

SESSION SEVEN

A God Who Reigns (*Psalm 97*)

“A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling 'darkness' on the wall of his cell.” ~ C. S. Lewis

I. Overview

While many of the psalms refer to Yahweh as king, there are a particular group of psalms that focus on royal imagery and language.¹ These psalms depict Yahweh as enthroned, ruling over the created order, as a divine warrior who fights for His people, and as the monarch over the nation of Israel. Consequently, Yahweh's reign possesses both national and cosmic dimensions. It is a kingship that is righteous, universal, and eternal.

Psalm 97 serves as a prime example of one of these enthronement psalms. In these twelve verses, King David reminds the people of God the hope, peace, comfort, and joy we find in our King of Kings, the Lord of the universe. It is a powerful psalm in light of the political instability, social unrest, economic uncertainty, and moral decay we have witnessed these past couple of weeks.

II. The Content

A. The Announcement of the Lord's Reign (v. 1).

v. 1 – The psalmist notes the universal scope of Yahweh's reign. This reign warrants all calls those who live near (“those on the earth”) and those who live far away (those on the coastlands) to praise the King of Kings.

B. The Appearance of the Lord (vv. 2-9).

Verses 2 through 6 refer to creation's testimony of her Creator.

v. 2 – The reference to “dark clouds” often depict awesome judgment (cf. Deut 4:11; Jer 13:16; Ezek 30:3; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:15).

As noted by one commentator, “Righteous judgment is equated with the foundation of a throne, meaning that the basis of his rule is righteous judgment. His administration will be just in all its decisions . . .” (*Psalms*, 3:153).

v. 3 – “Fire” frequently refers to God's wrath (cf. Ps 21:9; Heb 12:29; Rev 20:9).

¹ Enthronement psalms typically noted are psalms 47, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, and 99.

vv. 4-5 – The psalmist cites elements of nature that humans fear and to the parts of Creation thought to be the most stable.

v. 6 - Similar to Psalm 19, David notes that the visible manifestation of the excellence of God's character, His glory, has been revealed in creation.

Note the contrast between the idolaters and the righteous living in Zion in verses 7 through 9.

v. 7 - “. . . bow down . . .” Some scholars translates this verb as an imperative. Consequently, the text would read: “Bow down to him, all you gods.” But grammatically, it would make more sense to render this verb as an indicative. Thus, the translation should read: “even all the gods bowed down to him.” (cf. Phil 2:10-11).

v. 8 – The judgments are not specified, but speak of overcoming hostile powers, deliverance, and security for God's people (cf. Ps 48:12-15). “In the same spirit our Lord, when speaking of the signs of fear which shall be the precursors of His second coming, says, ‘When ye shall see these things begin to come to pass, then lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh.’” (Perowne, *Psalms*, 2:202).

C. The Assurance tot he Righteous (vv. 10-12).

These final verses are the raison d'etre. Their summons to praise is aimed to strengthen the worshiping community.

v. 10 – The lovers of Yahweh are the people of pure devotion and genuine obedience. These lovers of God despise evil (cf. Prov 8:13; 1 John 3:5) and seek to obey Him (cf. John 14:15 - “If you love me, keep my commandments.”).

v. 11 – The “light” symbolizes the joy that accompanies deliverance and the blessings of divine favor.

v. 12b –These final words conclude the entire psalm: “give thanks to his holy name”. The reference to “holy” speaks to the Lord's uniqueness and greatness

According to Psalm 97, contrast the righteous individual with the unrighteous:

Righteous _____ Unrighteous/Idolater

III. Intersect

A. His awesomeness is “matched” by
Ephesians 1:3-6 –

His incredible love for us.

B. His sovereignty eliminates fears of today and concerns for the future.

Romans 8:31-39 -

Puritan Thomas Brooks writes: “God hath in Himself all power to defend you, all wisdom to direct you, all mercy to pardon you, all grace to enrich you, all righteousness to clothe you, all goodness to supply you, and all happiness to crown you.”

How Great Thou Art
Text by Carl Boberg, trans. by Stuart K. Hine

Verse 1:
O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

Chorus:
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!