



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 97

Metropolitan Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm has no title in Hebrew; therefore, there is no any indication to date or authorship
- However, according to the Septuagint, this Psalm is ascribed to David
- In Septuagint the title is, *A Psalm of David when his land was established*
- Indicating, probably the time after David had obtained possession of the kingdom of Israel and Judah, and became king over all the tribes
- Or after he had gained possession of all those countries according to the Divine promise, 1 Chronicles 18:1-2

Introduction



- In his Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul quotes a part of the seventh verse of this Psalm and applies it to Christ, Hebrews 1
- This is one of the enthronement Psalms (93, 95-99)
- Enthronement Psalms celebrate God as King and affirm His Lordship over all creation
- These Psalms emphasize God's care and providence exemplified in the ways in which God sustains, controls, and directs every aspect of creation
- These Psalms may have been read each year at the temple as part of a fall festival in which the people would celebrate God's enthronement



Introduction

- Psalm 97 begins with the declaration that the Lord reigns
- The rest of the Psalm tells everyone why it matters that the Lord reigns
- These Psalms have sometimes been interpreted as prophetic pictures of the second Return of Christ
- In Psalms 96 the recognition of His kingdom, here the judgement by which it has been manifested, is the prominent thought
- Psalm 97 encourages those who read it to remember that God is the only true hope we have
- This Psalm is one of the Nineth Hour Psalms of the Agpeya, the Prayer Book of the Hours



Introduction

- St. Augustine says, “This Psalm is entitled, ‘A Psalm of David’s, when his land was restored.’ Let us refer the whole to Christ, if we wish to keep the road of a right understanding: let us not depart from the corner stone... The earth restored is the resurrection of the flesh; for after His resurrection, all those things which are sung of in the Psalm were done. Let us then hear a Psalm full of joy on the restoration of the Earth. Let the Lord our God excite in us a hope and a pleasure worthy of so great a thing; may He rule our discourse, that it be fit for your hearts, that whatever joy our heart feels in such sights, He may bring on to our tongue, and thence conduct it into your ears, then to your heart, thence to your actions.”



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6
- The Influence of the Coming of the Lord 97:7-9
- The Blessedness of the Righteous 97:10-12

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- The Lord God is the true and supreme King, and all other kings are but His servants; therefore, *Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of isles be glad*
- Let all the inhabitants of the earth, and of the islands that are so numerous in the sea, rejoice and be glad
- Why? For should they be oppressed by any of the kings of the earth, the Lord, who is the supreme King, and can easily control and bring them to order, will not fail to protect and to shield them
- Every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord, from His counsel and providence, and in all affairs

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- The reign of the Lord is why we worship; God is sovereign and He rules over the earth
- The knowledge that the Lord reigns should cause joy to all people in the world
- Joy is supposed to characterize the lives of God's people on earth
- We read the Apostle Paul commanding the Philippian Christians and the Thessalonian Christians to "*rejoice always*" (Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16)
- St. Paul even said of himself that he was treated as sorrowful yet always rejoicing (2 Corinthians 6:10)

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- Speaking of the Incarnation, when God condescends to appear on earth, the earth is bound to rejoice
- Jesus has come, and all power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth
- Christ our Lord, who at one time humbly appeared before the kings of this world, for judgment, “has reigned,” for “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*” (Matthew 28:18)
- He is subject to no one, nor can anyone claim any authority over Him, “*Jesus Christ - He is the Lord of all.*” (Acts 10:36); “*and from Jesus Christ...the ruler over the kings of the earth.*” (Revelation 1:5)

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- So, *Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of isles be glad* because the Lord has let Himself down to be our brother, though He is our God
- Many fathers like St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and the scholars Tertullian and Origen, used to interpret 'the earth' as (the body), and 'the heaven' as (the soul)
- *The Lord reigns*, not only on the soul of the believer, but also on his body, making his whole being glad
- According to St. Jerome those multitude of isles are the believers, attacked by temptations on every side and according to St. Augustine, those isles are the local churches all over the world

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- He says, “It is so indeed, because the word of God has been preached not in the continent alone, but also in those isles which lie in mid sea: even these are full of Christians, full of the servants of God. For the sea does not retard Him who made it. Where ships can approach, cannot the words of God? The isles are filled. But figuratively the isles may be taken for all the Churches. Why isles? Because the waves of all temptations roar around them. But as an isle may be beaten by the waves which on every side dash around it, yet cannot be broken, and rather itself does break the advancing waves, than by them is broken: so also the Churches of God, springing up throughout the world, have suffered the persecutions of the ungodly, who roar around them on every side; and behold the isles stand fixed, and at last the sea is calmed.”

