

GRANDEUR AND GRACE:
GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE
IN PSALM 113¹

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Psalm 113 is a rich treasury for all. Literarily, it is a masterpiece of semantical, syntactical, and structural development. The Spirit of God inspired this psalmist to combine beauty with bounty, resulting in a highly functional piece of art that amplifies the psalm's theological substance and applicational summons. Liturgically, this hymn of praise has played a significant role in both Passover week and Passion week. Applicationally, it has served as a well of refreshment for needy people throughout its history. Theologically, the psalm's message of God's transcendence and immanence provides substance to the promise of refreshment. Today Psalm 113 continues to invite the people of God to come and drink deeply.

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A TRANSLATION

- 1 Praise the LORD!
O servants of the LORD, praise *Him!*
Praise the name of the LORD!
- 2 Let the name of the LORD be blessed
both now and forever!
- 3 From east to west,
let the name of the LORD be praised!
- 4 The LORD *is* high above all nations;
His glory *rises* above the heavens.

¹This essay was originally presented at the Forty-first Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in San Diego, CA, in November 1989 and has been adapted for incorporation in this issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal*.

- 5 Who is like the LORD our God,
who is enthroned on high,
6 who condescends to care for *things*
in the heavens and upon the earth?

- 7 *He* lifts up *the* downtrodden from *the* dust;
He raises *the* destitute from the dump
 8 to make *them* dwell with nobles,
 with the nobles of His people.
 9 *He* makes the woman barren in household to dwell
 as a joyful mother of sons.
 Praise the LORD!

INTRODUCTION

One reason for the spiritual poverty of some Christians is their ignorance or failure to reflect on who God is. In so doing, they have robbed themselves of a vital source of help and encouragement. No better solution to their problem is available than a careful study of Psalm 113.

"Presence-theology" discussions and debates about whether or not in theophany the LORD is ever genuinely conceived of as dwelling on earth have generally been counter-productive in the edification of the church.² Finite and fallible human deliberations, energized by overly simplistic assumptions, have both impeded the study of key texts and skewed their balanced theology. Conclusions that see contradictions rather than complementary truths have resulted, especially in reference to God's transcendence and immanence. Consequently, this investigation will undertake a long-overdue examination of the psalm's data without recourse to critical agency.

Psalm 113 provides a natural theological entrance into two corollary thoughts about God, His transcendence and His immanence. As in other texts, God's attributes of greatness and goodness, His characteristics of grandeur and glory, harmoniously blend in a theological duet. The psalm is an excellent avenue for a deeper appreciation of God's attributes.

LITERARY ENHANCEMENTS

Before proceeding with an exposition of the psalm, a look at how its great themes are enhanced by a variety of stylistic features is beneficial.

Semantical

Word-plays on the roots **<wr** (*rwm*, "to be high, exalted") and **bvy** (*y*)

²See John Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 215; Martin Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 37, 194-95, 300; Walter Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 70-81; Eugene Maly, "'The Highest Heavens Cannot Contain You': Immanence and Transcendence in the Deuteronomist," *Standing Before God* (ed. by A. Finkel and L. Frizzell; New York: KTAV, 1981) 100; Franz von Rad, "Oranw," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament [TDNT]* 5:504-7; cf. the other hypotheses which undergird most of the related discussions pertaining to "place-theology" and "name-theology." For brief critiques and interaction, note W. C. Kaiser, "b," *Theological Word and Thought [TWOT]* 1:411-12; *idem*, "<," *TWOT* 2:934-35.

dwell") magnify this psalm's astounding development.³ God's *rank*, appropriately summarized by the qal forms < (*rm*, "he is exalted") and / (*lebet*, "to dwell") in vv. 4a and 5b, does not inhibit God's ability to *rescue* those in distress, as well depicted in the corresponding hiphil forms <y (*ym*, "to raise, lift up"), **yyoh** (*lhb*, "to [make] dwell"), and **yyom** (*mb*, "to make [her] dwell, abide") (i.e. vv. 7b, 8a, 9). This exalted One mercifully and characteristically exalts lowly and exasperates the people. He who is transcendent enables them to transcend their stressful circumstances.

Syntactical

Syntactical subtleties also accentuate the psalm's theological motifs. For example, the introductory crescendo of *hallel*s (i.e., "praises") (v. 1) establishes the *priority* of praise to Yahweh. Then in the next two verses an inverse parallelism in four lines conveys the *propriety* of praise.⁵ The pual participle *Ob ("blessed") from *rb (*brk*, "to bless")⁶ in v. 2a is paralleled by its counterpart (mhulll, "to be praised") in v. 3b. Correspondingly, the d (#ad, "unto, until") . . . (min, "from") prepositional combination of v. 2b is immediately followed by its counterpart in v. 3a.

Verse 4, containing explicit assertions of God's transcendence, is highlighted by progressions and parallels. The abbreviated hy (*yh*, "the LORD") of v. 1a, hwhy (*yhw*, "the LORD") of v. 1b, and the circumlocution hwhy < (*m yhw*, "the name of the LORD") of vv. 1c, 2a, and 3b anticipate the exalted one, *yhw*, who is the subject of v. 4a. The Tetragrammaton is followed by another significant circumlocution in v. 4b, odob (*kbd*, "His glory").⁷

Especially important in v. 4 are the corresponding phrases with l ("above"), a preposition eminently suited to convey the concept of transcendence. An upward and outward movement from "over/above all people/nations" (v. 4a) to "over/above the heavens" (v. 4b) emphasizes the concept, possibly creating the impression that God is far removed from the cares of His creatures and creation. Nevertheless, the widening concentric circles of transcendence subsequently

³Cf. Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 100.

⁴Most interpreters construe **yyom** as a hiphil participle from **bvy**; contra. David Freedman, "Psalm 113 and the Song of Hannah," *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun, 1980) 249, who suggests it derives from **bwv** (i.e. "who transforms . . .").

