

## PSALMS 117 AND 118

Victory of Love, is to know a feeling akin to ecstasy; and that we should receive an invitation to indulge in so unselfish an anticipation from Jewish lips, in Jewish homes and Jewish synagogues, is to be conscious of an additional satisfaction which will one day be appreciated by our brethren of the Twelve-tribed nation. We heartily thank them for this their Passover Invitation preserved in their Hallel.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is the shortest psalm and in some way the grandest. In what way? Discuss.
2. Is there here a promise of the general turning of Israel to Jehovah in some future time? If so what effect is it to have on the rest of the nations?

## PSALM 118

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Passover "Hosanna"-Song.

### ANALYSIS

(See bracketed Headlines let into the Psalm).

---

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah!

(PART I.—INVITATIONS TO PRAISE.)

(First in Standing Refrain: then in Appeal to Three Classes.)

- 1 *Give ye thanks to Jehovah for he is good,  
for to the ages is his kindness.*
- 2 Pray you let Israel' say—  
*For to the ages is his kindness.*
- 3 Pray you let the house of Aaron' say—  
*For to the ages is his kindness.*
- 4 Pray you let them who revere' Jehovah say—  
*For to the ages is his kindness.*

(PART II.—THE PROCESSION SONG.)

(Answer to Prayer Acknowledged.)

- 5 Out of the strait called I on Yah,

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

Yah answered me with a roomy place.<sup>1</sup>  
(Sentiments Occasioned.)

- 6 Jehovah is mine I will not fear,  
what can man' do unto me?
- 7 Jehovah is mine as my great Helper,<sup>2</sup>  
so I shall gaze on them who hate me.
- 8 It is better to take refuge in Jehovah,  
than to put confidence in man:
- 9 It is better to take refuge in Jehovah  
than to put confidence in nobles.  
(Entangling Alliances Severed.)
- 10 All nations compassed me about,—  
in the name of Jehovah verily I cut them off;<sup>3</sup>
- 11 They compassed me about yea they encompassed me about,—  
in the name of Jehovah verily I cut them off:
- 12 They compassed me about as bees (encompass) wax,<sup>4</sup>  
they blazed up<sup>5</sup> as the fire of thorns,—  
in the name of Jehovah verily I cut them off.  
(An Unnamed Enemy Addressed.)
- 13 Thou didst thrust sore at me that I might fall,  
but Jehovah was my helper.  
(Snatch from the Song of the Exodus.)
- 14 *My might and melody is Yah,*  
*and he hath become mine by salvation.<sup>6</sup>*  
(Jubilation in the Homes of the Righteous.)
- 15 A voice! a ringing cry and salvation<sup>7</sup> in the homes<sup>8</sup> of the  
righteous!  
"The right hand of Jehovah is doing valiantly!"
- 16 "The right hand of Jehovah is exalting itself!"  
"The right hand of Jehovah is doing valiantly!"  
(A Nation's Inference.)

1. That is, "(by granting me) a roomy place." Cp. 18:19, 31:8. Or (metaph.): "with freedom."

2. Ml.: "my helpers." Prob. pl. of intensification.

3. "Will cut them to pieces."—"Will mow them down"—Dr. "Will circumcise them"—O.G. Prob. better as above, and (w. Kp.) tense rendered as a "graphic imperfect" (Cp. vers. 5, 13).

4. So it shd. be (w. Sep.)—Gn.

5. So it shd. be (w. Aram., Sep., Vul.)—Gn.

6. Cp. Exo. 15:2, Isa. 12:2.

7. Or: "victory."

8. Ml.: "tents."

PSALM 118

- 17 I shall not die but live,  
and tell of the works<sup>9</sup> of Yah.  
18 Yah chastened me sore,  
But unto death did not give me over.

(PART III.—REQUEST FOR ADMISSION  
INTO THE TEMPLE.)

- 19 Open unto me the gates of righteousness,  
I would enter by them I would thank Yah.

(PART IV.—REPLY FROM WITHIN.)

- 20 This is the gate of<sup>10</sup> Jehovah:  
Such as are righteous may enter thereby.

(PART V.—PRAISE IN THE TEMPLE.)  
(All Israel as One Man.)

- 21 I would thank thee, that thou hast answered me,  
*and hast become mine by salvation.*<sup>11</sup>  
(A Voice Announces.)

- 22 A stone the builders' rejected  
hath become head of the corner!  
(The People respond.)

