

The Great King Part III

The First and Second Comings of Jesus

Ps 96:1 1

Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!

² Sing to the LORD, bless his
name; tell of his salvation from
day to day.

³ Declare his glory among the
nations, his marvelous works
among all the peoples!

⁴ For great is the LORD, and
greatly to be praised; he is to be
feared above all gods.

⁵ For all the gods of the peoples
are worthless idols, but the LORD
made the heavens.

⁶ Splendor and majesty are
before him; strength and beauty
are in his sanctuary.

⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, O families
of the peoples, ascribe to the
LORD glory and strength!

Ps 98:1 *A Psalm.*²

Oh sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things!
His right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.

² The LORD has made known his
salvation; he has revealed his
righteousness in the sight of the
nations.

³ He has remembered his
steadfast love and faithfulness to
the house of Israel. All the ends of
the earth have seen the salvation
of our God.

⁴ Make a joyful noise to the
LORD, all the earth; break forth
into joyous song and sing praises!

⁵ Sing praises to the LORD with
the lyre, with the lyre and the
sound of melody!

⁶ With trumpets and the sound of
the horn make a joyful noise
before the King, the LORD!

¹ LXX superscription: “*When the house was built after the Captivity, a Song of David.*”

² Targum has, “A Psalm and prophecy.” LXX has, “A Psalm of David.”

⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!

⁹ Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!

¹⁰ Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity."

¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹² let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

¹³ before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Ps 97:1 3

The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!

² Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

³ Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around.

⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!

⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together

⁹ before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Ps 99:1 4

The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble!

He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

² The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.

³ Let them praise your great and awesome name! **Holy is he!**

³ LXX has: "To David, when his land is established."

⁴ LXX has, "A Psalm of David."

⁴ His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles.

⁵ The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.

⁶ The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.

⁷ All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods!

⁸ Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O LORD.

⁹ For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.

¹⁰ O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

¹¹ Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.

¹² Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!

⁴ The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

⁵ **Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he!**

⁶ Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the LORD, and he answered them.

⁷ In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them; they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them.

⁸ O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings.

⁹ **Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!"**

Psalm 96-99

KING JESUS

HE CAME AS ONE BORN “King.” On their way to Jerusalem from a land far to the east, several “magi” (*magoi*, Persian scholars) travelled perhaps as many as 1,000 miles or more to see The One the stars foretold would be born “King of the Jews” (Matt 2:2). The son of David, this man Jesus of Nazareth would grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

As the time for his ministry drew near, around the age of 30, he would call disciples to himself. One of these, a man named Nathanael, would know the power of Jesus’ omniscience and confess, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel” (John 1:49). For three years this king would not rule from a throne, but would minister throughout the land, cleansing, healing, feeding, providing, teaching. Until it all came to a climactic end in the last week of his life.

The first day of that week, he was ushered into the Holy City on a donkey, like his father David before him, to shouts of Hosanna! “Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38). By week’s end, however, he was on trial for crimes he didn’t commit. “Are you the King of the Jews?” Pilate

asked him (**Mark 15:2**). “You have said so,” he responded. By mornings new light, he found himself hanging on a cross. Soldiers began to mock him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (**Mark 15:17**). A sign with the same slogan was placed over his head for all to see (**25**).

The King died that morning, in humiliation. Humiliation for you, for his death was a gracious atonement that satisfied the wrath of God for sin, and provided the way whereby people from every tribe and tongue and nation might be reconciled to a Holy God. Since he died for your sins and not his own, Death could not hold him. He rose from the dead early on the first morning of that new week.

Forty days later, after showing himself to hundreds of people, he ascended in the clouds of heaven to sit at the Right Hand of the Father, enthroned above every Name that is named. Later, an old scraggly man, living as a prisoner on a cold barren rock called Patmos saw a sign in heaven. A host in heaven, those who had conquered the Great Beast and its image, were standing beside a sea of glass mingled with fire, harps in hands singing by the shore the song of Moses and yet “a new song” (**Rev 14:3**), the song of the Lamb. “Great and amazing are your deeds O Lord God the

Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!” (Rev 15:3).

