

Psalm 118

The final psalm of the Hallel, Psalm 113-118, sung at all pilgrimage feasts.

The rabbis were divided about whether this psalm refers to David or to the Messiah. The Zohar came down on the interpretation pointing to the Messiah (Zohar in Exod. fol. 93. 3. Vid. Tikkune Zohar, Correct. 5. fol. 15. 2.)

The key verses are 22-23: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

Psalm 118:1 - "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever."

God is Good!

"The goodness of God is infinitely more wonderful than we will ever be able to comprehend." - A.W. Tozer

- **Matthew 19:16-17** - "And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."

- **Mark 10:18** - "And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."

- **Psalm 33:5** - "...the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."

- **Psalm 34:8** - "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"

- **Psalm 119:68** - "You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes."

- **Psalm 31:19-20** - "Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues."

- **Psalm 145:9** - "The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made."

- **Nahum 1:7** - "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. "

"mercy" = *checed* - mercy, goodness, lovingkindness

His mercy and goodness are rooted in eternity, so they are ever-flowing and limitless.

Psalm 118:3-4 - "Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever."

The Priests and the Levites

Rashi - "Those who fear the Lord": These are the Levites, about whom it is written (Exod. 32:26): "Whoever is the Lord's, let him come to me! And all the sons of Levi gathered around him," in the episode of the [Golden] Calf, and they fought with Israel when they said (Num. 14:4), "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."

Psalm 118:5 - "I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place."

God delivered David from all his troubles, placed him on the throne of Israel, and gave him rest from all his enemies round about. He delivered Jesus at His resurrection and received Him into heaven - a "large place" enough for the innumerable company of angels, and for all the saints to sit with Him.

Or it could be translated "the Lord answered me largely" i.e. He gives us more than we ask for, a super-abundance. He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (**Ephesians 3:20**).

Psalm 118:6-9 - "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? The LORD taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes."

- **Matthew 10:28** - "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

- **Psalm 146:3-4** - "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."

- **Romans 8:33** - "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

The Canaanites

- **Deuteronomy 7:21** - "Thou shalt not be affrighted at them: for the LORD thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible."

Psalm 118:10-12 - "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes."

They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. 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."

- **Psalm 22:12** - "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round."

- **Deuteronomy 1:44** - "And the Amorites (Canaanites), which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah."

The Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Amalekites and Syrians threatened David. Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the leaders of Israel threatened Jesus. Some rabbis interpreted this of Gog and Magog (**Ezekiel 38 and 39, Revelation 20:7-10**). God sends fire from heaven to destroy them and then presides over the Last Judgment.

Psalm 118:13 - "Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me."

Or "pushing, thou hast pushed me that I might fall" - This seems like a reference to the "strong bulls of Bashan" previously in **Psalm 22:12**.

Psalm 118:14 - "The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation."

A recollection of the drowning of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, and the Song of Moses:

- **Exodus 15:1-3** - "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted. The horse and rider He has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him. The LORD is a warrior, the LORD is His name."

Rabbi Aqiba explains in the Talmud that it was the Holy Spirit who gave this song, and that the Israelites sang it as they crossed the Red Sea. And Rabbis Jehudah and Shmuel, said that "The prophets have commanded Israel that on the day of their salvation they are to sing this to their savior."

The Zohar explains that "there is a reference here to the 'One who is to come'... Therefore Israel is to sing this to Him who will come." And "God will once more extend his hand to save the remnant of his people." Then they "who died through the serpent's beguiling will arise and they will become the advisors of the Messiah-King." This song is a "royal" song and it speaks of "the community of faith and the coming of the Messiah". The Zohar repeatedly uses of the Messiah the name "The Holy and Most High King". In the future, "in the days of their Messiah-King, Israel will praise the fact that it is a joy for them to gather together at the house of the Holy One". "The words 'He has become my salvation' indicate the Messiah-King." When the Holy King comes we will "rejoice and be glad over his salvation; and his salvation means, of course, the LORD's salvation which

has come back to Zion."

