

# PSALMS

## Chapter 118

*His Steadfast Love Endures Forever*

**Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! 2 Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” 3 Let the house of Aaron say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” 4 Let those who fear the LORD say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” 5 Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free. 6 The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? 7 The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. 8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. 9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes. 10 All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! 11 They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! 12 They surrounded me like bees; they went out like a fire among thorns; in the name of /the LORD I cut them off! 13 I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me. 14 The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. 15 Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly, 16 the right hand of the LORD exalts, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!” 17 I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. 18 The LORD has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death. 19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. 20 This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. 21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. 22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. 23 This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. 25 Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD. 27 The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar! 28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. 29 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!**

**Ps 118†** A hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance from enemies. Of the many interpretations of this psalm, three have gained the most adherents (but with much variation in detail): 1. A Davidic king leads the nation in a liturgy of thanksgiving for deliverance and victory after a hard-fought battle with a powerful confederacy of nations (cf. 2Ch 20:27–28; see note on v. 19). 2. Israel celebrates—probably at the Feast of Tabernacles—her deliverance from Egypt and victory over the Canaanites. 3. The postexilic Jews celebrate deliverance from their enemies, either at the dedication of the second temple (see Ezr 6:16) or at the dedication of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem (see Ne 12:37–43). According to the first interpretation, the speaker in vv. 5–21 is the king; according to the second and third, the speaker is the Levitical (or priestly) leader of the liturgy, speaking (representatively) on behalf of the people. The notes that follow assume the first interpretation. In the postexilic liturgy developed for the annual festivals (see introduction to Ps 113), the song was used as a thanksgiving for national deliverance. As the last song of that liturgy, it may have been the hymn sung by Jesus and his disciples at the conclusion of the Last Supper (see Mt 26:30). It was Luther’s favorite psalm, especially because of v. 17. (CSB)

Following a liturgical call to praise (vv. 1–4), the king offers a song of thanksgiving for deliverance and victory in battle (vv. 5–21). In vv. 22–27 the people rejoice over what the Lord has done. Thereafter, the king speaks his final word of praise (v. 28), and a liturgical conclusion (v. 29) repeats the opening call to praise, thus framing the whole service. (CSB)

Luther: “This is my own beloved psalm. Although the entire Psalter and all of Holy Scripture are dear to me as my only comfort and source of life, I fell in love with this psalm especially. Therefore I call it my own” (AE 14:45). It may have been written for celebrations at the time of David or for the celebrations of the second temple. As the last song of the Hallel (see Ps 113–18 intro), it was used as thanksgiving for national deliverance. However, it was destined to find greater fulfillment when sung at the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (v 26; Jn 12:13) and when He Himself referred to it regarding His death and resurrection (vv 22–23; Mt 21:42–44). (TLSB)

Format: V 1, call to give thanks; vv 2–4, the Lord’s everlasting love; vv 5–7, the Lord is on my side; vv 8–9, refuge in the Lord; vv 10–13, enemies cut off; vv 14–16, the Lord’s right hand; vv 17–18, the Lord’s discipline; vv 19–21, the gate of righteousness; vv 22–24, the cornerstone; v 25, prayer for salvation; vv 26–27, entering the temple; vv 28–29, giving thanks. (TLSB)

The 118<sup>th</sup> psalm is a psalm of thanks and my dearest, most beloved *Confitemini* [the Latin title of the psalm]. It gives thanks and also prophecies of the Christian of Christ, the rejected cornerstone.

This psalm is a general statement of thanksgiving for all the kindnesses God daily and unceasingly showers on all men, both good and evil... This psalm praises God especially for the greatest benefit he bestowed on the world, namely, for Christ and his kingdom of grace—first promised and now revealed. (LW 14:47 – Reading the Psalms with Luther)

This psalm is one of the foremost Messianic psalms. As the last psalm of the Passover collection it may have been the last hymn Jesus and the apostles sang on Maundy Thursday evening. (PBC)

**118:1–4** The liturgical call to praise. (CSB)

Call to praise found in other passages (Ps 105–7; 136; 1Ch 16:8, 34; 2Ch 20:21). (TLSB)

This call to thanksgiving is a general invitation which appears also in other psalms. (PBC)

**118:1** A conventional call to praise (shared in whole or in part with Ps 105–107; 136; 1Ch 16:8, 34; 2Ch 20:21). (CSB)

