# Commentary on Psalm 145

## Introduction

Psalm 145 is the only psalm in the Psalter whose heading names it explicitly as a “praise,” a tehillah. That singular label is not a marketing flourish. It tells you how to read the poem—as a crafted act of naming God rightly—and hints that this single song, placed at the head of the Psalter’s closing hallel, aims to model the art of praise in full.

Two pieces of form matter at the outset. First, the poem is an alphabetic acrostic: each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. An acrostic is more than a parlor trick; in biblical poetry it often signals “from A to Z” completeness. Here the device functions theologically. Praise is an act of ordering reality—naming God’s ways from every angle—and the acrostic gives that intention a visible, memorable shape. (In Hebrew poetry a “colon” is a single line in a parallel pair; acrostics mark cola by letter.) Second, the psalm is framed by an inclusio, an envelope: the opening vow (“I will extol you… and bless your name forever and ever”) returns at the end as a universal summons (“let all flesh bless His holy name forever and ever”). An inclusio (a repeated phrase at beginning and end) not only brackets the unit but deepens the repeated words; the closing “forever” bears the weight of all that has been said in between.

Form and content move in step. The poem traces a deliberate arc from the throne room to the kitchen table. It begins with royal address—“my God the king” (*’elohay hammelekh*)—and steps back to say what can and cannot be said: “Great is the LORD… and His greatness is unsearchable.” The Hebrew uses the noun *ḥeqar*, from the world of inquiry: not merely “we have not found it out,” but “it is not a thing that can be fully searched” (compare Job 5:9; 9:10; Isaiah 40:28). Faced with that limit, the poet switches tactics. If God’s essence is beyond “search,” God’s “works” and “mighty acts” can be praised, and they can be taught “from generation to generation.” Praise turns historical and communal: this age tells the next what it has seen.

At mid-psalm the classic formula of Exodus 34:6 is quoted—“gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and great in steadfast love”—but in a trimmed version. The omission of “truth” or “faithfulness” here is not a denial. It is a choice that fits the psalm’s purpose: the emphasis falls on mercy and forbearance as the grammar of universal care. The next line makes that explicit: “The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works.” In Hebrew, the little word “all” (kol) recurs throughout Psalm 145 like a handbell—“all His works,” “all generations,” “all who fall,” “all flesh”—to expand the horizon. This is not a sectarian hymn.

And yet the poem refuses a piety that dissolves moral distinctions. The last movement introduces discriminations: God is “near to all who call… in truth” (v. 18), fulfills the desire “of those who fear Him” (v. 19), “guards all who love Him,” and—jarringly—“destroys all the wicked” (v. 20). The universal “all” does not erase the difference between calling and not calling, fearing and scorning, love and predation. The psalm holds these realities together without apology. The claim that “the LORD is good to all” describes creation-wide providence; the claims about nearness, fulfillment, guarding, and judgment describe covenantal relationship and moral governance.

One image lets the psalm tie transcendence to bread on the table. “The eyes of all look to you,” it says, “and you give them their food in its season… you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.” This is deliberate echo. “Open your hand” (*patoach tiftach et-yadkha*) is a legal idiom for human generosity in Deuteronomy 15:8–11; here the poet places that human ethic in God’s hand. The psalm thereby grounds compassion in the divine life and invites human imitation. “The eyes of all look” is equally rich. It is used elsewhere of creation’s dependence (Psalm 104:27) and of servants’ expectant attention (Psalm 123:2). Psalm 145 gathers both senses: creaturely need and patient, focused hope. The voice is not naively pastoral; predators also eat (v. 17 will face this with the word “righteous”), but the claim is that the open hand behind the food chain is providence, not indifference.

There are two notorious textual notes. The acrostic is missing a line for the letter nun. Rabbinic tradition retrieves the omission with a midrashic flourish: David “saw” the fall of Israel (Amos 5:2) and refused to inscribe it in the praise alphabet, only to “support” the fallen in the next verse (“The LORD upholds all who fall,” v. 14). Ancient translators made a different choice. The Greek Septuagint (LXX), an early Jewish translation, inserts an additional line after v. 13: “Faithful is the LORD in all His words and holy in all His works.” The inserted line begins with nun in Hebrew and restores the acrostic. Both traditions teach us how ancient readers heard the psalm: either by letting the missing letter become part of the poem’s message, or by supplying what the structure seemed to want. (LXX is the standard abbreviation for the Septuagint; MT denotes the Masoretic Hebrew text.)

