

Responsorial Psalm 2nd Sunday of Easter C

[Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24](#)

R. (1) Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Let the house of Israel say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let the house of Aaron say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His mercy endures forever."

R. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

I was hard pressed and was falling,
but the LORD helped me.

My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.

The joyful shout of victory
in the tents of the just:

R. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.

This is the day the LORD has made;
let us be glad and rejoice in it.

R. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Jerome Biblical Commentary

A thanksgiving liturgy. This Ps has received many varying interpretations. As a whole, it is thanksgiving liturgy, which is structured in three main sections: 1-4, a thanksgiving song divided between several choruses (Israel, Aaron, God-fearers); 5-14, a thanksgiving song of an individual, that has affinity to the so-called gate or entrance liturgies (Pss 15, 24) and in which a victory song (15-18) is to be found; 22-29, a proclamation and summons of a processional. It is tempting to understand the "I" as the king, who heads a public thanksgiving and procession to the Temple. Jewish tradition associated the poem with the Feast of Tabernacles. **1-4.** The whole community is

addressed in 1, and in 2-4 a summons is issued to each of three groups (also mentioned in that order in 115:9-11).**5.** If the “I” is the king, he is not the one who addressed the groups in 1-4. He begins here a thanksgiving Ps in which he expresses his great trust in the Lord (6-9), who has “set him free” from his “foes.” There is a certain sapiential style (“it is better...”) to his acknowledgment of Yahweh as the rescuer and in his recommendation of trust in God.**10.** *all the nations:* These are not identified; once more, he begins to describe his distress and the Lord’s saving intervention. There seem to be echoes of the royal Pss (18:29-30, 36-39; 27:3).**15.** *shout of victory:* Thus begins the victory song, which has been incorporated into the prayer; it associates the psalmist’s salvation with that of the community (“tents of the just”). *right hand:* God’s instrument of victory (cf. Skehan, *CBQ* 25 [1963] 94-110).**17.** *I shall not die:* Physical death is meant, and a full life on earth is implied.**18.** *chastised:* Reflects a view of suffering that is similar to Prv 3:11f.**19-20.** *gates of justice:* The gates of the Temple, where the justice of the one who enters is questioned (Pss 15:1ff.; 24:3 ff.) and through which only “the just shall enter.” A similar concept of the Temple gates exists in Mesopotamian literature (cf. Kraus, *op. cit.*).**22.** *the stone:* A symbol of the psalmist, who has just related the story of his distress, and of the restoration by the Lord. These lines must be spoken by those (“our eyes”) who accompany him to the Temple to offer thanksgiving. The NT interpretation (Mt 21:42; Acts 4:11) sees a more eminent fulfillment in Christ.**24.** *day the Lord has made:* The day of his saving intervention.**25.** *grant salvation:* The equivalent is “hosanna!”**26-27.** *blessed...:* These lines fit into the gate or entrance liturgy.**27a.** A kind of confession or “credo.” **27bc.** A command given to the community to execute a procession “to the horns of the altar.”**28.** The psalmist begins again, and in 29 he repeats the opening verse.

Haydock’s Catholic Commentary

The psalmist praiseth God for his delivery from evils; putteth his whole trust in him; and foretelleth the coming of Christ.

Ver. 1. *Alleluia* is borrowed from the end of the former psalm in Hebrew. Our Saviour and the apostles determine us to explain this solely of the Messiah, though should would also see another literal sense, applicable to the victories of David, or of the captives, at their return, over God or Cambyses. (Berthier) --- This supposition seems

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly

f. and the vollowing verse

ff. and the following verses

NT New Testament

very probable, 2 Esdras vi. 16. Yet the Jews saw that some passages belonged to the Messiah, and were accustomed to use ver. 26., in praying for his manifestation. This psalm is very pompous, and in the dramatic style, (Calmet) though this is not certain. (Berthier) --- *Praise*. Or "confess," and praise God for his great mercies. (Worthington)

Ver. 2. *That he is good*, is not here in Hebrew. The Septuagint insert the words in the two next verses. The people, priests, and all who fear God among the Gentiles must praise him (Psalm cxiii. 11.; Calmet) particularly *now* under the new law, since they have received greater benefits. (Worthington) --- Our Saviour seems to allude to this passage, observing that God alone is good, (Luke xviii. 28.) to intimate that the man who gave him that title, must also acknowledge his divinity. (St. Augustine) (Berthier)

Ver. 5. *Trouble*. Both spiritual and temporal. (Worthington) --- *Enlarge me*, or set me at liberty in a spacious place. (Calmet)

Ver. 7. *My helper*. Hebrew, "to me among the helpers," (Montanus) or most powerful, (Houbigant) and the mover of all, who lend assistance. Jesus Christ prayed with tears, and was heard for his reverence, Hebrews v. 7. We must expect afflictions, (Job xxxiii.) and must have recourse to God.