*Give thanks.* This, together with vv. 2–4 (except for the refrain) and 29, may have been by the same voice that speaks in vv. 5–21. (CSB)

**118:2–4** *Israel ... house of Aaron ... those who fear the LORD.* Triple repetition is a common feature in this psalm. (CSB)

**118:5–21** The king’s song of thanksgiving for deliverance and victory. (CSB)

Best understood to be a representative of Israel or the Messiah. (TLSB)

This psalm is fulfilled in Christ's passion. (PBC)

**118:5** *distress*. Vv 10–21 indicate that the nation of Israel is threatened with extermination. (TLSB)

*free*. Lit. “in a broad place”; “spacious place.” (CSB)

**118:6** *What can man do to me?* David's cry in 56:11 and ours in Heb 13:6. (TLSB)

**118:7** *helper* – The word “helper” (s.v. Ps. 46:1) does not not minimize God's part in the victory at all; it means that God did for his people what they could not do for themselves – get free from captivity. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

*I shall look*. Or “I look.” (CSB)

**118:10** *cut them off* – God did not permit Israel to be destroyed by her earthly enemies, nor did He allow His Messiah to be overwhelmed by the forces of evil. (TLSB)

**118:12** *like bees* – Luther says that persecutors of Christ were like bees that stung His humanity but could not touch His divinity. Believers can also be stung in the same way, but they cannot be destroyed. (TLSB)

*fire among thorns*. Their “curses and lies” (CSB)

Bees die when they lose their stingers. The thorns burn quickly, and soon the fire is out. So it is with persecution; its heat cannot last. (TLSB)

Verses 10-12 remind us of the viciousness and persistence of Jesus' enemies as described in Psalm 22 and in the Gospel accounts. (PBC)

**118:13** *I was pushed back* – Here the “you” might refer to the Lord, who allowed the chastening (Dt 8:2–5; Is 54:8). Augustine: “Those who fall away from piety do so not by the work of God but by their own will, and they are not forced to fall” (Chem, *LTh* 1:217). (TLSB)

*falling*. Be killed. (CSB)

**118:14** Perhaps recalls the triumph song of Ex 15, but more likely the verse had become a widely used testimony of praise (see Isa 12:2). (CSB)

Quoted from the victory song at the Red Sea (Ex 15:2a). (TLSB)

**118:15** *tents*. Dwellings. (CSB)

*righteous*. Israel as the people (ideally) committed in heart and life to the Lord. Cf. “the tents of the wicked” (84:10). (CSB)

**118:17** *live, and ...recount*.† A verse much cherished by Luther and his motto.(CSB)

**118:18** *disciplined me*. The king acknowledges that the grave threat through which he has passed has also served God's purpose—to discipline him and teach him humble godliness (see 6:1; 38:1; 94:12; Dt 4:36; 8:5). (CSB)

Israel understood the chastening of the Lord (Dt 8:5), as must we (Heb 12:6). However, Jesus endured the ultimate chastening for the sins of the whole world (1Pt 2:24). “Here, contrition is contained in the first clause, and how we are revived in contrition is clearly described in the second. We are revived by God’s Word, which offers grace” (Ap XIIA 49). Cf 119:28. (TLSB)

**118:19-21** Ritual approach and entry into the temple, perhaps between temple workers and a gatekeeper. (TLSB)

**118:19** *Open to me.* This line suggests a liturgical procession (see v. 27) in which the king approaches the inner court of the temple at the head of the jubilant worshipers (see Ps 24; 68). (CSB)

*gates.* Those leading to the inner temple court. (CSB)

The various courtyards that surrounded the tabernacle and temple were restricted by the various standards of holiness. To enter these holy places was to enter God’s presence. (TLSB p. 842)

*of righteousness.* Often thought to be the name of a particular gateway, but more likely only descriptive here of the gate “through which the righteous may enter” (v. 20). It is possible that the procession began outside the city and that “the gates of righteousness” are the gates of Jerusalem, the city of God. (CSB)

In its original setting, this psalm pictures priests, or Levites, approaching the Lord, who alone is righteous and gives righteousness to those who believe in Him. (TLSB)

**118:20** Augustine: “Cursed, therefore, is he that comes in his own name” (NPNF 1 8:559). (TLSB)

**118:21** This closing verse of the thanksgiving song echoes the “Give thanks” of v. 1, the “answered . . . me” of v. 5 and the testimony of v. 14. (CSB)

