

# The LORD Reigns



A Series of Short Essays  
On Four Psalms of  
Enthronement



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Matthew and the Angel  
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## Preface

These essays allow me to explore with you a subject of current personal interest, The Psalms of Enthronement<sup>1</sup>. The eschatological significance of these psalms is of particular interest because they anticipate facets of the person and future work of our Lord Jesus as He is foretold generally in the Psalms. They also convey the importance of our attitude toward God in our relationship with the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. That the Psalms have an eschatological dimension is beyond question. “Of the 283 direct quotes from the Old Testament in the New Testament, 116 (41 percent) are from the Psalter. Jesus Christ alluded to the Psalms over fifty times.”<sup>2</sup> While we do not know which Psalms Jesus expounded when traveling on the Emmaus road with His forlorn disciples, we do know that He talked of things “which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms”<sup>3</sup> concerning Himself.

On the Divine Names: The Old Testament has three primary appellations for the Divine Person: אֱלֹהִים (‘elohiym), אֲדֹנִי (‘adown), and יְהוָה (YHWH) the unpronounceable Tetragrammaton transliterated variously Jehovah, Yaweh, or YHWH. The translators of the Bible chose the convention to translate אֱלֹהִים (‘elohiym) as God, אֲדֹנִי (‘adown) as Lord, and יְהוָה (YHWH) as LORD (all uppercase)<sup>4</sup>. In this paper, I have chosen to continue the translators’ practice because it is most familiar, and integrates well with the many O.T. passages that we will look at. Where I quote from works of scholarship, I respect their choice of the other transliterations.

יְהוָה (YHWH) is generally believed to derive from הָיָה (hayah) a primitive root meaning to exist but always in the emphatic sense, and not a mere copula or auxiliary like our verb “to be.” יְהוָה (YHWH) means self-Existent or Eternal; and was the Jewish national name of God. When used in the joyous shout it carried with it the idea of the God of the Covenant. The phrase “calling on the Name of the LORD”<sup>5</sup> brought to mind the covenant relationship that Israel had with God, a relationship in which they might boldly accuse God of “sleeping”<sup>6</sup>, and demand that He arise<sup>7</sup>, to call down curses from Him on their enemies (imprecations)<sup>8</sup>, to protest their innocence<sup>9</sup> and cry of sad neglect on God’s part for not keeping

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<sup>1</sup> See Gunkel, Hermann *An Introduction to the Psalms* Chapter 3 page 66-81

<sup>2</sup> Waltke, Bruce K. and Houston, James M. *The Psalms as Christian Worship A Historical Commentary* page 110

<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

<sup>4</sup> “The pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton יְהוָה was lost when Jews avoided its usage for fear of desecrating the holy name in observance of the third commandment. In O.T. times the name was pronounced and was at times used in theophoric names which can be recognized in our Bibles by the prefixes Jo- or Jeho- (Jonathan and Jehoiada) and in the suffix -jah (Adonijah). The pronunciation fell into disuse after the exile when the Jews began to pay careful attention to the practice of the law. The translators of the Septuagint (LXX) consistently avoided the name and used *Kyrios* (Lord). This reflects the Jewish practice of reading Adonai (Heb. Adonay) “Lord” for Yhwh or reading Elohim Adonai in place of the Hebrew compound Yhwh Adonay (LORD God) to avoid the duplication of Adonay. The vowels of Adonay (a-o-a) were placed under the Tetragrammaton to remind the reader that he was not to pronounce Yhwh but instead was to read the word as Adonay. Christians, who were unaware of this substitution, read the vowels as if they actually belonged to the Yhwh, which resulted in YaHoWaH or JeHoVaH. Most English versions of the Bible continued the established practice of translating the Tetragrammaton by “LORD” (capital letters) to distinguish it from “Lord” (Adonai). Many scholars accept the widely held opinion that the Tetragrammaton is a form of the root הָיָה (hyh pronounced haw-yaw meaning “be” in the sense of existence) and should be pronounced as “Yahweh” (meaning ‘He who brings into being’ as in Exodus 3:12 “I will be with you” and Exodus 3:14 “I will be who I will be”).” – *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* W.A. Van Gemeren - Article on the Tetragrammaton

<sup>5</sup> As in Joel 2:32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 44:23 Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord?

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 74:22 Arise, O God, plead thine own cause

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 59:13 Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be... Ps 137:8-9 O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

up His part of the covenant ‘bargain’<sup>10</sup>, and a host of other “complaints” that Christians would be scandalized to even contemplate in their public worship or private devotions. Yet all of these and many more articulations are captured in the Psalms, the National Hymnbook of Israel. Such openness and honesty (which I am convinced God is well able to handle) also pave the way for a height of joy that is hard to describe. The closest that we come to the joy of the triumphal shout יהוה מלך (Yahweh Melech - the LORD reigns) occurs when we listen to Handel’s Halleluiah Chorus: “Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Who among us has not experienced the joy of participation in a glorious tradition as we rise to our feet<sup>11</sup> at the first strains of that magnificent chorus? Who among us has not thought that they heard the very courts of Heaven ring with the glorious praises of our Savior, Jesus Christ! How many tears of joy have been shed by countless believers at that joyous sound?

On the Translation: In these notes, I have used the King James Translation, again because of general accessibility and familiarity. But the KJV, if treated as ‘inerrant translation’, can be misleading. The translators of the KJV aimed at producing a readable English version of the Bible. And they succeeded brilliantly. But they sometimes translated the same Hebrew word in different ways and different Hebrew words in the same way for ‘variety’ sake. But words in Hebrew, like any language, have a semantic range. A quick review of the Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary that accompanies his exhaustive concordance will make this clear. To avoid commenting on translators artifacts, then, I have made use of several newer translations of the Psalms<sup>12</sup> to gain a better sense of what the psalmist was actually saying. Occasionally I have reviewed other uses of the Hebrew word in question to gain a wider sense of its use in scripture. I believe that this exercise has allowed me to penetrate more deeply into what was on the mind of the psalmist when he wrote. In using modern translations and their associated commentaries, I have had to account for newer approaches to Hermeneutics, but not without caution, which takes us to my last preface.

Hermeneutics: Since my approach in these essays on the Psalms of enthronement, my summary and my application have had to bear in mind their eschatological character both as originally conceived and as later interpreted, I found it necessary that I say a few words in an appendix on the History of Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, the art and science of understanding human communication, is part of our daily life whether we know it or not. Usually understanding communication is automatic and unconscious. But it becomes more difficult when the communication is poetry, particularly the ancient Hebrew poetry of the Psalms. But Hermeneutics has not been static over the last two millennia. Suffice it to say that Hermeneutics today is a hotbed of scholarly debate. I have provided a little overview of that complex history in the summary to help explain why I have used a traditional approach which builds on the solid approach of the New Testament (used by Jesus and the apostles) with the best of modern practices that focus on understanding the exact meanings of the original human authors.<sup>13</sup> This involves not only specialized hermeneutics relating to the Psalms but biblical hermeneutics in general. But my comments have not been slavishly devoted to exposing just what the psalmist meant and nothing else. I

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<sup>9</sup> Psalm 7:3-5 O LORD my God, if I have done this; if there be iniquity in my hands; If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me; (yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy:) Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honor in the dust. Selah.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 13:1 How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD, for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

<sup>11</sup> The tradition originates with one of the first performances of Handel’s masterpiece. It is said that when first performed for the King of England, at the first strains of the Halleluiah Chorus, he rose to his feet (for reasons not clear to me but out of reverence, I hope). Of course no one dared to continue sitting when the King of England stood, so the entire audience stood up and has been standing ever since.

<sup>12</sup> Particularly those of the NIV, Goldingay, and Alter

<sup>13</sup> For the reader who is interested in further study of these methods, there are several references on the subject provided at the back of this monograph.

have endeavored by prayer, meditation, and careful analysis to attempt to plumb the core message that the Spirit of God aimed to convey as He moved the human authors to write.<sup>14</sup>

In general, I have found that skeptical modern scholarship whose exclusive aim is to understand what the original authors of scripture meant has also produced little that warms the heart! In seeking the primary meaning of a text, it has neglected the wider or plenary meaning of the text as reflected in the history of its interpretation starting with the New Testament and continuing throughout the Church Age. “Rather than being inspired by the spirituality of the Psalter, critical “moderns” despiritualize the Psalms”<sup>15</sup>

Over the period of time when the Bible was being translated into English (1382 with Wycliffe to 1611 with the KJV) there were eleven translations or partial translations of the Bible. During the same period there were forty full or partial English Psalters including Sternhold and Hopkins, the first hymnal in English.<sup>16</sup> Their number bears witness to the desire and devotion of English people to have their hearts affected by these ancient works. People love reading the Psalms. More than any other book of the Bible, they speak to the spiritual experience of the individual or the group encounter with God. They have been the hymns of the Christian Church for almost two thousand years. They speak to the spiritual life from the inside out. Modern scholars would do well to take heed to the words of the Greeks to Philip, “Sir, we would see Jesus.”<sup>17</sup> With this in mind, I have not hesitated to understand the Psalms in the light of my own experience as well as the experience of other believers of every age. It may be that David and the other Psalmists did not foresee Jesus as they wrote of their experience in the Psalms<sup>18</sup>, but He is there! Jesus knew that. The writers of the New Testament knew that. The Church has known that. And we know that. It is always Jesus who warms the heart of any believer. It is always a wonder for the believer to turn a page of the Psalter and be greeted by some new insight into His blessed Person, character, and work.

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<sup>14</sup> 2 Peter 1:21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

<sup>15</sup> James L. Kugel quoted in Waltke, Bruce K. *et al.* *The Psalms as Christian Worship, a Historical Commentary*, page 3

<sup>16</sup> Pratt, Joseph *A Brief Survey of Psalms and Psalters with Particular Attention to the English Colonies in North America between 1620 and 1720*, page 8.

<sup>17</sup> John 12:21

<sup>18</sup> Gunkel, Hermann, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, Prophetic Elements in the Psalms page 252, “At the same time, however, one also sees that the eschatology of the psalms carries no “messianic” lines of thought as previous generations have erroneously sought to find.”

## Apology

Nearly forty years ago, I was approached by fellow employees at Sikorsky and asked to comment on the scriptures. That began a Bible study group that still continues today. It took us nearly twenty five years to work our way through the New Testament. As we came to the end of the New Testament in 1997, I wondered where we should go next. For many years I had been using a pocket testament because its shirt pocket size made it easy for me to carry and study at odd times while at work. I suppose the convenience of the size coupled with the fact that this, like many little testaments, included the book of Psalms at the back, decided me in favor of continuing on with the Psalms. I had been reading Psalms for many years and enjoyed meditating on its short and wonderful passages. Looking back, my reason for starting in Psalms seems embarrassingly superficial. I little realized the size of this undertaking. One able commentator has observed: "Theologically, the Psalms are the densest material in the entire Old Testament. There is a greater concentration of statements about God here than anywhere else."<sup>19</sup> I soon proved that point. My comments, which had been slow, drew to a snail's pace. It had taken only twenty five years to go through the entire New Testament. We began Psalms in 1997 and fifteen years later we have just completed Psalm 96! If our Lord spares me, I expect that it will take another fifteen years to complete the first pass. But in His mercy, our Lord has encouraged me to grow in my ability to comprehend somewhat the depth of the material on which I had started with such embarrassing shallowness! These notes on the Psalms come from that study.

Recently, dear friends at Alliance College, in Nyack invited me to audit some of their classes on the Psalms given by Dr. Bryan Widbin. Dr. Widbin's extensive language skills in Biblical Hebrew, his knowledge of current hermeneutic trends, as well his knowledge of modern Bedouin and Ancient Israelite life all combined to open deeper insights on the Psalms for me. He also introduced me to some seminal works on interpreting the Psalms that have been most helpful.<sup>20</sup>

On a personal note, as I look back, I am embarrassed at my naiveté in starting on the Psalms. As I look ahead, I am overwhelmed by the sheer bulk of scholarship on them. But I am not discouraged. I have concluded that any teacher, who is not still learning, shouldn't continue teaching. That may sound to some like those who are "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"<sup>21</sup> but it isn't. God, who is Truth, is transcendent! And it is our greatest joy to continually find new and wonderful things about Him. I hope that in sharing some of these things with you, it will further excite you to continue your own 'voyage of discovery' perhaps on the vast sea of the Psalms!

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<sup>19</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*: Vol. 1 Page 69

<sup>20</sup> Brueggemann, Gunkel, and Westermann.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Timothy 3:7

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## Chapter 2 The LORD Reigneth

The jubilant cry “The LORD reigneth” (יהוה מלך Yhwh Melech) occurs in five places in the Psalter, 93:1, 96:10, 99:1, psalm 97:1 and 146:10. A similar cry “God reigneth” (אלהים מלך Elohim Melech) occurs in Psalm 47:7. Of these, psalm 47, 93, 97, and 99 are viewed as Enthronement Psalms, while Psalm 96 and 146 are considered Enthronement Hymns.<sup>22</sup> I have chosen to study 93, 96, 97, and 99 because of the prominence (or, in the case of Psalm 96, the centrality) of the phrase “The LORD reigneth”. For ancient Israel, the King was a guarantor of internal domestic stability and international security. If the king happened to be unrighteous (and many were) then the plight of the vulnerable (the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoners, the blind, those that are bowed down, the fatherless, and the widow<sup>23</sup>) was tenuous at best. Goethe summarized the feeling well. “An old king drives the hopes of human beings deep into their heart and imprisons them there. The sight of a new sovereign however liberates the long bound desires. In ecstasy they press forward. They, the wise and the fool, greatly enjoy the breath that had been so sorely lacking.”<sup>24</sup> Behind the rejoicing with which these psalms abound is the memory of hard times just before the new king is enthroned. For earthly kings, it may have been personal, but in the case of Yhwh, it is national. They rejoice that “The LORD reigneth” because now that He is in power things will be different. “He preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.”<sup>25</sup> Behind Psalms of Thanksgiving lie Psalms of Lament.<sup>26</sup>

There are several themes that occur as leitmotifs in these Psalms besides the joyous shout. They include the twin affective response of rejoicing with awe filled trembling, strength and stability, judgment and overturning of existing governance, and a new relationship of worship and sacrifice.

### 2.1 “The LORD reigneth”

The joyous cry raises two questions: The timing connected with God’s reign and the nature of that reign.

Timing: Hebrew does not have the full array of tenses that we have in English. There is no present tense in Hebrew. There is only action begun and complete in the past and action begun and continuing on into the future. The verb translated “reign” is מלך {pronounced maw-lak’} is a primitive root meaning to reign; inceptively to ascend the throne; causatively to induct into royalty. There is a sense that its use indicates that the event is in the past. Not that God has reigned in some past time and now reigns no longer, but that His reign had a definite beginning and continues at the present time. The more accurate translation is “the LORD began to reign”. Psalm 47:2-3 presents a similar thought about God’s reign.

For the LORD most high is terrible;  
He is a great King over all the earth.  
He shall subdue the people under us, and  
The nations under our feet.

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<sup>22</sup> Gunkel *Introduction to the Psalms* page 22. Gunkel also devotes chapter 3 Songs about YHWH’s Enthronement to the discussion of this genre which is beyond the scope of this paper to summarize.

<sup>23</sup> The very groups mentioned in Psalm 146:7-9

<sup>24</sup> Goethe “Elepnor” quoted by Gunkel Ibid p.67

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 97:10.b

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 40:1-3a “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God” Brueggemann describes this interplay as Psalms of Orientation (when everything is going just fine), Psalms of Disorientation (when nothing is going well and we don’t know why) and Psalms of New Orientation (when God takes us out of the pit and creates a new orientation by means of his ineffable grace when everything is changed and everything is so much better). The value of this approach lies in its pastoral schema that makes the Psalms more available and understandable to people whose lives are in a continual flux of orientation, disorientation and new orientation.

In these four psalms generally the LORD's reign is attached to Israel's political fortunes. Psalm 93 is an exception. No context for the timing of when the LORD began to reign is given in terms of Israel's governance. The LXX attempts to answer the time question with its heading (lacking in the Masoretic text): "For the Day before the Sabbath, when the earth/land became inhabited." The sense is that the LORD began to reign on the sixth day of creation when mankind was created and given dominion over the earth. But that in itself is an inadequate answer, because there are many other orders of beings of greater antiquity over which God, by way of His creation, already exercised dominion. Is the psalmist going to say that God "began" to reign on the sixth day of creation when He already exercised authority over those other orders of creation? We must remember that this is a psalm for the people of Israel and the shout the LORD reigns reflects their corporate experience. As such there must be a time when they *first experience* the ongoing reign of God and here in Psalm 93 the tacit assertion is that the event occurred very long ago before Israel was a nation and even before Abraham or the patriarchs. True, God seems to manifest His reign to Israel in the Exodus and in other times of striking deliverance, but that only indicates that His reign, which "began" so long ago, continues in the present. From our present theological perspective, we might say that God's sovereignty is an eternal attribute and that the event referenced by the LXX is actually a revelation *to mankind* of His ongoing reign, and certainly not the first revelation of such to other orders of beings like angels. So we are dealing with a revelatory event and not an actual beginning in the strictest sense of the word. The revelatory nature of the event is further strengthened by the assertion of the "clothing" of God. It is a common fact of human experience that garments, besides their primary function, serve as a revelation of the character and the intent of the individual wearing them. From the Doctor's white coat to the policeman's uniform, the office and intent of specific people dedicated to specific services is revealed by their outer vestments. The two fold reference to majesty (*grandeur*) and strength (*might*) are revelatory of the nature of governance (*to reign*). Which leads to the next point to consider.

Meaning: How are we to understand "The LORD *reigneth*"? Clearly there are governments functioning upon the earth that have no formal connection with Divine rule, do not recognize God and are antithetic to Him by virtue of their inhumane and ungodly actions. This cry brings to the fore the problem of Israel in dealing with the kings of the earth that oppressed and enslaved them. God seems to them to be 'asleep' and many psalms plead for Him to 'awake'. But can God sleep?<sup>27</sup> Clearly the answer is no. The LXX heading for Psalm 93 (giving us a vector back to the account of creation on the sixth day) hints at the answer.

"And God said; Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."<sup>28</sup>

Man, created in the image of God, is given authority to govern upon the earth as the representative of God's governance over all of His creation. After creating man, He delegates His governing authority to act as His agent, to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." The reign of God involves the persons of His creation. The concept of hierarchically shared governance introduces

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<sup>27</sup> Psalm 121:4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

<sup>28</sup> Genesis 1:26-28

several concepts necessary for the human role in governance to make sense. These concepts open windows to help us understand what “the LORD reigneth” means.

Law as the Basis for Governance: God creates human kind with specific ends in mind which He communicates to them in the form of a set of commands: With the revelation of this aspect of God’s governance we see His will for mankind expressed in a simple but far reaching command that is twofold and strategic:

- A) “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and”
- B) “Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

The first part of the command establishes the fundamental interrelationship of man and woman, marriage. Their anatomy and their psychology are focused on this command. The institution of marriage with children following forms the basic triangular building block of all human systems. The second part of the command relates to their joint governing role over all the myriad and complex ecosystems that God has created. Governance requires law.

Freedom to Execute Commands: While the commands appear to be general in nature, specific obedience is implicit. The commands (be fruitful and multiply; have dominion) with their associated goals (replenish the earth and subdue it) and bounds (the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.) might be said to be strategic while human obedience is of a tactical nature involving the application of the general command to specific circumstances both physical and spiritual that can and will change with time. So there must be a measure of human freedom of action implied under God’s general governance to allow man to adapt his specific obedience to various circumstances. Human cognitive and affective faculties are given to facilitate the proper use of that freedom. Cognitive abilities (reason and imagination) to establish ethical solutions within the moral structures of the law and affective abilities (conscience) to govern the proper execution of those solutions; are both part of the human nature. We have the same experience today. In our society, open debate over the best course of action to address specific problems with wise governance does not imply that either side, though diametrically opposed, has any other desire than what is best for the wellbeing of the governed. For either side to label the other side “traitorous” is not demonstrable and is inevitably counter-productive. Dialogue in pursuit of the truth is healthy, if not humbling to both sides.

Responsibility and Accountability: Freedom of will implies the possibility of human choice not only within the strategic boundaries of the overarching command, but also the deliberate transgressing of those boundaries for reasons unacceptable to God. Man is clearly not only a governor over nature, but an agent under God, a steward. With the privileges of freedom comes the responsibility and accountability to Him for actions taken. The sad story of man’s fall (which God did not intervene to prevent though He knew it would happen) only bears witness to this reality. Accountability (and Judgment) for irresponsible stewardship follow disobedience to God. Were these three aspects of governance not so, man would be little more than an elegant automaton. We are familiar with these three aspects in our own system of governance as follows:

Law as the basis for Governance	the legislative branch of government
Freedom to Execute Commands	the executive branch of government
Responsibility and Accountability	the judicial branch of government

These three aspects of governance were personified in the O.T. in three offices: the prophet, the priest, and the king.

Legislation:	The Prophet, Moses the ultimate prophet, being the Great lawgiver particularly with the Decalogue. The hallmark of the prophet being “Thus saith the LORD” In the monarchy, the office of the prophet focuses on the moral and ethical character of the King (as in the case with Nathan and David in the matter of Beersheba).
Execution:	Under the monarchy, the King was ultimately responsible for planning and leading the defense of the nation as well as protecting the weak and vulnerable from societal abuse. The King was the guarantor of internal stability and external security.
Judgment:	Locally the village elders but nationally the King in civil matters, and for religious judgment the priesthood.

