

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

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship
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Psalm 148 — Choirs for the Final Hallel

1.0 Introducing Psalm 148

- The Psalter's "Final Hallel" consists of five psalms (Pss 146–150) that each begin and end with "Hallelujah" (= "Praise the LORD").
- The Apocrypha expands this psalm and inserts it into the Book of Daniel between 3:23 and 24 as "The Song of the Three Jews."
- Psalm 148 summons all creation to praise the Mighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth. This creation choir consists of two antiphonal groups in the heavens above and the earth beneath.
- Psalm 148 "could be sung as a hymnic response after the first chapter of the Bible is read."—James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 445.

2.0 Reading Psalm 148 (NAU)

148:1 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;

Praise Him in the heights!

148:2 Praise Him, (all) His angels;

Praise Him, (all) His hosts!

148:3 Praise Him, sun and moon;

Praise Him, (all) stars of light!

148:4 Praise Him, highest heavens,

And the waters that are above the heavens!

148:5 Let them praise the name of the LORD,

For He commanded and they were created.

148:6 He has also established them forever and ever;

He has made a decree which will not pass away.

- 148:7 **Praise the LORD** from the earth,
Sea monsters and (all) deeps;
148:8 Fire and hail, snow and clouds;
Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
148:9 Mountains and (all) hills;
Fruit trees and (all) cedars;
148:10 Beasts and (all) cattle;
Creeping things and winged fowl;
148:11 Kings of the earth and (all) peoples;
Princes and (all) judges of the earth;
148:12 Both young men and virgins;
Old men and children.
148:13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For His name alone is exalted;
His glory is above earth and heaven.
148:14 And He has lifted up a horn for His people,
Praise for (all) His godly ones;
Even for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him.

Praise the LORD!

3.0 Understanding Psalm 148

3.1 Outline

- I. The Praise Choir in the Heavens (vv. 1–6)
 - A. The Call (v. 1)
 - B. The 7 Choir Members (vv. 2–4)
 - C. The Cause (vv. 5–6)
- II. The Praise Choir on the Earth (vv. 7–14)
 - A. The Call (v. 7a)
 - B. The 23 Choir Members (vv. 7b–12)
 - C. The Cause (vv. 13–14)



3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “Praise”
 - All thirteen occurrences of “praise” in Psalm 148 are from the same Hebrew word, *halal*, from whence we obtain the first and last words of this psalm: *Hallelujah*. This usage provides the basis for referring to these final psalms as the “Final *Hallel*.”
 - Twelve uses are the verb and one (the first “praise” in v. 14) is a noun.
- v. 1 “from the heavens”
 - The psalmist begins in heaven itself. Mankind should not worship angels or the stars above. Angels and stars ought to worship God.

- **v. 2** “hosts”
 - The older English word “hosts” represents a Hebrew word that simply means “armies.” Here it refers to the angelic beings (cp. 1 Kgs 22:19; Ps 103:20–21).
- **v. 4** “highest heavens”
 - Literally “the heavens of the heavens” like “the holy of holies,” indicates a superlative: “the highest heavens.” Perhaps it is a reference to the divine residence itself (cp. 2 Cor 12:2), a place where angels serve Him.
- **v. 4** “the waters that are above the heavens”
 - Some commentators believe that the psalmist refers to the rain clouds, while others think that it indicates waters in space, perhaps accounting for ice on planets or in the form of comets. See Genesis 1:6–8.
- **vv. 5, 13** “Let them praise the name of the LORD”
 - Like a mini-refrain this line introduces the final lines of each of the psalm’s two stanzas.
 - Praise consists of a recognition, declaration, and exaltation of God’s attributes, moral character, and deeds—His “name” (= reputation).
- **v. 5** “He commanded and they were created”
 - God created everything by His spoken word. Compare “said” throughout Genesis 1.
- **v. 6** “He has also established them”
 - God not only created all things, He assigned them their allotted positions, functions, and durations.
- **v. 7** “from the earth”
 - The flow of the psalm begins with personal beings (the angels, v. 2) and moves through a variety of unconscious (unthinking) participants until personal beings are once again addressed (vv. 11–14).
- **vv. 7–12** The Pairs
 - Throughout these verses (with the single exception of the stormy wind in v. 8b) the psalmist calls eleven pairs of entities to praise God.
 - These pairs consist of a series of merisms, each indicating a totality (like “ladies and gentlemen” or “young and old”). See also the ten recurrences of “all.”
- **v. 8** “Fire and hail, snow and clouds”
 - Bible versions treat the fourth word in a variety of ways: “clouds” (NASB, NAU, NKJV, NIV, HCSB, NET, NLT), “frost” (RSV, NRSV), “vapor” (KJV, ASV, JPS), “smoke” (NJPS), “mist” (ESV, NJB).
 - The four words may form a chiasm: **a** Fire, **b** Hail, **b** Snow, **a** Clouds.



