

# Yahweh Malak Psalms

## 'The LORD Reigns' - Psalms 93-99

### STUDY THREE - Psalm 95

Ray Bell ~ 10th September, 2015

---

If Psalm 94 was a lesson in PRAYER, then Psalm 95 - is a lesson in **WORSHIP!**

**Psalm 95** is a wonderful psalm of praise which is well known, often sung in part, or in full, in both old hymns and contemporary worship songs. However, there seems to be a very *abrupt* change of course in the middle of this psalm:

- what **BEGINS** with a welcome note of invitation to sing and make a joyful noise to the LORD, **CONCLUDES** with a resounding note of warning.

At first glance there seems to be no rhyme or reason for this change of tune. However, by the end of our study I hope we will see, and agree, that this is **NOT** the case! In fact, this psalm has a wonderful flow to it. One which we would do well to learn from and **APPLY** in our own worship settings- **NOT** as a 'one-size fits all' formula for corporate worship, but definitely as a principle to recognize, consider, and apply as appropriate to our own contexts and settings.

**There are a number of 'markers' in this psalm**, some obvious, others less so, which help us see the movement and trajectory of the psalm. Movement which deliberately and carefully **PREPARES** and **PROVOKES** the reader (the worshippers) to shift from one action to another, one *posture* to another, from one legitimate dynamic of worship to another.

**Verses 1-6** urge the people to worship the LORD through song, by making "a joyful noise" to the LORD. But there is a clear shift in direction from **v7d** onwards- urging the people from this point on, to **LISTEN!** - "**Today, if you hear his voice...**"

- *The SHIFT is from an invitation to INCLUSIVE and CORPORATE fellowship and worship to an AUTHORITATIVE EXHORTATION and WARNING based on Israel's history.*
- Furthermore, one could argue this psalm does not really 'finish'- that it ends without a conclusion. It simply stops after quoting the LORD- *and not on a very positive note at that!* - "*They shall not enter my rest.*"

**So...** do we have two distinct sections to this psalm, with an abrupt break or shift in the middle, and an even more abrupt ending? **Or**, is there good reason, and a good and logical (or rather THEO-logical) flow to the psalm?

**From the very first words** this psalm invites the people of God to join together in song and worship to the LORD, as if to say, "Come on guys and girls, let's get together and sing to the LORD!" And the second verse calls the people, not only to gather together, but to do so in the very presence of God- literally, "let us meet his face", **AND** to make some noise as they do so!

#### **WHY should we make a joyful noise to the LORD?**

Verses 3-5 explain the reason (at least one reason!) why the people of God should worship him in this way. "**For the LORD is a great God, a great King above all gods.**" And all creation, from top to bottom, and as far as the eye can see, is his. He made it all! And **THAT** should be reason enough for us to 'make a joyful noise' (Lit. "to shout aloud!") to the rock of our salvation.

**At verse 6**, (NOT verse 7 yet), we find a deliberate transition in the psalm. What might look like merely a repeat of, or perhaps a 'book-end' to, verse 1, echoing the call to worship and closing off the first section of the psalm, is in fact a point of transition in the psalm as it leads the worshippers in worship. This transition call for *a change in posture* from the worshippers of Yahweh - the LORD, the 'great King above all gods'.

The three verbs in verse 6 - let us WORSHIP and BOW DOWN... let us KNEEL before the LORD, our Maker - each refer to a *downward* motion or movement. And this change in posture is not just outward or physical, it's a genuine expression of something going on in the heart of the worshipper.

There is a change in both physical posture AND in 'volume', which is indicative of a complete change in both the mood and the mode of the worship!

- *The volume has come down, and the heads and the hands now move down as well, in humble reverence and awe, as the worshippers 'come in' before the LORD.*

### **But again... WHY? What is it that should evoke such a change in posture?**

Just as there was a 'for' in verse 3, giving reason for the call to make a joyful noise, here the reason for the call to 'Come in' and worship, bow down and kneel, before the LORD our Maker is found in verse 7 - "**FOR he is OUR God...**"

- This God, the LORD who is a great God, and a great KING above ALL gods is in fact "**OUR GOD!**"
- The MAKER of all things, the one who holds all the land and all the seas in his hands, who owns and holds the depths of the earth and the heights of the mountains... - that GOD - that KING! - Yahweh - is OUR God!
  - o *and WE are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

There is MUCH we could say regarding the imagery of sheep and shepherds, kings and rulers, and Israel, all the way through to Jesus, our Lord, being the *true shepherd* of the sheep. But for now, take note of how this psalm of delightful praise, joyful noise and thanksgiving, has all of the sudden become very personal.

Now we can see that the point of transition which seemed so abrupt and out of character at first glance, is in fact exactly where this psalm has been heading from the outset. The worshippers, who were called together, to raise their voices in songs of praise and thanksgiving to God, have been led and prepared, through that singing, are now called to change their posture, to still their tongues, and ready their ears and their hearts, as they 'hear the voice' of this great God and King above all gods, who is their God. They began by making a joyful noise *to the LORD*, now they are ready to hear his voice *to them!* - "*Today, if you hear his voice...*"

### **And what is it the LORD is saying to his people? What is it they (we) are hearing? Today?**

The remaining verses of the psalm declare a warning to the people of God- exhorting them to learn from their own history, and not to harden their hearts as the wilderness generation did all those years ago. This is a warning, given not to evoke fear, but to 'keep us on track!' Remember, he is our God! Our shepherd! We are his sheep, the people of his pasture! *And he wants NOTHING MORE than for us to REMAIN in his fold!* - that he might go on caring for and keeping us, and that we might go on knowing and receiving his goodness and grace.

### **TODAY... if you hear his voice**

The writer of Hebrews tells us 'the promise of entering his rest still stands' (Hebrews 4:1). And therefore, so too does the warning (Cf. Hebrews 4:6-11). 'Let us therefore strive to enter that rest' - by hearing the Word of the LORD, our King, *with faith*, as we gather together to make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation, to worship and bow down before him, and hear his voice.