

Psalm 117:1-2

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-117/psalm-1171-2/>

Sincerest praise is the appropriate response to the Lord's activity in creation from all of God's people in all corners of the earth. By so acknowledging the Lord's special love for every person, each of whom He has created for an everlasting purpose, we honor God's historic and salvific deeds among us. We also find freedom in the reality of who God is. His love for every person unshackles us to be all God intended.

This psalm is part of "The Hallel" (praise) which consists of Psalm 113-118.

Psalm 117 is the shortest psalm and chapter in the entire Bible.

It is in the middle the Hallel grouping of psalms called the "Egyptian Hallel" found in Psalm 113-118.

"Hallel" has its root form in the Hebrew verb הָלַל (H1984 - pronounced: "haw-lal"). Hallel, in various forms means "to acclaim," "to boast of," "to glory in," "to praise." It expresses a deep satisfaction that is found in praising the activities and character of the person being praised.

The verb Hallel is used primarily in the plural suggesting that the joy of recognizing God's greatness is to be shared by God's people. Those who love God come together to rejoice in *the LORD*, and to exalt Him together. The exclamation, "Hallelujah!", comes from this word.

In addition to Psalm 113-118, the Egyptian Hallel, the book of Psalms contains two other Hallels: Psalm 136, the "Great Hallel"; and Psalms 146-150, the "Final Hallel".

The Egyptian Hallel (Psalm 113-118) gets its name from the reference to Egypt in Psalm 114:1. This group of psalms were traditionally sung during Passover Seders which commemorate God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. (To learn more about Passover Seders see The Bible Says article: "The Passover Seder"). Psalm 117 may have been among the hymns sung by Jesus and His disciples during their Passover celebration the night before He was crucified (Matthew 26:30).

Psalm 113 appears to be a rework of the song of Moses and the sons of Israel after God saved them from the clutches of Pharaoh when He closed the Red Sea upon the Egyptians (Exodus 15:1-18). The central verse of this psalm – "Who is like the Lord our God"? (Psalm 113:5) – asks the famous question of the hymn in Exodus: "Who is like You among the gods, O Lord?" (Exodus 15:11).

Psalm 114 is a praise song describing the Exodus. It marvels at how the physical features of the earth trembled in wonder at how God called and miraculously brought Israel out of Egypt through the sea and across the Jordan River into the promised land.

Psalm 115 proclaims how God is the central figure in every story and beckons its listeners to trust *the LORD* for they will not be disappointed.

Psalm 116 is a prophetic hymn of praise about the Messiah's betrayal, death, and resurrection.

Psalm 117 is a praise and an evangelical command. It is an exhortation for all peoples to praise *the LORD* for His lovingkindness and whose proclamation prefigures the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

Psalm 118 is the Hosanna Hallel. The first half of the psalm recalls a time when the psalmist called upon *the LORD* as he was surrounded by enemies. *The LORD* delivered Him. The second half of the psalm consists of his triumphant celebration of *the LORD*'s salvation. Psalm 118 is prophetic of the Messiah's victories and its lines were shouted over Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on "Palm Sunday"

First, we encounter the command *Praise the LORD*. Having its root form in the Hebrew verb "hallel" (to praise). This directive to praise establishes the benchmark for the encounter of human mortality with the Existing Immortal Creator God, *the LORD* (Yahweh). This sort of praise shines a bright, focused light upon its Subject. What kind of response ought to be expected other than an articulated recognition of awe toward Someone beyond all human experience? Think of it, we so easily express our joy and wonderment at a beautiful sunset in which we had not the least part in creating. How much more should our appreciation be for the One whose creativity set into place that same sun by which we are so enthralled?

Israel, whose firsthand experience of the Lord in part resulted in the Book of Psalms, was literally born to be an evangelical people. They were destined by the Existing Creator God to call the entire world to faith in the Lord. From Abraham forward they were to bless every nation of the earth, to be a "light to the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6, 42:6; Genesis 18:18). In this manner, Israel was intended to be an agent of God's grace to the entire world.

The second thing we learn from the second phrase of Psalm 117:1 is that those called to *Praise the Lord* are, in fact, the expected yield, harvest, result of Israel's evangelistic tasking. The praise is to emanate from the very nations, races, and cultures that Israel had been born to bless. The Hebrew term "goyim" is translated as *all nations*, which is the same term that over time was readily applied by evolving Jewish religious life to describe the gentile population of the world; all peoples who were not Israel. The call to praise God, then, is issued not exclusively to the sons and daughters of Abraham, but also to the blessed Gentile (non-Jewish) adoptive heirs of salvation!

Beyond being the origin of many nations, Abraham was to be the beginning of a particular line, a great family, a chosen people favored of God (Genesis 17:6-9). Eventually, this growing community and expanding tribe would be named after Abraham's grandson, Jacob, later named Israel. The nation would be known as Israel (Genesis 32:28).

The second phrase of verse 1, *Laud Him, all peoples*, delivers a demand to not only the Jews, but *all peoples*. This includes the most direct heirs of Abraham's received promise from God. The term used here, *peoples*, is intended to expand the focus of the demand from the Gentile nations, to include the tribes of Israel directly descended from Abraham, now known collectively as Israel. The point seems to be that Israel's God is God of all, and desires all to know Him.

