

# A Day to Praise: Join Israel in Thanking God For His Continuous Protection

It is unprecedented when a chief rabbi of an Israeli city invites Christians to praise God for the miracle of the State of Israel with the Jewish people. This is exactly what the chief rabbi of Efrat, Shlomo Riskin, is doing in his latest initiative the Day to Praise.

Over six and half decades ago, the chief rabbinate of Israel initiated Israel's Independence Day, a sacred holiday within the Jewish calendar whereby Psalms 113 through 118 are invoked in corporate liturgy. The last time the rabbinical establishment instituted a holiday was 22 centuries ago with Chanukah, known in the New Testament as the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22).

Psalms 113-118 has a rich history in Jewish liturgy. It is recited during the morning prayers on biblical feasts such as Passover, Shavout (Pentecost) and Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) and is also mentioned during the Haggadah, the liturgy of the Passover meal (this is the hymn in Matthew 26:30). These series of psalms are entitled Hallel, which means "praise." The purpose of Hallel is to demonstrate our gratitude for God's redemptive acts within Jewish history.

Part of the Hallel mandate is for the nations of the world to praise God for His covenantal love for Israel (Psalm 117). It makes sense that the recipient of God's loving-kindness should be the one to thank God. However, why does psalmist require the nations to praise God for what He has done for Jewry?

The shortest of all the psalms is theologically one of the most profound for it includes the notion that the fullness of praising God for what He did and continues to do for Israel

incorporates humanity to be involved in the practice of it. It also gives insight into the notion of blessing God for a miracle.

“Although Psalm 117 is a short psalm, its range is universal. The nations are enjoined to praise the LORD because he has shown his steadfast love to the despised little nation of Israel.”[1]

According to one Jewish commentator, there are two types of miracle blessings: thanksgiving and praise. The former is said by the beneficiary of the miracle itself. The latter is invoked when a person sees something awe-inspiring. Psalm 117 is dated by some in reference to the defeat of the Assyria Emperor in 2 Kings 19; a mighty and vicious dictator who murdered and exiled the populations of the countries that he conquered. Psalm 117 also has a prophetic voice that applies to our lives today—the re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel.

The Jewish people have been divorced from their land for nearly 2,000 years. During that time, the nation suffered immeasurable atrocities by the hand of other empires. It seemed that Jewish history was coming to an end when a third of its population was exterminated in the Holocaust. Then in one day a nation was reborn as stated in Isaiah 66:8.

No other rational explanation in the world can explain the phenomenon of Israel's existence today except that God continues to be faithful to His covenantal promise made thousands of years ago to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God never repents of His gifts.

The miracle of Israel today should serve as an inspiration to other nations to bless the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob since they can fully comprehend His kindness to the Jewish nation. The nations of the world have the revealed and hidden historical record of what occurred in the past to eradicate

God's elect. They also know of what is presently transpiring to undermine its status today.

Yet, through it all, the State of Israel continues to be a beacon of light to help the world in all areas of our daily living. God has always been with Israel and will continue to protect "the apple of His eye." The existence of the State of Israel should serve as an inspiration for other nations to praise Him. It is our hope that one day the fullness of Psalm 117 will be witnessed in our lifetime.

As Rabbi Riskin's liaison to the Christian world, it is my honor to serve this vision that God has put into our hearts. We both realize that the remnant within the Christian world that supports Israel and the Jewish people is the one of the greatest miracles next to the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. In a time that Israel is being isolated on the world stage and media pundits are forecasting disaster ahead, committed Jews and Christians are fully aware that it is God who protects Zion as stated in Psalm 91.

We just celebrated the holiday of Purim in Israel, which begins the season of redemption in the Jewish calendar that lasts until the end of Shavout. The difference between the Hallel of biblical feasts & rabbinic holidays and the Hallel recited on Israel's Independence is that the former is about the remembrance of miracles done to us in the past.

The Hallel on Israel's Independence Day is about thanking God in the present for His continuous protection and deliverance. It is our hope that Christians will recite the six psalms of Hallel on April 23. Please let us know by visiting .

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[1]Willem S. Prinsloo, "The Psalms," in Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand

*Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 421.*