

Psalm 147:7

“Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; Sing praises on the harp to our God...”

The Hebrew word first translated sing is the word `anah. `Anah means to eye or generally to heed, i.e. pay attention; to respond; to begin to speak; specifically to sing, shout, testify, announce. The psalmist is exhorting the listener to look at what the Lord has done; to heed and pay attention to the works of the Lord. He is furthermore encouraging them to respond by singing a song of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is the Hebrew word towdah which means an extension of the hand, i.e. avowal(admission or acknowledgement), or usually adoration; specifically, a choir of worshipers. This leaves us with the idea that we should lift our hands in acknowledgement and adoration for what God has done and lift our voices as a choir of worshipers giving thanks to his name. Psalm 100:4 concurs by exhorting us to *“Enter into his gates with thanksgiving (towdah), and into his courts with praise. Be thankful to him and bless his name.”*

This theme carries over to the New Testament. Hebrews 13:15 reads, *“Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.”* The Greek word used in this verse for thanks is homologeo. Homologeo means to assent (to express agreement or concur), i.e. covenant, acknowledge. The writer conveys that a sacrifice of praise is the lifting of our voices thankfully acknowledging the Lord for his works toward us as covenant people.

Paul wrote to the Philippians to, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...”* (Philippians 4:6) John witnessed the angels, elders and living creatures on their faces worshiping God saying, *“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”* (Revelation 7:12) The Greek word used for thanksgiving in these verses is eucharistia which means gratitude; grateful language to God, as an act of worship. So in both the Old and New Testaments the act of thanksgiving is not only an acceptable form of worship but commanded.

The phrase “sing praises” is translated from the Hebrew word zamar. Zamar conveys the idea of striking with the fingers; properly, to touch the strings or parts of a musical instrument, i.e. play upon it; to make music, accompanied by the voice; hence to celebrate in song and music. The instrument of choice in this particular psalm is the kinnowr or harp.

Researchers differ in their descriptions of the kinnowr. The common thread of thought is that the shape and number of strings of the kinnowr changed over time and varied from civilization to civilization. Some of the descriptions of the kinnowr resemble our modern day harp while others more resemble a guitar. It also appears that some musicians played the kinnowr with a plectrum. A plectrum is a small piece of metal, plastic, bone or some other material. Today we call it a “pick.” Other musicians played the kinnowr with their fingers.

Again we find this form of worship carried over into New Testament times. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.”* (1 Corinthians 14:15) James wrote, *“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.”* (James 5:13) The Greek word used in these verses for sing is psallo. Psallo means to rub or touch the surface; to twitch or twang, i.e. to play on a stringed instrument; celebrate the divine worship with music and accompanying odes.

In reading the remainder of Psalm 147 you can identify a list of God’s works which warrants our response of thanksgiving.

Scripture references:

Psalm 50:14

Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.

Psalm 116:17

I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord.

Psalm 98:5

Sing to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm...

Psalms 149:3

Let them praise his name with the dance; Let them sing praises to him with the timbrel and harp.

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