



Psalm 47 - God's Rule over the Nations

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

Introduction

This psalm celebrates God's kingship, i.e. his rule over all the earth; refer to the comment made on Psalm 5:2. The promises to Abraham that all peoples will be blessed in him (Genesis 12:3), are founded on the fact that there is only one true God to whom all mankind owes love and loyalty. Psalms 93 and 96-99 have a similar theme as well.

The Korahites were Levites from the family of Kohath and were descended from Korah. By David's time it seems they served in the musical aspect of the temple worship (2 Chronicles 20:19). Korah led a rebellion of 250 community leaders against Moses during the wilderness days of the Exodus (Numbers Chapter 16). God judged Korah and his leaders and they all died, but the sons of Korah remained. Perhaps they were so grateful for this mercy that they became notable in Israel for praising God.

Psalm 47:1-4 - The Lord Is to Be Feared by All

The Lord loves Israel and gave them their heritage; but this was in order that all peoples might come to fear and love him. Thus God's subduing of the Canaanites is not his final word for the Gentiles. To clap hands is here an expression of exultation and joy.

- ¹ Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.

Psalm 47:1

Clap your hands. The clapping of hands draws attention to something, usually as an outward expression of inward joy. The Bible uses it both in a negative and

positive sense. There is both clapping for praise, such as in Psalm 47:1, Psalm 98:8, and Isaiah 55:12; and clapping in derision, seen in Job 27:23, Lamentations 2:15, and Nahum 3:19.

All you peoples. This is a command to more than Israel or followers of God; it is a command to all people. It is ultimately the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham to bless all the peoples of the earth through his descendant, the Messiah.

Shout to God. The note is strong and happy. The psalmist did not have in mind sleepy singing or whispered prayers. Most people are not against shouting or enthusiastic outbursts; they simply believe there is a right and wrong place for such shouting. Sadly, many who think a loud exclamation is fine at a football game think it is scandalous in the church.

² For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth.

Psalm 47:2

For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome. The psalmist presented this without proof as a self-evident fact. He considered it obvious to everyone, as much as water is wet and fire is hot.

A great king over all the earth. Both the office and the realm are important. He is a great King, in that he is the King of kings and the highest monarch. His realm extends over all the earth, and he is sovereign in all places. The pagan gods of the ancient world, e.g. Baal, Molech, Ashtoreth, and so forth, were imagined to be territorial gods. Their authority was limited to a nation or a region. The psalmist proclaimed that the Lord God is not like one of these imagined gods.

³ He subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.

⁴ He chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah

Psalm 47:3-4

He subdued peoples under us. Here the psalmist spoke as one of God's chosen nation, Israel. He looked forward to the time when the righteous reign of the great King would be exercised all over the earth, and Israel would assume its destined place of leadership among the nations. Without doubt, the psalmist knew that this great King would be the Messiah; yet he looked ahead to the hope of the Messiah. Christians look back at the fulfilment of the promise to send the Messiah, fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the great King who will rule the earth and subdue the

nations, granting believing Israel, i.e. the church of Christ, superpower status in the coming age.

He chose our heritage for us. The psalmist was confident in the wisdom and goodness of the great King. He was happy to let the great King choose his people's inheritance.

It is a glorious fact that Jesus has chosen the inheritance of his people. Ephesians 1:3-6 is just one passage that describes some of his choosing for them:

- He chose individuals in him before the foundation of the world.
- He chose his followers to be holy and blameless before him in love.
- He chose his followers to be adopted as sons into his family.

It is a wise prayer, to ask Jesus to choose the Christian inheritance for them. They often get into trouble by wanting to choose their own inheritance:

- They sometimes want to choose their own blessings. One has health, another has wealth, a third has great talents; each wishes they had what the other has. Yet it is far better to let God choose their blessings.
- They sometimes want to choose their own calling. One sees the calling of another and thinks that the calling of the other is better, or they want to imitate the calling of another instead of running their own race.
- They sometimes want to choose their own crosses. They think that their own problems are so much worse than others, and they think that they could bear any number of crosses, except the one he chose for them.

Charles Spurgeon thought that this was a psalm of David and not the sons of Korah; that David wrote it, but they sang it. He wrote, "Our ear has grown accustomed to the ring of David's compositions, and we are morally certain that we hear it in this psalm." This may or may not be true, but certainly David knew that his King chose his inheritance at each stage of his life, and he showed contentment with the inheritance God chose for him:

- As an anonymous shepherd boy.
- As a warrior against Goliath.
- As a fugitive running from Saul.
- As a king over Israel.
- As a disciplined sinner.

The pride of Jacob whom he loves. This explains why a Christian can be at peace with the inheritance he chooses for them. They know that for Jesus' sake and because they are in him, God is for them and not against them. He loves them as his chosen; because he chose them they are happy to let him choose our heritage for us.

Selah, used 71 times in the Book of Psalms and three times in Habakkuk, has never been fully understood because the Hebrew root word is undefined. Many take it to be an instruction related to either the music, such as an interlude, or the cadence of the song, e.g. stop and reflect.

Psalm 47:5-7 - Sing Praises to Our King

This probably looks back to the ark going to reside in Jerusalem; 2 Samuel 6:15 tells of how the ark was made to go up with a shout, as confirmed by Psalm 24. The Lord is Israel's acknowledged King and the rightful King of all the earth, to whom all ought to sing praises.

⁵ God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

Psalm 47:5

God has gone up with a shout. The going up here refers to ascending to a royal throne. The idea is that the great King has taken his throne and therefore receives a shout of praise. The idea is that God comes down from heaven to help and save his people, and when he goes back up to heaven he deserves praise and acclamation from his people. Jesus ascended the royal throne in heaven after he finished his work for humankind on the Cross and proved it by the empty tomb. He can only go up with a shout because he came down in humility to fight for his people and to save them.

The Lord with the sound of a trumpet. In the world of ancient Israel the trumpet made the strongest and clearest sound; it was the sound of victory. To honour God clearly and strongly for his victory on behalf of the human race, the sound of a trumpet is heard.

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 praises with a psalm.

Psalm 47:6-7

Sing praises. In this context, this is almost a command. It is a fitting command in light of the glory of the king of all the earth. God might have given speech to humanity without the gift of song; there are some tone-deaf people in the world. What is the case of some might have been the case of all; but God gave the gift of song and music to people, and the highest use of this gift is to praise the God who gave it.

The idea from the second verse is repeated for emphasis. God's glorious authority extends far beyond the land or people of Israel. He is the global God, the king of all the earth.

Sing praises with a psalm. Psalm is the Hebrew word *Maskil*. Praise is appropriately offered with singing and should also be made with understanding. God wants his people's worship to be intelligent and not mindless. It is not necessary to be smart to worship God, but Christians should worship him with all their being, including their minds: <<***you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength***>> (Mark 12:30).

All in all, this psalm reveals how Christians are to praise God: They should praise him:

- Cheerfully when they clap their hands as an expression of their inward joy.
- Universally together with all who should praise the Lord.
- Vocally as they shout unto God with the voice of triumph.
- Praise him frequently, as the idea of sing praises is repeated often. People cannot praise him too much.
- Praise him intelligently, as they are to sing praises with understanding and to know and proclaim the reasons for their praise.

Psalm 47:8-9 - God Reigns over All Nations

God's throne is his sanctuary in Jerusalem, from which he will extend his rule over the nations; the psalm looks forward to the time when the Gentile princes of the peoples gather for worship as the people of the God of Abraham, i.e. the people to whom the blessing of Abraham has finally come.

⁸ God is king over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.

Psalm 47:8

God is king over the nations. The Lord is not King of all the earth in only a passive or ceremonial sense. He reigns over the nations and moves history towards his desired destination.

God sits on his holy throne. When John had his heavenly experience as recorded in Revelation Chapters 4 and 5 he described everything in heaven in relation to this occupied throne. The centre of heaven - indeed, the centre of all creation - is this occupied throne in heaven:

- God sits upon the throne; it is not empty. He is no empty or ceremonial ruler.

- It is his throne; it belongs to him and to none other.
- It is a holy throne, where the holiness of God has been perfectly satisfied by the work of Jesus on the Cross. Therefore, it is both a holy throne and a throne of grace: <<**Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need**>> (Hebrews 4:16).

⁹ The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
he is highly exalted.

Psalm 47:9

The princes of the peoples gather. In the mind of the psalmist, the leaders of God's people gather to both receive and exalt the King of all the earth.

For the shields of the earth belong to God. The Septuagint translates this *hoi krataioi*, the strong ones of the earth. The words refer to something by which the inhabitants of the earth are defended; God's providence, guardian angels, etc. It is the abundant fulfilment of the promise of Genesis 12:3; it anticipates what Paul expounds of the inclusion of the Gentiles as Abraham's sons: <<**He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised**>> (Romans 4:11-12), and: <<**so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.'** For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed>> (Galatians 3:7-9).