

STUDIES IN PSALMS
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. All creation is called upon to express thanks and wonder at the goodness and greatness of our God. Is it happening? Discuss.
2. God has commanded, stationed, the physical creation. How did it (has it) responded? What lesson for us?
3. We could not imagine a world of chance and yet this is very much what the evolutionary concept of creation would ask us to believe. Discuss.
4. The law of the mind is involved in the second stanza of this psalm. Discuss.
5. There will come a time when all creation will be delivered from the limitations now upon it. Discuss cf. Romans 8:10-21.

P S A L M 1 4 9

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A New Song for Israel, which Others may Not Sing.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, A Well-Defined People Addressed. Stanza II., vers. 4-6, A Well-Defined Time Indicated. Stanza III., vers. 7-9, A Well-Defined Work Described.

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah.¹

- 1 Sing ye to Jehovah a song that is new,
his praise in the assembly of his men of kindness.²
- 2 Glad be Israel in his great Maker,
let the sons of Zion exult in their King:
- 3 Let them praise his name in the dance,
with timbrel and lyre let them make melody unto him.
- 4 Since Jehovah is taking pleasure in his people,
adorneth the humble ones with victory³

1. Apparently doubled. See Exposition of 147.
2. Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Kindness."
3. Or: "salvation."

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- 5 Let the men of kindness exult with glorying,⁴
let them ring out their joy at their great Habitation:⁵
6 Let extollings of GOD be in their throat,
and a sword of two-edges be in their hand.
7 To execute an avenging on the nations,
chastisements on the peoples;
8 To bind their kings with chains,
their honourables with fetters of iron;
9 To execute on them the sentence written⁶
a stateliness it is for all his men of kindness.⁷

(Nm.)⁸

PARAPHRASE

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Hallelujah! Yes, praise the Lord! Sing Him a new song.
Sing His praises, all His people.

2 O Israel, rejoice in your Maker. O people of Jerusalem,
exult in Your King.

3 Praise His name by marching together to the Temple,¹
accompanied by drums and lyre.

4, 5 For Jehovah enjoys His people; He will save the humble.
Let His people rejoice in this honor. Let them sing for joy
as they lie upon their beds.

6, 7 Adore Him, O His people! And take a double-edged
sword to execute His punishment upon the nations.

8 Bind their kings and leaders with iron chains,

9 And execute their sentences.

* * * * *

He is the glory of His people. Hallelujah! Praise Him!

EXPOSITION

The well-defined *People* is the Ideal Nation of Israel; the well-defined *Time* is the time of Israel's Restoration to Jehovah's favour, when that people again realise that Jehovah is indeed

4. Or: "with (ascriptions of) glory"—O.G. 459. Cp. 29:9.

5. So Br. w. probability: departing by one letter from M.T.: i.e., sh-k-n instead of sh-k-b.

6. "Viz, by prophets, in such passages as Mic. 4:13, Is. 41:15f, Joel 3:12-14"—Dr.

7. M.T. adds: "Praise ye Yah."

8. Apparently doubled. See Exposition of 147.

1. Literally, "Let them praise His name in the dance."

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their King; and the well-defined *Work* is the work of punishing Gentile nations. The lines along which legitimate interpretation should run are reasonably clear; but, by a corrupted exegesis, the scope of this psalm has been so perverted, that the *Sword* has been placed in unauthorised hands, and the earth has been drenched with human blood, shed without Divine Authority. The secret of the mischief has lain in substituting the Church for Israel; and this, again, has resulted from the corruption of a Church which has forgotten her own especial calling, and mistakenly deemed herself to be the Kingdom, and has vain-gloriously vaulted herself into a place in the Prophetic Word never designed for her.

Happily, expositors are beginning to discover the mistake, and to trace back to it the deplorable consequences which have ensued; though it may be doubted whether they can be said to have laid the axe to the root of the tree so long as they call the nation of Israel a "Church." The following extract from Delitzsch will lay bare the terrible results which have sprung from this mistaken application of the Word of God:—

"The New Testament spiritual Church cannot pray as the Old Testament state Church prays here. Under the delusion that it could be used as a prayer without any spiritual transformation, Psalms cxlix. has been the pass-word of the most horrible aberrations. By means of this Psalm Caspar Scioppius in his *Classicum belli sacri*, which, as Bakius says, is written not with ink but with blood, inflamed the Roman Catholic princes to the Thirty Years' religious war. And within the Protestant Church Thomas Munzer by means of this Psalm stirred up the War of the Peasants. One can easily see that the Christian cannot directly appropriate such a psalm, without disavowing the apostolic admonition: *ta hopla tees strateias heemon ou sarkika* [the weapons of our warfare are not carnal] (2 Cor. 10:4)."

The serious question arises, whether, in view of such consequences of a mistaken exegesis as are here disclosed, it would not be better to leave off altogether the habit of speaking of the Old Testament Nation as a CHURCH; and, instead of merely abstaining from *directly* appropriating such a psalm as this, would it not be more reverent and far safer to *abstain altogether* from appropriating it? Why appropriate it at all? It is not for us. Nevertheless, we can learn much from it. We can gather therefrom lessons which are by no means yet exhausted; and if some "Jew-baiting" communities would only listen to

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Jehovah's voice ringing through it, they would not be surprised to hear their rulers calling out to them, with genuine concern, "Hands off!"

