

# DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

March 6, 2022 | Why We Praise God

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

What most frequently stirs your heart to praise?

Read Psalm 47.

Pray God will use this psalm to elevate your heart to praise.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Praise God for everything He is!

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

None of us truly understands the majesty of God and the extent to which He deserves our praise.

### MEDITATE

*“Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!” (Psalm 47:1).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+Psalm 47 shares several themes with Psalm 46. The strongest point of connection concerns God’s glory among the nations. In Psalm 46, the psalmist calls for it. Psalm 47 reveals why God warrants their praise. He is king over all the earth.*

Q: *What causes praise?*

Q: *What would keep you from joining others in praise?*

For several years, I worked in a support role for a company that manufactured multi-million-dollar products. As support personnel, I was often clueless about the company's products and processes. One day, I noticed an engineer so elated she was nearly doing summersaults around the shop floor. When I asked her what the cause for her excitement was, she told me she had just reengineered a process on one of the products the company makes. She said something about synchronizing a welding and milling process so they could be done simultaneously (I still don't understand what exactly she said). After she finished explaining, she looked at me with a funny expression because she could tell I didn't share her excitement. When it dawned on her I had no clue what she was saying, she simply told me her work could cut the cost of making the product by 3-4%. Her achievement would significantly increase the company's profits and fast-track her career. When she put it that way, I was excited for her.

It is hard to feign excitement when you do not understand why you should be excited. In Psalm 47, the psalmist calls for the readers to praise God, but he understands his audience will need to know why. As he calls people to praise God, he quickly outlines reasons we should praise Him. At times, his excitement simply overcomes him. He cannot stop calling for God's praise long enough to explain why we should praise Him. Nevertheless, the psalmist offers a compelling argument for why all the earth should praise the God of Scripture.

Q: *What keeps you from praising God in the manner you should?*

Q: *How does praising God differ from other arenas in which we may show praise?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – A closer fellowship with God should lead to a deeper praise of Him. As you monitor your progress in your devotional life this year, pay attention to how your praise and worship of God is impacted. During a time when I was seeking to reinvigorate my prayer life, it dawned on me one day that my prayer times had become an expression of praise even when the intent of the specific prayer did not immediately concern praise. I could not pray for the salvation of my children without praising God's worth. I could not pray for the

healing of the sick apart from rejoicing at the thought that God would hear me and respond. I could not pray for my pastor's sermon without overflowing emotion at the thought of God changing lives through His Word. As you consider praise during this lesson, keep in mind that praise is not restricted to singing songs. Praise is something that comes bursting out of your inner being at even the most unexpected times.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Many scholars have tried to divide Psalm 47 into stanzas, but hardly anyone agrees on how. The psalm oscillates between several themes, and it only contains a single poetic term that could indicate structure (selah, verse 4). The central focus of this psalm is a repeated call to praise God. Therefore, the best way to structure this study will be around the reasons the psalmist calls for people to praise God.

1. GOD IS MOST HIGH.
2. GOD IS A WARRIOR.
3. GOD IS KING.
4. GOD IS PROVIDER.

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will trace in more detail the reasons Psalm 47 gives for praising God.*

## 1. GOD IS MOST HIGH

### ▣ PSALM 47:1-2

Q: *In what ways is God "Most High" in this psalm?*

Q: *Does the designation "Most High" mean the psalmist believed in other gods?*

The psalmist begins his justification for calling others to praise God by addressing Him as “Most High.” The designation “most high” occurs among Israel’s neighbors to address their deities. For them, the phrase likely alluded to a pantheon of gods of which the “most high” is preeminent. But as a monotheistic Israelite, the psalmist used this language to allude to God’s preeminence over the rest of the created order. No created object, no created being is superior to God. He transcends everything else that is real or can be imagined. God intrinsically warrants praise.

The designation “Most High” was frequently used by Israelites when people outside of the covenant people of God were being addressed (Genesis 14:18–22; Numbers 24:16; Isaiah 14:14). This point coincides nicely with the main point of Psalm 47 because the psalmist was addressing all nations, calling them to lay aside their pantheons of gods to worship the one true God.

❓: *What competes with God for the title of “most high” in your life?*

❓: *What kind of “gods” are in our culture’s “pantheon”? What do we praise?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – More than 2500 years have passed since Psalm 47 was written, but the affirmation of our God as “Most High” is just as important and just as contentious now as it was then. The characters have changed. The pantheons of the ancient Near East are now found in the history books rather than the market down the street, but new wanna-be contenders have emerged to take their place. Perhaps the most pervasive and contentious contender in our culture is the autonomous self. We see ourselves as rulers of our own fate and instinctively rebel against any outside force intruding into our lives, including God. Christians would be foolish to think we are not equally capable of being caught up in this way of thinking. This is one reason Oakwood’s emphasis on daily devotionals is so crucial. At the heart of a consistent devotional life is the recognition that we ultimately are not in control of ourselves or the world around us. God Most High is! Spending part of our day contemplating the glory of God, reading His Word, and communing with Him in prayer is a crucial way we acknowledge God as Most High and as the highest authority in our lives.

