

God's Rule Over the Nations

Printed Text · Psalm 47

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY reasons to praise God's rule over all the earth; BE FILLED with joy that God rules over all the earth; and PRAISE God for His sustaining leadership.

In Focus

For many years, Lottie was an enthusiastic fan of several Black leaders who she considered to be good leaders. She even joined a number of organizations that heralded an excellent leadership staff.

But by the time Barack Obama was running for president, she was somewhat ambivalent. Although she voted for him, she felt that racism was too deeply entrenched in this country for a Black man ever to be voted in as president. When the evening of Election Day came, Lottie was standing with the crowds, tears streaming down her face as Barack Obama, the president-elect, gave his victory speech. She thought that she would never see that day come in her lifetime. Lottie believed America was beginning to change and things were getting better but since then several administrations have come and gone. She was witnessing a "backlash" and it appeared as if things were getting worse.

Today's lesson we are reminded above every earthly leadership is God, who reigns as Lord over all of heaven and earth.

Keep In Mind

"Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding" (Psalm 47:6–7, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. Terrible (Psalm 47:2) yare' (Heb.) – A form of the verb "to fear," it describes the awe-inspiring effect that the Lord has on people

B. Excellency (v. 4) ga'own (Heb.) – It refers to a right and proper joy in God's good gift of the Promised Land

Say It Correctly

Asherah. ASH-uh-ruh

Baal. BAY-uhl

Canaanite. KAY-nuh-night

Chemosh. KEE-mosh

KJV

Psalm 47:1 O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

2 For the Lord most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.

3 He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.

4 He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.

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

6 Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.

7 For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.
8 God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.
9 The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.

NLT

Psalm 47:1 For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

1 Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise!
2 For the Lord Most High is awesome. He is the great King of all the earth.
3 He subdues the nations before us, putting our enemies beneath our feet.
4 He chose the Promised Land as our inheritance, the proud possession of Jacob's descendants, whom he loves. Interlude
5 God has ascended with a mighty shout. The Lord has ascended with trumpets blaring.
6 Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises!
7 For God is the King over all the earth. Praise him with a psalm.
8 God reigns above the nations, sitting on his holy throne.
9 The rulers of the world have gathered together with the people of the God of Abraham. For all the kings of the earth belong to God. He is highly honored everywhere.

The People, Places, and Times

Kings. From the earliest days of written history in the Ancient Near East, people were mostly organized under kings. The first monarchies arose from city-states. Rural living did not need the rules, regulations, or organization that cities required, so monarchies first began in urban areas.

Israel was slower in adopting a monarchy because it began as a group of mostly rural clans. But from as early as Genesis 17:6, God promised Abram that he would become the father of kings, and so it was assumed that Israel would be ruled by kings. The major problem that Israel had, when they first asked Samuel for a king like all the other nations, was that they were breaking off the covenant relationship with God as their King (1 Samuel 8:4-8). They did not trust Him to lead them and protect them, and they desired leaders just like the nations around them.

Christ, the King. When God chose David to be the king of Israel, the people had a charismatic leader, a great military man, and a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 16:12-13; 2 Samuel 5:1-5; Acts 13:22). And it was through the line of David that our Lord and Savior, Christ our King came. The Old Testament made it very clear that this King would be called "Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of God as King.

Jesus announced that with His coming, His kingship began (Luke 17:21). At this time, He is King in the hearts of those who follow Him. He is also ruling over the physical world, which He created and sustains (John 1:3). But in the future, everyone everywhere will see Jesus as the King and all things will come under His rule (Revelation 11:15).

Background

When the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, they were surrounded by idol-worshipping nations and living among people who had numerous gods. The Gentile nations thought of their gods as ruling over the areas in which they lived. This idea often filled the hearts of the Israelites, and they began worshiping the gods they found in their land. The Canaanites had gods of fertility (Baal and Asherah) that the Israelites thought would help them in their farming. The people worshiped the gods of fertility in many decadent ways, such as in religious prostitution.

