

The Great King Part II

Worship and Warning

Ps 95:1 1

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

³ For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

⁶ Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

⁷ For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice,

⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

⁹ when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

¹⁰ For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways."

¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

Psalm 95

¹ LXX has a superscription: "*A Praise of a song by David.*"

KING OF CREATION

THE BIBLE BEGINS WITH three chapters describing the creation of the world, the creation of man, the fall of man, and the subsequent grace of God. In a way, everything that comes after this in the Bible is commentary. The first chapter describes the creation of the world. In it, the Triune God: Father, Word, and Spirit work together and create as One.

The text tells us that God did this creating work in the span of **six days**. Each of these days ends with the same words, “... and there was evening and there was morning, the ____ day.” This all comes to a climactic and rather stunning conclusion (though most of us have gotten too used to it for it to make much of a difference to us anymore) at the beginning of Genesis 2, “**Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the **seventh day** from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (**Gen 2:1-3**).**

In these glorious words, you find things that should make you **bow down and worship**. They tell you **three**

things about God. First, he finished his work that he had done. Second, he rested from all this work. Third, he blessed the seventh day. As you come to understand what these mean, you soon discover that they tell you something amazing about this God. That is, they describe to you one very special attribute that stands out for your sake above the others. But first, we need to look at them.

God finished his work. What does this mean? Does it mean the 5:00pm whistle blew and God was finally able to punch out his final time-card for the week as he quietly sang that old Dolly Parton “9 to 5” song on his way out the door? Was he just *Workin’ for the Weekend*? No. God finishing his work doesn’t even mean he stopped working. The Lord Jesus had to explain this very thing to the Pharisees who were “persecuting” him for doing things on the Sabbath. They didn’t understand Genesis. “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17).

Rather, it means that his original creative work in forming and filling heaven and earth had come to an end just the way he wanted it to, for the previous words were, “And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day” (Gen 1:31). “Everything” includes, well,

everything—on the earth and in the heavens, including “**all the host of them**” (2:1). This “host” refers to the animals on earth, but especially includes the angels in heaven, or as the nations and OT often call them, **the gods** (*elohim*). Nehemiah and Paul both confirm this as they comment on this very verse. “**You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you**” (Neh 9:6) and “**For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him**” (Col 1:16).²

Genesis 2:1	Nehemiah 9:6	Colossians 1:16
Thus the heavens and the earth were <u>finished</u> , and all the host of them.	You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.	For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him

Second, **God rested**. What does this mean? God took a nap because he was really tired? He couldn't wait to get home and go to bed because he was exhausted? None of this.

² See the discussion in **Meredith Kline**, *Kingdom Prologue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 23-24.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary” (Isa 40:28). Rather, as John Owen tells us, it is the exact opposite. God’s resting was his taking delight and satisfaction and refreshment in his works.³

But it is more. This rest is what scholars refer to as God’s **enthronement rest**. What does this mean? To understand properly, we must look at the third thing it tells us. God **blessed the seventh day** *because* on it he rested.

Context here is important. Throughout the Ancient Near East, the pagan nations would sing about their gods building temples, often in seven days, in order to rest. In **Sumeria**, the god Ningirsu builds his consort Bau a resting place. It took him seven days to build this temple. In **Egypt**, the god Ptah came to “rest” after making everything through his divine speech and after having given birth to the gods and given man their towns and homes. With the **Canaanites**, the newly crowned king Baal needs a temple, and so one is built in six days and on the seventh it is consecrated with a great meal with the gods and this house

³ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 332.

become the throne of his kingship, the place of rest from the siege of his dominion. In **Babylon**, the god Ea builds a temple for a place of rest after defeating all his heavenly foes.⁴

But while ancient Jews would have known this about their neighbors, it is much more important that this is **their own reflection** on Genesis 2:2-3. Listen to how Isaiah puts God's throne and "rest" (sabbath) together, "Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?' " (**Isa 66:1**). In one way or another, this will become a fairly important theme in many of the remaining psalms. For example, "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!" ... For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: 'This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it'" (**Ps 132:7-8, 13-14**).

The point is, what Genesis 1:1-2:3 are really describing at their core is the Triune God creating for himself a great palace—a palace the size of the entire universe, with its center—its footstool—right here on earth. When he is

⁴ For much more detail see my sermon "Sabbath Enthronement," Genesis 2:1-3, at <http://www.rbcnc.com/genesis>.

finished, he takes up his enthronement rest, and is crowned King before all of his creation. “King” is the great attribute we are being shown at the beginning of the Bible. God is King. The animals know it. The man and woman know it. The heavenly beings know it.

