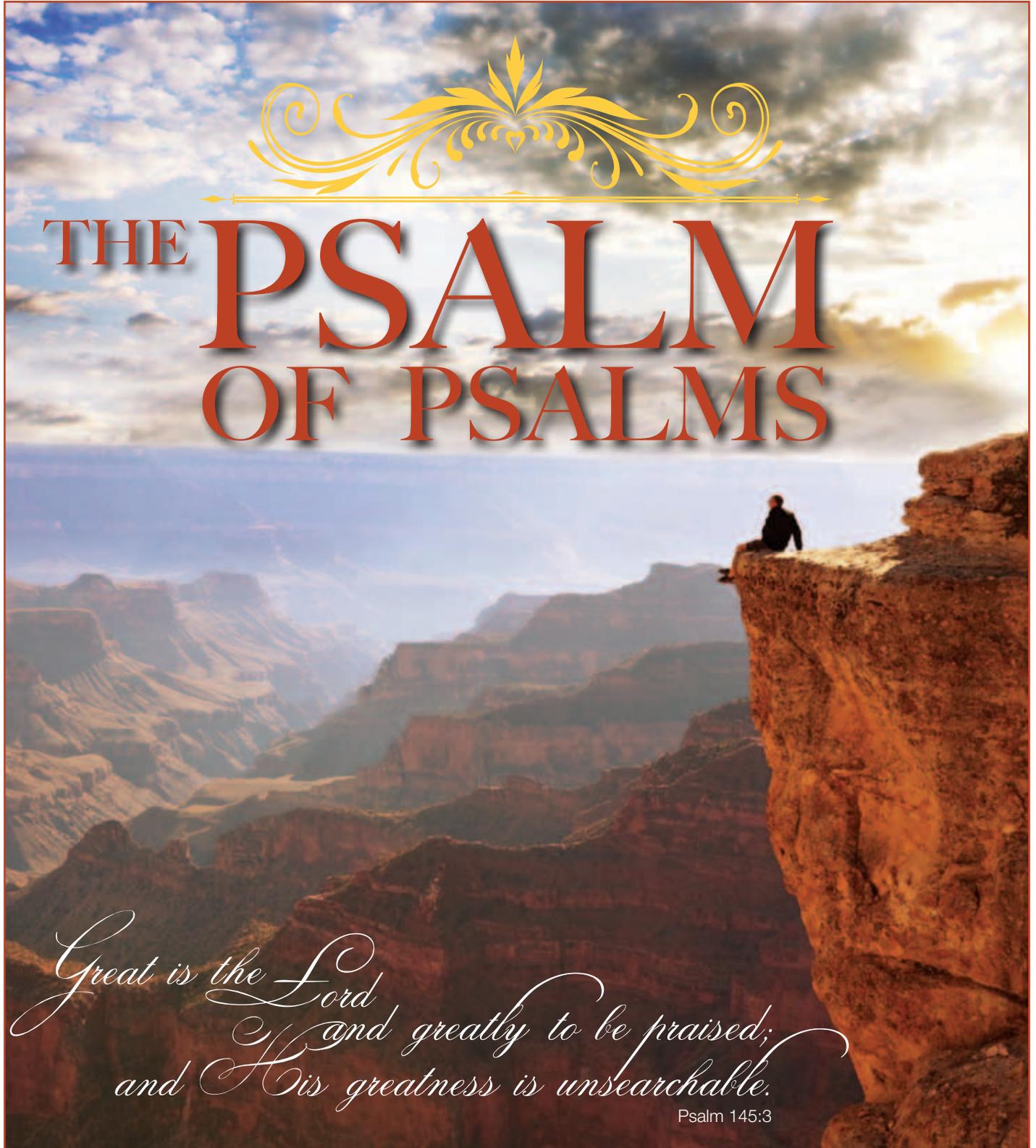


ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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THE PSALM OF PSALMS

*Great is the Lord
and greatly to be praised;
and His greatness is unsearchable.*

Psalm 145:3

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PSALM 145

a Song of God's Majesty and Love
a Praise of David

A RECENT HEADLINE in a newspaper from the eastern United States read, “Why Weren’t We More Prepared?” The article discussed the calamity that had befallen that part of the world in the path of Hurricane Sandy, bemoaning the fact that people just weren’t ready to deal with such a horrific storm. Neither, the article claimed, were emergency services and power companies prepared to help promptly in the aftermath.