Finally, the psalm’s politics are not abstract. “Your kingdom is a kingdom of all ages” borrows and transforms the royal language of the ancient Near East. In Ugaritic hymns to Baal, “eternal kingship” is a standard boast. Psalm 145 appropriates the idiom and redirects it: the true eternal reign belongs to Israel’s God. That polemic clears theological space for the next line, which is not imperial: “The LORD supports all who fall.” In this psalm, kingship is not about annexing territory. It is about justice with a human face and a hand that opens.

A few terms defined for the road:

- Acrostic: a poem whose lines begin with successive letters (here, Aleph to Tav), often signaling completeness.

- Inclusio: an envelope structure in which opening language returns at the end to frame the whole.

- Parallelism: the dominant Hebrew poetic technique in which the second half-line (colon) answers or intensifies the first (“A is so, and what’s more, B”).

- Colon: one line of Hebrew poetry in a parallel pair.

- MT/LXX: abbreviations for the traditional Hebrew text (Masoretic Text) and the ancient Greek translation (Septuagint).

Read this hymn, then, as more than uplift. It is a carefully built argument about reality: God’s greatness cannot be “searched out,” so praise must move to God’s public works; this God’s reign is not a threat but a shelter; and the grammar of praise is learned by looking steadily at the hand that feeds “all” and at the face that draws near when we call “in truth.”

