

**THE BOOK OF PSALMS AND THE MISSION OF GOD: A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO
A DICHOTOMIZE VIEW OF MISSION**

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Abstrak

Penegasan tentang status orang kafir adalah tema penting dalam Alkitab. Tema ini berlandaskan kepada sifat Allah yang pengasih dan menyelamatkan. Dalam buku kitab Mazmur, Pemazmur menyampaikan tema tentang belas kasih dan cinta kasih Tuhan untuk bangsa-bangsa. Dalam respons terhadap pernyataan perjanjian bagi umat umat Allah, tidak dapat dibantah bahwa Ia selalu memberikan kasihNya yang tidak pernah gagal dan perhatiannya kepada semua manusia. Ia membuat semua umat manusia sejajar dan layak untuk mendapat perhatianNya yang kekal itu. Bangsa bangsa akan mengingat, mengakui, menyerahkan diri, bergembira, dan menyembah Allah. Ada alasan eksplisit dan meyakinkan untuk memasukkan semua bangsa bangsa. Allah melayani kita sebagai pelindung bukan hanya untuk orang Israel tetapi juga untuk orang kafir. Jaminan misi Kristus bukan hanya bagi orang Israel, tetapi juga untuk kebebasan bagi bangsa lain sebagai bagian dari berkat perjanjian ketika kita memiliki hubungan denganNya. Oleh karena itu, bangsa yang sempit, bersamaan dengan klaim pilih kasih dan eksklusivisme berlawanan dengan misi Allah sebagai pendekatan diskriminatif dari pengajaran Alkitab tentang Tuhan yang secara aktif bekerja sama dengan dan untuk bangsa-bangsa lain.

Kata kunci: Orang Kafir, Kasih, Pelindung, Missi.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of God's redemptive rescue mission for the fallen humanity is an important theme in Scripture. Yahweh remains actively and positively involved in the history and stories of the nations. This is one of the important messages of the Bible since the outcome has implication for all people and ends with the same affirmatory substance. Charles H. H. Scobie succinctly asserts this when he points out,

Both the beginning and the end of Scripture emphasize a concern for people of "every nation and tribe and people" (Rev 14:6) forming a grand envelope structure framing the entire story of Scripture. Genesis 1-11 provides an overview of the origins and early history of all mankind, and Revelation ends the canon with a book in which God's purposes are equally related to the whole created order.⁴³

This grand mission suggests that God promises the nations deliverance from punishment, blessings of the covenant, and pilgrimages to His temple on Mount Zion, and other privileges such as equality, peace, favor of worship, and close a relationship with God.⁴⁴ It means that Yahweh's redemptive blessings are available for all people regardless of their ethnicity, culture, race, and/or color. However, different perspectives challenge the veracity of God's mission for the entire world. Some scholars argue that the message of salvation for the nations in the Bible was narrow condoned national favoritism and ultimately was exclusive.⁴⁵

⁴³Charles H. H. Scobie, "Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43 (1992): 285. See also Michael A. Grisanti, "Israel's Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55: An Update," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 9 (1998): 39-61.

⁴⁴Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Second Isaiah—Prophet of Universalism," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (JSOT)* 41 (1988): 83-103.

⁴⁵For more detailed information about this debate see the article of Grisanti, "Israel's Mission to the Nations," 39-61. Scholars debated whether God's blessings are intended for Israel alone or for the entire world. See also David Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles Too: The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, 1994), 75, quoted in Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 28. See Scot McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 117; Michael A. Grisanti, "The Relationship of Israel and the Nations in Isaiah 40-55" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, 1993).

Some Bible commentators and scholars furthermore object that the OT has nothing to do with God's redemptive salvation for the Gentile nations.⁴⁶ Horst Dietrich Preuss claims that since nations in the OT are under God's judgment and that they are constant threat to Israel's existence in terms of political, military, and religious way of life, it is not surprising that God's redemptive plan for Gentiles had "to recede into the background."⁴⁷ Further, Eckhard Schnabel holds that there is no mission to evangelize the world.⁴⁸

John F. Walvoord in his book *The Nations in Prophecy* argues that God's plan in the OT is to give the message of salvation exclusively to the Jews and only during the NT does God extend His plan to include other nations.⁴⁹ He contends that because the whole Bible is mainly devoted to a discussion of Abraham and his descendants, the nations are only introduced as related to Israel.⁵⁰ For Walvoord, the central focus of Scripture is Israel. When there are positive prophecies pointing to the nations in the Bible, he consigns them as applicable mainly on the earthly state and he further assumes a detachment of an ethnic individuality in their eternal. He argues:

It is only natural that prophecies relating to the nations should be primarily concerned with the present earth rather than the eternal state. It is an error, however, to assume that national identity will be lost in eternity. Just as there will be individual identity, so also there

⁴⁶Sheriffs, "A Tale of Two Cities," 19-57; Julian Mortgenstern, "Two Prophecies From 520-516 B.C.," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1949): 365-431.

