

May 1

Psalm 75, 93, 94, 97, 98, 99, 100

Psalm 75 is written to publicly reassure the Nation of Israel, in a world in which it often looks as though nice guys finish last and the bad guys win. The message is that at the appointed time, God will judge. It's a comfort to the people of God and a warning to anyone who might be tempted to "*lift up their horns against heaven.*"

The key verses in Psalm 75 are verses 6 and 7, "*No one from the east or west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges, He brings one down, He exalts another.*" Who does that? According to verse 9, it is "the God of Jacob". No one could have known that truth better than Jacob himself. The God who chose Jacob, who blessed him - often in spite of himself - and who exalted him - that God is in charge, so Israel - "Don't get too upset. Just trust the God of Jacob.

Psalm 99 is a wonderful song of praise. One of our modern worship choruses is drawn from it, "Exalt the Lord our God, exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool, worship at His footstool. Holy is He, holy is He." Now if you had never read the Book of Exodus, you would still be able to get the general meaning of the song: The Lord is great, and the Lord is holy. We should worship Him and we should praise Him.

There are at least five direct allusions to the Book of Exodus in the nine short verses of Psalm 99, and more indirect allusions, or ways in which, even without a direct reference, the Book of Exodus can amplify our understanding of the passage. In the very first verse, for example, we are told, "*The Lord reigns. Let the nations tremble.*" Well, that might not be a direct reference to the Book of Exodus, but after reading the story of God's encounter with Pharaoh and false gods of Egypt, and after seeing the painful struggle of the greatest nation on earth to avoid recognizing the obvious and inevitable fact that the Lord reigns, the cry of the Psalmist seems so much richer. "*The Lord reigns. Let the nations tremble.*"

What comes next, however, is directly dependent upon the Book of Exodus: "*He sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.*" Now you know that is a reference to the Atonement Seat (or the Mercy Seat) that was placed atop the Ark of the Covenant. That was the place where the presence of God dwelt. And the reference to the earth shaking - when the children of Israel first saw the presence of God descending on Mount Sinai, in Exodus 19, that is what they saw. That is what they felt, too, because the earth was literally shaking because of the presence of God.

The second specific reference to Exodus in this Psalm is the mention of Moses and Aaron, who are both identified as priests. Even though Moses never actually filled the office of priest, he certainly functioned as the High Priest of Israel in the days before the ordination of Aaron and his sons, particularly in the area of intercession, which is the priestly function in view in this Psalm...they called upon His name on behalf of Israel.

Next we're told that God spoke to them from the pillar of cloud. Without an understanding of the Book of Exodus, that is not comprehensible. We wouldn't even know what it meant.

God is identified as a forgiving God, but one who punishes misdeeds. That is illustrated quite well in the experience of Israel at Sinai and explained by God's amazing self-revelation in Exodus chapter 34 - a God who is full of mercy and loving-kindness and forgiveness and love, but who will not leave the guilty unpunished.

The Psalm closes with the enjoiner to worship at His holy mountain. That expression too had its origin in the Book of Exodus. The holy mountain of God was Sinai and was the first place that Israel ever met Jehovah God. Now, there is a great deal more that the 99th Psalm tells us and that can command our attention, but without the background of the Book of Exodus, much of the meaning of the Psalm is obscured and perhaps completely misunderstood.

As in the Book of Exodus, one of the chief attributes of God stressed in Psalm 99 is His holiness. Each of the three stanzas of the song ends with reference to it. He is holy, He is holy, the Lord God is holy!! I'm not sure that you noticed it, but the name "Jehovah the Lord" occurs seven times in the Psalm. That is not an accident or coincidence. The Psalmist crafted this poem in this way to underscore the perfection of the Lord, for seven is the Biblical number of perfection.

Psalm 94 starts out calling for justice - for punishment for the wicked - but it is still a Psalm that says "thanks". I found the key verses to be 18 and 19: "When I said, 'My foot is slipping, your love, O Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.'" In other words, "thanks".

I believe Psalm 97 is rooted in the Psalmist's experience of God in nature. I think that the Psalmist stood in a forest one day or perhaps on the roof of his house and watched a thunderstorm. It made him think about the power and majesty of God and then about what it would be like to be the object of His wrath: "The heavens proclaim His righteousness and all the peoples see His glory."

Psalm 98 is a "thanks" - Let's praise God for He has done a marvelous thing. The worshipers in the Temple are called to praise Him - the nations surrounding Israel are summoned to participate, and finally we all told that all of creation will join in paeans of praise. It reminds me of the geography of Revelations 5.

Psalm 97 - "Wow"; Psalm 98 - "Thanks" - Psalm 102 is a "Help" Psalm, another song written after the destruction of Jerusalem, written with the confidence that "the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in His glory."

Did you notice verse 18? It is striking because it gives us a hint that the authors of Scripture had a pretty good awareness of what they were doing and why. Listen: "Let this be written for a future generation that a people not yet created may praise the Lord." This Psalmist at least knew that He was writing for us!