## 2. GOD IS A WARRIOR

### ❏ PSALM 47:3, 5

Q: *How does God fill the role of a warrior in Psalm 47?*

Q: *How did God fill the role of a warrior in Israel's past?*

Thinking of God as a warrior may seem odd to us, but God filled this role at several key points in Israel's history. The first occasion was during the exodus. The Israelites were enslaved to the Egyptians and unable to deliver themselves. God waged war against Egypt (Exodus 7–12) and then rescued His people from being slaughtered by a vengeful Egyptian army (Exodus 14). The exodus narrative concludes with a song in which God is described as a “man of war” (Exodus 15:3). God also filled the role of warrior during the conquest. The first city to be conquered when Israel entered the promised land was Jericho. It was surrounded by massive defensive walls. The city would have been a major obstacle for the people of Israel at such an early point in their campaign. But God toppled the walls of Jericho on His own, and the Israelites won an easy victory at the outset of their conquest (Joshua 6). God filled the role of a warrior when His people were in military need.

As God had filled the role of a warrior in the past, the psalmist anticipated a day in the future when God will again function as a warrior on behalf of His people. He will subdue the nations under His people, and they will no longer be subjected to their rule or abuse (Psalm 47:3). Like a victorious battalion returning from triumph, God will enter into the city of His people with a shout (Psalm 47:5). Celebration will ensue. Our warrior God is worthy of praise.

Q: *How does the picture of God as a warrior differ from the way many people understand God today?*

Q: *How could the concept of God as a warrior appeal to some people in a way that other depictions of God do not?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Applying the “God is a warrior” theme demands sensitivity to our place in redemptive history and our role in God's divine mission. This theme cannot be ignored as some who would rather emphasize God's universal benevolence may prefer. Nor does this theme allow for Christians to invoke violence against what they find evil. Unlike the people of Israel in the Old Testament, the church will not inherit a physical land from God during this age, so we should not expect to see God adopting the role of divine warrior in that respect.

Christians do, however, recognize an ongoing battle between good and evil. We believe one day God will intervene in the history of the world and reassume the mantle of divine warrior. He will act decisively to put an end to all evil and all resistance to His reign. Christians should yearn for the day God will appear again as a warrior. In the meantime, it is our responsibility to confront evil with the gospel of Christ. The gospel has the power to transform lives and curb the reign of evil as it is manifested in the world today.

Finally, under very specific conditions, proper authorities may recognize evil has manifested itself in such a way that it must be fought with force. Under such conditions, it is appropriate for Christians to yearn for God to act as a warrior against evil in a manner that is consistent with but not connected to the time when He will finally act decisively to defeat evil. Under such circumstances, it is also appropriate for Christians to take arms against the spread of evil in the world. Such circumstances are typically described as a “just war.”

### 3. GOD IS KING

#### ■ PSALM 47:2, 6-9

Q: *What is the extent of God's reign?*

Q: *In what ways is God like a king?*

The psalmist shouted praise to God because He is king. Today, most monarchies do not function as an absolute monarchy; the powers of the monarch are limited. For example, in the United Kingdom, Queen Elizabeth is the head of state but appoints a Prime Minister who is approved by the House of Commons to run the government. In some cases, the monarch of a country could theoretically be voted out of that role. In the ancient world, however, monarchies were absolute. Within the kingdom, the king's powers were unlimited. Nothing could restrain the will of the king apart from having his authority usurped. This is the context in which the psalmist declared God to be king. He yearned for the day God's reign would be recognized throughout the whole earth and by every nation.

Unlike typical ancient Near Eastern monarchies, however, the nations under God's reign will not resent His sovereignty but rejoice because of it. God has no need to abuse the resources or subjects under His command. He does not need to prove His worth or dignity by massive building projects. He does not need to expand His realm, because it covers everything that is. God is free to mediate blessings to others.

Q: *In what ways is God already king over the whole earth?*

Q: *How do you resist God's reign over your life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Neither God nor the psalmist offers any alternative to absolute sovereignty. Unlike modern monarchies, God's reign over our hearts cannot be limited by us, nor will He delegate His reign to another. Many people are willing for God to be sovereign over specific parts of their lives but not over everything. They may allow God to be sovereign on Sunday mornings but not during the rest of the week, over finances but not their dating lives, in their private lives but not during work hours. Many secular people treat religion as if God operates in this way, as if His reign can be divided between public and private spheres. God has not left that option open to followers of Christ.

Q: *Why does the psalmist refer to the "God of Abraham"?*

Q: *How is God's reign over the nations depicted in Psalm 46?*

The psalmist stressed that God's reign will be complete. He will reign over the earth's landmasses and the nations within them. The psalmist links the nations of the earth to the God of Abraham. By referring to the "God of Abraham," he draws the reader's attention to the Abrahamic covenant. God declared that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham (Genesis 12:3). When God's reign is extended over the whole earth, the promise made to Abraham will be fulfilled. The peoples of the earth will unite with the descendants of Abraham to worship God (John 12:32; Romans 4:11; Galatians 3:7–9).

