

23. Psalm 98-99

August 9, 2018

Psalm 98

This Psalm has a simple title, "A Psalm" without any further explanations. Like Psalm 96, it speaks of praise to God for His work of salvation in widening circles – first Israel, then all the earth, finally all creation.

From this psalm, the 17th century British hymn writer Isaac Watts found the inspiration for his popular hymn "Joy to the World," often classified as a Christmas carol, but more accurately identified as a "kingdom hymn." In his hymn, Watts described Christ's Second Coming and not His first, the Messianic kingdom and not the manger.

This psalm was written to praise the Lord for a great victory over Israel's enemies,

It is very hard to do an inductive Bible study on a poem that has no connection with any particular event.

A. OBSERVATION – 5 Ws and 1 H

1) **Who:** We don't know the author of this psalm. But the author is speaking to the people of Israel about the God of Israel.

2) **What:** God's awesome victory over their enemies. Perhaps the victory of the Medes and Persians over Babylon that led to the return of the Jewish exiles to their land.

3) **Where:** We don't know. Most likely in Israel

4) **When:** After the return of the Jewish exiles to their land.

5) **Why:** The Lord is good and He deserves our praise, whether He did anything for us or not.

6) **How:** Sing, shout, playing the musical instruments. The author uses anthropomorphism to describe how the Lord gained the victory – His right hand and His holy arm. And the nature, like sea, rivers, and hills would also rejoice in His triumph.

OUTLINING:

- A Marvelous Salvation: v1–3
- A Joyous Celebration: v4–6
- A Glorious Expectation: v7–9

B. INTERPRETATION

1) A Marvelous Salvation

Psalm 98:1-3 A Psalm. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. 2 The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations. 3 He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

What can you interpret from these 3 verses?

What is the new song that the author is talking about?

Why did they need to sing a new song to the Lord?

The salvation mentioned here in v2 and 3, is that the same salvation as the salvation in Christ?

The focus in this section is on the Jewish people and the wonderful new demonstration of God's power they had seen. It was so great that it demanded a new praise and worship song from His people. The idea of a "new song" is found in many places in the Scripture, including Revelation 5:9 and 14:3.

Speaking of singing praise and worship songs, I want you to notice the sequence in v1. Tell me what you see there.

We are so used to the order of our church service: We sing praise and worship songs first; then, followed by listening sermon from the Word of God. If that order is correct, it is easy for us to think that we have to make an initiation to get blessings from God. No, thousand times no. Our God never stops in blessing us whether we know it or not. In reality, it is God who initiates everything toward us. We are only responders to what He already has done for us in praise and worship song.

The picture of God as warrior disturbs those who seem to forget that a holy God cannot compromise with sin. The cross declares not only that God loves sinners, but also that God hates and opposes sin. Since God is a spirit, He does not have a body, so the references to His hand and arm are metaphorical. What God did for Israel was a witness to the Gentile nations and a vivid demonstration of His faithfulness to His covenant and His love for His chosen people.

2) A Joyous Celebration

Psalm 98:4-6 Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. 5 Sing to the Lord with the harp, With the harp and the sound of a psalm, 6 With trumpets and the sound of a horn; Shout joyfully before the Lord, the King.

What is your take on this?

Does this mean when we praise and worship the Lord, it is OK to sing our hearts out? If so, why don't we do it? Why are we so reserved in worshipping our God who is beyond good to us, but we go crazy for stupid ball games that mean nothing in the future?

One of the things that I don't get from the majority of Christians in America, with the exception of our black brothers and sisters is that when it comes to worshipping the Lord, it can be easily compared to a funeral ceremony. A black baptist church would make white Pentecostal church look like a dead church.

The Spirit-filled saint is a song-filled saint! Animals can't sing. Neither can pews, or pulpits, or Bibles, or buildings – only humans can. And our song, regardless of how beautiful or pitiful we may sound, is broadcasted right into heaven, where God's antenna is always receptive. We often forget that we sing praise and worship songs for the Audience of One.

The joyful noise of verses 4 and 6 meets us elsewhere as the spontaneous shout that might greet a king or a moment of victory. It is the word translated 'shout aloud' in Zechariah 9:9, the prophecy that was fulfilled on Palm Sunday.

Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.

3) A Glorious Expectation

Psalm 98:7-9 Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell in it; 8 Let the rivers clap their hands; Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, 9 For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, And the peoples with equity.

What is your interpretation of this?

When the Scripture says, "With righteousness He shall judge the world," can you give me the time period for this?

In the ancient world, and still sometimes in the present day, justice was rare. Judges were bribed or turned by ideology and prejudice. The idea of coming judgment with equity was a great relief to those who were often oppressed and denied justice.

