

ספר תהילים צז | Tehillim / Psalms 97

MATSATI.COM Ministry | <http://www.matsati.com>

What we do in this life DOES Matter!

א יהוה מלך תגל הארץ In this week's study from *Tehillim / Psalms 97:1-12*, the Psalm opens saying, *א יהוה מלך תגל הארץ* 97:1 *The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; Let the many islands be glad. (NASB)* In this psalm, the psalmist calls upon the islands to rejoice before the Lord ascribing the anthropomorphic property of speech and movement. The psalmist continues saying, *ב ענו וערפל סביבו צדק ומשפט מכון כסאו: ג אש* 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. (NASB)* Why do the Scriptures describe the Lord as having clouds and thick darkness surrounding the Lord? The Torah also provides this description at the mountain of Sinai. Is His glory to be concealed? This is paralleled to God's righteousness and justice. Are His righteousness and justice concealed as well? The psalm continues saying, *ו הגידו השמים צדקו וראו כל-העמים* 97:6 *The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples have seen His glory. (NASB)* Note the parallel to the Lord's words following the rejection of the people to enter the Promised Land and the Lord saying they saw His glory and will not enter into their inheritance. The psalmist says, *ז יבשו | כל- עבדי פסל המתהללים באילילים השפתו-לו כל-אלהים: ח שמעה ותשמח | ציון ותגלנה בנות יהודה למען משפטך* 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. (NASB)* Ultimately, in the end all will worship the Lord God in heaven as Lord over all. The Psalm concludes saying, *י אהבי יהוה שנאו רע שמר נפשות חסידיו מיד רשעים יצילם: יא אור זרע לצדיק ולישרי-לב שמחה: יב שמחו צדיקים ביהוה והודו לגבר* 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. (NASB)*

עברית	Hebrew	ארמי	Aramaic	ελληνικός	Greek
	ספר תהלים פרק צז		ספר טוביה פרק צז		ΨΑΛΜΟΙ 97
	א יהוה מלך תגל הארץ ישמחו איים רבים: ב ענו וערפל סביבו צדק ומשפט מכון כסאו: ג אש לפניו תלה ותלהט סביב צריו: ד האירו ברקיו תבל ראתה ותחל הארץ:		א יהוה מלך תדון ארעא יחדון נג- וואן סגיעין: ב ענני יקרא ואמיט- תא חזור חזור די ליה צדקתא ודינא אתר די מכוון כורסיה: ג אשא קדמוי תהלך ומצלהבא ומשרבב חזור חזור מעיקוי: ד מנהרין בר- קוי תבל חמת ואתחלחלת ארעא:		97:1 τῷ Δαυιδ ὅτε ἡ γῆ αὐτοῦ καθίσταται ὁ κύριος ἐβασίλευσεν ἀγαλλιᾶσθω ἡ γῆ εὐφρανθήτωσαν νῆσοι πολλαί 97:2 νεφέλη καὶ γνόφος κύκλω αὐτοῦ δικαιοσύνη καὶ κρίμα κατόρθωσις τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ 97:3 πῦρ ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ προπορεύεται καὶ φλογιεῖ κύκλω τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτοῦ 97:4 ἔφαναν αἱ ἀστραπαὶ αὐτοῦ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἶδεν καὶ ἐσαλεύθη ἡ γῆ

<p>ה הָרִים כְּדוֹג נִמְסוּ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה מִלִּפְנֵי אֲדוֹן כָּל-הָאָרֶץ: ו הַגִּי- דו הַשָּׁמַיִם צְדָקוֹ וְרֵאוּ כָל-הָעַמִּים כְּבוֹדוֹ: ז יִבְשׁוּ כָּל-עַבְדֵי פֶסֶל הַמִּתְהַלְלִים בְּאֱלִילִים הַשֹּׁמְקוֹ-לוֹ כָּל-אֱלֹהִים: ח שְׁמָעָה וַתִּשְׁמַח צִיּוֹן וַתִּגְלָנָה בְּנוֹת יְהוּדָה לְמַעַן מִשְׁפָּטֶיהָ יְהוָה: ט כִּי-אָתָּה יְהוָה עָלְיוֹן עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ מְאֹד נְעֻלִית עַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים: י אֲהַבִּי יְהוָה שְׁנָאוּ רָע שֹׁמְרֵי נְפֹשׁוֹת חֲסִידָיו מִיַּד רְשָׁעִים יְצִילֵם: יא אֹרֹךְ יָרַע לְצַדִּיק וּלְיֹשְׁרֵי-לֵב שִׁמְחָה: יב שִׁמְחוּ צַדִּיקִים בְּיְהוָה וְהוֹדוּ לְזִכְרֵ קְדוֹשׁ:</p>	<p>ה טוריא היך שעוא יתמסון מן קדם יהוה מן קדם ריבון כל ארעא: ו יתניין אנגלי מרומא צדקתיה ויחמון כל עמיא עממיא איקריה: ז יבהתון כל פלחי פיסלא דמשתבחין בטעותא ויסגדון קדמוי כל עמיא פלחי טעותא: ח שמעת וחדת וחד- דיאת כנישתא דציון ודייצן בנתא דבית יהודה מן בגלל דיניך יהוה: ט ארום את הוא יהוה עילאה על כל יתבי ארעא לחדא אתעלית על כל דחליא: י רחימא דיהוה סנו ביש מטול דקיריס נטיר נפשת חסידוי מן אידיהון דרשיעי יפצי אינון: יא נהור דנח ומיטמר לצדיקיא ולתרי- צי ליבא חדווא: יב חדון צדיקיא במימרא דיהוה ואודון לדוכרן שום קודשיה:</p>	<p>97:5 τὰ ὄρη ἐτάκησαν ὡσεὶ κηρὸς ἀπὸ προσώπου κυρίου ἀπὸ προσώπου κυρίου πάσης τῆς γῆς 97:6 ἀνήγγειλαν οἱ οὐρανοὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶδον πάντες οἱ λαοὶ τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ 97:7 αἰσχυνθήτωσαν πάντες οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τοῖς γλυπτοῖς οἱ ἐγκαυχώμενοι ἐν τοῖς εἰδώλοις αὐτῶν προσκυνήσατε αὐτῷ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ 97:8 ἤκουσεν καὶ εὐφράνθη Σιων καὶ ἠγαλλίασαντο αἱ θυγατέρες τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἕνεκεν τῶν κριμάτων σου κύριε 97:9 ὅτι σὺ εἶ κύριος ὁ ὑψιστος ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν σφόδρα ὑπερυψώθης ὑπὲρ πάντας τοὺς θεοὺς 97:10 οἱ ἀγαπῶντες τὸν κύριον μισεῖτε πονηρόν φυλάσσει κύριος τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ὀσίων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς ἀμαρτωλῶν ῥύσεται αὐτούς 97:11 φῶς ἀνέτειλεν τῷ δικαίῳ καὶ τοῖς εὐθέσι τῇ καρδίᾳ εὐφροσύνη 97:12 εὐφράνθητε δίκαιοι ἐπὶ τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ ἔξομολογεῖσθε τῇ μνήμῃ τῆς ἀγιωσύνης αὐτοῦ</p>
---	---	---