This kingship is eternal. God does not stop being king on Sunday because he somehow has to go back to work. This is why there is something very special about the seventh day as it is found in Genesis 2:1-3. That is, unlike the other six days, this day has no morning and evening formula. In other words, **this day does not come to an end.** Or to put it another way, for the rest of the Bible, no matter what happens, God is the King. And therefore, everything else must respond appropriately. How it must respond is in worship.

PSALM 95 AND CONTEXT

It is in this context that we must read our song today. Psalm 95 stands in the middle of a set of royal psalms (93-100) that teach us perhaps more than any other place in the Psalter what it means that God is king. In the first half of this collection, scholars have noted that 90-92 serve as an

introduction. There is then much overlap between 93-94 and 96-98 (or 99). But Psalm 95 seems almost out of place. It isn't.

For example, God is called something in **95:1** that links back to **94:22**. He is called “**the rock**.” This was a term that Moses was especially fond of. In his great song at the end of Deuteronomy he sings, “**The Rock, his work is perfect**” (**Deut 32:4**). He sings about how Israel (Jeshurun) grew fat, sinned, and “**forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation**” (**32:15**). “**Rock of salvation**” is the very same language Psalm 95:1 uses of the LORD. Finally, in that same song, Moses sings about how “**their rock**” that is whatever god the pagans worship “**is not as our Rock**” (**Deut 32:31**). Therefore, Israel should not be tempted to turn away from the Rock who gave them birth (**18**) to worship the other gods.⁵

But of course, **Israel was tempted**. And, like Adam, Israel fell into temptation. Particularly noteworthy are the **various acts of national rebellion** throughout the 40 year wilderness wanderings, including testing the LORD for food and

⁵ My former Prof. David Howard lists many more connections between Psalm 95 and Deut 32. See **Howard**, *The Structure of Psalms 93–100*, 61, reference in **Robert Wallace**, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*, *Studied in Biblical Literature* 112 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 42.

water. The first food incident involved God sending the miracle manna from heaven. They complained, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, [but] you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Ex 16:3). The next verse says the LORD was testing (*nasah/peiraso*)⁶ them.

In the very next chapter, after moving on from that place, they come to the next. But their actions are very similar. This time it is water. “The people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test (*nasah/peirazo*) the LORD?’ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moss and said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’” (Ex 17:2). This is the famous

⁶ **Going Deeper:** The Greek *peiraso* is the same word James uses. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one” (James 1:13). A similar word (*peirasmos*) is used in the Lord’s Prayer, the ancient translations of which this past week came under fire from of all people the Pope, who is recommending changing the translations from “Lead us not into temptation” to something like “Do not let us fall into temptation” because the former “is not a good translation because it speaks of a God who induces temptation [but] it is Satan who leads us into temptation, that’s his department.” For a couple of responses see Dan Wallace, “Pope Francis, The Lord’s Prayer, and Bible Translation,” Daniel B. Wallace (Dec 12, 2017), <https://danielbwallace.com/2017/12/12/pope-francis-the-lords-prayer-and-bible-translation/>. Denny Burk, “Is the Pope right about the Lord’s Prayer?” Denny Burk (Dec 11, 2017), <http://www.dennyburk.com/is-the-pope-right-about-the-lords-prayer/>.

water from the rock story where Moses is told to take his staff with which he had just **struck the Nile** and its waters parted (5). (Remember, the Red Sea had just happened only a couple of chapters earlier. They saw what the LORD did there, not to mention in the Ten Plagues of Egypt, with miracles that were not duplicated again in the entire OT. They saw his power, and more importantly, they saw that he was King over the gods of Israel).

Now, Moses is told to **strike the rock** at Mt. Horeb (Sinai) and **water** will come out of it (6). As someone says, “The staff with which he had cut off the lifegiving waters of the Egyptians was now providing water for the Israelites: the Exodus is revisited.”⁷ Or as one ancient commentary puts it, “Through the very things by which their enemies were punished, they themselves received benefit in their need” (**Wis 11:5**). Exodus tells us “Moses did so” (6), but he called the place **Massah** meaning “testing” and **Meribah** meaning “quarreling.” For here, they tested the LORD by saying, “**Is the LORD among us or not?**” (7).