Being ready is a subject that seems to be on everyone’s mind these days, as the global community deals with serious threats and increasingly frequent natural disasters. Are we ready for economic upheaval? Some are asking if the world is ready for the coming of the Messiah. Many want to know if the world is ready to deal with a nuclear Iran, or if Israel is prepared to deal with the many military threats it faces.

The Bible attests to the fact that, throughout history, the nation of Israel has spent a great deal of its time taking steps to be prepared. Whether encouraging His people to be ready to go into battle, to build, to flee, to marry, or to face their God, the Lord makes it very clear that preparation and being ready are concepts close to His heart.

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Noah and Joseph: established in readiness

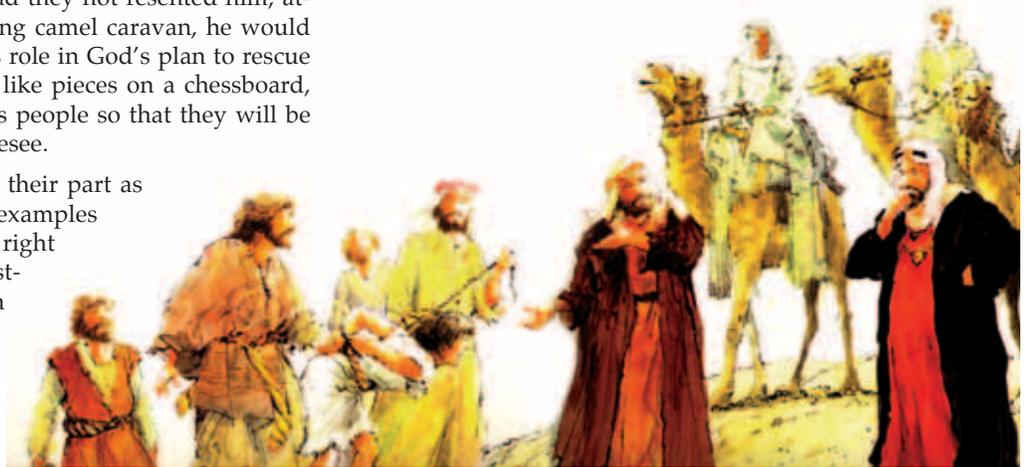
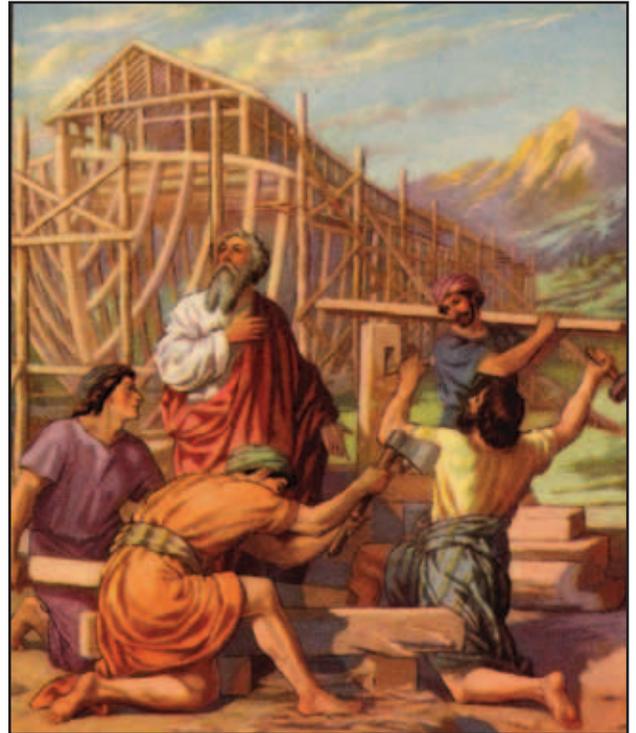
The verb *kun* (כון) appears over 200 times in the Scriptures and its Greek counterparts are found dozens of times as well. According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Greek and Hebrew Words*, it means to be ready. However, *kun* is referring to a different kind of readiness than simply having our car keys in hand as we go out the door. It means to be *established* in readiness, which introduces another Hebrew root to our study: *banah* (בנה). *Banah* is used dozens of times throughout the Bible and means to make solid or unchanging. It is the term God used when He told Noah to “build” the ark, instructing him to create something solid, unchangeable, indestructible, that would insure he and his family were firmly established in readiness for what was to come.