⁴⁷Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, Old Testament Library (OTL), vol. 2 (Edinburgh, Great Britain: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 298.

⁴⁸Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), quoted in Jiri Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19 (2008): 41. Moskala further mentioned several other scholars who argues along this thought. Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," *JSOT*, 41.

⁴⁹John F. Walvoord, *The Nations in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967).

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 41.

will be racial identity.⁵¹

This is an example of an exclusivistic and narrow nationalistic reading imposed on the Bible.⁵² The exclusivist attitude developed because the Bible contains passages that express the pre-eminence of the Israelite nations against other nations. This view also exhibits extreme hostilities against the nations. According to Jiří Moskala all of these ideas lead to the tendency of minimizing the missional viewpoint of the Bible.⁵³ The predisposition to compartmentalize the blessings of God for humankind would cast a negative impact of the ideals of divine commission in the Bible. As such, it creates a crucial attitude of suspicion with regards to the legitimacy of the missional program of God in the Bible.⁵⁴

The Bible and the book of Psalms in particular resist this kind of understanding. This poetic writing has a universal perspective as exhibited in the praise psalms in such as Ps 47:1-9. The psalmist is clear by showing that both Jews and Gentiles were under Yahweh's rule that both groups should praise Him. But some scholars still argue that there is no specific worldwide plan for the Gentiles or that the divine blessings were only intended for Israel in spite of this clear fact. Hence, their position tends to reduce the salvific plan of God for humankind in the Bible.

⁵¹Ibid., 169.

⁵²See also Arnold G. Fruchtenbaun, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994), 113-129.

⁵³Jiří Moskala, "The Message and Mission of the Old Testament Church," paper presented at the 10th AIIAS Annual Theological Forum, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2007, 13ff. Some missiologists hold a dichotomized view of mission in the Bible. For example, George W. Peters maintains that the OT has a centripetal (i.e., refers to movement toward the center) approach to God's redemptive program for the nations while in the NT it is centrifugal (i.e., movement out from the center). George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1972), 21-22.

⁵⁴Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 1, *Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004). Jiří Moskala holds that the "Hebrew Scripture knows nothing about an election for salvation but knows an election for mission (Exod 3:7-10; 7:1-2; 19:5-6; Jer 1:5)." Moreover, he eloquently presented five vital biblical principles about the mission-theology of God's redemptive program for the Gentiles. See Jiří Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," *JSOT*, 40.

Purpose

This article presents the biblical perspective of the universal redemptive plan for humanity as found in the OT. Special attention is given to several key poetic texts. The aim is to discover the role of other nations beside Israel played in God's salvific actions and in what context do they function.

God's Mission for the Nations Outside the Book of Psalms

The theme of God's redemptive actions is an important motif in the Bible. This motif provides significant insights concerning God's future redemptive program with regard to the people in general. For instance, in primeval history in the book of Genesis, the theme of hope and the promise of salvation permeate the books. In the midst of the rebellion, judgment, curses, and punishment (Gen 3:21; 4:15; 8:21), there are indications of the preserving and supporting grace from Yahweh (Gen 3:14-19; 8:21; 9:25).

In the earliest stories of Genesis, God is incontrovertibly universal with regard to His unfailing love.⁵⁵ His intention is or all His human creation to be equal in dignity and worthy for His eternal care (Gen 1:4,10,12,17,21,25,28-31).⁵⁶ The first eleven chapters of Genesis outline God's all-encompassing relations with humanity, in the light of His blessings, righteousness, and care.⁵⁷ Because of humanity's fall, which is all encompassing for human beings, judgment by means of

⁵⁵See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Israel's Missionary Call," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steve C. Harthorne, 3rd ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 10-16. Universality is rooted in the very nature of God who loves and saves. After the Fall, God came searching for humanity, calling out "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). He then continually seeks relationship as well as deliverance and reconciliation between Himself and His fallen creation. Genesis 1-11 accentuates God's universal interest. Before proceeding on the history of a particular nation (i.e., Israel), in Gen 10 the Lord considered various nations of the earth significant enough to list. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. also pointed out that the major themes seen in Gen 1-11—such as the fall of humankind, the wickedness that precipitated the flood, the Babel controversy and the dispersion—point to a redemptive promise for all of the nations.