<p>Tehillim / Psalms 97 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. (NASB)</p>	<p>Toviyah / Psalms 97 97:1 The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice, let the many isles be glad. 97:2 Clouds of glory and darkness are around him; righteousness and justice are the place where his throne is set. 97:3 Fire will go before him, and it burns around his oppressors. 97:4 His lightnings illuminate the world; the earth saw and trembled. 97:5 The mountains will melt like wax in the presence of the Lord, in the presence of the master of all the earth. 97:6 The angels of the height will tell of his righteousness, and all the peoples will see his glory. 97:7 All who worship idols will be ashamed, who pride themselves on a false god; and all the peoples who worship a false god will bow down in his presence. 97:8 The assembly of Zion has heard and rejoiced, and the daughters of the house of Judah exult, because of your judgments, O Lord. 97:9 For you are the Lord, the supreme one over all the inhabitants of the earth; you are greatly exalted over all that is revered. 97:10 O you who love the Lord, hate evil, because the Almighty protects the souls of his pious ones; from the hands of the wicked he will deliver them. 97:11 Light has shone and is hidden for the righteous, and joy for the upright of heart. 97:12 Be glad, O righteous, in the word of the Lord, and give thanks at the mention of his holy name. (EMC)</p>	<p>Psalmoi / Psalms 97 For David, when his land is established. 97:1 The Lord reigns, let the earth exult, let many islands rejoice. 97:2 Cloud, and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the establishment of his throne. 97:3 Fire shall go before him, and burn up his enemies round about. 97:4 His lightnings appeared to 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 have declared his righteousness, and all the people have seen his glory. 97:7 Let all that worship graven images be ashamed, who boast of their idols; worship him, all ye his angels. 97:8 Sion heard and rejoiced; and the daughters of Judea exulted, because of thy judgments, O Lord. 97:9 For thou art Lord most high over all the earth; thou art greatly exalted above all gods. 97:10 Ye that love the Lord, hate evil; the Lord preserves the souls of his saints; he shall deliver them from the hand of sinners. 97:11 Light is sprung up for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. 97:12 Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks for a remembrance of his holiness. (LXX)</p>
--	--	---

א יהוה מלך תגל הארץ, In this week's study from *Tehillim / Psalms 97:1-12*, the Psalm opens saying, *יהוה מלך תגל הארץ*, 97:1 *The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; Let the many islands be glad.* (NASB) The psalmist calls upon the islands to rejoice before the Lord ascribing the anthropomorphic property of speech and movement. The word anthropomorphism comes from two Greek words, (i) anthropos (man) and (ii) morphe (form). Therefore, an anthropomorphism is when the Lord God appears to us or manifests Himself to us in human form or even attributes to Himself human characteristics. Onkelos, the author of the Targum Onkelos (Aramaic Translation of the Torah), often renders the name of the Lord using substitutions such as

“the glory of the Lord,” “the Word of the Lord,” and “the fear of the Lord.” Similarly, he translates *“He saw”* and *“He knew,”* referring to the Lord as *“it was revealed before Him,”* the phrase *“He went down”* is translated as *“He revealed Himself,”* and *“He heard”* becomes *“it was heard before Him,”* and other similar examples may be found in the Aramaic Translation of the Tanach. If the same verb is used in the Scriptures to describe an action of God and of man, Onkelos uses two different words in order to distinguish clearly between the Lord God in heaven and mankind (examples may be found in *Bereshit / Genesis 32:29, 40:8, Shemot / Exodus 14:31, etc.*). In the Rabbinic literature, at times the rabbis also utilize anthropomorphic language in order to drive home a moral lesson. For example, the Lord God’s *“descent”* onto the Mountain of Sinai is used to describe the following exhortation, *“Let a man always learn from his Creator; for here the Holy One blessed be He forsook all of the mountains and high hills and caused His presence to rest on the lowly Mt. Sinai”* (*Talmud Bavli Sotah 5a*). Similarly, on the third day after the circumcision of Abraham, the rabbis say, *“the Holy One blessed be He said to the ministering angels: Let us go down and visit the sick man.”* The following are a few biblical examples on the use of anthropomorphisms.

Biblical examples

1. Human actions: He changed His mind, relented, remembered, rested.

- ***Shemot / Exodus 32:14***, *“So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.”*
- ***2 Samuel 24:16***, *“When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity, and said to the angel who destroyed the people, “It is enough! Now relax your hand!”*
- ***Bereshit / Gen. 9:16***, *“When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”*
- ***Bereshit / Gen. 2:2***, *“And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.”*

2. Human emotions: sorrow, jealousy, pity, regret.

- ***Bereshit / Gen. 6:6***, *“And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.”*
- ***Shemot / Exodus 20:5***, *“You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me.”*
- ***Judges 2:18***, *“...for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.”*
- ***1 Samuel 15:35***, *“And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.”*

3. Human physique: hands, face, mouth, eyes, arm.

- *Shemot / Exodus 7:5*, “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”
- *Bamidbar / Numbers 6:24*, “The Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you.”
- *Tehillim / Psalm 33:6*, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.”
- *Tehillim / Psalm 34:15*, “The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.”
- *Tehillim / Psalm 89:10*, “Thou Thyself didst crush Rahab like one who is slain; Thou didst scatter Thine enemies with Thy mighty arm.”

The use of anthropomorphisms is not foreign to the bible. In the opening verse of *Tehillim / Psalms 97*, the author of the psalm speaks of the islands being glad before the Lord. The psalmist describes the majesty of God using anthropomorphisms for the islands to give praise to the Lord saying, אֵי הַיָּהוּה מְלִךְ תִּגְלַל, *97:1 The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; Let the many islands be glad. (NASB)* The majesty, power, and glory of God is recognized of His creation, even the islands themselves give glory and rejoice before the Lord, unlike man who chooses to ignore and not give credit where credit is due, our maker. The psalmist’s use of the anthropomorphism is to emphasize the difference between man and God’s creation, and the stubbornness of man to acknowledge the Lord reigns and to rejoice because of who He is, merciful, patient, loving, and kind.

The psalmist continues saying, ב עָנָן וְעָרְפֶל סָבְיָו וּמִשְׁפָּט מְכוּן כְּסָאוֹ: ג אֵשׁ לְפָנָיו תִּלְהֹט וּתְלַהֵט סָבִיב, *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. (NASB)* Why do the Scriptures describe the Lord as having clouds and thick darkness surrounding the Lord? If the Lord is a God of light as referring to righteousness, holiness, and truth, why is He described as being shrouded in darkness? Maimonides describes the reason in the following way.

The Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3, 9:1

THE corporeal element in man is a large screen and partition that prevents him from perfectly perceiving abstract ideals: this would be the case even if the corporeal element were as pure and superior as the substance of the spheres; how much more must this be the case with our dark and opaque body. However great the exertion of our mind may be to comprehend the Divine Being or any of the ideals, we find a screen and partition between Him and ourselves. Thus the prophets frequently hint at the existence of a partition between God and us. They say He is concealed from us in vapors, in darkness, in mist, or in a thick cloud: or use similar figures to express that on account of our bodies we are unable to comprehend His essence. This is the meaning of the words, “Clouds and darkness are round about Him” (Ps. 97:2). The prophets tell us that the difficulty consists in the grossness of our substance: they do not imply, as might be gathered from the literal meaning of their words, that God is corporeal, and is invisible because He is surrounded by thick clouds, vapors, darkness, or mist. This figure is also expressed in the passage, “He made darkness His secret place” (Ps. 18:12). The object of God revealing Himself in thick clouds, darkness, vapors, and mist was to teach this lesson; for every prophetic vision contains some lesson by means of allegory; that mighty vision, therefore, though the greatest of all visions, and above all comparison,

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

1:1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 1:2 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 1:3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; 1:4 therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. 1:5 This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. 1:6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 1:7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 1:8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 1:9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power; 1:10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed for our testimony to you was believed. 1:11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; 1:12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (NASB)

