

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON PRAISE

LESSON FIFTEEN: PRAISE AND REJOICE

by Sandy Harber

"Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; for praise is comely for the upright." Psalm 33:1

Psalm 33 begins and ends with rejoicing. Praise and rejoicing have a lot in common. Both are noisy. Like "praise," the Hebrew words translated "joy," "rejoice," or a variation thereof (i.e. "joyous") indicate loud noise, shouting, clamor, and singing. Physical movement in the form of jumping (i.e. "jump for joy") and spinning around are indicated by other "joy" words. Praising and rejoicing are noisy, demonstrative acts. For believers, praise is directed toward God. It's all about how awesome He is and how wonderful are His works. On the other hand, rejoicing is about the believer. It's the way we express how happy we are that God is Who and what He is.

According to the dictionary, "joy" is a "state of happiness or felicity." The Bible tells us that joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Every Christian can possess inward gladness (joy) regardless of their circumstances. We have examples in Scripture of people who rejoiced in persecution (Acts 5:41) and praised God from a jail cell (Acts 16:25). James exhorted believers to view trials as opportunities to express that inward gladness knowing that these experiences would build up their faith. That inward joy will not keep silent but must burst forth as rejoicing.

Psalm 33 is a good example of rejoicing working in concert with praise. Hebrew Scriptures have no superscription (title or label) on Psalm 33 indicating who wrote it. It is, therefore, considered an "orphan psalm" (i.e. author unknown). The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew text) ascribes Psalm 33 to David. It does have a David-like vibe to it. And, it does reference the nevel, or lute, a 10 stringed instrument which was invented by David (v. 2; I Chron. 23:5).

This psalm falls naturally into three parts. Verses 1-3 record a call to praise and rejoice. Verses 4-19 give the reasons why praise is appropriate (i.e. the cause for praise). Verses 20-22 close with the conclusion: praise and rejoicing uplift us heart and soul. The psalm was sung in the Temple as part of communal worship. The song works after this fashion: 1) the leader invokes the call to worship with verses 1-3; 2) the Levitical choir leads the people in singing praises with verses 4-19; and, 3) everyone joins in the conclusion with an affirmation of faith from verses 20-22.

Psalm 33 opens with four commands: rejoice, praise, sing, and play (an instrument). Remember rejoicing and praise are noisy. Vocal and instrumental music are the means by which the worshipper rejoiced and praised the Lord. This activity is for believers (i.e. "ye righteous") only. Why would the unsaved praise the God they don't believe in? But, for believers ("the upright") it is "comely," or fitting, even beautiful, to do so. The song of praise is new (v. 3). Why? Perhaps because the blessings we receive are new every day (Lam. 3:22-23). We will never run out of new reasons to praise the Lord. His works are past counting and He adds to the list daily.

The psalmist enumerates reasons why we should praise God in verses 4-19. He is the Creator of heaven, earth, the sea, and all inhabitants therein (vv. 6-9). He chose Israel to be His special people and He blessed them (v. 12). He watches over those who fear Him and protects them (vv. 18-19).

The psalmist concludes that because of Who God is and what He has done we (believers) wait, rejoice, trust, and hope in Him (vv. 20-22). Psalm 33 begins and ends with the theme of rejoicing. Outwardly, we express our joy with singing the praises of the Lord (vv. 1-3). After considering what an awesome God we have (vv. 4-19) our joy is expressed confidently with patience, rejoicing, trust, and hope (vv. 20-22).

"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, Rejoice." Philippians 4:4

