

Psalm 118

Thanksgiving for the Lord's salvation

Psalm 118:

This psalm was a particular favorite of Martin Luther.

A national psalm of thanksgiving, it apparently accompanied a procession into the temple, probably that of a thanksgiving offering.

The changes of person in the psalm indicate that it may have been recited antiphonally, though the following explanation is admittedly conjectural.

First, there is an exchange before the door of the temple (verses 1-20).

The first four verses are a sort of invocation, probably delivered by a priest.

Next (in verses 5-18), the king leads the people in worship with himself as the speaker, though interrupted at times by antiphonal refrains offered by the people (verses 8-12).

(In verse 19), the king turns to the doorkeeper and asks for entrance.

The doorkeeper responds with a description of those who may enter (verse 20), retranslating as a statement: "This is the gate of the Lord".

The remainder of the psalm takes place within the temple (verses 21-29).

Again, there are apparently three speakers.

First, the king declares that God has saved him (verse 21).

The people respond in a joyful manner to this affirmation (verses 22-24).

The employment of the stone imagery that represents the Davidic king is echoed messianically throughout the New Testament, see (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7).

Next, the priests deliver a petition and a blessing (verses 25-26).

The final three verses portray the presentation of the actual sacrifice: the priests command it (verse 27), the king responds with praise (verse 28), and the people seal the ceremony with the same liturgical formula with which it began (verse 29).

Verses 1-29 (see note on Psalm 113:1-9).

This psalm (along with Psalm 110), is intensely messianic and thus the most quoted by the New Testament (Matt. 21:9, 42; 23:39; Mark 11:9-10; 12:10-11; Luke 13:35; 19:38; 20:17; John 12:13; Acts 4:11; Heb. 13:6; 1 Peter 2:7).

Neither the author nor the specific circumstances of the psalm are identified.

Two reasonable possibilities could be entertained:

- (1) It was written during Moses' day in the Exodus, or
- (2) It was written sometime after the Jews returned to Jerusalem from Exile.

Probably it was the former, given;

- (1) The nature of the Egyptian Hallel (especially Psalm 114);
- (2) Its use by the Jewish community especially at Passover;
- (3) The close similarity to Moses' experience in the Exodus;
- (4) The striking similarity in language (psalm 118:14 with Exodus 15:2; 118:15-16; and with Exodus 15:6, 12; 118:28 with Exodus 15:2); and
- (5) The particularly pointed messianic significance as it relates to the redemption provided by Christ our Passover (1 Cor.5:7).

It seems reasonable to propose that Moses possibly wrote this beautiful psalm to look back in worship at the historical Passover and look ahead in wonder to the spiritual Passover in Christ.

- I. Call to Worship (118:1-4);
- II. Personal Praise (118:5-21);
- III. Corporate Praise (118:22-24);
- IV. Commitment to Worship (118:25-29).

Verses 1-18:

The account the psalmist here gives of his troubles is very applicable to Christ.

Many hated him without a cause; nay, the Lord himself chastened him sorely, bruised him, and put him to grief, that by his stripes we might be healed.

God is sometimes the strength of his people, when he is not their song.

They have spiritual supports, though they want spiritual delights.

Whether the believer traces back his comfort to the everlasting goodness and mercy of God, or whether he looks forward to the blessing that's secured to him, he will find abundant cause for joy and praise.

Every answer to our prayers is an evidence that the Lord is on our side.

And then we need not fear what man can do unto us.

We should conscientiously do our duty to all, and trust in him alone to accept and bless us.

Let us seek to live to declare the works of God, and to encourage others to serve him and to trust in him.

Such were the triumphs of the Son of David, in the assurance that the good pleasure of the LORD should prosper in his hand.

Verses 1-3:

God withholds eternal death as punishment for sin, replacing it with his kindness, love, and compassion.

This psalm was used as an antiphonal reading in corporate worship, with “His mercy endureth forever” being used as the refrain.

Psalm 118:1 "O give thanks unto the LORD; for [he is] good: because his mercy [endureth] for ever."

“Give thanks”:

Compare Palms 105-107, 136.

The psalm ends (in verse 29), as it began here.

Some believe this whole chapter of Psalms to be a song of praise to be sung in the temple when it was built.

We see a reference to that very thing here in Ezra.

Ezra 3:10-11 "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel." "And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because [he is] good, for his mercy [endureth] for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid."

