

PSALMS

Chapter 33

Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. ²Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! ³Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. ⁴For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. ⁵He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. ⁶By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. ⁷He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. ⁸Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. ¹⁰The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. ¹¹The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. ¹²Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage! ¹³The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; ¹⁴from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, ¹⁵he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds. ¹⁶The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. ¹⁷The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. ¹⁸Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, ¹⁹that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. ²⁰Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. ²¹For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. ²²Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Ps 33 A liturgy in praise of the Lord, the sovereign God of Israel. In the Psalms, calls to praise (as in vv. 1–3) and motivations for praise (as in vv. 4–19) belong to the language of praise. Most likely the voices of the Levitical choir (see 1Ch 16:7–36; 25:1) are heard in this psalm. Perhaps the choir leader spoke vv. 1–3, the choir vv. 4–19, and the people responded with the words of vv. 20–22. The original occasion is unknown, but reference to a “new song” suggests a national deliverance, such as Judah experienced in the time of Jehoshaphat (see 2Ch 20) or Hezekiah (see 2Ki 19); see vv. 10–11, 16–17. Along with Ps 1–2; 10, this is one of the only four psalms in Book I without a superscription. Although structurally not an alphabetic acrostic like the psalm that follows it, the length of the psalm (22 verses) has been determined by the length of the Hebrew alphabet (22 letters); see Ps 38; 103; La 5. The body of the psalm is framed by a three-verse introduction (call to praise) and a three-verse conclusion (response to praise). In vv. 4–19 are heard the praise of the Lord, developed in two parts of eight verses each (vv. 4–11, 12–19). (CSB)

Reference to a “new song” (v 3) suggests a national deliverance, such as Judah experienced in the time of Jehoshaphat (2Ch 20) or Hezekiah (2Ki 19); cf vv 10–11, 16–17. This is a liturgy of praise toward God, most likely accompanied by the voices of the Levitical choir (cf 1Ch 16:7–36; 25:1). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, rejoice and praise; vv 4–5, the Lord’s Word and work; vv 6–7, His Word and work in creation; vv 8–9, awe at His Word; vv 10–12, the Lord’s counsel; vv 13–17, the Lord sees all; vv 18–19, the Lord sees those who fear Him; vv 20–22, hope in the Lord. (TLSB)

Psalm 33 is a declarative praise psalm. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Psalm 33 concerns the work of creation and preservation. This is one of only four psalms in Book I (1-72) which is not attributed to David. It may have been written to celebrate some special occasion when Israel had experienced deliverance from an enemy or from some disaster. (PBC)

33:1–3 The call to praise. Cf. Eph 5:19. (CSB)

In calling the faithful to praise God, the psalm uses six different words for praise. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

God’s people are invited to praise him for his faithfulness, justice and love. (PBC)

33:1 *shout for joy* – This is translated “sing joyfully” and means “give a ringing cry.” It is often a loud sound of rejoicing, such as was used in cultic shouting (Lev. 9:24), or on joyous occasions such as the deliverance from exile (Is. 52:8-9). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

righteous. The assembly of worshipers. (CSB)

praise – This word refers to spontaneous praise, the natural description of something praiseworthy, such as in the glowing report about the beauty of Sarai given by the princes of Egypt (Gen. 12:15). God is praised for so many things, but especially for his person (Pss. 48:19-12; 106:1), his creation and its preservation (Ps. 148:1-6), and his acts of salvation (Pss. 22:26; 34:2). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Upright – This refers to those who follow the Lord faithfully and seek to do what is right in his eyes. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

33:2 *give thanks* – This may be better understood as “acknowledge” since it can be used for confessing faith or confessing sin (Ps. 32:5). A confession of faith is an acknowledgement in praise of God and his attributes and his works (Ps. 89:5 and Pss. 105, 106 and 245). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Lyre – The praising was to be done with the harp, an instrument shaped like a harp, having from 3 to 12 strings. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Make melody – It has the idea of making music or singing a melody to the Lord; it often is used where musical instruments accompany the singing. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Harp of ten strings – Whatever the shape and sound of these instruments, it is clear that the call to praise included the use of stringed instruments. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

33:3 *new song*. Celebrating God’s saving act, as in 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; see Isa 42:10; Rev 5:9; 14:3. (CSB)

