

Triennial Torah Study – 5th Year 27/12/2014



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<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

Ex 22	Isaiiah 28-29	Ps 136-138	John 10
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Judgments Concerning Property and Immorality (Exodus 22)

In reading God's righteous judgments, we can conclude that these are not old, worn-out, outdated directives that do not pertain to us today. Rather, these are laws that wisely regulate a civil nation, and we should be able to understand the common sense of their application. Some modern nations, to their credit, have followed many of the principles and guidelines of these judgments. These underlying principles-often referred to as Judeo-Christian ethics or morals-formed the basis of much of British and American common law over the last few centuries. Regrettably, however, most nations today are drifting away from this standard..

We see this in the casual attitude towards and practice of premarital sex, extra-marital sex and homosexuality, as well as other vile sexual practices-so much is "legal" that would have merited a death sentence under the administration God gave. In ancient Israel, witchcraft was also a capital crime. Yet today, Ouija boards, seances and delving into the occult are popular pastimes. Television is filled with infomercials inviting people to call and find out about their future from psychics, astrologers or Tarot card readers.

Prisons today are overcrowded and, far too often, only teach criminals to be more violent or how to more finely hone their skills. Yet if nations were to follow the laws of restitution, while there might still be a need for temporary incarceration-i.e., jail until trial if the offender might pose a threat to others-prison overcrowding and violence would not exist since there would be no prisons.

God's people were to be a *holy* people. They were to represent God in their appearance and dress, in their speech and conduct, and even in the way that they killed, prepared and ate animals. God has not done away with these principles. Read these judgments carefully! Various prophecies we will cover later show that God's holy and righteous laws will once again be in force after Yeshua returns and establishes His kingdom on earth. Then, *all* people will be given the opportunity to know, understand and live by those just and equitable laws.

Here a Little and There a Little; Covenant With Death (Isaiah 28)

In the previous two chapters of Isaiah, he had focused on the wonderful future that awaits Israel and Judah. But now he returns to his dire theme of warning. In this chapter we have first a condemnation of Ephraim followed by one addressed to the “scornful men...in Jerusalem” (verse 14).

While this prophecy could have been given earlier, its position in the text would seem to date it to shortly before Sennacherib’s invasion of 701 B.C.—two decades after the deportation of Ephraim. So the warning to Ephraim, the chief of the northern ten tribes, was very likely a message intended for Israel of the last days. Indeed, the wording of verses 5-6 and particularly verse 22—“destruction determined even upon the whole earth”—makes that rather clear.

Verses 1-8 show that the people of Israel have become drunk. While this could denote a problem with actual alcoholic drunkenness, it is more likely meant to signify spiritual drunkenness, as in other scriptural passages. The people become practically intoxicated through false ideologies and their own stubbornness. In this state, they are incapable of understanding what God has to say to them—and thus are blind to His truth.

Verses 9-10 explain the way God reveals knowledge—and it is a major key to understanding the Bible. It is not merely as a babe drinking milk (compare Hebrews 5:13). Rather, we must *work* at studying the Bible. It is somewhat like assembling a jigsaw puzzle, with the message of truth scattered throughout its pages. We must search out all that the Bible has to say about a particular subject—bringing scattered information together—to understand God’s truth about that matter: “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little” (Isaiah 28:10).

Some reject this concept by pointing to the context of the people’s blindness and drunkenness and the repetition of the above phrase in verse 13, where it is added, “...that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught.” But that is actually consistent with interpreting verses 9-10 as relating the proper way to understand. In fact, it should help us to better grasp the point God is making. God has revealed His truth here a little and there a little for this very purpose—so that when those in the world, whose minds are willingly closed to His truth, attempt to comprehend it, they are unable. To them it seems one great mass of confusion—indeed it seems drunkenness when they themselves are the ones who are spiritually drunk. And they fall backwards over it, tripping and stumbling. But to those God has called to understand His purpose, it all comes together—and it all makes sense. For the same reason Yeshua spoke in parables—so the multitudes would *not* understand but His true followers would (Luke 8:10).

The context, then, is this. God has arranged His Word so that spiritually drunk people are unable to comprehend it. They trip and stumble over it as drunkards trip and stumble in general. They refuse to hear (Isaiah 28:12)—indeed, they refuse to hear and heed the way to understand

given in verses 9-10—so they remain drunk. That was true in Isaiah’s time—and, sadly, it remains true today.

