

Psalm 113

God's mercies are many

Psalm 113: Psalms 113-118 have been traditionally linked in Jewish worship with the great feasts of Passover and Tabernacles. At Passover for example, Psalms 113 and 114 are sung before the meal and 115 and 118 after it. How far back these traditions go is unknown, but the connection of such hymns with the Passover is maintained in the New Testament (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). The content of Psalm 113 is simple. There is a call to praise the Lord (verses 1-3) because He is great (verses 4-6), and because He cares for the poor and needy (verses 7-9).

Verses 1-9 of Psalms 113 – 118 comprise a rich 6 psalm praise to God commonly called the “Egyptian Hallel” (Hallel” meaning praise in Hebrew). These were sung at Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, but had the greatest significance at Passover, which celebrated the Jews’ deliverance from Egypt (compare Exodus chapters 12-14). Traditionally Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the Passover meal and Psalms 115-118 afterwards. Psalm 118 would most likely be what Christ and the disciples sang before they left the Upper Room the night Christ was betrayed (compare Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). There are two other notable sets of praise in the Psalter.

- (1) The Great Hallel (Psalms 120-136); and
- (2) The Final Hallel (Psalms 145-150).
 - I. The Call to Praise (113:1-3).
 - II. The Cause for Praise (113:4-9).
 - A. God’s Transcendence (113:4-5);
 - B. God’s Immanence (113:6-9).

Verses 1-9: An exhortation to praise God. God has praise from his own people. They have most reason to praise him; for those who attend him as his servants, know him best, and receive most of his favors, and it is easy, pleasant work to speak well of their Master. God's name ought to be praised in every place, from east to west. Within this wide space the Lord's name is to be praised; it ought to be so, though it is not. Before long it will be, when all nations shall come and worship before him. God is exalted above all blessing and praise. We must therefore say, with holy admiration say, “Who is like unto the Lord our God?” How condescending in him to behold the things in the earth! And what amazing condescension was it for the Son of God to come from heaven to earth, and take our nature upon him, that he might seek and save those that were lost! How vast his love in taking upon him the nature of man, to ransom guilty souls! God sometimes makes glorious his own wisdom and power, when, having some great work to do, he employs those least likely, and least thought of for it by themselves or others. The apostles were sent from fishing to be fishers of men. And this is God's constant method in his kingdom of grace. He takes men, by nature beggars, and even traitors, to be his favorites, his children, kings and priests unto him; and numbers them with the princes of his chosen people. He gives us all our comforts, which are generally the more welcome when long delayed, and no longer expected. Let us pray

that those lands which are yet barren, may speedily become fruitful, and produce many converts to join in praising the Lord.

Psalm 113:1 "Praise ye the LORD. Praise, O ye servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD."

Or, "hallelujah". This is the title of the psalm, as in the two preceding, and directs to the principal matter of it.

"Praise, O ye servants of the Lord": Refers to the redeemed, all of whom should serve God with obedience. Meaning not the angels, nor all men, nor the priests and Levites only; but all the saints, who are a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. Who are servants, not of sin, nor of Satan, nor of men, but of God and Christ; and who serve the Lord willingly and cheerfully. With much pleasure and delight, in righteousness and holiness, with reverence and godly fear, and without trusting to and depending on their service for salvation. And one principal branch of their service is praise, especially under the Gospel dispensation. In which all legal sacrifices are abolished, and the sacrifice of praise is continued. And which is pleasant and delightful work, and yet there is a backwardness to it. And therefore, there is need of such an exhortation to excite unto it, and to repeat it, as follows.

"Praise the name of the Lord": The name of God represents all His attributes. Not any particular name, as Jehovah; but him himself, and the perfections of his nature; his holiness, justice, truth, faithfulness, power, goodness, grace and mercy. The repetition of the exhortation denotes either the abundance of praise to be given to the Lord, or the constancy and continuance of it. Which ought to be done at all times, every day, since his mercies are new every morning. Some have thought the threefold repetition respects the trinity of Persons, who are each to be praised (as in Num. 6:24). But this is doubtful, and perhaps not sufficient to build such a doctrine on. And especially since the first of these exhortations is the title of the psalm. However, this is a certain truth, that Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit, are to be praised.