It is interesting to see the sample prayer given by our Lord Jesus through this governing lens

Prophet	Hallowed be thy name	Give us this day our daily bread (i.e. the word of God)	Thine is the glory
King	Thy kingdom come	Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil (both within us and	Thine is the kingdom
Priest	Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven	Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors	Thine is the power (Who but God can forgive sins)

In summary, God in creating human kind gave them dominion over the earth<sup>29</sup> but the entrance of sin resulted in man’s desire to dominate his fellow man, which lamentable state God patiently tolerates according to His purposes until a future time when the kingdoms of this earth revert to His direct control.<sup>30</sup> It is this intermediate state of Israel’s domination by others (Egypt, Persia, or Babylonia) that creates the nascent lament which silently precedes the joyous shout “The LORD reigneth”. It is for this reason that one copy of the *Tehillim* notes above the 93<sup>rd</sup> Psalm “This psalm speaks of the Messianic era, when God will don grandeur – allowing no room for man to boast before Him as did Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, and Sennacherib.”<sup>31</sup>

## 2.2 Strength establishes stability

As noted, the earthly king is responsible to maintain internal stability and territorial security. This presupposes that there are forces within and without that if not restrained by the king’s strength would bring about chaos. In the case of Psalm 93 “the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself.” He establishes the world that it cannot be moved.” The world is established because “Thy throne is established of old.” And the throne’s stability rests upon God Himself who is “from everlasting.”<sup>32</sup> But all is not quiet in the kingdom. The “floods” protest. They “have lifted up their voice ...their waves.” But “The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.”<sup>33</sup> So that we see the power of His reign that insures stability over the chaos of evil that constantly threatens to overwhelm His covenant people Israel. This theme is picked up in psalm

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and *let them have dominion* over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

<sup>30</sup> Revelation 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

<sup>31</sup> Yitzchak, Ohel Yosef (Ed.) *Tehillim with English Translation* Psalm 93

<sup>32</sup> Psalm 93:1b-2

<sup>33</sup> Psalm 93:3-4

96. “Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary”<sup>34</sup> so that “the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved.”<sup>35</sup> Again His enemies might try to challenge His power, but “a fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about.”<sup>36</sup> “Faithfulness and authority are the base of His throne”<sup>37</sup> therefore “The might of the king is dedicated to exercising authority.”<sup>38</sup>

### 2.3 Rejoice and Tremble in awe

Psalm 96 begins with a gracious invitation to sing – sing - sing, and ends with the heavens, the earth, the sea and its fullness, the field and all it contains, and all the trees of the wood joining in the universal rejoicing. Only in verse 9b is the fear of the LORD mentioned in conjunction with worship. Psalm 97 begins with a reprise of Psalm 96’s rejoicing, but the approach of the LORD who has begun to reign now appears like a volcanic eruption shrouded in cloud, darkness, fire, and lightening. The earth “trembles” and hills “melt like wax” as “all the people see his glory”<sup>39</sup> But Psalm 97 which opened with joy closes with it as well. “Ps 97:12 Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.”<sup>40</sup> But in Psalm 99 the response to the joyous cry “the LORD reigneth” is very different. The people are to tremble and the earth is to shake.<sup>41</sup> Psalm 99 which includes more of Jewish history than the others makes no mention of joy or rejoicing whatever. There is only awe at the transcendent LORD who has begun to reign.

### 2.4 Worship with sacrifices

Psalm 96, 97, and 99 all make mention of the need to Worship the LORD. The exhortation for people to worship the LORD in Psalm 96 and 99 is given against the backdrop of the surrounding idolatry of the heathen. The LORD is to be revered above all gods because the gods are non-entities.<sup>42</sup> The people of “all the earth” are to bring a gift, a sacrificial offering, to His presence.<sup>43</sup> In Psalm 97 those who continue to serve idols will be confounded because their gods are pictured as if they were placed before the LORD as worshippers in His temple.<sup>44</sup> God is highly exalted above all gods. The LORD made the heavens, whereas the non-entities have and can do nothing whatever.<sup>45</sup> Psalm 99 includes worship in two similar refrains that emphasizes the immensity and the holiness of the LORD.

“Exalt ye the LORD our God,  
And worship at his footstool;  
For he is holy.  
...  
Exalt the LORD our God,  
And worship at his holy hill;

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<sup>34</sup> Psalm 96:6b

<sup>35</sup> Psalm 96:19b

<sup>36</sup> Psalm 97:3

<sup>37</sup> Psalm 97:2b (Goldingay)

<sup>38</sup> Psalm 99:4a (Goldingay)

<sup>39</sup> Psalm 97:5a & 6b

<sup>40</sup> Psalm 97:12

<sup>41</sup> Psalm 99:1

<sup>42</sup> Psalm 96:4b-5a “Yhwh is... to be revered above all gods, because all of the gods of the peoples are non-entities.” (Goldingay)

<sup>43</sup> Psalm 96:8 Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts.

<sup>44</sup> Psalm 97:7 Confounded be all they that serve graven images that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods. “Worship him all ye gods” does not present a picture of non-entities worshipping the living God. Rather it is a picture that would have resonated with the idolaters of the day who placed lesser gods before their chief deity as in the case of the captured Ark of the Covenant which was placed before Dagon only to find Dagon on his face before God in 1 Samuel 5:2-3. “When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.”

<sup>45</sup> Psalm 96:5 For all the gods of the nations are idols (עֲלִילִים 'eliyl, literally: non-entities) but the LORD made the heavens.

For the LORD our God is holy.”<sup>46</sup>

But the worship of the LORD involves joy. The joy in the cry “The LORD reigneth” is so great that it must be shared with everyone. Thus the possibility of worshipping the LORD is not just for Israel but to all peoples everywhere. Joy in worship of the God who is accessible to all people is one of the springs of universal rejoicing. The cry “The LORD reigneth” is a gospel cry. It is a ‘good news’ invitation that recognizes Israel’s role as a witness to other nations to declare that that “The LORD reigneth.”<sup>47</sup> Participation in the covenant is open to the “heathen (גוֹיִם gowy)” provided they acknowledge that “the gods of the nations are idols (literally non-gods or nonentities). The future belongs to the covenant people who serve the LORD. In psalm 96 even the protesting waves of the sea found in psalm 93 have joined in the general jubilation,<sup>48</sup> an adumbration of the hoped for conversion of the gentiles. It is clear that safety, security, and blessing come to those who attach themselves to the LORD. This is the first cause of joy but it is tied, through the covenant, to the second cause of joy – the coming of the Judge of all the earth!

## 2.5 The Judge has come

The judgment anticipated for is twofold, external to the nation and internal to the nation. In both situations it is the vulnerable who, though righteous, have been abused by the stronger. Whether little Israel amid the greater (and idolatrous) world powers, or the individual in Israeli wronged by their brethren, “The LORD reigneth” is the signal that the King has come whose throne “is established of old,”<sup>49</sup> a throne is based in “faithfulness and authority.”<sup>50</sup> He has come to exercise authority according to the covenant and in behalf of those who “love the LORD and hate evil.” Because of their obedience “he preserves the souls of his saints and he delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.”<sup>51</sup> Salvation for Israel (unlike the Christian view) was generally seen in national and temporal terms. Having touched on some of the leitmotifs of these Psalms, let us now consider the details of their individual witness.

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<sup>46</sup> Psalm 99:5 & 9

<sup>47</sup> Psalm 96:10a “Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth...”

<sup>48</sup> Psalm 96:11c “... let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof”

<sup>49</sup> Psalm 93:2a

<sup>50</sup> Psalm 97:2b

<sup>51</sup> Psalm 97:10

### Chapter 3 Psalm 93<sup>52</sup>

*For the Day before the Sabbath, when the earth/land became inhabited Praise song. David's [LXX]*

<sup>1</sup> The LORD reigneth; he is clothed with majesty;  
The LORD is clothed with strength,  
Wherewith he hath girded himself:

The world also is stablished,  
That it cannot be moved.

<sup>2</sup> Thy throne is established of old:  
Thou art from everlasting.

<sup>3</sup> The floods have lifted up, O LORD,  
The floods have lifted up their voice;  
The floods lift up their waves.

<sup>4</sup> The LORD on high is mightier  
Than the noise of many waters,  
Yea, than the mighty waves of the sea

<sup>5</sup> Thy testimonies are very sure:  
Holiness becometh thine house,  
O LORD, for ever



#### Overview

Here we have a brief Psalm of praise that comforts the fearful, and encourages the devoted. The psalm does not begin with the usual invitation to praise followed by the reason for praise.<sup>53</sup> Note too the shifts in indirect address (1, 4) and direct address (2-3, 5). The verses present in quick succession several aspects of the Psalmist's perceptions of praiseworthy character of God.

[1a &b]	God's reign	Authority
[1c]	God's establishment of the earth	Stability
[2]	The establishment of God's throne	Stability
[3]	The opposition to God's governance <sup>54</sup>	Strength
[4]	The revelation of God's might in contradistinction to man's rage	Strength
[5a]	The God's testimonies in contradistinction to man's noise	Truth
[5c]	The revelation of God's holiness	Beauty

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<sup>52</sup> There are differences of opinion between Alter, Goldingay, and the NIV as to how verses 1 and 2 should be divided. Alter treats verse 1 as a tricolon and 2 as a bicolon. Goldingay reverses the order. But both are left with associating the 'vestments' of the LORD and the theme of stability. The NIV, on the other hand, treats 1a as a tricolon and 1b and 2 as a set of linked bicola or a quatrain. I have gone with this latter approach because it separates the royal 'vestments' from the effect of those vestments on creation in terms of stability.

<sup>53</sup> As does Psalm 47:1-2 for example:

[invitation] "O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph."  
[reason] "For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth."

<sup>54</sup> An instance where "the wrath of man shall praise thee" Psalm 76:10a.

### The Pedigree of Antiquity

<sup>1</sup> The LORD reigneth, ... The world also is stablished,



The setting of this psalm as noted above refers back to the sixth day of creation (the world having been established), when God made man in His image and gave him the responsibility to govern the world that He had just created. This was of course just before the seventh day on which God rested from all His labors as an example to man. The Sabbath rest then was an echo of this event and the use of this psalm at the beginning of the Sabbath underscores the whole creation story. It also tells us of the great antiquity of the cry "The LORD reigneth". As pointed out above this event predates all human governance of whatever sort and gives the claim, nascent in the cry, a validity of antiquity, its pedigree or provenance. As God has created all things, then just as surely He reigns over all things. Whatever appearances there may be to the contrary (and for little Israel there were many) that truth does not change. The cry, like the world of God's creation, is established so that it will not change. It is Truth! And this truth gives hope. It encourages the faint hearted. It challenges faith to see beyond mere appearances. It invites all to participate in its overwhelming joy.

### Immutability means Stability

The world also is stablished,  
That it cannot be moved.  
Thy throne is established of old:  
Thou art from everlasting.



How are we to understand the assertion "Thy throne is established of old"? Clearly the reference to God's "throne is an anthropomorphism. God is a spirit<sup>55</sup> and is present in all places and times. Our answer must address at least three questions: What does the term "throne" really signify in reference to God? What does the assertion "Thy throne is established" mean. And how are we to understand the temporal references both in regard to God's throne ("of old") and God, Himself ("from everlasting") We might also question how the shift from the psalmist's address to an unnamed third person or persons in verse 1 to a direct address to God ("thy...thou") in verse 2 plays into all this? And finally how do the answers to all these questions apply to us in our lives today?

God's "throne" – At its most elemental, a throne is a chair of some sort which is for the exclusive use of the king. While the throne may exceed the lifetime of earthly kings, the character of the king defines the throne.<sup>56</sup> Clearly it is the reigning king who defines the character of his throne. The throne shares with all seats the common property of being a place of rest. When we are tired after standing all day we tend to look for a place to sit down. Given the references already hinted at to the creating on the third and sixth days, and the fact that the Hebrew may be more closely translated "Yhwh began to reign" also suggests that that 'beginning to reign' culminates the creative period. God finishes the creation and then ascends His throne both to reign and to rest. The act of surveying all things is also linked to the throne as a place to survey all things that He has made and from which He passes His righteous judgment "very good". In the activities of the King the throne also signifies the seat of governmental power. It from the throne that laws are given. It is at the throne that judicial cases are heard and execution exacted. It is also before the throne that tribute is received.

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<sup>55</sup> John 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

<sup>56</sup> Psalm 89:14 Justice and judgment are the habitation (or stability) of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face. (For example)



"Thy throne is established" - This second assertion derives from the first that "the world ... is established". Since the "throne" of God is immaterial, how may we conclude anything about it? Clearly the permanent character of the habitable world (as opposed to the floods which constantly challenge its existence) is a revelation of the character of the throne of its creator. Stability is the common theme reflected in the parallel passages. The stability of the material world constitutes the revelation of stability the immaterial throne.

Temporal references in verse 2 – Since the first establishment of the habitable world took place in time (a very long time ago). The question is naturally raised "when did the throne of God get created?" Just as in the concept of antitypes preceding their types, so too revelatory events (the establishment of the world) must have been preceded by that which they reveal (the establishment of the throne of God). So if the world was established long ago, thy throne was established "of old". The psalmist is slowly working toward the comprehension of that which transcends him; "Thou art from everlasting." He has reasoned from that which reveals God's omnipotence to that which reveals God's eternity.

The psalmist's address from verse 1 to verse 2 is very touching. If God is omnipotent and eternal, one might be tempted to assume that He is absolutely unapproachable. The psalmist does not accept that. The change of his form of address places him squarely before the throne of the Great King. The LORD who reigns is also accessible to his loyal subjects. This accessibility is a testimony to God's love for His people and is answered by their trust in coming before Him with praise and worship as His proper tribute.

What this means to us: The writer to the Hebrews sums all this up succinctly when he says: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."<sup>57</sup> For the Christian, the establishment of God's throne of old means that not only justice and judgment but also God's grace and mercy has ever been and will continue stable and unchanging into eternity.

#### Opposition leads to Chaos

The world also is established,  
That it cannot be moved.  
Thy throne is established of old:  
Thou art from everlasting.

The floods have lifted up, O LORD,  
The floods have lifted up their voice;  
The floods lift up their waves.



How are we to understand the assertion "the world also is established"? If we accept the psalmist's point that the reign of God was revealed to mankind was on the sixth day of creation, then the reference to world vs. floods has as its background the specific act of creation on the third day.

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.<sup>58</sup>

The verse clearly has stability ("established ... established") in view. Stability in the created world is a revelation of the immutability of the God who creates. But is the stability implicit in the passage a static

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<sup>57</sup> Hebrews 4:16

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 1:9-10

or a dynamic one? Is it the static stability of one stone resting quietly on another for ages or the dynamic stability of a chemical equation that has reached its quiescent equilibrium? A poetic passage from Job suggests that it is the latter.

Who shut up the sea behind doors  
When it burst forth from the womb,  
When I made the clouds its garment  
And wrapped it in thick darkness,  
When I fixed limits for it  
And set its doors and bars in place,  
When I said, 'This far you may come and no farther;  
Here is where your proud waves halt?'<sup>59</sup>

Our experience confirms this is so. "The sea with its dynamic power crashes on the sandy shore. Why does it never overwhelm it? Indeed from time to time it does. Storms buffet the land and wash away soil and rocks and anything else in their way: might they overwhelm the whole land? The raging of the sea and storm are but aftershocks or reminders of attempts to do this back at the beginning. Way back then the LORD asserted kingly authority over the sea and declared, 'This far you may come and no farther'".<sup>60</sup>

If this is so, then the Psalmist might well raise the question can this dynamic stability be taken for granted? Clearly the stability requires that the "testimony" (vs. 5) or declarations of the LORD are very sure or reliable. So then the constant dialogue and sometimes argument between the sea and the land is an ongoing revelation of God's immutable dependability. We are safe because "the LORD reigneth".

Such a state is also suggested (in a much weaker argument from silence) in God's primal command to mankind to "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."<sup>61</sup> The omission of any reference to subdue the sea as opposed to earth seems quite significant; the power of the sea being such that only the omnipotence of God can stay its restless and "proud" waves.

But there is another possible layer of meaning suggested by the fact that in the original command the word for earth was אֶרֶץ {pronounced eh'-rets} meaning the world of nature. In verse 1.c of this psalm the world which is established uses the term תִּבְלָה {pronounced tay-bale'} which means the earth (as moist and therefore inhabited) and by extension, the habitable part, world of men. In this case another parabolic image is raised, not of the sea, but of wicked and rebellious men who do not wish to acknowledge God's sovereignty and who threaten the world of God's people with moral chaos by their raging and proud "waves".

... the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.  
There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.<sup>62</sup>

So that the reliability of God's 'testimonies' are a real source of comfort to the Psalmist.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth <erets> be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Job 38:8-10 NIV

<sup>60</sup> Goldingay *Psalms* Vol. 3 page 71

<sup>61</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>62</sup> Isaiah 57:20-21

<sup>63</sup> Psalm 46: 1-3

Here we understand that the psalmist is saying that even if the obvious parabolic testimony of the earth and raging sea failed declare that “the LORD reigneth”, still we would trust in God as our refuge and strength.

Finally one must confront the eschatological overtones of this dynamic stability, which requires the constant exercise of God’s power as a restraint on the restless forces that oppose Him. While “... the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God,”<sup>64</sup> the hindered activity of human raging reveals the ongoing power of God to restrain. This is what the psalmist means when he asserts “the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”<sup>65</sup> We come then to an interesting conclusion {that the Apostle Paul observes under the different circumstances}. “... the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”<sup>66</sup> We conclude that before God ever placed mankind on the stage of the world, there was a malevolent power already at work opposing His gracious plans. The later verses of this psalm will address this issue.

### Encountering Transcendence

<sup>3</sup> The floods have lifted up, O LORD,  
The floods have lifted up their voice;  
The floods lift up their waves.

<sup>4</sup> The LORD on high is mightier  
Than the noise of many waters, yea,  
Than the mighty waves of the sea



The Psalm to this point has stressed the dominion of God as revealed in the creation of the world (land and sea) in general and mankind in particular. The stability of the habitable created world, over against the raging sea, has argued the stability of God’s “throne.” God who is clothed in majesty and strength, who has been from everlasting, would seem unapproachable. Such was the case with the potentates of the east in ancient times.<sup>67</sup> Even the religious practice of the Jews reflected such a concern.<sup>68</sup> But far from being aloof from His creation, God takes an interest in it, particularly His covenant people - the objects of His mercy and grace. So the change from address to an unidentified third party to God directly, seems to indicate the Psalmist’s confidence that the mighty God of creation is approachable. The disturbance of the “mighty waves of the sea” and consequent distress for the Psalmist becomes the motivation for his

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<sup>64</sup> James 1:20

<sup>65</sup> Psalm 76:10

<sup>66</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8 (NIV) Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

<sup>67</sup> See Ester 4:11 All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.

<sup>68</sup> Any infraction of divine commands while making atonement for the sins of the people could result in the death of the high priest. The Holy of Holies with the Ark of the Covenant and Mercy seat atop it was in many ways like a royal throne and throne room. So it was that the construction of the high priestly robes involved bells and pomegranates so that “his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the LORD, and when he cometh out, that he die not.” See Exodus 28:31-35.

approach as he says: "The floods have lifted up their voice, O LORD." The next verse is very different in tone. The Psalmist asserts with genuine confidence: "The LORD on high is mightier than the mighty waves of the sea." What is puzzling is that people do not change their emotional state easily or suddenly without some external event prompting it. I believe what explains the difference between the emotional tones of the two verses is a genuine encounter with God! Accessibility has paved the way for Encounter. The story of Elisha and his servant gives an explicit description of such an event. It takes little imagination to enter into the servant's fear and consequent relief.

And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! How shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.<sup>69</sup>

The sudden change in the Apostle Peter's character (cowardly braggadocio<sup>70</sup> to genuine courage<sup>71</sup>) argues the truth of his being an eye witness of the resurrection, and being empowered by God to give the great Pentecost sermon to the people of Israel. The application is obvious for us. As troubles arise in our lives, we should remember that we also have accessibility to God, and we should not be surprised if God honors us with a similar life changing experience of His insuperable greatness and power.

#### Signal to Noise Ratio

<sup>4</sup> The LORD on high is mightier  
Than the noise of many waters, yea,  
Than the mighty waves of the sea.

<sup>5</sup> Thy testimonies are very sure:  
Holiness becometh thine house,  
O LORD, for ever.



In the last section we reflected on the probable cause of the change in the psalmist's affective state between verse 3 (*angst* over the waves that had lifted up their voice) and verse 4 (the calm, almost joyous announcement that "the LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters"). Just as the change in address between verses 1 and 2 signaled the Psalmist's confidence in the accessibility of the great and majestic God of whom he spoke, so this sudden and dramatic change in his feelings signaled an

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<sup>69</sup> 2 Kings 6:15-18

<sup>70</sup> Matthew 26:33-35a, 73-75; Peter answered and said unto him, though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. ... And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man, and immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

<sup>71</sup> Acts 2:1,4,14 "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place....And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ... But Peter, standing ... lifted up his voice, and said unto them, ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem ...hearken to my words..."

encounter with God. He announces what he has seen: that, all earthly appearances to the contrary, God still reigns! But there is more of the psalmist's experience hiding in his testimony.

We might ask what the psalmist's world was like just before he raised the alarm in verse 3: "The floods have lifted up their voice, O LORD." His subsequent testimony tells us clearly: it was noisy! And noise can be frightening to anyone if it is loud enough. But the noise is not just a threat.<sup>72</sup> It is a sound without any real constructive signal. Approaching armies make noise (unless it is Israel circling silently around Jericho). It threatens. It intimidates. But here, it is the sound of impotent rage. To use Macbeth's description of life when told of the queen's death, "It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing."<sup>73</sup> And we might also ask what it was like for the Psalmist when he raised the alarm within that throne room of God: "established of old." What is it like to stand in the Presence of Him who is "from everlasting"? My heart suspects there was a great, comforting and encouraging silence; a silence that bespoke neither haste nor uncertainty about the absolute power of God to reign. And if no other words were spoken, the silence would be sufficiently eloquent to convey the message: "The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters." But there must have been something communicated beyond the silence of undisturbed governmental power because in the next verse the psalmist declares "thy testimonies are very sure." That is to say that what God says cannot be gainsaid<sup>74</sup>. The evidence of God's continued governance is manifest in the inherent authority conveyed by His uttered word. But words convey ideas as well as authority. This leads us to a real contrast nascent in the Psalmist's testimony: The ideas (as well as power) conveyed in the silence of God's throne room vs. the emptiness of "the noise of many waters." There is a similar contrast in Solomon's experience. "The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools."<sup>75</sup> In this contrast, we find a very early reference to our modern concept of 'signal to noise' ratio. Noise conveys no intelligent signal, but there are frequencies that if we are attuned to them carry a wealth of information. And that is a real spiritual issue for us all. To what signal are we attuned? The world around us provides many signals, but if they are all laid up together they amount to little more than meaningless noise - static. This one says this and that one says that. Another will disagree with all. The world becomes a shouting match in which contestants seek to rule among fools by their cries. They vie for our attention, our consent, our allegiance. Politicians worry about their 'image' rather than solid accomplishments for the good of others. Everyone wants to be a 'mover and a shaker' but none will take the time to be still before God and be moved and shaken by Him. This enters even into the religious realm. A.W. Tozer observed it well fifty years ago.

