

PSALM 97

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 97

This psalm is ascribed to David by the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions. It is of the same argument, and upon the same subject, as the preceding, the coming and kingdom of Christ; and that it respects his first coming into the world, when angels were called upon to worship him, appears from (~~1970~~ Psalm 97:7) compared with (~~8006~~ Hebrews 1:6) though it is expressed in such language as seems to agree with his second coming; and, perhaps, both are included, with various things between the one and the other; or it respects the kingdom of Christ, from his first to his second coming; to which agrees the inscription of the Syriac version, which is

“a Psalm of David, in which he prophesies concerning the coming of the Messiah, and again he intimates in it his last appearance.”

Ver. 1. *The Lord reigneth*, etc.] He has reigned, now reigns, will and must reign until all enemies are made his footstool; (see Gill on “~~1970~~ Psalm 93:1”), (see Gill on “~~1960~~ Psalm 96:10”),

let the earth rejoice: not the land of Judea only, and the inhabitants of it, to whom the King Messiah came; for there were but few among them that received him, and rejoiced at his coming; but the whole earth, the vast continent, as distinguished from the isles after mentioned, and they that dwell upon it; the Gentiles, who had a concern in his coming, in whom they were to be blessed, to whom they were to be gathered, and in whom they should find a glorious rest; and therefore he is called

the desire of all nations: the first preaching of the Gospel was occasion and matter of great joy to them; not only the blessings contained in it of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; but the effects of it, delivering them from the dominion of Satan, the god of this world; and from superstition, and idolatry, with which they were enslaved; and the bringing them into the glorious liberty of the children of God:

let the multitude of isles be glad thereof; the isles of the sea are many, even many thousands: Columbus, when he first discovered America, sailing by Cuba westward, gave names, as he passed along, to seven hundred islands, leaving three thousand more without names ^{f1372}: Gejerus reports, from some writers, that an Indian king, in 1553, was converted to the Christian faith, that ruled over eleven thousand islands; and that in Maldivar there are reckoned to be sixteen thousand: well may the text speak of a multitude of them: or, “let the great islands”, etc. such as ours of Great Britain and Ireland; these isles are said to wait for Christ and his doctrine, (^{<304>}Isaiah 42:4 51:5 60:9) and therefore must be glad to hear of his coming and kingdom: the Gospel was very early sent to the isles, as to Cyprus, Crete, etc. (see ^{<410>}Acts 13:4-6 ^{<500>}Titus 1:5) and to our northern isles likewise, who have great reason to be glad at its coming among us, continuance with us, and the success it has had; and that it is yet in the midst of us for further usefulness; and that Christ reigns, and will reign evermore.

Ver. 2. *Clouds and darkness are round about him*, etc.] Either as a garment; so Apollinarius paraphrases it,

“near is the King clothed with a cloud and tempest;”

and it is usual with the Heathens to represent their deities as surrounded or clothed with a cloud ^{f1373}: here the allusion is to the tabernacle and temple, when reared up and dedicated, (^{<048>}Exodus 40:34) (^{<1080>}1 Kings 8:10-12) and to other appearances of God, or Christ, in a cloud, (^{<090>}Exodus 19:9,16 ^{<075>}Matthew 17:5), it may denote the obscurity of his divine nature at his first coming; he appearing in the form of a servant, and in the likeness of sinful flesh, so that few discerned his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father; as also the darkness and blindness of the Jews concerning him, who could not perceive him to be the Messiah; notwithstanding all the characters of him; clouds and darkness were about him to them; as they were, in a literal sense, when he hung on the cross; the sun withdrew and hid itself, and darkness was upon the face of the earth for three hours; Christ was enveloped in it; and a greater darkness surrounded his soul when his divine Father hid his face from him: dark providences attended the first setting up of his kingdom, and the ministration of his Gospel in the world; the apostles, the first preachers of it, were persecuted by their own countrymen the Jews; the whole Gentile world was against them; the Roman empire, emperors, and governors of provinces, opposed them; wherever there was an open door, there were

many adversaries, so that things looked very unpromising: nevertheless these clouds were dissipated, and the difficulties got over; though this has sometimes been the case since, and will be again, ere the kingdom of Christ is in all its glory; he now sits enthroned in heaven, surrounded with clouds and darkness, and unseen to us; whose being and perfections are inscrutable to us, his providences unsearchable, and his ways past finding out; and when he comes a second time, it will be at midnight, and in the clouds of heaven:

righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne; the seat, basis, and support of it; he sits on a throne doing right, and by it his throne is established; (see Gill on “¹⁸⁹⁴Psalm 89:14”).