The Moabites, who were descendants of Lot and lived just to the southeast of Israel, worshiped Chemosh, a god who demanded child sacrifice. We even read that King Ahaz, a descendant of King David, burned his own children as sacrifices to foreign gods (2 Chronicles 28:1–3). Molech, the god of the Ammonites, was also worshiped with human sacrifice. No wonder God detested these religions!

At-A-Glance

1. God Is King Over All the Earth (Psalm 47:1–4)
2. God Has Ascended (vv. 5–6)
3. God Is Reigning Over All the Earth (vv. 7–9)

In Depth

1. God Is King Over All the Earth (Psalm 47:1–4)

This psalm presents the coronation of our God, the King over all. No wonder everyone everywhere is commanded to clap! This psalm was composed during the period when Israel had kings, but always needed to be reminded that the Almighty God was their King.

The sons of Korah (temple assistants) wrote Psalm 47 for a Jewish religious festival, probably for the Feast of Tabernacles, in which Jews fashioned structures of branches and lived in them for one week, once a year, to commemorate the 40 years they lived in tents in the wilderness. First Kings 8:2 reveals that when the temple was inaugurated, Solomon led the people in celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. According to Oxford Universal Dictionary, a “tabernacle” is a temporary dwelling place made of canvas, branches, or boards. It is a hut, a tent, or a booth. During the wilderness years, God dwelt with His people in a tent called the Tabernacle.

Perhaps Solomon was reminding the people that when they lived in tents in the wilderness, so did their God. But now that they lived in the Promised Land in houses of mud, brick, and stone, the temple was to be a permanent facility for His presence. And as Solomon dedicated the brand new temple to the Lord, He saw God symbolically living in the temple. However, as the King of all nations, God is enthroned in heaven above. We read these words in Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple: “Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (1 Kings 8:27). Even Solomon’s beautiful temple was not the throne of God; heaven itself is not big enough to contain Him.

All of God’s people worship the Lord Most High, who is the King over all the nations; but Psalm 47:3–4 reminds us that He chose the Jews specifically. God was the one who empowered them to subdue the nations in Canaan and around them. He gave them an inheritance, that is, the Promised Land. And He took great pride in them and loved them.

But when we look back at verse 1, we see the anticipation of the evangelization of every nation, which is happening right now. Imagine the day when we will all be praising our God together!

2. God Has Ascended (vv. 5–6)

Verses 5 and 6 are the center of this psalm, which was composed as a liturgical procession. When Solomon dedicated the temple, the Ark of the Covenant was solemnly carried on the proscribed poles to bring it to the temple. The ark symbolized God’s throne and the temple as His heavenly palace, so it is not hard to imagine that this psalm was used or composed for this occasion. Other processions portrayed in the book of Psalms are meant to be sung as the

pilgrims made their way toward the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the special festivals.

However, many Christians today like to read Psalm 47 on Ascension Sunday, the day that commemorates the day that Christ ascended from earth back to heaven. Angels sang songs of praise when our Savior came to earth as a baby. Surely the whole heavenly host welcomed Him back with shouts of joy, sounds of trumpets, and songs of heavenly praise.

In verse 6, we are commanded four times to sing praises to our King. This is more than the enthusiastic, raucous praise of verse 1. This is the more formal singing of praise. Now we are commanded to make beautiful music to our King.

3. God Is Reigning Over All the Earth (vv. 7–9)

These verses portray the grand finale of history. God is now sitting upon His throne, King over all the earth. Once more we are commanded to sing praises to Him. This is a missionary psalm. It views the day when God's plan for all people is finally accomplished. God is the King over all the earth. This reminds us of Isaiah 52:7, NIV, which commissions us as missionaries, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, . . . who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" We have an important part in the installation of our God as King over all the earth. Our job is to bring the Good News of salvation to people all over the earth.

Psalm 46:10 tells us that God will be exalted among people all over the earth. The book of Revelation speaks over and over again about the Lord Jesus sitting upon the throne. Angels encircle His throne and sing, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (5:12).

Search the Scriptures

1. Name some audible ways of praising God, our King (Psalm 47:1, 6–7).
2. Name some reasons for praising God (vv. 2–4, 7–9).

Discuss the Meaning

1. In what ways is God the King over all the earth now?
2. In what ways is His reign in the future?

Liberating Lesson

When we look around, it's plain to see that Satan still has control over our world today. As believers, we are the ambassadors for the kingdom of God. We represent the interests of our King. Discuss some of the things that God cares about and how we can lobby for His kingdom and do our part to reflect God's kingdom in our society.

Application For Activation

Today, God wants to be King of our lives. What are some areas of your life that you need to more fully turn over to Him?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Psalm 47

1 O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

The psalmist begins by calling all the people of God to worship with clapping and shouts of triumph. The Hebrew word for “people” (‘am, ahm) is not the word for “nations” (gowy, GO-ee), which is normally used to refer to people outside the Jewish nation (Gentiles), but instead carries a more general meaning in this context.

However, the theme of this verse is parallel to the theme of other verses in the Psalms which call all the earth to worship the Lord as King. Consider Psalm 117:1: “O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.” Psalm 67:3 reads, “Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.” And Psalm 86:9 foretells a time when all peoples will unite in praise to the one true God: “All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.” There is a sense in which the call to worship is a call to separate ourselves from the world and devote ourselves to God and His glory. However, there is also a real sense in which the people of God are called to worship in order to lead the non-believing peoples of the world to worship. Jesus taught that the Father is actively seeking true worshipers from every nation, who will worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23). God-honoring worship is one way that the people of God display the worship that God is seeking.

Hand clapping in Old Testament times was sometimes a derisive gesture (see Lamentations 2:15 and Nahum 3:19), but in Psalm 47, the clapping is an expression of joy. In 2 Kings 11:12, the people clapped in celebration of Joash’s installation as king.

In Psalm 47:1, the invitation to shout recalls the celebration David led when he brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6:1–19. This event was marked by extraordinary amounts of sacrifice and dancing to the Lord. Of course, 2 Samuel 6:15 notes that shouting and trumpets were also a part of this joyous event. At this event, David danced with such abandon that his wife Michal derided him for making a fool of himself in front of the people (v. 20). The people of God also celebrated with shouting in Ezra 3:11–13 when the foundation of Zerubbabel’s temple was built.

2 For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.

In verses 2–4, the psalmist gives reasons for the call to clap and shout. The first reason is that the Lord is “terrible” (Heb. yare’, yaw-RAY). Yare’ is a form of the verb “to fear,” and it describes the effect that God has on people. His enemies shudder before Him in absolute terror. His people stand before Him in reverent awe. Other English versions use words such as “aweinspiring, awesome, glorious, to be feared.”

The name of God used here emphasizes the greatness and glory that provokes fear. “Most high” (Heb. ‘elyown, el-YONE) describes the Lord as the one who outranks all other rulers and authorities.

3 He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.

From the time of Abel (Genesis 4), the people of God have faced opposition from those who are in rebellion against the Lord. The promise of God has always been that He will fight for His people and subdue our enemies. In fact, apart from His efforts on our behalf, the fight would be hopeless.

Believers in Jesus must remember that although we are surrounded by people who do not share our allegiance to Christ, unbelievers are not our true enemies. Our ultimate enemies are sin, death, and Satan. And the Scriptures clearly teach that the Lord’s subduing of the nations is uniquely and finally fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Psalm 2:8–9 hints at this when it predicts the consummation of God’s reign over all the earth.