The perseverance and faith in the midst of persecutions and afflictions are paralleled to the one being counted as worthy of the kingdom of God. What we do in this life matters! Yeshua is described as coming with his angels with flaming fire dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord and Savior Yeshua. These who receive this punishment will be paid with eternal destruction away from the presence of God and from the glory of His power. What is the glory of God's power? Is this not the power of God to overcome sin, and to draw us to Himself and His Son Yeshua? This is coupled with the idea of being counted worthy of the kingdom. This is related to our cooperative work, as Paul describes as *"fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power"* (1:11) and the purpose of our good works, something of which is expected of God's children, *1:12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (NASB)* This is the description of the Lord from the beginning, as the Torah also provides this description at the mountain of Sinai. The glory of God, as it is described by Paul is not something to be concealed. This is the righteousness of God in our lives, who having made us righteous in His Son, we are now expected to live righteous and holy lives, which is the calling we are given as His children. This is the fruit that is the product of our faith. The question each of us needs to ask is *"If I am not seeking these things, if I have no fruit of this kind, has salvation really come to my life and do I really believe the Scriptures and the message of the Messiah Yeshua?"*

The psalm continues saying, הַגִּידוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם צְדָקוֹ וְרָאוּ כָּל-הָעַמִּים כְּבוֹדוֹ: 97:6 *The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples have seen His glory. (NASB)* Note the parallel to the Lord's words following the rejection of the people to enter the Promised Land and the Lord saying they saw His glory and will not enter into their inheritance.

Bamidbar / Numbers 14:17-24

14:17 'But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, 14:18 'The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations. 14:19 'Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people

according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.’ 14:20 So the Lord said, ‘I have pardoned them according to your word; 14:21 but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. 14:22 ‘Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, 14:23 shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. 14:24 ‘But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it. (NASB)

The people did not trust in the Lord God in heaven, they trusted in themselves, and they expressed their faith in themselves both verbally, in their hearts (the night long grumbling), and by their actions (wanting to stone Joshua and Caleb). Because of their lack of faith, the Lord wanted to destroy them, but Moshe prayed on their behalf, and the Lord relented and caused them to wander in the wilderness 40 years such that none of those who had seen the glory of God, His power at work, would enter into the Promised Land (*Bamidbar / Numbers 14:22-23*). Our daily prayer should be that the Lord would create within us the same spirit both Caleb and Joshua had that followed the Lord fully, such that we may enter into what the Lord has planned for us.

The psalmist continues saying, ז יבשו | כל-עבדי פסל המתהלים באלילים השתחוו-לו כל-אלהים: ח שְׁמֵעָה וַתִּשְׂמַח | צִיּוֹן וַתִּגְלַנָּה בְּנוֹת יְהוּדָה לְמַעַן מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ יְהוָה: ט כִּי-אַתָּה יְהוָה עֲלִיּוֹן עַל-כָּל-הָאֲרָצִים מֵאֲדָנִי וְעַל־יְהוָה: י
 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. (NASB)* Ultimately, in the end all will worship the Lord God in heaven as Lord over all. The psalmist speaks of all being ashamed who serve graven images. The graven image is an image carved out of stone, wood, or metal. It generally consists of a statue of a person or animal, or a relief carving in a wall or a pole. It is differentiated from a molten image in the sense that a molten image was formed by pouring melted metal into a cast. Many idols were carved from some material such as wood, and then overlay with gold leaf, as in the case of the Asherah poles and the Baals. Egyptian hieroglyphics are also considered a graven image. The progression of idol worship in a false religion begins with the recognition of a power other than the creator God that controls the natural forces. The presence of this power is believed to dwell within the object. Once the idol is developed, the people proceed to make physical images which may then be carried with the parishioner. The people then seeks this idol god for something, such as good crops or for fertility in child bearing (*Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5*). Temples are then created for these idol gods which are not gods. The Lord commanded according to *Shemot / Exodus 20:4-5*, “*You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them.*” This is the intent of the command that “*You shall have no other gods before Me,*” which specifically forbids the creation of idols. We are told that we should not create anything in heaven or on earth, suggesting that it is equally dangerous to create an image of the Lord God Himself. The psalmist declares “... *the heavens declare his righteousness,*” (*Tehillim / Psalms 50:6, 97:6*) indicating the Lord has displayed plenty of evidence for His power and Might. All the people seeing his glory, as it is manifested in the heavens, and in the power which he puts forth on the earth, that is, the people had the opportunity of seeing the power of God (His great and wondrous works). They did not appreciate all the Lord had done for them, and so they turn to the idol of their own making, they trusted in themselves for deliverance rather than trusting in the Lord God in heaven. The rabbis speak of the heavens declaring the righteousness of God in the sense that the inhabitants of the heavens (angels) bear witness to the justice and truth of God. Radak and Rashi have the following to say concerning these things.

Radak on Psalms 19:2, Part 1

The heavens declare the glory of God : - There are interpreters (Targumist and others) who take this as like “Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee” (Job 12:8), and “Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee” (ibid. 7) ; and so The heavens declare, for from the wonders and mighty works which man sees in the heavens he declares the glory of God. And this is what he (means when he) says : There is no speech nor words; Their voice cannot be heard, suggesting not that they declare in words, but from what man sees in them the sons of men declare the glory of God. We are able to explain declare with reference to the heavens and the firmament themselves, for by their course and circuit in an appointed order the glory of God - Blessed be He ! - is seen ; and that is the “declaring” and “telling,” on the analogy of “He sendeth out His commandment upon earth ; His word runneth very swiftly.” (Ps. 147:15) And when he says : There is no speech nor words (he means) no words like the words of men, but the work they do stands for the words, and constitutes the “declaring” and the “telling”; and so he says : And their speech to the end of the world. The great teacher of righteousness, the great sage our Rabbi Moses, has interpreted (Guide for the Perplexed, 2. 5) “declare” of the heavens, for his opinion and that of the Philosophers is that the spheres are living intelligences, serving God and praising Him with great praise, and singing His glory in great and mighty songs. And so he says : The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament telleth His handywork, notwithstanding that the “declaring” and the “telling” are not with mouth and tongue. This is what he (means when he) says : There is neither speech nor language; Their voice cannot be heard, but the “declaring” and the “telling” are to them like an image of the words and praises which a man forms in his mind without their actual issuing forth in speech.

Rashi on Deuteronomy 32:2, Part 1

יֵעָרַף כְּמַטֵּר לְקַחֵי MY DOCTRINE DROPPETH AS RAIN — This is the evidence that ye will have to give: that in your presence I declare that the Torah which I gave to Israel (לְקַחֵי) is life to the world as the rain which is life to the world (cf. Siphre) — even as the heavens drop down dew and rain. יֵעָרַף means, IT DROPS. Similar is (Psalms 65:12) “[And thy paths] drop fatness” (ירַעֲפוּן), where עָרַף = רַעַף); (Deuteronomy 33:28) “[also his heavens] shall drop down (יֵעָרְפוּ) dew”.

Both Radak and Rashi state the glory of God is apparent in His creation. The heavens declare the glory of God because He is who established and appointed the order (operation, function) of creation. Rashi states that the rain that comes to water the crops are evidence for the glory of God and His mercies.