⁵A bridge to this chiasm is provided by the hwhy <>/ at the end of v. 1, since occurrences of hwhy < serve as book ends for vv. 2-3.

⁶*rb is part of a repertoire of Old Testament praise synonyms; cf. llh, hdy, ,nr, ldg, <wr, rmz, etc.

⁷The odob of v. 4b may be construed as standing at the head of a parallel noun clause or as governed by the < of v. 4a. Concerning the latter option, Buitendijk translates, "His glory transcends . . .," arguing that "ram is a case of zeugma and is to be construed as a predicate also of 'kebedo'" (Moses Buitendijk, *The Psalms Chronologically Treated with a New Translation* [New York: KTAV, 1969] 348).

⁸Cf. BDB, 752, 755; Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967) 51; and G. L. Carr, "h," *TWOT* 2:669-70.

reverse, and the reality of the LORD's immanence emerges (vv. 6-9). This "revelation" is dramatically portrayed through a downward and inward movement (v. 6) which makes low⁹ to care for matters not only "in the heavens" but also "upon the earth."¹⁰ This reality is vividly documented by selected examples of intertextuality (vv. 7-9).

The rhetorical question¹¹ of v. 5 is pivotal. Patterns of the basic "who-is-like" formula recur throughout the Old Testament (e.g. Exod 15:11; Deut 3:24; Ps 3:1; Isa 40:12 ff.; 46:5; etc.) as a part of theological affirmations and in personal names. Both usages serve as reminders of the LORD's uniqueness.¹³ There is no one like Yahweh!

In the middle of v. 5 comes a shift of emphasis from being to doing. Yet the particular causative participles of vv. 5b and 6a still function substantive apposition with the *nywO1 eq \O(,') hwhy* (*yhwh @ eq \O(+,e)l eq \O(-,e) \O(=,e)n eq \O(=,u)*, "the LORD our God") (v. 5a).¹⁴ Furthermore, the apposition of . . . *y eq \O(I,h)y eq \O(I,B) eq \O(I,g) eq \O(I,e) eq \O(a,h)* (*hammag eq \O(+,e)b eq \O(=,i)h eq \O(+,i)*, "to make high, exalt") (v. 5b) with . . . *y eq \O(I,l)y eq \O(I,p) eq \O(I,v) eq \O(a,M) eq \O(a,h)* (*hamma eq \O(+,s)p eq \O(=,i)l eq \O(=,i)*, "to make low, condescend") (v. 6a) is extraordinary. The LORD who literally "makes high to dwell" (a poignant summary of His transcendence) is the very one who "makes low to dwell" (that is, *to care for* the needs of His subjects (i.e. an arresting introduction to immanence). By this stark apposition transcendence and immanence join hands in a complementary manifesta-tion of the incomparable one (i.e. v. 5a).

Structural

Depending upon emphases on form and/or content, the psalm may be

⁹Cf. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, eds., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* [GKC] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) 350 (par. 114n).

¹⁰Besides the impacting reversal of order (i.e. v. 4: earthly, heavenly; v. 6: heavenly, earthly) the shift from the preposition **ל** in v. 4 to occurrences of **ע** in v. 6 contributes to the change in mood (from separation to involvement).

¹¹Obviously, when proper attention is paid to the immediate context, "there is . . . much more than rhetoric in the question of verse 5, 'Who is like the Lord our God?'" (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 150* [Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1975] 402).

¹²Survey BDB, pp. 567-68, for the proper names built upon this theological formula.

¹³Cf., e.g., C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1966) 22, 99, 102.

¹⁴Through a less formal syntactical relationship, even the anarthrous participles of vv. 5b and 6a continue as vital links in a strong theological chain.

¹⁵For various views on the so-called *hîreq compaginîs*, see discussions in GKC 253-54 (par. 90); Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150* (Anchor Bible; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 101; Delitzsch, *Psalms (Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, eds., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.) 3:203-4; Avi Hurvitz, "Originals and Imitations in Biblical Poetry: A Comparative Examination of I Samuel 2:1-10 and Psalm 113:5-9," *Biblical and Theological Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry* (ed. by A. Kort and S. Morschauer; Winona Lake: Eisenbraun, 1985) 119-22; A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972) 2:782; and Allen, *Psalms 101-150* 99, n. 6a. Cf. also the forms in vv. 5b and 6a (probably), and 9a.

divided differently into major sections.¹⁶ A basic analysis of the psalm's form to the following twofold division: "a hymnic introduction" (i.e. vv. 1-3) and "reasons why God is worthy of praise and homage" (i.e. vv. 4-9).¹⁷ Most structural analysts, however, prefer a threefold division.¹⁸ A few of these end divisions are vv. 1 and 3 (i.e. vv. 1, 2-3, 4-9),¹⁹ while the majority prefer the following strophic division: vv. 1-3, 4-6, 7-9.²⁰

Kidner's "high above . . ." (i.e. vv. 1-4)/"far down . . ." (i.e. vv. 5-9) separation represents a twofold division based largely on thematic considerations.²¹ This breakdown naturally emphasizes the psalm's overarching pedagogy: the "nothing too great for Him, no-one too small."²² A shift to the interrogative mood at v. 5 lends some weight to this twofold division (i.e. coming between vv. 4 and 5).²³ The following propositional outline attempts to integrate the psalm's various literary phenomena with its two thematic divisions:

- Two choruses of thanksgiving flow from primary theological incentives:
- 1A. (vv. 1-4) The first chorus of thanksgiving flows from the incentive of God's transcendence.
 - 1B. (vv. 1-3) The worshipful response to God's transcendence
 - 1C. (v. 1) The exhortation:
 - 1D. Its reverberation: the threefold *hallel*
 - 2D. Its responsibility: the servants/worshippers of the LORD
 - 3D. Its Recipient: the LORD
 - 2C. (vv. 2-3) The extent:
 - 1D. (v. 2) considered temporally
 - 2D. (v. 3) considered geographically
 - 2B. (v. 4) The worshipful recognition of God's transcendence
 - 1C. (v. 4a) He transcends all that is earthly
 - 2C. (v. 4b) He transcends all that is heavenly
 - 2A. (vv. 5-9) The second chorus of thanksgiving flows from the incentive of God's immanence.
 - 1B. (vv. 5-6) The interrogatives develop His immanence
 - 1C. (v. 5) The interrogatives of v. 5 reveal that God's immanence

¹⁶For an excellent survey of the options, see Allen, *Psalms 101-150* 99-100.

¹⁷Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* 2:780.

¹⁸Based upon an older method of grouping various combinations of parallelism Briggs adopted a fourfold strophic division (Charles Augustus Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907] 2:387).

¹⁹See Allen, *Psalms 101-150* 99.

²⁰Cf. the strophic and poetic analyses of K. K. Sacon, "A Methodological Remark on Exegesis in the Preaching of Psalm 113," *Nihon no Shingaku* 25 (1986) 26-42 (see *Old Testament Abstracts* 10/1 [1987] 65); Peter C. Craigie, "Psalm 113," *Interpretation* 39/1 (Jan. 1985) 70-74. Craigie also develops the strophes in reverse order because "we will only be able to respond honestly to the opening summons to praise when we have perceived God's merciful dealings with human beings (vv. 7-9) and his majesty in heaven and earth (vv. 4-6)" (ibid., 71).

²¹Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* 401.

²²I.e. Kidner's title for Psalm 113 (ibid.).

²³Cf. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* 100.

- is uncompromising (i.e. it does not come at the expense of transcendence)²⁴
- 2C. (v. 6) The interrogative of v. 6 reveals that God's immanence is unassuming²⁵
- 3B. (vv. 7-9) The illustrations dramatize His immanence
- 1C. (vv. 7-8) The general illustration of God's concern for the downtrodden
- 2C. (v. 9) The special illustration of God's consolation for the childless

BACKGROUND

Another helpful preliminary to the psalm's exposition is an awareness of its background. Leslie conjectured that Psalm 113 "is a liturgical choir hymn which was sung antiphonally by two Levitical choirs."²⁶ The specific details of its usage are unknown, although "the setting was clearly cultic."²⁷

That it came to be recognized as "a classical Hebrew hymn"²⁸ is confirmed by its inclusion in the "Hallel" (i.e. Psalms 113-118) which "is recited on all major biblical festivals, with the exception of Rosh Ha-Shanah and the Day of Atonement."²⁹ This grouping "is also recited during the Passover *seder* service (Tosef., Suk. 3:2), when it is known as *Hallel Mizri* ('Egyptian *Hallel*') because of the exodus from Egypt which the *seder* commemorates."³⁰ The latter use probably relates to "The Last Supper":³¹

It is interesting to recall that probably just as Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn after they had eaten the Passover meal (Matt. 26:30) almost certainly Pss. 115-118 so most likely before

²⁴This particular reminder of an uncompromised transcendence at the outset of a consideration of our LORD's immanence* is supported by scriptural parallels. The most obvious example is Job 57:15:

- 1A. He has a transcendent manifestation of glory above (Isaiah in introducing the psalm focuses upon His transcendence)
- 1B. He is separate in position: "Thus says the high and lifted up One"
- 2B. His is separate in existence: "*who* perpetually exists"
- 3B. He is separate in character: "*whose* name is holy"
- 2A. He has an immanent manifestation of grace below (the LORD in speaking focuses upon His own immanence)
- *1B. *He is near but without compromise*: "I dwell in a high and holy *place*"
- 2B. He is near with grace: "and with the crushed and lowly in spirit"
- 3B. He is near with purpose: "in order to revive . . ."

²⁵The ultimate proof of this came in the Incarnation.

²⁶Elmer A. Leslie, *The Psalms* (New York: Abingdon, 1949) 192.

²⁷Allen, *Psalms 101-150* 99.

²⁸Craigie, "Psalm 113" 70.

²⁹"Hallel," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 7:1198-99.

³⁰*Ibid.* On the so-called Egyptian Hallel, cf. Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (trans. by D. R. Ap-Thomas; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 1:3.

³¹On the Passover setting of "The Last Supper," see J. Behm, "klv," *TDNT* 3:732-34, and J. Jeremias, "psxa," *TDNT* 5:896-904.

meal they had sung Pss. 113-114.³²

Craigie's summary helps to complete the historical survey of Psalm 113 in wor

With the passage of centuries, the psalm became more closely associated with the celebratory of Passover. Indeed, in the modern *Passover Haggadah*, Psalm 113 is still recited in the context of the blessing of the cup of wine, prior to the participation in the Passover meal. And in Christianity, Psalm 113 was traditionally designated as one of the Proper Psalms for evening worship on Easter Day, thus linking the Christian use of the psalm to its ancient Jewish antecedents. In both Judaism and Christianity, Psalm 113 was a special psalm employed in the worship of God at those times in the liturgical calendar when praise of excellence should be addressed to the Almighty.³³

Verses 7-9 of the psalm have been seen as "a connecting link between the Song of Hannah and the Magnificat of the Virgin."³⁴ In fact, Craigie calls 1 Sam 2:1-10 the prehistory of Psalm 113:7-9 and Luke 1:46-55 its posthistory.³⁵

EXPOSITION

The psalm opens and closes with **H** **u**l **e**q \O(A,y) **u**l **e**q \O(,l) \O(a,h) (*hal e*q \O(+,e)l *e*q \O(=,u) y *e*q \O(~,a)h, "praise the LORD"),³⁶ a formula that serves as a boundary, since

Psalm 113 bids all men to let the praise of God resound all the world over and motivate all to appeal with the declaration that this incomparable God, transcending the heavens in glory, is the Sovereign of the world who controls the affairs of men below from his throne on high.

Outside this psalm, the reverberating invitations to praise in v. 1 most closely parallel Ps 135:1.³⁸

Selected from an arsenal of worship synonyms,³⁹ **11h** (*hll*, "praise"), is especially suited to elicit jubilant praise⁴⁰ from the community.⁴¹ The voc

³²Leslie, *The Psalms* 192-93.

³³Craigie, "Psalm 113" 70.

³⁴J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966) 1:322. The 1 Sam 2 parallels are not an automatic indication of a postexilic date for Ps 113; cf. John T. Willis, "The Song of Hannah and Psalm 113," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35/2 (Apr 1973) 154.

³⁵Craigie, "Psalm 113" 71.

³⁶See Sacon in *OTA* 10/1 (Feb 1987) 65. There is no solid evidence for suggesting that the occurrences are later liturgical additions (e.g. Buitenweiser, *The Psalms* 348). Additionally, the placement of the final **H** **u**l before Ps. 114 (LXX 113) in the LXX is incorrect. Consequently, the twenty-four occurrences of the formula **H** **u**l bracket this great hymn.

³⁷Buitenweiser, *The Psalms* 348.

³⁸If the *hallel* pattern of Ps 113:1 is designated as a, b, c, then the corresponding *hallel* exhortations of Ps. 135:1 reflect an a, c, b order.

³⁹For some of the most important ones, note H. Ringgren, "11h *hll*I and II," *TDOT* 3:406; and C. C. Coppel, "1 II," *TWOT* 1:217.

⁴⁰*TDOT* 3:404; Coppel adds, from an overall assessment of **11h**, that "belief and joy are inextricably intertwined" (*TWOT* 1:217).

⁴¹Ringgren notes that the summons to praise with **11h** is almost always in the plural

construction **hw̄y ȳ eq̄ \O(E,d) eq̄ \O(⌈,b) eq̄ \O(a,;) (# \O(+,e)d eq̄ \O(=,e) yhw̄h**, "servants of the LORD")⁴² is a designation for "worshipping community,"⁴³ "the loyal among Israel."⁴⁴ It is also noteworthy the root **db̄;** (**#bd**, "to serve, worship") denotes both service and worship, emphasizing "the privileges of the worshippers as well as their duties and responsibilities."⁴⁶

"The name of the LORD" (**hw̄y < eq̄ \O(E,v)>/ eq̄ \O(e,') [@ \O(+,s) eq̄ \O(~,e)m yhw̄h**]) is the object of the third echoing imperative from Remembering that **eq̄ \O(+,s) eq̄ \O(~,e) m** "in the OT often included existence, character, and reputation,"⁴⁷ "the *name of the LORD*" "signifies the whole disclosure of God."⁴⁸ Passages such as Exodus 33:19-23 and 34:5-7 indicate that **\O(+,s) eq̄ \O(~,e) m**, when applied to God, encompasses the totality of God's attributes and actions.

The origin of the Tetragrammaton *yhw̄h* is in question. "While no consensus exists, the name is generally thought to be a verbal form derived from the root *hyh*, later *hyh*, 'to be at hand, exist (phenomenally), come to pass.'"⁴⁹ Significantly, the consensus of modern scholarship supports the biblical text [cf. Exod. 3:15] associating the name of Yahweh with the root **hyh**. . . .⁵⁰

The jussive exhortation **ȳ eq̄ \O(I,h) eq̄ \O(⌈,y) (y eq̄ \O(+,s) \O(=,i)** standing at the head of vv. 2-3 (i.e. "*May/Let the name of the LORD be praised*") centers on the *priority* of praise, and the subordinate *pual* participles in these verses with their compound prepositional phrases combine to introduce

associated with the community, while **hdwh** is generally singular being associated with an individual (*TDOT* 3:408). Cf. Coppes' discussion of the propriety of such a corporate reference (*TWOT* 1:217).

⁴²LXX tradition takes **hw̄y** as the object of **ul**, thereby construing the **ȳ** as an independent vocative (i.e. as if it were **<ȳ**). As Allen notes in the reference to this tradition, "Probably at an early stage abbreviation . . . has been *assumed*" [emphasis mine] (*Psalms 101-150* 99).

⁴³W. Zimmerli and J. Jeremias, "paw Ueo," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [1971] 5:475, n. 122.

⁴⁴A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, Soncino books of the Bible (London: Soncino, 1945) 378; in the light of Exod. 3, Cohen widens the scope of inclusion, commenting "the call is made to all, Israelites and Gentiles who acknowledge God" (ibid.). On the other hand, some would restrict **hw̄y ȳ** to the Levitical circle. Both Allen and Anderson entertain this option; however, they commendably opt for the more comprehensive interpretation (see *Psalms 101-150* 99, and *Psalms 2:780*, respectively).

⁴⁵E.g. its occurrences in 2 Kgs 10:18-24 and Jesus' association of the twin concepts in Matthew 23:17 (referring to Deut 6:13).

⁴⁶Anderson, *Psalms 2:780*; for a basic survey, see W. C. Kaiser, "**d**," *TWOT* 2:639-41.

⁴⁷W. C. Kaiser, "<," *TWOT* 2:934. Kaiser documents his conclusion with 1 Sam 25:25, among other passages.

⁴⁸Ibid.; cf. Delitzsch, *Psalms* 3:204-05. Anderson corroborates, noting that **hw̄y ȳ** "comprises primarily the whole self-revelation of Yahweh to his people; the phrase may be a circumlocution for 'Yahweh'" (*Psalms 2:780*). Kidner's reference to "the Revealed" is also correct (*Psalms 73-150* 401).

⁴⁹D. N. Freedman, M. P. O'Connor, and H. Riggren, "**hw̄y**," *TDOT* 5:500.

⁵⁰Ibid., 5:513. Cf. Payne's conclusions in "**h** II," J. B. Payne, *TWOT* 1:210-12; contra some other scholars' Harris' editorial comments within Payne's article.

propriety of universal praise. Indeed, "no less response in space or time is warranted of him."⁵¹

Blessing formulas are common throughout ancient Near Eastern literature. The Old Testament is saturated with them (for an identical parallel to Ps 113:2; Job 1:21).⁵² Based on the previous *hallel*s and a subsequent parallelism with $\backslash O(A, L) \text{ eq } \backslash O(U, h) \text{ eq } \backslash O([, m) (m \text{ eq } \backslash O(+, e)hull \text{ eq } \backslash O(\sim, a)l, "$ praised") in v. 3b, $* \text{ eq } \backslash O(A, r)Ob \text{ eq } \backslash O([, m) hwhy < \text{ eq } \backslash O(E, v) \text{ eq } \backslash O(I, h) \text{ eq } \backslash O([, y) (y \text{ eq } \backslash O(+, e)h \text{ eq } \backslash O(=, i) \text{ eq } \backslash O(+, s) \text{ eq } \backslash O(=, e) m) m \text{ eq } \backslash O(+, e)b \text{ eq } \backslash O(\sim, o)r \text{ eq } \backslash O(\sim, a)k, "$ let the name of the LORD be blessed") stands as "an expression synonymous with 'Praise the LORD.'"⁵³ Such praise is unrestricted in its duration (i.e. $< \text{ eq } \backslash O(A, l)o; > d \text{ eq } \backslash O(a, ;) \backslash O([, w) h \text{ eq } \backslash O(A, ?) \text{ eq } \backslash O(a, ;) \text{ eq } \backslash O(E, m) [m \text{ eq } \backslash O(=, e)# \backslash O(\sim, a)h w \text{ eq } \backslash O(+, e)#ad \# \text{ eq } \backslash O(=, o)l \text{ eq } \backslash O(\sim, a)m]$).⁵⁴ Literally, it should con-
"from now and forever,"⁵⁵ i.e. "forever, without ceasing."⁵⁶

In the middle of the inverted parallelism of vv. 3-4, a spatial focus repeats the emphasis on time: $o'ob \text{ eq } \backslash O([, m) > d \text{ eq } \backslash O(a, ;) v \text{ eq } \backslash O(\text{ eq } \backslash O(e, v) > i \text{ eq } \backslash O(a, r) \text{ eq } \backslash O([, z) \text{ eq } \backslash O(I, M) \text{ eq } \backslash O((mimmizra \text{ eq } \backslash O(>, h) \text{ eq } \backslash O(+, s)eme \text{ eq } \backslash O(+, s) \#ad \# m \text{ eq } \backslash O(+, e)b \text{ eq } \backslash O(=, o) \backslash O(=, o), "$ from the sun's place of rising to its entrance,"⁵⁷ "throughout the v from east to west."⁵⁸ (v. 4a). Concerning $l \text{ eq } \backslash O(A, L) \text{ eq } \backslash O(U, h) \backslash O([, m) (m \text{ eq } \backslash O(+, e)hull \text{ eq } \backslash O(\sim, a)l, "$ being praised") (v. 3b),⁵⁹ "the part. describes God as 'worthy of praise.'"⁶⁰ The following assertions of transcendence and immanence support the praiseworthiness of His name all and everywhere.

One of the major spheres of usage of $<ur (r \text{ eq } \backslash O(=, u)m, "$ to be exalted") (cf. $r \text{ eq } \backslash O(\sim, a)m$ at the head of v. 4) is "height as symbolic of positions such as glory and exaltation."⁶¹ Besides v. 4a, several passages corroborate God's exaltation, e.g., Ps 46:11; 99:2; 138:6;⁶² Isa 6:1; 57:15⁶³; etc.⁶⁴ Furthermore

⁵¹Allen, *Psalms 101-150* 101.

⁵²For a survey, see J. Scharbert, "***rb**," *TDOT* 2:284-88; for a condensed presentation, see Oswald, "*****," *TWOT* 1:132-33.

⁵³Anderson, *Psalms* 2:780.

⁵⁴For occurrences of this identical compound, cf. Pss 115:18; 121:8; 125:2; 131:3; Isa 9:6; Micah 4:7; and for similar compounds, cf. Pss 41:14; 90:2; 103:17; 106:48; Jer 7:7; 1 Chr 16:36; 29:

⁵⁵BDB, 763.

⁵⁶Anderson, *Psalms* 2:780.

⁵⁷Cf. BDB, 99-100, 280-81. See also this compound prepositional phrase in Ps 50:1; Mal 1:11.

⁵⁸A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge University Press, 1906) 678.

⁵⁹Cf. the occurrences of the pual participle from **llh** in Pss. 18:4; 48:2; 96:4; 145:3.

⁶⁰J. Herrmann and H. Greeven, "exomai," *TDNT* 2:786; for some discussion see *TDOT* 3:409.

⁶¹A. Bowling, "**<ur**," *TWOT* 2:837.

⁶²Note the interesting juxtaposition of the roots **<wr** and **lfv** in Ps 138:6; cf. Ps 113:4; 113:6a ff.

⁶³Note the parallelism between **<** and the root **'cn** in both of these verses from Isaiah.

⁶⁴For some pertinent observations, see Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Test*

prepositional phrase $\langle \text{eq } \backslash \text{O}(\text{I}, \text{Y}) \text{O} \text{G} \rangle \text{I} \text{eq } \backslash \text{O}(\text{A}, \text{K}) \rangle \text{I} \text{eq } \backslash \text{O}(\text{A}, \text{K}) \rangle \text{I}$ (*#al`kol`g eq \O(=, o)yim*, "above all nations") provides greater resolution to the portrait of God's transcendence.⁶⁵ When attention is fixed upon the exalted LORD, all the *g eq \O(=, o)yim* pale into insignificance (cf., e.g., Ps 46:11; Isa 40:17).

The LORD's *k eq \O(~, a)b eq \O(=, o)d* (v. 4b), like His *eq \O(+, s) eq \O(+, s)m*, refers to "God's self-disclosure,"⁶⁶ often standing for "Yahweh himself."⁶⁷ That very "glory," representing all He is and does, that surpasses the high heavens.

These affirmations of transcendence (v. 4) are a powerful incentive for the invited praise (vv. 1-3). Although the order is switched, similar choruses in Ps 57:6, 12 and 108:6 also observe the priority and propriety of praise: "Be exalted above the heavens, O God; and Your glory above all the earth!"

The implied response to the rhetorical questions in v. 5 is "No one!" No one compares with "the LORD, our God."⁶⁸ It seems that *uny eq \O(E, h)O \O(, ')* (*@ eq \O(+, e)l eq \O(~, o)h eq \O(=, e)n eq \O(=, u)*, "our God") carries covenantal overtones⁶⁹ and anticipates the gracious interventions of vv. 7-9.⁷⁰ In v. 4 it must be remembered that this personal God "makes high to dwell" (v. 4). Expressed in the participle *y eq \O(I, h)y eq \O(I, B) eq \O([, g) \O(a, M) eq \O(a, h)* (*hammagb eq \O(=, i)h eq \O(=, i)*, v. 5b), the verb *eq \O(a, b) eq \O(A, G)* (*g eq \O(~, a)bah*, "to be high, make high"⁷²), a synonym for *r eq \O(=, u)m* and an antonym of *l eq \O(a, f) eq \O(A, v)* (*eq \O(+, a) \O(~, a)pal*, "be low"),⁷³ "is often used to describe the greatness, height, or position of a person. . . ."⁷⁴ *G eq \O(~, a)bah* combines idiomatically with the complementary infinitive *l eq \O(~, a) eq \O(+, s)ebet* (from *b eq \O(a, v) \O(A, y)* [*y eq \O(~, a) eq \O(+, s)ab*, "to dwell"]) in a vivid statement of the LORD's exalted enthronement: "who is enthroned on high."⁷⁵

Even though v. 6a is conceptually antithetical to v. 5b, it is also syntactically appositional.⁷⁶ Delitzsch captures the apparent irony of a transcendent/immanent God:

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 35.

⁶⁵Cf. \langle with $\langle \text{y } \text{I} \rangle \text{I}$ in Ps. 99:2.

⁶⁶J. N. Oswalt, "d," *TWOT* 1:427.

⁶⁷Anderson, *Psalms* 2:781.

⁶⁸For a concise summary of the conjectural emendations and transpositions which have been suggested in vv. 5-6 of the MT, see Allen, *Psalms 101-150* 99, n. 6a. His first observation (concerning the transpositions) is preferable, his last is permissible, and the others are unacceptable.

⁶⁹Cf. Anderson, *Psalms* 2:781, who draws attention to Jer 24:7; 30:22; and 31:1.

⁷⁰Consequently, amidst a recapitulation of God's transcendence (v. 5), the stage is set for the concentration upon His immanence (vv. 6-9).

⁷¹On the hiphil expressing action in a definite direction see, once again, GKC 350 (para. 114r).

⁷²R. Hentschke, "H," *TDOT* 2:356-60.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 2:357-58; note the textual documentation cited for both assertions.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 2:358; concerning the theological significance of H, Hamilton appropriately notes that "God's position is said to be 'on high' (Ps. 113:5; Job 22:12) and his ways are 'higher' than those of mankind (Isa. 55:9)" (V. P. Hamilton, "H," *TWOT* 1:146).

⁷⁵Cf. Anderson, *Psalms* 2:781.

⁷⁶See the discussion above under syntactical enhancements.

He is the incomparable One who has set up His throne in the height, but at the same time directs His gaze deep downwards . . . in the heavens and upon the earth, i.e. nothing in the realm of the creatures that are beneath Him escapes His sight, and nothing is so low that remains unnoticed by Him; on the contrary, it is just that which is lowly, as the following strophe presents to us in a series of portraits so to speak, that is the special object of His regard.⁷⁷

Consequently, while the *hammagb eq \O(=,i)h eq \O(=,i)* of v. 5b trumpet of exaltation, the *hamma eq \O(+,s)p eq \O(=,i)l eq \O(=,i)* of v. 6a which is a note of condescension.⁷⁸

The complementary infinitive */o' eq \O(,r) eq \O(I,l)* (*\O(+,e)@ot*, "to see"), from the common *h eq \O(A,') eq \O(A,r)* (*\O(~,a)@ eq \O(~,a)h*), carries an uncommon theological significance. In contexts such as this and Gen 22:8, 14; 29:32; 1 Sam 1:11;⁷⁹ 2 Sam 16:12; Ps 106:44, *\O(~,a)@ eq \O(~,a)h* means to *look at* with interest, kindness, and helpfulness. Used here to confirm the LORD's intervention, it is acceptably rendered, "the LORD condescends to care for"⁸¹ (things) "in the heavens and upon the earth." The LORD's gracious condescension more than compensates for life's hard conditions (e.g. vv. 7-9).

The anarthrous causative participles of vv. 7-9 (i.e. *y eq \O(I,m)* *\O(I,q) eq \O(,m)* [*m eq \O(+,e)q eq \O(=,i)m eq \O(=,i)*, "raising up"] *eq \O(I,r) eq \O(A,y)* [*y eq \O(~,a)r eq \O(=,i)m*, "lifting up"], *y eq \O(I,b)y eq \O(I,v)om* [*m eq \O(=,o) eq \O(+,s) eq \O(=,i)b eq \O(=,i)*, "causing to dwell"]) illuminate His merciful immanence via forceful illustrations. In vv. 7-8 a general but extremely significant illustration of God's active concern for the downtrodden arouses the reader's amazement first. Then another unexpected example follows: God's consolation for the childless (v. 9). In reference to these illustrations, Allen recalls that "the third strophe [i.e. vv. 7-9] uses 1 Samuel 1 to illustrate this grace in terms of the providential reversal Yahweh brings about in raising the socially underprivileged to positions of respect."⁸² Keizer appropriately digresses regarding the theological ramifications of this psalm's great climax:

Consciously . . . those verses look back to the song of Hannah, which they quote almost exactly (cf. 7, 8a with 1 Sa. 2:8). Hence the sudden reference to the childless woman who becomes a mother (9), for this was Hannah's theme. With such a background the psalmist only makes its immediate point, that the Most High cares for the most humiliated, but brings them up.

⁷⁷Delitzsch, *Psalms* 3:205.

⁷⁸In reference to **l**, Austel notes that "though the idea 'be low' in the physical sense underlies the verb and its derivatives, its most important use is in the figurative sense of 'abasement,' 'humiliation,' 'humility'" (H. J. Austel, "**l**," *TWOT* 2:950). An examination of the roots **<wr** and **lfv** in Ps 138:6a would be appropriate here.

⁷⁹In light of these particular texts, note the appropriateness of the illustration in Ps 113:9.

⁸⁰BDB, 907-8.

⁸¹Cf. Anderson, *Psalms* 2:781.

⁸²Allen, *Psalms 101-150* 101.

mind the train of events that can follow from such an intervention. Hannah's joy became Israel's; Sarah's became the world's. And the song of Hannah was to be outshone one of the *Magnificat*. The spectacular events of our verses 7 and 8 are not greater than this done one; the most important of them have sprung from just such an origin.⁸³

The $\mathbf{1} \text{ } \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{D})$ ($d \text{ } \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\sim, a)l$, "poor") and the $\mathbf{,o} \mathbf{y} \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\mathbf{I}, \mathbf{b})$ ($\mathbf{,o} \mathbf{y} \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\mathbf{e}, ')$ ($@ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{b} \mathbf{y} \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(=, o)n$, "needy"),⁸⁴ normally social outcasts, are the focal point of God's bold intervention in vv. 7-8.⁸⁵ Although "the *dal* was not numbered among dependents who have no property,"⁸⁶ he still represented "those who lack."⁸⁷ The plight of the $@ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{b} \mathbf{y} \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(=, o)n$ in the Old Testament generally seems to be more aggravated: "The destitution of the *@ebhyon* is to be inferred from the whole tenor of the appropriate psalms: it manifests itself in affliction, illness, loneliness, and nearness to death."⁸⁸ Therefore, he represents those who are materially, socially, and spiritually in need.⁸⁹ God really cares for such people.

In the parallelisms of v. 7, the $d \text{ } \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\sim, a)l$ was associated with the $\mathbf{1} \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{f})$ ($\mathbf{1} \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\mathbf{A}, ;)$ ($\# \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\sim, a)p \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\sim, a)r$), "dust," "an emblem of low estate,"⁹¹ and the *@ebhyon* with the $/ \mathbf{o} \mathbf{p} \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\mathbf{I}, \mathbf{v})$ ($/ \mathbf{o} \mathbf{p} \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\mathbf{a}, ')$ ($@ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{b} \mathbf{y} \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(+, s)p \ \mathbf{e} \mathbf{q} \ \backslash \mathbf{O}(\sim, o)t$), an "ash-heap, refuse-heap, dung-hill,"⁹² certainly "an emblem of deepest poverty and desertion."⁹³ Anderson briefly describes the image of such an ancient garbage dump as this when he comments,

It was the rubbish heap outside the village or town, which had become the pitiful shelter for the poor, the outcasts, and the diseased (cf. Lam. 4:5; also Job 2:8). There they begged, ransacked the refuse dump to find some scraps of food, and slept.⁹⁴

But the LORD mercifully extricates the needy from (cf. the two occurrences)

⁸³Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* 402. There are no compelling reasons to construe these illustrations corporately as a reference to Zion according to targumic tradition (e.g. Cohen, *Psalms 37-100* 10; Buitenwieser, *The Psalms* 248).

⁸⁴For other combinations of $\mathbf{1}$ and $\mathbf{,o} \mathbf{y}$ in various contextual settings, see 1 Sam 2:8; Isa 25:4; Amos 4:1; 8:6; Pss 72:13; 82:4; Prov 14:31; Job 5:15-16; etc. Commenting upon this particular combination in our psalm, Botterweck concludes that "according to the context, the *dal* and *@ebhyon* belong to the same group as the feeble, hungry, poor, and godly" (P. J. Botterweck, *TDOT* 1:40).

⁸⁵For a good review of the humiliation of such people along with God's interest in them, see Grundmann, "tapeinw," *TDNT* 8:9-10.

⁸⁶H. J. Fabry, "1," *TDOT* 3:219.

⁸⁷L. J. Coppes, "1," *TWOT* 1:190. Coppes concludes that "we might consider *dal* as referring to one of the lower classes in Israel" (ibid.).

⁸⁸*TDOT* 1:36; Botterweck's whole survey is illuminating (ibid., 36-37).

⁸⁹Cf. L. J. Coppes, "1," *TWOT* 1:4-5.

⁹⁰Cf. "The *dallim* Under the Protection of Yahweh, the King, and His Fellow Men (Psalms 101-102)" *TDOT* 3:226-30; also notice Allen's New Testament applications (*Psalms 101-150* 101-102).

⁹¹Delitzsch, *Psalms* 3:205.