## Psalm 145

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| **1.** תְּהִלָּ֗ה לְדָ֫וִ֥ד אֲרוֹמִמְךָ֣ אֱלוֹקַ֣י הַמֶּ֑לֶךְ וַאֲבָרְכָ֥ה שִׁ֝מְךָ֗ לְעוֹלָ֥ם וָעֶֽד׃ | A song of praise. Of David. I will extol You, my God and king, and bless Your name forever and ever. |
| **2.** בְּכׇל־י֥וֹם אֲבָרְכֶ֑ךָּ וַאֲהַלְלָ֥ה שִׁ֝מְךָ֗ לְעוֹלָ֥ם וָעֶֽד׃ | Every day will I bless You and praise Your name forever and ever. |
| **3.** גָּ֘ד֤וֹל ה׳ וּמְהֻלָּ֣ל מְאֹ֑ד וְ֝לִגְדֻלָּת֗וֹ אֵ֣ין חֵֽקֶר׃ | Great is the LORD and much acclaimed; His greatness cannot be fathomed. |
| **4.** דּ֣וֹר לְ֭דוֹר יְשַׁבַּ֣ח מַעֲשֶׂ֑יךָ וּגְב֖וּרֹתֶ֣יךָ יַגִּֽידוּ׃ | One generation shall laud Your works to another and declare Your mighty acts. |
| **5.** הֲ֭דַר כְּב֣וֹד הוֹדֶ֑ךָ וְדִבְרֵ֖י נִפְלְאֹתֶ֣יךָ אָשִֽׂיחָה׃ | The glorious majesty of Your splendor and Your wondrous acts-a will I recite. |
| **6.** וֶעֱז֣וּז נֽוֹרְאֹתֶ֣יךָ יֹאמֵ֑רוּ (וגדלותיך) [וּגְדֻלָּתְךָ֥] אֲסַפְּרֶֽנָּה׃ | Men shall talk of the might of Your awesome deeds, and I will recount Your greatness. |
| **7.** זֵ֣כֶר רַב־טוּבְךָ֣ יַבִּ֑יעוּ וְצִדְקָתְךָ֥ יְרַנֵּֽנוּ׃ | They shall celebrate Your abundant goodness, and sing joyously of Your beneficence. |
| **8.** חַנּ֣וּן וְרַח֣וּם ה׳ אֶ֥רֶךְ אַ֝פַּ֗יִם וּגְדׇל־חָֽסֶד׃ | The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. |
| **9.** טוֹב־ה׳ לַכֹּ֑ל וְ֝רַחֲמָ֗יו עַל־כׇּל־מַעֲשָֽׂיו׃ | The LORD is good to all, and His mercy is upon all His works. |
| **10.** יוֹד֣וּךָ ה׳ כׇּל־מַעֲשֶׂ֑יךָ וַ֝חֲסִידֶ֗יךָ יְבָרְכֽוּכָה׃ | All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your faithful ones shall bless You. |
| **11.** כְּב֣וֹד מַלְכוּתְךָ֣ יֹאמֵ֑רוּ וּגְבוּרָתְךָ֥ יְדַבֵּֽרוּ׃ | They shall talk of the majesty of Your kingship, and speak of Your might, |
| **12.** לְהוֹדִ֤יעַ ׀ לִבְנֵ֣י הָ֭אָדָם גְּבוּרֹתָ֑יו וּ֝כְב֗וֹד הֲדַ֣ר מַלְכוּתֽוֹ׃ | to make His mighty acts known among men and the majestic glory of His kingship. |
| **13.** מַֽלְכוּתְךָ֗ מַלְכ֥וּת כׇּל־עֹלָמִ֑ים וּ֝מֶֽמְשַׁלְתְּךָ֗ בְּכׇל־דּ֥וֹר וָדֹֽר׃ | Your kingship is an eternal kingship; Your dominion is for all generations. |
| **14.** סוֹמֵ֣ךְ ה׳ לְכׇל־הַנֹּפְלִ֑ים וְ֝זוֹקֵ֗ף לְכׇל־הַכְּפוּפִֽים׃ | The LORD supports all who stumble, and makes all who are bent stand straight. |
| **15.** עֵֽינֵי־כֹ֭ל אֵלֶ֣יךָ יְשַׂבֵּ֑רוּ וְאַתָּ֤ה נֽוֹתֵן־לָהֶ֖ם אֶת־אׇכְלָ֣ם בְּעִתּֽוֹ׃ | The eyes of all look to You expectantly, and You give them their food when it is due. |
| **16.** פּוֹתֵ֥חַ אֶת־יָדֶ֑ךָ וּמַשְׂבִּ֖יעַ לְכׇל־חַ֣י רָצֽוֹן׃ | You give it openhandedly, feeding every creature to its heart’s content. |
| **17.** צַדִּ֣יק ה׳ בְּכׇל־דְּרָכָ֑יו וְ֝חָסִ֗יד בְּכׇל־מַעֲשָֽׂיו׃ | The LORD is beneficent in all His ways and faithful in all His works. |
| **18.** קָר֣וֹב ה׳ לְכׇל־קֹרְאָ֑יו לְכֹ֤ל אֲשֶׁ֖ר יִקְרָאֻ֣הוּ בֶאֱמֶֽת׃ | The LORD is near to all who call Him, to all who call Him with sincerity. |
| **19.** רְצוֹן־יְרֵאָ֥יו יַעֲשֶׂ֑ה וְֽאֶת־שַׁוְעָתָ֥ם יִ֝שְׁמַ֗ע וְיוֹשִׁיעֵֽם׃ | He fulfills the wishes of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and delivers them. |
| **20.** שׁוֹמֵ֣ר ה׳ אֶת־כׇּל־אֹהֲבָ֑יו וְאֵ֖ת כׇּל־הָרְשָׁעִ֣ים יַשְׁמִֽיד׃ | The LORD watches over all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. |
| **21.** תְּהִלַּ֥ת ה׳ יְֽדַבֶּ֫ר־פִּ֥י וִיבָרֵ֣ךְ כׇּל־בָּ֭שָׂר שֵׁ֥ם קׇדְשׁ֗וֹ לְעוֹלָ֥ם וָעֶֽד׃ {פ} | My mouth shall utter the praise of the LORD, and all creatures shall bless His holy name forever and ever. |

## Verse-by-Verse Commentary

### Verse 1

Tehillah l’David. The only psalm titled “praise” announces its agenda at once. The opening vow—“I will exalt you, my God, the king, and bless your name forever and ever”—sets two axes of the psalm: intimacy and sovereignty (“my God” and “the king”), and present vow with eternal scope. The verb “I will exalt” (*’aromimkha*) is an intensive form of the root “to be high.” In the Psalms, this form regularly denotes public exaltation—naming God’s highness out loud (cf. Psalm 30:2; 118:28). “Bless” (barakh) is not a synonym for “praise.” To bless God is to speak good of the Name with a view to increase His renown and, in human terms, to draw down His beneficence—language that later Jewish liturgy will make habitual.  
  