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- Verses 2-5 picture the arrival of the Lord
- Perhaps the Psalmist have had in mind the appearance of God at Mount Sinai, which was marked by *a thick cloud on the mountain* and *the smoke of a furnace* (Exodus 19:16-20)
- God is often thus represented as encompassed with clouds, Psalm 104:3; Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7; Psalm 18:7-15
- God covers His Deity when He shows Himself to the sons of men, or His excessive glory would destroy them
- There must be a veiling of His infinite splendor if anything is to be seen by finite beings

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- *Clouds and darkness*, God's judgments are so deep and unsearchable
- There is a depth in His counsels, which we cannot fathom or comprehend
- We are not aware of His will or plans, nor is it fit that we should be let into the mysteries of His rule
- *darkness* does not belong to the nature of God, who "*is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5)
- But it is rather in the eyes of the wicked who cannot see Him
- However invisible He may appear to be, He still is really present, and judges His people with extreme justice

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- St. Augustine says, “they who confess their blindness may obtain to be enlightened. Let there be therefore ‘clouds and darkness round about Him,’ for those who have not understood Him: for those who confess and humble themselves, ‘righteousness and judgment are the direction of His seat.’”
- God’s throne is not based on deception, but *the foundation of His throne* is nothing else but *righteousness and justice*
- This is why the earth can rejoice at His reign
- Some commentators think *Clouds and darkness* may denote the mystery of His divine nature at His first coming

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- He appearing in the form of a servant, and in the likeness of sinful flesh
- The Divine veiled Himself with flesh, and came not with that outward splendor which the Jews expected
- *A fire goes before Him*, The reign of the Lord means the judgment of His enemies
- The images reveal the Lord as a divine warrior coming to establish right order by removing all who stand opposed to Him
- His appearance is to right the wrongs and administer justice, *"our God is a consuming fire"* (Hebrews 12:29)

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- He comes to reign, and in His reign all His enemy will be destroyed
- Some apply this to the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, signified by the tongues of fire
- Some believe *fire* is the punishment that God inflicts on the wicked, when He chooses to punish them in this world
- He will send a fire before Him whenever He may wish to judge and punish the wicked
- Another interpretation refers it to that fire that will precede the general judgment, and burn men and all manner of living things on the face of the earth upon the coming of Christ

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- St. Augustine believe that it is not the fire of the eternal punishment but the fire that purifies and cleans from sin
- He says, “Because he speaks of some fire, which shall go before Him, before He comes to judgment. That fire will burn after His advent: this, on the contrary, will go before Him. What fire then is this?...that is to be understood of a kind of temporal punishment of the unbelieving and ungodly: let us understand the fire, if possible, of the salvation of the redeemed also; for thus we had proposed.”

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- The psalmist goes on with the relation of God's power over the wicked
- God, when He chooses, terrifies His enemies, not only with His fire, but even with the ordinary lightning, and cuts them down so unexpectedly, that they cannot possibly protect themselves
- Some interpret verse 4 of God's judgments on the Jewish nation which were manifest and clear, and obvious to all the world; Psalm 18:14
- And some interpret it of the doctrines of the Gospel because of the fast progress they made, and their large extent in the world, in a very little time

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- The spread of the Good News were done by the apostles who were the means of enlightening the world with the true knowledge of the way of salvation by Christ
- *The earth*, as if it had sense and feeling, *sees and trembles*
- A great description to give an idea of the effects of God's lightning indicating His power and the majesty
- He has only to look upon His works, and they stand in awe and tremble
- The earth itself is regarded as not only shaken, but as melting and crumbling away at the descent of God from heaven to earth (2 Peter 3:10)

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- The psalmist now shows the extent of God's power from its effects, and again compares it to fire
- Because as wax cannot be brought near the fire without liquefying and melting, thus the mountains, however elevated and durable, even the very earth, the most solid of all the elements, cannot stand for a moment, should God wish to consume and destroy them
- Nothing will be able to stand before the coming of the Divine Warrior, *The earth sees and trembles; the mountains melt like wax before the Lord*

