

Psalm 147:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.

Analysis

This verse shifts from worship practice to theological reflection on God's majesty and nature: 'Great is our God, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.' The affirmation 'Great is our God' personalizes the cosmic declaration, claiming God's greatness as directly known and experienced by 'us.' 'And of great power' (Hebrew 'va-ligvura rabbe') emphasizes that God's greatness is not merely theoretical but involves actual power to accomplish purposes. 'His understanding is infinite' (Hebrew 'le-tevunato ein mispar') asserts that God's wisdom exceeds human comprehension and measurement. The phrase employs 'understanding' (tevuna), emphasizing intelligent comprehension rather than mere knowledge. The progression from greatness to power to wisdom creates a multidimensional portrait: God is incomparably mighty and wise. This verse provides the theological foundation for the preceding call to worship - we praise because God is demonstrably great, powerful, and wise. The emphasis on God's 'infinite understanding' suggests that divine action, even when it appears incomprehensible to humans, flows from perfect knowledge.

Historical Context

The phrase 'Great is our God' echoes the testimony formula found throughout the Psalter and prophetic literature. The attribution of infinite understanding to God distinguishes Him from human rulers and even from angelic beings in ancient Near Eastern thought. Proverbs (composed in similar post-exilic period) emphasizes divine wisdom extensively (Proverbs 8), portraying Wisdom as an

attribute coexistent with God. The idea that God's power and understanding are infinite provided theodicy framework in post-exilic Judaism: God's infinite wisdom means that apparent injustices or incomprehensibilities are understood by God, even if hidden from human perception. The verse's theological claims appear throughout later Jewish liturgy, particularly in the Kaddish prayer ('May His great name be blessed throughout all time and worlds') and in medieval philosophical works integrating Greek philosophy with Jewish theology. In Psalm 147 specifically, this verse of theological affirmation is followed by verses of particular examples of God's power and care (building Jerusalem, gathering exiles, healing broken hearts, numbering the stars), demonstrating that infinite power and understanding are known through specific historical and natural acts.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does 'great power' differ from theoretical greatness, and why does the psalm emphasize both?
2. In what ways does recognizing God's infinite understanding provide comfort when divine action seems incomprehensible?
3. Why does the verse move from affirmation of God's power to affirmation of His understanding?
4. How should humanity's finite understanding relate to our claims about God's justice and goodness?
5. In what ways does the infinity of God's understanding challenge human attempts to systematize or limit theology?

Interlinear Text

מְסֻפָּר: אֵין תִּבְונַת כְּחַזְקַת
Great is our Lord and of great power his understanding is infinite
H1419 H113 H7227 H3581 H8394 H369 H4557

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 40:28 (References Lord): 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? there is no searching of his understanding.

Psalms 96:4 (References Lord): For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods.

Romans 11:33 (Parallel theme): O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

Nahum 1:3 (References Lord): The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

Psalms 40:5 (References Lord): Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

Psalms 48:1 (References Lord): Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.

Jeremiah 10:6 (References Lord): Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might.

1 Chronicles 16:25 (References Lord): For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods.

Revelation 15:3 (References Lord): And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

Psalms 99:2 (References Lord): The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people.

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