The mention of the foundation and cornerstone (verse 16), quoted by the apostles Peter and Paul as referring to Yeshua (Romans 9:33; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6), *also* reveals this prophecy to have a later application. Paul emphasized that “whoever believes” (Isaiah 28:16; Romans 10:11) was not restricted to the Jews—and explained this as opening the way for the gentiles to come to God. Moreover, Isaiah 28:11-12 is quoted by Paul in discussing the subject of speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:21).

Isaiah mentions Jerusalem’s leaders making a “covenant with death” or “agreement with Sheol [the grave]” (Isaiah 28:14-15, 18). “The phrase simply means that the people of Israel [or Judah] thought they had an agreement worked out by which they could avoid death. But God will soon annul that and strike His people with judgment (28:28)” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verse 15). In Isaiah’s day, perhaps this applied to the nation’s agreement with Egypt or Babylon to defend against Assyria. Yet, because some of this passage apparently refers to the end time as we’ve seen, the covenant with death may as well. In that context, it could refer to an Israeli pact or treaty with Europe that may initially preserve the Jewish state—an agreement such as that made with Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C. (see Daniel 11:23) and later with the Romans. None of these agreements has preserved the people of the Holy Land—and neither would any made in the end time.

Isaiah 28 contains some powerful imagery from Israel’s history in verse 21. The mention of God rising up as at Mount Gerazim refers back to a battle David fought with the Philistines when they sought to get rid of him soon after he became king of the combined northern and southern tribes (compare 2 Samuel 5:17-20; 1 Chronicles 14:8-11). The “Valley of Gibeon” refers to the famous “Joshua’s long day” battle against the Amorites in defense of Gibeon, when God not only prevented the sun from setting, but also used hailstones to kill even more Amorites than the Israelites killed with the sword (compare Joshua 10:6-14).

What should be disconcerting to the Israelites is that in this prophecy God’s wrath is directed against *them* rather than against their enemies.

Finally, in the last few verses of Isaiah 28, God uses some harvesting analogies that contain both a warning and some encouragement. The farmer uses his judgment on how much the grain needs to be ground. God, the farmer, will continue to “grind” Israel through trials as long as He determines it is necessary. It’s not up to Israel, “the grain” in the analogies, to say when God should bring their trials to an end. But God adds two encouraging thoughts. He reminds Israel that He is aware of the fact that some types of grain need delicate threshing methods, lest the grain be ruined. To be sure, some of the trials He allows His people to endure are truly “gentle” by comparison to what they could be without His oversight. The other point is that, regardless of how much threshing needs to be done, it’s only part of the process. That is, Israel can count on

the fact that at some point, “the grinding”—that is, the trials—will cease, and God will move on to the next part of His plan.

As David wrote in Psalm 103, “For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” and “the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting” (verses 14, 17).

Message to Ariel (Isaiah 29)

It is apparent that in spite of Hezekiah’s faithfulness, the nation as a whole has not made the turnaround God requires.

Jerusalem is referred to as “Ariel.” Some translate this name as “Lion of God”—the lion being the emblem of Judah and its kings. Others view the name as meaning “Altar Hearth”—seeing Jerusalem as the place of sacrifice and that Jerusalem itself will be made a sacrifice in its coming destruction. Yet Jerusalem was not destroyed in Isaiah’s day. The Assyrians laid siege to it, as described in verse 3, but they did not enter and destroy the city.

It is not clear whether verses 5-8 are referring to Jerusalem’s destruction by a great multitude of enemies or to the destruction of the enemies themselves. A seemingly parallel passage in Isaiah 17:12-14 would appear to argue for the latter. In the end time, Jerusalem will be initially invaded and trampled down by foreigners (Revelation 11:2). But, leaving the city at the very end to gather at Megiddo (16:16), these forces will return with others at Christ’s return to be wiped out (19:19-21; Joel 3:2, 12-14).

