

Psalm 47

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[0 : 00] Why don't I pray and then I'll read and we'll get stuck in. Father, please be with us this morning. Please give us open hearts and ears to listen and hear and obey your word today.

! 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. Well, let's start by considering the author.

[1 : 24] It's not David, instead the sons of Korah. You might have noticed them the last few weeks. All the psalms in book 2 so far have been by them. From 42 continues up to Psalm 49.

They get a couple of others later on in the Psalter as well. But who are the sons of Korah? Who is Korah for that matter? How many sons? Why are they writing psalms?

When are they writing psalms? We get a good clue over in 1 Chronicles chapter 6. You might like to turn there. 1 Chronicles 6. It's about the men that King David put in charge of the music at the tabernacle.

I remember the temple's not built in the time of David yet. And in chapter 6, the chronicler is rattling off some genealogies. He's into the family lines of Levi.

So the priestly family. And in 1 Chronicles 6, 31, we read, So Heman's kind of the band leader, if you like, the singer.

[2 : 46] He's lucky this morning. And then it gives Heman's genealogy. So Heman, the singer, the son of Joel, son of Samuel, son of Elkanah, son of Jeraham, son of Eliel, son of Toa, son of Zuth, Elkanah, Mahath, Amasai, Elkanah, Joel, Azariah, Zephaniah, Levi, Tehath, rather.

Asir, son of Ebiassath, son of Korah, son of Isaac, son of Kohath, son of Levi, son of Israel. That is Jacob. So did you catch that?

So Heman and his sons, they descend from Levi through Korah, and everyone else kind of in the way, or along the way, and they kind of take on the band name, the sons of Korah. But why take Korah's name for anything?

Out of all the patriarchs down the line, Korah is easily the dodgiest bloke. Back when Moses led the people out of slavery in Egypt, and the Israelites are in the wilderness, Korah gets a couple of mates together and starts a rebellion.

You can read about it in Numbers chapter 6. Is that right? Or 16, sorry. He gets a few mates together and makes a rebellion.

[4 : 00] It's to the effect of what makes you so special, Moses? I'm as good as you. I'm as cool as you. I can do all your special jobs too. Which is, you know, it's a little disrespectful to God, who's been pretty clear about this with Moses, you know, coming down from Mount Sinai, all the rest.

But Korah is stubborn. He doesn't repent. And the story ends up with God causing the earth to open up beneath Korah's tent. He swallows up Korah and his family alive, and all who kind of stood with him and took his side.

And his other rebel mates are burnt up with fire from God. Yeah, sorry, you can read about it in Numbers 16. And it seems like that's the end of Korah's line there. Every rebel wiped out, left as a warning.

But we find out later in Numbers 26 that some of Korah's descendants did survive. And I don't think that's because God kind of missed one, you know, tried to get them all and missed one.

Rather, it must be that at least some in the family rejected their father's evil way and listened to God instead. And they were preserved and not wiped out. So Heman and his sons live in the shadow of this history.

[5 : 11] His family line is a living history of God's mercy to his people. From the rescue out of Egypt to the wandering in the wilderness, the creation of the Levitical priesthood, you know, the rights by which Israel can meet with God and be with God, to the rebellion and destruction of Korah, to the protection of the family line who stayed true all the way down the generations, to now into the kingdom of David in the promised land.

Music leading the nation at the tabernacle. So I hope that helps place us in the world of the psalm, composed by Heman and sons. He has 14 sons, by the way, of checkered priestly lineage who serve musically at the tabernacle in the time of David as king or sort of thereabouts.

So in verse 1, the psalm opens with a bang. A crowd, a great multitude are led in raucous praise. 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. And why all this commotion? Why is he the most high? Why is he to be feared?

Why a great king over all? Because, verse 3, he subdued peoples under us and nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loves.

[6 : 35] With two verses there, the psalmist calls up the history of his countrymen, the Israelites, the descendants of Jacob. A multi-generational odyssey has played out and now finally come to rest.

God has lifted his people out of slavery in Egypt and crushed stubborn Egypt in the process by his divine work, ten plagues, drowned army. And then after years wandering in the wilderness, Israel has now entered the promised land and the former inhabitants have been driven out before them. Jericho is fallen and all the rest as well, not because of Israel's kind of military prowess, but because of God's divine working. God chose their heritage, the promised land.

Heritage or inheritance, maybe try and keep those kind of words together, same kind of meaning. And the inheritance is the promised land, Canaan. Remember that each tribe has been allotted a portion and a place.

