YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***TEHILLIM* (SERIES II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

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**L'iluy nishmat Yosef ben Aharon Shmuel H"YD, Grandpa Joe.**

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**Shiur #09: Psalm 117 - “O Praise The Lord, All You Nations”**

**The Shortest Psalm in the Book of Tehillim (Part II)**

I 1 O Praise the Lord, all you nations;

Praise Him all you peoples.

II 2 For His love for us is great;

And the truth of the Lord endures for ever.

Halleluya!

### III. "All you Nations” – What business have the nations of the world here?

As was explained in the previous sections, our psalm falls into the category of psalms of praise in the book of *Tehillim*, and within this broad category it belongs to the set of psalms of praise built with a "praise framework" consisting of an appeal to offer praise and a rationale for that appeal. Such psalms open with an appeal to the audience that is present to praise God, and continue with a rationale for that appeal, beginning with the word *ki*, "for, because."[[1]](#footnote-1) In several psalms of this type, the praise framework is repeated, but of course this is not the case in our psalm of two verses. Moreover, the components of the praise framework in our psalm appear in a most concise manner.

Stanza I is the appeal. It consists of a short directive concerning verbal praise ("praise the Lord"; "praise Him") without further specification,[[2]](#footnote-2) as well as words of address to the target audience ("all you nations"; "all you peoples").

Stanza II is the rationale. It opens with the word *ki* and briefly explains the appeal that is directed in stanza I to the nations to praise the Lord. Based on our explanation of this stanza in the previous section, we can paraphrase the rationale as follows: "For God's eternal love was shown to us."

Who is the speaker in the psalm, calling upon all the nations to praise God? As with other psalms of this type, this question can only be answered on the basis of the rationale that appears in the continuation of the appeal: "For His love **for us** is great…." We see, then, that the speaker in the psalm is the people of Israel (by way of the psalmist, who serves as the people's representative); it is he who calls upon the nations to praise God for the steadfast love that He has shown His people.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This gives rise to a baffling question: Is it because God's love **for us** is great that the nations are called upon to praise Him? The extreme brevity of our psalm sharpens this question, which arises also in other psalms in the book of *Tehillim*, but is particularly striking in our psalm.

This question was raised in the Talmud (*Pesachim* 118b):

When R. Yishmael the son of R. Yose fell sick, Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] sent to him: Tell us two or three things which you have said to us in your father's name. He sent back to him: Thus did my father say: What is meant by the verse: "O Praise the Lord, all you nations"? What business have the nations of the world here?

Rashi explains the *gemara*'s question as follows:

What business – [do they have] to praise? [If] because His love for us is great, surely it falls **upon us** to offer praise!

### IV. Three answers that Ignore the psalm's simple meaning

This question has disturbed readers of our psalm from the days of the *Tanna’im*, through the medieval period, and until our own generation, and various attempts have been made to answer it. In this section, we will present three such attempts from different periods.

**1. "And all the more so we must praise God"**

The first answer to this question is the answer presented by R. Yose, father of R. Yishmael, to the question that he himself had raised, as it appears in the continuation of the Talmudic passage cited in the previous section:

This is its meaning: "O Praise the Lord, all you nations" for the mighty and wondrous deeds which He wrought for them; **and all the more so we [must praise God],** **"for his love for us is great"** (Rashbam: Greater than that for any other people or nation).[[4]](#footnote-4)

According to this answer, the second stanza in our psalm is not a rationale for the appeal directed to the nations in the first stanza to praise the Lord, but rather a rationale for a different appeal to praise Him – directed at Israel, but not written in the psalm. Accordingly, not only is the appeal to Israel missing, but the rationale for the appeal to the nations to praise God – "for the mighty and wondrous deeds which He wrought for them" – is also missing.

In his typical manner, Rashi in his commentary to our psalm adopts the *gemara*'s explanation:

For His love for us is great – That is to say: And all the more so we, for whom His love is great.

