

Triennial Torah Study – 5th Year 07/02/2015



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

Ex 28	Isaiah 46-49	Ps 148	John 18
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Garments for the Priesthood; The Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28)

As Moses was the civil leader of the nation of Israel, the priesthood would be perpetuated through Aaron's lineage. The service of the Levites in general is not yet here established, as it is not implemented until after Israel's rebellion with the golden calf, which we'll soon read about. Consider once again the attention that is given to the wondrous and planned detail that God laid out for the adorning of the priesthood. Worshiping God is not a matter that is to be taken casually. When we come before God today, these principles still exist. Since God calls His people a holy and royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9), our dress and grooming at worship services should, to the best of our ability, be of the highest standard.

Everything God does is filled with purpose. In this case, He sent His Spirit to guide the artisans in fashioning the priestly garments. The onyx stones engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel and the breastplate with their names symbolized the priest's intercessory work of representing the people before God. They were to be over his heart to impress upon him his responsibility. And over his forehead, representing the thoughts of the mind, was the engraving denoting devotedness to God. The bells on the garment "would tinkle as the priest moved about within the sacred places. This sound would assure those outside that the priest was interceding on their behalf" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 33-35).

Note the mention in verse 30 of "the Urim and the Thummim"-literally, in Hebrew, "the lights and the perfections." The Greek Septuagint renders this "revelation and truth." Indeed, as light often represents the knowledge of God in Scripture, perhaps the Hebrew wording denoted perfect knowledge of His will-discerned through this device, which seemed to constitute a plurality. Actually, we don't know for sure exactly what the Urim and Thummim was except for the testimony of the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who, in relating the details of the ephod (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 3, chap. 7, sec. 5), refers to the breastplate as the "oracle" (Greek *logion* or "words") as it evidently communicated a message from God. He goes on to imply that the Urim and Thummim was the breastplate stones shining in concert with the onyx (or sardonyx) stones on the shoulders, which held up the ephod on which the breastplate was affixed:

"For as to those stones which we told you before, the high priest bare on his shoulders, which were sardonyxes... the one of them shined out when God was present at their sacrifices; I mean that which was in the nature of a button on his right shoulder, bright rays darting out thence, and being seen even by those that were most remote; which splendour yet was not before natural to the stone. This has appeared a wonderful thing to such as have not so far indulged themselves in philosophy, as to despise Divine Revelation. Yet will I mention what is still more wonderful

than this: for God declared beforehand, by those twelve stones which the high priest bare on his breast, and which were inserted into his breastplate, when they should be victorious in battle; for so great a splendour shone forth from them before the army began to march, that all the people were sensible of God's being present for their assistance" (chap. 8, sec. 9).

God used this same device to impart more specific information as well. David consulted the Urim and Thummim concerning whether King Saul would come down to the city of Keilah and destroy it lest the residents betray David into his hands (1 Samuel 23:9-12). The answer? "He will come down" (verse 11). Exactly how this decision was communicated, we don't know. Perhaps they shone a certain way to indicate yes and no. Whatever happened, it should be pointed out that the Urim and Thummim was not in itself "magical." It was clear that God, who had Himself ordained this manner of contact—probably to demonstrate the importance of His nation approaching Him through His priesthood—was the one communicating. And it was clearly He who caused any supernatural emanations such as those described.

The True God vs. Lifeless Idols (Isaiah 45:14-46:13)

Anciently, Egypt and territories south (verse 14) were not handed over to Cyrus. But they did fall to Cyrus' half-mad son Cambyses, who was a cruel tyrant. In the end time, these areas will actually be delivered from oppression by the returning Yeshua. Then they will be given over to the Israelites as servants. Yet what kind of deliverance is that? These servants will see the goodness of God in action. Treated so well, they and other previously Muslim peoples will at last repent of their former hatred against the Jews and other Israelites.

Verse 18 shows that God's original creation of the earth was not in vain (Hebrew *tohu*). Therefore Genesis 1:2 should properly be translated, "The earth *became* without form [*tohu*] and void [*bohu*]..."

Again, we see mention of the foolishness of idolatry. It is ridiculous that supposed gods who are worshiped as supernaturally powerful must be carried around by the worshipers (verse 20; 46:7). Eventually, "every knee shall bow" to the true God (verse 23). Verse 23 is quoted by Paul (Romans 14:11) to show that we all give account individually to God, and therefore we do not need to spend our time judging our brothers and sisters in Christ (verses 10-13).

Continuing in Isaiah 46, Bel and Nebo (verse 1) are Babylonian deities. "The reference to Cyrus and his victories over Babylon now brings to mind the futile gods of that great civilization, Bel (also called Marduk) and Nebo. Babylon's defeat proves God's superiority (46:1-2). And what a different relationship He has with His people. Pagans carry their gods.

The Lord carries His people (vv. 3-4). Israel's incomparable God alone shapes and reveals the future, a future that holds salvation for her (vv. 5-13).... How wonderful to have a God who holds us up, rather than an idol we must lug around on our shoulders" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, chap. summary of 46-47).

Only the true God is able to declare what will happen in the future and then bring it to pass. Incidentally, chapter 46 explains how God knows the future. It is not because the future already exists so that He is able to look forward in time. Rather, He declares what will be (verse 10) and in His omnipotence makes sure that it happens (verse 11). Yet it must be explained that He does not cause anyone to sin (James 1:13). Rather, He is able to foretell sin because He knows how demons and people will react under given circumstances—and He has ultimate control over circumstances.

Finally, "a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country" (Isaiah 46:11) is a reference "to Cyrus (41:2) and to the speed and power of his conquests (41:3)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 46:11). And as already explained, the coming of Cyrus was a type and forerunner of the coming of Christ in power. It is in Christ that God's righteousness and salvation are at last brought to stubborn Israel (verses 12-13).

The Lady of Kingdoms (Isaiah 47)

Isaiah 47 deals once again with Babylon. Remember that at the time Isaiah wrote, Babylon was still subject to the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians, we may recall, sacked Babylon in 689 B.C.—late in Isaiah's lifetime. However, the portrayal of Babylon in this chapter shows her to be preeminent over the nations. So it again appears that God was speaking to Isaiah about events far in the future—but when? The chapter apparently has a dual application that is parallel to other prophecies of this section. On one level, it can be seen as Cyrus' conquest of Babylon and its later destruction under one of Cyrus' successors, Xerxes. Yet the primary application of the prophecy appears to be for the end time—the “daughter” of Babylon referring mainly to a *future* Babylon. Indeed, the parallels with the fall of end-time Babylon in Revelation 17-18 are unmistakable.

God uses Babylon as an instrument to refine Israel and His saints, but He does not hold Babylon guiltless in the face of its ruthless treatment of them and its vain confidence in its supremacy and security (verses 6-7). The arrogance and pride of this daughter in verses 8-9 are stated again in Revelation 18:7-8. The remainder of Isaiah 47 deals with this fall and the sins that bring it about.

God's punishment will come partly, He says to the daughter of Babylon, “because of the multitude of your sorceries, for the great abundance of your enchantments” (verses 9). God strongly condemns all idolatry and demonic practices (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). However, the latter part of Isaiah 47:9 could perhaps be translated, as in the New International Version, to say that God's punishment will come “*in spite of* the multitude of your sorceries....” This ties in well with the next verse: “For you have trusted in your wickedness.” The adherents of this system are trusting in sorceries and enchantments in two ways—to give them supernatural protection and to give them “wisdom” and “knowledge” to guide them and to predict the future (verse 10). In verse 12, God is saying, in a sense, “Now see if your enchantments and sorceries will do you any good!”

