

## Sermon on the Hallel Prayer and Prayer in general

I have to admit that when I study the Old Testament, I turn to Jewish Rabbis to truly understanding the meaning of God's word's, and those of the prophets, in these books.

I do so because one of the errors that we Christians make, is to see things in snippets of the word of God, rather than in the full context of his words to us.

Jewish Rabbinical tradition excels at studying these words and texts.

For over 3600 years, scholars have worked to understand the meaning, and to constantly refresh the impact of God's word in the lives of the Jewish faithful, not only as individuals, but as a community.

Psalms 113 is the first Psalm in a series of 6; ..... Psalms 113 through 118. Together these Psalms are known as the **Hallel**.

The Hallel is a praise prayer.

You may realize this when you say the word Hallelujah; which is literally to **“Praise God”**.

This prayer is **most often** said for Jewish holidays. It is repeated at least daily during these times.

Often it is chanted by groups of the faithful at the Wailing Wall.

The **Hallel** is broken down into these parts:

### **Psalm 113: God's Majesty and Care for the Humble**

Psalm 113 opens the Hallel sequence and sets the tone for the praise and worship that follows. It begins with a call to worship, inviting servants of the Lord to praise His name.

The psalm highlights God's majesty and His care for the humble, reminding us that God's greatness does not distance Him from the lowly, but rather, He lifts them up.

**Key Verses:** “Praise the Lord. Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord.” (Psalm 113:1) “He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.” (Psalm 113:7)

### **Psalm 114: God’s Presence in Historical Miracles**

Psalm 114 is a poetic retelling of the Exodus from Egypt.

It vividly describes how the natural world responded to God’s presence when He delivered Israel from slavery.

**Key Verses:** “When Israel came out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue,” (Psalm 114:1) “The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back;” (Psalm 114:3)

### **Psalm 115: Trust in the Lord**

Psalm 115 contrasts the omnipotent God of Israel with the powerless idols worshiped by others.

It stresses the importance of trusting in the Lord rather than in man-made objects.

**Key Verses:** “Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory.” (Psalm 115:1) “But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.” (Psalm 115:4)

### **Psalm 116: Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Death**

In Psalm 116. When we find ourselves in the midst of difficult times it is of utmost importance that we hear from others that these times can be endured, survived, and overcome, due to God’s care and provision.

The psalm itself serves not only as witness to what God has done but as the thanksgiving and praise that is due to God. Having prayed for help, and having experienced all the bounty of the Lord, the response of the psalmist is now making good to sing God’s praises.

**Key Verses:** “I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy.” (Psalm 116:1) “The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.” (Psalm 116:5)

### **Psalm 117: Universal Call to Praise**

Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible, yet it holds a profound message. It calls all nations and peoples to praise the Lord for His steadfast love and

faithfulness. Despite its brevity, Psalm 117 emphasizes the universal reach of God's loving kindness and truth.

**Key Verses:** "Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples." (Psalm 117:1) "For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever." (Psalm 117:2)

### **Psalm 118: A Song of Victory**

Psalm 118 concludes the Hallel series with exuberant praise and gratitude. It is often associated with Jesus Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The account the psalmist here gives of his troubles is very applicable to Christ: many hated him without a cause; nay, the Lord himself chastened him sorely, bruised him, and put him to grief, **that by his stripes we might be healed.**

Every answer to our prayers is an evidence that the Lord is on our side; and then we need not fear what man can do unto us; we should conscientiously do our duty to all, and trust in him alone to accept and bless us.

**Key Verses:** "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." (Psalm 118:1) "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone;" (Psalm 118:22)

Of course to study this prayer, is to also raise the questions of the what and the why of prayer itself.

I learned something this week, while preparing this sermon, that I wanted to share with you; a Rabbi made a very strong point, the word "**pray**" in Latin, means to beg.

The Hebrew word **Tefilah** is generally translated into English as the word "prayer." This is not an accurate translation, for to *pray* means to beg, beseech, implore, for which there are a number of Hebrew words which **more accurately** convey this meaning. Daily prayers **are not simply requests** addressed to God to supply our daily needs, prayers are much more.

God knows those needs, before we even know them, **we also know that he is a loving God**, and is always willing to do what is in his loving will. So why then do we pray?

Like all other commandments which God has commanded us to do, we pray **not for His sake but for our own**. He commanded us **to pray to Him for our sake**.

God does not need our prayer; He can do without our prayers, **but we cannot do without our prayers**.

**In our “prayers’ we are not attempting to negotiate with God for our needs, .....**

we are **working to align ourselves WITH GOD, and with his will**.

We should be of course, praising God for his gifts, he gives each day.

However there should be more to our prayers.

In Hebrew, the word **tefilah** comes from the verb **pallel** , **"to judge."**

IF we were to think in the Hebrew way about prayer, then the reflexive verb **lehitpallel ("to pray")**, which also means "to judge oneself" would be what we are attempting to do in prayer. Thus, the time of prayer is the time of self-judgment and self-evaluation.

When a person addresses himself to God and prays for His blessings, he must inevitably search his heart and examine himself whether he measures up to the standards of daily conduct which God had prescribed for man to follow.

If he is not one who fools himself, he will be filled with humility, **realizing that he hardly merits the blessings and favors for which he is asking**. This is why we stress in our prayers God's infinite goodness and mercies, and pray to God to grant us our heart's desires, not because we merit them, but because of his love for us despite our sins. This is also why our prayers, on week-days, contain a confession of sins which we may have committed knowingly or unknowingly. We pray for God's forgiveness, which we have been given through Christ's sacrifice, and resolve to better ourselves.

Prayers help us to lead a better life in every respect, by living more fully the way of God's commands.

## **Closing Prayer**

**Dear Father,**

**Help us to be better servants of your will.**

**To be mindful of giving thanks for all the gifts that you give us each day, and throughout our lives.**

**To be thoughtful of our actions, and to possess ability to see our faults, and our strengths.**

**To earnestly thank-you for the gift of your forgiveness and grace.**

**We pray that we might be more attentive to your commandments.**

**You have given me more than I could ever ask for. Your presence fills my heart with joy and peace. I praise you for your faithfulness and mercy.**

**Help me to always remember your goodness and to share your love with others. May my life be a testament to your greatness.**

**In Jesus' name, Amen.**

[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/682090/jewish/The-Meaning-of-Prayer.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/682090/jewish/The-Meaning-of-Prayer.htm)

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