Poetically, the line introduces the inclusio: “forever and ever” returns at the end (v. 21). Theologically, the combination “my God, the king” (*’elohay hammelekh*) creates a tension the psalm will explore: the transcendent ruler is addressable as “my God.” This is not familiarity that trivializes; it is covenantal access. The rest of the acrostic will unpack what “bless” and “exalt” entail and what kind of kingship this God exercises.

### Verse 2

The doubling of time—“every day” and “forever and ever”—is not padding. It narrows and widens the lens at once: daily practice grounds eternal intention. The “every day” (*b’khol-yom*) commitment is what keeps “forever” from dissolving into dream. In Hebrew poetics, repetition with variation often functions like a rising staircase (a climactic parallelism): line two carries line one forward (“A is so, and what’s more, B”). Here vow becomes habit. The rabbinic tradition took the “every day” seriously enough to bind it to practice: whoever recites this psalm three times daily, the Talmud says, has a share in the world to come (b. Berakhot 4b). Rabbinic logic is literary: a psalm that stretches praise from daily speech to eternity trains the tongue for a life that does the same.

### Verse 3

A marked rhetorical shift: the psalm moves from “you” (v. 1–2) to third-person declaration: “Great is the LORD and much to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable.” That movement is not a cooling of feeling; it matches the content. Address yields to doxology at a distance when the subject is God’s “greatness” (*gedullah*). The noun *ḥeqar* (“searching out”) is technical vocabulary from the wisdom books; its most telling neighbors are in Job (5:9; 9:10) and Isaiah (40:28), where God’s ways outrun investigation. The point is not anti-intellectual. It marks a boundary: “search” can only go so far. The psalm will respect that boundary by pivoting, in the next verse, to what can be known: God’s works in time.  
  
The passive “much to be praised” subtly insists that God’s worthiness does not depend on human recognition. Praise is fitting; it does not confer value. The line also sets a cadence heard throughout the psalm: an initial assertion followed by an intensifying second colon. That second colon often introduces the technical precision or the image that makes the first line’s claim vivid.

### Verse 4

“Generation to generation shall praise your works and declare your mighty acts.” Structure follows theology. If divine “greatness” cannot be searched to its depths, praise becomes the communal work of recounting what God does. The double vocabulary matters. “Works” (*ma’asekha*) is the wide field of God’s creative activity; “mighty acts” (*gevurotekha*) is the language of power displayed in history. The verbs correspond: “praise” (y’shabbah) voices valuation; “declare” (*yaggidu*) is the verb of announcement, used for news that must be told.  
  
The generational line has a practical wisdom to it: one lifespan cannot exhaust the story; the tradition is cumulative. That is the psalm’s realism. It does not ask any generation to accomplish “complete praise.” It asks each to pass on what it has seen. In that sense “acrostic completeness” is communal and historical, not individual.

### Verse 5

“The splendor of the glory of your majesty—and the words of your wonders—I will meditate upon.” Hebrew piles the near-synonyms into a triple construct—*hadar kevod hod*—as if to concede that no single term will do. The sequence is not random. *Hadar* leans toward beauty or ornament; *kavod* has weight, substance; *hod* suggests radiance. The stack yields a composite: dazzling weightiness. The parallel colon brings it down to ground level: “the words of your wonders.” *Nifla’ot* elsewhere marks God’s extraordinary interventions (Exodus 15:11; Psalm 77:15). The verb “I will meditate” (*’asichah*) belongs to quiet speech, the murmur of inward rehearsal. The royal splendor that cannot be searched becomes something the poet can “talk to himself” about: particular events, told as “words.” This is typical Hebrew poetics: the second colon specifies and grounds the first.

### Verse 6

“They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will recount your greatness.” The line cleverly distinguishes “they” and “I,” not as a hierarchy but as complementary public and personal registers. “They” (the community) focus on the “might” (*‘ezuz*) of “awesome” (*nora’ot*) deeds—language that often frames miracles or judgments that command fear. “I will recount” (*’asaprennah*) returns to the poet’s task: not only retelling the frightening but naming “your greatness” as such. Manuscripts waver between “your greatness” and “your great deeds.” The ambiguity mirrors the psalm’s own tension: essence and act, unsearchable greatness and accessible works.  
  
A note on diction: “awesome” derives from the verb “to fear.” Reverent dread, not horror movie. The psalm is comfortable with that emotion; it belongs within praise as a response to a reality too large to domesticate.

### Verse 7

“They shall pour forth the remembrance of your abundant goodness, and sing of your righteousness.” The verb “pour forth” (*yabbi‘ū*) is a vivid choice. In the Hebrew Bible it regularly marks speech that bubbles up or gushes out (Psalm 19:3; 94:4; 119:171). Praise here is not a carefully rationed commodity; memory spills into speech. “Abundant goodness” (*rav-tuv*) can be taken as quantity as much as quality, a good reading in light of the next verse’s “good to all.” “Righteousness” (*tsidqah*) in God is not cold judicial correctness; in the Psalms it often names reliable, beneficial governance—the right ordering of life that benefits the weak (Psalm 98:2–3). The parallelism again runs from an overflowing memory (“remembrance” is a collective liturgical noun) to a public “song” (*yerannenu*)—joyful, voiced praise.

### Verse 8

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in steadfast love.” The line quotes Exodus 34:6, with a telling abbreviation: it omits “and truth/faithfulness.” The psalm is not denying divine truth; it is choosing the attributes that drive the next claims about universal mercy and provision. “Slow to anger” is Hebrew physiology: literally, “long of nostrils,” a metaphor drawn from breath and the visible signs of rage. This is anthropomorphic language used to make an abstract attribute accessible. The psalm is making a case: the God whose greatness is unsearchable exercises that greatness as forbearance and favor. The appeal to Sinai’s formula supports a universal horizon (vv. 9–10) without erasing Israel’s story. Notably, the line’s wording is echoed in later verses that insist God is “near to all who call… in truth,” which quietly reinstates “truth” where the Sinai citation left it out (v. 18).

### Verse 9

“The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works.” This is as expansive as biblical diction gets. *Lakkol*—“to all”—usually needs its scope specified. Here the parallel colon supplies it: “all His works,” a creation-wide term. The preposition “over” (*‘al*) is not “about” mercy as a feeling; it is supervisory care: mercy rests upon, presides over, creation. The line invites natural theology without sentimentality: providence is seen in the order by which creatures live, feed, and reproduce (compare Psalm 104; Meiri makes this move explicitly). The psalm will not forget the hard parts—the predator eats too (v. 17 acknowledges the problem)—but it insists the default of the universe is not malice.  
  
Literarily, this verse justifies the widened “they” of the next lines: if mercy is “over all His works,” then all creation is a chorus, even if only humans can voice it.

### Verse 10

“All your works will praise you, LORD, and your faithful ones will bless you.” A crucial distinction. All creation “praises”—that is, testifies to the maker’s wisdom and power simply by being itself, ordered and sustained. “Your faithful ones” (*hasideykha*) “bless,” an explicitly volitional, covenantal act. The root *ḥ-s-d* can mark both kindness and loyal devotion. In this psalm it names those who align themselves with the divine character described in v. 8 and the divine care described in vv. 14–16. The verse carefully keeps both choirs: an involuntary witness (the world’s ordered beauty) and a voluntary response (the community’s blessing). In short: praise is ontological; blessing is covenantal.

### Verse 11

“They will speak of the glory of your kingdom, and they will talk of your might.” The psalm now gives language to the faithful ones’ blessing. “Glory of your kingdom” (*kevōd malkhutkha*) marries aesthetic and political terms: the reign is both beautiful and effective. “Might” (*gevurah*) is the capacity to act. Ancient royal inscriptions habitually paired such terms; here the pairing is reclaimed for theology. The verbs—“speak,” “declare”—are public. Praise that began “my God the king” becomes proclamation. The king language is not decorative; it is the structural metaphor by which the psalm binds transcendence to care (see vv. 14–16).

