

"Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren" BWV 137

**1. Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren,
Meine geliebete Seele, das ist mein Begehren.
Kommet zu Hauf,
Psalter und Harfen, wach¹ auf!
Lasset die Musicam hören.**

**2. Lobe den Herren, der alles so herrlich regieret,
Der dich auf Adellers Fittichen sicher geführet,
Der dich erhält,
Wie es dir selber gefällt;
Hast du nicht dieses verspüret?**

**3. Lobe den Herren, der künstlich und fein dich
bereitet,
Der dir Gesundheit verliehen, dich freundlich geleitet;
In wieviel Not
Hat nicht der gnädige⁸ Gott
Über dir Flügel gebreitet!**

**1. Praise the Lord, the mighty king of honor,²
My beloved soul, that [praise] is my desire.
Come in great number;
Psalteries³ and harps, awake!⁴
Let music be heard.**

**2. Praise the Lord, who governs everything so
gloriously,⁵
Who has borne you securely on eagle's pinions,⁶
Who upholds you
As is felicitous to you yourself.⁷
Have you not sensed this?**

**3. Praise the Lord, who has artfully and finely
constituted you,⁹
Who has granted you health, has led you kindly;
In how much distress [of yours]
Has the merciful God
Not spread his wings over you!**

¹Some modern editions of the cantata read "wacht." Bach's own surviving materials, however, clearly read "wach." Contemporary hymnbooks give either "wach" or "wacht." ("Wach" or "wache" were the command forms for "wachen" in the singular, "wacht" and "wachtet" in the plural.) See also fn. 4, below.

²God is called the "König der Ehren" in Psalm 24. In English bibles the underlying Hebrew expression is generally rendered as "king of glory." "Ehren" here is singular, not plural; the modern genitive "König der Ehre" was given as "König der Ehren" in older German.

³The psaltery is a kind of zither, a flat wooden box with metal strings. In the Luther (and other) Bibles, "psaltery" was used for several different Hebrew musical-instrument terms whose meanings are now uncertain.

⁴This line is derived from Psalm 57:9 in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, which usually reads "Wache auf, meine Ehre, wache auf, Psalter und Harfe!" ("Awake, my honor; awake, psaltery and harp"); i.e., the German command verb and both nouns are in the singular, just like the underlying Hebrew of the Psalm. Some hymnbooks attached the plural command "wacht" to the two singular nouns "Psalter" and "Harfe," treating the two nouns together as a plural; other hymnbooks reflected more closely the usual all-singular biblical usage; still others, like Bach's cantata and some Luther Bibles, confusingly used the singular verb "wach" or "wache" with the apparently nominative plural "Harfen" (i.e., not read as the older-fashioned accusative or dative singular with "n"-ending) along with the word "Psalter" (which is the same word for the plural and the singular). "Psalter und Harfen, wach auf" is thus most likely "psalteries and harps, awake," the two groups together being treated as a singular subject of the singular form of the command verb.

⁵The language of this line is derived in part from Wisdom 12:15, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Weil du denn gerecht bist, so regierst du alle Dinge recht" ("Because, then, you [God] are righteous, you govern all things rightly").

⁶It is said in Deuteronomy 32:11 that God, as an eagle, bears his people, as a fledgling, on his pinions. A similar metaphor is employed in Exodus 19:4.

⁷These lines apparently derive their sense from Psalm 41:12-13, "... merke ich, dass du Gefallen an mir hast; ... mich ... erhältst du" ("I [the psalmist] perceive that you [the LORD] have favor on [or, 'have felicity/delight/pleasure in'] me; ... you uphold me").

⁸In Bach's original performing parts, the word "gütige" ("good/gracious") appears in place of "gnädige" ("merciful/gracious") in mm. 94-95.

⁹"Bereiten"/"einrichten" can mean "to establish/constitute." This line paraphrases Deuteronomy 32:6, "Ists nicht er allein, der dich gemacht und bereitet hat?" ("Is it not he [the LORD] alone who has made and established/constituted you [Israel]?"). God's people, "Israel," is closely related to the "Abraham's seed" of movement 5 (see fn. 14, below).

**4. Lobe den Herren, der deinen Stand sichtbar
gesegnet,
Der aus dem Himmel mit Strömen der Liebe
geregnet;
Denke dran,
Was der Allmächtige kann,
Der dir mit Liebe begegnet.**

**5. Lobe den Herren, was in mir ist, lobe den Namen!
Alles, was Odem hat, lobe mit Abrahams Samen!
Er ist dein Licht,
Seele, vergiss es ja nicht;
Lobende, schliesse mit Amen!**

Joachim Neander

**4. Praise the Lord, who has manifestly blessed your
station,¹⁰
Who from heaven has sent down rain of streams of
love;¹¹
Think on this,
What the Almighty [God] can [do],
Who meets you [in Christ] with love.¹²**

**5. Praise the Lord, all that is in me; praise the [Lord's]
name.¹³
Everything that has breath, give praise together with
Abraham's seed.¹⁴
He [the Lord] is your light;¹⁵
Soul, indeed do not forget this.
Praiser, close with "Amen."**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV137> for an annotated translation

¹⁰The notion that God blesses one's social station later became controversial, and the hymn's text "der deinen Stand sichtbar gesegnet" ("[the Lord,] who has manifestly blessed your station") has in modern times sometimes been changed to "der sichtbar dein Leben gesegnet" ("[the Lord,] who has manifestly blessed your life").

¹¹A metaphor for God the father's sending his son, Jesus Christ, down from heaven into the world as an act of love, a central theme in the gospel of John (see also fn. 12, below); i.e., "Liebe," here, is understood as a kind of synonym for "Jesus."

¹²The sentiments of this hymn stanza are derived from 1 John 4:9, "Daran ist erschienen die Liebe Gottes gegen uns, dass Gott seinen eingeborenen Sohn gesandt hat in die Welt" ("In this has the love of God toward us appeared: that God has sent [down from heaven] into the world his only begotten son [Jesus Christ]").

¹³An adaptation of Psalm 103:1, "Lobe den HERRN, meine Seele, und was in mir ist, seinen heiligen Namen!" ("Praise the LORD, my soul, and all that is in me [praise] his holy name").

¹⁴In Christian interpretation, "Abraham's seed"—a theologically controversial term that appears frequently in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament—means believers in God's son, Jesus Christ. Romans 9:6-8, in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, reads "es sind nicht alle Israeliter, die von Israel sind; auch nicht alle, die Abrahams Same sind, sind darum auch Kinder; ... nicht sind das Gottes Kinder, die nach dem Fleisch Kinder sind; sondern die Kinder der Verheissung werden für Samen gerechnet" ("they are not all Israelites, who are of Israel; also not all who are Abraham's seed are therefore also [his] children; ... those who are children of the flesh are not children of God; but the children of the promise [of God's blessing to Abraham, held to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ] are [the ones who are] counted as [Abraham's true] seed"); also, Galatians 3:29 reads "Seid ihr aber Christi, so seid ihr ja Abrahams Samen, und nach der Verheissung Erben" ("If you are Christ's, then you are indeed Abraham's seed, and heirs [of Israel] according to the promise [of God's blessing to Abraham]").

¹⁵An adaptation of Psalm 27:1, "Der HERR ist mein Licht" ("the LORD is my light").