The first part of Isaiah 29:10 is used by Paul to describe how God has temporarily blinded the Israelites (compare Romans 11:8, Deuteronomy 29:4). Part of this blindness is accomplished, as the last part of Isaiah 29:10 explains, through the removal of righteous teachers. All that is left to the people then is God’s Word. And yet people won’t even seriously look at what the Bible has to say even when they are asked to. Isaiah 29:11-12 profoundly summarizes their two main excuses for not reading it. The “literate” (educated religious leaders) claim it is no use to try because parts of the Bible are mysteriously sealed from human understanding, and the “illiterate” (the common people) claim it is no use to try because understanding the Bible requires more education than they have.

Yeshua quoted verse 13 in chastising the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Matthew 15:8-9; Mark 7:6-7). People’s religion can become hollow—appearing righteous to the outward observer but in reality substituting human tradition and reason for God’s actual instructions. They lack heartfelt desire to really listen to what God has to say. And again, Paul chose verse 14 of Isaiah 29 to support his discussion about how the wise of this world do not understand the truth of God (1 Corinthians 1:19). It is thus a prophecy of how God would use His servants to demonstrate this fact.

One lesson we should draw from this passage in Isaiah 29—that is, verses 9-14—is the danger in people looking too much to the instruction they receive from their spiritual leaders and not ultimately to God and His Word. People can add their own ideas to God’s Word and His revealed way of worship. Even if a leader is righteous, people must be careful about placing too much trust in him. He is certainly not perfect. And if people are relying too much on human leaders to guide them, then God may see fit to remove that leadership as in verse 10 and leave them with blind guides instead. This is basically the way God worked with His people throughout the time of the judges and the Jewish monarchy. God would provide strong righteous leadership for a time—and then withdraw it—over and over and over again. In so doing, each generation was tested to see who was merely following men and who really followed the true God to the point of *continuing* to follow Him even when the righteous leadership was withdrawn and wicked influences prevailed.

Thankfully, Israel as a whole will at last come to know God’s truth and live by it. Verses 18 and 24 foretell the time when all people will have their spiritual eyes and ears (their minds) opened to read and understand God’s Word.

Thanks to God for His creation, deliverance and enduring loving mercy (Psalms 136)

Psalm 136, a song of thanksgiving, is known in some traditions as the Great Hallel (or “Praise”) on its own, while others reckon the psalm as the last of the Great Hallel collection. Though the psalm is unattributed, its opening words and repeated refrain—“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy [*hesed*, loyal love or devotion] endures forever” (verse 1)- are known to have originally come from the song King David composed for the celebration of bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 16:34). The same words are also found at the beginning of Psalms 106 and 107 and at the beginning and end of Psalm 118.

The refrain—“For His mercy endures forever”—was sung by the Israelite congregation and the Levitical choir at the dedication of Solomon’s temple (2 Chronicles 7:3, 6) and later by King Jehoshaphat’s singers before Judah’s army (20:21). It seems likely that the accounts of these occasions are abbreviated, so that Psalm 136 may have been sung in these instances, as it appears to be written in the form of an antiphonal exchange—that is, back-and-forth, responsive singing—either between two choirs or between a choir and the congregation or as a litany between a worship leader and a choir or the congregation. In the latter case, the choir or congregation would sing the repeated refrain.

Note again the occurrence of the entire formula—both the call to thanks and the refrain—at the opening and closing of Psalm 118. This song, we may recall, concludes the Egyptian Hallel (113-118), so named for the customary use of this collection of psalms in the observance of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, celebrating Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. As it was likely seen as an amplification of Psalm 118’s opening and closing formula, Psalm 136 eventually also became part of the traditional Passover liturgy, being sung after the Egyptian

Hallel. Furthermore, as *The Nelson Study Bible* says, “This psalm, known as the ‘Great Hallel,’ was often recited in the temple as the Passover lambs were being slain” (note on Psalm 136).

The link between Psalms 118 and 136 is paralleled by the link between Psalms 113 and 115 (two other Egyptian Hallel songs) and Psalm 135 (reckoned among the Great Hallel in some traditions). Recall, furthermore, that besides the Passover role, the Egyptian Hallel also played a major role in the liturgy of the Feast of Tabernacles—as did the Great Hallel, especially when reckoned as a collection beginning with the songs of ascents.

