A MULTIDIMENSIONAL SUPERSTRUCTURE

The Burj Khalifa in Dubai is the tallest building in the world, standing 2,716 feet (828 m) tall. The extraordinary weight and height require a massive foundation in the sandy soil to support the superstructure against earthquakes and wind. The foundation consists of a gigantic concrete-and-steel mat, which is approximately 12 feet (3.7 m) thick and extends over roughly 48,400 square feet (4,500 sq. m.). In addition to the large surface area, the foundation piles extend 164 feet (50 m) belowground to rest on a layer of very hard rock and help evenly distribute the weight of the building and prevent the foundation from sinking or shifting over time.

Every building and organization needs a solid foundation. Societies around the world are built on various foundational governing principles, ideals, and concepts, without which they cannot function properly. Even so, none of them have lasted forever. Empires, kingdoms, governments, and societies all rise and eventually fall.

The government of the universe, the kingdom of God, is the largest and most important organization in existence. Its territory includes all of reality in all dimensions, in eternity past and eternity future. Just like the Burj Khalifa needs a massive foundation to stand secure, a superstructure of such infinite magnitude as God’s government needs a foundation that’s just as eternal, enduring, and powerful as God Himself in order to withstand the “earthquakes” of Satan’s claims against God’s rulership. The ingredients to the metaphorical concrete that makes up this universal super-foundation will be the focus of this week’s study.
Write out Psalm 97 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out verses 1–6. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
“The LORD reigns” (Ps. 97:1). Your emotional response to this statement depends on who you think “the LORD” is and what you think He’s like. If the verse said, “Hitler reigns,” it would certainly not trigger any positive reaction. If it said, “Mother Theresa reigns,” you might have questions, but you wouldn’t feel the same way you felt with Hitler. Fortunately, the author of this psalm assures us that this Lord is, in fact, God (v. 9b) and that His reign is cause for rejoicing and gladness. In contrast, Satan denies God’s goodness and poses questions about His character and intentions (e.g., Gen. 3:1, 4, 5; Job 1:9–11). Satan suggests doubts to undermine God’s leadership and ultimately overthrow Him and His kingdom (Isa. 14:13, 14).

Who is the Lord that He should be King? What guides His rulership? According to the Psalmist, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His [God’s] throne” (Ps. 97:2, emphasis added). Righteousness can be understood as being morally right or justifiable. It’s a standard of conduct based on principles of fairness, honesty, and integrity. To be righteous is to behave in a way that’s consistent with these principles, doing what’s right and good. If God’s kingship is marked by righteousness, it means He’s in perfect harmony with the law that defines what is right and good. As the Creator, all law, whether moral or natural, are expressions of who He is. If righteousness is the foundation of God’s throne, there simply cannot be any inconsistencies with God—no hypocrisy, no double standards. God is and always will be who He says He is. He does not change (Mal. 3:6). Righteousness is God’s perfect character of love (Ps. 18:30; 1 John 4:8) and holiness (Rev. 4:8) on display through all He is and does.

Justice is the quality of being fair and equitable. It’s a standard of behavior that ensures that all are treated impartially and receive what they’re due according to the law. Justice is the process by which laws are applied in a fair manner. If righteousness is God’s heart expressed, justice is righteousness at work on the law’s behalf.

A kingdom in which the King rules with righteousness and justice is almost impossible to imagine on this earth, yet the psalmist sees with prophetic vision King Jesus caring for the entire universe in this very way. His benevolent heart beats for His creations, and from this profound love He has made an incredible promise: each of us can choose to be a citizen in His kingdom, despite our sins, because He has made a way to declare us righteous (Ps. 97:12).

Just as “the mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD” (v. 5), so too will Satan’s lies and false depictions of God as an unfair ruler and tyrant melt in the light of His goodness and truth. God has revealed Himself and His character to this fallen world in Jesus. Therefore, “rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name” (v. 12), for He rules with righteousness and justice, love and truth.
WORSHIP THAT IS WORTH IT

Worship plays a major part in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Isaiah 14:13 tells us Satan desired God’s throne because he wished to use that symbol of power to obtain the worship and allegiance of its subjects, but could God’s throne alone provide this coveted loyalty? Psalm 97:7 calls all people to worship God exclusively. What is worship, then, and what makes someone worthy of worship? Would a magnificent, awe-inducing, spectacular appearance alone do the trick?

Merriam-Webster defines worship as “reverence offered [to] a divine being or supernatural power.” Historically, the word worship is connected to the word “worth,” meaning to hold in honor, esteem, show respect for, or revere. In other words, to worship is to ascribe special worth to someone or something. As the only Being with the power to create from nothing, God is, ex officio, worthy of worship (Rev. 4:11). In addition to creating matter and life in the past, God also continues to sustain and uphold life every day (Acts 17:28). Worshiping God acknowledges total dependence on Him for all things. All life depends on His daily willingness to provide continued lifeforce to His creations. We’ve seen that God’s reign is one of righteousness and justice—a cause for great rejoicing (Ps. 97:1, 2). Because God is Creator and Sustainer, He can ensure that true righteousness and justice are established throughout His universe.

If there is only one Creator and therefore only one God, worshiping other gods is truly a deluded and meaningless effort. Satan on the throne never could provide justice, righteousness, and life to sustain all of creation. He simply has nothing to offer that makes him worthy of true worship, yet false gods and idols have been around since humanity’s fall. We crave them because we cannot live without worship. Whether carved images, distorted or false religions, iconic people, attention-grabbing objects, or simply the exaltation of self, Satan has invented many ways to keep humanity busy in false worship. He keeps us running in ultimately meaningless circles in pursuit of life, purpose, healing, truth, direction, and help, and he seems quite successful in his deceptions.