Hbr *shir chadash*, a song written to celebrate God’s new work of salvation. The “old song” was the Song of Moses, which celebrated the redemption from Egypt (Ex 15:1–18). The “new song” in the Psalms often celebrated redemption from exile (cf Ne 12:27). Rv 5:8–9 says the “new song” is about the final redemption through Jesus. (TLSB p. 843)

Calling people to sing a new song was a way of calling people to enjoy God's presence and his benefits, so that they would have something new to sing about in the sanctuary. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

loud shouts. Jubilant character of praise. (TLSB)

33:4–19 The praise, in two eight-verse parts. (CSB)

33:4–11 Because the Lord is the Creator, who by his power imposed his order on the creation (see Ge 1), no power or combination of powers can thwart his plan and purpose to save his people. (Hence his chosen people are the blessed nation; see vv. 12–19). (CSB)

33:4-5 In the second section of the psalm we have the reason for the praise. It begins with a four-part summary (vv. 4-5) listing four attributes of the Lord. Each of these themes will then be developed in the subsequent sections of the psalm. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

33:4 *word.* God's royal word by which he governs all things (see 107:20; 147:15, 18). (CSB)

His infallible and inerrant revelation (written or spoken) to all humankind that describes His divine attributes and His mighty works of creation, mercy, forgiveness, and salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

Faithfulness – His faithfulness expresses itself primarily in His Word, which is here thought of in the widest sense – whatever words He is known to have spoken for the good of the children of men, or for the creation of the world, or laid down for man's use in Scripture. (Leupold)

That it is done in faithfulness means that his revealed plan is completely dependable (s.v. Ps. 15:2). God's plan will be fulfilled in spite of many human plans to oppose it. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

33:5 *loves.* Delights in doing. (CSB)

righteousness and justice. Very often the “righteousness” of God in the Psalms (and frequently elsewhere in the OT) refers to the faithfulness with which he acts. This faithfulness is in full accordance with his commitments (both expressed and implied) to his people and with his status as the divine King—to whom the powerless may look for protection, the oppressed for redress and the needy for help.). (CSB)

his unfailing love. Here, his goodness to all his creatures (see 36:5–9; 104:27–28 – the Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God's “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel (see Dt 7:9, 12) as well as to David and his dynasty.). (CSB)

33:6 *word.* God's creating word (see v. 9; 104:7; 119:89; Ge 1; Job 38:8–11; Heb 11:3). (CSB)

The spoken Word of God brought into existence all things and sustains and governs all things. (TLSB)

The point is that all of creation came about by the powerful word of the living God, delivered effortlessly and directly. . (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

by the breath. God's Word creates the righteous and makes them strong, and by His Holy Spirit works saving faith. Chemnitz: "The work of creation is proper to the Trinity or the Deity. Therefore it is attributed also to the Holy Spirit.... Therefore the Holy Spirit is truly God" (*LTh* 1:137). (TLSB)

host. Stars of heaven. (TLSB)

The magnificent heavens in all their vastness and splendor were made by nothing more than the mere word or command of God. (Leupold)

Isaiah 40:26 *Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.*

33:7 *sea as a heap.* Or, "wall." Shows the consummate ease of God Almighty (cf Gn 1:9–10; Jb 38:8–11; Pr 8:29; Jer 5:22). (TLSB)

into jars ... storehouses. Like a householder storing up his olive oil and grain (see 104:9; Ge 1:9–10; Job 38:8–11; Pr 8:29; Jer 5:22). (CSB)

He contains the seas as a farmer keeps the grain in a storehouse. Rainstorms, hurricanes, flash flood, subterranean waters, and the might ocean inspire awe because of their power and existence apart from humanity. How much greater should we stand in awe of the Lord. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

These are symbols of God's control. (PBC)

God keeps the ocean's turbulent waves under control with the ease which a man pours water into a leathern bottle – a customary sight in the Orient. (Leupold)

God controls the seas by his word and can use them as he sees fit. In fact, God often uses the elements of creation as weapons as he did at the exodus, so the Song of the Sea is drawing on elements of creation. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