### Verse 12

“To make known to the children of men His mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of His kingdom.” The infinitive of purpose (“to make known”) states the mission. The audience widens: *livnei ha’adam*—humankind. The content is twofold: acts in history (“mighty deeds”) and the inherent beauty of divine rule (*kevōd hadar malkhuto*, another stacked construct). The line subtly distinguishes what can be shown (deeds) and what must be proclaimed (glorious splendor). The first is history interpreted; the second is theology taught. The psalm assumes interpretation is needed: raw events do not self-interpret. “His faithful ones” are tasked to read and to tell.

### Verse 13

“Your kingdom is a kingdom of all ages, and your dominion is in every generation.” The psalm adopts the formula of eternal kingship common in the ancient Near East and redirects it. Where Canaanite myth ascribed eternal reign to Baal, this psalm claims it for YHWH. Two terms divide the field: “kingdom” (*malkhut*) is legitimate authority; “dominion” (*memshalah*) is the exercise of power. The plural “ages” (*‘olamim*) can denote epochs; the pairing with “generation to generation” fills in the time-line from cosmic to human.   
  
The ancient Greek translation (LXX) inserts an additional line at this point: “Faithful is the LORD in all his words, and holy in all his works.” That line, beginning with the Hebrew letter nun, appears to restore the acrostic. Whether it preserves a lost Hebrew line or represents an interpretive supplement, it shows early readers sensed that a confession of divine faithfulness naturally bridges universal kingship (v. 13) and particular care (v. 14). The Masoretic Text, by contrast, lets the pivot be abrupt—in a way that heightens the surprise of the next line.

### Verse 14

“The LORD supports all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down.” The king’s greatness becomes the strength that stoops. Two verbs draw tactile pictures: “supports” (*somekh*) suggests bracing a body about to collapse; “raises up” (*zōqef*) straightens those bent by burden. The inclusivity—“all who fall… all who are bowed”—is not moral sorting; it is the universal condition of vulnerability. The missing nun of the acrostic has generated much commentary. The Talmud (b. Berakhot 4b) hears an allusion to Israel’s “fall” (Amos 5:2) and sees the next line as divine rebuttal: the alphabet of praise will not enshrine defeat; God “supports.” Whether or not the poet had Amos in mind, the effect is clear: at the very point where the psalm could have plateaued in royal abstraction, it stoops to the ground to lift bodies.

### Verse 15

“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in its season.” This is one of Scripture’s most capacious personifications. “Eyes” are ascribed to “all” creatures (compare Psalm 104:27: “All of them look to you, to give them their food in due season”), and the gaze is not blank; it is expectant. The verb (*y’sabbaru*) connotes hopeful waiting. The line also echoes the domestic image of servants’ eyes waiting on a master (Psalm 123:2), but here it is creation-wide. The phrase “in its season” respects creaturely rhythms and variety. Divine provision is not random benevolence; it is ordered, reliable enough to be studied and depended upon.  
  
This line—and the next—underwrite the psalm’s liturgical prominence. The Talmud ties Israel’s thrice daily recitation of this psalm to v. 16’s confession of provision; the habit of praise trains attention on the hand that feeds.

### Verse 16

“You open your hand and satisfy every living thing with favor.” The idiom “open the hand” is borrowed intentionally from Israel’s social ethics, where it is a command to human generosity (Deuteronomy 15:8–11). Here it is an attribute of God. The metaphor invites imitation: human openhandedness images divine. The verb “satisfy” (*masbia‘*) surpasses mere survival; this is fullness, “to the heart’s content.” The noun *ratzon* can mean “good will” or “favor”—not just food, but benevolent regard. It is hard to miss the optimism; the psalm dares to sing satiety in a hungry world. The realism returns in v. 17, but 145 holds this note and asks us to inhabit it without irony.