It is truly incredible that people who had literally just seen such things as have never been seen before and had

⁷ Peter Enns, “Creation and Re-Creation: Psalm 95 and Its Interpretation in Hebrews 3:1-4:13, *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 264-65 [255-80].

actually been the recipients of such incredible grace through them, would in such a short time question whether the LORD was even among them now or not. Such is the fickle nature of our selective memories. But let's step back a bit and think about one more thing here. It was actually through these miracles that Moses teaches Israel that **God gave birth to them** as a nation.

Importantly, using **Genesis 1:2** imagery of the spirit of God hovering (*rachaph*) like a bird over the formless (*tohu*) earth, in the same famous song we looked at with the “rock” references earlier he says, “**He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste (*tohu*) of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters (*rachaph*) over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him”** (**Deut 32:10-12**). In his song in Exodus, Moses sings of God destroying Pharaoh in the sea and then shouts, “**Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone, till your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people**

pass by whom you have created” (Ex 15:16).⁸ So Israel is birthed or created through these very miracles. This is why Moses uses the creation language of the Spirit hovering over them in the wilderness. God has *not* stopped working. Indeed, at the Exodus he was doing a new creation, forming a people for himself. All of this is the necessary background to now approach Psalm 95.

PSALM 95: EXHORTATION TO WORSHIP (1-7A)

Psalm 95 is divided into two or three basic sections:

- I. An Exhortation to Praise Yahweh (1-7a)
- II. A Word of Warning Against Hardening One’s Heart (7b-11)⁹
 - I. A call to worship the Creator-King (95:1-5)
 - II. A call to worship the Covenantal God (6-7c)
 - III. A warning not to ignore God’s providence (7d-11)¹⁰

⁸ The word *qnh* is often translated “purchased” or “ransomed.” But it can also mean “created.” Enns, 259 n. 11.

⁹ Peter Enns, “Creation and Re-Creation: Psalm 95 and Its Interpretation in Hebrews 3:1-4:13, *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 255-80. Sub points falling under I. would be *A. Worship the Great God* (vv 1-5) and *B. Worship the Good God* (6-7a). See William D. Barrick, “Psalm 95—Adoration and Admonition,” *Psalms, Hymns, and Spirit Songs: The Master Musician’s Melodies*, DrBarrick.org (2007), https://drbarrick.org/files/studynotes/Psalms/Ps_095.pdf.

¹⁰ Sean Holloway, “An Invitation to Worship: An Exegesis of Psalm 95,” April 7, 2015, http://www.academia.edu/11894801/AN_INVITATION_TO_WORSHIP_AN_EXEGESIS_OF_PSALM_95

The two-point approach can be summarized this way:

Let us worship our Savior (1-2)

For he is the Creator of everything (3-5)

Let us worship our Maker (6)

For he is our Savior (7)¹¹

I said earlier that what we have revealed to us about God in Genesis 1-2 demands a proper response from creation. That response is worship. If Israel's creation is a kind of new creation by the same Being, then its proper response is that much more important. For in creating Israel to be his treasured possession and inheritance, the LORD is bestowing grace in a way that he has never done to any of his creation previously. How much more full of worship should Israel be?

Thus Psalm 95 begins with two verses calling Israel to worship. “Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to

¹¹ Charles Bruce Riding, "Psalm 95 1-7c as a Large Chiasm," *Zeitschrift Fur Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1976: 418.

him with songs of praise” (Ps 95:1-2). Seeing the chiasmic structure of these two verses is instructive.

- A. Come let us sing
- B. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation
- C. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving**
- B¹. Let us make a joyful noise to him
- A¹. With songs of praise

The outer section (A/A¹) teaches that **part of what it means to worship God is to sing to him**. This is a psalm after all. The second section (B/B¹) teaches two things about these songs. First, the **songs are to be full of joy**. That is, they are not dutiful songs sung out of pure obligation. They are not songs that come out of your mouth because you were forced to sing them by someone. They are songs that, like an underground spring, rise up from your own soul and heart.

