

Messianic Psalms Psalm 118

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

There is no inspired title to this Psalm, and no author is identified. However, some verses from Psalm 118 were quoted by the Lord Jesus during His ministry, vv.22-23 in Matthew 21:42 and v.26 in Matthew 23:39. Also, v.22 is quoted as applying to Christ by Peter in Acts 4:11 & 1 Peter 2:7; and by Paul in Ephesians 2:20.

As one of the Hallel Psalms, Psalm 118 was most probably repeated by the Lord Jesus, together with His disciples, at the Passover Supper before he inaugurated the Lord's Supper, as we read in Matthew 26:26-30. He sang a hymn with His disciples before leaving the Upper Room for the Mount of Olives on His last evening. It is most likely that this was certainly the kind of hymn they would sing for it was the closing Psalm of the Passover celebration.

However, nothing recorded in the Old Testament fully accounts for some of the closing details provided in this Psalm. The complete fulfilment of them is still future. We Christians believe that the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus is the key to this, as it is to so many other passages of Scripture. In these closing verses, there are brief, but graphic, descriptions of Israel's tribulation, deliverance, and spiritual conversion at the return of their Messiah, the Christ.

Many varied suggestions have been made as to division of this Psalm. However, I'll divide it as follows:

1. Verses 1-4: the call upon the faithful to magnify the Lord for His mercy, that is, His steadfast love.
2. Verses 5-7: provide the reason for the thanksgiving to God.
3. Verses 8 & 9: make clear the moral lesson that the Jewish people will have to learn.
4. Verses 10-18: provide a description of that terrible battle, Armageddon, and the Divine position.
5. Verses 19-29: outline Israel's reconciliation with their Messiah.

Verses 1-4: A call for thanksgiving to God

“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” Let the house of Aaron say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” Let those who fear the LORD say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

In these verses, the whole nation of Israel is called upon to join in this public acknowledgement, to give thanks unto their God, evidently in declaration of gratitude for some great, long, national deliverance brought about by God's goodness in intervening on their behalf at a time of desperate,

immense, national need. So, all Israelites are thus requested to praise God. Next, the house of Aaron, the priests, those who fear their God, are asked to join in. The term 'those who fear the LORD' probably refers to the Levites, who as a tribe first rallied round Moses after the sin of the golden calf. See Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 33, but especially Malachi 2:5:

“My covenant with [Levi] was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name.”

However, prophetically the term 'those who fear the LORD' also refers to the faithful Jewish remnant, those waiting for Messiah's advent, about whom Malachi wrote in 3:16-17:

“Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name.
“They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.””

Nationally, Israel, more than any other people upon earth, will have reason to thank God for His loving kindness. What a long list of benedictions they will have to consider, as they look back upon their whole history, from the time their God chose their forefather Abraham, till the moment when they stand face to face with their Messiah and Deliverer.

It is right that, in our day, we Christians should encourage each other to praise God. We've much to thank Him for: for physical mercies, for social benefits, for our families for Christian fellowship and for spiritual blessings. All should and can be traced back to Him. There may be many channels, but He is the true source of all.

Verses 5-7: The reason for thanksgiving to God

“Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.”

Israel's national distress, as is made clearer later in this Psalm, is really the time of Jacob's trouble, which is mentioned by Jeremiah 30:5-7:

“Thus says the LORD: [Israel and Judah] have heard a cry of panic, of terror, and no peace. Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labour? Why has every face turned pale? Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it.”

Their deliverance out of this distress is attributed to God Himself. The LORD's appearance on the battlefield turns defeat into victory. It is concerning that same time that Zechariah 9:14 & 16 say,

“The LORD God will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. ...On that day the LORD their God will save them, as the flock of his people.”

The expression, “I shall look in triumph on those who hate me”, in Psalm 118:7, means to fearlessly face the enemy, and answers to “I will not fear...what man do to me” in the preceding verse (v.6). That means that the presence of their God will impart courage and strength to besieged and enfeebled Israel to ensure their victory.

Verses 8-9: The moral lesson the Jewish people will have to learn

“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.”