**118:22–27** The people’s exultation. (CSB)

These verses are believers’ echoing of Messiah’s joy. (PBC)

**118:22** *The stone the builders rejected.* Most likely a reference to the king (whose deliverance and victory are being celebrated), who had been looked on with disdain by the kings invading his realm—the builders of worldly empires. Others suppose that the stone refers to Israel, a nation held in contempt by the world powers. (CSB)

*cornerstone.* † Lit. “head of the corner”—either a capstone over a door (a large stone used as a lintel), or a large stone used to anchor and align the corner of a wall, or the keystone of an arch (see Zec 4:7; 10:4). By a wordplay (pun) the author hints at “chief ruler” (the Hebrew word for “corner” is sometimes used as a metaphor for leader/ruler; see Isa 19:13; see also Jdg 20:2; 1Sa 14:38). This stone, disdained by the worldly powers, has become the most important stone in the structure of the new world order that God is bringing about through Israel. Jesus brings out this verse’s prophetic intent by applying it (and v. 23) to himself (see Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10–11; Lk 20:17; see also Ac 4:11; Eph 2:20; 1Pe 2:7). (CSB)

Or, keystone on which the building depends. Israel was rejected by her neighbors. But little, insignificant Israel was destined for greatness as God determined. The cornerstone foreshadows the Messiah, whom God would send through Israel. Even the leaders of Israel would reject this cornerstone. Yet God would build His “nation” of believers upon it (Mt 21:42; Rm 9:32–33; Eph 2:20; 1Pt 2:6–8). Hus: “Christ Himself is the foundation of the apostles and the whole Church, and in Him it is fitly framed together” (*The Church*, p 77). (TLSB)

**118:23** *the Lord’s doing* – God reminds us that the plan of salvation through the rejected stone was His idea. (TLSB)

*marvelous* – The Bible is replete with “marvelous acts” of God, but the sending of the Messiah is the greatest of all. (TLSB)

**118:24** *day the LORD has made ... rejoice*. This day of rejoicing was made possible by God’s deliverance in the victory being celebrated. Others suppose a reference to Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles. (CSB)

When the cornerstone of salvation is laid (i.e., Easter). (TLSB)

*has made*. Or “has done it” (see vv. 15–17, 23)—has made the “stone” the “capstone” (v. 22). (CSB)

**118:25** Prayer for the Lord to continue to save and sustain his people. (CSB)

Hebrew *hoshi‘ah na*, “Hosanna,” sung by the crowds on Palm Sunday (Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9; Jn 12:13). (TLSB)

**118:26** *who comes in the name of the LORD*. The one who with God’s help had defeated the enemies “in the name of the LORD” (see vv. 10–12). (CSB)

This song has entered into the traditions of Christian worship as part of the “The Sanctus” of the communion liturgy. (PBC)

*From the house of the LORD*. From God’s very presence (see 134:3). (CSB)

*bless you*. Plural in Hbr, indicating that the King/Messiah and all who join Him in His victory are blessed. (TLSB)

*you*. The plural may have been used to exalt the king (the plural was often used with reference to God), whom God had so singularly blessed. Alternatively, it may refer to those who have come with the king victoriously from the battle. The crowds who greeted Jesus at his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem used the words of vv. 25–26 (see Jn 12:13). (CSB)

**118:27** *made his light shine upon us*. An echo of the priestly benediction (see Nu 6:25). (CSB)

*With cords... up*. Apparently a call to complete the climax of the liturgy of a thank offering (see Lev 7:11–21), though others suggest the liturgy of the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>1`</sup> (CSB)

Cf Ex 34:6. The Lord reveals His steadfast love and salvation in the Messiah, enabling His people to worship. Although the last phrase is difficult to translate, it obviously points to worship. (TLSB)

**118:28–29** The final verse is like a parenthesis enclosing it as it began. (PBC)

**118:29** Psalm closes as it began, as a prayer of thanksgiving. (TLSB)

**Ps 118** We may sometimes wonder, “Where is the steadfast love of God?” Where is that “good action” of God for His people? He revealed His steadfast love in humble Israel, in the Child of the Virgin Mary. He veiled His greatest gift in what is least among people so that His gift might be received by all. • O Lord, when I cry, “Hosanna! Save now!” I know that I do not have to rise up to You, for You have lowered Yourself to save me. Amen. (TLSB)