

The Book of Psalms

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Notes:

Psalms of Enthronement

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Bruce K. Waltke, Ph.D.:

Another important group of Psalms is the enthronement psalms. Like the royal psalms, these are grouped together by their content, but unlike the enthronement psalms, they mostly have the common form of descriptive praise psalms; that is, you will find the motifs of a call for praise and the cause for praise in almost all these psalms. The unifying feature, in particular, is the phrase found in each of these psalms: *adonay malak* which translated means *Yahweh reigns*. For example, if you look at Psalm 47:8 we read, “God reigneth over the nations.” Again in Psalm 93:1 “The Lord,” or Yahweh “reigneth.” Psalm 96:10, “Say among the nations that Yahweh reigneth;” or Psalm 97:1, “Yahweh reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof.” Slightly different, but in the same semantic field of thought, Psalm 98:6, “With trumpets and sound of cornet, make a joyful noise before Yahweh the king.” And finally Psalm 99:1, “Yahweh reigneth.”

Now exactly how are we to understand this expression: *Yahweh reigns*. As you read their literature you will discover that there have been four ways of interpreting this phrase. One way of interpreting it is that of Mowinkle’s which is to say that there was an annual enthronement festival, particularly in the floral festival at the Feast of Tabernacles he believes that Yahweh was annually enthroned over His people, and in the cultic ceremony of enthroning Yahweh this acclamation was made, *Yahweh reigns*. He found support for this interpretation of the phrase in three directions. First of all, he insists that the perfect tense means that Yahweh has been crowned king. In other words, he insists that it is a past perfect. He also claims that the Hebrew religion is patterned after the Near Eastern religions and he finds similar enthronement festivals of the gods in Mesopotamia and in Egypt. Finally, he argues that there are hints of the ceremony in post biblical literature.

The objections to the theory are these. First of all, the perfect tense can be

understood as a prophetic perfect or as a characteristic perfect, but in any case not necessarily as a past perfect, or present perfect. And, secondly, there is no substantial evidence of such a festival as he envisions in the prose literature of the Bible. Finally, he overextends the Near Eastern parallels. Suffice it here to call your attention to Kenneth Kitchen's work who faults Mowinkle's thesis.

A second way of interpreting the phrase is to say it refers to Yahweh's universal reign at all times and in all places over His universe. This, for example, is the view of Alva McClain in his excellent work, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, pages 22 and following. In my own judgment, Psalm 93 can be so interpreted, but a literal interpretation of the other psalms will not tolerate this interpretation.

A third way of understanding it is to refer the phrase to the historical reign of Yahweh over Israel. Looking at His dwelling between the cherubim and to say, historically, He has reigned over Israel. I will grant that possibly Psalm 99 can be so interpreted, but not the others.

Finally, it can be interpreted as referring to the millennial reign of Jesus Christ; that is, to take the perfect as a prophetic perfect, that the Psalmist has transported us and himself into the future day when Yahweh, incarnate in Jesus Christ, will assume His reign over Israel and all the nations of the earth will come under His righteous rule. The following men, surprisingly enough (from our particular theological slant surprising) also hold that the perfect is prophetic and it looks to the eschatological reign of Yahweh. These men include Gunkel, Kraus, Westermann, and then we might expect here Delitzsch and other conservatives. The support for this is mainly the content of the psalmists themselves and we will investigate this on our own as we read and study these psalms.

Secondly, as Westermann calls our attention, this must be its meaning, that is this must be the meaning of this phrase in Isaiah chapter 52:7. In the context of Isaiah 52, he looks forward to the coming of Yahweh to assume His rule over Israel; in 52:1 anticipates Israel's reawakening. "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean." And this will give you some understanding of the context in which verse 7 occurs. Now we read, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that sayeth unto Zion, Thy God, *elohim yik mōlak*, thy God reigns." Very clear here the exact same tense form, the same statement refers to the future reign of God over His people. Interestingly enough, the reign of Yahweh is associated with the reign of his servant in 52:13, where we read, "Behold my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted, (or lifted up, he shall be raised up) and he shall be very high." And then he goes on for example in verse 15, "So shall he sprinkle

many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him:" That is we can see this on the ancient Near Eastern reliefs, they would hold their forefingers to their lips in homage and adoration of him. "For that which they had not been told, for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they have not heard shall they consider." And this great oracle of the exalted suffering servant concludes with verse 12 of 53: "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he had stripped out his soul unto death: he was numbered with the transgressors: and he bore the sin of many, and he makes intercession for the transgressors.." From this context, it seems quite clear to me that the phrase "Your God reigns" refers to the future reign of God over His people and, more specifically, God is identified with the reign of His servant.

