

Psalm 147:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD.

Analysis

The final verse of Psalm 147 concludes the psalm and transitions toward the cosmic praise of Psalm 150: 'He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly.' The phrase 'sendeth forth his commandment' (meshallach imrato) portrays God's word as an agent executing divine will. The metaphor of the word 'running swiftly' (ratz me'od) anthropomorphizes divine action as rapid and unstoppable. This verse emphasizes that God's communication and command are not abstract concepts but active forces in the world. The phrase 'upon earth' grounds divine action in concrete reality, not merely in transcendent realms. The verse suggests that God's will is efficaciously carried out - His word accomplishes what He intends. This stands in contrast to human words, which may be ignored or ineffectual. The emphasis on swiftness suggests immediacy and power: when God speaks, effects follow. The verse moves from particular theological affirmations about God's character and relationship with those who fear Him to a universal affirmation about God's active governance of creation through His word.

Historical Context

The concept of God's word as an active force appears in Isaiah 55:10-11, where the word goes out from God's mouth and 'shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.' This theological understanding informed Jewish meditation on the Logos (divine word) and influenced early Christian theology, particularly the Prologue to John's

Gospel ('In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'). In Second Temple Judaism, the concept of God's word (dabar YHWH) was sometimes personified as an agent of God's will. The verse's emphasis on swiftness may relate to divine immediacy - God is not distant or slow to act but present and effective. The transition from human piety (those who fear God and hope in His mercy, verse 11) to cosmic governance (God's word running swiftly over all the earth, verse 20) suggests that human reverence and divine action coexist in a unified system of meaning. The verse leads naturally toward Psalm 148, which calls all creation to praise.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that God's word 'runneth very swiftly,' and how does this describe divine action?
2. How does personifying God's word as an agent relate to understanding God's will and purpose?
3. Why does the psalm conclude with emphasis on God's active governance rather than with further imperatives to praise?
4. In what ways does the swiftness of God's word contrast with human experience of delayed justice or answers to prayer?
5. How should understanding God's word as an active, effective force shape our understanding of Scripture and revelation?

Interlinear Text

ל	א	שָׁהַ	לְכָל	כִּי	אַתָּה	וּמְשֻׁפֵּט	יְמִ
H3808	He hath not dealt	H3651	H3605	so with any nation	and as for his judgments		
	H6213			H1471		H4941	
בְּלֹ	בְּ	יְדָעָה	בְּלֹלֶל	בְּ	יְהֹהָ		
H1077	they have not known	H3045	H1984	them Praise	ye the LORD	H3050	

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 5:8 (References Lord): For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

Ephesians 2:12 (Parallel theme): That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

Acts 26:27 (Parallel theme): King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

Acts 14:16 (Parallel theme): Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.