

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON PRAISE

LESSON THIRTEEN: PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

by Sandy Harber

"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise. . . ." Psalm 100:4a

Praise and thanksgiving are inseparable. Several Hebrew words that are translated "praise" in some verses are translated "thanksgiving" in other verses. Often, it is out of a heart of gratitude (thanksgiving) that we offer up praise to the Lord. Praise and thanksgiving are linked together in worship. Thanksgiving expresses gratitude while praise expresses adoration. And many of the Hebrew words that are translated "praise" and/or "thanksgiving" in English carry along the idea of expression through music, either vocally or instrumentally or both, and gestures, such as kneeling or extending the hands showing adoration.

Psalm 100 is the only psalm with the superscription (title; heading) "A psalm of praise" as part of the text. The English "praise" is translated from the Hebrew "towdah," which indicates "thanksgiving" or a "thank offering." It is a short psalm (5 verses) acting as a doxology ("glory words") for a series of psalms praising Jehovah as King (Psalms 93-99).

Psalm 100 is filled with action verbs. Worship should never be passive. We can see this in the meaning of the "praise" and "thanksgiving" words in the Old Testament. Praise involves kneeling, extending hands and arms, singing and playing musical instruments. The same is true of "thanksgiving." Worship is happy, joyous, and loud. "Make (action) a joyful noise," the psalmist begins. Raise your voices. Play those instruments. This is a celebration and we want everyone within hearing distance to know it. The Hebrew language signifies a glad shout such as loyal subjects would give when their king appears. Who is the King? "The Lord" (i.e. Jesus) is the King. This is looking toward the future. One day Jesus will reign as King over all the earth. And, "all ye lands" (the whole world) will make that joyful noise at His appearing. Psalms 93-99 have been building up to this time when "the Lord reigneth" (Psalm 93:1; 97:1; 99:1).

"Serve" in verse 2 is another action word. Put feet to your praise. Show your adoration in service to your Lord. And be happy about it! Take joy in serving Jesus. Turn your joyful noise (v. 1) into glad service (v. 2). "Come" (more action) into His presence (v. 3). This shows progression. You are moving closer to the object of your worship. Raise your voice in song. Express your adoration and gratitude in words.

The basis of our thanksgiving and praise is knowledge of the Object of our worship (v.4). We understand Who He is and what He has accomplished through reading Scripture and personal experience. Our relationship is based on our recognition that He is our Creator and Redeemer. As the Creator, "it is He that hath made us." As the Redeemer (Good Shepherd), He laid down His life for us (John 10:11). He gave His people ("we are His people") physical life and His sheep (we are "the sheep of His pasture") spiritual (eternal) life.

It is as His sheep (redeemed ones) that we are able to enter (action) into His gates, then into His courts, and, finally into His presence. We are progressing, moving toward a goal: drawing near to God. Thanksgiving gets us through His gates. Praise gets us into His courts. But it is worship that brings us into His presence. "Be thankful" (v. 4) is a command. "Bless His name" (v. 4) is another command. We need to have the right attitude - gratitude, reverence, and adoration - if we want to enter into His presence.

The psalmist closes with these reasons why we should praise and serve the Lord: 1) He is good; 2) His mercy is everlasting; and, 3) His truth endures forever (v. 5). God is righteous and holy and, therefore, praiseworthy. And we are eternally thankful for God's mercy and truth. Thanksgiving and praise are twin duties we owe to our Creator and Redeemer. It is not a burden but a delight to offer these gifts to our Lord. Make a joyful noise!

"Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: sing forth the honor of his name: make his praise glorious." Psalm 66:1-2