- 23 From Jehovah hath this' come to pass:  
it is wonderful in our eyes!  
(A Voice)

- 24 This is the day Jehovah' hath made!  
(The People Respond.)  
Let us rejoice and exult therein.<sup>12</sup>  
(United "Hosanna"<sup>13</sup>-Prayer.)

- 25 Ah pray Jehovah! do save pray!  
ah pray Jehovah! do send success pray!  
(Priest, as if Noticing the Approach of a  
Distinguished Worshipper.)

- 26 Blessed is he that entereth in the name of Jehovah!<sup>14</sup>  
(Levites, as if Welcoming his Retinue.)

9. Or: "doings."

10. Or: "for."

11. Cp. ver 14.

12. Or: "in him."

13. "Hosanna" Heb. word, meaning *save now! save, we pray*"—Liddell and Scott.

14. Matt. 23:39: "Until ye say," "Until that day, the subject of all prophecy, when your repentant people shall turn with true and loyal Hosannas and blessings to greet 'Him whom they have pierced': see Deut. 4:30, 31, Hosea 3:4, 5, Zech. 12:10, 14:8-11. Stier well remarks, 'He who reads not this in the prophets, reads not yet the prophets aright'"—Alford in *loco*.

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

We have blessed you out of the house of Jehovah!

(Priest and Levites when Proceeding to Sacrifice.)

27 Jehovah is the Mighty One<sup>15</sup> and he hath kindled a light<sup>16</sup> for us,—

bind the festal sacrifice with cords!—  
up to the horns of the altar.

(Doxology by the People as One Man.)

28 My Mighty One<sup>15</sup> art thou and I will thank thee,  
my Adorable One<sup>17</sup> I will exalt thee.

(The Temple Refrain.)

29 *Give ye thanks to Jehovah for he is good,  
for to the ages is his kindness.*

(Nm.)

## PARAPHRASE

### PSALM 118

Oh, thank the Lord, for He's so good! His lovingkindness is forever.

2 Let the congregation of Israel praise Him with these same words: "His lovingkindness is forever."

3 And let the priests of Aaron chant, "His lovingkindness is forever."

4 Let the Gentile converts chant, "His lovingkindness is forever."

\* \* \* \* \*

5 In my distress I prayed to the Lord and He answered me and rescued me.

6 He is for me! How can I be afraid? What can mere man do to me?

7 The Lord is on my side, He will help me. Let those who hate me beware.

8 It is better to trust the Lord than to put confidence in men.

9 It is better to take refuge in Him than in the mightiest king!

10 Though all the nations of the world attack me, I will march out behind His banner and destroy them.

11 Yes, they surround and attack me; but with His flag flying above me I will cut them off.

15. Heb.: 'El.

16. Mal. 1:10.

17. Heb.: 'Elohim.

## PSALM 118

12 They swarm around me like bees; they blaze against me like a roaring flame. Yet beneath His flag I shall destroy them.

13 You did your best to kill me, O my enemy, but the Lord helped me.

14 He is my strength and song in the heat of battle, and now He has given me the victory.

15, 16 Songs of joy at the news of our rescue are sung in the homes of the godly. The strong arm of the Lord has done glorious things!

17 I shall not die, but live to tell of all His deeds.

18 The Lord has punished me, but not handed me over to Death.

19 Open the gates of the Temple<sup>1</sup>—I will go in and give Him my thanks.

20 Those gates are the way into the presence of the Lord, and the godly enter there.

21 O Lord, thank you so much for answering my prayer and saving me.

22 The stone rejected by the builders has now become the capstone of the arch!<sup>2</sup>

23 This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous to see!

24 This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

25 O Lord, please help us. Save us. Give us success.

26 Blessed is the One who is coming, the One sent<sup>3</sup> by the Lord. We bless You from the Temple.

27, 28 Jehovah God is our light. I present to Him my sacrifice upon the altar, for You are my God, and I shall give You this thanks and this praise.

29 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is so good! For His lovingkindness is forever.

## EXPOSITION

This psalm forms a worthy climax to the Hallel. Its leading voice—the "I" of the psalm—appears to be that of the Restored Nation, since no known individual wholly answers to its use through this particular psalm. If any individual voice is heard in it, it is that of Nehemiah, and that only near the beginning.