Psalm 118:15-16 - The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly."

Rashi refers this joy here expressed to future times, the times of the Messiah: and in the Zohar (Raya Mehimna in Zohar in Numb. fol. 64. 1.) the right hand of the Lord, three times mentioned in this verse and in Psalm 118:16, is interpreted of the Messiah, the son of David. The three repetitions might imply the actions of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Psalm 118:17-18 - "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death."

Speaks of the resurrection - and eternal life.

- **Psalm 16:10** - "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

Rashi - "The LORD hath chastened me sore" - David, for the episode of Bathsheba with torments, e.g. (II Sam. 12:6): "And the ewe-lamb he shall repay fourfold." David was stricken with *zaraath* (leprosy) for six months.

Rashi - "he hath not given me over unto death": (II Sam. 13) "Also the Lord has removed your sin; you shall not die."

Psalm 118:19-20 - "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter."

Targum: "open to me the gates of the city of righteousness"

- **Isaiah 1:26** - "And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city."

- **Psalm 25:7** - "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in."

Or these may be the words of the Messiah, requiring the gates of heaven to be opened to him by his blood, he having obtained redemption for his people. - *Gill's Exposition*

Also, the "Gate" may signify Christ Himself:

- **John 10:9** - "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

The HeadStone

Psalm 118:21-23 - "I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

Jesus clarified this for us in quoting **verse 22** in reference to Himself, to be rejected: - "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 marvelous in our eyes?...And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." (**Matthew 21:42,44**)

Rabbinic literature referred to the teachers and leaders of Israel as "builders."

"the head of the corner" = *rosh pinnah* - corner, pinnacle, chief person or ruler

Rashi views the stone as "A people that was humble among the peoples." But elsewhere he says the Messiah is "the stone that the builders rejected" and his origins are from ancient times, for 'before the sun was, his name was *Yinnôn*' which means a "shoot" or "may it sprout."

The Hebrew words for "stone" ("*bn*") and "son" ("*bn*") sound virtually identical.

In Testament of Solomon 23:6–8, Solomon speaks of the cornerstone in connection with his building of the temple.

In Jesus' preceding parable of the vineyard, echoing **Isaiah 5**, the owner of the vineyard in the parable is said to have built a tower (πύργος, **Matt 21:33**), an image also linked with the temple in ancient Judaism. In the rabbinic tradition, the winepress in **Isaiah 5** is identified as the altar (cf. t. Me'il. 1:16; t. Sukk. 3:15). Jesus told this parable in the temple (**Matthew 21:23**).

Jesus had already stated: "Something greater than the temple is here" (**Matthew 12:6**).

In ancient times the cornerstone was the stone at the corner of two walls that united them. It was the visible corner of the foundation of the building and the starting point of all future building above the foundation. It was the most costly stone because of its beauty and strength. It was also the largest, most solid and carefully constructed stone.

Targum: "The child the builders despised was among the sons of Jesse, and deserved to be appointed a king and a governor. From the Lord was this, said the builders; this is marvelous in our sight, said the sons of Jesse."

One rabbinic parable says:

"The verse was written by King David in reference to himself. When Samuel the Prophet was sent to Jesse's house to choose a king from among his sons (I Samuel 16:1-13),

Jesse brought all his sons before Samuel except for David, the youngest, who was in the fields tending the sheep. Samuel thought that G-d would choose the oldest son, but G-d told him, No, I have rejected these. Finally Samuel asked, Do you have any other sons? And Jesse sent for David. G-d said, Arise and anoint him, for he is the one. David was thus the stone rejected by the builders Jesse and Samuel, and he became the cornerstone of the great dynasty of Jewish kings."

Later, David was again refused by all the tribes but Judah; Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, was set upon the throne, although afterwards all Israel and Judah united in making David king (**2 Samuel 2:8**). This is probably the historical background for the metaphor. But it also had a prophetic meaning pointing to the Messiah.

