

Psalms 96:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.

Analysis

O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth. The psalmist summons universal worship with two imperatives. "Worship" (hishtachavu, הִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ) comes from shachah (שָׁחָה), meaning to bow down, prostrate oneself—physical expression of reverence and submission. True worship involves the body, not merely internal affection or intellectual assent.

"In the beauty of holiness" (behadrat-qodesh, בְּהַדְרַת־קֹדֶשׁ) is a rich phrase. Hadrach (הִדְרָה) means beauty, splendor, or majesty; qodesh (קֹדֶשׁ) means holiness, set-apartness, sacred purity. The phrase could mean:

1. worship in holy splendor/sacred attire
2. worship characterized by holiness, or
3. worship God who is beautifully holy.

All three senses converge: genuine worship of the Holy One requires worshipers approaching in holiness, arrayed in the beauty of righteousness.

"Fear before him, all the earth" (chilu mipanav kol-ha'arets, חִילוּ מִפְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ) uses chul (חִיל), meaning to tremble, be in anguish, or writhe—response to overwhelming divine presence. This fear isn't terror driving people away but awe drawing them near in worship. Revelation depicts this fear: creatures around God's throne cry "Holy, holy, holy" (Revelation 4:8), and redeemed multitudes fall before Him (Revelation 7:11).

Historical Context

Israel's worship was regulated by holiness codes—priests wore special garments, followed purification rituals, and approached God only as prescribed (Leviticus 8-10). This external holiness symbolized the inner holiness God required: "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16). The temple's architecture itself taught holiness—progressing from outer courts (accessible to Gentiles), to inner courts (Israelites), to Holy Place (priests), to Most Holy Place (high priest once yearly). Christ's sacrifice tore the veil (Matthew 27:51), granting believers direct access while maintaining the call to holy worship (Hebrews 10:19-22; 12:28-29).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does 'the beauty of holiness' look like in contemporary worship—avoiding both dead formalism and casual irreverence?
2. How do you cultivate holy fear (reverential awe) in an age that emphasizes God's approachability and friendship?
3. What practical steps can believers take to 'worship in holiness,' recognizing that Christ's righteousness clothes us while we pursue sanctification?

Interlinear Text

וְהַשְׁתַּחֲוִּיתֶם	לַיהוָה	בְּהַדְבַּחְתָּ	קִדְשׁ	חַיְלֹ	מִפְנֵי	כָּל
O worship	the LORD	in the beauty	of holiness	fear	before	H3605
H7812	H3068	H1927	H6944	H2342	H6440	

הָאָרֶץ:
him all the earth
H776

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 29:2 (Holy): Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

Psalms 114:7 (References Lord): Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;

Psalms 110:3 (Holy): Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.

Daniel 11:45 (Holy): And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him.

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