Now with this background, let us look at a few of these psalms in more detail. First of all, then, let us look at Psalm 47. Actually as I had inferred, these four psalms are clearly eschatological: Psalms 47, 96, 97, and 98. The message of Psalm 47 is this. The Psalmist calls upon all peoples of the earth to do homage to Israel's sovereign, holy monarch Yahweh, as He assumes His kingship over them after subduing them. The psalm falls into two parts. This is more readily apparent in the Hebrew text than it is in our English translation. It is interesting as you are looking at the Hebrew text that verses 1 through 4 all have a common tense form which we call the prefixed conjugation. But beginning with verse 5, the tense form shifts to what we call the suffixed conjugation in verses 5 through 9; and we may say here that the prefixed conjugation is really what we call the Hebrew jussive that can be either translated as a precativum or a preterite, that is it can be considered as a command: "Let him choose;" or as a preterite, a past definite act, "He chose." For myself, the context demands that we understand it in its preterite sense and I will assume that in the translation. In verses 1 through 4 then, we are given the reason why all of the nations should do homage to Yahweh, namely, He has proven Himself to be king. In verses 5 through 9, we are transported to the actual day of Yahweh's enthronement over Israel. We are actually there envisioning Yahweh assuming His throne.

Now with that background, let us look at the first section, more particularly, in verses 1 through 4, where the psalmist calls upon all people to do homage to Yahweh because He has proved Himself to be king over all the earth. So we examine this section, we find the normal motifs of praise psalms. First of all, we will hear a call to do homage in verses 1 and 2. And then, secondly, we will see the cause for giving Him homage in verses 3 and 4.

The call to homage, then, in verses 1 to 2: "Oh clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. For Yahweh Most High is awe inspiring; He is great king over all the earth." And now we move into the cause for doing homage in verses 3 and 4, and in typical fashion of praise psalms, we first had a summary statement and then the specifics are given to us. The summary statement: "He is a great king over all the earth," found

actually as we read it already in 2a. “He is a great king over all the earth,” and now in verse 3 the specific; “He subdued the peoples unto Israel and sovereignly chose the kingdom of Israel. He subdued the peoples under us,” the text reads, “and the nations under our feet. He chose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom He loved so long. Selah.

Now in the second section of the psalm, as I suggested, we are actually there, and the psalmist calls upon all people to praise Yahweh as He ascends His throne to reign over all the earth. In verse 5, we see Him ascending the throne. In verses 6 and 7 the peoples play skillfully to Him. Then in verse 8 He actually sits on His throne assuming His reign and in verse 9, we are to picture all the peoples gathered about Him. First of all, then, in verse 5 the psalmist pictures God ascending His throne amid shouts of acclamation. Verse 5: “God is ascended” or, “gone up,” implied “to his throne with the shout, the Lord with the sound of the trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: Sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: Sing ye praises with understanding.” Now in verse 8, the psalmist actually pictures Yahweh sitting upon His throne: “God reigneth over the nations. God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.” And now in verse 9, he pictures all peoples gathered about God as His people because He is all power. “The princes of the peoples are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: For the shields of the earth belong unto God: He is greatly exalted.”

Another enthronement psalm is Psalm 96. The message of Psalm 96 can be summarized in this fashion: The prophet calls upon all peoples of the earth and all the elements of the nature to praise Yahweh because He is greater than all the gods and will set up His kingdom in righteousness and truth.” I like the way Perowne expresses it: “This grand prophetic psalm looks forward with joyful certainty to the setting up of the divine kingdom upon the earth.”

Now having given succinct statement as to the message of the psalm, let us look at its structure. The psalm, as you analyze it, I think you will see that it falls into three sections, three praise sections. There will be a call to praise and then a cause for praise. This is found in verses 1 through 6. Then a renewed call to praise and a cause for praise In verses 7 through 10. And finally in the third division another call to praise and a cause for praise. You may see these quite quickly. Notice how in verses 1 through 3 you have a call to praise: “O Sing unto the Lord a new song.” And then with verse 4 the cause: “For the Lord is great.” Notice again verse 7: “Ascribe unto the Lord, oh ye kindreds of people, Ascribe unto the Lord glory and strength.” And now in verse 10 the reason, the cause, “Say among the nations that Yahweh reigns” and so forth. Again in verse 11 a call to praise: “Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad.” And then we have the cause in verse 13: “For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth.