What Rashi adds in his comment is that the word *ki* is not used here to introduce a rationale – "for, since" – but rather is an abbreviated form of the phrase ***af ki***, which in most places means "**all the more so**." This is what the *gemara* means when it says, “*kol sheken anu*,” "all the more so we;" all that is missing in the psalm is the word *anu*, "we."[[5]](#footnote-5)

This explanation requires several additions to the psalm that are not written in it. It ignores the simple reading of the psalm, and it does not reflect the plain meaning of the text.

**2. "The love that will be shown to all"**

The second explanation that we wish to bring is that of R. Moshe Gikitila, which is cited by the Ibn Ezra in his commentary to our psalm:[[6]](#footnote-6)

And R. Moshe said that it [the appeal in the psalm] is directed **to every** nation.[[7]](#footnote-7) And the words “*ki gavar*” mean: the love that He will show to **all,** keeping them alive and sustaining them.

According to this explanation, not only is the appeal to praise God directed "to every nation" – to all of humanity – but the rationale as well, "for His love for us is great," relates to all of mankind. The speaker in first person plural in verse 2 is not the people of Israel, as we thought. Rather, the psalmist includes himself among "all the nations." God's love that is great "for us" – for all of us – is that love which keeps all human beings alive and sustains them.

This solution is the exact opposite of the previous solution. Rather than severing the second half of the psalm from the first half and assigning it exclusively to Israel, R. Moshe Gikitila connects it to the previous half and explains it as dealing with "all the nations," without any connection to Israel.

We proposed a similar explanation for the first praise framework in Psalm 100: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth… Know that the Lord He is God… It is He **who made us,** and **we** belong to Him." The psalmist appeals to "all the earth," all of humanity, to make a joyful noise to the Lord, and justifies his appeal with the fact that God has created us – all of us – and we belong to Him – all human beings belong to their Creator. We explained there that the formulation in first person plural stems from the fact that the psalmist includes himself in the universal rationale as part of humanity as a whole, to whom he directs his appeal.[[8]](#footnote-8)

There is, however, a difference between the rationales offered in these two psalms, and we therefore find R. Moshe's interpretation of Psalm 117 difficult. "It is He who made us" in Psalm 100 means "He created us," and this rationale bears a universal nature by its very content. But the phrase, "His love **for us is great**," seems to describe a special kindness that God bestowed upon "us," a specific group of beneficiaries. "The love that He will show to all,keeping them alive and sustaining them," as R. Moshe puts it, is a constant and hidden action that God performs for all of the world's creatures, and is not aptly described by the words, "for His love for us is great."

The word order in the verse – *ki gavar aleinu chasdo* –also supports the understanding that the pronominal suffix in the word *aleinu*, "for us," refers to a specific group that merits special kindness. The object, *aleinu*, is placed before the subject, *chasdo* (in contrast to the similar verse in *Tehilim* 103:11: "So great is His steadfast love towards those who fear Him" (*gavar chasdo al yerei'av*) in order to emphasize and distinguish the object of God's love, in relation to humanity as a whole, referred to at the beginning of the psalm: “All of you praise the Lord, for His love for us – specifically for us – is great.” According to R. Moshe's explanation that the word *aleinu* also refers to all of humanity, the verse should have read: *ki gavar chasdo aleinu*.

Thus, our psalm describes a Divine demonstration of love specifically to "us," a particular group of people. This emphasis is only appropriate if the reference is to the people of Israel, which must be distinguished from the rest of humanity. We come back, then, to the identification of the word *aleinu* with the people of Israel.

**3. "A form of poetic rhetoric"**

The third resolution of the difficulty of why the nations are called upon to praise the Lord for having shown love to Israel is that of Amos Chakham in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary. In his interpretation of the psalms of *Hallel*, Chakhamaddresses the juxtaposition of the various psalms to each other, concluding that these psalms were meant to be recited by those arriving at the Temple on the pilgrimage festivals. The end of Psalm 116, the psalm that precedes our psalm, describes a commitment to go up to the Temple: "I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving… I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem" (verses 17-19). Similarly, in the next psalm, Psalm 118, an allusion is made to this: "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will enter them, and I will praise the Lord… Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord… Bind the sacrifice with cords, to the horns of the altar" (verses 19-27). This being the case, according to Chakham in his summary of Psalm 117:

