

PSALM 117

UNIVERSAL PRAISE OF JEHOVAH

AUTHOR: Anonymous

INTRODUCTION: There is no superscription attributing this psalm to a human penman. It is a Hallel psalm (i.e., a psalm of thanksgiving and praise) in which all "nations" and all "people" are called upon to give praise to JEHOVAH. As organized in the Christian Bible of 1189 chapters, Psalm 117 is the middle chapter of the Bible. With only 2 verses, Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible. In the English of the King James Bible, Psalm 117 is comprised of 33 words.

- [1] The psalmist calls upon "all ... nations ... [and] ... all ... people" to "praise the LORD". Note that it is not a generic conception of God that men are to praise, but JEHOVAH, who is "the most high over all the earth" (Ps83:18) as well as the God of Israel (e.g., Exod5:1). JEHOVAH is deserving of the "praise" of all "people" as their Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. That not all men receive His provision of propitiation does not negate its universal availability (1Jn2:2; Rev22:17).
- [2] In this verse, "his merciful kindness" is a translation of the Hebrew word *chesed*, which is one of the Hebrew words for love, although it is often translated "lovingkindness" or "mercy" (here, "his merciful kindness"). In contrast to *ahab* (a generic Hebrew word for "love"), *chesed* has a very technical meaning, which is "love" in the context of a **covenant commitment**. This is seen in the LORD's relationship with the nation of Israel in which His "love" for them is manifested by the covenants He has made with them¹ (cf. Deut7:8). Thus, the "merciful kindness ... toward us" has in view specifically the nation of Israel (i.e., Jews).

In a broader sense than God's covenant commitment to the nation of Israel, "the truth of the LORD endureth forever". In the Bible, two things are designated as "truth": 1) the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn14:6), and 2) the scriptures (Jn17:17). This comports with the fact that both Jesus Christ and the scriptures are "the Word of God", both of which "endureth forever" (cf. Ps12:6-7; Matt24:35; Jn1:1,14; 1Pet1:23-25; Rev19:13).

The psalm ends with the phrase, "Praise ye the LORD", a translation of the Hebrew *hallelujah*, which includes JAH² as the contracted version of the name JEHOVAH (Cp., Ps68:4). Though originally a Hebrew word, *hallelujah* has been incorporated into virtually every language as an expression of praise. Note, however, that the modern Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives its definition in English as, "used to express praise, joy, or thanks", or "a shout or song of praise or thanksgiving", with no mention that such praise is to be directed toward JEHOVAH, owing to the fact that His name is a component part of the very word itself.

¹ The LORD is not in covenant relationship with any people other than the Jews (cf. Ps147:19-20; Rom9:4-5; Eph2:11-12).

² In Hebrew, JAH is the first and last letters of the Tetragrammaton.