Ver. 9. *Princes*. For vain is the salvation of man, Psalm lix. 31., and Jeremias xvii. 5. (Calmet) --- So neither can man hurt those whom God protects, Romans viii. 31. (Haydock)

Ver. 10. *Revenged*. Hebrew, "I have broken them," (Calmet) or "will render to them." (Houbigant) --- This may relate to David, Nehemias, Christ, and his martyrs. (Calmet) --- The Church, or any just man in the midst of enemies, confidently hopes for victory. (Worthington) --- None shall prevail against Christ and his Church. (Berthier)

Ver. 12. *Bees*. Septuagint add, "do a honeycomb." But this is not in the original. --- *Burned*. Hebrew, "were extinguished." The Septuagint and Chaldean seem to have read better, as it would then be useless to add, as is the former verse, "but....I will destroy them;" and therefore Protestants and Duport here put, "for," &c., (Berthier) though the *ci* be still used. (Haydock) --- The rage of the enemy is well described by the similitudes of bees and fire. (Calmet) --- Christ was attacked with mortal hatred by the Jews. (St. Augustine) --- The fury of the multitude was fierce, but short-lived, as in God I have overcome them all. (Worthington)

Ver. 13. *Fall*. I was very near falling. Hebrew, "pushing thou hast pushed me that," &c. (Menochius) --- "My sin has strongly pushed me." (Chaldean) (Calmet) --- Those who stick to the Hebrew suppose, that the psalmist addressed the chief of his enemies. But a letter or two may have been added, as St. Jerome, Felix, &c., admit not the second person. Houbigant prefers, "they have pushed me." (Berthier) --- By God's grace I was prevented from yielding to the force of temptation. (Worthington)

Ver. 15. *Just.* Such were the Jews by their vocation, though many answered very ill the designs of God. (Calmet) --- Christians thank God for their redemption, and confessors are full of joy in their prisons and torments, Acts xvi. 25. (Berthier)

Ver. 16. *Me* is not in Hebrew. All salvation is from God. (Berthier) --- *Right hand*, repeated thrice, insinuates the blessed Trinity, as the word *Lord* is applied to Christ, who effected man's redemption with singular efficacy. (Worthington)

Ver. 17. *Live.* The captives were dying daily, so that this rather belongs to the Church of Christ. (Berthier) (John viii. 51.)

Ver. 18. *Chastised me, severely.* (Haydock) --- Septuagint may also signify, "has instructed me," (Calmet) by means of tribulation. (Haydock) --- God chastiseth as a parent, that his children may not perish eternally. (Worthington)

Ver. 19. *Justice.* Of the temple, where the undefiled Israelites alone can enter, (Psalm xiv. 1.) or the land of Judea, Isaias xxvi. The Fathers explain it of the Church, and of heaven, to which none can be admitted, who have not departed in the communion of saints, (St. Chrysostom; St. Augustine) having walked in the narrow path. (Eusebius) --- Christ styles himself *the way*, (Haydock) and the *gate*. (Berthier) (Apocalypse xxii. 14.) -- Formerly penitents were not allowed to be present during all the Mass; and heretics, &c., are cut off from the bosom of the Church. (Calmet) --- The just here beg for instruction, which they promise to follow. (Worthington)

Ver. 22. *Corner.* This was a sort of proverb, and is applied to David, Zorobabel, or the Jewish nation; but they can only be considered as figures of Christ, in whom this prediction was fulfilled, when he established his Church, and made one people of those who were before divided, Isaias xxviii. 16., Matthew xxi. 42., and Acts iv. 11. (Calmet) --- He was rejected by most of the Jews; yet he chose some of them, who, with the Gentiles, formed his Church. (Haydock) --- This all Christians now confess. (Worthington) --- The Pharisees pretended to build for the glory of God, when they opposed the designs of Christ, which, nevertheless, succeeded. They could not object to his application of this text, as they would have done, if it had been already verified in David, &c. (Berthier) --- He has laid the foundation. We must be *living stones*, if we would co-operate in this heavenly building, 1 Peter ii. 5.