He saw another vision. “Behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:11-16).

Such is the story of The Great King, the Lord Jesus Christ come to earth as a man, born in the womb of a virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, and buried, the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, from whence he will soon come to judge the living and the dead. Such is also the story told by Psalms 96-99, the four of which we will look at now.

PSALMS 96-99

Psalms 96-99 continue a string of several songs that teach in profound ways and through song all about God as King. Many have noticed that Psalms 96-98 share many themes in common, some also include Psalm 93 and/or 94 in this mix. When discussing Psalms together, it is usually these three that get their own grouping. However, a few have noticed that 96-99 can be grouped together, with 96-97 forming one division and 98-99 forming a second, parallel division.⁵

Without question, when you group them as two and two, you see that their placement is deliberate and that they

⁵ Here is a chart in Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, vol. 20, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 508.

96	97	98	99
a new song	Yahweh reigns	a new song	Yahweh reigns
earth called	thanksgiving	sea and world	exaltation
to praise	to Yahweh	called to praise	of Yahweh
Yahweh		Yahweh	
Yahweh's	Zion	Yahweh's	Zion
coming to		coming to	
Judge the		judge the	
world		world	
	holy name		holy hill

are meant to be mutually interpretive of one another. For example, consider how Pss 96 and 98 begin:

- Psalm 96:1. O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth!
- Psalm 98:1. O sing to the LORD a new song; for he had done marvelous things.

Then consider how they both end:

- 96:13. Before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness
- 98:9. Before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity

Again, look at how Pss 97 and 99 begin and end:

- 97:1. The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice.
- 99:1. The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble!
- 97:12. Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!
- 99:9. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!"

When read together, we see that they tell us about God the King in relation to complementary things. 96-97 focus on **heaven**. In them, Yahweh is the God of **gods**. In these two songs both “**heavens**” (96:5, 11; 97:6) and “**gods**” (96:4, 5; 97:7, 9) appear several times. But, neither idea occurs in the next two songs. By way of contrast, 98-99 talk about **things below**, especially **God’s chosen people**. “**Israel**” (98:3), “**Zion**” (99:2), “**Jacob**” (99:4), “**Moses,**” “**Aaron,**” and “**Samuel**” (99:6). But these ideas are not found in 96-97.

Back in 96-97, while there is focus on the heavens and the gods, there is also great emphasis on the **nations** (96:3, 10), the **world** (97:4), the **earth** (96:1, 9, 11, 13; 97:1, 4, 5, 9) and the **peoples** (96:3, 5, 7, 10, 13; 97:6). Why? It is the nations who have their gods, and the gods are what have lead the whole earth into darkness. Yet, God is still the King over all the nations. By contrast, Psalms 98-99 which also sing about the nations (98:2), the world (98:7, 9), the earth (98:3, 4, 9; 99:1), and the peoples (98:9; 99:1, 2), do so only in as much as the LORD has made himself known to them in Israel, and only in as much as God will judge everyone on the earth, including his people.

All of this is wrapped together in verses that, like bookends holding a great series of novels, prophecy incredible things about [the Incarnation and Second Coming](#) of Jesus Christ. Regarding [the Incarnation](#), we read in [Psalm 97:7](#), “Worship him, all you gods!” While you may not see it yet, this is a prophecy of Jesus. [The birth](#) of Messiah is also predicted in [Ps 98:3](#) when it says, “He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.” Again, we will see how this is the case a little later.

Regarding [the Second Coming](#), two of our songs end with nearly identical words. Psalm 96 ends, “...before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness” ([Ps 96:13](#)). Psalm 98 ends, “Before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity” ([Ps 98:9](#)). Along with OT images of God’s having already come, these words point towards even our own future, as we eagerly await the glorious return of Jesus Christ the King.

But Jesus isn’t just in the future for these Psalms. The thing to grasp is that for Israel even then, Yahweh was King. It is *this* Yahweh who is coming in the future in these songs.

