

Joy to the World – Psalm 98

In the early 1700's, at the age of 45, Isaac Watts' health was in decline and he was not able to do as much preaching as before. He began the task of writing songs that would make use of the Psalms in the context of Christian, Gospel truth. The last half of Psalm 98 (vs. 4-9) was dedicated to the topic of "The Messiah's coming and kingdom." He really wasn't trying to write a Christmas Carol, but that's what the public made of it! Today, "Joy to the World" is one of our favorites.

Psalm 98 truly celebrates God's deliverance of Israel in the past and projects a future deliverance that will impact the entire world. **Salvation - Psalm 98:1-3.** It is possible that these verses describe Israel's deliverance from Egypt, in the past, or some other great deliverance. The whole world will see God's faithfulness to His promises to Israel (Romans 11). **Celebration - Psalm 98:4-6** describes the glorious way we should celebrate God's deliverance. **Expectation - Psalm 98:7-9** projects a future deliverance of Israel that will affect the entire planet. It is the millennial Kingdom of Christ come to earth!

Though Psalm 98 portrays the second coming of Christ, perhaps the Spirit of God had already tied in the thoughts of Psalm 98 with the first coming of Christ. A comparison of the Virgin Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) would make us wonder if she did not have Psalm 98:1-3 in mind when she was praising the Lord for the announcement of the Messiah, miraculously conceived in her womb! It is like David made a prophetic proclamation and Mary echoed that with her praise:

David – "O sing unto the Lord a new song..." (Psalm 98:1a)

Mary – "My soul doth magnify the Lord." (Luke 1:46)

David – "...He hath done marvelous things." (Psalm 98:1b)

Mary – "He that is mighty hath done to me great things." (Luke 1:49)

David – "...His own right hand, and his holy arm hath gotten Himself the victory..." (Psalm 98:1c)

Mary – "He hath showed strength with his arm, he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." (Luke 1:51)

David – "The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen." (Psalm 98:2)

Mary – "...His mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation." (Luke 1:50)

David – "He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel..." (Psalm 98:3a)

Mary – "He hath holpen (helped) his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy." Luke 1:54)

The first and second coming of Christ have a united purpose in God's great plan. Scripture often speaks of them together: Isaiah 61:1-7, etc cp Luke 4:16-30; Isaiah 11:1-6, etc.; Isaiah 9:6-7. This is one reason the people of Israel had a hard time understanding that Jesus was their Messiah. They were looking for a conquering king – a lion, not a meek lamb for sacrifice. Note how Scripture ties the two aspects of Christ's first and second coming together (Lamb & Lion) in Revelation 5:1-10. As we celebrate Christ's birth, may we do it in the spirit of victory and triumph, keeping the second coming of Christ in mind! See Galatians 1:3-5; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 9:28.