



Translation, Interpretation and Exposition of Psalm 95

Interim Pastor Prof. Glen Taylor

*“He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me;
And to him who orders his way aright
I shall show the salvation of God.”* (Psalm 50:23)

“From days of old the church has always recognized that this psalm was an invitation to worship; witness its use in the Matins service, dating back even to the time of Athanasius and, for that matter, to the time of the ancient Jewish Church.” (Leupold.)

“Worship is more than words; it involves commitment in all aspects of one’s life.” (Beth Tanner.)

THE TEXT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Admonition from the worship coach

Stanza One: General call to gladly extol God as creator

¹ Come on,

let us shrill^a to the Lord,

Let us joyously bellow to the Rock^b of our Salvation.

²*Let us approach his presence^c with thanksgiving,*

Let us joyously bellow to Him with psalms.

³ **For** a great god is Yahweh,

And a great King above all gods,^d

⁴In whose hand are the depths of the earth,

The peaks of the mountains are His.

⁵To whom belongs the sea--He it was who made it,

And the land which His hands formed.^e

Stanza Two: More intimate call to worship Yahweh as covenant shepherd-king

⁶ Come in

let us worship, let us bow down,

Let us bend the knee^f before Yahweh our maker.

⁷**For** He is our God,

And we are the people of his pasture,^g

And the flock of his hand.^h

O that right now you would but pay heed to His voice!

Interjection from the worship critic

Stanza Three: Summons to obey or risk unrest

⁸Do not harden your heartⁱ, as at *Meribah*^j

As in the desert at *Massah*.^k

⁹When your ancestors tested Me,
Tried me, even though they saw My deeds.

¹⁰For forty years I felt a loathing for that generation;
And I said, “They waywardly err,^l
They would not know My ways.”

¹¹About them I vowed in My anger,
They shall never enter My resting place!^m

^a The NRSV translation “sing” and “make a joyful noise” fail to convey the strong force of these words. The former means “give a ringing cry, in joy, exultation” (BDB lexicon) and the latter “shout a war cry, or alarm of battle” (*ibid.*) Tanner is not far off the mark in noting, “The praise is loud and rowdy and would sound threatening and frightening to someone listening. This is praise using all of the force and power that the human body has.”

^b “When God is called a rock it ‘denotes God’s reliability and stability,’ the safety and security he provides.” (Greidanus, 320, citing Hayes). (God is referred to as a ‘rock’ nineteen times in the Book of Psalms, often in tandem with ‘refuge.’)

^c Literally, “His face.”

^d “The function of Creator is part of God’s divine kingship. This was displayed clearly in the Exodus, where the Lord defeated the Egyptian God Pharaoh, not with weapons but with creation. God’s function as the creator and controller of Creation is what Israel was to see and remember at the crossing of the sea.” (Tanner.)

^e Verse three forms a bottom-to-top merism (depths/peaks) whereas verse four forms a side-to-side merism (dry land/sea). As with the famous merism “I am the alpha and the omega,” the point is to include both ends of the spectrum *and everything between*.

^f This verse is central; three different verbs bid us reverently to submit to the Lord “our maker.” (“Our maker” connotes both the creator of the earth, as mentioned before, and creator of Israel’s special covenant with the Lord, as implied in the language of God’s pastoral care that follows.

^gThe Jewish (JPSV) translation “we are the people he tends” conveys the meaning well.

^hThe Jewish (JPSV) translation “the flock in his care” conveys the meaning well. The imagery implies the covenant relationship between God and his people, which includes pastoral care on a national level on God’s

part and obedience to the terms of the covenant on the people's part. As we shall soon hear, Israel often did not live up to the terms of that covenant.

ⁱ This language would evoke recollection of God hardening Pharaoh's heart in the Book of Exodus. "To 'harden your hearts' is to decide not to obey God." (Greidanus, 321.) Eaton states, "The 'hardened' heart is one without living relationship to the Lord, no longer attentive, hearing, trusting, centered on his will, but rather awake only to immediate desires and impulses" (ibid.).

^j Meribah as a place means "place of grievance." (The root word [*ryb*] has legal connotations.)

^k Massah as a place means "place of testing. "

^l Literally, "wanderers of heart." The root meaning of the Hebrew word (*t'h*) is to err (by wandering). JPSV translates "senseless" and, in a similar semantic context in Isa 29:24, "confused."

^m "This psalm leaves the people to ponder for themselves the dire consequences of disobedience"; "Psalm 95 ends so abruptly that we can talk of an open ending where the readers/listeners must decide for themselves what else is going to happen" (Davidson and Prinslo respectively, cited by Greidanus, 317 fn. 9.)

Greidanus covers most of the implications of rest in stating, "the 'rest' originally referred to entry into the Promised Land. But in connection with the pilgrimage to Jerusalem . . . it can now also refer to the rest experienced in God's presence in the temple. . . . In either case, rest is a state of not being threatened by enemies and being secure, safe, at peace in God's presence. The author of Hebrews, after quoting Psalm 95, will later move from rest on earth to eternal rest. 'So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God.' (Heb. 4:9)." (Greidanus, 321, emphasis mine.)