

Psalm 145: God's characteristics



Psalm 145 (144) (Mode 4. 3....4 / 2.....171)

Before praying the psalm let us note its special themes.

The key theme is that of totality and comprehensiveness. This is expressed by the acrostic form (The letter 'n' is missing in the Hebrew, but is supplied in the Greek Septuagint - verse 13b).

Totality is also clearly stated in the following verses:

‘I will extol you, my God and king, and never cease praising you’ (verses 1-2).

‘The Lord is faithful in all his words, loving in all his deeds’(verse 13b).

‘My lips will utter the praise of the Lord, and everyone will bless you for ever, for ages unending (verse 21).

It is a psalm praising the Lord, the king:

‘I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever’ (verse 1).

‘They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations’ (verses 11-13).

The reign of the Lord is gracious, for he cares for and saves especially the weak and needy:

‘The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing’(verses 14-16).

‘The Lord fulfils the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them. The Lord watches over all who love him’(verses 19-20).

Various characteristics of the Lord are praised:

- YHWH is great [Hebrew gadôl, גָּדוֹל] and powerful [Hebrew gibôr, גִּבּוֹר].

‘Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendour of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness’(verses 3-6).

‘They [all creatures, especially the hasidim - those loved by God] shall tell of your power, to make known to all peoples your mighty deeds’(verses 11-12).

- The Lord’s glory [Hebrew kabôd, כְּבוֹד].

‘On the glorious splendour of your majesty, I will meditate’(verse 5).

‘They [all creatures, especially the Hasidim - those loved by God] shall speak of the glory of your kingdom . . . to make known to all people the glorious splendour of your kingdom’(verses 11-12).

- The Lord is good [Hebrew tōb, טוב].

‘All generations shall celebrate the fame
of your abundant goodness’(verse 7)

‘The Lord is good to all’(verse 9).

- The Lord is just [Hebrew tsadîq, צַדִּיק]

‘All generations shall sing aloud of your
righteousness’(verse 7).

‘The Lord is just in all his ways’(verse 17).

- The Lord is gracious [hannûn, חַנּוּן].

‘The Lord is gracious’(verse 8).

‘The Lord is gracious [Greek hosios] in all his deeds.’

(LXX verse 13)

- The Lord is tenderly compassionate [rahûm, רַחוּם].

‘The Lord is tenderly compassionate’(verse 8).

‘His compassion is over all that he has made’(verse 9).

- The Lord is long suffering [’erek ’appayim, אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם]

‘The Lord is slow to anger’(verse 8).

- The Lord’s steadfast covenant love/kindness [hesed, חֶסֶד].

‘The Lord is abounding in kindness’(verse 8).

‘The Lord is kind in everything he does’(verse 17).

- The Lord's faithfulness [’emûnah, אֱמוּנָה].

‘The Lord is faithful [Greek pistos] in all his words’(LXX verse 13).

- The Lord is close [qarûb, קָרוֹב].

‘The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth’(verse 18).

- The Lord is holy [qodesh, קֹדֶשׁ].

‘All flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever’(verse 21).

[א] I will extol you, my God and king,

[ב] and never cease praising you.

[ג] Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
a greatness that cannot be measured.

‘Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the ever-lasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable’(Isaiah 40:28).

‘As for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause. He does great things and unsearchable, marvellous things without number’(Job 5:8-9).

‘He does great things beyond understanding, and marvellous things without number’(Job 9:10).

[ד] One generation proclaims to the next
what you have done,
recounting your mighty deeds.

[ה] I ponder on the glorious splendour of your majesty.
I tell the tale of your wonderful deeds.

[ו] They manifest your awesome power,
revealing your greatness.

[ז] They celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and sing aloud of your justice.

[ח] The Lord is gracious and tenderly compassionate,
slow to anger, abounding in love.

The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed: The Lord, The Lord, a God tenderly compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness and faithfulness'(Exodus 34:6).

[v] The Lord is good to all,
compassionate to all creation.

[v] All your works praise you, O Lord,
and all your faithful bless you.

'You love all that exists and detest none of the things you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it'(Wisdom 11:24).

The 'faithful' are the hasîdîm – those who welcome God's hesed. and keep the covenant.

'The Father, God of the universe, long suffering, full of mercy and compassion - is it possible that he does not suffer in any way? Do you not know that when he undertook human affairs he underwent human suffering? If people call on him he is moved with compassion and shares their pain, he suffers greatly from love and enters into the experience of things which, because of the greatness of his nature, he cannot of himself experience. For our sakes he takes upon himself human suffering'(Origen).

- [כ] They speak of the glory of your reign,
and tell of your might.
- [כב] They make known to all people your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendour of your reign.
- [כג] Yours is an everlasting kingdom,
your dominion endures through all generations.
- [כד] The Lord is faithful in all his words, in LXX
loving in all his deeds.

‘The Lord sits enthroned forever’(Psalm 9:7).

‘My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass. But you, Lord, are enthroned forever; your name endures to all generations’(Psalm 102:11-12).

‘The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!’(Psalm 146:10).

- [ד] The Lord upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.
- [ז] The eyes of all creatures look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
- [ט] You open wide your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.

‘The Lord upholds the righteous ... Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when he delights in our way; though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand’(Psalm 37:17,23-24).

‘The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.’

(Psalm 146:8)

‘These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things’(Psalm 104:27-28).

[٧] The Lord is just in every way,
loving in every deed.

[١٢] The Lord is near to all who call,
who cry to God from their hearts.

‘Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near’(Isaiah 55:6).

‘It was you who took me from the womb; you kept me
safe on my mother’s breast. On you I was cast from
my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been
my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near
and there is no one to help’(Psalm 22:9-11).

[ג] God fulfils all our desires;
hears our cry and saves us.

‘Hear my prayer, Lord, and give ear to my cry;
do not hold your peace at my tears’(Psalm 39:12).

[ש] The Lord watches over all who love,
but the wicked are destroyed.

[ת] My lips will utter
the praise of the Lord,
and everyone will bless you
for ever, for ages unending.

Saint Augustine reflects on this psalm in his 'Ennarationes':

'Look at the whole fabric of creation, all its intricate and ordered beauty, its harmony swelling to a crescendo from the simplest to the most intricate forms, only to descend again without interruption, splendid in its variation - all of creation praises the glory of God. In what sense can we say God is praised? God is praised when we, contemplating it and finding it beautiful, praise God. The perfection of the earth is like a voice that is mute. Let us fix our gaze upon it and see its beauty.

‘Let us see it, and in our contemplation seek answers to our questions. Let us allow ourselves to be overwhelmed as we inquire. Let us discover the immense power of it all, its beauty and energy. We will come to realise that creation does not exist of itself. It points to its Creator. What we have discovered in it witnesses to the one who gives it all it is, and we are carried on to praise the Creator. And so, as we contemplate the perfection of this world, its very beauty responds: ‘I do not make myself. It is God!

Let us observe this world. All its beauty surrounds us, and we are part of this creation! And what of the beauty of the angelic world which also envelops us? And what of the reign of God's love? This we do not yet see in all its splendour, but we know to believe in it even though we see it so imperfectly. Believing in it, we long for it, and this longing enables us to bear all things. It is the grandeur of a perfection which will certainly be revealed. Not yet seeing God, we are in love with him, that we may possess him when we see his beauty.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, in her poem on the Sacred Heart of Jesus (1895), writes:

One day, O my God, like Magdalen,
I wanted so much to see and be close to you.
My gaze searched the immense plain
seeking to find the Master and King.
My eyes caught the clear ocean wave,
the star, the flower and the bird. I cried:
‘If I do not see God, O beautiful nature,
you are for me only one vast tomb!’

Joseph Mary Plunkett (executed 1916) writes of Jesus:

I see his blood upon the rose

And in the stars the glory of his eyes,

His body gleams amid eternal snows,

His tears fall from the skies.

I see his face in every flower;

The thunder and the singing of the birds

Are but his voice – and carven by his power

Rocks are his written words.

All pathways by his feet are worn,

His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,

His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,

His cross in every tree.