Ver. 24. *Day.* Of grace. (Worthington) --- The Church often repeats this during the paschal time, though God is equally the author of all days. (Haydock) See Ephesians iv. 30., and John viii. 56.

Ver. 25. *Save me.* The person is not expressed in Septuagint. Or, (Calmet) Hebrew *hoshiha na*, "salvifica nunc." (Montanus) --- *Na* means likewise, "I beg." (Haydock) --- *Quæso, Domine, salvum fac, obsecro: Quæso, Domine, fac prospere agere, obsecro.* This formed the acclamations of the Jewish children, *Hosanna*, Matthew xxi. 9. The branches which were carried at the feast of tabernacles, were also styled Hosannas.

(Calmet) --- When Christ entered Jerusalem, the children sung his praises, holding palms. (Worthington)

Ver. 26. *We.* The Levites, (Calmet) or Christ and his ministers pronounce this blessing, (Worthington) or the psalmist gives it, after having expressed his thanks for the graces brought by the Messiah. (Berthier)

Ver. 27. *Us.* Christ, *who comes in the name of the Lord*, "is himself God," our instructor. (St. Augustine) (Titus ii. 11.) (Berthier) --- *Day.* The feast of tabernacles, for which this psalm was probably composed. The Jews dwelt under tents. (Calmet) (Leviticus xxiii. 40., and 2 Esdras vii. 15.) --- *Altar.* Hebrew, "Bind a festival with cords unto the horns," &c. To make sense, the Chaldean inserts, bind *the lamb for the* festival. But this Houbigant ridicules, and he believes that the solemn entrance of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem is here foretold. Scarcely any prediction in the Old Testament is more clearly verified in the new, Matthew xxi. 8. Hebrew *Bahabothim* certainly means, "in ramis opacis," and St. Jerome translates, "frequent the solemnity in shady boughs." (Berthier) --- The victims were never tied to the altar, but slain in the porch of the northern gate, Ezechiel xl. 39. (Calmet)

Ver. 28. *I will,* &c. This might be in the copies of the Septuagint. It occurs [in] ver. 26., (Berthier) though it was here retrenched in the Hexapla. (Calmet)

Ver. 29. *For ever.* Praise is our first and last duty, ver. 1. (Worthington)

Daily Study Bible Series (non-Catholic)

THE LORD RECEIVES A HEATHEN (I)

Psalms 118:1–14

¹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his steadfast love endures for ever!

²Let Israel say,

"His steadfast love endures for ever."

³Let the house of Aaron say,

"His steadfast love endures for ever."

⁴Let those who fear the Lord say,

“His steadfast love endures for ever.”

⁵Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me free.

⁶With the Lord on my side I do not fear.
What can man do to me?

⁷The Lord is on my side to help me;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

⁸It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to put confidence in man.

⁹It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to put confidence in princes.

¹⁰All nations surrounded me;
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!

¹¹They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!

¹²They surrounded me like bees,
they blazed like a fire of thorns;
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!

¹³I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the Lord helped me.

¹⁴The Lord is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.

This is one of the great missionary psalms. It follows directly from the command to love the heathen made clear in Ps. 117.

It covers an act of worship in which a pagan is received into the fellowship of the people of God. He is welcomed by the priest of the day as he invites the congregation, in the words of verse 1, to say with him the great liturgical statement that we find repeated so often in the Psalms (e.g. 107, 136).

Then in verses 2–4 three groups, standing as they are outside the gates of the Temple, are bidden to repeat this basic creed: “God’s unshakeable Covenant love continues into eternity.” The three groups are, first, Israel, the people of God as a whole; second, the “house of Aaron”, that is, the priestly caste; and third, the proselytes, the converts, who have been invited to be present at this special service. We hear much about proselytes in the NT. These were Gentiles who had been greatly attracted to the faith of the synagogue, to the *mishpat* of God revealed through Moses, God’s given way of life to be lived out in fellowship and in love for one’s neighbour. This kind of life was so different from the welter of religions around the many heathen gods of the time, and the immoralities rampant in the pagan life of the Roman Empire. These people were known in Paul’s day as “God-fearers”, both men and women, just as they are here at verse 4. Yet, we must note, if God had not placed Israel (the Church of God) there first, had not called her into being in the first place, whither could a proselyte have turned to find the Living God?