This psalm is indeed an independent composition, but is designed to be recited together with other psalms… Its main content, the call to the nations to praise God, serves as a transition from the end of Psalm 116 to the beginning of Psalm 118. At the end of Psalm 116, the psalmist says: "I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence **of all His people**," and here in Psalm 117 he adds that he wishes to proclaim God's lovingkindness and might not only in the midst of the Jewish People, but also among all the nations. Therefore, he begins with a call: "Praise the Lord, all the nations." **But this call is made as a form of poetic rhetoric alone, and those who hear the words at the time they are said are the congregation of God's worshippers who are present,** and the psalmist turns to them at the beginning of Psalm 119 and proclaims: "Let Israel now say." … In Psalm 118, we find (verse 19): "Open to me the gates of righteousness. Let me enter them and I will praise the Lord." This provides support for the theory that Psalm 117 is joined to Psalm 118, that they together form a unity, and that they constitute the song of those who come on pilgrimage to the house of the Lord to offer Him thanks… It is the way of those who give thanks to God that they wish the whole world, and in particular the whole human race, to join them in their thanksgiving... This is why Psalm 117 begins: "Praise the Lord, all the nations."

In the body of his commentary as well, Chakham writes:

Praise the Lord, all the nations – The use of the plural imperative "praise" is **figurative,** and the expression means: It is appropriate that all the nations should praise the Lord.

According to this understanding, there is no difficulty with the rationale offered by some member of the people of Israel who is going up to the Temple for his appeal to all the nations, "for His love for us is great," for in truth this appeal is directed exclusively to the members of his own people, to those who are present there.[[9]](#footnote-9)

However, Psalm 117's position among the other psalms does not change its meaning as a psalm that stands on its own in such a far-reaching manner as proposed by Chakham. Indeed, upon closer examination of the links that Chakham suggests exist between the neighboring psalms, it becomes evident that these links are far from persuasive. The underlying assumption regarding the chapters of *Hallel* as a whole – that they were meant from their very composition to be recited by those going up to the Temple on the pilgrimage festivals – has not been proven at all.

### V. A psalm for the end of days

As was the case with Psalm 100, understanding our psalm as a whole involves clarifying the historical circumstances to which the psalm refers. This clarification will also provide us with an answer to the central question arising from the content of the psalm (as formulated in section III).

The commentators who attempted to explain the psalm as referring to its own time – that is, to the time in which it was written – had to deal with a basic question: Who are "all the nations" and "all the peoples" whom the psalmist addresses in our psalm? Will any of them hear his appeal to praise God? This fundamental question (which, of course, relates to many other psalms as well) is particularly difficult when we add to it the question that we have been addressing thus far in this study: What is the meaning of the rationale given for the appeal directed at all the nations: "For his love for us is great"?

The Ibn Ezra, who apparently tries to explain our psalm as referring to its own time, writes with exceeding brevity: "‘Praise [the Lord, all you nations]’ – In my opinion, 'all you nations' means – those who were under the hand of David, as in: ‘There is no nation or kingdom’" (I *Melakhim* 18:10).

In his opinion, our psalm was written by David or one of his contemporaries, and the appeal to "all you nations" is not directed at all of humanity (for, as we asked above, which of the nations would have listened to such an appeal), but only toward those nations that were subjugated to David. As proof that it is possible that the expression "**all** you nations" refers to only **some** of the nations, the Ibn Ezra cites Ovadyahu's words to Eliyahu that Achav had searched for him among all the nations and kingdoms, and it is clear that he refers only to the nations bordering on the kingdom of Israel.

It is not clear from the Ibn Ezra’s comment whether he understands that the psalmist's appeal to the nations that "were under the hand of David" was a real appeal or only a rhetorical one. It is also not clear how he answers the other question regarding the rationale, "for His love for us is great." The Ibn Ezra seems to understand that His love for us which is great refers to the very dominion that God gave to David and the people of Israel over those nations, and it is possible that his comment comes primarily to answer this question.

Amos Chakham also explains our psalm as referring to its own time, as we saw in the previous section. He explains the address directed at "all you nations" as simply "a form of poetic rhetoric," so that it means, "It is appropriate that all the nations should praise the Lord," but the real target of the psalmist's appeal are those present in the Temple when they go there to offer their sacrifices.

