

be considered in the paragraph that follows.

Worship which results in a solemn commitment to keep the Lord's commandments: Worship that does not lead to a serious commitment to obey is not authentic and surely does not please the Lord. Worship may even be hypocritical; it may even be with a great multitude, simply pretending to be real. In this case, however, his people recognized that God was their sovereign Lord, that there were certain things that he expected of them, and that they were to commit themselves to obey him according to those expectations. The people entered into a public and formal commitment of obedience. This is the believer's final proof of love and worship toward God. Jesus' words are appropriate: "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me" (Jn. 14:21).

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CHAPTER

THREE

**WORSHIP
IN THE
POETIC BOOKS**

JOB

Of the five poetic books, or six according to Clyde T. Francisco, only two, that is Job and Psalms, employ the Hebrew term *shachah*, translated "worship". In Job, there is only one reference to this term, but in Psalms there are sixteen, as one would expect, being a book of more devotional nature.

The problem of suffering has been a challenge for the human mind since the beginning of history. How can one explain the fact that the God of love and compassion, being the Omnipotent One, allows in his domain injustices and suffering of the innocent? The Jews of that time had a simple answer for that question, though inadequate in the light of the New Testament. According to the Jews, the just prosper materially and physically, while the sinners suffer every type of adversity. Thus, Job's "friends" attempt to convince him that his tragedy is due to nothing but his own many sins. Job struggles against this concept, conscious that he was "just" before his God. In the beginning of the book, Job is found in a deep state of shock and grief upon learning that he had lost

all his material possessions, plus all his children and his servants. What would Job's attitude be toward a God that would permit such a tragedy? Would he curse him, deny his existence, or accuse him of being unjust? Job responded by humbling himself before God and worshipping him.

WORSHIP OF A MAN IN DEEP GRIEF (JOB 1:20)

Worship in the midst of unspeakable tragedy: Few people will ever have to bear such crushing blows that came upon Job. In the space of a few hours, he had lost wealth and family, except for his wife. Satan, the direct or indirect author of the majority of tragedies that humans suffer, was sure that Job would deny and blaspheme God. This was truly a testing of his character and faith in God.

Worship, while ignoring the reason for the affliction: When one understands the cause of an adversity, his own fault or that of others, it is easier to accept and even to reflect on some possible benefits that could come from it. For example, when the son of David and Bathsheba died, David worshipped God, but he knew pretty well that he was suffering because of his own unbridled lust. The case of Job was different; he could not remember any sin he had committed to merit the "punishment" that he was receiving. Two of his losses were due to two groups of enemies who attacked to kill and steal—the Sabeans and the Chaldeans. More difficult still would have been for Job to understand the losses due to natural forces, called "fire of God" (1:16), which probably refers to lightning and a "mighty wind" (1:19). In the case of the blow dealt by the enemies, God would not have had a direct role in what they did, but in the case of the destruction and death caused by natural forces it was a different matter. Many think even today that, since God has direct control over nature, he is directly responsible for destruction caused by natural forces. Nevertheless, "In all

this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (1:22).

Worship that reveals an unshakeable faith in God: God permitted Satan to test Job in order to demonstrate his quality of faith. Job's worship certainly reveals the dimension and quality of his faith in God and, at the same time, vindicates God's confidence in him. Without a doubt, God was pleased with the act of worship rendered to him by a man under the most severe conceivable

testing. Job did not disappoint the confidence that God had in him. Not only did Job not disappoint God, to the contrary, he humbled himself, worshipped and blessed the Lord: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (1:21b, 22).

Job's unshakeable faith continues to manifest itself in still more adversities: a very painful physical affliction, insensitive and false accusations from his "friends", and finally despised by his own wife. He came to the point of declaring: "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (13:15). From his lips comes forth one of the most solemn testimonies of faith and confidence in the future life to be found anywhere: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (19:25, 26). We cannot find a clearer affirmation in all of the Old Testament of the resurrection and eternal life than this one;

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and to think that Job expressed this class of faith when the hand of God weighed heavily on him. Indeed! Job's worship surely ascended to God as sweet-smelling incense!

Centuries later, another great man of God proclaimed a similar faith: "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that our suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3, 4). The term "character" may be translated "approved character". In his tribulation, God approved Job's character. God's pleasure in this expression of worship is displayed in the restoration of most of the things that had been lost and additional blessings, which Job received afterwards (42:7-17).