Psalm 136 opens with three calls to thanksgiving and closes with another (verses 1-3, 26). We should note that though this song is classed as or among the Great Hallel, the word *hallel* or “praise” is not found within it. Rather, the giving of thanks to God in song, publicly expressing gratitude to Him for His works, is itself an important form of praise. Note the following parallel. Psalm 136:1 begins, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!” Similarly, the previous psalm states: “Praise the LORD [*Hallelujah*], for the LORD is good” (135:3). To praise is to speak well of, and Psalm 136 has much to say in praise of God—even though the *word* “praise” is not actually used.

Besides God’s goodness, the opening calls to thanks also acknowledge God’s supremacy, with the titles “God of gods” and “Lord of lords” (verses 2-3). The meaning of the latter terminology is easy to ascertain—that is, all who are “lords” (or masters, as this term designates) are ruled over by the supreme Sovereign Lord and Master, God. Yet many argue that the first title here is merely a figurative superlative, as a literal interpretation would seem to admit the existence of other gods (compare also 135:5; 138:1). It could, however, be taken literally to mean that God is the God over all who are *called* gods—including demons posing as pagan deities (compare Deuteronomy 32:17) and pagan rulers falsely claiming divinity. Moreover, God Himself elsewhere refers to human beings made in His image, who are supposed to rule for Him in the created realm, as gods (Psalm 82:1, 6). And in the eternal realm to come, those who are glorified will share in God’s divinity—yet He will forever still be their God, and above all.

The three opening calls to thanks are all followed by the powerful refrain, which is repeated in every line of the psalm for a total of 26 times—perhaps because 26 is “the numerical value of the divine name Yahweh (when the Hebrew letters were used as numbers)” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 136). As noted above, the word in the refrain translated “mercy” in the KJV and NKJV is the Hebrew *hesed*, sometimes rendered “loyal love,” “steadfast love,” “covenant faithfulness,” “lovingkindness” or “graciousness.”

Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words has this to say: “The Septuagint [the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible] nearly always renders *hesed* with *eleos* (‘mercy’), and that usage is reflected in the New Testament. Modern translations, in contrast, generally prefer renditions close to the word ‘grace’.... In general, one may identify three basic meanings of the word, which always interact: ‘strength,’ ‘steadfastness,’ and ‘love.’

Any understanding of the word that fails to suggest all three inevitably loses some of its richness. 'Love' by itself easily becomes sentimentalized or universalized apart from the covenant. Yet 'strength' or 'steadfastness' suggests only the fulfillment of a legal or other obligation. The word refers primarily to mutual and reciprocal rights and obligations between the parties of a relationship.... But *hesed* is not only a matter of obligation; it is also of generosity. It is not only a matter of loyalty, but also of mercy. The weaker party seeks the protection and blessing of the patron and protector, but he may not lay absolute claim to it. The stronger party remains committed to his promise, but retains his freedom, especially with regard to the manner in which he will implement those promises. *Hesed* implies personal involvement beyond the rule of law. Marital love is often related to *hesed*. Marriage is certainly a legal matter.... Yet the relationship, if sound, far transcends mere legalities.... Hence, 'devotion' is sometimes the single English word best capable of capturing the nuance of the original" ("Loving-kindness," Old Testament Section).

Hesed is "the most significant term used in the Psalms to describe the character of God" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 1-2). And since God's character never changes, this awesome attribute of His character is, like Him, eternal-as the refrain repeatedly affirms.

As the refrain is given in response to every act of God recounted in the psalm, we are to understand that all His acts here-the "great wonders" exclusive to Him (verse 4)-are born out of this sublime character trait. God created the universe and the earth (verses 4-9) as a habitation for mankind-out of loving devotion for those He would yet create and bring into a relationship with Him. Out of His loyal love and mercy came His deliverance of His people Israel from Egypt and from enemies on the way to Canaan -so that they would receive the land He promised them as a heritage or inheritance (verses 10-22). And it is due to God's unflinching love and grace that He continues to deliver-and that He provides sustenance to all (verses 23-25).

