

Psalms 114:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan,
that thou wast driven back?

Analysis

What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? The psalmist personifies creation itself, interrogating the Red Sea that parted before Israel (Exodus 14). The Hebrew verb *nus* (נָס, to flee) depicts not mere movement but terrified retreat. The rhetorical question anticipates an answer given in verses 7-8: creation flees before the presence of the LORD.

Thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Similarly addresses the Jordan River's miraculous stoppage (Joshua 3:14-17), allowing Israel to enter Canaan. The passive construction emphasizes the water's involuntary response to divine power. These twin miracles—Red Sea at the Exodus, Jordan at the Conquest—bookend Israel's wilderness journey, demonstrating Yahweh's sovereignty over nature and history.

The interrogative form creates dramatic tension. Why would seas and rivers behave contrary to nature? The answer establishes that nature itself recognizes and submits to Israel's God, who commands both history's tide and water's flow.

Historical Context

Psalm 114 belongs to the Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113-118), sung at Passover commemorating the Exodus. Jewish families recited these psalms annually,

remembering God's deliverance from Egypt. The psalm's compressed narrative moves from Egypt (v.

1. to Canaan (v.
2. in two verses, treating the entire Exodus-Conquest as one unified act of redemption.

The historical events—Red Sea crossing (c. 1446 BC) and Jordan crossing forty years later—were Israel's foundational salvation history, the Old Testament equivalent of Christ's death and resurrection for the church.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do the twin miracles of Red Sea and Jordan crossing demonstrate that God finishes what He starts in redemption?
2. In what ways does all creation still respond to the presence of God, even when humans ignore Him?
3. What modern equivalents might there be to these 'fleeing waters' moments when God's power becomes undeniable in your life?

Interlinear Text

מָה	לָךְ	הָ יָם	כִּי	תָנּוּסָה	הָ יַרְדֵּן
H4100	H0	What ailed thee	H3588	that thou fleddest	thou Jordan
		H3220		H5127	H3383
תָּסָב	לְאַחֲרָיִךְ				
that thou wast driven	back				
H5437	H268				

Additional Cross-References

Habakkuk 3:8 (Parallel theme): Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?

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