

# PSALM 96

This psalm is part of that which was delivered into the hand of Asaph and his brethren (~~1~~ 1 Chronicles 16:7), by which it appears both that David was the penman of it and that it has reference to the bringing up of the ark to the city of David; whether that long psalm was made first, and this afterwards taken out of it, or this made first and afterwards borrowed to make up that, is not certain. But this is certain, that, though it was sung at the translation of the ark, it looks further, to the kingdom of Christ, and is designed to celebrate the glories of that kingdom, especially the accession of the Gentiles to it. Here is,

**I.** A call given to all people to praise God, to worship him, and give glory to him, as a great and glorious God (v. 1-9).

**II.** Notice given to all people of God's universal government and judgment, which ought to be the matter of universal joy (v. 10-13). In singing this psalm we ought to have our hearts filed with great and high thoughts of the glory of God and the grace of the gospel, and with an entire satisfaction in Christ's sovereign dominion and in the expectation of the judgment to come.

## ~~96~~ PSALM 96:1-9

### AN INVITATION TO PRAISE AND HONOUR GOD

These verses will be best expounded by pious and devout affections working in our souls towards God, with a high veneration for his majesty and transcendent excellency. The call here given us to praise God is very lively, the expressions are raised and repeated, to all which the echo of a thankful heart should make agreeable returns.

**I.** We are here required to honour God,

**1.** With songs, v. 1, 2. Three times we are here called to *sing unto the Lord*; sing to the Father, to the Son, to the Holy Ghost, as it was *in the beginning*, when *the morning stars sang together*, *is now*, in the church

militant, and *ever shall be*, in the church triumphant. We have reason to do it often, and we have need to be often reminded of it, and stirred up to it. *Sing unto the Lord*, that is, “*Bless his name, speak well of him, that you may bring others to think well of him.*”

(1.) *Sing a new song*, an excellent song, the product of new affections, clothed with new expressions. We speak of nothing more despicable than “an old song,” but the newness of a song recommends it; for there we expect something surprising. A new song is a song for new favours, for those compassions which are new every morning. A new song is New-Testament song, a song of praise for the new covenant and the precious privileges of that covenant. A new song is a song that shall be ever new, and shall never wax old nor vanish away; it is an everlasting song, that shall never be antiquated or out of date.

(2.) Let all the earth sing this song, not the Jews only, to whom hitherto the service of God had been appropriated, who could not *sing the Lord's song in* (would not sing it to) *a strange land*; but let *all the earth*, all that are *redeemed from the earth*, learn and sing *this new song*, <sup><6418></sup>Revelation 14:3. This is a prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles; all the earth shall have this *new song put into their mouths*, shall have both cause and call to sing it.

(3.) Let the subject-matter of this song be *his salvation*, the great salvation which was to be wrought out by the Lord Jesus; that must be shown forth as the cause of this joy and praise.

(4.) Let this song be sung constantly, not only in the times appointed for the solemn feasts, but from day to day; it is a subject that can never be exhausted. Let day unto day utter this speech, that, under the influence of gospel devotions, we may daily exemplify a gospel conversation.

2. With sermons (v. 3): *Declare his glory among the heathen, even his wonders among all people.*

(1.) Salvation by Christ is here spoken of as a work of wonder, and that in which the glory of God shines very brightly; in showing forth that salvation we declare God's glory as it shines in the face of Christ.

(2.) This salvation was, in the Old-Testament times, as heaven's happiness is now, *a glory to be revealed*; but in the fulness of time it was declared,

and a full discovery made of that, even to babes, which prophets and kings desired and wished to see and might not.

**(3.)** What was then discovered was declared only among the Jews, but it is now declared *among the heathen, among all people*; the nations which long sat in darkness now see this great light. The apostles' commission to preach the gospel to every creature is copied from this: *Declare his glory among the heathen.*

**3.** With religious services, v. 7-9. Hitherto, though in every nation those that feared God and wrought righteousness were accepted of him, yet instituted ordinances were the peculiarities of the Jewish religion; but, in gospel-times, the kindreds of the people shall be invited and admitted into the service of God and be as welcome as ever the Jews were. The court of the Gentiles shall no longer be an outward court, but shall be laid in common with the court of Israel. All the earth is here summoned to fear before the Lord, to worship him according to his appointment. *In every place incense shall be offered to his name,* <sup>3011</sup>Malachi 1:11; <sup>3347</sup>Zechariah 14:17; <sup>2623</sup>Isaiah 66:23. This indeed spoke mortification to the Jews, but, withal, it gave a prospect of that which would redound very much to the glory of God and to the happiness of mankind. Now observe how the acts of devotion to God are here described.