If Jesus is the one who fulfilled these words, and the one who was coming was Yahweh himself, then Jesus is Yahweh, the God of Israel in the OT.

PSALMS 96—PREPARATION OF THE NATIONS: THE KING IS COMING

The songs do not introduce these things all at once, or in a tidy outline like we have just seen. Instead, they wade you slowly down into these deep but pristine waters of the world to come. Psalm 96 [sets the stage for the Incarnation](#), even as it ends at the Second Coming. Its focus is on the nations of the earth, the people living in darkness who were promised to be blessed in Abraham.

The song was written during the days of David,⁶ as it is almost word-for-word repeated in the second half of a song found in [1Chr 16:23-33](#).⁷ One of the few changes appears at

⁶ The LXX says it was “When the temple was built after the captivity, a Song to David.” Given that it was written by someone in David’s court (see [1Chr 16:4-7](#)), the “captivity” is probably when David was in exile rather than when Israel was in exile in Babylon. Though, the editor of the song who put it into the psalter probably had a post-Babylon application in mind. Nevertheless, another “exile” is surely in the Lord’s mind. For Jesus came “to proclaim liberty to the captives” ([Luke 4:18](#)).

⁷

(Ps 96:1-13)	(1Ch 16:23-33)
"Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! ² Sing to the LORD, bless his name;	²³ Sing to the LORD, all the earth!

the beginning. “Oh sing to the LORD a new song” (Ps 96:1). This is not in Chronicles’ edition. The “new” (*kainos* in the LXX)⁸ song has been sung before. The phrase appears seven times in the OT and curiously, as Tremper Longman

<p>tell of his salvation from day to day. ³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ⁴ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. ⁶ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. ⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! ⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! ⁹ Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! ¹⁰ Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity." ¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; ¹² let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy ¹³ before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness."</p>	<p>Tell of his salvation from day to day. ²⁴ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ²⁵ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be feared above all gods. ²⁶ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. ²⁷ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place. ²⁸ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! ²⁹ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; ³⁰ tremble before him, all the earth; yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. ³¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!" ³² Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! ³³ Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.</p>
---	--

⁸ *Kainos* is like “new and improved” as opposed to “brand new.” See my *Covenant Theology* book, pp. 119-120.

argues, it always occurs in a **military context**, including in its two NT references.⁹

In the Psalm, the new song is sung to Yahweh. But in the NT, it is Jesus. In one instance, **Jesus' death and his ransoming people** from the nations is the object. The language is warfare. In other words, Jesus is Yahweh. **“They sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth’”** (**Rev 5:9-10**). The cross was the ultimate battle of spiritual warfare, even as Christ's ministry was a proclamation power in binding demons.

Notice how in the psalm, it is **the whole earth** that is to sing. **“Sing to Yahweh, all the earth!”** (**Ps 96:1b**). It's the same in Revelation 5. Of all the OT usages of this phrase “new song,” by far Psalm 96 fits Revelation 5 the best, for this psalm is directed towards these same peoples of the world.

⁹ “The designation “new song” occurs seven times in the OT (**Ps 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10**) and twice in the NT (**Rev 5:9; 14:3**), each time in a holy war context.” Tremper Longman III, “Psalm 98,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27:3 (1984): 269.

What is its message to them? What is the earth to sing? “Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day” (Ps 96:2). Again, you easily think of Jesus, even though it is a psalm. Salvation is the mighty thing. In the context of a “new song,” salvation is the spoils of war. It is available to the nations! The nation God has chosen is singing about salvation that is being made available to everyone.

The OT, especially the prophets but also the psalms, regularly predicts this otherwise unforeseen grace of God. Amazingly, this is exactly what Jesus does in Revelation 5, as he ransoms the peoples of the world. John sees Yahweh of Psalm 96 as being Jesus in Revelation 5. In the song, salvation becomes God’s glory. “Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!” (3). This, again, refers to Jesus as John says is fulfilled in the Incarnation, “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The song is saying that the Glory is coming to bring salvation and all the world be benefit from the marvelous work of God.