1. Literally, "the gates of righteousness."

2. Literally, "the head of the corner."

3. Literally, "in the name of the Lord."

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

As to the question of authorship,—whether or not Hezekiah or Isaiah began to write this psalm, as the conclusion of the Pass-over Hallel of their day,—this much is clear, that it was at least completed after the Exile and was expressly adapted for the consecration of the Second Temple. Zechariah, or Haggai, or both, may have composed it; or at least have given to it those exquisite finishing-touches which so admirably adapt it to that auspicious event.

It is obviously a *processional* psalm, and in the highest degree dramatic. The general course of it is clear; and the sound of several voices can be plainly heard, though precisely *who* speaks in the several divisions of the psalm is, naturally, to some extent, a matter of conjecture. Our headlines will therefore be accepted as exegetical suggestions, rather than as authoritative determinations—which, in no case, could they pretend to be.

Part I.—The standing “Refrain” of Temple psalmody which both opens and closes this psalm constitutes a remarkable testimony to the goodness of Jehovah, as a settled conviction in the heart of the Nation. However severely Jehovah had dealt with them, his abounding and abiding goodness to them was a fixed article of their faith.

The threefold appeal (vers. 2-4) which prolongs the national Refrain, is for several reasons interesting: partly because this is the second instance of its occurrence, the first being found at 115:9-11, and the third (amplified) at 135:19, 20; partly also because of its recognition of proselytes, as forming the third division, a class lying on the outside of Israel proper, and yet attached to them in the same general bonds of worship,—a recognition which reappears in the New Testament (Acts 13:16, 26, 16:14, 17:17, 18:7; cp. I K. 8:41, Isa. 56:6).

Part II.—It is not quite clear whether the *strait* and the *roomy place* of ver. 5 are anything more than picturesque phrases for expressing, in contrast, “distress” and “deliverance”; so that it may be needless to ask *what strait? what roomy place?* Deliverance from the irksome conditions of captivity would in any case justify the contrast; but, partly influenced by what has shortly to follow in the psalm, we can scarcely avoid reflecting how miserably hampered for want of elbow-room were the returned exiles, for carrying forward the work of restoration. How serious this difficulty was, and at how severe a cost it was overcome, the psalm itself will in a little vividly remind us.

## PSALM 118

The circumstance that, for *two* lines announcing the *facts* of prayer and deliverance (ver. 5), our song devotes *eight* lines to the expression of *sentiments* thereby demanded (vers. 6-9) may usefully remind us of the need there is that the Divine facts of Redemption should find fruitful lodgment in appreciative hearts. Of Nehemiah, we are already reminded (in 9b). HE had occasion for putting only a very little confidence in *nobles* (Neh. 6:17).

Is it too much to say that by finding in the next stanza (vers. 10-12) rather "the severance of entangling alliances" than the raising of a fierce battle-cry, we avoid the rock on which many expositions have split; and are wholly left without excuse if we incontinently hurry down the centuries to the time of the Maccabees to discover an atmosphere of defiance in which these lines, as commonly understood, could have originated? In any case, it was not until we observed, with acquiescence, Kirkpatrick's suggestion, that the context is better consulted by taking the verb variously rendered "will cut to pieces," "will mow down," "will circumcise," rather as vividly descriptive *past* tenses than as threatening *futures*.—it was not till then that everything in the psalm seemed naturally to fall into its right place. "Cut off" and "circumcise" of course go hand in hand thus far: that there is "a cutting off" in "circumcising." Only instead of supposing this psalmist to threaten to "circumcise" Israel's enemies (or else, as the word may be otherwise rendered, to "cut them to pieces," or "mow them down" by the edge of the sword),—if, rejecting these applications of the word, we take the "circumcising"-knife as sternly turned, by penitent Israel, against herself, in the way of cutting herself free from the entangling alliances which nearly strangled her on her return from captivity,—in that case, we reach a result worthy of the best of Israel's psalmists; worthy of Israel herself as now, at last, profiting by the chastising hand of her God; and worthy of being embalmed in song as a morally heroic act to be ever afterwards imitated, especially at Passover times. Let anyone read through the book Nehemiah with this thought before him, and he must be rather wanting in discernment if the spectacle that most impresses him be not just this—the awful flashing of the Pasha's terrible circumcising-knife as he unsparingly cut off Israel from her entangling alliances: foreign traders, foreign wives, all must go, if Israel is to be saved! We have only to imagine a poet-scribe, aware of Nehemiah's resolute doings and

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

in full sympathy with the spirit that actuated them, setting himself to memorialise them in Passover Song,—and what could be wished for more appropriate than the wonderful stanza before us? Those buzzing *bees* and lacerating *thorns* of would-be helpers, anxious only to thwart and hinder,—here we have them, photographed for all time, in this Passover Song!

