



PSALM 33

"YHWH's Plan Stands Forever"

Translation Challenges and Performance Notes

LEGEND FOR COLORED WORDS:

Key term

Exegesis of emotions

Imagery

Other translation challenges

Hebrew Text	v.	English Close-but-Clear Translation
רִנְנוּ צְדִיקִים בַּיהוָה לְיִשְׁרִים נֹאנָה תִהְיֶה:	1	Shout for joy in YHWH, righteous people! Praise is fitting for upright people.
הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה בְּכִנּוֹר בְּנֶכֶל עֶשׂוֹר וּמְרוֹלוֹ:	2	Give YHWH praise with a lyre! Make a song for him with a ten-string harp!
שִׁירוּ לֹו שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ הִשְׁכִּיבוּ נֶגֶן בְּתִרְעָה:	3	Sing a new song to him! Play skillfully with a blast!
כִּי-יֵשֶׁר דְּבַר-יְהוָה וְכָל-מַעֲשָׂהוּ בִּצְדָקָה:	4	Because YHWH's word is upright, and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness.
אֱהָב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט תִּסֵּד יְהוָה מְלֶאכֶה הָאָרֶץ:	5	He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of YHWH's loyal love.
בְּדִבְרֵי יְהוָה שָׁמַיִם נַעֲשׂוּ וּבְרִיחַת פִּי כָל-צָבָאָם:	6	The heavens were made by YHWH's word, and all their hosts [were made] by the breath of his mouth.
כִּנֵּס בְּיָד מֵי הַיָּם נָתַן בְּאֲצִרוֹת תְּהוֹמוֹת:	7	He is the one who gathers the sea waters as a heap! He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses!
יִירָאוּ מִיְהוָה כָּל-הָאָרֶץ מִגִּבּוֹר לְגוֹרֵי כָל-יֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֶל:	8	All the earth should be afraid of YHWH! All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him!
כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיְהִי הוּא-צִוָּה וַיַּעֲמֵד:	9	For he spoke, and it was; he commanded, and it came about.
יְהוָה הִפְרִי עֲצַת-גּוֹיִם הִנְיָא מַחֲשָׁבוֹת עַמִּים:	10	YHWH has thwarted the nations' plan; he has blocked the peoples' intentions.
עֲצַת יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תִּעֲמָד מַחֲשָׁבוֹת לִבּוֹ לְדָר וָדָר:	11	YHWH's plan stands forever; the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever.
אַשְׁרֵי הָגוֹי אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו הָעָם יִבְחַר לְנַחֲלָה לֹו:	12	Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH, [happy are] the people [whom YHWH] chose as a permanent possession for himself.
מִשָּׁמַיִם הִבִּיט יְהוָה רָאָה אֶת-כָּל-בְּנֵי הָאָדָם:	13	YHWH looked from heaven: he saw all of humanity,
מִמְכוּן-שִׁבְתּוֹ הִשְׁגִּיחַ	14	he gazed from his dwelling place

אֵל כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ:		at all the dwellers of the earth ,
הַיָּצֵר יֵחַד לִבָּם הַמִּבִּין אֶל־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם:	15	the one who forms all their hearts, the one who discerns all their works.
אִין־חַמֶּלֶךְ נוֹשָׁע בְּרֵב־חַיִל אֲבוֹר לֹא־יִצָּל בְּרֵב־כֹּחַ:	16	A king is not saved by a great force; a warrior is not delivered by great might.
שָׂקָר הַסּוֹס לְתִשׁוּעָה וּבְרֵב חֵיָּלוֹ לֹא יִמָּלֵט:	17	A horse is a deceptive means for victory, and it will not rescue by its great force.
הִנֵּה עֵין יְהוָה אֶל־יִרְאָיו לְמַיְחֲלִים לְחַסֵּד:	18	Consider: YHWH's eye is upon those who fear him; upon those who wait for his loyal love,
לְהַצִּיל מִמָּוֶת נַפְשָׁם וּלְחַיּוֹתָם בְּרָעָב:	19	to deliver their lives from death, and to keep them alive during famine.
נִפְשָׁנוּ חֲכָתָה לַיהוָה עֲזָרְנוּ וּמִגְדָּנוּ הוּא:	20	We ourselves wait longingly for YHWH; –he is our help and our shield–
כִּי־בּוֹ יִשְׂמַח לִבֵּנוּ כִּי בְשֵׁם קֹדֶשׁוֹ בָּטַחְנוּ:	21	because our hearts rejoice in him; because we have come to trust in his holy name.
יְהִי חַסְדְּךָ יְהוָה עָלֵינוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר יִחְלְנוּ לָךְ:	22	YHWH, may your loyal love be upon us, just as we have been waiting for you!

GENERAL TRANSLATION TIPS FOR THIS PSALM:

- To translate poetry accurately and beautifully, a knowledge of both the source language's poetry and the target language's poetry is needed. So, here are the steps we recommend to follow when setting out to translate this or any psalm:
 - GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE'S POETRY/ARTS.** Research and analyze many examples from numerous genres of poetry, storytelling, and music in the target language and culture, and document findings. See our [Local Arts Analysis Guide](#) for help.
 - GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOURCE LANGUAGE'S (HEBREW) MEANING AND POETRY.** The aim of all our materials is to provide exactly this for translator, poet/musician/artist, and consultant: an understanding of what the psalm *means*, as well as its *poetics*.
 - TRANSLATE THE PSALM IN THE APPROPRIATE LOCAL ART/POETRY GENRE(S).**
 - TEST THE TRANSLATION WITH THE LANGUAGE COMMUNITY, SEEKING FEEDBACK ABOUT BOTH WORD CHOICES AND FORM/GENRE/MEDIA OF TRANSLATION.**

TRANSLATION TIPS – THE PSALM AS A WHOLE

These are the elements that we believe are most helpful to keep in mind during both drafting and checking translations, to help verify that the translation or performance is accurate beyond just a word- or verse-level; just as important is accuracy on the level of a **whole**.

1. Overview

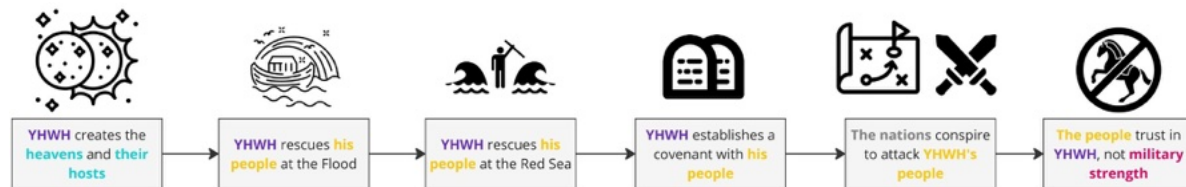
The following gives a gives a basic **Overview** of the Psalm, answering the following questions:

- **Title**-What title best describes this unique psalm?
 - YHWH's Plan Stands Forever
- **Purpose**-Why was this psalm written?
 - To inspire YHWH's people to worship while trusting in his loyal plan.
- **Content**-In summary, what is said in this psalm?
 - We remember what YHWH has done in the past. That's why we praise YHWH, and that's why we wait for him to do the same again.
- **Message**-What is the general theme of this psalm? What seems to be the main point the psalmist wanted his audience to realize by hearing this psalm?
 - Don't give up on God! Praise him as we wait on his plan!

2. Story Behind the Psalm and Background Situation

Every psalm has a coherent story behind it. However, many psalms are not written in typical "story" format, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Here, we attempt to understand the story and background that prompted the psalmist to write.

- **Story Behind**-How do the various parts of the psalm fit together into a single, coherent story? What is the main message/theme conveyed by this "story behind"?
 - Difficulty arises for YHWH's people, and they long for him and wait for him. That's why YHWH's righteous people gather and worship him in song through the singing of this psalm. As they do so, they remember his acts in creation in history. These acts include his past deliverances, in which the nations threatened YHWH's people, but YHWH prevented the nations' plan.
 - Sometime after the psalm is sung, YHWH judges humanity. He delivers his people from their enemies and sustains his people in the face of natural disaster. So, YHWH's people rejoice in him.
- **Background Situation**-what are the series of events leading up to the time in which the psalm was written?



3. Layout

Knowing the layout of the psalm by sections helps us to understand the progression of thought as the poem progresses.

How to read the visual below: The picture below shows the main “chunks” or pieces of the poem. Verse numbers appear on the left. The second column has a title for each section. The large third column contains a brief summary of the section's content. As you read through the content column, you will see important words and ideas highlighted in similar colors. The icons on the right may be used as memory aids.

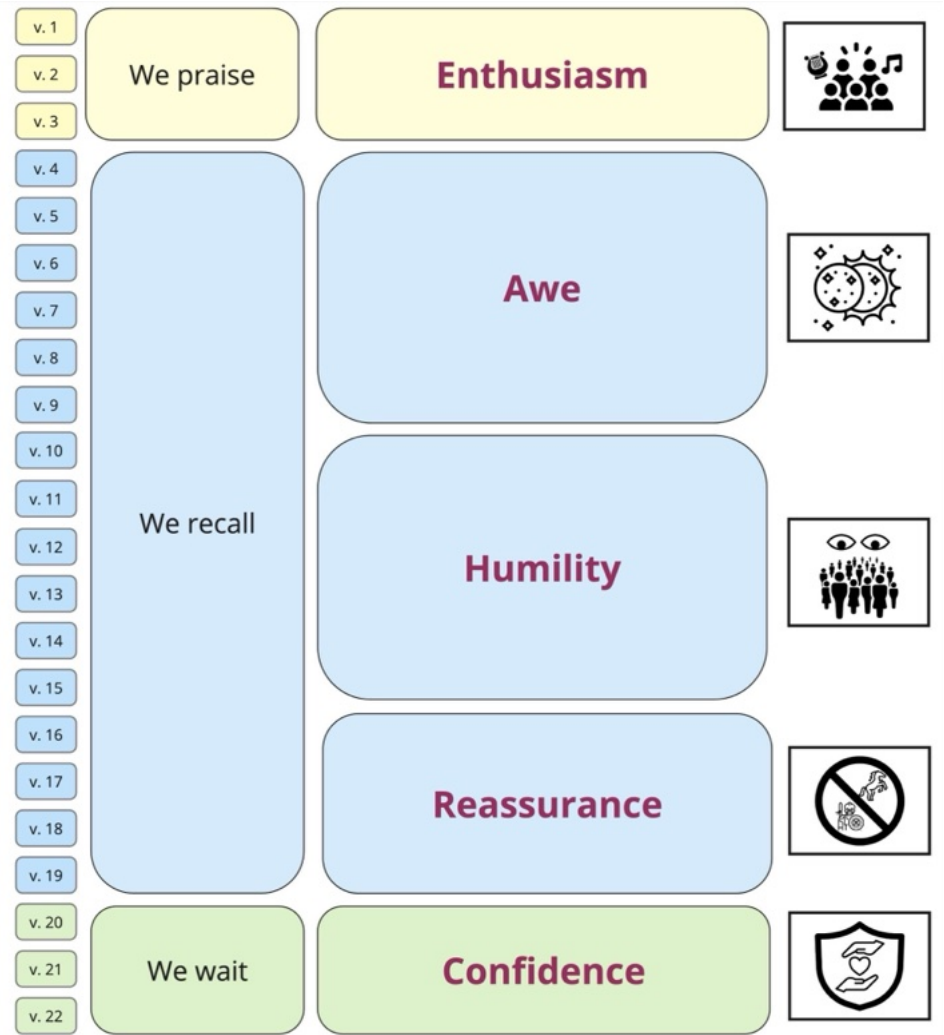
v. 1	We praise	Praise YHWH as his people should!	
v. 2			
v. 3			
v. 4	We recall	YHWH works in creation according to loyal love. All people should fear him!	
v. 5			
v. 6			
v. 7			
v. 8		YHWH's plan thwarts the nations' plan. YHWH sees all people's works.	
v. 9			
v. 10			
v. 11			
v. 12		Military strength cannot rescue. YHWH sees those who fear him and wait for his loyal love!	
v. 13			
v. 14			
v. 15			
v. 16		It's we who wait, YHWH our shield, for your loyal love!	
v. 17			
v. 18			
v. 19			
v. 20	We wait	It's we who wait, YHWH our shield, for your loyal love!	
v. 21			
v. 22			

Progression of Thought-How do the sections of the psalm flow from one to the other?

- The progression of the psalm moves through three sections:
 - The opening three verses call YHWH's people to make joyful praise.
 - Then the long middle section explains *why* to praise. The middle section starts with a summary statement that YHWH's works are good and they fill the world. The middle section then gives three examples of YHWH's good works in the world. The examples are: 1) YHWH has powerfully ordered creation, 2) YHWH has stopped other nations, so his nation is happy, and 3) YHWH has seen all people, so he discerns their works. The middle section continues with a reminder that armies and horses cannot save, but YHWH watches to save those who fear and wait for him.
 - In the final three verses, the people declare that they are the ones who wait for and trust in YHWH. So, they ask YHWH to apply his loyal love to them.

4. Emotions

Part of poetry is communicating emotion. Each section, and even each verse, can contain a number of different emotions. Here are the main emotional themes of each section:



5. Participants and Speech Acts

In poetry, it is important to keep track of who is speaking, who is the audience, and what it is that the speaker is trying to do with his words.

In the chart below, the left-hand column identifies the speaker. For the first 19 verses of this psalm, the speaker is the choir director, and in verses 20-22 the choir director and the people join together to speak.

The right-hand column identifies the audience, which is Israel - except for the last verse of the psalm, where the audience is YHWH.

The middle column tells what the speaker is trying to do with his words (his speech acts) in each section. An *exhortation* like the one in verses 1-3 actively urges someone to do something: in this case, praise! A *petition* like the one in verses 20-22 is a request: in this case, the people request that YHWH will apply his loyal love to them.

SPEAKER	SPEECH ACT SECTIONS	ADDRESSEE
Choir Director	EXHORTATION (vv. 1-3) Make Music to YHWH Supporting statements Make a song for him with a ten-string harp!	Israel
	PRAISE (vv. 4-9) YHWH Has Done Mighty Acts in Creation Supporting statements He is the one who gathers the sea waters as a heap.	
	PRAISE (vv. 9-19) YHWH Has Power in Battle Supporting statements YHWH thwarts the nations' plans. A horse is a deceptive means for victory.	
Choir Director and People	PROFESSION OF CONFIDENCE (vv. 20-21) He is our Helper and Shield	YHWH
	PETITION (v. 22) May your loyal-love be upon us	

6. Poetics

In this section, we ask, "what kinds of artistic beauty did the psalmist incorporate into the poem to reinforce its message?" (See Poetic Features video and layer for more details.)

