

“Assignment 6 – Sermon – Psalm 114”

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Psalm 114 - “The Hymn of Deliverance”

There was once a forest fire in the Himalayas. In the midst of the fire, some firefighters saw a young deer running about in the forest. The firefighters hugged it to save him from being burned to death. The frightened deer struggled desperately, and suddenly jumped from the arms of the firefighter into the flames and burned into a pile of ashes. Do you think that the history of mankind is not like this? To leap from the arms of God into the flames, is this a leap into freedom? This is not jumping into freedom but into flames. Human beings forsake God and only want to be free. If people are not delivered from God, their own destruction is doomed.

Today we will read Psalm 114 and see how the power of God delivers mankind from destruction and danger.

Introduction

This is a hymn of praise that celebrates the special status of God’s people in his plan: The Lord is the one whom all nature obeys, and trembles before. God has chosen Israel to be his own, and he exerts his power on their behalf. Falling into the category of “hymn” or praise of God, its intention is reflected in its single imperative: “Tremble, O earth” (v.7). This brings together parallel story worlds. Exodus and creation are synchronized and both are made present for the reader.¹ The psalm mentions the exodus from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai that made Israel to be God’s “dominion”, the crossing of the Jordan River under Joshua’s leadership, and God’s provision for his people as they traveled through the wilderness.² It is suggested that Ps. 114 may include a cosmologic dimension. Adele Berlin suggested that this psalm “achieves a nexus

¹ Richard D. Nelson, “Psalm 114,” *Interpretation*, 63, no.2 (Apr 2009): 172, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002096430906300207?icid=int.sj-abstract.similar-articles.3>

² ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008, 1087.

between exodus and creation by combining the motif of creation with the motif of the exodus and its aftermath.”³

This psalm belongs to the Hallel Psalms (Ps. 113-118). Ps. 113 and 114 were (and still are) sung at the beginning of the meal of the Passover. Jesus Christ probably sang this psalm when he and his disciples celebrated the Passover, the Lord’s Supper. Each time when the Israelites celebrated the deliverance out of Egypt, they sang this Psalm.⁴ In a literary sense, the Hallel has a view of the reconstruction of the temple and the reconstitution of the community in Jerusalem as the people emerge from the Babylonian captivity.⁵ Some authors consider its composition as a post-exilic period, justifying this opinion by the conscious avoidance of any mention of God’s name, by its parallel with post-exilic metaphor (such as Isa 41:18), and by an implicit reference to the Babylonian exile.⁶

The Poetry Form

Ps. 114 is one of the clearest and most straightforward. Its’ sixteen lines form eight verses, each of them a couplet whose lines are parallel in meaning. They make four stanzas of four lines each, and the whole divides into two chiasmic halves.⁷

A people made to serve God (vv. 1-2)

The waters repulses, the mountains shaken (vv. 3-4)

The waters repulsed, the mountains shaken (vv. 5-6)?

³ Nissim Amzallag and Mikhal Avriel. “The Canonic Responsa Reading of Psalm 114 and its Theological Significance.” *OTE* 24/2 (2011): 306.

⁴ Hempenius, Evert J. Psalm 114 – Stand in Awe. 2015. www.christianstudylibrary.org.

⁵ Hassell C. Bullock, *Psalms vol. 2: Psalms 73-150*. Michigan: Baker Books, 2017, 322.

⁶ Gert T. M. Prinsloo, “Tremble before the Lord: Myth and History in Psalm 114.” *OTE* 11 (1998), 321.

⁷ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, 178.

A world made to serve God’s people (vv. 7-8)

Structure

Ps. 114 is a very beautiful piece of art of poetry. Two stories, the exodus from Egypt and the entrance into the Promised Land are interwoven into one poem to give a central message:

“tremble at the present of God: ⁸

	Exodus from Egypt	Entrance into the Promised Land
v. 1	When Israel came out of Egypt	The house of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue
v.2	Judah became God’s sanctuary	Israel his dominion
v. 3	The sea looked and fled	The Jordan turned back
v.4	The mountains skipped like rams	The hills like lambs
v.5	Why was it, O sea, that you fled	O Jordan, that you turned back,
v. 6	You mountains, skipped like rams,	You hills, like lambs?
v. 7	Tremble,	
	O earth, at the presence of the Lord,	At the presence of the God of Jacob,
v. 8	Who turned the rock into a pool	The hard rock into springs of water.