PSALMS

In the Psalms, there are sixteen references to the Hebrew term *shachah* (22:27, 29; 29:2; 45:11; 66:4; 81:9; 86:9; 95:6; 96:9; 97:7; 99:5, 9; 106:19; 132:7; 138:2). In this study, these references will be examined, but first, and as an introduction, it will be helpful to consider the analysis of a well-known writer. Clyde Francisco mentioned six Psalms, which give a special emphasis to worship (26, 73, 84, 100, 116, and 122). I would like to add to that list Psalms 145-150. It is interesting to note that the Psalms, which give a greater emphasis to worship, do not employ *shachah*, the Hebrew term of particular interest in this study, nor other Hebrew terms that are translated "worship". Nevertheless, these Psalms describe the attitudes and actions that are peculiar to worship that please God.

Francisco finds six reasons in the Psalms that explain why the Israelites gave so much value to worship that was practiced in the temple in Jerusalem. For them it was the

most sacred and desired place on earth, because they understood that it was there that God dwelt in a personal and exclusive manner. During private worship in their homes, they bowed in the direction of Jerusalem, trusting that by doing so, they were directly facing the Lord,

1) The psalmist desired to go to the temple in order to experience personal communion with God. If it had been possible, they would have gladly lived their entire life in that temple (27:4). In the temple, they found quietness, peace, and all manner of spiritual blessings (84). The temple, located in Jerusalem, was what gave to that city a preeminent place among all cities. .

2) The psalmist went to the temple because it offered an opportunity to experience fellowship with others who worshipped. The Israelites practiced private and family worship, but they understood that there was a very special value in the worship of a national gathering. As they shared their experience of worship with others in the house of the Lord, they found great pleasure and were spiritually enriched (26:12).

3) The psalmist would discover, joined in the worship with the gathered community, that often the greatest problems of life would find a solution. The writer confessed that he did not understand why the just suffered and the evil ones prospered "till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny" (73:17). There are problems that human reason cannot resolve, but in intimate communion with God, one often discovers his mind and his purpose. If the problem is not resolved satisfactorily, at least one is able to leave it in God's hands with complete confidence that he has a purpose in the matter and will provide an exit for his faithful servant (73:23-26).

4) The psalmist learned that, in temple worship in Jerusalem, he would receive physical and spiritual strength

that others never knew. Psalm 84 describes the yearning of man for the house of the Lord and the blessing of gathering there with others of kindred spirit.

5) One of the principal purposes of worship is to praise the Lord. Psalm 100 exhorts the people of all nations to come together for the purpose of worshipping the only true God. He is the creator of all and his people are composed of those who believe in and obey him. The psalmist mentions specifically three motives for praise: God is good, merciful, and faithful in all generations.

6) Finally, the psalmist was going to Jerusalem to worship God and to give witness to others regarding the peace he had received from his Lord. Psalm 116 describes the experience of grace that the psalmist had received from the Lord; having been in a profound state of depression, he was lifted. Because of this experience, the psalmist desired to present an offering to God, which would be a testimony to others of his gratitude. Note carefully the verbs in verses 13-17: “I will lift up..., I will call..., I will fulfill my vows..., I will sacrifice a thank offering...” They describe the attitudes and actions that are involved in the worship that pleases the Lord.

WORSHIP AND THE NATURE OF GOD (PSALM 5:4-7)

In this Psalm, the composer points to the importance of a thorough knowledge of God as a condition for pleasing him in worship. Simply put, it is impossible to worship God in a way that pleases him if one ignores his nature and his works. In this case, two of God’s essential virtues are highlighted: his holiness and mercy. The Psalmist describes the experience of early-morning prayer. Delitzsch says, with reference to the psalmist, “prayer to him is his first work as he begins the day”. “I lay my requests before you” (v. 3) is the translation of the Hebrew verb that was used for the preparation of the daily sacrifice of the lamb: placing wood on the altar, placing

the bread of proposition on the altar, and adding the lamb of sacrifice. The idea is that the psalmist brings his prayers before the Lord as a spiritual sacrifice and then waits on an answer from him.

There are two considerations here in relation to worship: first, the awareness on the part of the worshipper of God’s nature and, second, the decisions that he makes as he contemplates God’s glory.