Verses 5–9. The convert has probably been taught the required responses by his village Levite before coming up to Jerusalem. We are not to picture the Israelite people all living together as a homogeneous nation. What was said of Abraham a thousand years before was still true in the psalmist’s day: “At that time the Canaanites were in the land” (Gen. 12:6; 2 Kings 17:24–40). The heathen inhabitants of Palestine continued to dwell there right up until Jesus’ day, for Galilee in the first Christian century was known as “Galilee of the Gentiles”. In other words, this proselyte had not come from a foreign country. He had been living next door to a member of the people of God.

Now that he has come up to Jerusalem, therefore, this particular enquirer has been invited to speak about his experience of *the steadfast love* of Israel’s God. We see that he had been taught what Ps. 107 says in its several vignettes of God, that God’s love *sets free* those who are *in distress* (from what had hemmed them in, squeezed them in, literally). But now he has Israel’s God, *Yahweh*, on his side, and so he dares to declare: “What can man do to me?” (compare rom. 8:31; Heb. 13:6). For now he has room to breathe, he is free of the horrible fears that overwhelm heathen people in every land of the world. An agnostic psychiatrist or social worker would not have been able to set him free. Instead of looking for secular help, what the enquirer did was to *call upon the Lord, and the Lord answered me and set me free*. And now, he adds, *the Lord is on my side to help me* (verse 7). The verb used in this verse is often associated with the coming of God’s Spirit in power; so the convert proclaims that the Lord is now helping him to face the battle against those very powers of evil which he had seen manifested in the heathendom he had abandoned.

Verses 10–14, *Israel echoes his cry*. The congregation speaks as one “I”, perhaps feeling themselves to be in the shoes of their first king, David, the warrior king. They could say so, because the phrase *cut them off* can mean “cut off their foreskins”, just as David did with the Philistines (1 Sam. 18:25–27), *for the Lord was with David* (verse 28). The figure of speech is crude and the thought is triumphalist. But the significance of the imagery in that old story was that before David could be accounted worthy to marry King Saul’s daughter he had to destroy (or, if he had been a North American Indian, scalp) two hundred enemy warriors. Israel, too, in seeking to fight the Lord’s battles, found she could cut off her enemies, even though surrounded by them on every side as if by bees (Deut. 1:44).

Verse 14 sounds like a chorus that everyone sang together. It is on a worthier level than the verses preceding it. In it they declare that God is (a) *my strength*, that is, his Spirit moves upon my spirit; (b) *my song*, the one that God gave my forefathers at the Reed Sea (Hebrew never calls it the Red Sea, but *yam suph*, which means Sea of Reeds). This song is now quoted as it was sung by Moses and the people of Israel (Exod. 15:2) because it allowed the worshippers to declare that (c) *my salvation* was God himself when he rescued us from slavery and death.

THE LORD RECEIVES A HEATHEN (II)

Psalms 118:15–25

¹⁵Hark, glad songs of victory

in the tents of the righteous:

“The right hand of the Lord does valiantly,

¹⁶the right hand of the Lord is exalted,

the right hand of the Lord does valiantly!”

¹⁷I shall not die, but I shall live,

and recount the deeds of the Lord.

¹⁸The Lord has chastened me sorely,

but he has not given me over to death.

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness,

that I may enter through them

and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰This is the gate of the Lord;

the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹I thank thee that thou hast answered me

and hast become my salvation.

²²The stone which the builders rejected

has become the head of the corner.

²³This is the Lord's doing;

it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day which the Lord has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵Save us, we beseech thee, O Lord!

O Lord, we beseech thee, give us success!

Verses 15–20, *The proselyte arrives at the Temple gates*. Hark! Listen!—cheers of victory *in the tents* (the people's homes in the city, the word used to remind them that life is still a pilgrimage as it used to be in the days of the Wilderness in the time of Moses). These were the cheers of *the righteous*. To us, that sounds rather like the “self-righteous”. But in the Bible it means the believing community, whom God had long since “put right” with himself. Note that we find the same language used “above” as is here used “below” when, in Our Lord's words, the angels cheered for “one sinner that repents” (Luke 15:7). So the “battle” goes on above and below at the same time. Thus when a group of priests repeats very loudly, so that all can hear in the assembled crowd:

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly,

The right hand of the Lord is exalted,

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly!

they are using the same language as that which described what God did when he overcame Pharaoh and brought Israel out of slavery into freedom. And here it is used of just one poor heathen enquirer!