After this three-verse introduction, the king theme so prominent in this entire collection of songs now begins to

seep into the forefront. It does this **first** by showing who Yahweh is in relation to the gods of the nations—the very beings they presently worship and serve. “**For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods**” (4). We saw the gods come up in the previous three songs (especially **95:3**),¹⁰ even as they will return in the next. Since it is an explicit and prominent theme in half our songs today, I want us to think a bit more about them.

This idea of **the gods really throws some people for a loop**. Most people in the West, including Christians, think the gods are as real as the X-Men. They are purely figments of the imaginations of men. This is not the view of the Scripture. Ask yourself, what sense does it make to tell someone that God is to be feared more than Magneto or Mystique or Juggernaut? It is a mockery to compare the Greatest Being in the universe to something that doesn't even exist. Yet, this is exactly what people think about gods.

One of the reasons may very well be the next verse. “**For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens**” (**Ps 96:5**). The way the ESV and many other translations make it sound, “gods” and “idols” are identical things. Since idols are only man-made objects,

¹⁰ For the previous two songs see the sermon on Psalms 93-94.

the idea becomes that the gods must be man-made inventions too. However, this is not what the Hebrew is teaching.

The normal word for an idol (the word used in the Second Commandment) is *pesel* (*eidolon* in Greek). This refers to a **man-made statue** of some kind meant to represent, or better, to house the gods. Though an incantation, the deity was thought to come and reside in the idol. But this is not the word used here.

The word used here is *'elilim*. The word means “**worthless**” or “**vain**” or “**insignificant**” or “**empty.**” Sometimes the word is used parallel to *pesel* or a “pillar” or a “figured stone” (**Lev 26:1**). But those images are always representing something. What are they representing? Something that is worthless, but not necessarily something that doesn't exist. **Job had “worthless” (*'elilim*) counselors**, but they still existed (**Job 13:4**).

Here the word is parallel with *'elohim*, so it becomes a wordplay. The *'elohim* are *'elilim*—worthless. Importantly, the translators of the LXX understood this point well. Thus, he rendered it as *daimonia*—**demons!**¹¹ The gods of the

¹¹ The Hebrew word is identical is **1Chr 16:26**, but the translator there rendered it as “idols.” Clearly, the translator of the Psalm wanted us to realize the “reality” behind the word that can be lost in the term “idol.” On this, think about Paul's discussion in **1Co 8-10**. In this section of

peoples are demons! That puts a different spin on it, doesn't it? As much as we could continue to investigate what's going on here, we would lose ourselves pretty quickly in the reason the gods are brought up.

God is comparing himself to them and calling them **worthless**. Why? Because “**the LORD made the heavens.**” Their worthlessness here is related to their **powerlessness**. They are impotent compared to him. Therefore, *he* is to be feared, *not them*. In the context of war—especially Jesus' victory over Satan (“**the god of this world;**” **2Co 4:4**) at the cross, this should take on very precious significance to you. It should keep you from ever being tempted to worship supernatural beings. The Bible mocks their power, and though it is vastly greater than your own, your God is infinitely greater than them, for he created them.

The king theme is developed more as the song winds down. “**Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary**” (**Ps 96:6**). This is a **present**

the letter, he is teaching on meat sacrificed to idols. The whole thing gets a little tricky, but several points can be made. First, he says that the gods of the nations have real existence (**8:5-6**). Second, to sacrifice to an idol is to sacrifice to a demon (**10:20-21**). Third, because Christ defeated them, for a Christian to eat meat sacrificed to them is irrelevant; we can eat or not eat (**8:8**). Fourth, however, we must not provoke the Lord to jealousy by playing games with demonic things and pretending to be a Christian and taking the Lord's Supper (**10:20-21**). In all this, the main point should not be lost. Demons exist. Everyone knows it. Demons are not “idols.”

reality and therefore, “Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his Name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!” (7-9). The present reality is of the beauty of King Yahweh in his sanctuary in Israel. Even back then, this is the reason the nations are supposed to be praising him. We see hints that this was being fulfilled when the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon.

