
PSALM 97: 1 The LORD reigns! Let the earth rejoice! Let the multitude of islands be glad!

The reign of Jehovah, its nature and blessedness, Psa 97:1, Psa 97:2. He is fearful to the wicked, Psa 97:3-6. Idolaters shall be destroyed, Psa 97:7. The blessedness of the righteous, Psa 97:8-12.

This Psalm has no title either in the Hebrew or Chaldee; and in fourteen of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. it is written as a part of the preceding. In the Vulgate it is thus entitled, *Psalmus David, quando terra ejus restituta est*. "A Psalm of David when his land was restored;" the meaning of which I suppose to be, after he had obtained possession of the kingdom of Israel and Judah, and became king over all the tribes; or perhaps, after he had gained possession of all those countries which were originally granted to the Israelites in the Divine promise. See 1Chr 18:1, 1Chr 18:2. The Septuagint is nearly to the same purpose, *ὅτι ἡ γῆ αὐτοῦ καθίσταται*, "when his land was established:" so the Ethiopic and Arabic. The Syriac has, "A Psalm of David, in which he predicts the advent of Christ, (i.e., in the flesh), and through it his last appearing, (i.e., to judgment.*)" The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews 1Chr 1:6, quotes a part of the seventh verse of this Psalm, and applies it to Christ. Who the author was is uncertain: it is much in the spirit of David's finest compositions; and yet many learned men suppose it was written to celebrate the Lord's power and goodness in the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity.

Verse 1

The Lord reigneth - Here is a simple proposition, which is a self-evident axiom, and requires no proof: Jehovah is infinite and eternal; is possessed of unlimited power and unerring wisdom; as he is the Maker, so he must be the Governor, of all things. His authority is absolute, and his government therefore universal. In all places, on all occasions, and in all times, Jehovah reigns.

But this supreme King is not only called *hwby* Jehovah, which signifies his infinite and eternal being, unlimited power, and unerring wisdom; and, as Creator, his universal government; but he is also *ynd*) Adonai, the Director and Judge. He directs human actions by his word, Spirit, and Providence. Hence are his laws and revelation in general; for the governed should know their governor, and should be acquainted with his laws, and the reasons on which obedience is founded. As Adonai or Director, he shows them the difference between good and evil; and their duty to their God, their neighbors, and themselves: and he finally becomes the Judge of their actions. But as his law is holy, and his commandment holy, just, and good, and man is in a fallen, sinful state; hence he reveals himself as; *אלהים* Elohim, God, entering into a gracious covenant with mankind, to enlighten his darkness, and help his infirmities; that he may see what is just, and be able to do it. But as this will not cancel the sins already committed, hence the necessity of a Savior, an atonement; and hence the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. This is the provision made by the great God for the more effectual administration of his kingdom upon earth. Jehovah, Adonai, Elohim reigneth; et his animadversis, and these points considered, it is no wonder that the psalmist should add,

Let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad - The earth, the terraqueous globe; especially, here, the vast continents, over every part of which God's dominion extends. But it is not confined to them; it takes in the islands of the sea; all the multitude of those islands, even to the smallest inhabited rock; which are as much the objects of his care, the number of their inhabitants considered, as the vastest continents on which are founded the mightiest empires. All this

government springs from his holiness, righteousness, and benignity; and is exercised in what we call providence, from pro, for, before, and video, to see, which word is well defined and applied by Cicero: Providentia est, per quam futurum aliquid videtur, antequam factum sit. "Providence is that by which any thing future is seen before it takes place." De Invent. c. 53. And, in reference to a Divine providence, he took up the general opinion, viz., Esse deos, et eorum providentia mundum administrari. De Divinat. c. 51, ad finem. "There are gods; and by their providence the affairs of the world are administered."

This providence is not only general, taking in the earth and its inhabitants, en masse; giving and establishing laws by which all things shall be governed; but it is also particular; it takes in the multitudes of the isles, as well as the vast continents; the different species as well as the genera; the individual, as well as the family. As every whole is composed of its parts, without the smallest of which it could not be a whole; so all generals are composed of particulars. And by the particular providence of God, the general providence is formed; he takes care of each individual; and, consequently, he takes care of the whole. Therefore, on the particular providence of God, the general providence is built; and the general providence could not exist without the particular, any more than a whole could subsist independently of its parts. It is by this particular providence that God governs the multitude of the isles, notices the fall of a sparrow, bottles; the tears of the mourner, and numbers the hairs of his followers. Now, as God is an infinitely wise and good Being, and governs the world in wisdom and goodness, the earth may well rejoice and the multitude of the isles be glad.

