Translation

1. Come, let us give praise unto the LORD. Let us shout to the rock of our deliverance.
2. Let us come before him with thanks, and shout to him with songs.
3. Yea, the LORD is a great God, and a great king over the gods.
4. In whose hand is the vastness of the land, and his is the majesty of the mountains.
5. Whose is the sea. Indeed, he has formed the dry land.
6. Come, let us do obeisance and bow down. Let us kneel in praise before the LORD who made us.
7. Yea, he is our God, and we are the people he pastures, and the sheep of his portion.

Today, if you would obey his voice,
8. Do not harden your heart as at Meribah, as on the day of Massah in the wilderness.
9. Where your fathers tried me. They tested me even though they saw my work.
10. For forty years I hated the generation, and I thought, “They are a people that are wandering of mind, since they do not know my ways,”
11. Where I swore in my anger, “They will not go into my rest.”

Text

1. מָלֵך יְהוָה לְרָצוּת יַעֲשֵׂנּו 1
2. תָּאִיר הַיַּהֲדוּת בְּתַנָּאתֵי 2
3. יִשְׂרָאֵל 3
4. וַיָּפֹן הַיַּהֲדוּת בְּתַנָּאתֵי 4
Preliminary Observations
The hymns normally make no reference to specific historical events, but Psalm 95 is an exception, referring in verse 8 to the testing and disputation at Meribah/Massah. Reference must be to the form of the story in Exodus 17:1-7 rather than to that of Numbers 20:2-13 since the dual name, Meribah/Massah, is used as in Exodus 17:7. The psalm is part of an entrance liturgy, perhaps at the Festival of Booths.

Notes on the Text
1. הָעָמַד (BDB 943b, HAL 1248b) On the heightening of a plural cohortative by a verb of motion see Waltke and O’Conner, Biblical Hebrew Syntax (1990), par. 34.5.1a. HAL suggest “cheer” for this verb. (That may, however, incorrectly suggest a sporting event!) The parallel with וַיְהִי (BDB 929b, HAL 1207b) determines the meaning as liturgical song. (You might find this a good opportunity to review both the cohortative and the hifil of hollow verbs. See Weingreen 88 and 199-201.) This is a call to give song, to cry aloud to God and is the direction of a priest or other liturgical leader. Gerstenberger, Psalms, Part 2 and Lamentations, 182, writes about the infrequency of such plural cohortatives, but Gunkel-Begrich (Introduction, 24) count about seventy instances in the Psalms. (See also הָעַלַּמְכָּה in the next verse.) The imperative with a following cohortative is similar in meaning to הָעָמַד with a following imperative.

More common than this is הָעָמַד followed by the imperfect introduced by כָּלָה:

One might also compare the many examples of הָעָמַד + cohortative as in Genesis 11:7.

לָא (BDB 849b, 1016ab-1017a). The word usually means a large rock, something larger than an אֹבָר at least. Its literal meaning ranges from “boulder” to “escarpment.” In this sense it is a metaphor for God and or Jerusalem. The word refers to safety and salvation from...
calamity that God offers.

1. Come, let us give praise unto the LORD. Let us shout to the rock of our deliverance.

2. (BDB 274a) Dahood, *Psalms* 2:353, would see this as a liturgy for entrance into the temple precincts. Perhaps Weiser, *Psalms* 626, is slightly more correct to use the word “sanctuary.” The setting seems already to assume a setting on the temple mount with its injunction in vs. 6 to prostrating oneself (נשתחתרתא, BDB 1005ab) and bowing the knee before the Lord.

2. Let us come before him with thanks, and shout to him with songs.

3. This is not a motive clause (“because”). Rather, it is a particle of magnification: “How great a God is the LORD!”

*עליכל-אליהם* “over all gods.” The image here is not (pace Dahood, *Psalms* 2:353) the LORD’s superiority over the weak gods of the nations but the preeminent role of the LORD as ruler “over” the gods, king in the divine assembly of gods. Gerstenberger correctly notes that Yahweh’s superiority is a major feature of the hymns, especially what he calls the “Yahweh-Kingship hymns.” This is hardly news. The issue is the kind of superiority. The contention here is that Yahweh is superior in the sense of being the leader of the divine assembly.

