

Praise God With Music

Bible Background • PSALMS 147, 148, 149, and 150

Printed Text • PSALMS 149:1–5; 150:1–6 | Devotional Reading • EPHESIANS 5:15–20

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will COMPARE the reason for and the expressions of praising God in two psalms, GAIN spiritual inspiration by various types of praise music and hymns, and PRAISE God using the psalms.

In Focus

“Now go in there and play one of those pieces by Chopin, Beethoven or Mozart,” Mr. Turner told his daughter. “You’re a gifted pianist, Lisa. When Dr. Bradley hears you, I know you’ll get a scholarship.” “Dad, you’re making me nervous,” Lisa replied. “I’m not sure what I’ll play. I’ll see what feels right once I’ve met him.”

Lisa entered the college’s recital room. Mr. Turner’s daughter loved the piano and could play any musical genre—classical, R&B, folk, jazz. Her joy, however, was playing Negro spirituals. She said it made her feel good in her soul. But today, Mr. Turner was focused on one thing: Lisa playing so well she’d get a scholarship.

Mr. Turner was anxious to know how the audition was going. Suddenly, he heard music coming from the recital room. “What? A Negro spiritual?” he thought.

Several minutes later, Lisa appeared and her father was up in her face. “What were you thinking?” he said. “Why did you play that? Classical pieces win scholarships!”

“Dad,” Lisa explained, “Dr. Bradley said I could play whatever I felt like playing, so I did. When I finished, he said it was a refreshing and inspiring choice...said it made him feel good in his soul...said I got a scholarship!”

“Praise the Lord!” Mr. Turner sang out!

God has given us a variety of musical styles to express joy and praise to Him. Name some musical styles, singers, and songs of praise that have enriched your times of worship.

Keep In Mind

“Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.”
(Psalm 150:6, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. God (Psalm 150:1) 'el (Heb.) — God, god, or even a strong human

B. Might acts (v. 2) geburah (Heb.) — Works and capabilities that show a particular entity's strength

Say It Correctly

Timbrel. TIM-brul.

Yom Kippur. YOM ki-POOR.

KJV

Psalm 149:1 Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.

2 Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

3 Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.

4 For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.

5 Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds.

150:1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

2 Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.

3 Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.

4 Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

5 Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

6 Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

NLT

Psalm 149:1 Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song. Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful.

2 O Israel, rejoice in your Maker. O people of Jerusalem, exult in your King.

3 Praise his name with dancing, accompanied by tambourine and harp.

4 For the LORD delights in his people; he crowns the humble with victory.

5 Let the faithful rejoice that he honors them. Let them sing for joy as they lie on their beds.

150:1 Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heaven!

2 Praise him for his mighty works; praise his unequalled greatness!

3 Praise him with a blast of the ram's horn; praise him with the lyre and harp!

4 Praise him with the tambourine and dancing; praise him with strings and flutes!

5 Praise him with a clash of cymbals; praise him with loud clanging cymbals.

6 Let everything that breathes sing praises to the LORD! Praise the LORD!

The People, Places, and Times

Musical Instruments. Just as today's praise ensembles are comprised of many different kinds of instruments, the musicians of David's day had a variety of instruments to call on to use in a worship service. Many are mentioned in today's psalms (Psalm 149:3; 150:3–5). The "trumpet"

(Heb. shofar, show-FAR) was a ram's horn, rather than the modern brass instrument. The "psaltery" (Heb. nebel, NEH-bell) was similar in shape to a lyre and was probably plucked rather than strummed. The "harp" (Heb. kinnor, ki-NOHR) was named because of its twanging sound. The "timbrel" (Heb. toph, TOFE) was closely akin to the modern tambourine. The "cymbals" (Heb. tselatsal, tsehlah-TSALL) were probably double cymbals similar to the modern instrument; the Hebrew root means "to clatter."

Other instruments mentioned here are more obscure. "Stringed instruments" (Heb. men, MEHN) is from a root meaning "parted," as when dividing slender strings or when pressed a string to only play part of it. The word translated "organ" (Heb. ugab, oo-GOB) is from a root related to "blowing," and likely refers to a wind instrument like a pipe or flute. It is one of the oldest instruments of the Bible (Genesis 4:21).