The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this one basic error in our religious thinking. With our loss of the sense of the majesty has come further loss of religious awe and the consciousness of the divine Presence. We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence. Modern Christianity is simply not producing the kind of Christian who can appreciate or experience the life in the Spirit. The words, "Be still and know that I am God," mean next to nothing to the self-confident and bustling worshipper in this middle of the twentieth century."<sup>76</sup>

For the Psalmist the assertion: "The LORD reigneth" was a personal testimony of his experience not a theological abstraction learned in a Bible school or read in a book.

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<sup>72</sup> The threat of rebellion that will overwhelm the righteous as in Psalm 2:2-3 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

<sup>73</sup> *Macbeth* act 5 scene 5

<sup>74</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

<sup>75</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:17

<sup>76</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, Harper and Row, 1961.

## The Family of God

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD reigneth,  
He is clothed with majesty;  
The LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself:  
...
- <sup>5</sup> Your testimonies are very sure:  
Holiness becomes your house,  
O LORD, for ever.



The two verses which open and close this wonderful little psalm are in some way inverse mirror images of one another. The strength of the LORD (1c) is manifest in that His testimonies are very sure (5a). It is this sureness in the face of seemingly recalcitrant forces that oppose themselves and that threaten to undermine the stability of creation that gives real comfort to the Psalmist. The thought in 1b (“He is clothed with majesty”) is paralleled by 5b (“holiness becomes your house forever”). Both thoughts have to do with God’s glory, the first with that which pertains to Him directly while the second is more revelatory in that which is about Him (His “house”). Verse 1a (“The LORD reigneth”) is parallel to 5c (“O LORD, for ever”) which completes it. Taken together they tell us that the LORD’s reign is forever. In order to better understand verse 5b we should answer three questions: How are we to understand the term “house”? How does it mean ‘to become’? And, most importantly, how are we to understand “holiness”?

**Your house:** As in the case of the sea waves referring parabolically to the opposing forces of sinful and rebellious mankind and not just the physical sea; so the term “house” may refer parabolically not only to the heavens as the site of God’s throne, but also may have corporate or individual significance. The view of a house in personal terms (in which we view our corporeal being as a “house”) occurs with the Apostle Paul.<sup>77</sup> The view of house in national or corporate terms (as a covenant people) also occurs in the scriptures.<sup>78</sup> From this last we derive such descriptions as “household of faith”.<sup>79</sup> In these instances, holiness is applicable not just to the world of created things, but specifically to individuals and groups of individuals who have a covenantal relationship with God. The holiness described is clearly from God (Who alone is holy) as a distinguishing characteristic of His people, His “house.”

**Becomes:** The word translated “becomes” is נָאֵם [pronounced naw-aw'] and means, properly, to be at home, and by implication, to be pleasant (or suitable), that is to be beautiful, or comely. The thought here is that God’s holiness adorns or beautifies His home. There is a revelatory aspect to such “becoming”. We see this in more clearly in the world of fashion. When a beautiful woman wears a dress, the question “is the dress becoming” makes perfect sense. That she is beautiful is not questioned but rather does the dress complement and ‘reveal’ her beauty in such a way as to render her even more attractive. The adornments or decorator objects in any home are revelatory of the home owner’s artistic taste (as well as their wealth)

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<sup>77</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:1-4 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle (i.e. our body) were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (i.e. our resurrection body). For in this (earthly body) we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven (our resurrection body): If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

<sup>78</sup> Heb 8:8 For finding fault with them, he says, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ... Hebrews 3:1-6 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he *who hath built the house hath more honor than the house*. For every house is built by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

<sup>79</sup> Galatians 6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

To have original oil paintings by famous artists certainly says more about their owner than magazine pictures ripped out and taped to a wall.<sup>80</sup> We find such pictures elsewhere in the scriptures.<sup>81</sup> Taken this way, we see that in the 'house' of the Holy God, the relative holiness of His household (i.e. His covenant people that serve Him) is such that their behavior brings glory to His person in a way similar to verse 1a. In 1a, God is "clothed" with majesty, in 5b, He is surrounded by those who reflect the glory of His Holiness in their holy lives, which leads us to the last and most important question of all.

**What is Holiness?** Holiness is the term of religion *par excellence*. It occurs throughout the Old and New Testaments in a variety of settings but most connected with God or the service of God. God is Holy<sup>82</sup> The holiness of God is not so much an attribute but seems to refer to His essential nature. "... Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts..."<sup>83</sup> Thrice holy, intensely holy is the Lord. Holiness, accordingly, is the background for all else declared about God. Holiness points to the inviolable divine sacredness. Moses may not draw near the burning bush, but must put off his sandals for he is on "Holy ground" The term conveys the majesty and awesomeness of God. Our response to holiness is predominately affective; we stand in awe and even fear, as did Jacob at Bethel. "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it. He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."<sup>84</sup> Holiness denotes separateness. God is supremely "other". The Hebrew term for holiness is קֹדֶשׁ *qodesh*, meaning a sacred place or thing; with the sense of being set apart or kept separate. His people are to make no graven image, for God cannot be likened to anything in creation or even imagined. Although separate, everything connected with Him is holy: the holy assembly, the holy priesthood, the holy city, the holy appointments of the temple, the holy heaven, the holy throne. Zion is God's holy mountain. And His people are to be holy.<sup>85</sup> While God's holiness is inherent and immutable, man's is not. He is both peccible (he can sin) and mutable (he can change). And man has sinned which introduced a corruption of his fundamental nature that prevents him from achieving that holiness for which he was created when made in the image of God. Holiness as perceived by man touches all aspects of his spiritual nature. Conceptually there is a recognition of God's will as revealed in commandments that pertain both to the externals of religious practice as God ordained it and inwardly to the character of life as man is to live it. But it goes much farther than just commandments and laws. There is the conceptual apprehension of that which God has revealed about himself. While His transcendence makes total comprehension impossible, still human reason has a role in developing an intelligent understanding of His will as an expression of his attributes. A.W. Tozer borrows the phrase in Proverbs 9:10 "the knowledge of the Holy" to describe this. Affectively we have already touched on the aspects of awe; fear, reverence, and even trembling that attend the experience of the presence of the Holy. But there is also love. God is immanent and we have access to one who loves us deeply with a Holy love.

Holiness involves the will. People sin which compromises holiness. The Old Testament practices of animal sacrifice, ritual washing and fasting addressed the need for cleansing from sin. Sanctification (rendering something or someone holy and therefore suitable for God's service) involved the dual aspects

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<sup>80</sup> Such an example is, of course, very limited. The ultimate test of good taste in art is whether the person who can afford such oil paintings has a real appreciation of their value and can articulate it. Donkeys may carry books as well as scholars. Many a wealthy person has displayed the good taste of some one they hired (a Bernard Berensen, for example) while many a fine artist could only afford ripped and pasted pictures of the old masters that they loved and studied. See also 2 Timothy 2:20 "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor."

<sup>81</sup> Titus 2:9-10 Tit 2:9 Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may *adorn the doctrine of God* our Savior in all things.

<sup>82</sup> For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

<sup>83</sup> Isaiah 6:3

<sup>84</sup> Genesis 28:16-17

<sup>85</sup> 1 Peter 1:15 - 16 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, be ye holy; for I am holy.

of cleansing and separation.<sup>86</sup> But these externals were also didactic in nature pointing to an inner aspect of holiness of the heart - a heart deeply affected by sin<sup>87</sup>. Paul describes the frustration of all his attempts to achieve holiness by self effort in the seventh chapter of his letter to the Romans. Inner holiness cannot be achieved apart from the grace of God ministered to all men through the sacrificial death of His only begotten Son Jesus the Christ.<sup>88</sup> The words of the psalmist ring true. The holiness of God's people is a work of God's grace, which glorifies Him. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ezekiel 36:25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, *will I cleanse you.*

2 Corinthians 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and *be ye separate*, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

<sup>87</sup> Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

<sup>88</sup> Ezekiel 18:31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, ... and *make you a new heart and a new spirit*: ... Ezekiel 36:26 *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

<sup>89</sup> Matthew 5:16



## Chapter 4 Psalm 96<sup>90</sup>

<sup>1</sup> O sing unto the LORD a new song:

Sing unto the LORD, all the earth.

<sup>2</sup> Sing unto the LORD, bless his name;

Shew forth his salvation from day to day

<sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the heathen,

His wonders among all people

<sup>4</sup> For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised:

He is to be feared above all gods.

<sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the nations are idols:

But the LORD made the heavens.

<sup>6</sup> Honor and majesty are before him:

Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

<sup>7</sup> Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people,

Give unto the LORD glory and strength.

<sup>8</sup> Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name:

Bring an offering, and come into his courts.

<sup>9</sup> O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness:

Fear before him, all the earth.

<sup>10</sup> Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth:

The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved:

He shall judge the people righteously.

<sup>11</sup> Let the heavens rejoice, and

Let the earth be glad;

Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof

<sup>12</sup> Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein:

Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice

<sup>13</sup> Before the LORD: for he cometh,

For he cometh to judge the earth:

He shall judge the world with righteousness,

And the people with his truth



### Overview and Provenance

The structure of the psalm consists of three exhortations: to praise, to worship, and to rejoice in the LORD's advent. The first and the last exhortations each have a reasonable basis for their arguments, while

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<sup>90</sup> There are real differences of opinion on how to divide this psalm. Alter sees it made up of bicola with the exception of verse 10 which he treats as a tricolon. The NIV agrees generally with Alter's division except that it treats verses 11 and 12a as a tricolon as well as verse 10. Goldingay sees it as entirely made up of tricola. I have opted to go with Goldingay based on his insightful comments on each tricola as well as an inherent pattern of three (the Trinity?) that marks the psalm.

the center exhortation omits any reason (worship should be an obvious response when considering who the LORD is) emphasizing, instead, the responsibility that true worship requires – evangelism (v.10). Psalm 96 is a remarkable missionary psalm for ancient Israel and we wonder, along with Spurgeon, how Israel, on reading this glorious psalm of David, could continue to insist on its exclusivism. Verses 1 to 3 begin with the exhortation the universal Praise of the LORD: “sing – sing – sing. Verses 4 to 6 give the reasons for the universal Praise of the LORD. The LORD is great, having made the heavens, whereas the gods of the nations are non-entities. Therefore He is to be feared above all gods. He is to be praised because of His honor, His majesty, His strength and His beauty. Verses 7 to 9 raise the second exhortation (and the invitation) for the universal worship the LORD. But verse 10 reminds the Jewish people of their responsibility to the heathen – evangelism. Verses 11 to 12 resume and extend the picture of universal rejoicing in the LORD because He comes to judge the earth (13), which implies that He has come to set things right.

While no heading for the psalm is found in the Masoretic Text, the LXX provides “When the house was built after the exile. Song of David’s”. The reference is to the account in 1 Chronicles 16 when David “...brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it: and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God. In 1 Chronicles 16:9–33 a psalm is found that was part of the ceremonies and rejoicing of that day. Verses 28 to 33 of that psalm include a variant of this psalm, which suggests its date and author.

#### Psalm 96

#### 1 Chronicles 16:28-33

<sup>1</sup> O Sing unto the LORD a new song:  
Sing unto the LORD, all the earth.  
<sup>2</sup> Sing unto the LORD, bless his name;  
Show forth his salvation from day to day.  
<sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the heathen,  
His wonders among all people.  
<sup>4</sup> For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised:  
He is to be feared above all gods.  
<sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the nations are idols:  
But the LORD made the heavens.  
<sup>6</sup> Honor and majesty are before him:  
Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

<sup>7</sup> Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people,  
Give unto the LORD glory and strength.  
<sup>8</sup> Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name:  
Bring an offering, and come into his courts.  
<sup>9</sup> O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness:  
Fear before him, all the earth.

<sup>10</sup> Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth:  
The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved  
He shall judge the people righteously.

<sup>11</sup> Let the heavens rejoice, and  
Let the earth be glad;  
Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof.  
<sup>12</sup> Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein:  
Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice  
<sup>13</sup> Before the LORD: for he cometh,  
  
For he cometh to judge the earth:  
He shall judge the world with righteousness, and  
The people with his truth.

<sup>28</sup> Give unto the LORD, ye kindreds of the people,  
Give unto the LORD glory and strength.  
<sup>29</sup> Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name:  
Bring an offering, and come before him:  
Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.  
<sup>30a</sup> Fear before him, all the earth:

<sup>31c</sup> Let men say among the nations, The LORD reigneth.  
<sup>30b</sup> the world also shall be stable, that it be not moved.

<sup>31a</sup> Let the heavens be glad, and  
<sup>31b</sup> Let the earth rejoice: and  
<sup>32</sup> Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof:  
Let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein.  
<sup>33</sup> Then shall the trees of the wood sing out  
At the presence of the LORD,  
  
Because he cometh to judge the ear

Consider David’s exercise of heart in bringing the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem. Not only did it strengthen his claim to the monarchy, but it identified Jerusalem with the covenant worship of Israel (as the history lessons and exhortations directed specifically to Israel in the first part of the psalm in 1 Chronicles makes clear). It also provided David, the prophet, with an opportunity to see far beyond the typical events then in hand to a far wider fulfillment in which Jerusalem would be the center of the world wide worship of the LORD not just Israel’s worship.

#### A New Song

<sup>1</sup> O sing unto the LORD a new song:

Sing unto the LORD, all the earth.

<sup>2</sup> Sing unto the LORD, bless his name;



The first colon of this psalm immediately raises a question. Why sing a new song? Is there something wrong with the old ones? The second colon hints at an answer. The command is given to all the earth, not just Israel (who was, presumably, the primary audience of this psalm). The exhortation continues into the third colon with the reason for the song namely to “bless his name”. But this does little to justify a new song. The tension these verses raise will not be resolved by here, but they do provide us an opportunity to wonder and to speculate about this “new song” and its *raison d’être*.

A universal discovery of a daily experience: What is common to one people may be amazingly new to others. Imagine the Australian Aborigines’ wonder when they first saw a cell phone that allowed people far distant to speak to them via this disembodied box with a lid! This is undoubtedly the case here. Israel had a long history with God. Their song was to be a testimony of that experience. It is to be a new song because that experience should have been ongoing every day. The universality of a new song that echoes the fresh discovery of the ongoing grace of God occurs in the eschatology of the Book of Revelation. “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”<sup>91</sup>

But with Israel (as with us) there was a tendency not only to become parochial, but to fail to deeply appreciate the greatness and power of the revelation that had been given to them. An undue familiarity with the power and glory of God may have bred a kind of contempt that blunted their ‘evangelistic’ fervor. How are any people going to convey a sense of excitement and joy to others when their own has flagged? Their history tells us that they struggled with the worship of the idols of the surrounding people, failing to fully realize how radical and revolutionary their own revelation of the God of Creation really was! It had become ‘old’ to them, and this humdrum ‘oldness’ is certainly not going to impress “all the earth”! What is needed is a new experience on their part. They needed a revival of their spiritual life, a resurgence of joy expressed in a totally new song. They, after all, are part of “all the earth” that were to sing this new song! It was to begin with them and they were to demonstrate it to others. This brings us to a second related observation.

Joy wanes if discovery flags: Joy is not unlike a flower. The life of the plant is in the root. Cut off from the daily supply of the root, the flower will be fresh and beautiful for a time, but that beauty fades quickly as the petals fall. The real challenge then was to stay spiritually connected to God, their Root, in such a way that each day brought forth new supplies of vivifying grace for the flower of their spiritual lives. Then the question would be not whether to sing a new song but *which* new song! Each day’s new discoveries brings forth a new song. Jeremiah understands this when he says “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”<sup>92</sup> David wrote not one but many psalms, each was new in the day that he penned them! The secret lay in the reality that David possessed an ongoing and vital experience with God. “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he

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<sup>91</sup> Revelation 5:9-10

<sup>92</sup> Lamentations 3:22-23

inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”<sup>93</sup> The real power of an evangelistic (“good news”) message lies in the fact that it was good news for you in your experience not just good news in the abstract. The “new song” then is to be Israel’s ongoing testimony to the world of it’s vital experience of the God who began by delivering them from Egyptian Bondage; who continues to deliver them from “all the gods of the nations (which) are idols”; and one day comes “to judge the earth: ... the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.”

What happened to them can happen to us: When we consider these observations, it is an unspeakable tragedy that Israel failed to heed the exhortation of this psalm; systematically went after the idols of the peoples that they were to displace; lapsed into a hostile “us-them” attitude relative to Gentile nations that they were meant to be a witness to; and ultimately failed to receive their Messiah, the Son of the very God who had delivered them from Egypt! Paul feels the pain of this tragedy when he says: “I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart...for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.”<sup>94</sup> But it is Paul who also observes: “that blindness in part is happened to Israel,” and he adds that this is only “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.”<sup>95</sup> Paul does not doubt that, despite this tragedy, “...all Israel shall be saved...”<sup>96</sup> This is a mystery and it pertains to this psalm as well. This psalm is not just an exhortation, it is a prophetic description of what most assuredly will be! These things will come to pass. Israel might have been a great instrumentality, but God does not need instrumentalities to accomplish His sovereign will!

This being the case, there is nascent in the introductory tricola, an exhortation and a warning to us. It is we, like Israel, who should maintain a daily contact with the grace of God which inspires a perpetual “new song” that, in its freshness and authenticity, is a joyous and vibrant witness to “all the earth.” God is willing to use us to extend His kingdom! But as Israel failed in their high and holy calling, so too may we “... because of unbelief. They (Israel) were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”<sup>97</sup> It behooves us to take seriously the admonition “O sing unto the LORD a new song” and not to fail in its accomplishment!

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<sup>93</sup> Psalm 40:1-3

<sup>94</sup> Romans 9:2, 3b-5

<sup>95</sup> Romans 11:25b

<sup>96</sup> Romans 11:26a

<sup>97</sup> Romans 11:20-22

### A Worldwide Witness

<sup>1</sup>O sing unto the LORD a new song:  
Sing unto the LORD, all the earth.  
<sup>2</sup>Sing unto the LORD, bless his name;  
Show forth his salvation from day to day.  
<sup>3</sup>Declare his glory among the heathen,  
His wonders among all people



The first tricola sets forth a three fold goal state: what: “a new song”, who “all the earth” and its intent: to “bless his name”. If the first tricola of this psalm sets forth the form of worship, i.e. a new song, the second tricola describes the three fold content of that song. The new song celebrates the LORD’s salvation or deliverance, His glory or honor, and His wonders. Both passages stress alike the universality that is hoped for: “all the earth”, “the heathen”, “all people.” In the first three lines it is unclear just how this new song is to be started by such a universal chorus. Surely if this chorus involves all the earth, then it must involve the heathen. And for them it will be for them a new song; replacing the songs they once offered to the idols that they worshipped. But how is this going to happen? The second line of the second tricola hints at the answer. Someone is to “declare his glory among the heathen”. Clearly that someone is Israel! The new song, then, is to begin with Israel and to go forth into all the earth, among every people, among the heathen and to inspire, to incite, to initiate the universal worship of the LORD. That witness is to be “from day to day”, a continual witness. As the words of the song, so also the subject of the witness will focus on the LORD’s salvation (deliverance), His glory (honor), and His wonders. What Israel teaches in song to the whole world, is intended to become the world’s universal song of praise to God. Although salvation as understood by Israel would be somewhat different than the Christian view, *vis-a-vie* national deliverance from political powers like Egypt or Babylon as well as natural disasters vs. deliverance from sin, death, and hell; there is a common ground in the daily activity of the LORD in securing the covenant blessings on a daily basis. The transposition (and application) to our setting is relatively easy. Isaac Watts does so admirably in several of his poetic renditions of these verses.

Sing to the Lord, ye distant lands,  
Ye tribes of every tongue;  
His new discovered grace demands  
A new and noble song.

Say to the nations - Jesus reigns  
God’s own almighty Son;  
His power the sinking world sustains,  
And grace surrounds His throne.

## The Greatness of God

<sup>1</sup>O sing unto the LORD a new song:

Sing unto the LORD, all the earth.

<sup>2</sup>Sing unto the LORD, bless his name;

Show forth his salvation from day to day.

<sup>3</sup>Declare his glory among the heathen,

His wonders among all people

<sup>4</sup>For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised:

He is to be feared above all gods.

<sup>5</sup>For all the gods of the nations are idols:



If the first tricola sets forth what should be done ("sing unto the LORD a new song"), who is to do it ("all the earth"), and what the purpose of the song should be ("bless his name"); The second tricola describes the content of the words of the song (His salvation, glory, and wonders). The third tricola introduces the twofold reason for these encouragements and directions. The LORD is great and (therefore) greatly to be praised and the gods of the nations are non-entities, not worthy of any praise. As the LORD is real (and the gods of the nations are not) so His praise must be real. The subject matter of the new song must reveal his excellent greatness in the truth of His activities. This having been said, it is reasonable to explore not only His salvation, glory, and wonders, but His greatness as reflected in them. While God's greatness (like His person) is unsearchable, yet the narrowing of the subject matter points the reader along a fruitful line of meditation. With this in mind, we may contemplate the greatness of God with several observations.

Epistemology: While the Infinite God is ultimately unknowable in His essential being by finite created beings; something of Him must be knowable or His praise could not be reasonably uttered. How can we sing the Excellencies of someone that we do not and cannot know? To sing a new song requires of the singers a true knowledge of the one praised. That knowledge must be derived by either natural means (observation, deduction, and induction) or by supra-natural means (revelation). There are indications in scripture that both means are valid<sup>98</sup>.

Inherence: The activities of God in general (and salvation in particular) are revelatory because His attributes are inherently observable in them. His existence (the LORD is...) and His greatness (the LORD is great...) are both revealed in His activity, so that His salvation, glory, and wonder all reflect His greatness and are themselves inherently great.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, a careful consideration of the subject of salvation would also reveal God's righteousness, His justice, His mercy, His Wisdom and above all His love.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Romans 1:19-20 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For *the invisible things of him* from the creation of the world *are clearly seen*, being understood *by the things that are made*, even his eternal power and Godhead...

Psalm 19:1-3 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

<sup>99</sup> Hebrews 2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect *so great salvation*; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

<sup>100</sup> John 3:16 - 17 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Experience: The subjects of the song constitute the revelation of God's character in those works that He has accomplished in the lives of the singers. The new song is not just a testimony to God's greatness, but a personal testimony on the part of the singers. And if it is a testimony on the part of "all the earth", then it is reasonable to infer that "all the earth" will one day see in their experience "his salvation" so that they can truly bear witness of His greatness in their "new song" It is the greatness of His offer of salvation to "all the earth" that, accepted and possessed by them, leaves them greatly indebted to God. They cannot but say that He is "greatly to be praised" for His salvation, glory, and wonder.