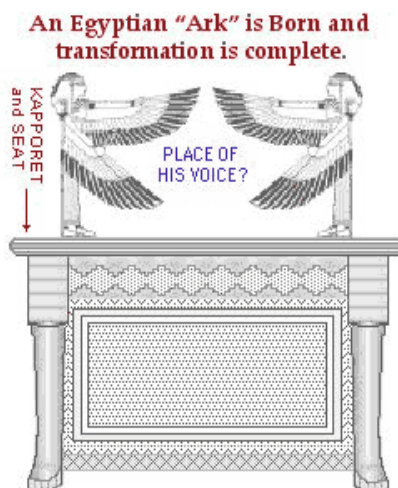
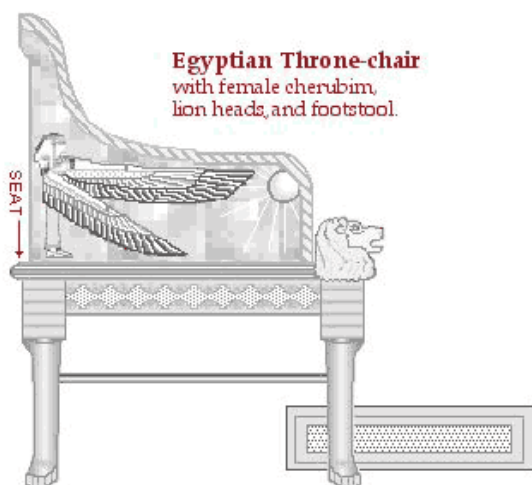
Second, these songs are **directed at him**. They are not generic songs that could just as easily be about your girlfriend as God. He is the Rock, the Foundation, the Grounding of all joy and happiness. All the more, he is this because he is the rock of our salvation. Yahweh has saved his people from slavery and sin. He has abundantly fed them

and given them waters that they may never thirst again. He has clothed them, sheltered them, taken care of them, been with them, never forsaken them. No wonder the songs are full of joy.

Finally, the center (C) teaches that these songs are to be **sung not merely by yourself, but with God's people** in the very presence (that is, lit. his "face") where he has put his special presence in the midst of them. For Israel, this was where the ark of the covenant resided, inside the glory-cloud, inside the great temple, in the center of Jerusalem, in the center of Israel, in the center of the earth, in the middle of the universe. This is where God placed his Name. Thus, the singing commanded here is corporate worship with God's people, full of joy and thanksgiving directed at the Triune God.

Now, this **ark of the covenant** idea is important because it teaches you something about the God who has come in the midst of his people. The ark was designed to be **the Royal Throne of God** who would meet with Moses **"from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony"** (Ex 25:22). This is easily seen by comparing the golden throne of **King Tut** (Egypt) with its winged cherubim on the sides and its footstool at the base

with the design of the ark of the covenant God had Moses build:



The whole thing was designed to teach Israel that Yahweh was their King, that he was there, enthroned in their midst,

in his temple. And while there is One God, it was King Jesus who met with Moses “face to face” in those days.

Adding this now to what we’ve already seen about Genesis 1 and God making for himself a great temple in which he would be enthroned you get the very natural reason why **vs. 3** says, “**For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.**” Yahweh is not merely one god among many. He is the Supreme God, the Creator of the heavenly host, the Creator of creation itself, infinitely superior to King Tut (or any Pharaoh) and his gods, as he proved in the events of the Exodus. It is **God as King of the gods** that becomes **the first reason why Israel is to worship him.**

A second reason follows from it. “**In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land**” (4-5). There are several things to think about here. First, the images give the impression that this God is **utterly immense**. From the lowest to the highest, from the farthest to the nearest, from the most mysterious to the stuff made for us, all these are merely in the “hand” of God. “Hand” here is not to be taken literally; it is a metaphor to teach you

that everything he has made is merely held by him in his hand. He is bigger and superior to it all.

Second, you won't naturally think this way, but the Israelites would have. The things mentioned here were deified as gods by the pagans. In other words, these images follow quite natural after God being "king of the gods." He rules the underworld where Hades (Baal is also Lord of the Underworld) resides. He is king over the sea where Yam (Poseidon) rule. The land/earth? Gaia has nothing on Yahweh. The mountains where they all met for council? They belong to the LORD.

Putting these together then, do any of us truly understand the gravity of coming to worship this Being? Do we stop before we come to consider that this God made all things, that he is superior in every way, that his power is absolute, that his knowledge is infinite, that his days are eternal, that all things owe their very existence to this Being? Do we really stop to think that if he were to cease (*sabbath*) speaking the Word, everything would cease to exist instantly? And do we stop to think that this immense Being who cannot be contained even by the vastness of the universe that he created has nevertheless stooped down to consider man, to be mindful of man, that he would even

show grace upon this piece of dirt who does nothing but spit in his face all day long?