Suddenly, the audience expands. Not merely are the nations to praise God, so also are all things. “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD” (11-13a). Why? Well, the most obvious reason that comes to mind, especially given the previous songs, is that he is the King of creation! He made them all. Therefore, to him alone is rightful praise due.

The song ends on a different note. It prepares the world and the heavens for something to come. “For he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness” (13b).

Judgment. But behold! Judgment *in equity* and *faithfulness*. God's judgment is never capricious, never despotic, never unjust. What could this possibly mean? Our minds probably go to the Second Coming and rightly so. But first, something else is in mind, which is why it is so helpful to read the songs together.

PSALMS 97—PREPARATION OF THE HEAVENS: THE KING IS COMING

Psalm 97 has no superscription in Hebrew. It does have one in Greek and it is important. “**To David, when his land is established.**” This song is dedicated to king David as it foresees some future time when his kingdom will be established. When could this be?

“**The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad**” (Ps 97:1). He reigns now! It begins similarly to the previous song. But this time, you see a truly dreadful sight of this God in his condescending glory. “**Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around**” (2-3).

Clouds and darkness should remind you of various comings of God in the OT, especially on Mt. Sinai. Fire going before him, burning up adversaries makes you think of Sodom and Gomorrah or Nadab and Abihu and many other instances of judgment upon people by God.¹² It was truly terrifying to think about God coming into the midst of sinful people. Nothing like today, where so many feel so warm and fuzzy with God who is more like their childhood teddy bear than what is sung about here. The **theophany** come to a climax, “His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth” (4-5). The point is obvious. When this God comes, everything uncontrollably trembles before him. Even the mighty mountains cannot help it, for God is King.

Something I find interesting is the name God in vs. 5. First, he is **Yahweh** (Yahweh). Then he is **Adonai** (Lord). Now, this could just be poetic parallelism. Indeed, it is poetic

¹² We could also add here, “Fire [an image of the Spirit] goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around” (Ps 97:3). This is echoed in Rev 11:5, “If anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes.” Here, however, it refers to the “two witnesses” which Beale says “are not two actual individual prophets; rather, they symbolize the corporate prophetic witness of the church.” G. K. Beale and Sean M McDonough, *“Revelation,”* in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 1119. In the context of Zechariah where the Olive Trees and Lampstands of the previous verses are found, we have Joshua (priest) and Zerubbabel (king) standing as representatives of the OT type.

parallelism meaning that they are the same Being. But the longer I have thought about this, especially with the NT's own reflections in mind, the more I have come to wonder if the very form of poetry, where you can have parallel ideas like this, isn't actually a reflection of a triune God. For, the NT sees Adonai as the Son of Yahweh. (We will investigate this much more in **Psalm 110:1**).

I raise this issue here because of what comes next. “The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory” (6). This is parallel in thought to **96:11**, “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice.” Its reason is different. A moment ago, we saw that all creation must worship God before King Yahweh comes in judgment upon the earth. Now we read, “All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods” (**97:7**).

As we try to understand this mysterious verse and its reason for being here, we must first realize that judgment is still in view. **Vs. 8** reads, “Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O LORD.” Then, **vs. 9** returns us right back to the gods. “For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.” Whatever judgment is in mind,

it makes “Zion” and “Judah” happy because/for (*ki*) Yahweh in his judgment is exalted far above all gods. So, what is this talking about? Believe it or not, it is talking about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

You may wonder how, but then you read Hebrews which begins the whole letter saying, “In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:2). “These last days” are not the days of the Second Coming, but “these” days, the days of “now.” Today! (see Psalm 95). It immediately tells us that the Son has become “superior to angels” (4), because “when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’” (6).

