

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship
Placerita Baptist Church
2009

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Psalm 147 — God of Creation and Covenant in the Final Hallel

1.0 Introducing Psalm 147

- The Psalter's "Final Hallel" consists of five psalms (Pss 146–150) that each begin and end with "Hallelujah" (= "Praise the LORD").
- The psalmist might have penned Psalm 147 after particularly frigid weather in Jerusalem (vv. 16–17) following Israel's return from Babylonian exile (vv. 2, 12–14). Nehemiah 12:27–43 provides a potential setting for the singing of Psalm 147.
- In Psalm 147 the psalmist praises God for His actions in three areas: (1) creation and preservation of heavens and earth, (2) healing and support for the afflicted, and (3) sending His word.
- The ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint) treats verses 12–20 as a separate psalm.

2.0 Reading Psalm 147 (NAU)

147:1 Praise the LORD!

For it is good to sing praises to our God;
For it is pleasant *and* praise is becoming.

147:2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem;
He gathers the outcasts of Israel.

147:3 He heals the brokenhearted
And binds up their wounds.

147:4 He counts the number of the stars;
He gives names to all of them.

147:5 Great is our Lord and abundant in strength;
His understanding is infinite.

147:6 The LORD supports the afflicted;
He brings down the wicked to the ground.

- 147:7** Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
Sing praises to our God on the lyre,
- 147:8** Who covers the heavens with clouds,
Who provides rain for the earth,
Who makes grass to grow on the mountains.
- 147:9** He gives to the beast its food,
And to the young ravens which cry.
- 147:10** He does not delight in the strength of the horse;
He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man.
- 147:11** The LORD favors those who fear Him,
Those who wait for His lovingkindness.
- 147:12** Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!
- 147:13** For He has strengthened the bars of your gates;
He has blessed your sons within you.
- 147:14** He makes peace in your borders;
He satisfies you with the finest of the wheat.
- 147:15** He sends forth His command to the earth;
His word runs very swiftly.
- 147:16** He gives snow like wool;
He scatters the frost like ashes.
- 147:17** He casts forth His ice as fragments;
Who can stand before His cold?
- 147:18** He sends forth His word and melts them;
He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.
- 147:19** He declares His words to Jacob,
His statutes and His ordinances to Israel.
- 147:20** He has not dealt thus with any nation;
And as for His ordinances, they have not known them.

Praise the LORD!

3.0 Understanding Psalm 147

3.1 Outline

- I. Praise Is Fitting Because God Heals the Afflicted (vv. 1–6)
- II. Praise Is Pleasant Because God Favors Believers (vv. 7–11)
- III. Praise Is Good Because God Sends His Word (vv. 12–20)

3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “For”
 - “Indeed” provides a better translation for the first “for” in this verse.
 - The issue involves whether the first line indicates a reason for the opening “Hallelujah!” or an emphatic opening declaration.



- v. 1 Praise is “good . . . pleasant . . . becoming”
 - See these same concepts in Psalms 33:1; 92:1; and 135:3.
 - ***Why is praise good, pleasant, and becoming?***
- v. 1 “our God”
 - “Our” occurs three times in verses 1, 5, and 7. “I,” “me,” and “my” do not occur at all in the NAU’s translation of this psalm.
 - However, “He” in reference to God occurs 20 times, “His” occurs 12 times, and “Him” occurs once. Divine titles like “God” (3x), “LORD” (7x), and “Lord” (1x) add to the 44 total references to God.
 - Praise must be God-centered, not me-centered.
- v. 3 “He heals the brokenhearted”
 - God’s people praise Him for caring about them during difficult times.
 - For “brokenhearted,” see Psalms 34:18; 51:17; 69:20; Isaiah 61:1; Jeremiah 23:9.
 - For God as Healer, see Exodus 15:26 and Psalm 30:2.
- v. 4 “He counts the number of the stars”
 - God numbers and names all the stars. This illustrates His omniscience. He knows what mankind does not know.
 - See Isaiah 40:26.
 - The God Who made, numbers, and names the stars is the God Who cares for you!
- v. 5 “Great is our Lord”
 - Verse 5 breaks free of the content and form of all other verses in this psalm’s first stanza in order to highlight the praiseworthiness of God in theological terms.
 - God’s care for the helpless, the afflicted, and the brokenhearted reveals His greatness, His abundant strength, and His infinite understanding.
 - “Our Lord” refers to the sovereign Master of the universe—He reigns as the Almighty and All-wise God.
- v. 6 “The LORD supports the afflicted”
 - The word translated “supports” occurs only four times in the Old Testament, all in Psalms (20:8, “stood upright”; 119:61, “encircled”; 146:9, “supports”).
 - The term presents a picture of God encircling the afflicted and helping them stand upright.
- v. 7 “with thanksgiving”
 - Giving thanks must form a major element in praising God.
 - ***How can we make thanks a consistent element in our praise and worship?***