The Psalm can be read by two voices. The first voice reads column 1, and the second voice, as a kind of echo, column 2; they join together at v. 7, “Tremble”. There is widespread agreement that the psalm falls into four strophes of two bicola each. A clear chiastic pattern is noticeable. ⁹ Ps. 114 can be briefly analyzed as follows:

- 114:1-2 Israel’s exodus origins
- 114:3-4 Nature’s reaction to its adversary
- 114:5-6 Explanation sought
- 114:7-8 Answer: God’s theophany and power (p. 140)

⁸ Hempenius, Evert J. Psalm 114.

⁹ Leslie Allen, *Psalms 101-150. World Biblical Commentary vol. 21.* Dallas: Word Books, 2002, 140.

1. Set Free from the Bondage of Slavery (v. 1-2)

114 When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
² Judah became his sanctuary,
Israel his dominion.

The theme of the poem is Yahweh's gracious acts of salvation. He is the only God therefore Israel can trust in him and expect blessing from him.¹⁰ When Israel went forth out of Egypt, the Egyptian language was unintelligible to Israelites (Genesis 42:23). In the ancient world difference in language emphasized differences of race; and a stranger was presumably an enemy. The tyranny of oppressors seemed to be aggravated by the barrier that difference of language placed between them and their victims (Deuteronomy 28:49; Isaiah 28:11; Isaiah 33:19). "A people of the foreign tongue" faces two directions: Egypt, which they left centuries ago, and Babylonia, from which they have only recently departed. Deuteronomy 28:49-50 speaks of a "nation whose language you will not understand" to predict that Israel's disobedience will lead to conquest by a foreign power.¹¹ By means of the exodus, they became part of a new relationship, a holy people who worshiped Yahweh as their God.¹²

The word "sanctuary" and "dominion" (v. 2) (lit., "dominions") are parallel, and we should understand them to mean that Judah, the name by which the land was known, became the place of

¹⁰ Gert T. M. Prinsloo, "Psalms 114 and 115: One or two poems?" *OTE* 16/3 (2003), 680.

¹¹ Bullock, *Psalms vol. 2: Psalms 73-150*, 114.

¹² Allen, 141.

God's sanctuary and the place where God rules. The word pairs "Israel/house of Jacob" (114:1ab) and Judah/Israel' (114:2ab) describe the people as a whole.¹³

Vv.1-2 reminds the people of Israel that Yahweh brought about a complete turnabout in their fate by delivering them from Egypt (v.1) and making them a small and insignificant group of former slaves, his "sanctuary" (v.2). The people, and not a place, is Yahweh's sanctuary¹⁴ Yahweh reveals himself to and is present in the world, not through a statue like the other gods, but through his people.

In order to celebrate the 100th anniversary of American independence, the French invited famous architects and artists at that time to build a Statue of Liberty with a height of more than ten stories, which was transported to the east coast of the United States by large ships and stood at the mouth of the Hudson River into the Atlantic Ocean in 1886. When I came to ATS last year for my cohort study, I had a chance to visit the nearby island where the statue is located. It is very spectacular. She holds a precious document in her hand and the flame of freedom high in another hand. Over the past century, the American nation has forged Lincoln's ideal of democracy and freedom. Under the Statue of Liberty, there is a short poem engraved: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" Being set free from bondage is an everlasting desire of mankind. The Israelites' history reminds us that when we were lost by sin, God sent redemption through His beloved Son Jesus Christ as our deliverer. He called us into the kingdom of grace and freedom. Israel was then raised to be a peculiar people

¹³ Prinsloo, 318.

¹⁴ Ibid, 682.

and was consecrated to the service of the Lord. As children of God, we are called to live a life that is set apart from the influence of the world.

Remember Romans 12:2

² Do not be conformed to this world,^[a] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.^[b]

2. Creation Trembles in the Presence of the Lord (v. 3-4)

3 The sea looked and fled;

Jordan turned back.

4 The mountains skipped like rams,

the hills like lambs.

These two miracles at the Red Sea and the Jordan River are the beginning and the end of the journey of redemption that leads to the sanctuary in Judah. They are compared in Joshua 4:14 (ps. 66:6). We are not told what the sea “sees” (NIV: “looked”), which is enough to generate the questions of vv. 5-6. The poet’s answer filled the blank – the sea sees the appearance “of the God of Jacob” (114:7).¹⁵ The personified description in vv. 3-4 is associated with theophany and specifically the divine battle with a watery chaos, borrowed from the mythology of the Canaanite storm god and here used metaphorically and historicized.¹⁶ The allusion in v. 4 refers to Sinai and the giving of the law when Sinai “trembled violently” (Exod. 19:18). Here the verb “leaped” has the sense of “danced” and may imply a joyful celebration.¹⁷ For the jumping in v. 4, one can compare Ps 29:6 in a description of theophany, where the same verbal root is used. The similes of

¹⁵ Bullock, 325.