This is just a Psalm of pure praise. Praise being mentioned 3 times has to do with Father, Word, and Holy Ghost. Christians are servants of the Lord. Look at the two following verses about the sacrifice of praise.

Jeremiah 33:11 "The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD [is] good; for his mercy [endureth] for ever: [and] of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD."

Hebrews 13:15 "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of [our] lips giving thanks to his name."

The very least we can do is to praise the Lord.

Psalm 113:2 "Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for evermore."

Some prefix the word "saying", as directing to the matter and manner of praising the Lord, and to express themselves thus; "let the name of the Lord be blessed"; honored, glorified, spoken well of.

"From this time forth and for evermore": From the beginning of time, or as soon as time began. The Lord's name was to be praised, and was praised by the holy angels, who were present at laying the foundation of the earth (Job 38:4). And all the works of the Lord, in their way, have praised him ever since. Here it may respect the time of penning this psalm, or the time when the persons called upon commenced the servants of the Lord, the time of their conversion. A time of love, life, light, and deliverance, and therefore a time to begin to praise the Lord. Or the whole time of the Gospel dispensation, to which this psalm refers. The accepted time and day of salvation, and of the Gentiles glorifying God for his mercy. In which the Lord is to be and is praised, as he will be to all eternity, by angels and glorified saints. Praise is to be rendered always (compare Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18).

Praises will not cease, when we leave the earth and go to heaven. Even the angels in heaven are praising the Lord. They cry Holy, Holy, Holy.

Psalm 113:3 "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD'S name [is] to be praised."

"Rising ... going down": From the first moment of consciousness in the morning to the last waking moment before sleep.

Rising of the sun, means early in the morning, and going down of the same, means late in the evening. This just means to praise the LORD all day long. Jehovah, or Jah, is intended by the name.

Verses 4-6: Unlike the gods of the surrounding nations, the God of Israel rules over "all nations" and the entire universe ("the heavens"). Also unlike those false gods, God Almighty "humbleth Himself" to attend to His people and the concerns of their lives.

Verses 4-5: Believers are to praise the only One worthy of praise for His transcendent sovereignty.

Psalm 113:4 "The LORD [is] high above all nations, [and] his glory above the heavens."

He is the Most High in all the earth; he is higher than the highest; he is King of kings and Lord of lords. All nations are made by him, and are under his government and dominion. He is the Governor among the nations. They are in comparison of him as the drop of a bucket, as the small dust of the balance; as nothing, yea, less than nothing, and vanity. Here it seems to respect the time when the Lord shall be more visibly King over all the earth, and the kingdoms of this world shall be the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ (Zech. 14:9).

"And his glory above the heavens": It is above what the heavens do or can declare; they declare something of it, but not all. Christ, who is the brightness of his Father's glory, is made higher than the heavens, and has ascended far above them; and is above the angels in them, both as to nature, name, office, and place (Heb. 1:4).

There is no greater in heaven or earth, than the LORD. He is greatly to be praised. The glory of the Lord shines in heaven and in earth. The Light of God gives all things the power to exist. The Creator is above His Creation.

Psalm 113:5 "Who [is] like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high,"

Who can be compared with Yahweh our God? (see notes at Isa. 40:17-25). The meaning is, that no creature, no idol, can be compared with Yahweh. The remark here has special reference to his attributes as immediately specified, his humbling himself to behold the things in heaven and in earth. His raising up the poor, etc. It is true "in general," in regard to God, that no creature can be compared with him. It is true, in regard to each one of his attributes, that they are far above all created excellence.

"Who dwelleth on high": Margin, "exalteth himself to dwell." Literally, "The one making high to sit." The language is applicable to one who is seated on a lofty throne (compare Psalm 8:1). He has his dwelling, his throne, his permanent seat, in the heavens. So high and exalted that it requires infinite condescension to look upon the earth, or even upon the heavens.

There is no greater in heaven or earth, than the LORD our God. This was quickly proved in Egypt, when He defamed the false gods of Egypt (world).

Verses 6-9: "Humbleth": In appearance, God must figuratively lean over from the faraway heavens to examine the earth (compare Isa. 40:12-17). In a far greater way Christ humbled Himself in the incarnation (compare Phil. 2:5-11).

Psalm 113:6 "Who humbleth [himself] to behold [the things that are] in heaven, and in the earth!"