⁵⁶In the first chapter of Genesis, God is revealed as the creator, sustainer, and a supreme being to all. At creation, God is good and there is harmony between God and His creations (Gen 1-2). Out of His love, He created humans in His own image, hence the stamp of God was on humankind. From the standpoint of God's nature, it means that God is universal in character.

⁵⁷Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 85.

universal is necessary (Gen 6-9). Humanity's subsequent rebellion at Babel resulted in dispersion (Gen 11). However, in spite of the failure of humanity, the subsequent calling of Abraham shows God's positive attitude toward other nations (Gen 12:1-3).⁵⁸ He reveals His plan and proclaims His grace to the nations.⁵⁹ The promised blessing to Abraham was not only for the future of his family but also for all the nations. By electing Abraham, God was choosing a people through whom He would bring salvation to all. Abraham's offspring served as a channel of hope and Yahweh's blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1-3).

This idea is furthermore reinforced by how God worked with different people outside Israel, most notably Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God (Gen 14:18-20). Melchizedek appeared suddenly on the scene as an unknown character, blessed Abraham, and expressed his strong belief in the Creator—God who gave victory to Abraham over his enemies. Because Melchizedek faithfully served the Lord, he was identified as figure of Christ (Heb 7:1-3; 7:11-17). Abraham, as an expression of his love and gratitude to God for all he received from God, gave tithes to Melchizedek.

God, before the flood, offered 120 years of grace to the anti-deluvian world (Gen 6:3). Similarly, Jethro, priest of Midian and Moses' father-in-law was used by God to give pertinent advice to Moses (Exod 18:1). In addition, Balaam, a prophet of God announced messianic prophecies (Num 24:17-19). Similarly, God gave the Canaanite people 400 years of grace to repent and return to Him (Gen 15:13-16). God intervened with the Cushites, Philistines and Arameans the same way He worked with Israel (Amos 9:7). Together these are strong indications within the OT of God's mission for the Gentiles.

This concept of universality can be defined as a belief in one God who is to be worshiped by

⁵⁸Chris Wright, "The Old Testament and Christian Mission," *Evangel* 14 (1997): 37-43, quoted in Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 7. According to Chris Wright, the call is God's response to the problem of humanity. Ibid.

⁵⁹See Richard W. DeHaan, *Israel and the Nations in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1968), 16-17. Richard W. DeHaan holds a narrower focus of God's promises given to Abraham. For Him, the promises given to the patriarchs were literally fulfilled only through the natural and biological affinity of the nations coming from the bloodline or actual seed of Abraham. Ibid.

all peoples—Jews and Gentiles alike.⁶⁰ In this definition, the purpose of God was to give blessings that resulted to salvation not limited to any nation or particular race, that is, the Hebrew nation. In addition, the concept suggests that the knowledge of the one and true God revealed to Israel is not only for this nation but for other nations as well.⁶¹ The Bible is replete with the message of God's salvific intention for the Gentiles. This universal perspective was an ongoing development in the Bible. Readers of Scripture encounter a number of breathtaking pronouncements from a wide prophetic repertoire which catalogues God's positive intent to reach the Gentiles with the message of salvation.

God's Mission in Psalms

Among the poetic books, the theme about God's care for the nations is present.⁶² The book of Psalms is lucid in speaking about the inclusion of the nations within God's redemptive purposes. God's salvific program for the Gentiles is expressed, and provided as an ample illustration of the fact that at deeper levels of the worship experience for Israel that God's rescue mission for the Gentiles is clearly revealed.

The fact that the book of Psalm is a collection of poetry makes it an obviously unique form of literature. The book as a collection contains responses by God's people to the revelation of God.⁶³ In it God's covenant people reach out to God in celebration and lament. In the first category, Psalms function as praise emphasizing the mood of joy with bright hope ("I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart [Ps 9:]). The second type, operate as prayer or petition

⁶⁰See Herbert Gordon May, "Theological Universalism in the Old Testament," *The Journal of Bible and Religion* 16 (1948): 100-107.

⁶¹Blenkinsopp, "Second Isaiah—Prophet of Universalism," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41 (1988): 83.

⁶²The theme related to "nations" in the poetic books appeared 58 times. Out of these, the book of psalm is foremost (61x used). This is followed by Job in which the term is used twice. Proverbs used the term once. Moreover, the term related to strangers or foreigners appears seven times in all poetic material, six times in the psalms, and once in the book of Job. In Job 31:32, the context speaks of Job's hospitality toward strangers. In addition, nations were mentioned in 12:23, twice referring to the nations under God's sovereign control.

