

“God’s Rule over the Nations”

Lesson Text: Psalm 47:1-9

Background Scripture: Psalm 47:1-9

Devotional Reading: Colossians 1:27 Psalms 47:1-9

Psalm 47:1-9

¹ Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. ² For the Lord Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth. ³ He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. ⁴ He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.

⁵ God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. ⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. ⁷ For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.

⁸ God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. ⁹ The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 11:3-5 says that God’s Spirit “shall make him (Messiah) of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his reins.”

We do not see much true justice in the world today because there is no way for human judges to know the facts without doubt. It is common for witnesses to promise to tell nothing but the truth but then to lie under examination. Lying, in fact, has become so commonplace in today’s world that it is no longer considered wrong.

What a difference there will be when Jesus Christ is ruling on earth in Jerusalem! As Isaiah explained; He will not be bound by witnesses say or by physical evidences. Since Jesus is God, He is omniscient, just like His Father, meaning He already knows all things without being told.

LESSON BACKGROUND **Time:** unknown **Place:** Judah

Psalm 47 lends itself to public worship and praise. Its enduring qualities are shown by its current place in the celebration of Rosh Hashanah (New Year’s Day) in some Jewish congregation today. By tradition, Psalm 47 is recited seven times before the blowing of the shofar (ram’s horn) to mark the beginning of the New Year and its celebration.

Psalm 47 is the fifth in a series of seven psalms associated with “the sons of Korah.” Descendants of Korah seem to have been important pioneers in the liturgical worship of the temple in Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 9:19; 2 Chronicles 20:19).

The psalms traditionally are divided into five “books.” Seven psalms of the sons of Korah begin Book II, which consists of Psalms 42-72. Originally, Psalms 42 and 43 were one unit, so the seven are 42/43, 44, 45, 46, 37, 48, and 49 (Psalms 84-88 comprise another collection of Korah psalms).

The superscription of Psalm 47 calls it A Psalm. By contrast, some other Korah psalms are identified as maschil. We are sure what a maschil is. One theory is that this title is given to song-poems of a personal, contemplative nature, while the designation A Psalm is attached to works written as expression of praise to God for use in public worship. We note, however, that Psalm 88 features both designations. Psalm 47, for its part, combines words of praise to the Lord with active participation from the congregation.

We do not know the precise historical context of Psalm 47, but it has allusions to the history of Israel. For example, the reference to “a trumpet” in verse 5 reminds us of the miraculous victory of Joshua over the walled city of Jericho (Joshua 6). The psalm, then, combines praise of God with a patriotic celebration of the victories of the nation of Israel.

TODAY’S AIM

- **Facts:** to show that God is on the throne and all the nations of the earth are under His control.
- **Principle:** to state that God is over all the nations of the earth.
- **Application:** to demonstrate that we have nothing to fear, for our God is absolutely in charge of all the nations of the world.

CELEBRATING GOD’S REIGN (Psalm 47:1-4)

Many bible scholars refer to this psalm as a royal, or an enthronement, psalm because it portrays the Lord as the King of earth. It seems that the authors, again said to be the sons of Korah, spoke in prophetic statement expressing future certainty. At the time they wrote these words, it was true that God was in charge of the earth and, as such, ruled over it. However, there is a millennial fulfillment coming in which the Lord Jesus Christ will literally reign on earth.

1. Why do Bible scholars refer to Psalm 47 as a royal psalm (Psalm 47:1)?

Clapping for the Lord (v.1)

There are certain human practices that predate recorded history because they are instinctive. We smile. We laugh. We cry. We stomp our feet. And we slap the palms of our hands together to make noise. Clapping, among other things, is an auditory gauge as measured by its loudness and length. Clapping is a physical act that requires active involvement.

This is a participatory psalm. It is not intended to be droned out in a monotone voice to an unresponsive crowd. It begins by encouraging the worshippers to clap and shout. Such crowd noise is reminiscent of the celebration after a military victory. It is not praise for an army, though, but a tribute to the mighty God of Israel.