3. Yea, the LORD is a great God, and a great king over the gods.

4. The four occurrences of *אנת* in this psalm are unusual for poetic diction. (See also vss. 5, 9, 11.) The first two are relative possessives, but the last two are almost prose-like relative clauses. Here “in whose hand” is the best translation, and in in vs. 5, “whose is the sea.”

*ução* (BDB 350b, HAL 571b) The root .י.ר suggests the idea of research or investigation. The LXX suggests מינתנ “distances” as the appropriate reading. Dahood, on the basis of נכת in Job 38:16 questions whether the מ is an enclitic from the preceding word.

3. *Psalms* 2:353. This suggestion seems unlikely as does the attempt to make the translation parallel the Job passage. The translation “depths” is no more justified than would be “expanses.”
“Eminence,” suggested by BDB is a very promising translation. Dahood errs to limit the scope to “mountaintops.” The reference is to the majesty of the mountains together with the previous reference to the vastness of the land.

4. In whose hand is the vastness of the land,
and his is the majesty of the mountains.

5. Ownership, expressed in vs 4 is related to the theme of creation in vs. 5. Creation and ownership are carried together in the expression used of God blessing Abram in Genesis 14:19:

In fact, the word קָנָה means both “create” and “own.” So here the sea belongs to God because God made it.

The alternate form נֵכַשְׁתִּים is found only here and in Exodus 4:9. Notice how Hebrew prefers absolute forms of the nouns for the abstractions “majesty of the mountains,” or “dry land” when possible.

5. Whose is the sea.
Indeed, he has formed the dry land

6. נַעַשֵׁה (BDB 1005ab, G-K par. 75kk, HAL 1457b) BDB follow G-K in considering this a hitpolel of the root ר.ה.ש, whereas HAL regard it as eshtafel, reflexive of a shafel form. For them the root is ר.ה.ה. The oddity of the form disappears for readers because it occurs 171 times in the Hebrew Bible according to HAL. It does not mean “bow” -- which is closer to the meaning of the following נֵכַשְׁתִּים -- but “do obeisance” or “prostrate oneself.” נֵכַשְׁתִּים (BDB 138b) here is best understood as “bow” or “bend the knee” (in praise). We are so used to translating this as “bless” that we forget its specific meaning of “bless/praise while bowing.”

Just as God has made the sea and dry land, the eminence of the mountains and the expanses of the land, so has God also made human beings who, like the other things made, belong to God.

6. Come, let us do obeisance and bow down.

4. Ibid.
5. In case the term shafel has yet to cross the reader’s radar screen, it is another causative stem like the hifil that is marked by the prefix רָשׁ instead of רָז. G-K par 55i discuss it under “less common conjugations” and, indeed, give only noun forms derived from shafel forms as examples. The shafel is frequent in Syriac.
Let us kneel in praise before the LORD who made us.

See above on vs 3.

(BDB 945b) This continues the theme of belonging to God, in this case on the model of sheep who belong to a farmer. It is certainly not an unusual metaphor for the kind of possession Israel is for God (cf. Psalm 23:1). The metaphor works because the possession cannot be used effectively unless the owner provides it with appropriate care. Berlin and Brettler, Jewish Study Bible (2004), 1389, emphasize the royal connotations of the shepherd image. While that would not be inappropriate here, the royal image too works well because of the necessity for the king to provide his possession with care.

(Dahood (Psalms 2:354) argues that here has the sense of “portion” or “share” based on Job 1:14, Jeremiah 6:3, as well as 2 Samuel 19:44, 2 Kings 11:7. The translation “plot” may be going afield.