⁶³All scholars generally agree that Psalms is an anthology rather than an integrated book.

directed toward God and express the dispositions of grief, sorrow, trust, and confidence in the midst of adversity (“Arise, O Lord, Save me, Oh my God [Ps 3:7]). This book then is a miniature portrait of wide variety of ways that God deals with His covenant people as well as their religious response to Him. The book offers us a panorama of the religious life of the people, and contains valuable knowledge about worship in Israel. A selection of their responses as God’s covenant people shed light on God’s redemptive plan for the Gentiles.

Psalm 22:27-29

Scholars observe that in the lament and thanksgiving Psalms Ps 22:27-29, the psalmist expresses a hopeful attitude toward the nations. First, the Psalm commences with an individual cry for help (vss 1-2) and closes with a portrayal of the nations worshiping the Lord (vs 27).⁶⁴ It opens with the affirmation of God’s sovereignty, justice, and mighty acts of deliverance for Israel (vss 3-5). The Psalm closes with the glorious anticipation of God’s rule over and care for the nations (vss 25-29). It commences with what God has done in past generations (i.e., Israel) and ends with the expectation for future generations. It begins with a particular group of people and ends with the universal generations who would worship and serve Him.⁶⁵ God’s covenantal obligations and favor are put forward as the focal point of all the activities materialized in this (Ps 22:9-21).⁶⁶

Second, the observation in verse 27 could be seen as an eschatological prediction of the future

⁶⁴For the messianic implication of this Psalter, see Gerald H. Wilson, “Psalms Vol 1,” *NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text . . . to Contemporary Life*, ed Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 412-413. This psalm has been called a prophetic and messianic psalm. It is called a psalm of the cross because of the references the NT writers apply to the suffering of Jesus Christ. Scholars consider this psalm messianic. I agree with this.

⁶⁵The psalmist affirms the importance of public worship (verses 22-23). Praise and offerings are made. Blessings and praise for His salvation are offered (verse 24). “[Introduction]: Psalms 22,” *Seventh—day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1977), 3:682 (681-685). See also Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in Psalms: Message of Hope for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impression, 1983), 104.

⁶⁶See Willem A. VanGemenen, “Psalms,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed., Frank A. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 5:199. In these verses, the psalmist describes his experience in the language which is appropriate to the suffering Messiah. Hence, the psalm is called Messianic. Verses 14-16 prophetically describe crucifixion.

worldwide conversion and worship of the Lord, which happens not only in one nation but includes countless nations as well.⁶⁷ The text reads: “all the ends of the earth will remember and will turn to the Lord.”⁶⁸ The clause indicates national repentance toward God. Critical to the act of turning in this passage is the direction toward which the nations turn.⁶⁹ In this case, verse 27 says they turn toward Yahweh. The second clause of the same verse reiterates universality in the context of worship (“and all the families of the nations will worship before thee”). The expression “will worship” refers to the physical act of prostration (Gen 18:2; Lev 26:1; Ps 5:3).⁷⁰

Further, the act of remembering in the text as used in the book of Psalms means recollecting the past saving work of Yahweh, and anticipates deliverance ahead (Ps 77:11; 105:5; 143:5).⁷¹ The word is vitally linked with the mighty acts of God in the history of saving His people (Ps 77:3-7, 11-12). Hence the psalmist uses the nations as the object of the verb to “remember.” To “remember” on the part of God relates to His integral attachment with His people (Exod 32:13; Lev 26:42; Deut 9:27; Ps 98:3). Yahweh remembers His covenant promise to Abraham when

⁶⁷Gerald H. Wilson, in his commentary on this passage, holds that the hope presented in this psalm is merely political in nature, that is, the submission of earthly powers in the eschatological time. See Wilson, *Psalms*, 428. However, a close scrutiny of the passage shows that it is more than an interplay of political life but more than religious. LaRondelle comments that “the psalm anticipates that Gentiles will return to the God of Israel. In this eschatological perspective of universal praise of God, David re-confirms the divine purpose of Israel’s mission: to bless all the families of earth (Gen 12:3).” LaRondelle, *Deliverance in Psalms*, 104.

⁶⁸See Francis Brown, with S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, based on the lexicon of William Gesenius (1952), s.v. “rkz”; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. and ed. by M. E. J. Richardson (1994), s.v. “rkz”; William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (CHALOT)*, based upon the lexical work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (1971), s.v. “rkz.” In its *qal* form, “rkz” is used one hundred 65 times with 43 times in the book of Psalms. The meaning is to “remember,” “call to mind,” “reflect on,” “think about,” “pay attention,” or “recollect.”