**(1.)** We must *give unto the Lord*; not as if God needed any thing, or could receive any thing, from us or any creature, which was not his own before, much less be benefited by it; but we must in our best affections, adorations, and services, return to him what we have received from him, and do it freely, as what we give; for *God loves a cheerful giver*. It is debt, it is rent, it is tribute, it is what must be paid, and, if not, will be recovered, and yet, if it come from holy love, God is pleased to accept it as a gift.

**(2.)** We must acknowledge God to be the sovereign Lord and pay homage to him accordingly (v. 7): *Give unto the Lord glory and strength, glory and empire, or dominion, so some.* As a king, he is clothed with robes of glory and girt with the girdle of power, and we must subscribe to both. *Thine is the kingdom, and therefore thine is the power and the glory.* “Give the glory to God; do not take it to yourselves, nor give it to any creature.”

**(3.)** We must *give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name*, that is, to the discovery he has been pleased to make of himself to the children of men.

In all the acts of religious worship this is that which we must aim at, to honour God, to pay him some of that reverence which we owe him as the best of beings and the fountain of our being.

(4.) We must *bring an offering into his courts*. We must bring ourselves, in the first place, the *offering up of the Gentiles*, <sup><616></sup>Romans 15:16. We must offer up the *sacrifices of praise continually* (<sup><615></sup>Hebrews 13:15), must often appear before God in public worship and never appear before him empty.

(5.) We must *worship him in the beauty of holiness*, in the solemn assembly where divine institutions are religiously observed, the beauty of which is their holiness, that is, their conformity to the rule. We must worship him with holy hearts, sanctified by the grace of God, devoted to the glory of God, and purified from the pollutions of sin.

(6.) We must *fear before him*; all the acts of worship must be performed from a principle of the fear of God and with a holy awe and reverence.

**II.** In the midst of these calls to praise God and give glory to him glorious things are here said of him, both as motives to praise and matter of praise: *The Lord is great, and therefore greatly to be praised* (v. 4) and *to be feared*, great and honourable to his attendants, great and terrible to his adversaries. Even the new song proclaims God great as well as good; for his goodness is his glory; and, when the everlasting gospel is preached, it is this, *Fear God, and give glory to him*, <sup><616></sup>Revelation 14:6, 7.

**1.** He is great in his sovereignty over all that pretend to be deities; none dare vie with him: *He is to be feared above all gods* — all princes, who were often deified after their deaths, and even while they lived were adored as petty gods — or rather all idols, *the gods of the nations* v. 5. All the earth being called to sing the new song, they must be convinced that the Lord Jehovah, to whose honour they must sing it, is the one only living and true God, infinitely above all rivals and pretenders; he is great, and they are little; he is all, and they are *nothing*; so the word used for idols signifies, for we know that *an idol is nothing in the world*, <sup><618></sup>1 Corinthians 8:4.

**2.** He is great in his right, even to the noblest part of the creation; for it is his own work and derives its being from him: *The Lord made the heavens and all their hosts; they are the work of his fingers* (<sup><618></sup>Psalm 8:3), so

nicely, so curiously, are they made. The gods of the nations were all made-gods, the creatures of men's fancies; but our God is the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, those lights of heaven, which they imagined to be gods and worshipped as such.

**3.** He is great in the manifestation of his glory both in the upper and lower world, among his angels in heaven and his saints on earth (v. 6): *Splendour and majesty are before him*, in his immediate presence above, where the angels cover their faces, as unable to bear the dazzling lustre of his glory. *Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary*, both that above and this below. In God there is every thing that is awful and yet every thing that is amiable. If we attend him in his sanctuary, we shall behold his beauty, for *God is love*, and experience his strength, for *he is our rock*. Let us therefore go forth in his strength, enamoured with his beauty.

## <99>PSALM 96:10-13

### THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

We have here instructions given to those who were to preach the gospel to the nations what to preach, or to those who had themselves received the gospel what account to give of it to their neighbours, what to *say among the heathen*; and it is an illustrious prophecy of the setting up of the kingdom of Christ upon the ruins of the devil's kingdom, which began immediately after his ascension and will continue in the doing till the mystery of God be finished.

**I.** Let it be told *that the Lord reigns*, the Lord Christ reigns, that King whom God determined to set upon his holy hill of Zion. See how this was first said *among the heathen* by Peter, <40C>Acts 10:42. Some of the ancients added a gloss to this, which by degrees crept into the text, *The Lord reigneth from the tree* (so Justin Martyr, Austin, and others, quote it), meaning the cross, when he had this title written over him, *The King of the Jews*. It was because he became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, that God exalted him, and gave him a name above every name, a throne above every throne. Some of the heathen came betimes to enquire after him that was *born King of the Jews*, <40B>Matthew 2:2. Now let them know that he has come and his kingdom is set up.