Verse 2 uses some fabulous descriptions for God. The Bible’s first use of the title “*Lord most high*” appears in the record of Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek, the king of Salem (Jerusalem; Genesis 14:18). During this episode, Abraham confessed an oath to “*the Lord, the most high God*” (Genesis 14:22). The sense of this phrase is not to say that the God of Israel is the greatest among a large group of competing gods. It is to affirm, rather that the Lord is on a unique plane and has no rivals.

2. What evidence do we see today that God is “King over all the earth” (vs.2)?

Psalm 47:2 describes the Lord as “awesome.” In this context, the word awesome (or terrible in the KJV), denotes the one who strikes terror in those who encounter Him. This is not terror associated with a fear of evil, but a reverential awe of the mighty power of God. Describing as “awesome” is a way of saying that He commands great reverence because He is so awesome. He inspires awe in those who contemplate Him. We often tend to be too reserved to let ourselves rejoice with enthusiastic clapping and shouting. In that day our joy will be so great it will be unhindered.

The second line of verse 2 affirms the unlimited sovereignty of God. The description great king is sometimes extended to earthly, human kings in the Bible (compare 2 Kings 18:19, Ezra 5:11). In an absolute sense, however, God is the ultimate king, the unrivaled and unquestioned king of the universe (see Malachi 1:14). We are wise to remember that while we may have an intimate, personal relationship with God, He is still the King of Kings and Lords of lords (see Timothy 6:15).

The end of verse 2 expresses the fact that God “*is a great King over all the earth.*” This explains the call for all people to express joy by clapping their hands and shouting to God with expressions of triumph.

Notice that the call is not restricted to Israel but includes all those living on earth. The day is coming when He will rule as described.

3. What did the psalm writers mean when they referred to God as “awesome” (v.2)?

Verses 3-4 are set in the future tense (shall), but they have larger sense: the people’s anticipation of great victories in the future are based on the mighty triumphs in the past. This is what allows them to expect God’s continuing assurance of protection and success.

It is clear that the writers of Psalm 47 had Israel in mind in verses 3-4, as seen in the words “us,” “our feet,” “our inheritance,” and “the excellency of Jacob whom he loved.” The exaltation of Israel began when God chose Israel as His special nation. We have seen its complete fulfillment in history, however; so there is a time coming when Israel will be the dominant nation of the world. Historically, it might also be that these verses have reverence to Israel’s conquest of Canaan under Joshua.

With peace comes prosperity. Rather than worry about the looming threat of war caused by a foreign invasion, the people can truly look to enjoyment of their inheritance, a land chosen for them by God (v. 4). This is a marvelous heritage, worthy of celebration with all the clapping and shouting that the crowd can muster!

4. How is the psalmist’s faith seen in the statement in verses 3-4? How can we demonstrate similar faith?

UNDERSTANDING GOD’S REIGN (Psalms 47:5-9)

The psalm now moves to a celebratory picture drawn from the world of military acclamation. After a great victory, the Israelite army would march back to Jerusalem in triumph. Upon approaching and entering the city, the army naturally would ascend the “holy hill” to the temple, the focal point of the city (Psalm 24:3; 43:3). In this case, the ascending victor is an army of one, God, for it is the Lord who has gone up to the applause and shout of the crowd and with the ringing “sound of a trumpet.” The scene being pictured is one of near pandemonium, of joy and exuberance directed to God for His victory.

We speak sometimes of the “roar of the crowd” as when a collection of people has a single voice like a lion. You might have experienced this in a large sports stadium when an unexpected yet brilliant play on the field moves the crowd to a spontaneous combination of yelling, whistling, stomping, and clapping. The people rise to their feet as one without any direction. You can feel a wave of emotion sweep the stadium. It can bring goose bumps to any spectator.

To be recognized in this way is breathtaking for the shouters and for the player who caused the uproar. To be the focus of the loud, spontaneous praise of 50,000 fans is a thrill like no other. This is the phenomenon that the psalm describes here, but all the praise and focus is for the Lord.

In the same manor, our worship celebrations are our recognition of Jesus’ victory over death. The shout and trumpet also remind us of the description of the Lord’s return in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, where we read, “*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.*” This refers to the rapture, when God will begin a process of events beyond mankind’s control, leading to His later return to earth to establish His kingdom.