33:8 *all the earth ... all the people.* Not only Israel, but all mankind, for all experience the goodness of his sovereign rule – God's saving acts, sometimes involving miracles—as in the exodus from Egypt, the desert wanderings and the entrance into the promised land—and sometimes not, but always involving the manifestation of God's sovereign lordship over events.)—but he foils all their contrary designs (vv. 10–11). (CSB)

All are invited to praise God for His divine works. All—faithful and faithless, saint and sinner—receive God's creative gifts and sovereign rule. (TLSB)

fear the LORD. Those who honor God and order their lives in accordance with his will because of their reverence for him. (CSB)

Man's littleness and weakness must always lead him to due reverence for the One who is so much greater than himself. (Leupold)

So not only are people called to acknowledge God as their creator, but also that acknowledgment should fill them with a fear that will prompt reverence and obedience. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

33:9 God’s will and Word create all things. This moves souls to praise Him. Mel: “That things were created out of nothing is taught by this statement” (Chem, *LTh* 1:151). (TLSB)

It stood firm – This report of his commanding and everything standing firm emphasizes that all creation endures by God’s decrees and stands before the Lord to do his bidding. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The nations must also know that the order in the world is not the result of a harmonious coexistence of the gods. Nothing is accidental! Everything reflects God’s wise decree. He alone is reliable. Whatever he spoke came into being (cf. Heb. 11:3). He is powerful and wise. Order in the world reflects God’s sovereign rule. His sovereignty is no cause for dread but is a comfort to the godly. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

33:10 *foils the plans of the nations* – God continues to rule in history so that all things work for the good of his people. In the OT, God protected his chosen people Israel, so that when they were faithful to him, they defeated enemies who were much more powerful than they. Although no nation, including our own, is God’s people today in the same sense that Israel was in OT times, His Church is the new Israel and God will continue to protect and support her to accomplish his mission. (PBC)

Augustine: “[God brings down] them that seek not His Kingdom, but kingdoms of their own ... them that covet earthly happiness ... them that seek to rule over such peoples” (*NPNF* 1 8:72). (TLSB)

He uses the perfect tense, which in Hebrew is also used to express facts that are universally true. (Leupold)

The two key words here are “counsel” (or plan) and “purpose” (or intention). The first word means “plan, counsel, advice” (see Ps. 1:1; and Ex. 18:19 where Jethro gave Moses advice). The second word (s.v. Ps. 32:2), often translated “purpose,” looks to the idea of intention (see Gen. 15:6 where the verb is used to say God “reckoned” righteousness to the believer; or Gen. 50:20 where it is said the brothers “intended” [planned] evil in their treatment of Joseph). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

33:11 *counsel*. His ways and thoughts are higher and oppose the “counsel of the nations” (v 10). (TLSB)

Isaiah 55:8-9 “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*”

Stands forever – Here the verb “stand firm, endure” has the idea that God’s plan cannot be shaken. The plan of the Lord can be trusted completely because it is carried out in faithfulness. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Nothing will “thwart” his plans, which he has purposed for the encouragement of the godly. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

33:12–19 Israel is safe and secure under God’s protective rule. (CSB)

33:12 *Blessed*. The happy condition of those who revere the Lord and do his will, who put their trust in him, and so are blessed by God. (CSB)

It is blessed precisely because its national existence is based upon the divine plan, not merely upon human aspirations. The nation whose God is the Lord is not only blessed but also occupies an enviable position among the nations. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

people he chose for his inheritance. Israel is God’s chosen people (cf Dt 9:29). (TLSB)

33:13-14 *Lord looks down* – Heaven is described as being above the earth and hell below, placed in an earthly context for our understanding. Heaven and hell are, however, not specifically located according to earthly terms in Holy Scripture. Heaven is God’s throne from which He orchestrates all things, sustains all things, and sees all who dwell upon the earth. (TLSB)

Sees...looks – Since the Lord is never an indifferent observer, the meaning of the verbs must either be supervision or evaluation. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

33:15 *forms the hearts* – Bestowing the powers of the mind and will. (TLSB)

Considers everything they do – He watches to see how they will use His gifts. Chem: “The providence of God includes both His care and His governance” (*LTh* 1:167). (TLSB)

Because he created mankind, his evaluation can penetrate even to motivations behind actions. He understands completely what we are, what we do, and why we do it, and the standard by which he evaluates us in his righteousness. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Moreover, humanity can never collude so as to thwart God’s purposes, because in and through all the planning and affairs of people, God works out his own goals. He controls the destiny of each person. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

