

Israel's Hymnal
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PSALM NINETY-FIVE

[Pss 95:1] Oh come, let us sing unto Jehovah; Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

[Pss 95:2] Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving; Let us make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.

[Pss 95:3] For Jehovah is a great God, And a great King above all gods.

[Pss 95:4] In his hand are the deep places of the earth; The heights of the mountains are his also.

[Pss 95:5] The sea is his, and he made it; And his hands formed the dry land.

[Pss 95:6] Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker:

[Pss 95:7] For he is our God, And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To-day, oh that ye would hear his voice!

[Pss 95:8] Harden not your heart, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness;

[Pss 95:9] When your fathers tempted me, Proved me, and saw my work.

[Pss 95:10] Forty years long was I grieved with (that) generation, And said, It is a people that do err in their heart, And they have not known my ways:

[Pss 95:11] Wherefore I sware in my wrath, That they should not enter into my rest.

I. Call to worship the King (vss. 1,2)

II. Jehovah, the Creator, is the Great God (vss. 3-7a)

III. Warning against disobedience (vss. 7b-11)

THE PROPHETIC CALL TO ISRAEL TO ACCEPT HER MESSIAH

As I have repeatedly mentioned in these expositions in this department, the psalms are the poetical versions of the utterances of the prophets. A knowledge therefore of that portion of the Word is essential to the proper understanding of the psalms. Certain of these hymns of Israel are especially dependent upon a thorough knowledge of the prophetic word. Psalm 95 falls into this category because it presupposes a clear grasp of certain definite predictions and of known historical facts. When these are seen the psalms become very luminous; when they are not known, they are usually enigmatical.

The first question which arises in our minds when we read this psalm is this: Was David speaking to the men of his generation or was he projected by the Spirit of God into some future time and was his message addressed to that generation? It is either the one or the other. The facts of the context when studied in the light of related passages alone can give this information. It is important that we have the answer to this question at the very outset of our study; otherwise we cannot understand the passage.

A hasty glance at the psalm shows that it is an invitation for Israel to come before Jehovah and worship Him since He is the King above all gods and is the Creator. He is also in a special way the God of Israel, who are His people. This hymn concludes with a warning against Israel's failure to hear His voice. Moreover she is urged not to harden her heart as her ancestors did during the wilderness wanderings. This parallel instantly takes us back to the time of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. When we turn back to the historical record and study carefully the situation there, we immediately can reconstruct the situation, out of which this prophecy sprang.

When Israel came unto Mount Sinai (Exodus, chapter 19) Moses, at the instruction of the Lord, told the people to sanctify themselves and prepare to receive the message of the law. They were to approach the mountain, within certain limits, on the third day. When the day arrived, the hosts of Israel were in the plain at the foot of the mountain. Then in their sight Jehovah descended upon it amid smoke and fire, which were as the smoke of a furnace and the whole mountain quaked exceedingly. God called Moses to come up to Him in the mountain, which thing He did. The Lord spoke with Israel from the mountain top out of the midst of the fire. At that time He gave her the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21). When the Lord thus spoke to them, they were terrified and asked that He no longer address them directly but rather speak to Moses and let him relay the message to them. The full statement of this occurrence is found in Deuteronomy 5:22-27, to which each reader should turn and study anew in order fully to appreciate Psalm 95.

In Deuteronomy 18:15-19 the Lord promised Israel that He would raise up a prophet to her from their midst who would be like Moses. This promise was made in fulfillment of Israel's request at Mount Sinai that God not speak as He did there.

"15 Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; 16 according to all that thou desirest of Jehovah thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of Jehovah my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. 17 And Jehovah said unto me, They have well said that which they have spoken. 18 I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. 19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

Thus the promise of God's raising up a prophet to Israel was the outgrowth of her request that God not speak to her anymore as He had done. The Lord therefore told the people that He would speak to the nation through this prophet who would, He said, "speak ... all that I shall command him." Moreover, He warned He would hold every Israelite personally responsible for obeying His voice.

In the light of the historical circumstances out of which this promise to raise up a prophet came, it is absolutely certain that the prediction forecast that God would speak to the nation, not out of the midst of thunders, voices, lightning, and earthquakes as at Sinai, but would come in a different manner and speak to the people; namely, would speak to them in the person of a prophet who would deliver His message.

Moreover, all the facts of the situation and of the prophecy preclude our understanding this prediction as one promising that He would speak through a line of prophets or any one single man as He did through the various prophets. A fair understanding of the promise, studied in the light of the historical

circumstances, demand that we understand this language as a prediction that in some special way and in a manner entirely different from that in which He had ever communicated with men before or would in the future, He would approach the nation in this prophet. Otherwise interpreted, the prediction has no point, for God had already spoken to them in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom were prophets. For proof of this fact see Psalm 105:7-16. Moreover He continued to speak to the nation through succession of prophets. These facts therefore demand that this prediction be understood as involving something unique--this prophet is to be different from all others. According to promise He is to be an Israelite--"of thy brethren"--like Moses.