The symbolism here in Isaiah 47 goes back to the very beginnings of the city of Babylon or Babel. Babel and its empire were founded by Nimrod, a rebel against God (Genesis 10:8-12). Based on the evidence of secular history, it is apparent that he and his wife Semiramis were the originators of idolatry in the post-Flood world, evidently resurrecting a number of false concepts present before the Flood yet adding their own embellishments. They thereby set themselves up as the greatest human enemies of God's true servants. Incredibly, they are the fountainhead of much of the idolatry in the world today (yet still mere agents of the true author of idolatry, Satan the Devil).

Upon the death of Nimrod, Semiramis did not want to “sit as a widow” but desired to continue as “queen” and adored “lady” over the kingdoms of Nimrod's empire forever (compare Isaiah 47:5, 7-8; Revelation 18:7). So she concocted a fable wherein she miraculously became pregnant without having sexual relations—bearing her child Tammuz by a supposed “virgin birth” and claiming that he was the reincarnation of Nimrod. Her son was therefore deemed to be her husband. She promoted him as the “savior” of the ancient world. In reality, Semiramis was not a “virgin daughter” at all (compare Isaiah 47:1) but a great harlot, prostituting herself to the various kings of the empire to buy their aid in keeping her in power (compare Revelation 17:1-6).

Yet it should be noted that the denunciations in the various scriptures cited in the previous paragraph are not primarily aimed at Semiramis herself, but at a false Babylonian system to arise of which she served as a type. It is the same system we saw referred to as Tyre and the “virgin daughter of Sidon” in Isaiah 23—also typified by the pagan Phoenician queen Jezebel.

And this refers, first and foremost, to a pagan false Christianity portrayed in Revelation 17 —“Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth” (verse 5)— the roots of which may be traced largely to the Babylonian Samaritans of apostolic days and the idolatry of ancient Babylon before that. This type of Christianity was to eventually gain preeminent political power, which first happened when it became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. Through the Middle Ages, it dominated the Holy Roman Empire. And even today, it wields enormous authority and influence.

Interestingly, this “woman,” while claiming to be the wife of Christ, is actually the wife of a false, idolatrous concept of Christ that originated in Babylonian paganism, as well as the adulterous partner of the “beast” of Revelation 17.

Indeed, she is really married to the Babylonian savior figure. Yet the false gods of Babylon are going to be destroyed at Christ's return, as implied in Isaiah 46. Thus, the fallen woman will indeed be a widow. The children of this "mother of harlots and abominations"—that is, her other idolatrous creations and the false churches sprung from her—will also be destroyed (see Revelation 17:5, 16).

Babylon, it should be noted, is also the term used to represent the political and economic system that is dominated by this great false religion centered at Rome—as Revelation 18 implies. The name is also used for the city of Rome itself. The Roman-Babylonian system will experience its apex of power just before the return of Christ. But its end-time manifestation will fall with a great fall. Its "merchants" or commercial brokers and partners will be dismayed (verses 9-16; Isaiah 47:15). For in a very short time period, end-time Babylon will be destroyed—burnt with fire (verse 9, 14; Revelation 17:16; 18:9, 18).

Revelation 18:24 states that all the blood of the prophets and saints is found in her. Indeed, a trail of blood can be followed in the history of this religion. Through Babylon's fall, God will at last avenge His people for all the torment they have experienced at the hands of this evil system (verse 20). More information about this false religious system can be found in Alexander Hislop's *The Two Babylons*, 1916. While we would not endorse everything in this particular source, it is a thoroughly researched and well-documented publication—providing a great amount of detail supporting its thesis. (It can be read and searched on-line at www.biblebelievers.com/babylon/00index.htm or http://philologos.org/___eb-ttb/default.htm.)

You should also request or download our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built* to better understand the origin and development of the great counterfeit Christianity. The booklet will point you to places in the New Testament that mention the beginnings of this merger of paganism with biblical teachings, which most people now accept as Christianity. The booklet will also provide you with the means to identify God's true Kingdom of people today, which Yeshua promised would never die out (Matthew 16:18).