Feature 1: Absence of YHWH

1 רגלו אדוקים יהוה לשירים נאה התקול: הללו ל יהוה בכנור בנגיל ששור וקוריל: שיריך שיר חדש הקצו לו בחריצות:	1 Shout for joy in YHWH , righteous people! Praise is fitting for upright people. 2 Give YHWH praise with a lyre! Make a song for him with a ten-string harp! 3 Sing a new song to him ! Play skillfully with a blast!
4 כי ישר יהוה כל עשהו באמונה: אמנו עמנו ושלום והשם יהוה כלחם הארץ:	4 Because YHWH 's word is upright, and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness. 5 He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of YHWH 's loyal-love.
6 דבר יהוה שמים נעשו וכרח פיו כל יצאם: בסם בוד פיו תסם בסם באצרות תולדות: ירדו יהוה ליתאמן בסם יצרו כל יצאם תכל:	6 The heavens were made by YHWH 's word, and all their hosts [were made] by the breath of his mouth. 7 He is the one who gathers the sea water as a heap! He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses! 8 All the earth should be afraid of YHWH ! All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him !
9 כי דבר אמר ובר הוא יצא ונעמד:	9 For he spoke, and it was; he commanded, and it came about.
10 יתחם העיר צעדיהם בסם חסותם נעמד: נצח יהוה לעולם ועד חשבות לבו לנר ונר: אשרי וגו' אשרי יהוה אלהיו הם י חסו למנהל לו:	10 YHWH has thwarted the nations' plan; he has blocked the peoples' intentions. 11 YHWH's plan stands forever; the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever. 12 Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH . [happy are] the people [whom YHWH] chose as his permanent possession.
13 חשיתם הים יהוה ראו ארץ כל האדם: מקביל יושביו יהוה אל כל יושבי הארץ: הוא י יצר לבם הוא י ידוע כל עמלם:	13 YHWH looked from heaven: he saw all of humanity, 14 he gazed from his dwelling place at all the dwellers of the earth, 15 the one who forms all their hearts, the one who discerns all their works.
16 איהוה יושע ברב עז גבור לא יציל ברב עז: שקר חסו למשועב והוא י לא יציל:	16 There is no king [who is] saved by a great force; a warrior is not delivered by great might. 17 A horse is false for victory; and it does not rescue by [its] great force.
18 הנה עין יהוה אל יראו למשועב למסור: לעזר סבות נשעים ולחיותם ברב:	18 Consider: YHWH's eye is upon those who fear him ; upon those who wait for his loyal-love, to deliver their lives from death, and to keep them alive during famine.
19 ונשנו חסו ל יהוה נצח ונשנו חסו: כי כסם דרשו חסו: הי חסות יהוה עלינו כאשר יחלנו לו:	20 We ourselves wait longingly for YHWH he is our help and our shield— therefore our hearts rejoice in him . 21 because we have come to trust in his holy name. 22 YHWH , may your loyal-love be upon us, just as we have been waiting for you !

YHWH appears as a participant in every verse of this psalm except **verses 16-17**.¹ YHWH's absence in these verses makes them stand out within the psalm. After exclusively positive verses about YHWH for the whole psalm, there is an emotional shift in verses 16-17. There is nothing positive in verses 16-17, which only discuss false hopes for victory (kings, warriors, and horses).

The absence of YHWH creates a kind of poetic pause here. Then, immediately following verses 16-17, the psalmist calls the audience to attention with the discourse particle "**Consider**" (הנה) in verse 18a. This call to *consider* that YHWH is paying attention may suggest that people were tempted to do the opposite: to trust in military strength, to doubt YHWH's attentiveness, and to seek alternative means of rescue. Without directly accusing anybody of such a thought, the poetry of verses 16-19 argues both *against* all human means for victory and *for* strict dependence on YHWH alone.

¹ Verse 19 also does not mention YHWH, but it is not a complete sentence since it only contains infinitive verbs, and is therefore dependent upon v. 18, which mentions YHWH.

Feature 2: The Unexpected Enemies

1 רננו אדירים ביהנה: לשירים נאנה מנהנה: הודו ליהנה בכנור: במביל עשור זמיריו: שיריו ילך שיר חנש: השיבו גלל כהריונה:	1 Shout for joy in YHWH , righteous people! Praise is fitting for upright people.
2	2 Give YHWH praise with a lyre! Make a song for him with a ten-string harp!
3	3 Sing a new song to him! Play skillfully with a blast!
4 כי ישר דבר יהנה: וכל מעשיו באמינות: אזכר צדקה ומשפט: תקד יתלה קולוה הנאצי:	4 Because YHWH 's word is upright, and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness.
5	5 He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of YHWH 's loyalty.
6 בדבר יהנה שמים נעשו: ובקרו שיר כל צבאם: כנס בנח מי תמם: תקו באצרות תחומות: הרואו חתונה כל יראיו: מקננו יאירו כל יושבי תבלי: כי הוא אמר ויהי: הוא יצא ויבטל:	6 The heavens were made by YHWH 's word, and all their hosts [were made] by the breath of his mouth.
7	7 He is the one who gathers the sea water as a heap! He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses!
8	8 All the earth should be afraid of YHWH ! All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him!
9	9 For he spoke, and it was; he commanded, and it came about.
10	10 YHWH has thwarted the nations' plan; he has blocked the peoples' intentions.
11	11 YHWH 's plan stands forever; the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever.
12	12 Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH . [happy are] the people [whom] he chose as his permanent possession.
13	13 YHWH looked from heaven: he saw all of humanity,
14	14 he gazed from his dwelling place at all the dwellers of the earth,
15	15 the one who forms all their hearts, the one who discerns all their works.
16	16 A king is not saved by a great force; a warrior is not delivered by great might.
17	17 A horse is a deceptive means for victory; and it does not rescue by its great force.
18	18 Consider: YHWH 's eye is upon those who fear him; upon those who wait for his loyalty.
19	19 To deliver their lives from death, and to keep them alive during famine.
20	20 We ourselves wait longingly for YHWH —he is our help and our shield—
21	21 therefore our hearts rejoice in him, because we have come to trust in his holy name.
22	22 YHWH , may your loyalty be upon us, just as we have been waiting for you!

YHWH's name occurs 6 times in verses 1-9 and 6 times in verses 11-22. Six occurrences, in Hebrew poetry, is distinctively "imperfect," meaning that both sections need the occurrence of YHWH in verse 10a in order to achieve a perfect seven occurrences of the divine name. Thus, verse 10a structurally binds the psalm together in the middle.

Strikingly, verse 10a presents a state of affairs to the psalm that is unexpected and new. There are no overt clues in the first 9 verses of the psalm that the nations are a concern, that they have a plan, or that YHWH has thwarted their plan. As so many times in the Psalms, enemies did not need to be explicitly mentioned in order to be present. But YHWH's people did not need to fear these enemies, because YHWH would always thwart them. The discussion of YHWH's power over creation (verses 4-9) establishes his equal power over enemies and their plans (verses 10-15).

Additionally, the name **YHWH** is fronted at the very beginning of verse 10a, and this is the only time this happens within the psalm, despite YHWH's name appearing 13 times. The result is a stress upon YHWH: "(It was **YHWH** who) thwarted the nations' plan." This is not simply a hymn in praise of YHWH. It reassures those singing that YHWH always has (and always will) thwart enemy plans. That is what gives them cause to rejoice even while they long and wait for him.

Feature 3: YHWH's nation

יְהוָה הִפִּיר אֶצְמַת-גּוֹיִם הִנִּיא מַחְשְׁבוֹת יָמָם׃	10	YHWH thwarted the nations' plan ; he blocked the peoples' intentions .
אֶצְמַת יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תִּעָמָד מַחְשְׁבוֹת לִבּוֹ לְדָר נָדָר׃	11	YHWH's plan stands forever; the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever.
אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּתָר לְנַחֲלָה לּוֹ׃	12	Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH, [happy are] the people [whom YHWH] chose as his permanent possession.

At the center point of Psalm 33, the psalmist uses word play to contrast the nations of the earth and the LORD and his nation. Verse 10 speaks of the nations' **plan and intentions**, which are contrasted with YHWH's **plan and intentions** in the next verse (verse 11). Verse 10 also refers specifically to the **the nations** (גוים) and **peoples** (עמים), which are contrasted with Israel, YHWH's **nation** (הגוי) and **people** (העם) in verse 12.

The word play in these central verses present a reversal, where the nations' plan and intentions do not last, but are thwarted. The central location of this feature within the psalm reflects the central message of the psalm to trust in YHWH's plan instead of military strength.

7. Prominence

It is also important to consider how the author chose to draw attention to certain parts of the psalm. Here are the parts of the psalm that we believe are most prominent, and thus should be most prominent in a performance of the psalm.

The **most prominent** part of Psalm 33 is verses 10-12:

1	שִׂחוּ לַיהוָה בְּעַמּוּת צְדִיקִים	1	Shout for joy in YHWH, righteous people!
2	לְעֵדִים נָכוֹן תְּהַלֵּל	2	Praise is fitting for upright people.
3	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׁחַלֵּל	3	Give YHWH praise with a lyre!
4	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	4	Make a song for him with a ten-string harp!
5	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	5	Sing a new song to him!
6	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	6	Play skillfully with a blast!
7	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	7	Because YHWH's word is upright,
8	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	8	and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness.
9	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	9	He loves righteousness and justice;
10	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	10	the earth is full of YHWH's loyal-love.
11	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	11	The heavens were made by YHWH's word,
12	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	12	and all their hosts [were made] by the breath of his mouth.
13	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	13	He is the one who gathers the sea water as a heap!
14	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	14	He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses!
15	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	15	All the earth should be afraid of YHWH!
16	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	16	All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him!
17	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	17	For he spoke, and it was;
18	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	18	he commanded, and it came about.
19	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	19	YHWH has thwarted the nations' plan;
20	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	20	he has blocked the peoples' intentions.
21	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	21	YHWH's plan stands forever;
22	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	22	the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever.
23	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	23	Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH,
24	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	24	[happy are] the people [whom YHWH] has chosen as his permanent possession.
25	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	25	YHWH looked from heavens:
26	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	26	he saw all of humanity,
27	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	27	he gazed from his dwelling place
28	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	28	at all the dwellers of the earth.
29	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	29	The one who forms all their hearts,
30	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	30	The one who discerns all their works.
31	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	31	There is no king [who is] saved by a great force;
32	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	32	a warrior is not delivered by great might.
33	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	33	A horse is false for victory;
34	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	34	and it does not rescue by [its] great force.
35	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	35	Consider: YHWH's eye is upon those who fear him;
36	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	36	upon those who wait for his loyal-love.
37	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	37	To deliver their lives from death,
38	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	38	and to keep them alive during famine.
39	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	39	We ourselves long for YHWH;
40	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	40	he is our help and our shield,
41	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	41	because our hearts will rejoice in him,
42	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	42	because we trust in his holy name.
43	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	43	YHWH, may your loyal-love be upon us,
44	בְּקֶלֶד וְנָדִיר תִּשְׂבַּח	44	just as we have been waiting for you!

- These verses contrast the **plan** and **intentions** of the nations with the **plan** and **intentions** of YHWH.
- The nations plan to destroy the people of God, but YHWH thwarts the plan of the nations.
- YHWH's plan is to rescue his people, and his plan stands forever.
- Therefore, YHWH's people are happy.

The **second-most** prominent part of the psalm is verses 18-19:

- Verses 18-19 tie together many important themes from earlier in the psalm: **YHWH's loyal-love** (from verse 5), **fearing YHWH** (from verse 8), and **YHWH's looking** (from verses 13-15).
- Verses 18-19 turn these themes into a promise that the audience applies to themselves in the final section (verses 20-23). **YHWH looks** at those who **fear him**, so that YHWH will apply his **loyal love** to them.

1	רָנָה בַּיְהוָה צְדִיקֵי	Shout for joy in YHWH, righteous people!
2	לְיָדָיו יִתְּנוּ תְהִלָּה	Praise is fitting for upright people.
3	הַלְלוּ יְהוָה בְּקִינָה	Give YHWH praise with a lyre!
4	בְּקִינָה נְיוֹןָה	Make a song for him with a ten-string harp!
5	בְּקִינָה נְיוֹןָה	Sing a new song to him!
6	בְּקִינָה נְיוֹןָה	Play skillfully with a blast!
7	כִּי יָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	Because YHWH's word is upright,
8	וְכָל עֲשָׂתוֹ בְּאֵמֶת	and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness.
9	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	He loves righteousness and justice;
10	וְכָל הָאָרֶץ מְלֵא	the earth is full of YHWH's loyal-love.
11	כִּי יִצְרָא הַשָּׁמַיִם	The heavens were made by YHWH's word,
12	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	and all their hosts [were made] by the breath of his mouth.
13	וְהוּא הַיָּם	He is the one who gathers the sea water as a heap!
14	וְהוּא הַיָּם	He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses!
15	וְכָל הָאָרֶץ	All the earth should be afraid of YHWH!
16	כִּי יִשְׁמַע הַיָּם	All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him!
17	כִּי יִשְׁמַע הַיָּם	For he spoke, and it was;
18	וְהָיָה כְּדָבָר	he commanded, and it came about.
19	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	YHWH has thwarted the nations' plan;
20	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	he has blocked the peoples' intentions.
21	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	YHWH's plan stands forever;
22	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever.
23	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH,
24	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	[happy are] the people [whom YHWH] has chosen as his permanent possession.
25	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	YHWH looked from heaven:
26	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	he saw all of humanity,
27	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	he gazed from his dwelling place
28	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	at all the dwellers of the earth,
29	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	The one who forms all their hearts,
30	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	The one who discerns all their works.
31	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	There is no king [who is] saved by a great force;
32	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	a warrior is not delivered by great might.
33	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	A horse is false for victory,
34	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	and it does not rescue by [its] great force.
35	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	Consider: YHWH's eye is upon those who fear him;
36	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	upon those who wait for his loyal-love.
37	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	To deliver their lives from death,
38	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	and to keep them alive during famine.
39	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	We ourselves long for YHWH;
40	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	he is our help and our shield,
41	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	because our hearts will rejoice in him,
42	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	because we trust in his holy name.
43	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	YHWH, may your loyal-love be upon us,
44	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	just as we have been waiting for you!

The **third-most** prominent part of the psalm is verses 16-17.

1	רָנָה בַּיְהוָה צְדִיקֵי	Shout for joy in YHWH, righteous people!
2	לְיָדָיו יִתְּנוּ תְהִלָּה	Praise is fitting for upright people.
3	הַלְלוּ יְהוָה בְּקִינָה	Give YHWH praise with a lyre!
4	בְּקִינָה נְיוֹןָה	Make a song for him with a ten-string harp!
5	בְּקִינָה נְיוֹןָה	Sing a new song to him!
6	בְּקִינָה נְיוֹןָה	Play skillfully with a blast!
7	כִּי יָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	Because YHWH's word is upright,
8	וְכָל עֲשָׂתוֹ בְּאֵמֶת	and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness.
9	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	He loves righteousness and justice;
10	וְכָל הָאָרֶץ מְלֵא	the earth is full of YHWH's loyal-love.
11	כִּי יִצְרָא הַשָּׁמַיִם	The heavens were made by YHWH's word,
12	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	and all their hosts [were made] by the breath of his mouth.
13	וְהוּא הַיָּם	He is the one who gathers the sea water as a heap!
14	וְהוּא הַיָּם	He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses!
15	וְכָל הָאָרֶץ	All the earth should be afraid of YHWH!
16	כִּי יִשְׁמַע הַיָּם	All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him!
17	כִּי יִשְׁמַע הַיָּם	For he spoke, and it was;
18	וְהָיָה כְּדָבָר	he commanded, and it came about.
19	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	YHWH has thwarted the nations' plan;
20	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	he has blocked the peoples' intentions.
21	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	YHWH's plan stands forever;
22	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever.
23	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH,
24	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	[happy are] the people [whom YHWH] has chosen as his permanent possession.
25	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	YHWH looked from heaven:
26	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	he saw all of humanity,
27	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	he gazed from his dwelling place
28	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	at all the dwellers of the earth,
29	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	The one who forms all their hearts,
30	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	The one who discerns all their works.
31	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	There is no king [who is] saved by a great force;
32	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	a warrior is not delivered by great might.
33	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	A horse is false for victory;
34	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	and it does not rescue by [its] great force.
35	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	Consider: YHWH's eye is upon those who fear him;
36	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	upon those who wait for his loyal-love.
37	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	To deliver their lives from death,
38	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	and to keep them alive during famine.
39	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	We ourselves long for YHWH;
40	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	he is our help and our shield,
41	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	because our hearts will rejoice in him,
42	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	because we trust in his holy name.
43	וְיָשָׁר דְּבַר יְהוָה	YHWH, may your loyal-love be upon us,
44	וְכָל חֲסִי הַיָּם	just as we have been waiting for you!

- Every verse in the psalm features **YHWH** as a participant, except verses 16-17.
- Instead of YHWH, the main participants of these verses are *agents of war* such as a king, a warrior, and a horse.
- The emotional effect of these verses is to create a void, or an emotional let-down, after verses 4-15 have given many positive examples of YHWH's character and activity. This sets up the audience to "Consider" the promise of verses 18-19.

TRANSLATION TIPS, VERSE BY VERSE

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in green) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 1-3: We Sing (with a Blast)!

- Verses 1-3 are a call to praise. These verses are characterized by **plural** imperatives, meaning that the speaker addresses an entire group. Some languages will need to provide the plural pronoun *you* to make the audience of the imperative clear. Furthermore, the sense of the imperatives here is that they form an invitation (that is, telling people to do something that they likely want to do) more than a command (that is, telling people to do something that they might not want to do).
- The main emotion in this section is enthusiasm! The emotions are happy as the people are called to sing and make a new song with a blast.

VERSE 1

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

YHWH established his covenant with Abraham's offspring, and YHWH's covenantal word is upright. YHWH's people keep the covenant, so they become righteous and upright. They assemble for worship, and the leaders say: **Shout for joy in YHWH, righteous people** who have kept YHWH's covenant! **Praise** to YHWH, who keeps his covenant, **is fitting for upright people** like you.

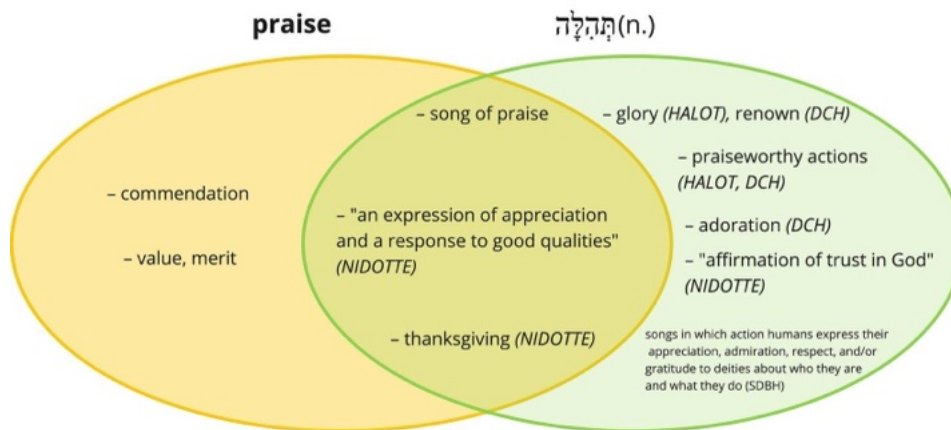
רִנְנוּ צְדִיקִים בַּיהוָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם תְּהִלָּה:	1	Shout for joy in YHWH, righteous people! Praise is fitting for upright people.
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- **Shout for joy** is a single word in Hebrew (רִנְנוּ) that is important to the emotional exegesis of the psalm. Joy is part of the meaning of the Hebrew word and should be included in translation. The NIV translates the verb as *sing joyfully* and the NLT has *sing for joy*, but the word is closer to *shout for joy* (ESV, NET).
- The root for **righteous** (צָדִיק) refers to "a pattern of behavior by humans or deities that is in accordance with the requirements of the divine law."² It is a key term in this psalm. Here the adjective functions as a noun (that is, *substantivally*), referring to **righteous people**. 'Righteous people' (צְדִיקִים) are the ones to whom the speaker is addressing his statement (using the vocative). Thus, some languages will need to provide *you* (plural) to make it clear that it is the 'righteous people' who are being addressed (see NIV).
- The prepositional phrase **in YHWH** (בַּיהוָה) is a figure of speech that means the people are to shout for joy *because of* YHWH. Translators should attempt to make it clear that YHWH is the reason for the praise.
 - The word **YHWH** is the *proper name* for Israel's deity; it is not as generic as the term *god*. The term is important in terms of placement and the number of appearances of the word in the psalm. See the section on [Prominence](#) and the notes on verses 10-12 and 16 for more detail.
- The root of the Hebrew word **upright** is repeated in this psalm; it also appears in verse 5. Here it is an adjective (functioning as a noun) meaning **upright people**, that is, people "whose behavior is morally and

² SDBH.

ethically right."³ 'Upright people' (לְיֹשֵׁרִים) is a synonym for the **righteous people** who have just been mentioned in the previous clause. Languages that do not have words for each term may use the same word for both. The adjectives righteous (צַדִּיק) and upright (יֹשֵׁר) occur together frequently in the Bible. Try to retain the same renderings for these words as they are found elsewhere.

- The phrase here rendered **fitting for** (נֶאֱמָרָה) is a figure of speech that means that the act of praising *matches well* with people who are upright. *Praise is fitting for upright people* does not mean that **upright people** should receive praise, but rather that they should give it, as they are called to do throughout verses 1-3. Some strategies for making this clear include rendering the praise as a verbal idea, such as *it is fitting for the upright to praise him* (NIV), or making the source of the praise clear, such as *praise from the upright is beautiful* (CSB).
 - Unlike the surrounding phrases, which are all direct commands (with imperative verbs), this phrase is a declaration that functions as an *indirect* exhortation, that is, an indirect way to encourage a certain kind of behavior. The people are meant to identify themselves as **upright people** and to respond with the appropriate behavior for such people (specifically, by praising YHWH).
- The English word **praise** is very close to the Hebrew term (תְּהִלָּה). See the diagram below for a more detailed



look at the Hebrew understanding of the root word (green circle on the right), our modern English understanding of the idea (yellow circle on the left), and what the two understandings have in common (the middle section where the two circles intersect):

VERSE 2

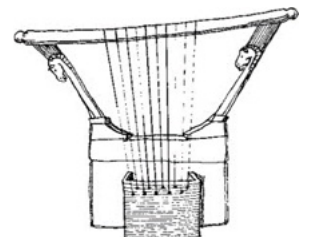
Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

As the people gather to worship, the leaders say to the musicians: **Give YHWH praise with a lyre, an instrument fitting for worship in the temple, which the Levites might play! Make a song for him with a ten-string harp** such as David used, when he worshiped!

הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה בְּכִנּוֹר בְּנֶבֶל עֶשְׂרִי זָמְרוּ-לוֹ:	2	Give YHWH praise with a lyre! Make a song for him with a ten-string harp!
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- The words for the instruments in this verse could be challenging:

³ SDBH.



- The **lyre** (*kinnor*, כִּנּוֹר; for a video of a lyre in use click [here](#)) is "a musical instrument consisting of a sound box made of wood, out the ends or sides of which projected two arms; the arms supported by a crosspiece; strings descended from the crosspiece over the sound box and the number of strings could vary."⁴ This is the instrument that David played, and is traditionally rendered in English as *harp*. So, translators should use the same term here as in 1 Sam 16:15, 23, where David plays a *kinnor*.
- The word **harp** (*nebel*, נֶבֶל) is uncertain. Some propose that it was a soundbox made of wood with animal intestines stretched over the top.⁵ In Ps 32:2 the word **ten** refers to the number of strings.
- It may not be possible to find exact matches in the local culture for these instruments, but translators can keep a few guidelines in mind.
 - Stringed instruments should be preferred, if they are available in the local culture, but any instrument used in celebration may be used.
 - The *kinnor* was more common than the *nebel*.⁶ So, if possible, translators may choose a more common instrument in the local culture to translate the first word, and a rarer instrument to translate the second.
 - If more than one instrument is not available, then translators may simply repeat the same instrument.
- The combination of **lyre** (כִּנּוֹר) and **harp** (נֶבֶל) was common in worship. For example, they appear together in Ps 150:3-5 and 1 Chr 16 and 25:1-8. Translators should strive to match the translation of these words in Ps 33 with those passages.
- The prepositional phrases **with a lyre** and **with a harp** mean by *playing a lyre/harp*. Some languages may require making clear that these are instruments *being played*, and that the playing is what brings about the praise: "praise the Lord by playing music on the lyre."⁷
- In Hebrew, the phrase **with a ten-stringed harp** is out of the typical word order. It is fronted within its clause. The result is that the whole verse is poetically arranged (in a *tail-head linkage*) so that the center emphasizes both of the phrases about instruments. It looks like this:



הַדָּן לַיהוָה	Give praise to YHWH
בְּכִנּוֹר	with a lyre!
בְּנֶבֶל עֲשׂוֹר	with a ten-string harp
וְאָמְרוּ לָו:	make a song for him!

VERSE 3

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Sing a new song to him! Play skillfully with a blast!

שִׁירֵי-לָו שִׁיר חָדָשׁ הִשְׁתַּבְּחוּ אֱלֹהִים בְּתִרְעָה:	3	Sing a new song to him ! Play skillfully with a blast!
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⁴ SDBH.

⁵ SDBH.

⁶ Ps 43:4; Keel 1997, 349.

⁷ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 311.

- The phrase **a new song** (שִׁיר הַדָּשׁ) is a common phrase found "in calls to praise with *renewed enthusiasm* resulting from a new experience of deliverance or a new appreciation of the Lord's presence."⁸ The call "to sing a new song was a way of calling people to enjoy God's presence and his benefits, so that they would have something new to sing about in the sanctuary."⁹ So, what is in focus is not the *content* of the new composition, but the *feeling* that caused the new composition to be sung.
- The pronoun **him** refers to YHWH.
- Some languages cannot use the verb **play** without naming the instrument; in this case, translators should supply the **lyre** (and possibly the **harp**) or a generic term like *instruments*.
- Words that communicate playing *well* or *beautifully* could replace **skillfully** here. The word **skillfully** means *to do well*.
- The meaning of the challenging word **blast** (הַרְוֵעָה) indicates that its most important feature is not who or what is making the sound, but how loud the sound is.¹⁰ So the common English translation *shout* may not be the best choice. The focus on instruments in verses 1-3 suggest that it is the instruments making the *loud sound* - so, *loud sound* is another translation possibility. The heightened volume expresses joy, and it often occurs in warfare as a call to arms.¹¹ The Hebrew word does not necessarily connote that the sound is sudden, though, as the English word 'blast' might.

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in *green*) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 4-19: We Recall (YHWH is powerful)

- The middle section (verses 4-19) provides the reasons for the praise in the first section (verses 1-3) "by elaborating certain representative acts of God in creation and history."¹²
- The verse lines in verses 4-19 appear in pairs that display parallelism.

VERSES 4-5: Summary of Reasons

- Verses 4-5 contain a summary statement of YHWH's character and work.
- These verses contain a parallelism of *adherence to a standard* and *adherence to a relationship*:
 - adherence to a standard appears as **uprightness** (verse 4a) and **justice** (verse 5a)
 - adherence to a relationship appears as **faithfulness** (verse 4b) and **loyal love** (verse 5b).¹³

VERSE 4

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

⁸ Ross 2011, 730; emphasis added. A **new song** (שִׁיר הַדָּשׁ) could be sung in anticipation of the "new things" that YHWH was about to do for his people (Isa 42:9-10), in response to being rescued from the pit (Ps 40:2-3), so that all the earth would know the greatness of YHWH and that his judgment is coming soon (Pss 96), as a response to YHWH's saving act in battle (Ps 98), or as a battle cry before the people execute judgment on the nations with swords (Ps 149). For a detailed discussion of the usage of **new song** in Psalm 98, see the Exegetical Issue ["What Prompts the 'New Song' of Psalm 98:1?"](#)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ SDBH, cf. TWOT §2135b.

¹¹ TDOT vol 13, 414-415.

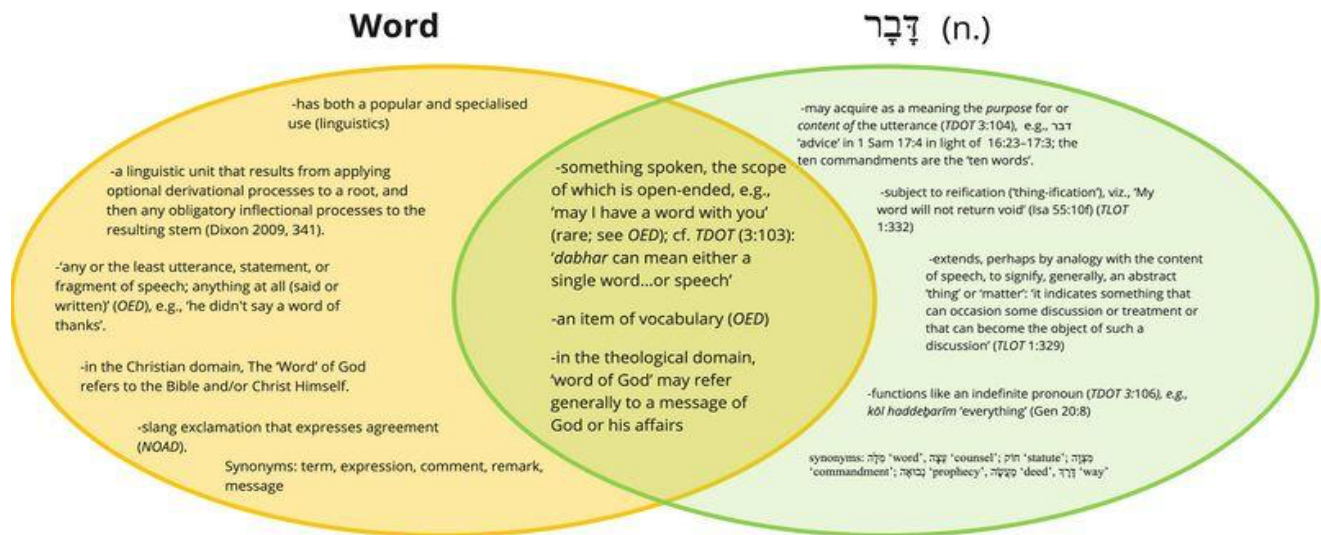
¹² Anderson 1972, 261; Ross 2012, 723.

¹³ Auffret 2009, 90.

Here is a summary of the reasons we should praise him: **Because YHWH's word is morally upright, and all of his work in creation and in history is [done] in faithfulness** for the benefit of his covenant people.

כִּי-יֵשֶׁר דְּבַר-יְהוָה וְכָל-מַעֲשָׂהוּ בִּאֱמוּנָה:	4	Because YHWH's word is upright, and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness.
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- The word **Because** (כִּי) that begins verse 4 is a crucial conjunction in this psalm that should not be missed by translators. It connects verses 1-3 with verses 4-19, which give the reasons why the congregation should praise YHWH. Though most English translations render this word as *for*, the word *for* is not the normal way to introduce reasons in modern English.
- The root of the word **upright** (יֵשֶׁר) is repeated in this psalm. It described the audience in verse 1b, and here it describes **YHWH's word**. Thus, the psalmist describes the audience in terms of YHWH's good character. Translators should retain the repetition.
- The phrase **YHWH's word** is repeated in this psalm; it also appears in verse 6. Translators may render it as *the words that YHWH speaks*. These words include both instructions and the power to create, as verse 6 indicates. See the Venn diagram below for a more detailed look at the Hebrew understanding of the term **word** (green circle on the right), our modern English understanding of the idea (yellow circle on the left), and what the two understandings have in common (the middle section where the two circles intersect):



- The key word **work** shares a root with the verb to *do* (עָשָׂה), which in verse 6 describes YHWH's act of creating the heavens. Thus, the creation of the heavens is an example of YHWH's faithful work. In many languages, it will be necessary to convert the word 'work' into a verb, with the resulting phrase *all he does* (NIV; NLT: *everything he does*).
- The word **faithfulness** (אֱמוּנָה) describes "a state in which humans and deities are considered worthy of trust, because they are truthful and committed, with an unwavering disposition, which is reflected in their actions."¹⁴ When applied to God, it expresses "his total dependability."¹⁵ Although in this verse it is YHWH's works and not himself that is in view, his works take on his character. In some languages it will be

¹⁴ SDBH.

¹⁵ TWOT, 51-2.

necessary to change 'in faithfulness' to a verbal phrase, such as the NLT's *we can trust* or the NIV's *he is faithful in*.

VERSE 5

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Because **He loves righteousness and justice**, he ensures that this is what fills the earth. When sin fills the earth with violence, he responds with judgment and cleansing, so that, in the end, it's always true that **the earth is full of YHWH's loyal-love** not just in loyal love to his own but also faithfulness to judge the wicked.

אהב צדקה ומשפט תסד יהוה מלאה הארץ:	5	He loves righteousness and justice ; the earth is full of YHWH's loyal love .
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- The noun **righteousness** (צדקה) is a key term that shares the same root as the word **righteous people** (צדיקים) in verse 1. Thus, the audience is addressed by the psalmist as those whose character YHWH loves. Translators should repeat the sense of the root in both verses or use similar-sounding words. This root and the word **upright** both describe YHWH's people (verse 1) and what YHWH loves (verses 4-5). They appear in a mirror ab||ba pattern in the section. It looks like this:

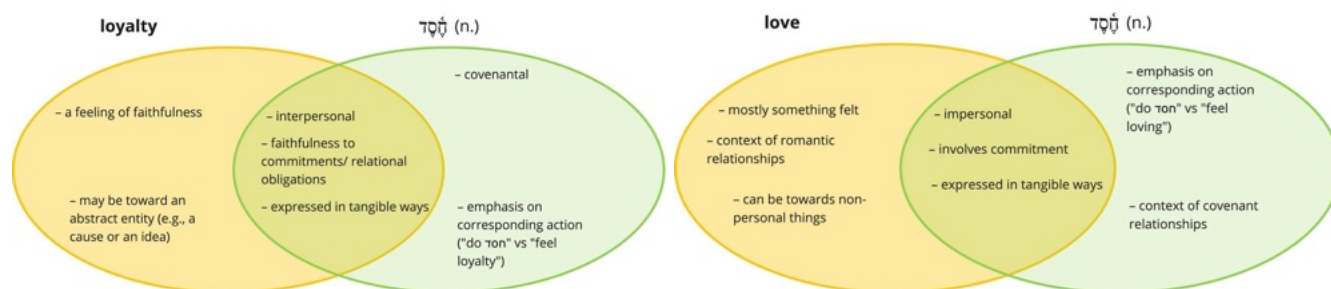
רננו צדיקים ביהוה לשרים נאנה תהלה:	1	Shout for joy in YHWH, righteous people ! Praise is fitting for upright people .
הודו ליהוה בכנור בגבל עשור ומריליו:	2	Give YHWH praise with a lyre! Make a song for him with a ten-string harp!
שירולו שיר חדש היטיבו נגון בתרועה:	3	Sing a new song to him! Play skillfully with a blast!
כי ישר דבר יהוה וכל מעשהו באמונה:	4	Because YHWH's word is upright , and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness.
אהב צדקה ומשפט תסד יהוה מלאה הארץ:	5	He loves righteousness and justice ; the earth is full of YHWH's loyalty.

- The combination of **righteousness** (צדקה) and **justice** (משפט) can be performed either by YHWH or by his people. In this verse, YHWH's **love** of these activities results in the earth being full of his loyal love (verse 5b), which suggests that YHWH is the one doing righteousness and justice: *YHWH loves to do righteousness and justice, therefore the earth is full of his loyal love*. For languages that need a verbal translation of these abstract nouns, a rendering like *YHWH loves to do what is right and to judge fairly* is possible.¹⁶
 - The Hebrew root of the word **righteousness** (צדק) "focuses on the principle of 'what is right, correct.'" In contrast, **justice** (משפט) "often refers to the practical consequences of righteousness" in society.¹⁷ Translators should attempt to distinguish the terms if possible, but some languages may lack separate words for these concepts. In this case, it is best to use a single word with intensification, such as: *YHWH loves to do what is thoroughly just*. The word combination occurs often in the OT.

¹⁶ cf. Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 312.

¹⁷ TDOT v. 12, 248.

- The verb **is full** (מָלֵא) is stative in Hebrew. It "represents a state flowing from an earlier situation."¹⁸ Many English translations, such as the NLT, render the verb in its active sense (YHWH's loyal love *fills* the earth) but an active rendering should be avoided unless it is the only choice in the target language.¹⁹
- The term **loyal love** is a key term. It is a single word in Hebrew (חַסֵּד) that includes a number of concepts that are difficult to translate into one English word. It refers to loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, love, and mercy,²⁰ and the fulfilling of obligations.²¹ The two most essential of these are *loyalty* and *love*, or **loyal love**. The word also occurs in verses 18 and 22, and should be translated consistently throughout the psalm. See the Venn diagrams below for a more detailed look at the Hebrew understanding of the root word (green circle on the right), our modern English understanding of the ideas of "loyalty" and "love" (yellow circle on the left), and what the two understandings have in common (the middle section where the two circles intersect):



- The CEV renders the figure of speech **the earth is full of YHWH's loyal love** as *he is kind to everyone*, but doing so equates **the earth** with *people*. This adds interpretation to the text that may not be there in the Hebrew. Although the word **the earth** can mean *all people on earth* (as it does in verse 8), here in verse 5 it probably means the created, physical world mentioned in verses 6-7. For languages in which the expression **the earth is full of** would not work, an alternative would be *everything in the earth has received the Lord's loyal love*.²²
- The dominant emotion in this section of the psalm is *awe*, as the psalmist speaks of the power that YHWH has to control creation.

¹⁸ IBHS §30.3b.

¹⁹ From the standpoint of the Hebrew, the active rendering is grammatically unfeasible. The verb is feminine and so the subject of the verb must be the feminine noun **earth** and not the masculine noun **loyal love** (*hesed*). Furthermore, the active sense does not emphasize that the *filling* has already happened.

²⁰ DCH.

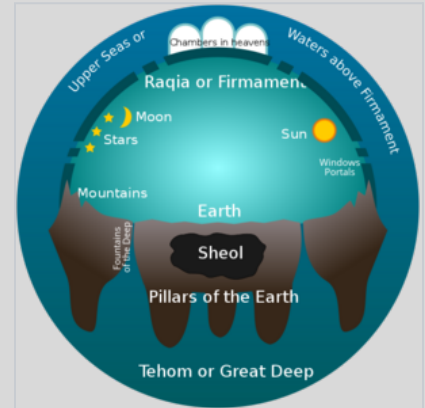
²¹ SDBH.

²² cf. Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 312.

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in green) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 6-9: YHWH Controls Creation

- Verses 6-9 contain the language of creation: *the heavens* (verse 6a), *the sea waters and deep oceans* (verse 7), and *the earth* (verse 8), as well as the phrase *he spoke and it was*, which is a reference to the creation story in Gen 1.
- The Israelites viewed creation with great oceans surrounding the earth and sky. The sun, moon, and stars inhabited the heavens. Above the heavens was a firmament (or wall) that usually prevented the upper seas above from pouring down rain on the earth. Below the earth were the great deep oceans, which sprung up in wells and springs.



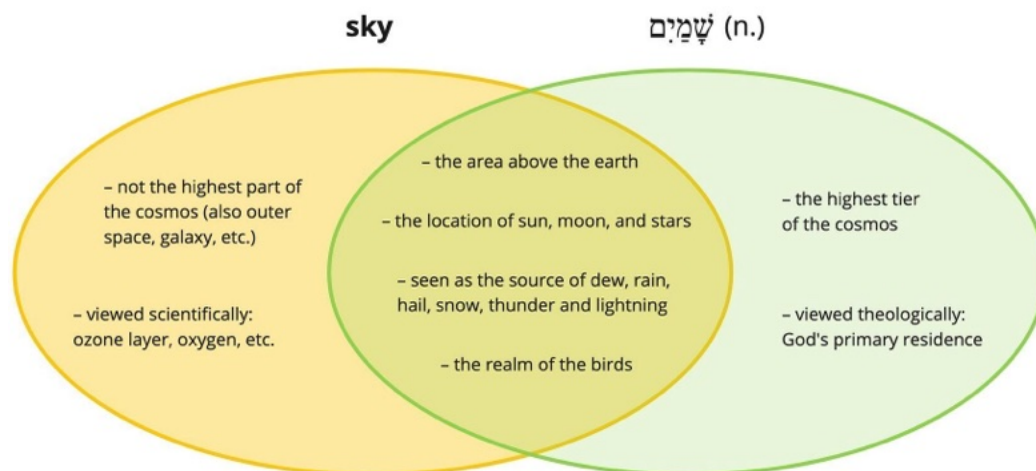
VERSE 6

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Here is what we mean in more detail: YHWH has power over all of creation. **The heavens were made by YHWH's word, and all their hosts** meaning the sun, moon, and stars [were made] by the breath of his mouth.

בְּדִבְרֵי יְהוָה שָׁמַיִם נַעֲשׂוּ וּבְרוּחַ אֵי פִי כָל־צִבְאוֹת:	6	The heavens were made by YHWH's word, and all their hosts [were made] by the breath of his mouth.
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- The original order of the words in the first line of this verse is By YHWH's word the heavens were made (as in ESV, NASB, NIV, NET, NRSV). We have rearranged the order to create a more smooth English translation, but the original order should be retained in the target language if doing so does not create difficulty in understanding.
- The word **heavens** (שָׁמַיִם) has different meanings in Hebrew and modern English, and translators should seek to be faithful to the Hebrew. The Venn diagram below shows the Hebrew understanding of the word (green circle on the right), our modern English understanding of sky (yellow circle on the left), and what the two understandings have in common (the middle section where the two circles intersect):



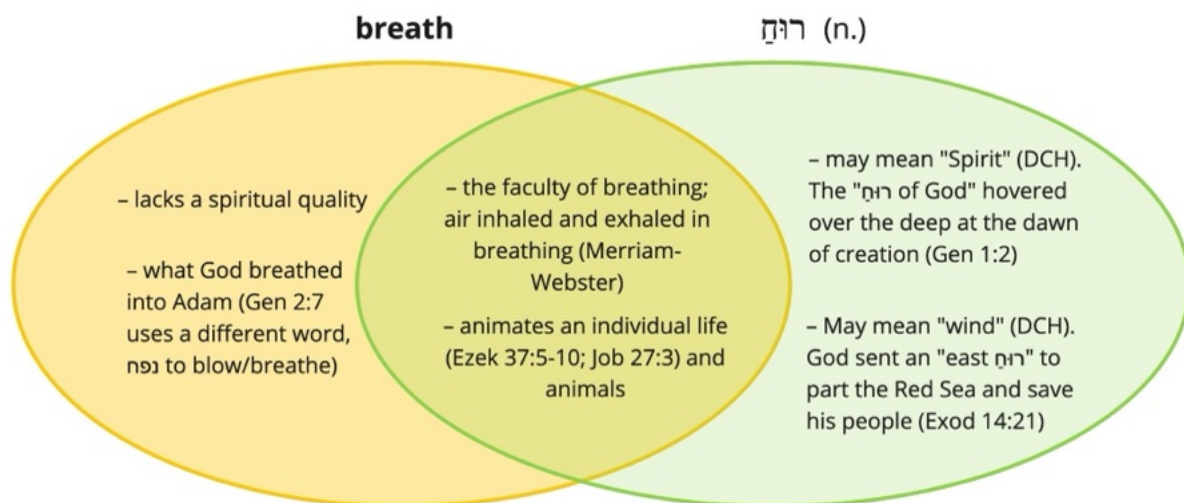
- The phrase **were made by** consists of a passive verb (נִשְׁעָנָה) and the preposition **by** (בְּ) that marks the means (that is, the instrument) used to create the heavens.²³ Some languages may require an active verb instead of a passive verb. In this case, a translation like *By his word the Lord made the heavens* (TOB translated) still treats **YHWH's word** as the instrument and not the subject of the verb, which is closer to the Hebrew than the REB's *The word of the Lord created the heavens* (REB).
- The phrase **the breath of his mouth** (רוּחַ פִּי) is a figure of speech that applies the language of a human body part, a **mouth**, and a human function, **breath**, to **YHWH**. It may be helpful to bear in mind that here the phrase appears in parallel with **YHWH's word**.²⁴ Thus, **the breath of his mouth** further describes YHWH's spoken, creative word. The complete phrase could be understood as *the breath that comes out of his mouth*. Commentators are correct that the essential meaning of this phrase is that *the Lord commanded*, and in the target language the phrase may need to be transformed into something like *when the Lord commanded*.²⁵ But if there is a clear way to retain the imagery in the local language, this should be done in order to be faithful to the beauty of the poem.
 - Although the Hebrew word for **breath** (רוּחַ) sometimes means *spirit* elsewhere in the OT, that is not the sense here. The Venn diagram below shows the Hebrew understanding of the word **breath** (רוּחַ) (green circle on the right), our modern English understanding of **breath** (yellow circle on the left), and what

²³ The prepositional phrase is fronted in both clauses for poetic emphasis.

²⁴ Technically, it is in a vertical relationship of apposition, in which the second term gives more information about the first one.

²⁵ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 312.

the two understandings have in common (the middle section where the two circles intersect):



- **Hosts** (צְבָאָה) most literally refers to an army. The phrase **all their hosts** means *all the army of the heavens*, which is an image that means the *sun, moon, and stars* (see also Gen 2:1, which uses the same phrase as here in Ps 33:6). The NLT renders the term **hosts** as *stars*, and this may be the best choice in many languages. However, military imagery is a significant part of this psalm (verses 10, 16-17), and translators could follow the NIV's *starry host* to retain the image while making the meaning clear. Translators should also be careful that their rendering does not refer to spiritual beings, which are not in view here.
- The second clause of verse 6 literally says **and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth**. It contains no verb; instead, the clause is governed by the verb from the previous clause for economy of style and poetic effect. It is possible that translators will need to repeat the verb **were made** (נִצְּרָו) in the second clause.

VERSE 7

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

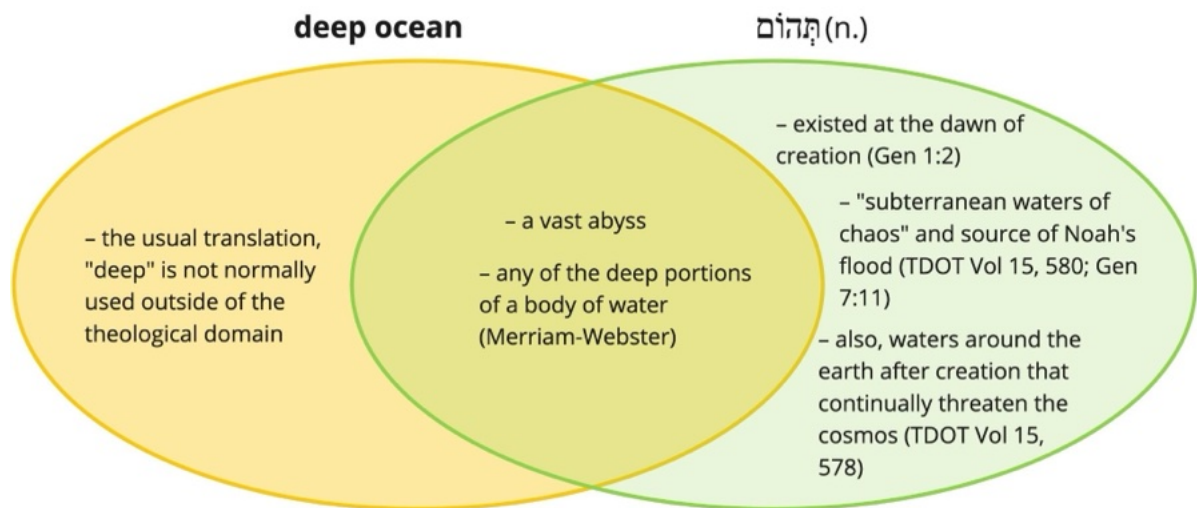
At creation, YHWH separated the waters above from the waters below, and he separated the water from dry land. Therefore, **He is the one who gathers the sea water as a heap!** *Not only did this show his power to create, but the separation of water from dry land was a preview of YHWH's later saving acts for his people: At the Exodus, YHWH piled the water as a heap so that his people could walk through on dry land; and the same thing happened at the crossing of the Jordan. At the crossing of the Red Sea, the enemy Egyptians were destroyed by the collapse of the waters upon them. Therefore, the one who gathers the sea water as a heap is powerful and compassionate to save his people from military threats. YHWH caused the Flood by allowing the spring of the deeps to burst forth along with opening the windows of heaven, then stopped the Flood by shutting the deeps and the windows of heaven. So, we say that He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses!* His control of the deeps saves righteous people like Noah but destroys YHWH's enemies, like the Egyptians.

כִּנֹּס בְּיַד מִי הַיָּם נָתַן בְּאֵצְרוֹת תְּהוֹמוֹת:	7	He is the one who gathers the sea waters as a heap! He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses!
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- The phrases **he is the one who gathers** and **he is the one who places** are both single words in Hebrew (participles). They could be rendered as verbal, as the NIV does: *he gathers/he puts*. But the preferred

reading is to take both of these participles as nouns (substantival). They describe well-known characteristics of YHWH: **he is the one who...**²⁶

- The phrase **gathers the sea waters as a heap** is an image that refers to YHWH's power over creation. But the specific wording 'as a heap' is a clear reference to the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan. In both of these events, God miraculously gathered 'the sea waters as a heap.' Translators should attempt to use the same wording here as in those passages (Exod 15:8, Josh 3:13, 16; Ps 78:13).
 - The phrase **the sea waters** is literally *the waters of the sea* (it is a *construct chain*). It refers to not just any water, but the water of the sea, thus signifying YHWH's power over vast amounts of water. **The sea waters** do not refer to the waters above the skies, which are never referred to as the sea. See the creation visual under the Section Notes for verses 6–9 (p. 15) for more detail.
 - The phrase **as a heap** is technically a comparison, but it is possible to render it with the preposition *into* instead of *like/as* without losing the meaning. This is the strategy of the CSB (*into a heap*), the GNT (*into one place*) and the French NBS and NVSR (*en une masse*).
 - The NLT's rendering *He assigned the sea its boundaries* is not very close to the Hebrew. Some scholars have argued that the phrase **as a heap** should be rendered *into jars*, as the NIV does. But the wording 'as a heap' has good textual support and should be followed.²⁷
- The phrase **places the deep oceans into storehouses** is also an image that refers to YHWH's power over creation.²⁸ It may contain echoes of the Flood story.²⁹ The deep oceans burst forth to cause Noah's flood (Gen 7:11) until God shut them up again (Gen 8:2), which is similar to him placing the deep oceans into storehouses.
 - The term **deep oceans** (תְּהוֹם) may be unfamiliar in many cultures. It refers to the body of water below the earth; the NIV's *deep* and the NLT's *oceans* by themselves do not accurately describe it, but combining the two words into 'deep oceans' does. For many cultures, the best way to express the term may be *the source of underground springs and well-water*, or more vaguely (and poetically) *the water under the earth*. Here is a Venn diagram comparing the English and Hebrew words:



²⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the options, see the Exegetical Issue [Participles in Ps 33:7](#).

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion, see the arguments in the Exegetical Issue [Heap, Wineskin, Or Jar?](#)

²⁸ Briggs 1906, 288.

²⁹ There is also a possible echo of the Song of the Sea. The waters which swallow Pharaoh's army in Exod 15 are referred to as the deep ocean.

- The term **storehouses** (אֹצְרוֹת) is an image that recurs throughout the OT. Most literally it is a place where "one stores valuable goods" for safekeeping.³⁰ An example of a specific kind of storehouse might be a room for storing grain. The importance of the storehouses image throughout the OT means that translators should try to retain it here in Ps 33:7, and to translate it consistently throughout the OT (see the footnotes to this paragraph for some of the most important occurrences).³¹
 - Some cultures may lack the concept of a storehouse. In that case, the important point is that it is a place where things can be shut inside. So, possible alternatives might be *inside closed spaces* or *inside closed rooms*.

VERSE 8

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

YHWH's power over creation and history to save and destroy means that **All the earth should be afraid of YHWH! All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him!**

יִירָאוּ מִיְהוָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ מִגֹּרֵי כְּלִישְׁבֵי תֵבֵל:	8	All the earth should be afraid of YHWH! All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him!
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- The phrase **all the earth** is a figure of speech which refers to everything in creation (that is, animals, rocks, trees, etc.) including Israel and other nations, that is, all the people who live on the earth. The parallel line **all the dwellers of the inhabited world** narrows the scope to people.
 - The participants are important in this verse. It is unlikely that the speaker of verse 8 is talking to **all the earth** and **all the dwellers of the inhabited world** directly; other nations would have been unlikely to accept that they should fear YHWH's power as it is described in verses 4-9. The statements of verse 8 instead make sense as rhetorically-charged statements to Israel about the power and supremacy of YHWH: everyone should fear YHWH, so certainly Israel should fear YHWH!
- Both of the verbs rendered **should be afraid** (יִירָאוּ) and **should be in dread** (לִגְוֹרוּ) express what *ought* to happen (they are jussives). Most modern translations render them as *Let...fear...let...revere*. The problem with this rendering in English is that it sounds like the psalmist is *granting permission* rather than expressing how things *ought to be*. Translators should attempt to render these verbs with a similar sense to 'should' in their languages.
- To **fear (be afraid of)** God is to be in awe and reverence of him (Mal 2:5) and to trust him (Ps 40:3; 115:11).³² See the Venn diagram below for a more detailed look at the Hebrew understanding of the word **be afraid of** (יָרָא) (green circle on the right), our modern English understanding of 'to fear' (yellow circle on the left), and what the two understandings have in common (the middle section where the two circles intersect):

³⁰ SDBH.

³¹ YHWH keeps the rain (Deut 28:12), wind (Jer 10:13 [51:6]), snow and hail in storehouses. He also keeps his vengeance and retribution (Deut 24:32) and his weapons of wrath (Jer 50:25) in storehouses.

³² Ryken et. al. 1998, 962.



- Most English translations render the word **dwellers** (יֹשְׁבֵי) as *inhabitants* or *people*. Here we have chosen to render it as 'dwellers' in order to highlight the connection with verse 14, where YHWH gazes upon the **dwellers of the earth** from his **dwelling place** (all of the *dwelling* words share the same Hebrew root). Translators should attempt to use the same word here and in verse 14 to enhance the sense of unity throughout the poem. In some languages, the term **dwellers** may take a verbal function: *the people dwelling*.
- **The inhabited world** (תְּהוֹמֵי) is a single Hebrew word whose specific sense often cannot be translated into another language with just one word. It means "the earth as opposed to the sky, with special focus on the area that is inhabited by humans."³³ If there is not a way in the local culture to convey this meaning, then translators could use a synonym for **the earth** such as *the world*.
- The word **be in dread** (נִיר) is "an even stronger" version of **be afraid of** which "means to be intimidated by something [or someone] superior and more powerful."³⁴ The ancient translations *be shaken* (LXX) and *be disturbed/shake/tremble* (Peshitta) suggest that this was an emotion of fear that had a physical effect. Most modern translations, with their renderings of *stand in awe*,³⁵ *revere*,³⁶ and *honor*,³⁷ undersell the powerful effects of the verb upon a person.³⁸ With the combination of the words *be afraid of* and *be in dread*, the verse covers a range of emotion from awe/reverence to panic/terror.

VERSE 9

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

For we should remember that **he spoke** saying, "let there be..." on the seven days of creation, **and it was; he commanded** both in creation and in history, such as at the Flood and crossing of the Red Sea, **and it came about**.

כִּי הָיָה אִמְרָ וַיְהִי הָיָה צִוְּיָהּ וַיַּעֲמֵד:	9	For he spoke, and it was; he commanded, and it came about.
--	---	---

³³ SDBH.

³⁴ Ross 2011, 733

³⁵ ESV, NET, NLT, NEB/REB, NRSV, CSB, GNB.

³⁶ NIV, NJB, NGÜ.

³⁷ CEV, GNT, HFA, NVI, DDH.

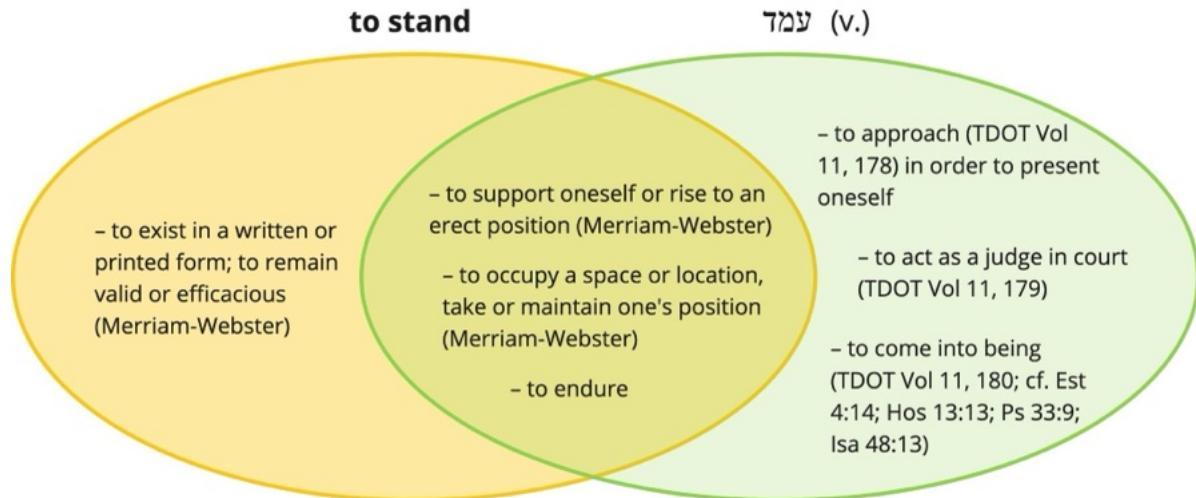
³⁸ Closer is JPS85's "dread"; also preferred is the vivid word "tremble" (EÜ, ZÜR, NBS, NVSR, BDS, PDV, NFC, S21, RVR95, and BTX4).

- The first word **for/because/since** (כִּי) is a crucial conjunction that indicates the reason for the ideas in the immediately preceding section of verses 6-8.³⁹ It is not just "an extra syllable whose function is to add an extra beat to the line."⁴⁰
- In both lines of this verse, the word **he** (הוא) appears in a non-typical place (both subject-pronouns come before finite verbs, which is unusual in Hebrew). This structure emphasizes that YHWH is the one who spoke and commanded, and no one else. So, translators may render these phrases as something like *for it is he who spoke, and it was* and *it is he who commanded, and it came about*. Even if this particular rendering is not feasible in the target language, translators should still consider somehow drawing emphasis to the two **he** pronouns.
- The phrase **he spoke, and it was** is a clear reference to Genesis 1. This knowledge helps translators to fill in some informational gaps:
 - The verb **spoke** begs the question, "what was said?" Genesis 1 tells us that God said, "Let there be..." in order to create. Psalm 33 elsewhere refers to this as **YHWH's word** (verse 6). For languages that require a direct object for the verb 'spoke,' then, translators may say *he spoke his word*.
 - The referent of the word **it** is not clearly stated. It could be rendered to mean *what God said* (based upon the context of the verse) or even *creation* (based on the clear connection to Genesis 1).
 - The verb **was** means *came into existence* or *began to exist* (this is the *inchoate* sense).⁴¹ Several English translations do a good job making this sense clear with the renderings *it came to be* (ESV, NIV, NRSV) or *it came into being* (CSB).
- Unlike the first phrase, the second phrase **he commanded, and it came about** does not contain vocabulary from Genesis 1. So it probably refers to YHWH's commands to people and to nature to behave in certain ways in history.
 - For languages that require a direct object for the verb **he commanded**, translators should be vague: *he commanded events* or *he commanded his intentions* (which would match well with verse 11) are possibilities.
 - Again, the referent of the word **it** is not clearly stated in Hebrew. Here it is *what he commanded* or *the events he commanded*.
 - The Hebrew word translated **and it came about** (וַיִּהְיֶה) most literally means *and it stood*. Many English translations render it as *endured* or *stood firm* (NIV). We have chosen to render it closer to the sense of *arise* (the inchoate sense of the verb), which fits the idea of *events happening*. However, it should be noted that the same verb occurs in verse 11 to say that YHWH's plan **stands forever**. There, the emphasis is on *enduring* or *standing firm*. So translators may choose to render it that way in this verse, too; consistency will add to the sense of unity in the poem. See the Venn diagram below for a more detailed look at the Hebrew understanding of the word (green circle on the right), our modern English understanding of 'to stand' (yellow circle on the left), and what the two understandings have in common (the middle section where the two circles intersect):

³⁹ It is an "argument coordinator" which means that it does not mark a grammatically subordinate clause, but instead connects larger sections of discourse (Aejmeleaus 1993, 181).

⁴⁰ Against Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 314.

⁴¹ *Inchoate* refers to something that has just begun (and is not yet fully formed). Another possible sense is *inceptive*, which emphasizes the beginning of an action.



- The author of Psalm 33 assumed that the audience could make the above connections without him making all of the information explicit. So, in languages where this information is not necessary for syntax and meaning, translators should consider mimicking the author's poetic economy of style.

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in green) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 10-12: YHWH's plan, not the nations' plan

- Verses 10-12 are at the center, and are the most prominent part of the psalm. See page 6 for more detail. When putting this psalm to music, consider making these verses a repeated refrain.
- Verses 10-12 are the only part of the psalm that contains the divine name YHWH in every verse.
- The name YHWH occurs six times before verse 10 and six times after verse 10. This numbering means that both halves of the psalm need to include verse 10 in order to achieve a perfect seven occurrences of the divine name. This feature points to verse 10 (and thus verses 10-12) as very prominent in the psalm. In verse 10, YHWH is fronted for emphasis, which is the only time this happens in the psalm and which also contributes to the prominence of the verse.

VERSE 10

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Even though the nations have a plan to destroy YHWH's people and dishonor YHWH, such as Egypt's plan to enslave Israel once again at the Red Sea **YHWH has thwarted the nations' plans; he has blocked the peoples' intentions** which have been evil from the time of the Flood - every time, our enemies have failed to defeat Israel.

יְהוָה הִפְרִי עֲצַת-אֹיִם הִזְיָא מַחֲשָׁבוֹת עַמִּים:	10	YHWH has thwarted the nations' plan; he has blocked the peoples' intentions.
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- English translations usually render the verbs **has thwarted** and **has blocked** as present tense verbs that connote timelessness (in other words, they happen all the time; for example, *thwarts* and *blocks*). However, the Hebrew verb form (*qatal*) is very unlikely to take on a simple present tense or timeless sense with action verbs like these. Hebrew *qatals* refer to past events. While the hearer may infer that what YHWH has

done in the past, he will do again for us now, the verbs themselves do not have this meaning.⁴² These verbs are best translated using an equivalent of the English present perfect tense, as we have done here (**he has thwarted...he has blocked**). This tense refers to an event that took place in the past, but whose effects are still felt in the present time. If an equivalent of the present perfect is not available in the local language, the next best option is the simple past tense: *thwarted* and *blocked*.

- The Hebrew verb translated **has thwarted** (פּוֹרֵר) is related to the verb (פָּרַר) which means "to break, perhaps by bursting from within rather than by smashing from without." The form which is represented here (*hiphil*) "takes exclusively non-concrete objects" such as a covenant (Ezek 17:19). Other possible renderings might be *has sabotaged* or, most poetically, *has caused to burst apart*. Many English translations render this verb as *frustrates* (NLT, CSB, GNB, NET), but the expression *frustrates someone's purposes/counsel/plans* is awkward English that does not have the benefit of retaining the imagery of bursting.
- The word **plan** (עֲצָה) is a repeated word in this psalm, since the central theme of this psalm is that YHWH's plan triumphs while the nations' plan does not. The word is singular, so that the nations share a single plan against Israel (Psalm 83:2-8).
- The **nations** in this verse refers to pagan, non-Israelite nations.
- The word rendered **intentions** (מַחְשָׁבוֹת) has "thought" as its first definition in many Hebrew lexicons, but to characterize this term as expressing mere thought is misleading. It is part of a "procedure for achieving a certain purpose, originating from someone's mind."⁴³ Before the flood, YHWH saw that "all the purpose of the **intentions** (מַחְשָׁבוֹת) of the peoples' heart was only evil all the time" (Gen 6:5).
- In some languages, the phrases **the nations' plan** and **the people's intentions** may need to be rendered as verbal ideas: *what the nations were planning* and *what the people were intending*.

VERSE 11

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

In contrast, YHWH's plan to bless his people so that they may bless the earth stands forever; the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever.

עֲצַת יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תִּעֲמֹד מַחְשָׁבוֹת לִבּוֹ לְדָר וָדָר:	11	YHWH's plan stands forever ; the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever .
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- The Hebrew word rendered **stands** (תִּעֲמֹד; see verse 9) is a poetic image that here means *endures*, since it is coupled with the word **forever**. The word 'stands' is the only verb in this verse, and it is implied in the second clause for poetic effect. For clarity, translators may choose to supply the verb again in the second half of the verse.
- The word **heart** (לֵב) is an image that uses the language of human body parts to describe an aspect of God (like **the breath of his mouth** in verse 6). In English, the 'heart' (לֵב) is the place of a person's *emotions* and *desires*. The Hebrew word, by contrast, is the place where both thoughts/reasoning and emotions originate.⁴⁴ Translators should attempt to find a word that comes closer to the Hebrew meaning than the English one.
 - The phrase **intentions of his heart** may be difficult to render in many languages. In this case, a verbal idea may convey the meaning: *What his heart intends*.

⁴² For more detailed arguments, see the Exegetical Issue Verb Tenses in Psalm 33:10, 13-14.

⁴³ SDBH.

⁴⁴ SDBH.

- The expression **forever and ever** literally says, "to generation and generation," where generation means "a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously."⁴⁵ It is a figure of speech that emphasizes a long time/duration. It is often in parallel with the term **forever** (עולם), as it is here.

VERSE 12

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

YHWH chose us as a covenant people so that he "will be our god" and we will be his "people" or "treasured possession," and we will benefit from his blessing. So the people of YHWH can say: **Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH, [happy are] the people [whom he] has chosen as a permanent possession for himself.**

אֲשֶׁרִי הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו הָעַם בְּחַר לְנֶחֱלָה לָּו׃	12	Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH, [happy are] the people [whom YHWH] chose as a permanent possession for himself.
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- The Hebrew noun rendered **happy** (אֲשֶׁרִי; literally: "happiness") is important to the emotional exegesis of the psalm. Many modern English translations render it as *blessed* (such as NIV).⁴⁶ The LXX translates it with **happy** (μακάριον), which is probably closer to the sense of the term. It refers to someone who should be celebrated and considered to be on the correct path, which is how it appears in Psalm 1.
 - Despite its appearance in some translations, the phrase **Happy is the nation** (אֲשֶׁרִי הַגּוֹי) is not a complete sentence; it is a Hebrew construct chain. Literally it says *the happiness of the nation*; in other words, *the happiness experienced by the nation*. As a sentence fragment, it functions as an exclamation.
- The word **Happy** (אֲשֶׁרִי) governs both halves of this verse. The relative pronoun **[whom]** (אֲשֶׁר), which appears in the first clause of the verse, is elided in the second clause. A relative pronoun may be supplied in the second clause by translators.
- Permanent possession** is a single word (נֶחֱלָה) in Hebrew, and is most often rendered *inheritance* in English translations. However, *inheritance* denotes receiving something by hereditary right; obviously, YHWH did not receive the people of Israel by hereditary right. So, **permanent possession** is preferred here.

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in **green**) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 13-15: YHWH is Watching (verses 13-15)

- YHWH's act of "looking" is a regular motif throughout the HB. When YHWH looks at people, it is almost always to discern (see verse 15b) in judgment before saving the righteous and punishing the wicked.
- The dominant emotion evoked by this section is humility before YHWH on high.

VERSE 13

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

YHWH looked from heaven which is an elevated place, implying his power and authority over everyone on earth: from there **he saw all of humanity** much like he did before the Flood, as an act of discernment that leads to acts of saving the righteous and punishing the wicked. So, YHWH is not blind to wickedness, but is actively discerning people right now to judge,

⁴⁵ Merriam-Webster's Dictionary.

⁴⁶ Also KJV/NKJV, ESV, NET, NJB.

בְּשָׁמַיִם הִבִּיט יְהוָה וְרָאָה אֶת-כָּל-בְּנֵי הָאָדָם:	13	YHWH looked from heaven : he saw all of humanity ,
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- The word **looked** (נבט) is a figure of speech for the activities of YHWH. Several times the word is used in requests that God would "look down (נבט) from heaven" and subsequently show engagement with his people who are suffering.⁴⁷
- The words he **looked** (הִבִּיט) and he **saw** (רָאָה) in verse 13 and the word **he gazed** (הִשְׁגִּיחַ) in verse 14 are often rendered in the timeless present tense (that is, actions that can happen at any time) in English. However, action verbs in the Hebrew *qatal* stem refer to past tense actions. Here we have rendered the verbs with the simple past tense.⁴⁸ In Hebrew, the audience is left to infer that what YHWH did in the past, he can also do now. But the present tense action of *seeing* is not found in the Hebrew verbs.⁴⁹ The past tense rendering brings out a possible reference to the Flood story, where YHWH "saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth" (Gen 6:5, NIV).
- The phrase **from heaven** appears several times to refer to YHWH's location.⁵⁰ The height of his location fits well with the idea that he has authority and power to supervise, judge, and save.
- **Humanity** is technically a figure of speech in Hebrew. Literally, it is a two-word Hebrew phrase (a construct chain) that means *the sons of man*. It means **humanity**, *people*, or *human beings*.

VERSE 14

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

he gazed from his dwelling place <i>which is also his kingly throne</i> at all the dwellers of the earth,		
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מִמְּכוּר־שִׁבְתּוֹ הִשְׁגִּיחַ אֶל כָּל-יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ:	14	he gazed from his dwelling place at all the dwellers of the earth ,
---	----	---

- This verse is a continuation of verse 13, so that the pronoun **he** refers to YHWH (verse 13a). In contrast to the words **he looked** and **he saw** in the previous verse, the rare word **he gazed** (הִשְׁגִּיחַ) denotes fixing one's

⁴⁷ Isa 63:15; Pss 80:15; 102:19.

⁴⁸ In verse 10, we rendered the *qatal* verbs in the present perfect. There, the verbs described the finish of a larger scenario or sequence in which the nations planned, but YHWH "has thwarted" those plans. So, the emphasis in verse 10 is on the state of affairs following a finished sequence of events. Here in verses 13-15, though, the *qatal* verbs seem to be part of an unfinished scenario or sequence of events: YHWH "looked," but the audience is left asking, "and then what?" Psalms 14 and 53 provide a clue: there, YHWH looked "to see if there was any who give insight." In other words, the next step in the scenario after YHWH "looked" is that YHWH will evaluate the people he sees; this matches our psalm in verse 15. After evaluating the people, he will judge them (Ps 53:5); presumably, the same is also expected, even if not stated, in Psalm 33. In English, the most natural way to render the steps in an unfinished sequence is to use the simple past tense ("he did this, then he did that..."). For more detail, see the Exegetical Issue Verb Tenses in Ps 33:10, 13-14.

⁴⁹ Instead, the promise in verse 18 that **YHWH's eye** is upon people confirms that YHWH looks, sees, and gazes now.

⁵⁰ Pss 20:7; 57:4; Ps 76:9-10.

eyes on an object "for a prolonged period of time."⁵¹ As the third word in the progression of words for seeing, it adds an element of increased engagement on the part of YHWH. This progression will continue in verse 15 (where YHWH **discerns**) and then again in verse 18 (where **YHWH's eye** is upon his people to protect them).

- The phrase **his dwelling place** is an image for the place that YHWH dwells, which is a synonym for **heaven** in verse 13. The word **dwelling** is from the root meaning to sit or to dwell, inhabit (יָשַׁב). When applied to YHWH, the language of sitting "usually signifies his kingship" as though he is sitting on a throne.⁵² This word and the word **dwellers** in verse 8 are from the same verbal root (יָשַׁב). This repetition contrasts the dwelling place of people on earth with the dwelling place of God in the heavens.
- In verses 13 and 14, the phrases *from heaven* and *from his dwelling place* are fronted in their respective clauses to create a poetic repetition. The result is a parallel abc || abc structure that translators should seek to retain if possible:

מִשָּׁמַיִם הַבֵּיט יְהוָה רָאָה אֶת־כָּל־בְּנֵי הָאָדָם:	from heaven YHWH looked: he saw all humanity,
מִמְכוּן־שִׁבְתּוֹ הִשְׁגִּיתָ אֶל כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ:	from his dwelling place he gazed at all the dwellers of the earth.

VERSE 15

Expanded Paraphrase – the gray words provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

and just as David said to Solomon that "YHWH searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought" [1 Chr 28:9], YHWH is **the one who forms all their hearts** no matter whether they acknowledge him or not, and **the one who discerns all their works** as good or evil, no matter whether they believe in his rules or not.

הַמְבִּיט אֶל־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם: הַיֹּצֵר יְיָ לִבָּם	15	the one who forms all their hearts, the one who discerns all their works.
---	----	--

- The two phrases **the one who forms** and **the one who discerns** are images for YHWH that describe him in greater detail.⁵³ Each of these phrases is a single word in Hebrew (a participle) that is a noun formed from a verb: *the one who forms/discerns, he who forms/discerns, or he is the one who forms/discerns* are examples of translation possibilities.⁵⁴ Since they refer to God, translators could translate them as YHWH is *the one*

⁵¹ SDBH. However, this verb describes an event in an unfinished sequence that has more steps, so the emphasis should be on the completion of the event, not on its ongoing effects in the present time. Therefore, there is no need to use a different tense or aspect than that of the other two verbs in the sequence ("he looked" and "he saw"). See footnote 37 for more detail.

⁵² Pss 9:7; 29:10; 55:19; 107:13; Ross 2011, 736. YHWH is "enthroned" between the cherubim on the ark, he "reigns" (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; Isa 37:16; Ps 99:1; 1 Chr 13:6) or "is enthroned" (Ps 9:8; 102:13; Lam 5:19) forever, in Zion (Ps 9:12), over the flood and as King (Ps 29:10 (2x)). In the OT, the word **dwelling** can refer to the mountain of YHWH (Exod 15:17), the temple (1 Kgs 8:13), or heaven (Kgs 8:30, 39, 43, 49; 2 Chr 6:2, 21, 30, 33, 39).

⁵³ They are in vertical grammatical apposition to YHWH in verse 13a ("YHWH looked from heaven...").

⁵⁴ cf. ESV, NET, NIV, NRSV, JPS, TOB, NBS, PDV, NFC, S21, NVI, DDH, BTX, LUT, ELB, EÜ, ZÜR. The definite article on these participles means that they must be substantival (treated as nouns).

who forms/discerns or God is the one who forms/discerns (cf. CEV). The only caveat is that this poem purposefully mentions the name YHWH a certain number of times and in certain places (see the section on **prominence** at the beginning of this document), and so translators should avoid supplying a proper name here unless it is necessary for understanding.

- The phrase **the one who forms** has the root verb to **form/shape** (יצר). It may denote "various forms of craftsmanship" and it is often used to describe YHWH as a "potter."⁵⁵ It is used in Gen 2:7 to describe the creation of Adam using dust, which is then given life with YHWH's breath. Thus, it describes YHWH's personal involvement and care in the process of creating humans.
- The phrase **all their hearts** is an image that has some important features:
 - The word rendered **all** (יחד) in the first clause often means *together*, but can also mean *all-inclusive* or *all* (that is, each and every person) as it does here, in synonymous parallelism with **all** (לך) in the second half of the verse.⁵⁶ Several modern translations render the phrase **all their hearts** as *the hearts of them all* or *à tous* or *chacun* (each).⁵⁷ These are preferred over renderings like TOB's *lui qui leur modèle un même cœur* (*he who models one heart for them*).
 - The noun **heart** (לב) is singular in Hebrew. Here the word should be understood collectively, and so translators may render it in the plural. See the notes on verse 11 for more on the meaning of **heart**.
- The phrase **the one who discerns** has the root verb to *discern/understand* (בין). In many places it specifically refers to discerning *good from evil*.⁵⁸ Thus, translators may understand the second phrase of this verse as *he is the one who knows what is good and what is evil in all that they do*.
- Both of the possessive pronouns **their** are important in participant tracking. They refer to **humanity/the dwellers of the earth** from verses 13 and 14, in other words, *people*. Translators may render the first phrase *he is the one who forms all people's hearts* and the second phrase as *he is the one who discerns all people's works*.
- The word **works** may also be rendered *deeds/actions*. It is the same word as the one used in verse 5 for YHWH's **work**. In many languages translators will need to convert the word **works**, whose root is to *do* (עשה), into a verb: *what they do*. This is the strategy of several translations.⁵⁹

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in green) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 16-19: YHWH Rescues

- Verses 16-19 contains repeated root words that bind these verses together:
 - the root *save* (ישא) in verses 16a and 17a.
 - the word *force* (חיל) in verses 16a and 17b.
 - the word *great* (רב) in verses 16a, 16b, and 17b.
 - the root to *deliver* (נצל) in verses 16b and 19a.
 - the similar sounding Hebrew words *not* (אין) and *eye* (עין) in verses 16a and 18a.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ TDOT v. 6, 258-261.

⁵⁶ Ross 2011, 737.

⁵⁷ ESV, NEB, NRSV, JPS, CSB; à tous: NBS, NVSR, BDS, S21; chacun.

⁵⁸ cf. 1 Kgs 3:9-11.

⁵⁹ NIV, CEV, GNT, NLT, REB, NJB, HFA, NGÜ, GNB, NFC, DDH.

⁶⁰ Lugt 2006, 329.

VERSE 16

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

History has shown over and over that **A king is not saved by a great force; a warrior is not delivered by great might** because YHWH has proven that he can crush a great army without help.

אִי־הַמֶּלֶךְ נִשְׁעַ בְּרַב־חַיִל אֶבֶר לֹא־יִנָּצֵל בְּרַב־כֹּחַ:	16	A king is not saved by a great force; a warrior is not delivered by great might.
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- See [Poetic Feature 1](#) for important information on the special poetic role of verses 16-17. See [Prominence feature 3](#) for information on the prominence of these verses within the psalm.
- Does the Hebrew article on **king** mark it as definite, referring to someone specific (*the king*), or as a generic image (*a king*)? Some modern translations render it *the king*.⁶¹ But the overall phrase is a timeless proverb, and the parallel words **warrior** (verse 16b) and **horse** (verse 17a) are both generic images and therefore indefinite. So, no specific king is in view here, and translators should render it 'a king.'
- The word **not** (אֵין) could show non-existence, so that the phrase declares that *there is no king saved* (NIV). Or, it could function as an adverb, so that the phrase means **a king is not saved**. Ancient translations prefer reading it as an adverb, and so this is our preferred interpretation.
- The Hebrew word for **force** (חַיִל) can mean *power/might/strength*, but here it is an image that means *army*. The phrase **a great force** in Hebrew is almost the same as the phrase found in the next verse to describe the strength of the horse: **its great force**. If possible, translators should attempt to use a similar word to translate both terms. But it may not be possible in many languages to find a word that can mean both *army* and *strength*; in this case, it is better to make clear that the word in verse 16 refers to an army, and the word in verse 17 refers to strength.
- Both verbs **is...saved** and **is...delivered** are in the passive voice. Some languages may require converting to the active voice, which would result in the phrases *a great force does not save a king* and *great might does not deliver a warrior*.
- The prepositional phrases **by a great force** and **by great might** are governed by the Hebrew preposition (בְּ) that marks instrumentality. So the phrases could be rendered *by means of a great force/great might* or *by using a great force/great might*. The same applies to the similar phrase in the next verse.
- The term **warrior** would normally follow the indicative verb **is...delivered** in Hebrew. Here, **warrior** is fronted in its clause. The result is a parallel abc || abc structure between the two clauses of the verse. Translators should seek to retain this parallelism if possible. It looks like this:

אִי־הַמֶּלֶךְ נִשְׁעַ בְּרַב־חַיִל אֶבֶר לֹא־יִנָּצֵל בְּרַב־כֹּחַ:	A king is not saved by a great force; a warrior is not delivered by great might.
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VERSE 17

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

The surrounding nations rely on horses, but the people of YHWH should not. At the Exodus, the horse and its rider were thrown into the sea, so: **A horse is a deceptive means for victory, and it will not rescue by its**

⁶¹ ESV, ELB, EÜ, ZÜR, BDS, PDV, NFC, S21, RVR95, NVI, BTX4.

great force.

שָׁקָר הַסּוֹס לְתִשׁוּעָה
וּבְרֵב חֵילוֹ לֹא יִמְלֹט:

17

A horse is a deceptive means for victory,
and it will not rescue by its great force.

- A horse is an image that should be taken symbolically as representing military power as a whole. So, even though it has a definite article in Hebrew, it is generic and should be rendered as indefinite (not *the* horse, but *a* horse). In cultures where horses are not familiar, another animal that signifies strength (preferably strength in battle) may be employed.
- The phrase a deceptive means is a figure of speech that comes from a single Hebrew word (שָׁקָר) whose basic meaning is lie, deception, or falsehood.⁶² Modern translations render it as a vain hope,⁶³ useless,⁶⁴ or disappointing those who trust in it⁶⁵ but miss that a horse's strength and its widespread usage as a weapon of war contributed to a deception that Israel was tempted to believe. Renderings such as false or deceptive are preferred, if possible.
- The term rendered victory (תִּשְׁוָעָה) could mean salvation (that is, rescue from enemies) or victory (that is, defeating enemies). In other contexts involving battle, the term overwhelmingly refers to victory over enemies, and so that is the best choice here. The complete prepositional phrase for victory is governed by the Hebrew preposition (לְ) that can denote purpose. So the phrase may be rendered for the purpose of victory or for achieving/obtaining victory.

VERSE 18

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Instead of relying on military strength like the nations do, Consider: YHWH's eye of concern and protection is upon those who fear him as we do, who remember his previous acts; upon those who wait for his loyal-love as we do, who are waiting for him to rescue us from our enemies).

הִנֵּה עֵין יְהוָה אֶל-יִרְאַיוֹ
לְמַיְחֲלֵים לְמַסְדּוֹ:

18

Consider: YHWH's eye is upon those who fear him;
upon those who wait for his loyal love,

- Verse 18 ties together several themes from earlier in the psalm: YHWH's loyal love (verse 5), fearing him (verse 8), and YHWH's looking (verses 13-14). Verse 18 combines these themes into a promise: YHWH is looking, and he will rescue those who fear him according to his loyal love. With this promise, the speaker indirectly exhorts the people to fear and wait for YHWH (in other words, "people who wait on YHWH will be rescued, so you should wait!").
- The crucial particle consider (הִנֵּה) directs "special attention" to an important truth.⁶⁶ Leaving the word untranslated does a disservice to the reader, who would have no reason to pay particular attention to this important verse without it. It may be rendered as notice! or look here!
- YHWH's eye is another image that uses a body part to describe YHWH (mouth and heart are others). YHWH's eye symbolically represents the act of seeing. YHWH looked, saw, and gazed upon all people before (past tense, in verses 13-14), but now his eye of loving care is upon his people. A few ancient

⁶² TDOT v. 15, 472; DCH; HALOT.

⁶³ NIV, NRSV.

⁶⁴ GNT.

⁶⁵ NET.

⁶⁶ Keil and Delitzsch 1995 Vol 5, 259.

translations make the noun eye plural, and this is acceptable for modern translations, especially in cultures where a singular eye may mean "the evil eye." Some modern translations simply substitute a verb such as *watches*, though it is better to retain the poetic image of eye or eyes, if possible in the culture.

- The phrase **those who wait** is a key term whose root will appear again in verse 22. It is a single word in Hebrew that comes from the verb to *wait* (יחל). It reflects "a state in which humans are confident that their longings will be fulfilled"⁶⁷ and it "always involves a specific expectation."⁶⁸ So, it involves not only waiting but *hope*.

VERSE 19

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

When YHWH's people suffer, as we are now, he will soon act **To deliver their lives from death, and to keep them alive during famine** as he has many times before, especially when he fed his people with manna after the parting of the Red Sea.

לְהַצִּיל מִמָּוֶת נַפְשָׁם וּלְחַיֵּיהֶם בְּרִעָב:	19	to deliver their lives from death, and to keep them alive during famine .
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- The two phrases in this verse give examples of the ways that the **YHWH's eye** will work for those who fear him and wait for him. It is likely the two phrases of this verse combine to form a poetic device in which two representative parts symbolize a larger whole (a merism). In this case, they indicate YHWH's *total protection*.
- Both verbs **to deliver** and **to keep** are grammatically dependent on v. 18. The infinitive verb has no tense on its own.
- The verb **to deliver** is a key term. It has the same root (נצל) as the verb **is not delivered** in verse 16. The warrior **is not delivered** by his great might, but YHWH can **deliver** his people who wait for him and fear him. Both of these verbs should be translated with the same root.
- The noun *life* (נֶפֶשׁ) means "throat, neck, breath, living being, life, soul, person, being."⁶⁹ The basic idea is the animating aspects of a person. Though it is singular in Hebrew, it may be taken collectively, which fits the context here, and rendered as a plural noun: **lives**.
- **Famine** was a regular threat in the agrarian Middle East, and it could last for years.

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in *green*) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 20-22: We Wait (in Anticipation)

- Verses 20-22 contain personal application.
- This section is characterized by the first person: *we*, *our*, and *us*.
- The first two verses are a direct address to the people of God.
- The final verse is a direct address to YHWH.

⁶⁷ SDBH.

⁶⁸ TDOT Vol 6, 52.

⁶⁹ HALOT, DCH.

VERSE 20

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

We ourselves wait longingly for YHWH – he is our help to rescue us and our shield to protect us from military threats – and we say this to remind ourselves that we need to long for YHWH alone

וּפָשְׁנוּ חֶפְזָהּ לַיהוָה עֲזָרָנוּ וּמִגְנוּנוֹ הוּא	20	We ourselves wait longingly for YHWH; –he is our help and our shield–
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- The phrase **we ourselves** marks an important shift in the speaker from a singular choir leader to the people of Israel. The phrase is fronted for emphasis, answering the unstated question, "Who waits for YHWH?" Thus, the people of Israel identify *themselves* as those who fulfill the requirements of the promise in verses 18-19. They use the same word (נָפֵשׁ) to describe **ourselves** that was just used in verse 19a to describe the **lives** of those whom YHWH would deliver from death. Context suggests that the speaker wants his entire audience to be involved in the **we** group. Therefore, languages that distinguish between an inclusive and exclusive 1st person plural should treat this pronoun as inclusive.
 - Several English translations render this phrase as *our soul* (ESV, KJV, NASB, LEB, NRSV). However, the English term *soul* usually refers to the non-material, spiritual essence of a person as opposed to their physical body. That sense is not in view here, and so such a rendering is dispreferred.
- The meaning of the verb **wait longingly** (חָכָה) is important to the emotional exegesis of the psalm. It means "to defer action; to wait; to lie in wait; to delay; to hesitate; to long."⁷⁰ Within the context of this psalm, the word does not mean mere inaction, but rather a deliberate choice to depend upon YHWH rather than other means of deliverance.
- The clause **he is our help and our shield** has several important features for translator:
 - The figure of speech **he is our help and our shield** is parenthetical, meaning that grammatically it is disconnected from the verses around it. This may be difficult to render in translation, especially in oral translations. Translators should be sensitive to the grammar in verses 20-21 to avoid the meaning that YHWH protects his people *because* they rejoice in him. The NIV and NLT solve the problem by leaving the word **because** untranslated at the beginning of verse 21. Some ancient translations solved the problem by adding the word **because** before **he is our help and our shield**.⁷¹ See the notes in verse 21 for more information.
 - The structure of the clause in Hebrew means that it answers the question, "What is YHWH like?"⁷² This clause says YHWH is *like* **our help and our shield**. Some languages may need to include the word *like*.
 - The phrase **he is our help** is a figure of speech. It contains a possessive construction that in some languages should become a verbal idea: *he helps us*. Translators should also note that the word **help** in English is not as strong as the underlying Hebrew term.⁷³ In English, 'help' often assists someone to do something that they could do on their own. The Hebrew term very often means someone who *protects* or *delivers* a person from a situation that they are powerless to overcome by themselves. The

⁷⁰ SDBH.

⁷¹ See the Exegetical Issue Praise for Salvation? for more detail.

⁷² It is a clause of classification (as opposed to identification); cf. IBHS §8.4.2.

⁷³ Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29; Isa 30:5; Ezek 12:14; Hos 13:9; Ps 20:3; 70:6; 89:19; 115:9-11; 121:1-2; 124:8; 146:5; Dan 11:34. As an introduction to the creation of Eve, God is unable to find an עֶזְרָא who is suitable for Adam.

combination here with **shield** means that *protection* is a primary sense of the word.⁷⁴ So, *he protects us* is also a good alternative when a verbal idea is needed.

- The image of a **shield** (מָגֵן) is of a hand-held "smaller type of defensive armor" that was "probably round-shaped and made either of metal or, more often, of a wooden frame covered with leather which was coated with fat or oil."⁷⁵ The word is an image "to describe God's protection from attacks."⁷⁶ Some languages may need to convert the figure of speech **he is...our shield** to *he protects us (from attacks)*.

VERSE 21

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

because our hearts rejoice in him *since we are so happy that he is our god*; **because we trust in his holy name** *since he is powerful to rescue us from military threats, as he has shown before in the Exodus.*

כִּי־בּוֹ יִשְׂמַח לִבֵּנוּ כִּי בְשֵׁם קֹדְשׁוֹ בָּטַחְנוּ:	21	because our hearts rejoice in him ; because we have come to trust in his holy name.
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- The logical connections in verses 20-21 are important. They look like this:

בְּפִשְׁנוּ חִתְּתָה לַיהוָה עֲזָרָנוּ וּמִגִּבּוֹרֵינוּ הוּא:	20	We ourselves (are those who) long for YHWH —he is our help and our shield—
כִּי־בּוֹ יִשְׂמַח לִבֵּנוּ כִּי בְשֵׁם קֹדְשׁוֹ בָּטַחְנוּ:	21	because (it's) in him (that) our hearts rejoice, because (it's) in his holy name (that) we have come to trust.

- Each of the clauses of verse 21 begin with the word **because** (כִּי). These clauses give reasons why the people **wait longingly for YHWH** in the preceding verse.
- The phrases **in him** and **in his name** are fronted for emphasis. They are figures of speech that answer the unstated questions, "In whom will we rejoice?" and "In whom will we trust?" These questions were prompted earlier when the psalmist urged the people not to put their trust in a king, a warrior, or a horse to fight their battles (verses 16-17).
- The figure of speech **rejoice in him** means **rejoice** because of **him** (see the note on **in YHWH** in verse 1). The Hebrew verb **rejoice** (שָׂמַח) does not normally refer to mere internal joy or being glad, but to "articulated expressions of joy."⁷⁷ It is a joy that is *expressed*. The word probably refers to the singing and music that was commanded in verses 1-3. Thus, the phrase **our hearts rejoice** is a figure of speech that is meant to denote personal engagement and enthusiasm involved in rejoicing out loud.
- The figure of speech **his holy name** refers to YHWH's unique character and identity. Thus, the phrase **we have come to trust in his holy name** means *we have come to trust him who is holy*. The phrase *him who is holy* may be difficult to render in some languages; in this case *because he is holy* may be an alternative.⁷⁸

VERSE 22

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

So now, **YHWH**, **may your loyal-love** expressed in your mighty acts **be upon us**, that is, *applied to us in order to rescue us and judge our enemies*, **just as we have been waiting for you** to save us from threats!

⁷⁴ TDOT vol. 11, 16.

⁷⁵ Anderson 1972, 72.

⁷⁶ YHWH told Abram that he was Abram's shield, and that he should not be afraid (Gen 15:1).

⁷⁷ TDOT v. 14, 149.

⁷⁸ Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 318.