Surely the writer was looking beyond a mere local victory, because he wrote about the witness of this event to the nations in v2, the earth in v3-4, and the world in v7 and 9. It appears that this psalm points ahead of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and His judgment of end-time Babylon that is mentioned in Revelation 17-18. There will come a day when all wrongs will be righted and all sins will be judged, and our Ultimate Judge will bring justice and equity to the earth.

C. APPLICATION

The Spirit-filled saint is a song-filled saint. Sing your praise to Him daily.

Psalm 99

This is the sixth of the "royal psalms," – chapter 93, 95-100, all of which magnify the sovereign rule of Jehovah the King. Like chapters 93 and 97, it opens with "The Lord reigns," and it emphasizes that the Lord is exalted above all the nations and not just Israel. The psalmist describes the throne of the Lord and encourages the people to exalt the Lord as they worship Him.

A. OBSERVATION – 5 Ws and 1 H

1) **Who:** We don't know the author of this psalm, either.

2) **What:** This Psalm, without title in the Hebrew text, is a three-time proclamation of God's holiness.

3) **Where:** We don't know. Most likely in Israel

4) **When:** We don't know.

5) **Why:** Because our God is holy.

6) **How:** Recollecting how exalted and holy our God is, and how profound is the reverence we owe Him.

OUTLINING:

- An Awesome Throne: v1-3
- A Just Throne: v4-5
- A Gracious Throne: v6-9

B. INTERPRETATION

1) An Awesome Throne

Psalm 99:1-3 The Lord reigns; Let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; Let the earth be moved! 2 The Lord is great in Zion, And He is high above all the peoples. 3 Let them praise Your great and awesome name – He is holy.

What is your interpretation of these 3 verses?

Which portions of the Bible do remind you of when you read “He dwells between the cherubim”?

Our God sits upon the throne in heaven. But during the OT time, the Israelis could relay the idea with the Ark of Covenant where the two cherubim on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies of the sanctuary on the Mount Zion. It was there that God’s glory rested, and from there God spoke to Moses and ruled the nation of Israel.

God chose the Jews to be His vehicle for telling the Gentile nations about the true and living God, and God chose Mount Zion to be His dwelling place. God made His covenant with Israel alone and they were His special people. When the Gentiles beheld what God did for Israel, they should have trembled with awe and put their trust in Him.

2) A Just Throne

Psalm 99:4-5 The King’s strength also loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. 5 Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His footstool – He is holy.

Give me your interpretation of these 2 verses.

The Lord ruled His people of Israel through the kings in the Davidic dynasty. The Lord is perfectly righteous in His character and just in His actions, and He wanted the throne of Israel to be just.

Though our God’s dominion is absolute and cannot be controlled by anyone else, and His power cannot be fought back, yet He does not abuse it to tyranny and oppression, as the leaders of the world commonly do, but He rules the universe with the perfect righteousness.

In Scripture, the “footstool” could be referred to the ark of the covenant, the sanctuary of God, the city of Jerusalem, or even planet earth. Solomon’s throne had a footstool of gold, and visitors would kneel there in homage before him. The sanctuary on Mount Zion was God’s chosen dwelling place, and the ark in the sanctuary was His appointed throne, so when the Jewish pilgrims came to Jerusalem, they were worshipping at His footstool.

3) A Gracious Throne

Psalm 99:6-9 Moses and Aaron were among His priests, And Samuel was among those who called upon His name; They called upon the Lord, and He answered them. 7 He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar; They kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them. 8 You answered them, O Lord our God; You were to them God-Who-Forgives, Though You took vengeance on their deeds. 9 Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His holy hill; For the Lord our God is holy.

What do you see here?

How should we respond to this kind of a God who sits on this kind of a throne?

The best definition of God's mercy is portrayed perfectly in v8 – *You answered them, O Lord our God; You were to them God-Who-Forgives, Though You took vengeance on their deeds.* I love that. Please notice the very important point here. The Lord our God took vengeance on their deeds, not on them, because He loved them. Because He loved them, He forgave them and was known as God-Who-Forgives.

Often Moses, Aaron, and Samuel had to intercede for the disobedient people of Israel, and the Lord heard them and answered. God's gracious ministry to His old covenant people is still available to His new covenant family: He speaks to us from His Word; hears our prayers and answers; disciplines us when we sin; and forgives us when we confess. How many times the Lord forgave Israel and gave them another opportunity to serve Him! The throne and the altar were not far apart in the sanctuary.

C. APPLICATION

We must worship Him, praise and exalt Him, and remember that He is holy. We must pray to Him and seek to glorify His name by our obedience and service.