Refining and Redemption of Israel (Isaiah 48)

Regarding this chapter, one source explains: "The overall mood of comfort is abandoned for a moment, for accusation. Israel has stubbornly resisted God, and pursued idols. This treachery forced God to defend His name by sending Israel into a 'furnace of affliction' (48:1-11). Yet all this is a backdrop for grace. God presents Himself anew (vv. 12-16), expresses His yearnings for Israel (vv. 17-19), and dramatically announces the good news of coming redemption (vv. 20-22)" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, chap. summary of Isaiah 48-49).

God says one of the reasons for telling Israel, and all of mankind, what would befall them is so they could not successfully argue that their idols caused their fate (verses 3-5). "It was not enough that Israel stubbornly refused to respond to God. They tended to credit His works to other gods (cf. Jer. 44:15-19). Spiritual blindness persists, and today we may credit gracious acts of God in our own lives to luck or to our own genius or hard work. How important to sense

God's hand in our lives, to be responsive to Him, and to acknowledge His works for us" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on Isaiah 48:5).

Of course, one way to be sure of God's involvement in world affairs is to study the prophecies of His Word. Here in Isaiah, God says He is giving Israel new prophecies, ones they have not heard before, and ones they have not anticipated (verses 6-7). Indeed, as we have seen, a dominant Chaldean Babylon features prominently in Isaiah's prophecies (see verses 14, 20), and yet Assyria was the dominant power at the time he preached.

There are strong messianic themes in the chapter. God identifies Himself as the One who was born as Yeshua the Messiah (compare verse 12 with Revelation 1:17 and verse 13 of Isaiah 48 with Hebrews 1:8-12). And notice verses 14-15 of Isaiah 48. After God asks, "Who among them [your idols] has declared these things?," He then states, "The Lord loves him; He shall do His pleasure on Babylon, and His arm shall be against the Chaldeans.... I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper." But who is "him"? The New International Version renders the first part of this as "The Lord's chosen ally [because allies are elsewhere referred to as "lovers" in Scripture] will carry out his

purpose against Babylon..." Thus, it is likely a reference, once again, to Cyrus on one level. But, as already explained, Cyrus was a forerunner of the ultimate Messiah, Yeshua, who will overthrow end-time Babylon at His second coming. And this is the primary reference here. Indeed, in verse 16, the pronoun changes from Him to "Me"—showing Yeshua directly speaking as having been sent by the Father through the Holy Spirit.

God laments the Israelites' past disregard of Him and His commandments. Verse 8 reveals that God was displeased with Israel right from the start ("from the womb")—before they even left Egypt. Yet He preserved them—clearly not because of great righteousness on Israel's part. Rather, it was because of His promise to Abraham, His prophecies, His promise of delivery and to show His great power and His great mercy to all nations—all of which had to do with preserving His name, His own reputation. "For My name's sake..." God explains (verse 9). Indeed, in interceding for Israel, Moses made this the basis for His plea (see Exodus 32:11-14; Numbers 14:13-19).

In Isaiah 48:18, God says how much better for the Israelites it would have been if they had obeyed Him. In verse 19, the statement that they would have been as the sand does not mean that Israel has never had great numbers. It is referring to the fact that so many of Israel's great numbers will have perished in the coming Great Tribulation. "His" name being cut off and destroyed in the same verse refers to the destruction of *Jacob's descendants* that will have taken place because of national disobedience.

In verse 20, God gives a responsibility to His servants to proclaim a message to the ends of the earth. Indeed, it is a responsibility His people of the end time is to be carrying out still, telling people to come out of Babylon (as representative of this sinful world) and announcing the good news of how God through Christ will redeem His people and deliver them from captivity with miraculous help to a joyful life of peace and freedom. Remembering God's mighty acts of the past should inspire complete faith (verse 21)—a vital key to this way of peace. But in the last verse, the chapter soberly warns that there is no peace for the wicked, a fact repeated in Isaiah 57:21. Once delivered from its past evil ways, Israel must not go back to those former ways. The same applies to us.