Thus vs. 6, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” Yes, worship the LORD. And now the reason why is because he is our Maker. We’ve seen how he made the universe and the world in Genesis 1. We’ve seen how he created Israel in the Exodus, giving birth to a nation that did not exist before, calling them to himself. God is the Creator of all things, but he is especially “our” maker.

Along these lines, “He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (7a). What’s so beautiful here is that this omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent Being is not just some far-off God of the Deists. He is immanent, with his creation, and with his people as the now familiar Psalmist metaphor relates: as a Shepherd is to his sheep. He has created us. He has saved us. He has come near to us. He protects us. He watches over us. How many more reasons could there be to worship this God. Do you hear his voice calling you to worship him this very hour?

PSALM 95: WORD OF WARNING (7B-11)

Just here, I want you to recall the nature of the songs that are to be sung to Yahweh. They are to be joyful and full of thanksgiving, it says. Thus far, Psalm 95 has been. But the whole song would not be categorized this way. That almost seems to make the song contradict itself. It doesn't. However, what happens next is so abruptly different in tone that it has caused liberal scholars no end of speculation, as some think an incompetent editor must have combined two very different songs into one incoherent hymn. I like how Peter Enns puts it, “One cannot simply argue for original disunity by taking refuge in an inept redactor who, for no apparent reason, brought together two distinct and unrelated songs for use in the [temple].”¹²

Why? Because if we do, we fail to see the seriousness, the weightiness with which we are to approach this God even in joy and thanksgiving; we fail to take seriously our own stubborn inclination to be just like Israel; and we fail in all ways to understand the totality of what it means to worship God. For you see, worshiping God is not merely something

¹² Enns, 256.

you do with your mouth or even with the feelings that well up within your heart when you come together as God's people.

True worship of God goes far beyond this. It goes to what you are going to be like after you leave this place and return to your ordinary lives. Are you one person when you come here, and a totally different person when your pastor doesn't see you? Many people are. But this is the opposite of worship. Indeed, it is the opposite of what it means to have the Rock save you. For salvation is not merely exterior (from slavery), but interior (from your own sinful desires). To be duplicitous like this, to have people in church think you are one thing but people at work think you are something completely different is perhaps the worst possible place a person can be. It is the very definition of hypocrisy.

Psalm 95 enters into a warning at this point. It is a warning that gets at the heart of what it means to worship and what it means to be saved. It is also very well known, not the least reason being because the inspired sermon known as Hebrews uses this very passage as the basis of nearly two full chapters early on in that letter. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers

put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, ‘They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.’ Therefore I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest’” (Ps 95:7b-11).

What should we say about these words? **First**, again, Hebrews uses them for nearly two chapters, quoting often from them throughout. An outline of how Hebrews uses it is informative.

- I. Moses over a house as a servant, Jesus over a better house as a son (Heb 3:1-6)
- II. Ps 95:7b-11 quote and warning of an evil, unbelieving heart so as not to enter God’s rest (3:6-14)
- III. Ps 95:7b-8 quote and Israel as an example of an unbelieving heart that did not enter God’s rest (3:15-4:3a)
- IV. Ps 95:11 quote and God’s rest at creation [over his created house] (4:3b-4)
- V. Ps 95:11 quote and the meaning of “today” for Israel (4:5-7)
- VI. Ps 95:7b-8 quote and the ongoing nature of “today” for Christians (4:8-13)

Second, by way of side-note, Hebrews attributes them to **the Holy Spirit**. This is fascinating, because Psalm 95 is about Yahweh. Suddenly, however, Yahweh starts speaking

in these verses (see vs. 9's "me"). Therefore, Hebrews is calling the Holy Spirit Yahweh (this obviously does not exclude the Father or Son as Yahweh, even in the song, for there is but One God).

Third, Hebrews us uses the LXX. This is why it attributes the song to David (see n. 1 above), even though there is no superscription in the Hebrew.

Fourth, the whole burden of this part of Hebrews is to make something that was very contextually located (one/two episodes in the wilderness with Israel applying to the nation of Israel in David's day) become applicable to you and I! To put that another way, we've been thinking about *Israel* as God's new creation, and thus someone might think that this song only applies to them. However, all that can be said of Israel is now given to **the church**, including many of the same words used to describe Israel (the circumcision, Israel of God, Jews, holy nation, etc.). Perhaps the most important is that Paul calls Christians "**a new creation.**" "**If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation**" (2Co 5:17). "**Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation**" (Gal 6:15).

