

Psalm 147

“Great is our God and of great power”

Psalm 147: If the previous psalm is individualistic, this psalm forms an appropriate contrast with its emphasis on communal praise. The three sections of the psalm are clearly discernible since each is initiated with a call to praise (verses 1, 7, 12), and then followed by a cause for praise;

- (1) Because the Lord delivers the oppressed (verses 2-6);
- (2) Because the Lord provides for the faithful (verses 8-11); and
- (3) Because the Lord especially protects Israel (verses 13-20).

Verses 1-20 (see note on Psalm 146:1-10). This seems to be a post-Exilic psalm (compare verses 2-3), which might have been used to celebrate the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem (compare verses 2, 13; Neh. 12:27, 43). The hard questions that God posed to Job (Job chapters 38 to 41), and Israel (Isa. Chapter 40), the psalmist here turns into declarations worthy of praise. (Verses 1, 7, 12), each introduce a stanza of praise in this 3-part hymn. (Verses 2, 3, 19, 20), specifically spake of God’s involvement with Israel.

- I. Praise the Lord – Part 1 (147:1-6);
- II. Praise the Lord – Part 2 (147:7-11);
- III. Praise the Lord – Part 3 (147:12-20).

Psalm 147:1 "Praise ye the LORD: for [it is] good to sing praises unto our God; for [it is] pleasant; [and] praise is comely."

When he shall reign, as Kimchi connects this psalm with the preceding. The arguments used to engage men to this work are taken partly from the nature of it, as in the next clauses. And partly from what the Lord is and does, as in the following verses.

"For it is good to sing praises unto our God": It being agreeably to his revealed will, what he enjoins, approves of, and accepts. And is profitable to his people, as well as makes his glory (see Psalm 92:1). Some render it, "because he is good" (as in Psalm 106:1); but the accents, and what follows, will not admit of this sense.

"For it is pleasant": To our God; with which the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, join this clause. The sacrifice of praise is more pleasing to the Lord than any ceremonial sacrifice. Especially when offered from a grateful heart in the name of Christ, and with a view to his glory. And it is pleasant to saints themselves, when grace is in exercise, and they make melody in their hearts to the Lord.

"And praise is comely": Is due to the Lord, and becomes his people to give it to him. It is but their reasonable service. And a beautiful and lovely sight it is to see the chosen, redeemed, and called of the Lamb, harping with their harps, and singing the song of redeeming love.

Comely in the verse above, means suitable. Praise ye the LORD could be said in one word, "Hallelujah". This word is universal. It has the same meaning in all languages. There is nothing more beautiful than a praise service unto the Lord. There is such a beautiful spirit that sweeps over the church and the people. It is as if you could reach out and touch God with your hand. God inhabits the praises of His people. This is a quick way to experience His presence.

Psalm 147:2 "The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel."

He builds up the walls; he restores the city. He has caused the temple to be reconstructed. This language would be applicable to a return from the captivity. There may be an allusion here to the language in (Psalm 102:16), "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory" (see notes at that passage). What is there spoken of as what would be in the future is here spoken of as accomplished, and as a ground of praise. "Build up Jerusalem": Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle this portion of Israel's history.

"He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel": Those who have been exiled from their native land, and who have been scattered as outcasts in a foreign country. This is appropriate language to use on the supposition that the psalm was composed after the return from the exile, for it is in such language that the return was predicted by the prophets. "And he shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah" (Isa. 11:12). "The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel" (Isa. 56:8).

This could be a prophetic pronouncement by David of the return of the Israelites to their homeland. Jerusalem has always been thought of as their holy city. They feel as if they are not home, until they can worship in Jerusalem.

Psalm 147:3 "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

"Healeth the broken in heart" (compare Psalm 137; brokenhearted), with Psalm 126 (healed).

The healing of the "broken in heart" in the broadest sense includes those who grieve over their sins as well as those who are afflicted by life's adversities. The binding of wounds presents a similar picture. In either case, the gentle pity of the Lord is beautifully depicted as He tends to the hurting as a kindly physician (Luke 4:18; 5:31-32).

God is not going to discard the people of earth and start all over with a new group. He is going to change the group he already has and make them new.

Revelation 21:5 "And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."

God will mend the broken hearted and heal their spirits, as well as their bodies.

Psalm 147:4 "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by [their] names."

He counts them all. God only can do this. The stars are so numerous that no astronomer can count them. They lie so far in the depths of space, and are so remote from each other, that no man can be so presumptuous as to suppose that he has even seen any considerable part of them. Even by the aid of the most powerful telescopes.

"He calleth them all by their names": As if each one had a name, and God could call them forth one by one by their names, like the muster-roll of an army. This language seems to be taken from (Isa. 40:26). "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number; he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth" (see notes at that passage).

