

to do this more easily if we have a good general understanding of the psalm, where it comes from, and what its meaning may be in the context of scripture as a whole. Some people regard praise as being a very individual thing, but most of us both enjoy worshipping God privately, but also appreciate that when we are with other, the 'collective' nature of the experience is very important. What is most important, however, is that whatever the circumstances of life, or of the nature of the services of worship we attend, we offer due praise to our God who made us.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Think back through the recent days of your life, and count up the number of times you have praised God whilst you have been by yourself. If the number is too great, then that's fine, but if you find it hard to think of when this has happened, then it may be that you should ask the Lord, prayerfully, to help you rediscover a heart of praise.
- Fast and pray for the life of your church and the worship and praise that takes place there. It means much to many people, but there will undoubtedly be different feelings about what is done, and whether it is appropriate!

Final Prayer

Travel with me, Lord God. Travel with me through pain and joy, through persecution and victory, through distress and comfort. And when I feel as if You are not there, greet me again with a smile as I turn the next corner of life, and meet me as one who has waited for a friend. Thank You, Lord God my Saviour. AMEN

Prayer

We praise You this day, Lord God, Heavenly Father. You have made more things within Your world than we will ever see, You have made more opportunities than we can ever take, and You have made more beauty than we can ever appreciate. Give us eyes to see what You would have us see, hearts to do what You would have us do, and feelings to appreciate the value of everything around us: to the glory of Your Name; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Fire Services

Pray today for those who work in very dangerous situations, particularly fighting forest fires or similar large conflagrations that threaten life. Pray for their safety and support.

On-going prayers

- Pray for the safety of young children in schools and institutions
- Pray for small businesses struggling to keep going
- Give thanks to God for safety whilst you travel

Meditation

Why do people pass You by, Lord of Love?
Why do people sneer at You, Lord of Compassion?
Why do people swear with Your name, Lord of Justice?
Why do people argue about You, Lord of Peace?
Why do people make a mockery of You, Lord of Truth?
Why do people dismiss You, Lord of Open Arms?
Is it because they reject us, Your Church, not You?
Us who have failed to manifest the truth?
Renew Your people in Your image O God
And draw the nations close again.

Bible Study - Psalm 47

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

<p>¹ Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.</p> <p>² How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!</p> <p>³ He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet.</p> <p>⁴ He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved. Selah</p> <p>⁵ God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.</p>	<p>⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.</p> <p>⁷ For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.</p> <p>⁸ God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.</p> <p>⁹ The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.</p>
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Review

To say that this is a Psalm of praise is an understatement! Along with its description of why we should praise God and a call for all to join in, the Psalm also tells how the people of Israel went about their praises. The opening contains a lively call to clap, shout and call out to God (47:1); then later on, trumpets are sounded (47:5) and extensive singing (47:6) is called for with the singing of a 'psalm of praise' (47:7). The festive season of Christmas is a wonderful time for us to learn from God's people about what it means to praise God.

Such a wonderful Psalm has plenty for us to explore, and it may have had its origins in the worship of Israel at an exciting event in which the Kingship of God was celebrated. From the earliest days of Israel when Saul reigned under the guidance of Samuel, it was made clear that Israel could only have a king as a leader if God's authority and kingship was held as supreme (1 Samuel 12:13ff). In many ancient nations, a king was regarded as a god, but this could not be so for Israel, for their king had to submit to Almighty God. They frequently had to be reminded of this by a prophet, and Nathan performed this duty for King David and King Solomon. David was the first king to bring the 'Ark of the Covenant' up to Jerusalem, and he did so 'a shout and the sound of a trumpet' (2 Samuel 6:15), and this reminds us of our psalm (47:5). After the time of David, Israel held an annual festival of praise to God as King in Israel, and it is possible that this psalm was used. Years later, after the exile, when the Ark had been destroyed by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, God could still be celebrated as King, even though Jerusalem had been destroyed. God's people discovered that they could still worship their God as 'King' in whatever circumstances they found themselves.