Background

The Book of Psalms can be grouped into five sections which have as their overarching themes: creation, the nation of Israel, God's holiness, the sovereignty of God's kingship over all nations, and thanksgiving and praise. The psalms in today's lesson are from the fifth section. They are a sub-category called the Hallelujah Psalms because these psalms, 146 through 150, begin and end with the Hebrew word, "Hallelujah," meaning "praise the Lord." Songs of joyful praise are a fitting conclusion to Psalms. The Psalms are noted for expressing the full range of human emotions, including deep feelings of praise.

At-A-Glance

1. A Call to Praise (Psalm 149:1-3)
2. God Delights in Praise (vv. 4-5)
3. The Focus of Praise (Psalm 150:1-6)

In Depth

1. A Call to Praise (Psalm 149:1-3)

The call to praise is an invitation to creatively boast, showcase, commend, rave, and celebrate the Creator, who also is the One who gives victory to His people. This celebration is to be embodied through singing, dancing, the use of musical instruments, and the creative art of composing new musical masterpieces. Praise to God lifts us His triumphant ability to deliver, restore, and defend His people from their adversaries. For such feats, not any song will do, but a new song will need to be created.

In what ways should we treat God as a King?

2. God Delights in Praise (vv. 4–5)

The fact that God is both Creator and Victor could be reason enough to honor and praise Him. Yet, the writer gives a third: praise brings delight to God because God finds delight in caring for His people. Those who humbly come to God will find Him a faithful protector and defender. While God’s protection does not exempt anyone from the realities of life in a fallen world, it provides an assurance that God is good, and that His peace and presence are eternally with those who trust Him (Psalm 23:4–6). The history of those who have walked with God is a history of those who have fought, and even died, for Christ. A just God will vindicate those who remain faithful, even when they suffer hardships and cannot understand His ways (Hebrews 11:16). Faith will be rewarded, and that is something to sing about.

What does the phrase, “the LORD taketh pleasure in his people” mean to you?

3. The Focus of Praise (Psalm 150:1–6)

The psalm that concludes the Israelites’ songbook concisely sums up the dominant message of the Hallelujah Psalms: God is to be praised. God is to be praised in our homes, our first house of worship; our sanctuaries, where we gather in community; and throughout the vast expanse of God’s creation, basically, everywhere we go. God is to be praised for His works—what He does; and for His excellent greatness—who He is. God is to be praised with songs, instruments, and dance. Our creative skills, our bodies, and our musical tools are to be used in praise to God. God is to be praised by everyone who breathes. Each breath we take is part of a thankful rhythm of praise.

From Psalm 150, name two reasons for praising God.

Search the Scriptures

1. Who are the “saints” mentioned in Psalm 149:1 and 5? What are the responsibilities of those who are called saints?
2. What are some of God’s mighty acts that have left you in awe of Him?

Discuss the Meaning

From the Hebrew language, Hallelujah is a word whose meaning—praise the Lord—and pronunciation is the same in nearly every language around the world. What might be some benefits to your church to learn and sing songs in different languages?

Liberating Lesson

Gospel music—which gave birth to the blues, jazz, soul, rock, and other styles of music—has in recent years been influenced by the genres it birthed. For some church members, these new sounds are not gospel or what they would call church music. Others feel it is necessary to broaden the church’s musical repertoire to appeal to younger audiences. What do you find in today’s lesson that would cause you to take a stance on either side of that issue? What makes a musical style fitting for church worship?

Application for Activation

“Praise the Lord” is not an admonition we follow out of duty, but from deep delight. To praise the Lord is an invitation to share our delight in Him, and to tell of His goodness. When we enjoy something, whether it is a cup of coffee, a sports game, or time with a friend, we will verbally and creatively express our pleasure in the thing or person we enjoy. Take a moment to list some things you enjoy about God. Use the items on your list to write a song, poem, or prayer. Share your creation with others.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Psalm 149:1-5; 150

1 Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.

Both Psalms 149 and 150 begin with a command, “Praise ye the LORD.” The Hebrew term for this phrase is familiar, hallelujah. Hallelujah literally means “praise the Lord.” This simple phrase is jam-packed with meaning. First, it is an imperative, compelling the audience to praise. The “jah” part in hallelujah is short for the sacred name of God, which is often transliterated as Yahweh or Jehovah. This name is the personal name of Israel’s God. The psalmist instructs the audience also to sing to the Lord a new song. Singing to the Lord a new song is not novel in this psalm (Psalm 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9). Each occurrence implies that God’s work is so magnificent that old songs, although true, do not fully capture everything about God that is worth singing about. The greatness and faithfulness of God is so inexhaustible that it demands us to compose new songs to attempt to describe who God is. The audience is to sing this new song to the assembly of the chasid (Heb., khaw-SEED). The chasid are faithful people who have set themselves apart by choosing to be loyal and faithful to God. Today, we call this people the Church. This passage helps us remember that the church is important not because it is a beautiful building, but because it is where God’s praise is sung among people who separate themselves by remaining loyal to God.

2 Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. 3 Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.

Israel has a special relationship with the God of the universe. They recognize that the God who was their God created everything, including them. God is not just a distant designer of the world, but the people of Israel recognized that God brought the people together out of the land of Egypt when they were not a people. God made them into a people by giving them laws, land, and life. Within this line one can see Israel's history and relationship with the Lord. The second part of verse 2 hints toward the Israelites' invasion of the Canaanites' land that ends under David's reign. They captured the city of the Jebusites, which becomes Jerusalem also known as Zion. Zion was the hill where the Temple and king's palace resided, while the rest of the city spread around them. The psalmist wants to point the audience to a throne higher than the king's: the true heavenly Temple of which the earthly version was but a replica. The psalmist tells the people to be glad in the Lord, their ultimate King.

4 For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. 5 Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds.

God takes pleasure in His people. The word for "taketh pleasure," *ratzah* (Heb. rat- ZAH) can also mean to delight in, accept, or give favor. God finds delight in His people not because they are great, but because they are humble and lowly. The Hebrew for the word "beautify" is *pa'ar* (pah-ARE), also translates as "crown" or "adorn," and ultimately means to make something worth boasting about. God does not take what is conventionally beautiful, but what others overlook. Not only that, but then God also gives them favor. God grants salvation (Heb. *yeshuah*, YEHshoo-ah) or victory, not because it is deserved, but because God is merciful. "Yeshuah" is the root for the name "Joshua," and its Greek variant "Jesus." God still today beautifies those who are weak, displeasing, unacceptable, and overlooked. God makes them worth boasting about because He adorns them with Jesus. Being beautified by God leads faithful folks (Heb. *chasid*, see v. 1) to rejoice in such an honor. The praise that erupts from people who are otherwise insignificant keeps those favored believers awake at night. They recognize the unmerited victory that God gives them as His people, and it leads them to sing for joy.

Psalm 150

1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

As noted above, "hallelujah" means "praise the Lord." This part of the verse contrasts the next part that says, "praise God." The word for "God" in this verse is *'el* (Heb. ELL). *'El* means "god" and can refer to other gods and can even refer to a strong human. The psalmist, however, in no uncertain terms, begins the psalm with an instruction and specification. It is an instruction to praise, and the term specifies to whom the praise belongs. The praise does not belong to just any god, the praise belongs to Yahweh, the Self-existing One. This psalm instructs the audience on the arenas in which to praise God and the abilities for which to praise Him (vv. 1-2). The first

arena is God's sanctuary. The word for sanctuary is qodesh (Heb. KOH-desh), which means holy place. It often refers to the place where

where God's presence dwelt. Within the Temple, in the Holy of Holies, God's presence dwelt in a special way. In many ways, the holiness of all of Israel radiated from the Holy of Holies. The chamber outside of the Holy of Holies was holy. The room beyond that was holy. The space outside of that where the worshipers offered their sacrifices and prayers was holy, and that holiness filtered out into the entire land. We are also to praise Him "in the firmament of his power." We can trace the word "firmament" back to Creation, when God made the firmament and called it "sky" (Genesis 1:6–8). The people's praise is to go even beyond the holy place; their praise is to go all the way up into the heavens where God's power is clearly manifested. In this way, their praise is transcendent. It does not focus on the cares of the world, but instead it is exalted to the God of heaven. The command to praise God in the firmament could also be an instruction to angels who reside in the heavens. It could address God's heavenly court. Many ancient writers believed that the Temple in Jerusalem was a temporary replica based on an eternal heavenly model. The psalmist envisions a worshipping community that does not only include praising on earth, but it also includes praising God in the heavens. The psalmist is inviting all created things on earth and above the earth to give God praise.

2 Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.

The psalmist moves from the arenas for praising God to reasons to praise God. The first reason is manifested in God's acts of power. The word for "mighty acts" is geburah (Heb. geh-boo-RAH). It is used to refer to works and capabilities that belong to a particular entity (Judges 5:31; Job 39:19). God's acts of power are works that only God can do. Only God can do what God can do! God's works are incomparable, inimitable, and innumerable. We cannot truly find any comparison for the way that God acts and moves in the world. Therefore, the psalmist instructs us to praise God for God's acts of power, the type of acts that only God can do!

The psalmist then implores the worshipers to praise God for His "excellent greatness." The phrase suggests that worshipers are to praise God because He surpasses or excels the very concept of greatness. God is so amazing that "great" is insufficient to describe Him. Greatness is anemic in describing God's works. God's activity in the world and in our lives surpasses, exceeds, and goes beyond greatness. God is so great that even God's greatness is excellent. The psalmist invites us to praise a God that the word greatness only begins to describe.

3 Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. 4 Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. 5 Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

The psalmist tells the worshipers where to praise, then why to praise, and finally the psalmist says how to praise—with instruments! The psalmist depicts a symphony of praise. Each instrument is mentioned in this lessons' People, Places, and Times section, but there is more to say on two of them. The "trumpet" (Heb. shofar, a ram's horn) was a symbol of three things: 1) God's voice, 2) God's victory, and 3) God's freedom. The shofar was a reminder of God's

thundering voice at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). Later the Israelites blasted the shofar to announce the victory God had given them over the people of Jericho (Joshua 6). Finally, the priests were to blow the shofar on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) and in the fiftieth year in order to proclaim the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). The year of Jubilee occurred every fifty years, and those who were in debt or bondage were set free. The blasting of the horn let all of the bound Israelites know that they were set free. The psalmist picks up on this and commands the worshiper to praise God with a symbol of freedom. This freedom can also be captured in one of the other instruments mentioned. The psalmist brings in the “harp” (Heb. kinnor), which is the instrument that David masterfully used to free Saul from the evil spirits that he had (1 Samuel 16:14–23). The psalmist invites the worshipers to praise God in a way that echoes God’s liberating power. This leads to dancing and playing the timbrel or tambourine and stringed instruments. The praise that the psalmist envisions is one founded on, rooted in, and performed with freedom.

6 Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

We noted above that the psalmist could be inviting the angels into the praise party, and in this verse the psalmist is inviting everything that has breath into the festivities. This creates a low barrier for entry, to say the least. Every breathing, living thing owes God praise if for no other reason than the fact that God is the Creator of every living thing. In the Bible, this is particularly important for the human creature, because God personally took time to craft humans in God’s image and then personally breathed in them the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Life itself then becomes its own reason to praise the Lord. The repetition of “praise the LORD” could be a statement of emphasis. Often in Hebrew, a writer will repeat a phrase to emphasize it. We do this in English as well. When we really, really mean something, we accentuate the statement by saying it again. Here the psalmist could be saying that everything with breath needs to really praise the Lord. Even if they do not have musical talents or skills and even though they cannot comprehend the excellent greatness of God, worshipers are called praise the Lord, praise the Lord, for real, for real.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Song of Praise is Fitting
(Psalm 147:1–7)

TUESDAY

David's Music Soothes Saul
(1 Samuel 16:14–23)

WEDNESDAY

Paul and Silas Sing in Prison
(Acts 16:23–26)

THURSDAY

Praise the Name of the Lord
(Psalm 148)

FRIDAY

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs
(Colossians 3:12–17)

SATURDAY

Making Melody to God
(Psalm 149)

SUNDAY

Praise God with Musical Instruments
(Psalm 150)