God made it clear in setting up Israel that they had an evangelistic mission. He called them to be a priestly nation that was holy to the Lord (Exodus 19:6). This means Israel was to follow God's ways, and demonstrate to the surrounding nations that His ways, the way of loving and serving one another, were superior to the pagan ways where the strong exploited the weak.

The very core of Israel's existence was to joyfully proclaim the Lord's uniquely well-deserved and exalted status in all of creation, to *laud Him*. This nation, now especially identified as God's own people, was to carry the burden of extolling the Lord's merits in such a way as to bring the rest of the world to awareness of God's greatness and salvation from the devastating and demeaning effects of sin. God's plan was to reconcile all peoples to Himself, which was ultimately accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:19-20). This psalm calls all people to God, and demonstrates that the God of Israel is the God of all.

Verse 2, *For His lovingkindness is great toward us*, is startling in its inclusiveness. Despite the demeaning attitude toward Gentiles and Samaritans that seems to be displayed during the time of Jesus' life, the more ancient declaration here is magnificent and generous in its application beyond any one tribe, beyond any one nation, and beyond any one people. It is the indisputable proclamation of the Lord's basic character—love in its fullest expression—and of that unchangeable love toward every person. In this way, Jesus was the fulfillment of Psalm 117, in that He reconciled all peoples to Himself through His death and resurrection (Colossians 1:19-20).

Clearly, *us*, in the phrase *For His lovingkindness is great toward us* is not limiting. Both the directive that nations *Praise the Lord* and the command that all peoples *Laud Him* are embraced as one undifferentiated call. This use of *us*, purposefully reaches out beyond cultural differences, national borders, and all other perceived distinctions raised between one human being and another. From God's point of view, every man, woman, and child is His own creation; each one meant to receive God's love, kindness and grace; each one is meant for the Lord's salvation. Each one is called into relationship with their Creator.

This short psalm's final verse adds *And the truth of the Lord is everlasting*. This concluding addition insists on two absolutes that stand contrary to and constant against much 21st century Western philosophical perspectives about *truth* and time. *Truth* comes from the Lord, and does not change with the whims of men. And this *truth of the Lord* lasts forever, it is *everlasting*.

A popular saying in modern times is that "Everything is relative." That this is an internally contradictory statement can be shown by asking the question "Is that always true?" If yes, then the statement "Everything is relative" is an absolute statement, which means everything is not relative. If the answer is "no" then it is untrue. Either way, the statement is shown to be false. This will ultimately be the case for any philosophy that is based on finite human reason.

But God is not limited by time. He has no finite constraints. Time for us is experienced and limited by an imperfect memory of the past, a tenuous grasp on the present, and merely conjectures (well-informed or not) about the future. Eternity as an expression of limitless time, the *everlasting*, is a topic generally reserved for the metaphysical (theology), the poetic (artistic expression), or the exaggerated (science fiction). But this psalm declares that it should be for all peoples, because the *truth of the Lord* is for everyone in all times.

By contrast to the whims of man-made philosophies that come and go, the psalmist declares *the truth of the Lord is everlasting*. Recall that the name of the Lord, Yahweh, evokes the Being Who is the One Existing Immortal Creator (Exodus 3:14). Note that this unassailably real truth is such because the Lord is the sole creator of the real truth. That which is not of the Lord cannot compete with real truth; it never can be more than a counterfeit brush against truth.

This is precisely what made Jesus' claim of singleness with God so astonishing to those first hearing His words "I am...*the truth*" (John 14:6) established the Son's oneness with the Father in such forceful terms that those hearing it could no longer avoid declaring either allegiance with or opposition to the Nazarene. This was and is truth in the absolute, unchanging through time, and undiluted by human fear, the passage of history, or the rising and ebbing tides of human reason or ambition.

In fact, it is precisely because this truth is centered in the Existing Eternal Yahweh that it does not *need* proof. All that it speaks of its creator (Psalm 119). It is the Lord's and so it *is* truth. God Himself is eternal—has no beginning nor has an end—so it is with God's truth. God's essential character is love (1 John 4:8, 16); the truth of the reality of God bears witness to that very love. That the *truth of the Lord is everlasting* means that truth, like love, also does not falter, change, or die (1 Corinthians 13:8).

The upshot is that fullest praise and greatest laud is due for the God who loves us all with such focused intensity of eternal purpose. We cannot see it all, we cannot understand it all, we cannot explain it all. It is to us as a vapor or fog, "Hebel" in Hebrew. As [our commentary on Ecclesiastes notes](#), attempts to rely upon human reason and experience to make sense of this fog of reality only leads to futility, folly, madness, and evil.

But when we rely on faith in the truth of God's word to us, our limitations do not matter, for the Eternal Existing Creator God has seen to it all Himself. When we believe His explanations, we can enjoy life to the fullest, even into eternity and the judgement.

We are eternally loved and destined from and within eternity to receive God's invitation: to enter into the true salvation God has offered. That salvation is not only from sin (John 3:14-16) but also from the futility of being trapped in human limitations. The praise of God, recognizing that God is God, and that we can trust that He has our best interest at heart, is the key to breaking away from that which limits and oppresses, and frees us to be all God created us to be (Galatians 5:13).

Biblical Text

1 Praise the Lord, all nations;

Laud Him, all peoples!

2 For His lovingkindness is great toward us,

And the truth of the Lord is everlasting.

Praise the Lord!