This leads us **finally** to consider the meaning of the words in the warning of this song. The warning begins with

this important word, “**Today**.” What is “today?” Well, on a basic level it just means right now, as you hear this message. However, by the end of the song, it becomes clear that “today” is actually a very special day that relates back to creation.

Today if you accept his voice or word. “Voice” (*qol*) is the word found in Genesis 3, when the LORD comes to Adam and he “**heard the sound**” (**Gen 3:8**) and the embodied Yahweh eventually killed a sacrifice and clothed Adam and Eve with it. Curiously, after quoting this verse for the last time, Hebrews launches into its last warning for us to strive to enter God’s rest “**For the Word of God is living and active...**” (**Heb 4:11, 12**). What is curious is that the Word here is not called an “it,” but **a Him** and a His, “**No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account**” (**13**). In other words, Hebrews is thinking of this voice of the Psalm not merely as a call to worship from the Psalmist, but as the very voice of the Word of God, the King of Israel.

It is Christ who speaks through the word. The Word speaks the word. When you read the Bible or, especially, when you hear a sermon, Romans says, “**Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ ... [but]**

how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Rom 10:17, 14). Michael Horton explains how important this is for you to understand. In preaching, we follow the “Reformers in insisting that the preached Word is not merely a word about God or Christ, but is itself the Word of God! Therefore, the goal is not merely to explain doctrines and lecture about these important truths, but to actually bring Christ to the people through the proclamation.”¹³

What is the point? It is that as you hear the beginning of Psalm 95 and its call to worship, Christ himself is telling you to do this. Christ himself is showing you why you are to do this. Because he is King. And Christ himself is now warning what happens if you will not.

Today, if you hear his voice, “Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness” (Ps 95:8). Hebrews and the LXX calls it “the rebellion” or “the provocation.” We’ve already seen what they did there. But the Psalm explains it for us again. “When your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work” (9). They deliberately

¹³ Michael Horton, “What Are We Looking For in the bible,” Modern Reformation Magazine, “Scripture” (May/June 5.3). http://www.reformed.org.ua/1/83/Horton#_ftn5

provoked God, tempting him as it were to do their bidding. Testing him, making him prove himself even after all they had seen.

This is a terrible thing, but in Hebrews it is that much worse for Christians, because he has been arguing how Christ is superior to all OT things. He is **superior to the angels** (one of the Psalms it quotes uses “gods” [*elohim*]). He is superior because he made them, in fact he made all things. In other words, **Hebrews 1:3** talks exactly like **Psalm 95:4-5**: About the Son! He is **superior to Moses** over the house. Remember the temple-house language of Genesis 1? Moses was told to build one that was patterned after it. But Jesus made the original. And the one he is making in the NT is even superior to it, because in it God is creating new people out of sinful flesh, molding them into his very image, forgiving them, cleansing them, healing them, setting them free. He is the author of our very salvation. Therefore, the warning comes. We are in a much more serious position if we try to prove or tempt the Lord after such a great salvation.

How might you do this? By denying what he has done in Christ. By saying he hasn't done it. By demanding more and more proof after you have all the proof you need in the

Bible and in his very people. Show us a sign! They won't believe even if someone was raised from the dead!

What was God's response to this kind of tempting? He made a wicked generation wander for 40 years in a desert. Can you imagine wandering homeless in the hot California desert since 1977? "For forty years I loathed that generation." Loathed! It means "to feel intense dislike or disgust for someone." Hebrews takes the wilderness wandering and applies it spiritually, but we're getting ahead of ourselves.

What was their problem? "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." As incredible as it sounds, the verse tells us that people can see miracles with their own eyes and yet not actually know God's ways. Psalm 77 told us God's way was through the sea. They saw the miracle. In fact, they walked right through the miracle. Yet, they did not see the LORD in it, for the Psalm continues, "Yet your footprints were unseen." Even with tangible, physical evidence the likes of which most people say if they had they would immediately trust God. But no. This isn't true. It is fooling yourself. Wicked people demand signs. That's what Psalm 95 is saying. That's what Jesus said.