PSALM 97: 2 Clouds and darkness are around him. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

Verse 2

Clouds and darkness are round about him - It is granted that this is a subject which cannot be comprehended. And why? Because God is infinite; he acts from his own counsels, which are infinite; in reference to ends which are also infinite: therefore, the reasons of his government cannot be comprehended by the feeble, limited powers of man. There must be clouds and darkness - an impenetrable obscurity, round about him; and we can no more comprehend him in what is called aeternitas a parte ante - the eternity that passed before time commenced, than we can in the aeternitas a parte post - the eternity that is to come, when time shall be no more. Yet such a Being cannot but see all things clearly, and do all things well; therefore the psalmist properly asserts: -

Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne - Righteousness, צדק *tsedek*, the principle that acts according to justice and equity; that gives to all their due, and ever holds in all things an even balance. And judgment, משפט *mishpat*, the principle that discerns, orders, directs, and determines every thing according to truth and justice: these form the habitation of his throne; that is, his government and management of the world are according to these; and though we cannot see the springs, the secret counsels, and the times, which this omniscient and almighty

Father must ever have in his own power, yet we may rest assured that all his administration is wise, just, holy, good, and kind. For, although his counsels be inscrutable, and the dispensations of his providence be sometimes apparently unequal, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

In this most sublime description, the psalmist, by the figure termed prosopopoeia, or personification, gives vitality and thought to all the subjects he employs; here, the very throne of God is animated; righteousness and judgment are two intellectual beings who support it. The fire, the lightnings, the earth, the heavens themselves, are all intellectual beings, which either accompany, go before him, or proclaim his majesty.

PSALM 97: 3 A fire goes before him, and burns up his adversaries on every side.

Verse 3

A fire goeth before him - Literally, this and the following verse may refer to the electric fluid, or to manifestations of the Divine displeasure, in which, by means of ethereal fire, God consumed his enemies. But fire is generally represented as an accompaniment of the appearances of the Supreme Being. He appeared on Mount Sinai in the midst of fire, thunder, and lightnings, Exo 19:16-18. Daniel, Dan 7:9, Dan 7:10, represents the Sovereign Judge as being on a throne which was a fiery flame, and the wheels of his chariot like burning fire; and a fiery streamer issuing from it, and coming forth from before him. St. Paul tells us (2Thes 1:8) that the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire; and St. Peter, (2Pet 3:7, 2Pet 3:10, 2Pet 3:11), that when the Lord shall come to judgment the heavens and the earth shall be destroyed by fire. the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the elements melt with fervent heat, and the earth and its works be burnt up. Here then, will appear: - "Our God in grandeur, and our world on fire."

Burneth up his enemies round about - The fire is his pioneer which destroys all the hinderances in his way, and makes him a plain passage.

PSALM 97: 4 His lightning lights up the world. The earth sees, and trembles.

Verse 4

His lightnings enlightened the world - Though this be no more than a majestic description of the coming of the Lord, to confound his enemies and succor his followers, yet some spiritualize the passage, and say, the lightnings signify the apostles, who enlightened the world by their heavenly doctrine.

The earth saw, and trembled - The earth is represented as a sentient being. It saw the terrible majesty of God; and trembled through terror, fearing it should be destroyed on account of the wickedness of its inhabitants.

PSALM 97: 5 The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

Verse 5

The hills melted like wax - The fire of God seized on and liquefied them, so that they no longer opposed his march; and the mountains before him became a plain.

The Lord of the whole earth - **אֲדוֹן כָּל הָאָרֶץ** adon col haarets, the Director, Stay, and Support of the whole earth. The universal Governor, whose jurisdiction is not confined to any one place; but who, having created all, governs all that he has made.

PSALM 97: 6 The heavens declare his righteousness. All the peoples have seen his glory.

