God	God	God	[God]	Lord
6. will bring up	freed, delivered, redeemed	brought	came	brought
7. you, Israel	Israelites, God's people	ancestors	people	you (pl.)
8. from this land [Egypt]	from Egyptians	out of Egypt	out of Egypt	out of Egypt

IIa. Prophets: Former / Historical Books (LXX)

Joshua (24:1–7, 13)	Judges (2:1)	1 Kings (3 Kingdoms) (8:48, 51, 53)	2 Kings (4 Kingdoms) (13:22–24) ³⁴
1. Yahweh	God	God	God
2. gave	promised	gave	preserved
3. Seir, all Canaan	land	land	land
4. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau	ancestors	ancestors	Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob
5. God via Moses & Aaron	God	God	God
6. brought, led	brought	brought	delivered
7. your ancestors	"you"	people of Israel	Israel [Northern Kingdom]
8. out of Egypt	up from Egypt	Egypt	Aram [after Egypt & before Babylon]

31 N.B. The order in the displays is stylized for convenience, the sequence being diverse in the texts themselves.

32 These headings reflect the fact that, although the content of most Protestant Bibles is identical to the Jewish Scriptures in the HB, their sequence and titles resemble those of the LXX, the Jewish Scriptures in Greek—which the earliest Church inherited and embraced in its Bibles.

33 It is significant that this recital occurs in the great "Shema": "Hear, O Israel . . ." (vv. 4–9). Three more instances of the pattern appear at 9:26–28; 11:8–12; and 26:3–9 (at the beginning, middle, and end of the work).

34 In this case, Egypt was not the immediate oppressor; rather, God (on the same pattern) delivered Israel from Aram (or Syria).

IIb. Prophets: Latter / Prophetical Books (LXX)

Isaiah (51:2, 9–11)	Hosea (12:2–4, 8–9, 12–13)	Micah (7:15, 20)
1. God	God via angel	God
2. called & blessed	strove with & blessed	will show faithfulness, sworn, to
3. made many, return to land [Judah]	Bethel [promised land]	[boundaries extended] ³⁵
4. Abraham & Sarah	Jacob [=Judah] & Ephraim	Abraham, Jacob, ancestors
5. arm of the Lord	Lord by a prophet	Yahweh's signs & miracles
6. redeemed through the waters	brought	came out
7. generations long ago	Israel	generations
8. cut Rahab [Egypt] to pieces	up from Egypt	of Egypt

III. Writings / Historical Books (LXX)

Nehemiah (2 Esdras 19) (9:7–11)	2 Chronicles (2 Supplements)³⁶ (6:5, 25, 38)	2 Maccabees 1:2, 24–29
1. Lord, God	God	God
2. chose, bequeathed	gave	remember
3. land of Canaanite, etc.	land	covenant, holy place
4. Abram→Abraham, descendants	ancestors & them	Abraam, Isaak, Iakob
5. God	God	Lord
6. his people, our ancestors	his people	people, slaves,
7. passed through waters	brought	gather, free, plant
8. from Egypt	out of Egypt	nations

³⁵ There are many references to land, territory, and geography.

³⁶ 2 Supplements 20:3–10; 30:5–9, from n. 3, belong in this category. But, to avoid clutter, I have displayed only a single example from each book.

IV. Poetical Books (Historic Christian Canon, Cont'd) & “Pseudepigrapha” (Canonical: Ethiopian Orthodoxy)

Psalms 105:9–11, 37–38, 42–43³⁷	Wisdom of Solomon 10:5, 10, 15, 18–19	Jubilees 1:1, 7, 21³⁸
1. God	[God] via Wisdom	God
2. gave	showed	swore
3. land of Canaan	kingdom of God	land
4. Abraham, Isaac Jacob, thousands	righteous men: Abraam & Iakob [by context]	to ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
5. God via Moses & Aaron	[God] via Wisdom [via Moses, by context]	God & Moses
6. his people	holy people & a blameless race	Israel
7. brought out	rescued	delivered
8. from a ravaged Egypt	from nation of oppressors	from Egyptians

³⁷ The Psalm in its entirety expands upon these two movements.

³⁸ The full pattern also appears at 48:8, 13.