All of these explanations and those similar to them are forced.

The considerations that we raised with respect to Psalm 100 are even more valid with respect to our psalm. Psalm 117 is a psalm of praise that is meant to be fulfilled in the end of days, after the people of Israel are redeemed from their exile.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The psalmists of the book of *Tehillim* wrote a considerable number of psalms in reference to the distant future, to the messianic period in the history of Israel and the history of the world. These psalms in the book of *Tehillim* parallel the eschatological prophecies in the books of the Prophets.

It may be argued that the vast majority of psalms in which the nations are called upon to praise God and accept Him as their king, and similarly those psalms which describe the nations as doing so, are psalms for the end of days.

This assumption regarding the circumstances to which our psalm refers impacts, of course, our understanding of the second verse in our psalm. God's love and truth, which are great for us, refer to Israel's dramatic redemption! The redemption of the people of Israel will prove that God's covenant with Israel is eternal, for Israel will be redeemed at the end of days by virtue of that covenant. This is the meaning of the verse: "And the truth of the Lord [= His love for and covenant with us] endures **forever**."[[11]](#footnote-11)

How does this understanding of the psalm resolve the main problem that we are dealing with? Why are "all the nations" being asked to praise God because He redeemed His people?

Israel's redemption as it is described in Scripture is not a marginal event in human history, one that is connected solely to the intimate relationship between God and Israel. **The redemption of the people of Israel from its exile among the nations and their return to their land involves a worldwide reorganization,** a change in the flow of history and a change in the consciousness of many peoples. Thus, the sting of the question – what is the connection between all the nations and God's great love "for us" – is removed. This love – the fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel – which will be bestowed upon them in the end of days, will affect all the nations and shock the order that existed before Israel's redemption, when Israel lived among the nations during their long and bitter exile.

The Radak, who lived in Christian Provence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and was aware of the ongoing Christian-Jewish debate during the Middle Ages, fully understood this meaning of our psalm, explaining it as follows:

This psalm, of only two verses, refers to the days of the Messiah. And by making it only two verses, [the psalmist] alludes that **all** the nations [Israel and the nations of the world] will be on two sides: Israel alone, who will be with their Torah, and all the [other] nations on the other side, with the seven [Noachide] laws. **And all of them** will praise God, because at that time all will recognize Him… And he said in reference to **all of them:** Praise the Lord, **all** you nations… For His love **for us** is great – for this you must praise Him, for His love for us is so great **that He took us out from under your hands, which you did not believe He could do,** owing to the length of our exile. But now, give thanks and say, all of you: And the truth of the Lord endures forever! For His word and the promise that He made to us to take us out of the exile is true.

What the Radak writes at the beginning concerning the allusion lying in the fact that our psalm is comprised of only two verses, appears at first glance as a homily offered by the Radak himself, which is not at all typical of this commentator, who generally adheres to the plain sense of the text. Upon deeper examination, however, his words manifest a profound observation. Our short psalm "of only two verses" is divided between a clearly universal verse and a clearly Israelite-particularistic verse. The Radak explains this as the primary intention of the psalm. Even in the days of the Messiah, which is the time towards which our psalm is directed, the distinction between Israel and the nations of the world will be preserved. While it is true that at that time "all will recognize" God and praise Him, and it is to this that the first verse of our psalm refers, nevertheless Israel will remain distinguished from the nations of the world by way of their adherence to the Torah, which obligates them alone, and no less by way of their historical fate. The people that had been exiled and scattered among the nations for so many generations will go out from among them when God's love appears upon them and He fulfills His covenant with them, even though the nations "did not believe He could do this."[[12]](#footnote-12) The nations are now called upon to recognize and admit their mistake regarding the people of Israel, and to praise God who opened their eyes to recognize their extended mistake. Now they recognize that the people of Israel have a covenant with God, and that God fulfilled His covenant as He had promised in His Torah and through all of His prophets. For this clarification – for this new religious recognition that the historical event of Israel's redemption brought them to – the nations are called upon to praise God.

