

Yahweh Malak Psalms

'The LORD Reigns' - Psalms 93-99

STUDY FOUR - Psalms 96

Ray Bell ~ 17th September, 2015

¹Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!
²sing to the LORD, bless his name;

Tell of his salvation from day to day.
³Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!

⁴For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be feared above all gods.
⁵For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,

But the LORD made the heavens.
⁶Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

⁷Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
⁸ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;

Bring an offering, and come into his courts!
⁹Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!

¹⁰Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity."

¹¹Let the heavens be glad,
let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹²let the field exult, and everything in it!
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
¹³before the LORD, for he comes,

For he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness,
and the peoples in his faithfulness.

A 'new song' with a long history

Whilst Psalm 96 is appropriately placed in Book IV of the Psalter, it may well have been *written* well before the exile. The Septuagint (LXX) provides evidence which suggests Psalm 96 was used during the *return* of the exiles, when the temple was being rebuilt. It includes the following superscription in its title - '*When the house was built after the exile*'. However, as we will soon see, there is stronger evidence still which dates the original composition of this psalm in the time of King David.

So, a psalm which exhorts God's people to "Sing a *new song* to the LORD," could well be 'an old song' - a 'golden oldie' even! However, it would not be inappropriate to take an old song and use it to exhort a new generation to sing (perhaps even to *compose*) a new song! This would quite apt, especially when anticipating or declaring the dawning of a new day, a new victory, or a new season in the life of God's people.

'NEW SONG' - this term most likely refers to a song of triumph following a military victory, or a new 'reign'. Located here, in the Yahweh Malak psalms, it symbolises and declares afresh, the renewed recognition of the LORD's reign - not only over Israel, but over all the earth - as the LORD's people return from exile!

As suggested above, the origin of Psalm 96 goes back much further than the exiles. In **1 Chronicles 16:23-33** we read David's song of thanks and joy as the ark of the covenant came to Jerusalem. There is no mistaking the similarity here. This was the 'new song' of the day for David, and for all Israel as they rejoiced at the arrival of the ark of the covenant into their midst (despite Michal's displeasure).

The Psalm itself

The placement of this psalm here, in Book IV of the Psalter, highlights the significance of the people's return from exile and all that this means for them, and for their God - the LORD, their God, has not been defeated, he has not forsaken them, nor renounced his covenant (see Ps 89:38-39). In fact, as the psalm declares loud and clear - "*Yahweh Malak - The LORD reigns*".

Whilst this is a song for Israel, it exhorts the people of the LORD to declare his glory and his reign 'among the nations' (96:3, 10). Here is an Old Testament 'Great Commission' of sorts (Psalm 98 sings of how the LORD has done marvellous things '*in the sight of the nations*'). The songs we sing are intended to be part of the proclamation of the good news to all the nations.

Verses 4-6 tell us WHY this new song should be sung- with reasons which would not be well received in today's 'age of tolerance' (see esp. v5). *Will we acquiesce to the spirit of the world, and its relativism, or honour the one, true living God, and worship him alone?*

Verses 7-9 act like a 'second verse', repeating in a different way the call to sing and praise the LORD! Here though, there is no explicit 'reason' ('for') given. We can only 'give' and 'ascribe' to the LORD that which is already his!- his character, his nature, his name! These provide both the *content* AND the *reason* for our praise! In other words, we don't need to make anything up when we write songs or speak words of praise and worship to the LORD!

Verse 10 borrows content from Psalm 93:1-2, but then adds v10c - '*He will judge the peoples with equity.*' We are getting near to the point of this psalm!

Verses 11-13 extend the call to worship, beyond the people of Israel, to all creation. And, as the crescendo of worship reaches its climax, we are given the ultimate reason for this new song of joy- '*for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.*'

The judgments of the LORD are good reason to sing for joy! Without judgment, there is no justice and no righteousness. Without judgment, the LORD's holiness cannot be sustained. And ultimately, without judgment, there can be no salvation! For, "now is the judgment of the world," says Jesus, "now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31-32).