33:16 *king*. Nation (see v. 12) and king constitute an organic social unit. (CSB)

The verse is set forth as a general principle, essentially a universal truth. The point is that ultimately does not come through military strength alone (as the Egyptians learned; see Ex. 15:1-11). (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

33:17 *horse* – Only domesticated animal in this list. Horses, employed chiefly in warfare, were imported from the steppes of Central Asia, first appearing in Mesopotamia and Egypt around 2000 BC. Horses were valued for their speed, strength, and aggressiveness. Thus, in Job’s time, horses were seen as awesome wonder-animals. (TLSB)

The “horse” represents the weapons and machines of warfare. People who trust them will feel betrayed, because in spite of its great strength, it cannot save. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

33:18–19 The concluding couplet of the second eight-verse stanza of praise contrasts with the concluding couplet of the first (vv. 10–11); both are climactic and together they voice the heart of the praise. (CSB)

33:18 *eye of the Lord* – Human attribute ascribed to God, who is Spirit. (TLSB)

The Lord watches over those who fear him, the faithful covenant believers. and if, according to verse 15, the Lord knows the hearts of the people, he certainly knows those “who hope for his loyal love.” (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

Hope – “Hope” (s.v. Ps. 31:24) includes the ideas of waiting with some tension until the thing hoped for arrives (see Gen. 8:2) and of a confident expectation of trust (Ps. 42:5). It is not a last resort, a hoping against hope, as it were. Rather, it is an expectant faith, but a faith that struggles with the tensions in life. Here the object of the hope is “the loyal love” of the Lord, i.e., the faithful, loving acts done in accordance with the covenant promises. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

33:19 *he may deliver* – “Deliver” (s.v. Ps. 22:20) means “to snatch away, rescue, deliver” (what the warrior in verse 16 could not do). (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

famine – When the threat of sudden death or disaster comes, the Lord delivers. When famine threatens others, He miraculously sustains His own people as He did Elijah. God gives the nourishment of His Word and the bread of everlasting truth. (TLSB)

The famine may have been part of a military siege (as the military language in the psalm might suggest); but it could also simply be a natural disaster (see Job 5:20). (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

33:18, 22 *unfailing love*. Here, his covenant favor toward Israel. The Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel as well as to David and his dynasty.). (CSB)

33:20–22 The people’s response: faith’s commitment expressed in confession (vv. 20–21) and petition (v. 22). (CSB)

Three-verse response to praise. The king is the protector of the citizen and God is the protector of His chosen people, Israel (cf 84:11; 91:4; 115:9–11; Dt 33:29; Pr 30:5). (TLSB)

33:20 *help...shield*. That one’s king is his shield (protector) was a common concept in ancient Israel. That the Lord is the shield of his people is frequently asserted or claimed. (CSB)

The two key words, “help” and “shield” provide a clue to the reason for their waiting. The first word “help” (s.v. Ps. 46:1) refers to the victory that only God can give. The word essentially means that he will provide for them what they do not have or cannot do themselves. For example, it is used in this sense in Deuteronomy 33:26-27, where the Lord “helps” by driving out the enemies. The other word “shield” is a metaphor signifying protection. It is a term belonging to a military context; in general it means that the Lord defends his people. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Such confidence naturally leads to the joyfulness of faith. (Leupold)

33:21 *name* – Yahweh (Ex 3:14). (TLSB)

Shows that the trusting in his holy name was the basis for the gladness of heart that resulted.
(Leupold)

33:22 *steadfast love* – Here they are wanting what that loyal love produces, further acts of deliverance and protection. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

We hope in you – Their appeal is based on their hope in him, for he delivers and sustains believers (vv. 18-19). (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Ps 33 God's people are always to put their trust in Him alone and not in arms, generals, national defenses, and so on. Through His Word and Spirit, almighty God grants us faith in His Christ and His steadfast love. Thus, He gives us hope in our hearts and minds and certainty of His salvation in His Son, Jesus Christ. All praise, laud, and worship belong to our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. • O Lord Jesus Christ, through Your precious blood You redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, and called me to be Your very own. Renew my heart in righteousness and holiness that I may praise and adore You. Amen. (TLSB)