### VI. Other appeals to the nations to praise God for the Love that he has shown to Israel

Our psalm is not the only place in Scripture, nor the only place in the book of *Tehillim*, where all of the nations are called upon to offer a positive religious response upon revealing God's relationship with Israel. This response is sometimes described as verbally offered by them, and sometimes as expected of them.

It is a fundamental principle in Scripture that the fate of Israel is a focus of interest for the other nations and that they offer a religious interpretation for it for better or worse. Here are several examples of this principle:

God's punishment of Israel is liable to be understood by the nations as a sign of His weakness, and this is liable to lead to a desecration of God's name among them. Moshe puts forward this argument in his prayers following the sin of the golden calf (*Shemot* 32:12) and following the sin of the spies (*Bamidbar* 14:13-17), and his prayers are accepted by God, who waives Israel's punishment in order to prevent the desecration of His name among the nations.

In *Parashat Ha'azinu* (*Devarim* 32:26-27), this concern is expressed by God Himself:

I said, I would scatter them into corners

I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men.

Were it not for the heaped up wrath of the enemy,

Lest their adversaries should misdeem,

And lest they should say, Our hand is high,

And the Lord has not done all this.

At the end of the song of *Ha'azinu*, we find for the first time in Scripture an appeal directed to the nations to praise God for having acted favorably towards Israel (ibid. v. 43):

Praise, O nations, His people,

For He will avenge the blood of His servants,

And will render vengeance to His adversaries,

And will forgive His land, and His people.

The Rashbam sensed a connection between this verse and our psalm, and wrote in his commentary there:

"Praise, O nations," **about "**His people." This is like, "O Praise the Lord, all you nations; praise Him all you peoples." And believe in Him, for "His love for us is great," more so than for the other nations.[[13]](#footnote-13) And therefore praise Him and believe in Him… Here too: Praise Him, and serve Him…

In the books of the Prophets, especially in the book of *Yechezkel*, emphasis is placed on the universal significance of every change in the fate of Israel. Their exile among the nations causes the desecration of God's name among those nations, whereas their redemption will bring to a sanctification of God's name among them.[[14]](#footnote-14) We will cite from a prophecy of Yermiyahu (chapter 31), in which, as in our psalm, a vigorous appeal is directed toward the nations to praise God for having redeemed His children from among the nations:

6: For thus says the Lord:

Sing with gladness for Ya'akov/ and shout on the hilltops of the nations/ announce, praise and say,

O Lord, save Your people/ the remnant of Israel.[[15]](#footnote-15)

7: Behold, I will bring them from the north country/ and gather them from the ends of the earth…

9: Hear the word of the Lord, O you nations/

and declare it in the isles afar off, and say,

He that scattered Israel will gather him/

and keep him, as a shepherd keeps his flock.

10: For the Lord has redeemed Ya'akov/

and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.

The difference between Yermiyahu's prophecy and our psalm is with respect to the issue of who is calling upon the nations to praise God for having redeemed Israel. In the prophecy, it is God who calls upon them to do this (via his prophet): "For thus **says the Lord"** (v. 6); "Hear **the word of the Lord,** O you nations" (v. 9); and he speaks of the people of Israel in third person: "Behold, I will bring **them**" (v. 7). In our psalm, on the other hand, the call, "Praise the Lord, all you nations," is made by the people of Israel (via the psalmist), who speaks later in the psalm in first person plural: "For His love **for us**is great…."

These differences follow from the fundamental difference between prophecy, which is directed "from above downwards," and the psalms of *Tehilim*, which are directed "from below upwards." In the prophecy, the nations are called upon by God to participate in Israel's redemption, whether as those who pray on behalf of the people of Israel (v. 6), or as those who herald the redemption and describe it in the furthest of places (v. 9). In the psalm, on the other hand, the nations are called upon by the people of Israel to offer a positive religious response as a conclusion from the historical process that opened their eyes: They are asked to praise God for the very fact that Israel was redeemed from among them.

Let us conclude our study by mentioning several psalms in the book of *Tehillim*, which also include an appeal to the nations to praise God for His relationship with Israel, His covenantal nation:[[16]](#footnote-16)

Psalm 66 states:

8: O bless our God, **you peoples**/

and make the voice of His praise to be heard:

9: Who has kept **our soul** in life/

and has not suffered **our foot** to be moved.

