



Translation, Interpretation, and Exposition of Psalms 149-50 (in the context of 144-50)

"Psalm 149, especially vv. 6-9, parallels Ps 2 in several ways. The main difference between the two psalms is that in Ps 149 God's people accomplish the tasks of God's anointed king in Ps 2. When read together, these two psalms reveal the close connection between the anointed king and his people. God's anointed king represents his people, and the people reflect the godly anointed king." (Howard, ZNIVSB, 1186).

"Praise is the cup of cold water that the faithful person has no right to withhold from a neighbor who is thirsty for God." (Rolf Jacobson, Psalms, 381-82).

"[P]raise translates the first commandment 'You shall have no other gods' into the grammar of relational speech." (Jacobson, ibid., 376, 382.)

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THE TEXT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Psalm 149

Stanza One: Typical Praise, Yet In a "New Song"

Hallelu-Yah!

¹Sing to Yahweh a new song,^{a*}

His praises in the assembly of godly-covenanters.

²Let Israel rejoice in His deeds,*

The children of Zion exult in their King.

³Hallelu-His-name with dancing, with tambourine and lyre,^{b*}

Let them play music to Him.

⁴For Yahweh delights in His people;*

He adorns^c the humble^d with salvation.^e

Stanza Two: An Oddly Militant Twist^f

⁵Let godly-covenanters exult in glory,*

Let them joyously shrill on their beds.^g

⁶Lofty exaltations in their throats,*

Two-edged swords in their hands.^h

⁷To enact redress upon the nations,

Retribution on the peoples,ⁱ

⁸To bind their kings with shackles,*

And their nobles with chains of iron,^j

⁹To enact the judgment decreed for them.^{k*}

This is an honor for His godly-covenanters.

Hallelu-Yah!

Psalm 150

Hallelu-Yah!

¹Hallelu-Yah, Hallelu-El in His sanctuary.*

Hallelu-Him in the sky, His stronghold.

²Hallelu-Him for His heroics,*

Hallelu-Him as befits His enormous greatness.

³Hallelu-Him with a blast of the shofar,*

Hallelu-Him with harp and lyre.

⁴ Hallelu-Him with timbrel and dance;*

Hallelu-Him with strings^l and pipe.

⁵Hallelu-Him with loud cymbals,^m

Hallelu-Him with resounding cymbals.

⁶ Let everything with the breath,ⁿ Hallelu-Yah.

Hallelu-Yah!

^a Reference to a “new song” recalls the same wording used in the nearby Davidic Psalm 144:9. It also occurs in 96:1 and 98:1, psalms which celebrate (somehow anew) the “kingship of Yahweh.” [Because the first of these psalms which presume some unspecified novelty about the kingship of Yahweh occurs three psalms after the seeming death of the Son of David, I identify the novelty with the resurrection of the Son on the third day; the church more typically associates these psalms with the Ascension of Christ; cf. Psalm 47.] Psalm 40:3 also speaks of a “new song” that God put in the mouth of the psalmist (whom we are to understand as David), “a song of praise to our God.” (Ps 40:5 exemplifies this praise.) A thorough analysis concludes the expression “new song” in the metanarrative of the Psalter tells “of an impending decisive shift in YHWH’s deliverance, bliss, and justice at the final consummation.” (Ho, *Design Psalter*, 183.)

^b Compare Exod. 15:20 in which Miriam “took a tambourine in her hand” and in which all the women followed “with tambourines and with dancing”; 2 Sam. 6:14, in which “David danced with all his might before the Lord,” as the ark was making its way toward Jerusalem.”

^c This word can also mean “beautify.” DeClaissé-Walford (*Psalms*, 1007) writes, “The word translated *adorn* . . . means ‘head-dress, head-wrap’ and is used to describe the head coverings of upperclass women of Jerusalem in Isa. 3:20; of priests in Exod. 39:28; Ezek. 44:18; and of a bridegroom in Isa. 61:10.”

^d The word can also mean, “lowly, afflicted.”

^e This word is *yeshuah*; the Christian reader can hardly help but devoutly pause upon reading, “He adorns the humble with-Yeshuah.”

^f Compare Ps 2:8-12.

^g This reminds one of youngsters, “jumping on their beds” with loud, joyful, singing!

^h Throats and hands are pluralized; they are literally singular: “their throat”/“their hand.” (No special significance should be attributed to this.)

ⁱ Both here and with the same expression in Ps 44:15 the Masoretic [standard Hebrew] text divides the letters peculiarly, to create the word “not” within what would otherwise read straightforwardly “on the peoples.” [A rough comparison might be writing in English “o n[ot] the peoples.”

^j There can be almost no doubt that the wording of this verse is intended to recall that of Psalm 2; not only is the wording rare and closely akin, but each psalm is related structurally: the second-to-last [Ps 149] and second [Ps 2]. Although some have argued [e.g. J. Clinton McCann] that the role of the Son of David has been taken over [i.e., *replaced*] by the covenant people as a whole, David having endured a devastating crisis in Psalm 89, it is much better to see here the Messiah’s people acting *in continuity* with the mission of the Son of David in Psalm 2. (This

view is preferable to the alternative mentioned above, which “democratizes” the Messiah’s role; this is because, in my judgment and that of several others (e.g., Mays, Vaillancourt, Howard) the Son of David/royal Messiah is ‘resurrected’ in Book V of the Psalms, (e.g., Pss 110, 118, 132, 145.) For a helpful recent discussion, see the work of Ian J. Vaillancourt, *The Multifaceted Saviour of Psalms 110 and 118*, pp. 35-36ff. When compared with Psalm 2:2,3, 9, Psalm 149:6-8 may be understood as the righteous followers of the Messianic Son of David participating in his mission. (Compare Jesus’ great commission of his disciples, less the vengeful aspect [which, it may be argued, He took upon Himself at the cross.]

Note Vaillancourt (p. 102, though with respect to Psalm 110): “the people may act on behalf of the king, and the king may represent the people, but instead of jumping to conclusions about the deomcratization of the king to a messianic people, Psalm 110 exhibits evidence that the king and people act together but are still distinct. Perhaps this should be kept in mind . . . when canonical interpreters note that Psalm 149 witnesses the . . . [godly covenanters] doing for Yhwh what the king was supposed to do in Psalm 2. The evidence of Ps. 110:3 would suggest that the simple explanation of corporate solidarity is better than the idea of a messianic people who replace the need for an individual coming one, as proposed by those who argue that Book 5 does not witness to the return of the king.”)

“He [Christ] and his people [the Church] rejoice in each other; by their prayers and efforts they work with him, while he goes forth in the chariots of salvation, conquering sinners by grace, or in chariots of vengeance, to destroy his enemies.” (Matthew Henry.)

^k The purpose of the “lofty exalations” and “two-edged sword in the mouth” is explained by the three infinitival phrases to enact . . . , to bind . . . , and to enact . . . , explicated in verses 7a, 8a, and 9a.

^l I.e., a “stringed instrument.” JPSV translates, “lute.”

^m The Hebrew word is perhaps onomatopoeic: *tsil-tsil* [+plural ending].

ⁿ Here alone, for dramatic effect, the poetic line does not begin with *Hallelu*; this jarringly highlights the summons for “all that has breath” to praise the Lord. This final praise the Lord is number thirteen in such a short psalm!