⁶⁹See J. A. Thompson and Elmer A. Martens, “bwv,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 4:57. The root bwv, “turn,” may also mean “return,” “repent,” “turn back,” or “change one’s mind.” It is used 683 times in the OT. The word is central to the concept of repentance.

⁷⁰See *Bible Works*, “Wwx]T;v.yIw>.” The word is a *hishtafal* imperfect third person masculine plural form with particle conjunction which comes from the root word hwx, “to bow down deeply,” or “to do obeisance.”

⁷¹See Leslie C. Allen, “rkz,” *NIDOTTE*, 1:1100-1106. The synonym for the word “remember” is “to visit with blessing” or “visit me with thy salvation” (NIV). In Ps 22:28, the nations remember God hence an indication that the nations too are entitled to divine intervention.

Israel was in Egypt and this moves Him to intervene and save them (Ex 6:5). In thanksgiving, David ask God to “remember” His “covenant faithfulness forever” (1 Chron 16:15; 2 Chron 6:42).

In the passage, there are three dynamic acts: “remember,” “turning,” and “worship” are each applied to other nations. The implication is, therefore that it is not only the suppliant who seeks help from Yahweh as seen in the previous verses (verses 1-16). Now it is extended to the whole world (cf., Ps 18). This portrays the Gentiles recollecting (e.g., Ps 105:5), repenting (Lam 3:40), and worshiping just as like Israel.⁷² Immediately following verse 27 the reason why nations will remember, repent, and worship is revealed by Yahweh. The explicit and compelling reason for such actions from the nations is by virtue of His kingship and rulership the nations submit to Yahweh.⁷³ Because of His “dominion” the nations (i.e., included in the Abrahamic covenant as “all the families of the nations” [verse 27; cf., Gen 13:3; Ps 96:7]) “remember” the Lord’s sovereignty. Furthermore, Yahweh’s activity in behalf of the life of the nation of Israel is the hint that points to the manner which Yahweh can act toward the world as a whole (Ps 1-28).⁷⁴

Psalm 47:1-9

Another poetic writing that has a universal perspective is the praise Psalms especially Ps 47:1-9.⁷⁵ The psalmist visualizes universalism by showing that both Jews and Gentiles are subject to Yahweh’s rule as both groups praise Him.

There are two major points that need to be observed. First, this Psalm is a hymn of praise to

⁷²See John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 338.

⁷³In this psalm, while the psalmist ascribes kingship to Yahweh, he explores the significance of Yahweh’s rule not only for Israel, but also the nations and all of creation (Pss 93; 96-99).

⁷⁴Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 339.

⁷⁵See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 486-470. Kraus strongly believes in the universality of this passage.

Yahweh.⁷⁶ In praise Yahweh is described in several ways as God, not only of a particular people, but of all nations. In the first stanza, Yahweh is revealed as “a great King over all the earth.” The first stanza reveals Yahweh as the one who reigns over the whole world and subdues the nations (vs 4).⁷⁷ The hopeful mood toward the end of the first stanza shows Yahweh as King. Yahweh “has gone up” amidst the congregation’s festal shouts of joy and with the sound of the trumpets He ruled over the nations (vs 5). The second stanza repeats this theme. It shows God reigning over the nations (vss 6-8). Verse 7 reveals that Yahweh is “the King of all the earth.” Verse 8 shows further that, He is “the God who reigns over all nations” (verse 8a) and “the God who sits on His holy throne” (verse 8).⁷⁸ Verse 9 reveals that nobles and nations assemble together before Him in praise and adoration (verse 9). Hence, this Psalm’s main theme is the kingship of Yahweh over all nations. These nations celebrate and acknowledge Yahweh’s universal rule over them (verses 5,8).⁷⁹

Second, universality seems apparent in this praise passage. In the opening hymn, the word “all the inhabitants” clearly invites them to praise God (verse 1). In the following verses, the words, “peoples; and the nations” (vs 3); “all the earth” (vs 7); and “over the nations” (vs 8), keep on echo to emphasize this theme.⁸⁰ Interestingly in verse 9, the phrase “the nobles of the

⁷⁶VanGemerem, “Psalms,” *EBC*, 5:357. Verse 1 begins with the clapping of the hands of all the people and the shouts for joy to God. According to Willem A. VanGemerem, the genre of this psalm celebrates the kingship of Yahweh (cf., Pss 83-100). *Ibid.* Its original context, as suggested by Peter C. Craigie, may have been a celebration after a military victory in which representatives of the conquered nations are required to worship Yahweh—the victorious God. See Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, WBC 19, 348-350.

