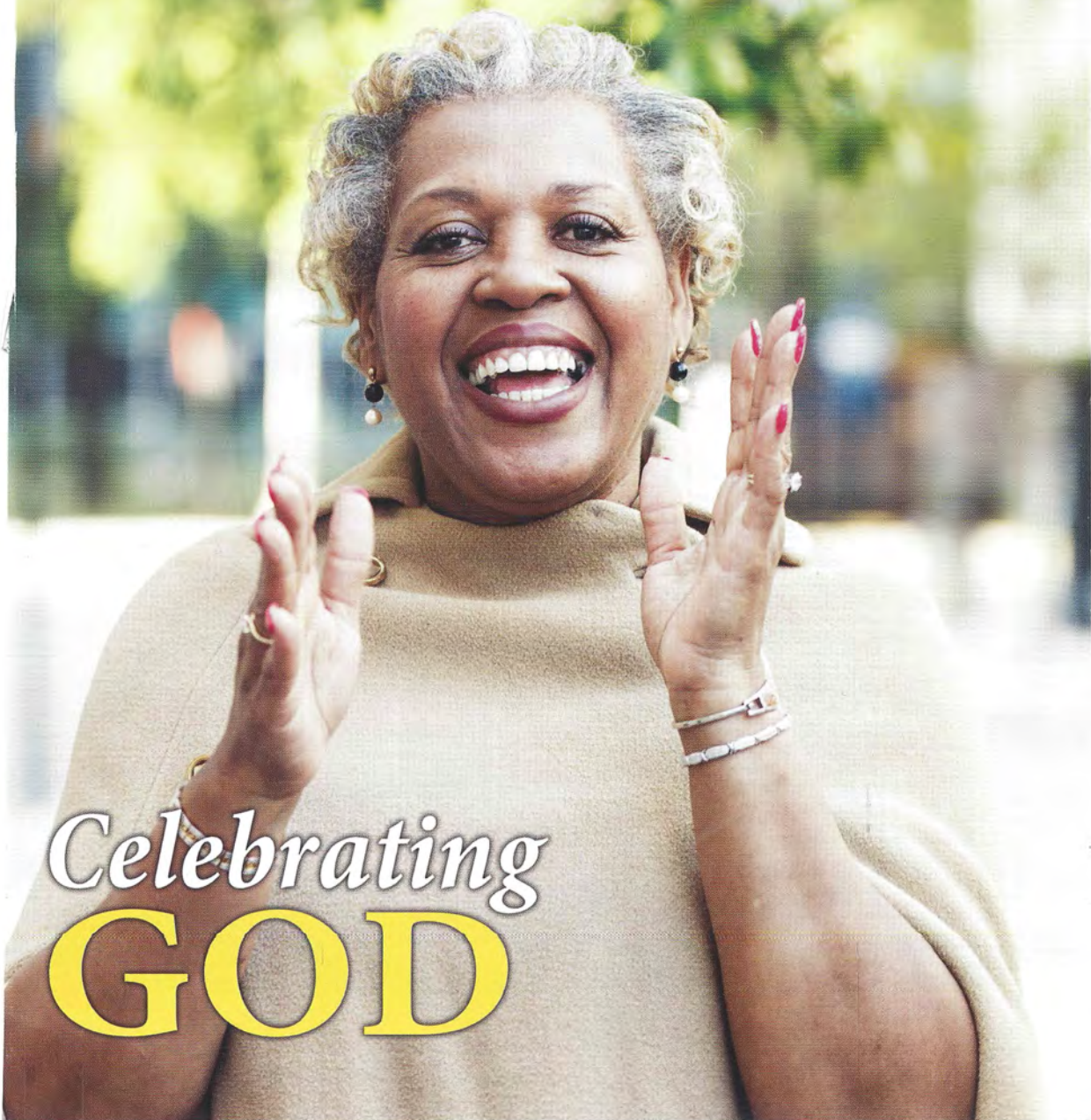


DIRECTION[®]

THE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE FOR ADULTS

Celebrating
GOD





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SEPTEMBER • OCTOBER • NOVEMBER 2021

THEME: Celebrating God

September 2021 Quarter At-A-Glance

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Quarter At-A-Glance

September 2021

Celebrating God

This quarter focuses on acts of worship and praise that celebrate both God's divine attributes and God's actions on behalf of the whole created order. The lessons of the Fall quarter draw on several examples of biblical people who celebrate God, psalms that give thanks for God's benevolent actions, and visions of praise for God's work in establishing an eternal realm of justice and righteousness.