The Psalm concludes saying, **יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה שִׁנְאוּ רַע שִׁמְרֵן נַפְשׁוֹת חֲסִידָיו מִיַּד רָשָׁעִים יִצְיָלֵם: יֵא אֲוֹר זָרַע, 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. (NASB) The Lord God is powerful and able to deliver His people from all kinds of adversity. He works in the hearts of men to do His will, both the righteous and the wicked. The commentary *Or Chaim on Bereshit / Genesis 1:1, Part 22* has the following to say concerning these concluding verses in *Tehillim / Psalms 97*.**

Or Chaim on Genesis 1:1, Part 22

The whole section also hints to the creation of man - who is the main goal of the creation - in the following way: In the beginning, when God created man, He created him from the source of spirituality, which is hinted by the word, heavens, and from the source of physicality, which is hinted by the word, earth. And you will find that our Rabbis, of blessed memory, hinted [to

this by explaining] (Sanhedrin 91b), what the verse stated (Psalms 50:4), “He called to the heavens above” to be the spirit [and] “and upon the earth” to be the body, which is built from the earth. And His will in this, may He be blessed, is that through the actions of man, he will have the power to transform matter, which is the body, until it is considered to be form. And behold, you will find (Shabbat 152b) that the righteous ones do not return to the dust, given that they purify their matter, until it becomes spiritual; as was written by Rabbi Y. Arama, of blessed memory, and these are his words, “and it is the power of the perfect ones to change matter into form.” And this is why they, of blessed memory, said (Berakhot 18a) that the righteous ones are called living even in their death, since the material side has become spiritual, which relates to life; and that the evil ones are called dead even in their lifetimes, from the angle that even the spirituality in them becomes material and [like] earth, which relates to the lifeless objects which are [therefore] dead. And it hints to these two characteristics when it states “the heavens and the earth,” in the following way: if they merit [it], behold, they raise up the material part of themselves which is hinted by “the earth” and they connect it and it becomes one entity with the “heavens.” And if they do not merit [it], they transform the part of spirituality within them to the trait of “earth” and the form becomes matter. And this is what it is stating, “and the earth.” And its stating, “and the earth was chaos and void” here is hinting to what occurred in the times that the physical side overpowers which is the ‘earth’ and [the person] is emptied out of spirituality; as it is translated [by Onkelos into Aramaic], “desolate and empty;” “and darkness,” which is the evil impulse that is called in their holy words (Zohar, Bereishit 63)...

The rabbis recognize the significance of the manner in which man was created, both spiritual and physical, emphasizing the importance of what we do, how we live for the Lord, in the sense that “... *through the actions of man, he will have the power to transform matter, which is the body, until it is considered to be form.*” This indicates that the Lord is working in the lives of His people to transform them, similar to what Paul wrote the Lord is conforming us unto the likeness of His son (*Romans 8:29*). The major point here is to recognize the work of God in our lives and if we do not see the Lord actively working in our lives, we need to ask questions why? It is important to not what the rabbis say, “*And behold, you will find (Shabbat 152b) that the righteous ones do not return to the dust, given that they purify their matter, until it becomes spiritual...*” They are speaking of walking in the spirit, doing so is accomplished by obeying God’s Torah, and turning from sin. This is the meaning of those who are alive, even in death, and those who are called dead, even when they are alive. Those who are called dead are as lifeless objects, similar to those of molten images (idols). We are not to be as idols, useless and dead, because we are called as God’s children to be righteous and holy. Without the Lord’s help, we could not do so. This is why it is important to ask questions and to seek for the Lord God in heaven to work in our lives in Yeshua His Messiah. This is also the meaning of having a heart and a spirit that seeks the Lord, a very important attribute of God’s people. Let’s pray!

Rabbinic Commentary

The Rabbinic Commentary (Midrash) on *Tehillim / Psalms 97* has 2 parts. Reading through the Midrash we will be looking at Part 1 and 2. Let’s begin by outlining *Midrash Tehillim Chapter 97, Parts 1 and 2*.

Outline of Midrash Tehillim / Psalms, Chapter 97, Part 1 and 2

Part 1

- The Midrash introduces the Psalm with the *דיבור המתהיל* (Dibur Hamathil) saying, “*The verse The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice (Tehillim / Psalms 97:1) proves that as long as the kingdom of Edom abides, there will be no rejoicing in the earth.*”

- The פתיחתא (Petihta) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “Neither will the name of the Lord be whole, nor will the throne of the Lord be whole, since it is said Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of the Lord (Shemot / Exodus 17:16).”
- The משל (mashal) “the parable,” goes on to explain the פתיחתא (Petihta), the rabbis speak of the exile of Israel out of the Land of Israel.
- The נמשל (Nimshal) “expansion on the parable” expands upon the משל (mashal), the rabbis conclude it is the Lord who will fight against the nations Israel is exiled into.
- The Concluding phrase says, “In the verse His lightnings lighted up the world, the earth saw and trembled. The mountains melted like wax (Tehillim / Psalms 97:4-5), the mountains are the nations of the earth.”

Part 2

- The Midrash introduces the Psalm with the דיבור המתחיל (Dibur Hamathil) saying, “Ashamed be all they that serve graven images (Tehillim / Psalms 97:7).”
- The פתיחתא (Petihta) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “Rabbi Samuel son of Nahmani taught, In the time to come, all the nations of the earth will assemble with their graven images in their hands.”
- The משל (mashal) “the parable,” goes on to explain the פתיחתא (Petihta), the rabbis speak of the nations bringing their idol gods to meet the Lord God in heaven.
- The נמשל (Nimshal) “expansion on the parable” expands upon the משל (mashal), the rabbis expand upon the mashal saying the Lord will give life to the idol gods and they will also worship the Lord God in heaven.
- The Concluding phrase says, “This is the great light which the Holy One blessed be He, created when the earth was created, and which He hid away for the righteous against the time when He will take it from its sheath, as is said Raise, shine, for your light is come (Isaiah 60:1). Then the holy One blessed be He, will say, Be glad in the Lord, you righteous; and give thanks to His Holy Name (Tehillim / Psalms 97:12).”

Midrash Tehillim 97, Part 1 opens with the דיבור המתחיל (Dibur Hamathil) saying, “The verse The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice (Tehillim / Psalms 97:1) proves that as long as the kingdom of Edom abides, there will be no rejoicing in the earth.” Today, Edom is gone, is there rejoicing in all the earth because Edom is gone? The book of Devarim / Deuteronomy commands all of Israel to rejoice before the Lord three times a year in the Shelosh Regalim, the three pilgrimage festivals (Devarim / Deuteronomy 16:15). According to the Torah, this is understood as one’s obligation to stand before the Lord God in heaven at במִקוֹם (in the Place) the Lord has established His Name. This command became problematic in the Tannaim (תנאים) period following the destruction of the Second Temple. In the rabbinic literature, we are presented with the association of Torah study, coupled with the observance of the commands that causes one to experience an inexplicable joy in the Lord, because one Loves the Lord and is walking in His ways. This is a common motif in the rabbinic literature. A common Christian claim is that the Torah and its commandments reflect something external that was forced upon me by authority from the outside, it is bad, sinister, and burdensome, etc. This comes out of the basic premise “under the Mosaic covenant, man had to earn his salvation, whereas under the covenant in Yeshua we only have faith now.” The interesting point is that based on the rabbinic literature, the rabbis emphasize the joyful manner by which Israel first received the Torah and fulfilled its requirements from that time onward. In fact, obedience to the commands is an act of love towards our Father in heaven, and this is what Yeshua was speaking of in John 14:15 saying “If you love me keep my commands.” It is in this opinion that Yeshua draws upon from the rabbis that the joy found in the precept is to instill a feeling of gratification and joy in the one who obeys the Torah because he loves the Lord God of Israel.

The homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “Neither will the name of the Lord be whole, nor will the throne of the Lord be whole, since it is said Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of the Lord (Shemot / Exodus 17:16).” According to the midrash, when Edom is gone there will be rejoicing in all the earth. Edom appears sometimes in the aggadah as referring to the actual Edomites and sometimes to the Romans, who are identified with them, but the overarching theme is as a reference to a nation that has turned away from the covenant of God, and are determined to hurt God’s people.

The entire midrash states the following:

<p>מדרש תהלים פרק צז סימן א א ה' מלך תגל הארץ. ללמדך שאין בעולם גילה כל זמן שמלכות אדום קיימת, ואין השם שלם ואין הכסא שלם, שנאמר ויאמר כי יד על כס יה (שמות יז טז), וכיון שימלוך הקב"ה בתוך גלות רביעית, מיד והיה ה' למלך [על כל הארץ ביום ההוא יהיה ה' אחד ושמו אחד] (זכר ריה יד ט). ה' מלך תגל הארץ [יש- מחו איים רבים]. אז יבא להלחם באומות העולם. ענן וערפל סביביו צדק ומשפט מכון כסאו. לרחם על ישראל, שנאמר צדק ומשפט מכון כסאך וגו' (תהלים פט טו). אש לפניו תלך ותלהט סביב צריו. אלו אומות העולם. האירו ברקיו תבל [וגו'] הרים כדונג נמסו. אלו אומות העולם.</p>	<p>Midrash Tehillim 97, Part 1 1. The verse The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice (Tehillim / Psalms 97:1) proves that as long as the kingdom of Edom abides, there will be no rejoicing in the earth. Neither will the name of the Lord be whole, nor will the throne of the Lord be whole, since it is said Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of the Lord (Shemot / Exodus 17:16). But during the fourth exile, the Holy One blessed be He, will become king, and then The Lord will be King over all the earth; in that day will the Lord be One, and His name One (Zechariah 14:9). The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad (Tehillim / Psalms 97:1) then, for God will come to fight against heathen nations of the earth. Clouds and darkness are round about Him. But with righteousness and justice the foundation of His throne (Tehillim / Psalms 97:2), He will show mercy to the people of Israel, as is said, Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth will go before You. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they will walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance (Tehillim / Psalms 89:16). A fire goes before Him, and burns up His adversaries round about (Tehillim / Psalms 97:3) that is, burns up heathen nations of the earth. In the verse His lightnings lighted up the world, the earth saw and trembled. The mountains melted like wax (Tehillim / Psalms 97:4-5), the mountains are the nations of the earth.</p>
--	--

According to the Jewish Virtual Library, Edom as Rome is defined in the following way.

EDOM AS ROME

*The identification of Edom with Rome is never found in the literature of the Second Temple period. It appears for the first time close to the Bar Kokhba revolt (cf. Margolioth, p. 610/2). R. Meir even connects it with the verse (Isa. 21:11), “The vision of Dumah” = the vision of Dome (ימור = ימור, Rome, TJ, Ta’an. 1:1, 64a see ed. princ.); also “The re’emim [wild-oxen] shall come down with them” (Isa. 34:7) is read as “The Romans shall come down with them” (PdRK 7, 11, ed. Mandelbaum, p. 134). The previous verses (5–6) speak of Edom (cf. also Targ. Jon. ed. Sperber, Isa. 9, “The streams thereof shall be turned into pitch”: “The streams of Rome shall be turned into pitch”). Many scholars are of the opinion that the source of this identification lies in the connection between *Herod, a descendant of Edomite proselytes, whose evil rule over Judea left a harsh impression and the intensification of Roman rule in Judea, especially as Herod was virtually a vassal of Rome. However these conjectures cannot be accepted. Not only are substantial proofs lacking, but the identification appears only in the second quarter of the second century C.E., more than four generations after the death of Herod. It seems, therefore, that its source is to be sought elsewhere. (Jewish Virtual Library)*

Edom is defined as the eternal enemy of Israel (*Amos 1:11, Ezekiel 35:5*), and as we can see here in the Midrash also the eternal enemy of God. At the end of the tannaitic period, the identification of Edom as Rome became very widespread, and the overwhelming majority of homilies about Edom spoke explicitly of Rome. It was stated that Rome was founded by the children of Esau, and Rome was identified as one of the cities of the chiefs of Esau enumerated at the end of *Bereshit / Genesis 36* where these identifications occur in the Midrashim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, the Targums of the Torah and in the Targums to the Lamentations and Esther. In the Midrash, in addition to Edom, Amalek is said to be oppressing the throne of the Lord, and therefore both Edom and Amalek have an effect upon the completeness of the throne of the Lord according to the Midrash. (*Shemot / Exodus 17:16 and he said, 'The Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.'* NASB) Based upon the Scripture from the Torah, the Lord will make war with Amalek from generation to generation, and from the Midrash, no rejoicing on a world wide scale will occur while Edom and Amalek are present. The Midrash states “*But during the fourth exile, the Holy One blessed be He, will become king, and then The Lord will be King over all the earth; in that day will the Lord be One, and His name One (Zechariah 14:9).*” There is the expectation of a future event that leads to the exile of Israel and the Lord becoming king and Lord over all the earth. This also may presume some sort of world wide apocalyptic event that transforms the world and causes the world to look towards the Lord God of Israel (*Isaiah 2*). The Midrash highlights the concept of either the Lord conquering these nations, or some how these nations are transformed and conform to the rule of God in their lives and His Torah as a guide for life and righteousness. When a person is transformed by the Lord God in heaven and His Messiah Yeshua, the Torah as a guide for life and righteousness becomes a matter of joyfulness and delight because of our love for the Lord. Therefore, the proper disposition of a believer before the Lord is to be one of joy, which follows the one who had previously repented and been mournful because of his sins, now receiving the forgiveness of sins where joy abounds.

The midrash continues saying, “*The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad (Tehillim / Psalms 97:1) then, for God will come to fight against heathen nations of the earth. Clouds and darkness are round about Him. But with righteousness and justice the foundation of His throne (Tehillim / Psalms 97:2), He will show mercy to the people of Israel, as is said, Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth will go before You.*” (Midrash Tehillim 97, Part 1) The Lord reigns and though He is all powerful, He remains merciful, and establishes righteousness and justice as a way for His people. The Lord provides us with His word and it should delight us to study His word. This is where the concept of studying Torah brings joy to one’s soul is developed. The association of Torah study with the experience of joy must be set in its proper context however. One can find numerous associations of Torah study with joy in the rabbinic literature, but the study of the Torah is not to be for the sake of the satisfaction of one’s physical appetites or for pride. Take for example from the Talmud Bavli Taanit 20a.

Talmud Bavli Taanit 20a

מעשה שבא רבי אלעזר (בן ר') שמעון ממגדל גדור מבית רבו והיה רכוב על החמור ומטייל על הרבה שפת נהר ושמח שמחה גדולה והיתה דעתו גסה עליו מפני שלמד תורה הרבה *It once happened that R. Eleazar the son of R. Simeon was coming from Migdal Gedor, from the house of his teacher, and he was riding his donkey by the river and he felt a great happiness and full of himself because he had studied a lot of Torah*

The Talmud Bavli Taanit 20b follows with a story on what happened to Rabbi Eleazar as a result of his pride.

