



Psalm 149 - Praise for God's Goodness to Israel

Introduction

This hymn of praise calls on God's people to praise the Lord for their special privileges. In particular, if Psalm 148 recalls the benefits that the whole world will one day receive through God's work on behalf of the faithful in Israel, Psalm 149 ends by calling to mind the expectation that the faithful will one day be God's agents of judgement through the world: *<<Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels – to say nothing of ordinary matters?>>* (1 Corinthians 6:2-3), *<<It was also about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, 'See, the Lord is coming with tens of thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgement on all, and to convict everyone of all the deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him'>>* (Jude 14-15), *<<And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses>>* (Revelation 19:14).

Psalm 149:1-4 - Let the Godly Sing to Their Maker Who Delights in Them.

The members of the worshipping congregation, the assembly of the faithful, call one another to praise the Lord, and to sing to him a new song. The tone is one of jubilant, even exuberant, gladness: be glad, rejoice, dancing, and making melody. God's people can call him their Maker and their King, and know that he takes pleasure in his people. This idea would be unbearably arrogant had not the Lord himself declared it: *<<Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine>>* (Exodus 19:5), *<<but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love>>* (Psalm 147:11), the psalm also clarifies that the full benefit of salvation comes to the humble, i.e. those who receive it properly, without presumption.

¹ Praise the Lord!
Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.

Psalm 149:1

Praise the Lord! The last five of the 150 collected Psalms begin and end with this phrase. In most of the previous songs there was a trouble, crisis, or evil described and brought before the Lord. In these last psalms it is all praise.

Sing to the Lord a new song. God loves to receive the rejoicing and praise of his people expressed in song, especially the new song. The new song can just as easily come from someone who has followed the Lord for a long time as they gain fresh awareness of God's love and grace as it can for the newly converted. Charles Spurgeon commented, "He is ever new in his manifestations; his mercies are new every morning; his deliverances are new in every night of sorrow; let your gratitude and thanksgivings be new also."

The concept of singing a new song to the Lord is not so much a song with different lyrics and music but a change of heart that accepts God as the one true God and brings praise to his name. The call for a new song in Scripture also appears in Psalm 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, and 149:1, Isaiah 42:10, and Revelation 5:9 and 14:3.

His praise in the assembly of the faithful. It is wonderful for the individual to offer praise to God; it is even better and greater to do so in the assembly of the faithful. The community of God's people makes praise all the richer, especially praise offered in song.

The faithful. The Hebrew word *hasid* is the adjective form of 'steadfast love', Hebrew *hesed*. This term, variously rendered 'godly,' 'saint,' 'faithful one,' and 'holy one' in the Psalms, refers to those who have genuinely laid hold of God's steadfast love; here it is singular, to stress that each faithful member of the people may have this confidence, provided they do what is right: <<***Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come***>> (1 Timothy 4:7-8), and: <<***Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?***>> (2 Peter 3:11-12).

- ² Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.
- ³ Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.
- ⁴ For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with victory.

Psalm 149:2-4

Let Israel be glad in its Maker. If one ever lacked for reasons to praise God, there is one great reason that is always at hand. It is always right and honourable for everyone to praise and rejoice in their creator. James Montgomery Boice commented, “The starting point for us creatures must be our acknowledgment of the Creator, since it is only when we have begun to know God as our Creator that we can appreciate what we owe him and understand how we have failed to praise and thank him properly.”

Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King. God is the maker of all humanity, but is recognised as King only over his people. This recognition is a source of incomparable joy to his people, who realise they could never hope for a ruler greater in love, wisdom, and power. It is common for people to be thankful for a good political leader or head of state. The visit of such a ruler is treated as a special occasion. The believer regards it as a special and joyful thing to recognise and enjoy the presence of their King. Spurgeon remarked, “The true splendour of kings lies not in what their people do for them, but in what they do for their people: and herein our Lord excels all the princes that ever lived.”

Let them praise his name with dancing. The joy among God’s people in their creator and King showed itself with dance, song, and music. This was a happy expression of gratitude, and shows that God approves of and encourages such happiness among his people. Adam Clarke wrote that the Hebrew word here translated dance (*mahol*) means a flute or musical pipe, not a dance. “I know no place in the Bible where *machol* and *machalath* mean dance of any kind; they constantly signify some kind of pipe.”

For the Lord takes pleasure in his people. If God is so rich in grace and mercy to take pleasure in his people - despite all their sin and weakness - it is a good reason for great rejoicing. Spurgeon commented, “What is there in us in which the Lord can take pleasure? Nothing, unless he has put it there. If he sees any beauty in us, it must be the reflection of his own face. Yet still the text says so, and therefore it must be true: ‘The Lord takes pleasure in his people.’”

He adorns the humble with victory. Most of the great ones among men despise the humble and leave them in their low condition. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble; refer to Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5. He makes them beautiful with victory, referring to their salvation.

Alexander Maclaren commented, “The qualification for receiving Jehovah’s help is meekness, and the effect of that help on the lowly soul is to deck it with strange loveliness.” And Spurgeon remarked, “God takes pleasure in all his children as Jacob loved all his sons; but the meek are his Josephs, and upon these he puts the coat of many colours, beautifying them with peace, content, joy, holiness, and influence.”

Psalm 149:5-9 - Let the Godly Exult in the Honour of Sharing in God’s Rule.

