

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Hideyoshi, a Japanese warlord in the late 16th century, commissioned a great Buddha statue for a shrine in Kyoto. 50,000 men spent 5 years building it. Shortly after its completion, the earthquake of 1596 wrecked the statue. Enraged, Hideyoshi shot an arrow at the fallen Buddha and cried out, "I put you here at great expense and you can't even look after your own temple."

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Psalm 97 — The King Is Coming to Judge

1.0 Introducing Psalm 97

- “The LORD reigns” in Psalm 97:1 repeats 96:10; “let the earth rejoice” (97:1) echoes 96:11. Psalm 97 develops the judgment theme of Psalm 96:13.
- This psalm continues the collection of theocratic psalms (Psalms 93–100).
- See notes on Psalm 96 for the chart comparing Psalms 96–99.

2.0 Reading Psalm 97 (NAU)

- 97:1** The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice;
Let the many islands be glad.
- 97:2** Clouds and thick darkness surround Him;
Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.
- 97:3** Fire goes before Him
And burns up His adversaries round about.
- 97:4** His lightnings lit up the world;
The earth saw and trembled.
- 97:5** The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the LORD,
At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.
- 97:6** The heavens declare His **righteousness**,
And all the peoples have seen His glory.
- 97:7** Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images,
Who boast themselves of idols;
Worship Him, all you gods.
- 97:8** Zion heard *this* and was glad,
And the daughters of Judah have rejoiced
Because of Your judgments, O LORD.

97:9 For You are the LORD Most High over all the earth;
You are exalted far above all gods.

97:10 Hate evil, you who love the LORD,
Who preserves the souls of His godly ones;
He delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

97:11 Light is sown *like seed* for the **righteous**
And gladness for the upright in heart.

97:12 Be glad in the LORD, you **righteous** ones,
And give thanks to His holy name.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 97

3.1 Outline

- I. The LORD Will Execute All the Faithless (vv. 1-6)
- II. The LORD Will Be Exalted Above the False Gods (vv. 7-9)
- III. The LORD Will Exhilarate All the Faithful (vv. 10-12)



3.2 Notes

- **vv. 1, 6 Framed**
 - Verses 1 and 6 are both positive statements about the glory of the Lord's reign over the earth.
 - Verses 2 through 5 speak of judgment and are negative in tone.
- **v. 1 "the many islands"**
 - "Islands" (sometimes translated "coastlands") in the Old Testament characteristically refers to the most distant of lands.
 - ✓ See Psalm 72:10; Isaiah 41:1-5; 42:10, 12; 49:1; 51:5; 66:19.
 - Psalms 93–100 all have a global or universal focus.
- **v. 2 "Clouds and thick darkness"**
 - Clouds and darkness usually accompany a theophany (an appearance of God). God's presence in such an appearance sometimes involved revelation (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:11; Psalm 18:7-10; Ezekiel 1:4). Here, however, it involves judgment, as in Zephaniah 1:14-18 (cp. Joel 2:1-3).
 - When God actually appears, He does so to have an effect on people.
 - ✓ See Isaiah 6:5; Habakkuk 3:16.
- **v. 2 "Righteousness and justice"**
 - King David's own reign was characterized by these virtues (2 Samuel 8:15).
 - According to the queen of Sheba (speaking to Solomon), these are the duties of a good king (1 Kings 10:9). God Himself loves these qualities (Psalm 33:5; Proverbs 21:3).
 - The Messiah will rule with "righteousness and justice" (Isaiah 9:7; 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15).

✓ See Psalms 89:14; 94:15; 99:4.

• v. 5 “mountains melted like wax”



■ People think of mountains as the most enduring objects on the planet. They provide the most permanent memorials and the most secure places of refuge.

✓ Compare Deuteronomy 32:22; Judges 5:5; Psalm 46:6; Micah 1:3-4; Matthew 11:25; Revelation 11:4.

• v. 5 “the Lord of the whole earth”

■ First occurrence of this divine title is in Joshua 3:11, 13. Every context in which this title is used speaks of divine sovereignty intervening in history.

✓ Compare Micah 4:13; Zechariah 4:14; 6:5.

• v. 7 “graven images . . . idols . . . gods”

■ The psalmist refers to idols with three different terms.

✓ “Graven images”—pagan deities are manmade objects (cp. Isaiah 40:20; Habakkuk 2:18).

➤ “Cut out” in Exodus 34:1 is from the same root word.

✓ “Idols”—literally “nothings” or “worthless things” (see notes on Psalm 96:4, 5).

✓ “Gods”—the normal word for referring to pagan deities.

■ *In what ways are modern people guilty of idolatry?*

✓ Today’s idols are more in the self than on the shelf.

• v. 7 “Worship Him, all you gods”

■ The ancient Greek Septuagint translation of this sentence takes the “gods” to be “angels.”

■ The context, however, appears to be more clearly a reference to false gods, idols.

✓ Hebrews 1:6 might be a reference to this text, but is more likely a reference to the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 32:43.

• v. 8 Compare Psalms 48:11; 146:10; 149:2.

• v. 9 “LORD Most High”

■ See Psalms 7:17; 47:2; 83:18 (final verse of the Asaph psalms).

■ He is “Most High” (*Elyon*) because He is “exalted above all gods,” “above the heavens” (Psalm 57:5), and “above all the peoples” (Psalm 99:2).

■ Word play: “Most High” = “Elevated” and “exalted” = “elevated.”

• v. 10 “Hate . . . love”

■ The righteous must have a loathing for evil and a love for God.

■ “[H]ate evil because it is contrary to the nature of the LORD you love, the LORD who ‘guards,’ or keeps safe, the lives of his ‘faithful people’ (see 4:3), and rescues them from the clutches of the wicked.”—Robert

Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 321.

- Evil in this particular context is idolatry.
- **vv. 10-12** Exhilarating the Faithful
 - “Encouragement to hold on till daylight and victory come is the note on which the psalm ends. . . . But we are not to wait for ‘the morning’ The whole spirit of the psalm has been to view the final victory as if it were already an accomplished fact.”—Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 351.
- **v. 11** “Light is sown”
 - “Light” is a metaphor for life and salvation (Psalms 27:1; 36:9).
 - “Sown” could be the equivalent of sending (Psalm 43:3) or giving (118:27).
 - It might also mean that God’s people will experience joy-filled blessings because God causes such blessings to sprout in the midst of even the darkest times to show that He cares for them (cp. Isaiah 58:8).
- **v. 12** “be glad”
 - Just as verses 1 and 6 framed the first section of this psalm, so verses 1 and 12 frame the entire psalm with references to gladness and joy.
 - Compare Psalm 32:11.
- **v. 12** “to His holy name”
 - Literally, “to His holy memorial *name*” (cf. Exodus 3:15), a reference to the name “Yahweh.” The same phrase occurs in Psalm 30:4.

4.0 Singing Psalm 97

O God, Thou High and Lofty One

(Tune: “The Solid Rock” = “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less”)



1 O God, Thou high and lofty One,
Transcending all the rolling spheres,
Who wast, and art, and art to come,
The same through everlasting years.
Thee would we worship and adore,
Thy Name extol forevermore.
Thy Name extol forevermore

2 Thou art the Framers of the skies;
The heav’ns Thy glory do declare;
And nature’s wondrous mysteries,
In earth and sky and sea and air,
Thy immanence fore’er proclaim
Throughout her universal frame.
Throughout her universal frame

3 To all Thy works thy power extends;
Omnipotent we know Thou art;
Thy wisdom matchless comprehends
The universe in every part:
Past, present, future, unto Thee
Are known—one vast eternity.
Are known—one vast eternity.

4 Thou art Thyself in every place,
Infinite Life and Light and Love,
Confined to neither time nor space;
None from Thy presence can remove,
Nor any soul hide aught from Thee,
Whose presence fills immensity.
Whose presence fills immensity

5 Prostrate before Thy throne we fall,
With reverence worship and adore;
Thou art Jehovah, over all,
God blessèd now and evermore;
Unworthy we to lisp thy Name,
Yet justly Thou our praise dost claim.
Yet justly Thou our praise dost claim.

— Wilson T. Hogue

I Exalt Thee

For thou O Lord, art high above all the earth,
Thou art exalted, far above all gods;
For Thou Oh Lord, art high above all the earth,
Thou art exalted, far above all gods.

(Chorus)

I exalt Thee! I exalt Thee!
I exalt Thee, Oh Lord!

(Repeat)

— Pete Sanchez Jr.

5.0 Praying Psalm 97



- Lord, prepare me for Your return. [vv. 1-6]
- Father, use me to take Your Word to those who do not believe. [v. 7]
- Teach me how to love You and to loath evil. [v. 10]
- Thank You, LORD, for providing light and joy for me. [vv. 11-12]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 97

- God is the sovereign ruler of all creation.
- Gladness and happiness go together with godliness and holiness.
- God commands idol worshippers to worship only Him.
- God summons those who love Him to serve Him, even though they live in the midst of an ungodly world.

At this future point the kingdom has been won, the protracted events of conflict have come nearly to a close, and the Lord Jesus Christ is now on His throne. In this prophetic vision in the hymns of ancient Israel, we may wonder what the immediate effects will be. They turn out to be two: *delight* and *devastation*. There will be delight among God's people, but devastation among those who do not know Him.

— Ronald B. Allen, *When Song Is New: Understanding the Kingdom in the Psalms*
(Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 195-96