Jesus was also rejected by his own people as the cornerstone and culmination of Israel, but He became the foundation stone for the church and the chief cornerstone of the spiritual temple in which Peter said we each serve as "living stones," again quoting this psalm:

Acts 4:9-12 - "If we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else."

And again in his letter:

- **1 Peter 2:2-8** - "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed."

- **1 Corinthians 1:18-24** - "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

- **Ephesians 2:19** - "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Furthermore, "All the prophets prophesied not but of the days of the Messiah." (Babylonian Talmud, Sanh. 99a).

- **Isaiah 28:16** - "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."

Rashi, who saw the Messianic nature of the psalm, also says of **Isaiah 28:16** that it points to "the Messiah King who is to be the touchstone of Zion."

The Metsudat David, a popular 17th century Jewish exposition of the Prophetic and Historic books, says that, this rejected cornerstone "will thus be put in the most coveted place of all" for everyone to see.

"'Touchstone' here represents three conditions: 1. firstly it will be a touchstone strong and tested and firmly founded, because it is true stone, neither composed of sand and foreign matter; 2. secondly it is of such a value and form that it will be placed as a cornerstone which is precious like sapphire, as a precious stone, so that it might become a precious cornerstone; and 3. it must be on a firm foundation because the whole building rests upon it. It will be the foundation of the foundations and will support the whole structure. The analogy means that this king has, on the one hand, been himself tested and found to be wholly righteous, free of error, and clear in his thinking. The word *yahîsh* (to be in haste) means that he will later become the cornerstone which will prove to be the precious seed of the house of David and the foundation of the foundations... 'He who believes will not be in haste' means that this will not happen at once, but there will first be great tribulations." - From the Malbi'm Hebrew commentary, Bi'ur ha-Inyan, Is. 28:16.

- **Daniel 2:44-45** - "In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will shatter all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself stand forever. And just as you saw a stone cut out of the mountain without human hands, and it shattered the iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold, so the great God has told the king what will happen in the future."

Nebuchadnezzar's dream shows that all of history was building toward the coming of Christ.

Augustine: "Is not this rock Christ, which was cut without hands out of a mountain, which is the Jews, without a husband's activity? Did not that stone break all the kingdoms of the world, that it, all the despotisms of idols and demons? Did not that stone grow and become a great mountain and fill the whole world?" (Homilies on 1 John, 1:13)

Another mention:

- **Zechariah 4:7** - "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

Speaking of the headstone or "capstone" of **Zechariah 4:7** the Targum says, "In this way the Messiah will be revealed, for his name is from the most ancient times and he rules all the kingdoms"

The Metsudat David sees here the "king who is exalted by the people, and who is placed as the cornerstone in the building, the most polished... as it is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.'"

See <https://wit-resources.s3.amazonaws.com/Messiah-in-the-Old-Testament-in-the-Light-of-Rabbinical-Rabbis.pdf>

The 'Journal of the Bordeaux Pilgrim'

There is a mention of an actual stone "at the side of the sanctuary."
(See article by Nathan Kaplan - <http://www.templemount.org/>)

This "corner" stone was a part of God's pattern and APPOINTED BY HIM as the "keystone" of the temple. It had been "tried" structurally and has even become damaged, but it still exists today in one piece - (An anonymous traveler from Bordeaux in Gaul left the very first journal of a pilgrimage to Palestine in A.D. 333 called the Itinerarium Burdigalense). The most interesting thing the Bordeaux Pilgrim tells us about this stone is this: "AT THE SIDE OF THE SANCTUARY THERE IS A PIERCED STONE". It served as the "landmark" or "marker" of the Temple grounds. It had become the supporting corner stone (keystone) that held Solomon's laid foundation together to the "sides of the north". As a matter of fact, the Hebrew word for this "corner" stone in Psalm 118:22 is Panah meaning especially "TO MARK", like a boundary stone - Furthermore, it was situated near the Tavi (Tadi or Tav) Gate - ta diy' meaning "of the mark" and also means "to mark", "nail", "tent peg", "signature", "to imprint." Likewise, the office of the Captain was over this area. Remember, the Captain of the Temple was, in fact, called the "NAIL" in the sure and established place. "Nail" is one of the meanings of Tav. It marked the northwestern boundary of the Temple along which the partition wall ran, and the place of the "shamar" (or place of "observation" - "to mark"; i.e. the "Great Watchtower"). I also believe this "Corner" (Panah) Stone will become the Rosh Stone (King's Stone) of the rebuilt Temple. It "

