



## Psalm 113 - God the Helper of the Needy

### Introduction

This short hymn of praise celebrates the way in which the great and majestic God who rules over all takes notice of the lowly. Such a God is indeed worthy to be praised by all mankind. Verses 7-8 overlap with 1 Samuel 2:8, part of Hannah's Song. Perhaps the psalm borrowed the words, as the reference to a barren woman suggests.

Psalms 113-118 have been called the Egyptian Hallel, where Hebrew *hallel* means praise; and Egyptian because of the later connection with Passover, Psalms 113-114 sung before the meal and 115-118 after it. They became to be a regular part of the great festivals of the liturgical year including Hanukkah, the Dedication, once it was instituted in the intertestamental period: <<***At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter***>> (John 10:22). These psalms likely provided the hymn that Jesus and his disciples sang after their Passover meal: <<***When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives***>> (Matthew 26:30). Adam Clarke commented, "To these reference is made by the evangelists, Matthew 26:30, and Mark 14:26, there called the hymn which Jesus and his disciples sang at the Passover, for the whole of the Psalms were considered as one grand hymn or thanksgiving."

### Psalm 113:1-3 - The Lord Is to Be Praised through All the World.

The theme of the whole psalm is set by the words that open and close the psalm, Praise the Lord! (Hebrew *Hallelujah*). The servants of the Lord, especially faithful Israelites: <<***and gave their land as a heritage, for his steadfast love endures for ever; a heritage to his servant Israel, for his steadfast love endures for ever***>> (Psalm 136:21-22), where the entire nation is called God's 'servant', who have received his covenant, should lead the way in praise; but they live in confidence that one day their God will be praised from the rising of the sun to its setting, i.e. all over the world by all kinds of people, as he deserves.

- 1 Praise the Lord!  
Praise, O servants of the Lord;  
praise the name of the Lord.

### Psalm 113:1

Praise the Lord! This is the third consecutive psalm to begin with the exclamation, *Hallelujah!* As in Psalms 111 and 112, it is both a personal statement of praise and an encouragement to others to do the same: <<*You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!*>> (Psalm 22:23).

Praise, O servants of the Lord. God's servants have special reason to praise him: <<*The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned*>> (Psalm 34:22). They have the honour of sharing in his great work, and they are promised eternal reward for doing so. If everyone has reason for praise, servants of the Lord have even more reasons.

Praise the name of the Lord. This means honouring and exalting Yahweh himself and his character, which are represented by his name. Derek Kidner commented, "There is point in specifying the Lord's servants and his name, since worship to be acceptable must be more than flattery and more than guess-work. It is the loving homage of the committed to the Revealed."

- 2 Blessed be the name of the Lord  
from this time on and for evermore.
- 3 From the rising of the sun to its setting  
the name of the Lord is to be praised.

### Psalm 113:2-3

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Following on from the call to praise the name of the Lord the worshippers are now called to bless his name. This is the only occurrence in the psalms where this precise wording is used although Job uses it when he is in severe distress following an attack on his family by Satan: <<*He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'*>> (Job 1:21). David wrote: <<*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name*>> (Psalm 103:1). David did not mean this in the sense that a greater bestows a blessing on a lesser. God is infinitely greater than man and in this sense man could never give a blessing to God. David meant this in the sense that it blessed and honoured God when his creatures praised him and thanked him appropriately.

The call by the prophet also fits here: *<<And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted>> (Isaiah 12:4). God's salvation flows out to the peoples through the witness of his people. The message is his name, i.e. who he has revealed himself to be.*

From this time on and for evermore. In v.1 worshippers were encouraged to praise the name of Yahweh. In this next verse they are encouraged to do it forevermore: *<<Daniel said: 'Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his'>> (Daniel 2:20). The unchanging God never becomes unworthy of praise. For the child of God with open eyes, time only reveals more reasons to praise him.*

From the rising of the sun to its setting. Using the Hebrew form of repetition, the psalmist emphasised the idea that God is worthy of continual praise: *<<so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other>> (Isaiah 45:6), and: <<For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts>> (Malachi 1:11).*

#### Psalm 113:4-9 - Though He Is on High, He Looks upon the Lowly.

This section develops the universal theme of the previous section in a surprising way: the God who deserves to be praised by all mankind is seated on high, ruling over the whole world, and yet he looks far down and raises the poor from the dust. The imagery of vv.7-8 describes a position of extreme degradation and misery being transformed to one of dignity and privilege.

For an Israelite woman to be barren, i.e. unable to bear children, was a misery too (refer to 1 Samuel 1:2-17 and the associated comments), and this likewise provides an image of God's tender care for his loved ones. God's majesty never implies his remoteness from those who look to him; it implies instead his exhaustive attention to detail, and his inexhaustible ability to care for his faithful.

- 4 The Lord is high above all nations,  
and his glory above the heavens.
- 5 Who is like the Lord our God,  
who is seated on high,
- 6 who looks far down  
on the heavens and the earth?

### Psalm 113:4-6

His glory above the heavens. Yahweh is not only greater than all the heathen nations, but his glory extends above the heavens: <<*O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens*>> (Psalm 8:1). The covenant God of little Israel is greater than everything in creation. Charles Spurgeon observed, “Though the Gentiles knew him not, yet was Jehovah their ruler: their false gods were no gods, and their kings were puppets in his hands.”

Who is like the Lord our God? His exaltation above everything on earth or heaven shows that Yahweh is incomparable. Nothing exists that is greater than he who is seated on high: <<*Even now, in fact, my witness is in heaven, and he that vouches for me is on high*>> (Job 16:19).

Who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? When someone understands the greatness of God, his interest and care for creation, especially for humankind, is remarkable. Here the psalmist shared the idea of David: <<*what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*>> (Psalm 8:4). Psalm 144:3 has a similar sense of amazement. Spurgeon commented further, “Heathen philosophers could not believe that the great God was observant of the small events of human history; they pictured him as abiding in serene indifference to all the wants and woes of his creatures.”

7 He raises the poor from the dust,  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
8 to make them sit with princes,  
with the princes of his people.  
9 He gives the barren woman a home,  
making her the joyous mother of children.  
Praise the Lord!

### Psalm 113:7-9

He raises the poor from the dust. When God in heaven beholds the things on earth (v.6), he sees the poor down in the dust and the needy in the ash heap – and he raises them up. Spurgeon also noted, “When no hand but his can help he interposes, and the work is done. It is worthwhile to be cast down to be so divinely raised from the dust.” When Jesus sang these words on the night of his betrayal and arrest, it must have occurred to him that in a sense he was the one who would be lifted from the dust of the grave to the highest place.

**To make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.** God lifts the poor and needy from the depths up to the heights. In light of the new covenant, the reader makes the connection with God's work in the life of the believer as described in: <<*even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*>> (Ephesians 2:5-6). Christians can see in a sense that these words look forward to Ephesians 2:5-6, but they also look back.

**He gives the barren woman a home.** The psalmist illustrated one way the work of lifting the poor and needy to a high and honoured place might work. The picture is of a woman barren of children becoming a **joyous mother**.

**Praise the Lord!** The caring, loving God who comes from the highest heaven to help the humble of the earth is worthy of praise – *Hallelujah!* Spurgeon stated, “The music concludes upon its key-note. The Psalm is a circle, ending where it began, praising the Lord from its first syllable to its last. May our life-psalm partake of the same character, and never know a break or a conclusion. In an endless circle let us bless the Lord, whose mercies never cease.”