

Psalm 118¹

Context

This Psalm has two contexts (Table 1, chart): the overall organization of the Psalter, and the use of Psalms 113-118 by Jews at the Passover.

The parallels among other Psalms in Book 5 set off 118 and 119 as the central pair. These Psalms focus on the Messiah and the Law of God, respectively. We saw this pairing in Book 1, in the opening two Psalms (Psalm 1 concerning the law, Psalm 2 introducing the Messiah), and in a major section of Book 1, the qualifications to dwell with God in Psalms 15-24 (Table 2, chart)

Jewish tradition used 113-118 at the Passover, and numerous elements of this group would have special meaning to our Lord at the Last Supper. Table 3 (chart) suggests what might have been going through his mind, stimulated by these hymns. Psalm 118 reviews his past sufferings and his future glory.

107, Suffering, coming to the land: ידה	120-134, Ascents: Coming to the Temple
	135-137, ידה, ברך, memory of suffering
108-110, Psalms of David	138-144, Psalms of David
111-112, Hallelu-Yah; Acrostic (111 Works of the Lord)	145, David; Acrostic (Works of the Lord)
113-117, Hallelu-Yah	146-150, Hallelu-Yah
118, Messiah ← Pair	119, Torah (Acrostic)

Table 1: The Contexts of Psalm 118

Qualifications to dwell with God	15	24 (+ the King)	<p>The diagram shows two boxes: 'Messianic King, Ps 2' (red border) and 'God's Law, Ps 1' (blue border). Lines connect the '24 (+ the King)' cell to the 'Messianic King' box, and the '19 (cf. Psalms 15 and 24)' cell to the 'God's Law' box. There are also lines connecting the two boxes to each other.</p>
Confidence	16 thou wilt show me the path of life	23 The Lord is my Shepherd	
Laments	17	22	
Thanksgiving	18 request + answer	20 (request) + 21 (answer)	
God's revelation	19 (cf. Psalms 15 and 24)		

Table 2: Messiah and Law in Psalms 15-24

Intro, vv. 1-4:

1 O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever. 2 Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. 3 Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. 4 Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever. The Psalm begins with the three groups from Psalm 115:9-13: Israel, the house of Aaron, and them that fear the Lord (possibly Gentile believers). Psalm 115 focused on God's blessing to them (vv. 12-13). Here, they confess God's intrinsic character, his eternal loyal love.

These three groups perform a drama that unfolds over the course of the Psalm (Figure 1, chart). Israel, as a person, reports the persecution he has suffered and the Lord's defense (vv. 5-18). He approaches the gates of the temple and asks admittance (v. 19). The priests reply (v. 20) that only the righteous may enter, and he claims that right on the basis of God's salvation (v. 21). Then the priests welcome him in (22-27). He replies in 28, and the call goes out to all who fear the Lord in 29 to join in acknowledging the Lord's loyal love.

1 A longer exposition of the Psalm is available from Easter, 2015, which also has expository notes on some details.

Psa 118

Psalm	Ref	NT
113	5 Who is like unto the Lord our God, who exalts himself to sit, 6 who humbled himself to behold ... 7 He raiseth up the poor	2Co 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.
114	4 The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.	Mat 28:2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.
Passover Meal		
115	1 Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory,	Joh 12:27 Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. 28 Father, glorify thy name.
	2 Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?	Mat 27:43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.
	13 He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.”	Rev 19:5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.
116	3 The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: ... 8 For thou hast delivered my soul from death, ... 9 I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.	Death and Resurrection
	14, 18 I will pay my vows unto the LORD now, in the presence of all his people ...	Rev 19:5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.
117	1 O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye peoples.	Jn 10:16 Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold

Table 3: *Passion Allusions in the Egyptian Hallel*

Israel’s description of the Lord’s Loyal Love, vv. 5-18

v. 2 asks Israel to report God’s loyal love. A single person responds. Like Isaiah’s Servant, he represents both the nation and the Messiah. He speaks repeatedly of three things: Past suffering, Recent deliverance, and Future victory. Every verse mentions the Lord.

5-12, From Oppression to Victory

The first eight verses move from oppression to victory. Twice he recounts the sequence, and in the middle he gives the secret.

