

PSALMS

Chapter 97

The LORD Reigns

The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! 2 Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. 3 Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. 4 His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. 5 The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. 6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. 7 All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods! 8 Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O LORD. 9 For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. 10 O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked. 11 Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. 12 Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!

Ps 97 A joyful celebration of the Lord’s righteous reign over all the earth. (See introductions to Ps 93; 95.) The psalm’s two main divisions (vv. 1–6, 8–12) are joined by a centered that serves as a counterpoint to the main theme. The opening verses of the two main divisions are thematically linked: v. 1, “be glad ... rejoice”; v. 8, “rejoices ... are glad”—in reverse order, a frequent stylistic device in OT poetry. (CSB)

Joins Ps 93; 95; 96; 98; 99 in joyfully proclaiming the power and majesty of God’s rule over all creation. However, in this psalm we glimpse a fearsome side to God’s rule as He comes with destructive power against those who worship false gods. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–5, God’s awesome majesty; vv 6–9, contrast idolaters with God’s faithful children; vv 10–12, praise God, who defends His people. (TLSB)

Psalm 97 develops one aspect of Psalm more fully, namely, the futility of idols. (PBC)

97:1–6 A testimony to the nations—that they too have seen God’s majesty displayed (vv. 2–6) and ought to rejoice with Israel that the Lord reigns supreme. (CSB)

97:1 *The Lord reigns.* The psalm makes it clear that the scope of the Lord’s reign is universal; this is a common emphasis in the psalms of Book IV. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

coastlands. Even distant lands reached by the far-ranging ships that sail the seas. (CSB)

Even the most remote areas of the world are to praise God. His reign is universal. (TLSB)

97:2–6 The Lord’s majestic glory revealed in the sky’s awesome displays, especially in the thunderstorm. (CSB)

97:2-5 *Clouds and thick darkness ... Fire ... lightnings ... melt like wax.* Acts of nature that give us a peek at God’s awesome power. To meet God as His adversary is horrifying. To speak of

mountains—figures of stability and permanence—melting like wax is to show that no one can stand against the Lord’s anger. (TLSB)

The dark storm clouds that hide the sun and cast a veil across the sky are dramatic visual reminders that the fierce heat and brilliance (also metaphors) of God’s naked glory must be veiled from creaturely eyes (see Ex 19:9; 1Ki 8:12). Thus also a curtain closed off the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple (see Ex 26:33; 2Ch 3:14), veiling it in darkness. (CSB)

foundation of his throne. God rules by his power (see 66:7), but his reign is founded on righteousness and justice, which also the heavens proclaim. (CSB)

His administration will be just in all its decisions, but especially in putting down wickedness and rebellion (Pss. 101 and 45:6-7). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

97:3 *Fire.* Manifested in the storm cloud’s lightning bolts (see v. 4), fire often signified God’s judicial wrath (see, e.g., 21:9; 50:3; 83:14; Dt 4:24; 9:3; 32:22; 1Ki 19:12; Isa 10:17; 30:27, 30). (CSB)

97:4 *lightnings* – In the ancient world lightning was interpreted as divine fire, a weapon of the gods. For that and for practical reasons it would strike fear in the hearts of people, especially when related in their minds to the power and wrath of God. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

earth. Here probably the physical earth personified. (CSB)

97:5 *melt like wax* – Under the intense pressure of the presence of the divine judge, nothing can hold up. And so in a similar way the prophets anticipate major geological changes will take place when the Lord comes at the end of the age (Ez. 47; Zech 14). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

97:6 *proclaim his righteousness.* The stable order of the heaven’s vast array “speaks” (see 19:1–4); it declares that God’s reign similarly upholds the moral order. (CSB)

For God’s people the awesome events of that day will be a cause for joy. (PBC)

97:7 The center verse and counterpoint of the psalm: joy to all who acknowledge the Lord; shame and disgrace to those who trust in the false gods. (CSB)

Those who worship false gods will be humiliated and dismayed at God’s judgment. (TLSB)

worship him. With biting irony the psalm calls on all the gods that people foolishly worship to bow in worship before the Lord. (CSB)

Perhaps ironic satire. Even worthless idols will worship God, exposing the folly of worshipping anyone except the true God. Cf 1Sm 5:1–4. (TLSB)

Their idols will not help them when God’s judgment comes. In fact, the idols themselves will be subjected to God’s judgment. (PBC)

97:8–12 A declaration of Zion’s joy that the Lord reigns (vv. 8–9), and a reminder that only those who hate evil have real cause to rejoice in his righteous rule (vv. 10–12). (CSB)

The battle may be painful and costly, but we are assured of God’s protecting power. (PBC)

97:8 *Zion hears*. That “the LORD reigns” (v. 1) in “righteousness” (v. 6). (CSB)

daughters of Judah – Towns and villages surrounding Zion (Jerusalem). (TLSB)

judgments. God’s righteous acts in the affairs of mankind (see 105:7; Isa 26:9), especially his saving acts in Israel’s behalf (see 48:11; 105:5; Dt 33:21). (CSB)

97:9-12 The last three verses of the psalm present a didactic force: the psalmist instructs the righteous to live in a way that anticipates their ultimate redemption and participation in the kingdom of righteousness. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

97:9 *Most High*. In contrast to the utter worthlessness of worshiping false gods, the God above all is praised for His righteous judgments (cf Ps 48). (TLSB)

97:10 *saints*. They rejoice because He protects them from the wicked and preserves their lives for all eternity. (TLSB)

97:11 *Light*. Metaphor for salvation (cf 27:1). (TLSB)

97:12 When people stand before God to be judged, only two responses are possible: terrified humiliation or joyful thanksgiving. Which will it be for us? The cross is where God’s justice is served and His anger appeased on our behalf. The empty tomb is the assurance that we are preserved for life everlasting. We rejoice because His judgment is that we are His saints, the upright in heart, through faith. • Lord, smash the idols we are tempted to revere. Let us worship You alone. Amen. (TLSB)