



## Can Psalms save us? The Penultimate Psalm – Psalm 149



### Psalm 149

#### (1) Hallelujah!

Sing to **the Lord** a new song,  
His praise **in** the assembly of **the devoted**.

(2) Let **Israel** rejoice **in** its Maker;

**Zion's sons** exult **in their King**.

(3) **Let them praise** His name **in** dance,  
**with** timbrel and harp sing praises to Him.

(4) For **the Lord** delights **in** his people;  
He adorns the humble **with** salvation.

(5) Let **the devoted** revel **in glory**;  
sing for joy on their beds.

(6) Exultations of **God in** their throat,  
and a double-edged sword **in** their hand;

(7) **To exact** vengeance **on** the nations,  
punishment **on** the peoples;

(8) **To bind their kings in** fetters,  
and **their glorious ones in** iron chains,

(9) **To exact from** them justice as written –  
It is grandeur for all **His devoted ones**.  
**Hallelujah!**

### תהלים קל"ט

#### (א) הַלְלוּקָהּ

שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ  
תְּהַלְתֶּנוּ בַּקְהֵל הַחֲסִידִים :

(ב) יִשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֲשׂוֹ  
בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן יִגִּילוּ בְּמַלְכָּם :

(ג) יִהְלְלוּ שְׁמוֹ בְּמַחוּל  
בְּתֹף וּבְנֹר יִזְמְרוּ לוֹ :

(ד) כִּי רוּצָה ה' בְּעַמּוֹ  
יַפְאֵר עַנְוִים בִּישׁוּעָה :

(ה) יַעֲלִזוּ חֲסִידֵי יְהוָה בְּכַבֹּד  
יִרְנְנוּ עַל מִשְׁכְּבוֹתָם :

(ו) רוּמְמוֹת קַל בְּגָרוֹנָם  
וְחָרֵב פִּיפְיוֹת בְּיָדָם :

(ז) לַעֲשׂוֹת נִקְמָה בַּגּוֹיִם  
תּוֹכַחַת בַּל אַמִּים :

(ח) לְאַסּוֹר מַלְכֵיהֶם בְּזַקִּים  
וּנְכַבְּדֵיהֶם בְּכַבְּלֵי בְרִזָּל :

(ט) לַעֲשׂוֹת בָּהֶם מִשְׁפָּט כְּתוּב  
הַדָּר הוּא לְכָל חֲסִידָיו  
הַלְלוּקָהּ :

### There seems to be a three-part structure:

- (i) v.1 Introduction: a new song
- (ii) v.2-4 Israel praise God and God delights in them
- (iii) v.5-9 The devoted praise God too but, strangely, this leads to mighty acts of retribution

- Bookended by **Hallelujah**, as are all the last five psalms of the book; similar wording also in v.3
- Particularistic language in the second section: **Israel** and **Zion's sons**
- Triple used of **devoted**, unique to this psalm, signals the three sections
- God appears in each section (v.1,4,6)
- A kingly contrast: v.2 **Zion's sons** exult **in their King**  
v.8 **To bind their kings in** fetters
- And a related glorious contrast too: v.5 Let **the devoted** revel **in glory**  
v.8 and **their glorious ones in** iron chains
- Note contrast of "He adorns the humble" (v.4) with "Let the devoted revel in glory" (v.5)
- 15 times repeated use of Hebrew letter **bet** to *frame* words (1,2,2,3,3,4,4,5,6,6,7,7,8,8,9)
- Last three verses begin with forceful infinitives: **To exact... to bind... to exact**

## Psalm 148

1. **Hallelujah! Praise the Lord** from the heavens; praise Him in the heights. 2. **Praise Him**, all His angels, **praise Him**, all His hosts. 3. **Praise Him**, sun and moon, **praise Him**, all shining stars. 4. **Praise Him**, highest heavens, and the waters above the heavens. 5. **Let them praise** the name of **the Lord**, for He commanded and they were created. 6. He established them for ever and all time, issuing a decree that will never change. 7. **Praise the Lord** from the earth: sea monsters and all the deep seas; 8. Fire and hail, snow and mist, storm winds that obey His word; 9. Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars; 10. Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and winged birds; 11. Kings of the earth and all nations, princes and all judges of the earth; 12. Youths and maidens, old and young; 13. **Let them praise** the name of **the Lord**; for His name alone is sublime; His majesty is above earth and heaven. 14. He has raised the pride of His people, for the glory of all **His devoted ones**, **for the children of Israel**, the people close to Him. **Hallelujah!**