You may notice the language here. It sounds very much like Psalm 97:7, except rather than say “gods” it says “angels.”¹³ This is because Hebrews is quoting the LXX instead of the Hebrew. I like that for this reason—it helps us in a different way (remember “demons” above) to grasp how the OT’s *elohim* (gods) are real beings. By translating it as “angels,” suddenly, the problem that many people have

¹³ **Going Deeper.** Some might be tempted to see a conflation between the “demon” translation in Psalm 96:5 and the “angel” translation of 97:7. As if demons are somehow fallen angels. Such a theological move is not warranted from the translations. At best, all that merging these two translations together could tell us would be that all angels are demons, but this is obviously not something anyone believes. It is better, in my opinion, to let each psalm’s context stand on its own. In Psalm 96, the idea is obviously that the heathen gods are evil. In Psalm 97 the idea is that all the heavenly beings (good or evil) must worship the Lord.

about the existence of these creatures fades away, for hardly any Christian believes that angels do not exist. I can't prove it, but I have a suspicion that the very same kind of obstacle was in the way of early hearers, and that this is one reason why "angel" because the word to translate *elohim*. It took an unnecessary offense away for the hearer.

Notice how in **vs. 7** we have the same three words we talked about earlier: images (*pesel*), worthless idols (*'elilim*), and gods (*'elohim*). They are all in parallel as they are all related to one another. But now we realize that cartoons cannot be in view, because cartoons cannot be commanded to worship the LORD. That makes no sense.

Therefore, consider how these verses are fulfilled in the NT. **First**, think about how the angels did this very thing **at Jesus' birth**. "Suddenly, there was a with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men'" (**Luke 2:13-14**).

Second, understand that it was at this First Coming that great judgment came, but not upon men. "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will

draw all people to myself” (John 12:31-32).¹⁴ Those who are tempted to see in the judgment in these psalms only the Second Coming will miss the glories of the First. Jesus was born so that Jesus could die. Christmas is nothing without Easter. Here in these words, we learn that at his death, Jesus won a great victory over Satan “delivering humankind from bondage to him.”¹⁵ Fighting against and triumphing “over the evil powers of the world, the ‘tyrants’ under which mankind is in bondage and suffering.”¹⁶ Crushing the serpent’s head “as was foreshadowed in his victory over the demons, sickness, and death—during his earthly ministry.”¹⁷

This is the reason why Zion is glad, indeed, why the entire earth is rejoicing. It is what so many of the Christmas songs celebrate explicitly.

Good Christian men, rejoice
With heart, and soul, and voice
Give ye heed to what we say
Jesus Christ is born today

¹⁴ For much more, see my sermon “The King and His Kingdom,” on John 12:19-33.

¹⁵ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 812.

¹⁶ Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), 151.

¹⁷ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 502.

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear

O come, all ye faithful
Joyful and triumphant
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem
Come and behold him
Born the King of angels

It is how the song ends. “O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD, o you righteous, and give thanks to his holy Name!” (Ps 97:10-12).

PSALMS 98—PREPARATION OF ISRAEL: THE KING IS COMING

Psalm 98 is simply “a Psalm” (the LXX adds again “to David”). It is very similar to Psalm 96, beginning with singing a “new song” (Ps 98:1), and ending almost word-for-word with the same theme of judgment (vs. 9). In the

middle, it commands us (4-6; cf. 96:8-10) and the whole world (7-8; cf. 96:11-12) to praise the LORD.

Like Psalm 97, it predicts [the First Coming](#) of Jesus. We see this when it says, “[The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations](#)” (2). But whereas Psalm 96 was a song explicitly to the nations, this song turns towards Israel as the source or origin of this revelation of God to man. “[He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God](#)” (3).

Elizabeth, full of the Holy Spirit, tells her cousin Mary, “[Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb ... \[God\] has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy](#)” (Luke 1:42, 54).¹⁸ In other words, she echoes this very verse as being about the baby Jesus in the womb of the blessed virgin. When his mouth was finally opened after months of silence, Elizabeth’s husband Zechariah said something similar. “[A horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ... to give](#)

¹⁸ “Three specific OT passages provide the context for this conclusion to the Magnificat: Isa. 41:8–9; Ps. 98:3 (97:3 LXX); Mic. 7:20. All three make the connection between the Abrahamic promises and God’s redemptive act for his people (see Lampe 1993: 76–77).” David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “[Luke,](#)” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 262.

knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God” (Luke 1:66, 76-77). Also, the old man Simeon said when he held the baby Jesus, “my eyes have seen [God’s] salvation” (Luke 2:30). All this occurred at Jesus’ birth.

