

Psalm 149

Morning Prayer Sunday Week 1

This is a call to the inhabitants of Jerusalem to praise God and to honour their obligation to be YHWH's instrument in 'executing vengeance on the nations.' Some suggest that this is a late psalm from the period of the Maccabees.

**¹Praise YH! [Halêlû Yâ]
Sing to YHWH* a new
song, his praise in the
assembly of the faith-
ful.**

A hymn for the ḥâsîdîm (the 'faithful', verses 1, 5 and 9) who oppose the oppressor 'with two-edged swords in their hands'(verse 6), and, as 'sons of Zion'(verse 2) defend Jerusalem with their life. The expression 'the assembly of the ḥâsîdîm' occurs only here and in the First Book of Maccabees:

There united with them a company of Hasidim, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law.

– 1Maccabees 2:42 (see 7:13)

There are echoes here of the trouble faced by the Jews who were attempting to rebuild the city walls after the return from the exile:

Each laboured on the work with one hand and with the other held a weapon.

– Nehemiah 4:17

Thanks to YHWH the ḥâsîdîm have been part of a new victory against their oppressors (verse 1).

Sing to him a new song; play skilfully on the strings.
Raise your voice!

– Psalm 33:3 (see Psalm 96:1 and 144:9)

He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.

– Psalm 40:3

Sing to YHWH a new song,
for he has done marvellous things.
His right hand and his holy arm have achieved victory.

– Psalm 98:1

**²Let Israel be glad in
its Maker; let the chil-
dren of Zion rejoice in
their King.**

Let us kneel before YHWH, our Maker!

– Psalm 95:6

Know that YHWH is God. He made us, we belong to him;
we are his people, and the sheep of his fold.

– Psalm 100:3

Is this a sword dance – a ritual celebration of victory in battle?

Strike hand to hand. Let the sword fall twice, thrice;
it is a sword for killing. A sword for great slaughter
... It is made for flashing, it is polished for slaughter.
Attack to the right! Engage to the left! Wherever
your edge is directed.

– Ezekiel 21:14-16

Compare the speech of Judas in 1Maccabees 3:18-22 and 4:8-11 and of Jonathan in 1Maccabees 9:44-46. The sentiments need radical re-interpretation in the light of Jesus' teaching.

Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.'

– Matthew 26:52

Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

– Ephesians 6:17

From his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

– Revelation 1:16 (see 2:12)

On the subject of divine judgment read the prayer of the priests against Nicanor in 1Maccabees 7:37-38.

The psalmist wants them thrown in prison before execution. See Joshua 10:15-27, and read 1Maccabees 3:3,7 and 14:13-14.

**³Let them praise his name
with dancing, making melody
to him with tambourine
and lyre.**

**⁴For YHWH takes pleasure
in his people; he adorns the
poor* with victory*.**

**⁵Let the faithful exult in
glory; let them sing for joy
as they rest.**

**⁶Let the praises of God rise
up in their throats with
two-edged swords in their
hands,**

**⁷to execute vengeance on
the nations and punishment
on the peoples,**

**⁸to bind their kings with
fetters and their nobles
with fetters of iron,**

**⁹to execute on them the
judgment* decreed. This is
an honour for all his faithful
ones.**

Praise YH! [Hal'lu Yâ]