- **vv. 8–9** God’s Gracious Provision
 - God provides the clouds that pour out rain upon the earth.
 - The watered earth produces grasses and herbs.
 - The grasses and herbs provide food for the animals.
- **v. 9** “the young ravens”
 - The ravens that God feeds provided food for Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kgs 17:2–6). God cares for the ravens, but He cares for His people even more (Luke 12:24).
- **vv. 10–11** “He does not delight . . . the LORD favors”
 - Verse 11 contrasts with verse 10 and identifies that in which the Almighty Creator delights. This truth closes the psalm’s second stanza.
 - Man delights in physical power and prowess in both military and athletic pursuits. God, however, delights in and favors the spiritually minded—those who fear Him.
- **v. 12** “Praise . . . Praise”
 - This summons to praise commences the final stanza of the psalm.
 - The psalmist employs two different words, but they are virtually synonymous. The psalmists use the first term only seven times, while they employ the second (which is the word involved in “Hallelujah”) over 60 times.
- **v. 15** “His command . . . His word”
 - Verses 15 and 18–20 focus on the spoken word of the Lord. By His word God creates, He preserves and continues to operate in His creation, and He enters into a covenant relationship with His people Israel.
 - The God Whom we praise communicates His will to His people by His authoritative word. We must obey His word.
- **v. 17** “His ice . . . His cold”
 - Such winter weather occurs with relative rarity in Palestine.
 - “Indeed there is nothing we grumble more about than the weather, which should be one of our greatest themes of praise.”—John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms*, 2 vols., John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 2:672.
 - “If God so desires, he can plunge the planet into another ice age or swathe the world in a blanket of flame.”—Ibid., 2:674–75.
- **v. 19** “He declares His words to Jacob”
 - See Deuteronomy 4:32–34. Compare Romans 3:2 and 9:3–5.
 - *How do we know that New Testament believers are now the recipients and caretakers of God’s Word?*

- v. 20 “He has not dealt thus with any nation”
 - The psalmist closes the third stanza and the entire psalm by revealing the special relationship that Israel enjoys with the LORD.
- v. 20 “Praise the LORD!”
 - “The words ‘Praise the LORD!’ are meaningless except on the lips of those who are responding to the grace of God in a life of obedient commitment.”—Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 473.

4.0 Singing Psalm 147

“O Sing Ye Hallelujah”

(Tune: “The Church’s One Foundation”)



1 O sing ye hallelujah! 'Tis good our God to praise.
'Tis pleasant and becoming to Him our songs to raise;
He builds the walls of Zion, He seeks her wandering sons;
He binds their wounds and comforts the brokenhearted ones.

2 The starry hosts He numbers, He calls them all by name;
His greatness and His wisdom His wondrous works proclaim;
The meek He lifts to honor, He humbles sinful pride.
Give thanks to Him and utter His praises far and wide.

3 The heav'ns with clouds He covers, He sends the cheering rain;
The slopes of all the mountains He fills with grass and grain;
To beast and bird His goodness their daily food supplies;
He cares for all His creatures, attentive to their cries.

4 No human power delights Him, no earthly pomp or pride;
He loves the meek who fear Him and in His love confide;
Then praise thy God, O Zion, His gracious aid confess;
He gives thee peace and plenty, His gifts thy children bless.

5 He sends His swift commandment, and snow and ice enfold
The world, and none are able to stand before His cold.
Again He gives commandment: The winds of summer blow,
The snow and ice are melted, again the waters flow.

6 His statutes and His judgments He makes His people know;
To them as to no others His grace He loves to show;
For matchless grace and mercy your grateful praises bring;
To give Him thanks forever and hallelujah sing.

— Words: Unknown author

5.0 Praying Psalm 147



- Father, thank You for healing the brokenhearted. [v. 3]
- O our God, we praise You for all You are and all You have done. [v. 7]
- Thank You for the rain we received this week. [v. 8]
- Lord, help me to respond to Your Word as quickly as You sent it. [v. 15]

6.0 Applying Psalm 147

- My praise must be God-centered, not me-centered.
- My God made, numbers, and names the stars, arranges for food even for the ravens, yet He cares for me.
- My praise to God must include giving thanks to Him.
- God delights in me when I delight in Him, His Word, and obedience to Him.

How often does our worship focus on us instead of on God and our Savior, Jesus Christ? Examine the songs we sing. If our songs speak only about what “we will” do (or, “I will”) and fail to mention God as the recipient of praise, it might not be worship at all—at least not a worship of God. Does the song speak of God’s character and His works? Is the song addressed directly to God Himself?

James Boice declares that much of what we call worship is really “narcissism, a self-absorption characteristic of our contemporary secular culture. So if we are self-absorbed in worship, as we seem to be, it only means that we are worldly in our worship, and not spiritual, as we suppose. We are focused on ourselves.”

— James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 3:1265