⁷⁷See Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, (Brookings St., London: SCM Press, 1962), 37. This verse is probably an allusion to the consummation of history. For the eschatological—universal implication of this Psalm, see *ibid.*

⁷⁸VanGemerem, “Psalms,” 5:357. According to VanGemerem, Yahweh is the glorious king, who is close enough to hear and respond to the prayers of all His people (Pss 5:1-2; cf., 4:3; 6:9).

⁷⁹In this psalm, while ascribing kingship to Yahweh, it explores the significance of His rule not only over creation (Pss 93; 96-99), nor for Israel/Judah (114:2), but also for the nations.

⁸⁰See VanGemerem, “Psalms,” 5:358. The opening verse summons all people to join in the celebration of the kingship of Yahweh. This sets the scene of the vision as worldwide. Nations, then, joyfully acclaim Yahweh as the great king, with the clapping of their hands (cf., 2 Kgs 11:12). The words peoples, nations, and all the earth dominate this psalm. When God’s rule will be established, “‘nations’ on earth will join with the heavenly choirs, celebrating his universal and everlasting kingship.” *Ibid.*

people” who have gathered to praise Yahweh are being identified with the phrase “as the people of the God of Abraham.”

The passage shows that nobles and nations assemble together before God in praise and adoration. Here, the nations are described as the “people of God of Abraham.” Nations are addressed as the citizens of the God of Abraham—the predecessor “of the man of faith in God

who had once received the promise that in him ‘all nations shall be blessed’ (Gen 12:3).”⁸¹

Moreover, the last stanza of verse 9 is the promise of Yahweh for the nations: “for the shields of the earth belong to God.” The clause asserts that the princes who are called “shields” of God served as protectors of the nations. Shields in the Bible especially in Psalms are juxtaposed with salvation and deliverance: My shield is with God, Who saves the upright in heart” (Ps 7:10 NAS; see also 2 Sam 22:3; 18:3; 144:2).⁸²

Psalm 87:1-7

Psalm 87:1-7 is a hymn of praise for Zion.⁸³ It is a declaration of the psalmist about the importance of Zion. In the affirmation, the psalmist projects the theme of God’s mercy and love

⁸¹See C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 231-232; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 378. In Deut 23:7-8, there was an ordinance regarding the admission of the foreigners as members of the covenant community of Israel. Further, Judg 5:24 and Josh 9 testify to the fact that in one point of the history of Israel the non-Israelite had been admitted into the membership of Yahweh, even before the state of Israel was established. During the time of David, there were Canaanite tribes who were incorporated into his kingdom.

⁸²The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; My **shield** and the horn of my **salvation**, My stronghold and my refuge; My Savior, You save me from violence. (2Sa 22:3 NKJ).

⁸³Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC 20, 387. Psalm 87 is also a poem which praises Zion as the city of God and the center of life, not only for Israel, but eventually for all people. For John Goldingay, this psalm is a prophetic psalm that verbalizes Yahweh’s relationship with Zion and the nations; hence naming this particular psalm as the nations and citizens of Zion. See John Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 2,632.

for the nations.⁸⁴ In this Psalm, the inclusion of the Gentiles as the inhabitants of the city of God (Zion) is clearly elaborated. A few points can be deduced.

First, the opening statement of Ps 87 begins with the founding of Zion “on a holy hill.”⁸⁵ Verse 2 follows with the declaration about Yahweh’s love for “the gates of Zion.” Then verse 3 refers to the glorious things spoken about Zion. All of these point to Zion as the central motif of Ps 87.

Second, verse 4 introduces the theme of universality by way of relating the words from Yahweh describing the representative sample of Gentiles being the inhabitants of the city of Zion. Their status is declared in two ways. First, Rahab, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia are among those who “know” Yahweh.⁸⁶ Here, Yahweh is naming these nations as the people who acknowledged Him. Second, these nations are further introduced by the clause as “these are the ones who were born there” (i.e., in the city of Zion).⁸⁷

This is an explicit reaffirmation that the nations are citizens of Zion and that it is their

⁸⁴See Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 188. According to Kraus, this psalm has a nationalistic tone. For him, the various nations in verses 4-6 refer to the Jews in the Diaspora. The ones who were born were members of Israel; those who were born in the foreign land belong to the nations. Zion is the mother of all Israelites living in the dispersion. However, Marvin E. Tate and Derek F. Kidner have taken this as the poem foreseeing Zion to be the center for worldwide worship. See Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 387; Derek F. Kidner, *Psalms 72-150*, TOTC 14, 315. S. L. Klouda rightly says that the psalmist’s recognizes the worship of Yahweh on Zion in cosmological terms, hence foreseeing the procession of the foreign nations to Zion to worship Yahweh. See S. L. Klouda, “Zion,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 1:938.