Ver. 3. *A fire goeth before him*, etc.] Not the fiery law, which went forth from his right hand on Mount Sinai; but rather his Gospel, which, as it enlightens, warms, comforts, and refreshes his people, searches, torments, and destroys his enemies, and is the savour of death unto death to them; (see ²²⁹Jeremiah 23:29 ⁴²⁶2 Corinthians 2:16 ⁶¹⁵Revelation 11:5). Some apply this to the gifts of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, signified by cloven tongues of fire; but then no such effect followed as mentioned in the next clause: it seems best to interpret it of his wrath, which, like fire, was poured out to the uttermost on the Jews, for their disbelief and rejection of him; they would not have him to reign over them; they despised his Gospel, and slew his servants; wherefore he sent the Roman armies to them, who destroyed those murderers, and burnt their city, (⁴²⁷Matthew 22:7), this will be also verified in the second coming of Christ, who will descend in flaming fire, and the earth will be burnt up, and all that is therein, (⁵⁰⁰2 Thessalonians 1:7,8 ⁶⁰⁰2 Peter 3:10,12), some Jewish writers interpret this of the war of Gog and Magog, in Ezekiel, which they suppose still future; as, when it is, fire will be sent and rained upon them, (⁴³²Ezekiel 38:22 39:6), but may be better applied to the Gog and Magog in (⁶¹⁸Revelation 20:8,9)

and burneth up his enemies round about; so that none can escape: this was true of the Jewish nation, who were burnt up; so that there was not left root nor branch in it, (³⁰⁴Malachi 4:1), and will be true of the wicked, at the general conflagration of the world, upon Christ's second coming; and of the Gog and Magog army, after the resurrection.

Ver. 4. *His lightnings enlightened the world*, etc.] Either the doctrines of the Gospel, compared thereunto, because of the swift progress they made,

and the large extent of them in the world, in a very little time; by the apostles they were published in all nations, and were the means of enlightening them in the true knowledge of themselves, and of the way of salvation by Christ: hence they are called the “lights of the world”, (^{<4154>}Matthew 5:14), as the coming of Christ, in his kingdom and power, by them, is compared to lightning, and so are the arrows of his word, (^{<4127>}Matthew 24:27 ^{<3014>}Zechariah 9:14), or else his judgments on the Jewish nation are meant, which were manifest and clear, and obvious to all the world; (see ^{<1984>}Psalms 18:14),

the earth saw, and trembled; the inhabitants of the earth, of the Gentile world, saw the judgments of God upon the Jews, and were astonished at them; (see ^{<1524>}Deuteronomy 29:24), it is usual for lightnings and earthquakes to go together; (see ^{<6119>}Revelation 11:19 16:15).

Ver. 5. *The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord*, etc.] Kimchi interprets the “hills” of the kings of the wicked; and it was verified in Herod and his nobles, and the citizens of Jerusalem, who, when they heard of the coming of the Messiah, of the birth of the King of the Jews, were exceedingly moved and troubled; their hearts melted like wax within them, (^{<4111>}Matthew 2:1-3), so when he appeared, in the power of his Gospel, in the Gentile world, and went forth in the ministration of it, conquering, and to conquer, all fled before him; every mountain and island were moved out of their places; and the kings of the earth, and great men, ran to the rocks to hide them from his face, which they could not bear, (^{<6164>}Revelation 6:14-17), and the like events, and more terrible, will they be, when he comes to destroy antichrist, and especially to judge the world, (^{<6169>}Revelation 16:19,20 20:11,12)

at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth; as Christ is; he is Lord of all, the Prince of the kings of the earth, (^{<4106>}Acts 10:36) (^{<6106>}Revelation 1:5 11:4), and as he will show himself to be at the great day; and that is the reason why the proud and lofty, comparable to hills and mountains, shall melt at his presence.

Ver. 6. *The heavens declare his righteousness*, etc.] His justice in punishing his enemies; the lightning and the thunder in the heavens, the tokens of his wrath, and instruments of it; his wrath itself, which is revealed from heaven, (^{<5118>}Romans 1:18), or the inhabitants of heaven, as Aben Ezra; the angels of heaven; so the Targum, “the angels on high (or of heaven, as in the king’s Bible) declare his righteousness”; (see

~~6615~~ Revelation 16:5-7), it is true of the ministers of the Gospel, who are Christ's angels or messengers, men of heavenly gifts and grace, whose work it is to declare the justifying righteousness of Christ, which is revealed in the Gospel from faith to faith, and which is therefore called the word of righteousness, and the ministration of it, (~~6617~~ Romans 1:17 ~~6619~~ 2 Corinthians 3:9 ~~6623~~ Hebrews 5:13),

and all the people see his glory; the glory of his justice in the destruction of his enemies; the glory of his power and grace in the salvation of his chosen; the glory of God in the face of Christ; the glory of Christ himself, as the only begotten of the Father; the glory of his person, office, grace, and righteousness, in the glass of the Gospel; the glory and honour he is now crowned with in heaven; and all the people, even all the chosen, redeemed, and called people, shall behold his glory to all eternity: it seems chiefly to respect the revelation of his glory, and his people's view of it at his first coming; (see ~~6625~~ Isaiah 60:5,6).

