

END OF PSALM 96

## You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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## PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST  
IN THE  
LORD *and do good;  
dwell in the land and  
enjoy safe pasture.*  
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 96

All are invited to rejoice at the glorious coming and reign of Christ.

1. The Lord hath reigned; let the earth rejoice: let many islands be glad.
2. Clouds and darkness are round about him: justice and judgment are the establishment of his throne.
3. A fire shall go before him, and shall burn his enemies round about.
4. His lightnings have shone forth to the world: the earth saw, and trembled.
5. The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the Lord; at the presence of the Lord, all the earth.
6. The heavens declared his justice: and all people saw his glory.
7. Let them be all confounded that adore graven things, and that glory in their idols. Adore him, all you his angels:
8. Sion heard, and was glad. And the daughters of Juda rejoiced, because of thy judgments, O Lord.
9. For thou art the most high Lord over all the earth: thou art exalted exceedingly above all gods.
10. You that love the Lord, hate evil: the Lord preserveth the souls of his saints: he will deliver them out of the hand of the sinner.
11. Light is risen to the just, and joy to the right of heart.
12. Rejoice, ye just, in the Lord: and give praise to the remembrance of his holiness.

*The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.*

## **PSALM NUMBER: 96**

### **EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM**

1. "The Lord hath reigned; let the earth rejoice: let many islands be glad." This Psalm admits of two literal explanations. Some refer it to the kingdom of God absolutely; others to the kingdom of Christ after his Resurrection. Read according to the first the meaning of this verse is: "the Lord hath reigned." The Lord God is the true and supreme King, and all other kings are but his servants; therefore, "let the earth rejoice; let many islands be glad;" let all the inhabitants of the earth, and of the islands that are so numerous in the sea, rejoice and be glad; for should they be oppressed by any of the kings here below, the Lord, who is the supreme King, and can easily control and bring them to order, will not fail to protect and to shield them. In the second sense, the meaning is: Christ our Lord, who at one time humbly appeared before the kings of this world, for judgment, "hath reigned," for "all power on earth and in heaven hath been given unto him," so that he is subject to no one, nor can anyone claim any authority over him; but, on the contrary, he governs all as "Prince of the kings of the earth, as King of kings, and Lord of lords;" and therefore, "let the earth rejoice, let many islands be glad," because the Lord, who has got possession of his kingdom, has let himself down to be our brother, though he is our God, by having created us, and our Lord, by having redeemed us.

2. "Clouds and darkness are round about him: Justice and judgment are the establishment of his throne." According to the first meaning, the nature of God is touched upon here, who, though invisible, governs and rules the visible world with extreme justice. "Clouds and darkness are round about him." Our King, the Lord, is invisible, for "he inhabits light inaccessible," and is like the sun concealed by a cloud, yet still diffusing its light and heat. God is also described similarly in Psalm 17, "and he made darkness his covert, his pavilion round about him; dark waters in the clouds of the air." In like manner, when God gave the ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, he was covered with a dark cloud; "Justice and judgment are the establishment of his throne." However invisible he may appear to be, he still is really present, and judges his people with extreme justice. The second meaning is Christ's coming to the general judgment; for "he will come on the clouds of heaven," in great splendor, as he has in Matthew 25, and in the Apocalypse.

3. "A fire shall go before him, and shall burn his enemies round about." According to the first meaning the admirable power, efficacy, and celerity of the punishment that God inflicts on the wicked, when he chooses to punish them in this world, is here

souls, which is a far greater blessing; and hence, the expression, “preserveth the souls,” for he causes “all things to work together unto good, to such as according to his purpose are called to be saints.” According to explanation Number Two, the meaning would be, He will preserve the souls of his Saints on the last day, so that they will not be injured by the accusations of the enemy; he will most completely deliver them from the hand of the sinner, for once the last sentence shall have been passed, the sinner can no longer harm the just.

11. “Light is risen to the just, and joy to the right of heart.” Another reward of the just is, that they will not only be delivered from all evils, but they will be replenished with blessings. By light, here, maybe understood the light of divine grace, or what seems more likely, the light of justice of which Wisdom 5 says, “therefore, we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us.” Now, the light of justice and of understanding is said to rise on a person when he begins to know, not only in theory but in practice, what is just and what is unjust, what is good and what is evil; and forms a correct judgment, and makes a judicious choice of what is really good and just, and not of what is apparently so to a badly formed and irregular mind. The light, then, that has risen to the just, is that which constitutes him a just man; and as the just take the greatest pleasure in doing what is just, he very properly adds, “and joy to the right of heart;” for justice directs the heart, and an unspeakable amount of joy is poured into the upright of heart from the fact of its conformity to the will of God, and everything that pleases God, on whose nod all creation hangs, pleases that soul. Nothing, then, can sadden the just; they rejoice and are joyful under the most grievous tribulations, “and nobody taketh their joy from them.”