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- All that is stable and enduring cannot be stable or endure before the Lord of all the earth; the Creator and Ruler of the entire world
- St. Augustine says, “Who are the hills? The proud. Every high thing raising itself against God, at the deeds of Christ and of the Christians, trembled, yielded, and when I say, what has been already said, ‘melted,’ a better word cannot be found.”
- The God who thus manifested Himself is not the God of a particular nation, but the God of the whole world, before whom all created things are as nothing

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- *The heavens declare His righteousness*, By signs in the heavens it is proclaimed that the Lord has come to judgment
- Both Jews and Gentiles shall partake of the glorious fruits and benefits of His coming
- According to St. Augustine *heavens* are the apostles
- He says, “What heavens have declared? ‘The heavens declare the glory of God.’ Who are the heavens? Those who have become His seat; for as God sits in the heavens, so does He sit in the Apostles, so does He sit in the preachers of the Gospel.”

Rejoicing in the Greatness of God 97:1-6



- Some interpret verse 6 saying that these words allude to the Angel's trumpet, that will announce from heaven the Judge about to sit in judgment on the whole world, and the severity of His justice on those who rejected a merciful Redeemer
- And then, *all the peoples see His glory*, when He shall appear in the clouds in His majesty, with all His Angels
- His faithfulness to His people and His sovereign justice in the punishment of evil have been openly and visibly manifested in the sight of all the world (Psalm 98:3,50:6; Isaiah 35:2,40:5,52:10,66:18)

The Influence of the Coming of the Lord 97:7-9



- All worshippers of idols should be justly defeated, when it is sufficiently clear that there is only one true God, who rules and governs in heaven and on earth, and who is able with the greatest power, wisdom, and justice to direct everything
- Considering the greatness and power of God, those who *boast of idols* should be ashamed
- The display of real Divine power makes manifest the powerlessness of the idols and puts their worshippers to embarrassment
- They would be regretful and humiliated at the powerlessness of their gods

The Influence of the Coming of the Lord 97:7-9



- *Who boast of idols*, is a prediction, in the form of a prayer, of the immense confusion that will overwhelm all idolaters on the day of judgment
- Those who are trusting in idols are going to be judged
- They are going to lose; they are going to be counted as the adversaries of the Lord
- Because they will then most clearly see that their idols were nothing, that they who spoke through them were unclean spirits, with whom they will be condemned to eternal punishment
- It may be also a prayer, that the idolatrous Gentiles might be enlightened to see the vanity of the idols and turn to the true God

The Influence of the Coming of the Lord 97:7-9



- *Worship Him*, let all so called, *carved images* and idols bow down, and prostrate before the Lord
- *all you gods*, according to the Septuagint it is *all his angels*
- The reference here, according to the quotation in Hebrews 1:6, is to the angels, “*But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’*”
- The Apostle would appear by the word *again* to mean His second coming, and to apply these words to it, for no other words of the sort are found in the entire Scripture

The Influence of the Coming of the Lord 97:7-9



- St. Augustine says, “Let Pagans learn to worship God: they wish to worship Angels: let them imitate Angels, and worship Him who is worshipped by Angels. ‘Worship Him, all you His angels.’”
- The whole earth benefits from the majestic and awesome revelation of God, but His people, *Zion*, the members of Church of the New Covenant are especially *glad*
- There was joy in *Zion* that the evils and hatred of idolatry were at an end, and that the worship of God had taken the place of idol-worship
- The Lord comes for their relief, for their deliverance, for their exaltation

The Influence of the Coming of the Lord 97:7-9



- His righteous *judgments* make *the daughters of Judah rejoice*
- Previously the psalmist spoke about God to the world
- Here he addresses God directly, praising and extolling Him as *exalted far above all gods*
- He gives a reason for God's people beginning to exult and be glad on hearing those things, and the reason is, because God is *exalted far above all gods*.
- According to St. Augustine the reason of their joy is that God is the *most high*, "Not over Zion only, but over all the earth. To this whole earth the judgments of God prevailed, so that it assembled its nations from every quarter."