It was a terrible ordeal for Israel! Nor is it at all incredible that the poet—in concentrating all the stinging of the bees and all the piercing of the thorns into the personification of one unnamed enemy—*Thou didst thrust sore at me that I might fall* (ver. 13)—was thinking of an enemy, not only unnamed, but also *invisible!* Zechariah, at all events, knew of an “Accuser” who durst present himself at the right hand of the Angel of Jehovah (Zech. 3:1); and the *sore thrust* at Israel’s fidelity, which Nehemiah resisted, was probably as determined as SATAN himself could make it.

The Song of Triumph, sung on Deliverance from Egypt, in its sublimest sentiment (ver. 14), well becomes this new Triumph for Israel. Jehovah (“the Becoming One”) having “become” the *might* of his people in trial, and the *melody* of his people in triumph, Israel more firmly than ever before, now becomes His in the strong ties of gratitude: *Mine by salvation!* It is all there.

The *jubilation* of vers. 15, 16 possesses quite a fascination, by reason of its highly dramatic record. It must be confessed, however, that it severely taxes the power of sober exegesis. In the first place, it is not clear whether the more literal meaning *tents* should be pressed: if it should, then the thought of the reader is carried away to an army camping out, to whom is brought news of victory, as if achieved by a relieving force in some other part of the field; since men actually engaged in fighting are not found in their “tents,” and yet it would seem that the battle is actually being waged somewhere when these outbursts of triumph are heard in the *tents* alluded to—if such be intended. It is so easy in Hebrew story to take “tents” as simply standing for “homes” that we are tempted to simplify in that direction. But then, again, why are the “tents” or “homes” termed those of *the righteous*? Are they *the homes of the righteous* “nation preserving fidelity,” of which we read in Isa. 26:1? It may be so; and it would not be very wild so to conclude, seeing that that phrase occurs in a song to be sung “in the land of Judah.” Of course, those who fly from the

## PSALM 118

nation of Israel to the Church of Christ, for relief from every difficulty in Old Testament interpretation, need not feel any difficulty here. They could say: "Ah, yes! during the present dispensation, there have been rousing outbursts of jubilation *in the homes of the righteous* as news has arrived of the conversion to Christ of the South Sea Islanders, the Chinese, etc., etc. And the righteous dwellers in those homes have exclaimed—just like this in the psalm—*The right hand of Jehovah is doing valiantly!*" Now we have to confess that we could envy the facility with which many enliven Old Testament exegesis by such natural sallies of Evangelical fervour as this; but then we are sharply called to account by the context, here in this psalm, and are admonished that, after all, such imaginative applications *are not exegesis*. For what is it that follows? Is it, or is it not, "a Nation's Inference" (vers. 17, 18), drawn from the exploits of *Jehovah's right hand* of which they now hear, that they, the Nation, *shall not die but live, And recount the doings of Yah?* Besides: these extracts are taken from the Passover procession-song of Israel; and as the procession slowly moves up to the gate of the Temple to seek admission, is it not the obvious dictate of candour to enquire, WHOM the processionists represents: is it their own nation or is it not? At least, if we demur to this, let us in all consistency accept the peril of *national extinction* and *national chastening from hand of Yah*, of which the context here speaks, before we foist any Gentile nation or Church into Israel's place as pictured in this psalm. She has had her centuries of humiliation and shame and sore sorrow. Of *jubilation*, in the past, she confessedly has had but few and short-lived occasions. If, therefore, it be seemly that we should conclude that Israel as a nation will yet repent; and that thereupon the "set time" for Jehovah to make bare his arm on her behalf will come, let us reverently let be, and see whether, even yet, in the future, this bright vision of national joy shall not be filled to the full. We are not even sure that it may not be necessary to restore the "tents" in their literality; seeing that, according to the prophet Zechariah (12:7), Jehovah intends, *in the yet future siege of Jerusalem*, "to save the tents of Judah first," and what precisely that may mean, perhaps only fulfilment can shew. In spite of the outstanding grounds for suspending our judgments seen in this part of our psalm, let us note well that the loud note of jubilation has in it the following clear significance, namely: That at the very time that

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

these shouts of triumph are being raised in the *tents* or *homes* of the righteous, Jehovah is glorifying his power on Israel's behalf. To that conclusion we are bound by the language employed.

