

## Psa 118

Easter, 5 April 2015

The reflections on the past captivity in the fifth book of the Psalter (107-150) show that it is probably post-exilic, and vv. 19-20 presume the existence of a restored temple. Probably, this Psalm was written at the dedication of the second temple in Ezra 6 (chart).

Ezr 6:15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month **Adar [the 12<sup>th</sup> month]**, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. 16 And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, 17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which *is* at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. 19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth *day* of **the first month**.

Compare (chart) the three groups mentioned in Ezra 6:16 (children of Israel, priests/Levites, the rest of the children of the captivity) with the three groups invited to praise the Lord in Ps 118:2-4 (Israel, the house of Aaron, them that fear the Lord).

Ezra records that the temple was dedicated in the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the year, followed with a passover in the first month. In fact, Ps 118 concludes the series of Psalms (113-118) known as the Hallel, which is sung at the close of every passover seder. The Lord would have sung it with his disciples at the last supper, and it is likely to be the hymn mentioned in Matthew,

Mat 26:30 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

The Psalm sets forth a little drama, in which a righteous person, reporting his persecution and the Lord's defense (vv. 5-18), approaches the gates of the newly restored 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.

### Intro, vv. 1-4:

The Psalmist calls on Israel, then the house of Aaron, then those who fear the Lord, to praise the Lord. This invitation outlines the rest of the Psalm (chart, Illustration 1).

- 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. [→ vv. 5-18]
- 3 Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy *endureth* for ever. [→ vv. 22-27]
- 4 Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy *endureth* for ever. [→ v. 28]

The two large sections (5-18, 22-27) correspond to Israel and the house of Aaron.

## Israel's description of the Lord's mercy, vv. 5-18

v. 2 invites Israel to report on God's mercy. The voice that responds speaks in the singular, not the plural. The Psalmist has in mind Isaiah's Servant, who represents at once the nation and its representative in the Messiah. So, we hear the voice of our Savior in this section.

Throughout this section we see three elements repeatedly (chart, Table 1):

- Past suffering
- Deliverance already accomplished
- Future victory

In our Savior's experience, these correspond respectively to his passion, his resurrection, and his coming kingdom. Chronologically, the Psalm looks back on the resurrection as accomplished.

Every verse mentions the Lord. Israel's focus is entirely on the one whom he serves and who has delivered him.

The confession is grouped into small sections: sometimes a single line, sometimes two or three similar lines. But the analysis of past, present, and future shows a larger structure with three main divisions:

- vv. 5-12 move through all three periods.
- vv. 13-17 start back at the oppression, and then focus on the present deliverance.
- v. 18 suggests a strikingly different view of the oppression.

### 5-12, From Oppression to Victory

These verses are chiasmic, with 8-9 stating a general principle at the center, and the three-fold temporal development on either side (chart).

The singleton v. 5 moves from oppression to deliverance.

**5 I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place.--** The Hebrew word "distress" literally means "confinement, constraint." When he had no options, the Lord broke down the constraints and set him free. What a vivid image of resurrection, coming out of the confines of the tomb into freedom.