But he has been saved out of death and destruction. He knows this, for in his excitement he now exclaims: “I am *not* to *die*!” (I believe that, *ki*) “I am going to *live*, so

that I can tell others about the *mighty deeds of the Lord*. The Lord has ‘educated’ me (through suffering) very drastically, but what is so wonderful, *he has not given me over to death.*”

Verses 19–20. A priest has evidently coached him on what to say next. He turns and looks at the huge outer gates of the Temple, and shouts aloud: *Open to me the gates of righteousness* (the realm of salvation, of the new life) *that I may enter through them, and give thanks to Yahweh*. Whereupon the priest opens the gates and, pointing, invites him in with the words: *This gate* belongs to Yahweh; the “saved” (those whom Yahweh has already “put right”) *enter by it* (the emphasis being “and by it alone”). What this psalm is giving us, then, is a theology of God’s saving love in an acted parable, one that later on was turned into a poem that was intended to be sung.

Verse 21, *He is in!* He is now one with all God’s redeemed people. In entering the Temple he has entered into life. There have been no questions asked of him, whether he has lived a good life or anything else. He enters the Holy Place merely by responding to grace alone.

His heart is full. He simply must show his gratitude. So he thanks God for the experience of the journey he has travelled before reaching the Temple gates, when God had “disciplined” him, had “humbled” him, and had “made him get rid of his self-righteousness” (this rather than RSV’s *answered*). And then, surprisingly, he adds, “Thou hast become the victory for me.” He seems to have been witnessing to the fact that he has not saved himself from his own self-righteousness: it is God who has done it for him—and he a mere pagan foreigner! But now, wonder of wonders, he is a new creation!

Verses 22–25. Various voices now back up our new “member”. Perhaps the issue of the corner-stone, which took the great weight of the Temple, was much debated when the Second Temple was being planned. A massive block had at first been rejected, but finally had been used to hold up the south-west corner of the outer wall to keep the whole edifice from sliding down into the Valley of Hinnom. This latter name becomes Gehenna in the LXX and so too in the Greek of the NT. It was used as a rubbish dump and was always burning, so it gradually became an alternative word for what we call hell-fire. The corner stone, then, was to keep God’s people from sliding down to hell!

This use of the stone that the builders had rejected was God-inspired, it was not a sign of man’s ingenuity. At Isa. 28:16 Isaiah had earlier used a similar metaphor when he spoke of the *tested, precious, cornerstone, a sure foundation* that God had set in Zion. No doubt that metaphor was in the psalmist’s mind when he composed these verses, which are quoted no less than three times in the Gospels and Acts, as well as in Ephesians and 1 Peter, as a marvellously apt prophecy of what happened in the Cross

RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

LXX The Septuagint or Greek Version of the OT.

of Jesus. It may even be that the keystone of the old Solomon's Temple had at first been lost in the rubble of the destruction in 587 B.C. but had been found and produced in Zerubbabel's day with great excitement (see Haggai 1:12–15). Be that as it may, the precious nature of this cornerstone was to reveal the continuity of God's *marvellous doings*. Each day as the people passed the Temple walls a new revelation was offered them within the whole long series of miracles of revelation since the days of Moses.

The congregation next acclaim, with the thought of their new convert in mind, *This is the day in which the Lord has acted* (this rather than *made*). *Let us rejoice and be glad in it*. Each day that a heathen comes home to God is a miracle of God's grace, as Paul put it succinctly: "Now (today) is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). See also Luke 19:9. They have all just beheld a miracle of grace when one sinner was brought home to God. So they add: *Save us too, O Lord! Keep us always right with you. Make our lives successful* in the battles still ahead of us. A century after the building of the Second Temple Nehemiah took this verse and applied it to himself (Neh. 1:11). Let us do so *this very day* in our turn.

THE LORD RECEIVES A HEATHEN (III)

Psalm 118:26–29

²⁶Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord!

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

²⁷The Lord is God,

and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches,

up to the horns of the altar!

²⁸Thou art my God, and I will give thanks to thee;

thou art my God, I will extol thee.

²⁹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

for his steadfast love endures for ever!