⁸⁵Verses 1-3 is an address to Zion announcing all the goodness and commendable things in it.

⁸⁶Martin Buber, “Redemption,” in *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York, NY: Schockers, 1982), 165, quoted in Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” *EBC*, 5:355. The meaning of the word [d;y], “to know,” nuances a kind of personal intimate relationship which is based on the covenant. Here in this passage, since the nations “know” who God is, they are called the dwellers of Zion and recipients of God’s mercy and grace. They find shelter in Zion, called as people of integrity and uphold God’s standard of justice, love, and humility. Since Zion extends beyond the temple and Jerusalem, the benefits (i.e., of kingship and kingdom) also extend to the nations who seek to hear the good news of God’s redemptive grace (Ps 9:11). Salvation focuses on Zion. Zion’s restoration is the renewal of the world. *Ibid.*

⁸⁷In the book of Psalms, God’s redemptive activity is vitally connected with His presence in Zion (Ps 65). The community praises Yahweh because “He forgave our transgressions” and prospered Zion (65:3). Yahweh sends forth His support and help from Zion (20:2). In Ps 69:35, God gives hope to His people.

home.⁸⁸ Third, verses 5-6 show the affirmation from the psalmist about the message of Yahweh in verse 4. The phrase “these are the ones who were born there” is repeated in verse 4 and further expressed in verse 6 in order to give a strong emphasis to the message. What follows is the voice of the psalmist concerning Yahweh’s approval as, “the Lord records when he shall count or registers the people,”⁸⁹ thereby adding clarity to Yahweh’s favorable concern for the Gentiles in verse 4.⁹⁰ Finally, the Psalm closes with the response of praise regarding the significance of Zion (vs 7).⁹¹ These are the words of joy and praise from the nations who were told that they have a place and home in Zion.

Psalm 67:1-7 is the prayer for God’s blessing by the assembled community.⁹² It extends its blessings to a universal proportion through the inclusion of the nations. Moskala asserts that this passage speaks of a universal mission with a particular focus on God’s promise to Abraham that all nations will be blessed through him and his posterity.⁹³ A few important points ought to be noted here. Verse 1 begins with the prayer of mercy and blessing. God’s mercy is the foundation of

⁸⁸See Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 636-637.

⁸⁹The occurrences of the word *rpeS'yI*, “shall count” in the Bible is predominantly linked with God’s promise of blessing and prosperity in multiplying the descendants of His elect for which their posterity could not be counted (Gen 16:10; 32:13; Jer 33:22). These uncounted descendants will in turn worship and serve Yahweh (Ps 22:31; 71:15; Jer 33:22). In Hos 2:1, the uncounted multitude, which refers to Israel, are called “sons of the living God,” but in Ps 85 the concept is extended to the foreign nations which are also called those “who were born of God.”

⁹⁰The hope of the psalmist in Ps 87 lies in the eschatological vision, according to which all the nations will submit in Zion (cf., Ps 72:15-17). The kingdom of God will be fully established. “The nations will fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth will revere His glory” (Ps 102:15). Thus in Israel’s eschatological vision, nations are admitted.

⁹¹See Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 639. Goldingay suggests that the image of “springs” or “fountains” (*%B' yn:y"[.m;-lK'*, “all my springs are in you”) may refer to the conception of the children. “If these peoples were fathered in Zion, then that is where the fountains were that brought them into being” (Prov 5:16; cf., Song 4:12,15). Ibid.

⁹²See Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 123-124. According to Geoffrey W. Grogan, this chapter struck the climax of a universal remark that begins in Ps 64:6 and continued in chapters 65 and 66. He further notes that the promise of Abraham in Gen 12:1-3. and the Aaronic blessing in Num 24-27 affect not only Israel but the nations as well. Here in the passage, the repetitive occurrence of “nations” and “people” refers to a social and political connotation and not to a restrictive sense (i.e., Israel). It employs a widely used term and could mean the broadening of God’s people beyond the boundaries of Israel. Ibid.

⁹³See Jiříi Moskala, “The Mission of God’s People in the Old Testament,” *JSOT*, 51.

human salvation, “May His countenance shine among us.” The passage is clear allusion to the Aaronic benediction where nations are included. Here, the name Yahweh was changed to Elohim thus stressing the contextualized significance of God’s salvific intention for the nations. In verse 2, the prayer does not apply or restrict the blessing to the praying community by itself, but expresses or extends it to the nations. The prayer is a sign for the nations. The purpose clause “that your way may be known on earth” is a visible track of “your salvation among all nations.” Thus in this poem salvation is progressively affected in Israel first (vs 1-2), then from Israel it is to be perceived among all nations (vs 3). Together, Israel and the nations will praise Yahweh (vss 4-5) since He blesses them all (vss 6-7).