This section begins like the first, with a call to the godly to exult and sing for joy, even on their beds, when they ought to be sleeping. Verse 6 takes a startling turn, with the high praises of God apparently combining praise with preparation for battle, an unexpected element in corporate worship!. Verses 7-9 explain that the faithful will do God’s work of bringing vengeance on the nations, assuming that they refuse the invitation to: <<*praise the name of the Lord*>> (Psalm 148:13a); such is the honour that God shares with all his faithful ones.

- 5 Let the faithful exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their couches.
- 6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,
- 7 to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,
- 8 to bind their kings with fetters
and their nobles with chains of iron,
- 9 to execute on them the judgement decreed.
- This is glory for all his faithful ones.
- Praise the Lord!

Psalm 149:5-9

Let the faithful exult in glory. The spirit of the first part Psalm 149 continues, the people are so happy in God’s glory that they sing for joy on their couches, i.e. on their beds. Waking hours do not give enough time to express all their praise and joy unto God, so they must continue it on their beds. This is a reminder to

Christians that although songs of praise are especially wonderful among the assembly of God's people (v.1), they should never be restricted to the assembly. It is a sacred and wonderful thing for the saints to sing aloud on their beds. The theme here is a complete contrast to: <<***When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent***>> (Psalm 4:4), <<***I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping***>> (Psalm 6:6), and: <<***You keep my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak***>> (Psalm 77:4)

Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands. God's people are pictured as ready for battle, equipped with two mighty weapons:

- They bear the high praises of God; their worship indicates the allegiance and surrender to the God of every victory. In 2 Chronicles 20:20-21 a great victory was won for the people of God as they entered the battle with praise.
- They bear a two-edged sword in their hand, demonstrating both the use of practical weapons and means, and in a spiritual sense, their reliance upon God's Word, which is described as a two-edged sword: <<***From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty***>> (Revelation 19:15), as being even sharper than one: <<***Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart***>> (Hebrews 4:12), and as the sword of the Spirit: <<***Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God***>> (Ephesians 6:17).

Spurgeon observed, “‘In their throat,’ says the Hebrew, for God's saints sing deep down in their throats. There is a deeply rooted music when we praise God, which is altogether unlike the mere syllables of the lips that come from a hypocrite's tongue.”

The combination of these two - the high praises of God and the two-edged sword spiritually speaks to every leader among God's people. The gatherings of God's people should excel in both praise and the preaching of God's Word. Christians should always press to have excellent praises of God and a right, sharp handling of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Spurgeon commented, “The word of God is all edge; whichever way we turn it, it strikes deadly blows at falsehood and wickedness. If we do not praise we shall grow sad in our conflict; and if we do not fight we shall become presumptuous in our song. The verse indicates a happy blending of the chorister and the crusader.” And again, “If you had a sword of steel, you would fight with men; but that is no part of your business. You are not

called to that cruel work; but, as you have the sword of the Spirit, which is two-edged, which is indeed all edge, for it cuts whichever way you turn it, go forth and praise God by the use of that two-edged sword which is the Word of God.”

To execute vengeance on the nations. The power of praise and the word of God will ultimately see God’s work accomplished among **the nations**. For those who persist in disobedience, it will be **vengeance** and **punishment** at the end of the age. Not even **kings** or **nobles** can escape this judgement to come. Maclaren commented, “The stern close of the psalm strikes a note which many ears feel to be discordant. Yet it is entirely free from any sentiment of personal vengeance.” Derek Kidner added, “Now, in terms of a holy war, such as those of Israel against the Canaanites, we sing of the retribution which will overtake the enemies of God. As a nation, Israel had been charged with executing this in literal fact at her entry into the Promised Land; and at the last day the angels, the armies of heaven, will accompany our Lord to judgement.”

In the immediate context of the psalmist, in some way Israel was to be the agent to **execute vengeance**. This means that their joyful praise had to connect itself to radical obedience, even to God’s difficult and costly commands. As believers under a new covenant, Christians do not battle flesh and blood enemies in accordance with Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 6:12-18, yet they have the responsibility to be not only worshippers, but warriors in a spiritual warfare that at times will be difficult and costly. In a spiritual sense, Christians are to **execute vengeance** on everything that would oppose Jesus Christ and the work of his kingdom in their lives. Kidner observed, “Our equivalent of binding kings with chains (v.8) is to ‘take every thought captive to obey Christ’ (2 Corinthians 10:5).”

To execute on them the judgement decreed. For the believer under the New Covenant, there is a judgement written against every spiritual enemy, and Jesus confirmed it by his work on the Cross: ***<<about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned>>*** (John 16:11), ***<<And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross>>*** (Colossians 2:14). Spurgeon remarked, “It would be a sad thing for anyone to misuse this text: lest any warlike believer should be led to do so, we would remind him that the execution must not go beyond the sentence and warrant; and we have received no warrant of execution against our fellow men.”

This is glory for all his faithful ones. In some way beyond present human comprehension, God will use his people in the setting right the wrongs of this present age. Even if Christian participation is only as an audience to the righteous judgements of God, it will be an honour to all his saints. Maclaren noted, “They are redeemed from bondage that they may be God’s warriors. The honour and obligation are universal.”

Praise the Lord! This sentence - one word in the Hebrew, *hallelujah* - is understood as either a declaration or an exhortation. Here especially it can be taken as an exhortation, and encouragement for all those who reject and resist God to praise him instead, to be among his faithful ones and not among the nations who will receive God's vengeance.