Talmud Bavli Taanit 20b

A particularly ugly man happened upon him and said to him, Peace be upon you, Rabbi, and he [R. Eleazar] did not respond. He said to him, Good for nothing! How ugly this man is! Are all the people of your city as ugly as you are? The man said: I do not know, but go and tell the artisan who made me, how ugly is the vessel which you have made. When he [R.

Eleazar] acknowledged, in his gut, that he had done wrong he got down from his donkey and prostrated himself before the man and said to him, I submit myself to you; forgive me. He said to him: I will not forgive you until you go to the artisan that created me and tell him: How ugly is the vessel that you created. He [R. Eleazar] walked behind him until he reached his city. When his fellow citizens came out to meet him greeting him with the words, 'Peace be upon you Rabbi and teacher,' the man asked them, 'Who are you calling Rabbi, Rabbi?' They replied, ... 'The man who is walking behind you.' He said to them: 'If this man is a Rabbi, may there not be any more like him in Israel!' They asked him: 'Why'? He replied: 'He did such and such to me.' They said to him: 'Nevertheless, forgive him, for he is a man of great Torah learning.' The man replied: 'For your sakes I will forgive him, but only if he does not make a habit of acting this way.' Immediately, R. Eleazar son of R. Simeon entered [the Beit Midrash] and expounded, A man should always be soft like a reed and not hard like a cedar. And for this reason the reed merited that of it should be made a quill for the writing of the Torah scroll, phylacteries and mezuzot.

The concepts here are studying God's word should not become a matter of pride in one's life. We should consider it a great privilege to have God's word and be thankful for the freedoms of being able to study God's word each day. The enjoyment of Torah study became such a fixed entity in the rabbinic imagination that it achieved a ritual significance in the life of the rabbis. The context of the story of Rabbi Eleazar is the concept of "*Rejoice, Oh my soul, rejoice, Oh my soul, for you I have read Torah, for you I have recited Mishnah*" where the one rejoices in himself on the performance of the command. The joyous quality of Torah study is brought into the context of the festivals along with the other materials of celebration such as eating and drinking, anointing with oil, praising God, wearing festive garments, etc. The rabbis also however step back and ask the question of whether the Torah should be studied for a higher purpose? Should not the Torah to be studied for higher purposes than merely the pleasure or "joy" for one's own self for doing so? Rabbi Eleazar's answer is a resounding "YES," saying "*A man should always be soft like a reed and not hard like a cedar. And for this reason the reed merited that of it should be made a quill for the writing of the Torah scroll, phylacteries and mezuzot.*" The higher purpose for studying God's word is to change our hearts from the inside towards others and towards God; to show love for our fellow man which demonstrates God's love for us in His mercy.

Midrash Tehillim 97m Part 1 concludes saying, "*Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they will walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance (Tehillim / Psalms 89:16). A fire goes before Him, and burns up His adversaries round about (Tehillim / Psalms 97:3) that is, burns up heathen nations of the earth. In the verse His lightnings lighted up the world, the earth saw and trembled. The mountains melted like wax (Tehillim / Psalms 97:4-5), the mountains are the nations of the earth.*" The coming judgment is the result of the sin of mankind, and the Psalmist states that fire goes before the Lord consuming the ungodly nations. This is similar to what is written according to the Apostle Peter in His second epistle.

2 Peter 3:1-14

3:1 This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 3:2 that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. 3:3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 3:4 and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.' 3:5 For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, 3:6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. 3:7 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 3:8 But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord

one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 3:9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 3:11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 3:12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 3:13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 3:14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, (NASB)

The second epistle of Peter shows that the Apostles believed the consummation of the heavens and earth and the Messiah's appearance in glory is in fact a future expectation. (*Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 7:29, 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:1*) The word "fire" is used allegorically, symbolically, and literally throughout the Bible. Fire is used to describe the Lord God of Israel, His anger (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 32:22, 21:9*), His angels and His servants (*Tehillim / Psalms 104:4, Hebrews 1:7*), and of Yeshua the Messiah (*2 Thessalonians 1, Revelation 1*). For example, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moshe in a burning bush (*Shemot / Exodus 3:1-2*) and there was a fiery cloud atop the mountain of Sinai (*Bamidbar / Numbers 19, Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:11*) when the Torah was spoken to the people. There is also mention of a lake of fire where the dead are tormented (*Matthew 25:41-46 and Revelation 21:8*) throughout eternity. Peter says that *3:7 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (NASB)* and it is for this reason we are to live godly lives in holiness, righteousness, and truth, and to forsake the lustful things of this world. This is also the greater purpose for obeying God's Torah, as a way to glorify the God of Israel (*3:11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, NASB*) just as Peter states, *3:13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 3:14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless. (NASB)* The wicked will melt before the Lord, as the Psalmist states in *Tehillim / Psalms 97:4-5*, the fire will go before the Lord and consume His adversaries. This same imagery is given of Yeshua when He returns according to the Apostle Paul in *2 Thessalonians 1:3-12*.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

1:3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; 1:4 therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. 1:5 This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. 1:6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 1:7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 1:8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 1:9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power; 1:10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed for our testimony to you was believed. 1:11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, 1:12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (NASB)

The coming of our Lord will be followed by a consuming fire, to consume those who do not obey the gospel of Yeshua. What exactly is the gospel of Yeshua if it is something to be obeyed? This speaks in stark contrast to the grace movement today (hyper grace) because our faith is something to be lived out and not simply a metaphysical concept of salvation. According to Yeshua himself, he said “if you love me obey my commands” (John 14:15) and that “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments.” (John 14:23) The gospel of Yeshua includes the Torah commands of righteousness, Justice, Holiness, and Truth. Yeshua said obedience to the command is the determining factor for remaining in His Love.

Midrash Tehillim 97, Part 2 opens with the Dibur Hamathil (דיבור המתחיל) saying, “Ashamed be all they that serve graven images (Tehillim / Psalms 97:7).” The פתיחה (Petihtha) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “Rabbi Samuel son of Nakhmani taught, In the time to come, all the nations of the earth will assemble with their graven images in their hands.” The point of the opening passages from the Midrash appear to refer to our becoming the thing that we worship, whether self, a hobby, entertainment, sports, or an inanimate object (idol). The Entire midrash states the following:

<p>מדרש תהלים פרק צז סימן ב</p> <p>ב יבשו כל עובדי פסל. אמר ר' שמואל בר נחמני לעתיד לבוא יתכנסו כל אומות העולם ופסיליהם בידיהם, ואומר להם הקב"ה למי האמנתם, אומרים לו לפלוני ולפלוני, אמר להם הקב"ה והלא אין בהם ממש, מיד אמר להם הרי הפיסים חים והאלמים והסומים שמחצתי יבואו וירפאום, מיד כשרואין אומות העולם שאין ממש, משליכים אותם מידם, אותה שעה הקב"ה כביכול נותן ממשות לע"ז, ובאים הע"ז ומשתחווים להקב"ה, ואומות העולם בושו וגם נכלמו, הוי יבשו כל עובדי פסל [המתהללים באלי-לים] השתחוו לו כל אלהים, מיד משלי-כין אותן לאבדון, שנאמר ישליך (העם) [האדם את] אליילי כספו [וגו'] (ישעיה ב כ), אותו היום שמעה ותשמח ציון, למה למען משפטיך ה', שאתה עושה משפט לאומות העולם ובאליליהם, אז יאמרו כל באי עולם לישראל, אוהבי ה' שנאו רע שומר נפשות חסידיו [מיד רשעים יצילם]. אור זרע לצדיק. זה אור גדול שברא הקב"ה כשנברא העו-לם וגנזו לצדיקים שעתיד להוציאה מנ-רתיקה, שנאמר קומי אורי כי בא אורך (ישעיה ס א), אז יאמר הקב"ה שמחו צדיקים בה' והודו לזכר קדשו.</p>	<p>Midrash Tehillim 97, Part 2</p> <p>2. Ashamed be all they that serve graven images (Tehillim / Psalms 97:7). Rabbi Samuel son of Nakhmani taught, In the time to come, all the nations of the earth will assemble with their graven images in their hands. He Holy One blessed be He, will ask them, In what have you believed? And they will reply, in such an image, or in such an image. The Holy One blessed be He, will say, But there is nothing in them. And He will go on, Here are they lame and the dumb and the blind whom I have stricken. Let the images come and heal them. Then the nations of the earth, seeing that there is nothing to their graven images, will case them down from their hands. Whereupon the Holy One blessed be He, will give some life, as it were, to the graven images, and the graven images will come and worship the Holy One blessed be He, so that the nations of the earth will be ashamed and confounded. Hence, Ashamed be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of things of nought; bow down to Him, all you gods (Tehillim / Psalms 97:7). Forthwith the nations of the earth will throw the graven images down to Abaddon, as is said in that day a man will cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold (Isaiah 2:20). In that day, Zion will hear and will be glad (Tehillim / Psalms 97:8). Why? Because of Your judgments, O Lord, for You will execute judgment upon the nations of the earth and upon their images. Then all the inhabitants of the world will say to the people of Israel, O you that love the Lord, hate evil; He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked (Tehillim / Psalms 97:10). Light is sown for the righteous (Tehillim / Psalms 97:11). This is the great light which the Holy One blessed be He, created when the earth was created, and which He hid away for the righteous against the time when He will take it from its sheath, as is said Raise, shine, for your light is come (Isaiah 60:1). Then the holy One blessed be He, will say, Be glad in the Lord, you righteous; and give thanks to His Holy Name (Tehillim / Psalms 97:12).</p>
---	---

The Psalm states, *יבשו | כָּל-עֲבָדֵי פֶסֶל הַמִּתְהַלְּלִים בְּאֱלִילִים הַשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ-לוֹ כָּל-אֱלֹהִים: 97:7 Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, Who boast themselves of idols; Worship Him, all you gods. (NASB)* The Aramaic Targum states, *ז יבהתון כל פלחי פיסלא דמשתבחין בטעותא ויסגדון קדמוי כל עמיא פלחי טעותא: 97:7 All who worship idols will be ashamed, who pride themselves on a false god; and all the peoples who worship a false god will bow down in his presence. (EMC)* The MT and the Targum used the words Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) The Targum uses the word טעותא (*idolatrous divinity JLA^{tg}, Gal, PTA, LJLA. --(a) idol of such a divinity JLA^{tg}, Gal, PTA, CPA, LJLA. --(b) a type of spirit JB^{Amb}.*) the idea is conveyed by the MT word for idols (אֱלִילִים) those worthless things as shaming those who worship them. It is interesting how the Septuagint translates this word as angels (ageloi, ἄγγελοι) 97:7 *αἰσχυνθήτωσαν πάντες οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τοῖς γλυπτοῖς οἱ ἐγκουχόμενοι ἐν τοῖς εἰδώλοις αὐτῶν προσκυνήσατε αὐτῷ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ 97:7 Let all that worship graven images be ashamed, who boast of their idols; worship him, all ye his angels. (LXX)* The rabbis translate “angels” and not “gods” as is found in the MT. Here the term may be a reference to a supernatural being as something that is worshiped by the heathen nations as deities. Rashi on *Tehillim / Psalms 97:7* states, *: יבשו כל עובדי פסל . דכתיב (ישעיה ב) והאלילים כליל יחלוף :* (*All who serve sculpture/ idols dry up . Written in (Isaiah 2) and the idols will completely pass away*) making reference to those who serve statues (sculptures) and to *Isaiah 2*.

Isaiah 2:1-12

2:1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2:2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 2:3 And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 2:4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. 2:5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. 2:6 For You have abandoned Your people, the house of Jacob, Because they are filled with influences from the east, And they are soothsayers like the Philistines, And they strike bargains with the children of foreigners. 2:7 Their land has also been filled with silver and gold And there is no end to their treasures; Their land has also been filled with horses And there is no end to their chariots. 2:8 Their land has also been filled with idols; They worship the work of their hands, That which their fingers have made. 2:9 So the common man has been humbled And the man of importance has been abased, But do not forgive them. 2:10 Enter the rock and hide in the dust From the terror of the Lord and from the splendor of His majesty. 2:11 The proud look of man will be abased And the loftiness of man will be humbled, And the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. 2:12 For the Lord of hosts will have a day of reckoning Against everyone who is proud and lofty And against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased. (NASB)

Isaiah spoke of the last days where the mountain of the Lord will be established as the chief of mountains. He says that it will be raised up above all the mountains, suggesting the mountain of the Lord is a reference to Israel, as being chief is a reference to being head over the nations, or raised up over the nations in the sense that the people of God will be lifted high, based upon the manner in which one lives his life for the Lord. (*The Righteous nation shall rise up.*) This is paralleled to drawing near to the house of the Lord and walking in His paths, and the Lord will rule over the nations in the sense that He will bring judicial decisions between the nations. War and bloodshed will end, and all the people of the earth will be illuminated by the light of God (His righteousness, holiness, and truth). So Rashi’s commentary speaks of something opposite to what is written in *Tehillim / Psalms 97:7* of the nations *יבשו | כָּל-עֲבָדֵי פֶסֶל הַמִּתְהַלְּלִים בְּאֱלִילִים*

97:7 *Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, Who boast themselves of idols; Worship Him, all you gods. (NASB)* The description Isaiah is giving is of the last days with the return of the Lord who rules and reigns over the nations who have forsaken their idolatry. Isaiah said 2:5 *Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. 2:6 For You have abandoned Your people, the house of Jacob, Because they are filled with influences from the east, And they are soothsayers like the Philistines, And they strike bargains with the children of foreigners. 2:7 Their land has also been filled with silver and gold And there is no end to their treasures; Their land has also been filled with horses And there is no end to their chariots. 2:8 Their land has also been filled with idols; They worship the work of their hands, That which their fingers have made. (NASB)* where the Lord turned from Israel because of her idolatry and consulting of the nations. In the last days all of the nations will seek the Lord and come before Him in the Holy Place.

The Midrash states, *“In the time to come, all the nations of the earth will assemble with their graven images in their hands,”* speaking of a time when all men will come before the Lord God of Israel. They will bring with them their idols. What is interesting is how we entered into this world, where Paul wrote in *1 Timothy 6:7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. (NASB)* But yet here in the Midrash, the people stand before the Lord not with silver or gold, but with their idols. How is it possible for one to enter into the world with nothing, and leave the world with nothing, but yet bringing an idol before the Lord in the world to come? This might be explained by *Ezekiel 14*.