Restoration and Future Expansion (Isaiah 49)

The Lord's Servant here steps forward. "The 'law of double reference' may apply in interpreting this prophetic passage, which may point in part to Cyrus, but certainly [and more directly] describes the mission of the Messiah, Yeshua. Christ was called to His mission and named long before His birth (49:1). His first efforts were unrewarded (v. 4), but He is destined to bring Israel back to God (v. 5) and bring salvation to all peoples (v. 6). Although despised, He will ultimately be honored by all (v. 7)" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on chap. 49).

The chapter thus begins as a prophetic quote from Yeshua, describing elements and allusions to His work (verses 1-7). In verse 3, He is referred to as "Israel." Yeshua was an Israelite, of course. He purchased Israel with His blood. He is the King of Israel, and a king, in the Scriptures, is often equated with the nation he rules. Moreover, Israel means "Prevailer With God," and Yeshua is the *quintessential* Prevailer with God. But also, God intends the *nation* of Israel to ultimately assist Christ in setting an example of righteousness for the whole world. They have failed at this in the past. But once the Israelites have themselves learned true righteousness through Christ, they too will collectively become God's servant—represented by Christ their King—and a light, a beacon, for other nations to follow.

The spiritual Israel of God (compare Galatians 6:16). When Paul and Barnabas first arrived in Antioch of Pisidia, they preached in the synagogue, but drew the attention of the gentiles as well. This caused the Jews to be filled with envy and they attempted to discredit Paul. The two apostles responded by saying that the Lord had commanded *them* to be a light to the gentiles, quoting Isaiah 49:6 (Acts 13:47) as the passage where they found this command (compare Acts 13:14-52).

In 2 Corinthians, Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 and then goes on to state that, for them at least, the "acceptable time" and "day of salvation" was "now" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Some attempt to use these verses to argue that now is the *only* day of salvation. But they do not say that. Indeed, the New Revised Standard Version translates both verses as stating that now is "AN acceptable time" and "A day of salvation." Indeed, God is not drawing the whole world to salvation at this time.

Still, “*the acceptable time*” could perhaps be a reasonable translation—if it has the same sense as “the acceptable year of the Lord” in Isaiah 61:2, a reference to the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is the time of God’s judgment on the nations and His redemption and salvation of Israel. Yet Peter related a prophecy of the end-time Day of the Lord as having an application to the beginning of the New Testament era in Acts 2:14-21. Perhaps Paul was indicating something similar in 2 Corinthians 6—that for believers it is as if the time of God’s intervention is already here, as indeed it is on a personal level. There will be more on this in the highlights for Isaiah 63.

Isaiah 49:10 speaks of God’s ultimate deliverance. Just before the seventh seal of the book of Revelation is opened, one of the 24 elders before God’s throne in heaven describes a group of people as having come out of the Great Tribulation, finding deliverance at last. He uses the words of Isaiah 49:10 in doing so (Revelation 7:16-17).

The remainder of Isaiah 49 deals mainly with the return from captivity of Israel and Judah following the return of Yeshua. In verse 11, we see the image of the road and highway of chapter 40—here plural, as the return from exile is from more than one place and, considering highway in its figurative sense, relations will need to be developed between many nations.

In verse 12, we see where the exiles return from. First from the north and west—meaning northwest, as Hebrew has no specific word for this direction. And also from the land of Sinim. “Sinim was a district on the southern frontier of ancient Egypt” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 12). Also, the Latin Vulgate translates the word as *Australi*, meaning “south.” There are perhaps two indications here. One is that Israel is returning from their captivity in Central Europe (modern Assyria), which is northwest of the Promised Land (not northeast as ancient Assyria was) and from Egypt and other African lands to the south (compare Isaiah 11:11).