¹⁶ Allen, 142.

¹⁷ Bullock, 305.

domesticated animals indicate the unthreatening submission of natural obstacles and so the overwhelming power of the mysterious aggressor.¹⁸

When Jesus was hanged on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn into two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split (Matt. 27:51). During Jesus' resurrection, there was a great earthquake (Matt. 28:2). When God rescued Paul and Silas from the prison, there was a great earthquake (Acts 16:26). When God claims the Lordship and kingship of the world, God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings,^[a] peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail (Rev. 11:19).

When people are living in the presence of God, his mighty power manifests in people who are willing to surrender their lordship to God. That means the Spirit will first illuminate his sins, his self-righteousness, his lack of faith; sometimes, his unforgiveness and bitterness. Many of us today do not experience much of the power of God in our lives because we have accumulated a lot of garbage in our souls and have not truly yielded the Lordship of our lives to Jesus.

C. T. Studd was a godly missionary to China, India, and Africa. He is known as God's original CIA agent (China, India, and Africa). While on furlough, he visited the famed Keswick Convention where F. B. Meyer, the well-known Bible expositor, was preaching. Studd was allocated 15 minutes to give an impromptu report on his work in Africa. An amazing thing happened. In those few minutes, there was such a spiritual brokenness that people began to weep/ The Spirit of God moved in mighty power as Studd related his experience of serving the Lord in Africa. After the meeting, Meyer sought out Studd, and he said in effect, "How did you do that?" Studd replied, "Have you given all of the keys of your life to Jesus Christ?" Meyer realized that he had never done that. So, after the convention, he got along with God and surrendered all the keys

¹⁸ Allen, 142

of his life to him. But there was one key in Meyer's life that he cherished. It was his popularity and reputation as a preacher. He then heard God's Spirit speak to him at that moment, "If I am not Lord of all, I am not Lord at all!". Under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he surrendered all and found a new freshness and power in his ministry!¹⁹

Dear brothers and sisters, do you have keys you cherish so much that you do not want to give them to our Lord? You will not experience empowerment if you do not surrender all to Jesus. We will run spiritually dry and end up going through the motions with no spiritual power.

3. Seize the time to live for God (vv. 5-6)

⁵What ails you, O sea, that you flee?

O Jordan, that you turn back?

⁶O mountains, that you skip like rams?

O hills, like lambs?

Four sets of paired verses (vv. 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8) are set into concentric pattern. Vv. 1-2 and 7-8 focus on God and God's actions, while the topic of the inner sections, vv. 3-4 (third person narrative) and vv. 5-6 (second person questions), is the reaction of elements of the natural world.²⁰ A somewhat parallel concentric pattern pairs "sea" and "Jordan" (v.3) with "pool" and "spring" (v/8), while inside this appears a pairing of "mountains" and "hills" (vv.3-6) with "earth" (v.7) (173). The poetic parallelism is firmly synonymous and extremely regular.

Wiser comments that nature "becomes a visible witness to and interpreter of the divine epiphany." The questions are rhetorical, but the Psalmist's sense of history as present reality is a

¹⁹ Chan, Edmund. *Radical Discipleship. Five Defining Questions*. Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2014.

²⁰ Nelson, 173.

mark of his piety.²¹ The waters were repulsed and the mountains shook because Adonai, their Sovereign Lord, was making himself known.²² The natural elements are personified, as if the sea, the river, and the mountains were all terrified of the Lord. This imagery is designed to show the absolute power that God has over his own creation.²³ We may draw out the idea that the mountains and hills, at least in anticipation, already expect (and joyfully!) the presence of the Lord. One may wonder if Paul did not have this psalm in mind when he wrote that “the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed” (Rom. 8:19). This is a world in anticipation of God’s coming (Gal. 4:4). The fear will fade into joy.²⁴ So, how will you live today like Jesus is coming soon? How does knowing He could return any day affect your choices?

Tim McGraw’s song “Live Like You Were Dying.” In it, he describes some of the exciting “bucket list” things a man did after receiving some bad news about his health. He also chose to love and forgive people more freely—speaking to them more tenderly. The song recommends that we live well as if knowing our lives will end soon. This song reminds us that our time is limited. It’s important for us to not put off for tomorrow what we can do today because one day we’ll run out of tomorrow. This is particularly urgent for those who believe that Jesus may return at any moment. Jesus urges us to be ready, not live like the five “foolish” virgins who were caught unprepared when the bridegroom returned (Matt. 25:6–10). But McGraw’s song doesn’t tell the whole story. We who love Jesus will never run out of tomorrow. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by

²¹ Bullock, 326.