Ver. 7. *Confounded be all they that serve graven images*, etc.] Images of gold, silver, and stone, graven by art and man's device; to serve and worship which must be the grossest ignorance and stupidity, which, when convinced of, must fill with shame and confusion: this may be considered either as a prayer, that the idolatrous Gentiles might be enlightened to see the vanity of their idols, and their worship of them, and turn to the living God; or as a prophecy that it should be; for it may be rendered, "they are" or "shall be confounded", or "ashamed"^{f1374}, as the Targum, Jarchi, and Kimchi; which had its accomplishment in the first times of the Gospel; when, being preached in the Gentile world, multitudes forsook their idols and served the true God; and especially at the opening of the sixth seal, when Pagan worship was abolished throughout the Roman empire; and when the kings and great men in it, through shame, confusion, and dread, fled to the rocks and mountains, to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb, (~~6622~~ Revelation 6:12-17), and will have a further accomplishment, when the Papists, the worshippers of the beast, shall be ashamed of their graven images, of the Virgin Mary, and other saints; which will be when the Gospel shall be published throughout the world, (~~6646~~ Revelation 14:6-11),

that boast themselves of idols; as their saviours and deliverers, which yet are nothing, as the word^{f1375} signifies; that praise and extol them, as the givers of good things to them, or the procurers of them for them; that glory

in them, and in their worship of them, than which nothing can be a greater instance of folly and madness:

worship him, all ye gods; those that are so called, the graven images and idols before mentioned; let them bow down, and be prostrate before the Lord, as Dagon before the ark; or they that serve other gods, as Kimchi; so the Targum,

“and all the nations that serve idols shall worship before him;”

rather kings and princes, civil magistrates, who are sometimes called gods, are meant, (^{<49818>}Psalm 95:3 82:1,6), and who, in the latter day especially, shall serve and worship the Messiah, (^{<49710>}Psalm 72:10) though it is best of all to interpret it of angels, as this word Elohim is rendered in (^{<49885>}Psalm 8:5), and Aben Ezra says there are some of their interpreters that understand it of angels: the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions, and so Apollinarius, render it, “worship him, all his angels”: Gussetius ^{f1376} interprets it, “all that is God’s”; all that belong to him, angels and men, and all creatures; particularly angels, the most noble of all: and this sense is confirmed by an inspired writer, who manifestly refers to and quotes this passage, and applies it to the angels worshipping Christ, the first begotten Son of God, when he came into the world, (^{<5006>}Hebrews 1:6), with which compare (^{<49213>}Luke 2:13,14), from whence it appears not only that Christ is superior to angels, for the proof of which it is produced by the apostle; but that he is truly God, since God only is the object of religions worship; and that, if he is worshipped by angels, he ought to be worshipped by men; and that angels are not the proper objects of worship, since they are worshippers.

Ver. 8. *Zion heard, and was glad*, etc.] Or, the congregation of Zion, as the Targum; the church of Christ, and the members of it, called Zion, in allusion to the mountain of that name, in which the temple stood; a type of the church, (^{<5022>}Hebrews 12:22), these heard the Gospel, the good news and glad tidings of good things; they heard that Zion’s King reigned, and that his kingdom was enlarged, and interest increased; they heard the heavenly men declare his righteousness, by which they are justified from all things; they heard of the conversion of the Gentiles, and the confusion of idolaters; of the incarnation of Christ, and of his being worshipped by angels; all which filled them with joy and gladness:

and the daughters of Judah rejoiced; particular congregated churches, particular believers and professors of Christ and his Gospel; these rejoiced at the above things, as well as because of what follows:

because of thy judgments, O Lord; either the doctrines of the Gospel, which come from the God of judgment, and are according to his justice and holiness; and are matter of joy and gladness when they are spread in the world, and succeed to the conversion of sinners, the comfort of saints and the glory of Christ; (see ^{<1913>}Psalm 19:9,10), or his judgments upon his enemies, and the enemies of his church and people; which also are an occasion of rejoicing to them, because Christ is thereby glorified in his power, justice, truth, and faithfulness, (^{<1913>}Revelation 19:1,2).

