

Psalm 47: A Celebration of Jehovah as the King of all the Earth

Introduction

The author of this Psalm is not named, although many believe it to be David; its original human author is relatively unimportant: its ultimate author is God the Holy Spirit. Like its human author, the original occasion of its composition is not known; it clearly refers to a time of jubilant celebration in the life of the nation of Israel: maybe some great victory over their enemies, or possibly the journey of the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-edom up to Mount Zion (this latter event certainly seems to be indicated in verse 5); again, its historical setting is secondary to the spiritual truths which are set forth for the instruction of God's people in all generations.

Verse 1

"O clap your hands, all ye people, shout unto God with the voice of triumph". The Hebrew word here translated "people" is in the plural and should be translated "peoples". Whatever the original occasion of the Psalm, the celebrations were to involve **all the nations**, because what God originally did for His people Israel was, ultimately, for the benefit of **all nations**. Israel was always meant to be God's instrument for bringing about blessing to all the nations. The promise given to Abraham was that **in his seed** – "which is Christ" (Galatians 3:16) **all the nations of the earth** should be blessed (Genesis 22:18). In Ephesians chapter 3, Paul speaks of the mystery (verse 3) which "has now been revealed to (God's) holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; that the Gentiles are **fellow heirs** and **fellow members of the body**, and **fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus** through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:5-6, NASB). It was always God's intention that Jesus' victory on the cross should embrace **all peoples**. Jesus is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of **the world**" (John 1:29); so believers can rejoice together, irrespective of their nationality, in their common salvation and common Saviour.

Verse 2

"For the LORD (Jehovah) most high is terrible; he is a great king over all the earth". Our celebrations are to be directed first and foremost not to the **victory**, but to **the Victor – God Himself**, the great King over all the earth. We rightly glory in our "so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:3), but, supremely, our glorying should be in the Lord, the one who accomplished that salvation for us: "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13, NKJV). He is Jehovah Most High, who is **awesome** in His being, and worthy of our highest praises: "Great is the LORD (Jehovah), and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable" (Psalm 145:3). His rule extends over **all the nations of the earth**, and all nations should join in praising our sovereign Lord: "The LORD (Jehovah) is great **in Zion**; and He is exalted above **all the peoples**. Let them praise Thy great and awesome name; holy is He" (Psalm 99:2, NASB).

Verse 3

“He shall subdue the people (again plural: “peoples”) under us, and the nations under our feet”. The nation of Israel was able to conquer the nations that occupied the land of Canaan because Jehovah, the great king over all the earth, was **their** all-powerful Leader. Elsewhere in the Psalms, similar words are used prophetically of the Messiah, to refer to the subjection of the nations under His future rule: Psalm 2:8-9, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen (nations) for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel”. It is in the name of Christ, our victorious, risen and ascended Head, that His church goes forth with the Gospel to conquer the nations and bring them to “the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:26).

Verse 4

“He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved”. The land which God gave to the nation of Israel was the land of Canaan. This land was promised to Abraham and Jacob and the other patriarchs as a possession for their physical descendants: “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8). The inheritance given to the nation of Israel was a type of the far more glorious inheritance which God has in store for Abraham and Jacob’s spiritual seed (“which is Christ”, and all those who are united to Him “[who] is the head of the body, the church” – Colossians 1:18), and **this inheritance** will never be taken from us, because it has been secured for us by the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ: “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto (a) salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice” (1 Peter 1:4-6). And the reason for God giving us this inheritance is simply because He loves us. Here we have God’s special, electing love, as exemplified in the person of Jacob: “I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau” (Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:13). This electing love of God is not due to anything in us. God doesn’t love us **because we are special**, we are special **because He loves us**.

Then, at the end of this section, we have this little word “Selah”, which occurs a number of times in the Psalms. No one is quite sure exactly what it means; the best guess is that it is likely a musical term, perhaps indicating a **pause** in the singing. What do **you** do when you come across this word when you are reading a Psalm? Well, this is what **I** do, and I think it’s a very good idea: “**pause, and ponder**”; take some time to consider what you have just read; chew it over in your mind, and let it sink into your heart. If you do, I’m sure it will repay the effort.

Verse 5

“God is gone up (ascended) with a shout, the LORD (Jehovah) with the sound of a trumpet”. After His victory, as described in the first four verses, the King ascends to His throne amidst great acclamation. The original setting may well have been the ascent of the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-edom (whose name means “worker of red” or “ruddy servant”) up to Mount Zion. What a wonderful picture this gives us of our Lord Jesus Christ who, as the suffering **servant**, shed His **red blood** on the cross, and then, having made atonement for sin, rose victorious over death and hell, and ascended up on high to “the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Hebrews 8:1): “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men”

(Psalm 68:18). As a result of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, He has "spoiled principalities and powers" (Colossians 2:15); Satan, the accuser of the brethren, has been cast out (Revelation 12:9-10; John 12:31); the strong man has been bound and his house spoiled (Matthew 12:29); the dragon, that old serpent, the devil, Satan, has been bound (Revelation 20:2) and cast into the abyss of the bottomless pit where he is unable to deceive the nations any more as the gospel is proclaimed throughout the world, until his final little season (Revelation 20:3). No wonder there was shouting and trumpet blast when Christ ascended in triumph to sit with His Father in His throne (Revelation 3:21). One day there will be another shout and another trumpet blast when He who ascended into heaven will "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Verse 6

"Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises". This is a time of great celebration for the people of God, and indeed for all the hosts of heaven. We are given a picture of the celebrations of heaven, after the ascension of Christ, in Revelation chapter 5; there we see every creature gathered around the throne in heaven and singing, "Worthy is the Lamb" (verse 12). The celebrations of heaven are to be echoed in the praises of God's people here on earth: "Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH (a shortened form of "Jehovah"), and rejoice before him" (Psalm 68:4). Our victorious God and King is worthy of our highest praises.