This is a lesson that we all need to learn for our contentment, and it applies for all time. At the Lord’s appearing in power and great glory, Israel finally learn the lesson to lean no longer upon world forces for support, nor to rely upon their own valour.

So far, verses 1-8 have only provided a general introduction; now the psalmist commences his message in detail.

Verses 10-18: A description of the terrible battle and the Divine position

“All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! They surrounded me like bees; they went out like a fire among thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly, the right hand of the LORD exalts, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!” I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. The LORD has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death.”

These verses provide a picture of the Jews who will have returned to Palestine, hedged about by the anti-Christ forces who will have come against them. The phrase ‘All nations’ is a key phrase. When used prophetically in connection with Israel’s future, it generally refers to the confederacy of nations at Armageddon under the Antichrist, who will give these beleaguered Jews so much trouble, and whom the Lord Jesus will remove on His descent from heaven. It was of this event that the inspired psalmist caught a vision. A battlefield with a feeble remnant of Jews, hard pressed on all sides by the merciless enemy and despairing of any help; but suddenly the Lord appears, and speedily destroys the anti-Christ armies, who are as hostile towards Him as they are towards His people. The Jews, now set free, exclaim,

“All nations surrounded me like bees, [numerous and with a venomous sting]...in the Name of the LORD I cut them off” (vv.10-12).

Israel repeatedly acknowledges that the victory is God-given:

“In the name of the LORD I cut them off!” (vv.10, 11, 12).
“The LORD is my strength and song; he has become my salvation”
(v.14).

Verses 15 and 16 outline the effect this God-given victory has upon the Jewish warriors. The voice of rejoicing and of salvation is heard in the tents of the righteous. How gladly, how earnestly, and how effectively, will Israel then declare the works of the Lord. It is to this end that God has

preserved them, in spite of all the hostile surroundings, and the persecution they have endured all through the ages.

What a wonderful story Israel will have to tell the nations of the world of God's merciful dealings with them throughout their whole history; from the time that He chose Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees and blessed him, to the moment when, as a nation, they stand reconciled, and face to face with their Messiah. How trustworthy and forceful will be their witness to Him, when they declare His doings among the nations and make mention that His Name is exalted. It's then that,

“Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit” (Isaiah 27:6).

Verses 19-29: Israel's reconciliation with their Messiah

“Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD. The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar! You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!”

It is true that, in the purpose of God, Christ is King from all eternity, but it was not as King that Christ descended to Hades or ascended to heaven. He was a prophet on earth, but He will return to earth as King crowned with many diadems, as King of kings and Lord of lords. When our Saviour deals with Antichrist and all his confederates, He will indeed be mighty in battle, and universally acknowledged as King of glory (see Psalm 24).

When Messiah enters Jerusalem, accompanied by His saints, outbursts of applause meet His ears from grateful people whom He has saved. How natural that the people of Israel should thus offer their sincere thanks to their Deliverer! And how worthy He will be of their heartfelt thanks and adoration! Then, as they come into closer proximity to Him, and find that He who has saved them is none other than the Lord Jesus, the One whom they had despised and rejected all through the centuries of this age, they shall exclaim with astonishment:

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”
(v.22).

This will be the nation's acknowledgement of Christ as their Saviour and Lord. It's the moment when they look upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourn and repent; the moment of fulfilment, when 'the heavenly Joseph' makes Himself known to His brethren (see Genesis 45:1-5). What wonder! but what grief! What remorse will fill their hearts as they realise all the wrong they have done to their Messiah! How they will marvel at their blindness and sinfulness! And, still more, at the wonderful compassion of Christ, with His pardoning grace.

Referring to verse 22, Peter speaks of Christ in 1 Peter 2:4-8 as,

“In the sight of God chosen and precious...a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious...but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected [is] a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.”

In v.6, he quotes from Isaiah 28:16:

“Thus says the LORD God, “Behold I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation.””

In v.5, Peter says that Christian believers are living stones, who are being built into a spiritual house, which God is building. In this spiritual temple, Christ is the cornerstone, binding together the foundation upon which the entire superstructure rests. How sad that He, The Foundation in the unending purposes of God, was rejected by Israel, who have tried to lay their own foundation.