Psalm 97 shouts into this darkness, foreshadowing the first angel’s message of Revelation 14: Recognize and worship the only One who can and will provide you with all you need and more! Only the Lord is worthy, for He alone is Creator!
What relationship do the following verses have with Psalm 97?

Nehemiah 9:5, 6
Psalm 89:14
Psalm 93:1, 2
Psalm 99
Isaiah 9:7
Isaiah 33:22
Revelation 4

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from Psalm 97.
HIS KINGDOM: ALREADY, BUT NOT YET

Psalm 97 exalts the Lord as the only true God, the King of the universe who rules with righteousness and justice, love and truth—qualities most people would like to see in their heads of state and the laws of their lands. God calls those who are loyal to His kingdom “saints,” “righteous,” and “upright in heart” (vv. 10, 11). These are the citizens who rejoice in His decision-making (v. 8), who love Him and hate evil (v. 10). If this described everybody, we might have a perfectly harmonious society!

God’s kingdom has not yet become perfectly united. Jesus has not yet returned surrounded by clouds, preceded by fire, lightning, and earthquakes, and greeted by mountains melting away at His presence as all the earth sees His glory (vv. 2–6). As you’ve been studying this week’s lesson, you may have been longing for a place where truth and love are the foundation of life. Take heart—it will come soon! This is our great hope. By faith, we look forward to that moment, and by faith, we live today on this side of eternity. However, God did not command us to simply wait and hope. Jesus powerfully proclaimed, “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). As we joyfully surrender to Him and become citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), His Spirit works a transformation of the heart through which we not only learn to appreciate more and more of God’s rulership and law but also develop a character in harmony with His rulership. Our words and actions begin to reflect God’s kingdom of righteousness and justice even now in our sphere of sinful influence.

Lucifer wanted a kingdom of a different order. Anyone who wonders what the universe would be like with Satan on the throne must look no further than the atrocities and horrors of this world (John 8:44) while holding no hope for righteousness, justice, or eternal life. Destruction, chaos, and death uphold that reign. Force, lies, and brutality motivate that worship. What a contrast to our loving God, and what an easy choice to make when God is seen in truth!

All who “love the Lord” and “hate evil” (Ps. 97:10) can have the assurance that Jesus delivers and preserves them. “Light is sown” (v. 11) where before there was only darkness. In full harmony with His righteousness and justice, Jesus declares us righteous, so that today and throughout eternity we will continually “rejoice in the Lord... and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name” (v. 12). Indeed, the whole universe will worship God for His incredible goodness.
**THE MOST MARVELOUS VEIN OF PRECIOUS TRUTH**

“The apostle Paul exclaims: ‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!’ But though ‘clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.’ [Revised Version.] We can so far comprehend His dealing with us, and the motives by which He is actuated, that we may discern boundless love and mercy united to infinite power. We can understand as much of His purposes as it is for our good to know; and beyond this we must still trust the might of the Omnipotent, the love and wisdom of the Father and Sovereign of all.” (Ellen G. White, _Testimonies for the Church_, vol. 5 [1882, 699.)

“In all His dealings with His creatures God has maintained the principles of righteousness by revealing sin in its true character—by demonstrating that its sure result is misery and death. The unconditional pardon of sin never has been, and never will be. Such pardon would show the abandonment of the principles of righteousness, which are the very foundation of the government of God. It would fill the unfallen universe with consternation. God has faithfully pointed out the results of sin, and if these warnings were not true, how could we be sure that His promises would be fulfilled? That so-called benevolence which would set aside justice, is not benevolence, but weakness.

“God is the life-giver. From the beginning, all His laws were ordained to life. But sin broke in upon the order that God had established, and discord followed. So long as sin exists, suffering and death are inevitable. It is only because the Redeemer has borne the curse of sin in our behalf, that man can hope to escape, in his own person, its dire results.

“We are to accept of Christ as our personal Saviour, and He imputes unto us the righteousness of God in Christ.... ‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins’ (1 John 4:10).

“In the love of God has been opened the most marvelous vein of precious truth, and the treasures of the grace of Christ are laid open before the church and the world.... What love is this, what marvelous, unfathomable love that would lead Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners. What a loss it is to the soul who understands the strong claims of the law, and who yet fails to understand the grace of Christ which doth much more abound.... Look at the cross of Calvary. It is a standing pledge of the boundless love, the measureless mercy of the heavenly Father.

“There is a God in Israel, with whom is deliverance for all that are oppressed. Righteousness is the habitation of His throne.” (Ellen G. White, _God’s Amazing Grace_ [1973], 73.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How have you learned to trust God as your Ruler? What’s holding you back from trusting Him fully?

How can we live and speak in a way that encourages more people to trust God’s leadership?

What is God’s justice, and how does it relate to His righteousness?

How does Psalm 97 portray the relationship between God and His creations?

What kind of alternative kingdom and rulership does Satan offer?

What makes God worthy of worship to you?

What are some idols and gods in today’s world?

As citizens of God’s kingdom, how can we demonstrate righteousness and justice in our lives and earthly communities?

How does the idea of God’s government being built on righteousness and justice challenge our societal structures and practices?