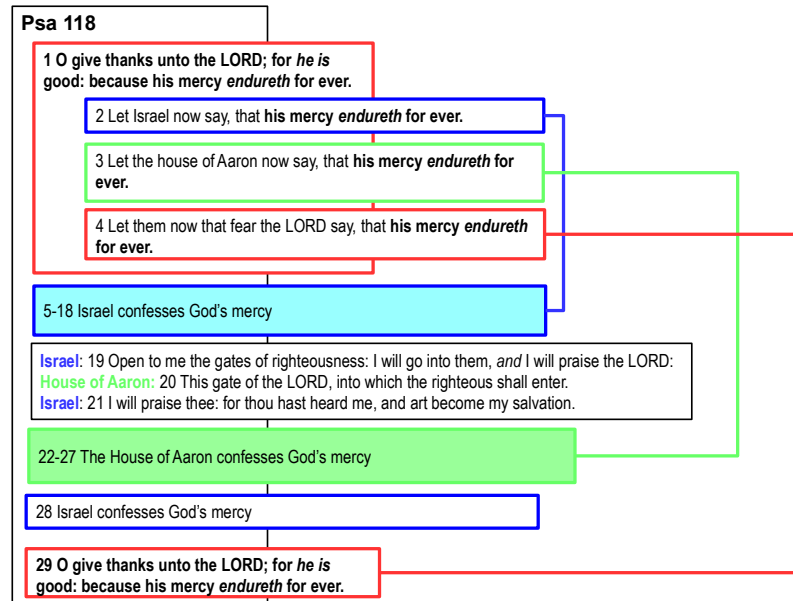


Illustration 1: Structure of Ps 118

Psa 118

Past Oppression	Deliverance	Future Victory
5 I called upon the LORD in distress:	the LORD answered me, <i>and set me</i> in a large place.	
	6 The LORD <i>is</i> on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? 7 The LORD taketh my part with them that help me:	therefore shall I see <i>my desire</i> upon them that hate me.
<b>8 It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. 9 It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.</b>		
10 All nations compassed me about:  11 They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: 12 They compassed me about like bees;	they are quenched as the fire of thorns:	but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them. but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.
13 Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall:	but the LORD helped me.	
	14 The LORD <i>is</i> my strength and song, and is become my salvation. 15 The voice of rejoicing and salvation <i>is</i> in the tabernacles of the righteous:	
	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.	
<b>17 I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.</b>		
18 The LORD hath chastened me sore:	but he hath not given me over unto death.	

Table 1: Israel's Oppression, Deliverance, and Victory

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

**6 The LORD is on my side** **יְהוָה לִי**; **I will not fear: what can man do unto me?**

**7 The LORD taketh my part** **יְהוָה לִי** **with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me.**--The two verses begin the same in Hebrew: "The Lord is for me," יהוה לִי (chart). Joshua, entering battle, asked the captain of the Lord's host,

Jos 5:13 Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, *Art* thou for us לָנוּ, or for our adversaries לְצַרְאֵנוּ ?

He was told that he was the one who should choose sides, not the Lord.

Jos 5:14 And he said, Nay; but *as* captain of the host of the LORD am I now come.

But once one has chosen to serve the Lord, we find that he fights fiercely for his own. Instead of adversaries, we find "them that help me," and finally we will look in triumph on those who opposed him...and us. Paul probably has these verses in mind when he writes,

Rom 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?

The next two verses rise above the temporal structure to give the conclusion that Israel draws from the overall history. Since both 5-7 and 10-12 cover all three periods, these two verses are

the center of a small chiasm.

**8 It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.**

**9 It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.**--We put trust in man when we seek strength in numbers, but the disciples fled the Lord. We put trust in princes when we seek protection from the world's legal structures, but both Herod and Pilate yielded to unjust pressure.

There is an important difference between the Hebrew words behind "trust" and "put confidence in." "Trust" בְּחַסֵּהוּ literally means "to take refuge in," while "put confidence in" בְּבַחֵהוּ is more like our "trust." The Lord is more than a power in which we trust—he is a refuge, a strong fortress into which we flee. We can become identified with him in a way that we can never be identified with a nation or movement, so that he protects us as he would a part of himself. In the light of the New Testament, we realize that to "take refuge in the Lord" is in fact to become part of the body of Christ.

After the summary, we return to a temporal development. The final victory, briefly introduced in v. 7, is now in full focus.

**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.**

**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.**--Here we see clearly the past oppression, and the expectation of future victory.

Israel traces his oppression to "all nations." Recall the prayer of the apostles, interpreting Ps 2 (chart):

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 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]**<sup>1</sup> of **Israel**, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

Israel's history before the nations vividly anticipates our Savior's rejection by the Gentiles.

The third line, v. 12, presents the past, present, and future together.

The future anticipates our Lord's victory in Revelation 19. The Hebrew inserts an emphatic particle before each of the three future statements: "I shall certainly destroy them."

1 The only time we have the plural of λαοσ in this construction; 14x in BGM it is singular. They are clearly commenting on Ps 2, and perhaps have in mind the breadth of the diaspora represented at the Passover in Jerusalem.

### **13-17, The Joy of God's Deliverance**

This section deals only with the past and present (chart). Like the previous section, it also contains a non-temporal principle, but at the end rather than at the center (v. 17).

**13 Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me.**--Here he addresses himself to his adversaries. Identified as "all nations" in v. 10, they are now reduced to a single character. In the light of Daniel's experience with angels representing nations (ch. 10), and Ezekiel's teaching of the "king of Tyre" (ch. 28), it is reasonable to see the reference being to Satan, who is behind the raging nations. We see again the past suffering, and deliverance. He does not claim victory by his own strength, but gives God glory.

**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. Again, the context is present security from past suffering.

**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.**--Like vv. 8,9, this verse strictly does not fit into the temporal scheme, but presents a higher-level principle. The purpose of God's deliverance is to enable us to praise him. He does not save us from our enemies for our sakes, but so that he might be glorified.

### **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 returns again to the contrast between past suffering and present deliverance, but with 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 originally as the nations, then specialized to "thou," probably the Adversary. But now, he traces the suffering itself back to the Lord.