King of the Chosen People The psalm begins with an extraordinary phrase. Despite all we have said about the connections of this psalm with Israel, the first words call the whole world to come and take part in the praises of God! The words 'Clap your hands, all you nations' (47:1) recognise that God, as Creator of the whole world, calls all people to worship Him. These nations are described as 'subdued' (47:3) implying that they had been conquered by Israel. This may have been true in David's day, because He gained military victory in order to secure the boundaries of Israel (2 Samuel 8); but later on, in the time of Solomon, nations came to Jerusalem to honour the kingdom of Israel through trade and in admiration of Israel's success.

The word for 'God' (47:2), where He is described as 'King over all the earth' is the Hebrew word 'Elyon', normally translated as 'Most High'. This is a very ancient name associated with the High God 'El' celebrated by the different national groups that lived in Canaan before the arrival of the Hebrew people under Moses, and their God 'Jahweh'. In time, the Israelites accepted both names 'Jahweh' and 'Elohim' (a derivative of 'El') as names of God, connecting their ancient traditions through Moses and Abraham. However, whilst the name 'Jahweh' was very exclusive, having been revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:14), the name 'El' was widespread and used by many nations, and it makes good sense for the word to be used here.

Clap hands? There is a mystery surrounding the opening phrase, which, literally translates as 'all peoples, clap hand'. Yes, 'hand' is in the singular; even though it is quite impossible to clap with one hand! It is easy to just gloss over this and say they must have meant what we think of as applause; however, it could describe at least two different things. Firstly, the word for 'clap' could mean 'punch'; this gives the idea of punching the air with one hand, an expression of enthusiasm! Secondly, it could mean clapping in time together ('with one hand'), and this is also common today. I have even heard the idea that joy can be expressed by doing what we call today a 'high five', where people only uses one hand to

'clap' with someone else! One explanation is as good as another when dealing with a mystery like this; we don't know how they did it, but they probably enjoyed it!

After affirming God's choice of His people and their inheritance (47:4) a reverential pause is called (indicated by the word 'selah') before returning to the shouts of praise and joy that accompanied some act of symbolic 'lifting up' of God; 'God has ascended amid shouts of joy' (47:5). This may have originated in the bringing up of the Ark to Jerusalem, but for Christians today, it means honouring God by 'lifting Him up' in praise at any suitable occasion or season.

The reign of God The second half of Psalm 47 calls again on all nations to praise Almighty God. The words keep re-enforcing the theme; 'God is the King of all the earth' (47:7), 'God reigns over the nations' (47:8); and finally, the most bold statement of all which goes far beyond mere invitation; 'the nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God' (47:9). This is an expression of the prophetic hope that God's call upon Israel to be a blessing and a 'light to the nations' would one day be accomplished (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6.). Whilst the people of Israel anticipated this day before the time of Christ, we can now sing this Psalm with confidence because the Messiah, Jesus Christ, has indeed set up the Kingdom of God throughout the world, and everyone is called to come to the Lord, the Creator of the world. Jesus Christ made it possible for this Psalm to be fulfilled.

I have heard it said by some that the Old Testament has no real 'Missiology' (which means the mission of God to the whole world). The reason people say this is because so much of the Old Testament is wrapped up in the problems of Israel and the life of God's people. However, the Old Testament makes clear that God chose His people Israel in order to reveal Himself to the whole world, and this is His 'mission'. Now, just as he once chose Israel, He has now appointed the church to fulfil his mission with the added assurance of the saving work of Christ, but there is still a great deal we can learn from the stories and psalms of the Old Testament.

Over and over again the psalms call for God's love to be made known throughout the world, and this helps us understand that the heart of God is for all His Creation. Of course, this revelation can only happen where the Holy Spirit is at work and the light of Christ our Saviour is shown, but the underlying love of God for the whole world is clearly made known in the Old Testament.

The importance of this Psalms to the Church's mission illustrated by the monks of Holy Island who travelled across England in the Dark Ages, walking the length and breadth of the land bringing the good news of God's love to all they met. As they went, they recited the Psalms, which as part of their training, they had learned by heart!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you often feel like praising God? Or is it that the joy of praise only comes when you join with others to do it? Why do we need to be called to praise?
2. How can we call the nations to join in the praise of God today?
3. Is singing essential to our expressions of praise? Make a list of ways that you like to praise God, and rate their importance to you.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This psalm says so much more about praise than we can say in a short study. Almost each verse can be taken and used to help us understand more about praise, but we will be able