

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

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

2 Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for evermore.

3 From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD's name *is* to be praised.

4 The LORD *is* high above all nations, *and* his glory above the heavens.

5 Who *is* like unto the LORD our

God, who dwelleth on high,

6 Who humbleth *himself* to behold *the things that are* in heaven, and in the earth!

7 He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, *and* lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;

8 That he may set *him* with princes, *even* with the princes of his people.

9 He maketh the barren woman to keep house, *and to be* a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD.

NOTES

God's Dwelling on High

Lesson Text: Psalm 113:1-9

Related Scriptures: Psalms 57:1-11; 103:19-22; 108:1-13;
1 Samuel 1:26—2:10; Luke 1:46-55

TIME: unknown

PLACE: unknown

GOLDEN TEXT—"The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens"
(Psalm 113:4).

Lesson Exposition

OPENING CALL TO PRAISE— Psalm 113:1-3

When people think about God's commands, they usually think about the Ten Commandments. One of the most famous commands in the Bible, however, is usually not thought of as a command: hallelujah. Hallelujah is a command to a group of people to praise the Lord, and it is how Psalm 113 begins its poem of praise: "praise ye the Lord" (vs. 1). Verse 1 specifies the command with an addressee and an object of praise. The addressees in verse 1 are those who serve the Lord. One cannot adequately serve the Lord without praising Him, and one cannot adequately praise the Lord without serving Him.

In this text, God's servants were those who trust Him enough to gather and sing His praise in the congregation.

The object of praise, mentioned thrice in verses 1-3, is the Lord's name. The biblical concept of name includes reputation (cf. S Sol. 1:3) and character (cf. 1 Sam. 25:25). Exodus 34:5-7 explains the Lord's name by expounding on His attributes. To praise the name of the Lord, then, means to verbalize the wonderful things He has revealed about His character.

This helps clarify a puzzling biblical truth. How, as Psalm 113:2 says, can humans bless the Lord with their praise? Stunningly, He allows His reputation among the people of the world to increase as His people praise Him. The Lord deserves unending praise forever, as Psalm 113:2-3 emphasizes. His imperfect people will never be able to supply such a constant flow of praise, but He allows His reputation to be linked to them all the same. Praise blesses the Lord.

Why does the Lord's name deserve constant praise and blessing? The rest of the psalm presents two basic reasons, but verses 2-3 indicate that the reasons are endless.

REASONS FOR PRAISE— Psalm 113:4-9

Praise the Lord because He is exalted (Ps. 113:4-6). The first reason for which the psalmist praised the Lord is His exalted status. If, as many propose, this psalm originated after the Babylonian Exile, the Lord's exaltation above the nations is a bold assertion.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel could not withstand the brutal Assyrian army (2 Kgs 17:6), and the Southern

Kingdom of Judah could not withstand the Babylonian army (25:8-10). God's people returned home only when King Cyrus of Persia allowed it (Ezra 1:1-4). From a human standpoint, God's people were at the mercy of the nations.

The psalmist reminded the people that the Lord is above all nations (Ps. 113:4). Even the exile, which seemingly evidenced the nations' supremacy, only happened because of the Lord's plan for His people (2 Kgs. 17:7-8).

In Psalm 113:4, 6, the Lord is more exalted than the heavens. Even the starry hosts praise God by declaring His glory to all who see them (19:1-6). The prophets knew that the Lord names and accounts for all the stars (Isa. 40:26).

Praise the Lord because He exalts the lowly (Ps. 113:7-9a). Human kings, even in Israel, used their exalted status to gain at the expense of their subjects (cf. 1 Sam. 8:10-18). The surprise twist in Psalm 113 is that the Lord uses His exalted status to exalt the humble. That makes the Lord even more glorious and impressive, further demonstrating He is above the ways of the world.

The Lord lifts the poor and barren from the dunghill—that is, the ash heap or refuse pile (vs. 7). Why do the poor and barren start in the place of refuse in Psalm 113?

First, many in the ancient world assumed that suffering was a result of God's anger at personal sin (cf. John 9:1-3). Peers assumed the poor and barren were forsaken by God.

Second, the poor were vulnerable to mistreatment in the ancient world—including in Israel (cf. Amos 5:12). The poor lacked earthly security.

Third, children established one's legacy and the greatness of one's name (cf. Isa. 56:4-5). In Luke 1:25, Elisabeth described the result of her barrenness as "reproach," which comes from a Greek word that also means "disgrace"

or "shame." Here is a delightful irony in Psalm 113: the Lord possesses the name above all names, and He uses this status to help those with no name among humans.

Psalm 113:7-8 uses the exact wording of 1 Samuel 2:8, Hannah's song. Hannah's shame and pain at being childless were ever present, coming from within her own home (vs. 6). Her husband was not much help either (cf. vs. 8). Her only recourse was to cry out to God and make vows to Him.

God graciously reversed Hannah's shame by giving her a son. She saw God act for her good (vs. 3). Like Psalm 113, she asserted that God is unparalleled. He allowed her to "keep house" (vs. 9), to have children.

It is one thing to say God exalts the lowly (vss. 7-9), but it is another thing to cite a specific instance. Quoting Hannah's song adds concreteness to the reasons for praise in Psalm 113. This also adds solidarity with previous generations of God's people. What God did before can be done again for those who humbly seek Him.