I personally believe this to also be a prophetic Scripture of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Chief Cornerstone.

Verses 2-4: “Israel ... Aaron ... them now that fear the LORD” (see note on Psalm 115:9-11).

The phrase "His mercy endureth for ever" is repeated in all 26 verses of Psalm 136 (compare 118:1, 29).

Psalm 118:2 "Let Israel now say, that his mercy [endureth] for ever."

Let such who have had an experience of it acknowledge and declare it to others.

Not only believe in it with their hearts, and privately give thanks for it, but with the mouth make confession of it to the glory of divine grace.

Not only literal Israel, whom the LORD brought out of Egypt, led and fed in the wilderness, and settled in the land of Canaan.

And to whom the law and the services of God, the covenants and promises, word and ordinances, belonged.

And who now were so happy under the government of such a king as David.

But also, the spiritual Israel of God, the whole Israel of God, Jews and Gentiles, under the Gospel dispensation.

The Israel whom God has chosen, the one Christ has redeemed, and also the Spirit effectually calls and sanctifies.

Such who are Israelites indeed, who have been encouraged to hope in the LORD, and in his mercy, and are made partakers of it.

These should speak of the grace and mercy of God, and the continuance of it, for the encouragement of others.

This also can be two-fold.

The physical house of Israel would certainly be able to say that His mercy endureth forever.

They were able to build the temple.

Spiritual Israel (Christians), could shout this even more, because the mercy of Jesus Christ is sufficient to save thousands and even millions of people for all generations.

It is His great mercy that saves them, if they believe.

Psalm 118:3 "Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy [endureth] for ever."

The priests and Levites that blessed the people, and taught them the knowledge of divine things.

But not these literally, at least not only these, since the priesthood of Aaron is changed, and the law of it abrogated.

And all believers are now priests unto God, and offer up spiritual sacrifices to him.

And particularly the sacrifice of praise for his grace and mercy, the perpetuity of which they should publish and proclaim all abroad.

This verse has to do with the physical house, because Aaron had been High Priest.

The earthly priesthood would have to do with the earthly sanctuary or temple.

Psalm 118:4 "Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy [endureth] for ever."

This verse is an exact quote from the victory song at the Red sea (Exodus 15:2), and is repeated in (Isaiah 12:2).

The Exodus events were an object lesson in God's redemptive character and His desire to deliver His people from trouble.

This verse reaches much further than just the Hebrews.

This is for all who fear Him.

This includes the Christians.

One reason to fear Him, is because we are not worthy to be saved.

He saved us, because of His mercy toward us, not because of anything we did for Him.

Verses 5-21:

This section contains individual praise by the psalmist, possibly Moses.

Verses 5-9:

The psalmist focuses intensely on the LORD.

Psalm 118:5 "I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, [and set me] in a large place."

Margin, as in Hebrew, "out of distress."

In the very midst of trouble, he called upon the LORD.

His voice was heard, as it were, coming from the depth of his sorrows (see notes on Psalm 18:6).

"The LORD answered me":

That is, he heard my prayers, and delivered me (see notes on Psalm 18:6).

"And set me in a large place":

I was before pressed on every side; sorrows compassed me around.

I could not move; I had no liberty.

And now he gave me space and freedom on every side, so that I could move without obstruction or pain.

This is literally, "The LORD", (not Yahweh here, but Yah), "answered me in a large place" (see notes on Psalms 4:1; 18:19).

To pray in distress, would mean that this was a sincere prayer of the heart.

We have spoken before of how this type prayer gets to the heart of God.

The LORD takes him from the closed in place that he was in and freed him.

This could have been a physical, or a spiritual prison that he had been closed up in.

Psalm 118:6 The LORD [is] on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

Margin, as in Hebrew, "for me."

The LORD is with me.

He is my helper.

He defends my cause.

"I will not fear":

I have nothing to be afraid of.

God is more mighty than any or all of my foes, and he can deliver me from them all (compare Psalms 56:4; 56:9; 56:11).

"What can man do unto me?":

Any person; all people.

They can do no more than God permits.

They cannot destroy me when he means to save me.

They cannot defeat his gracious designs toward me.

I am safe if God is my Friend (compare notes at Romans 8:31).

(Hebrews 13:6 quotes this verse; compare Psalm 56:4, 11).

Notice the act of the psalmist's will, in stating, I will not fear.

