

Psalm 97

Several points from the Torah reading in **Numbers 8 and 9** appear in this psalm:

The Pillar of Cloud and Fire - **verses 2-3** - "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about."

The Lampstand -

verse 4 - "His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled."
and **verse 11** - "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

The superscription of the Syriac version says: "a Psalm of David, in which he prophesies concerning the coming of the Messiah, and again he intimates in it his last appearance."

Psalm 97:1 - "The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof."

Mention of the isles or "coastlands" points to God's universal dominion extending even to far off lands, not just over Israel.

- **Isaiah 51:-6** - "My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished."

- **Daniel 7:14** - "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

- **Revelation 11:15** - "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Rashi sees these verses as apply to God's victory over Amalek: "when He takes the kingdom from Amalek and from his descendants." This is what Ezekiel said (**Ezekiel 35:14**): "When the whole earth rejoices, I shall make you desolate." He prophesied this concerning Amalek.

Personally, knowing that the Lord reigns within our earthen vessel is a cause of rejoicing.

Psalm 97:2-3 - "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about."

God's presence in the Pillar of Cloud and Fire are seen here. And it recalls Moses' prayer in **Numbers 10:35** -"And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee."

The image here is God's kingdom advances by the defeat and submission of His enemies. In other scriptures, the enemies surrender and are transformed into His subjects. Personally, the Old Man, Adam, is defeated, but through the Spirit our minds are renewed and we are transformed into His subjects, who once were enemies.

Rashi - "Fire will go before Him": in the war of Gog and Magog, for it is written concerning his war (**Ezekiel 38:22**): "And I shall plead against him with pestilence and with blood, and rain bringing floods and great hailstones, fire and brimstone." (See also **Revelation 20:8**).

Psalm 97:4 - "His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled."

Rashi - His lightnings: His "brilliant lights," an expression of (**Ezekiel 21:15**): "It is polished that it may glitter (ברק)."

This points to the Lampstand, and Christ's declaration, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (**John 8:12**)

It also recalls the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai:

- **Exodus 19:16** - "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled."

But it also points forward to Christ's coming in glory, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels" (**2 Thessalonians 1:7**).

Psalm 97:5 - "The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth."

- **2 Peter 3:10** - "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

Psalm 97:6 - "The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory."

Reference to the Gospel reflected in the constellations of the zodiac or

Mazaroath" (**Psalm 19** - "the heavens declare the glory of God")

But also the Targum has: "the angels on high declare his righteousness"

- **Revelation 16:5** - "And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus."

Psalm 97:7 - "Confounded (ashamed) be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods."

Since idols start off as personifications of created, natural forces and phenomena - forests, caves, fertility, fire, the sea, the sun, etc. - all these will be "worshipping" Him as the "earth rejoices" (see **verse 1**).

Instead of "worship him, all ye gods" the Targum has, "and all the nations that serve idols shall worship before him"

This whole scene is expanded by the prayer of Habbakuk (**Habakkuk 3:1-9**)

Psalm 97:8 - "Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD."

"Zion" - The Targum has "The congregation of Zion"

"heard" = *shama* - to hear under in submission and obey

The "daughters of Judah" are the other cities of Judaea besides Jerusalem.

The saints, persecuted so long, "rejoice" when an end is put to their sufferings by the final judgment of the wicked.

Psalm 97:9 - "For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods."

Targum: "Above all the inhabitants of the earth"

"far above all gods" - No comparison can be made between Yahweh and the heathen gods, who are "nothings."

Psalm 97:10 - "Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked."

God's supremacy over idols and other gods is not just a question of power. There is a moral center and a bright line of holiness.

- **Isaiah 1:16** - "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil"

- **Isaiah 55:7** - "Let the wicked man forsake his own way and the unrighteous man his own thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion, and to our God, for He will freely pardon."

- **Psalm 34:14** - "Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."

"he preserveth the souls of his saints" - the stories are many - Daniel preserved in the lion's den; Shadrack, Meshak and Abednego in the fiery furnace...

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

"sown" = *zara`* - scattering and planting seed is seen as analogous to conception and pregnancy

Light (Christ) was sown by God into Mary for the righteous - or to bring forth righteousness.

The Targum has "light is risen and prepared for the righteous"

Rabi David Kimchi (1160–1235) - "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."

Psalm 97:12 - "Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness."