

PSALLO

Psalm 47:1–9

You have our latest offering of a new Psalm tune and metrical translation of Psalm 47 before you. Note the title of the Psalm (verse 1 in the Hebrew text) as it is divided into three sections. In the first, we find that this Psalm was written for the public praise of the Lord, and was therefore to be given to the “Chief Musician,” also translated in other versions as Choirmaster (ESV), Music Director (NASB), Director of Music (NIV). In these witnesses to the original Hebrew, we understand that the author of the Psalm intended to present it to the *לְמַנְצִיחַ* (Heb. *Lamnatseach*), to the man appointed over the two hundred eighty-eight member Levitical choir and orchestra which David ordained for public worship as the Prophet of God, a part of the *pattern* revealed to him by the Lord.¹ This “Chief Musician” is a common title or address among the Psalms, used fifty-five times. The second term we will mention is that it is a Psalm. The Hebrew word translated by *Psalm* here is *מִזְמוֹר* (Heb. *mizmor*), rendered *Psalm* by the all the major translations, used 57 times in the “book of praises,” to describe the song of praise that follows. The third portion of the title teaches a most precious truth concerning our God, that He is *merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving-kindness and truth*. The song was written by “the sons of Korah.” We remember the rebellion of their father, and marvel that they were delivered from the same destruction, not participating in that dissatisfaction with the Lord’s ordering of offices in the days of Moses. These sons of Korah appear at several places in Israel’s history as those who remained as Levites, serving the Lord, though their father was destroyed, along with his rebellious company.² This title, indicative of authorship (or those into whose hands the Psalm was delivered) is used eleven times in the Psalm titles.³ These sons of Korah were with Jehoshaphat when the kingdom was under threat by an alliance of Israel’s enemies gathered into a single fighting force (2 Chron. 20:1–3). The commentator J. A. Alexander is persuaded that this is the occasion of the writing of this Psalm, seeing that it was the “Korhites” that went out before the army, in those days, at the command of Jehoshaphat, praising the Lord, saying, “Praise the LORD, for his mercy endureth forever!” (2 Chronicles 20:20–22).⁴ Knowing their history as they must have, they were a fitting example of the Lord’s mercy to sinners, and

a reminder that the sins of the fathers shall not be visited upon the sons (Deut. 24:16).

The translation is straightforward, and needs little explanation, with one exception. In the last verse the word translated as princes (Heb. *פְּרִינֹסִים*) is seen as either princes or nobles in other translations. The word speaks of generosity, liberality, willingness to distribute goods or other largess.⁵ I believe this is related in Hebrew parallelism to the *shields* that follow later in the same verse. In other words, these nobles who led and protected the people in the day of battle were those who willingly hazarded themselves in the strife, and the Lord answered them—they were as the shields of the earth, forming as it were a protection of the people of God as their leaders, by their own faith, leading them faithfully into battle against the Lord’s and their enemies. Another clarification to note is that we have rendered the word often translated *people*, as *peoples* (which is plural in the original) in keeping with the universal nature of the Psalm, for it is not just the people of God, but all “peoples” that will come and worship at the Lord’s feet. This is also in keeping with the mention of Abraham in verse 9, for in him, “shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”

The theme of the Psalm is that of joyful, triumphant praise to God, in His triumphal ascension over His enemies, and the blessings that He bestows upon the people of God as a result. If Alexander and Hengstenberg are correct in their assessment, these Sons of Korah saw in the victory of their day over the Moabites, Ammonites and others of that confederated force gathered against the people of God, the triumph of God over all His enemies, throughout history, culminating in the ascension of Christ, “leading captivity captive.”⁶ This association to Christ and His full and final triumph over His enemies is the interpretation held by Luther, Gill, Henry, Poole, and others. Certainly we do agree that every triumph of the Lord in history over His and our enemies is related to, and forecasts

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1. 1 Chronicles 28:11–21. It is good to notice that this same Hebrew word *תַּבְּנִיט* (Heb. *Tavnit*) or *pattern* is the same word used when the Lord gave such a “pattern” to Moses in the days of the building of the Tabernacle. (Exodus 25:1–9). For the number of the choir and orchestra ordained by David, see 1 Chronicles 23:1–5; 25:1–7.