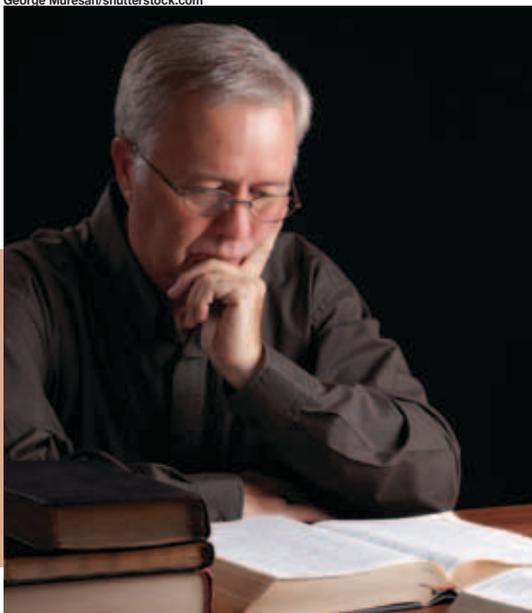
Established in Readiness

One of the earliest examples in Israel's history of the critical importance of this kind of solid preparedness comes from the story of Joseph. Through dreams, Pharaoh is warned of coming famine, but it is also revealed to him that preparations can be made that will save Egypt from destruction. As Joseph follows the leading of the Lord, Egypt is established in readiness when disaster strikes. But the actual preparation for this miraculous deliverance can be traced all the way back to an unfortunate encounter between Joseph and his brothers. Had they not resented him, attacked him, and sold him to a passing camel caravan, he would not have been in position to play his role in God's plan to rescue the Egyptians from famine. Clearly, like pieces on a chessboard, God leads, guides, and positions His people so that they will be ready for events that only He can foresee.

His people, however, have to do their part as well, and there are many scriptural examples of the importance of making the right kind of preparations. Israel's priesthood, for example, was tasked with offering sacrifices on behalf of the entire nation, interceding for deliverance, and leading the people in temple worship. But a significant amount of their time was spent in very specific acts of preparation. When they bathed, how they bathed, what they wore, even how they slept the night before certain rituals, were all clearly spelled out for them because they needed to be established in readiness according to God's instructions.

As Christians, we recognize this very Hebraic principle in much of what Yeshua and His apostles taught as they walked the land of Israel, and there are many rabbinic injunctions stressing the importance of readiness as well. One of my favorites has to do with prayer. Certainly, the rabbis say, we can and should pray at any time. We should find at least 100 reasons per day to bless and thank the Lord. The Apostle Paul reiterates this principle when he encourages us to go boldly before the throne of God (Heb. 4:16), and further that we should be constantly in prayer (1 Thess. 5:17).





But there is another kind of prayer, a deep, personal encounter with the Lord of the Universe, that the rabbis say requires preparation. As a matter of fact, they encourage at least one full hour of quiet meditation and studying the Word of God in order to bring the heart to a state of established readiness. Only then, they say, can we be prepared for intimate interaction with God, bathed in His love, hearing His voice, being strengthened and empowered—made ready for whatever is next on our own horizon.

Prepared Then, Prepared Now

God’s call for Israel to be prepared continues today. As in ancient times, she exists in the middle of a very bad neighborhood, surrounded by those who continually seek to do her harm. Consequently, she finds herself in a constant state of preparation, necessitated by the attitude of those around her.

I grew up in a very small town of only 400 people in the central part of the United States. There was no crime rate, never any burglaries or car thefts, no break-ins or murders. It was a quiet, peaceful place, and I never saw, or heard of, a “house key.” No one locked their doors, and though one would occasionally come home to find someone else’s children playing in the living room, locked doors were unnecessary. But when I left home for college, I wasn’t so fortunate. I lived in a very dangerous neighborhood, and had to quickly learn the importance of house keys, locked windows, emergency phone numbers, and yard lights. My crash course in readiness was necessitated by the area in which I lived. My neighborhood, like Israel’s, proved to be a threatening place. And Israel is diligently engaged in providing safety for her citizens and her many visitors, preparing social and emergency services, training and equipping the military, so that, come what may, the nation is established in readiness.