The structure of praising God for His works in creation and then for His works in delivering Israel in the Exodus and on the subsequent journey to the Promised Land is also found in the previous psalm (see 135:5-12). In fact, as was noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on that psalm, the wording of the latter aspect is very similar, providing evidence that one of these psalms influenced the composition of the other. "Slew mighty kings" (135:10) occurs in Psalm 136 as "slew famous kings" (verse 18). In both cases this is followed by mention of "Sihon king of the Amorites" and "Og king of Bashan" (135:11; 136:19-20), who were defeated by Israel (see Numbers 21:21-35; Deuteronomy 2:26-3:11) and whose land on the east side of the Jordan was taken over by the Israelite tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh (see Numbers 32; Deuteronomy 3:12-22). It is likely that the "famous kings" of Psalm 136:18 is also intended to include the kings of Canaan on the west side of the Jordan (as in 135:11), so that "their lands as a heritage...to Israel" (136:21-22) would include the land of Canaan (compare 135:11-12).

Considering the focus of Psalm 136 on God's loving acts of salvation, we should recall the psalm's festival association-for God's annual festivals outline His plan to redeem and save

mankind. God's deliverance of Israel is a central focus in this plan, for all people must become part of Israel in a spiritual sense to ultimately be saved.

The psalm ends in verse 26 as it began-with another call to thank God and a final resounding affirmation, through the refrain, of His eternal steadfast love.

Remembering Zion in exile (Psalms 137)

Psalm 137 is a song of Zion expressing desire for God's holy city while in exile in the land of Babylon . In that sense, it is reminiscent of the opening of the songs of ascents in Psalm 120, where the desire is to be delivered from a hostile foreign environment to travel to Jerusalem, as expressed in other songs of ascents, to be in fellowship with God. "Here [in Psalm 137] speaks the same deep love of Zion as that found in Ps 42-43; 46; 48; 84; 122; 126 [these latter two being songs of ascents]. The editors of the Psalter attached this song to the Great Hallel as a closing expression of supreme devotion to the city at the center of Israel 's worship of the Lord" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 137). We earlier read this psalm in conjunction with the biblical narratives of the Babylonian Exile and prophecies delivered at that time. We now read it again in the context of the Psalter's arrangement. The comments that follow are repeated from the earlier Bible Reading Program comments on this song.

Psalm 137, which is not attributed to a particular author, appears to have been composed during the Babylonian exile. Even if it was written afterward, it nonetheless sums up the feelings of many of the Jews in captivity. It is a deeply mournful song, full of longing for their homeland, where they had some semblance of contact with God through His holy city and temple. Now they are far away, adrift, without mooring. They could no longer sing the joyful songs of past days. They "hung up their harps" on the trees-that is, they put away their musical instruments.

The Babylonians, however, asked for some music. While they may have actually wanted to hear some rousing hymns from the famed Jerusalem temple, it is also possible that this was simply a taunt-as in, "Let's hear some victory songs now...ha, ha." Whatever the case, in reflecting on the psalms of past days, recalling the former glory of their nation, all the Jews could do was sit by the great rivers of Babylon and weep. "How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" they groaned (verse 4). How could they sing praises to God for His help and deliverance against enemies when their nation and temple lay in ruins and they themselves were captives? Would not this just be more reason for their captors to mock? And were they, unclean sinners banished from God's land, even worthy to sing His songs?

In any case, the psalmist, speaking for the nation, resolves to keep Jerusalem in the forefront of his mind-to never forget and to never cease hoping for restoration. Were the harps retrieved from where they were hung to sing at least this particular song? There is, of course, no way to know. But the sentiment was surely widespread.

In thinking of what had befallen their homeland, the utter horror and misery of what had occurred, there was no way to avoid recalling those who had carried out the destruction-the Babylonians. Moreover, they were urged on by the longtime foe of God's people, Edom. A special plea is made to God in verse 7 to keep in mind Edom's cruel enmity. And a pronouncement is then made against the Babylonians-that God will bring back on their heads what they have done to the Jews. It may well be that when the Babylonians asked for a song of Zion from the exiles, this very one was composed in response. It would have served as a rather shocking rebuke against any mocking and ridicule.

Today many grimace at the ending of this psalm, wondering how it squares with God's loving character. This is due to a misunderstanding of the wording here and of God's plan in general. First of all, the "one" who is "happy" at destroying the Babylonians in verses 8-9 is not specifically declared to be God. It may simply mean the national power that would later overthrow Babylon -the Persian Empire . The verses would then seem to constitute a prophetic declaration rather than an appeal. In fact, it seems likely that there is even a dual prophetic application here-to ancient Babylon as well as its *end-time* counterpart, the phrase "*daughter of Babylon*" perhaps hinting at this. Edom and Babylon will both play similar roles in the overthrow of Israel and Judah in the last days-and they will both suffer subsequent destruction themselves as repayment.