Verse 6

The heavens declare his righteousness - They also, in this poetic description, become intelligent beings, and proclaim the majesty and the mercy of the Most High. Metaphorically, they may be said to declare his glory. Their magnitude, number, revolutions, order, influence, and harmony, proclaim the wondrous skill, matchless wisdom, and unlimited power of the Sovereign of the universe. See the notes on Psa 19:1-14 (note).

And all the people see his glory - Whatsoever God has made proclaims his eternal power and Godhead; and who, from a contemplation of the work of his hands, can be ignorant of his being and providence?

PSALM 97: 7 Let all them be shamed who serve engraved images, who boast in their idols. Worship him, all ye gods!

Verse 7

Confounded be fell they - Rather, They shall be confounded that boast themselves in idols. There is a remarkable play on the letters here, **הַמַּתְהַלְלִים** hammithalelim, who move like madmen; referring to the violent gestures practiced in idolatrous rites.

Of idols - **בְּאֵלִילִים** baelilim, in vanities, emptinesses; who "make much ado about nothing," and take a mad and painful pleasure in ridiculous and unprofitable ceremonies of religion.

Worship him - Who? Jesus: so says the apostle, Heb 1:6. Who will dare to dispute his authority?

All ye gods - **οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ**, his angels: so the Septuagint and the apostle: "Let all the angels of God worship him:" and the words are most certainly applied to the Savior of the world by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews; see the note there. The Chaldee says: "All nations who worship idols shall adore him."

PSALM 97: 8 Zion heard and was glad. The daughters of Judah rejoiced, because of your judgements, LORD.

Verse 8

Zion heard, and was glad - All the land of Israel, long desolated, heard of the judgments which God had shown among the enemies of his people.

And the daughters of Judah - All the villages of the land - Zion as the mother, and all the villages in the country as her daughters, rejoice in the deliverance of God's people.

PSALM 97: 9 For you, LORD, are most high above all the earth. You are exalted far above all gods.

Verse 9

For thou, Lord, art high - Thou art infinitely exalted above men and angels.

PSALM 97: 10 You who love the LORD, hate evil. He preserves the souls of his saints. He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.

Verse 10

Ye that love the Lord hate evil - Because it is inconsistent with his love to you, as well as your love to him.

He preserveth the souls of his saints - The saints, חַסִּדָּיִם chasidaiv, his merciful people: their souls - lives, are precious in his sight. He preserves them; keeps them from every evil, and every enemy.

Out of the hand of the wicked - From his power and influence.

PSALM 97: 11 Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.

Verse 11

Light is sown for the righteous - The Divine light in the soul of man is a seed which takes root, and springs up and increases thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. Gladness is also a seed: it is sown, and, if carefully improved and cultivated, will also multiply itself into thousands. Every grace of God is a seed which he intends should produce a thousand fold in the hearts of genuine believers. We do not so much require more grace from God, as the cultivation of what we have received. God will not give more, unless we improve what we have got. Remember the parable of the talents. Let the light and gladness be faithfully cultivated, and they will multiply themselves till the whole body shall be full of light, and the whole soul full of happiness. But it is the righteous only for whom the light is sown; and the upright in heart alone for whom the gladness is sown.

The words may also signify that, however distressed or persecuted the righteous and the upright may be, it shall not be always so. As surely as the grain that is sown in the earth shall vegetate, and bring forth its proper fruit in its season, so surely shall light - prosperity, and gladness - comfort and peace, be communicated to them. They also will spring up in due time.

PSALM 97: 12 Be glad in the LORD, you righteous people! Give thanks to his holy Name.

Verse 12

Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous - It is your privilege to be happy. Exult in him through whom ye have received the atonement. Rejoice; but let it be in the Lord. All other joy is the mirth of fools, which is as the crackling of thorns under a pot - it is a luminous blaze for a moment, and leaves nothing but smoke and ashes behind.

At the remembrance of his holiness - But why should you give thanks at the remembrance that God is holy? Because he has said, Be ye holy; for I am holy: and in holiness alone true happiness is to be found. As he, therefore, who hath called you is holy; so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. False Christians hate the doctrine of Christian holiness; they are willing to be holy in another, but not holy in themselves. There is too much cross-bearing and self-denial in the doctrine of holiness for them. A perfect heart they neither expect nor wish.

The analysis considers the whole Psalm as relating to Jesus Christ and the last judgment: so it was understood by several of the ancient fathers. The reader may take it in either sense.