It may not be out of place to observe that there is enough in this psalm to prevent even the favoured nation itself from hastily taking up the "sword," though it were in self-defence. Let them make reasonably sure that Jehovah is again *favouring his people*, and intends to *adorn the humble ones with victory!* When Jehovah wills them to "thresh," he will not fail to say unto them "Arise!" Besides which, it has yet to be emphasised, that even upon Israel a restriction is placed which further safeguards the power of the "sword," as commissioned by this psalm. This restriction has already been respected by the qualifying term "ideal" in the phrase "ideal Israel": it is only to "ideal Israel" that the commission to use the "sword" is here prophetically given. Now, as the "ideal Israel" is necessarily a purified and godlike Israel—the real nation, indeed, but the real nation as morally qualified for the stern and critical task of punishing Gentile kings and nations,—it is important that this restriction to the mission of the "sword" be thoroughly grasped and tenaciously held.

Note then, first, that the restriction is well in evidence hereabouts in the Psalms. Recall how strongly it appeared at the close of the last psalm (148). The perfect tense there may perhaps be safely taken as the prophetic perfect of anticipation: *He hath uplifted a horn for his people*—the "horn" being a well-known symbol of royal power and prowess. This "horn" Jehovah will have given to "his people": say,—naturally, in a Hebrew psalm,—*"to his people Israel."* But in what moral condition are "his people" to be when this "horn" of power is restored to them? It is to be observed that the restoration is to be *a theme of praise for all Jehovah's men of kindness*. It follows, that it will be an event which will fill Jehovah's "men of kindness" with joy.

His men of kindness! but *who are they?* They are His *hasidhim*: THE RECEIVERS AND REFLECTORS OF HIS OWN DIVINE KINDNESS. It is not difficult to define them: our only misfortune is, that we have not a single word to denote them; and, in the last resort, *that* is doubtless our own fault; for if we had been awake to the immense importance—within the realm of the Old Testament—of the *idea*, the happy word to express it would surely have been agreed upon before now; and English readers

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would not have been suffered to lose themselves amid such a variety of renderings of this Hebrew designation as "holy ones," "pious ones," "godly ones," "favoured ones," &c., &c. Surely the idea and the character embodying it, should by no means be allowed to escape us. Just here, the restriction implied is vital.

So, then, Jehovah's "men of kindness" will rejoice and give "praise" when a "horn" is again "uplifted" for "his people"; which presupposes their confidence that "his people" are *prepared* to wield the "sword" in strict accord with Jehovah's will. And the next line in Ps. 148 confirms this confidence; for by the very way in which it follows on, without a conjunction, such as "and" or "moreover," that line—the last of the psalm—is turned into *an expansion of the foregoing*; and so implies that "the sons of Israel," AS A BODY, will have become "men of kindness"; in other words, will have become Jehovah's "ideal nation"; the perception of which prepares us for the splendid climax—*a people near him*—morally near him, and not merely by outward privilege and profession: ONLY TO SUCH A PEOPLE, hath Jehovah here promised to raise up a horn of power and prowess.

All of which brings us, on a full-flowing tide, over the bar at the entrance of our present psalm, the redoubtable 149th: *Sing ye to Jehovah a song that is new*; and indeed it is "new," even to Israel,—so new and peculiar that no others than Jehovah's "ideal Israel" *have any right to sing it with self-appropriation*. The same restrictive peculiarity immediately reappears as the psalmist, in the second line, says: *his praise in the assembly of his men of kindness*. These peculiarly godlike men have now become an "assembly"; and, from what follows, we may infer that they are the whole national assembly of *humble ones* who have borne the sin and the curse and the shame of centuries: JEHOVAH'S IDEAL ISRAEL. These are the men to whom alone it is possible, without fanaticism, to have, at one and the same time, *the extollings of God in their throat, and a sword of two edges in their hand!*

With a remarkable—and indeed quite an unusual—maintenance of descriptive power the final stanza of this ominous psalm conducts us steadily up to its unique and amazing climax: *To execute—chastise—bind—execute the sentence written* (and we thank Dr. Driver for referring us to such appropriate parallels for showing what that "sentence" is) *is a stateliness for all his men of kindness!* thus, once more and finally, holding

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us to the Divinely imposed restriction of this unique commission to *such* men—to *these* men—and to *no others*. "A stateliness": a quite unusual and significant word, whose peculiar value the psalms have recently taught us. As "glory" is an attribute of "majesty," so is "stateliness" an attribute of the "glory" of "majesty" (Ps. 145:5). Such "stateliness"—such "magnificence," as the Sep. in some places has it—has Jehovah in reserve for "his men of kindness." Some day a relieved world will wake up to discover how Jehovah himself has displayed his own kindness in thus forcibly sweeping away centuries of oppression and wrong. Let all tyrants beware!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is a most interesting psalm, at least the sometimes tragic use made of it is of real interest, Rotherham feels it has been very much misused. What is the basic mistake?
2. "There is not Church in the Old Testament". How is this thought to be understood. Discuss.
3. Rotherham evidently believed the physical nation of Israel was to (will) be used by God. How? When? Why? Where?
4. Who are "His men of kindness"? What is their work?
5. In the analysis of this psalm we learn of a new song for Israel. When will they sing it? For what reason? Is there another way of interpreting this psalm? Discuss.

P S A L M 1 5 0

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

An Expansion and Enforcement of the "Public Reader's Invitation" to the People to Join in the Responses in the Temple-Worship.

ANALYSIS

1. "The Public Reader's Invitation"—*Hallelu-yah*, "Praise ye Yah," is first given in the Usual Way at the Head of the Psalm. 2. Then follow Ten Lines of Expansion: consisting of (a) a Ten-fold Repetition of the Invitation *hallelu*, "praise ye"; (b) a Ten-fold Statement of the Object of Praise—once by the familiar Divine Name EL, "the Mighty One," and nine