With man it would be impossible to count the stars, for they are as numerous as the sand of the sea. Notice, that He calls them each by name. We are not a number with God. He has a special name for each of us, that only God and we know. This name reveals our true character. Whether the stars here or people are physical stars does not matter.

Psalm 147:5 "Great [is] our Lord, and of great power: his understanding [is] infinite."

(See the notes at Psalm 48:1).

"And of great power": This seems to be added, as in (Isa. 40:28). In view of the power required in making the heavens, and in guiding and numbering the stars. "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"

"His understanding is infinite": Margin, of his understanding there is no number. That is, this corresponds with his power to number the stars. There is no limit to it. It is not bounded. There is no point reached where it can be said that there is no more; that it is exhausted. "There is no searching of his understanding" (see notes at Isa. 40:28).

Infinite in the verse above means impossible to number. There is no way to measure His greatness. There is nothing so great that you could compare it to. Great in this instance, just does not seem to be descriptive enough of Him. All things are possible to Him. Have you ever noticed that a miracle comes from Him, when it is impossible to man? Our intelligence is not great enough to even describe the greatness of the Lord. Lord is Adonai in this particular instance.

Psalm 147:6 "The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground."

Each part of the psalm ends with a contrast, here the meek and the wicked (compare verses 10, 11, 19, 20).

Matthew 5:5 "Blessed [are] the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

The meek may seem to be down trodden now, but God has plans for them to inherit the earth. Those who seem to be in control now, will be cast down and ruled over by the meek.

Psalm 147:7 "Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God:"

Accompany the praise of God, the expression of worship, with a grateful remembrance of the past. The one will aid the other, and the two will constitute acceptable and proper worship. The first word here means properly to answer, or respond. And the idea would seem to be, that we are to make a suitable response or answer to the manifold layouts which we have received at the hand of God.

"Sing praise upon the harp unto our God": An instrument of music used in the times of the Old Testament. An emblem of the heart, and of making melody in it to the Lord. The hearts of believers are the harps of God, on and with which they sing unto him. When they sing aright, and these are in proper tune.

In the last few verses, we have been seeing the greatness of God and what He does for His own. Now, we see what our response to all of His goodness should be. We have said before in these lessons, that praising Him in prayer is not always enough to do. Our heart is so full of praise at times that it burst forth in singing. David is saying in this verse, to not only sing, but play the harp as well. This is the highest form of praise and thanksgiving. We must show our thanks to God who has done all of this for us.

Psalm 147:8 "Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains."

God sends "rain" as part of His blessing on all people so crops can grow (Lev. 26:1-13; Job 38:41; Matt. 5:45). Theologians call this "common grace", God's goodness to all people, both the saved and the unsaved.

There are some modern ministers who would have you believe that the devil is in control of the elements of this earth. Over and over in these studies, we have seen that it is God who causes it to rain or not to rain. It is God who set the heavens in place, it is God who causes the mountain to grow grass. God is in control of everything.

Psalm 147:9 "He giveth to the beast his food, [and] to the young ravens which cry."

Through the plenty of grass growing upon the mountains. By the rain falling from the clouds of heaven upon them. These cannot provide for themselves, but the Lord feeds them. And they wait upon him for their food, and receive it of him (Psalm 104:27). How much more will he feed his own people, both with temporal and spiritual food. Though in their fallen state they are become like the beasts, of which they are sensible when called by grace, and own and acknowledge it (Psalm 49:12).

"And to the young ravens which cry": Which are particularly mentioned, because contemptible creatures, and of no use and service to men, and by the ceremonial law were impure to the Jews. And the rather, because, as naturalists observe, they are very early turned out of their nests, or forsaken by their dams. And this particular instance of the care of Providence is elsewhere

observed (Job 38:41). Arama takes notice of the preservation of this creature in the ark, and the use of it to Elijah. The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, render it, "that call upon him"; that is, upon God and to him. They are expressly said to cry (Job 38:41). The ancient fathers interpret this figuratively. And by the "ravens" understand the Gentiles; and by their "young ones" Christians that spring from them, who call upon the true God.

God built this earth and the heavens, and the animals, and the grass to furnish the needs of the animals, who in turn take care of the needs of man. Everything was made for the habitation of man upon this earth. God is concerned about all the animals and birds and fish. He even told Noah to take the animals and birds on the ark with him to preserve them.

Psalm 147:10 "He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man."

The horse is among the noblest works of God, perhaps the noblest of all the animals that he has made (see notes at Job 39:19-25). Yet God regards with more interest and pleasure humble piety than he does any mere power. However great and wonderful it may be.