²² Michael Wilcock. *The Message of Psalms 73-150*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, 178.

²³ ESV, 1088.

²⁴ Bullock, 114.

believing in me will never die” (John 11:25–26). Our life in Him *never* ends. So, don’t live like you’re dying. Because you’re not. Rather, live like Jesus is coming. Because He is! ²⁵

4. Turn to God in All kinds of Difficulties (v. 7-8)

⁷Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,

at the presence of the God of Jacob,

⁸who turns the rock into a pool of water,

the flint into a spring of water.

These verses may give the answer to the questions of verses 5-6. The “earth” can mean the world and be viewed as inclusive of the items of creation already mentioned: the sea, the Jordan, mountains, and hills. Earth in v. 7 could mean “land”. ²⁶ Since the psalm is concerned with the new community that is forming after the exile ²⁷ The first word for the thus-far-unnamed deity is “Master” (Adon, “Lord”), this term carried the sense of “Master”, Master of creation, and Master of his people too. The second name is the singular term for “Elohim (‘eloah), which does not occur frequently in the Psalter (e.g. 50:22; 139:19). ²⁸ Tremble, O earth – as with 97:4, this directs the singers’ attention to how God can sweep away all opposition.²⁹

The allusion in v. 8 is likely to refer to the rock that Moses struck and from which water came out to slake the Israelites’ thirst (Deut. 8:15; 32:13; Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:10-11). Isaiah

²⁵ Mike Wittmer, “Live like Jesus is Coming,” Our Daily Bread (Sept 27, 2019) accessed Jun 19, 2020. <https://ourdailybread.ca/>

²⁶ Wilcock, 179.

²⁷ Bullock, 326.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ ESV, 1088.

employs this metaphor to describe the superlative effect of the return from Babylonian exile (Isa. 41:18). So, the parable concludes by assuring Israel that a supply of water will be abundant.³⁰ The Ironic question in v. 5-6 was a device to pave the way for the grand denouement of v. 7. The curtains are swept back to reveal Yahweh as the divine hero, the victorious warrior whose impact has been measured obliquely by the enemies' reactions (Ps. 97:4-5).³¹

Yahweh comes as one who on Israel's behalf has already demonstrated transforming power over nature. Yahweh both saves and keeps the covenant people (cf. Ps 77:16, 21), and Canaan had to submit to God's sovereign will for Israel's sake.³² The complete turnaround in Israel's fate is clearly stated in v.8, by the reference to "rock" that is turned into a "pool of water" and "flintstone" into a "spring of water". It refers to the miraculous flowing of water from the rock during Israel's wilderness sojourn.³³ On the mythological and metaphorical level, it stands for salvation, rejuvenation, and blessing (Mays 1994:363).³⁴ God showed his power in v. 7-8 over the elements in order to care for his people. God's people in each generation may sing this and take courage from his great power.³⁵

All barriers are overcome and the impossible is made possible by His great power. There is a story to the effect that a certain society in South Africa once wrote to David Livingston, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to know how to send other men to join you." Livingston replied, "If you have men who will come ONLY if they know there is a good

³⁰ Bullock, 326-327.

³¹ Allen, 142.

³² Ibid, 143.

³³ Prinsloo, "Psalms 114 and 115: One or two poems?" *OTE* 16/3 (2003), 668.

³⁴ Ibid, 682.

³⁵ ESV, 1088.

road, I don't want them. I want men who will come even if there is no road at all.”³⁶ Many today do not experience much of the power of God in their lives because they never try anything that requires the power of God.

Sometimes we are in situations where there is nothing to depend on other than God, wait until we cry out to Him with all of our heart and we say, “Lord, you have given me nothing to rely on except you!” and then we begin to realize that it is at that point he has given us the very thing we need. The Lord never said that the Christian life would be an easy one, just a life in that He would take care of all of our troubles. When it looks like your back is up against a wall, do not turn to the wall, but rather, turn to God who is our deliverance. He will deliver us from bondage or danger – from the people, places, material things, position, power, sex, money, and ungodly culture, the things that bound us up from walking in alignment with God's will. What is it that gives victory to God's children? How is it that the adversary is abashed? The Red Sea fled when the Red Sea saw the sanctuary was in Judah, and that the kingdom was with Israel. They saw the presence of the Lord, and they “tremble” (v. 7). All in all, if God is present, who can against us? “What shall we then say to these things?” If God be for us, who can be against us?”(Rom. 8:31).

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