Verse 7

"For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding". Once again, as we noticed in the first three verses, the **multi-national nature** of God's kingdom is described. God is the King of all the earth, and **all His creatures** are to give Him the praise and worship which is His due: "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands (all the earth): sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious" (Psalm 66:1). This verse also adds another dimension to our worship: our praises are to be sung "with understanding", literally "in a Maschil": this term is used in the headings of a number of Psalms of instruction, e.g. Psalms 32, 42, 44, etc., and the Hebrew word means "to be prudent, wise, intelligent, to instruct, to understand". This use of **the understanding** when we sing is echoed in the New Testament by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:15, "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also".

Among the uses of Psalm and hymn-singing is that of instruction: Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; **teaching and admonishing one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord". The hymns that we sing should be full of **truth**, and when we sing them, we should make full use of our minds. As we focus our attention on the words we are singing, the Holy Spirit enlightens the eyes of our understanding so that our hearts are affected and our tongues are loosened, to give joyful, acceptable praise to God, in spirit and in truth. Or, the hymn we are singing may be of a more solemn or admonishing character,

and, as the Holy Spirit enables us to meditate upon the words, we are moved to sing in a more thoughtful and reflective manner. Whatever the character of the hymn we are singing, we shouldn't let our tongues run away from our understandings, and we shouldn't get carried away by the "nice tune". "We must not be guided by the **time**, but the **words** of the Psalm; we must mind the *matter* more than the *music*, and consider *what* we sing, as well as *how* we sing; the *tune* may affect the *fancy*, but it is the *matter* that affects the *heart*, and *that* God principally eyes" (John Wells, as quoted in Spurgeon's "Treasury of David"). Augustine famously said, "As oft as the song (the tune) delights me more than that which is sung (the words), so oft I confess I sin grievously". Self-indulgent **singing** is self-indulgent **sinning**. Sing hymns as you would read them, observing the punctuation, and paying intelligent attention to the **words** you are singing rather than the **voice** with which you are singing them – you don't need to have a beautiful singing voice in order to sing God's praises: the Lord looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

When we gather together for worship, perhaps it would be helpful for us if we were to take time to look at the words of the hymns we are due to sing before the service starts; of course, this would mean arriving for the service in good time and sitting quietly before the Lord. At Whiddon Valley we have a "Lord's Day Covenant", which reads, in part: "I SHALL ENDEAVOUR MY UTMOST... to arrive 15 minutes before time; to be seated 10 minutes before time for QUIET MEDITATION in the Sanctuary; to subdue all conversation and noise; to discipline my children to do likewise. So, help me, God!". If we all sought, by God's grace, to give heed to the words of this covenant and thus prepare our hearts before the service, what a difference it would make to our gathering together for the supreme act of the human soul – the worship of almighty God.

"Fools rush in, where angels fear to tread" is a saying that could be applied to our gathering together for the worship of the thrice-holy God; or, to put that saying into Biblical language, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil" (Ecclesiastes 5:1). And if all this sounds like a lot of hard work and effort, then listen to what king David said at the end of 2 Samuel: "neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD (Jehovah) my God of that which cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24). Our worship and service to the Lord should cost us something. Our God is worth all the time and effort that we put in to make sure we come before His presence and sing His praises in a worthy manner.

Verse 8

"God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness". Even God's enemies are subject to His rule, and no one is able to thwart His plans: "(his) dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:34-35).

God's throne is holy because the one who sits on it is holy, and He is to be worshiped "in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 96:9); "holiness becometh thine house, O LORD (Jehovah), for ever" (Psalm 93:5).

Verse 9

“The princes of the people (plural, “peoples”) are gathered together, even (or, “as”) the people (singular) of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted”. The nations of the world are represented here by their leaders: “The princes of the peoples”... “the shields of the earth”. Once again we are told that one day **all the nations** would be gathered together to be the people of God. Through Him who is Abraham’s seed (Christ), elect from every nation are become the people of the God of Abraham. God’s purpose has always been that, in Christ, He would have a people for Himself gathered from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. This was something the proud Jews struggled to accept, and, as a result, they were reluctant to welcome the early Gentile converts into the church on an equal basis, without the need for them to become Jews and be circumcised. The Jews thought that God loved them because they were special in and of themselves. But, as I said earlier, God doesn’t love His elect people **because they are special**, they are special **because God loves them**.

The Psalm ends with the words, “he is greatly exalted”. The fact that a great multitude from all nations are entering into the Kingdom of God, and acknowledging Jesus as their King, brings great glory to God. King Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the throne of God; and one day, all men will acknowledge that “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:11) – better to do so willingly **now**, than have to do so unwillingly when He returns.

So then: let us bow the knee to King Jesus; let us “**Exalt** the LORD (Jehovah) our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD (Jehovah) our God is holy” (Psalm 99:9); “O magnify the LORD (Jehovah) with me, and let us **exalt his name together**” (Psalm 34:3). Amen.