This is very similar to the statement, "let not your heart be troubled".

In many instances throughout the Bible, we are told to fear not.

It is within our ability to fear, but it is not in our best interest.

Those who put their trust in the LORD, should not fear.

Fear, in a case like that, would be to say that we cannot trust God.

We must determine in our heart to trust God and not to fear.

If God be for us, who can be against us?

Man is no match for God.

If God is fighting our battles for us, man can do us no harm.

There is no reason to fear.

Faith is the opposite of fear.

Have faith!

Psalm 118:7 "The LORD taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see [my desire] upon them that hate me."

The psalmist had friends.

There were those who stood by him.

He relied, indeed, on their aid, but not on their aid without God.

He felt that even their help was valuable to him only as God was with them.

There was direct dependence on God in reference to himself; and there was the same sense of dependence in respect to all who were engaged in his defense.

This might be rendered, however, simply "for my help," and is so rendered by DeWette.

The Septuagint and Latin Vulgate render it, "The LORD is my helper."

"Therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me":

Literally, "I shall see upon those that hate me;" that is, I shall look upon them according to my wish.

I shall see them overthrown and subdued (see the notes at Psalm 54:7; and compare Psalms 92:11; 112:8).

The LORD said vengeance is mine.

We are not to take vengeance ourselves.

We are to let the LORD handle the problem.

Those who offend the chosen of the LORD shall not prosper.

Psalm 118:8 "[It is] better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man."

This, with what follows in (Psalm 118:9), is the conclusion from the above premises and experience; it is good to trust in the LORD.

Such enjoy peace, as they are in safety, nor shall not want any good thing, nor ever be ashamed and confounded.

The Targum is, "it is better to trust in the Word of the LORD;"

"Than to put confidence in man":

It is not good to put confidence in man at all.

It is trusting to a broken staff, to a mere shadow, which can yield no support or relief.

It is best to trust in the LORD; he is able to help, as well as willing.

He is faithful to his word, and unchangeable in his promises.

Whereas man, though he may have a will to help, oftentimes has it not in his power.

And when it is in his power, and has promised it, he disappoints, being changeable or unfaithful.

Wherefore trust not in man, but in the LORD.

Yea, cursed is the man that trusts in man (see Jer. 17:5).

If you place your confidence in man, he will let you down.

The LORD will never let you down.

Psalm 118:9 "[It is] better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes."

The Targum is, "in the Word of the LORD."

This is repeated for the sake of what follows:

"Than to put confidence in princes":

Who have greater ability to help, and whose honor should engage them to keep their word.

And yet it is better to trust in the LORD than in them (see Psalm 146:3).

Two different words being used in this verse and (Psalm 118:8).

For trust and confidence, Jarchi has observed, that the one signifies a lesser, while the other a stronger confidence.

As if the sense was this, "It is better lightly to trust in the LORD than to put the strongest confidence in men and princes."

But the observation is scarcely solid enough.

Even a prince is a man.

They cannot really be trusted any more than just an average man.

Man in his weakness will disappoint you, because he is flesh.

God will never let you down.

Even though a prince or anyone else who is in authority, is looked up to in the flesh, they many times have even more temptations and may even succumb to some of them.

Verses 10-14:

It seems obvious that the leader of the nation is speaking here.

Psalm 118:10 "All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them."

They have surrounded me; they hemmed me in on every side, so that I seemed to have no chance to escape.

It would seem from this that the psalm was composed by someone who was at the head of the government, and whose government had been attacked by surrounding nations.

This would accord well with many things that occurred in the life of David.

But there were also other times in the Jewish history to which it would be applicable, and there is nothing that necessarily confines it to the time of David.

"But in the name of the LORD will I destroy them":

Margin, as in Hebrew, "cut them off."

This is the language which he used at that time.

The purpose which he then formed; an expression of the confidence which he then cherished.

He meant to subdue them; he had no doubt that he would be able to do it.

I believe the psalmist here to be David.

We do know that he had trouble with the countries around him.

We also know that God was with him in battle.

He is very aware that with the help of God, he can destroy these nations coming against him.

Psalm 118:11 "They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them."

Which is repeated not only for the confirmation of, it, but to denote the frequency and fury of their attacks, and their obstinate persisting therein (see note on Psalm 118:10).

