Praise the Lord!
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We will start today from James 5:13. There we read:

James 5:13
“Is any among you afflicted let him pray. Is any merry, let him sing praise. ”

Life has both times of merry and times of affliction (see also Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4). In times of affliction the Word says to pray, while in times of merry it says to sing praise to the Lord. I was astonished recently when I found out how much there is in the Bible about praising and singing to God. In fact, a whole book of the Bible - one of the most lengthy and most loved ones - is called Psalms, which I would translate as Songs to God. I would like today to have a look at praising and singing and some of the references of the Word to it.

Praising in the Old Testament

There is so much about praising and singing to God in the Old Testament that is difficult to decide where to start. The first occurrence of the word “praise” is in Genesis 29:35, in the birth of Judas, of the tribe of whom the Lord came. There we read:

Genesis 29:35
“And she [Leah] conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah”.

Apart from this, there are 260 more occurrences of the word “praise” and about 180 of the word “sing”.

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By going to some of these occurrences we see for example that one of the tasks the Levites were assigned to, was to praise the Lord. In fact, a portion of them was assigned only to this task:

I Chronicles 23:3-6
“Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and above; and the number of individual males was thirty-eight thousand. Of these, twenty-four thousand were to look after the work of the house of the Lord, six thousand were officers and judges, four thousand were gatekeepers, and four thousand praised the LORD with musical instruments, "which I made," said David, "for giving praise."

And also I Chronicles 16:4-6
And he [David] appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-Edom: Jeiel with stringed instruments and harps, but Asaph made music with cymbals; Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests regularly blew the trumpets before the ark of the covenant of God.

Moving further, in the book of Psalms we will find many other passages that refer to praising and singing to God. The list is big and thus I had to be restricted to only some of the references:

Psalms 21:13
“Be exalted, O Lord, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power.”

Psalms 22:23
“You who fear the Lord, praise Him!”
Psalms 28:7
“The Lord is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him.”

Psalms 30:4
“Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.”

Psalms 33:2
“Praise the Lord with the harp; Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.”

Psalms 50:23
“Whoever offers praise glorifies Me;”

Psalms 57:9-10
“I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations.”

Psalms 63:3
“Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.”

Psalms 63:5
“My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.”

Psalms 67:3
“Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You.”
Psalms 68:4

“Sing to God, sing praises to His name. Extol Him who rides on the clouds, by His name Yah, and rejoice before Him.”

Psalms 86:12

“I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And I will glorify Your name forevermore.”

Psalms 106:1

“Praise the Lord! Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”

Psalms 118:28

“You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You.”

Psalms 117:1

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!”

Psalms 139:14

“I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made”

Psalms 147:1

“Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful.”

Psalms 150

“Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him!”
Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Alleluia.”

Jeremiah 20:13

“Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! For He has delivered the life of the poor from the hand of evildoers.”

As I said, these are but a selection from passages, about praising God and singing to Him. There are many others too. Psalm 148 for example, records the whole creation as praising Him:

Psalm 148

“Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light! Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, And you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, For He commanded and they were created. He also established them forever and ever; He made a decree which shall not pass away. Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all the depths; Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word; Mountains and all hills; Fruitful trees and all cedars; Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and flying fowl; Kings of the earth and all peoples; Princes and all judges of the earth; Both young men and maidens; Old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven. And He has exalted the horn of His people, The praise of all His saints - Of the children of Israel, A people near to Him. Praise the Lord!”

Also in Isaiah 43:19-21 the Lord said:

“Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field will
honour Me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen. This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.

Man and angels, sun and moon, the earth and the starts, the whole creation, praise the Lord. “For He commanded and they were created.” NONE OF US WOULD HAVE BEEN HERE TODAY IF GOD HAD NOT COMMANDED IT. We see all these around, the sun and the moon, the stars and the nature, because God commanded it and were created. Yes, we will declare His praise. Yes, we will praise our Creator. As Psalm 150 says: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Alleluia!”

Praising in the New Testament

Singing and praising of course is not a subject of the Old Testament only. In fact, in the New Testament, with the coming of the holy spirit, one more way of singing to God was added: the singing in the spirit. Really in I Corinthians 14 we read:

I Corinthians 14:14-17
“For if I pray in tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is 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. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.”

In addition to singing with the understanding there is also the singing with the spirit, which is speaking in tongues. I know there is a big debate in the church today concerning speaking in tongues and the manifestations of the spirit in general. I don’t want to open this debate here. If you believe that Jesus is Lord and God raised Him from
the dead you are my brother either you speak in tongues or not. What I want to do here is
to honestly state what I see the Word of God saying. And what I see is that I can sing
with my understanding and I can sing with my spirit too, through speaking in tongues.

Moving further in our subject, Colossians and Ephesians tell us:

Colossians 3:16
“Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one
another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts
to the Lord”

Also Ephesians 5:18-19
“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the spirit,
speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and
making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God
the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Psalms and hymns can even be a mean of teaching and admonishing one another
and the instruction of the Word is to sing and make melody in our hearts to Him.

Jesus and his disciples used to sing hymns in their gatherings. We see this in
Matthew 26:30:

Matthew 26:30
“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives”

Singing and praising God is not an activity of the past. Instead it is an activity for
all ages, for all creation and it will never cease. “Let everything that has breath praise the
Lord. Alleluia!”
Some things that happen when people praise the Lord

Acts 16

It was in a prison in Philippi in northern Greece. Paul and Silas, being led by the holy spirit, had left Troas to go to this city. However, after a few days there, they were put into prison because they had cast out an evil spirit (Acts 16:16-24). Acts 16:25-28 tell us what happened in their first night in the prison.