Of course, it is entirely possible that God *is* meant as the one repaying Babylon with destruction. If so, His being "happy" at doing so would not mean He sadistically relishes punishing human beings. The terminology in that case would have to be understood as His receiving "satisfaction" in a legal sense-that is, God's righteous *justice* being satisfied through just recompense. Babylon's "little ones" or "children," who are to be dashed against the rock, would in this case most likely mean Babylon's citizenry in general (the city or empire being portrayed as a woman, as already noted).

Moreover, being dashed against a rock is likely a figurative, rather than literal, expression denoting destruction. As the book *Hard Sayings of the Bible* notes on these verses: "One thing Babylon was devoid of was rocks or rocky cliffs against which anything could be dashed. In fact there were not any stones available for building, contrary to the rocky terrain of most of Palestine. All building had to depend on the production of sun-dried mud bricks and the use of bituminous pitch for mortar. Therefore when the psalmist speaks of 'dashing...against the rocks,' he is speaking figuratively and metaphorically" (Walter Kaiser Jr., Peter Davids, F.F. Bruce, Manfred Brauch, 1996, pp. 281-282).

Interestingly, "the verb [translated "dashes"] in its Greek form is found only in Psalm 137:9 (in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text) and in the lament of our Lord over Jerusalem in Luke 19:44" (p. 281). In this verse Christ speaks to Jerusalem as if she is a mother, saying, "They [enemies] will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls." Again, children appear to denote the citizenry in general.

Of course, infants would die too-in both Babylon and Jerusalem . Yet all, children as well as adults, will be raised in the second resurrection to be taught God's ways and given the opportunity for lasting repentance, as explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Ezekiel 37. Indeed, repentance and conformity with His will, resulting in great blessing, is what God desires-what makes Him truly happy. He assures us in other scriptures that He takes no pleasure in punishing people for sin, but that they would turn and live. This passage is no exception.

Praise to God for giving strength and revival (Psalms 138)

Just before the final five praise hymns that close the book of Psalms (146-150), those responsible for its final compilation placed a collection of eight psalms attributed in their titles to King David (138-145). This serves to tie the whole Psalter together, as David composed most of its first two books. The final Davidic collection, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments, "is framed by songs of praise (Ps 138; 145). The first of these extols the greatness of the Lord's glory as displayed in his answering the prayer ('call') of the 'lowly' when suffering at the hands of the 'proud.' The last, employing a grand and intricately woven alphabetic acrostic design, extols the 'glorious majesty' of the Lord as displayed in his benevolent care over all his creatures- especially those who 'call' on him (look to him in every need). Within this frame have been placed six prayers-with certain interlocking themes" (note on Psalms 138-145)-the first (139) taking a stand against the wicked and the five others (140-144) seeking deliverance from wicked foes.

In **Psalm 138** David wholeheartedly praises God for imbuing him with confidence that God will help him against threatening enemies. Given the prophecy of all kings of the earth coming to praise God (verse 4), the song clearly looks forward to the time of the setting up of God's Kingdom with the future coming of the Messiah for ultimate fulfillment.

David says in verse 1 that He will sing praises to God "before the gods." As in Psalm 135:5 and 136:2, the identity of the "gods" here could refer to foreign kings falsely claiming divinity or perhaps to human rulers who, as the offspring of the true God commissioned to represent Him in dominion, can bear this title in a sense (compare 82:1, 6). The reference could also be to demons, the powers behind the thrones of pagan nations who sometimes posed as the false gods these nations worshipped (compare Deuteronomy 32:17). Then again, as this song looks forward to the time of Christ's reign over all nations, the term "gods" here may designate the resurrected saints of God who will reign with Him and share in His divine glory.

In Psalm 138:2 David says that He will worship toward God's holy temple. He said the same thing in Psalm 5:7. While the Jerusalem temple was not built until after David's death, this does not rule out David as the composer of these psalms. Some point out that the word for temple here was a general one that could refer to the tabernacle structure David built for the ark in Jerusalem. Moreover, it is possible that David was referring to God's temple in heaven. We

should also consider that David was looking forward to the time of God's Kingdom, when a temple will evidently stand in Jerusalem, as seen in the concluding chapters of the book of Ezekiel. Another thought to bear in mind is that David may have composed these songs to be sung in temple worship after his death. Alternatively, it is possible that others edited them to fit later circumstances, though, as we've seen, there is no need to assume this.

