

Psalms 47:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

Analysis

For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

This verse provides the reason ('for') why continuous praise is commanded (v.6): God's universal kingship warrants intelligent, thoughtful worship. The call to 'sing praises with understanding' emphasizes that worship must engage both heart and mind.

"For God is the King of all the earth" (כִּי־מֶלֶךְ כָּל־הָאֶרֶץ אֱלֹהִים/ki-melekh kol-ha'aretz Elohim) repeats the psalm's central theme: God's universal sovereignty. The emphatic position of 'King' and the comprehensive 'all the earth' stress His rule extends everywhere, over everyone. This isn't merely potential kingship (He could rule if He chose) but actual, present reality—He does rule over all the earth, whether acknowledged or not.

The term 'earth' (אֶרֶץ/eretz) can mean land, country, or earth—the entire world. Here, paired with 'all,' it clearly means the whole earth, all nations, every territory. No region escapes His sovereignty; no nation operates outside His control. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar: 'the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will' (Daniel 4:25).

"Sing ye praises" (זַמְּרוּ/zammeru) repeats the command from verse 6, maintaining the emphasis on musical worship. But now the command is qualified:

"With understanding" (מִשְׂכִּיל/maskil) adds crucial instruction. Maskil comes from

sakal, meaning to be prudent, wise, have insight. The term appears in psalm superscriptions (including this one: 'A Psalm for the sons of Korah, Maschil') indicating didactic, instructive content. Here it means to sing intelligently, with comprehension, thoughtfully—not mindlessly or emotionally detached from truth.

This balances the psalm's earlier calls for exuberant physical expression (clapping hands, shouting) with intellectual engagement. True worship involves whole-person response: emotions expressed through clapping and shouting, voices lifted in song, and minds engaged in understanding truth. Paul instructs: 'I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also' (1 Corinthians 14:15). Worship isn't mindless emotionalism or heartless intellectualism but Spirit-filled, truth-saturated, whole-person engagement with God.

Historical Context

The 'Maskil' superscription appears on thirteen psalms (32, 42, 44, 45, 52-55, 74, 78, 88, 89, 142), suggesting didactic purpose—psalms meant to instruct, provide insight, and develop understanding. Israel's worship aimed not merely to produce emotional experiences but to shape minds, form theology, and teach truth. The psalms were simultaneously worship songs and theological instruction.

Israel's Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) commanded loving God with all the heart, soul, and strength—whole-person devotion. This included teaching children diligently, talking about God's commands in all contexts, and writing them on doorposts. Faith wasn't compartmentalized but integrated into all of life. Worship expressed this integrated faith through Spirit-inspired, truth-grounded praise.

Jesus emphasized worship 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:23-24). True worshipers worship the Father in spirit (by the Spirit, from the heart) and in truth (according to revealed truth, understanding reality correctly). Emotional enthusiasm without truth leads to superstition; intellectual knowledge without Spirit produces dead orthodoxy. Biblical worship requires both.

Paul's instructions on worship balance order with freedom, mind with spirit. In 1 Corinthians 14, he addresses chaotic Corinthian worship, insisting on intelligibility,

order, and edification. Tongues without interpretation don't edify because hearers don't understand (14:2-19). Yet he doesn't quench the Spirit's freedom—he seeks worship that engages both spirit and understanding (14:15).

Throughout church history, tensions have existed between rationalist worship emphasizing teaching and cognitive engagement versus charismatic worship emphasizing emotional expression and spiritual experience. This verse (and broader biblical teaching) calls for integration: worship that engages mind and emotions, Spirit and truth, understanding and affections. We're not disembodied intellects or mindless enthusiasts but whole persons created to worship God with all we are.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to 'sing praises with understanding,' and how does this balance emotional expression with intellectual engagement?
2. How can worship be both Spirit-filled (emotionally genuine, heart-engaged) and truth-grounded (theologically sound, intellectually coherent)?
3. What are dangers of worship that emphasizes emotion without truth or truth without emotion?
4. How do the psalms function as both worship songs and theological instruction, shaping both our affections and our understanding of God?

Interlinear Text

כִּי מֶלֶךְ כָּל הָאָרֶץ לְאֱלֹהִים וְזָמְרֻהוּ
H3588 **is the King** H3605 **of all the earth** **For God** **sing ye praises**
H4428 H776 H430 H2167

מִשְׂפִּיל:

with understanding
H7919

Additional Cross-References

Zechariah 14:9 (Kingdom): And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.

Colossians 3:16 (Sin): Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Psalms 47:8 (Kingdom): God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

Revelation 11:15 (Kingdom): And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.