Ver. 9. *For thou, Lord, art high above all the earth*, etc.] Above all the inhabitants of the earth, as the Targum; he is highly exalted above every name, men of the greatest name that is named in the world; he is made higher than the heavens, and the inhabitants of it; and has all power in heaven and earth, as Mediator; and, as a divine Person, he is the most high God, as the word “Elion”, here used, signifies; and all this lays a foundation for joy and gladness in the saints; even the dignity of Christ’s person, and the exaltation of him in the human nature:

thou art exalted far above all gods: not only the fictitious deities of the Gentiles, or the greatest potentates upon earth, being made higher than the kings of the earth, who are called gods; but also than the angels in heaven; he is set down at the right hand of God, where they are not, and never were, nor shall be; angels, authorities, and powers, being subject to him, (^{<1913>}Hebrews 1:13 ^{<1912>}1 Peter 3:22).

Ver. 10. *Ye that love the Lord, hate evil*, etc.] The evil of sin, which is to be hated, because of the evil nature of it, it being exceeding sinful; and because of its evil consequences, bringing death, ruin, and destruction with it to the souls of men, unless grace prevents; and disquietude, distress, and trouble to the saints themselves; and because it is hateful to God, being contrary to his nature, will, and law, and is hated by Christ; and therefore those that love him should hate that, shun it, avoid it, depart from it, and abstain from all appearance of it; as all such will that love him in sincerity above all persons and things; and all of him, and that belong to him, his people, ways, worship, truths, and ordinances: and such are they that have seen the loveliness of him, and know his love, and have had it shed abroad in their hearts; and these will not only hate the evil of sin, but evil men; not

their persons, but their actions and conversations; and will avoid them, and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness:

he preserveth the souls of his saints; that are set apart by him, and chosen in him to be holy; that are sanctified by his blood, and by his Spirit and grace, and to whom he is made sanctification: the “souls” of these, their better and more noble part, which are dear to him, and he has redeemed by his blood, and whose salvation he has obtained, and they still receive, he “preserves” from the evil of sin, from its governing and damning power, from a final and total apostasy by it, from ruin and destruction through it, from being hurt by the second death; and he preserves them from all their enemies, sin, Satan, and the world, from being destroyed by them, safe to his kingdom and glory; therefore he is to be loved, and sin to be hated by them:

he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked; of wicked and unreasonable men, into whose hands they sometimes fall, cruel and bloodthirsty persecutors; as he is able to deliver them, so oftentimes he does; and will, ere long, put them entirely out of their reach. Kimchi interprets this of the deliverance of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, Media, and Persia.

Ver. 11. *Light is sown for the righteous*, etc.] Who are made righteous by the obedience of Christ, and live soberly and righteously; the light of joy and gladness, as it is explained in the next clause; (see ^{<1786>}Esther 8:16) so, φως, “light”, is frequently used by Homer ^{f1377} for joy and gladness: these sometimes are without it, through the hidings of God’s face, the prevalence of corruptions, the force of Satan’s temptations, and the many afflictions they meet with; but joy and gladness, peace and comfort, are sown for them in the counsels and purposes of God, in his covenant, in the Scriptures, in the Gospel, and in the promises of it; and, though at present hidden, will spring up in God’s due time, (^{<1834>}Psalm 112:4), and which also may be interpreted of the light of glory, which at present does not appear; but it is prepared in the purpose of God, and in his promise, and shall be enjoyed by the heirs of it. The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions, render it, “light is risen for the righteous”; and so the Targum,

“light is risen and prepared for the righteous;”

Christ, the light of the world, the sun of righteousness, is risen for them, and upon them, with healing in his wings, which bring joy and comfort to them:

and gladness for the upright in heart; such as have new hearts and right spirits formed in them, and are Israelites indeed, that have the truth of grace and the root of the matter in them: gladness is prepared, provided, and promised to them, and sooner or later they shall have it; the seed of it is sown, and it will spring up, and a large crop shall be enjoyed. Kimchi's note is,

“light is sown for the righteous in this world, and they shall reap light and joy in time to come, in the days of the Messiah.”

Ver. 12. *Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous*, etc.] In the word of the Lord, as the Targum; in Christ, the essential Word, in his person, the greatness, glory, and fulness of it; in his righteousness, and in salvation by him, and that always; (see ³⁰⁰⁴Philippians 4:4),

and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness; of his essential holiness, as a divine Person, in which he is glorious, and which appears in all that he has done; and of the holiness of his nature and life, as man and Mediator, which are imputed to his people for their justification; and at the remembrance of that holiness which they have from him, and are made partakers of in sanctification: and at the remembrance of that perfect holiness which they shall have with him in heaven to all eternity. Holiness may also signify his faithfulness in the discharge of his work and office as Mediator, and in the fulfilment of his promises to his people; (see Gill on ³⁸⁰⁴Psalm 30:4”).