Again, the birth of Jesus is nothing without his life, death, and resurrection. The song begins, “For he has done marvelous things! His Right Hand and his Holy Arm have worked salvation for him” (Ps 98:1). As with Psalm 96, we see something marvelous. There is only one time in the NT where “marvelous things” appears. Jesus, quoting the upcoming Psalm 118 says, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?*” (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10-11). In this way, Psalm 98 predicts the birth and death of Christ.¹⁹

¹⁹ “In Mark’s new exodus, then, it is the rejected Davidic son-stone Jesus who through his resurrection becomes the preeminent stone of a new people-temple (14:58; cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-7; note also “stone,” “building,” and “wonder” in Mark 13:1-2; see Marcus 1992: 119-25). This would indeed be “the Lord’s doing” and “wonderful in our eyes” (12:11), which language of seeing Yahweh’s wonderful deeds originates in delivering and vindicating his people with the defeat of Egypt at the exodus (Exod. 15:11; 34:10), is echoed in the celebration of King Yahweh’s worldwide victory over the nations in general (Ps. 97:1-2 LXX [98:1-2 ET]), and provides the basis of their eschatological defeat in Micah’s vision of the new exodus (Mic. 7:15-20 LXX). At the same time, in Ezekiel the new exodus was also understood as a “resurrection” (37:1-14) in which a Davidic king would oversee a reconstituted people and a new sanctuary (37:15-28).” Rikk E. Watts, “Mark,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 214.

But it doesn't end there. Psalm 98 ends the same way 96 does. “Before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity” (Ps 98:9). These verses are clearly referenced by Paul in his sermon to the Athenians when he tells them, “[God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). John says the same thing, “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war” (Rev 19:11).” Both refer to the Lord Jesus as the one who fulfills these words, for these words are about him in the totality of what he came and is coming to do. For the Lord Jesus is Yahweh, the God of Psalms 96-99.²⁰

PSALMS 99—BOW DOWN: THE KING HAS COME

²⁰ We could also add here, “Fire [an image of the Spirit] goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around” (Ps 97:3). This is echoed in Rev 11:5, “If anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes.” Here, however, it refers to the “two witnesses” which Beale says “are not two actual individual prophets; rather, they symbolize the corporate prophetic witness of the church.” G. K. Beale and Sean M McDonough, [“Revelation,”](#) in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 1119. In the context of Zechariah where the Olive Trees and Lampstands of the previous verses are found, we have Joshua (priest) and Zerubabel (king) standing as representatives of the OT type.

With that, Psalm 99 becomes the climactic song of the four-song set. It begins the same way Psalm 97 begins, “**The LORD reigns.**” The focus of them all is on God as King. It changes the former song a little. Instead of “**Let the earth rejoice,**” now it is “**Let the peoples’ tremble!**” (99:1).

Christmas is what I think of as a “safe” holiday. The cuddly, baby Jesus safe in the arms of his mother, cooing upwards at her and she snuggles the infant in her arms. It is good and right that we remember that Jesus was a baby, born in the womb of a virgin. But it is safe if that’s all we think. How many people “tremble” at Christmastime?

The remarkable thing that we have seen about his coming as predicted here is that angels bow down in worship, salvation is delivered strongly to Israel, and Satan is cast firmly down to the ground. These are not deeds done by a helpless little babe, but by a divine warrior (the new song), who through pure strength, sheer will, and perfect holiness has overcome all his enemies, but through absolute love and pure grace has won freedom for the captives. “**Now salvation and the power of the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and**

night before God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 12:10-11).

The OT had ways of helping Israel think about all this. Thus, the song continues. “He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!” (Ps 99:1). Yahweh is pictured sitting on his ark-throne, and because he is enthroned, the earth cannot keep still. Earthquakes are terrifying, because in them the most stable and trusted of all things—the very ground beneath our feet—becomes like pudding in the hand of a kid at lunch.