"He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man": Not the same pleasure as in piety. He prefers the humble heart to this. The reference is to man as capable of rapid marches, of quick movements in assaulting an enemy. The allusion being, perhaps, to an army prepared for war, cavalry and infantry. The horse moving on with resistless force, the foot-soldiers with rapid motion.

A horse to God, was a work animal. His strength was for the purpose of helping man. God is not interested in how far the horse can run, neither is He interested in the athletic ability of the man. God is interested in man's soul, not his body.

Psalm 147:11 "The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."

In those who truly worship him, however humble, poor, and unknown to people they may be. However unostentatious, retired, unnoticed may be their worship. Not in the "pride, pomp, and circumstance of war" is his pleasure. Not in the march of armies; not in the valor of the battlefield. Not in scenes where "the garments of the warrior are rolled in blood." But in the closet, when the devout child of God prays. In the family, when the group bend before Him in solemn devotion. In the assembly, quiet, serious, calm, when his friends are gathered together for prayer and praise. In the heart that truly loves, reverences, adores Him.

"In those that hope in his mercy": It is a pleasure to him to have the guilty, the feeble, the undeserving hope in Him, trust in Him, seek Him.

As we said in the verse above, God is interested in our spirit and soul. This is speaking of those who have put their faith and hope in the mercies of God. The wise hearted who fear Him are the Christians.

Psalm 147:12 "Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion."

In addition to this general praise in which all may unite, there are special reasons why Jerusalem and its inhabitants should praise God. Just as now, in addition to the general reasons pertaining to all people why they should praise God. There are special reasons why Christians, why his redeemed people, should do it. What those reasons, as pertaining to the inhabitants of Jerusalem were, is specified in the following verses.

Jerusalem is the city of our Great God. Zion is speaking of the church. This is really speaking of physical and spiritual Israel. The church of believers should be praising God continually.

Psalm 147:13 "For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee."

“He hath strengthened”: Refers to a means of defense, most likely in reference to the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls in Nehemiah’s time.

There is a wall that surrounds the physical Jerusalem. He has built a hedge around those spoken of in the verse above. He is the fortress for the Christians. His blood covers us, and surrounds us and keeps us safe. The children within are the children of God. We are the ones who have been transformed from sons of men into sons of God.

Romans 8:15 "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

Psalm 147:14 "He maketh peace [in] thy borders, [and] filleth thee with the finest of the wheat."

Margin, he maketh thy border peace. The word border here refers to a boundary, and stands for all the domain or territory included within the boundaries of a country. The idea is that peace prevailed throughout the land.

"And filleth thee with the finest of the wheat": Margin, as in Hebrew, fat of wheat. Literally, "He satisfies thee with the fat of wheat." There is no want of wheat, and that of the best kind. "I will satisfy her poor with bread" (compare notes at Psalm 132:15).

The only real peace is the peace that the Lord Jesus Christ brings, for He is the King of peace. The choice wheat is speaking of the believers in Christ.

Matthew 13:30 "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

Verses 15-18: Describes the cold weather that Jerusalem can experience. God sovereignly oversees the normal and the extraordinary.

Psalm 147:15 "He sendeth forth his commandment [upon] earth: his word runneth very swiftly."

That is, with reference to the productions of the earth. To the changes which occur. To the seasons. To snow, frost, ice, cold, heat, wind; and he is universally and immediately obeyed. Nature everywhere yields a ready acquiescence to his will.

"His word runneth very swiftly": So the Gospel did in the first times of it. Like lightning, from one end of the heaven to the other. The words of it went into all the world, and the sound of it unto the ends of the earth. It had a free course, and was glorified. And so it will in the latter day, when many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased (see Rom. 10:18).

It was by the Word of God that the world, and in fact, the universe was created. The Word of God is the great power in the earth. The spoken and the written Word are the two greatest powers, and they are one. His Word is law. His Word will make a quick work of this earth.

Psalm 147:16 "He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes."

He covers the earth with snow, so that it seems to have a clothing of wool. "For he saith to the snow, be thou on the earth" (compare notes at Job 37:6).

"He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes": As if ashes were strewed over the earth. Or, as easily as one strews ashes.

This is just saying that it snows at His command. The snow is white and fluffy like wool. One very amazing thing to me is that no two snowflakes are alike. You wake up in the morning and frost is everywhere. Just as soon as the sun arises, it is gone.

Psalm 147:17 "He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?"

The word rendered morsels means properly a bit, a crumb, as of bread (Gen. 18:5; Judges 19:5). The allusion here would seem to be to hail, which God sends upon the earth as easily as one scatters crumbs of bread from the hand.