**II.** Let it be told that Christ's government will be the world's happy settlement. *The world also shall be established, that it shall not be moved.* The natural world shall be established. The standing of the world, and its stability, are owing to the mediation of Christ. Sin had given it a shock, and still threatens it; but Christ, as Redeemer, upholds all things, and preserves the course of nature. The world of mankind shall be established, shall be preserved, till all that belong to the election of grace are called in, though a guilty provoking world. The Christian religion, as far as it is embraced, shall establish states and kingdoms, and preserve good order among men. The church in the world shall be established (so some), that it *cannot be moved; for it is built upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it; it is a kingdom that cannot be shaken.*

**III.** Let them be told that Christ's government will be incontestably just and righteous: *He shall judge the people righteously* (v. 10), *judge the world with righteousness, and with his truth*, v. 13. Judging is here put for ruling; and though this may be extended to the general judgment of the world at the last day, which will be *in righteousness* (<sup><4473></sup>Acts 17:31), yet it refers more immediately to Christ's first coming, and the setting up of his kingdom in the world by the gospel. He says himself, *For judgment have I come into this world* (<sup><4499></sup>John 9:39; 12:31), and declares that *all judgment was committed to him*, <sup><4452></sup>John 5:22, 27. His ruling and judging with righteousness and truth signify,

- 1.** That all the laws and ordinances of his kingdom shall be consonant to the rules and principles of eternal truth and equity, that is, to the rectitude and purity of the divine nature and will.
- 2.** That all his administrations of government shall be just and faithful, and according to what he has said.
- 3.** That he shall rule in the hearts and consciences of men by the commanding power of truth and the Spirit of righteousness and sanctification. When Pilate asked our Saviour, *Art thou a king?* he answered, *For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth* (<sup><4657></sup>John 18:37); for he rules by truth, commands men's wills by informing their judgments aright.

**IV.** Let them be told that his coming draws nigh, that this King, this Judge, *standeth before the door; for he cometh, for he cometh.* Enoch, the seventh from Adam, said so. *Behold, the Lord cometh*, <sup><4614></sup>Jude 1:14.

Between this and his first coming the revolutions of many ages intervened, and yet he came at the set time, and so sure will his second coming be; though it is now long since it was said, *Behold, he comes in the clouds* (~~600~~ Revelation 1:7) and he has not yet come. See ~~600~~ 2 Peter 3:4, etc.

**V.** Let them be called upon to rejoice in this honour that is put upon the Messiah, and this great trust that is to be lodged in his hand (v. 11, 12): *Let heaven and earth rejoice, the sea, the field, and all the trees of the wood.* The dialect here is poetical; the meaning is,

**1.** That the days of the Messiah will be joyful days, and, as far as his grace and government are submitted to, will bring joy along with them. We have reason to give that place, that soul, joy into which Christ is admitted. See an instance of both, Acts 8. When Samaria received the gospel *there was great joy in that city* (v. 8), and, when the eunuch was baptized, *he went on his way rejoicing*, v. 39.

**2.** That it is the duty of every one of us to bid Christ and his kingdom welcome; for, though he comes conquering and to conquer, yet he comes peaceably. *Hosanna, Blessed is he that cometh*; and again, *Hosanna, Blessed be the kingdom of our father David* (~~400~~ Mark 11:9, 10); not only *let the daughter of Zion rejoice that her King comes* (~~300~~ Zechariah 9:9), but let all rejoice.

**3.** That the whole creation will have reason to rejoice in the setting up of Christ's kingdom, even *the sea and the field*; for, as by the sin of the first Adam the whole creation was made *subject to vanity*, so by the grace of the second Adam it shall, some way or other, first or last, be *delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*, ~~400~~ Romans 8:20, 21.

**4.** That there will, in the first place, be *joy in heaven, joy in the presence of the angels of God*; for, when the First-begotten was brought into the world, they sang their anthems to his praise, ~~400~~ Luke 2:14.

**5.** That God will graciously accept the holy joy and praises of all the hearty well-wishers to the kingdom of Christ, be their capacity ever so mean. *The sea can but roar*, and how *the trees of the wood* can show that they *rejoice* I know not; but *he that searches the heart knows what is the mind of the Spirit*, and understands the language, the broken language, of the weakest.