



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 96

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Introduction

- This Psalm has no title in Hebrew
- Therefore, there is no mention of author or occasion
- However, the Septuagint has a title which is *A Song of David, when the House was built after the Captivity*
- The Psalm contains the middle verses of the Psalm David sang for the entrance of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:23-33), which suggested that David was the author
- This is one of several enthronement Psalms (93, 95-99)
- Enthronement Psalms celebrate God as King and affirm His Lordship over all creation



Introduction

- Enthronement Psalms call people to praise God and sing songs of joy
- This Psalm praises God with an emphasis on God's rule and reign, as well as His presence
- Though this Psalm was sung at the time of bringing up the ark, it looks further, to the kingdom of Christ, and is designed to celebrate the glories of that kingdom, especially the return of the Gentiles
- Or we could read Psalm 96 as a warm-hearted invitation to the nations to come to the God of Israel and find salvation



Introduction

- With a look backwards to the Ark arriving in Jerusalem, this Psalm also is looking forward to when the Messiah brings God's reign over all the earth
- God is the true King over all the earth
- Although, according to some, this Psalm concerns the new temple built by Zerubbabel after the return from the Babylonian captivity
- It is actually, the song of the whole humanity praising the Lord for the sake of her liberation from the captivity of the devil, and her building a holy spiritual temple for the Lord



Introduction

- This Psalm first speaks to the people of God, then to all the nations of the earth, and finally to creation itself
- According to St. Jerome, the title of this Psalm is an invitation to every believer to rebuild his house, destroyed by the enemies
- He says, “This house of Christ, as is clear from the words of the psalmist, is being rebuilt every day in the life of the repentant.”
- This Psalm is one of the Nineth Hour Psalms of the Agpeya, the Prayer Book of the Hours



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- All the Earth is Invited to Praise the Lord 96:1-3
- God Alone is Great and Glorious 96:3-6
- Calling the Entire World to Glorify God 96:7-9
- Proclaim Him Among the Nations 96:10
- The Message of Joy to All Creation 96:11-13

All the Earth is Invited to Praise the Lord 96:1-3



- Praise is due to God from *all the earth*
- The psalmist begins by exhorting the whole world to unite in thanksgiving to God for the favors bestowed on them
- Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the psalmist saw a day when *all the earth* would *sing a new song* to the Lord
- A new song represents a victory song and a song of deliverance, Revelation 5:9
- A song not like that of Moses, or Deborah, or any of the old songs that could not be sung outside the promised land according to Psalm 137, "*How will we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*"
- But a new song that may be sung all over the world

All the Earth is Invited to Praise the Lord 96:1-3



- And he, therefore, adds, *Sing to the Lord, all the earth*, not only Judea, but the whole world
- *A new song* befitting men who have been renewed
- The word new here implies that there was some new occasion for celebrating the praises of God; that some event had occurred, or that some truth relating to the divine character had now been made known
- Three times we are here called to *sing to the Lord*
- Sing to the Father, to the Son, to the Holy Spirit
- *Sing to the Lord, bless His name*, In song, praise His power

All the Earth is Invited to Praise the Lord 96:1-3



- Beside singing, the Lord is to be blessed
- His name, His character, His revealed word and will, are to be enchanted, and remembered with everlasting thanksgiving
- Then the psalmist proceeds to tell the subject of his praise and song, which is the coming of the Savior
- Let the subject-matter of this song be *His salvation*, the great salvation which was to be done by the Lord Jesus Christ
- These songs to the Lord were not only celebrations; they were also proclamations

All the Earth is Invited to Praise the Lord 96:1-3



- They proclaimed *the good news of His salvation*
- This may have referred to what He had done to save the people in time of danger, but the language is such also as to express salvation in a higher sense - salvation from sin and death
- It expresses what God has done for mankind - for all people, Jews and Gentiles - in providing a way of salvation
- Let this song be sung constantly, not only in the times appointed for the feasts, but from *day to day*
- It is a fit subject for unceasing praise
- Every man should praise God every day - on every morning, and on every evening