Coherence: The fundamental testimony of the scriptures is that God is one.<sup>101</sup> And since He is one then the attributes of God must be coherent and interpenetrate. Thus when the scriptures assert that God is love<sup>102</sup> and that God is wise<sup>103</sup>, it is evident that His is a loving wisdom and a wise love. So it is that three fold subject of the new song, His salvation, glory, and wonders, are really a tri-unity and not three separate subjects to be praised in isolation from one another. To put it simply, His great salvation is full of glory and utterly wonderful!

Distinction: Although coherent, salvation is not glory or wonder; glory is not salvation or wonder; and wonder is not salvation or glory! If salvation at least points to God's great love to "all the earth"; glory at least points to His great power to effect the impossible in saving mankind, and wonder at least points to the mystery of His great wisdom in the means of accomplishing "so great a salvation". The least summation then points to the human experience of the mysterious power of God's love in reaching foolish heathens who had rejected Him in favor of worshiping the non-entities they called 'gods'.<sup>104</sup> In saving such, God demonstrates that "He is to be feared above all gods, for all the gods of the nations are idols but the LORD made the heavens."

Eschatology: Clearly there is an element of future events in this psalm. Even in our day, not all the earth has forsaken the idolatrous non-entities that people serve, whether material or immaterial. One day there will be a new song.<sup>105</sup> But more than a new song giving glory to God, the singers themselves will reveal His glory. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."<sup>106</sup>

### To Whom Will You Look?

For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised:

He is to be feared above all gods.

<sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the nations are idols:



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<sup>101</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD *our God is one LORD*:

Mark 12:29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

<sup>102</sup> 1 John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for *God is love*.

<sup>103</sup> Romans 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

<sup>104</sup> Romans 1:21-23 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

<sup>105</sup> Revelation 5:9-10 And *they sung a new song*, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

<sup>106</sup> Ephesians 2:4-7

It is a proverb that assures us that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.”<sup>107</sup> The term for fear, **יִרְאָה** (pronounced yir-aw’), has both the negative meaning of fear<sup>108</sup>, and positive meaning of reverence that issues in obedience<sup>109</sup>. Although both have an affective content of anxiety or fear as our English word connotes, the word **יִרְאָה** used in reference to God also involves influencing the will as a positive motivation toward obedience.<sup>110</sup> One must determine the meaning of the word from the context which it is used. Here the use is clearly reverence or awe. Not only is God to be praised because He is great, but He is to be obeyed because He is awesome and revered. But what form of obedience is required here? The second and third lines make clear that the obedience required is the abandonment of idolatry. This line calls to mind the first and second commandments of the Decalogue:

“I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have *no other gods* before me. *Thou shalt not make* unto thee *any graven image*, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.”<sup>111</sup>

Since the gods are really non-entities, we might ask “Why is God concerned? Can the Creator of the Universe be in competition with non-entities?” The answer is that God is not in competition with anyone, but rather He is concerned with the heart of man whom He made in His image. The question is ultimately to whom will man look for solace, support, and solutions to life’s endless problems? It is not that the idol is anything, but the process by which the idol came to have seeming reality in the heart of man that is at issue.

Thou shalt not make ... any graven image: The second commandment is an injunction against making “idols”. But first commandment, forbids worship of “any other god” so why is it necessary to forbid the creation of images of other gods? It isn’t. The second commandment is actually an injunction against representing the LORD as anything that has material (or conceptual) existence; of making a “graven image” and saying that *this* represents the LORD. In a wider sense, the second commandment addresses itself to the act of creation, of making things. When people ‘create’ they give material expression to immaterial entities like ideas. The human process of creation seeks to make an immaterial ‘vision’ known in some material way. In the case of a sculptor, for instance, he envisions the form of the statue ‘imprisoned’ in the block of stone. He liberates that imagined statue by the successive blows of hammer and chisel. In the context of this commandment, the process that precedes the creation (or graving) of the image is imagining. As the sculptor creates or graves the image, each blow of the chisel both destroys the old form and ‘creates’ a new form. If we were to stop the sculptor and ask why is he destroying that block of stone, what would he answer? Clearly he is not satisfied with the block of stone as it is or he would not have started carving. He rejects the form of the stone as it is in favor of what it could be. The creative process (making images) involves not only the affirmation of what is imagined

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<sup>107</sup> Proverbs 9:10

<sup>108</sup> For example: Deuteronomy 2:25 This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear (**יִרְאָה**) of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee.

<sup>109</sup> Exodus 20:19-20 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and *that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.*

<sup>110</sup> Psalm 103:17-18 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon *them that fear him*, and his righteousness unto children’s children; *To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*

<sup>111</sup> Exodus 20:2-5



but also rejection of what actually exists. The material result or “graven image” points back to its immaterial predecessor imagined in the mind of its creator.

Human creation also raises the question of human valuation. Would not the empty canvases of Van Gough have been more valuable if he had not smeared them with paint? The city tears down a historic land mark because the new high rise apartment needs the space. The graveyard is paved over so that the new shopping center can have a parking lot. “Creation” may or may not be desirable depending on the relative values of what is rejected vs. what is left in its place.

The second commandment does not prohibit all human ‘creative’ activity. It simply says that God is not to be a subject of our imaginative processes. I see two reasons for this. (1) God transcends all possible human comprehension. To represent His essence in material terms is impossible and false. This is not to say that we should never try to describe God. To avoid such would be the death of all devotion. Quite the contrary, those who love Him the most seem the most inclined to talk about Him and are under great internal pressure to describe him to others. These descriptions, however, never set a limit to His person. They are all, on the contrary, breathlessly trying to describe what they know to be indescribable and boundless. It is not that the verbal representation or image of God is not there; just that it is only partial. All such behavior reflects a growing understanding of God which is desirable and normal. But when a person stops and says proudly “that’s it, I have succeeded in describing God”; creation becomes sin. Any husband or wife who concludes that they know all there is to know about their mate is making a similar mistake! The petrification of, or rigidity in, religious systems and marriages is often traceable back to a violation of the second commandment. (2) God created mankind “in our image, after our likeness...”.<sup>112</sup> Since man is made in God’s image, it is unnecessary for man to make an image of God, seeing that he is that image already. No other image is necessary or desirable. To attempt, therefore, to imagine another image of God is to reject our own humanity in a very fundamental way.

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: Mankind still faces the danger of rejecting their humanity in favor of what is deemed to be a more desirable image of themselves. How many people buy products today that are advertised as part of an image ginned up by ad agencies? The customer buys a certain brand of cigarette because he sees a macho cowboy smoking the same brand. Or he buys a certain automobile because it seems that lovely young women like to hang all over the drivers of that particular vehicle. In buying and consuming the fruit of the ad agency’s imagination, he serves the image they have projected by purchasing its accoutrements. He wants to conform to the image that is projected for him because of dissatisfaction with himself. How many politicians in Washington are worried not so much about their integrity but their ‘image’? Not so much about what is right for the country, but maintaining that appearance of things that will get them elected next term. I’m sure that you can develop many other examples based on your own experience.

The presence of an image raises the matter of conformity to the image. In primitive societies where material image worship is practiced, the ubiquitous and concurrent practice of mask making bears witness to a consistent practice of mask wearing that reflects the devotee’s desire to be conformed to and even to become the god thus worshipped. Modern people in the west do not wear physical masks, any more than they bow down before physical idols. But with the internalization of the image, the mask becomes a psychological one. How many people wear some sort of ‘mask’ to hide their true identity? All such immaterial masks represent the concretization of the desire to create a new image that has at its core a rejection of the image of

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<sup>112</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

God in our own humanity. We may take verses 4b and 5a, then, as a paired injunction. God is to be revered not rejected. God is to be feared (and obeyed), not replaced by an inhumane non-entity.

### In the Throne Room

But the LORD made the heavens.

<sup>6</sup> Honor and majesty are before him:

Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.



At this point, we might enquire why the psalmist makes the statement “the LORD made the heavens.” The statement is true, of course. But the LORD also made the earth, so why not say that? In fact the LORD made everything. Wouldn’t such an all inclusive reference be much better than just that regarding the heavens? Considering the universal focus of who will one day sing unto the LORD, the answer is clearly no! The argument for universal praise of the LORD requires a contrast between the petty fabrications of men, little idol non-entities, and the unfathomable vastness of God who alone is reality. Nowhere is that vastness more universally visible than in the heavens. Nowhere is the contrast as great as that between the tiny earth and the limitless universe.<sup>113</sup> Men may divide the earth into ‘my land’ or ‘your land’ and fight to acquire or defend title to this or that little scrap of territory for a brief time, but who will dare to lay claim to the eternal vastness of the universe? So the imagery of the psalmist is a subtle but powerful ontological argument against the idol non-entities found on earth and in favor of the vast reality of the LORD. The heavens are not only His creation but His throne room. And their witness is universal!

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God; and  
The firmament sheweth his handiwork

<sup>2</sup> Day unto day uttereth speech, and  
Night unto night sheweth knowledge

<sup>3</sup> There is no speech nor language,  
Where their voice is not heard

<sup>4</sup> Their line is gone out through all the earth, and  
Their words to the end of the world<sup>114</sup>

Not only is the consideration of the heavens’ witness a universal possibility for all men; it is a beneficial exercise for any soul. David, himself, who may have authored this psalm, made such consideration a part of his devotional life.

<sup>3</sup> When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

<sup>4</sup> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and  
The son of man, that thou visitest him?<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> The issue of choosing heaven over earth as a witness to the greatness of God may be resolved in another way, with the same answer. If we were to judge the greatness of an earthly monarch by his furniture would we be more likely to accurately assess his greatness by consideration of his throne or footstool? Clearly his throne is more revelatory. It is this same analogy that is reported in Isaiah 66:1 “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest?”

<sup>114</sup> Psalm 19:1-4a

<sup>115</sup> Psalm 8:3-4

Clearly the throne room is visible but inaccessible for man “made a little lower than the angels”<sup>116</sup> But when we consider the heavens, from afar, what is it that we are expected to see? The psalmist points to four aspects of the LORD that are revealed there: Honor and Majesty, Strength and Beauty. These are four distinct words.<sup>117</sup> A quick search reveals that there is considerable semantic overlap between the words honor (used 24 times in the O.T.) and majesty (used 29 times in the O.T.). Beauty has a similar overlap with honor and majesty, but more extensively with their translation as glory. This semantic overlap points, I believe, to a coherent witness that we can more easily understand by our own experience of considering the heavens than by linguistic analysis. The witness is easily available to each of us on any night with a clear sky, particularly when the moon is new. When we consider the heavens, what do we see? We see a breathtaking vastness with myriad stars. The view is a beautiful magnificence, grand in scope, whose very existence suggests a creative power far beyond any that we can conceive of. To think of this as the throne room of God is to be awed at His magnificence that demands by its very greatness and beauty that we offer our feeble praise in wonderment as an honor to His Excellence. The argument is not fundamentally rational or emotional, though these are involved. Rather it is a spontaneous and awesome “Wow”! The content of our praise is also the basis of it. God is to be praised for who He is He because of what He has done by telling what He has done. “There cannot be reasons for acknowledging Yhwh beyond the facts about who Yhwh is.”<sup>118</sup>

Further, one senses the picture of Honor and Majesty, Strength and Beauty standing before the LORD in His throne room or temple as separate personifications of aspects of His being, declaring to Him: His worthiness (worship). This is similar to the way in which lesser idols stand before the central idol in earthly temples. In the case of the earthly temples made by man, these lesser idols have no more reality than the non-entity before which they stand. But in the case of the heavens, Honor and Majesty, Strength and Beauty are personifications of Absolutes proclaiming the LORD’s Inherent Worthiness! And their reality invites the beholder to join them in the worship of the LORD who alone is to be so honored and glorified for His beauty and strength.<sup>119</sup>

Having pondered the poetic reality of the universe, it remains to ponder the depths of the human soul which is said to be the Temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>120</sup> How little do we enter into the realization of the vastness of the depths of our being and the potential for glory in the universe within each of us?

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<sup>116</sup> Psalm 8:5a

<sup>117</sup> Honor (הוֹדָה pronounced hode) meaning grandeur (i.e. an imposing form and appearance):--beauty, comeliness, excellency, glorious, glory, goodly, honor, majesty. Majesty (הוֹדָה pronounced haw-dawr') meaning magnificence, i.e. ornament or splendor:--beauty, comeliness, excellency, glorious, glory, goodly, honor, majesty. Strength (עֹז pronounced oze) meaning strength in various applications (force, security, majesty, praise):--boldness, loud, might, power, strength, strong. Beauty (תִּפְאָרֶת pronounced tif-aw-raw') meaning ornament (abstractly or concretely, literally or figuratively):--beauty, beautiful, bravery, comely, fair, glory(-ious).

<sup>118</sup> Goldingay, John, *Psalms* page 104

<sup>119</sup> 2 Chronicles 20:21 And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.

Psalm 29:1-2

Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty,  
Give unto the LORD glory and strength.  
Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name;  
Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

<sup>120</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

## Participating in the Grand Cycle

<sup>7</sup> Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people,  
Give unto the LORD glory and strength.

<sup>8</sup> Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name:



With this tricola, we enter the second of the three parts of this Psalm. This first part encourages universal praise, the second universal worship, and the third universal rejoicing. While praise, worship and joy are not identical, they are related and necessary in any healthy human relationship with God. People need someone to look up to as a role model. Role models are praiseworthy. Humans need to worship in order to fully participate in God's creation. It is the role that we were created for.<sup>121</sup> But praise and worship, relating as they do to finding and adoring the Beloved, should be joyous if they are authentic!

The "sing, sing, sing" of the first tricola is answered by the "give, give, give" of the second. And the questions which the second tricola answers, parallel those of the first. In stairstep parallelism<sup>122</sup>, the second tricola answers: Who should give: "Ye kindreds of the people"; what they should give: "glory and strength"; and why they should give: it is "due unto his name."

While these verses emphasize giving, verse nine tells us that this is part of worship: "O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness." When giving is connected with worship, it is sacrificial in nature.<sup>123</sup> The question raised by sacrificial giving is 'why should I do this?' The answer is not just that it is His due, but that He to whom you are giving is worthy of this sacrifice. Joy at the point of sacrifice is possible only because the worshiper genuinely loves the one for whom the sacrifice is made. Paul says of the Philippians whom he loves "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all."<sup>124</sup> Love is the gold in the vault that gives the scrip of sacrificial giving the power to affirm the worth of the one loved. Sacrifice attests to the ultimate reality of love. "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends" says Jesus as He enjoins His followers to "love one another, as I have loved you."<sup>125</sup> He will demonstrate His love for them (and us) by laying down His life on the cross so that all who would enter into the relationship with God spoken of in this psalm may do so.

But giving is only part of the picture. Reason tells us that one cannot give what one does not have, and one does not have unless one receives. What is not obvious in this is that giving is not simply a linear thru-put of receiving on the one hand and giving away on the other. Giving (even sacrificially) brings returns with interest. Giving and receiving are connected as part of a larger

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<sup>121</sup> The Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it simply (scripture references shown): Question: What is the chief end of man? Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God [a], and to enjoy him for ever [b]. References: [a] Ps. 86:9; Isaiah. 60:21; Romans 11:36; I Corinthians 6:20; 10:31; Revelation 4:11 [b] Psalm 16:5-11; 144:15; Isaiah 12:2; Luke 2:10; Philippians. 4:4; Revelation 21:3-4

<sup>122</sup> <sup>7</sup> Give unto the LORD,      O ye kindreds of the people,  
Give unto the LORD      [O ye kindreds of the people]      glory and strength.

<sup>8</sup> Give unto the LORD      [O ye kindreds of the people]      the glory      due unto his name:

<sup>123</sup> The first mention of worship in the Bible is in connection with Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac recorded in Genesis 22:5 "And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." The sub-sentence "I and the lad will ... come again to you" is taken by the writer to the Hebrews as evidence of Abraham's confidence in the resurrection because of God's promise to him of a progeny through Isaac. Hebrews 11:17-19 "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

<sup>124</sup> Philippians 2:17

<sup>125</sup> John 15:12b-13

cycle. Jesus tells His disciples “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”<sup>126</sup> The agricultural paradigm for this would not have been lost on these ancient hearers of this psalm. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”<sup>127</sup> The Apostle Paul links this agrarian reality to giving “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”<sup>128</sup> The measure of the giving is determined by the measure of the love. More love means greater sacrifice, but also greater joy! And it is this that God loves to see. So what we have here is really a cycle of love expressed in giving. We love God and He loves us back. We give to God and He gives back. And that is the nature of a healthy relationship with God. Furthermore it was a grand cycle begun by God Himself. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”<sup>129</sup>

So this tricola presents us with a paradox and a challenge. The challenge is that each of us has a choice. We can either participate in this grand cycle of loving and giving or we can refuse to participate and try to hang on to the stuff we have been given. The agrarian reality “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” accounts for the possibility of selfishness as well as selflessness. It is this reality that is generalized by the proverb “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.”<sup>130</sup>

The paradox is that by hanging on to what we have been given in an insecure selfishness we lose what we have, but by giving it away in love, we secure not only its possession but its increase. Not only does this operate on the level of possessions, but it pertains to life itself. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and *whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it*. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”<sup>131</sup> Jesus is going on His way to a sacrificial death by means of which He will both affirm that God, His Father, is worthy of such an offering and that we, who are bought out of the bondage of sin and the sentence of death, are worth that very sacrifice that delivers us. Jesus’ death affirms the infinite worth of our souls<sup>132</sup>. But Jesus does much more. He invites us to join Him in that pathway and participate in the grand cycle of loving sacrifice that leads to blessing and increase. Why blessing and increase? Because on the other end of our giving is God Himself who receives our sacrificial gifts of love which affirm His worth and who returns much more to us as His expression of love for us that ultimately affirms our worth as authentic human beings made in His image! To live in selfishness is to be cut off from God and experience the ultimate poverty of death. To live a life of loving

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<sup>126</sup> Luke 6:38

<sup>127</sup> Psalm 126:5-6

<sup>128</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

<sup>129</sup> John 3:16

<sup>130</sup> Proverbs 11:24 ¶

<sup>131</sup> Matthew 16:24-26

<sup>132</sup> 1 Peter 1:18-19a “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ...”

sacrifice to our fellow man (which is to live a life of sacrifice to God<sup>133</sup>) is to live an eternal life of love in fellowship with God, Himself.

### The Audience with the King of Kings

<sup>8b</sup> Bring an offering, and come into his courts.

<sup>9</sup> O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness:  
Fear before him, all the earth.



In the last lesson participation in the great cycle of giving and receiving was discussed. It is God, the One who made the heavens, Who receives our gifts of glory and strength. What we have in this passage is a description of where those gifts are offered (“his courts” i.e. the celestial grandeur of the heavens themselves), the process of their offering (“worship the LORD”), the way in which He receives them (“in the beauty of holiness”) and finally the affective response of the worshippers to the whole experience (“fear”). There are no exceptions here. If all the earth sings unto Him a new song, and if the “kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength;” then “all the earth” will fear before Him. That is all the earth will experience the fear of the LORD.

The picture is more coherent if we realize that the imagery here builds upon the way in which eastern ‘absolute’ potentates received tribute from vassal kingdoms that they had conquered or that they had threatened into submission by their overwhelming military power.

Bear tribute and come to His courts  
Bow to the LORD in sacred grandeur  
Quake before Him, all the earth.<sup>134</sup>

But *it is what is different from earthly exchanges with human monarchs* that challenges the reader.

First the tribute is immaterial: glory and strength, not silver and gold.

Second, the motivation behind the gift is different. With an earthly monarch, the fear of losing one’s individual or corporate life when standing before unbridled power lay behind the tributes. No tribute (or not enough tribute) and your life could be forfeit. Not so with God. The fear spoken of here is entirely compatible with a deep love and gratitude for the many benefits He has already given.<sup>135</sup> The worshipper gives all that he has out of love in exactly the way God has given.<sup>136</sup> It is the heart of the one approaching His court with which God is concerned, not his pocketbook!<sup>137</sup> The invite to come to His courts is a gracious one, not a veiled extortion like that of unbridled human power. The gift is not the central fact; it is only a symptom of the heart condition.

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<sup>133</sup> 1 John 4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

<sup>134</sup> Alter, Robert, *The Book of Psalms*, page 338

<sup>135</sup> Psalm 103:1-5 Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

<sup>136</sup> John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

<sup>137</sup> 1 Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

Third, there is the scope of His generosity. All may come to His courts, rich and poor, high and low, bond and free, not as with earthly monarchs who had patience only for the *crème de la crème* of society. All may experience the wonder of the Royal Presence when their heart felt gift is received by the hand of the Creator!

This last brings us to the center piece of this whole picture: the encounter with the LORD. We are encouraged to declare the worthiness of the LORD to receive the little gifts that we have brought. He has glory and strength beyond measure! He needs not the paltry gifts that all the people of the earth bring to Him. But the invitation reveals the openness of His great heart in allowing us to approach Him with the tribute of our hearts' love, though it is small. And the wonder of all wonders lies in the way He receives even the smallest gift of love! God appears in the full grandeur of His royal holiness, as if greeting an equal to Himself in glory and strength. He appears in the grandeur of the celestial courts of His own making<sup>138</sup> in the sacred panoply of His impeccable Holiness! We are not treated as beggars, as "the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" that we were by nature but as the royal children that He has made us to be: children loved and worthy of such honor!

And what happens at in this encounter? The intensity of the affective response causes all the earth to fall prostrate at His feet, not in fear but in awe that surpasses expression. The psychosomatic response to awe is not unlike that of great fear that the limbs quake. It is not unlike Moses before the burning mount! <sup>139</sup> But unlike any earthly monarch with unrestrained power who could inflict good or evil on their subjects at will, God supremely loves those whom He has invited into His court to encounter Him. It is only in loving Him and being in His presence that we are truly safe. Those who despise His invitation risk His anger for rejecting His love.

This psalm is an Old Testament "Gospel" psalm. And just as in the New Testament, God has prepared a feast (not pictured here) for them that love Him. But as Jesus explains in the New Testament there will be those who will reject His offer, to their eternal sorrow!

Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou make a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the

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<sup>138</sup> Verse 5b. the LORD made the heavens.

<sup>139</sup> Hebrews 12:21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake...

highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”<sup>140</sup>

The Message, the Messengers, and the Recipients

Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth:

The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved:

He shall judge the people righteously.