It is also possible that the psalm is personifying the collective people of God as a poor and barren woman waiting on God to make them fruitful again, just as Isaiah did elsewhere with the metaphor of barrenness (Isa. 54:1). The literal and the figurative poor and barren should pour out their hearts to the Lord while they await the reversal that His grace can bring.

Both in Hannah's song and Psalm 113, the lowly end up in a place of nobility. People with noble status do not always deserve it, but the Lord often and eventually settles the score by demoting the undeserving and promoting the humble.

Psalm 113 declares that the Lord is high and so is His glory (vs. 4). The same wording occur in Hannah's song, where "high" ("raiseth") describes elevating the poor from their place

of shame, and “glory” describes the place where the Lord seats the formerly shamed person (1 Sam. 2:8). Who is like the Lord, who uses His status to benefit those with no status?

Considering that the first reason for praise noted the Lord’s status above the nations (Ps. 113:4) and the second concerns the poor and barren (vss. 7-9), what about the poor and barren among the non-Israelite nations? Ultimately, the Old Testament demonstrates God’s resolve to bless the nations through Israel (Gen. 12:1-3).

The Lord Jesus fulfills this in the salvation He secures (Gal. 3:8). As God’s exaltation knows no bounds, neither does His compassion.

CONCLUDING CALL TO PRAISE— Psalm 113:9b

Psalm 113 ends the way it began, namely, commanding the listeners to praise the Lord. When a Bible passage begins and ends the same way, scholars call this bracketing or an *inclusio*. The opening and closing function as slices of bread on a sandwich. They look the same and tie the sandwich together into a cohesive entrée with a united taste. The command to praise the Lord does the same thing in Psalm 113—tie the psalm together with a cohesive goal. The goal is twofold.

First, it reminds the reader that the purpose of God’s interaction with sinners is His glory. He created people for His glory (Isa. 43:7). Although they did not give Him glory (Rom. 3:23), the saving work of Christ brings God the glory He has always deserved (cf. Eph. 1:13-14).

Second, praising God increases a person’s humility. To praise God is to acknowledge that His greatness exceeds one’s own. The proud praise themselves (cf. Dan. 4:30), but the humble praise their Creator and invite His help (Isa. 66:2). The humble

are the ones God helps in Psalm 113.

The arc of Psalm 113 moves from the congregation’s song to the heavens, from the heavens to the trash heap, and from the trash heap to joyous congregational praise once again. The great King confers honor from His enthroned place of honor by grace.

—Matthew Swale

QUESTIONS

1. According to Psalm 113:1, what is the relationship between praising God and serving Him?
2. What does the biblical concept of one’s name include?
3. Above what two entities does the psalmist present God? What implications does the suggested exilic dating of the psalm have on this claim?
4. Despite appearances, why did the Babylonian Exile occur?
5. Unlike human kings, how does God use His exalted status? What does this further demonstrate?
6. How did Elisabeth describe her barrenness in Luke 1:25? How does Psalm 113 offer some irony to this situation?
7. How did God graciously reverse Hannah’s shame?
8. Beyond Hannah’s concrete example, who else could the psalmist be personifying in his discussion of the barren woman?
9. What implications does Psalm 113 have for non-Israelite nations? How does the larger Old Testament storyline demonstrate this?
10. What is it called when a passage begins and ends the same way? What effect does this literary device have?

—Andrew Rudolf

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. As Christ's followers, we should praise the Lord (Pss. 113:1; 34:1).
2. Our circumstances should not dictate when we worship God; we should always praise Him (113:2-3).
3. As Christians, we cannot allow the sway of politics to stand in the way of our faith, for God is over the nations (Ps. 113:4; cf. Dan. 3:13-29).
4. God is sovereign over the cosmos He created (Ps. 113:5-6).
5. God cares for the poor and forgotten in society (Ps. 113:7-8; cf. Matt. 25:31-46).
6. God sees those who long for a family and children, and He is faithful to care for them (Ps. 113:9; cf. Jas. 1:27).

—Andrew Rudolf

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Which comes easier to you, praising the Lord or serving Him?
2. What is one habit that would move you closer to praising the Lord in the morning and in the evening (Ps. 113:3)?
3. Which is easier for you to remember, God's transcendence or immanence? How can you reflect on God's distance and nearness each day (vss. 4-5, 7-9)?
4. Can you think of a low time in your life when you sensed the attention and care of God? How did that encourage you?
5. Are there people in your life who feel like they are in the dump? How can you help them see God's compassion?

—Matthew Swale

Golden Text Illuminated

"The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens" (Psalm 113:4).

In our golden text, the psalmist highlights the lofty, exalted dwelling place of God. He is not bound by earthly limitations; He rules from a position that transcends all human governments, powers, and borders.

Through this truth, we grasp the undeniable authority of God. He governs from a position higher and greater than any nation or government.

Psalm 113:4 also testifies to God's glory. As the psalmist declares, God's glory extends far beyond the heavens. His dwelling place becomes a powerful symbol of His glorious nature, which surpasses all human comprehension.

The psalmist is pointing to the great truth that our God is above all other gods. The people during this time period often worshipped gods that were bound to nature in some way. They also saw gods in the stars. But Yahweh is a God who reigns even above all the false gods.

We can find solace in the knowledge that our lives are held in the hands of the all-powerful and all-knowing God, who rules from the heavens. We can anchor our trust in the Almighty, who reigns over all.

As we navigate life's uncertainties, let us remember God is reigning over our lives. He sees us from high above, yet He cares for us in the lowest details of life. Let us continually be drawn to worship and adore Him, who dwells on high.

—Page Brooks