2. See Numbers 16:1–40; 27:3. Note also that a famous son of Korah is none other than Heman, a man appointed by David, a Levite, as one of those who was set “over the service of song” (1 Chronicles 6:31–37). See also 1 Chronicles 9:19; 2 Chronicles 20:19–21.

3. Psalms 42, 44–47, 48–49, 84–85, 87–88.

4. Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot; James Thin, 1864), pp. 211–212. He is joined in this understanding by E. W. Hengstenberg. See E. W. Hengstenberg, John Thomson, and Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), p. 154.

5. See also Judges 5:2, 9; 2 Chronicles 17:16.

6. See Psalm 68:17–19; Ephesians 4:8–10.

that great and final deliverance purchased by Christ, at the cost of His own life (1 Peter 1:18–20).

This Psalm focuses upon the Lord; why He is worthy to be praised, and how He is to be praised. Concerning the “how” it begins with something loud, assertive, muscular. There is clapping, shouting, enthusiasm, joy, celebration. The voice of triumph is a voice of loud jubilation. This word in the original language is sometimes used for weeping in times of intense suffering as well as the joy seen in our passage. The common element between the rejoicing and the wailing is its volume, and impact. It is a cry that shows its affectation on the subject, whether for joy as in the case of Psalm 47, or because of a darker blow as in Psalm 88:3.⁷ It is clear in our passage that beholding the great works of God, and the attributes of God, His people ought to be thus *affected*. The greatness of our God and His works is not to be meditated upon with stoicism or apathy. He is a great God, worthy of more glory and honor than we are able to give, and we ought to be stretched by the remembrance of His greatness, and moved from coldness or deadness in devotion to a warm and full-throated praise to God. This commitment to a loud and full-hearted praise is especially expressed in verses six and seven, where the Hebrew word זָמַר *zamar*, to sing praise, is used four times out of a total of six words in verse six, and again in verse seven. There are other places where this word, or others like it, is multiplied, but not with the same intensity and emphasis as it is here.⁸

A Psalm like this one, in its command and example, ought to encourage congregations to their duty to sing to the Lord with strength, volume, from hearts purified by faith, or as the Confession of Faith says, “with grace in the heart” (21.5). Several things are in order to obedience to this imperative in our text. The first, as was hinted at above, is preparation to praise the Lord. There is both physical and spiritual preparation necessary to offer the Lord the glory due to Him in this way. Physically, we have differing abilities in our vocal apparatuses for singing. In acknowledging this, let us also admit that no matter what our ability is, it will be improved by diligent *practice*. Everything we do as human beings, we do better when we work at it. Let us work at our singing ability, rather than simply to accept the status quo. Certainly our God is worth us wringing out every drop of vocal ability from our

weak frames. Further, worshippers ought to review the Psalms they will be singing each Sabbath as they come together to worship the Lord in their congregations, understanding that a well-known tune and lyric is better able to be sung than an unknown or lesser known one. Preparing or warming up the voice on the Lord’s Day before coming to Church is also a good idea. Make sure to have had something to drink before the worship service—use a throat lozenge if that helps. In these, and in other ways, physical preparation will advance our ability to sing praise to the Lord.

Regarding spiritual preparation, each worshipper should come to church with meditation on God’s attributes and works, and His condescension to receive sung praise from His people (and to delight in it!) for the sake of the Mediator, Christ. Not only is everything we do as human beings advanced with practice, it is also enhanced by *preparation*. Go over the lyrics you plan to sing with your fellow-worshippers, meditate on them, ready yourself in your thoughts to sing them back to God, singing of His marvelous works, and His incomparable attributes, His Person and works. Prepare to join in with others, melding your voice with theirs, such that you are with conviction obeying the command to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).