"Who can stand before his cold"? Or, hail. The word is the same, except in pointing, as the preceding word rendered ice. The idea is that no one can stand before the pelting of the hail, when God sends it forth, or scatters it upon the earth.

The answer is no one. The body cannot live, if the temperature of the blood changes more than ten degrees. Notice, in all of this, God's control over nature.

Psalm 147:18 "He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, [and] the waters flow."

He commands: or, he speaks.

"And melteth them": Melts the snow and the ice. "By the breath of God frost is given" (compare notes at Job 37:10-12). The idea is, that they are entirely under his control. They obey him when he speaks.

"He causeth his wind to blow": The warm south wind: "his" wind, because he directs it, and causes it to perform his will.

"And the waters flow": The snow and the ice melt.

We know that this is true because of the overwhelming rain that came in Noah's day. Not only did it rain on His command, but the water came up from the deep as well. It had never rained on the earth, until God commanded it to rain then. All of nature is subject to the commands of God.

Verses 19-20: The psalmist acknowledges God's unique election of Israel from among all the nations (compare Gen. 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6; Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2; 26:18-19; 2 Sam. 7:23-24; Ezek. 16:1-7).

Psalm 147:19 "He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel."

Margin, words. His commands; his promises; his laws. The things which were before adverted to, pertain to the world in general. All people see his works; all enjoy the benefits of his arrangements in the seasons, in the changes which occur upon the earth. But he has especially favored his own people by giving them his laws, his revealed will. This distinguishes them above all other nations of the earth, and gives them special occasion for gratitude.

"His statutes and his judgments unto Israel": His laws; his written word. The word judgments here refer to the law of God as being that which he judges or determines to be right.

The family of Jacob, who became the nation of Israel, were blessed to have God judgements spoken to them from the mountain and carved into stone by the finger of God for them. All of the rest of the world looked on with awe.

Psalm 147:20 "He hath not dealt so with any nation: and [as for his] judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD."

Or "every nation"; or all the nations under the heavens. Only with the Jewish nation: these only for many hundreds of years were favored with the divine revelation. With the word and ordinances of God; with the law, and with the Gospel. And with the service and worship of God; as well as with promises and prophecies of Christ, and good things to come by him. These were not communicated to any one nation or body of people besides them. Only now and then, to one here and there among the Gentiles. The Gospel was first preached to them at the coming of Christ, and after them to the Gentiles, when rejected by the Jews.

"And as for his judgments, they have not known them": By which are meant, not the providential dispensations of God, which are unsearchable, and past finding out, till made known. Nor punishments inflicted on wicked men, unobserved by them. But the word of God, and the ordinances of it, which the Gentile world for many ages were unacquainted with (see Psalm 19:9).

"Praise ye the Lord": As literal Israel had reason to do, for those distinguishing instances of his favor and goodness. And as the spiritual Israel of God everywhere have. And his ordinances truly and duly administered; at least in some parts of it. And that more than in any other nation under the heavens.

Why He chose this little nation of Israel, no one except God knows. The knowledge of God was given to them in written word. They had the writings of Moses. God set up His tabernacle with them and guided them with His presence for 40 years across the wilderness. He spoke the Word to Moses, and Moses in turn spoke to them the way of God. The spiritual house of Israel is even more blessed. The Word of God took on the form of flesh, and walked upon the earth, and taught all who would listen. This very Word of God gave His body on the cross, so that all who would believe might be saved. Jesus is the spoken Word and He is the written Word. The Bible is the Word of God in written form. Let it speak to you today. This lesson has been about praise of God, who is so far above human understanding that this is our only way to show Him our love for Him. Do not neglect to praise Him.

Psalm 147 Questions

1. What does comely in verse 1 mean?
2. What is one word that says, praise ye the Lord?
3. God _____ the praises of His people.
4. What does the author think that verse 2 could be?
5. Besides numbering the stars, what does He do?
6. The secret name that God gives each of us, tells what about us?
7. What does the word (infinite), in verse 5 mean?
8. When does God do a miracle?
9. The Lord lifteth up the _____.
10. He casteth down the _____.
11. What kind of singing is to be done in verse 7?

12. Is the devil in control of the elements of the earth?
13. The earth, and everything in it, was made for the _____ of man.
14. He is not interested in the athletic ability of man; He is interested in his _____.
15. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that _____ Him.
16. Who are they?
17. Jerusalem is the _____ of our great God.
18. Who is Zion symbolic of?
19. What covers the Christian and protects him?
20. Who are the wheat in verse 14?
21. What are the 2 great powers in the universe?
22. He giveth snow like _____.
23. Who can stand before His cold?
24. All of nature is subject to whose command?
25. Who did God give His law to?
26. In what did the children of Israel receive the written Word?
27. What has been the subject of this lesson?