Psalm 118:24 - "This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

The day would be either the last day of Tabernacles mentioned above, or the day of Christ's resurrection (at the Feast of First Fruits when Psalm 118 was also sung) or the day of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, as shown from the next verse.

Psalm 118:25 - "Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send

now prosperity."

"save now" = "save we pray" or "save we beseech!" - *hosanna* or *hōshā'-nnā* - from *yasha`'anna'* - the word Hosanna seems to be a "special kind of respect" given to the one who saves, saved, will save or is saving now. By Jesus' day in Aramaic it had also become a shout of jubilation and praise, as seen at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

- **Matthew 21:9** - "The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'"

"prosperity" here has the idea of continuing the work or mission God has begun:

- **Nehemiah 1:11** - "O Lord, I beseech thee ... prosper now thy servant."

The allusion may be to the shouts usually made at the laying of the foundation or corner stone of any considerable edifice, and at the bringing in of the head stone of it.

Historically -

- **Ezra 3:11** - "When the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their positions to praise the LORD, as King David of Israel had prescribed. And they sang responsively with praise and thanksgiving to the LORD: "For He is good; for His loving devotion upon Israel endures forever." Then all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD had been laid."

And prophetically -

- **Isaiah 28:16** - "So this is what the Lord GOD says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; the one who believes will never be shaken."

Psalm 118:26 - "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD."

Rashi - They will say to those who bring the first fruits and to those who perform the pilgrimages.

(According to Rabbinical writings, pilgrim caravans were thus welcomed on their arrival at Jerusalem).

"He that cometh" was a title of the Messiah (**Genesis 49:10, Matthew 11:3**) The disciples, expanding the original, shouted "Blessed is the king that cometh in the name of the Lord" (**Luke 19:38, John 12:13**)

The Targum for these two verses:

"We beseech thee, O Lord, "save" now, said the builders; We beseech thee, O Lord, send now prosperity, said Jesse and his wife. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord, said the builders; Let us bless you out of the house of the sanctuary of the Lord, said David."

Psalm 118:27 - "God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar."

"which hath shewed us light" - Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles: " I am the light of the world" (**John 7**)

Rashi - The sacrifices and the festival offerings, which were clean and examined for a blemish, they would bind to the feet of their beds until they brought them to the Temple court at the corners of the altar. It is also possible to interpret the entire end of this psalm from (verse 17), "I shall not die but I shall live," as referring to David himself.

With this interpretation, we should think of Christ's sacrifice, and ourselves as living sacrifices, even as Isaac was voluntarily bound to the altar by Abraham at the Akeda.

But scholars have a hard time interpreting this text.

"bind the sacrifice" - '*acar chag* - "*chag*" means a 'dance' or a pilgrimage festival, but probably not the festival sacrifice. "Cords" can mean boughs of which the booths were made, or the *lulav* carried by worshippers at Tabernacles. The LXX has "bind on a crown, go with garlands even to the horns of the altar" referring to the worshippers circling the altar at Tabernacles with the *lulav*. i.e. this could depict a celebration rather than a sacrifice.

Psalm 118:28-29 - "Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

Targum: "thou art my God, and I will confess before thee; thou art my God, and I will praise thee, said David: Samuel replied, and said, Praise, O ye congregation of Israel"

The psalm ends as it began. Here ends the "Hallel", or hymn, sung at the passover and other festivals.