5 I called upon the LORD in distress:--The past suffering.

Psa 118

the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place.--“Distress” means “confinement, constraint.” In resurrection, he came out of the confines of the tomb into freedom.

vv. 6-7 are parallel, focusing on the deliverance. v. 7 moves on to the future victory.

6 The LORD is on my side יהוה לי; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? 7 The LORD taketh my part יהוה לי with them that help me:
 --The two verses begin the same: “The Lord is for me,” יהוה לי, literally “the Lord is mine.”²

therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me.--He moves beyond the deliverance to the future victory

The next two verses give the secret of this deliverance: trust in the Lord.

8 It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.--As demonstrated in the flight of the disciples when the Lord was arrested.

9 It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.--As demonstrated by the failure of Herod and Pilate to exercise their divinely-given responsibilities.

Now the writer returns to a temporal development, focusing on the final victory.

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

11 They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.--Here we see the past oppression, and the expectation of future victory.

“All nations” recalls Psalm 2, and the apostles’ interpretation of the gospel history:

Act 4:25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the **heathen** rage, and the **people[s]** imagine vain things? 26 The **kings** of the earth stood up, and the **rulers** were

2 The closest grammatical parallel is Jacob at Bethel, Gen 28:21.

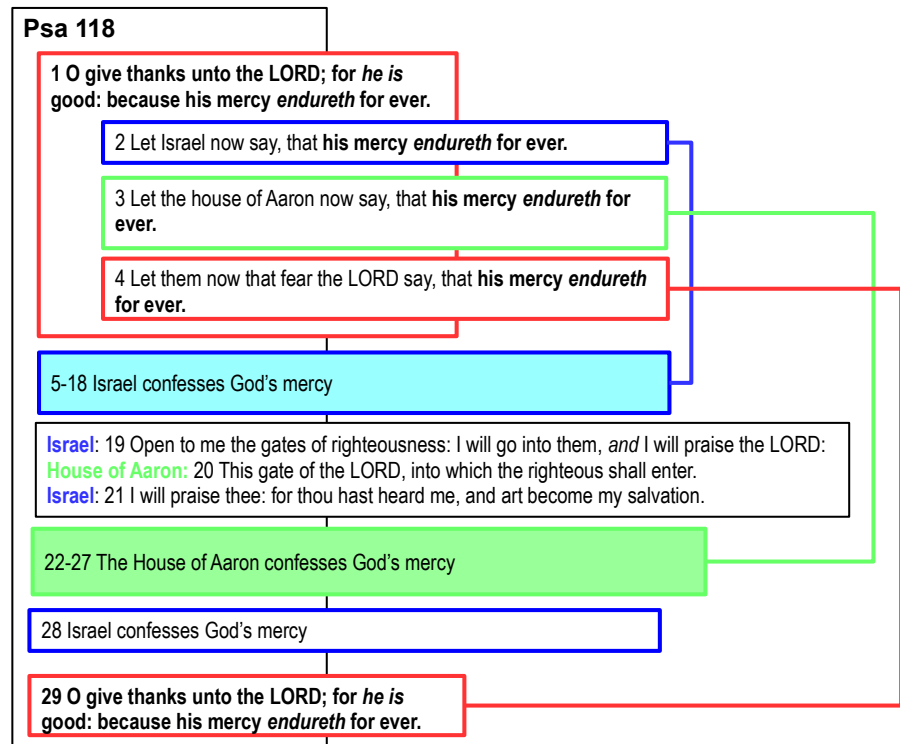


Figure 1: Structure of Psalm 118

gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. 27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both **Herod**, and **Pontius Pilate**, with the **Gentiles**, and the **people[s] of Israel**, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

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.--The third line presents all three periods.

13-17, The Joy of God's Deliverance

This section deals only with the past and present, focusing on the purpose of the history.

13 Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me.--Here he addresses himself to his adversaries, glorifying God for his deliverance.

14 The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. 15 The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous:--This couplet emphasizes the joy that comes from the Lord's deliverance.

the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. 16 The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly.--These three lines emphasize the divine power that has produced his deliverance.

17 I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.--The purpose of God's deliverance is to enable us to praise him (recall 115:1).

