

Psalms 117:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.

Analysis

O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. Psalm 117 is Scripture's shortest chapter—only two verses—yet it contains the Bible's most expansive worship invitation: all nations, all peoples called to praise Israel's God. This tiny psalm anticipates gospel's universal reach centuries before Christ's Great Commission.

"O praise" (הלל/halelu) is imperative plural of halal, meaning to praise, celebrate, boast in, make a show of. This isn't private, internal appreciation but vocal, visible, exuberant celebration. The imperative indicates command, not suggestion. Praise isn't optional response to God's character but appropriate, necessary, commanded response. The verb form calls for immediate, active, ongoing praise.

"The LORD" (יהוה/et-Yahweh) uses Israel's covenant name for God with direct object marker et. This is remarkable: Gentile nations are commanded to praise Yahweh—not generic deity, not their own gods, but Israel's covenant God. This assumes Yahweh's sovereignty extends beyond Israel to all nations. He isn't merely Israel's tribal deity but universal Creator and King deserving universal worship.

"All ye nations" (כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם/kol-hagoyim) explicitly addresses Gentiles. Goyim means nations, peoples, Gentiles—non-Israelite ethnicities. The comprehensive "all" allows no exceptions. Not just friendly nations or culturally similar peoples but ALL nations—enemies and allies, distant and near, known and unknown. This universal scope anticipates Revelation's vision: "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" worshiping before God's throne (Revelation 7:9).

"Praise him" (שִׁבְּחוּהוּ/shavchuhu) uses different verb—shabach, meaning commend, praise, proclaim. While halal emphasizes celebration, shabach emphasizes proclamation, declaration, public testimony. Together they paint complete picture: celebrate God enthusiastically and proclaim His worth publicly.

"All ye people" (כָּל-הָעָם/kol-ha'umim) intensifies and parallels the previous phrase. Le'om means people, nation, tribe, community—emphasizing population groups. The parallelism drives home the point: absolutely every people group should praise Yahweh. No ethnic group, cultural identity, or national affiliation exempts anyone from this worship obligation and privilege.

Historical Context

This universal call to praise appears throughout Scripture, though often overlooked in light of Israel's particular election. God's covenant with Abraham included: "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). David's psalms repeatedly envision universal worship: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee" (Psalm 22:27). Isaiah prophesied God's house becoming "an house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 56:7).

Ancient Near Eastern religion was typically nationalistic—each people had its god(s), and each god had its people. Moabites worshiped Chemosh, Ammonites worshiped Molech, Canaanites worshiped Baal and Asherah. Gods' power was thought limited geographically and ethnically. When Naaman the Syrian was healed, he asked for Israelite soil to worship Yahweh in Syria, thinking God's power limited to Israel's territory (2 Kings 5:17).

Against this background, Psalm 117's universal call is revolutionary. Yahweh isn't merely Israel's national deity but universal Creator and King deserving all peoples' worship. His sovereignty transcends geography, ethnicity, culture. He created all nations (Acts 17:26), rules all kingdoms (Daniel 4:17), and judges all peoples (Romans 2:11). Therefore all owe Him worship, obedience, praise.

Jesus's ministry demonstrated this universality. He healed Gentiles (Matthew 8:5-13; 15:21-28), ministered in Gentile regions (Mark 7:31), and commissioned disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19). His death ransomed people "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9). Psalm 117 prophetically anticipated this gospel expansion.

Paul quotes Psalm 117:1 in Romans 15:11 as scriptural proof that gospel includes Gentiles. He argues: Old Testament consistently predicted Gentile inclusion in God's salvation. Therefore Jewish and Gentile believers should worship together as one family, all praising Israel's Messiah who came to save the world.

Church history records gospel's progression fulfilling Psalm 117. Pentecost gathered Jews from every nation (Acts 2:5-11). Philip evangelized Samaritans and an Ethiopian (Acts 8). Peter preached to Cornelius's household (Acts 10). Paul's missionary journeys planted churches throughout Roman Empire. Through centuries, gospel spread to Europe, Africa, Asia, Americas, Oceania—all nations praising the LORD.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Why does the shortest psalm contain the Bible's most expansive worship invitation, and what does this suggest about Scripture's priorities?
2. How should recognizing that all nations are commanded to praise Yahweh affect Christian evangelism and missions?
3. What is significant about Paul quoting Psalm 117:1 in Romans 15:11 as proof that gospel includes Gentiles?
4. How can diverse ethnic, cultural, and national expressions of worship fulfill this psalm's vision while maintaining doctrinal unity?

Interlinear Text

כָּל שֶׁ בָּח וְהוֹדָה לַיהוָה אֶת הַלֵּל ו
O praise H853 the LORD H3605 all ye nations H1471 praise H3605
H1984 H3068
הָאֲמִיּוֹת:
him all ye people H523

Additional Cross-References

Romans 15:11 (Resurrection): And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.

Revelation 15:4 (Worship): Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

Revelation 5:9 (Parallel theme): And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

Psalms 86:9 (Worship): All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.

Psalms 150:6 (Resurrection): Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

Psalms 67:3 (Resurrection): Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.