In this psalm, the psalmist ‘sees’ the future as though it were the present: a day when “all the earth” will sing a new song unto the LORD;<sup>141</sup> when his Glory shall be declared among “all people”;<sup>142</sup> when the kindreds of the people will give unto the LORD glory and honor;<sup>143</sup> when all the earth will worship the LORD in awe.<sup>144</sup> The psalmist knows this is not the case at present. But the Psalmist’s eye of faith recognizes that the LORD does, in fact, reign. The paradox between the appearance of the present situation and the profound reality of the ongoing, uninterrupted governance of God is not unlike that spoken of by the writer to the Hebrews who said:

“You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honor, and did set him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, *he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.* But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”<sup>145</sup>

Given this dichotomy between appearance and reality, it becomes the responsibility of those who have been singing the new song and worshipping the LORD to also bear the message that “the LORD reigneth.” They are to bear it to “the heathen” who have not yet responded to the gracious invitation to “bring an offering, to come into his courts” and to “worship the LORD”.

But it is entirely possible that those, to whom this message comes, will reject the invitation of God by rejecting the very existence of God. “... without faith it is impossible to please him: *for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*”<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, the message is true and the evidences for that truth are presented in the second and third lines of the tricola. “The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved” and “He shall judge the people righteously.”

The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved. The Hebrew text of this and the next line may be translated in either the present tense or the future. But translated in the present tense (“Yes, the world stands firm, will not shake (or totter)”<sup>147</sup>) conveys an ontological argument that argues against the denial of God’s existence, the rejection of His invitation, and the disbelief in His governance. The message is similar to that of Psalm 93:1 “The LORD reigneth, ... the world also is established, that it cannot be moved.” But here the evidence for the truth of the message is not only seen in cosmic security of Psalm 93, but also Israel’s security seen in the defeat of much

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<sup>140</sup> Luke 14:12-24

<sup>141</sup> Psalm 96:1 *O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth.*

<sup>142</sup> Psalm 96:3 *Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.*

<sup>143</sup> Psalm 96:7 *Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength.*

<sup>144</sup> Psalm 96:9 *O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.*

<sup>145</sup> Hebrews 2:7-9

<sup>146</sup> Hebrews 11:6

<sup>147</sup> Robert Alter’s and John Goldingay’s translations



larger enemies like the Egypt of the Exodus, or the fall of Assyria and the fall of Babylon. It is both corporate and personal experience that testifies to the truth of the message.

He shall judge the people righteously. This second argument further enlarges on the first. The world stands firm and will not shake because it is the LORD who reigns as a righteous judge deciding (appropriately) in favor of the people who have a covenant relationship with Him. Israel's world stands firm in the face of superior earthly might because it is the LORD (the Self-Existent, the Eternal) who passes sentence as the judge of all the earth.<sup>148</sup> The judgment described here is that of a king making a binding decision for his people as when adjudicating differences between his subjects. But such judicial decisions are only a subset of the far wider decision-making authority vested in the king. Righteous judgment implies that any royal decision is made in accordance with God's law. The king is an agent of God on the earth. As such he is not above the law but must render all his decisions in alignment with its principles, not with his own will. But the case is subtly different with God. God is not under the law in the sense of a human regent. The law is the revelation of the character of God. When God acts, He decides for His people in accordance with His character of which the law speaks. For those in a covenantal relationship with God, the tenor of that relationship is governed by the character of God, and their behavior. God's decisions for (or against) the covenant people (and sometimes against (or for) those who would oppose his people) are primarily an expression of His character and secondarily His people's behavior. When His people sin and break the covenant, it is God's choice whether to punish them or show mercy. But his decision is always in complete accord with Who He is. The LORD reigns over all people. If the people want to be on the beneficial side of His righteous judgment, "all the earth" would do well to acknowledge that "the gods of the nations are idols", to accept His gracious invitation to "come into his courts" to "worship the LORD", and to "fear before him."

Based on these observations, it is of particular importance to us that we recognize that this grand message is true not only in the abstract sense but that it must be true in the experience of the messenger (both corporate and individual) for them to be *bona fide* messengers. The people who are to go forth into all the earth are to be those who have experienced the truth of which they speak. And that brave throng includes us. The message of this psalm is timeless. The LORD reigns today as when this psalm was first written. His invitation is just as wide as today as when this psalm spoke of it. The reality of the stability of Israel is felt today in the personal stability of the lives of each messenger. It is a stability based on trust in God's word.

"Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."<sup>149</sup>

The stream represents the righteous judgment of the LORD which beats against these 'houses'. Those who heed the word of His testimony will find that their life is "established that it shall not be moved" because "he shall judge the people righteously." Those who reject God's invitation will suffer great ruin.

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<sup>148</sup> Genesis 18:25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

<sup>149</sup> Luke 6:47-49

### The Judge Cometh

<sup>11</sup> Let the heavens rejoice, and  
Let the earth be glad;  
Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof.

<sup>12</sup> Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein:  
Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice

<sup>13a</sup> Before the LORD: for he cometh



This set of tricola pick up the theme of verse 10c “he shall judge the people righteously.” The passages make use of two poetic devices: anthropomorphism and personification.

Anthropomorphism: In the light of God’s attribute of omnipresence, how can He be said to be “coming” anywhere. He is already everywhere and at all times. His omnipresence and omniscience are central to the concept of His righteous judgment in that He needs no witnesses because He, Himself, is witness to all the doings of men.<sup>150</sup> The reference to God’s coming is comforting, however, in that it paints a picture of a human judge on his circuit coming to a particular village to resolve legal disputes between individuals. It helps to comfort the covenant member who must deal with God’s apparent inactivity with respect to those who do evil but are not immediately punished<sup>151</sup>. Then too there is a contrast between verse 8b “come into his courts” and 13a where the King, as judge, comes to all the people.

Personification: The heavens, the earth, the sea and its fullness, the fields, and all the trees of the woods are given a very human ability to feel and express emotion (personification). Clearly it is the psalmist and those to whom he addresses this psalm who are to rejoice and be glad in emulation of the “response” of all creation! But it is not immediately obvious that individuals should rejoice at the advent of the “judge of all the earth<sup>152</sup>” One of the great hymns of the Middle Ages was the *Dies Irae* or Day of Wrath.

Day of wrath, that day of trouble  
When a fire shall wrap the whole,  
And the earth be burnt as coal  
  
O what horror smiting dumb  
When the Judge of all shall come  
Sinful deeds to search and sum.<sup>153</sup> ...

Nor was such a terrified view the product of later spirituality far removed from the Psalmist. The prophet Isaiah paints a far less jubilant picture than the Psalmist of the emotional response at the LORD who comes “to judge the earth.”

“Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man’s heart shall melt: And they shall

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<sup>150</sup> 2 Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.

<sup>151</sup> Psalm 37:7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

<sup>152</sup> Genesis 18:25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

<sup>153</sup> Dr. Cole’s translation from *The Seven Great Hymns of the Medieval Church*, Randolph & Co, 1868

be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames. Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.”<sup>154</sup>

Why then such optimistic rejoicing on the part of the psalmist? This psalm is about the “salvation of the LORD”<sup>155</sup>, but not an eternal or highly individualistic salvation, that we know today. Rather it is about the LORD coming to honor the terms of the Israel’s covenant of with Him. The Psalmist rejoices in the same way a local villager, who has been wronged by a more powerful and unscrupulous neighbor, rejoices at the advent of a local judge. He knows his case is just but that he lacks the power to set things right. And, until the righteous judge comes to set things right for him, he must patiently endure wrongful suffering. The advent of the judge brings rejoicing over his anticipated vindication, deliverance, and restitution! Who would not want to rejoice at such! Who would not want all creation to share his joy?

But is this joy really so petty? Is it just the vindication of one little nation (Judah) against its much larger and more powerful and abusive neighbors (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Rome ...)? The full account of King Asa’s unwise choice reveals the sorrow that could come to the covenant people for not “relying on the LORD” and waiting for the Him to judge the earth.<sup>156</sup>

In a wider sense, both the sorrow at wrongful suffering of worldwide injustice, greed, abuse and exploitation of the vulnerable and the patient waiting for the Judge who will end that unjust suffering is not only for the psalmist and Israel but of the entire community of believers today. Behind the joy of verses 11 and 12 there lays a great tale of sorrow. It is this sorrow that is the well spring of tears of effectual intercessory prayer. It is this agony which should lay behind the oft repeated, but seldom understood pleas “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” and “Deliver us from evil”<sup>157</sup>. These are the pleas that arise from the exploited and wronged in their patient waiting for the LORD to come and judge for His people. It is the joy that succeeds the cries of God’s people in the Apocalypse “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”<sup>158</sup>

### The Judge, the Judged, and the Cost

For he cometh to judge the earth:

He shall judge the world with righteousness,  
And the people with his truth.



This last tricola describes the judged by using three words: the earth, the world, and the people. In doing so it refers back to the opening of the psalm, reflecting the very ones encouraged to sing unto the LORD a new song: the earth (אֶרֶץ 'erets) occurs in 1b and 13b. The people (עַם `am) occurs in 3b and 13d. But the heathen (גּוֹי gowy) in 3a is subtly different than the world (תֵּבֵל

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<sup>154</sup> Isaiah 13:6-9

<sup>155</sup> Psalm 96:2 Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day.

<sup>156</sup> 2 Chronicles 16:7-9 And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.

<sup>157</sup> Matthew 6:10,13b

<sup>158</sup> Revelation 6:10

tebel) in 13c. The implication of the first mention (גִּוְיִי gowy in 3a) seems to be that it is Israel's witness to the heathen nations that is in play, whereas the second reference (תֵּבֵל tebel in 13c) seems to include all people (the Jew who witnessed and Gentile who believed the witness and has joined the song). So with this bracketing, there is a sense of completeness as well as a resolution of the tensions that the psalm raised as it proceeded. For example if all the earth is to sing a new song unto the LORD (96:1b), why is there a need to "declare his glory among the heathen" (96:3a)? If all the earth fears before him (96:9b), why must we say among the heathen, that the LORD reigneth (96:10a)? Clearly there is a process of witnessing of the Jews and conversion of the heathen going on and it is not until the last verse that we see all nations, heathen and Jewish, gathered in one as members of a common covenant (or New Testament) standing before the Great Judge about to render His righteous and true judgment in their favor.

Most versions translate line 13b "he is coming" in anticipation of a future judgment (NIV & RSV "he will judge", KJV "he shall judge", etc.). Goldingay's explanation and translation give a slightly different focus.

"The Psalm is coming to its point, so the action is slowed up. In form the verb *ba* could be a participle, suggesting "he is coming" (cf. LXX) and referring to a future event. But we have seen that the psalm more likely refers to the reality of the LORD's rule in the present, based on having already asserted kingly authority. The LORD has come (cf. Jerome). If we then translate the yiqtol verb in 13c as future (cf. LXX, Jerome), this must not imply a postponing of that rule, as if the LORD were not exercising authority in the present over the תֵּבֵל tebel, the human world, as well as the earth, the אֶרֶץ 'erets, with the characteristic qualities of faithfulness and truthfulness."

"Because **he has come** to exercise authority over the earth  
**He exercises** authority over the world in faithfulness,  
Over the peoples in his truthfulness."<sup>159</sup>

The reason this translation appeals to me, lays not just the details of the Hebrew, but that it accords more accurately with the reality that there never has been a time when the governance of the LORD over all creation has not existed. And because the LORD does exercise authority over all creation, the world of nature as well as the world of men, we may rejoice in confidence that He will honor the terms of His covenantal relationship with His people of all times and places. True this may be reading in a later perception of God's governance than what the psalmist actually had, but the details of the Hebrew suggest to me that he "got it", and Goldingay gives the psalmist due credit. If the psalmist did recognize that the LORD is exercising authority as witnessed by the stability of the earth (i.e. the earth *is* established that it shall not be moved - 96:10b), then the covenant people, suffering wrongfully at the hands of the heathen and unable to defend themselves, could suffer patiently, resting in the truth that the LORD has *already* come and that He *is exercising* authority over men.

One could question, if this is so, why then does the sufferer not yet see judgment in his favor right now? To borrow the pattern of reasoning of the writer to the Hebrews<sup>160</sup>: The psalmist is

<sup>159</sup> John Goldingay *Psalms* Vol. 3, Page 107

<sup>160</sup> Hebrews 2:6-9 But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

saying, that the LORD has come already and is exercising authority. And in that He is exercising authority already, there nothing that is not under his authority even now. But now we see not yet all things put right according to His faithfulness and truthfulness. But we see the present stability of the world as evidence of His governance.

The rejoicing then is not in regards to His advent, for He is already here, but in the revelation of His justice, that has been held in check by his patience with sinners. And this is what Paul styles a mystery.<sup>161</sup> The suffering of God's people may not be just for their violations of the covenantal relationship (the blindness of rejecting their Messiah), but may also be their unwitting part in cooperating with the patience of God that leads men to salvation.<sup>162</sup> But when that waiting is over and God's judgment is revealed, their sorrow will be turned to joy.<sup>163</sup>

Even though the psalmist may have seen by faith the present exercise of the LORD's authority as well as the mystery of His patience with sinful man in deferring humanity's well deserved judgment in order to offer a gracious invitation to the "kindreds of the people" to "come into his courts;" he could not have guessed the root that sustained the covenant nor the cost that the God, in His holiness, would pay to deal thus with a universally sinful humanity. The psalmist knew only sacrificial lambs, a type or shadow of Him who was to come. Indeed, he had even herded them. It would be nearly a millennium before the cry would ring out in the Judean wilderness: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."<sup>164</sup> A cry that pointed to the Lamb "without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Romans 11:25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of *this mystery*, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; *that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.*

<sup>162</sup> 2 Peter 3:8 -11 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, ..."

<sup>163</sup> John 16:22 And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

<sup>164</sup> John 1:29

<sup>165</sup> 1 Peter 1:19b-20



## Chapter 5 Psalm 97<sup>166</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice;  
Let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.
- <sup>2</sup> Clouds and darkness are round about him:  
Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.
- <sup>3</sup> A fire goeth before him,  
And burneth up his enemies round about
- <sup>4</sup> His lightnings enlightened the world:  
The earth saw, and trembled.
- <sup>5</sup> The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD,  
At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth
- <sup>6</sup> The heavens declare his righteousness,  
And all the people see his glory.
- <sup>7</sup> Confounded be all they that serve graven images,  
That boast themselves of idols:  
Worship him, all ye gods
- <sup>8</sup> Zion heard, and was glad;  
And the daughters of Judah rejoiced  
Because of thy judgments, O LORD
- <sup>9</sup> For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth:  
Thou art exalted far above all gods
- <sup>10</sup> Ye that love the LORD, hate evil:  
He preserveth the souls of his saints;  
He delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked
- <sup>11</sup> Light is sown for the righteous,  
And gladness for the upright in heart
- <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in the LORD ye righteous;  
And give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness



### Overview

In verse 1 the grand theme is presented: the LORD reigns, let the farthest reaches of the earth rejoice. The stage is set for a royal enthronement procession in which all the people will see His glory. In verses 2 to 6, the effect of God's enthronement entourage is described together with its effect on the world at large. Although all the people see his glory, it is a glory shrouded in "clouds and darkness" punctuated by a fire which goes before him to burn up his enemies and

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<sup>166</sup> For the most part the NIV, Alter, and Goldingay agree on the division of this psalm. They are of differing opinions on verses 1, 9, 11, and 12; but the differences are superficial. Goldingay treats verses 1 and 9 as tricola while Alter and the NIV treat them as bicola. Goldingay treats verses 11 and 12 as a quatrain, while Alter and the NIV seem to treat them as unrelated bicola. I have gone with the NIV and Alter on verses 1 and 9 and Goldingay on verses 11 and 12.

lightening which enlightens the world. Before such power the earth which was rejoicing now trembles with awe and hills melt like wax. But such power is not like that of earthly monarchs who “serve graven images”. Their power only had the effect of enslaving and de-humanizing people. In devaluating God, they de-humanized the weak and the vulnerable, those who were only good for slavery or fodder to support the potentate’s worldly ambitions. The throne of the LORD rests upon “righteousness and judgment”. The power of the LORD has a dual effect. In verse 7 it confounds all who boastfully serve graven images, but in verses 8 and 9 it causes Zion and her surrounding daughter villages of Judah, to rejoice because the grand procession reveals the LORD high above all the earth and exalted far above all gods. The idols (non-entities) who were thought to control this or that part of creation are seen now in the light of the glory of the LORD, as worshipping the LORD, that is surrendering all their power to Him (a power which they never had because they didn’t exist anyway despite the proud boasts of their earthly potentate servants). How then is allegiance to the LORD to be expressed? Verse 10 presents the challenge to the righteous to love the LORD and hate evil. If you want the LORD to preserve your life and save you from the hand of the wicked you must make a choice. You will either bow to men or bow to God. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”<sup>167</sup> Verses 11 and 12 describe the benefits that accrue to those who acknowledge “The LORD reigneth.” The fire that burned up his enemies and the lightning that caused the hills to melt now sows light as a crop to give life to the righteous causing joy in the hearts of the upright that rejoice in the LORD and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness.

“The climactic element is a contrast of the wicked and the righteous. In the normal course of public life, the unresponsive wicked control things. But the kingship of Yahweh causes an inversion. The wicked are exposed for what they are. They are denied their preeminence. Conversely, the righteous, the ones who keep covenant and do Yahweh’s will, are given life and power ... God is welcomed by the marginalized poor who may now expect a better life.”<sup>168</sup>

### The Glorious Truth

<sup>1</sup> The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice;  
Let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.



This psalm opens with the glorious truth that echoes Psalm 93 and anticipates Psalm 99. But it seems to summarize Psalm 96 that begins with singing and ends with world-wide rejoicing. The exultant opening shout “The LORD reigneth” is the same gospel message that is at the core of the previous psalm (96:10b). There Israel was to “Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth”. The response of 97:1b (“let the earth rejoice” - אֶרֶץ גִּיל erets giyl) above is the same as 96:11b (“let the earth be glad” אֶרֶץ גִּיל erets giyl) and the verb of 97:1c (שָׂמַח samach- to be gleesome) is exactly the same verb as 96:11a. The only difference between the two is in the introduction of a new term “the isles” (אִי 'iyyim) in 1b. It refers not so much to islands off the coast of Israel as to foreign lands much as we might use the term ‘foreign shores’ to stand for all the rest of the earth not part of our nation. The point is that the rejoicing at the LORD’s reign has to do with the entire world, because His governance extends there.

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<sup>167</sup> Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13

<sup>168</sup> Brueggemann, Walter *The Message of the Psalms*, page 147



Yet, this psalm, while referring back to psalm 96, is going in a different direction. In this psalm, God is approaching as He begins to reign. But how does He approach? He approaches in cloud and darkness with lightening flashes and fire that introduces the new theme of awed response at His coming (“the earth saw, and trembled”). But behind the imagery of God’s approach is the sense that one never knows what God will do when He appears<sup>169</sup>. Not only is His glory shrouded in thick and awesome darkness but His plans and purposes are as well. The image evokes the *Mysterium Tremendum* of God. So for the Israelite, the beginning of the LORD reigning equates to His intervention on Israel’s behalf – a cause for rejoicing indeed. As we observed in psalm 93, this does not mean that God has heretofore not been governing the totality of His creation. What it does mean is that now Israel will see (or expects to see) that governance demonstrated in a way that is meaningful to them as a small nation among great powers. They expect to see that He will preserve the people and will deliver them out of the hand of the wicked, in response to their hating evil (97:10). But we should not see this introduction as whistling in the dark as if the psalmist hopes that God will somehow appear as he has described. The psalmist recognizes (and we should as well) that there is a difference between appearance and reality. The appearance of the present situation and the profound reality of the ongoing, uninterrupted governance of God has been observed by the writer to the Hebrews.<sup>170</sup> But unlike Psalm 96 which advises them to sing, this psalm advises the people to “hate evil.” So that when a fire goeth before him to burn up his enemies and His lightnings enlighten the world (3-4a); they will sow light for the righteous (11a). The Christian shares this joyous hope and for them, the psalm is prophetic of the second advent of Jesus to “put down all authority and power.”

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power, for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him that God may be all in all.”<sup>171</sup>

### The Veil and the Fear of God

- <sup>2</sup> Clouds and darkness are round about him:  
Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.
- <sup>3</sup> A fire goeth before him, and  
Burneth up his enemies round about
- <sup>4</sup> His lightnings enlightened the world:  
The earth saw, and trembled.

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<sup>169</sup> Malachi 3:2 But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap...

<sup>170</sup> Hebrews 2:7-9 “You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honor, and did set him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, *he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.* But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”

<sup>171</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:22-28

<sup>5</sup> The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD,  
At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

<sup>6</sup> The heavens declare his righteousness,  
And all the people see his glory



The psalmist was among those who saw in nature, the evidence of God's veiled power. He describes what to us seems to be a storm or a volcano,<sup>172</sup> but to him is a potent veil, shielding man from the terrible glory of God, a glory that no man may gaze upon and live.<sup>173</sup> Here is one before Whom the whole earth will tremble. Clouds, darkness, fire, lightening are the combined manifestation of that awesome power. But this is not arbitrary power like the unrestrained power that earthly kings of antiquity wielded. In the middle of these powerful images, there stands a single line that describes not the phenomena of God's approach, but the moral character that underlies His sovereignty: righteousness and judgment (faithfulness and authority <sup>174</sup>), a righteousness that the heavens declare as people behold His glory. These are the foundations of His throne, the attributes of His governance. One does not celebrate (verse 1b "let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.") because one is intimidated by the sheer display of God's power. They rejoice because God's power is governed by His faithfulness to those who keep His covenant i.e. those "that love the LORD and hate evil" (10a) and His authority that will be exercised in their deliverance "out of the hand of the wicked." (10b).

"Along with *massive power*, the actual *substance of governance* is characterized by "righteousness and justice" (v.2), "righteousness" and "glory" (v.6). This is not only sheer force. It is the introduction of human value into the life of the world. The new orientation will be one in which the weak have rights not trampled on by the strong. The power of the new king is not noteworthy unless social transformation is the purpose of the power."<sup>175</sup>

How then are we to see these tempestuous manifestations of the LORD's advent? Returning to Moses and his encounter with God we read.

