

A Little Psalm With A Big Message

Psalm 117

- 1) In *Let The Nations Be Glad*, John Piper notes, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.”
- 2) Psalm 117 is all about missions to the nations who do not worship God in order that they may worship Him.
- 3) Psalm 117 is both the shortest Psalm in the Psalter and the shortest chapter in all of the Bible. Luther loved it, and wrote a 36 page commentary on it.
- 4) It is a part of a sextet of songs, Psalms 113-118, known as the “Egyptian Hallel.” Built around the emphasis of Psalm 114, a celebration of the Exodus, these 6 songs were sung as the Hebrews gathered to celebrate the Passover. Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the memorial meal, and Psalms 115-118 were sung afterwards. Jesus and His disciples would have sung these very psalms on the night they celebrated the Passover, just before His betrayal and arrest (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26).
- 5) Interestingly Psalms 120-136 is called the “Great Hallel” and Psalms 146-150 conclude the Psalter on a Hallelujah or praise note.
- 6) Psalm 117 is anonymous and the fifth of the Egyptian or Exodus hallels. Paul quotes this little jewel in Romans 15:11 as evidence that God’s redemptive love and purpose has always included the nations, just like He promised Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Psalm 117 brings the whole world before our eyes. Now, just what do we see?

I. The Lord is to be magnified among the nations.

117:1

- The Psalm follows a command/reason pattern. We are told what to do in v. 1 and why we do it in v. 2.
- Further, the Psalm opens and closes with the same word, “praise” or “hallelujah.”

1) God desires that all the nations praise Him.

- The psalm begins with a call to praise (Heb. *hallu-yah*) the Lord (*Yahweh*).
- Normally it is the people of God, the covenant community, who are called to praise the Lord. But not here. No, it is the *goyim*, the “nations” (*NASV, NIV, ESV, HCSB*).
- “Nations” does not refer to political states but people groups, different ethnic and linguistic groups. The “Joshua Project” (www.joshuaproject.net) list 16,320 different people groups in the world with 6,741 as unreached. The percent of unreached people groups is 41.3% totally 2.72 billion people. At this moment, 4,100 language groups have no hope of praising King Jesus as Lord of the universe.

2) God desires that all the nations extol Him.

- The word “extol” means to boast, laud or praise. It has the idea of bragging on someone. It means to make much of someone.
- “Peoples,” like nations, refers to ethnic, language and cultural groupings of people. “Tribes” is a good word to capture what is being said. Note it is in the plural (peoples). It occurs this way more than 230 times in the *ESV*.