Yet some will be returning from *beyond* Central Europe and Egypt. The word translated “coastlands” in Isaiah 49:1 is rendered “islands” in the earlier King James Version. Jeremiah 31:10 gives this as “isles afar off,” clearly related to those coming “from afar” in Isaiah 49:12. The isles northwest of Jerusalem and even of Europe are the British Isles. Some will be returning from here. And there are important isles in the south of the world too, one being a continent actually called Australia. Some will be returning from there as well. Indeed, besides the lands of their captivity, some Israelites will be returning from islands and coastlands all over the world—the places to which the descendants of Israel have spread abroad and colonized.

Verses 20-21 are rather interesting. God had prophesied that the Israelites would be great colonizers (see Genesis 28:14; 49:22). Notice Isaiah 49:20: “The children you will have, after you have lost the others...” This is referring to new children born during the coming reign of Yeshua—after Israel has lost many of its people in the Great Tribulation, which will befall it just before He returns. These new children “will say *again* in your ears...”—indicating that it is a repetition of an earlier occurrence. And they say, “The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell.” Indeed, Israel’s burgeoning population in the Promised Land under the reign of Christ will necessitate they be given other lands to dwell in. And indeed, at that time, “Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isaiah 27:6).

But again notice that this is a repetition of something that occurred sometime in the past. When? Not apparently while Israel dwelt in the Promised Land in ancient times—for they did not then expand abroad in significant numbers. It seems to refer to something that occurred much later, when the “isles” of the northwest in which many of the Israelites settled—the British Isles—became too cramped for their growing numbers, making it necessary to expand and colonize abroad. British historian Colin Cross states: “One of the unexplained mysteries of social history is the explosion in the size of the population of Great Britain between 1750 and 1850. For generations the British population had been static, or rising only slightly. Then in the space of a century it almost trebled—from 7.7 million in 1750 to 20.7 million in 1850. Why it happened is unknown.... It must just be recorded that human reproduction and vitality follows unpredictable patterns.... Britain was a dynamic country and one of the marks of its dynamism was the population explosion” (*The Fall of the British Empire, 1918-1968*, 1968, p. 155).

On a lesser scale, other nations of northwest Europe—also of Israelite descent—experienced a population increase and some spreading abroad as well. But by far the greatest growth in population and territorial expansion was experienced by the birthright tribes of Joseph—today the United States and British-descended peoples. From the small homeland of the British

Isles, the people went forth and colonized the North American continent, Australia, New Zealand, parts of South Africa and numerous islands and territories besides. The timing of this was rather significant, fitting exactly in the period in which God decreed that the birthright blessings of national greatness would eventually be bestowed on His people.

Given all this, we can see what God apparently means in Isaiah 49:20. Here it is quoted with further explanation in brackets. To Israel God says: "The children you will have [increasing population of the land of Israel during the millennial reign of Christ], after you have lost the others [great numbers of people in the terrible tribulation just before Christ's return], will say again in your ears [as the people of Britain and other Israelite lands did when their populations increased and they needed to expand in colonial times], 'The place [the land of Israel in the Middle East] is too small for me; give me a place [other areas to expand to] where I may dwell.'"

How wonderful that though the Israelites will be severely cut down in population just prior to Christ's return, they will *again* expand and grow during His peaceful reign—perhaps eventually even recolonizing and repopulating many of the lands they have inhabited in this age (rebuilding the old ruins and waste places that many of these areas will have become following the great wars and massive population deportations of the end time).

