

Psalm 47:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.

Analysis

For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth. This verse provides the theological foundation ('for') for the preceding call to universal worship. God deserves worldwide acclaim because He is the LORD Most High, awesome in power, reigning as King over all the earth.

"For the LORD most high" (בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה עֶלְיוֹן/ki-Yahweh Elyon) combines Yahweh (God's covenant name) with Elyon (Most High). This juxtaposition is significant: Yahweh—the personal, covenant-keeping God of Israel—is simultaneously Elyon—the transcendent, supreme God above all powers. He isn't merely a tribal deity but the Most High God over all nations, all creation, all spiritual powers.

The title 'Most High' (Elyon) appears first in Genesis 14:18-22, where Melchizedek blesses Abraham by 'God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth.' This title emphasizes God's supremacy—He is higher than all earthly kings, more powerful than all heavenly beings, supreme over all creation. No power exceeds Him; none can challenge His authority.

"Is terrible" (נָרָא/nora) means awesome, to be feared, inspiring reverent dread. The same root describes God's 'terrible' (awesome) acts in delivering Israel from Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:21). This isn't terror that drives away but awe that compels worship—the appropriate human response to encountering infinite power, holiness, and majesty. Modern worship sometimes loses this sense of God's terribleness, emphasizing only His love and accessibility while neglecting His

awesome holiness and power.

"He is a great King over all the earth" (מלך גָּדוֹל עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ) declares universal sovereignty. He isn't merely Israel's king but 'great King over ALL the earth.' The emphasis on 'all' appears throughout this psalm (vv.1, 2, 7, 8, 9)—all peoples, all the earth, all nations. His reign isn't limited geographically, ethnically, or temporally. He rules everywhere, over everyone, always.

This title, 'great King,' evokes ancient Near Eastern imperial terminology. Assyrian and Babylonian emperors called themselves 'great king, king of kings.' Yet these human empires rose and fell. Only Yahweh is the eternal great King whose kingdom endures forever.

Historical Context

The phrase 'LORD most high' connects to Israel's patriarchal history. After Abraham defeated four kings and rescued Lot (Genesis 14), Melchizedek—priest of God Most High—blessed Abraham, who gave him tithes. This mysterious encounter established Melchizedek's priesthood, later connected to Christ's eternal priesthood (Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 5-7). The God who is 'Most High' possesses heaven and earth, answering to no one, supreme over all.

Israel's concept of God's kingship developed through their history. When Israel demanded a human king (1 Samuel 8), Samuel warned them—Yahweh was their true King; human kingship meant rejecting God's direct rule. Yet God granted their request, establishing David's dynasty with the understanding that earthly kings served under God's ultimate kingship (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Israel's kings were vice-regents, not autonomous rulers.

The prophets frequently proclaimed God's universal kingship against idolatrous nations claiming their gods ruled. Isaiah mocked Babylonian pride (Isaiah 47), proclaiming Yahweh as the one true God, Creator of all, before whom nations are as grasshoppers (Isaiah 40:15-17, 21-24). Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, declaring God 'removeth kings, and setteth up kings' (Daniel 2:21),

controlling all earthly power.

Jesus proclaimed 'the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:15), announcing that God's reign was breaking into history through His ministry. His miracles demonstrated the kingdom's power; His teaching revealed its ethics; His death and resurrection defeated the usurping powers and established His kingship (Colossians 2:15). Though not universally acknowledged now, Christ reigns as 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS' (Revelation 19:16).

Church history repeatedly affirmed God's sovereignty over earthly powers. Augustine's 'City of God' argued that human empires rise and fall under God's providence. The Reformation principle of God's sovereignty challenged papal and imperial claims to ultimate authority. Believers throughout history have confessed: Christ alone is Lord, and all earthly powers must submit to Him.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does understanding God as 'terrible' (awesome, fearsome) balance contemporary emphasis on His love and approachability?
2. What does it mean practically that God is 'great King over all the earth,' including nations and rulers who don't acknowledge Him?
3. How should the reality of God's universal kingship affect how believers relate to earthly governments and authorities?
4. In what ways has church history demonstrated God's sovereignty over human empires that seemed invincible (Rome, medieval papacy, communist regimes, etc.)?

Interlinear Text

כָּל	עַל	יְהִי	עֶלְיוֹן	נָזָר	מֶלֶךְ	מֶדֶלֶת	בְּבוֹרָה	בְּבוֹרָה	בְּבוֹרָה	בְּבוֹרָה	בְּבוֹרָה
H3588	For the LORD	most high	is terrible	King	he is a great					H5921	H3605
	H3068	H5945	H3372	H4428					H1419		

הארץ:

over all the earth

H776

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 95:3 (Kingdom): For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

Psalms 68:35 (Parallel theme): O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God.

Psalms 99:3 (Parallel theme): Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy.

Psalms 47:7 (Kingdom): For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

Deuteronomy 7:21 (References Lord): Thou shalt not be affrighted at them: for the LORD thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible.

Malachi 1:14 (Kingdom): But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.

Psalms 65:5 (Parallel theme): By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea:

Nehemiah 1:5 (References Lord): And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:

