

Psalm 47: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 47, to the choir master, a psalm of the sons of Korah. Clap your hands, all peoples. Shout to God with loud songs of joy. For the Lord, the Most High, is to be feared, a great King over all the earth.

He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loves. God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

Sing praises to God, sing praises. Sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth. Sing praises with a psalm. God reigns over the nations. God sits on his holy throne.

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 is a great celebration of the Lord's kingship.

Like Psalms 93 and 96 to 99, it praises God's sovereignty overall. Sigmund Movinkel famously proposed the existence of an annual New Year's festival, celebrating the Lord's enthronement, at which these particular psalms will be performed.

[1 : 1 2] This theory has proven influential, but it is highly speculative. We don't have any clear evidence for the existence of such a festival. Given the fact that psalms are material to be performed, many scholars have hypothesised concerning the setting in life, or to use the scholarly German expression, the *sitzimleben* of specific psalms.

Knowing the *sitzimleben* of a particular text can assist us in the task of interpretation. For instance, if 2,000 years from now someone discovered the lyrics of Here we come a caroling, they might be rather confused by them.

A key to understanding these lyrics would be to understand that their setting in life, or *sitzimleben*, is the practice of caroling from house to house. However, there is a danger in taking such approaches too far.

Alan Ross pushes back against excessive theorising about the *sitzimleben* of this particular psalm, remarking, The psalm would have been used, no doubt, in various types of assemblies, either in the established festivals or in special celebrations of victory where the Lord was praised for his kingship.

Conrad Schaeffer observes that this psalm is formed of two symmetrical panels. The section from verse 1 to verse 5 can be mapped onto the section from verse 6 to verse 9.

[2 : 2 4] Both begin with an invitation to worship, which introduces the contents of the praise that follows. There is then a declaration of the Lord's universal sovereignty, and his rule over and subduing of the nations.

Paralleled with the first panel's presentation of the Lord's choice of Jacob is the second panel's presentation of people of other nations gathering as his people. The first panel concludes with a reference to God's ascension in power, and the second by pronouncing his exaltation.

The summons of the psalmist to worship is comprehensive. It is delivered to all peoples, not merely to Israel. They are called to participate in a joyous celebration, a celebration of clapping, shouting, loud singing and trumpets.

The cause for the celebration is the kingship of the Lord over all of the earth. The Lord, the Most High God, has chosen Jacob especially as his people and his heritage, placing them in his land.

He subdued the seven Canaanite nations under them. The ascension of God spoken of here should likely be related to the ascension of God's throne upon Mount Zion, as the ark was brought up.

[3 : 28] 2 Samuel chapter 6 verse 15 reads with much the same language. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord, with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

Verses 6 to 7 repeat the engagement to sing praises, calling on the assembly to join in the acclamation. God is the king of all of the earth, but he is also the king of his people Israel in a very particular way.

He sits on his throne, represented by the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat, in the temple on Mount Zion, ruling over all of the nations. However, there is a surprising shift in the final verse.

It isn't merely Israel who gather as worshippers, but all of the nations with them. They are gathering either with or even as the people of the God of Abraham. The blessing of Abraham is not restricted to Israel, but all nations participate in it to some extent.

This is looking towards the future, and I believe to what Christ brings in through the gospel. This fulfills both the promise given to Abraham, In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed, and also prophecies found in places such as Isaiah chapter 19 verses 21 to 25.

[4 : 41] And the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them.

And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.

All the shields of the earth belong to God, all the mighty men and warriors are under his rule. Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess his lordship.