

Psalm 114 NKJV

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Psalms 113—118 are known as the Hallel Psalms, or simply the Hallel (Hallel means “praise”). While many psalms praise God, this set of psalms became associated with Passover due to the mention of the deliverance from Egypt in Psalm 114. The focus on the exodus is the reason these psalms are also sometimes referred to as the Egyptian Hallel. These psalms were recited at Jewish feasts, especially Passover. Depending upon which tradition was being followed, one or two of the psalms were recited before the meal, and the rest after. The Hallel Psalms were a fitting passage to be included in Passover celebrations and fitting for today’s New Covenant believer to celebrate salvation from the power and the penalty of sin.

Introduction: God’s power demonstrated in the Exodus

A highly poetic description of the Exodus, this psalm emphasizes both God’s power displayed (verses 3-6), and His provision supplied (verse 8). The God of Israel’s deliverance (verses 1-2) is still their God (verse 7), the implication being that He can still expand His power. The author of this psalm is unknown.

This psalm celebrates God for delivering His people from bondage and leading them to the Promised Land, with references to several of the wilderness miracles, including the parting of the waters (Red Sea, Jordan), and the “water from the rock” (Exodus 17:5-6; Num. 20:8-11). God’s gracious work is spoken of with exultation, joy, and triumph.

The psalmist used poetic metaphors to teach history and theology. When Jewish families sing this psalm at Passover, it must be very meaningful to them. But the psalm is about God and reveals His gracious relationship to His own people.

- God is for Us (Verse 1)
- God is with Us (Verse 2a)
- God is over Us (Verse 2b)
- God is before Us (verses 3-8)

God is for Us (verse 1)

Verse 1 - When Israel went out of Egypt, The house of Jacob from a people of strange language,

The Exodus is mentioned frequently in the psalms (74:13; 77:17-20; 78:12-16, 52-53; 106:9-12) because Israel's deliverance from Egypt was their "national birthday". Exodus 13:3a(NLT) states, "So Moses said to the people, "This is a day to remember forever—the day you left Egypt, the place of your slavery. Today the Lord has brought you out by the power of his mighty hand".

The people were now set free to serve God and accomplish the important tasks He had assigned to them: bearing witness of the true and living God, writing the Scriptures, and bringing the Savior into the world. In terms of "biblical geography," Egypt represents the world and the bondage of the sinner to its evil forces (Ephesians 2:1-6).

Ephesians 2:1-6 The Message

1-6 It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

It was the blood of the lamb applied to the doors that protected the Jewish firstborn from death, just as the blood of Christ, God's Lamb, saves us from sin and death. God's power in opening the Red Sea liberated Israel and separated them from their cruel taskmasters. This is a picture of the resurrection of Christ and the believer's participation in it (Ephesians 2:4-10; Colossians 3:1).

Ephesians 2:7-10 The Message

Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving.

He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

Ephesians 2:8-10 KJV

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

In the centuries that followed, each annual celebration of Passover reminded the Jewish people that Jehovah was their God and that He was for them. **“If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).** The prophet Isaiah saw the Jewish exiles deliverance from the Babylonian captivity as a “second exodus” (Isaiah 43:14-21). What an encouragement it was to that struggling Jewish remnant to know that Jehovah God was for them!

Isaiah 43:14-21 New Living Translation

14 This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “For your sakes I will send an army against Babylon, forcing the Babylonians to flee in those ships they are so proud of.

15 I am the Lord, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator and King.

16 I am the Lord, who opened a way through the waters, making a dry path through the sea.

17 I called forth the mighty army of Egypt with all its chariots and horses. I drew them beneath the waves, and they drowned, their lives snuffed out like a smoldering candlewick.

18 “But forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do.

19 For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

20 The wild animals in the fields will thank me, the jackals, and owls, too, for giving them water in the desert. Yes, I will make rivers in the dry wasteland so my chosen people can be refreshed.

21 I have made Israel for myself, and they will someday honor me before the whole world.

When Israel went out of Egypt: This is speaking of the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. God sent Moses to bring them out. It was through ten plagues that God delivered Israel. The family of Jacob had gone into Egypt, but just over 400 years later the mighty nation of Israel came out.

Israel's deliverance from Egypt was the central act of redemption under the Old Covenant. It was to be constantly remembered and celebrated, and this song joins in the celebration. For those who are under the New Covenant in Jesus, the work of Jesus at the cross and empty tomb becomes the central act of redemption. We are likewise called to constantly remember and celebrate what God did to set us free by dying on the cross for us.

The house of Jacob from a people of strange language: The emphasis is on the idea that Israel did not belong in Egypt. Though they lived there for some 400 years, it was never their home. In a similar way, this world is a place of a people of strange language for all whom God redeems.

The name Jacob was used when speaking of him as the father of the twelve sons. The name Israel was His name when his twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. The Hebrews were in the land of Egypt, but they were not Egyptians. They were Hebrews. They spoke Hebrew. The strange language here, is the language of the Egyptians.

If God be for us, who can be against us? God is for us.