The Blessedness of the Righteous 97:10-12



- The psalmist concludes the Psalm, by exhorting the people to lead a life of holiness and purity, for which they will get a great reward, both in this world and in the next
- When he says, *You who love the Lord*, he appeals to all the truly just, for love covers all virtues, *“for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”* (Romans 13:8)
- An exhortation to those who love God to prove themselves
- Love of God implies the hatred of all He hates
- *hate evil*, which can only proceed from the heart; this is why he does not say, fly from, or decline from evil
- The heart is the source of all our actions, good and bad

The Blessedness of the Righteous 97:10-12



- Because as the love of the supreme good comes from the heart, so, in like manner, *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”* (Matthew 15:19)
- The psalmist then announces the reward for having done so, saying, *He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked*
- The Lord is a faithful, diligent, powerful, and prudent guardian of those that love Him, and He will defend and deliver them from the power of the wicked

The Blessedness of the Righteous 97:10-12



- This promise is fulfilled even in this life, in regard of the righteous, for God often saves their lives
- But will certainly save their souls, which is a far greater blessing
- That is why he used the expression, *preserves the souls* for He makes “*all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*” (Romans 8:28)
- Another reward of the just is, that they will not only be delivered from all evils, but they will be filled with blessings
- The figure of sowing light is an unusual one, but the meaning is obvious

The Blessedness of the Righteous 97:10-12



- It is, that the righteous will not always be in darkness
- There is in preparation for him a harvest of joy; that it will as certainly be produced as a harvest will from grain that is sown
- That though there may be present tribulations, there will be ultimate peace and triumph
- What is sown will come up again in due time; though, like a winter seeds, it may lie long under the clods, and seem to be lost and buried, yet it will return in a rich and plentiful increase
- For justice directs the heart, and an unspeakable amount of joy is poured into the upright of heart from the fact of its obedience to the will of God, and everything that pleases Him

The Blessedness of the Righteous 97:10-12



- Nothing, then, can sadden the righteous
- They rejoice and are joyful under the most severe tribulations, *“your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”* (John 16:22)
- *Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous*, This is a consequence of what has been said in the preceding verse
- For if joy *is sown for the upright in heart*, it follows that they should not rejoice in the vanities of the wicked, but *in the Lord*, who bestows justice and gladness on them
- The rejoicing should not be primarily in what He has given, but in the Lord Himself

The Blessedness of the Righteous 97:10-12



- Because He Himself is their real and firm joy, being most beautiful to the eyes of the soul
- Not only should they *Rejoice in the Lord* but they should also *give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name*
- They should ever celebrate with thanksgiving the memory of the sanctification they received from God, for they should never forget so great a favor as that which transformed them from being sinful and wicked, to be holy and just
- Whatever is the matter of our rejoicing ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving, and particularly the holiness of God

The Blessedness of the Righteous 97:10-12



- For He is supremely holy; hence, Isaias calls him *“Holy, Holy, Holy,”* and we give praise to the remembrance of His holiness
- When with praises we always remember that our God is most holy
- And, therefore, that we should with all earnestness endeavor to make ourselves holy too, *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification”* (1 Thessalonians 4:3) and *“because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”* (1 Peter 1:16)
- God is ruling and He has promised to vindicate
- God repeatedly did so in the past and he will do it again

The Blessedness of the Righteous 97:10-12



- St. Augustine says, “If you are Christians, look for tribulations in this world...Brethren, you deceive yourselves; what the Gospel does not promise you, promise not to yourselves...The Gospel says this, that in the last times many evils, many stumbling-blocks, many tribulations, much iniquity, shall abound; but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved... Whosoever then has been steadfastly fervent in spirit... his love shall not wax cold...Let no man therefore promise himself what the Gospel does not promise. Behold, happier times will come... It is good for you to listen to Him who is not deceived, nor has deceived any man, who promised you joy not here, but in Himself.”



Discussion

- Why should the earth rejoice that the Lord is reigns?
- What do the "*clouds and darkness*" represent?
- How do the heavens declare the righteousness of God?
- What is the response of God's people when they view His judgments? Why?
- What is God's throne established upon?



Discussion

- What false gods do people worship? What distinguishes God from false gods?
- What is the effect of God's presence on nature? On mankind? On Zion? On You?
- How does God treat the faithful?
- What advice concludes the Psalm?