Focusing on Psalm 47 and why the Lord is to be praised, we see the following works and attributes of God on display: He is known in this Psalm as Jehovah-Elyon. This speaks of His immanence in that He is a covenant keeping, promise honoring God—that He will keep His covenant mercies forever, being Jehovah, and in addition His transcendence in that He is most high. These two seemingly opposite attributes of our God are brought together that we might marvel at His greatness, such that He communes with His people by way of covenant on the one hand, and yet retains His highness and transcendence above them. He is not diminished by His covenant with men in Christ Jesus, and we are not exalted in our humanity above our being His creatures, although we will be advanced to the highest degree of creaturehood in Christ. We see also that the Lord is terrible, or to be feared, revered. This speaks to His strength and power, authority, holiness, and our humility and deference to Him. We praise the Lord because while at the last day men will beg the rocks and mountains to fall upon them to hide them from the face of God the Father and the wrath of His Son, the Lamb (Rev. 6:16), yet He brings His people near with “fear not” (Rev. 1:17), and relates to us as a Father with His dear children, and we respond with the fear of sons, not slaves (Rom. 8:14–16). We next see that God is to be praised because He has conquered our enemies, subduing them under His feet and giving us

7. See also Psalm 106:44; 119:169; 142:7.

8. See Psalm 66:4. Psalmists express similar intensity, using different combinations of Hebrew words, in Psalms 56:10; 67:3, 5; 108:3; 109:30; 111:10; 113:1; 135:1–3; 146:1–2; 147:1; 148:1–7,13–14; 149 and 150, all. The word found in Psalm 47:6–7 speaks more particularly of praise that is sung. Its word-group widens in meaning to include the gazelle (probably for its leaping), and is also a word for strength, as in protection, or strength, as in the yield or best fruits of a land.

their inheritance, which is called our “glory.” That is, what we receive from the Lord in inheritance is that for which we glory in Him. This seems a reference to the conquest of Canaan, which is a type of Christ’s victory and His subduing all things under His feet (Ps. 110:1; 1 Cor. 15:25).

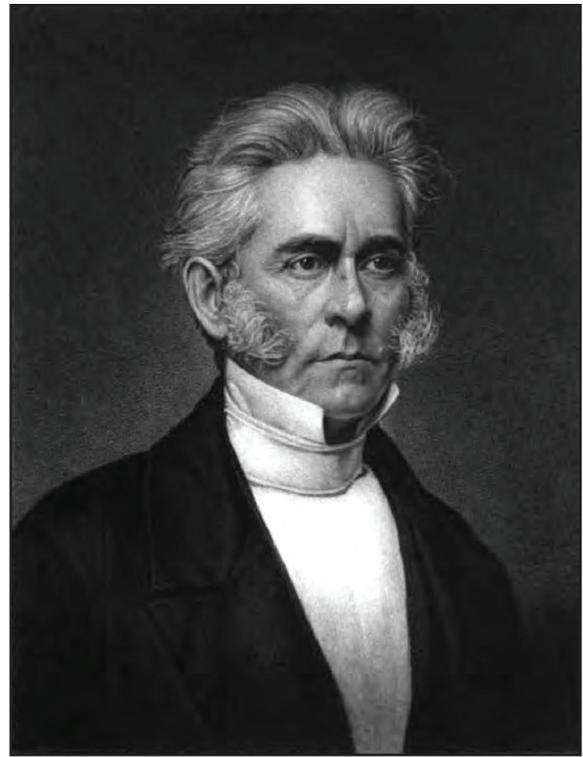
We augment this victory beginning in verse 5, which, as was said above, reminds us of Psalm 68:17–19 and Ephesians 4:8–10. This is the shout of a victor and His attendants as He takes His rightful place upon His throne of glory, with the trumpet blasting and advertising His victory. Dear reader, your Messiah has conquered death, and has led, captive to himself as the spoils of victory, you who were once held captive by the Devil, and by death itself (2 Tim. 2:26; Rom. 6:13; 7:5–6.). Can we not find some shouting, some elevation of spirit and voice in such deliverance! At this very point in the Psalm, the author breaks forth with “Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.” We learn next that this God cannot be withheld by any earthly or heavenly force for He is king over all the earth, which implies that He does as He pleases.