Ezekiel 14:1-14

14:1 Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me. 14:2 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 14:3 ‘Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all? 14:4 ‘Therefore speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, ‘Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols, 14:5 in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols.’ 14:6 ‘Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God, ‘Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations. 14:7 ‘For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the Lord will be brought to answer him in My own person. 14:8 ‘I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the Lord. 14:9 ‘But if the prophet is prevailed upon to speak a word, it is I, the Lord, who have prevailed upon that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel. 14:10 ‘They will bear the punishment of their iniquity; as the iniquity of the inquirer is, so the iniquity of the prophet will be, 14:11 in order that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me and no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions. Thus they will be My people, and I shall be their God,’ declares the Lord God.’ 14:12 Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 14:13 ‘Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it and cut off from it both man and beast, 14:14 even though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves,’ declares the Lord God. (NASB)

Most people believe idolatry involves worshiping some inanimate object, such as the Ashtoreth pole (*Note: Ashtoreth is the moon goddess of the Phoenicians, representing the passive principle in nature, their principal female deity; frequently associated with the name of Baal, the sun-god, their chief male deity, see Judges*

10:6 and 1 Samuel 7:4; 12:10, *These names often occur in the plural (Ashtaroth, Baalim), probably as indicating either different statues or different modifications of the deities. This deity is spoken of as Ashtoreth of the Zidonians. She was the Ishtar of the Accadians and the Astarte of the Greeks (Jer. 44:17; 1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13). There was a temple of this goddess among the Philistines in the time of Saul (1 Sam. 31:10). Under the name of Ishtar, she was one of the great deities of the Assyrians. The Phoenicians called her Astarte. Solomon introduced the worship of this idol (1 Kings 11:33). Jezebel's 400 priests were probably employed in its service (1 Kings 18:19). It was called the "queen of heaven" (Jeremiah 44:25.)* or similar deity's one finds for example in other religions such as Hinduism. Idolatry however comes in many forms and are not limited to the molten images (*Bamidbar / Numbers 33:52, Devarim / Deuteronomy 9:12, 27:15, Judges 17:3, 17:4, 18:14-18, etc*) which were so often mentioned in the scriptures. The idols Ezekiel speaks of concerns those we establish in our hearts. This may also be the kind of idols the rabbis are thinking of with regard to the Midrash, going before the Lord with their idols in hand. Such idols of the heart include personal pride, fame, money, finances, school, education, sports, etc. I would also conclude that trying to "please" everyone as opposed to trying to please the Lord God of Israel is also a form of idolatry of the heart. The idols of the heart have become an epidemic in Christian society today. People are more concerned with which sports team is winning the super bowl, what the latest hottest clothing a particular actor or movie star is wearing, or any other bit of useless information rather than asking the Lord God how He can help us to become a better witness to our family, spouse, friends, and neighbors, etc. While study the scriptures, the Lord God speaks to us and teaches us which highlights the importance of studying God's word each day. Daniel spoke of the last days, and how the wicked will continue in their wickedness and none of the wicked shall understand. We are seeing evidence for this by the division in the Church, over various topics, such as the topic of homosexuality.

Daniel 12:10

Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. (KJV)

Today it is getting difficult to discern the meaning of the word "Christian" because of the sinful lifestyle of those who claim to be Christian. The indication of such is when one is a believer in word, but one's deeds do not produce the fruits of the spirit. There is a difference between those who are saved, calling sin for what it is, sin, and there are those who exchange good for evil, and the truth for a lie, and will not admit that their sin. (*Isaiah 5:20-24, i.e. hyper-grace movement*) Most people today despise the judgments of God, take for example the great animosity there is against the Torah.

Ezekiel 20:16

Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols. (KJV)

Worship begins in the heart, and thus God desires that we come back to the heart of Worship with him at the center without the idols of this life, lust, money, etc. The Lord searches deeper than we realize, he knows our deepest fears, and desires. Therefore, the same that comes as a result of one's idolatry, is because the idol, the thing that one places at the center of one's life, takes one away from the Lord, and has the capacity to take one away from His commands because serving these images, these idols takes us away from the most important aspect of our faith as the children of God, which is to serve the Lord God of Israel and His Messiah Yeshua.

The Midrash continues saying the following:

Ashamed be all they that serve graven images (Tehillim / Psalms 97:7). Rabbi Samuel son of Nakhmani taught, In the time to come, all the nations of the earth will assemble with their graven images in their hands. He Holy One blessed be He, will ask them, In what have you

believed? And they will reply, in such an image, or in such an image. The Holy One blessed be He, will say, But there is nothing in them. And He will go on, Here are they lame and the dumb and the blind whom I have stricken. Let the images come and heal them. Then the nations of the earth, seeing that there is nothing to their graven images, will case them down from their hands. Whereupon the Holy One blessed be He, will give some life, as it were, to the graven images, and the graven images will come and worship the Holy One blessed be He, so that the nations of the earth will be ashamed and confounded. Hence, Ashamed be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of things of nought; bow down to Him, all you gods (Tehillim / Psalms 97:7). Forthwith the nations of the earth will throw the graven images down to Abaddon, as is said in that day a man will cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold (Isaiah 2:20). In that day, Zion will hear and will be glad (Tehillim / Psalms 97:8). Why? Because of Your judgments, O Lord, for You will execute judgment upon the nations of the earth and upon their images. Then all the inhabitants of the world will say to the people of Israel, O you that love the Lord, hate evil; He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked (Tehillim / Psalms 97:10).

The Midrash speaks of the insignificant nature of the image (idol) that one holds on to all his life, not having the capacity to heal the lame, dumb, or blind. Note that healing does not necessarily need to refer to physical sickness, but may also refer to healing of relationships, emotional, and mental. I would be as bold to state that if the Lord is not healing something in your life, maybe it is time to look a little deeper at your life and relationship with the Lord and with others. Note what Peter says in *1 Peter 3:7 You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker; since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. (NASB)* If a husband's prayer life may be hindered by his relationship with his wife, what other relationship attributes do you think would hinder answered prayer? What about our attitude for everything we do? The Midrash continues by emphasizing how the nations will throw their graven images down to Abaddon (Hell). When we choose to abandon the things we set up that supersede the Lord God of Israel, then even heaven itself will hear and rejoice (*Luke 15:7-10*).

Midrash Tehillim 97, Part 2 concludes saying, "*Light is sown for the righteous (Tehillim / Psalms 97:11). This is the great light which the Holy One blessed be He, created when the earth was created, and which He hid away for the righteous against the time when He will take it from its sheath, as is said Raise, shine, for your light is come (Isaiah 60:1). Then the holy One blessed be He, will say, Be glad in the Lord, you righteous; and give thanks to His Holy Name (Tehillim / Psalms 97:12).*" Note there is something that has been created from since before the creation, that the Lord has reserved for His people. This Light that is sown, are righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth, all of which God's people are called to walk in according to God's Word. Whereas, judgment (justice, righteousness) is meted out to those who are disobedient, or as Paul says, to those who do not "*Obey*" the gospel of Yeshua (*2 Thessalonians 1*). Note that the Apostolic Writings speak of the new man who is created in justice, holiness, and truth, and therefore it is time to begin the process of casting away the idols we have created in our hearts and lives, and begin to seek the Lord God in heaven with all of our heart, mind, and strength (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:5*). Let's Pray!

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for Your mercies each day. Help us to see the idols we have created in our hearts and help us to cast them away for we desire to seek and serve You alone all the days of our lives. Lord help us to have the strength to stand for truth and life, and to have faith in Yeshua and a devotion to Your Word every day. We thank You Lord for Your continued faithfulness to Your promises and to us. Thank You Lord for giving us the faith to believe in Yeshua the Messiah and for always calling our hearts back to You! Please have mercy on us, forgive us for our sins. Help us to grow in our faith, to walk in the spirit, and apply these

truths to our lives. We praise Your Holy Name and give You all of the honor, and the glory, and the praise forever and ever.

In Yeshua's (Jesus') Name we pray! Amen!

Be Blessed in Yeshua, Christ our Messiah!

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:
Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
“Yeshua” King Messiah forever and ever

Notes