

# PRAISE GOD FOR HIS GREATNESS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 150

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 147–150

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Psalm 149:1-5; 150

## I. A New Song

### Psalm 149:1-5

- <sup>1</sup> **Praise the LORD.  
Sing to the LORD a new song,  
his praise in the assembly of his  
faithful people.**
- <sup>2</sup> **Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;  
let the people of Zion be glad in  
their King.**
- <sup>3</sup> **Let them praise his name with  
dancing  
and make music to him with  
timbrel and harp.**
- <sup>4</sup> **For the LORD takes delight in his  
people;  
he crowns the humble with vic-  
tory.**
- <sup>5</sup> **Let his faithful people rejoice in  
this honor  
and sing for joy on their beds.**

1. *Praise the Lord* is a translation of only two words in Hebrew. The first word, *hal-lelu*, is a command to praise. The *jab* is a shortened version of Yahweh, the Hebrew name of God—the object of the praise.

In the New Testament, the Hebrew is transliterated into Greek, so it sounds the same whether one is speaking Greek or Hebrew. The result is the four occurrences of our English “Hallelujah” in Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6. So whether we say English “Praise the Lord” or the original Hebrew

and adapted Greek “Hallelujah,” we are saying the same thing!

1b. *Sing* is also a plural command, occurring in that form 15 times in the Old Testament. The last is in a context of oppression: captors requesting songs of the defeated who were in captivity.

*A new song* suggests that circumstances have changed. In this case, the people have returned from their Babylonian captivity. Being something of a “second exodus,” this return certainly called for new words of celebration! Isaiah speaks of the Messiah to come, and a new song is called for because of the new things God will do on the earth (Isaiah 42:10; 43:19). Similarly in Revelation, songs are composed because of the new circumstances of the saints in Heaven (Revelation 4:9; 14:3).

1c. This clause applies the previous one by stating where the people are to offer *praise* to the Lord. *The assembly of his faithful people* sketches a setting of public, corporate worship. The faithful are those who demonstrate fidelity in their relationship with the Lord. They are not the ones who chase false gods or rebelliously disobey his commands.

2. Again, we see parallelism that often characterizes Hebrew poetry. This means that it's a mistake to see *Israel* and *the people of Zion* referring to different groups. Similarly, *rejoice* and *be glad* repeat one another.

Piling up phrases that have the same or very similar meanings emphasizes their importance. Though the English *let* may read like a suggestion or permission, it is actually a common way of translating Hebrew commands.

This verse also gives reasons for expressing joy. The verse refers to the same being, namely God, but to different roles he has. First, the Lord is not only the Creator of humans in general, but also the one who created the nation of Israel in particular. Second, the Lord is Israel's ruler (1 Samuel 12:12; Isaiah 43:15). As subjects of his rule, the Israelites were beneficiaries of his protection. The Israelites are reminded that even though their earthly monarchy had come to an end, God was still their leader. He had made them a nation, and he could and would sustain them as such.

3. Here the psalmist provided means for expressing *praise* and joy. *Dancing* to the sound of musical instruments indicates boisterous, unrestrained worship.

4. Because this psalm was composed after the return from Babylonian exile, Ezra 7 forms a particularly fitting backdrop. In Ezra 7:27, the word here translated *crowns* is used for bringing honor to the temple under the approval of the Persian monarchy (Ezra 6:1, 13-15).

In a similar way, *the Lord* was working on the hearts of *his people*. The *humble* are the afflicted, which is how the same word is translated in Psalms 9:12 and 10:17. This may include a spiritual sense—such people are aware of their low position before the Lord—or it may be meant in only a physical sense. The people experienced great uncertainty when they arrived back in Judah. They were certainly not wealthy or of high standing.

*Victory* in the Old Testament often describes the deliverance from enemies. For the vulnerable population newly returned to Jerusalem and Judah, God's protection

would indeed have been a comfort. The word translated *victory* can also be used of deliverance from sin, though this is much more prevalent in the New Testament as the word comes over from Hebrew into Greek (Psalm 3 with Revelation 7:10).

5. Psalm 149 can be divided into two stanzas. Whereas the first stanza (verses 1-4) invokes praise primarily looking back to the past acts of the Lord, the second stanza (verses 5-9) invokes praise looking forward to his future acts. The verse at hand again requires the people to praise the Lord, as the phrase *let his faithful people rejoice* echoes the command in 149:2.

Such celebrations are called for elsewhere: in anticipation of an enemy's defeat, in sheer wonder at God's greatness, and in instances of personification. *In . . . honor* refers to having been favored with a change of circumstance, from exiles to people living once again in their homeland.