We can understand how the Church throughout the centuries has chosen to sing this psalm particularly at Easter. At verse 17 we heard the assurance of God's gift of life. So the Church later coupled verse 24 with verse 17 and declared on Easter day: "This is the day when the Lord has acted" to bring life to man, life out of death, even death on a Cross. And the Church has continued to declare: Because of God's act on this day we shall be able to sing his praise to all eternity. The words of v. 25, *Save us, we beseech*

thee, taken all together form the one Hebrew word *Hosanna*. This, we will remember, was the very word that was shouted by the crowd when Jesus entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Verses 26–27. Next comes the festive procession. It had formed up inside the main gate that led into the great outer courtyard, but now it advances to enter through the inner gate to the Holy Place. A priest welcomes the procession there with the words of verse 26a. (Interestingly, this welcome is written today in Hebrew at the arrival platform of Jerusalem’s railway station.) The people thereupon reply with the words of verse 26b, “We are in it!” Whereupon the priest proclaims: *The Lord is God, and he has given us light*—for of course God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Then the priest gives an order that greatly excites the worshippers. He invites ordinary “laymen” to come right through the barrier between them and the altar. (This is what Martin Luther did at the Reformation, when he invited the congregation to ignore the “fence” before the altar, in that all laymen are priests to God.) They were to bring branches in with them with which to decorate the four horns of the altar. These horns stuck out, one at each of its corners. They were intended to be grasped only when a man, fleeing from justice, could push his way right in and implore the justice of God, which is always mercy. Thus these horns actually preached the unspeakable love of God. At the Feast of Booths (according to the Jewish *Mishnah* or great Commentary on Scripture produced around A.D. 200) after the sacrifices had been offered, once a year *priests* in procession entered the holy place carrying willow branches and singing as they circled the altar: *Save now we beseech thee; send now prosperity* (compare verse 25). But this picture is different. Here God allows ordinary lay-folk, of course now including the proselyte to the faith, to come crowding into that one awesome spot on earth where he had caused his Name to dwell!

How did the crowd understand the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday when they strewed his way with palm branches and sang the words of verse 25? Was Jesus, in their eyes, their chosen Priest who was on the way to enter the Holy of Holies, not only on their behalf, but on behalf of all the heathen nations of the earth?

Verses 28–29. The proselyte finally declares exultingly: *Thou art my God...* Whereupon all those good, ordinary folk who have accompanied him in, answer him with the cultic cry with which the psalm began, and which perfectly expresses the joy God’s people possess in believing in the living and everlasting God.

Taken as a whole this psalm never loses sight of the fact that all Israelites are one. In 932 B.C., at the death of Solomon, Israel split into two kingdoms, but still they remained one Israel. Three hundred and seventy years later Ezekiel saw that the “lost sheep of the house of Israel”, the northern kingdom destroyed in 722 B.C., were still one with the sheep of Judah that had remained in the fold, for the latter too were “lost” in the Exile (Ezek. 37:15–23). Then again, after another six hundred years, when Israel had once more been split in two in schism, into Jews and Christians, Paul assures us that God (using the language that we get in the psalms) cannot go back on his Covenant

world, his promise of love, so that in Christ both Jews and Christians are still, *together*, the one Israel of God (Rom. 9:4–5; 11:29; Gal. 3:28–29; Eph. 2:14–22). We see in this psalm that that unity is to be preserved even when the heathen Gentile world enters into it, there to find their rest and their home. Paul says the same in Col. 3:11. One thing is sure, the Church is not “the new Israel”, as some thoughtless people declare. Nowhere in the NT is such a thing ever suggested. The Church is the people of the New Covenant that God has made with Israel (Jer. 31:31), and so with the whole people of God. We must never forget that the word “Israel” has no plural.

We have noted before Martin Luther’s fascination with the *Hallel* psalms. He observes that the whole action in this Ps. 118 is sacramental, meaning that it shows us what God is like. Luther recalls that Christ alone has entered the Holy Place as our High Priest, so that, as a result, we dare to grasp the horns of the altar, but only through his doing so first by ascending the Cross. He recalls that Christ said, “I am the light of the world” (compare verse 17), and that Christ alone has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He reminds us that in Isa. 56, a chapter which deals with the period to which this psalm alludes when the cornerstone of the Temple was being relaid, the question of proselytes being allowed to worship in the Temple was being warmly debated. Finally, Luther lists all the issues arising from this psalm which illuminate the work of Christ who, on the evening when, with his disciples, he “sang a hymn”, knew that his death was for the redemption of even the heathen of the world.

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¹Knight, G. A. F. 2001, c1982. *Psalms : Volume 2*. The Daily study Bible series. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville