

Advent: Joy

STUDY NOTES

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PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

00:00 - 00:38

Being in a good mood is really great, and most languages have lots of words to describe the experience, like happy, cheerful, joyful, and so on.

The same goes for the languages of the Bible. In ancient biblical Hebrew, there's a variety of words, like *simcha*, *sason*, or *giyl*, and in the Greek New Testament there's *khara*, *euphosune*, or *agalliasis*. Each word has its own unique nuance, but they all basically refer to the feeling of joy and happiness.

Now what makes these biblical "joy" words interesting is noticing the kinds of things that bring happiness and also seeing how "joy" is a key theme that runs through the whole story of the Bible.

BIBLICAL JOY

00:39 - 02:26

Let's start with sources of joy. On page one of the Bible, God says that this world is "very good," and so naturally people find joy in beautiful and good things of life, like growing flocks or an abundant harvest on the hills.¹ The poet of Psalm 104 says a good bottle of wine is God's gift "to bring joy to people's hearts."² People find joy at a wedding³ or in their children⁴ There's even a Hebrew proverb that compares the joy that

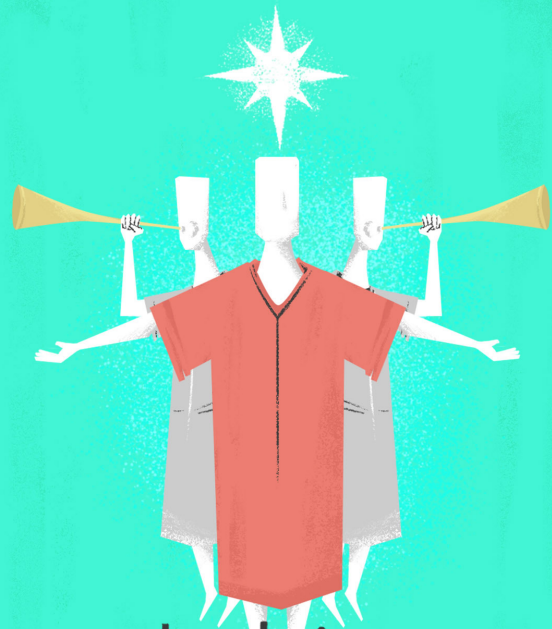
1. See Psalm 65:11-12.

2. You can read this in Psalm 104:15.

3. See Jeremiah 33:11.

4. See Proverbs 23:24-25.

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Good news that brings great **JOY.**

Luke 2:10

perfume brings to your nose with the joy a good friend brings to your heart.⁵

However, human history isn't just a joy-fest. The biblical story shows how we live in a world that's been corrupted by our own selfishness. It's marked by death and loss, and this is where biblical faith offers a unique perspective on joy. It's an attitude God's people adopt, not because of happy circumstances, but because of their hope in God's love and promise.

So when the Israelites were suffering from slavery in Egypt, God raised up Moses to lead them into freedom, and the first thing the Israelites did was sing for joy. Even though they were in the middle of a desert. They were vulnerable; the Promised Land was still far away. They rejoiced anyway. Later biblical poets looked back on this story, and they remembered how "The Lord caused his people to leave with joy, his chosen ones with shouts of joy."⁶

5. You can read this in Proverb 27:9.

6. You can see this reference in Psalm 105:43.

This “joy in the wilderness,” this was a defining moment, a way of saying that the joy of God’s people is not determined by their struggles but by their future destiny.

This theme reappears later in Israel’s story when Israel suffered under the oppression of foreign empires. The prophet Isaiah looked for the day when God would raise up a new deliverer like Moses. That’s when “those redeemed by the Lord will return to Zion with glad shouts, with eternal joy crowning their heads; happiness and joy will overtake them.”⁷ And while the Israelites waited, they chose joy to anticipate their future redemption.

JESUS BRINGS GREAT JOY

02:27 - 04:05

This is why it’s significant that when Jesus of Nazareth was born, it was announced as “good news that brings great joy.”⁸ We’re told that Jesus himself “rejoiced and gave thanks to God his Father”⁹ when he began to announce the Kingdom of God. He taught his followers the same “joy in the wilderness” saying, “when people reject and persecute you for following me, rejoice, be very glad, because your reward is great in heaven.”¹⁰

After his death and resurrection, Jesus commissioned his followers to go out and announce the good news that he was the risen King of the world. And as they did so, the early Christian communities were known for being “full of joy”¹¹ even when they were persecuted.¹² Like when the Apostle Paul was sitting in a dirty Roman prison, he could say that he’s chosen joy even if he gets executed.¹³ He called this the “joy of faith,” or “joy in the

7. You can read this in Isaiah 51:11.

11. See Acts 13:52.

8. You can read about the arrival of Jesus in Luke 2:10.

12. See also Acts 5:41.

9. See also Luke 10:21.

13. You can read this part of Paul’s writing in Philippians 3:1.

10. You can see these words of Jesus in Matthew 5:12.

Lord.” He believed it was a gift of God’s Spirit,¹⁴ a sign that Jesus’ presence is with you inspiring hope in the midst of hardship. And when you believe that Jesus’ love has overcome death itself, joy becomes reasonable in the darkest of circumstances.

Now this doesn’t mean you ignore or suppress your sorrow. That’s not healthy or necessary. Paul often expressed his grief about missing loved ones, or losing friends or his own freedom. He called this “being full of sorrow, and yet rejoicing.”¹⁵ As he acknowledged his pain, he also made a choice to trust Jesus, that his loss wouldn’t be the final word.

This is very different from the trite advice to “turn that frown upside down.” Christian joy is a profound decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus’ own life and love.

And that’s what biblical joy is all about.

14. See Romans 15:13.

15. You can read this in 2 Corinthians 6:10.