God is with Us (Verse 2a)

Verse 2(a) - Judah became His sanctuary,

The Lord not only separated Israel from Egypt, but He also separated Israel unto Himself. They were His people, His treasure, and His inheritance. “Judah” and “Israel” refer to the whole nation and not to the two kingdoms that formed after the death of Solomon. After the tribes conquered the land Canaan, the sanctuary of God was placed in Judah (Exodus 15:17) and that was where Solomon built the temple. The nations around Israel had their temples, but they were empty. God’s glorious presence dwelt in the tabernacle (Exodus 40) and later in the temple (1 Kings 8:1-11). Today, God does not dwell in man-made houses (Acts 7:48-50), but He does dwell with His people, for our bodies are His temples and the church is His sanctuary (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 2:19-22).

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 New Living Translation

16 Don’t you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? **17** God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 New Living Translation

19 Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, **20** for God bought you with a high price. So, you must honor God with your body.

Judah became His sanctuary: The leading tribe of Israel (Judah) represented the whole nation which became the dwelling place of God (His sanctuary). The godly in Israel always understood that God’s dwelling in the tabernacle or temple was only symbolic of His presence in His people.

Judah is the tribe that the Lord was descended from in the flesh. He was the Lion of the tribe of Judah. God’s presence was with His people on their journey. The LORD dwelled with them (was His sanctuary).

Genesis 49:10 New Living Translation

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor”.

Genesis 49:10 The Message Bible

“The scepter shall not leave Judah; he’ll keep a firm grip on the command staff, Until the ultimate ruler comes and the nations obey him”.

Jesus is “Immanuel, God with us” (Matthew 1:23; 28:19-20).

If God be for us, who can be against us? God is with us.

God is over Us (Verse 2b)

Verse 2b - And Israel His dominion

Not only was God’s sanctuary in Judah but so was His throne (Exodus 19:6). David and his descendants were God’s chosen rulers, but they represented the Lord God and had to obey His law. God made a covenant with David in which He promised him a throne forever and an heir forever on that throne (2 Samuel 7).

David’s throne is gone (Hosea 3:4-5), but that covenant is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Luke 1:30-33, 68-73). One day He will sit on David’s throne and rule over His kingdom. Had the people of Israel obeyed the Lord and allowed Him to exercise dominion over them, they would have been a great witness to the Gentile nations around them. Instead, they followed the ways of these nations and worshipped false gods instead of the true and living God.

Any place God dwells, He dominates. God’s desire to make Israel His sanctuary was so they could honor Him as Lord and Master. The LORD dwelled with them (was His sanctuary), and He ruled over them (His dominion).

If God be for us, who can be against us? God is over us.

God is before Us (verses 3-8)

3The sea saw it and fled; Jordan turned back.

“The sea ... Jordan”: Two miracles of God, separating the waters began and ended the Exodus. On the way out of Egypt, God parted the Red Sea (Exodus 14:15-31), and 40 years later He parted the Jordan River for the Jews to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 3:1-17).

The sea saw it and fled: The psalmist personified nature and described it as responding to God in fear or reverence. Here he mentioned the parting of waters at both the Red Sea and the Jordan River, at the beginning and end of Israel’s journey to the Promised Land.

Psalm 77:16 New Living Translation

“When the Red Sea saw you, O God, its waters looked and trembled! The sea quaked to its very depths”.

Jordan turned back: The psalmist gives a beautiful and powerful picture. When these waters divided, they simply responded to the awesome presence of the Lord. The sense is, “What else could they do?”

It was the presence of the LORD in the Ark of the Covenant that caused the sea to part, and the Jordan to part. In the case of the Jordan, it did not go back until the feet of the bearers of the Ark had stepped into the water. The water bowed to the presence of God in both instances.

Spurgeon saw spiritual significance in this combination of the start of the Exodus and the end of it: “The division of the sea and the drying up of the river are placed together though forty years intervened, because they were the opening and closing scenes of one great event. We may thus unite by faith our new birth and our departure out of the world into the promised inheritance.... It is all one and the same deliverance, and the beginning ensures the end.”

Question about verse 3:

5 What ails you, O sea, that you fled? O Jordan, that you turned back?

Why did the sea flee, and Jordan turn back?

The psalmist challenged both the sea and the mountains. They were powerless to stand against the mighty presence of God. It's even more foolish to think that mankind (either individually or together) can stand against God's mighty presence.

There was no explaining to the human understanding why the Red Sea opened at the command of God. The sea, like all other creations, must bow to its Creator. There was no unusual phenomenon to explain away this miracle of God.

The conclusion of this event offers an additional insight into its significance and the reason for the memorial. Joshua 4:23–24 says, “The Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God.”

First, a comparison is made with the crossing that took place at the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses. This emphasis on God's miraculous provision was an ongoing sign to the people of Israel.

Second, there was an emphasis on the power of God. The miracle was done “so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful.” No other god could compare in power. The gods of Israel's enemies were created things that had no ability to move water and provide dry passage across a river.

Third, the result of the miracle was that the Israelites would fear the Lord forever. The idea was that this miracle would leave the people in such awe that they and their descendants would talk about it and live in the fear of God and worship Him as a result.

God showed His power and presence in the crossing of the Jordan, and the memorial set up by His people served as a reminder of His might and why the Israelites should fear the Lord.

Both the act and its memorial worked to point to God's glory, presence, and strength, which would empower the Israelites as they took possession of their land

in the days ahead. Still today, a look at this powerful miracle reveals the greatness of God, and our only appropriate response—to worship and serve Him.

4 The mountains skipped like rams, The little hills like lambs.

The mountains skipped like rams: This probably has reference to the strong earthquakes and similar phenomena that happened at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-20) when God manifested His presence there. They shook and “skipped” like sheep. This incident happened about two months after the Israelites reached the wilderness and God wanted them to hear His voice speak to Moses so that they would learn to trust Moses.

The idea of skipping like rams also carries the thought of joy. We might say creation was happy God brought this deliverance to His people. “Truly Yahweh appeared to Israel and established his kingdom in Israel. That is why nature as it were responded with a twofold response: fear and great joy.” (VanGemenen)

Question about verse 4:

6 O mountains, that you skipped like rams? O little hills, like lambs?

Why did the mountain and hills skip? What was it that disturbed you, and put you into a panic, that you skipped like frightened lambs?

These questions are put, by a beautiful and poetic figure, to inanimate creatures. The Red Sea, the river of Jordan, the mountains of Sinai and Horeb, and the hills about them; to which an answer is turned in the next verse (verse 7).

When the majesty of Almighty God was on the mountain, it smoked, and there was nothing to touch the mountain lest it die. Only the one God called to the mountain could go up. Moses was the only one who could go near the presence of God, and he only when he was called to do so.

Exodus 19:12-13 New Living Translation

12 Mark off a boundary all around the mountain. Warn the people, ‘Be careful! Do not go up the mountain or even touch its boundaries. Anyone who touches the mountain will certainly be put to death.

13 No hand may touch the person or animal that crosses the boundary; instead, stone them or shoot them with arrows. They must be put to death.’ However, when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, then the people may go up on the mountain”.

7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, At the presence of the God of Jacob,

Answers to the questions in verses 5 and 6:

The Lord is ruler of not only the people, but all of nature as well. It is no small thing for the earth to tremble before its Creator. God is the Creator of the heavens and all earth. The psalmist called upon all the earth to honor the Lord in His mighty presence. The God of Jacob is more than a local deity; He is God of all the earth.

Psalm 96:9 New Living Translation

“Worship the Lord in all his holy splendor. Let all the earth tremble before him”.

Psalm 114:7 is the first time in this psalm that God is referred to by any name or title (Lord and God of Jacob). Up to this point, the psalmist has asked questions: Who is it? What did it?

“The author must have been having fun as he wrote, knowing the answer and knowing we know the answer too, but holding it off. What could have caused the sea to part, the river to turn back, and the hills to tremble? he asks. For twelve lines he has allowed our interest to build for dramatic effect.” (Boice)

8 Who turned the rock into a pool of water, The flint into a fountain of waters.

The psalmist remembered one more event which demonstrated God’s power over creation during the Exodus years – when God brought forth water for His people from the rock and the hardened flint (Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:11).

This assured the people of God that His mighty presence works for them, not against them.

As Psalm 113 closed with God's compassion on the barren woman, this psalm closes with God's compassion on thirsty Israel. His great power and might are not merely for the dividing of waters and the shaking of mountains. His majestic might bring blessing to His people one by one.

Jesus probably sang this psalm together with His disciples on the night He was betrayed and arrested (Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26). He would grant the people of God a greater deliverance than Israel out of Egypt. In that work all nature would be shaken (Matthew 27:45, 51).

Summary of Psalm 114

Most of the psalm is devoted to describing the miracles God performed for Israel as they left Egypt and headed for Canaan. The key thought is that God went before His people, and everything in nature trembled at His presence and obeyed His will (verse 7).

The Red Sea opened, and Israel marched through on dry land. Forty years later, the Jordan River opened, and the people of Israel marched into the Promised Land. During their long march, God gave them bread and meat to eat and water to drink. The Exodus may have been history, but the presence of the God of Jacob is a present reality to those who trust Christ and allow Him to lead (John 10:4).

John 10:4 New Living Translation

“After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice”.

Remember that the Jews used this psalm in those difficult post-exilic days when the work was hard, and the dangers were many. This vivid picture of God going before His people must have helped them grow in their faith and trust Him for their needs. It can also help us today.

“If God be for us---and with us---and over us---and before us---who can be against us?”

Resources:

Stephanie Goldsmith
Triumphant Tuesday Bible Study
Wisdom Wednesday Bible Study
November 7-8, 2023

The Leadership Bible, NIV

<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/psalm-114/>

www.biblegateway.com

<https://bible-studys.org/psalm-114/>

Warren Wiersbe Commentary, Psalm 114

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