UNIT 1 • God's People Offer Praise

This unit has four lessons looking at Moses and Miriam's songs of praise for God's mighty acts, at King David dancing before the ark, at "blind" Bartimaeus glorifying God for healing, and at early believers responding to the Pentecost event by entering into a life of praise for God's redemption through Jesus.

UNIT 2 • Called to Praise God

This unit has five lessons that explore psalms calling God's people to celebrate what God has done. The psalms speak of making joyful noise to praise God, of praising God for justice and righteousness, of giving thanks for deliverance, of the joy of worship, and of music as a way to celebrate and praise God.

UNIT 3 • Visions of Praise

This unit has four lessons that share John's visions of celebration for God's ultimate victory in establishing a realm of peace and justice. In Revelation, people from every nation praise God and all heaven rejoices. In the passage from Acts, believers praise God that the Good News now includes everyone as Gentiles receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Moses and Miriam Praise God

Bible Background • EXODUS 14:1–15:1–21

Printed Text • EXODUS 15:11–21 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 105:1–2, 37–45

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE why and how Moses and Miriam praised God; REFLECT on the actions of God that are celebrated through music, dance, and words; and CELEBRATE God's faithfulness with joy.

In Focus

"FIRE DEPARTMENT, CALL OUT!"

"Over here!" Ramona cried, coughing.

The smoke stung her eyes and was so thick that she couldn't see where the voice was coming from. The disaster had been sudden. One moment, she was typing away at her desk. The next, there was a quick rumble from the ground that shook the floor and shattered the floor-to-ceiling windows. Part of the ceiling frame fell to the floor, dragging down tiles and light fixtures. Some of the sprinklers came on and drenched everything nearby, but others were broken. The way to the exit stairs was blocked with flaming debris.

Ramona prayed, "Heavenly Father, please bring me to safety." She could hear the firefighters crashing through the wreckage to get to her. "OVER HERE!" she shouted again.

Ramona could see the shapes of the firefighters coming forward in the dark, knocking aside desks and chairs and filing cabinets. The water sprayed from their hoses sizzled and turned to steam as it hit the flames, adding to the chaotic scene. But after a moment, two of them emerged like ghosts and crouched next to her.

"Praise God! I am so grateful to see you!" Ramona cried.

One firefighter said, "Just stay close." The other firefighter slid his arm around her and stood up. "We'll get you out of here. Stick with me."

In between coughs, Ramona said, "Thank you! God is good! God is so good!"

When have you spontaneously praised God after an emotional event?

Keep in Mind

"Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Exodus 15:11** Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

12 Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them.

13 Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.

14 The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina.

15 Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.

16 Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD,

till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased.

17 Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O LORD, which thy hands have established.

18 The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.

19 For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

21 And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

The People, Places, and Times

Miriam. The sister of Aaron and Moses and the daughter of Amram and Jochebed. When Moses is placed in a basket in the Nile as a baby, Miriam watches over her brother and volunteers her mother as a wet-nurse when Pharaoh's daughter decides to keep the child. She is also one of the people sent by God to lead the Israelites. Miriam leads the people in a joyous victory song after they cross the Red Sea out of Egyptian slavery. Much later while journeying through the wilderness, Moses married an Ethiopian woman and Miriam did not approve, rebelling against Moses. She and Aaron spoke against Moses, but God heard them and rebuked them. God struck Miriam with leprosy. Moses prayed for her and she was quickly healed.