Acts 16:25-28

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying **AND SINGING HYMNS to God**, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called him with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” Then he called for a light, ran in and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptised. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced having believed in God with all his household.”

I honestly don’t think that all this would have happened if Paul and Silas were not doing what they did: singing and praying to God. The whole prison was touched by this. See that God didn’t loose only their own chains but also the chains of **ALL the prisoners and opened the door for ALL of them!** Only heaven will reveal how many souls found the Lord that day and became truly free. However we already know some:
the prison keeper and his family. They accepted the Lord that night and they will be one day there, together with us and Paul and Silas, SINGING AND PRAISING GOD.

**II Chronicles 20:20-23**

Another passage where we see God’s people praising Him is in II Chronicles 20. A big army was coming against Jehosaphat the king of Judah and he feared greatly because of this. However he acted as he should: he started seeking the Lord and His power. Thus, he called together Judah and Jerusalem and prayed publicly to God, making mention of the promises He had made to their fathers. Then the Lord gave to him and the people the promise of deliverance. In fact the deliverance would be so great that they wouldn’t even have to fight! As He said in verse 17 to the people:

II Chronicles 20:17

“You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourself, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem! Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against for the Lord is with you.”

Israel had only to stand still and the Lord would deliver them without any other action from their side. This was the prophetic message the Lord gave to His people. Verses 18-24, tell us what then this God-fearing king did:

II Chronicles 20:18-24

“And Jehosaphat bowed his head with *his* face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the Lord, worshipping the Lord. Then the Levites of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with voices loud and high. So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehosaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper." And when he
had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the Lord, For His mercy endures forever." NOW WHEN THEY BEGAN TO SING AND TO PRAISE, THE LORD SET AMBUSHES AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF AMMON, MOAB, AND MOUNT SEIR, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated."

Does it have significance that the Lord set the ambushes WHEN HIS PEOPLE STARTED PRAISING HIM? Of course it has. Otherwise, the Word would not have made the link the word “when” indicates. Sure, the Lord would have delivered His people anyway, as He promised it. However it has significance to note the point He started doing it: it was when they started praising Him.

II Chronicles 5:11-14

Another instance where we see the presence of the Lord connected with praising is in II Chronicles 5. The construction of the temple in Jerusalem had finished and Solomon was there with the people for the inauguration. The priests had brought the ark of the covenant from the city of David to the Holy of Holies in the temple. Then, starting from verse 11 we read:

II Chronicles 5:11-14

“And it came to pass when the priests came out of the Holy of Holies (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without keeping to their divisions), and the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets – indeed it came to pass, WHEN the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and
WHEN they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: “For He is good, For His mercy endures forever” that the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God”

When the Levites started praising the Lord, His glory appeared and filled the building. Is it accidental that this happened when the people started praising Him? Again NO. Otherwise the Word of God would not have given the emphasis the two “when” indicate. The glory of the Lord filled the building and this happened when the priests and the Levites started praising Him.

By mentioning these examples I do not mean that praising and singing should be seen as a religious duty, as something we “should do to earn” the presence or the deliverance of the Lord. Instead it should be seen as something coming from the heart, when it perceives the majesty and the magnificence of our Creator. Paul and Silas didn’t praise the Lord as a religious duty, as something they had to do …. every evening before they go to bed. Nor they did it because all was going well for them. In contrast they were in a prison with wounds in their body that nobody had taken care of. However, they had joy in their hearts, the joy of the Lord that is our power (Nehemiah 8:10), and out of this joy they were singing. They were looking not unto the outward conditions at those “that are seen”, but at those that are not seen, the eternal (II Corinthians 4:18). We have the joy of the Lord in us, to the measure and the degree our eyes are looking unto the Lord. As I Peter says:

I Peter 1:3-9

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation
ready to be revealed in the last. **In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,** that the genuineness of your faith, **being** much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, **you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,** receiving the end of your faith - the salvation of your souls.”

The people to whom Peter was speaking had trials that grieved them, exactly as we may have. However they had joy inexpressible and full of glory by believing in the Lord Jesus. “They were running with endurance the race that was set before them, **LOOKING UNTO JESUS THE AUTHOR AND THE FINISHER OF OUR FAITH**” (Hebrews 12:1-2). It was this I believe that made them full of joy, despite the various trials. It was the same I believe that made Paul and Silas to sing, despite the fact that their body was beaten and their future was uncertain. And it is this I believe the only that can make us full of joy that nobody can steal.

To summarise therefore: there are many references in the Word of God on the topic of praising and singing to Him. This is not for sure a topic of a past age. In contrast it is subject for the whole creation, for every age and moment. We praise the Lord for He has made us (Psalms 139:14), for our heart trusted in him and we were helped (Psalms 28:7), for His mercy reaches unto the heavens and His truth unto the clouds (Psalms 57:10), for His mercy endures forever (Psalms 106:1), for it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant and praise is beautiful (Psalms 147:1), for He created everything with His command (Psalms 148).

**“Let all that breathes praise the Lord. Alleluia” (Psalms 150).**

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