12. “Rejoice, ye just, in the Lord: and give praise to the remembrance of his Holiness.” This is a consequence of what has been said in the preceding verse; for if joy has arisen to those right of heart, it follows that they should not rejoice in the vanities of the wicked, but “in the Lord,” who bestows justice and gladness on them; nay, who himself is their real and solid joy, being most beautiful to the eyes of the soul, and sweet to the interior; and not only should “the just rejoice in the Lord,” but they should also “give praise to the remembrance of his Holiness;” they should ever celebrate with thanksgiving the memory of the sanctification they received from God, for they should never forget so great a favor as that which transformed them from being impious and wicked, to be holy and just. By holiness also may be understood God’s own holiness, for he is supremely holy; hence, Isaias calls Him “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and we give praise to the remembrance of his Holiness, when with praises we always remember that our God is most holy; and, therefore, that we should with all earnestness endeavor to make ourselves holy too. “For this is the will of God your sanctification;” and “be ye holy;” saith the Lord, “for I am holy.”

detailed. “A fire shall go before him.” He will send a fire before him whenever he may wish to judge and punish the wicked, and that will be most effective and immediate, for it will suddenly “burn his enemies,” and consume all “round about him,” so that a trace of them will not remain. This fire may also mean his ministering angels, as we read in Psalm 103, “who makest thy angels spirits; and thy ministers a burning fire,” of which fire Psalms 17 says, “a fire flamed from his face;” and Daniel 7, “a swift stream of fire issued forth from before him.” The second interpretation refers it to that fire that will proceed the general judgment, and burn men, houses, gardens, vineyards, and all manner of living things on the face of the earth, concerning which St. Peter says, as in Noe’s time, “the world that there was, being overflowed with water perished;” so in the coming of Christ, “the heavens which now are, and the earth, are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment,” and will be consumed. And the Psalms says that said fire will hurt God’s enemies only, because it is for them only it is intended; for those who have their heart and their treasure in this world. It will be a heavy load on them to have themselves, and the wealth they so loved, consumed by the fire. The just will suffer nothing from it, but they long since despised the goods of this world, seeing that death would only put them in a better position.

4. “His lightnings have shone forth to the world: the earth saw, and trembled.” According to the first interpretation, David goes on with the relation of God’s power over the wicked. God, when he chooses, terrifies his enemies, not only with his fire, or that of his angels, but even with the ordinary lightning, and cuts them down so unexpectedly, that they cannot possibly protect themselves. He says the same in Psalm 17, “and the Lord thundered from heaven, and the highest gave his voice, and he sent forth his arrows, and he scattered them, he multiplied lightnings, and troubled them.” He then says, “his lightnings have shone forth to the world;” he had his winged lightning, where with to rouse the world, which so “shone forth as to terrify all who saw them,” and hence, “the earth,” as if it had sense and feeling, “saw and trembled.” A most poetic description to give an idea of the effects of God’s lightning. In the second explanation, he explains how an enormous fire, that will consume everything, will precede the Last Judgment, and will be caused by lightning, of which Wisdom 5, says, “their shafts of lightning shall go directly from the clouds, as from a bow well bent, they shall be shot out, and shall fly to the mark.”

5. “The mountains melted like wax, at the presence of the Lord; at the presence of the Lord, all the earth.” The Prophet now shows the extent of God’s power from its effects and again compares it to fire, for as wax cannot be brought near the fire without liquefying and melting, thus the mountains, however lofty and durable, nay, even the very earth, the most solid of all the elements, cannot stand for a moment, should God wish to consume and destroy them. We are not to understand, then, that the mountains did, or will run like wax, but that God could cause them, if he chose, to melt, and be dissolved like wax.

6. “The heavens declared his justice: and all people saw his glory.” According to the first interpretation, “the heavens declared his justice,” because men could easily infer from the appearance of the Sun, Moon, and Stars, and their continual changes, that God was a most just director of the whole world, as is also said in Psalm 18, “the heaven show forth the glory of God;” St. Paul, Romans 1, and Wisdom 14, say the same. According to the second interpretation, these words allude to the Angel’s trumpet, that will announce from heaven the Judge about to sit in judgment on the whole world, and the severity of his justice on those who rejected a merciful Redeemer; and then, “all people will see his glory,” when he shall appear in the clouds in his Majesty, when all his angels. The apostle says of such coming, “for the Lord himself shall come down from heaven with commandment, and with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trumpet of God;” and the Lord himself says, “and he shall send his Angels with a trumpet and a great voice;” and in the Apocalypse, St. John writes, “behold, he cometh with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him.” “The heavens declared” the angels from heaven, “his justice,” for he will come to render unto everyone according to his works, “then all people saw,” without any exception, “his glory,” for every knee will bend of those that are in heaven, on earth, and in hell.

