

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: November 13: Psalm 118: Some Notes

Psalm 118

The Message

118 ¹⁻⁴ Thank GOD because he's good,
because his love never quits.

Tell the world, Israel,

"His love never quits."

And you, clan of Aaron, tell the world,

"His love never quits."

And you who fear GOD, join in,

"His love never quits."

⁵⁻¹⁶ Pushed to the wall, I called to GOD;
from the wide open spaces, he answered.

GOD's now at my side and I'm not afraid;
who would dare lay a hand on me?

GOD's my strong champion;
I flick off my enemies like flies.

Far better to take refuge in GOD
than trust in people;

Far better to take refuge in GOD
than trust in celebrities.

Hemmed in by barbarians,
in GOD's name I rubbed their faces in the dirt;

Hemmed in and with no way out,
in GOD's name I rubbed their faces in the dirt;

Like swarming bees, like wild prairie fire, they hemmed me in;
in GOD's name I rubbed their faces in the dirt.

I was right on the cliff-edge, ready to fall,
when GOD grabbed and held me.

GOD's my strength, he's also my song,
and now he's my salvation.

Hear the shouts, hear the triumph songs
in the camp of the saved?

"The hand of GOD has turned the tide!

The hand of GOD is raised in victory!

The hand of GOD has turned the tide!"

¹⁷⁻²⁰ I didn't die. I *lived!*

And now I'm telling the world what GOD did.

GOD tested me, he pushed me hard,
but he didn't hand me over to Death.

Swing wide the city gates—the *righteous* gates!
I'll walk right through and thank GOD!

This Temple Gate belongs to GOD,
so the victors can enter and praise.

²¹⁻²⁵ Thank you for responding to me;
you've truly become my salvation!

The stone the masons discarded as flawed

is now the capstone!
This is GOD's work.
We rub our eyes—we can hardly believe it!
This is the very day GOD acted—
let's celebrate and be festive!
Salvation now, GOD. Salvation now!
Oh yes, GOD—a free and full life!

²⁶⁻²⁹ Blessed are you who enter in GOD's name—
from GOD's house we bless you!
GOD is God,
he has bathed us in light.
Adorn the shrine with garlands,
hang colored banners above the altar!
You're my God, and I thank you.
O my God, I lift high your praise.
Thank GOD—he's so good.
His love never quits!

The Message (MSG)

Related Hymns: The church's one foundation; Christ is made the sure foundation; Abide with me; He hideth my soul; Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might; Good Christians all rejoice and sing; the strife is o'er, the battle done; the day of resurrection;

Paula Gooder is particularly useful as a guide to this psalm – very much a praise psalm. Traditionally, in later Jewish practice, used at both Passover and Feast of Tabernacles; written to be sung by priests and people; containing both individual and collective celebration. You may well recognise New Testament quotes of 118: e.g. Hebrews 13.6, Matthew 21.9 and 42, Peter 2. 4 and 7. God's "hesel" is God's steadfast and unwavering love. "Hosanna" is the Greek letters for the Hebrew "Hoshea na" – in Hebrew the message is "Save now!", while the Greek Hosanna has become a shout of praise for having been saved. Hence the Matthew 21 account of Jesus riding into Jerusalem; and all that the Hosanna shout implied to both friends and foes. The "corner stone" (applied to Jesus by Christians as formerly applied to Israel itself) can be either the base stone or the central arch stone – in either case crucial to the whole building.

I'm not a wild excitement person, still less a collective wild excitement person: concert, political meeting, sporting fixture – at best a slight smile or gentle clap. As the enthusiasm (for or against) swells, I opt out and want to go home. My over the top celebration is a cup of coffee and a piece of cake alone in the garden. Where do you stand on this? The celebrations at the end of WW2 struck me and my family as understandable but undesirable: too many people dead and disabled to be partying. We had a discharged soldier living with us who went up to London to celebrate with the whisky my mother gave him. It was actually cold tea, to keep things under control. (My father was a WW1 fighter and a WW2 air raid warden.)

In some wars, it is entirely understandable that one side (or both sides) sees "God on our side". The defeat of the Spanish Armada was celebrated with medals saying "God blew and their ships were scattered"....as indeed the wind did and the ships were. But should we ever dare to claim more than that God is a restraint on our brutality? Kenya in the news at the moment: Mau Mau

(nationalists/terrorists) extremely brutal; but so, at times, were the British forces in repressing the Mau Mau. I remember meeting a German boy who was just about old enough to carry a gun as WW2 drew to a close. He met English soldiers, and the officer in charge said to him "Just give me your gun, sonny, and go home in peace". That sounds like God in war.