⁹²BDB, 1046.

⁹³Delitzsch, *Psalms* 3:205.

⁹⁴Anderson, *Psalms* 2:781-82.

of , eq \O(I,m) [*min*, "from"]) such dire circumstances. He "lifts up, raises them from their predicament. The lifted up and exalted One (vv. 4-5) "can raise men high in rank (i.e. 'exalt' them . . .)."96 Verse 8 confirms that by its progression from extrication to exaltation.

The LORD's intention is "to cause [them] to dwell,"97 "to make (them) sit *l eq \O(+,e)h eq \O(=,o) eq \O(s) eq \O(=,i)b eq \O(=,i)*98 in fellowship with99 < \O(I,b)Y eq \O(I,d) eq \O(I,n) (n eq \O(+,e)d eq \O(=,i)b eq \O(=,i))" nobles, princes"), those of "exalted material and social position."100 Verse 9 is therefore "a figure for elevation to the highest rank and dignity,"101 and compared with the plight of v. 7, it "is meant to bring out by way of contrast the magnitude of divine power and grace."102

Barrenness (v. 9) in the cultural context of the Old Testament was a poor status.103 "The lot of a childless wife must have been hard (cf. 1 Sam. 1:6). Barrenness was often regarded as a disgrace and a curse from God (cf. Gen. 20:18; 1 Sam. 1:5; Lk. 1:25 . . .)."104 It is no wonder that, from a woman's perspective, a barren womb was among the insatiable things in Proverbs 30:15 (cf. Rachel's agonizing cry in Gen 30:1). From a man's perspective, it occasioned ultimate frustration as indicated by Abraham's response in Gen 15:2 and Jacob's in Gen 30:2.

Although the syntactical options of v. 9 are diverse,105 the overall impact of its illustration is incontestable. The gracious LORD "makes the wife barren in the household to dwell106 as a joyful mother of sons," i.e. "he grants

⁹⁵Cf. BDB, 878-79, 927; the hiphils from <uq and <ur are near synonyms as shown by the parallelism here. Interestingly, since Y is synonymously related to <Y, it not only is semantically to God's description as < in v. 4 (cf. the previous discussion under semantic enhancements), but also conceptually to the root hbg in v. 5 (cf. R. Hentschke, "H," TDOT 2:333 for a general discussion of these synonyms). In reference to <uq with God as subject, Coppes observes that "the word may denote his creative, saving, and judging action" (L. J. Coppes, "The LORD's Creative Action," TWOT 2:792); cf. A. Oepke, "gerv," TDNT 2:334.

⁹⁶A. Bowling, "<ur," TWOT 2:838.

⁹⁷BDB, 443.

⁹⁸Most emend the final Y of the MT to w based largely on LXX and Syriac tradition (e.g. GKC, 2:139n), but there are other options: Dahood takes it as a "third-person suffix -y" (Psalms III: 101-150n); Delitzsch says, "ver. 8 shows how our Ps. cxiii in particular delights in this ancient i, where it is affixed to the infinitive as an ornament" (Psalms 3:204); and Buttenwieser argues, "Though Gr. lhshb, the reading of the Hebrew is equally correct: according to this reading the objects of vs. 8 may be construed also with lhshb, being a case of brachylogy" (The Psalms 249).

⁹⁹The two occurrences of < in v. 8 balance the two occurrences of , in v. 7. < in such contexts emphasizes "fellowship and companionship" (BDB, 767).

¹⁰⁰L. J. Coppes, "b," TWOT 2:555. His brief summary of the major synonyms of by is informative (ibid.).

¹⁰¹Kirkpatrick, The Book of Psalms 679.

¹⁰²TDOT 3:228.

¹⁰³Cf. other occurrences of the adj. r in Gen 11:30; 25:21; 29:31; Judg 13:2-3; 1 Sam 2:5; and Job 24:10.

¹⁰⁴Anderson, Psalms 2:782.

¹⁰⁵E.g. BDB, 443; Buttenwieser, The Psalms 349; Delitzsch, Psalms 3:206; etc.

¹⁰⁶Again, note the causative verbal from b (i.e. yom, v. 9; cf. yyoh, v. 8).

security."¹⁰⁷ Consequently, He not only prospers the poor (v. 8), but He blesses the barren (v. 9). The appropriate $H \text{ eq } \setminus O(A, y) \cup l \text{ eq } \setminus O(l, l) \setminus O(a, h)$ (*hal eq \setminus O(+, e) l eq \setminus O(=, u) y eq \setminus O(\sim, a) h*, "praise the LORD") close psalm.

What a majestic God Psalm 113 reveals! Yet his grandeur does not nullify His grace, and conversely, His grace does not undermine His grandeur:

The bridge which man himself cannot throw across to reach the remote, transcendent nevertheless exists; it is built by God himself so that in spite of all the disparity between God and man a communion exists between them which enables man to believe that the God who is far off is also the God of the here and now. What remains a mystery to the mind of man is revealed to the eyes of faith: that the exalted God not only looks down upon men but in fact looks graciously to them.¹⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

Since God is supreme in the universe for all time and yet has still shown His concern for His creatures, how should His children respond? Certainly a reverent attitude of gratitude is in order, as is a God-consciousness that pervades every activity and attitude. In times of need, reminders of a transcendent God's involvement in human life can be important sources of strength. These and other lessons derived from Psalm 113, a gem among gems. Disclosures about God that arise from the exquisite beauty of the language should be adorning the Bride of Christ. Furthermore, preachers and teachers of God's word should shine their expository floodlights on this Scripture more regularly. God's infinite greatness and inexplicable grace need more attention. The richly blessed should give spontaneous thanksgiving and praise to Him who reigns in heaven and graciously responds to human needs.

¹⁰⁷Anderson, *Psalms* 2:782.

¹⁰⁸Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 707.