In verse 7 as well, we learn to sing with meditation, or *understanding* as the KJV has it.⁹ W. S. Plumer rightly connects this with the example of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:15, where he writes, What is it then? “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.” The Hebrew word is מִשְׁכִּיל (maschil) which occurs in some Psalm titles.¹⁰ Many Old Testament scholars consider these to be wisdom Psalms of instruction, meditation, or understanding.¹¹ This principle works well with that preparation of soul we have seen above. Ours is a spiritual worship, a worship full of mental understanding, and this will enliven and give strength to our praise to God. We praise the Lord for His sovereignty next—not just Israel, but God reigns over the nations, and seeing He has set His King over Zion to inherit all nations, the Messianic nature of the Psalm is brought forward, as many commentators recognize. In this we praise Christ Himself for, “of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end.” Next, we note the holiness of God in that this throne is a throne of holiness, and so in the works and attributes of God our praise finds its true and upright expression.

In the final portion of the Psalm, the author reminds us of the Abrahamic promise: That all nations of the earth shall be blessed in Him, and in His great Seed, Christ, will be victorious. We have sung concerning the nations—that God is King over them, that they will be subdued under our (and Christ’s) feet, that their inheritance is become ours. In this portion we remember that this was the plan of the Lord from the beginning, to call out from every kindred, tribe, and tongue a people for Himself, by faith—that those

who have the faith of Abraham are the children of Abraham (Gal. 3:26–29), from all ethnicities of men. No matter where they are from on this earth, they, through Christ are brought near to God. The great salvation of God is on display in this Psalm, par excellence.

For His Person, and for His works then, let us also sing praise, sing praise, sing praise to our God. He is greatly exalted in His Person and works, and ought to be exalted, glorified, praised, by His people with volume, with enthusiasm, with our strength. Let us come prepared, each Sabbath, to praise His holy Name. ■



William Swan Plumer (1802–1880).

9. NASB: “With a Psalm of wisdom.”

10. See Psalm 32:1; 42:1; 44:1; 45:1; 52:1; 53:1; 54:1; 55:1; 74:1; 78:1; 88:1; 89:1; 142:1.

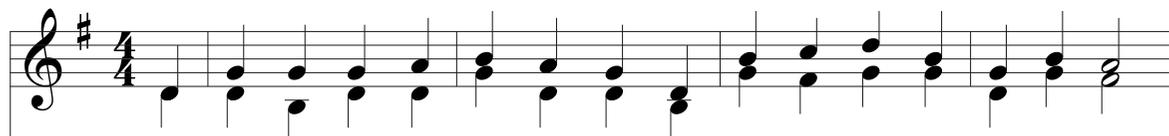
11. Plumer is representative. See William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms: Being a Critical and Expository Commentary, with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks on the Entire Psalter* (Philadelphia; Edinburgh: J. B. Lippincott Company; A & C Black, 1872), pp. 396–397.

Psalm 47:1-9

To the chief Musician,
A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

Kol-Ha-Amim

Todd L. Ruddell



¹O all ye peo-ples clap your ha - nds; lift your voice to God with joy!
³He shall sub-due the peo-ples 'neath us. 'Neath our feet we'll na-tions tread.
⁵God is gone up with voice of bat - tle, Je - ho - vah with trum-pet sound.
⁷For God is King the whole world o - ver: praise with un - der-stand-ing bring.
⁹Princ - es are gath-er'd of the peo-ples, those of th' God of A - bra - ham:



²For the LORD Most High is fear - ful; The Great King the whole world o'er.
⁴Our her-'tage shall He choose for us, Ja - cob's glo - ry whom He lov'd.
⁶Sing ye praise to God sing prais-es: praise to our King, sing a - loud.
⁸God doth reign o - ver the na-tions from His ho - ly throne as King.
For the shields of th' earth be-long to God; He's great - ly ex - alt - ed.