א הַלְלוּקָה הַלְלוּ אֶת ה' מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם  
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִרוֹמִים: ב הַלְלוּהוּ כָּל  
מַלְאָכָיו הַלְלוּהוּ כָּל צְבָאוֹ: ג הַלְלוּהוּ  
שָׁמֶשׁ וְיָרֵחַ הַלְלוּהוּ כָּל כּוֹכְבֵי אוֹר:  
ד הַלְלוּהוּ שְׁמַי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר  
מְעַל הַשָּׁמַיִם: ה הַלְלוּ אֶת שֵׁם ה' כִּי  
הוּא צִנְהָ וְנִבְרָאוֹ: ו וַיַּעֲמִידֵם לְעַד  
לְעוֹלָם חֶק נָתַן וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר: ז הַלְלוּ אֶת  
ה' מִן הָאָרֶץ תַּיִנִּינִים וְכָל תְּהוֹמוֹת: ח  
אֵשׁ וּבָרָד שֶׁלֵּג וְקִיטוֹר רוּחַ סַעְרָה עֹשֶׂה  
דְּבָרוֹ: ט הַהָרִים וְכָל גְּבוּעוֹת עֵץ פְּרִי  
וְכָל אֲרָזִים: י הַחֲזֵה וְכָל בְּהֵמָה רֹמֵשׁ  
וְצִפּוֹר כָּנָף: יא מַלְכֵי אֶרֶץ וְכָל לְאֻמִּים  
שָׂרִים וְכָל שֹׁפְטֵי אֶרֶץ: יב בַּחוּרִים וְגַם  
בְּתוּלוֹת זְקֵנִים עִם נְעָרִים: יג הַלְלוּ  
אֶת שֵׁם ה' כִּי נִשְׁגָּב שְׁמוֹ לְבַדּוֹ הוֹדוּ עַל  
אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם: יד וְיָרֵם קִרְוֹ לְעַמּוֹ תְּהַלֵּה  
לְכָל חַסִּידָיו לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עִם קִרְבּוֹ  
הַלְלוּקָה:

### Commentary of Hirsch to Psalm 149 [19<sup>th</sup> cent.]

Psalm 148 (the previous Psalm) sang of that time when all of God's creatures, without exception, will render God homage. At that time Israel will reach the goal of its mission at last, and it will rise again in its ancient splendour. Then all the others throughout the earth who have dedicated themselves to God with devotion will also receive the recognition that is justly theirs, and they will join Israel, the nation that has been close to God from the very beginning.

Psalm 149 has the same theme, but dwells upon it in greater detail. It calls upon us to sing *shir chadash*, the song of the new future day (c.f. Ps. 33:3), when not only the Jews, but also all the others who will then come near to God with devotion, will form one great assembly *bikhal chasidim* ('assembly of the devoted') and God's greatness as revealed in God's mighty acts will be proclaimed in their midst. Of course, it is Israel in particular that will have cause to rejoice and to give unrestrained expression to its gladness (v.2-4), but this cannot come to pass without the execution of the Divine judgment of rulers and nations which had been announced long ago (v.7-9).

However, that exultation will not be restricted to Jews alone (v.5-6). The *chasidim* ('devoted') of all the nations, all those, regardless of nationality, who have recognised God before and have quietly dedicated themselves to God, and even all those who will come to know and worship God only then, will have reason to rejoice together with Israel. For together with Israel, they, too, will come to honour. Through their sincere homage to God they will be protected from the hostility of men as from adverse

implication in the approaching Divine judgment. Indeed, this Divine judgment will award to their pure endeavours that recognition which had been denied them on earth until now...

Even as Israel in particular has cause for rejoicing (v.2-4), so, too, the *chasidim* among all the other nations of the earth will have reason to exult in honour, or in the honour that will come to them now (v.5-6). For now, even as Psalm 147:10-11 has taught us, Israel's return to its ancient splendour will clearly prove that the true greatness of men and nations does not lie in political tyranny and power which men have always worshiped, but that man's genuine salvation, which is God's alone to give, can be built only upon loyalty to duty, founded upon trust in the Lord. Because this truth had not been generally accepted as such before, the *chasidim* of the non-Jewish nations also did not receive the recognition justly due them from their fellow-men...

Before unreserved homage to the Lord will be paid throughout the earth, satisfaction must first be exacted from the nations for the crimes which they have committed against other nations, and states must be chastised for the sins of which they have been guilty against individuals (v.7-9). First the kings of the nations and the rulers of the people must be made to desist from putting their power and position to unlawful use, and the judgment which has so often been heralded in the Sacred Scriptures must be executed upon them.

*hadar hu*, "it is grandeur" (v.9) – This Divine judgment itself constitutes honour and recognition for all those among mankind who with loving devotion commit all their lives and endeavours to the Lord alone.