So high that it is necessary he should stoop even to behold the things which seem most lofty to us. And who actually does stoop thus to regard the things which he has made in heaven and on earth.

"To behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!" More literally, "to look in heaven and in earth." Even to look on heaven, high as it is to us, still more to look on earth, so insignificant as compared with the vast bodies in the heavens, is condescension on the part of God. It requires him to stoop, even to look on the sun, the stars and the distant worlds! Yet he does this. There is not a world which he does not survey constantly. Not a creature whose interests he does not regard. Not an insect, a flower, or an atom that he does not regard with as much minute attention as though there were nothing else to demand his care.

I mentioned in a previous lesson, that I believe the dwelling place of God is perfection that we do not understand.

Verses 7-8: The poor": This is borrowed almost exactly from Hannah's song in (1 Sam. 2:8). God is responsible for both the rich and the poor (Prov. 22:2). God's compassion reaches out to the poor and needy (compare Psalm 72:12-13). Ultimately, Christ came to save those who are poor in spirit (compare Isa. 61:2; Luke 4:18).

Psalm 113:7 "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, [and] lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;"

Persons of mean extraction and in low life are sometimes raised by him to great honor and dignity, as Saul, David, and others. And is true of many who are spiritually poor and needy, as all men are, but all are not sensible of it. Some are, and these are called poor "in spirit", and are pronounced "blessed", for "theirs is the kingdom of heaven". They are raised out of a low and mean estate, out of the dust of sin, and self-abhorrence for it, in which they lie when convicted of it.

"And lifteth the needy out of the dunghill": Which denotes a mean condition. So one born in a mean place, and brought up in a mean manner, is sometimes represented as taken out of a dunghill. And also, it is expressive of a filthy one. Men by sin are not only brought into a low estate, but into a loathsome one. And are justly abominable in the sight of God, and yet he lifts them out of it. The phrases of "raising up" and "lifting out" suppose them to be fallen, as men are in Adam. Fallen from a state of honor and glory, in which he was created. Into a state of sin and misery, and out of which they cannot deliver themselves. It is Christ's work, and his only, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to help or lift up his servant Israel (Isa. 49:6).

God brings up who He will. It is not for us to question. It is so interesting to me, that the Lord Jesus did not go to the temple in Jerusalem to find His disciples. He chose the working people who had no formal training in the ministry. The Lord Jesus trained them Himself. We are told that the Holy Spirit of God is our teacher and guide.

Psalm 113:8 "That he may set [him] with princes, [even] with the princes of his people."

As all the saints are by birth, being the sons of God, the King of kings; born of him, and not of the will of man. And are of a princely spirit, have a free spirit, and offer themselves and services willingly to the Lord. Have the spirit of adoption, in opposition to a spirit of bondage. And, as princes, have power with God and prevail. And are also heirs of God, heirs of salvation, heirs of a kingdom, as princes be. Now such as are raised by Christ and his grace from a low estate and condition are set among those princes here. They are brought to Zion, and have a place and a name in the house of God, better than that of sons and daughters. And become fellow citizens with the saints. And they are set among princes hereafter in the kingdom of heaven.

"Even with the princes of his people": The more eminent among the people of God, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom they shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven. And with the prophets of the Old Testament, and the apostles of the New. And even with all the saints, who are made kings and priests unto God (see Psalm 45:16).

Kings are kings, because God ordained it. These who would be thought to be unworthy to serve Him are the very ones He chooses to make kings and princes.

Psalm 113:9 "He maketh the barren woman to keep house, [and to be] a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD."

"The barren woman": Sarah (Gen. 21:2), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), and Rachel (Gen. 30:23), would be the most significant since the outcome of the Abrahamic Covenant depended on these childless women being blessed by God to be mothers.

There are so many times in the Bible where women thought to be barren have a child in their old age. With man these things are impossible, but with God all things are possible. You have to have an impossibility in man's sight, before God can do a miracle.

Psalm 113 Questions

1. Chapter 113 is a Psalm of pure _____.
2. Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for _____.
3. What are the angels in heaven crying out?
4. What does rising of the sun mean?
5. What does going down of the same mean?
6. The name is Jehovah, or _____, in verse 3.
7. What gives all things the power to exist?
8. What did God prove in Egypt to get the people out?