From Numbers 12:6-8 we see that Moses occupied a position different from that of any of the prophets in relation to God. This prophet whose coming the great lawgiver foretold likewise stands in a unique position to God. Speaking in a figure, I would say that Moses and this prophet stand on mountain peaks of advantage whereas the prophets lived in the valley below. Since this future prophet is to speak the final revelation to the nation--"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him"--we see that He stands on even a higher mountain peak in His relation to God than did Moses. Though the language of the prediction demands this interpretation, we cannot learn from Deuteronomy 18 what this relationship is. The promise and its implications must be studied in the light of subsequent revelations.

The natural implications involved in the language regarding this promise are confirmed by definite predictions that Jehovah would assume the form of man and would deliver His message to the people. For instance, in Isaiah 7:14 we have this language: "therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." From this we see that God promised to enter the world by miraculous conception and virgin birth. Further confirmation of this same position is seen in Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." According to this prediction a child is born to Israel and a son is given, who is God incarnate. He is the God-man who approaches the nation in this manner. Additional confirmation of this interpretation is seen in Zechariah 13:7: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts: smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn my hand upon the little ones." Here we see the sword doing its worse against the one whom God calls His Shepherd, who is a man, yet He is God's "fellow." The word translated "fellow" means in all other places an equal. Thus here is a man who is God's equal; He therefore must be God-man. He can be none other than the prophet of whom Moses spoke, the child born to the virgin and the one who is born to the nation as the "Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

When one sees that, according to promise God would come and deliver a final message to Israel, appearing as a prophet, and when one reads Psalm 95 which consists of an earnest exhortation to Israel to come and worship before God and gives the most solemn warning to those who fail to hear His voice, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the writer of Psalm 95 was carried by the prophetic Spirit into a future time and saw the day when this prophet would appear with the final message of God for Israel.

With all these facts in view then one may be confident that David the author of our psalm was not addressing the people of His own generation but the generation when Messiah would make His appearance upon the earth.

Having all these various prophecies in mind at which we have just looked, we are now ready to examine Psalm 95.

I. Call to worship the King (vss. 1,2)

In verse 1 and 2 the psalmist sounds a call to the people of the generation when Messiah appears and calls upon them to come in order that they might sing unto Jehovah and to make a joyful noise to the rock of their salvation. Moreover, He urges them to come before His presence with thanksgiving and to make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms. The Old Testament saint who knew all the prophecies at which we have just looked will naturally understand that the psalmist here was speaking to the generation when the Messiah makes His appearance and was urging them to accept this one and worship Him.

II. Jehovah, the Creator is the Great God (vss. 3-7a)

The reasons assigned for Israel's worshipping this one is that He is a great God, that He is King above all gods that He is the one who holds the deep places of the earth in His hand, together with the high mountains and that He is the maker of all things. When one therefore studies verse 3,4 and 5, recognizing the facts just stated and knowing the further fact that the Messiah is the one through whom all material things have been made, one comes to the conclusion that this language is properly interpreted as referring to the Messiah.

A second call is sounded to Israel to come and worship, bowing down before Jehovah (Messiah) her Maker. They are urged to kneel before Him. They owe allegiance and homage to Him because He is their God and they are "the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."

III. Warning against disobedience (vss. 7b-9)

The final section of this psalm contains a solemn warning and consists of the following verses:

"To-day, oh that ye would hear his voice!

8 Harden not your heart, as at the Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness;

9 When your fathers tempted me, Proved me, and saw my work.

10 Forty years long I was grieved with *that* generation, And said, It is a people that do err in their heart, And they have not known my ways:

11 Wherefore I swear in my wrath, That they should not enter in to my rest." (vss. 7b-11).

This warning begins with the words: "To-day, oh that ye would hear his voice!" This type of statement implies that the nation as a whole will not heed the warning and hear His voice. Another inference to be drawn from it is that, if they would only obey His voice, their lot and situation would be entirely different from what it will be since they do not obey Him.

They are warned not to harden their hearts as the generation of Israel which came out of Egypt under Moses had done. One may harden his heart or he may open it and receive the truth. Man is responsible for the attention or the lack of it which He gives to the Word of God.

The generation which Moses brought out of Egypt began to tempt God by complaining and grumbling just as soon as they got out of the land of Egypt. They murmured against Moses and against God and at one time sought a captain to lead them back into Egypt. This rebellious, murmuring spirit manifested itself throughout the entire forty years of the wilderness wanderings.

In the third month of the year of the Exodus Israel reached Sinai. The law was delivered to her and instructions to build a tabernacle were given. The sacred edifice was reared on the first day of the first month of the second year of the Exodus. On the twentieth day of the second month they left Sinai for Kadesh-barnea. The journey was of eleven days' duration. Upon their arrival Israel sent spies into Canaan to determine the situation of the land. Ten of them brought back an unfavorable report saying that they could not do what God said they could. Caleb and Joshua, however, though in the minority, were true to their convictions and said that Israel could conquer the land. The people believed the false report of the majority and refused to go into the land. When they took this attitude, God refused to let them go in. At that time He pronounced the judgment that they would have to wander in the wilderness for forty years in order that that rebellious generation might pass off and that another of a different spirit might arise. Thus those who rebelled against God, who did not want to hear His voice, nor obey His instructions, were never allowed to cross over Jordan into Canaan.

This disobedient generation was held up by David as a warning to the generation which he saw in this psalm and to which Jehovah in the person of King Messiah would speak. He thus forewarned the people of Messiah's generation to profit by the awful disobedience and the consequences thereof of the generation to which Moses ministered.

In our study of Psalm 95 we must remember that this is a national affair. God dealt with Israel as a whole and not as with individuals. David looking to the generation when Messiah would appear, said that God would deal with it as a whole. If it would accept Him, all would be well; but if not, the judgment threatened would fall upon it.

They were urged to give heed as a nation to this prophet of God, King Messiah, within the period called "Today." If they refused Him during this time and let it close, the judgment would fall upon the nation. In other words, this period would be a time of testing, a day of demonstration.

Israel was tested in the wilderness for forty years. Our Lord was tested in a different wilderness for forty days. Do these facts suggest anything as to the length of this period called "Today"? Since the period of forty years was the time allotted to Israel of Moses' day as a nation, let us, for the sake of investigation, see if this period of "Today" might not also be forty years in length. Messiah came to the nation in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. About this position there can be no doubt. He pleaded with His people and exhausted all means of grace to get the nation as a whole to accept Him. On the contrary, they rejected Him. It is true that a small minority accepted Him; but this psalm as we have seen, has a national aspect. If we say the forty-year period of testing began with Messiah's call to Israel after He was declared to be the Son of God by the power of the resurrection from the dead--this greatest of all events occurred in the year 30 A.D.--we may add forty years to this date and arrive at 70 A.D. as the conclusion of another period of testing. Was that a year of crisis? Everyone who is acquainted with Jewish history knows that Jerusalem was taken, the Jewish national hope crushed, and the people were sent off into slavery. In view of these facts it is quite likely that the period called "Today" was the time from 30 A.D., the crucifixion, to the year 70 A.D. when the Jewish nationality became extinct.

New Testament Interpretations

When one turns to the Epistle to the Hebrews and studies it carefully, one comes to the conclusion that the writer--who, I am persuaded, was the Apostle Paul--addressed the Epistle to the entire Jewish nation of his day and time. It constituted God's final call to that generation of Hebrews to accept the Messiah. The examination of chapters 3 and 4, in which Psalm 95 is quoted, shows that the author of the Epistle interpreted this poem exactly as I have just done. He tells us that David was the author and that he was not speaking to his contemporaries but to the generation of Israel of the first century of the present era. The Lord Jesus Christ in fulfillment of the Old Testament predictions entered the world by a miraculous conception and virgin birth. He began His ministry when He was about thirty years of age and continued his labors for something like three and one-half years. Finally He was rejected and crucified in the year 30 A.D. The Gospel was preached first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, next in Samaria, and finally to the uttermost part of the earth. The method of procedure was always to the Jews first, of a given community, and then to the Gentiles of the same locality. God, through New Testament preachers, appealed to the nation of Israel to accept the Messiah and hear His voice while it was still being called "Today." This exhortation was pressed upon them, being reinforced by the warning that, if they did not heed, the period called "Today" would pass, and judgment would fall upon them. Since the stroke of wrath did fall upon the nation 70 A.D. by the fall of Jerusalem, we may be certain that the period called "Today" in the psalm ended then.

Since 70 A.D. the Lord has been dealing with Israel individually. He is now taking out from that nation, as He is endeavoring to call out from all other peoples, individuals to make up the body of Christ. The commission to evangelize Israel, which was never completed according to Matthew 10:23, will be resumed in the future. God's call to the nation to repent will yet go forth. It will be proclaimed doubtless by the 144,000 Hebrew evangelists of whom we read Revelation chapter 7. At the present time we of the Biblical Research Society together with others working in the fields of Israel, are endeavoring to get this message of salvation and redeeming love to all Israel as God enables. We are told to evangelize the *nation*. Every born-again person is eager to see the individual Jew accept Christ now, but everyone who sees clearly the plan of God for Israel is most eager for the call to go out to the entire nation in order that she might give heed to the message, come, and accept her Lord, Savior, and Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. To this end let us spend our energies, that the truth may be given to the entire nation of Israel in the shortest time, in the most forceful manner, and in the most economical way.