Parts III. and IV. need but little comment. It is only dramatically that they come into great prominence. Still they are not without significance for exegesis. As, just now, the "tents" or "homes" through which victory resounded were described as those of "the righteous," so now the same moral quality is again brought into prominence. The gates into which the processionists desire to enter are frankly admitted to be *gates of righteousness*; and by giving them this designation, the applicants acknowledge that only in the character of "righteous" men can they expect to enter; as, on the other hand, they seem to protest that, conceding them this claim, admission cannot be denied them. This moral prerequisite is abundantly confirmed by the answer which comes from within. This particular gate is, for some reason, described as in an especial way belonging to *Jehovah* or as reserved for his use; and then it is added that *such as are righteous may enter thereby*, no doubt implying that none others may. All of which goes strongly to protest to Israel that her worship makes for righteousness; that Jehovah is a righteous God; that sin must be put away if the worshipper is to have any communion with Him. The interest of these verses, however, is mainly dramatic. Silence gives consent. No protest comes from within, to the effect that the applicants cannot be allowed to enter; and as (in Part V., ver 21) the *I* of the applying nation is resumed in the language of direct address to Jehovah, the inference is that the entrance has now been effected, and that it is *within the sacred precincts of the Temple* that this voice is raised. The language is that of thanksgiving: "*I would thank thee*—this is wherefore I have come into thy presence—that thou hast answered me; thou hast saved me—thou hast become mine by salvation." And thus again the climacteric language of the Exodus is used, now for a second time; and as no further words are added as following in sequence as part of Israel's praise, we are perhaps entitled to say that this Refrain from the song of the ancient Exodus is felt to be too expressive to need further addition. Such, at least, is our decipherment of these dramatic words. There can be nothing further for Israel than that Jehovah *should have become hers by salvation*: provided, always, that the salvation itself has at

## PSALM 118

last answered to the ideal of Jehovah's own kindness and faithfulness as expressed in his promises. So that, until this goal is reached, every returning Passover should become another rung in the ladder of national advance.

We cannot doubt that we are justified in thus regarding ver. 21 of our psalm as leading us up to a *resting and breathing place*, if for no other reason than this: that the remainder of the psalm seems to be broken up into something like a rather fragmentary and conversational *retrospect*. Henceforth the building—whether the literal Second Temple, or Israel herself under the notion of a temple—is complete; and the assembled people give themselves up to the pleasure of admiring it. As they view the FINISHED EDIFICE, a voice breaks in,—we prefer to regard it as a *prophetic* voice, the voice of a Haggai or a Zechariah:

A stone the builders rejected  
Hath become the head of the corner!

There it is, *in situ*, in its place in the building, before all eyes, challenging examination. Can any fail to note the present prominence of that *Stone*, or deny its past history of *rejection*? Can any word of excuse be offered to shield those mistaken *builders* who formerly set it aside? Silence leaves those builders to bear the blame of their mistake. But if the builders, whose province it was to know and act, set aside that most magnificent Corner Stone, Whose doing is it that it is now in its right place? The answer comes from the beholders, with firm conviction and undisguised admiration:

From Jehovah hath this come to pass:  
It is wonderful in our eyes!

Is all this a parable? And, if so, what does it mean?

History records no such literal incident in connection with the building of the Second Temple. Surely then, the Temple must be Israel! Besides, if the insertion of this Rejected Stone in the Temple was effected by Jehovah's own hands, apparently without human instrumentality,—then again must we not conclude, for this reason also, that the Temple is the nation of Israel? And if, by the Temple, the Nation itself is here ultimately meant, then Who was this CORNER-STONE, first rejected then accepted?

