**“THIS IS THE DAY THAT THE LORD HAS MADE!”**

**PSALM 118**

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INTRODUCTION

Psalm 117 ended with the fact that God’s faithfulness is forever; this psalm begins with the fact that its “sister” quality loyal-love endures forever. In this last of the *Hallel* Psalms (111-118), the psalm begins and ends with the same expression of thanks to Yahweh—“Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting” (vv. 1, 29). This expression also brings to light a few of the primary emphases of the psalm—the names of God which are its focus, and the emphasis upon the giving of thanks to Him, and his *loyal-love* that endures forever.”

1. Although “God” is used in vv. 27 and 28, by far the name *Yahweh* predominates in the psalm; the full name Yahweh appears 22 times with three doubles uses in vv. 16, 25, and 26. Moreover, the abbreviated spelling *Yah* is used in vv. 5 (twice), 14, 17, 18, and 19. Thus, the divine covenant name is found 28 times in the 29 verses of the psalm. Such is understandable when we note that the emphasis is upon the “Loyal-love” of Yahweh who faithfully and dependably honors His responsibilities to His covenant subjects, and is always there for them to bless and help them, especially in their dire times of need such as are expressed in Psalm 118.
2. One of Yahweh’s primary manifestations of covenant faithfulness is shown by His “loyal-love—*chesed*. The psalmist mentions this quality once in each of the first four verses and again in the last verse, and notes each time that such loyal-love is permanent, lasting “forever.” Yahweh honors the relationship into which He has entered with His people and can be relied upon by them—as this psalm abundantly manifests.
3. “Give thanks” appears 5 times in the psalm—vv. 1, 19, 21, 28, and 29. Indeed, Psalm 118 is a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance from enemies. That emphasis manifests itself also in two other characteristics.
4. The noun “salvation” or “deliverance” and its cognate verb “save” appears in vv. 14, 15, 21, and 25. Yahweh has heard the prayers of his people and has rescued them.
5. Yahweh’s covenant is based upon His righteous nature and character, and when He saves them both physically and spiritually he simply manifests such righteousness, and of course has reproduced such righteousness in His subjects, who then fully partake of the covenant benefits (see vv. 15, 19, 20).
6. The salvation/righteousness manifested to Yahweh’s people is due to the enemy “surrounding” them—mentioned **four** times in vv. 10, 11 (twice), and 12; as the result the psalmist has confidence that he and his people both have and will “cut off” the enemy—mentioned **three** times in vv. 10-12.
7. Each time this cutting off is carried out “**in the name of Yahweh**”—that is the activity is based upon the manifested deeds of Yahweh reflecting His divine character—again three times in vv. 10-12.
8. The character qualities expected and manifested by the godly followers of Yahweh are both “the **fear of Yahweh**” (v. 4; not the “fear” of “man”—v. 6) and the “**trust**” and “taking of refuge” in Yahweh—rather than in “man” or even in powerful “princes” (vv. 8, 9).
9. Along with the giving of thanks characteristic of this psalm is the “song” (v. 14), the “sound of joyful shouting” (v. 15), the “telling” of Yahweh’s “works” (v. 17), the “marvel” in the eyes of the worshipers (v. 23), the “rejoicing” and “being glad” (v. 24), the “beseeching” of Yahweh (v. 25), the “blessing” of the One coming in Yahweh’s name (v. 26), the “extoling” of Yahweh (v. 28), and the offering of the “festal sacrifice” to Yahweh (v. 27).

This psalm indeed is amazing, and much more must be described before the reader has a full picture.

As the last of the Hallel psalms (111-118, especially 113-118 which is the Egyptian Hallel), this final psalm was likely the one sung by Jesus and His disciples after the Last Supper (Mt. 26:30). It was in part recited by the crowd when Jesus entered into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:9 and parallels), and Jesus alludes to the fact that these words will be spoken by repentant Israel upon His return (see Mt. 23:39). This psalm was also sung at Tabernacles in later times. In this usage in the postexilic liturgy along with 113-117 the song celebrated a national deliverance. But, there are several views on what was the original background of this psalm:

1. Some regard that the celebration here is of the nation of Israel possibly at the feast of Tabernacles or Booths after entering Canaan. They celebrate deliverance from the land of Egypt and victory over the Canaanites. But little within the psalm, except vv. 14-15, stands out that would seem to indicate such a background. Generally traces exist that reflect some of the unique experiences involved in the Exodus, wilderness wanderings, and conquests. Moreover, in such a case the speaker in vv. 5-21 would merely be some Levitical or priestly leader. But the context seems to require someone more directly involved in the conflict—such as a king.
2. Others thinks that the scene here is postexilic, and that the Jews celebrate deliverance from their enemies. The scene could then take place either at the time of the dedication of the Second Temple (cf. Ezra 6:16; so Perowne, pp. 338-39, at the feast of tabernacles after temple completion) or at the dedication of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 12:37-43).
3. Leupold argues for the latter event “after almost a century of delay” since “mention is made of celebration with thanksgiving.” He then argue that the “I” refers to the entire congregation (p.p. 810-11). The one factor favoring such a time frame are the few expressions held in common with some of the Psalms in this same group—such as vv. 2-4 with Ps. 115:9-10. But, that is flimsy evidence to set a time of writing, for there are even more similarities with earlier Psalms, especially those written by David. As with view one, the speaker of vv. 5-21 would again have to be one of the priestly or Levitical leaders, and the substance of these verses favors a powerful leader who was personally involved in the conflicts. Several of the statements seem far more personal than to be merely reflective of the experience of the entire nation. Moreover, the Messianic ties of vv. 22ff. favor a king of Israel as the speaker. Leupold has Israel prefiguring Christ; how much better that a human king of the Davidic line prefigures Christ, like David of old (p. 812).
4. Perowne lists four possible dates, all post-exilic, but finally settles on the fourth—the special celebration of Tabernacles after the completion of the Second Temple, based on the record in Neh. 8:13-15. He correctly notes that the first two post-exilic options [the 1st celebration of Tabernacles in the 7th month of the first year of the return—only the altar stood at that time; the laying of the foundation-stone for the Second Temple in the 2nd month of the 2nd year of the return—Ezra 3:8-13] are invalidated by the fact that the Second Temple had not yet been completed; the context of this psalm mentions “gates” and seem to assume the functioning of a temple. The third post-exilic view is that of Delitzsch, who opts for the time of the completion of the temple and its consecration in the 7th year of the return, the 12th month (Ezra 6:15-18); he claims that there is no doubt about its post-exilic time frame (213). This view is more viable, yet the context of Psalm 118 does not seem to reflect such a time of celebration of a recently completed temple; rather, a victory over enemies is the focus. Perowne has a strong point in the likely connection with the celebration of Tabernacles in this psalm; for as noted at v. 25, later in Second Temple Judaism, the worshipers sang the words of v. 25 while compassing the altar of burnt offering once on each of the first six days of Tabernacles, and then seven times on the seventh day—a day still called “the great Hosanna.” Even the branches of various trees are called Hosannas—the Ethrag (or Citron), myrtle, and palm (p. 339). Probably Perowne’s strongest point for his supposition is the reference to the stone rejected by the builders (v. 22) as having the construction of the temple in view. A weaker point is identifying the weak and beggarly enemies surrounding the Jews at that time as “the nations” spoken of in v. 10. These peoples were also under the dominion of the Persians, and could do nothing without their permission.
5. A Davidic king is the person who leads the nation in this worship and thanksgiving for Yahweh’s deliverance and victory given after a hard-fought battle with a powerful enemy (cf. e.g. II Chr. 20:27-28). The context of this psalm, as well as the strong Messianic references definitely favor this interpretation. Kidner concurs: “The stir of a great occasion lends its excitement to the psalm as it proceeds, and we become aware of a single worshipper at its centre, whose progress to the Temple to offer thanks celebrates no purely private deliverance like that of Psalm 116, but a victory and vindication worthy of a king” (p. 412

The psalm has five clearly defined divisions:

1. A call to praise Yahweh (vv. 1-4)
2. A song of thanksgiving from the king for victory in battle and salvation from Yahweh (vv. 5-21)
3. A celebration by the people over the amazing deeds of Yahweh—words with powerful messianic implications (vv. 22-27).
4. The king’s final words of praise (v. 28).
5. A liturgical conclusion identical to v. 1 (29).

Leupold notes that Martin Luther considered this psalm to be his personal favorite in all of Scripture—“my own psalm which I specially love….I feel free to call it my very own….It has done me great service on many an occasion and has stood by me in many a difficulty when the emperor, kings, wise men and clever, and even the saints were of no avail” (p. 811-12).

This psalm is clearly Messianic, and is quoted and referred to numerous times in the New Testament.

Here in vv. 22ff for the first time we see that the most powerful opposition came from the very builders—and not even mainly from those outside the nation, but from those within it. Isaiah had alluded to this very situation (28:15-16). The NT makes crystal clear that this stone foreshadowed Christ.

Clearly, the builders are all those opposed to Yahweh’s plan, program, and persons. Jesus clearly identifies this verse with His own treatment by the primary religious leaders of His day—the chief priests and the elders of the people (see Mt. 22:23, 42-43; see parallels in Mk. 12:10-11; Lk. 20:17). Peter and John likewise spoke of this verse with reference to the Jewish Sanhedrin members—“the rulers and elders and scribes” who as counterfeit kingdom “builders” had rejected Jesus, their only and true Messiah, the “stone” thought unworthy to be placed in their building (Acts 4:11). But God instead made this very Stone “the chief corner *stone.*” Compare Paul’s identification of Jesus as the “chief corner *stone*” of the New Testament Church—which God had established once He had set aside the counterfeit religion being built by the Jewish leaders. Peter combines a reference to this verse of “the stone which the builders rejected” becoming “the very corner *stone*” with two passages in Isaiah: 28:16—“Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner *stone*, and he who believes in it (Him) will not be disappointed.”—and 8:14—“A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.” The passage in Is. 28:16 specifically speaks of this stone “being for the foundation, firmly placed” (NASB), and the Is. 8:14 passage shows that the stone must be close enough to the ground in order for one to “strike” and “to stumble over.” Jesus’ use of the verse seems to indicate that the Jewish builders, who thought they were practically finished with construction and needed the perfect capstone to complete it, rejected Jesus as a clear “fit” for them; thus God took this rejected stone and made it the cornerstone of a new structure—built largely from another people, the saved Gentiles (Mt. 21:43). Peter and John made the stinging point to the Jewish leaders that “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Paul also refers to the Is. 8:14 passage to show that the Jews had indeed stumbled over Jesus as “the stone of stumbling and rock of offence” (Rom. 9:33).

Next week we will look at the details of Psalm 118 more carefully. It is truly am amazing Psalm!