Q: *How does the psalmist's vision coincide with the mission Jesus gave His followers [Matthew 28:18–19]?*

Q: *Through the lens of the New Testament, what demand does the psalmist's vision make on us?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – One day, the nations will unite with the true people of Abraham to glorify God and embrace His sovereign reign. But that day has not yet arrived, and many nations still rebel against Him. Jesus has made salvation available to all who would receive it, and He has called on His followers to spread the good news of salvation among the nations. His promises to Abraham and the psalmist’s vision remain to be fulfilled. We have been given the task of taking the gospel to the nations. Whether that entails actively going yourself or giving generously so others can go, you cannot treat the vision of this psalm as a recommendation or an add-on. God’s intention to be worshipped throughout all the earth should direct your calling as a believer.

## 4. GOD IS PROVIDER

■ **PSALM 47:4; AMOS 6:8; MARK 10:29–31**

🔍: *What is Israel’s heritage?*

🔍: *How is the promised land described in the Old Testament?*

God warrants our praise because He is our provider. God’s provision in the Old Testament centers on the promised land. We have already seen how God functioned as a warrior when Israel was occupying the promised land, but the story of God’s provision goes deeper. As modern society has shifted to an urban and industrialized setting from a rural and agricultural one, the importance God’s promise of land becomes more difficult to see. But ancient peoples recognized that their prosperity was often tied to their land and its fruitfulness. As the psalmist said, God chose Israel’s heritage for them (verse 4), and He chose a fruitful land that would allow Israel to flourish.

🔍: *What heritage do we look forward to as Christians?*

🔍: *Why is it challenging to trust in God’s provision?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Just as God provided a heritage for the nation of Israel in the Old Testament; He will provide a heritage for everyone who confesses Christ as Lord. Jesus alluded to our heritage in Mark 10:29–31. This



passage contains the discussion between Jesus and His disciples after His encounter with the rich young man. The rich young man rejected the heritage found in Jesus because he did not trust that Jesus could provide better than he could himself. Jesus assured His disciples that they would receive more from following Him than they could ever obtain on their own. One remarkable thing about this passage is that Jesus emphasized that His followers will find their heritage in this age as well as the age to come. We do not have to wait until heaven before we realize how God has provided a heritage for us. We are a hundred times better off receiving from Jesus than we would be searching for our own inheritance. Jesus said this despite elsewhere acknowledging that following Him will lead to trouble in this life (John 16:33). No matter what it costs, the heritage we have through Jesus's provision is worth it.

❓: *What is the "pride of Jacob"?*

❓: *How is the phrase "pride of Jacob" used differently in Amos 6:8?*

In Psalm 47:4, the "pride of Jacob" refers to the promised land, the heritage the people of Israel received. Jacob was the patriarch who was renamed "Israel" in Genesis 32:22–32. His children were the forefathers of what would become the twelve tribes of Israel. Psalm 47:4 mentions the pride of Jacob within a context of Israelite faithfulness, and God is said to love the pride of Jacob. The same phrase appears in Amos 6:8 but in the context of Israelite unfaithfulness. There, God said He hated the pride of Jacob. This contrast calls attention to both God's grace in provision and Israel's rebelliousness against God. Even though God had been faithful to provide the promised land as an inheritance, Israel could not keep from abandoning their God.

❓: *How is God's grace evident in our lives even after repenting of sin and confessing Jesus as Lord?*

❓: *How can we train ourselves to enjoy our heritage to an even greater extent in this life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – God has also been gracious in providing a heritage for us, even though we did not deserve it at the moment of salvation and do not deserve it still. God's provision always begins with His grace and

always continues in His grace. We should never deceive ourselves into thinking we have somehow warranted God's provision. The key to our growth in holiness and love for God is reflecting upon the grace He has shown us in Jesus Christ. As we reflect more upon His grace, we will appreciate our inheritance even more.

## NEXT STEPS

The psalmist gave several reasons for praising God with every ounce of energy we have, but his list is certainly far from exhaustive. During your devotion times, you should periodically be giving yourself time to think and reflect on God, His creation, and your part in it. At some point over the next week, take some time to reflect on additional reasons God deserves your praise. Make a list of the reasons you think of and consider sharing it during your next small group time.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*Father, I praise you because you are the divine warrior who battles on my behalf. I need never worry that your victory is out of reach.*

*God, I praise you that you are indeed God Most High! Nothing warrants my praise the way you do. Nothing should take my gaze from your glory.*

*Father, you are the great king over all the earth. You deserve my absolute allegiance.*

*God, you have provided for me more through Jesus than I will ever deserve. Help me to dwell on your grace more every day.*