### Verse 17

“Righteous is the LORD in all His ways, and faithful (or kind) in all His works.” This line does two pieces of work. It affirms the moral rightness of divine governance (“ways”) and, with an unusual adjective (*chasid*) applied to God, affirms God’s loyal, beneficent commitment in His “works.” The predicate *chasid* is striking; elsewhere it marks human piety. Here it means that generosity is not an afterthought; it is God’s manner. The verse also anticipates objections: appetites are satisfied (v. 16), yet creatures prey upon one another. The rabbinic answer is to compare God to a physician: some bitter prescriptions serve healing. The psalm’s answer is not so argumentative. It pairs righteousness and faithful kindness and leaves them as the interpretive frame for experiences we do not yet understand. The “all” in both cola refuses any exception clause.

### Verse 18

“Near is the LORD to all who call upon Him—to all who call upon Him in truth.” The verse begins with another universal “all,” then narrows it with a condition. “Nearness” (qārōv) in biblical idiom is not topographical; it is availability. The rider “in truth” (*be’emet*) can mean with sincerity (mouth and heart aligned) or in fidelity (calling consistently, not as a last resort), or even with right understanding. The classical Jewish commentators prefer sincerity: not magical incantation, but real prayer. The psalm’s rhetoric is precise: universal goodness (v. 9) does not imply indiscriminate intimacy. Providence and presence are related but not identical.

### Verse 19

“The desire of those who fear Him He will do, and their cry He will hear and save them.” Hebrew poetry often pairs desire and cry to move from ordinary needs to urgent distress. “Fear” here is reverent allegiance—an emotional and ethical posture that orders desire. The line will offend if read as promising a blank check. The psalm’s implicit psychology is subtler: those who fear God have desires shaped by that fear. Their “cry” (*shava‘*) is the emergency register of prayer; the verb “save” commits God to action. The pattern is consistent across the Bible’s prayer language: God’s nearness (v. 18) becomes audible and practical when voiced as need.

### Verse 20

“The LORD guards all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.” This is the psalm’s sharpest edge. It insists on more than rescue; it promises keeping—ongoing protection—for those characterized by love, a stronger word than fear. (Several Jewish exegetes note the order: fear to love is a maturation.) The antithesis is unembarrassed: comprehensive goodness (v. 9) and comprehensive justice (v. 20) belong together. How? The psalm offers no syllogism. It sings both, trusts that judgment serves the good (Ibn Ezra’s point), and that the removal of entrenched wickedness is itself an act of mercy for the world. It is important to hear this verse in chorus with v. 9: until and unless destroyed, the wicked live under the same “mercies over all His works.” The psalm is not endorsing human zeal; it is articulating trust in God’s ultimate governance.

### Verse 21

“My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless His holy name forever and ever.” The inclusio closes: the opening vow returns, now answered by a universal summons. “All flesh” (*kol basar*) in biblical Hebrew often means “all humanity” (e.g., Isaiah 66:23; Jeremiah 32:27), though in some contexts it can mean “all living creatures.” Given that “bless” is speech, the primary sense here is humankind. The phrase “His holy name” is a humane touch: holiness here is not separation only; it is the Name by which God can be addressed. The acrostic has done its pedagogical work. The individual mouth and the community of “all flesh” are invited to the same act, bound to the same timeframe: “forever and ever.”  
  
A coda on the missing nun: whether we follow the MT’s suggestive omission or the LXX’s supplied line, this final verse makes the point that mattered most to the poet. Praise begins with a single mouth and ends with a world, and the alphabet of praise, however artful, finally resolves into desire: “let all flesh bless His holy name.”

## Methodological & Bibliographical Summary

### Research & Data Inputs

**Psalm Verses Analyzed**: 21

**LXX (Septuagint) Texts Reviewed**: 21

**Phonetic Transcriptions Generated**: 21

**Ugaritic Parallels Reviewed**: 1

**Lexicon Entries (BDB/Klein) Reviewed**: 33

**Traditional Commentaries Reviewed**: 111 (Ibn Ezra (21); Malbim (20); Meiri (20); Metzudat David (17); Radak (20); Rashi (6); Torah Temimah (7))

**Concordance Entries Reviewed**: 14

**Figurative Language Instances Reviewed**: 149

**Master Editor Prompt Size**: 197,158 characters

### Models Used

**Structural Analysis (Macro)**: claude-sonnet-4-20250514

**Verse Discovery (Micro)**: claude-sonnet-4-20250514

**Commentary Synthesis**: claude-sonnet-4-20250514

**Editorial Review**: gpt-5

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