All the Earth is Invited to Praise the Lord 96:1-3



- Each day brings us deeper experience, each day reveals the power of the gospel, therefore, never stop, be it ours to tell out the glorious message of grace
- Having said He should be praised at all times, he now adds, that He should be praised in all places
- *Declare His glory among the nations*, Make known God's glory, not only to the Jews, as did the prophets of old, but also to the gentiles
- This, he expresses more clearly, when he says, *His wonders among all peoples*

All the Earth is Invited to Praise the Lord 96:1-3



- Tell all nations of the wonderful works of God, that so manifest His glory
- Let all mankind hear the joyful news (Psalm 2:8, 47:1, 8, 138:4)
- St. Augustine comments on *His glory* and says, “His honor, not yours. O you builders, ‘Declare His honor unto the heathen.’ Should you choose to declare your own honor, you shall fall: if His, you shall be built up, while you are building.”
- *His wonders*, His Incarnation, what wonderful love He has shown in His incarnation, sufferings, death, and His resurrection from the dead, His ascension to heaven

God Alone is Great and Glorious

96:3-6



- The psalmist now informs us what glory of the Lord, and what wonderful works of His deserve such praise as he just spoke of
- His glory consists of that He is absolutely great, whether in regard of His power, His wisdom, His goodness, His authority, His riches, and in every possible sense that He should be, and is actually praised in proportion to such greatness, and thus the heavens and the earth are full of His glory
- God is infinite in His nature and attributes; and greatly to be praised
- All our most exalted praises fall infinitely short of His greatness

God Alone is Great and Glorious

96:3-6



- *above all gods*, Though they have seized the name and place of the Divine Majesty, yet they have nothing of His nature or power in them
- God rises so far above all who have falsely claimed to be called gods
- They rather tremble before His majesty
- Then the psalmist gave a reason for why our God is feared above all gods, when he says, *For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens*
- That is to say, God is to be feared above all false gods, wrongly worshiped by the gentiles

God Alone is Great and Glorious

96:3-6



- Because the gods of the gentiles are not true gods, but demons, who, through pride, have rebelled from the God who created them, and have been destined by Him to eternal punishment
- *but the Lord*, Is the Creator who *made the heavens*, the greatest and the most beautiful things in nature, as well as everything, all created things
- The word idols is translated by the Septuagint, demons
- The Hebrew means of nothing, empty, vain, Job 13:4
- They are *nothings*, as they are called, in 1 Corinthians 8:4,10:19; or, *vain things*, as the word signifies

God Alone is Great and Glorious

96:3-6



- They had no real existence; they were the creations of the imagination; they could not in any sense be regarded as what they were pretended they were; they had no claim to reverence and worship
- Having said that God was great and to be feared; he now adds, that He is most worthy of praise because He is most beautiful, glorious, and holy
- The whole universe displays God's majesty
- The attributes of *honor and majesty* are perhaps personified, and regarded as attendants standing in God's Presence

God Alone is Great and Glorious

96:3-6



- *Strength and beauty* are terms applied in Psalm 78:61 to the Ark, the symbol of His Presence
- The word *sanctuary* refers to the holy place where God dwells
- His sacred place, whether His dwelling in heaven, or the temple on earth as the place of His earthly dwelling
- The earthly one was a 'copy and shadow' of the heavenly (Hebrews 8:5)
- When it is said that *strength* is there, it means that the dwelling-place of God is the source of power, or that power originates from God Himself

God Alone is Great and Glorious 96:3-6



- All and any *beauty* proceeds from Him
- In God all are combined whatever is mighty and lovely, powerful and splendid
- According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “Confession and splendor are before Him; Purity and great majesty are in His sanctuary”
- Based on this translation, St. Augustine comments and says, “Do you love beauty? Wish to be beautiful? Confess! He said not, beauty and confession, but confession and beauty. You were foul; confess, that you may be fair: you were a sinner; confess, that you may be righteous.”

