

# Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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## Psalm 114 — No Obstacle is Too Great

### 1.0 Introducing Psalm 114

- Just as in Psalm 29, the psalmist's theme in Psalm 114 is the glorious appearance of God on earth — a theophany.
- Psalm 114 distills Israel's history into eight short verses that stand in contrast to the more lengthy historical hymns found in Psalms 78, 105, and 106.
- As the second psalm in the "Egyptian Hallel" (Pss 113–118, see notes on Ps 113), Psalm 114 is traditionally recited on the eighth day of Passover.
- "Here is the Exodus not as a familiar item in Israel's creed but as an astounding event: as startling as a clap of thunder, as shattering as an earthquake." — Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 403.

### 2.0 Reading Psalm 114 (NAU)

**114:1** When Israel went forth from Egypt,  
The house of Jacob from a people of strange language,  
**114:2** Judah became His sanctuary,  
Israel, His dominion.

**114:3** The sea looked and fled;  
The Jordan turned back.  
**114:4** The mountains skipped like rams,  
The hills, like lambs.  
**114:5** What ails you, O sea, that you flee?  
O Jordan, that you turn back?  
**114:6** O mountains, that you skip like rams?  
O hills, like lambs?  
**114:7** Tremble, O earth, before the Lord,

Before the God of Jacob,  
**114:8** Who turned the rock into a pool of water,  
The flint into a fountain of water.

### 3.0 Understanding Psalm 114

#### 3.1 Outline

- I. Extraction of a Designated People (vv. 1-2)
- II. Exhibition of Divine Power (vv. 3-6)
- III. Exaltation of the Divine Person (vv. 7-8)



#### 3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “strange language”
  - This is the only time this particular Hebrew word occurs in the Old Testament. The meaning is “speaking an incomprehensible language.”
  - Anyone who has attempted to speak a difficult foreign language can sympathize with the Israelites’ situation during their time in Egypt.
- **v. 2** “Judah became His sanctuary”
  - “His sanctuary” = “His holy place.”
  - God chose Jerusalem in the territory of Judah as the site for the Ark of the Covenant and for His Temple.
  - Note the use of the pronoun to refer to the Lord without an antecedent to which it might refer. The poetic purpose becomes evident as we read the psalm.
    - ✓ The psalmist delays direct reference to the Lord until the completion of a crescendo of rhetorical questions (vv. 5-6). It creates suspense, arousing and preserving the hearer’s or reader’s interest.
    - ✓ A number of recent Bible versions interfere in the poetic effect by inserting “God’s” in verse 2 (NIV, NRSV, NLT).
- **v. 2** “Judah . . . Israel, His dominion”
  - The parallelism of “sanctuary” and “dominion” are a reminder that all Israel was to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6).
  - The use of both names need not indicate a time during the divided kingdom since both were used side by side in the time of Saul (1 Sam 11:8; 17:52), David (2 Sam 3:10; 24:1), and Solomon (1 Kgs 1:35; 4:20).
- **vv. 3-6** “sea . . . Jordan . . . mountains . . . hills”
  - Each of these geographical elements responded to the presence of God during the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt and their entry into the promised land of Canaan.
  - Next, the psalmist addresses each of the elements with “What ails you?” (literally, “What *happened* to you?” or “What *is it* to you?” = “Why did you . . . ?”).

- The answer the psalmist expects is, “Because of the Lord, the God of Jacob” (cp. v. 7).
- The rhetorical questions draw emphatic attention to the power of God’s presence and enhance the feeling of awe.
- v. 3 “The sea looked and fled”
  - At the crossing of the Red Sea, the waters fled from the path God provided for Israel so they could cross over on dry land.
  - See Exodus 14:21. Compare Psalms 77:16; 104:6-7.
- v. 3 “The Jordan turned back”
  - When God led Israel across the Jordan River, He stopped the waters from flowing so that they could cross on dry land.
  - See Joshua 3:16; 4:23-24.
- v. 4 “skipped like rams, . . . like lambs”
  - When did the mountains and hills move like this?
  - When God appeared on Mt. Sinai, the mountain quaked (Exod 19:18; Judg 5:4-5; Ps 68:7-8). Earthquake and fire often accompany theophanies in the Old Testament.
  - Compare Habakkuk 3:3-13 and Nahum 1:3-6.
- v. 7 “Tremble, O earth”
  - “Tremble” expresses the consciousness of one’s unworthiness in the presence of the holy and almighty God. See 1 Chronicles 16:30.
  - “Earth” sums up sea, river, mountains, and hills.
  - As in similar contexts elsewhere, the Lord is presented as Sovereign over all the earth.
    - ✓ See Joshua 3:11; Psalm 97:4-5.
- v. 7 “the Lord, . . . the God of Jacob”
  - “Lord” is the Hebrew title *Adon*, meaning “Master,” “Lord,” or “Sovereign.”
  - The Hebrew of “the God of Jacob” appears nowhere else in the Old Testament.
    - ✓ *Eloah Ya‘aqov* employs an ancient title of God that dates back to the Book of Job, where it is found 41 times.
    - ✓ *Eloah* is the Hebrew equivalent of the Arabic *Allah*, the biblical name for God used in Arabia (Job’s land) long before it was appropriated by Mohammed and Islam. In Habbakkuk 3:3 it is *Eloah* who comes from Teman in Arabia.
    - ✓ See also Deuteronomy 32:15; Psalm 18:31-32.



- **v. 8 “Who”**
  - With dramatic effect the psalm has built to this climax. The focus is upon God.
  - “If God is for His people, what can possibly stand in their way to oppose them? The answer is, Nothing at all, neither seas nor rivers nor mountains.” — James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 3:931.
- **v. 8 “turned the rock into a pool of water”**
  - See Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11; Psalm 105:41.
  - In the future God will repeat this kind of provision for His people as He blesses them.
    - ✓ See Psalm 107:35-38; Isaiah 41:17-20; 35:1-7.

#### 4.0 Singing Psalm 114

##### When Israel, Freed from Pharaoh’s Hand

(Tune: “Before the Throne of God Above”)



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| <p><b>1</b> When Israel, freed from Pharaoh’s hand<br/>Left the proud tyrant and his land,<br/>The tribes with cheerful homage own<br/>Their King, and Judah was His throne.</p> <p><b>3</b> The mountains shook like frightened sheep,<br/>Like lambs the little hillocks leap;<br/>Not Sinai on her base could stand,<br/>Conscious of sovereign power at hand.</p> <p><b>5</b> Let every mountain, every flood,<br/>Retire and know th’approaching God,<br/>The King of Israel: see Him here;<br/>Tremble, thou earth, adore and fear.</p> | <p><b>2</b> Across the deep their journey lay;<br/>The deep divides to make them way;<br/>Jordan beheld their march, and fled<br/>With backward current to his head.</p> <p><b>4</b> What power could make the deep divide?<br/>Make Jordan backward roll his tide?<br/>Why did ye leap, ye little hills?<br/>And whence the fright that Sinai feels?</p> <p><b>6</b> He thunders, and all nature mourns;<br/>The rock to standing pools He turns;<br/>Flints spring with fountains at His word,<br/>And fires and seas confess the Lord.</p> |
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— Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David*, 1719

#### 5.0 Praying Psalm 114

- Lord, You alone deliver Your people. [v. 1]
- Father, You control all the elements of Your creation. [vv. 3-6]
- Create in me a godly sense of awe at Your great Power and Presence. [v. 7]
- Thank You for providing for Your people in unexpected ways. [v. 8]
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#### 6.0 Applying Psalm 114

- No obstacle is too great for our God to overcome on our behalf.