David says He will praise God "for Your lovingkindness and Your truth" (138:2). The word lovingkindness is translated from the important Hebrew term *hesed*, which can also mean "mercy," "grace," "loyal love" or "devotion." The word rendered "truth," *emet*, besides defining reality as opposed to falsehood, is also understood to refer to the quality of being true to one's word-faithfulness. These words for mercy and truth are often paired together. The NIV translates them as "love" and "faithfulness." We also find this terminology in the New Testament as "grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Continuing from this description of God's character, David further states, "For You have magnified Your word above all Your name" (Psalm 138:2, NKJV). Different versions give an alternate rendering, with translators unable to reconcile how God's word could be above His name-signifying His identity and reputation. Following the Hebrew arrangement, the actual word order is "For You have magnified above all Your name Your word" (J.P. Green, *The Interlinear Bible*). The NIV renders it this way: "For you have exalted above all things your name and your word." However, there is no "and" specified in the Hebrew here, though it could perhaps be interpolated. More importantly, the KJV and NKJV translation does make sense and conveys a wonderful message. The meaning seems to be that God does not put who He is above what He has said. Rather, what He has said comes first. Consider that the Almighty Sovereign God could go back on every promise He has made and no one could do a thing about it. Yet God of His own will has set His word above all the prerogatives associated with His divine supremacy-that is, He has obligated Himself to abide by everything He has declared. This is truly awesome to ponder. It should lead us all to join with David in wholehearted worship and praise.

In verse 3, David recounts his own experience of God's faithfulness in having his prayer answered. It is not clear if the day of David crying out refers to a particular instance or if he is describing a regular pattern. Whichever is intended, David is thankful for God intervening and strengthening his resolve and confidence.

As noted above, all kings of the earth coming to praise God and sing of His ways in verses 4-5 is a prophecy of the future messianic era. "David, as a king who believed in God, looked forward to a day when all the kings of the earth would share his experience" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 4-6). In the meantime, God, despite His high and lofty station, regards the lowly and humble in spirit-as the mighty of the earth today are typically arrogant and cut off from a relationship with Him (verse 6).

The mighty and proud evidently include David's wrathful enemies, mentioned in verse 7. David here trusts in God to deliver him from them in terms reminiscent of the words he wrote in Psalm 23:3-4.

In verse 8, David says, "The LORD will perfect *that which* concerns me" (the italics here and in the following citations signifying interpolated text not in the original Hebrew). Essentially the same thing is written in Psalm 57:2, where David says that God "performs *all things* for me"-the word translated "performs" being the same Hebrew verb translated "perfect" in 138:8. It can also mean "complete" or "fulfill," as in the NIV translation: "The LORD will fulfill *his purpose* for me." David had faith that God would save him from his enemies in order to fulfill God's reason for his existence. God would not let anything cut short the work He had begun in him-a tremendous promise that also applies to us (compare Philippians 1:6).

David ends with a declaration similar to the refrain of Psalm 136 and a closing plea, uttered in great confidence as we've seen, that God not abandon the work He was doing in him. As a final observation, it may be that the notation at the beginning of the superscription of Psalm 139, "For the Chief Musician," is actually a postscript for Psalm 138.

John 10

Yeshua teaches a parable: He is the door. Anyone who enters into the sheepfold by any other way than through the door is a thief and a robber. His sheep hear His voice as He alone is the Good Shepherd. Whoever enters the fold/house through Him shall be saved.

In addition to thieves and robbers, there are hirelings who pretend to keep the sheep but do not care for the sheep. The hireling flees and leaves the sheep to the wolves when there is trouble. A Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep – just as Yeshua did. "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold – I have to bring them as well, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one shepherd." He is speaking of scattered Israelites and their companions.

Our Father gave Yeshua all authority to lay down His own life and then take it up again. These words again caused division amongst the people and the Yehudim pressed Him to tell them plainly whether or not He is the Messiah. Yeshua responds that He has already told them – yet they do not believe. They do not believe because they are not of His sheep.