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The Most Important “Preparedness”

In both Judaism and Christianity, however, there is a strong belief in another kind of readiness: being spiritually prepared. And both communities believe that our instructions for that kind of preparedness are found in the Bible, the guidebook for life given to us by the Creator of the Universe.

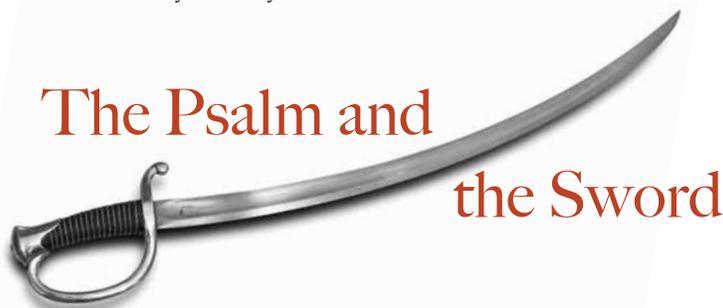
The rabbis ask the question, however, what if you couldn't have the entire Bible? Many Christians today, for example, live under extreme persecution and do not have the freedom to own a complete Bible. If that were the case, the sages ask, which book should you have? Should it be one of the five books of Moses? Something from the prophets? What about Job or Daniel?

The answer that is almost universally accepted among Israel's teachers is the book of Psalms. In it, they say, you find revelation of the nature and character of God, His relationship with Israel and the nations, history, prophecy—everything we need to know about our Creator, all interwoven with an almost child-like delight and awe.

A blessing awaits us, we are told, every time we recite a psalm and even a quadruple blessing when we take the psalms to the streets in our actions and behavior. But the rabbis have an additional question: What if you couldn't have the entire book? If you could only have one, which psalm should that be? Again, the rabbis answer with almost universal agreement: Psalm 145.

Called the “Psalm of Psalms,” these beautiful verses are a part of Jewish liturgy and are recited three times a day. There are a number of reasons why Judaism places such importance on this particular song of David. In Hebrew, it has 150 words. That is no accident, the sages say, since the book of Psalms has 150 chapters. The psalmist distilled the heart of the entire book into those 150 words. Further, all the verses except one are separated into phrases by the word “and.” That word is represented in Hebrew by *vav* (ו), a letter that is straight as an arrow and represents truth. Not only does Psalm 145 bring us a full revelation of God and His desires for His creation, but each verse resounds with the proclamation: “It is true, it is true, it is true!”

Each time the psalm is read, it is prefaced with other verses including Psalm 144:15 (NIV): “*Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.*” The sages tell us that we can only truly understand Psalm 145 in the context of Psalm 144. Both were written, they say, by David toward the end of his life to celebrate his military victories, but they are very different from one another.



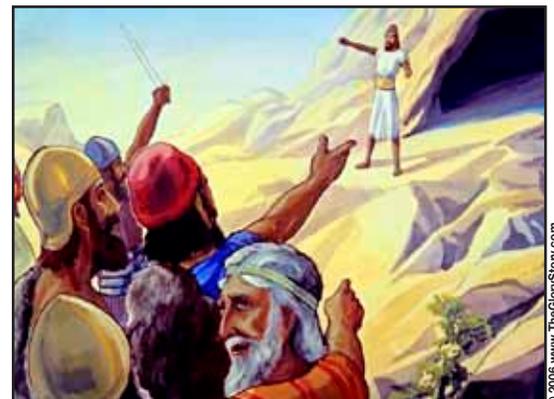
The Psalm and the Sword

Psalm 144 falls within a category of literature called “martial literature,” common in both ancient and modern cultures throughout the world. It is a genre that focuses on military conquest, singing the praises of heroes, lauding soldiers and their amazing exploits, and military accomplishments. However, Psalm 144 is unique in the way David expresses the Jewish attitude toward war and warriors. There are no triumphant soldiers praised in this song because triumphant soldiers have absolutely no claim to the victory or to the resulting glory. They are only a tool in the hand of their God and they know it. He is the One who fights. He is the One who trains the hands for war and the fingers for battle (Ps. 144:1). The Almighty is the One that parries with the enemy, subdues the attacker, and protects His people (Ps. 144:5-7).