*On their beds* sets up a contrast with Psalm 149:1, where the people are to offer praise "in the assembly of his faithful people." So both public and private praise are covered. A bed is not always a pleasant place to be (Job 7:13-15; Psalms 6:6; 41:3). There is also a time when silence is called for while lying in bed (4:4). We easily imagine that beds were tearful places during the exile. But in the verse before us, we see what should happen in private as a result of God's having transformed the situation of an entire nation (Psalm 137).

## II. The Setting of Praise

### Psalm 150

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD.

Praise God in his sanctuary;  
praise him in his mighty heavens.

<sup>2</sup> Praise him for his acts of power;  
praise him for his surpassing  
greatness.

<sup>3</sup> Praise him with the sounding of  
the trumpet,

- praise him with the harp and  
lyre,  
<sup>4</sup> praise him with timbrel and dancing,  
praise him with the strings and  
pipe,  
<sup>5</sup> praise him with the clash of cymbals,  
praise him with resounding  
cymbals.  
<sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath  
praise the LORD.  
 Praise the LORD.

1a. This imperative was treated above (Psalm 149:1a).

1b. Here we see mention of a location where it is especially appropriate to *praise God*. As a noun, the word *sanctuary* can take 20 different meanings, by one count, according to context. The big-picture idea is one of “sacredness” or “apartness.” The context here seems to require that the sacred space in view is where God’s people gather for worship.

1c. The word *heavens* reflects the conception of people in Old Testament times, who considered the sky to be a vault over the earth. It is the place where the stars are located, the place that separates the earth from the abode of God beyond. The phrase *in his mighty* describes the magnificence of the heavens; the almighty God created it.

2. Two reasons for praising the Lord are given: his works and his character. *Acts of power* are things God has done in the past. Some psalms very clearly celebrate specific works God has done by recounting his deeds in Israel’s history. Psalm 136 recounts the acts of the Lord in creation, in delivering Israel from Egypt, in conquering enemies and giving Israel the land, and for providing food for all creatures.

The phrase *his surpassing greatness* summarizes the Lord’s character. God is per-

fect in his knowledge, in his ethics, in his works, and in his words.

3. Here begins a three-verse list of several musical instruments the readers were encouraged to use to *praise him*. Metal horns were known in the Old Testament world, but *the sounding of the trumpet* signifies the blast of a ram’s horn. These were used in worship, as a signal in war, to warn of danger, to express joyous celebration, to herald news, at the installation of a king, and to call to assembly.

*The harp and lyre* are stringed instruments. These instruments therefore stand parallel with one another and are essentially the same instrument. The main difference is that one was larger than the other.

4a. *The timbrel* is similar to a modern tambourine, being small enough to be held in the hand. Use of this rhythm percussion instrument is associated with dances of joy several times in the Old Testament, even joy that has the wrong focus (Isaiah 5:11-12).

4b. *The strings* is a collective term for instruments such as the lyre and harp. The designation may include a rather fixed collection of instruments, much like reference to “the strings” in an orchestra refers generally to violins, violas, cellos, etc.

Pipes are first mentioned in Genesis 4:21: “Jubal . . . was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes.”

5. *Cymbals*, in the category of percussion instruments. The Hebrew behind the translation *resounding* occurs five times in the psalms. The translations in those other four instances are all in terms of volume. Thus *clash* and *resounding* are parallel terms.

6. *Breath* was the first sign of life. At creation the Lord breathed into the man “the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). Encouraging *everything that has breath to praise the Lord* is broader than a call to people only (Psalm 103:22).

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## PRaise GOD FOR HIS GREATNESS

### Into Life

*The most exciting game I ever attended was . . .*

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Would the game have been as exciting if it had been watched by only one person? What if the crowd had been absolutely silent?

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As we consider Psalms 149 and 150, look for ways biblical praise is like and unlike the expressions of celebration in the memorable games you described.

### Into Life

Brainstorm ways to complete these two sentences:

*It's easiest to praise God when . . .*

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*It's most difficult to praise God when . . .*

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How much mention of the worshippers' situations is included in these two psalms?

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What does this tell us about when or whether we should praise?

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### Into the Word

Read Psalms 146:1-5 and 150. Based on the available information, complete the chart. Distinguish between responses that have a factual basis and those that are speculative. Clarify, as far as possible, both the immediate contexts of the two psalms and how they fit into the Psalter as a whole.

	Psalm 149:1-5	Psalm 150
<i>Who?</i>		
<i>What?</i>		
<i>Where?</i>		
<i>When?</i>		
<i>Why?</i>		
<i>How?</i>		

### THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Praise the Lord—always!