"But in the name of the LORD I will destroy them":

Which also is repeated to show the strength of his faith, and the continuance of it, notwithstanding his numerous enemies, and their violent efforts against him.

David had discovered when he was just a lad fighting Goliath, that his power in battle was the name of the LORD.

We would do well to remember the very same thing, when the enemy surrounds us.

We cannot fail, if we do battle in the name of the LORD.

Psalm 118:12 "They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them."

In great numbers; as a swarm of bees, which, being irritated and provoked, will fly upon persons in a body, and with great fury.

To which the Amorites and the Assyrian army were compared (Deut. 1:44).

They will attack horses and kill them, as Aristotle says; and places besieged have been delivered by throwing out hives of bees among the besiegers.

And yet as they are feeble creatures, so by striking they lose their sting.

And either die very quickly, or however become useless.

All which denotes the numbers of the enemies of David and of Christ.

And of his church and people, and the wrath and fury of them against them, as well as their fruitless and unsuccessful attempts upon them.

For though they rage, what they contrive and endeavor to put in execution are vain things, and in the issue, end in their own ruin and destruction.

"They are quenched as the fire of thorns":

Dried thorns burn easily and quickly, which make a blaze, a noise, for a while; but are soon consumed, and leave only a few ashes behind.

Wicked men are often compared to thorns, they being like them, unfruitful in themselves, unprofitable to others, harmful to the saints, and whose end is to be burnt.

And whose destruction is certain and sudden, and easily effected as the burning of thorns (see Psalm 58:9; Eccl. 7:6).

The Targum renders it, "they burned as fire among thorns;" which is easily kindled and very soon quenched.

And so the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions; as if it was expressive of their wrath and fury, which was soon over; which agrees with what follows:

"For":

Or "but", or "verily".

"In the name of the LORD I will destroy them":

See notes on Psalm 118:10-11.

Perhaps the statement about the bees means that they were buzzing around David on every side.

A thorn will pierce the skin, but it seems here, that they were quenched before they even wounded David or his men.

He says again, that the power is in the name of the LORD.

Psalm 118:13 "Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me."

Literally, "Thrusting thou hast thrust at me.":

Refers to the psalmist's enemy.

This is the Hebrew mode of expressing intensity, repetition, or emphasis.

The meaning is, that they had made a deadly thrust at him.

That they had repeated the blows; that they had come with a fierce determination to crush and destroy him.

The psalmist, as it were, sees the enemy again before him, and then addresses him as if he were still present.

Everything is vivid to the mind; the whole scene appears again to pass before him.

"But the LORD helped me":

Helped David, so that he perished not by the hand of Saul, he sometimes feared he should.

Helped Christ, as man and Mediator, in the day of salvation, and raised him from the dead, and gave him glory.

And he helps his people against all their enemies.

Holds them with his right hand; helps them to fight against them; maintains his own work of grace in them, and keeps them from a total and final falling away, by his power unto salvation.

The Targum is, "the Word of the LORD helped me."

The enemies did attack David (thrust sore at me), but they did not defeat David.

If we were to look at this to get us a message for today, we would realize that the devil is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may destroy.

We have the same help that David had here.

We must use the name of the LORD.

The 6th chapter of Ephesians gives us a few suggestions on how to fight this battle.

Ephesians 6:10 "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

Ephesians 6:13-17 "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;" "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;" "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:"

Psalm 118 Questions

1. O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is _____.
2. Where, in the Bible, is the Scriptures that make us think this Psalm is written to be sung at the opening of the temple?
3. What does the author believe about this Psalm?
4. How could verse 2 apply to Christians?
5. Who does the house of Aaron represent, and why?
6. Why did Jesus save us?
7. What is meant by the large place in verse 5?
8. What two words show the Psalmist determined not to fear, in verse 6?
9. If we fear, what are we saying about God?
10. What is the opposite of fear?
11. Those who offend the chosen of God, will not _____.
12. It is better to _____ than to put confidence in man.
13. What happens, if you put your confidence in man?

14. Even a prince is a _____.
15. Even though nations compassed him about, he put his confidence in what?
16. When had David learned that God would help him in battle?
17. They compassed me about like _____.
18. What does the statement “thrust sore at me” mean?
19. Today, what is the devil like?
20. What are we to use against the devil?
21. Describe our armor.
22. What are our loins to be girt around with?
23. What is the breastplate?
24. How are our feet shod?
25. What is the sword of the spirit?