



## Psalm 117 - Universal Call to Worship

### Introduction

This short hymn invites all nations to praise the Lord. The Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness is pledged to Israel but is intended for the entire world; hence the Gentiles addressed are included in the word 'us'. The calling of Israel was for the sake of the whole world, and the OT constantly nurtures the hope that a day will come when the Gentiles will gladly join in worshipping the one true God.

When Israel sang this in faith, they would recall both their privileged position and their reason for existence. Paul quotes v.1 in Romans 15:11 as part of his argument for Jewish and Gentile Christians welcoming one another and worshipping together: the long-awaited time has arrived.

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord, all you nations!  
Extol him, all you peoples!

### Psalm 117:1

**Praise the Lord.** Previous psalms called on Israel to give praise to Yahweh, but here **all** the Gentile **nations** are called to praise Him. This showed a largeness of heart that God intended Israel to have from the beginning, understanding that in Abraham all the peoples of the world were to be blessed; refer to Genesis 12:3. Charles Spurgeon commented, "The Psalm was an intimation to Israel that the grace and mercy of their God were not to be confined to one nation, but would in happier days be extended to all the race of man."

Since this is one of the five Hallel Psalms (113-118), sung as part of the Passover service, Jesus sang Psalm 117 with his disciples; refer to Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26. Therefore, on the eve of his crucifixion, it is known that Jesus had all the peoples, all the Gentiles in mind. Through his work on the Cross and victory over death at the empty tomb, God would call a people to himself from every tribe and tongue.

Extol him, all you peoples! To extol or laud is to say praiseworthy things about a person. The psalmist called upon all peoples to praise God intelligently, thinking of reasons why he is worthy of worship. Some suggest that all you peoples refers to the Jewish people, but Paul's quotation of v.1 in Romans 15:11 leads most commentators to believe that this is a call to the nations. This is also demonstrated in that the word for peoples has in sense all the tribes of the earth; this a strong missionary psalm.

<sup>2</sup> For great is his steadfast love towards us,  
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever.  
Praise the Lord!

### Psalm 117:2

For great is his steadfast love towards us. In thinking of reasons to praise God, first listed is because of his great *hesed*, his merciful kindness. The Hebrew actually has his *hesed hesed*, with the idea of God's loyal, covenant love repeated twice for emphasis. That so great a love and mercy is poured out on his people is further reason for praise; not only that God has great loving kindness, but that it is toward his people, indeed towards all of humankind. By us the psalmist has in mind Israel and the all peoples as mentioned in the previous verse.

Derek Kidner shared this view, "It may also be that the 'us' of verse 2 has already found room for the 'you' implied in verse 1, by seeing Israelites and Gentiles as one people under God."

The faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever. God is to be praised not only for his loyal love, but also for his faithfulness, literally 'his truth'. His ever-enduring truth means that he will not change in his love and goodness towards those who love him. When mercy and truth are praised together like this, it is always a reminder that: <<*The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*>> (John 1:17).

Praise the Lord! Once again, all peoples are called to say, *Hallelujah!*

Martin Luther devoted thirty-six pages to this psalm, expounding it in four important categories:

1. Prophecy - the Gentiles will participate in Gospel blessings.
2. Revelation - the Kingdom of Christ is not earthly and temporal but rather heavenly and eternal: <<*Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here'*>> (John 18:36).
3. Instruction - Christians are saved by faith alone and not by works, wisdom, or holiness.
4. Admonition - Christians should praise God for such a great salvation.