Psalm 47 states:

2: O clap your hands, **all you** **peoples**/

shout to God with the voice of triumph.

4: He subdues people **under us**/

and nations under **our feet.**

5: He chooses **our inheritance for us**/

the pride of Yaakov whom He loves. Sela.

And Psalm 148 states:

7: Praise the Lord from the earth…

11: **Kings of the earth, and all peoples**/

princes, and all judges of the earth…

13: Let them praise the name of the Lord/

for His name alone is exalted;

His glory is above the earth and heaven.

14: He also has exalted the horn of **His people**/

a praise for all **His pious ones**;

even **for the children of Israel**, a people near to Him,

Halleluya!

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. See our study of [Psalm 100, section I](http://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-01-tehillim-100-%E2%80%93-psalm-thanksgiving-difference-between-praise-all-earth-and-praise-his-people), and our study of the set of [Psalms 95-100](http://etzion.org.il/en/topics/tehillim-advanced-series-2). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. An appeal to offer verbal praise can specify the content of that praise, as in *Tehillim* 96:1-3. An appeal to offer musical praise usually specifies the sounds that are to be made and the instruments that are to be used to produce them, as in *Tehillim* 98:4-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See additional examples in our study of Psalm 100, section IV. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. According to the *gemara*'s explanation, two parties praise God in our psalm: the nations and Israel. In *Midrash Tehillim* on our psalm (ed. Buber, p. 240), each clause of the psalm is assigned to a different party who praises God, so that there are four parties offering praise:

   R. Shimon the son of Rabbeinu Ha-Kadosh asked his father: Who are “all the nations,” and who are “all the peoples”? He said to him: “All the nations” – these are the nations who subjugated Israel; “all the peoples” – these are the peoples who did not subjugate them. “All the peoples” said: If they who subjugated the people of Israel praise the Holy One, blessed be He, we who did not subjugate them, all the more so! Therefore it is stated: “Praise the Lord, all you nations; praise Him all you peoples.” **Israel said: We, all the more so! They began to say: “For His love for us is great.”** The earth said: "And the truth of the Lord endures forever.” What is “And the truth”? True is the covenant that you established with the patriarchs, as it is stated: “Then will I remember My covenant with Ya'akov… [and I will remember the land]” (*Vayikra* 26:42).