The verb "chastened" יסר is the root of the noun "chastisement" מוסר that describes the Messiah's suffering (chart):

Isa 53:5 But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the **chastisement** of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

It also reminds us of our Lord's experience as explained in Hebrews,

Heb 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

This verse gives a very deep insight into suffering. On one hand, it represents the enmity of unsaved people and even Satan against the Lord, and we have the assurance of the previous verses that the Lord will stand for us and defend us. On the other hand, it is completely under the Lord's control, and he will use it to form us for his purposes. And in our Lord's case, it procured our salvation.

## Interchange, 19-21

Now the worshiper arrives at the temple and requests access.<sup>2</sup>

**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 implied in the title "gates of righteousness."

The language may be inspired by Isaiah's vision of the restored Jerusalem (chart):

Isa 26:1 In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will *God* appoint *for* walls and bulwarks. 2 Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.

This characterization gives us pause. The temple was the place where sacrifices were offered for sin. If only the righteous could enter in, how could sinners ever have their sin forgiven? Recall Solomon's prayer of dedication for the first temple (1 Kings 8), anticipating that people would come to it in order to obtain forgiveness. Repeatedly he prays that God would "hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel" (vv. 30, 34, 36, 39, 50).

In each case those who pray are "thy people Israel." In each case they have turned from their sin and come to God in confession and repentance. The righteousness that is required for access to the temple is not absolute sinlessness, but devotion to the Lord, humble recognition of our sin, and desire to serve him. Recall the distinction in Numbers 15 between sins of ignorance (for which sacrifice was provided) and sins of high hand (for which no sacrifice is available, and whose perpetrators are excluded from the temple). Examples of those who are thus excluded include Athaliah in 2 Kings 11 at the coronation of Joash, Uzziah in 2 Chr 26 (who actually entered the Holy Place), and the moneychangers in John 2 and Matt 21.

**21 I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.--**As credential of his righteousness, Israel summarizes the praise to God that he has been expressing in vv. 5-18. God has heard him and delivered him. Perhaps we are to understand that the house of Aaron, recognizing his righteousness, has opened the gates, stimulating this burst of praise.

2 Technically, this is a chiasmic linked keyword transition between Israel's confession in vv. 5-18 and the priestly response in vv. 22-27.

## 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 and parallels). The location of these quotations poses something of a puzzle (chart).

We have suggested that this Psalm was written for the dedication of the restored temple in Ezra 6. Herod's temple, the one known by our Lord in the NT, was an extension of that temple. This Psalm describes how the priests in Jerusalem should have welcomed our Savior. In fact, portions of vv. 22-27 are quoted in the Palm Sunday accounts, but not by the priests. In the NT these verses highlight our Lord's rejection by the temple hierarchy.

In addition, the timing is wrong for this to be a prophecy of Palm Sunday. The Israelite in vv. 5-18 has already experienced God's deliverance from the wrath of his foes, but our Lord's deliverance (his resurrection) was still future when he entered the temple during passion week.

This tension emphasizes the sin of the nation in rejecting the Messiah. But it also opens the door to a broader understanding of the Psalm. If the house of Aaron in fact did not welcome the Messiah into the restoration temple as this Psalm anticipates, who did welcome him, and into what temple? There are two possibilities, both future.

One is that the Psalm is prophetic of the temple that Ezekiel predicts, into which the Messiah will one day enter, welcomed by members of the house of Aaron who are truly eager to receive him.

Another is that the Spirit may be describing our Lord's entry into the heavenly sanctuary anticipated in Hebrews 8, 9 (chart).

Heb 8:1 Now of the things which we have spoken *this is* the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2 A minister of the sanctuary, and of **the true tabernacle**, which the Lord pitched, and not man. ... 9:11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by **a greater and more perfect tabernacle**, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood **he entered in once into the holy place**, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. ... 23 *It was* therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but **the heavenly things themselves** with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, *which are* the figures of the true; **but into heaven itself**, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

In this case those who welcome him may be either the heavenly host, or more likely the spirits of righteous sons of Aaron from ages past (such as Aaron himself, or Phinehas, or Ezra, or Ezekiel), who welcome him into the heavenly sanctuary.