For, the reality is, either for the church or for Israel, that:

“No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1Cor. 3:11).

When Israel nationally recognise the Lord Jesus to be their Messiah and Saviour, they will give Him the most honoured position in the building. Metaphorically they will place Him as the topmost position in the building, the top stone, that which crowns the whole structure. This they will do in the same manner as Zerubbabel did when he completed their second Temple, with shouts of joy,

“Grace, grace to it” (Zechariah 4:7).

But Ephesians 2:20-22 states that Christian believers are:

“...Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him [they] also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**”

Similarly saved Israel will get the figurative house that God promised to build for David – that dynasty of living persons to succeed him on Israel’s throne culminating in the Lord Jesus, the topmost stone, who completes the building and perpetuates His Kingdom for ever. In recognition that all this is in harmony with God’s purposes, as predicted in the Scriptures, they will cry:

“This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24).

It truly will be a day of joy and gladness, because it will be the day of Israel’s reconciliation with their Messiah:

“Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress” (Isaiah 65:18 -19).

This joy will be shared by many nations beyond the borders of Israel.

In Psalm 118:25 & 26, Jerusalem’s happy crowd will acclaim their Messiah with hosannas:

“Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.”

What a scene it was in Jerusalem, when the people spread their garments and spread the branches of palm trees on the path for the Lord Jesus to ride over them. No wonder that on that occasion they cried,

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel” (John 12:13).

They were repeating the greater fervour and enthusiasm of the future Jewish remnant when they welcome Christ on His actual return, which the psalmist anticipated. Then, never more will they waver in their adherence and fidelity to Him. The time of His Coming, the manner of His Coming, the place of His Coming, the purpose of His Coming, the result of His Coming, have all been foretold! Their prayer for salvation and prosperity will be abundantly answered for them. Indeed, Psalm 118:25 is a petition and prediction combined, as every prayer of faith based upon God’s gracious promises ought to be.

Verse 27 is vivid:

“The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!”

When God’s light flashes upon them what a revelation of Messiah they will get! Their whole past will stand out before them; they will see themselves and others as they have never done before. Seeing Christ in a new way, they will see everything else in a new and proper light. The psalmist sees the future time, when the Lord Jesus will be enthroned by His people, and a joyous festival will be held. In Old Testament language, this time of rejoicing is pictured by a great number of festive sacrifices filling the whole Temple area.

Verse 28 is a further acknowledgement of Christ’s Deity for, looking into the face of Christ, whom they will have welcomed into their midst, they collectively, yet personally, say:

“You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you.”

As redeemed Israel look upon Him whom they have pierced, they will cry out, “My Lord and my God”, like Thomas did of old, when he saw the wounds in the hands and side of Christ. Their unbelief will vanish, and their faith will become strong. Furthermore, the entire nation, will encourage themselves and one another, to cry the concluding words of Psalm 118:

“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!”

And we Christians can do no better ourselves, we heartily join in. Praise His holy Name! We can be doubly sure that none of God’s purposes will ever be frustrated, either for Israel nationally, or for the Church corporately, or for us Christians individually.

Finally, in addition to all that we have considered about Psalm 118, many students of scripture appreciate the thought that in verses 18 to 29 there is the idea of what it felt like to the Lord Jesus to be ‘The Peace Offering’. Historically, this was one of the major offerings in the nation of Israel’s worship of the LORD. Bearing in mind what we’ve been considering, we cannot be surprised that Psalm 118 is full of expressions of appreciation and praise. It is surely right that He, who bore the

Cross and made the supreme sacrifice, must have the major role in the celebration of the victory which He Himself gained.

In closing, I want to inform you that this talk was written by my 94-year-old colleague, Ernie Brown. However, the Lord called him home to glory on 31st October 2022, before he had opportunity to record it. So I'll sign-off today in his customary manner:

But, for the moment, let me say, "Thank you very much indeed for your patience and interest in listening to this Truth for Today talk number T1301, entitled 'Psalm 118', which concludes our Messianic Psalms series."

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