The nature of the God whom we worship (5:4-6): As the psalmist draws near to his God, he is conscious of his perfect holiness and abundant grace. The two attributes must be maintained in a healthy balance. Because of his perfect holiness, God hates and rejects all that is sinful; for that reason he could as well destroy all humanity, for all have sinned. However, based on his grace, or effective mercy, he offers pardon and restoration to those who repent and turn to him.

God’s holiness expresses itself in two emotions and three actions. The psalmist says that God is not one “who takes pleasure in evil” (v. 4a) and he hates “all who do wrong” (v. 5b). God is not indifferent to evil, but rather there emerges from his holy nature a strong emotion of displeasure (negative), and of hate (positive).

He not only feels a strong emotion of rejection to evil, but he takes three actions that express that emotion. First, “with you the wicked cannot dwell” (v. 4b) and “the arrogant cannot stand in your presence” (v. 5a), that is, God will not permit them in his presence. Second, “You destroy those who tell lies” (v.6a). The lie is an action that opposes the nature of God, who is the fountain of all truth, and to that of his Son who said, “I am...the truth...” (John 14:6). Third, “You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors” (v. 6). The verb “abhors” means that he “condemns” or “sentences” such persons. In summary, God

will not permit them in his presence; he condemns them; he will destroy them. These three actions emerge naturally from this holy nature.

The good news for all men is that God is not only holy and just, but he is rich in mercy, abundant in grace, for those who repent and trust in him. This grace or unmerited favor includes the forgiveness of sins and the right to communion with God. Now all the grace of God comes to man based on the completed redemptive work of Jesus Christ

The psalmist employs in this text nine terms to describe the sinner and sin: evil, wicked, arrogant, wrong, lies, bloodthirsty, deceitful, enemies, and intrigues. These terms describe the depth of man's moral condition and his desperate need for God's mercy.

Thus, the psalmist enters the temple to worship, having a clear concept of the nature of God and the moral and spiritual depravity of man. This double understanding will permit him to worship in a way that is pleasing to God.

Drawn to worship by the awareness of God's nature (5:7): The psalmist did not only feel a strong rejection to sin, but he also had a strong attraction for the house of the Lord. He desired to enter there to worship. The NIV translates the Hebrew verb *shachah* as "I will bow down". The term normally is translated "worship", but, as has been observed, the central idea in worship is to bow down, or prostrate oneself. The psalmist prostrated himself in reverence. His concept of the holy nature of God filled him with a sense of holy fear or reverence.

No doubt, the lack of enthusiasm for going to the house of the Lord to worship is often due to a lack of consciousness of God's holiness and mercy. Indeed, one would be the most ungrateful of all if he, being conscious of God's abundant grace in his life, did not feel a spontaneous desire to go to the house of the Lord, worship him there, and have communion

with fellow believers.

WORSHIP AND ANGUISH (PSALM 22:27, 29)

This is one of the best-known Psalms, in part because Jesus quoted several verses from it as he was hanging from the cross. Nevertheless, there is no agreement as to its historical origin, that is, who wrote it and when it was written. Based on the evident contrast between the first and last sections of the Psalm, some conclude that in reality they represent two psalms that were at some time united into one. Some commentators divide the Psalm into three sections (2-12, 13-22, 23-32, see Delitzsch), while others find only two divisions (1-21 & 22-32, see Anderson). The more conservative position assigns the Psalm to the time of David when he was being persecuted by Saul, and later restored. Numerous other situations have been suggested as a background for the Psalm: the situation during Hezekiah's sickness and healing, or that of Jeremiah during and after his imprisonment, or the Babylonian exile and the return of the Israelites, or the time of the Maccabees, or the time immediately before the Christian era.

No doubt, the lack of enthusiasm for going to the house of the Lord to worship is often due to a lack of consciousness of God's holiness and mercy.

Whatever might be the historical origin, the Psalm presents a believer who is passing through a terrible experience of anguish and abandonment by his friends and, apparently, by God, being scoffed at by his fellow

countrymen, but in all his tribulation, maintaining a firm hope in God. His testimony of suffering and hope in the Lord will serve to encourage multitudes to bow before the Lord and worship him. This is the reason that many consider this Psalm to be messianic, describing Jesus' suffering, his abandonment by his friends, his fellow countrymen, and his Father, with the ultimate purpose of providing salvation for the multitudes who will then bow before the Lord and worship him.

Worship preceded by anguish (22:1-21): The psalmist describes the depth of his anguish, employing the figure of fierce animals to symbolize his enemies who are seeking his death. He laments and cries out to the Lord night and day; feeling that all have abandoned him and that even God pays no attention to his plight. Yes, he does lament his situation and cries to the Lord, but not as someone who is totally desperate and lost, but as one who is sure that in the opportune moment, God will come to save him. He remembers how God has saved his ancestors from similar situations and this memory encourages him to maintain his hope in God alone.

Worship of one who testifies to the salvation provided by God (22:22, 23, 25): The anguish has now passed, but the psalmist does not forget the promises that God made during his time of suffering. He does three things. First, he announces God's intervention and salvation to his fellow citizens. Second, he invites and exhorts his family and fellow believers to praise, glorify and fear the Lord. Third, he promises to fulfill the vows that he made to the Lord.

Worship of the multitudes stimulated by psalmist's faith (22:26-29): The multitudes will receive the benefit of the anguish and faithfulness of the psalmist. The poor will be able to eat and satisfy their hunger from the offering of peace that the psalmist places on the altar. They will have a reason to praise the Lord for the benefits that they are receiving,

which are a direct product of the anguish and faithfulness of the psalmist. He has the vision that his experience will have universal results—"All the ends of the earth" and "all the families of the nations will bow down before him" (v. 27). The following verses reflect the psalmist's confidence that practically the entire universe will worship the Lord. In both verses 27 and 29 the Hebrew term *shachah* is used, once translated "bow down" and once "worship. Not only will they worship the Lord, but they will also serve him (v. 30), one of the expected results of worship that pleases the Lord.

"All who go down to the dust" (v. 29) refer to those who are at the point of death. This verse refers specifically to two classes of persons who worship the Lord—"the rich" and "those who cannot keep themselves alive", that is, the poor, the sick, and the elderly. Perhaps the psalmist wishes to include the two extremes of society who will worship the Lord: the self-sufficient, or the rich, on the one hand, and on the other, the extremely poor and the elderly.

This Psalm teaches us that God is pleased in the worship of those who suffer the depths of physical and emotional anguish and who, in spite of this, maintain their faith. In addition, it teaches that this experience, when shared, will result in the blessing of many and will contribute to the extension of God's kingdom in the world. This principle was operative in maximum degree in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Verses 15 to 18 describe in particular Jesus' experience while hanging on the cross. The last section of the Psalm presents the results that come forth from the resurrection. This interpretation explains why Jesus cites this Psalm while he was suffering indescribable anguish, paying in full the price for our sins on the cross. Due to his suffering, death, and resurrection, multitudes today of all nations have access to salvation and the kingdom of God will continue extending itself until the end of the world.

WORSHIP OF HEAVENLY BEINGS (PSALM 29:1-11)

Apparently, Psalm 29 was a hymn, composed by David, which the people sang at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles. During this Feast, the people left the comfort of their homes and lived in tents. The event served to remind the Israelites of their experience in the desert between Egypt and Palestine when they lived in portable tents and when God provided for their needs through daily miracles. It was a time of great joy and praise for God's protection and provision of his chosen nation. As in the second part of Psalm 19, the revelation of the Lord is presented with seven descriptive adjectives, so in Psalm 29 there are seven mentions of "the voice of the Lord" which thunders forth.

The Psalm is divided into three parts: the introduction, vv. 1, 2; the seven thunders ("voice of the Lord"), vv. 3-9; and the affirmation of psalmist's confidence in the goodness of his sovereign Lord, vv. 10, 11. It is curious that the psalmist, in the introduction, exhorts the heavenly beings to worship the Lord. "O mighty ones" or "sons of gods", as in some translations, probably refers to the angels (*cf.* Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 82:6; 89:6). Nevertheless, some commentators understand that "mighty ones" refer to the stars.

The reason the psalmist gives for exhorting the heavenly beings to worship the Lord may be found in the fact that he considers human language inadequate to describe God's glory and that they do not have such limitations. It may also be that the psalmist wanted to suggest other motives for praising the Lord, that is, the experiences of God's people when they were in the desert, or the revelation of God's power that was about to be exhibited (29:3-11).