Now let’s look at it in more detail, these three sections, each with its own call

and its own cause. In the first section, verses 1 through 6, the psalmist calls upon all the world to sing to Yahweh and to proclaim His salvation because He is greater than all the gods and His temple is characterized by glory and strength. Notice first of all, then, the call to praise in verses 1 through 3, in which in verses 1 through 2a the psalmist calls upon all the earth to sing to Yahweh a new song, to bless His name. We read, AOh sing unto Yahweh a new song: sing unto Yahweh all the earth. Sing unto Yahweh, bless His name.” And then in 2b through 3, the psalmist calls upon all the earth to proclaim Yahweh’s salvation among the nations day by day. “Show forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his wonders among all peoples.” And now the cause for praise in this first section. First of all we read, “He is greater than all the gods. They are impotent but He made the heavens,” in verses 4 and 5. AFor Yahweh is great and greatly to be praised. He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.” And finally in verse 6, His temple is characterized by glory and strength. AHonor and majesty are before him, strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. I may just comment here. If you are looking at a Hebrew text, you will notice there is a beautiful play upon the words in verse 5 where it says, AFor all the gods of the nations are idols. The word for gods is Elohim and the word for idols is elilim. All the Elohim are elilim.

In any case, moving then to the second major division of the psalm, in verses 7 through 10 the psalmist commands the tribes of the nations to give due glory in worship to Yahweh, for by His reign the world is finally established in righteousness, in verses 7 through 10. The call to praise, then, is found in verses 7 through 9. In verses 7 through 8a the psalmist commands the Gentile tribes to ascribe to Yahweh the glory due His name. Seven through 8a: “Ascribe unto Yahweh, oh ye kindreds of people: Ascribe unto Yahweh, glory and strength. Ascribe unto Yahweh the glory due His name.” And now the psalmist calls upon the clans of Gentiles to worship and to submit to Him as He assumes His reign in verses 8b through 9. “Bring an offering and come into His courts, oh worship Yahweh in the beauty of holiness.” That means put on the priestly garments, put on the beautiful garments befitting His temple. “Fear before him all the earth.” And now the cause for praise: because Yahweh reigns the earth is finally established in righteousness in verse 10. “Say among the nations that Yahweh reigns, the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved. He shall judge the peoples righteously.” Finally the desire of all the nations has come. That which the peoples have longed for is now in their midst. The King of Peace has finally assumed His dominion over the earth.

Finally, in verses 10 through 13 the psalmist calls upon nature to rejoice because Yahweh will judge the earth in righteousness and truth. In verses 11 and 12 we have the call to rejoice and then in verse 13 the cause for rejoicing. First of all the call, “Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad. Let the sea roar and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful and all that is therein.” That is, all the animals of the field will also rejoice for that which was hoped

for in Romans Chapter 8, namely that the creation itself is yearning for its release and its redemption from the present bondage. “Then shall all the trees of the forest rejoice.” That is, when finally the second man comes with his perfection and in his peace, even the creation will be redeemed and released from its captivity. The cause in verse 13: He shall judge the earth with righteousness and truth. “Before the Lord, for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth.”

Yet another psalm that we should consider now of these eschatological psalms anticipating Yahweh’s enthronement over the world when He will come incarnate in our Savior is Psalm Chapter 97. The message of Psalm 97 is that the psalmist exhorts the saints to hate evil and to rejoice in Yahweh in the light of his vision of the awe inspiring epiphany of Yahweh when Yahweh will judge His adversaries in righteousness. The psalm falls in three parts. We have an introduction in verse 1. Then we actually have the theophany and epiphany, that is, Yahweh actually comes back to this earth and He manifests Himself in the phenomenon of nature, (that’s what I mean by epiphany) in verses 2 through 9. And then finally a conclusion to all of this in verses 10 through 12 where the Psalmist calls upon the saints to hate evil and to acknowledge gladly their holy Savior, verses 2 through 12.

First of all then, the introduction in which the psalmist calls upon all the earth to rejoice at the establishment of Yahweh’s kingdom. Yahweh reigns, which we have said right along here refers to His setting up of His kingdom. “Yahweh reigns. Let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the aisles be glad thereof.” The “aisles” being a synechdoche for the uttermost parts of the earth for they will rejoice for finally righteousness has been established upon the earth.