**22 The 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.**--We've already suggested that the use of a single person to represent Israel reflects a knowledge of Isaiah's prophecies in this post-exilic Psalm, and the Psalmist may have in mind here another of Isaiah's passages (chart):

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Isa 28:14 Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which *is* in Jerusalem. 15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: 16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

The rulers of the people had forsaken the Lord, the rock of Israel (Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 31, 32), and built their refuge out of lies and falsehood. Earlier, Isaiah says that the Lord is the stone whom Israel rejects as a sanctuary:

Isa 8:13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and *let him be* your fear, and *let him be* your dread. 14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a **stone of stumbling** and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

The Lord promises Isaiah that he will provide the required stone. Now in Ps 118, with the arrival of the Israelite, the house of Aaron recognizes the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise (and the completion of the temple, with the arrival of the incarnate "head stone").<sup>3</sup> This One Person who has arrived, representing Israel, is the stone that their ancestors had rejected.

Our Lord is thus consistent with the original meaning of the verse when he quotes it to the priests in Matthew 21.

Mat 21:42 Jesus saith unto them, 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?

The author of Ps 118 pictures the house of Aaron welcoming the Israelite into the temple as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. In fact, the house of Aaron rejected the Messiah when he came. But we can be sure that when the risen Savior entered the heavenly sanctuary, he met a joyful welcome from the members of the house of Aaron who were already there (including Aaron, and Phinehas, and Zadok, and Asaph, and Jehoiada, and Ezekiel, and Ezra, and many other godly priests and Levites from down through Israel's history).

**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 use of the first person singular in v. 25 is not required by the Hebrew phrasing. The verse uses particles of request (אֲנִי, אֲנִי) that do not specify person, and may equally be rendered "we beseech thee," or simply "please" (chart). Thus these words can be understood as still spoken by

3 For other interpretations, see the Notes



the house of Aaron.

They can be understood as a prayer to the Father to send salvation and prosperity, now that the promised Israelite has arrived. But the words may reflect a deeper meaning, consistent with the shift in person that we see in other post-exilic literature, e.g.,

Zec 12:10 I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only son,

We can understand them as spoken to the Israelite himself, recognizing his deity and asking him to send salvation and prosperity.

In Matthew, the priests would not offer this welcome, so the multitudes do instead, and had they failed, the stones would have picked up the cry (Luke 19:40), for the single ideal Israelite anticipated by Isaiah has in fact arrived. Note that they address the “hosanna” to the one whom they recognize as the Son of David, not to the Lord as someone distinct from him.

Mat 21:9 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.

When our Lord entered the heavenly sanctuary, it was with the anticipation of returning to set up the kingdom that the Father has promised him, and we can imagine those who welcome him looking forward to the broader salvation that he will bring.

**we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.**--The plural recognizes that the Israelite 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:**--The reference is probably again to Ezra, who uses the same verb (אור C) (chart):

Ezr 9:8 And now for a little space grace hath been *shewed* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, **that our God may lighten our eyes**, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.

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.

“Unto the horns of the altar” doesn’t mean that the altar serves as a hitching post, but rather that the court is so full of bound animals that they extend even to the altar itself. The point is the abundance of the sacrifices that are offered.

The word “sacrifice” חג is literally “festival,” and refers to a sacrifice of joy and thanksgiving, as at the dedication of the temple in Ezra’s time:

Ezr 6:17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two

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hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

That sacrifice (712 animals) was puny compared with the magnitude of the sacrifices that Solomon offered at the dedication of the first temple:

1Ki 8:63 And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep.

But in both cases, the sacrifice is not a sacrifice for sin, but rather one of worship and praise (Solomon's "peace offerings," 118:27 "festival sacrifice").

Already in the OT, the appropriateness of praise as a sacrifice was recognized (Psa 50:13, 14; Hos 14:2). And prophetically, this is the kind of sacrifice that is appropriate, now that the Israelite has completed his work. In fulfillment, now we are exhorted to bring sacrifices to the Lord:

Heb 13:15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name. 16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

With such sacrifices, we can exceed even the abundant offerings that Solomon brought.

### 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.

## Notes

### **Original Setting**

The Psalm falls in the fifth book of the Psalter, which is mostly post-exilic. Thus the Pulpit Commentary:

The period succeeding the return from Exile affords a more suitable occasion, and, since vers. 19, 20 presuppose the completion of the Temple, this occasion could not have been the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month of the first year after the return, Ezra 3:1–4 (Ewald), or the laying of the foundation-stone of the Temple in the second month of the second year, Ezra 3:8 f. (Hengst.), but either the dedication of the completed Temple in the twelfth month of the sixth year of Darius, Ezra 8:15 ff. (Del.), or the first complete celebration, according to the legal ceremonies of the Feast of Tabernacles, Neh. 8:14 ff. (Stier).<sup>4</sup>

The association with the founding of the temple is defended on the basis that the opening and closing words of the Psalm correspond with Ezra's report:

Ezr 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. 11 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.