Calling the Entire World to Glorify God 96:7-9



- The theme is repeated – God is worthy of praise from the entire earth, from all *families of the peoples*
- In this context, *give* means to recognize and to declare the *glory and strength* that belong to God in all His being
- God promised Abraham, *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Genesis 12:3), and that promise would be fulfilled in Abraham's greatest descendant, Jesus Christ
- The same word for *families* found in Genesis 12:3 is used here
- This verse may refer to the fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 12:3

Calling the Entire World to Glorify God 96:7-9



- When we *give unto the Lord* these things, we do not give or attribute things to Him that He did not have before
- We recognize things as they really are, because God is full of *glory and strength*
- *O families of the peoples is O tribes of the nation* in other translations, by whom are meant the Gentiles
- And based on that translation the psalmist now predicts that all nations will be converted, and will glorify God after he had already prophesied that the knowledge of God would be preached to all nations, through the coming of Christ

Calling the Entire World to Glorify God 96:7-9



- He calls upon them to come in families, in allusion to the Jewish custom of families coming on the several festival days to worship in Jerusalem
- And the Holy Spirit gives us here to understand that such custom was to serve as a model for Christians, whose families should unite in coming to the Church to give glory and honor to God for all the wonderful things He accomplished in the redemption of man
- We come into God's presence to receive, but also to *give* unto Him
- Our worship is mainly offering praises and thanksgiving unto God

Calling the Entire World to Glorify God 96:7-9



- Bring to God what is due to Him
- The psalmist refers here in verse 8 to a custom of the Jews, who, when they went up to the temple, offered their sacrifices, and after having worshiped God, returned to their homes
- *Bring an offering*, Now, as the gentiles are here invited to come to the Church of the Lord, such sacrifices are to be understood of those spiritual sacrifices of which St. Peter speaks of “*to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*” (1 Peter 2:5)
- The psalmist calls on us to bring offerings; to offer works of love and mercy, (Hosea 6:6)

Calling the Entire World to Glorify God 96:7-9



- Those spiritual sacrifices are, the sacrifices of a repentant humble heart, confession of sins, prayer, fasting, alms, and likewise
- Then the psalmist called the world to *worship* God in recognition of His *holiness*, and to *worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness*
- God delights in spiritual beauty; not in external outward beauty
- Worship must not be given to God in a careless, sinful, superficial manner
- We must be reverent, sincere, earnest, and pure in heart both in our prayers and praises
- All the acts of worship must be performed from a principle of the fear of God and with a holy awe and reverence

Calling the Entire World to Glorify God 96:7-9



- In the presence of great power, we often find ourselves manifesting some measure of awe
- God is ultimate power, so it is appropriate to *tremble before Him*, especially when we understand that He will come to judge the earth (v. 13)
- Some will refer this verse to the first, others to the second, coming of Christ; but there is no reason why it should not take in both
- He, therefore, says, *Tremble before Him, all the earth*
- Let all the inhabitants of the earth be full of fear and reverence on the approach of the Lord

Proclaim Him Among the Nations 96:10



- The theme of speaking to the entire earth continues, calling the people of the world to worship and honor God as they should
- In order to stir the people up, preach to them that *The Lord reigns*
- This is the joyful pleasant news which can be carried to them
- This is a fundamental and powerful message for God's people to proclaim to the world
- The Lord God, in the person of His Son is on the Throne
- But His kingdom is a spiritual one, through which He reigns by faith in the hearts of men

Proclaim Him Among the Nations 96:10



- Whether others recognize His reign or not, the Lord nevertheless *reigns*, and that reign will one day be openly and obviously imposed upon the whole world
- God always reigns in heaven, and He reigns on earth through His power and majesty
- But He began to reign, through faith, among the gentiles, from the coming of the Messiah, where the devil previously reigned, through the idolatry; hence the Lord Himself said, “*now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*” (John 12:31)
- When God manifestly reigns, the earth is at once *established*, settled, placed on a firm foundation (Psalm 93:1)

Proclaim Him Among the Nations 96:10



- *It shall not be moved*, Not the natural material world; for that shall pass away
- But it is *firmly established*; so fixed and firm that nothing can move it from its place
- God, the Deliverer of old time (vv 3,4), God, the King of the whole earth (verse 10), is also God the Judge, who gives sentence on *the peoples righteously*, justly
- This is the greatest source of joy to oppressed people
- Iniquity makes the reigns of oppressors fall
- Justice causes the throne of Jesus to stand
- He will justly rule over Jew and Gentile