"And it came to pass, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount that Moses knew not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had

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<sup>172</sup> A volcano would explain more of the phenomena cited than a storm : Clouds and Darkness – the volcanic plume, Fire that burns up all in its path – molten lava, Lightening – atmospheric activity that is often linked to volcanic activity as at Pompeii ("In another direction loomed a horrible black cloud ripped by sudden bursts of fire, writhing snakelike and revealing sudden flashes larger than lightening" - Pliny the Younger), Trembling of the earth – seismic activity caused by the eruption, Hills melting like wax – again the effect of molten lava.

<sup>173</sup> Exodus 33:18-20 And he (Moses) said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

<sup>174</sup> Goldingay's translation

<sup>175</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, page 146.

spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.”<sup>176</sup>

Indeed the cloud and darkness of this Psalm reappear in Psalm 99 as the “the cloudy pillar” from which God, Himself, speaks to Israel. (99:7a).

“The cloud and darkness are a veil that intervenes between the people and God. Paradoxically, the description of YHWH as surrounded by cloud and darkness indicates that it really is the case that YHWH appeared, because it signifies that this real presence had the protective shield around it that was necessary if it was not to devastate the people it was designed to help and encourage.”<sup>177</sup>

The eschatology of such a picture is incarnational. It anticipates the coming of Israel’s Messiah whose glory is “veiled” in flesh (i.e. His humanity).<sup>178</sup> Just as the cloud shielded the chosen Israelites from destruction at the brightness of His coming<sup>179</sup>, so also Jesus “came not to judge the world but to save the world”<sup>180</sup> As YHWH from whose mouth “a fire goeth before him” which “burneth up his enemies round about” (97:3), so Jesus comes to save the world by exercising judgment on the prince of this world.<sup>181</sup> But unlike this psalm, (in which the cloud and darkness protectively veil the LORD from His people rejoicing at His coming) Jesus’ humanity poses a real stumbling block to the people of His day. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”<sup>182</sup> This unfortunate effect of the veil is noted by the Apostle Paul who likens Jesus’ divinity veiled in humanity and His moral perfection veiled in the law to the veil on Moses face.

“And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished. But their minds (*the Jews of Jesus’ day*) were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”<sup>183</sup>

“The view of Exodus 34:30-35, according to the Septuagint is adopted by Paul, that Moses in going in to speak to God removed the veil till he came out and had spoken to the people; and then when he had done speaking, he put on the veil that they might not look on the end, or the fading, of that transitory glory. The veil was the symbol of concealment, put on directly after Moses’ speaking; so that God’s revelations by him were interrupted by intervals of concealment [ALFORD].... Paul here (2 Corinthians 3:13) passes from the literal fact to the truth symbolized by it, the blindness of Jews and Judaizers to the ultimate end of the law: stating that Moses put on

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<sup>176</sup> Exodus 34:29-33

<sup>177</sup> Goldingay Vol. III page 112

<sup>178</sup> Hebrews 10:19-20 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.” Here the human nature of Jesus (His flesh and blood humanity) is likened to the veil that separated the holy place from the holiest of all where the Shekinah (the visible manifestation of God’s glory) was seen. It was John who states that “... the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John 1:14

<sup>179</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

<sup>180</sup> John 12:47 And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

<sup>181</sup> John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

<sup>182</sup> John 1:11

<sup>183</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:13-17

the veil that they might not look steadfastly at (Christ, Romans 10:4) the end of that (law) which (like Moses' glory) is done away. Not that Moses had this purpose; but often God attributes to His prophets the purpose which He has Himself. Because the Jews would not see, God judicially gave them up so as not to see. The antitype of the glory of Moses' face is Christ's glory shining behind the veil of legal ordinances. The veil which has been taken off to the believer is left on to the unbelieving Jew, so that he should not see (Isaiah 6:10; Acts 28:26, 27). He stops short at the letter of the law, not seeing the end of it. The evangelical glory of the law, like the shining of Moses' face, cannot be borne by a carnal people, and therefore remains veiled to them until the Spirit comes to take away the veil (2 Corinthians 3:14-17) [CAMERON].

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown

### A Lethal Threat!

<sup>7</sup> Confounded be all they that serve graven images,  
That boast themselves of idols:  
Worship him, all ye gods



As we noted above in the notes on 96:4 and 5a "To whom will you look" the making of Idols was forbidden to Israel lest they try to represent the LORD, who in His transcendence is inexpressible, in any way. To make an image would not only be to believe a lie about God, but to reject man made in God's image; to dehumanize him. The Apostle Paul reminds us that the genesis of all this lay in mankind's failure to give glory to God and to be thankful. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things."<sup>184</sup> But the reason for making idols involves control: control of gods and men! They are the lies that the strong use to dehumanize the weak and use them for their selfish purposes. The strong create these non-entities in terms which can be controlled. The idols are not the One who is omnipotent! They are many with specific areas of governance (weather, fertility, war, good fortune, money, etc.) and can easily be manipulated for the ruler's purposes. The people need the idolatrous king to propitiate the gods for good rains, fertile harvests, victory in battles, and just good luck in living. In return the king extracts taxes and uses people to extend his territory and power. If they win a war with another idolatrous kingdom, then their gods are stronger than the gods of the conquered people. And the gods of the conquered will probably wind up in the temple of the conquering god as a kind of a war trophy that 'worships' the god who defeated them. One can easily see how Israel and the LORD were reproached by more powerful nations that surrounded them.

"To understand the yearning of the people in this psalm, we must understand that the *tradeoff of gods* is matched by a *reduction of people*. The matter of idols is not a matter of statues and figurines. It is a matter of changing symbols and values. As the True God is diminished, so the value of human persons is diminished in commensurate fashion. The smashing of idols is not a narrow religious agenda, but has to do with creating free space for the practice of humanness."<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Romans 1:21 – 23

<sup>185</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Ibid*, page 147.

It is these perpetrators and perpetuators of lies about the LORD who will be confounded by the LORD whose reign has begun! They are the enemies who will be destroyed “with the brightness of his coming;”<sup>186</sup> We have already noted<sup>187</sup> how the mysterious command; “Worship him, all ye gods” is not a command for sticks and stones to bow down before the LORD. Rather it hints at the reversal of what idolatrous societies sought to do to Israel. As those societies diminished the LORD by making ‘trade-off gods’ so they sought to dehumanize Israel by dismissing their covenant God as an impotent tribal deity. The command creates a picture that would have resonated with (and warned) the idolaters of that day who placed the ‘lesser gods’ of conquered people before their chief deity as in the case of the captured Ark of the Covenant which was placed before Dagon. Just as they found Dagon on his face before God,<sup>188</sup> so these idols will be cast down before the LORD God. What they sought to do to the LORD will happen to their gods. Their dehumanizing, enslavement, and abuse of little Israel, will be visited on their heads and their faces filled with the shame of their confusion!

But what shall we say of our situation today? The representation of gods is endemic throughout the whole world, now as then. Then the representations were material, whereas today they seem to be largely conceptual. In either case they represent a rejection of God as He is and man made in the image of God. They are the ploy of the ‘strong’ to exploit the ‘weak’. The principle is the same. The immaterial idols of this age are no less dehumanizing and manipulative. The postulation of Hitler’s Arian superman was balanced by the demonizing of the Jew in anticipation of genocide! The idol of a proletarian<sup>189</sup> paves the way for the reduction of our complex humanity to a simple parameter: “wage earner”, a term which completely strips away myriad layers of authentic human character not involved with money. Our Lord’s famous rebuttle to Satan, “man shall not live by bread alone” reveals the lie. Man is much more than a ‘wage earner’ or a ‘bread winner’, and his life is far more complex than the simplistic Marxist economic view. The term “proletarian” reduces man to the role of a cog in an economic machine that someone else is going to control, if not the Capitalist, then the Central Communist Committee! The postulation of the idol named “proletariat” has resulted in the dehumanization of millions in China and other communist countries that allowed a few ‘strong’ communist party leaders to control all others in the name of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. Idolatry is ultimately the lie that engenders dehumanization and slavery. It highlights the importance of the Truth for any free society. “...Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”<sup>190</sup> The cry “the LORD reigns” presages “a fire (that) goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about.” It is a lethal threat to all forms of oppressive governance founded on idols! The prayer, “Thy Kingdom come” is, at its root, subversive of all who would reign over others.

“Yhwh reigns. Therefore Pharaoh or Sennacherib or Nebuchadnezzar or Cyrus or Caesar or Constantine or the Pope or George III or Hitler or the current British Prime Minister or the

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<sup>186</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming...”

<sup>187</sup> Foot note 31 above

<sup>188</sup> 1 Samuel 5:2-3 “When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.”

<sup>189</sup> From the Latin *proletarius*, a citizen of the lowest class. it is a term used to identify a lower social class, usually the working class; a member of such a class is **proletarian**.

<sup>190</sup> John 8:32

current American President do not reign. Yhwh reigns. Therefore Saul or David or Solomon or Rehoboam or Jeroboam or Hezekiah or Manasseh or Josiah do not reign.

“The fact that Yhwh reigns is a worrying fact for people who think they reign. It means among other things that ‘prayer is a subversive activity’ because ‘it involves a more or less open act of defiance against any claim of ultimacy by the current regime.’<sup>a</sup> But for the people whom others pretend to reign over, the fact that Yhwh reigns is good news. It is noteworthy that the themes of joy/gladness and faithfulness are ‘unifying features’ of Ps. 97<sup>b</sup>”<sup>191</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Peterson *Where Your Treasure Is*, P65.

<sup>b</sup> McCann “Psalms” 1068

### The Source of Joy

<sup>8</sup> Zion heard, and was glad;  
And the daughters of Judah rejoiced  
Because of thy judgments, O LORD

<sup>9</sup> For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth:  
Thou art exalted far above all gods



This passage raises a subtle question. It does not ask what it was that Zion heard or why the outlying villages rejoiced. The verse clearly says they heard and rejoiced at the judgments of the LORD, judgments rendered “high above all the earth.” Judgments that revealed that the LORD was “exalted far above all gods.” But there is something more here than meets the eye at first glance. It is not immediately obvious that such judgments should be met with joy. After all the idolaters of verse 7 were confounded, ashamed at them. The response of Zion and the villages is revelatory of their character. And the capacity to rejoice at the judgments of God is not unique to them. This is something that is universally present but rarely seen fully developed. This is more than the rejoicing of an oppressed people for whom the table has been turned by God’s judgments. It reflects a foundational aspect of our humanity as God first created us. The judgments of the LORD must be according to truth, and love “rejoiceth in the truth.”<sup>192</sup> Integral to love which rejoices in the truth is the desire for justice. There is no justice without truth. It is a reality that is reflected in our oaths for witnesses: “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

But herein lays a real trial. The patience of God is not at all matched by finite humans. “Before thy patience all our patience is impatience” - Tertullian. The temptation, when the sense of injustice is burning within us, is to take justice in our own hands, to act out of anger at wrongdoing, to act upon our hatred of evil. Who has not, in their thought life, laid hold at some time on that of God’s which is forbidden to us – vengeance.<sup>193</sup>

So the rejoicing here bespeaks not only love of God and a corresponding hatred of evil (v.10), but patience in suffering wrong. While it rejoices in the truth, love also “suffereth long.”<sup>194</sup> Behind the psalm of praise there is a psalm of lament. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in

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<sup>191</sup> Goldingay *Psalms*, Vol. 3 page 117

<sup>192</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:6b

<sup>193</sup> Romans 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, *Vengeance is mine*; I will repay, saith the Lord.

<sup>194</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4a

the morning.”<sup>195</sup> The two movements answer each other. They are two halves of a whole. The Apostle John “saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” ... And it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”<sup>196</sup> The source of the joy in this passage is born of a love that has been tried in the furnace of affliction. Their part was to express their love of the LORD by waiting for His advent, but God also had a responsibility to them as well.

### Love that Waits on God

<sup>10</sup> Ye that love the LORD, hate evil:  
He preserveth the souls of his saints;  
He delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked

<sup>11</sup> Light is sown for the righteous,  
And gladness for the upright in heart



It is a difficult thing to be angry and sin not.<sup>197</sup> It is a difficult thing to hate evil and still wait while God patiently woos the evil doer to repentance.<sup>198</sup> Were it not for the grace of God, such waiting would be impossible. Every moment presents us with a choice, whether we know it or not. Every moment the grace of God is available to help us avoid the pitfalls to which our carnal nature exposes us. The choices are here as well. The requirement for people who would be found among those rejoicing with awe and not among those in shame faced confusion rests on whether we have lived according to the truth because we love the LORD and hate evil or believed a lie and served an ‘idol’. It is important for those who “love the LORD” and consequently “hate evil” to realize that the grace of God is immediately available to sustain us, even though God may seem far away. We have considered the soul destroying temptation to lay hold of God’s vengeance, of acting out of carnal anger. But how can such a trap be avoided? The answer is before us: “He preserveth the souls of his saints” (10b). The Psalmist knew this only too well.

“Truly God is good to Israel,  
Even to such as are of a clean heart.  
But as for me, my feet were almost gone;  
My steps had well nigh slipped.  
For I was envious at the foolish,  
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked  
...  
Behold, these are the ungodly,  
Who prosper in the world;  
They increase in riches.

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<sup>195</sup> Psalm 30:5b

<sup>196</sup> Revelation 6:9b-11

<sup>197</sup> Ephesians 4:26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath

<sup>198</sup> Romans 2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain,  
And washed my hands in innocency.

For all the day long have I been plagued,  
And chastened every morning.

If I say, I will speak thus; behold,  
I should offend against the generation of thy children.

When I thought to know this,  
It was too painful for me. "<sup>199</sup>

His steps were almost gone. Like a man walking a narrow path descending into a deep wadi that slips on a small stone, he almost fell the great distance to his death; almost but not quite. He was pained *until* he "went into the sanctuary of God then understood I their end."<sup>200</sup> He may be embarrassed at his ignorant foolishness but God has held his right hand lest he slip and fall into the pit of bitterness and depression. God "preserves the souls of his saints." Believers need to recognize that their heightened sense of right and wrong, their acute sense of justice, their hatred of evil can cause them to take their eyes off the LORD and focus on evil men. But God waits in the sanctuary of their heart. The key to the preservation of their souls from falling into the abyss of bitterness and anger lies precisely in withdrawing inwardly to be in the presence of the God who is! This is not to say that believers should never make use of those proper and blessed legal means available for the redress of valid grievances. It does mean, however, that they should never allow their inward peace to be disturbed in the process. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."<sup>201</sup> One day when faith gives way to sight, and we hear the joyous shout "the LORD reigns," we will be delivered "out of the hand of the wicked." But for now let us learn to be content with the preservation of our souls by His grace and wait patiently on the LORD to accomplish His purposes.

But what happens in the secret place of the heart, that prayer closet shut off from the eyes of men? By what means does God preserve the soul and give the shout of joy in morning for the tears that endured in the night? The psalmist has already told us, 'then I understood.' The soul of the saint is preserved by the light that is sown for the righteous, and the gladness that accrues for the upright in heart. The lightening that enlightened the world and caused the earth to see and tremble touches the heart of the sorrowing saint and gives joyous illumination to them. Nor is this just a brief moment of illumination. This is light which is sown for the righteous. It is growing luminous understanding that forever changes how we see things. It is not that the wicked prosper, but that they abide in a slippery place. It is a sowing that brings a new crop of life. The light has come and taken up residence in our heart. The Shekinah of God's glory now glows in the holiest of our inward being and all is changed. We learn afresh what it means to be "the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you,"<sup>202</sup> what it means to have "this treasure in earthen

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<sup>199</sup> Psalm 73:1-3, 12-16

<sup>200</sup> Psalm 73:17

<sup>201</sup> John 14:27

<sup>202</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?



vessels.”<sup>203</sup> Where we saw no way forward, a new way opens before us, a way of joyous obedience that we knew not. We are a “new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”<sup>204</sup> Oh the wonder and the power of God’s grace! Who can describe its effect on life? It brings freedom and joy in bondage and suffering. It brings light in darkness. It brings hope in despair. It brings peace where only fear and anger once held sway. It is life from the dead. It is resurrection power!

### Closure

<sup>1</sup> The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice;  
Let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.

...

<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous;  
And give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness



This Psalm begins with rejoicing and ends with it. The rejoicing is not meant for just Israel but for the whole world of humanity. It is interesting to consider what people rejoice in. Sometimes it is newness of circumstance: a new job, a new home, a new baby, a new life. Sometimes it is rediscovery: I have found a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son.<sup>205</sup> Rejoicing may result from a change in life: the start of a vacation, marriage, retirement. But in all these, there is more. They give evidence of the manifestation of the governance of the LORD: “The LORD reigneth”. It is God who orders our lives. And it is His governance which should be the source of rejoicing. There is nothing of our lives that is out of God’s control. All things really do work together for good for those who love God.<sup>206</sup> Whether what happens is ‘good’ or ‘evil,’ the response is to be the same: rejoice. Jesus tells us as much. “When men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake, rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”<sup>207</sup> “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,” says James.<sup>208</sup>

Why rejoice? To rejoice in the LORD, is to live in a joy that is deeply rooted in the nature of man as God created him. It is a joy that bears witness that even in our sorrow our humanity has not been so distorted and destroyed that we can no longer feel pain. It is a joy that bears witness that even in the confusion of our sorrow; we do not doubt the wise bestowment of our loving Father in heaven. Man desires freedom to become what God meant him to be and truth is necessary for that fulfillment. The prevalence of idols which reject our full humanity; the presence of false worship that brings bondage and manipulation; the presence of lies that sear the conscience is hateful at some level for all people, if only a subconscious one. But the people in this psalm are not rejoicing over an external or cerebral recognition of an attribute of God (holiness, righteousness, justice). They rejoice because of what God has done and is doing for them. What God does for the humanity He has created grows out of who He is. His Holiness (His Name – what He is known for - v.12b), His righteousness (His faithfulness to His governmental principles

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<sup>203</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

<sup>204</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

<sup>205</sup> Luke 15 three parables of rejoicing over lost things found.

<sup>206</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>207</sup> Matthew 5:11-12

<sup>208</sup> James 1:2 (NIV)

- v. 2b) and His judgment (His just equity in applying them to all - v. 12b) are all reflected in what He does for us! We are to rejoice in the LORD because of our experience of Him! But this raises a problem. Much of what God does for us is not understood by us. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."<sup>209</sup> In the present moment, God's wise governance may involve pain and suffering for reasons unknown. It may be given to us to experience our Lord's suffering cry "My God, my God why...?" But there remains the promise "thou shalt know hereafter" and the inevitable response "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation ... All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD'S..."<sup>210</sup> The Psalm ends not so much with a command as with a promise: we will "rejoice in the LORD ... and give thanks at the remembrance of his Holiness."

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<sup>209</sup> John 13:7

<sup>210</sup> Psalm 22:1a, Psalm 22:25a, 27-28a

## Chapter 6 Psalm 99<sup>211</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD reigneth;  
Let the people tremble:  
He sitteth between the cherubim;  
Let the earth be moved.
- <sup>2</sup> The LORD is great in Zion;  
And he is high above all the people.
- <sup>3</sup> Let them praise thy great and terrible name;  
For it is holy.
- <sup>4</sup> The king's strength also loveth judgment;  
Thou dost establish equity,  
Thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob.
- <sup>5</sup> Exalt ye the LORD our God,  
and worship at his footstool;  
for he is holy.
- <sup>6</sup> Moses and Aaron among his priests,  
And Samuel among them that call upon his name;  
They called upon the LORD,  
And he answered them.
- <sup>7</sup> He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar:  
They kept his testimonies, and  
the ordinance that he gave them.
- <sup>8</sup> Thou answeredst them,  
O LORD our God:  
Thou wast a God that forgavest them,  
Though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.
- <sup>9</sup> Exalt the LORD our God,  
and worship at his holy hill;  
for the LORD our God is holy.



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<sup>211</sup> Goldingay and Alter see a bicola in verse 1, while the NIV treats it as a quatrain. I have gone with the NIV. It is not immediately clear how verses 3 and 4 relate. Some see 3b as a conclusion like 5c and 9c, each emphasizing a different aspect of the Holiness of God: His name, His place, His person. While the three themes are definitely there, both Alter and Goldingay see 4a as a continuation of what all the people should be praising (the word 'also' in the KJV being a connective). Thus Goldingay translates: They are to confess your name, great and to be revered (it is holy) and the might of a king dedicated to exercising authority. Alter translates: They acclaim Your name: "Great and fearful, He is holy. And with a king's strength He loves justice." I have gone with Goldingay's and Alter's view on these verses because they reflect the people's dual recognition of the authority and might of the LORD more clearly than the KJV.

## Overview

This Psalm follows the usual praise psalm structure. It urges praise and gives the reasons for that urging. It repeats this pattern three times. (1-3, 4-5, 6-9). Verses 3, 5, and 9 form a refrain that separate the three parts of the psalm. The three parts of the psalm focus, respectively on: the Holy Name (3a), the Holy place (5b), and the Holy God (9c).

<u>Exhortation 1</u>	Let the people tremble (1b), Let the earth be moved (1d), Let them praise thy great and terrible name (3a), also the king's strength (which) loveth judgment (4a)
<u>Reason 1</u>	For it (His name) is holy. (3b)
<u>Exhortation 2</u>	Exalt ye the LORD our God (5a), Worship at his footstool (5b)
<u>Reason 2</u>	For he is holy. (5c)
<u>Exhortation 3</u>	Exalt the LORD our God (9a) Worship at his holy hill (9b)
<u>Reason 3</u>	For the LORD our God is holy (9c)

In addition to this pattern, there is another pattern of alternating indirect and direct address that overlays but does not coincide with the three fold pattern of praise.

<u>Indirect address</u>	<u>Direct address</u>
1-2	3-4
5-7	8
9	

These two interwoven patterns provide a unity of the entire piece.<sup>212</sup>

The imagery in the psalm is consistently from Israel's present and past. It preserves two traditions in the Psalms, the Zion tradition and the Sinai tradition.<sup>213</sup> "He sitteth between the cherubim" (1b) refers to the mercy seat.<sup>214</sup> "The LORD is great in Zion" (2a), Zion is the place where the LORD has chosen to place His "great and terrible name."<sup>215</sup> The people are to "worship at his holy hill." (9b) The Zion tradition addresses the stability of Israel, the establishment of the kingdom, the permanence of the Theocracy.

"Moses and Aaron among his priests" (6a); "He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar" (7a); and "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, Though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions" (8b) all recall the Sinai experience. The Sinai tradition addresses the creation of Israel, the disestablishment of oppressive governments (Pharaonic Egypt), the shaking up of all things that

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<sup>212</sup> Goldingay *Psalms*, Vol. 3 page 126

<sup>213</sup> We have an echo of these two traditions in the passage in Hebrews 12:18-29. "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched" (i.e. Mount Sinai - the place where the Law that condemns is given) but "But ye are come unto mount Sion" (i.e. the place of the mercy seat - "to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling"), the place of worship - "church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven", and the place of the governance by God of just men made perfect (by grace through faith) - "to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect").