However, this expression is common elsewhere in the Psalms (106:1; 107:1; 136:1), and so reflects a common sentiment that does not uniquely tie Ps 118 to the founding of the temple. The whole drama of the Psalm presumes that the temple is complete as the worshippers approach it.

The liturgical use of the Psalm at the Feast of Tabernacles suggests either Ezra 3:1-4 or Neh 8:14ff. Thus Perowne, cited in the Pulpit Commentary:

For the words of the 25th verse were sung during the feast, when the altar of burnt-offering was solemnly compassed, that is, once on each of the first six days of the feast, and seven times on the seventh day. This day was called 'the great Hosanna' (*save now*, ver. 25), and not only the prayers for the feast, but even the branches of trees, including the myrtles which were attached to the palm-branches, were called 'Hosannas.' Further, although the Psalm itself contains no allusion to any of the national feasts, the word

4 Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Moll, C. B., Briggs, C. A., Forsyth, J., Hammond, J. B., ... Conant, T. J. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Psalms* (p. 577). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

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‘tents,’ in ver. 15, at least accords very well with the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>5</sup>

However, the entire Psalm was also sung at the conclusion of each Passover seder, as part of the Hallel (Pss 113-118), which is the season when the second temple was dedicated.

Ezra 6:19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth *day* of the first month.

The Psalm was most likely written at the dedication of the temple in Ezra 6:16:

And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy,

“Children of Israel” is probably summary, then described as priest + Levites + the rest of the children of the captivity. This division reflects the structure of the Psalm as antiphonal between the worshipers and the Levites.

### ***Prayer in the Temple***

How does the requirement of righteousness for access into the temple align with Solomon’s vision of the temple as a place where people come for forgiveness?

Most of the time, Solomon refers to the temple as a place *toward which* people pray, יתפלל אל המקום הזה (vv. 29, 30, 35), אל הבית הזה (vv. 38, 42).

Note Jehoshaphat’s interpretation of the prayer:

2Ch 20:8 And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, 9 If, *when* evil cometh upon us, *as* the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house לפני הבית הזה, and in thy presence, (for thy name *is* in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.

But once Solomon speaks of praying בבית הזה, as in 8:33.

1Ki 8:33 When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee **in this house**:

But the apodosis presumes that they are not in the land:

1Ki 8:34 Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers.

The Pulpit Commentary suggests,

The marg. *towards* is a mistaken attempt at avoiding the difficulty which lies on the

<sup>5</sup> Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Moll, C. B., Briggs, C. A., Forsyth, J., Hammond, J. B., ... Conant, T. J. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Psalms* (p. 577). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

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surface of the text, viz., that persons in a foreign land could not pray *in* the temple. But the king obviously is speaking here, not of those taken captive, but of the nation at large (“thy people Israel”) by its representatives (cf. Joel 2. 2:17), supplicating after its defeat.<sup>6</sup>

And KD:

the mass of the people remain in the land, so that they who are beaten can pray to the Lord in the temple, that He will forgive them their sin, save them out of the power of the enemy, and bring back the captives and fugitives into their fatherland.<sup>7</sup>

### **Reference of v. 22**

There are three possible references in the context of the original Psalm: a physical stone in the temple, the nation Israel, and the Messiah.

Delitzsch sees the primary reference to the **physical temple**, reflecting the discouragement of Ezra 3:12ff, while allowing that this serves as metaphor for the nation. Thus KD:

Psa 118:22 points back to that disheartened disdain of the small troubles beginning which was at work among the builders (Ezr 3:10) at the laying of the foundation-stone, and then further at the interruption of the building.

The Cambridge Bible recognizes that this is metaphorical, and a reference to **the nation Israel**, even in its original form:

Israel is the ‘head corner-stone.’ The powers of the world flung it aside as useless, but God destined it for the most honourable and important place in the building of His kingdom in the world. The words express Israel’s consciousness of its mission and destiny in the purpose of God.

So Hengstenberg:

The figure in ver. 22 becomes clear, as soon as we acknowledge the national reference of the Psalm, and ascertain correctly the occasion for which it was written. The whole Psalm is taken up with the happy change which had taken place in the circumstances of the people of God. It is this that is treated of in the three verses immediately preceding. The sense therefore can only be: the people of God whom earthly potentates have despised, have been exalted by the influence of their God to the rank of a people that shall reign over the world.

But given Isaiah 28:16, it could be a reference to **the Servant**, so that our Lord’s citation is not just an application of the metaphor, but a reflection of the original meaning of the text.

<sup>6</sup> Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Ed.). (1909). *1 Kings* (p. 155). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

<sup>7</sup> Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 3, p. 91). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.