(Dahood (Psalms 2:354) claims the translation “Today, if you would hearken to his voice” would amount to an aposiopesis7 because the following clause begins with a negative jussive and so should not have an antecedent clause like this one. Not all translators would agree. The traditional text of the Book of Common Prayer (1976), 146 reads

Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts *
 as in the provocation,
 and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness;

and the JPS translation (1985), 1222, has

O, if you would but heed His charge this day:
 Do not be stubborn as at Meribah,
 as on the day of Massah, in the wilderness,

It is not clear what a modern reader might understand by the translation “hear” or “heed.” The verb with ב means here to listen to God with the purpose of obedience.

Should one read this stich with the next two (vs 8) as a synthetic-synonymous tristich? It is

6. See their notes especially on Psalm 23:1-4, 1307. The royal figure the authors propose here seems to me unlikely because there is no obvious connection between the LORD as king and the functions the psalm ascribes to the LORD.

7. If “aposiopesis” is a word that doesn’t often trip off your lips, you might want to know that it refers to a rhetorical figure that stops just short of its payoff, leaving the hearer to complete the figure. My Mom was noted for her quiet way of saying, “If you don’t pick up your room, ...” She didn’t have to fill in the blank. My imagination was enough. Little did I know at the time that this was an aposiopesis.
difficult not to do so.

7. Yea, he is our God,  
and we are the people he pastures,  
and the sheep of his portion.

Today, if you would obey his voice,  
8. Do not harden your heart as at Meribah,  
as on the day of Massah in the wilderness.

8. On the figure of the hardness of the heart, see my note on Psalm 33:15 in the previous lesson. As noted earlier, the psalm presupposes the form of the story we find in Exodus 17:1-7 since Numbers 20:2-13 does not mention Massah.  

9.  "Where" in this context. The וַיְשָׁנָה might not be required here and may seem unusual for poetry, but it links this stich together with the "wilderness" of vs. 8 clearly. The verb הָסַּנ (piel) means "test" or "try" and can also mean "attempt" (BDB 650a). Although the LORD may freely test human beings, as in Genesis 22:1 and Exodus 15:25, it is always an evil for human beings to test the LORD. See Numbers 14:22, Psalm 78.18; 106:14, etc. The pious disclaimer of Ahaz, however, that he will not test the LORD in Isaiah 7:19, finds portrayal as an evasion. The case at Meribah seems to be the Bible’s paradigm case for “testing” God. The situation is loss of faith owing to extreme deprivation and is characterized by an angry outpouring against the LORD.

The parallel to הָסַּנ is בַּטִּית (BDB 103b, HAL 119a). Although it is perfectly reasonable for God to “test” human beings, humans do not test God. There is no mutuality of knowledge between creator and created. Humans know God by God’s deeds. God knows and tests human beings by virtue of that creator’s ownership referred to earlier.  

Although humans may not “test” God, they are not without knowledge of God’s character as revealed through God’s actions in the world. The versions read the plural here, but the MT prefers the singular, perhaps with specific reference to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

9. Where your fathers tried me.  
They tested me even though they saw my work.

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8. See Deuteronomy 6:16, which mentions Massah and not Meribah.  
9. See especially Psalm 11:4-5.  
10. The Lord’s Prayer reads (Matthew 6:13 // Luke 11:4): καὶ μὴ εἰσεπερατεθή ημᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν. This suggests that God’s “testing” comes through adversity, and that provides a possible explanation for the prohibition against “testing” God. It is not permissible to plague God with fear and anger with the result that God is “tested.” God has nothing to prove to human beings. The Lord’s Prayer suggests that it is permissible to ask not to be tested.
10. נאָכָּט (BDB 876b, HAL 1083ab) This verb expresses strong emotions of revulsion toward someone or something, and it is shocking to find it applied to God in reference to the generation of wandering. As a verb of emotion or cognition, we are not surprised that it takes its object in ו, but this must influence our translation. Instead of translating as does the KJV, “Forty years long was I grieved with [this] generation,” modern translations like the NRSV correctly remove the preposition in translation: “For forty years I loathed that generation.” The BCP, 725, also does this correctly: “Forty years long I detested that generation.”

