

The International Church of the Universal King

Psalm 47

Studies in the Psalms #48

WE so often think of the Psalm as individual puzzle pieces that happen to be gathered in one box. But there are many connections between them. The vision of universal peace after Lord's victory over the nations we saw in Psalm 46 is now celebrated in a vision of universal worship by those same nations. Psalm 46 depicted the chaos of the nations as the earth giving way, the mountains moving into the sea, the sea roaring and foaming, and the mountains trembling at the seas' swelling pride (Ps. 46:2, 3). All that gives way as those same nations are subdued in obedience to the Lord. Psalm 46 concluded with the call for the vanquished to "come, behold the works of the LORD" and "be still, and know that I am God" (vv. 8, 10); now they're called to worship him. In its two parallel halves, verses 1–5 and verses 6–9, we celebrate THE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH OF THE UNIVERSAL KING.¹

A CALL TO PRAISE (vv. 1, 6)

Both halves open with A CALL TO PRAISE. **Clap your hands and shout to God with loud songs of joy**² (v. 1). This is a call to **all peoples** (*'ammim*; v. 1). The Abrahamic promise, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3), is expressed in a call to worship.

Paralleled to this is verse 6, but it's a fourfold call: **Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!** There's one difference. Did you catch it? **Clap your hands, all peoples...Sing praises to our King!** Do you see it? The impersonal **all peoples** is personalized as **our King**. Something's happened between God's covenant people and the nations that were just attacking that an Israelite choir can call upon those same nations to worship **our King**. The first piece of the puzzle is THE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH.

THE REASON: GOD IS KING (vv. 2, 7–8)

Why should or must the **peoples clap, shout, and sing**? Two parallel stanzas give THE REASON: GOD IS KING. Verses 2 and 7 begin with **for** (*ki*). **For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth** (v. 2). The **God** who is **King** (vv. 1, 6) is identified as the **LORD**, Israel's God and Savior, and **the Most High**, the only God and Savior. Because of who he is, he is **to be feared**. Children, there are two kinds of fear in the Bible. There is being afraid of God and there is being reverent towards God. You never want to experience being afraid of him as that's "slavish fear." You want "filial fear"—the reverence and awe a little child has for mom and dad but towards God because he's your Father through Jesus.

Verse 7 opens in the same way as verse 2: ***For (ki) God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!*** But look at how verse 8 moves us forward: ***God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.***

God reigns. The sense is that God *has become king*.³ That sounds a little strange to us because we know that God already *is* King (e.g., Ps. 93:2). So our translators smooth it out to communicate to us. But in the Old Testament, kingship is not merely a status—God *is* King—but an action. God acts as King when he works deliverance for his people.⁴ Don't we pray, "Thy kingdom come?" We know the kingdom *has* already come when Jesus entered our world and performed miracles and signs. When we pray this we're asking him to show his rule and reign over us and the world until one day all things are actually in subjection to him. Revelation 15 has a scene of the church in heaven that's conquered the beast, singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb:

Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations! [Jesus *is* King already]
Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you, [yet this Kingship is *not yet* fully known]
for your righteous acts have been revealed.

The next puzzle piece is THE UNIVERSAL KING.

THE KING'S PEOPLE (vv. 3–4, 9ab)

Now we get more detail about THE KING'S PEOPLE. Who are **all peoples**?

(v. 1) Who is **our**? (v. 6)

Verses 3–4 speak of *those subdued*. **He subdued peoples** ('*ammim*) **under us, and nations** (*ummim*) **under our feet** (v. 3). One way this happened was in the conquest under Joshua when his men put their feet on the necks of Canaan's kings (10:24). Verse 4 says **he chose our heritage**, meaning, *The Promised Land* (NLT) **for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves** (v. 4). Why? It was not because Israel was more righteous (Deut. 9:1–6) or greater in number than the Canaanites, but because he loved Israel (Deut. 7:7–8). But this begs the question of why should those conquered and subdued by the King of Israel and the world **clap, shout, and sing**?

The first two clauses of verse 9 says *those subdued* are also *those incorporated* into the people of God. This is really amazing! **The princes of the peoples** ('*ammim*) **gather as the people** ('*am*) **of the God of Abraham**. Some translations substitute *with* in the place of *as* to help us make sense of what's going on (NLT). The thing that's so amazing, though, is that there is no *as* or *with* in the Hebrew text! **The princes of the peoples** are in apposition to **the people of the God of Abraham**. That means they're equals grammatically.

Together they **gather** on equal footing! Together they are the people of God!

Remember the impersonal **all peoples** became the personal **our King** in verses 1 and 6? The puzzle is coming together!

THE KING'S EXALTATION (vv. 5, 9cd)

The final verses of the two stanzas bring these pieces together of THE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH and THE UNIVERSAL KING. **God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound** (v. 5).⁵ In Isaiah 31 the Lord “came down” to fight on Mount Zion versus King Sennacherib. Now he’s depicted as a victorious King going back up. It reminds us of David re-capturing the Ark of the Covenant, processing up the mountain of God in joyous singing and dancing (2 Sam. 6). The end of verse 9 tells us why he ascended back up: **for the shields, meaning, kings, of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted!**

What brings these pieces of Psalm 47 together with the pieces of Psalm 46 and all the other pieces of Scripture is the realization that the celebration of Psalm 47 was for temporal deliverance. It was all typological of something much, much greater. When our Lord hung upon the cross he said, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” (John 12:31) as “he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put the to open shame, by triumphing over them” (Col. 2:15). When he rose from the grave “death

[was] swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). When “he ascended on high he led a host of captives” (Eph. 4:8) and was “seated...at [God’s] right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Eph. 1:20–21). And when he descends again on the last day, it will be to the sound of “the last trumpet...of God” (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thes. 4:16).

He’s the universal King! He’s building an international church! Let’s pray that our branch of that church prays for, reaches out to, and welcomes in the diverse peoples living in our communities so that in this place we experience a microcosm of that heavenly host that no man can number!

Endnotes

¹ This fascinating structure is pointed out by Moyter, *Psalms by the Day*, 123 n17.

² Or, “the voice of praise” (*beqol rinnah*).

³ Futato, 170–171.

⁴ Geerhardus Vos, “The Eschatology of the Psalter,” in *The Pauline Eschatology*, ed. Geerhardus Vos (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 342–343.

⁵ Or, “the voice of a trumpet” (*beqol shofar*).