5. How is God seen as a victorious warrior (v. 5)?

Four times here the words “*sing praises*” are given. The Hebrew word translated “sing” is *zamar*. It can refer to singing or playing a musical instrument. It is defined as “sing, sing praise, and make music” (Harris, Archer, and Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Moody). Thus we understand that there are various ways in which we can offer praises to the Lord. The important thing is that we praise Him!

However, there is a qualifier here: the people are enjoined to sing praises “with understanding” (1 Corinthians 14:15). If a time of praise devolves into mindless chaos, the purpose is lost. Some may enjoy

such bedlam, but praise without focus and understanding is not what this psalm is advocating. The more we know about God, the more effective and satisfying our times of praise will be. We do not need to park our intellect at the door when we come to praise the Lord. We should bring both our heads and our hearts to the service of praise.

6. *The psalmist calls upon us to sing praises to God (vs. 6-7). What does it mean to the psalmist mean to “sing praises with understanding?”*

The psalm moves toward its conclusion with a picture of God enthroned in holiness. His reign is not confined to Israel, but extends to pagan nations. The psalmist does not make the mistake of elevating his own nation, Israel, to a position of power over all the nations of the earth. To do so would be historically inaccurate and doctrinally erroneous. Israel is never a dominating world power, even during its heyday of Solomon. Ancient Israel never challenges Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, or Rome for word domination.

What a lesson for every believer! “*God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne*” (v. 8). No matter what you might be facing right now, it is all under the control of God’s almighty hand. It is easy to accept this when circumstances are good, but we must remember that the same truth holds in unpleasant and trying circumstances.

7. *In what sense is God King over the “nations” who reject Him (v. 8)? Why should this be a comfort to us?*

The psalm pictures a gathering of all nations at the throne of God. This might be a reference to leaders of the various countries on earth during the millennium (compare Revelation 7:9). Israel is among them, “even the people of the God of Abraham.” These many nations are represented by their princes and their shields. In this context, these two terms are equivalent. The legitimate king of any nation has an obligation to protect his people from foreign invasion, and thus is a shield to that nation’s sovereignty. However, all of these guardians are subservient to the dominant, all-powerful reign of God. There is no shield from His wrath and no challenge to His authority.

The final line of the psalm is a fitting summation: he is greatly exalted. The reality of God’s exaltation is not in question, only our understanding of it. At some point, however, we must confess our inadequacy to comprehend fully the reign of God over the earth (see Romans 11:33). Our limited understanding does not lessen God’s eternal power. When words fail and comprehension falters, we may always fall back on praise. We may yield to our inborn, created function and give Him all the honor and glory of which we are capable.

8. *What hope does verse 9 give us? Should we expect great numbers of people to turn to the Lord as the end of time approaches? Explain.*

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God’s awe-inspiring nature demands praise from all people (Psalm 47:1,2).
2. God’s work on behalf of Israel is proof that He is compassionate and faithful (vs. 3,4).
3. One of our primary responsibilities is to acknowledge God’s works with praise (vs. 5,6).
4. Nothing is beyond God’s rule and control; He is worthy of our praise and commitment (vs. 7,8).
5. It is comforting to know that all the powers of the earth are under God’s control, whether they realize it or not (v.9).

CONCLUSION

National Praise

The history of Israel itself proves how difficult is to burn back the clock when religious decline begins. As the kings of Israel and Judah became unfaithful, their nations followed. Reforms under righteous kings like Hezekiah didn’t last.

The doctrines and purpose of Psalm 47 remain unchanged though. It still has a place in the worship of God's people, the church. Here we can sing and praise to our utmost. We can be told repeatedly to "sing praises" and agree by our joyous obedience. And we know that the final picture of the psalm still rings true. Our God is more than the God of ancient Israel whom Christians have adopted. He is, rather, the God over all nations and all princes and all people. This is true whether the leaders and citizens of any given nation choose to acknowledge it or not. He is the only God, the true God. May we sing His praises!

PRAYER

O Lord God, all-powerful Ruler of the universe, to You we bring our praise and honor. May You reign from the mighty throne of Your holiness and from the tiny thrones of our hearts. May our clapping and shouting be for Your glory. We pray this in the name of Your Son, Jesus, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Bring joyous praise to His throne.