The imperfect שָׁכַה, as opposed to the expected שָׁכַה נִמְשָׁכְת, emphasizes continued action in the past (G-K par. 107b). Throughout the forty years in the wilderness God detested the generation of those who had tested God. The wandering and its deprivations constitute the evidence of God’s loathing. Vss 10-11 interpret that historical memory in terms of God’s emotion. An interesting parallel to that, including a parallel to the use of the imperfect is in the Mesha inscription where the narrator explains Israelite domination over the land of Moab in terms of the anger of Chemosh: כְּכִי ויַמְּחַ נִמְשָׁכ (line 5). Why, then, did evil come upon the generation of the wilderness. One might entertain the possibility either that God had forgotten the wanderers or that they had angered God. Lamentations 5:20 and Isaiah 49:14 remind us that it is reasonable to suppose that God has forgotten the people of God. Hosea 4:6 suggests in words that remind us of our passage that God has forgotten Israel because of lack of knowledge. In 1 Samuel 1:11 Hannah implores the Lord to remember her. So individuals or an entire nation might conclude that misfortune derives from the fact that God has forgotten them and has forgotten to protect them from evil. On the other hand, our passage supports the other interpretation, the idea that the people of God have angered God and so have received specific punishment. It is interesting how the tradition expresses this historical evaluation in terms of the movements of God’s emotion.

11. נִפְטָא לַבָּא (BDB 1073b, HAL 1766b) The usage here is similar to that in Isaiah 29:24 נִפְטָא לַרְח. In Isaiah 28:7 and 21:4 the verb נִפְטָא לַרְח refers to intoxication from wine. Since the verb also means “wander” as well as “err,” the application to the generation of the wilderness is pointed. God caused them to wander because their minds had already wandered. This specific reference to their cognitive disability is confirmed in the third stich: וְהָיָה לָא יִדְעַ דָּרְכֵּי. The pleonastic לא is one of emphasis: “and they did not know my ways,” with the obvious implication that they of all people would have known God’s ways had they not hardened their hearts. The image here is not pastoral as Dahood incorrectly suggests. The shepherd does not condemn the stupidity of a flock but rounds the sheep up to keep them safe when its members stray from the path or pasture. After all, the shepherd’s financial wellbeing rests with those

11. Students will have no trouble finding the meaning of these Moabite words in their Biblical Hebrew lexicons. Note that the ending ה on נאָכָּט is the masculine singular suffix: “his land.” See Cowley’s note 1 to G-K 107b. See also S. R. Driver, A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions (3d ed, 1969), par 27.1a.

foolish sheep. Not so in this Psalm. As this Psalm explains, God was willing to let the entire flock die in the wilderness because they were "לא ילבו".

For forty years I hated the generation,
and I thought, “They are a people that are wandering of mind.
since they do not know my ways.”

11. 'אשנ could refer back to עם, the people with the wandering mind. It also might correspond to the “where” of vs 9, and I have taken it in this sense. While stylists may not like the use of 'אשנ in this poem in vss 4, 5, 9, and 11, that usage does tie the poem together as the work of a single redactor. Here one might read the text as “Where I swore in my wrath.” The negative oath formula begins with מ'אנ.

13. Just to remind you that we have a Latin term for everything, the nun at the end of this word is called the Nun paragogicum. G-K tell us that the form expresses emphasis and occur often at the end of sentences. Any pausal vowel in the preceding syllable is retained.

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11. Where I swore in my anger,
“They will not go into my rest.”

13. My Grandfather used to have a strange negative oath formula that worked this way: “I’ll be swiggered if he’ll take advantage of me again.” I never learned what “swiggered” meant exactly, but the formula was always crystal clear in meaning.