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

We have said that history records no such incident in connection with a literal Stone. It is easy, with Thrupp and Plumptre, to conjecture that such an incident may have happened; nor is it at all unwarranted to imagine such a thing, so long as the only object is to form clear conceptions of what ideas the language fairly conveys. But the point of importance just here is, to keep open the natural connection between the literal and the metaphorical in interpretation. It is right to cling to literal interpretations whenever they will fairly stand; but it is also right, and at times very important, to recognise that when the literal will not fairly stand, then the metaphorical conception should be frankly adopted. It is so here. The very form of the saying—so terse, so telling—almost reduces it to a proverb, convenient for conveying forcibly the familiar occurrence of the promotion to power of the person or party that had previously been set aside through prejudice or enmity. That it is proverbial here, and so also prophetic, we have already seen cause to conclude. The correctness of such conclusion is further confirmed by the fact that a celebrated prophet before the Exile (Isa. 28:16) had already familiarised the minds of the people with this very metaphor in a most impressive manner, and for most serious educational ends: "Therefore, thus saith the Sovereign Lord, Jehovah,—Behold me founding in Zion a stone, a stone of testing, a costly corner of a well-laid foundation: he that trusteth shall not make haste." This, be it remembered, is said long after Solomon's temple had been built: therefore the foundation here is metaphorical—one for men themselves to be builded upon. "He that trusteth" is plainly he that comes to rest on this foundation: therefore, again, this promised new foundation, spoken of by Isaiah, is metaphorical. The proposal to lay this foundation in Zion is plainly the fundamental part of a great moral testing, to which it is proposed that the "scoffing rulers of Jerusalem" (Isa. 28:14) shall be brought. With all this teaching, Israel had now for centuries been familiar: as also she had been made familiar—still under the figure of a sacred edifice, because an ASYLUM—with "a stone to strike against and a rock to stumble over" to the testing of "both houses of Israel" (Isa. 8:14). To which may be added that Zechariah, one of the post-exilic prophets (cp. Ezr. 5:1, 6:14), is manifestly quite familiar with this metaphorical style of teaching; since he knows not only of a Living foundation stone below, but of a Living Cope or Gable-stone above—one with seven

## PSALM 118

eyes! (Zech. 3:9). To come back to our psalm, there can be no doubt that the builders who rejected the very Stone that Jehovah afterwards made head of the corner, were thereby themselves tested and proved incompetent builders of Israel.

Yes! it is a parable, here in the psalm; and, to the Christian Expositor, its meaning is as clear as day:—Israel, as a nation, first rejects her own Messiah; and then, by a series of providences which mark out the entire revolution as Jehovah's own doing, accepts him as the chief corner-stone of her national structure. But, such is the power of this same testing-stone, that, in the very process of reversal, Israel herself becomes a new, a regenerated, Nation.

Here again, as in expounding Ps. 110, we come upon an occasion of deep emotion, as we think of the mighty ministry of the already written word to the mind of Jesus of Nazareth in giving him solace as his Rejection drew near! (Mat. 21:42, Mk. 12:10, 11, Lu. 20:17).

*This is the day Jehovah hath made!* says another (or the same) prophetic voice (ver. 24); meaning thereby, naturally, the day when these things are fulfilled by the national regeneration of Israel: to which the people—being at length the entire nation—will respond: *Let us rejoice and exult therein!* as well they may!

But that day has not come yet; and until it does come, Israel is taught, at every passover celebration, to pray with an importunity of pleading touchingly expressed in the quaint words—

Ah pray Jehovah! do save, pray!

Ah pray Jehovah! do send success, pray!

That the three English words, *do save, pray*, in the above quotation, are an exact rendering of the Hebrew compound-word *hoshiah-na* which constitutes our adopted word "hosanna," may be news to more than a few English readers. At first, this may seem to be a mere curiosity of literature, and of no further importance. But further reflection will dispel this easy-going conclusion. As reappearing in the Gospels in connection with the story of what is called "the triumphal entry" of Jesus into Jerusalem (Mat. 21:9, Mk. 11:9, Lu. 19:38, Jn. 12:13), it may turn out to be something more than a curiosity of literature to be informed that *hosanna*, instead of being a mere flourishing banner-word of PRAISE, really constitutes a PRAYER of the most importunate significance. For who does not see, that to cry

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

out to this Nazarene Claimant to the Messiahship, "Do save, pray!" constituted a far graver offence in the Jewish rulers' eyes than merely to flourish a comparatively unmeaning compliment of praise by way of welcoming him to the holy city? The jealous rulers of Jerusalem may very well think: This prophet of Galilee may be able to speak beautiful parables and even to heal a few sick folk,—but who is HE that he should be able to "save" Israel? No wonder that those rulers were vexed beyond measure. Not on this man, as a Corner Stone, do these "builders" desire Israel to build!