18, A Different Perspective

18 The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.--The final line of Israel's testimony presents a stunning twist. Up to this point, those who oppress him have been his enemies, against whom the Lord has been defending him. They were identified as the nations. But now, he traces the suffering itself back to the Lord.

Isaiah taught the nation to see, in the oppression brought by Assyria and Babylon, the chastening hand of the Lord (cf. Isa 7:17-20; 8:7; 10:5). That was chastisement for their own sin, but Isaiah 53 also presents the righteous Servant of the Lord, chastened by God in spite of his innocence, the Lamb of God who bears our sin in our place.

Interchange, 19-21

Now the worshiper arrives at the temple and requests access.

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD:--Israel requests entry, so he can thank the Lord for the deliverance that he confessed in vv. 5-18.

20 This [is the] gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter.--The Levites reply that the condition for entry is righteousness on the part of the worshiper, a condition already

Psa 118

implied in the title “gates of righteousness.” We saw this condition in Psalms 15 and 24 (chart):

Psa 15:1 LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? 2 He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

Psalm 24 prepared us for what is happening here:

Psa 24:7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

21 I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.--To prove his righteousness, Israel presents God’s deliverance. Paul writes that our Lord’s resurrection proves both our forgiveness (Rom 4:25) and our Lord’s title as Son of God (Rom 1:4).

The response of the house of Aaron, 22-27

This section is the source of the two main quotations from this Psalm in the NT—v. 22 (in Matt 21:42 and parallels), and v. 25 (in Matt 21:9; 23:39 and parallels) (Table 4, chart). But at first glance the quotations are somewhat puzzling. In the Psalm, it is the sons of Aaron who should be welcoming Israel into the temple. But in the gospels, the Lord rebukes the chief priests for *not* welcoming him, and it is the multitudes, not the priests, who cry “Hosanna.”

We have already seen that the Psalm looks beyond Israel’s past suffering to the Lord’s deliverance. That deliverance, the resurrection, was still in the future when the Lord entered Jerusalem. The gospels show us that the oppression he faced included rejection by the priests. This Psalm picks up the hope of Psalm 24 that one day a new generation of priests will welcome the Lord of glory, whose righteousness is declared by his resurrection, into the temple

22 The stone *which* the builders refused is become the head *stone* of the corner. 23 This is

Psalm 118	Matthew
<p>22The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. 23 This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.</p> <p>25 Save now, I beseech thee (Hosanna), O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.</p> <p>26 Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD:</p>	<p>42 Jesus saith unto them [the chief priests and elders, v. 23], Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? ... 45 And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.</p> <p>9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. ... 15 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,</p> <p>23:38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. 39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.</p>

Table 4: Psalm 118 in the Gospels

the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.--The sons of Aaron in this Psalm have insight that goes far beyond their ancestors in the first century. Our Lord's contemporaries were "the builders" who refused the head stone, the Messiah. When the Messiah returns, their descendants will finally recognize him.

24 This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.--That is, the day in which the Messiah enters the temple.

25 Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. 26 Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD:--Now the priests speak to the Israelite directly. The first person singular in v. 25 is not required by the Hebrew phrasing. The verse uses particles of request (אָנֹכִי, אָנֹכִי) that do not specify person, and may be rendered "we beseech thee," or simply "please." These words can be understood as still spoken by the house of Aaron.

In Matthew, the priests would not offer this welcome, so the multitudes do instead. But one day the priests will welcome him into the temple.

we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.--The plural "you" recognizes that the Israelite does not enter alone. He represents the nation, and in him his people receive access to the presence of God.

27 God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light:--Just as the Israelite has given praise to the Lord for delivering him, so the house of Aaron recognizes that he is the one who has delivered them from their bondage.

bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.--The priestly invitation continues, instructing the worshipers (plural) to prepare their offerings.

Israel again, v. 28

In response to the call for sacrifice, the Israelite brings a sacrifice of praise:

28 Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee.--This is the overwhelming focus of the Psalm: God receives credit for the deliverance that he gives to his people.

As in v. 21, the Israelite's response to the invitation of the house of Aaron is to praise the Lord. This should be our main preoccupation in every circumstance of life.

Concluding summary, echo of the opening

29 O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.--With the Israelite's example before us, we are encouraged to join in praise to the Lord for his everlasting lovingkindness.