In Ps 72:15-17, the psalmist reflects upon the benefits of God’s kingship.⁹⁴ In the prayer, the security and perpetuity of His Kingship is advanced by the nations praying before Him that they too bring tribute to Him.⁹⁵ The psalmist petitions for the extension of blessing to all the nations (vse 17). Thus, nations are included in the prayer for prosperity through a king.⁹⁶ They too will be blessed (cf., 1:1; 65:4) in accordance with the promise of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-2; 22:18; 26:4). Moreover, several texts in the book of Psalms articulate clearly about God’s positive intention in behalf of the Gentiles (Pss 76:12 “God will “be feared the kings of the earth”; 86:9 the [goyim] or nations will “come and worship before Yahweh”). There are also enough evidences in Psalm indicating that Israel was engage in mission to go to the nations. (Pss 9:11; Ps 93:3; 96:2-9; 105:1-2; 119:46; 145:11-12).⁹⁷

Summary

The passages under study indicated that in the OT the nations were included in God’s redemptive actions especially in the book of Psalms. Several selected passages from the book

⁹⁴See Wilson, *Psalms*, 984-989. Psalm 72 is a prayer for an anointed king, asking that Yahweh would bring about His universal rule on earth through the reign of His anointed king. Here, nations will be blessed through this king.

⁹⁵Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, trans. J. R. Porter (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 63.

⁹⁶Grogan, *Psalms*, 133.

⁹⁷Jiříi Moskala, “The Mission of God’s People in the Old Testament,” *JSOT*, 52-53.

indicate God's hopeful attitude for the nations. Although the list is not exhaustive, the selection comprehensibly and reasonably showcases a broad missiological imperative that include all nations. As these passages were surveyed, the theme of universality is not only present, but a pervasive theme in Psalms. This book is a diminutive description of the many facets of God's compact or covenant in dealing with His special community and their responses to Him. In worship, hymns, praise, and lament passages, the psalmist foresaw that the Gentiles will be converted and worship the Lord in Zion.

The reaffirmation of the Gentiles was vitally connected with the promises, worship, praise, covenant community, and Zion motifs. Gentiles were described as the inhabitants of the city of Zion and ultimately will become their home, too. They will find shelter in Zion. Zion is the foreground where God's grace radiates toward all the nations. Redemption focuses on Zion. The renewal of the world is the renewal of Zion. Hence, repeats itself indicating emphasis.

In the book of Psalms, the psalmists' projects the theme of God's mercy and love for the nations. They remember, acknowledge, repent, celebrate, praise, and worship Yahweh. The explicit and compelling reason for such actions is by virtue of God being Creator, King, and Ruler. Thus nations surrender to Yahweh. Inherent in such a thematic word picture is the fact that Yahweh serve as the protector of Israel and the Gentiles.

Such theme showcase that Israel was not the only beneficiary of God's grace, but the Gentiles were similarly included. The Israelites were not intended to be the only people to enjoy certain privileges. Although they misuse this concept to set themselves apart from humanity, in the end God will intervene so that nations have the opportunity to share in the same salvation. The theme inclusion as a vital part of God's redemptive plan indicates that it is theocentric instead of ethnocentric. It is based on God's favorable acts of love, mercy, justice, judgment, promise, and covenant actions, not only for Israel, but also for the Gentiles. This is in contrast to some scholars who argue that this plan had a narrow nationalistic focus.

The concept of hope and salvation for the nations in the book of Psalms is an OT phenomenon that recurs throughout the OT. Within the narrative—writings and prophetic literature of the OT—there were passages that affirm that God makes redemptive benefits available for all. Thus God's relationship is open and the Gentiles are included as part His

redemptive promises.

God is incontrovertibly universal with regards to His unfailing love and intention for His creation. He makes all human beings equal in dignity and worthy under His eternal care. In God's covenantal dealings with Abraham, blessings for the nations were essential and primary focus of the call. The basis for national inclusion in God's promised blessing to Abraham was textually and theologically vitally linked to the concept of covenant, election, and promise which were re-established, developed, and reaffirmed once again later on with his descendants.

These links guarantee the nations have a positive destiny in a progressive and emphatic way, assuring their significance in God's salvation plan. Thus the promised blessing to Abraham was not only for his descendants alone, but for all. By electing Abraham, God was choosing a people through whom He would bring knowledge of salvation to all. Abraham's offspring would in turn serve as a channel of hope about Yahweh's blessing to the nations. This was the very purpose of Abraham's calling (and thereby Israel's), which was linked to the well-being of the nations