Proclaim Him Among the Nations 96:10



- As the call for faith has been presented to all nations, in His second coming, the Lord will judge the peoples righteously
- Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, quotes this verse: 'Say among the nations, the Lord rules *by the wood*,' meaning the cross
- He accused the Jews of having omitted this word because of the evidence it gave of the truth of Christianity
- He treats the Psalm as a prophecy of Christ's reign after His crucifixion
- And according to the Septuagint, this verse reads, *Tell it out among the nations, that the Lord reigns from the wood*
- And has been quoted by Tertullian and Augustine

The Message of Joy to All Creation 96:11-13



- The psalmist calls upon all creation to be glad and to rejoice, by reason of the first as well as the second coming of the Messiah
- The thought introduced in the previous verse is used as reason for all creation to *rejoice*
- All the creation is again called to rejoice and worship the Lord
- The God who reigns on earth reigns in heaven; and what affects one part of the universe affects all
- Hence, in all the manifestation of the character of God, whether made in heaven or in the earth, it is proper to call on all the universe to partake in the general joy
- *the heavens and the earth* rejoiced at the incarnation of Jesus Christ

The Message of Joy to All Creation 96:11-13



- In the establishment of God's righteous rule, the Psalmist sees the lead-in of the Messianic age which is to bring harmony and peace to all creation, Isaiah 11:1,35:1,55:12-13; Romans 8:19
- The heavenly hosts become in awe before the grace given to mankind on that day of Incarnation
- The roaring of the waves is the voice of the sea, which sometimes speaks terror, and here expresses joy
- *all its fullness*, All that it contains; that is, Let all that dwell in the seas praise God
- His reign is an occasion for universal joy

The Message of Joy to All Creation 96:11-13



- All creation is excited that God *is coming to judge the earth*
- Everyone is to exalt the Lord because He is coming to judge the earth
- According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, *the fields* where the Lord Christ used to preach, will rejoice, and *the trees of the woods* will become glad, for our Lord has honored them by the cross taken from them
- And according to St. Augustine, the field is all the meek, all the gentle, and all the righteous
- Also, according to him, *the trees of the woods* are the heathen

The Message of Joy to All Creation 96:11-13



- Because they were cut off from the wild olive, and engrafted into the good olive
- The Psalm ends with the joyful confidence that God will *judge* and set things right
- *before the Lord*, at the presence and approach of their Lord and Maker
- *He is coming, for He is coming*, Is repeated to show the certainty of Christ's coming and the just reason there was for the above joy
- And according to St. Jerome and others, to point out both the first and second coming of Christ, which are both matter of joy to the believers

The Message of Joy to All Creation 96:11-13



- The last judgment is sometimes described as a fearful occasion, *“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”* Luke 21:25-26)
- At other times it is described as something pleasant and delightful, by reason of the glory of the elect, which will produce a certain effect on the creation therefore, in verse 28, in the same chapter, our Savior says, *“Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”*

The Message of Joy to All Creation 96:11-13



- All the things above named will rejoice in the presence of the Lord, because *He is coming* to redeem the world in His mercy, and because He will come again to judge it in His justice
- God is Just, is it possible, says St. Augustine, that God could have been so faithful in everything, and so false as to the day of judgment?
- He will judge the earth in righteousness
- The psalmist pictures the coming of the Judge as something to anticipate
- He looks forward to the coming of the Lord

The Message of Joy to All Creation 96:11-13



- St. Augustine says, “For with righteousness shall He judge the world:’ not a part of it, for He bought not a part: He will judge the whole, for it was the whole of which He paid the price. You have heard the Gospel, where it says, that when He comes, ‘He shall gather together His elect from the four winds.’ He gathers all His elect from the four winds: therefore from the whole world...What are righteousness and truth? He will gather together His elect with Him to the judgment, but the rest He will separate one from another; for He will place some on the right, others on the left hand. But what is more just, what more true, than that they shall not expect mercy from their Judge, who have refused to act mercifully, before their Judge come? But those who chose to act with mercy, with mercy shall be judged....”

Discussion



- Why is the Lord worthy of our praise?
- What exactly do we want to declare to the heathen nations?
- Why should creation be joyful concerning the fact that God is coming to judge the earth?
- What does it mean to “bless the Lord”? How do we do that?



Discussion

- What does the repetition in this Psalm emphasize? (96:1-2,7-8)
- What reasons did the psalmist give to the nations to praise the Lord?
- What does this Psalm reveal about God's character?
- How is the judgment of the Lord described?