

Psalm 96:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. The conjunction "for" (ki, כִּי) grounds the call to sing a new song (vv. 1-3) in God's character: worship flows from who God is. "The LORD is great" (gadol Yahweh, גָּדוֹל יְהוָה) uses gadol (גָּדוֹל), meaning great in magnitude, power, significance, and transcendence. God's greatness isn't relative but absolute—infinitely beyond creation.

"Greatly to be praised" translates mehulal me'od (מְהֻלָּל מְאֹד)—deserving of utmost, maximal praise. The intensive me'od (מְאֹד, "exceedingly") emphasizes that no praise offered exhausts God's worthiness. "He is to be feared above all gods" (nora hu al-kol-elohim, נָורָא הוּא עַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים) uses yare (יָרָא), meaning to fear, revere, or stand in awe. This isn't servile terror but worshipful awe before overwhelming holiness and power.

"Above all gods" acknowledges polytheistic context—not that other gods truly exist, but that false gods (idols, demons behind idols, or deified human authorities) claim worship. Yet Israel's God stands categorically above all rivals. This anticipates Paul's declaration: "there is none other God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4) and John's vision of universal worship: "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord...for all nations shall come and worship before thee" (Revelation 15:4).

Historical Context

Psalm 96 is nearly identical to 1 Chronicles 16:23-33, sung when David brought the ark to Jerusalem. The psalm calls all nations (not just Israel) to worship Yahweh, reflecting Israel's missionary vocation to be a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6). The Ancient Near East was polytheistic; every nation had patron deities. Israel's radical claim was monotheism: Yahweh alone is God; all other so-called gods are worthless idols (v. 5). This theological revolution prepared for the gospel's global spread.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What competing 'gods' (money, status, pleasure, security) vie for worship in your heart, and how does recognizing Yahweh's supremacy dethrone them?
2. How does God's greatness motivate praise rather than indifference or fear?
3. In what ways should believers declare God's greatness 'above all gods' to a pluralistic culture that treats all religions as equally valid?

Interlinear Text

נָזַךְ אֵת מְהֻלָּל מְאֹד וְנִזְנַת
is great For the LORD to be praised and greatly he is to be feared

עַל הָלָה כָּל אֱלֹהִים:
above all gods

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 18:3 (Resurrection): I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.

Psalms 145:3 (Resurrection): Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.

Revelation 15:4 (Worship): Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

Psalms 95:3 (References God): For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

Psalms 89:7 (References God): God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.

Psalms 66:3 (References God): Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee.

Psalms 86:10 (References God): For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone.

Psalms 48:1 (Resurrection): Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.

Psalms 66:5 (References God): Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men.

Exodus 18:11 (References God): Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them.

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