Background

Over roughly 400 years, the 70 members of Jacob's family who had moved from Canaan to Egypt had grown to over 600,000 strong (Exodus 12:37). They lived freely in Goshen until a new pharaoh came to power. He was unaware of the life-saving role that Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, had played in saving Egypt and surrounding countries from famine. Threatened by this growing population, Pharaoh tried to decrease their numbers through genocide and enslavement. The people prayed for salvation from oppression. God answered, upholding the promise He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose name had been changed to Israel. Through a man called Moses, God performed ten mighty acts that forced Pharaoh to end the Israelites' slavery. But Pharaoh couldn't accept the fact that he had been defeated by the God

of slaves. He set out to find and kill them. In an epic act of salvation, God walled back the waters of the Red Sea, giving the Israelites safe passage across the final barrier that blocked their exodus. The same waters drowned their oppressors. To memorialize God's phenomenal intervention on their behalf, Moses and Miriam led the Israelites in a song of exuberant praise.

At-A-Glance

1. Sing to Gain Strength
(Exodus 15:11–13)
2. Sing to be Heard (vv. 14–18)
3. Sing to Remember God's Goodness
(vv. 19–21)

In Depth

1. Sing to Gain Strength (Exodus 15:11–13)

The Egyptian culture was known for its numerous gods and goddesses. There was a sun god who was responsible for light and a goddess who was in charge of fertility. Another goddess brought the rain and Pharaoh himself was believed to be the god who had power over all the inhabitants of the land. But for the people who had just experienced deliverance and witnessed the annihilation of their oppressors, no god surpassed their God. He was unrivaled, not only in His power but also in His holiness and His worthiness to be praised. God had wiped out their enemies and that new reality gave them the courage and strength to sing about a future, unlike their past. This song of praise was also a song of hope. They looked forward, confident that their victorious God would guide them and bring them to a place where they would dwell in God's holy presence.

How has a past experience with God shaped your outlook about your future?

2. Sing to be Heard (vv. 14–18)

On their journey, the formerly enslaved people were going to meet people from other nations. News of God's mighty acts would have reached these nations before the Israelites actually arrived. How would the Canaanites respond? Would they realize that God was God? Or would fear lead to violent actions? The fitting response when learning about God's manifested power and goodness is holy reverence. Such an example is Rahab, the prostitute who protected the spies sent to assess Canaan. By the time the Children of Israel reached Jericho years later, she was able to recount the incident at the Red Sea (Joshua 2:9–11). The testimony embedded in this song had proceeded the spies and secured their safety, and the safety of Rahab and her family. The song at the Red Sea was a testimony meant to be shared so that others would hear, trust, and worship God.

Name a time when your faith has been strengthened by someone's testimony.

3. Sing to Remember God's Goodness (vv. 19–21)

Miriam was Moses's sister. She was a courageous woman who, as a child, defied Pharaoh's horrific decree to kill male babies. When her mother, Jochebed, placed her brother, Moses, in a water-tight basket and put him in the Nile River, Miriam kept an eye on the basket and when Pharaoh's daughter found the baby and wanted to keep him, Miriam, with the daughter's consent, ran to get her mother to nurse him. Jochebed was able to rear Moses and share with him his true heritage.

Now years later, Miriam was at her brother's side. She could trace God's deliverance in the past to the joys of freedom she and all Israelites were experiencing that day. Using the unique gifts God had given her as a prophetess, musician, and dancer, Miriam led a chorus

of singers and dancers who recounted the triumphant victory of their God.

What are some ways you have celebrated God's liberating grace in your life?

Search the Scriptures

1. Name three ways the Lord God is different from the so-called gods other nations worshiped (Exodus 15:11).

2. What will be the response of other nations when they hear of God's victory for the Israelites (vv. 14–16)?

Discuss the Meaning

Victory for the Israelites also brought about the annihilation of others. Egyptian families lost loved ones that day. In Matthew 5:43, Jesus tells His listeners that they are to love their enemies and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute them.

1. Compare and contrast the context and attitudes toward violence between today's text and Jesus' words in Matthew 5:43–45.