Worship that pleases the Lord is concentrated in the glory of his person: The psalmist refers to the glory of the Lord three times in this Psalm. The Lord is described as "the

God of glory" (v. 3). "The splendor of His holiness" (v. 2b) probably refers to His sacred and glorious robes (*cf.* Isa. 6:1). The worshipper who is able to visualize the mind and glory of the Lord will not cease to praise him and give him "the glory due his name" (v. 2a).

Worship that pleases the lord is concentrated in his power and goodness: Psalm 29 describes the sovereign power of God (vv. 3-10) and the confidence in his goodness toward his people (v. 11). Two principal blessings that God provides for his people are power and peace. The sovereign Lord who is "enthroned as King forever" (v. 10b) shares his strength with his people (11a), giving security against any enemy. The Psalm begins with a description of the glory in the heavens and ends with peace on earth (*cf.* Lk. 2:14).

PSALM 45:11

Psalm 45 describes the wedding of the king, an event of great national and religious importance. The king was the maximum authority in both civil and religious matters. Since the term *shachah*, translated here as "honor him" (v. 11b, in some versions "incline yourself"), refers to the action of the new wife before the king, it is not treated extensively in this study. It is mentioned here only in order to establish the fact that the term "worship" is not used exclusively in relation to God.

UNIVERSAL WORSHIP (PSALM 66:1-7)

There is no consensus as to the time Psalm 66 was written, or who may have written it. Some writers find evidences for a pre-exilic period, others point to a post-exilic time. The two most frequent motives that served as a basis for praise prior to the Babylonian exile were the creation and the exodus from Egypt. There is a rather clear reference to the exodus (v. 6), but nothing pointing to the exile and return

from Babylon.

The Psalm is composed of three distinct sections. The first (vv. 1-7) appears to be a hymn of praise to God; the

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second (vv. 8-12) describes the affliction of the people and the liberation which they experienced; the third (vv. 13-20), on the other hand, adopts the first person singular, that is, the experience of a person in his

thanksgiving to the Lord. Other commentators divide the Psalm in only two parts: national worship (vv. 1-13) and personal worship (vv. 14-20). The interest of this study centers on the first section since the term *shachah*, translated here “bows down”, is found in verse four. Attention will be given to the act of worship itself, and to the God who is worshipped.

The act of universal worship (vv. 1, 2): The psalmist affirms that all the earth worships the Lord. His worship is expressed by means of a song. The scene is the entire universe, as a great chamber loft filled with a choir. The participants are all the inhabitants of the earth, thousands upon thousands. Their participation is with shouts of joy (v. 1; cf. Ps. 100:1, 2). Even their enemies will be forced to submit to God and recognize his sovereignty (v. 3b; cf. Php. 2:9-11).

The theme of their song is “the glory of his name” (v. 2a). For the Hebrews, the mention of a person’s name was solemn since it represented that person himself. Therefore, the expression “the glory of his name” means the glory of the person himself. There are various translations of the second

part of verse two: “give him glory in praise”, “put glory in his praise”, or “make his praise glorious” as in the NIV. In reality, God is already supremely glorious and man cannot add more glory to that which he has. What man may indeed do is to recognize that glory, sing to it, praise him for it, and especially live in a way that reflects the glory that proceeds from the Lord. The believer who is more and more Christ-like in his life is the one who permits the glory of the Lord to manifest itself in his person, for Christ “is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being...” (Heb. 1:3). In this way, the believer is able to give glory to God, or better stated, is able to allow God’s glory to be seen in him.

Not only does he reign in sovereignty over the entire universe, but also his dominion is from eternity to eternity.

The God who is worshipped (vv. 3-7): The psalmist then describes some aspects of God’s glory—powerful in works, saving, and sovereign. The works of God are “awesome”, or amazing, and powerful. His powerful works inspire, give confidence, and are a motive for his people to worship him, but for the enemies they instill a terrible fear. The psalmist reviews some of the awesome works that God performed during the exodus from Egypt (v. 6).

The psalmist invites all the inhabitants of the earth to draw near and consider the works of God by which he liberated his people from Egyptian slavery and saved them from the evil plans of Pharaoh to destroy them. It was indeed a miraculous salvation and an equally miraculous introduction into Canaan, in both cases crossing divided waters on dry

ground. Canaan, which came to be known as the Promised Land, became the symbol of the heavenly dwelling in God's presence. By these works, God revealed himself as savior for his people, another evidence of his glory and a concrete motive for worship.

The third aspect of God's glory is his sovereignty as stated in verse seven: "He rules forever by his power". Not only does he reign in sovereignty over the entire universe, but also his dominion is from eternity to eternity. In his sovereignty over the nations, he observes in particular the rebels who resist him and who persecute his people. The rebels tend to be arrogant, egotistical, and attempt to exalt themselves. God has marked and controlled them; they are always under his watchful eyes. They will never be able to elevate themselves against the sovereign Lord, but rather they will have to humble themselves before him (v. 3b).

In summary, worship that pleases the Lord may be expressed in singing, with great joy, and by means of offerings (vv. 13, 15), but always exalting his glorious person and his awesome works.

WORSHIP THAT DISPLEASES THE LORD (PSALM 81:8-10)

There is no consensus with reference to the date when this Psalm was written, but it is rather certain that it refers to the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles or of the Passover.

Since this Psalm refers to the liberation of Israel from Egypt and of the Ten Commandments, recorded by Moses at Sinai, many believe that the author has in mind the Passover. In the subtitle, the author attributes the Psalm to Asaph, David's principal musician, or perhaps a descendent of Asaph, or the leader of the society of singers in the temple. The psalmist takes a retrospective look at Israel's history in which God

showed his everlasting love for his people, with the purpose of motivating them to worship and faithfulness.

The Psalm is divided into three parts: the first (vv. 1-5b) takes the form of a hymn which records the liberation from Egypt; the second (vv. 5c-10) adopts a style of exhortation, warning, and promise; the third (vv. 11-16) represents a lament of the Lord for the unfaithfulness of his people and the disciplinary measures that he has applied. The second section is of interest for this study since vs.9 employs the term *shachah*, where the worship of other gods is prohibited. The following lessons regarding worship are found in this passage:

Defrauded Worship: God, being creator and, more important still, the liberator of his people from the Egyptian slavery, had the inalienable right to expect recognition, worship and obedience from his people. This just expectancy was defrauded by his people who very soon forgot His everlasting love that has been proven again and again through history, and rushed after pagan gods who had done absolutely nothing good for them. This was the height of ingratitude!

Prohibited worship: God, with every right, demands worship of his people (positive) and prohibits the worship of other gods (negative). This prohibition is found in explicit form in the first of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7). A "foreign god" refers to any person or object that is not the Lord, the creator-God, liberator, guide, provider, revealed in Scriptures. The prohibition to worship "foreign gods" and the demand to worship only the Lord does not have in mind so much the personal gratification of God as the spiritual benefits of his people. The sincere and sustained worship of the Lord is the formula for the believer's happiness.

WORSHIP AND THE ATTITUDES OF THE WORSHIPPER (PSALM 86:1-13)

Psalm 86 is a prayer of an individual in great need, but who trusts in the goodness of the Lord and believes that at last he will be liberated from his stress. The subtitle indicates that it is “A prayer of David”, but the consensus is that David did not write this Psalm in the form we now have it, but that the writer used a number of expressions from psalms written by David. This Psalm does not compare with the poetic level of David’s writings, for it is liturgical than his own is. One characteristic of the Psalm is that it employs seven times the title *Adonai*, or Lord, when referring to God. There is no consensus as to the date when the Psalm was written, however some commentators point to a post-exilic period.

The Psalm may be divided into four sections: the first (vv. 1-7) is a cry for the help of the Lord, giving reasons why he should consider the request; the second (vv. 8-11) is a poetic expression of the absolute confidence that the psalmist manifests toward the Lord; the third (vv. 12, 13) is a thanksgiving for the liberation at the hand of the Lord; while the fourth (vv. 14-17) is a lament and prayer of confidence in the Lord. What stands out is the positive attitude of the one who worships the Lord.

The attitude of the worshipper toward his own person: The psalmist adopts a humble attitude before the Lord, an attitude that is appropriate and pleasing to the Lord. First, he recognizes his own physical and spiritual need: “I am poor and needy”. Second, the psalmist knew where to go with his need; he appeals only to the Lord. Third, he is conscious of being a sincere and faithful believer: he is devoted (v. 2); he is a servant (v. 2); he trusts in the Lord (v. 2); he is constant in prayer (3, 4b, 6, 7), he is desirous to learn as a disciple (v. 11).