Why are they wicked? **Because they always go astray in their heart.** It is always an issue of the heart. It is what is on the inside that makes a man unclean. They do not have faith in the LORD who demonstrates who he is in plenty of miracles. And the reason they do not is because they crave the things in their belly more than they crave knowing the LORD. This causes them to tempt and test the LORD, to put him on trial as **C. S. Lewis** puts it (*God in the Dock*), with us as the Judge. It is the opposite of worshiping God. It is worshiping self.

And what do you suppose it deserves? **Psalm 95:11** says, **“Therefore I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”** For that generation, it meant wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, dying there without ever reaching the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. But this was a type of something much more serious.

It is a type of not entering **God’s rest**. What is that rest? Hebrews takes us back to Genesis 2 at this point, showing us that on the seventh day God rested. We have seen that this rest was a **royal enthronement rest**, a celebration that God rules the world and is completely sovereign over the whole thing. The Lord Jesus explained it this way. **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt 11:28-29).

The opposite of resting is **restlessness**. Restlessness is this edgy, impatient, agitation, a disquietness deep in a soul full of anxiety, worry, and angst. **Augustine** knew of it and famously began what may be the most famous book outside of the Bible in Western Civilization, *The Confessions*: “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; Your power is great and Your wisdom infinite. Man would praise you, man, who is but a particle of Your creation, who bears about him his mortality, which is the witness of his sin, the witness that ‘You resist the proud.’ Yet, man would praise You, he, who is but a particle of Your creation. You awake us to delight in praising You; for You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.”

To not enter God’s rest is to live an eternity with this kind of agitation of soul which even only gets worse. It is to live apart from the rest that is provided by the Lord, a wanderer like Cain, ever roaming, never finding a home. It is to live in an eternal city of death, fear, hatred, greed, sloth, lust, worry, where there is no rule of law, where everyone is wicked and looks out only for themselves. Such a place is

restrained here, even in the worst of societies. But [hell](#), I believe, will be full of it. For this is what gnashing the teeth is, not so much a symbol of pain, but of anger and hatred and disdain for everything there is, especially God. The only reason you may not think this is very bad now, is because you have not been the recipient of what such dark malice does to everyone around it.

God's kingdom is one of rest, not restlessness. In it, you find peace and calm and quiet for your soul. By faith in Christ, by following and learning from the King, your soul can know rest. When?

This is the best part of all. The invitation has been ongoing since the day God entered his enthroned rest. "[Today](#)." Today is not just right now, but it is [the never-ending day of God's enthronement](#), a day without morning or evening because God never stops being King. It is the great ongoing Sabbath day that is pictured in creation, codified in Israel's laws, and talked about in Hebrews. Until Christ returns, entering into that day has never ceased being a possibility. There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, that if you would worship him not merely with your mouth, but with your heart and soul and mind and body and strength, you will not end up like the Israelites,

complaining, grumbling, testing, angry, never satisfied, always looking back, never looking forward.

This is the message Psalm 95 holds out for you. It begins with a call to worship a glorious God. It ends with a stern warning. The warning is for all people in all ages. It is for you. Anyone who has heard the King's voice and has heard what he has done, has been given Good News that can save their soul. Will you enter and rest, praising God with is people? Will you come to him, you who are restless, to find rest at the King's footstool in his temple in his holy city and glorious kingdom? Or will you stay outside, eternally restless with the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, with everyone who loves and practices falsehood? (**Rev 22:15**).

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.

Amen.

Ps 95:7-11 ESV	Ps 95:8-11 LXA	Ps 95:7-11 PST	Heb 3:7-11 ESV
⁷ "Today, if you hear his voice,		⁷ "today, if you <i>accept his word-</i>	⁷ "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,	⁸ "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, according to the day of irritation in the wilderness:	⁸ Do not harden your heart as in the dispute, as on the day <i>you tested God</i> in the wilderness.	⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,
⁹ when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.	⁹ where your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works.	⁹ For your fathers tempted me, they tried me; yet they saw my works.	⁹ where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.
¹⁰ For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways."	¹⁰ Forty years was I grieved with this generation, and said, They do always err in their heart, and they have not known my ways.	¹⁰ Forty years I rejected the generation <i>of the wilderness</i> , and I said, "They are a people with error <i>in their heart</i> , and they do not know my ways."	¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.'
¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest.""	¹¹ So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest."	¹¹ For I swore in <i>the harshness of my wrath</i> , "They will not enter the <i>repose of my sanctuary</i> .""	¹¹ As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"