

IV. Consummation of Sonship

Israel's psalms celebrated the privileges and glory of the nation's unique sonship, while also candidly speaking to the various challenges that confronted them as they sought to fulfill their calling as Yahweh's covenant children. The numerous lament psalms highlight the people's sorrowful awareness of their failure of faithfulness, but even the most despondent among those songs held out confident hope that Yahweh would remain faithful, no matter what. His intent behind Israel's election would not be thwarted, even by the defiant and incorrigible nation itself; somehow, Yahweh would see to it that Israel became Israel *in truth* and fulfilled its calling of sonship on behalf of the world. His purpose and zeal for His creation would yet prevail.

Thus the Psalter contains exultant songs of consummation – songs that proclaim Yahweh's sovereign power and lordship with a view to the day when He would arise to judge the world and establish His complete and everlasting dominion over all creation. Notably, such psalms aren't concerned with a human eternal destiny in heaven, and certainly not with a supposed cosmic conflagration and the destruction of the present time-space universe. Rather, they are *eschatological* in a truly biblical sense. They look to and celebrate the Messianic “day” – the day when Yahweh would judge and overthrow the powers that oppose Him and have enslaved His image-children and His creation. He would achieve this triumph through the Son of David, His messianic Servant, and so liberate, purge and renew His creation and take His throne in its midst as its rightful, everlasting King. Thus the psalms of consummation look to the time when God would bring his Messiah into the world and put all things right through Him. In that day, the creation would be redeemed and Israel, through its Messiah, would fulfill its sonship, now at last mediating Yahweh's blessing to all the earth's families, just as He pledged to Abraham.

Numerous psalms convey this eschatological message, some more overtly and others more subtly. And yet, all of the psalms are grounded in this perspective, even as are the rest of Israel's “God-breathed” scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16). For God brought forth His creation having destined it for this messianic outcome (Ephesians 1:9-10; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28), and everything He has said and done since then testifies to and works toward this intent. Above all else, then, the Scriptures are the unfolding account of this design and its accomplishment, and this is the fundamental sense in which all of the Scriptures testify of Jesus the Messiah.

A. The King's Judgment of Creation – Psalms 96-99

Psalms 96-99 are four such psalms, and the way they are arranged punctuates their eschatological thrust and core themes. Whatever the intent of the compilers, this arrangement forms an obvious alternating structure (cf. 96:1 with 98:1 and 97:1 with 99:1). Psalms 97 and 99 focus on the theme of Yahweh's kingship and reign, and so embellish Psalms 96-98, which also highlight this theme (96:9-10, 98:5-6), but as it pertains to His intent to become King over all the earth through a great triumph and work of deliverance (“salvation”) (96:1-3, 98:1-3).

1. Psalms 97 and 99 open with the same proclamation, and then extol God's regal sovereignty and call for men to respond accordingly. God is identified under His covenant name as Israel's King, but with the focus on His universal reign: *Yahweh is the Creator-God whose sovereign power, authority, integrity and glory fill the earth, and so call for the devotion and praise of all things – all people, all powers, and all creation.*

The psalmist(s) declared Yahweh's manifest power and glory as *Most High over all the earth* (97:9) and the *Holy One* (99:3, 5, 9), and called for all men to rightly acknowledge Him for who He is and what He has done. He is the true God and Savior who protects, preserves and delivers; the mighty and merciful King who spreads out His goodness and care like the light that He floods the earth with. So all idolaters are to repent, and those who love Yahweh are to spurn all evil – everything that lies against Him and His truth. And all creation is to devote itself to rejoicing, thankfulness, and praise.

These psalms together stress Yahweh's intent to become King over all the earth. The writers understood that He is ever and always the sovereign Lord over all creation, but also recognized His declared intent to one day rule all the nations as covenant King and Father in the way that He uniquely ruled Israel. Indeed, His kingship as Israel's covenant King was established precisely with this universal goal in mind. Yahweh chose Abraham and his descendents and made them a kingdom under His rule in order that they would shine forth His glory and mediate His blessing to all the earth's peoples. *He was covenant Lord and Father to Israel in order to be Lord and Father to all mankind and all creation.* Yahweh reigns as King in Israel, therefore the *earth* is to rejoice (v. 1).