<sup>214</sup> Exodus 25:18-22

<sup>215</sup> 1 Kings 9:3 And the LORD said unto him (Solomon), I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

that are (Canaan). The Sinai tradition is linked to the Zion tradition. There must be a shaking up, a condemnation, justice, a removing of things as they are (Sinai) before there can be a revealing of what is unshakable, forgiven by mercy, an establishment of what will be forever (Zion).<sup>216</sup>

In this psalm there is no theme of rejoicing as in 96 and 97. If the exhortation of 96 was sing, sing, sing; here the cry is that of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."<sup>217</sup> In place of jubilation, there is awe. The "clouds and darkness which are round about him" in psalm 97, are remembered here as "the cloudy pillar" in which the LORD speaks to Moses, Aaron, Samuel, and the people. While Psalm 96 urges all people to "Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him," this psalm acquaints us with what it means to 'fear the LORD'.

### The Climax of Time and Eternity

<sup>1</sup>The LORD reigneth;  
Let the people tremble:  
He sitteth between the cherubims;  
Let the earth be moved.



It is a real temptation to place the opening lines of psalm 97 and 99 together as a bicola.

The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice,  
The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble.

In doing so one would think that they necessarily contradict each other. But such is not the case. Taken together they describe awe filled rejoicing, or joyous awe. The two emotions, far from being incompatible describe the essence of the human emotional reaction to the presence of God. The reaction was admirably described by Rudolf Otto's most famous work is *The Idea of the Holy*. The book defines the concept of the Holy as that which is *numinous*. Otto explained the numinous as a "non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling whose primary and immediate object is outside the self". He coined this new term based on the Latin *numen* (deity). The numinous is a mystery (Latin: *mysterium*) that is both awe-filling or terrifying (*tremendum*) and joyous or fascinating (*fascinans*) at the same time.<sup>218</sup> But the trembling is not that of a total fear of judgement and condemnation for the One who causes the people to tremble "sitteth between the cherubims." That is, His glory is revealed in the Holy of Holies above the mercy seat.<sup>219</sup> The cherubim mentioned recalls the fact that the salvation of our souls into which the prophets have enquired and searched diligently is a subject that the angels desire to look into.<sup>220</sup> The whole

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<sup>216</sup> Hebrews 12:26-27 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

<sup>217</sup> Isaiah 6:3

<sup>218</sup> Otto, Rudolf *The Idea of the Holy*, see also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf\\_Otto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Otto) First published first in 1917 as *Das Heilige - Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (*The Holy - On the Irrational in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*). It is one of the most successful German theological books of the 20th century, has never gone out of print, and is now available in about 20 languages. Otto was one of the very few modern theologians to whom C. S. Lewis indicates a debt, particularly the idea of the numinous in *The Problem of Pain*.

<sup>219</sup> Exodus 25:18-22

<sup>220</sup> 1 Peter 1:9 -12 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that

section points to a blood bought salvation. Not of sacrificial animals, but of the blood of the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”<sup>221</sup> The LORD is seated between the cherubims. The cherubim cast their downward glance at the mercy seat to behold the blood of Jesus shed for the remission of our sins! And all the earth is moved by both fear and joy. Such a sublime salvation is both a joyous and awesome mystery! But how do we know this?

‘I *know* that my Redeemer liveth’: ‘I *believe* in Jesus Christ, risen from the dead’ such is the Christian’s confession. ‘I know’ and ‘I believe’ of ‘have faith’ – these are not here mutually exclusive expressions. This ‘knowing’ is not that with which scientific theory is concerned, based upon empirical sense-knowledge; it is rather faith-knowledge, and faith-knowledge does not rely on the evidence of the senses, but is, in the scriptural phrase, ‘the evidence of things not seen’, that is, not presented to sense-perception; and it would lose its essential nature and be transformed into a mere sorry empirical knowledge, if it relied on any other evidence than ‘the witness of the Holy Spirit’ which is not that of sense-experience. ... It is only ‘of the Spirit’ that the higher knowledge is born. It is the eye of the Spirit, not the eye of sense that beholds eternal things; but what it sees is not a mere insecure half woven fabric of ‘convictions’, but the adamant certainty of the eternal truth itself.”<sup>222</sup>

But these verses are not so much concerned with *our salvation which is of God* (though they hint at that). Rather these verses acquaint us with what it is like to encounter *the God of our salvation!* “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...”<sup>223</sup> the *dénouement* of our eternal existence! These lines focus our attention on what should be the consuming concern of our entire earthly sojourn! And this is not a truth that we arrive at by some cerebral means. Rather it is, as suggested above, the solemn warning of God the Holy Spirit, which we do well to heed.

#### Reality and our Response

<sup>2</sup> The LORD is great in Zion;

And he is high above all the people.

<sup>3</sup> Let them praise thy great and terrible name;

For it is holy.

<sup>4</sup> The king's strength also loveth judgment;



The first verse of this psalm is really in the form of an announcement.<sup>224</sup> But the second verse is a description of the reality of the new state of things. The phrase “he is high above all the people” speaks not of God’s physical height, but of His exaltation in authority and strength. The statements about exaltation pertain not to idols as in 96:5 and 97:7, but to people. Idols never occur in this psalm. As mentioned above, verses three and four constitute a two part confession

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should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister *the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*

<sup>221</sup> John 1:29b

<sup>222</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Ibid*, Appendix XII The Resurrection as a Spiritual Experience.

<sup>223</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:10

<sup>224</sup> When Absalom made his abortive *coup d'état* against his father David’s kingdom, he made such an announcement 2 Samuel 15:10 “But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron.”

of praise on the part of the people in response to the reality of verse 2. They praise the LORD's holy name which is great and awesome as well as the LORD's strength which is devoted to ("loveth") judgment. But the praise described in this verse is not formulaic or mechanical. The root of the praise represents the apprehension on the people's part of the great two-fold truth about God.

Authority: The people have come to understand the basis of God's governance based not so much on power as with human systems but on authority. In verse three of Moses' great psalm, he says:

I will proclaim the name of the LORD.  
Oh, praise the greatness of our God!<sup>225</sup>

His teaching rested on the authority of the LORD. The standard introductory assertion of the prophets (occurring 413 times in the O.T.) was "Thus saith the LORD." When the law was given in Sinai, the basis of for claiming obedience to the commandments was "I am the LORD".<sup>226</sup> God did not say, I'm bigger and stronger than you are and if you don't do what I say I'll destroy you, but you shall do this because I am the LORD. When God created the universe and all that is therein, He spoke and it was so<sup>227</sup>. Only when He came to man did He say "Let us *make* man in our image"

Yhwh (יהוה) was the name by which God introduced Himself to Moses<sup>228</sup> The very answer to Moses question "whom shall I say sent me?" {I AM THAT I AM (היה היה) hayah hayah)} gives the root (היה hayah) of the name by which God will reveal Himself to Moses and the covenant people. "It signifies that the God of Israel, unlike pagan deities, is present with His people to deliver them, to fulfill His promises to them, and to grant them His blessings."<sup>229</sup> The name is to be viewed as holy.

Strength or Might: The authority of the Lord is supported by His might or strength, strength not unrelated to His word. In psalm 93.1b and 96.10b that strength was the source of stability. It overcame the forces that opposed His reign that would, unchecked, lead to chaos. God *speaks* to the sea saying "here shall thy proud waves be stayed"<sup>230</sup> The world is established that it should not move. But in this psalm, the strength is devoted to judgment, justice, or the ability to exercise authority. The present heavens and earth are kept in store for judgment by the same word<sup>231</sup> This two-fold recognition reflects the stabilizing power pictured in the Zion tradition and the

<sup>225</sup> Deuteronomy 32 – 33

<sup>226</sup> As in the case of Leviticus 11:44 "For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy" and Leviticus 18:4 "Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God."

<sup>227</sup> Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20 "and God said" vs. Genesis 1:26 "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness". All the rest of creation was by divine fiat.

<sup>228</sup> Exodus 6:2-3 And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD. And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty (אל שדי - 'el Shadday) but by my name JEHOVAH (יהוה) was I not known to them.

<sup>229</sup> Ed. Elwell, Walter A., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* on the Tetragrammaton.

<sup>230</sup> Job 38:8-11 Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?

<sup>231</sup> 2 Peter 3:5-7 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

destabilizing power pictured in the Sinai tradition. It is God who can judge and ‘shake things up’ and it is God who can show mercy and ‘establish’. This dual theme surfaces again farther down in verse 8b.

Thou wast a God that forgavest them, (Mercy)  
 Though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. (Judgment)

In this Psalm, one does not know how God will act toward them, when they fail. And it is that uncertainty that raises the Fear of the LORD.

### The King’s Policy

Thou dost establish equity,  
 Thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob.



As if to add his voice to the preceding exhortation (“Let them praise...”), the Psalmist now addresses the LORD directly. The Psalmist’s testimony in praise of the LORD “makes clear that Yhwh is not merely about authority and power, but about uprightness and faithfulness.”<sup>232</sup> “He does what He does because He is who He is.”<sup>233</sup>

Establishing Equity: <sup>234</sup>We are left with the question just when did the LORD establish equity, uprightness or righteousness and how? Clearly the rest of the psalm which follows takes us back to the wilderness. The very next people mentioned are Moses and Aaron. God establishes righteousness or equity by giving the law. Even the governance of God requires law, for humans’ sake. But this law is not something that the people choose for themselves as in a democracy. God makes the decision for them. The role of the King as lawgiver (through Moses) as well as instructor in righteousness (through Aaron) is thus brought to the fore. Here God is establishing, not judging or condemning. He is making decisions for His people as to how they are to act in the covenant that He has now brought them into. This is the legislative aspect of governance. Israel was given this covenant not for works of righteousness they did. They were rescued from Egypt before the law was given to them by Moses. They were rescued from Egypt because of the blessing that accrued to them because of the promise given to Abraham, vouchsafed to him <sup>235</sup>and his children<sup>236</sup> because of his faith and because God will judge both Egypt and Canaan for flouting God’s faithfulness and for their unrighteousness.<sup>237</sup>

<sup>232</sup> Goldingay, *Ibid.* p. 132

<sup>233</sup> John Phillips *Exploring the Psalms*, vol. 2 Page 95.

<sup>234</sup> מִישָׁר meishar, evenness, also straightness, (figuratively) rectitude, or uprightness

<sup>235</sup> Romans 4:3 – 5 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

<sup>236</sup> Genesis 28:13-15 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

<sup>237</sup> Genesis 15:13-14, 17-18 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also *that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge*: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. ... But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: *for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full*. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark,



Executing judgment <sup>238</sup> and righteousness:<sup>239</sup> Judgment and rectitude are both defined with respect to the law of God. These are the executive and the judicial aspects of governance. The law is not only given but it is used. It condemns or acquits, but it also guides those who wish to be governed by it. So there continues a didactic element as well as an almost parental aspect of the judge who makes decisions according to the law for the people in cases where they cannot decide them. We come close to the concept with the term 'ad-ministrate', i.e. to minister *for* someone. Thus the role of God referred to here is not narrowly that of a judgment of condemnation (though it includes that role) but a larger role of moral guide or preceptor and administrator. The point being that not only are the people bound by the law as the terms of the covenant, but God also obligates His sovereign actions toward Israel in accord with its precepts. The terms of the relationship between the people who are to praise the LORD and the LORD God is one of mutual rectitude and faithfulness to the covenant terms. It is God who implements righteousness and faithfulness as a basis for a stable relationship between Himself and His covenant people. But relationships require communication and to that facet we come next.

### Call and Response

<sup>6</sup> Moses and Aaron among his priests,  
And Samuel among them that call upon his name;

They called upon the LORD,  
And he answered them.

<sup>7</sup> He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar:  
They kept his testimonies, and  
The ordinance that he gave them

<sup>8</sup> Thou answeredst them,  
O LORD our God:



In this longer historical section we are introduced to three historical figures, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel. The question arises why these three people? In this section we clearly see the covenant practice of calling upon the LORD and His answering them. In that context all three of these men had a first hand experience of divine communication. But there is another aspect in their experience. All three of them had a profound relationship with Israel. Although not specifically mentioned in this Psalm, the ancient hearer of this psalm would have identified with each of them for slightly different reasons. Moses and Aaron had to do with God's formation and governance of the nation. As the Great prophet and deliverer and as the High Priest, Moses and Aaron were seminal figures in the formation of Israel in the wilderness. They echo the twin themes of Sinai (disorientation – shaking things up) and Zion (New orientation – establishing things that will not be moved). Moses and Aaron were the human agents that applied the

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behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, *Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.*" It is interesting to note that even at its greatest extent, the people never fully realized this promised land area. How much 'land' is there for us as believers to lay hold of that we have never possessed?

<sup>238</sup> מִשְׁפָּט mishpat, properly, a verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree of divine law.

<sup>239</sup> צֶדֶק tsedaqah meaning (abstractly) rightness, (subjectively) rectitude, (objectively) justice, (morally) virtue or (figuratively) prosperity : justice

judgments of God to Egypt. They were the ones who oversaw the destruction of the power of the greatest ruler of the time, Pharaoh. But ...

“Moses was the means of establishing uprightness by being *the* mediator of Yhwh’s original teaching to Israel. Aaron did so and the priests continue to do so by virtue of the fact that teaching is their ongoing vocation.”<sup>240</sup>

So in Moses and Aaron we see both a disestablishment of Egyptian power and an establishment of Israel’s governance as a people.

“Samuel among them that call upon his name” (6b), located near the center of this psalm, is also pivotal. Samuel marks the transition in Israel from the period of the Judges (selected by God from time to time as part of His governance) to the Kingdom (first of Saul and then of David and his line). It is Samuel who is told to “Hearken unto the voice of the people” in making a king over them. It is not Samuel that they have rejected as a ruler over them but the LORD.<sup>241</sup> In Samuel the Sinai tradition and the Zion tradition meet again. Samuel is the proponent of the Theocracy even as he is the divine instrument in establishing the monarchy. There is a tension between the two movements - but this Psalm will not let us abandon either one. The monarch is still accountable to God, as Saul finds out when Samuel informs him that the kingdom has been taken from him and given to “a man after his own heart”.<sup>242</sup>

None of these men operates as an independent agent. There is a constant dialogue ongoing between the LORD and them. “They called upon the LORD, and he answered them.” They are intercessors for Israel. The governance of Israel is mediated governance. The High Priest goes once a year to place the blood of the sacrifice “between the cherubims” while “the people tremble” without waiting the successful results of the Day of Atonement. The verset “He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar” calls to remembrance the request of the people, “Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”<sup>243</sup> They sensed intuitively that they needed a mediator for communication with the LORD. The central thought is “Thou answeredst *them*” (Moses, Aaron, and Samuel).

The continuance of the all important mediatory dialogue is dependant on continued obedience. They called -You spoke – they kept the testimony and ordinance – You answered. Here, as in Psalm 97, “Clouds and darkness are round about him” The Shekinah Glory of the LORD is veiled for their protection. And for the High Priest there is also the veil, marked again by the cherubims.<sup>244</sup> The veil which separates the intercessors from the all consuming holiness and glory of God is a mercy to them and to the people they represent. Nor is their intercession without importance. The consequence of such intercessors is that Israel was spared total destruction over the matter of the Golden Calf. God foreseeing the nature of the people He has chosen (“it is a

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<sup>240</sup> Goldingay *Psalms*, Vol. 3 page 130

<sup>241</sup> 1 Samuel 8:7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

<sup>242</sup> 1 Samuel 13:1-14

<sup>243</sup> Exodus 20:18 -21 And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, *Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.* And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and *Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.*

<sup>244</sup> Exodus 26:31 And thou shalt make a vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made: Exodus 36:35 And he made a vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen: with cherubims made he it of cunning work.

stiff-necked people”) asks Moses to let Him alone (i.e. say nothing) so that “that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them.” But Moses as a true intercessor “besought the LORD his God” and pleads not on the basis of the character of the people, which has been accurately described in full, but on the basis of God’s honor as seen by other people. “Wherefore should *the Egyptians speak, and say*, ‘For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’” Moses also pleads God’s promises to “Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.”<sup>245</sup>

Israel was also granted victory over the Amalekites not by way of military might but by the prayer of Moses. As long as Moses could lift up his hands in prayer, Joshua defeated Amalek. But when Moses grew tired and let his hands go down, Amalek prevailed. So Aaron and Hur were called upon to support Moses in the activity of intercessory prayer by holding up his hands until sunset.<sup>246</sup> The key to the difference between total destruction in both cases lay not in the people’s behavior or might, but in the faithful prayers of their intercessor! Clearly they were not destroyed which is the mercy of the “God who forgave them.” But when Moses had finished venting his deadly anger on the offenders and returned to beg forgiveness for them from God,<sup>247</sup> He answered Moses “in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them.” And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.”<sup>248</sup> He took “vengeance of their inventions.”

Beyond their roles as mediators, however, there is an eschatological element which we see commented on in the New Testament. In some measure they all fulfill aspects of the three fold office of the Messiah: prophet, priest, and king. Moses, king-like, assures internal stability by judging the people<sup>249</sup> and external corporate identity by directing the tribes in war.<sup>250</sup> Moses, priest-like, intercedes with God for the people when they sin in making the Golden Calf. In response to Moses’ prayer, “the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.”<sup>251</sup> Moses is the ultimate type of the prophet. Of him it is said “there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.”<sup>252</sup> But Moses, himself, speaks

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<sup>245</sup> Exodus 32:9-13. The last argument being a weak one since God had purposed “make of thee a great nation” which certainly would have fulfilled those promises. But the point that gave the argument power with God was Moses’ humility in refusing to become a great progenitor of the chosen nation like Abraham. Moses humbly declines God’s offer, which was in no way obligatory for him to accept.

<sup>246</sup> Exodus 17:8-14. An interesting New Testament corollary to Moses sitting down and having his hands held up is in the exhortation to “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” of Hebrews 12:12. Although the writer to the Hebrews quotes Isaiah 35:3 “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees,” it doubtless has to do with strengthening the ministry of intercessors, the consequences of which intercession are several. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.” (Isaiah 35:5-6) These are clearly anticipatory of our Lord’s earthly ministry, as a victory supported by His faithful prayers of intercession.

<sup>247</sup> Exodus 32:19-33

<sup>248</sup> Exodus 32:34b-35

<sup>249</sup> Exodus 18:13-16 And it came to pass on the morrow, that *Moses sat to judge the people*: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening. And when Moses’ father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? And Moses said unto his father in law, Because *the people come unto me to enquire of God: When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws.*

<sup>250</sup> Exodus 17:8-9 Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.

<sup>251</sup> Exodus 32:7-14

<sup>252</sup> Deuteronomy 34:10

of another, his antitype: "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee *a Prophet* from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, *like unto me*; unto him ye shall hearken "<sup>253</sup> It is Moses, more than any other that is singled out for comparison with Jesus Christ.<sup>254</sup> Moses is to Israel a type of what Christ is to all God's people. Aaron and his sons will minister in the priest's office.<sup>255</sup> In the words of Hebrews they are "ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices ... according to the law, who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things."<sup>256</sup> But it is the Psalms that testify that "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek,"<sup>257</sup> which is quoted three times pertaining to Jesus in Hebrews.<sup>258</sup> Finally, Samuel, like Moses, is both a prophet<sup>259</sup> and a judge<sup>260</sup>. As a judge, he speaks to the people. As a prophet he speaks to the king. He has this function, again because of the mediatory nature of monarchic governance under the covenant. Good kings lead the people toward obedience to God, bad kings lead them astray. Prophets are the ministers that provide guidance relative to the king's actions in the sight of God.

### Justice and Mercy

Thou wast a God that forgavest them,  
Though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.



This passage reminds us that God is both merciful and just. One writer rightly observes:

"We see Him pardoning and punishing at the same time. This is typical of the prophetic ministry of Scripture. When Nathan came to David and David fell down in contrition before God, the *crime* he had committed was removed by God's grace. The *consequences*, however, remained as part of God's governmental dealings with him. David had decreed: "The man shall pay fourfold," when he pronounced sentence on the man in Nathan's parable. Thus it was that the sword struck four times at David's own sons. As the consequences of his behavior pursued him down the years they were used of God, not as a *punitive* measure but as a *purifying* one. God used them not just to *chastise* but to *change* the character of the penitent."<sup>261</sup>

The observation applies not only to David, but also to Moses, Aaron, and Samuel as well, for all experience some degree of failure in the ministry. Moses strikes the rock in anger rather than speak to it as he was told and the consequence limits his long productive life. He will see but not enter the land promised to his people.<sup>262</sup> Aaron participates in the construction of the Golden calf

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<sup>253</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15

<sup>254</sup> Hebrews 3:2-6a Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath built the house hath more honor than the house. For every house is built by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

<sup>255</sup> Exodus 28:1 And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.

<sup>256</sup> Hebrews 8:3-5

<sup>257</sup> Psalm 110:4

<sup>258</sup> Hebrews 5:6, 7:17, 7:21

<sup>259</sup> 1 Samuel 3:19-20 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that *Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD*.

<sup>260</sup> 1 Samuel 7:15 And *Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life*.

<sup>261</sup> Phillips, John, *Exploring the Psalms*, Vol. 3 page 97

<sup>262</sup> Numbers 20:7-12

and the associated worship rather than standing up to the people who know not and care not what has happened to Moses.<sup>263</sup> Samuel promotes his unworthy sons to help with judgment and precipitates the very plea for a human monarch that he so decries.<sup>264</sup> All are to some extent flawed intercessors. We are all flawed people. The consequences of our sins and errors follow us all our days with the same effect as that of David. But (as with David) God is One who forgives us though He takes “vengeance” on our “inventions”. The experience of Israel is our experience, except that our intercessor is the flawless person of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

“You were a God who carried things for them,  
and one who exacted redress for their deeds”

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“Yet Moses, priests, and prophets were also people who from time to time fell short of Yhwh’s expectations and needed Yhwh to “carry” things for them (cf. Yhwh’s self-description in Exodus 34:6-7). Many English Bible versions have “forgive,” but here as commonly else where the word is נָשָׂא (*nasa* (pronounced naw-saw’), the ordinary word for “carry.”<sup>265</sup> Forgiveness means bearing the burden of the people’s wrongdoing, bearing the cost oneself, instead of making them bear it.