   This *midrash* starts from a question that is different from that of the *gemara* ("Who are 'all the nations,' and who are 'all the peoples'?"), but the result is the same. The verse, "for His love for us is great," is not understood as a rationale for the appeal to the nations to praise God, but rather as the words of praise of Israel themselves, and this Midrash therefore similarly removes the difficulty with which we are dealing. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The phrase “*af ki*” is found twenty-six times in the Bible, and in almost all cases it means "all the more so." It is astonishing that in his concordance, Even Shushan explains the phrase (s.v. *ki*, at the beginning) as "even though." In his commentary on our psalm, Dr. Meir Gruber (in the *Olam Ha-Tanakh* series) cites the words of Rashi and writes: "Rashi explains the word *ki* here as 'even though,' because he finds it ironic that the psalmist invites the nations of the world to praise God for the acts of steadfast love that God performed for the people of Israel." The writer did not understand the words of Rashi, and attributed to him a strange explanation, because he did not know the meaning of the Biblical phrase *af ki*. He understood it in accordance with its sense in Modern Hebrew, as he was not familiar with Rashi's source in the Talmud. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. R. Moshe Gikitila (b. Cordova, Spain at the beginning of the 11th century) wrote a commentary on the book of *Tehillim* in Arabic, which has not yet been translated into Hebrew. The Ibn Ezra often cites him in his commentary to *Tehillim*, on the average about once every psalm. For more about him, see Prof. Uriel Simon, *Arba Gishot Le-Sefer Tehillim* (Ramat Gan, 5742), chapter 3, pp. 96ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is against the view of Ibn Ezra himself, who earlier explained the appeal as being directed to specific nations. See our discussion of his position in section V. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See our study of Psalm 100, end of section V. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It would seem that it was not our difficulty that brought Chakham to explain that the appeal to "all the nations" is a form of poetic rhetoric, but rather his understanding of the psalm as intended to be recited by pilgrims arriving in the Temple to offer thanks to God. Chakham offered a similar explanation regarding the appeal directed toward the nations at the beginning of Psalm 100, "Make a joyful noise, all the earth." We cited that explanation in section IX of that study. (He repeats what he said there in his commentary to our psalm, though we omitted in our citation of his words the comparison that he draws between the two psalms.) However, in Psalm 100, it is the **psalm's heading** – "A psalm of thanksgiving" – that brings him to explain the entire psalm as a psalm composed for those bringing a thanksgiving-offering to the Temple, and he therefore explains: "The imperative, 'Make a joyful noise,' is addressed **poetically** to all of the inhabitants of the earth, but in practice it is directed to the congregation of celebrants who are going up to the Temple in a thanksgiving procession." In our psalm, what brings him to a similar argument is **our psalm's proximity** to the psalm preceding it and to the psalm following it and to the chapters of *Hallel* as a whole. In our opinion, however, this commentator has veered from the plain understanding of these two psalms based on erroneous considerations; see further in our study of Psalm 100, end of section IX. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See our study of Psalm 100, sections X and XI, and Appendix I: Psalms dealing with the end of days in the book of *Tehillim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Just as *chesed* and *emet* are a fixed pair in Scripture, "two that are one" (hendiadys; see section II above), so too *berit* and *chesed* appear in Scripture as a pair several times, and they too constitute a hendiadys. The pair *berit ve-chesed* appears seven times in Scripture, always in reference to God, "keeper of the covenant and love." In *Devarim* 7:12, it is stated: "That the Lord your God shall keep unto you the covenant [*ha-berit*] and the love [*ha-chesed*] which He swore to your fathers." Sometimes, the pair is divided between two parallel clauses, e.g.: "But My faithful love [*chasdi*] shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant [*berit*] of My peace be removed" (*Yeshayahu* 54:10, and similarly *Yeshayahu* 55:3). But even when the word *berit* does not appear, this is the meaning of the word *chesed* when it is found in the phrase *chesed ve-emuna* (trustworthiness); see our study of Psalm 100, section VIII, and note 11 there. Even in some of the verses containing the phrase *chesed ve-emet*, the phrase alludes to a covenant, and that seems to be the case in our psalm as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. It stands to reason that the Radak is polemicizing with the Augustian doctrine of Jewish witness, which grants the people of Israel the right to exist, and even opposes their annihilation at the hands of the Christian nations, but only so that their exile among the nations, and their **eternal**humiliation among them, will serve as a constant, living testimony to the correctness of the Christian religion and the punishment of those who refuse to accept it. Augustine bases this argument in his book, *The City of God* (beginning of the fifth century), on the Christian interpretation of *Tehillim* 59:12: "Slay them not, lest my people forget: scatter them by Your power, and bring them down, O Lord our shield." Pope Innocent III, a contemporary of the Radak, repeated the words of Augustine and applied them in practice in the Roman empire. According to this Christian doctrine, Israel's redemption from among the nations is not at all possible. The Radak's interpretation of our psalm turns the psalm into an appeal to the Christians, when the time of Israel's redemption will arrive, to admit their error. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The Rashbam's objective with the connection that he makes between the verse in the song of *Ha'azinu* and our psalm is to argue (as opposed to Rashi and other commentators who understand the words as: "Praise His people") that the object of the verb "Praise" is God, even though He is not explicitly mentioned, as the nations are called upon to praise **Him** for what He did for His nation. Psalm 117, which expresses the same idea, serves as proof for the correctness of his explanation. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See especially *Yechezkel* 36:16-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In this prophecy, the nations are called upon to pray and plead for the redemption of Israel: "O Lord, save Your people." This does not seem to accord with the nature of the previous imperatives: "**Sing** with gladness for Ya'akov, and **shout**… **announce praise**, and say…." Therefore Shadal explains: "**When you see Israel returning from the exile,** pray that He should save them from all trouble on the road." [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. We noted these and other psalms in our study of Psalm 100, note 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)