2. This theme of Yahweh's eschatological kingship is the crucial context for Psalms 96 and 98, and it provides the lens through which they are to be read and understood. These two psalms are constructed as closely corresponding poems, with each comprised of the same three parts: a call to the inhabited earth to sing a "new song" to Yahweh because He is the sovereign Creator and Deliverer (96:1-6, 98:1-3); a more specific call to all humans to proclaim the Lord's praises as the great King over all creation, including the entire world of men (96:7-10, 98:4-6); finally, a call to all creation to rejoice because this great King is coming to judge the world and put all things right (96:11-13, 98:7-9).
 - a. Again, both psalms open with the same call: "*Sing to Yahweh a new song.*" The psalmist didn't explain this newness, but the context shows what he meant. He was calling for a song whose newness consists in its proclamation and celebration of the *new work* Yahweh had pledged to do – the mighty work of triumph and deliverance that pertains to all nations and peoples, and thus needed to be proclaimed to them (vv. 1-3). He'd made known His intentions to Israel, but most importantly, He had shown Himself fully capable of fulfilling them: He is the God above all gods and lords, the sovereign Creator who fashioned the heavens and heavenly realm and rules from His throne there (vv. 4-6; cf. Psalm 11:4, 103:19).

Both psalms share this same perspective, but Psalm 98 elaborates on it more than its counterpart. Both focus on Yahweh's work of *salvation* (i.e., His victory over His enemies by which He liberates those who have been subjugated), and the need to proclaim it to the nations, but Psalm 98 builds on this theme by stating that He has revealed this "salvation" to all people – indeed, to the very ends of the earth. Even more, the psalmist declared that this mighty work of triumph and liberation that encompasses all of the earth's peoples is bound up in Yahweh's covenant faithfulness to the house of Israel (98:2-3). His salvation, then, is His manifest faithfulness to His covenant oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the nation descended from them (ref. Genesis 12:1-3, 22:15-18, 26:1-5, 28:10-14).

- b. The second section of both psalms calls for the appropriate response to this mighty triumph: The earth and all of its inhabitants are to ascribe to Yahweh the glory and power that are His alone (96:7-8, 98:4-5), and sing His praises for His conquest and enthronement as King over all the earth. He has gained the victory, taken His throne, and established the world under His reign so that it will not be moved forever. Thus all people are to worship Him with exultant joy, for He is Yahweh, the King (96:9-10, 98:6).
- c. The closing sections of the two psalms are also very similar, paralleling each other in their theme and language. They extend the call to rejoicing, praise and worship beyond the human world to the *wider creation* (96:11-12, 98:7-8). Most importantly, the psalmists (perhaps the same person) issue this call specifically in view of the fact that the day was coming when Yahweh would arise to judge the earth and its inhabitants (96:13, 98:9).

On the face of it, this might seem odd or confusing, especially since *judgment* has a negative connotation in contemporary usage. For most people, including Christians, the idea of God coming to judge the world isn't something to be longed for and celebrated; at best, it's a necessary outcome because of God's righteousness and His opposition to the evil that fills the world, but it's nothing to look forward to. True, many Christians believe they'll be "raptured" to escape God's judgment on the world, but even they view this episode as fearsome and cataclysmic. For perhaps the majority of Christians, God's "judgment day" is understood in terms of the complete destruction of the existing world, so that He can make an entirely new "heavens and earth" (ref. 2 Peter 3:10-13). From this perspective, the psalmists' call to longingly rejoice in Yahweh's judgment seems bizarre, *especially since he issues this appeal to the very earth that is supposedly going to be annihilated in the fire of God's wrath.*

But the writer (or writers) was not pointing to an end-of-the-age conflagration as envisioned by contemporary readers; he was referring to the time when Yahweh would arise to fulfill His word to the patriarchs, their Israelite offspring, and their prophets. That word was His pledge to confront and overthrow all that opposes Him and has corrupted His creation and set it at odds with Him. That triumph would see Him liberating and renewing the world, and restoring His covenant kingdom and covenant household as King, not just over Israel, but over all the earth. The psalmist(s) was pointing to the *messianic triumph*, not a supposed "end times" judgment that destroys the present created order. Yahweh was coming to deal justly with the earth and its inhabitants – to vindicate His eternal design for His creation by breaking the bonds of its alienation and consuming its corruption. *This is why the creation was summoned to rejoice and sing the Creator's praises:* He had not lost sight of His oath to Abraham, and was unwavering in His enduring commitment to fulfill it. He would arise and judge the world, banishing the creational curse and its enmity and reconciling all things to Himself. The psalmist(s) called for exultant praise in view of *that* coming day; we have the privilege of looking back on it, beholding the full splendor of Yahweh's triumph and glory in the face of His Messiah (cf. Luke 1:26-33, 67-79; Romans 8:1-39).