

Praise Him: Common and Special

Psalm 148:1 Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

² Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts!

³ Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created.

⁶ And he established them forever and ever; he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps,

⁸ fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word!

⁹ Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

¹⁰ Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds!

¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

¹² Young men and maidens together, old men and children!

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven.

¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him. Praise the LORD!

Psalm 149:1 Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!

² Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!

³ Let them **praise** his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!

⁴ For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation.

⁵ Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds.

⁶ Let the high **praises** of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands,

⁷ to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples,

⁸ to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron,

⁹ to execute on them the judgment written! This is honor for all his godly ones. **Praise** the LORD!

Psalms 148-149

Starting Off Books

WITH WHAT ATTRIBUTE of God does **Hebrews** begin? How about **Colossians**? How does **John** start his Gospel? Three New Testament books written by what I believe are three different human authors. Yet, each book begins its reflections of God as **Creator**.

- **Hebrews:** “But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” (**Heb 1:2**)

- **Colossians:** “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him.” (Col 1:16)
- **John:** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:1-3)

Why would three books focus on this attribute at the beginning? The same reason the Bible itself does so. I think it's for this reason: The **One who made all this** stuff—heaven and earth, visible and invisible, animals and trees and rocks and ... everything—the one who made this **is Omnipotent and cannot be thwarted** in anything by anyone ever. He is utterly powerful and can do anything he wants, anytime he wants, anywhere he wants, to anyone, or anything.

Is this not precisely the reason why, be it the Greeks with **Chaos** or atheists with a **Big Bang** that just “happened,” so many refuse to ascribe creation to God? For if there is a God and he can do all this, then he can do anything he wants *to*

me. And if he can do anything that he wants to me, then I'm not in control, I'm not sovereign, I'm not captain of my own destiny. Someone else is, and frankly, people don't like that. It goes against every fiber of our fallen nature, against our desire to be in control.

Nevertheless, from the first chapter of the Bible, to its last chapter where he rules in a new heaven and new earth made by himself, God is described to us as the Creator. There are only two things in this universe: Him and everything else; Creator and creation. And if that's true, if God is this kind of a God, then **what does this creation owe to him?** And if you are part of that creation, **what do you owe him?**

Psalm 148: Finishing This Book

While **these books begin** with the theme of creation, **the Psalms end with it**. In the final set of five songs, the so-called “**Final Hallelujahs**” (**Ps 146-150**), creation becomes a major theme. It is probably found in all of the songs. In Psalm 146 he is the one “**who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them**” (**Ps 146:6**). In Psalm 147 he “**determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names**” (**Ps**

147:4). In Psalm 149 he is “Israel’s Maker” (149:2). In Psalm 150 it is “everything that breathes” (150:6). The epicenter of this tsunami of God’s creative power is located in Psalm 148.

Psalm 148 is a great psalm celebrating and praising the God of all creation. As such, it teaches you what this creation, and therefore you, owe to him. The structure is simple and elegant. It is chiasmic in terms of it repeating lines, but it does so in a different way than most. Rather than having a center tiny central verse, the whole song between the first and last verse is its center. As such, it can be divided into two parallel sections such that literally everything you can think of must praise the LORD.

- A. Praise the LORD (1)
- B. Praise the LORD from the heavens (2-4)
- C. Let them praise the Name of the LORD (5a)
- D. For he commanded, and they were created (5b)
- E. He established them, he gave a decree (6)
- B¹. Praise the LORD from the earth and the depths (7-12)
- C¹. Let them praise the Name of the LORD (13a)
- D¹. For his Name alone is excellent, his glory is above earth and heaven (13b)
- E¹. He raised up a horn for his people
- A¹. Praise the LORD (14)

As all five of these songs do, Psalm 148 begins and ends with: *Praise the LORD*. It is an **imperative** verb, the verb commanding something. If the Creator commands, what will you do? We saw in Psalm 146 that it is **I** who must praise him. In 147 it was **you** who must praise him. Psalm 148 say that **all creation** must praise him, and this transitions into Psalm 149 in a most amazing and important way. First, Psalm 148.

The song is divided into **two halves**. The first is **vv. 1-6**. Here, those commanded to praise are “**from the heavens**” and “**in the heights**” (**148:1**). It begins with the most obvious and at the same time least obvious heavenly thing. It is the most obvious, because it refers to what we probably think of as the highest of that order, at least metaphysically speaking: **angels**. “**Praise him, all his angels**” (**2**). The parallel here is “**all his hosts**.” Calvin’s commentary reads, “**all his armies**.” These are the armies of Yahweh. The heavenly legions Jesus could have called to his commanded at any moment had he so wished.

It is least obvious because of the parallels in other song. Those who are here called “angels” (Heb: *malak*; Gk: *aggelos*) are called in other places “**gods**” (*elohim*). **Ps 97:7**, “**Worship**

him, all you gods!” Angels is probably a bit more inclusive and less offensive to modern ears. The term seems to allow for a host of heavenly beings (sons of God, seraphim, cherubim, messengers, etc.). But at the very least, there is overlap, and this is important. Why?

We are still in Book V in one sense, and as we have seen, this is a book that was very much written to help those returning from Babylon reinvigorate the worship of the LORD in the second temple. Babel was, of course, the epicenter of a great cosmic rebellion in Genesis 11, with man trying to reach up to the gods rather than calling upon the Name of the LORD. It was so all encompassing in its scope, that it in fact led the LORD to curse both earthly and heavenly beings, giving the whole world over to the darkness of rule from fallen *elohim*.

In the Bible, Babylon is looked upon as the anti-city. It is a place filled with demons and the worship of false gods. Later on in its history, one particular god rose to the top. His name was Marduk. Well, I should say one of his names was Marduk. In fact, in the *Enuma Elish* he is given fifty-names (Tablets VIb-VII).¹ In the Bible he is called Merodach and

¹ A translation by E. A. Speiser is here: <http://www.piney.com/EnumaSpeis6a7.html>

Bel (Jer 50:2; 51:44; Isa 46:1). Any Israelite coming out of this would have known the story.

The *Enuma Elish* is the most famous of the Babylonian *creation* stories. Think about the topic of Psalm 148—creation! Discovered in 1849 in among the ruins of the famed library of **Ashurbanipal** in Nineveh, it was written on seven stone tablets.



It tells the story of how in the beginning the swirling waters were chaotic, until over time they separated. Depicted as gods, Apsu (fresh water) and Tiamat (salt water) give birth to other gods, who then proceed to murder Apsu. Tiamat, depicted as a **chaos monster**, becomes enraged and declares

war on these younger gods. But one, Marduk, takes it upon himself to slay the sea-monster, and after destroying her is elevated to god of gods, the creator of man, the one with fifty names.



Tiamat Slain by Marduk

In my view, the Babylonians and other pagan cultures are not inventing fairy tales, but are rather twisting history to worship the creation as they **deify nature** and **worship the fallen heavenly beings like Marduk**. Into this context, what do you suppose it would have meant to a Jew to sing in your own temple after returning from Babylon, “**Praise him all his angels, all his hosts?**” Would this not include Marduk or any other fallen or even holy angel?

I say holy angels, because we know from places like Isaiah 6 and Revelation 5 that there is a host in heaven who sing, “**Holy, Holy, Holy.**” But what about the rebels, those who did not remain loyal to Yahweh? Well, they are to praise him too. He is God their creator. They must do his will.

There is more to the context than this. The Babylonians sang hymns to Marduk. For example, Assurbanipal implores: “**May all the gods and every goddess, Anu, Inlil, the constellations, the Abyss, the solid ground [i.e., underworld] ... witness the deeds of the lord of the gods, Marduk.**”² In this hymn, and in others like it in other cultures such as Egypt, the creation in all its manifold witness (like the gods, animals, reptiles, birds, trees, storm-clouds, dew, waters, earth, islands, kings, etc.)³ is called upon to praise the god.

This is what the Psalm does next. “**Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!**” (3). We are still in the heavenly realm, that place that represented the far-away

² Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, no. 2 lines 36–38; in John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): The Minor Prophets, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 440–441.

³ See Delbert R. Hillers, “A Study of Psalm 148,” *CBQ* 40:3 (July 1978): 329–331 [323–334].

other world. There are two ways of looking at this. The **first** is as a continuation of vs. 2 such that these heavenly objects represent in the thinking of an ancient person, some kind of deified beings. Deuteronomy uses them this way. “**Beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, those that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven ... [do not serve] other gods and worship them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden**” (Deut 4:19, 17:3). Even the great heavenly lights of Genesis 1 must praise God. The **second** way is somewhere closer to how we would think of them, not as gods, but as great objects of God’s creative power. The truth is, some Israelites did worship these objects as gods, but they were never supposed to, for there is only one True God, and these things worship him.

The praise continues from the heavens, this time *by the heavens themselves*. “**Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!**” (4). This is language straight out of Genesis 1. Whatever you make of the teaching here about water being above the heavens, I do not think the point is to

give a geography lesson any more than the point of the previous verses is to give a biology lesson or a metaphysics lesson. The point is that because God made it, it praises him. And this is exactly what vs. 5 concludes. “Let them praise the Name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created.” He spoke, they came into being. He said it, they suddenly began to exist.

Vs. 6 adds what I believe is **covenantal language**. “And he established them forever and ever; he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away” (6). This is an obvious parallel to vs. 5 with “**commanded**” and “**decree**” being the points of contact. But I said this is covenantal language.

This **covenant with creation** is based on the oath of God which binds the powers of nature by laws. They are referred to as God’s decree, ordinances and rule over the creation. Creation was to be regulated and ordered by these laws. The concept of “law” is key to this. A breach of this covenant meant releasing the forces of nature which could destroy creation.⁴ That’s the same idea here. God is not merely speaking, but commanding. He is entering into covenant

⁴ See my *Covenant Theology: A Reformed Baptist Primer*, 35-36.

with these things, in whatever sense that is.⁵ He is their Lord, and they praise his Name. For he established them and they do not pass away.

If the permanent fixtures of the heavens, the exact same things that humans have been staring at for thousands of years praise God, what about **things down here**? This second half of the poem begins, “**Praise the LORD from earth**” (**Ps 148:7**). Where does it go from here?

It begins with the “**great sea creatures and all deeps**” (7). “**The deep**” is found in the second verse of the Bible. Before God said anything, the Spirit is hovering over the deep. The deep praises God.

But the deep is more than just a thing God made. It represents something, something **terrible**. Throughout the ancient world, the deep is the place of **chaos** (sound familiar?) often depicted by—you guessed it—a **sea monster**. In the Babylonian story, Marduk murders Tiamat—a sea-monster. In the Scripture, even in the Psalms, Leviathan and Rahab are sea-monsters that stir up chaos and trouble.

⁵ **Terence E. Fretheim**, “Nature’s Praise of God In The Psalms,” *Ex Auditu* Vol. 3: 16-30 argues that the ancient Jews were not merely personifying nature, but believe nature actually could participate in praising God. His argument is an interesting start, but I think would love for a conservative Christian to give it a crack.

The word for a sea-monster here is *tannin*. It is actually a synonym of Leviathan in **Psalm 74:13-14** and **Isa 27:1**. The deep is *tehom* (or in the form here, *tehomot*). Someone explains,

Tehomot is related to the Babylonian **Tiamat**, who in the epic myth of *Enuma Elish*, is the divine primordial ocean, progenitor of the gods ... The author of Psalm 148 has a similar view of sea monsters as that behind Genesis 1 and Psalm 104, that the sea monsters are part of God's balanced and well-ordered creation, not opposed to that order ... These monsters still praise God. What does this mean? ... Psalm 148 tells us that no one and nothing is too far from God that they cannot praise God's name. Even the sea monsters and ocean depths are necessary, their songs unique and irreplaceable. And if God wants even their song added to the mixture of the chorus of the universe, how much the more does God want yours?⁶

This starts to move us ahead to the final thought of the song, but let's not get there too quickly. We have more stuff

⁶ **Roni Tabick**, "From the Deep – Praise the Lord – Psalm 148," *Roni Tabick's Mythic Writing* (Sept 9, 2013), <http://mythicwriting.blogspot.com/2013/09/from-deep-praise-lord-psalm-148.html>. Tabick is a Jew, and while his insight can be helpful, I would want to say, "How much more does God want your praise, O Christian!" We will turn to this idea soon enough.

in between. **Next**, some of the elements from the previous songs return, and some new things. “**Fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!**” (8-9). These are, as we understand them, all inanimate things. They are not persons, properly speaking. And **yet, they praise God**.

Moreover, many of them are what we would in most circumstances think of as terrible things, like sea-monsters. **Fire** destroys, even as it is literally doing throughout the Western United States even as we speak. We haven’t been able to see the mountains for weeks, and we live right next to them. All because of fires thousands of miles away. But fire praises God.

Hail wreaks havoc—on crops, on cars, on everything. It was one of the plagues of Egypt it is so terrible. **Snow** and **mist** may sound charming and fine, just a soft light covering on the ground. But “mist” can be translated as “**thick smoke**,” and so this “snow” could be a **blizzard**. That fits with the context. All this praises God.

Stormy winds frighten many people, but why should they? They are created by God and only do his bidding! Nothing is apart from the will of God, not even a sudden

wind storm that blows your trampoline away! In fact, that storm praises God! How? Because it is not outside of his control.

The images move to **more pleasant things**. **Mountains** (big) and **hills** (small), which seem almost eternal. **Trees** (short) and **cedars** (tall), which outlive many lifetimes of men. All of them are his creation. He is their Lord. These praise God. **“The trees of the forest clap their hands.”** **“The rocks cry out.”**

“Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds!” (10). Those things that **eat upon** the land. Those that **lurk under** it. Those that **fly over** it. Those things that we count as having a modicum of intelligence, very little intelligence but still some, and some that can even parrot our own voices. All these things that God made in Genesis 1, they praise him.

What is left? **“Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!”** (11). He starts with the **leaders of the peoples**, those who represent them before heaven (whether they admit it or not). He moves to the **“Young men and maidens together, old men and children”** (12). He

takes a **sampling of humanity** and gives the broadest range of their ages, the **different sexes**, the **different stages of life**.

“Let them praise the Name of the LORD, for his Name alone is exalted; his majesty is above the earth and heaven” (13). It is a fitting way to conclude the song.

But the song is not done. There is one more verse. “He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him. Praise the LORD” (14). This verse is the key, for like the sixth day and the creation of man who is the climax of that creative week, this verse gives us the climax of the creative activities as Psalm 148 sees them. And what is that? **Not man in general, but man redeemed**. The church. The bride. The beloved. The elect. The saved. The regenerated.

Friends, what I really need you to see this morning is how this climax of Psalm 148 **becomes the theme of Psalm 149** and how, when you read them together, they inform one another, like days 1-5 inform day 6 of Genesis 1. So let us turn to Psalm 149 and see how this is so.

Psalm 149: From Creation to the Church

If in Psalm 148 all creation must praise the LORD. In Psalm 149, the focus comes specifically, as we see even at the end of Psalm 148, **to the church**. It is for this reason that I have called this sermon “**Praise Him: Common and Special**.” I could have called it “**secular and sacred**” or perhaps “**creation and the church**.” All get at the same point. There are glorious, incredible things that God has made. But the greatest glory is his church. A star shines billions of miles through the darkness to shine a point of light on earth; the church shines like a billion suns in the throne of heaven.

But what does this mean for you? We are the church, and it is the gathering of God’s people who are now hearing this message. While it is good that all creation praises the LORD, it is imperative that the church does so more fully, completely, and devoutly than anything else in all creation.

“**Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!**” (Ps 149:1). You hear how this is speaking about the church? In fact, that’s the word in Greek: *Ekklesia*. It could rightly be translated “**the church of the godly**.” This is a psalm for the church, which

is here called “the godly.” Not those who pretend to be godly. Not, those who come to a building and call themselves something they are not. Not those who are born to parents of the godly. The godly. How did they get godly? There are hints in this verse with the “new song” even as there are in the previous song. But let’s continue for now.

“Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!” (2). Continuing the creation theme of the previous song, now it is Israel that is created, or from vs. 1, the Church. Same thing. It is created by Yahweh, “their King.” This revives the king theme from Psalm 144, which we saw is a prophetic kind of psalm about a coming or returning king.

“Let them praise his Name with dancing, making melody to him with the tambourine and lyre” (3). This anticipates the very last song, which we will look at next week. The joyful, exuberant, musical, dancing of worship that Israel was so well known for. But in this verse, there is something else we’ve already seen today. Several times. Do you see what it is? They are praising the same thing everything else has been praising.

Why? “For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation” (4). “Pleasure” is a word we saw twice in Psalm 147, where it was the central focus of the song. There, as here, his pleasure is in his people, “in those who fear Him.” The idea that you could be just a biological Jew with no faith and just get by from your birth-right or your legalistic righteousness is foreign to the OT. The idea that you can be somehow born a Christian or that God doesn’t care about the heart of a person being transformed is foreign to the Scripture.

Why are you to praise the LORD? Because he saves you. Because he delights that you fear him. Because he takes pleasure in adorning you with the beauties of eternal life: complete forgiveness, release from sin, no tears or crying or pain, patriation in the divine nature in Christ, life everlasting. Because he loves you.

So “let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds” (5). This is not only for the assembly, it is for alone time at home. It is corporate and private, alone or with others. Day or night.

“Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them the judgment written! This is honor for all his godly ones” (6-9). Huh? How and why did we so suddenly move from all creation praising God, to the singular joys of being saved and his church praising him, to this?⁷

Here, we really come to **the penultimate question in the entire Psalter**. For this is the very last thing that the next-to-the-last Psalm says. What is the meaning of all this. Because of all we’ve looked at, you are prepared to see the answer. I need to show you something I didn’t point out at the beginning of the sermon. We can and need to be more specific

⁷ I’ll save this for a footnote, but the structure shows you the parallels and helps answer this question.

- A. **Praise the LORD** (1a)
- B. Sing a new song, Praise in the assembly of **the godly** (1b)
- C. Let Israel rejoice in **its King** (2-3)
- D. For the LORD takes pleasure in his people, **saving them** (4)
- E. **Let the godly be joyful and sing to God** (5-6a)
- D¹. With two-edged swords in their hands, they execute **vengeance on the peoples** (6b-7)
- C¹. Binding **their kings** with chains and executing judgment (8-9a)
- B¹. This is honor for all **his godly ones** (9b)
- A¹. **Praise the LORD** (9c)

about who is doing the creating in those passages we began with this morning.

Who created in Hebrews? **The Son**. In Colossians? **The Firstborn**. In John? **The Logos**. It is not “God” in his bare essence doing the creating, though of course we do say that God creates. Instead, it is God creating through *the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ*. He is the Power of God. Christ is the Creator in all these passages. We confess with the Church, “**I believe in God the Father, Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord...**” Read this way, immediately after the Father, Jesus is co-creator with Him, and the central Person that the NT points out who does the creating.

Indeed, in Psalm 148, it is without question that the focus is on the same person, and this is the original authorial intent! Because they knew the Son. There are three things here. First, they are praising not just Yahweh but “*the Name of Yahweh*.”

“Let them praise the Name of the LORD” (148:5).

“Let them praise the Name of the LORD” (13).

“Let them praise his Name” (149:3).

Why such an explicit and deliberate focus on the Name, on the Son, on the Firstborn, on the Logos as the Creator? Why not just “God?” Because it is through *this Person* of the Godhead that the Holy Trinity showers blessings and mercy and grace and salvation upon you.

True, the Father is the one who sent the Son to do this. And yes, the Spirit is sent to us to increase these gifts in the lives of believers. But it is **through the work of the Son that redemption was won**. It is through **his act of condescension** to take on our human nature that he upheld the Covenant of Works, that he offered a sacrifice pleasing to the Father, that he became the sacrifice that takes away sin, and that he won the victory over fallen man and evil beings in his resurrection and ascension.

Second, this is the meaning of the “**horn**” at the end of Psalm 148. “**He has raised up a horn for his people**” (14). This is what Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist said about Jesus. “**And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David**” (Luke 1:69).⁸

⁸ You may be tempted to think that Zechariah is speaking here about John, but he isn't. John is from the house of Levi, not David. He is a priest only, not a king. Zechariah is prophesying about the Christ.

And how did Christ become our horn? Through his entire incarnation, ending in his death, burial, and resurrection. Thus, third, the “**new song**.” “The ‘new song’ is typically a song of salvation sung to the Creator/King in the context of military victory.”⁹ “**A new song (96:1) ... This was common after military victories.**”¹⁰ “In the OT a “new song” is always an expression of praise for God’s victory over the enemy.”¹¹ Scholars are unanimous. This is why there is **military language** at the end of the psalm. In fact, this is probably why there is **dancing and tambourine** rejoicing, just like Moses’ sister: “**Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea’**” (**Ex 15:20-21**).

⁹ **Mark D. Futato**, “The Book of Psalms,” in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 7: The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 314.

¹⁰ **John H Walton**, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): The Minor Prophets, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 402.

¹¹ **G. K. Beale**, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 358.

This is even clearer when you understand the relationship this next-to-the-last song in the Psalter has to the second song. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Messiah, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us’” (Ps 2:2-3). He who sits in the heavens laughs, Adonai holds them in derision (4). Why? “I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel’” (6-9).

And now? Vengeance on the nations; binding their kings with chains and fetters of iron, executing judgment on them, the judgment that is written. Where? Psalm 2 for starters!

But it says that **the church does this**. This is right because the church is Christ’s body. But that means the Head is the one who commits that first blow, and he did it on the cross, when he was thought to have been blown down. No, that was the victory, not the defeat. It was there, as Psalm 68 told

us, that a host of captives were freed, and a mighty throng of enemies was defeated. Any interpretation must take these things into consideration.

The imagery here has certainly been **used to justify any manner of military conquest under the sign of the cross**. But Christ's kingdom, as seen in Psalm 145 is not of this earth. Jesus tells us as much and says you can't see it. Then he tells his church that **the gates of hell will not prevail** against the onslaught of his church. So what must this mean? The church is a church militant.

This is **not military vengeance upon Russia or Israel or America**. It is a victory over the powers of hell, the very gods and fallen angels that must praise the LORD at the beginning of Psalm 148. It is a binding, even a punishing of their kings who have ruled so badly, mistreating so many. But how?

This warfare is conducted through the sword. But the only sword that the NT knows when it quotes the OT is the sword of the Spirit and the Word of God. Calvin says, **“As to the Church collective, the sword now put into our hand is of another kind, that of the word and spirit, that we may slay for a sacrifice to God those who formerly were enemies,**

or again deliver them over to everlasting destruction unless they repent” (Eph 6:17).¹² In fact, the term “double-edged sword” is literally “a sword of mouths.”¹³ Someone writes, “The praise of God in the faithful’s mouths becomes the weapon of their choice to bring the nations to their knees.”¹⁴

This then is our warfare, and it follows the warfare of the King of kings on the cross. When the church proclaims the word—law and gospel—nations are held accountable, the mouths of kings are stopped. These things put them under are more direct accountability for their actions, for they know right from wrong. But we saw earlier that these kings praise the Lord, and some of them are subdued by the Lord into salvation in earlier psalms.

Beloved, the psalms are ending the way they begin, with thoughts about the coming Messiah and his work and his kingdom and his reign. This is exactly what the NT teaches us about it. And it is what we have come to expect since Psalm 1:1. why?

¹² John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 5 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 316.

¹³ Kilnam Cha, *Psalms 146-150: The Final Hallelujah Psalms as a Fivefold Doxology to the Hebrew Psalter*, A Dissertation to the Graduate Faculty of Baylor University, 2006: 94.

¹⁴ Cha, 95; citing also Broyles, 517-18; Clifford, 315.

Without Christ, you would not know the grace of God, the goodness of God, the salvation of God. Without his work at the cross in his own brutal death which defeated the evil powers and his resurrection which conquered death itself, you would not know the true power of God displayed in condescending humility to empty himself and take on your nature. This is why in [the Solas](#) of the Reformation you do not have just grace alone, but grace alone is through Christ alone.

Psalm 148 is about Christ. Psalm 149 is about Christ. All the Psalms are about Christ. This is why we praise the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Name under heaven by which a man or woman, a boy or girl, a slave or a freeman, rich or poor, black or white, Republican or Democrat, any opposite you can think of, may be saved. Have you been saved? Have you praised the Lord Jesus Christ from your heart? It is the most important praise that the universe offers. God is calling you to do that now.

This is the honor for all his godly ones, that they may participate in his kingdom, in his ongoing battle against sin and death and the devil, in salvation itself. This is why we

especially above anything else in all creation which already does it must praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD.¹⁵

¹⁵ Interesting resources: **Robin Routledge**, “Did God Create Chaos? Unresolved Tension in Genesis 1:1-2,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 61.1 (2010), 71-88. <http://www.tyndalehouse.com/Bulletin/61=2010/4%20Routledge.pdf>. **Dilbert R. Hillers**, “A Study of Psalm 148,” *CBQ* 40:3 (July 1978): 323-334