- ✓ The central focus on winter terms ties in nicely with a theme in Psalm 147:16–17.
- ✓ Fire/Smoke could be volcanic (Lava/Steam) or meteorological (Lightning/Clouds). The latter is most likely by context.
- **v. 8** “Stormy wind, fulfilling His word”
 - See Psalm 104:4.
- **v. 10** “Beasts and all cattle”
 - The two words probably refer first to wild animals and then to domestic animals. “Cattle” misrepresents and overly limits the reference to domestic animals (which include camels, donkeys, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, etc.).
 - *How can the physical, plant, and animal entities (vv. 3–4, 7–10) praise God? Is this merely a case of poetic license?*
- **v. 13** “earth and heaven”
 - This order occurs only here and in Genesis 2:4 where it also occurs as an inverted summary of what began in Genesis 1:1.
- **v. 13** “is exalted”
 - Literally, “out of reach.”
- **v. 14** A Final Coda?
 - Some scholars think that v. 14 acts as an appended title for this psalm or as the heading for Psalm 149. Of this verse’s last seven Hebrew words (v. 14b-c), six occur again in Psalm 149. Only one of those seven words appears in the rest of Psalm 148.
 - However, the verse serves as a good counterpart to vv. 5–6 by identifying two equivalent divine decrees: one regarding the station of the heavens and the second regarding the station of Israel, the people of God.
 - ✓ Both vv. 5–6 and 13–14 provide reasons for the praise to be offered. First, God commanded, established, and decreed the role of the heavens. Second, God established Israel as His people and decreed that they would share His glory and praise.
 - ✓ Psalm 149 might have been composed to carry on the theme of 148:14 in the crescendos of praise concluding the Psalter.
- **v. 14** “a horn for His people, praise”
 - God provides for the restoration, re-strengthening, and re-establishment of Israel upon their return from the Babylonian Captivity.
 - His act of restoration redounds to His praise—the restored people themselves are the praise. Compare Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14 (“to the praise of His glory”).



- **v. 14** “a people near to Him”
 - Compare Deuteronomy 4:7.
 - As the psalm commences with heavenly beings nearest to God’s heavenly throne (the angels), so the psalm concludes with earth dwellers nearest to Him because of their covenant relationship (believing Israelites).
 - This forms a fitting climax that John employs in Revelation 21:3 as he wraps up the final book of the New Testament (“Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them”).

4.0 Singing Psalm 148

“All Creatures of Our God and King”



1 All creatures of our God and King
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam!

Refrain:

*O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

2 Thou rushing wind that art so strong
Ye clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou rising moon, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice!

3 And all ye men of tender heart,
Forgiving others, take your part,
O sing ye! Alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and on Him cast your
care!

4 Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One!

— Words: Francis of Assisi (ca. 1225)

Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!

(Tune: “This Is My Father’s World”)

- 1** Hallelujah, praise the Lord!
From the heav’ns and heights, give praise.
All angels too, stars and sun and moon,
The Name of the Lord, come and praise.
For He created all, and He set them in their place.
He gave command that will ever stand.
The Name of the Lord now be praised.
- 2** Hallelujah, praise the Lord!
From the earth and sea, give praise.
Hail, clouds, and snow, stormy winds that blow,

The Name of the Lord, come and praise.
You mountains and all hills, trees and an' mals, great and small,
Both wild and tame, let them praise His Name,
For it is exalted o'er all.

3 Hallelujah, praise the Lord!
Kings and rulers all, give praise.
Old men and youth, women, children too,
The Name of the Lord, come and praise.
His Name's exalted high, and His splendor's o'er the earth.
Those close to Him always blessed have been.
Come praise the Lord, tell of His worth.

— Words: Susan Peterson (1999)

5.0 Praying Psalm 148

- Lord, thank You for allowing me to praise You along with the angels. [v. 2]
- Praise the Lord, for He is the Creator of everything in the heavens. [v. 5]
- Lord, I praise You for everything with which you have filled the earth. [vv. 7–10]
- Father, You alone I exalt and praise. [v. 13]

6.0 Applying Psalm 148

- The heavens that God created by His word declare His praise.
- All living and non-living things on earth proclaim the praise of their Creator.
- God's election and redemption of Israel rivals the glory of His creation.



This Psalm is neither more nor less than a glorious prophecy of that coming day, when not only shall the knowledge of the Lord be spread over the whole earth, as the waters cover the sea, but from every created object in heaven and in earth, animate and inanimate, from the highest archangel through every grade and phase of being, down to the tiniest atom—young men and maidens, old men and children, and all kings and princes, and judges of the earth, shall unite in this millennial anthem to the Redeemer's praise.

— Barton Bouchier (1794–1865), in C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 3/2:442

Philippians 2:9–11
Revelation 5:11–14