Now in verses 2 through 9, we have an epiphany. The psalmist describes Yahweh’s epiphany and the effects of His epiphany on all moral beings. In verses 2 through 5, the psalmist describes Yahweh’s awe inspiring epiphany and then in verses 6 through 9 the psalmist describes the righteous effects of Yahweh’s epiphany on all moral beings. Let us look then at verses 2 through 5 where we see His coming and manifestation in the phenomenon of nature. He will describe His awful, holy throne, verse 2; then he will describe the consuming fire in verse 3, a very dominating motif associated with the coming of Yahweh. For example, Malachi 3 and Malachi 4 anticipate His coming always with the purifying fire. In verse 4 we will see His awe inspiring universal lightening which will accompany His coming. And then in verse 5 even the melting of the mountains at the time of His coming. Let’s read then through verses 2 through 5 where he describes Yahweh’s awe inspiring epiphany. “Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and justice are the habitation of His throne. A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His enemies round about. His lightnings lighten the world; the earth saw

and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord; at the presence of the Lord the whole earth.” The terminology here reminds me very much of Micah 1 where the hills are melting when Yahweh comes back upon the backs of the mountains and the thunder and lightening reminds me of Amos as well. All of these normal manifestations of nature when Yahweh comes to establish righteousness upon the earth.

In verses 6 through 9 now, the psalmist describes the righteous effects of Yahweh’s epiphany on all moral beings. First of all, in verse 6 the effect it will have upon the inhabitants of the heavenlies. Then in verse 7 the effect upon the idol worshipers. And finally the effects upon Judah. The heavens will declare His righteousness and all people will behold His glory as we read in verse 6. “The heavens declare His righteousness; and all the peoples see His glory. The idol worshipers are now put to shame.” Confounded be, frankly I don’t see why we should interpret that as an imperative rather I would translate it in this fashion as a specific future: “All those who served carved images are confounded. All the gods who boast themselves of the idols and then all the gods worship Him.” That is not an imperative form in the original, so the full translation of verse 7 would be in my judgment, “All those who served carved images, who boast themselves of idols, are confounded. All the gods worship Him.” The effect upon Zion is that they shall be glad and rejoice. “Zion heard and was glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments oh Lord.” So the response would be according to one’s moral fitness. And now in verse 9, “For thou, O Lord, art high above all the earth; thou are exalted far above all gods.”

Finally now in verses 10 through 12, the conclusion, the psalmist calls upon the saints to hate evil and to acknowledge gladly their holy Savior in verses 10 through 12. In verse 10 the psalmist calls upon the lovers of Yahweh to hate evil because He will deliver them from the wicked. Verse 10: “Ye who love the Lord, hate evil. He preserveth the souls of His saints. He delivereth them out of the hands of the wicked.” And now he calls upon the righteous to acknowledge Yahweh with gladness because a blessed estate and joy are sown for them in verses 11 and 12. “Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright of heart.” That is in the present light is sown, it’s yet to be reaped. It’s in its small stage right now, the full harvest is yet to come. But it is sown and we are moving toward this final consummation of Yahweh’s kingdom. “Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in the heart. Rejoice in the Lord ye righteous and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness,” or better yet, “And give thanks at His holy memorial.” And His holy memorial is His name.

We have time yet for one more psalm. We might take a look now at Psalm 98, the last of the purely eschatological or clearly eschatological enthronement psalms. In Psalm 98 the psalmist calls upon all the earth at the time Yahweh sets up His kingdom to sing a new song to Yahweh because He has done

wondrous things; that is, He has saved Israel and He is about to judge the earth in righteousness. The psalm falls into two parts and in each of these parts, as in Psalm 96, there will be a call to praise and then a cause for praise. In the first unit, verses 1 through 3, the psalmist calls for a new song to Yahweh because He has demonstrated His loyal love and truth by saving Israel in the sight of all the nations. Hear his call to praise at the beginning of verse 1. AOh sing unto Yahweh a new song. And now the cause for praise in verses 1b through 3, namely His holy right hand wrought salvation for Him. He revealed His salvation in the sight of the nations, verse 2. He demonstrated His loyal love and faithfulness to Israel before all the earth in verse 3. Let us read them. AFor He hath done marvelous things. His right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory. The Lord hath made known His salvation. His righteousness hath He openly shown in the sight of the nations. He hath remembered His loyal love and His faithfulness toward the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

And now in the last section, verses 4 through 9, the psalmist calls upon all the earth to rejoice exuberantly before Yahweh the King because He will judge the earth in righteousness. The first half had to do with the salvation of Israel, the second half He is now about to judge the earth in righteousness which it SO desperately needs. Verses 4 through 8, the psalmist calls for all the earth to rejoice exuberantly before Yahweh the King. Verse 4, AMake a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth. Make a loud noise and rejoice and sing praise. Sing unto the Lord with a harp, with a harp and the voice of a song, with trumpets and the sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord the King. Let the sea roar,” for the background music for the symphony, “and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands, let the hills be joyful together before the Lord.” And now finally the psalmist cites the cause for this exuberant shout of joy before Yahweh the King, that is He will judge the earth in righteousness. “For He cometh to judge the earth. With righteousness shall He judge the earth and the peoples with equity.”

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