Even in this ancient literary museum of wonders, we now come upon a line or two of surpassing interest. We have presumed to place ver. 26 in a headline setting, which, if correct, may cause it to burst forth with a blaze of light, by bringing it into touch with the most thrilling biography of the world. Or rather, perhaps, it should be said that, with or without explanation, it already stands in vital connection with the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

It will be remembered that, according to the scenic plan of this Temple Procession, the main body of processionists have already come up to the Temple Gates—requested admission—been answered from within by the laying down of the great condition of entry—have gone triumphantly through those jealous gates—and, *within*, have raised their final Song of Triumph. And yet now, after this,—after the Retrospective Dialogues of prophet and people as to the admired *Corner Stone*, and as to the New Dispensation *Day* that has dawned, and after the united importunate "Hosanna" Prayer that all the Congregation of Israel have offered,—after all this, a strange incident happens! It would seem as though an unexpected arrival catches the High Priest's eye. Some distinguished Stranger has, thus late, presented Himself at the Temple Gate: to whom the observant priest cries out in holy ecstasy—

Blessed is he that entereth in the name of Jehovah!

And then the attendant Levites, observing further that the distinguished Stranger has with him a body of Attendants,—with a like inspiration, but changing the singular *he* to the plural *you*,—called for by the shifted application of the welcome,—exclaim:

We have blessed you out of the house of Jehovah!

## PSALM 118

Do we dream? Or are we suddenly precipitated into the Spirit-land of the Unfulfilled? In any case, here are the words, in their precise significance. And here is the setting of scenic crisis in which the words fall upon our wondering ears. We have not invented these arresting conditions. The materials for thought have been lying, waiting, embedded, here for long centuries. Is it possible at last to wake up to their true significance?

We must be forgiven if we avow our overwhelming conviction, that we do here catch a glimpse of a thrilling incident yet, in the future, to be fulfilled; and to the certain fulfilment of which the four Gospels in our hands give us not only the clue but the positive assurance. The event which here casts its shadow before, is nothing less than this: The sudden arrival of the Lord (*ha'-adon*) whom Israel all along in her better moments has been "seeking," "even the Messenger of that (New) Covenant" which shall yet be solemnised with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Mat. 3:1, Jer. 31:31).

How come we by the courage to say this? Where is our "gospel" evidence which furnishes the link which connects these things together? In reply, we simply point to the words of our Lord Jesus which he spoke to the Jewish rulers when he bade them officially his solemn farewell. "Henceforth," said he (Mat. 23:39), "ye shall not see me until ye say:—

Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

using the very words by which the Septuagint translates the line in this psalm which is now engaging our attention; and which Westcott and Hort and Nestle in their Greek Testaments print in special O.T. quotation-type, the Ginsburg-Salkinson Hebrew New Testament giving the identical Hebrew words that stand in the psalm—*Baruk habba' beshem Yahweh*. So that, in point of fact, what Jesus here says amounts to this—"Ye reject me now: henceforth ye shall not see me until ye welcome me with especial and official Temple Greetings!" That glad day has yet to come; but when it does come this incident in our psalm, we may well believe, will be fulfilled with perfect precision and undoubtedly with an excitement which will thrill through all earth and heaven. We must not forget that, when Jesus used these words from the psalm (Mat. 23:39), they had already been employed (Mat. 21:9), some days before, by the multitude and the children, to give emphasis to their welcome of Jesus as the Messiah. While this fact goes to show plainly that our psalm

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

had come by that time to be regarded as undoubtedly Messianic, —the two incidents, when set side by side, have a deeper lesson to convey. The welcome which the *multitude* gave to Jesus, the Jewish *rulers* took care *not* to extend to him. But could Jesus be satisfied without receiving such an official welcome? Could he pass the matter by as an incident of no importance? Could he be content with the welcome of the unlettered throng, and treat an official welcome as unnecessary? He could not. He knew that an official welcome was what the psalm had foretold; and he knew that what was denied him then should be accorded him thereafter. 'Tis as if he had on occasion of his finally leaving the temple said:—"Ye have not said these words; but you or your successors *will* say them. Till then, we part: you go your way—I go mine." That is the lesson which this second quotation of those words in the psalm by Jesus himself warrants us to learn. And therefore we confidently claim that our Master himself confirms our interpretation of this remarkable verse (26) in our psalm, as betokening nothing less than a national welcome to the Messiah, a national acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as the once rejected Corner-stone.