“The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome Name! Holy is he! The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob” (2-4). As Yahweh ruled over Israel, the peoples all saw what kind of a God he was. In these verses, more attributes are mentioned.

First, he is “exalted.” He is lifted up, high over everyone else. No one can touch him. Think about how difficult it would be for you to get into the Oval Office while the President is there. There are layers upon layers upon layers of security such that it is impossible unless you are invited. It is infinitely more so with God.

Second, he has a great and awesome Name. Yahweh's name is unlike any others. It means, "I AM WHO I AM." He is not created, he simply "is." He is eternal. So also is the One who bears the Name who comes down from heaven to do the will of his Father.

Third, he is holy. "Holy is He" is a mini-refrain repeated again in vs. 5. To be holy is to be set apart as special and different in a religious sense, primarily because it is untainted with worldly defects and sins.

Fourth, he is just. The kingly office is on full display. In Israel, God has established laws that are fair and equitable to the poor yet not so as to be a kind of reverse discrimination. God takes care of the orphan and the widow, yet not in such a way as to do harm to the fathers and husbands. His law spread throughout the land, establishing his rule in the 12 tribes, showing the world that he is just and righteous.

Therefore, fifth, he is worthy of worship. "Exalt the LORD our God. Worship..." (Ps 99:5). Worship is something only rightly given to someone who has these attributes. The gods or angels don't have them. Fallen kings don't have them, not even David. Only God is worthy of worship.

All of this is true because God has done something. He has condescended to man. He has come down to be with us. It begins, “**Worship at his footstool**” (5). If God has a footstool, and we can worship there, then it is because God has come close to us. This is exactly what they believed happened at the temple, which is why they always had to go to temple to worship. His footstool (the ark) was there.

God did not just come to them in the temple. He was also among them and their leaders. “**Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his Name. They called to the LORD, and he answered them**” (6).

Moses and Aaron and Samuel represent bookends of the period of wilderness wandering and the Judges, just before the kings would begin reigning. It was during this time especially that Yahweh was their King alone. Yet, God made them priests who would speak to him on behalf of the people, and offering sacrifices to make atonement.

Now, these men talked to God, and even saw him. This is the meaning of calling upon his Name. Read Exodus 34 or 1Sam 3 and you can easily see an embodied person there that they called upon. This particularly means that they knew the Second Person of the Trinity. Then, because they

called upon him, he answered them. All because he condescended to be with them.

The condescension continues. “In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them; they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them” (7). Now, all the people see the LORD, albeit veiled in the pillar of cloud. They heard the voice, but they did not see a form. They heard his decrees, and began keeping his covenant as his people.

But sometimes they fell. “O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings” (8). His condescension was also gracious in that when he was among them and they sinned, he did not destroy them all. But he forgave their sins through the mediation of Moses and others. Yet, he did not let their sins go unpunished.

In this, we come full circle. Psalms 96-99 are proclaiming the future even as they teach the past. Jesus’ Incarnation as a human being is the climactic condescension of “God With Us” in the Bible. It is rooted in God with them in the OT. His coming in judgment yet future is mitigated by his coming in salvation 2,000 years ago in the womb of the virgin Mary. As he died upon the cross, judgment for your sins was poured out on him. When he

died, he delivered a message of victory to evil powers in heavenly places. He was raised he was vindicated as having power over Death.

Now that he has ascended and begun reigning in his kingdom from heaven, he has sent his Holy Spirit in his place. His Spirit now goes before the Word to tell all about the good news of salvation that is offer freely to the nations, that in the Name of Jesus forgiveness of sins and salvation can be had if you repent and trust that the King has come for you.

If you do not, the warning have gone out in several of the songs. Judgment awaits you for your rebellion against God, the avenger of wrongdoings. If you would, trust in King Jesus and sing the last verse of Psalm 99 from your heart. “Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy” (Ps 99:9).