4 He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.

If verse 2 directed our attention to God’s nature and verse 3 to His certain victory, verse 4 calls us to recognize His generosity. “Inheritance” (Heb. nachalah, nakh-al-AW) is used frequently in the Old Testament to refer to Canaan—the Promised Land which the Lord promised to Abraham and his descendants forever. An inheritance is a permanent possession and cannot be taken or lost, either voluntarily or involuntarily. In fact, the law of the Jubilee required that land in Canaan not be sold permanently, but returned to the family to which it was allotted in the days of Joshua every 50 years (the Year of Jubilee, Leviticus 25:8–17). This was a perpetual testimony to God’s eternal promise.

“Excellency” (Heb. ga’own, gaw-OHN) is translated “pride” or “glory” by other English translations such as NLT and NIV. In other contexts, it refers to the sin of pride (overestimating one’s own worth). Here, however, it refers to a right and proper joy in God’s good gift of the Promised Land.

5 God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

This verse reminds the reader of 2 Samuel 6:15, in which David and the people of Israel bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem with shouting and the blowing of trumpets. In fact, the psalmist has used keywords from 2 Samuel 6:15 in this text to link the passages. “Shout” (Heb. t@ruw`ah, ter-oo-AW) can refer to shouts of joy or victory or shouts of fear and alarm. The word is used to mention shouts at the coronation of a king (1 Samuel 10:24), and in battle (Joshua 6:10). In Psalm 47:5, the phrase “sound of a trumpet” is literally “voice of the ram’s horn” in the Hebrew text. The showphar (sho-FAR), or “ram’s horn,” was used in celebration as well as in signaling armies or large groups of people in civil assembly. It was a blast of the showphar that signaled the people to approach Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16).

The Ark of the Covenant served as the “seat” for God’s presence in the tabernacle and the later temple. Thus, the Lord is referred to as the one who is enthroned between or above the cherubim (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15).

6 Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. 7 For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

The psalm begins its final, climactic section with a rousing call to the people of God to join together in loud and passionate worship. The repetition of “sing praises” raises the intensity of the psalm’s message, but without losing any focus on the truth. The description of God also builds in intensity, progressing from God to King, to King of all the earth.

“Sing” (Heb. zamar, zaw-MAR) may mean either “sing” or “make music.” The precise meaning of “with understanding” (Heb. maskil or maskiy, mas-KEEL) is uncertain. Some English versions translate this “with a psalm” (NLT, RSV) or “a psalm” (NIV), at least partly because maskil is used as a title for some 13 psalms (for example 32, 42). Even though we don’t know its precise meaning, maskil is derived from a Hebrew word meaning “wisdom, understanding.” So we can be certain that the psalmist is not calling his hearers to a type of worship that is based exclusively on humangenerated emotion. Worship that honors God is marked by a passionate, sincere, thoughtful response to the truth of who He is and the great things He has done for us.

8 God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

The Lord is not only the King of His people. He is King over all the earth, even over those who do not acknowledge Him as God. God tells us, “That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Isaiah 45:23). The word for “heathen” in Psalm 47:8 is the Hebrew word gowy (GO-ee), which literally means “nations,” but is used frequently in the Old Testament to refer to the Gentiles.

9 The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.

The final verse of the psalm points out another reason why God’s reign is cause for rejoicing. It is only right and proper for the Creator and Owner of the universe to be on the universe’s throne. After all, He is the greatest, the highest; therefore He should reign. “Princes” (Heb. nadiyb, naw-DEEB) are people of exalted social position such as nobles or overlords. The “shields of the earth” may be a reference to the princes of the people. They are both the protectors and the representatives of all the peoples of the earth, so the Lord’s rule over the “shields” expresses both His power over even the greatest human rulers and the universal reach of His reign.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Jeremiah 10:6-10

Tuesday

Psalm 97

Wednesday

Romans 3:1-9

Thursday

Psalm 3

Friday

Deuteronomy 33:26-29

Saturday

Psalm 99

Sunday

Psalm 47