The next section of the psalm (ver. 27) need not detain us, notwithstanding that endless conjectures have been offered by expositors as to its precise meaning. We have ventured to suggest the general conception of the verse by heading it, "Priests and Levites when proceeding to Sacrifice"; as good as to say, these words appear suitable for them to utter when about to offer the Chief Sacrifice of the day. The first line is not so very difficult; especially if we accept the suggestion of Thrupp, in which, by reference to Mal. 1:10, he obtains for the close of the line this allusion—"and he hath set alight the fire on our altar which is approvingly to consume our sacrifice." And then this turn of *line one* may help us to obtain a feasible sense for *line two*, which has been the most troublesome to interpreters—"Bind the festal sacrifice—which consists of many victims that have come crowding into the temple court about the altar ready to be slain—Bind these *with cords*, so as to have all ready. The Divine fire is even now alight in the wood; therefore, lose no time; proceed rapidly with the immolation. Pile up the sacrificial pieces up to the horns—and so to the complete circumference—of the altar." Or, throwing in the middle line of the verse as parenthetical, "The fire of approval which Jehovah the Mighty One hath kindled upon our altar hath already reached even to

## PSALM 118

the horns; therefore pile up the victims on the altar without delay." To all appearance, it is a ceremonial allusion, to which some simple act on occasion of an ordinary passover might do sufficient justice, so as to prevent its seeming to be unmeaning. But, if we are right in throwing the chief fulfilment of it into the future; then, like the Corner-Stone, this Sacrificial part of the Great Ceremonial may prove to be wholly metaphorical, and its Lesson be evolved in a manner which no human eye has ever witnessed and which no imagination can conjecture. We need not be further anxious about this confessedly puzzling verse. Some day it may be that we shall simply smile at our dullness of perception.

The conclusion of the psalm is abundantly worthy of its main burden; and consists of a Special Doxology for the occasion, and then of the standing Temple Refrain. Respecting the former (ver. 28), our only regret is, that, owing to our not being accustomed to discriminate, in English, between the two Hebrew Divine names '*El*' and '*Elohim*', we are without the linguistic means, in strict verbal translation, to give effect to the probable climax which their parallelistic use here constitutes. Still, as there is a perceptible ascending force in the other members of the lines, by which *thank thee* is intensified into *exalt thee*; we may perhaps complete the discrimination between the two lines, if, for '*El*', we say *Mighty One*, and for '*Elohim*', *Adorable One*. The main thing to note is that now again, once more, the whole nation is speaking as one man in language of blissful appropriation:—

My Mighty One art thou and I will thank thee,  
My Adorable One I will exalt thee.

When that Doxology is really and realisingly uttered in fulfilment of the prophecy of this Passover Psalm, Heaven and Earth will be nearer to each other than they have ever been before.

Give ye thanks to Jehovah for he is good,  
For to the ages is his kindness.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. "This psalm forms a worthy climax to the Hallel"—what is meant?
2. What was the specific occasion and author of this psalm?

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

3. The three-fold appeal of verses 2-4 is interesting for at least two reasons. What are they?
4. What was "the strait" and "the roomlyplace" of verse 5?
5. It is more important to express our adoration and praise than petitions. Why?
6. Rotherham's heading: "Entangling alliances severed" is an innovation. Why? Discuss.
7. Who is the enemy of vs. 13? How decided?
8. "Jubilation in the homes of the righteous" (vs. 15, 16) offers a real exegesis problem. What is it?
9. Rotherham firmly states "imaginative applications *are not exegesis*"—with this we agree. But, we wonder who exercises more imagination—the Evangelical writers or Rotherham? Discuss.
10. What are the "gates of righteousness" of verse 19? Is there any application for us in this? Discuss.
11. From vs. 21 to the end of the psalm we have a different literary form. What is it? What building is here involved?
- 12.. Who voices these words: "A stone the builders rejected hath become the head of the corner"?
13. When were the above words fulfilled?
14. The figure of the cornerstone and the foundation was very familiar to Israel. Give examples.
15. Are we to believe Jesus is the chief—once rejected—later accepted cornerstone of the Jewish nation—or regenerated Israel? Discuss.
16. The three English words: "do save, pray" are quite significant when studied in-depth. Discuss.
17. Verse 26 offers a beautiful thought for discussion—please take the time to understand the point and application here made.
18. Jesus twice fulfilled the words of vs. 26. Explain.
19. Verse 27 gives a problem. What is it? How answered?
20. This is indeed a magnificent psalm. How much of it did the Jewish nation understand?

## PSALM 119

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Jehovah's Will in Relation to Human Character and Conduct, celebrated in Twenty-two Alphabetical Stanzas, and by the aid of Eight Comprehensive Synonyms.