

# Psalm 114

## *The Transforming Power of God*

"This is the Exodus Psalm *par excellence*" (Michael Wilcock, Vol. 2, p. 178).

"A fierce delight and pride in the great march of God gleams through every line of this little poem – a masterpiece whose flights of verbal fancy would have excluded it from any hymn book but this. Here is the Exodus not as a familiar item in Israel's creed but as an astonishing event: as startling as a clap of thunder, as shattering as an earthquake" (Kidner, pp. 402-3).

The Psalm has balanced ABBA structure of 16 lines, 8 verses, 4 stanzas; vv. 3-6 create a pattern of suspense (reaction and question) which is relieved by v. 7-8:

- A Israel's origin in the Exodus (vv. 1-2)
- B Nature is mysteriously stimulated at the time of Exodus (vv. 3-4)
- B The cause of Nature's stimulation is sought (vv. 5-6)
- A The explanation is given: the Lord is present (vv. 7-8)

### 1. Israel's origin in the Exodus (vv. 1-2)

"Stammering speech" connoted for Israel detachment and homelessness.

"There is a dramatic change in status between the first verse and the second. The group of aliens, their isolation increased by the *strange language* that surrounded them, is now viewed in relation not to man but to God. They have the dignity of a church and kingdom; they are the visible sign of God's holiness and His rule" (Kidner, p. 403).

These verses look back "to the basics of Israel's faith and self-understanding. It begins by recalling the theologically significant time when the burden of foreign oppression rolled away" (Allen, p. 140).

"Parallelism forbids us to look for an essential difference between the terms which are here used or to try to understand the term 'sanctuary' as a reference to the Temple, showing preference for Judah above Israel. The author wants to emphasize that the rule of God holds sway in both these states, and therefore, more particularly, that the spiritual unity of the two brother kingdoms is both given and demanded" (Artur Weiser, p. 710).

"The psalmist deliberately avoids speaking openly of Yahweh here; he refers to him only by hints; in this way he maintains the tension until he reaches the conclusion of v. 7 and also reinforces the weird impression which the subsequent verses produce" (Weiser, p. 710).

### 2. Nature mysteriously stimulated at the time of Exodus (vv. 3-4)

Each natural feature does what is contrary to its nature. "...sea and river falling over themselves, so to speak, to make way for Him; mountains and hills no longer aloof and majestic but all animated and agog" (Kidner, p. 403).

"Although jumping can express joy...here as in Ps. 29 it expresses alarm. Israel's arrival had the same effect on mountains like Hermon as the coming of a thunderstorm; the ground shuddered and shock, jumping in alarm like a frightened deer" (Goldingay, p. 323).

"The similes of domesticated animals [rams and lambs] indicate the unthreatening submission of natural obstacles and so the overwhelming power of the mysterious aggressor" (Allen, p. 142).

### 3. The cause of Nature's stimulation is sought (vv. 5-6)

"The purpose of his question is not only to indicate participation in the past as if it were present, but also to allow time for further reflection, so that the miraculous character of the effects on Nature of God's appearing is thereby rendered still more prominent and the impression of awe and terror produced by the theophany is emphasized" (Weiser, p. 712).

"At the same time these questions exhibit a touch of real humour and irony, expressing the freedom and spiritual superiority of a man who by virtue of his faith unreservedly gives himself up to joy in God's sublime nature and sides with him in his bold dealings with Nature. This striking mixture of reverent and trembling awe and of utterly devoted joy in the world-shaking majesty of God is a characteristic feature of Old Testament piety" (Weiser, p. 712).

"The poet pauses over the scene, savoring the mystery and deliberately delaying his eventual disclosure. He revels in these past events, pretending not to know, so that its wonder may shine out afresh" (Allen, p. 142).

"It has all the light-hearted gusto of Elijah's taunts at the impotent Baal, and it prepares with artistry for the sudden change of mood that will follow" (Kidner, p. 403).

"Sea, river, mountain, and hill know that they are not just witnessing an ordinary group of migrants but something of earthshaking significance" (Goldingay, p. 323).

### 4. The explanation is given: the Lord is present (vv. 7-8)

Compare Rev. 20:11, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them."

"He is *the God of Jacob*, and His purpose is salvation. The psalm ends...on the note of His quiet creativity and care: His power directed to the point of need, transforming what is least promising into a place of plenty and a source of joy" (Kidner, p. 403).

"The greatness of the miracle is a measure of the greatness not only of the transcendent majesty of the divine Lord, but also of his incomprehensible grace" (Weiser, p. 713).