יְהוָה-חַסְדּוֹ יְהוָה עָלֵינוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר יָחַלְנוּ לָךְ:	22	YHWH, may your loyal love be upon us, just as we have been waiting for you!
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- In this final verse, the people together address **YHWH** directly. **YHWH** (יְהוָה) is in the vocative (direct address), so that the psalm begins and ends with a vocative. In verse 1a the Chorus Leader addressed the **righteous people**; here the **righteous people** address **YHWH**.
- The verb **may ... be** (יְהִי) expresses a wish or desire, not a prediction. The Psalms often end with a request to YHWH such as this one.
- What does it mean for **loyal love** to **be upon us**? Here **be upon us** is a figure of speech that means *be applied to us*. The entire clause is a request that YHWH would *apply your loyal love to us or love us in a way that shows your loyalty*, and these are possible translation options. The key word **loyal love** (חֶסֶד) has appeared in verses 5 and 18, and should be translated the same way here if possible.
- In verse 22, a shift occurs in which the speakers now address YHWH directly. YHWH is the hearer, and the speakers are requesting that he act. So the words **us** and **we** are both *exclusive* first person plurals.
- The word **just as** (כְּאֲשֶׁר) means that the people want YHWH's loyal love to be applied in a way that equals the faithfulness they shown in their act of **waiting** for him.
- The phrase **those who wait** is based upon a Hebrew root that appears several times in this psalm. The same Hebrew root appeared in the phrase **we have been waiting** (יָחַל) in verse 18a. There, the psalmist promised that 'those who wait' for YHWH's **loyal love** will receive his protective care. Thus, the people explicitly state that they fill the expectations of verse 18.

APPENDIX

Feature This psalm contains multiple echoes from the Red Sea events (predominantly located in the Song of the Sea in Exod 15). The echoes are both lexical and thematic. While no single echo by itself is sufficient to draw the connection to the Red Sea events, the cumulative weight of them suggests that this well-known story lurks just beneath the surface of the psalm. Lexical parallels - At the Red Sea, the "waters stood as a heap" (Exod 15:8). This rare combination of words is only found elsewhere in Ps 78:13, where it is a clear reference to the Exodus. In Ps 33:7, YHWH is "the one who gathers the sea water as a heap." - As the waters stood as a heap, the deeps congealed (Exod 15:8), and covered Israel's enemies (Exod 15:5). In Ps 33:7, YHWH is the one with power to control the deeps. - The waters were piled up by the breath of YHWH's nose (Exod 15:8; cf. 15:10; 14:21). In Ps 33:7, YHWH's breath likewise has a potent impact on the created order, as the breath of YHWH's mouth is powerful enough to create the sun, moon, and stars. - The Song of the Sea emphasizes that "the horse" of the enemies was destroyed (Exod 15:1, 19, 21). Ps 33:17 states that the horse is unable to achieve victory with even more emphasis than that given to the futility of the king and the warrior (a full verse instead of half a verse). - The Song of the Sea extols YHWH's loyalty (or <i>loyal-love</i>) for his people to save them (Exod 15:13). YHWH's loyalty is mentioned 3 times in Ps 33 (vv. 5, 18, 22). Thematic parallels - Victory in battle: A major theme of the Song of the Sea is victory in battle (Exod 15:6-7), which is likewise the theme of Ps. 33:16-17, 20. - Nations' plan: The Song of the Sea describes the planning of the nations against YHWH's people (Exod 15:9), while Ps 33:10 describes YHWH's ability to thwart the nations' plan. - YHWH among the gods: The Song of the Sea extols YHWH as the greatest among the gods (Exod 15:11), and Ps 33:12 says that the nation that is happy has YHWH as its god among other contenders for the role. - The people an inheritance: YHWH's one-time act of making the people his inheritance is said to be the Exodus out of Egypt (Deut 4:20; 9:26, 29; 1 Kgs 8:51); Ps 33:12b says that the people he chose as an inheritance are blessed. - Power over hearts: At the Red Sea, YHWH hardened the heart of the Egyptians (Exod 14:17); Ps 33:15 says that YHWH formed each heart. - Fear of YHWH: As a result of YHWH's saving act at the Red Sea, the nations were overcome with great fear and dread at YHWH (Exod 15:14-16), and the people likewise feared him (Exod 14:31). Ps 33:8 says that all the earth should fear and dread him. - At the Red Sea, YHWH rescued his people from being killed by their enemies (Exod 15:16b-17, 19). Ps 33:10 says that YHWH rescues his people from death. - After the Red Sea event, YHWH provided food for his people in the desert to keep them alive during hunger/famine (Exod 16, esp. v. 3). Ps 33:19 rather unexpectedly mentions YHWH keeping his people alive during hunger/famine, after focusing on his ability to deliver them in battle.	Effect Much like the echoes of the Flood in the Psalm, the cumulative echoes of the Red Sea event conjure up a narrative arc that includes YHWH's powerful judgement on enemies and salvation for his people. This arc serves as a framework for the Psalm: even though the people are threatened now, they trust that YHWH will act as he did at the Red Sea to protect his people. The echoes of the Exodus narrative also help to explain the joining in this Psalm of themes that appear to be disconnected on the surface, including YHWH's power over creation and his power in battle. Furthermore, the narrative arc helps to explain the otherwise unexpected insertion of "hunger" late in the psalm, in v. 19b. Perhaps the most well-known example of YHWH sustaining his people during hunger came on the heels of the Red Sea event (Exod 16; Deut 8). This narrative arc is not found in other passages such as Ps 104 or Job 38, which some scholars claim is behind the references to YHWH's control of the waters (Dahood 1966, 201). Those passages do not contain anywhere near the number of lexical and thematic echoes that are found in the Red Sea narrative and Song of the Sea.
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ECHOES OF THE RED SEA

רננו צדקים ביהוה לְשִׁירִים נָאֵה תהלה: הודו ליהוה בְּקִנּוֹר קִנְבֵּל עֶשׂוֹר וְסָרִי־לִי: שִׁירֵי־לִי שִׁיר תַּנְשׁ הִסְכִּיכוּ נָא בְּתִרְשׁוֹת:	1 Shout for joy in YHWH, righteous people! Praise is fitting for upright people. 2 Give YHWH praise with a lyre! Make a song for him with a ten-string harp! 3 Sing a new song to him! Play skillfully with a blast!
כִּי־יִשְׁרָר דְּבַר־יהוה וְלֹא־שָׁעֲשִׂהוּ בְּאִמְנָה: אֱהָב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט חֶסֶד יְהוָה מִלֵּאָה תֵּאָרֵץ: דְּבַר יהוה שָׁמַיִם נִשְׂעוּ וּבְיָמֵינוּ כָּל־צָבָאָם: כֶּסֶם בְּגֵד מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם נָתַן בְּאֵזְרוֹת מְהֻמָּת: וְיִרְאָה מִדְּתוֹת כָּל־בָּהֶמָּה מִמֶּנּוּ יִצְרֹו כְּלִישְׁבֵי תֵּבֵל: כִּי תִהְיֶה אֶמֶר יְהוָה הוֹאֲלָהּ וְיִעֲמֵד:	4 Because YHWH's word is upright, and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness. 5 He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of YHWH's loyal-love. 6 The heavens were made by YHWH's word, and all their hosts [were made] by the breath of his mouth. 7 He is the one who gathers the sea water as a heap! He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses! 8 All the earth should be afraid of YHWH! All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him! 9 For he spoke, and it was; he commanded, and it came about.
יהוה הקיר עֲצַת־עַמֵּי לֹא־יִמָּשְׁכוֹת עַמֵּים: עֲצַת יהוה לְעוֹלָם תִּשְׁמָד מִקְשָׁבוֹת לִבּוֹ לֹדֵד וְנֹדֵד: אֲשֶׁר־הָיוּ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הָעַם י קָחָר לְנִשְׁלָה לֵוִי:	10 YHWH has thwarted the nations' plan; he has blocked the peoples' intentions. 11 YHWH's plan stands forever; the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever. 12 Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH, [happy are] the people [whom YHWH] chose as his permanent possession.
וְשָׁמַיִם הִבִּיט וַיִּרְאֵה רָאָה אֶת־כָּל־בְּרִיָּה הָאָדָם: מִקְבוֹר־שְׁבָתוֹ הִשְׁקִיף אֶל כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ: הִיִּצֹר יְהוָה לָבָם הַמְכִּיזוּ אֶל־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם:	13 YHWH looked from heaven: he saw all of humanity, 14 he gazed from his dwelling place at all the dwellers of the earth, the one who forms all their hearts, the one who discerns all their works.
אִין־יִשְׁלָח נֹשָׁע קִרְב־חַיִל עֲבֹר לֹא־יִנָּצֵל בְּרִיָּה־חַיִל: שָׁקֵר הַסֵּם לְמִשְׁתַּח וּבְקִרְב־חַיִל לֹא יִמָּלֵט: הִנֵּה עֵינֵי יְהוָה עַל־יֹרְאָיו לְמַחֲלִים לְחַסְדּוֹ: לְהַצִּיל מִמָּוֶת וּמִפֶּה־חַיִל וּלְחַיֵּימָם בְּרָעָם:	16 A king is not saved by a great force; a warrior is not delivered by great might. 17 A horse is a deceptive means for victory; and it does not rescue by its great force. 18 Consider: YHWH's eye is upon those who fear him; upon those who wait for his loyal-love. 19 To deliver their lives from death, and to keep them alive during famine.
וּנְשָׂנוּ חֲתָמָה לַיהוָה עֲרַנּוּ וְיִקְנְנוּ יְהוָה: כִּי־בֹ שִׁמְחָה לָבֵנוּ כִּי בָשָׂם מְדִשּׁוֹ כְּאֶתְמֵנוּ: יְהוָה חֶסֶד וְחֵנֶּה עֲלֵינוּ כְּאֶשֶׁר יִחְלְנוּ לָךְ:	20 We ourselves long for YHWH –he is our help and our shield– because our hearts rejoice in him, because we have come to trust in his holy name. 21 YHWH, may your loyal-love be upon us, just as we have been waiting for you!

ECHOES OF THE FLOOD

Feature

This psalm contains multiple echoes from the Flood story. While no single echo by itself is sufficient to draw the connection to the Flood events, the cumulative weight of them suggests that this well-known story lurks beneath the surface of the psalm.

- In the Flood story, YHWH shuts the **deep oceans** in order to stop the Flood (Gen 8:2). In Ps 33:7, he puts the **deep oceans** into storehouses.
- At the time of Noah, "the earth was full of violence" (Gen 6:11, 13), which reflected a failure of mankind to fulfill the commandment to "fill the earth" with God's image (Gen 1:28). After the flood, Noah is commanded to "fill the earth" again (Gen 9:1; Exod 1:7). In Ps. 33:5, "the earth is full of YHWH's loyalty" (cf. Ps. 119:64).
- In the Flood story, "YHWH saw that the evil of humanity was great upon the earth" (Gen 6:5). In Ps. 33:13-14, "YHWH sees humanity, all the dwellers of the earth." This combination of roots only occurs elsewhere in the Babel episode (cf. Ps 14:2, 53:3). But there, YHWH descends to look at a specific group of people, not everyone (Gen 11:1-5).
- In the Flood story, YHWH looks at humanity and sees "every purpose of the intentions of his heart" (Gen 6:5; cf. 8:21). In Ps 33:15, YHWH is the one who "purposes" (i.e., forms) the peoples' heart, and in Ps. 33:10, YHWH blocks the peoples' intentions.
- In the Flood story, YHWH became grieved in his heart (Gen 6:6). In Ps 33:11, the intentions of his heart stand forever and ever.
- Noah's name is explained as one who will "releave us from our work" (Gen 5:29). In Ps 33:15, YHWH discerns all the peoples' works.

Effect

While no single allusion in this psalm is by itself enough to evoke the Flood narrative, the net effect of the multiple lexical and thematic parallels would evoke the narrative arc in the minds of the audience. The effect of this poetic feature is that the psalm does not simply make a series of random statements extolling YHWH. Rather, it makes allusion to a specific story from the history of YHWH's people. This story contains elements such as:

- YHWH's control over nature, not just to display his power, but also to bring punishment on evildoers and rescue his people (Ps 33:7).
- YHWH's looking at the whole earth, which results in him judging humanity but setting aside the righteous (Ps 33:1, 13-15; Gen 6:9).
- YHWH makes and honors a covenant with his people (Gen 6:18; Ps 33:12).

This basic framework was shared by those reciting the psalm, who applied it to their own situation to justify their trust in YHWH (Ps 33:20-21) that he would respond to their request for help (Ps 33:22).

רננו צדיקים ביהוה
לשרים אנה תהלה:
הודו ליהוה כנגור
בנגיל עשור ומרדקו:
שירדלו שיר מנש
השיבו לנו כמרינה:

כי יאמר דבר יוהנה
וכל מעשיו באמינה:
אהב צדקה ומשפט
תקד יוהנה מלאה הארץ:

בדבר יוהנה שמים נעשו
בכחותיו כל צבאם:
כלם בנו מי הים
תל כאערות תהומות:
יראו מיתנה כל תפוצין
מקנה יאדו כל יושבי תבל:
כי הוא אמר ויהי
הוא יצלה וינצל:

יוהנה הפיר עצת גוים
ולא משבות צמים:
עצת יוהנה לעולם תעמד
מקשותו לנר ונר:
אשרי גוי אשר יתנה אלקיו
הם ו כתר לנצח לוי:

משמים הביט יוהנה
ראה את כל בני האדם:
מקדו שבתו השניה
אל כל יושבי הארץ:
היצר יחד לבם
הפכו אל ילד מעשיהם:

אין המלך נאשע ברב חיל
גבור לא ינצל ברב כח:
שקר הסוס לתועה
וברב חילו לא ינצל:
הנה עין יוהנה אל יראיו
למחוללים לחסדו:
למחולל ממות נפשות
וקחייתם ברעב:

בשנו חקנה ליהוה
עזנו וינצנו הוא:
כי יבדו ישיח לבנו
כי בשם קדשו באתנו:
היחסד יוהנה עלינו
כאשר יחלנו לה:

- 1 Shout for joy in YHWH, righteous people!
Praise is fitting for upright people.
- 2 Give YHWH praise with a lyre!
Make a song for him with a ten-string harp!
- 3 Sing a new song to him!
Play skillfully with a blast!

- 4 Because YHWH's word is upright,
and all of his work is [done] in faithfulness.
- 5 He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of YHWH's loyal-love.

- 6 The heavens were made by YHWH's word,
and all their hosts [were made] by the breath of his mouth.
- 7 He is the one who gathers the sea water as a heap!
He is the one who places the deep oceans into storehouses!
- 8 All the earth should be afraid of YHWH!
All the dwellers of the inhabited world should be in dread because of him!
- 9 For he spoke, and it was;
he commanded, and it came about.

- 10 YHWH has thwarted the nations' plan;
he has blocked the peoples' intentions.
- 11 YHWH's plan stands forever;
the intentions of his heart [stand] forever and ever.
- 12 Happy is the nation whose god is YHWH,
[happy are] the people [whom] he chose as his permanent possession.

- 13 YHWH looked from heaven:
he saw all of humanity.
- 14 he gazed from his dwelling place
at all the dwellers of the earth,
- 15 the one who forms all their hearts,
the one who discerns all their works.

- 16 A king is not saved by a great force;
a warrior is not delivered by great might.
- 17 A horse is a deceptive means for victory;
and it does not rescue by its great force.
- 18 Consider: YHWH's eye is upon those who fear him;
upon those who wait for his loyal-love.
- 19 To deliver their lives from death,
and to keep them alive during famine.

- 20 We ourselves long for YHWH
—he is our help and our shield—
because our hearts rejoice in him,
because we have come to trust in his holy name.
- 21 YHWH, may your loyal-love be upon us,
just as we have been waiting for you!

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