

## Psalm 33

### *The Earth is Full of God's Steadfast Love*

Psalm 33 praises the LORD as the Creator who is sovereign in history and in covenant. His work displays his steadfast love for his people.

#### 1. Structure

*Introduction: a call to enthusiastic and skilful worship of the LORD* (vv. 1-3)

##### A. *The Lord of Creation* (vv. 4-9)

The word and the work of the LORD are morally pure (vv. 4-5)

Examples of the work of the word of the LORD (vv. 6-9)

##### B. *The Lord of History* (vv. 10-11)

The LORD frustrates the plans of the nations (v. 10)

The LORD's plans cannot be frustrated – they stand forever (v. 11)

##### C. *The Lord of the Covenant* (v. 12)

How happy the people in covenant with the LORD (v. 12)

##### A'. *The Lord of Creation* (vv. 13-15)

The LORD fashioned mankind – he knows their hearts and deeds (vv. 13-15)

##### B'. *The Lord of History* (vv. 16-19)

Neither king, warrior nor horse can save (vv. 16-17)

But the LORD saves those who hope in his covenant love (vv. 18-19)

##### C'. *The Lord of the Covenant* (vv. 20-22)

We (the happy nation) wait with expectation for the covenant love of our God (vv. 20-22)

#### 2. Theology of the Psalm

"In Ps. 33, there are integrated some of the most basic themes of Hebrew theology: creation, history, covenant, and the human response of worship...Creation is not an abstract doctrine, providing answers to human intellectual curiosity concerning the origin and nature of the world; rather, creation doctrine deals with the world in its relationship to God, to human history, and to individual human beings. The created world is the stage on which the drama of human history unfolds; but the Hebrew concepts of God's providence and might in the developing drama of history must presuppose God's mastery of the created world as such. God is not simply another actor, along with humans, within the created world; he is Creator and thus controls the sphere within which history moves and develops. And the covenant in, turn, which is at the heart of Hebrew

religion, presupposes God's roles both as Creator and as sovereign in human history.

"Thus, the profound theological doctrines which permeate the verses of this psalm are separated by a great distance from the cool abstractions of philosophical theology. Their setting in the words of worship provides them with a personal base, related both to Israel as a nation and to each worshiper as an individual. And though the themes of God's creative role and might are central to the psalm's substance, it is perhaps his *lovingkindness* that dominates the whole; it permeates the created earth (v. 5), it is in the Lord's deliverance of his people (v. 18), and it is integral to the concluding prayer (v. 22).

"This ancient hymn of praise, with its balanced and integrated theology, is a timely reminder of the essence of biblical theology. In an age when the biblical doctrine of creation is all too frequently discussed in conjunction with *science*, the psalmist offers a reminder that creation must be reflected on in conjunction with *history*" (Peter Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary, Psalms 1-50*, p. 275).

#### 3. Comments

##### (a) *The Lord of Creation* (vv. 4-9, 13-15)

References to the divine word (vv. 4,6) show that the word not only brought things into being (v. 6), but also that the character of the word (it is "upright", v. 4) imparted to the creation the characteristics of the Creator, i.e. faithfulness, righteousness, justice and lovingkindness (vv. 4-5). The universe is not morally neutral – it is fundamentally ethical and relational. We cannot live right in the world unless we live right with respect to God.

God also fashioned the hearts of mankind (v. 15). Thus the Lord of Creation is also the One with ability to observe (he "looks down... sees... looks out... observes"), and (by implication) to judge those who dwell in the earth.

##### (b) *The Lord of History* (vv. 10-11, 16-19)

Just as God stands behind creation, so he stands behind history. At the macro-scale of nations, the counsels and plans of the LORD (v. 11) triumph over the counsels and plans of the nations (v. 10). At the micro-scale of individuals, not a king, nor a warrior, nor a horse can save; the LORD alone is the one who saves those in covenant relationship with him (vv. 18-19).

##### (c) *The Lord of Covenant* (vv. 1-3, 12, 20-22)

So to be in covenantal relationship with God is the epitome of blessing (v. 12) – it means being set at the heart of his purpose, and having the assurance that his purpose cannot be frustrated. The right response is to wait (v. 20), to rejoice (v. 21a), to trust (v. 21b) and to hope (v. 22) – that is to say, to live as a person for whom the covenant love of God is the beginning and end of life.