Praise to God from all creation (Psalms 148)

Third in the series of five concluding Hallelujah Psalms, **Psalm 148** is a creation hymn in which the whole of the created realm is called on to praise the Creator. "Whatever its original liturgical purpose, its placement here at the center of the five concluding hymns serves to complete the scope of the calls to praise with which the Psalter closes.... Two similarly constructed stanzas call on all creatures in the heavens (vv. 1-6) and all creatures beneath the heavens [i.e., on earth] (vv. 7-14) to join in the chorus of praise.... Both stanzas end with a couplet setting forth the motivation for praise. The second of these (vv. 12-14), made up of extended lines, clearly constitutes the climax" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, introductory note on Psalm 148).

It is interesting to note that the word "praise" (*hallel*) is used 13 times in the psalm—once in the opening *Hallelu Yah* ("Praise the LORD") frame, once in the closing frame and 11 times in between. This is parallel in count to the final, closing psalm of the Psalter, Psalm 150. Yet while the final psalm is rather uniform in all its calls to praise, listing them in short statements one after the other (as we will later examine), Psalm 148 follows that pattern in only its first part. Observe in this song that the opening call to praise is followed by seven short calls to praise in the imperative (or command) mood (verses 1-4), followed then by one in the jussive subjunctive mood—that is, in the form of "let them" (verse 5). The second section of the psalm begins with a single imperative call to praise (verse 7), which is followed much later by another in the form of "let them" (verse 13) and then the use of "praise" as a noun (verse 14)—ending with the final closing call to praise.

The worship of God begins in the heavens (verse 1) with God's angels (verse 2), the celestial bodies (verse 3), and the "waters above the skies" (verse 4, NIV)—seemingly referring to the vapor of the earth's atmosphere (compare Genesis 1:7). Thus all three "heavens" mentioned in the Bible appear to be represented in this passage—the "heaven" of God's throne, the "heaven" of outer space and the "heaven" of earth's atmosphere. Note in this regard that the apostle Paul refers to the heaven of God's throne as the "third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2).

In Psalm 148:2, the word "hosts" seems to be paralleled with angels—which would follow the pattern of Psalm 103:20-21. Yet this term (translated from the Hebrew *sabaoth*) in a broader sense designates groupings of forces or powers, such as armies (sometimes including Israel's armies). The word can even refer to the sun, moon and stars (Deuteronomy 4:19; Psalm 33:6; Jeremiah 33:22). As these are mentioned next in Psalm 148:3, perhaps "hosts" is being used as a transitional term between angels and the heavenly bodies—especially as angels are compared to stars in other passages (see Job 38:7; Revelation 1:20). Indeed, as the call to the hosts in Psalm 148:2 is the central one of the seven calls to praise (following the opening call), the term perhaps applies here to all the heavenly powers, both throngs of angels and the multitude of the stars that light the physical universe. The praise of the heavenly

bodies is silent but undeniable, as their beauty, grandeur, enduring patterns of movement, and seemingly numberless count speak volumes about the One who made them (see Psalm 19:1-6).

In the closing couplet of this section, God's creation of all these things through the power of His word along with His perpetual establishment of them through natural laws is the basis for praise (Psalm 148:5-6).

The next section starts with a call to praise from the earth (verse 7). Rather than constantly repeating the word "praise" as in the first section, the opening call to praise God in verse 7 is issued collectively to all things listed in verses 7-12. As the previous section left off with the waters above the heavens, this section begins with the waters below the heavens in the mention of "great sea creatures and all ocean depths" (verse 7b, NIV).

Next mentioned is a diversity of weather phenomenon (verse 8)-classified not in the heavenly realm but with things on earth because their impact is felt on the ground. "Fire" here is most likely a reference to "lightning" (NIV), as in other passages. Note that these things are pictured as "fulfilling His word"-their existence and the fact that they follow laws He has set, as well as His direct command at times, serving to glorify God (compare 147:15-18).

Mountains, trees and animals in all their natural wonder also join in the chorus of praise (148:9-10). Though they cannot speak, they all declare the design of the Master Designer.