Recall in Joshua, the years of tumult under the judges have passed. The abortive reign of King Saul is over. Now David is king. Israel is stable, safe and at peace.

[7 : 42] It's God's people in God's place under God's rule. The promise to Abraham has mostly landed. Verse 4 ends with a *selah* then.

Something like a musical interlude or pause or transition point. So the psalm then transitions into verse 5. Verse 5, God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

Not sure exactly what is in view here. It sounds very military. It's the way you talk about kings and armies going to battle in the Old Testament. It's especially close to the shout and the trumpet as Jericho fell or when Gideon's men kind of had the jars and torches surrounding the Midianites.

You read about that in Joshua 6 and Judges 7. And the form kind of fits. Those are victories where God has gone up with a shout ahead of his people and won the victory. However, there was also an occasion where God went up with a shout and with a trumpet sound, a national celebration in the time of David.

And Heman. One that I think fits the kind of ultimate victory and reigning that the psalm describes. It's when the Ark of the Covenant was brought up to Jerusalem and placed in the tabernacle.

[8 : 59] So we're in the reign of King David. David's set up Jerusalem as the capital city. But the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle, things are a bit muddled at the time. And David resolves to bring the Ark up to Jerusalem.

There's a huge ceremony and celebration when it's done. The Ark coming here is a bit like it's finally arrived home. It's a bit like a coronation as well. Even a victory kind of triumph procession.

We read about it in 2 Samuel chapter 6. You might like to turn there. 2 Samuel 6. There's some verses there. So verse 1. David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, 30,000.

And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Bali, Judah, to bring up from there the Ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts, who sits enthroned on the cherubim.

So think of the Ark of the Covenant like God's throne. God's on top of the throne of the cherubim.

And then on to verse 5. And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord with

songs and lyres and harps.

[10:05] Sorry, excuse me. Lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And then later, down in verse 15, there's a bit of narrative on the way.

They have a try and then they have to have another try later on. But verse 15. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn. And the Hebrew, that's very similar to the psalm.

Up with a shout and a trumpet sound. And the picture is God, his throne, the Ark, between the cherubim is going up with a shout and with a trumpet blast.

It's the capstone victory and triumph. The promised land is secured. God's people are in his place under his rule. We said there's a huge celebration.

David makes some offerings. Heaps of food is given out. And that joyous celebration, I think, matches the psalm. Because after the proclamation in verse 5 of our psalm, it just bursts into praise and adoration.

[11:04] It's praising God. It's calling his people to sing and praise too. So verse 6 of Psalm 47. 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. Hopefully you caught on to the repetition there.

Five times in two verses. Sing praises. It's exultant. It's gladsome. Bursting at the seams with joy and thrill and resounding praise. It's kind of difficult to imagine like a contemporary equivalent of national sort of celebration.

Maybe Cathy Freeman gold at the 2000 Olympics, if you were there to remember it. Maybe the rescue of the boys from the flooded cave in Thailand, if you remember that. Maybe any kind of Queensland state of origin victory as well.

I don't know. But it's something to capture the jubilation of the occasion that all and sundry, you know, burst into clap and song. Maybe VE day or VJ day, peace at last, that kind of thing.

[12:12] Now, it may not be the case, but I think the psalm fits that kind of occasion for the Israelites. A grand moment of national praise and celebration, remembering God's great works and kingly leadership and protection.

Singing aloud his praises with clapping and loud songs of joy. Now, by way of an extended side note, the psalm has mentioned God's people clapping and singing and shouting loud songs of joy. So it's appropriate to maybe have a quick think about how we go about our singing together. When you first read the psalm, it may be an easy target to think, mapping it straight across to our singing week by week in church.

Should our songs match, you know, this kind of atmosphere all the time? And I want to resist that urge because it's not sort of particularly the point of the psalm. But I don't want to completely resist it either.

This can be a surprisingly tricky topic, thinking about how we kind of sing and behave in our singing each week. Can generate confusion or feelings of guilt or judgment. But a few thoughts to draw out of the psalm about the manner of our corporate singing together.

[13:23] Firstly, there is a wide spectrum of emotions before God in the psalms. There is dark lament, overwhelming joy, nostalgic recalling of God's great works, extended contemplation, cries for help and rescue, cries of confusion and dread.

There is majestic adoration, tearful repentance. And our songs today kind of, you know, reflect something of this mix. Obviously, we live in the light of Christ and that changes things as well. But it is fitting that our bodies and our singing at least sort of roughly align to the spirit of whatever song we're singing. And while not every song is overwhelming joy and praise, some are.

Secondly, I think it's fair to say we're not a particularly clappy church. Certainly, I'm not a particularly clappy person. And maybe there's all kinds of reasons for that.

Perhaps a healthy suspicion of the charismatic movement and things that maybe kind of remind of that or look like that. Perhaps a twinge of fear that someone next to me will judge me or in some way.

[14:27] Perhaps not wanting sort of physical actions to distract from the substance of the words, of the lyrics. You know, there is, after all, a teaching priority to our singing together, Colossians 3.

Whatever it may be, though, I think we should be reminded gently, certainly I need to be, that clapping and shouting loud songs of joy are within the realms of appropriate behavior in corporate

singing before God and shouldn't be rejected outright.

Thirdly, though, let all things be governed by orderliness and love of one another. If it's not too irreverent of me to adapt Romans 14, let not the one who claps pass judgment on the one who refrains, nor the one who refrains pass judgment on the one who claps.

Don't see your brother or sister clap before the Lord and quietly think of him as silly or undignified or with some vague air of suspicion. Don't see your brother stand reserved before the Lord and think him cold and unmoved by the grace of God.

Do nothing to hinder your brother or sister. Don't, you know, clap in the hope of being seen as more spiritual. Don't refrain in the hope of being seen as more spiritual. God knows our heart in all these things, doesn't he?

[15:40] Okay, back to our psalm. At the end of verse 7, the psalm transitions again out of this kind of super middle praise section and into the final section. Verse 8 starts, God reigns over the nations.

God sits on his holy throne. And maybe it was obvious, but sort of just in case, back when verse 7 said that God is king over all the earth, it wasn't just in the sense of the rock and the grass and, you know, the sea, but the nations too, the peoples.

It hinted at in verse 3, but recall how God raised Pharaoh up, Exodus 9, 16, and ten plagues later brought him low. Or Jabin and Sisera of Canaan, Judges 4, you know, raised up with their iron chariots and later laid low by Jael and her tent peg.

Or King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4, you know, the mighty king of Babylon, he looks over his city one night, brags of his magnificence. He's literally just, how good am I?

How good is my kingdom? I am the best. And for his arrogance, the Lord brings madness upon him. He's driven from the throne. He lives like a wild animal for a time.

[16:51] Plenty of other examples, of course. But God reigns over the nations. He raises up kings and their peoples and brings them low. God sits on his holy throne, unperturbed by the machinations of states and rulers, unthreatened and able to fulfill his every purpose unhindered.

The psalm concludes then with verse 9. 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.

Now, by princes there, think rulers, leaders, representatives. By shields of the earth. Some translations might render shields also as rulers, but the word is shields.

The idea here isn't that sort of every single shield ever made belongs to God, even if that's sort of technically ultimately true. But by shield, think of the sort of symbolic collective military prestige of a nation.

It's king and warriors. It's not really a theme in the Bible, but we do hear about a king's shield. Over in 1 Kings chapter 10, King Solomon makes 200 large and 300 small shields out of gold.

[18:06] And they basically serve to adorn his palace. Not for combat, obviously. Gold's pretty soft. Instead, it represents the prestige and strength of the royal house and royal authority.

Now, at first glance, verse 9 might seem kind of nice and ecumenical and benign. You know, it kind of wraps everything up. The princes gather. The shields belong to God.

He is highly exalted. Done deal. But I hope you noticed, verse 9, princes of the peoples, plural.

Princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham.

So representatives of the peoples, that is, rulers of other nations, not Israel. Verse 9 is very unlike what we saw back in verse 3 and 4.

Here, the peoples, the nations, are represented before God, and in a way, the peoples themselves are kind of present, you know, through their respective princes. And they're present not as footstools, not as conquered enemies, but as part of God's people, as part of the people of the God of Abraham.

[19:17] And perhaps even more puzzling, consider in what sense can this verse even happen in the time of the psalm? As Heman and sons write this, remember, it's the time of the early kingdom, David, the ark coming to Jerusalem.

And sure, there are some neighboring territories who are vassals of King David or have friendly diplomatic relationships. You can imagine these guys kind of maybe coming to attend an event or coming to pay tribute to King David.

But would that even count? Does a couple of neighboring dignitaries bringing a gold vase or flowers or something to some national event really count as being part of God's people, God's chosen