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David



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Psalm 145

A Song of God's Majesty and Love; a Praise of David

- 1 I will extol You, my God, O King;
And I will bless Your name forever and ever.
- 2 Every day I will bless You,
And I will praise Your name forever and ever.
- 3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
And His greatness is unsearchable.
- 4 One generation shall praise Your works to another,
And shall declare Your mighty acts.
- 5 I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty,
And on Your wondrous works.
- 6 Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts,
And I will declare Your greatness.
- 7 They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness,
And shall sing of Your righteousness.
- 8 The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,
Slow to anger and great in mercy.
- 9 The Lord is good to all,
And His tender mercies are over all His works.
- 10 All Your works shall praise You, O Lord,
And Your saints shall bless You.
- 11 They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom,
And talk of Your power,
- 12 To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts,
And the glorious majesty of His kingdom.
- 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.
- 14 The Lord upholds all who fall,
And raises up all who are bowed down.
- 15 The eyes of all look expectantly to You,
And You give them their food in due season.
- 16 You open Your hand
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.
- 17 The Lord is righteous in all His ways,
Gracious in all His works.
- 18 The Lord is near to all who call upon Him,
To all who call upon Him in truth.
- 19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him;
He also will hear their cry and save them.
- 20 The Lord preserves all who love Him,
But all the wicked He will destroy.
- 21 My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord,
And all flesh shall bless His holy name
Forever and ever.

He is the triumphant One and glory belongs to Him, not David or his mighty men. God grants salvation to His people, and David, more than many others, recognizes that this bloody sword is not something to be praised or to be longed after. It is actually a necessary evil (Ps. 144:9-10). This is made very clear to him when God refuses him the right to build the Temple because he has too much blood on his hands (1 Chron. 22:7-8). Much of it was spilled at the direction of Lord, but David recognizes that it is not something to rejoice over. It is a necessary evil.

That sword may be needed to combat hostile neighbors, as are Israel's weapons today, but it is something that should always be deplored. So David had a passion to create a new kind of literature, a new kind of song that wasn't about muscle or might. Rather, he longed for a psalm about purity and holiness, and the power and goodness of God, a song of praise to the God who deserves all the credit for David's successes. He is the God who delivers His people from those who would destroy them, and not just because He loves them. Those enemies, David says, were actually haters of God Himself. Likewise today, those that would destroy Israel are at war instead with Israel's God. They are His enemies and He will protect and deliver His people.

Psalm 145 embodies the heart of David, the passionate Israelite and warrior king, as he proclaims who God is and what He does. David wants all the world to understand that it is the action and purpose of God that gives us everything: our breath, our lives, our energy, our vitality, everything is a perpetual gift from Him.

He is a God who constantly gives life, protects life, blesses life, and blesses the world with life; and we, like David, can't help but be drawn to Him by that irresistible love. He draws us, draws us, and draws us into ever deeper communion with Him. This causes us to love Him at a deeper level, which causes us to be drawn even deeper, and love Him even more, bringing us into a beautiful, wonderful, perpetual cycle of love relationship.



“The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty;
the LORD is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength.
Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved.” Psalm 93:1

The Unfathomable God

David is at his most eloquent as he speaks of the majesty, magnificence, and grandeur of God. Suddenly, the powerful majestic vistas of creation such as the Grand Canyon in America, the Rocky Mountains in Canada, the oceans, the galaxies of the heavens become our context for comprehending this incredible God.

No matter how much of God’s grandeur and greatness we understand, however, it is barely a drop in the bucket. We are simply intellectually incapable of truly comprehending Him, but of course, that is where faith comes in. And in His incredible, infinite, majestic power, He decided to put on creation like a garment, as we are told in Psalm 93:1: *“The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved.”*

As we absorb this, we can begin to get a glimpse of who He is. And when we do, all we can do is fall on our faces and praise the Name of such an amazing God. He is unfathomable in His power, and yet near and comprehensible in His essence. He is also the One who consoles us in the middle of the night, comforts us when we are mourning, warms us when we are cold, and encourages us when we are afraid. He is the One that has numbered the hairs on our heads, who loves us intimately, passionately, tenderly. He is the One who is always there at just the right time, just the right way, every time.

The rabbis have one more question for us. If this God is so incredible, so all-knowing, and so committed to opening His hand and caring for our needs and desires, why do we have to cry to Him as it says in verses 18 and 19 of Psalm 145? Why does He allow us to get into uncomfortable situations or allow circumstances that cause us to cry? Then they answer: because He loves to hear the sound of our voices. He loves to hear the sound of *your* voice. And so He allows you to be in situations that cause you to draw near and cry. But David is clear that this incredible Lord will never let those cries go unanswered.

In verse 16, we are told *“You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”* Yes, we cry out with desperation when we have critical needs. We are afraid, or something terrible is happening with our children, or we don’t have enough money, and He hears us. But He also cares about our *desires*. Many years ago when I was a new believer, I was stewing about something, obviously displaying a lack of faith. My mentor at that time asked, *“What is the matter with you, Cheryl? Don’t you believe that God is going to take care of you and your needs?”* I replied, *“Oh, yes, I know He’ll take care of my needs. It is my desires I am concerned about.”* I should have read Psalm 145! He knows our every need, but He also cares about every intimate, hidden desire. What an incredible God.

Verse 18 further tells us, *“The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.”* It is important to note that this is actually a future tense verb. So the psalmist is not just talking about those who might call out to Him in times of trouble but those who will continue to call on Him and not get discouraged if there isn’t an immediate answer. These are the ones who will never think He is not listening, or that He doesn’t care. They will continue to call, continue to trust, continue to have faith—to truly depend on God. These are the voices that God loves to hear; these are the cries that He answers.



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A New Kind of Song

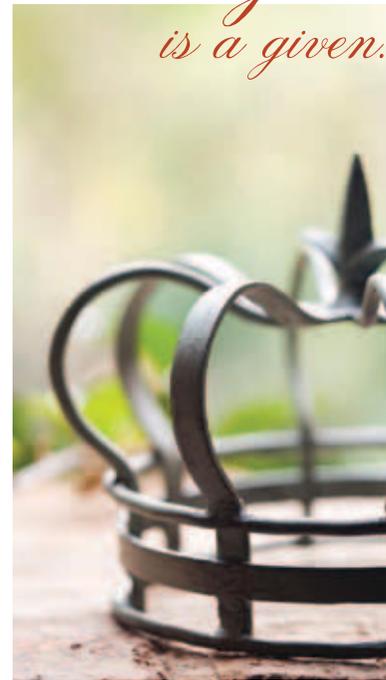
Psalm 145, we are told, was written by David—a warrior, a king, a leader, the greatest fighter in Jewish history—to celebrate his military victories. But, when you read it, you quickly discover that there is not one word in it about military triumph or military anything for that matter. It is not an ode to battle, unlike Psalm 144, or even an ode to a God who thunders across the heavens and fights the battle for Israel. It is not a celebration of military victory. To some this may seem confusing, but the rabbis tell us that David doesn't need to mention God's victories, because victory is always a given. This amazing God of unfathomable power and might cannot and will not lose, and David's experiences on the battlefield made that incredibly, though sometimes painfully, clear to him.

His desire is to celebrate who God is by giving us a glimpse of the majesty, the grandeur, the hugeness of Him, as well as His essence: the tenderness, intimacy, and passionate love that David knew so well. In other psalms, David asked the question: "Who in the world should I be afraid of?" And so we should ask ourselves, "How can I ever be afraid of anyone or anything when I know that this incredible God is my God?"

This is the God who holds Israel in the palm of His hand. This is the God who holds each of us at this very moment, and at every moment, in the palm of His hand. No matter what we are facing, no matter what challenges Israel is facing, no matter what catastrophes or natural disasters may confront the global community, there is nothing that we should fear. Nothing. Victory is a given. And all we can do is fall on our faces and praise our God, David's God, Israel's God. Then we are ready for anything.

By Rev. Cheryl Hauer,
International Development Director

Victory
is a given.



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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Bridges for Peace is a Jerusalem-based, Bible-believing Christian organization supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews worldwide through education and practical deeds expressing God's love and mercy.

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