The attitude of the worshipper toward his Lord: A definite and correct concept of the Lord is absolutely necessary on the part of the worshipper if his worship is to be accepted. Four concepts of the psalmist toward God will be mentioned, indicating the personal relationship and definite knowledge he has of the Lord. First, according to the psalmist, the Lord is “forgiving and good” (v. 5a). His goodness is expressed concretely in the fact that he offers pardon to those who repent and return to him. Second, the Lord is “abounding in love to all who call on him” (v. 5b), as the father of the prodigal son who was moved to mercy. Third, the psalmist had learned that the Lord responds to the prayers of his own (v. 7) and he prayed in that confidence (*cf.* Heb. 4:16). Fourth, the psalmist had learned that his God was incomparable in power and works (vv. 8, 10). The history of Israel is rich in the account of situations when God intervened with miraculous power to rescue his people, one concrete case being the ten plagues sent to liberate his people from Egypt.

The attitude of the worshipper toward the nations: The psalmist had a vision of God’s universal plan to extend his kingdom. He could visualize the day when “all nations” would come to worship and glorify the Lord, by faith. In the midst of a people that were frequently short-sighted in relation to their concept of the kingdom of God, or even selfish and proud, the psalmist was of another spirit. His spirit is shown as being in perfect harmony with that of his missionary God. These three attitudes of the psalmist, and of any believer, will be pleasing and bring approval and blessing from the Lord.

WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE (PSALM 95:1-11)

There is no consensus as to the date of this Psalm, nor who was the author, nor the historical occasion. Some

commentators believe that it was composed and sung as a psalm of enthronement, or perhaps in the Feast of the Tabernacles, or in the New Year. In any case, it appears that the context of the Psalm has to do with worshippers entering the temple (vv. 2, 6). Anderson finds four prominent themes in the Psalm: the reign of the Lord, the fact of being the owner of the universe because he created it, his care for the covenant people, and the responsibilities of the members of that nation toward their God. A theme that is repeated throughout Scripture: there is no worship that pleases the Lord apart from obedience.

There are three evident divisions in this Psalm: worship of the creator of the universe, who is “the Rock of our salvation” (vv. 1-5); worship of the Lord of the covenant (vv. 6, 7a-c); and warning against disobedience practiced by their ancestors (vv. 7d-11).

Worship directed to the creator of the universe (95:1-5): The psalmist employs five imperatives as an exhortation to worship: “come, let us sing..., let us shout aloud..., let us come before him..., and let us extol him...” It appears that the scene presents some faithful ones standing at the entrance to Jerusalem, or the temple, exhorting the people to come and worship the Lord. The exhortation, or invitation, took the form of a song and encouraged the faithful to unite their voices in praises being sung to the Lord.

Notice how the author introduces a number of statements with the conjunction “for” (vv. 3, 5, 7) which gives an explanation or reason for action. The psalmist is giving reasons why the faithful should worship the Lord. He not only exhorts them to worship, but he points to the attributes of the Lord, which should motivate the faithful to worship him. First, “For” God is sovereign over all gods (v.3), that is, the pagan gods who are not really gods (cf. Ex. 15:11) and here are considered as not existing. Second, “For” God is

sovereign over the world, which he alone created (vv. 4, 5). From the “depths of the earth” to “the mountain peaks”, that is, from one extreme of the creation to the other, and all that falls between these two, God is sovereign. Nothing escapes his dominion. Third, we should worship him “for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture...” (v. 7).

Worship directed to the God of the covenant (95:6, 7a-c): In this passage are found three more imperatives of exhortation: “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;” Each of the exhortations describes a posture that corresponds in the worship of the Sovereign of the universe. The psalmist recognizes the Lord as the God who entered into a covenant with his people (Ex. 19:5ff; 2 Sam. 7:24; Ps. 100:3; Jer. 31:22; Eze. 11:20, 14:11; 34:31), employing terms that describe this relationship. The Lord continues being the God of the covenant, but now it is a new covenant based on the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. This fact constitutes the bases for worship of believers in all ages.

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Worship without obedience not accepted (95:7d-11): The Lord warns that he will not accept worship from an incredulous and disobedient people. The condition that God establishes for acceptable worship is “if you hear his voice” with the purpose of obeying. That voice refers to what God had established in the covenant regarding the responsibilities of his people. That “voice” is heard today principally through God’s inspired word, the Bible.