

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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The “Hallelujah” Psalms

(Jerry Fite)

God deserves praise from all His creation. Throughout the Old Testament Psalms, such a point is driven home. But Psalms 113 -118 form a special grouping called the “Hallelujah” Psalms. The title is taken from the first verse of Psalm 113, which reads, “Praise ye Jehovah. Praise, O ye servants of Jehovah, Praise the name of Jehovah.” The word “praise” translates the Hebrew word, “Hallul.” This is where we get the more familiar word “Hallelujah.” These “Hallelujah” psalms were sung when the people of Israel traveled to Jerusalem for the various appointed feasts.

The Jewish Talmud reveals the tradition of using this grouping of Psalms when partaking of the Passover meal. After partaking of the first of four cups of the fruit of the vine, Psalm 113 and 114 would be sung. Then, at the end of the meal, Psalm 115-118 would be sung.

The first two Psalms in this group exhort God’s servants to praise God, because the extent of His glory demands it. God’s character establishes a name that should be praised for ever more (Psalm 113:2). His praise-worthy name goes from east to west, following the direction of the sun’s

rising and setting. Then, the Lord should be praised as His servants look upward above all nations and fathom the fact that God’s glory is “high above the heavens.” (Psalm 113:4). God is so high above all things, that He must “humble” Himself “to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth” (Psalm 113:6). He not only beholds but raises the poor and needy from dire straits (Psalm 113:8). He blesses the barren woman with the joy of keeping house in motherhood (Psalm 113:9).

Psalm 114 begins with Israel coming forth out of Egypt (Psalm 114:1). The Psalmist seems to be so impressed with God’s miraculous deeds that he uses the pronoun, “his” before saying, “Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob” (Psalm 114:7). Before establishing “His” presence in the temple in Judah and ruling over Israel, the sea divided in fear before His presence as Israel was delivered from Egypt (Psalm 114:3). The Jordan River also “was driven back” as God’s people were allowed passage into the promised land. While in the wilderness, the mountain of Sinai quaked, skipping as disturbed rams when the Law of Moses was delivered to

the people. (Psalm 114:4, 6). God’s glorious presence “turned the rock into a pool of water...” when the people thirsted in the wilderness (Psalm 114:8). God is praised for delivering His people from bondage, providing for them in the wilderness and ruling over them in Judah.

At the end of the Passover meal, the Psalms, broadening the focus to the nations, contrast God with their idol gods (Psalm 115) and look to the future when God is praised for His lovingkindness and truth among all “ye peoples” in “all the nations” (Psalm 117). Loving God because He has “delivered my soul from death” (Psalm 116:7) and rejoicing in the day when “the stone which the builders rejected is made the head of the corner” point to the nations praising God in the resurrected Christ (Psalm 118: 22-24, I Peter 2:7).

The Passover meal allowed Jesus to institute the Lord’s supper, and the “Hallelujah” Psalms connected Him in song as well. This last section of Psalms, especially Psalm 118, was probably the hymn Jesus sang with His apostles at the end of His partaking of the Passover...right before heading to the mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30).