We then come at last to the pinnacle of God's earthly creation, mankind, described here as all nations and their leaders (verse 11) as well as all individual human beings-male and female, young and old (verse 12).

In the conclusion of this section (verses 13-14), two reasons are given for all to join in the praise of the name of the "LORD" (i.e., Yhwh -"He Is Who He Is"). First is that His name alone is exalted above the earth and heavens just described (verse 13). His name designates Him alone, in contrast to the created realm, as eternal and uncreated, having life in Himself.

Moreover, He is the very Creator and Sovereign Ruler of all His creation.

The second basis for praise here is God's exalting of the "horn" (symbolizing strength) of His covenant people, His saints, for He has empowered them to declare His praise on behalf of the whole earthly creation (verse 14)-in this psalm and throughout the entire Psalter. The word translated "saints" here is *hasidim*, the singular form of this word being related to *hesed*, used of God's loving devotion. The saints here, then, are those who are faithfully devoted to God in return-the pious. (From this word, incidentally, derives the designation "Hasidic" Jews, denoting the orthodox Jewish community.) The faithful here are further defined as "the children of Israel, a people near to Him" (same verse). This special relationship was spotlighted at the end of the previous psalm (147:20), the focus there being on God giving His statutes and judgments to Israel and not any other nation. That blessing and the special status here of being near to God are both found in Deuteronomy 4:7-8. "Israel" in the psalm's conclusion should be understood in the ideal sense of those who remain in covenant with God, as opposed to those who are cut off through disobedience. Thus true believers serve as God's priesthood and spiritual nation to declare His praises on behalf of all the earth.

The concluding focus on Israel and the *hasidim* serves to introduce the next psalm, as we will see.

John 18

Yeshua leads His taught ones into the very place where He knows He will be betrayed and handed over to those who will kill Him – the garden of Gethsemene. Yehudah appears there with soldiers, officers, chief priests, Pharisees, lanterns, torches, and weapons. Yeshua hands Himself over. When He speaks to them answering their profession that they seek Yeshua of Natsareth and says, "I AM," they all fell backward by the power of His Word.

Yeshua pleads the life and freedom of His followers, to let them alone. Peter draws his sword and cuts off the right ear of Melek – the servant of the High Priest. In another gospel we are informed that Yeshua healed the ear right

away. Yeshua was bound and taken to Chanan who was actually the Father-in-law to the acting High Priest, Qayapha which is very curious don't you think? Who really was the acting authority here we must wonder.

Peter and John follow with Yeshua as He is taken for "secret trial." Chanan asks Yeshua about His taught ones and His teachings. Yeshua does not answer him, for He taught often out in the open for all to hear. Following this, He is taken then to Qayapha. In the meantime we read of the denial of Peter three times, just as Yeshua told him he would do. Yeshua is then taken from Qayapha to Pilate in the palace of the Romans, not entering themselves because to do so would make them unclean for the Passover feast (a manmade rule mind you).

Pilate desires that Yeshua be taken care of by the Yehudim themselves, and tried by their court and laws. But they desire specifically for Yeshua to be put to death and they no longer have this authority for it was taken away from them under the Romans.

Pilate has one question for Yeshua and it is concerning Authority, Power, Reign, and Kingdom. Note this!!! It is about Rule and Reign and nothing else here. Note the following exchange:

Pilate: You are a sovereign, then?

Yeshua: You say it, because I am a sovereign. **For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.** Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.

Pilate says, 'What is Truth'

Can we also answer this question then? What is truth? The truth is there is a Kingdom that is not of this world. Yeshua is bearing this truth by His birth and presence. He is the Sovereign of that Kingdom – the Kingdom without end.

Pilate sees a way out of not condemning Yeshua, for there was no fault in Him. He asks the Yehudim about a prisoner to be released to them as was a tradition at the time of Passover every year. Pilate desires to release Yeshua – but the Yehudim cry 'NO!, release Barabba!' who was a robber.