“But Yhwh is also the one who exacts redress<sup>266</sup> for their deeds. The expression summarizes the negative side to Yhwh’s words in Exodus 34:6-7 (with some subtlety, using *naquam* where Exodus 34:6-7 uses *naqa*). One can see that Yhwh did this for people such as Moses and Aaron. The Psalm no more resolves the tension between the two aspects of Yhwh’s action than does Yhwh does at Sinai.”<sup>267</sup>

While the first comment admirably answers the “What” of God’s doing in this passage, the second hints at the difficulty of answering the “Why” of God’s doing, and with good reason. The answer goes beyond obedience which, at best is flawed for all men, except Jesus.

In short, there is a deep mystery in these simple verses. While we can grasp the “what” of God’s doing, we cannot grasp the “why”. The general question: “My God, my God why...?” asked with such specific and heartbreaking eloquence in Psalm 22:1 seeks to comprehend realities hidden in the eternal counsels of the God-Head. Why have you loved Jacob but hated Esau?<sup>268</sup> “Why was I made to hear thy voice, and enter while there’s room, when thousands make a wretched choice and rather starve than come?”<sup>269</sup> All these “why” questions and many more center on God’s great plan of salvation, formulated “before the foundation of the world” when we were chosen<sup>270</sup> and when Christ was foreordained to be the spotless Lamb of God whose blood would be shed for us.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Exodus 32:21-25

<sup>264</sup> 1 Samuel 8:1-5

<sup>265</sup> We have a similar aspect of forgiveness as bearing with someone, when we see Jesus who bears our guilt on the cross.

<sup>266</sup> The word is conventionally rendered “vengeance,” but it does not have the connotations of personal feeling and revenge that “vengeance” suggests. Rather it indicates punishment exacted by a competent authority in a way appropriate to the wrong done that thus puts things back in order. – Goldingay’s notes

<sup>267</sup> Goldingay, John *Psalms*, Vol. 3 page 131

<sup>268</sup> Romans 9:13

<sup>269</sup> F. Allaben’s hymn No. 159 *Life, Life of Love Poured Out*, *Hymns of Worship and Remembrance*

<sup>270</sup> Ephesians 1:4 According as *he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

<sup>271</sup> 1 Peter 1:19-20 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

Some might suspect that it is a choice that God makes in light of His foreknowledge of how we will choose. But such a view diminishes God's autonomy. The choices He makes are based solely on His own good pleasure, not His foreknowledge of our actions. Indeed we might say that even our actions are affected by His sovereign decisions, as in the case of the effectual call.<sup>272</sup> It is we who are the subjects, however uncomprehending, of those eternal counsels of His matchless Grace!

### The Awesome Refrain

<sup>5</sup> Exalt ye the LORD our God,  
and worship at **his footstool**;  
for he is holy.

...

<sup>9</sup> Exalt the LORD our God,  
and worship at **his holy hill**;  
for the LORD our God is holy.



These two verses form a kind of refrain that divides the Psalm. They are similar in that both refrains ask the people "exalt the LORD our God" and to worship. They differ slightly both as to the description of the place of worship and the reason. The first refrain mentions the place of worship as "at his footstool" while the second mentions "at his holy hill", presumably Zion. The first refrain states the reason for worship is that "he is holy", though Goldingay translates the phrase "it is holy"<sup>273</sup> perhaps because the term may refer back to the "footstool" which, in turn, refers in part to the temple<sup>274</sup> which is viewed as a holy place. In the last refrain, the reason is unambiguous, "the LORD our God is holy."

The picture of exaltation has anthropomorphic overtones that come from the practices of the kings of that time. Those kings had royal courts and in those courts, lesser kings of vassal or conquered states might be summoned to sit on thrones around the exalted central throne. The psychology of the symbolism of the height of exaltation being that the power of the higher throne was greater than the lesser thrones surrounding it. Those lesser thrones gave glory and worth to the throne that was exalted above them. It is an image that also underlies the references to idols in the other psalms. The Cult idol of the victorious nation like the king of that nation would have lesser idols to surround it as a kind of royal god-court in which the lesser gods of conquered or vassal states 'worshipped' the idol of the victorious nation. In this Psalm, it is the LORD who is to be exalted. He is high above all as a testimony of the exceeding greatness of His power. But the passages we are considering still begs the question what does it mean "to exalt the LORD our God"? How can man contribute to the exaltation of God? Does God need man for anything, let alone exaltation? Does man in any way actually contribute to His omnipotence? The answer is clearly not; God does not need man. Then whatever can the psalmist mean when he says "Exalt ye the LORD our God"?

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<sup>272</sup> Romans 8:29 For *whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate* to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover *whom he did predestinate, them he also called*: and *whom he called, them he also justified*: and *whom he justified, them he also glorified*.

<sup>273</sup> Goldingay, *John Psalms*, vol. 3, page 129.

<sup>274</sup> 1 Chronicles 28:2 Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building:

The exaltation spoken of here is most important to the believer in his relationship to God. It refers to the inward attitude of the individual relative to the reality that God truly is exalted. Does he willingly join in that exaltation? The reality that the LORD is exalted is perceived in this psalm by different means. The first refrain (5a) looks back to verses 1 to 4 for its basis, a picture of the future reign of the LORD prophetically now occurring. The manner of that reign is “equity, judgment, and righteousness in Jacob; the king’s strength is devoted to justice (NIV). The Israelite is to exalt the LORD in his whole being, in his whole life because of this prophetic reality. The second refrain (9a) looks back to the olden times of Israel before the monarchy (Samuel) and in the wilderness (Moses and Aaron), to a picture of His continuing reign in times past, when God spoke to Israel because of their faithful mediators and showed mercy because their intercessors obediently took His words to heart. Obedience is the essential element of an effectual intercessor. “The effectual fervent prayer of a *righteous* man availeth much.”<sup>275</sup> Exaltation affects our relationship with God by our willingness to give Him the highest place in all our life. Exaltation affects emotions with overarching awe. Exaltation affects our thinking bringing all our thoughts into an obedient captivity to him<sup>276</sup>. Exaltation affects the will, causing obedience to His word.

But exaltation is not enough. Why do we give Him the highest place in our thoughts? Why are we overcome with awe and love at His presence? Why do we obey His every word? We do this because He is supremely worthy of it and much more. It is the worship that naturally flows from this inward attitude that the refrain actually encourages. Exaltation is inward acknowledging that the LORD is high above all the earth including ourselves. Worship is outward, the bowing of the body before the LORD. As high as we lift Him up, even so low we bow before Him. But outward posture has little value if the heart is not right with God. The application is easily made to our situation. Do we exalt the LORD in our hearts as we bow our lives in submission to Him?

The places of worship also convey two different feelings. The footstool refers to the Temple, as we have noted. But it also refers to the entire world. “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest?”<sup>277</sup> The image of the earth as the footstool of God conveys a sense of His immenseness. God is transcendent. And the reaction to that realization in the heart is the awe that accompanies “the fear of the LORD”.

But the reference to the holy hill can only mean Mount Zion. Zion is not seen as the highest or most impressive of mountains (as are mountains of Bashan which represent the impressive power of the heathen) but Zion is “the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the LORD will dwell in it for ever.”<sup>278</sup> Zion is an accessible hill. Even the elderly and children may ascend its gentle slopes. The God who desires to dwell there does so because of His willingness to be accessible to the vulnerable, the weak, the humble and the poor. God is immanent. And the heart that finds such a One responds with love for the LORD.

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<sup>275</sup> James 5:16b

<sup>276</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ

<sup>277</sup> Isaiah 66:1

<sup>278</sup> Psalm 68:16 Why leap ye, ye high hills? This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the LORD will dwell in it for ever.





## Conclusion

I once asked my brother David, whose painting career spanned seven decades, “What is art?” Without a moment’s hesitation he said, “Art is therapy!” Writing is art as well as painting. And if there is one thing that I have proven to myself in this monograph, it is that he was correct. The writing of this monograph has been a personal challenge in thought, a source of spiritual growth, and has affected a deeper awareness of the cast of my will, i.e. what I hoped to achieve in writing it: my goals. After several weeks, in which I have felt the patient assistance of the Spirit of God in thinking as well as writing, I have come to see more clearly the two-fold goal of this work: (1) to speak as faithfully as possible about the Person of the LORD as He is represented in these psalms and (2) to encourage by their exposition both the reverential awe and love for the person of our Lord Jesus in His ultimate governmental office as foreshadowed in them.

To me Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of God the Son, is the *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans* described by Rudolf Otto. He is both immense and immanent. He fills the limitless universe without being constrained by the unconstrained sphere of His creation. Yet He is closer than my breath, closer than my beating heart! His power is awesome beyond conception! Yet there is none who is as tender or gentle with me as He is! Holy beyond the power of sinless angels to steadfastly behold, He daily shows me mercy for my faults beyond number! I would that this reality of the glorified Christ might fill us all with both the Fear of God and the Love of God universally encouraged in the Scriptures. Who would not love and fear such a One!

### What did the Psalmists Understand?

The unifying theme of eschatological psalms (of which the enthronement psalms are a part) is joy. Based on many passages, Gunkel postulated a sevenfold source of joy in the eschatological elements of the Psalms:<sup>279</sup>

1. Joy at the restoration of the city of Jerusalem and the people of Israel
2. Joy that the rule of the nations is then broken
3. Joy at the overthrow of the great natural calamities at the end time
4. Joy at the LORD’s victory over the nations as typified in His battle against the roaring ocean with the attendant world domination of the Jewish people
5. Joy at the attendant establishment of the *kingdom of righteousness*
6. Joy at the transfiguration of the Holy Place
7. Joy that even greater things happen in Heaven.

Of these seven joys, traces of four are found in these psalms.

Joy that the rule of the nations is then broken: “The psalms like the prophets relatively frequently portray the desired overthrow of the world’s kingdoms as Yhwh’s *universal judgment*....” One should note, first, that the passages accentuate that YHWH’s judgment will be issued *in complete righteousness*.<sup>280</sup> But He can also be an “avenger” for “all their wickedness.”<sup>281</sup>

Joy at the overthrow of the great natural calamities at the end time: The natural calamities of the end time also appear “in the Psalms as a horrid moral confusion that will follow the end. The gods judging unjustly are the ones causing the shaking of the earth. However at the end YHWH

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<sup>279</sup> Gunkel, Hermann, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, Chapter 9 Prophetic Elements in the Psalms pages 255 to 262

<sup>280</sup> Psalm 96:13, 97:6, 99:3b

<sup>281</sup> Psalm 99:1-4

will intervene and affix the earth's columns.<sup>282</sup> At the same time the earthquake symbolizes the *new certain world order* which YHWH will found."<sup>283</sup>

Joy at the attendant establishment of the *kingdom of righteousness*: Along with the gift of the destruction of all weapons of war, the warriors scattered, and YHWH's control of all war, one finds that YHWH himself assumes the *kingship* and *rule of the world*.<sup>284</sup>...After all of this confusion, the God who rules the world establishes a *kingdom of righteousness*. He speaks justice among the nations.<sup>285</sup> ... Thus it happens that the world raises a *hurricane of jubilant voices*. Zion rejoices and "the daughters of Judah exult over your judgment, YHWH."<sup>286</sup>

Joy that even greater things happen in Heaven: "Once YHWH has subdued humanity on earth, then in heaven "all gods sink in the dust before him"<sup>287</sup> ... Other ideas of the heavenly procedures speak about YHWH sitting upon the cherubim, the highest throne in the world.<sup>288</sup> The assembly of subservient gods surrounds YHWH. When their gods fall, their servants must also doubt and recognize the futility of idol worship.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Psalm 75:2-3 When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly. The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it. Selah. Also Psalm 93:1b "the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved."

<sup>283</sup> Psalm 99:1b - Similar to the conflation of Hag 2:6 and 2:21 referenced in Hebrews 12:26.

<sup>284</sup> Psalm 97:5, 99:2

<sup>285</sup> Psalm 96:13; 97:2, 6; 99.

<sup>286</sup> Psalm 97:8

<sup>287</sup> Psalm 97:7,

<sup>288</sup> Psalm 99:1

<sup>289</sup> Psalm 97:7

## A Word Picture

The world was without form and void.  
The evil one sought to create but could only destroy.  
In place of light, darkness reigned  
The darkness of troubled waters

And God said "let there be light"  
And in the darkness a great light shown  
The light of a single perfect life  
And that life was the light of men.

The waters raged, the darkness, which did not comprehend,  
Could not over come that light  
But that light subdued the waters, dividing them  
And brought order to those drawn to the Him

And the Father said "It is not good that He is alone"  
So He caused a deep sleep to fall upon that life.  
He rested from His struggle against the darkness of moral chaos  
And while he slept, His bride was born - From His side.

He awoke – in triumph  
A triumph to be shared with his Beloved,  
A witness to be told - Truth and Love  
And by His side the witness of that Love

He is gone away  
But she remains – crying in the market place  
Telling the untellable<sup>290</sup> to all who would hear  
Abused, mocked, and missing Him terribly.

Love looks for His return, meanwhile  
She does what she can - Knowing its bitter inadequacy  
Failure ? – Somehow the little she does is exactly  
What was meant to be

Far off, He sees and smiles  
Angels behold them both and wonder  
They strain upon the battlements of Heaven, awaiting the Day  
To join their Shout to her cry – The LORD reigns!



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<sup>290</sup> Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made  
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade  
To write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry

Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky. - Attributed to Meir Ben Isaac Nehoral, 1050

<sup>291</sup> I have chosen to conclude this section with a bare footnote for several reasons. (1) To encourage the reader to pay attention to the footnotes. (2) having worked through several short essays as examples, I leave it to the reader to consider the meaning of the word picture above, with the following two hints: (a) The psalmist lacked what the Spirit of God has revealed to us. All power in heaven and in earth is given unto Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18b). (b) There are two advents of our Lord Jesus. The word picture above fits Psalm 93 which speaks of His first advent and is contiguous with Psalm 96 which speaks of our present age. But it precedes Psalm 97 and 99 which speak of our Lord's return. Hence while Psalm 93, 97, and 99 all began with the joyous shout, and Psalm 96 presents it in the middle, it occurs in the word picture at the very end!



## Appendix - Hermeneutics

Having looked somewhat informally and cursorily at these four psalms of enthronement, the question naturally arises, “What do they mean for us today?” Behind this question lies another question “What did they mean to those who wrote them?” Before we can establish their meaning for us, we must make some attempt to discover what they meant for those who wrote them. That is the central question of Hermeneutics.

To be valid, exposition must be firmly based on exegesis: the meaning of the text for hearers today must be related to its meaning for the hearers to whom it was first addressed. The study of principles of interpretation – both the grammatico-historical interpretation and the practical application of that interpretation in the pulpit is called hermeneutics”<sup>292</sup>

“Hermeneutics explores how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of a life different from our own. Biblical hermeneutics investigates more specifically how we read, understand, apply, and respond to biblical texts.”<sup>293</sup>

Exegesis is what we do with a particular Bible text when we apply hermeneutic principles to help us understand what it originally meant and now means to us. But Hermeneutics has not been static over the last two millennia. <sup>294</sup>

The New Testament: The Hermeneutics of the New Testament was theocentric. God was the ultimate author of the Scripture.<sup>295</sup> Jesus Christ is the ultimate subject of Scripture.<sup>296</sup> And the understanding of their message was made possible by the illuminating ministry of God the Holy Spirit.<sup>297</sup> The means by which the Old Testament Record was applied to Jesus Christ was largely typical, figurative, or a shadow.<sup>298</sup> The word “typology” comes from the Greek word for form or pattern, which in biblical times denoted both the original model or prototype and the copy that resulted.

In the NT the former (original prototype) was labeled the antitype, and this was used in two directions: (1) the correspondence between two historical situations like the Red Sea and baptism (1 Peter 3:21) or two figures like Adam and Christ (Romans 5:14); (2) the correspondence between the heavenly pattern and its earthly counterpart, e.g. the divine original behind the earthly tent/tabernacle (Acts 7:44, Hebrews 8:5, 9:24). There are several categories – persons (Adam, Melchizedek), events (flood, brazen serpent), institutions (feast), places (Jerusalem, Zion), objects (alter of burnt offering, incense), offices (prophet, priest, king). ... It has been increasingly recognized that typology expresses the basic hermeneutic,

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<sup>292</sup> Ed. Elwell, Walter A. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Interpretation of the Bible page 565

<sup>293</sup> Thiselton, Anthony C. *Hermeneutics an Introduction* page 1.

<sup>294</sup> There are several excellent texts on Hermeneutics that are referenced in the back but for a detailed view of the history of hermeneutics, I highly recommend the introductory material by James Houston in *The Psalms as Christian Worship, a Historical Commentary*, and the text by Anthony C Thiselton, *Hermeneutics an Introduction*.

<sup>295</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16 “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”

<sup>296</sup> John 5:39 “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”

<sup>297</sup> John 15:26 “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me”

<sup>298</sup> Hebrews 8:4b-5 “... there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.”

indeed the attitude or perspective by which both the OT and NT writers understood themselves and their predecessors.”<sup>299</sup>

“The early Christian exegesis that grew out of this method of understanding meant that NT writers treat the OT oracles as a unity, teaching the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and providing believers with all that was needed for the service of God (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The basis for this unity is that those who, “moved” by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:21), all bear witness to Christ. In the earliest Christian interpretation the OT is related to the NT as promise is to fulfillment. The promise is found in the histories that led up to Christ as well as in prophecies that foretold His coming; the fulfillment is found in Him.”<sup>300</sup>

The Post Apostolic Age: Two schools of interpretation emerged in the Post Apostolic Age in Alexandria and Syrian Antioch. The Alexandrian school was influenced by Greek theories about inspiration that led to an allegorical method of interpretation.

“A well known patristic exegete, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215) believed that scriptures hide their true meaning so that we might be inquisitive and because it is not suitable for everyone to understand. He theorized that scripture has both a literal and a spiritual meaning, with the deepest riches available only to those who understand the deeper, spiritual sense. ... Origen (185-254) was the noted successor of Clement. He believed that Scripture is one vast allegory in which every detail is symbolic, and he made much of 1 Corinthians 2:6-7 (“We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery”). Origen believed that even as human beings consist of three parts – body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23) – so too Scripture possesses three senses. The body is the literal sense; the soul is the moral or ethical sense; and the spirit the allegorical or mystical sense. In practice Origen typically disparaged the literal sense, rarely referred to the moral sense, and constantly employed allegory, since only allegory yielded true knowledge.”<sup>301</sup>

The Syrian School of Antioch tended to avoid the ‘letterism’ of the Jews and the allegorization of Alexandria. They favored more of what John Calvin came to describe as the “plain meaning”. One of their leading members, Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350-428) staunchly defended the grammatico-historical interpretation. He insisted that a text should be interpreted according to the rules of grammar and the facts of history. They believed that the spiritual meaning of a historical event was implicit within the event itself. For example according to the allegorists, Abraham’s departure from Haran signified his departure from knowing things by means of the senses. The Antiochians viewed it as an act of faith and trust as he followed God’s call to go from the historical city of Haran to the land of Canaan.<sup>302</sup>

Medieval Exegesis: The approach of the Western Medieval Church followed along lines laid down by Augustine (354-430). He developed a fourfold sense of the scriptures that was historical, allegorical, moral, and analogical (deriving heavenly things from earthly data). It was reduced to verse and became the general approach of the Middle Ages.

The *letter* shows us what God and our Fathers did;  
The *allegory* shows us where our faith is hid;  
The *moral* meaning gives us rules of daily life;

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<sup>299</sup> Ed. Elwell, Walter A. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Type, Typology page 1117-1118

<sup>300</sup> *ibid.* Interpretation of the Bible page 566.

<sup>301</sup> Virkler, Henry A. et al. *Hermeneutics Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, page 52-53

<sup>302</sup> *ibid.* page 54.

The *anagogy* shows us where we end our strife.

For example, a reference to water on different levels could denote (1) literal water, (2) moral purity, (3) the allegory of the doctrine and practice of baptism, and (4) the anagogy of eternal life in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Alongside the cultivation of derivative senses of meaning, there were centers that continued to cultivate the literal sense of Scripture. This was often supported with the study of Hebrew which was available from the rabbis. One exegete, Nicholas of Lyra, the greatest Christian Hebraist of his age, produced commentaries on the entire Bible that were both literal and figurative, but stressed the literal sense. He had a great influence on Martin Luther who called him “a fine soul, a good Hebraist and a true Christian.”

Reform Exegesis The ongoing divorce between the grammatico-historical method of hermeneutics and theological exegesis was halted in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, by the Reformation. Luther exclaimed, “What is theology but grammar applied to the text?” Luther rejected the allegorical method of interpreting the scriptures. Luther maintained that the interpreter of Scripture must pay attention to the literal understanding of the text including grammar, historical conditions, and literary context. Luther also maintained that that the OT and NT point to Christ. In doing so, he provided a unity of interpretation without recourse to mystical interpretations. Probably the greatest exegete of the Reformation was John Calvin who agreed in general with the principles articulated by Luther. “Scripture interprets scripture” was a favorite phrase of Calvin. Calvin’s commentaries are still in print and read with profit today. In spite of some differences, the hermeneutical principles articulated by these men became the guiding principles of the modern orthodox Protestant interpretation.

Historical Biblical Criticism: By the nineteenth century a new hermeneutic, “Higher Biblical Criticism” became for many the only way of interpreting the Bible. Developed fully in Germany, all reference to orthodox interpretation was driven out of academic Biblical studies. Skepticism (a hermeneutic which doubts the Bible’s truth, such as its divine inspiration, historical veracity and integrity), coherence (i.e. every effect has a natural – this worldly – not a supernatural cause), and analogy (i.e. the laws of nature in biblical times are the same now as then e.g. the dead are never raised) became the guiding principles of interpretation. The hermeneutic became anthropocentric rather than theocentric. It treated the Bible as just other ancient book. It was a hermeneutic of unbelief that centered on man as the measure of all things. While sound exegesis should reflect a correct understanding of what the original author meant, it should not omit the role God plays in authoring and interpreting the scriptures. It is not by reason alone that we are enabled to comprehend what God has said through human authors, who may or may not have been fully aware of the deeper message the Spirit of God was communicating. The picture has become exceedingly complex and the reader is encouraged to pursue their own researches in texts such as those referenced. Fortunately there are those exegetes today who are endeavoring to take back the scholarly field and who “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Jude 1:3

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