7. “Let them be all confounded that adore graven things, and that glory in their idols. Adore him, all you his angels.” According to the first interpretation, the Prophet infers from what has been said, that all worshipers of idols should be justly confounded, when it is sufficiently clear that there is only one true God, who rules and governs in heaven and on earth, and who is endowed with the greatest power, wisdom, and justice to direct everything. “Let them be all confounded that adore graven things,” that are vain and empty gods, that cannot help themselves nor anyone else; and much more confusion to those “that glory in their idols,” for glorying in what, above all other things, they should be ashamed of. According to the second interpretation, this is a prediction, in the form of a prayer, of the immense confusion that will overwhelm all idolaters on the day of judgment; for they will then most clearly see that their idols were nothing, that they who spoke through them were unclean spirits, with whom they will be condemned to eternal punishment. “Adore him, all you his angels.” According to the first interpretation, the Prophet, in order to prove how justly he said, “let them be all confounded that adore graven things, and that glory in their idols,” turns to the Angels, and invites them to adore God; for, if even the Angels, who are the most noble of created things, so far from being adored, should, like so many servants, adore God, how much less are demons or idols to be adored. According to the second interpretation, the Prophet proves the majesty of Christ coming to judgment, from the fact that it will appear on that day that he is the true God, from the homage that will be rendered to him by the Angels. For the Angels will stand by like so many servants, will adore him, and will execute all his commands, which will be a source of the greatest joy and gladness to the true faithful, seeing their Lord so honored and glorified before the whole world. He appeals to the Angels, as if he were exhorting them to do what he foresaw would certainly be done by them. “Adore him, all you his angels,” sitting on his throne for judgment. The apostle bears out this exposition, when he says, in Hebrew 1, “and again, when he introduceth the first begotten into the world, he saith: and let all

the Angels of God adore him;” for the apostle would appear by the word “again” to mean his second coming, and to apply these words to it, for no other words of the sort are found in the entire Scripture.

8. “Sion heard, and was glad. And the daughters of Juda rejoiced, because of thy judgments, O Lord.” When God’s people heard that he reigned supreme everywhere, that idols had disappeared, that the very angels were subject to God, they were greatly rejoiced at having such a king. “And the daughters of Juda rejoiced, because of thy judgments, O Lord;” the same people, now called Sion, now Juda, rejoiced to find the Lord sitting in judgment with so much justice.

9. “For thou art the most high Lord over all the earth: thou art exalted exceedingly above all gods.” He assigns a reason for God’s people beginning to exult and be glad on hearing those things, and the reason is, because they inferred from them, that the God of God’s people was really the supreme Lord of all, “the Most High Lord over all the earth,” over all kings and princes, and “exulted exceedingly,” especially over the false gods erroneously worshiped by the Gentiles; and, however true this may be, according to interpretation Number One, for God proved himself by various miracles, to be superior to all the kings of the earth, and all their false gods; it is no less true, when we read by interpretation Number Two, for God never displayed his glory so openly as he will on the last day, when, as we said above, all men and Angels, bad as well as good, will bend their knee before him.

10. “You that love the Lord, hate evil: the Lord preserveth the souls of his saints: he will deliver them out of the hand of the sinner.” He concludes the Psalm by exhorting the people to lead a life of holiness and purity, for which they will get a great reward, both in this world and in the next. “You that love the Lord, hate evil.” The holy Prophet could not possibly address God’s chosen people more briefly, yet more comprehensively; for, when he says, “you that love the Lord,” he appeals to all the truly just, for charity comprehends all virtues; for, “he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law, and love, therefore, is the fulfilling of the law,” Romans 13: “you that love the Lord,” then, means all you just and holy souls, that fear the Lord really, and not feignedly, not only with your lips, but in your heart, according to the substance, and not the shadow of the law, “hate evil.” Which is the essence of perfection, for he does not say, fly from, or decline from evil, which may be done externally, but “hate evil,” which can only proceed from the heart. The heart is the source of all our actions, good and bad; for, as the love of the supreme good comes from the heart, so, in like manner, “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication’s, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies.” He then announces the reward for having done so, saying, “the Lord preserveth the souls of his Saints, he will deliver them out of the hand of the sinner.” The Lord is a faithful, diligent, powerful, and prudent guardian of those that love him, and he will defend and deliver them from the power of the wicked, who are, generally speaking, deadly enemies of the just. According to interpretation Number One, this promise is fulfilled even in this life, in regard of the just, for God often saves their lives, but will certainly save their