2. In our modern context, how are we to respond when our enemies fall into unfortunate situations?

Liberating Lesson

In *Harriet, the Moses of Her People*, biographer Sarah Hopkins Bradford, states that one of the favorite songs of abolitionist Harriet Tubman was "Swing Low Sweet Chariot." Coded in its verses was a message of salvation from oppression. The Underground Railroad, a network of places and people who helped enslaved African Americans escape the horrors of the South, was the sweet chariot that would be swinging low or coming to the South. It was going to carry home or take to the North, those willing to get on board. Listening with hope, enslaved men, women, and children set out on a journey toward freedom for themselves and their descendants. What songs can you share

with others that offer a message of the hope and freedom found in Christ?

Application for Activation

Songs are often used to help shape a people's identity. The song in today's lesson helped formerly enslaved people to see themselves as victors. They could advance, knowing that their unrivaled God would guide them into the land he had promised their forefathers. Another song, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," had a similar impact. Written in 1900 by James Weldon Johnson and set to music by his brother, John Rosamond Johnson, it helped African Americans to see the gains made despite great adversity. While recognizing the past, it continued in hope, anticipating increased goodness from the God who had brought them thus far on the way.

Consider memorizing all three stanzas of "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," and as a class, perform it at a church service, nursing home, or shelter for formerly incarcerated men or women.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Philistina. fill-iss-TEE-nah.
Moab. MOE-ab.
Edom. EE-dom.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Hardens Pharaoh's Heart
(Exodus 14:1-9)

TUESDAY

Don't Just Do Something; Stand There!
(Exodus 14:10-20)

WEDNESDAY

Victory by the Sea
(Exodus 14:21-31)

THURSDAY

Blessed Be God Our Savior
(Luke 1:67-75)

FRIDAY

Victory in Jesus
(1 Corinthians 15:51-58)

SATURDAY

Moses Sings of God's Triumph
(Exodus 15:1-10)

SUNDAY

Moses and Miriam Praise God
(Exodus 15:11-21)

Notes

David Dances Before the Ark

Bible Background • 2 SAMUEL 6

Printed Text • 2 SAMUEL 6:1–5, 14–19 | Devotional Reading • ECCLESIASTES 3:1–9

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE David's joy and Michal's contempt for him, APPRECIATE the many ways to celebrate God's presence, and PLAN celebrations that honor God through praise and worship.

In Focus

Pastor Michael heard some people in his church complaining about the new musicians who wanted to change the service to a more contemporary style. However, he hadn't realized how upset people had become until an after-church meeting got out of control. A discussion on music became more and more heated as people from the two factions argued with each other.

"What are you people doing to our church's music?"

"We want to do something that's more relevant to people today. Is that a problem?"

"I've been playing the organ here for 25 years; you can't just walk in and change it!"

"If we want our church to grow, then we have to play new music. We can't keep doing what we've always done."

"I can't stand these new songs with all those repetitive choruses!"

"Have you ever read Psalm 136?"

Horried, Pastor Michael stood up and dismissed the meeting. Afterward, he escaped into his study, near tears. "Lord, what have I been doing wrong?" he prayed. "Why is there so much division in my own church? What have we all been missing?" He continued to pray frantically until he took calming breaths and truly focused himself on God. He knew from personal experience when he started by looking at God, everything became clearer.

Even among Christians, selfishness can lead to conflict and disunity. When we focus on God instead of self we can worship in peace. How do you focus on God?

Keep in Mind

"And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals." (2 Samuel 6:5, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV 2 Samuel 6:1 Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.

2 And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.

3 And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart.

4 And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark.

5 And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.

14 And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.

15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

16 And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

17 And they brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

18 And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts.

19 And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house.

The People, Places, and Times

The Ark's Journey. During the wilderness wanderings, the Ark was kept in the Tabernacle wherever the camp moved, but once the Israelites were established in the Promised Land, the Ark and entire Tabernacle complex were kept in Bethel (Judges 20:27). At one point during Samuel's time as a judge, the Philistines captured the Ark in battle (1 Samuel 4). God sent signs and sickness on the Philistines until they returned the sacred object to Israel at Beth-shemesh. God also struck down seventy men of Beth-shemesh who tried to look inside the Ark. The people there called for the priests of Kiriath-jearim to retrieve the Ark. No attempt was made to return it to the Tabernacle, and

it remained in Kiriath-jearim for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:2).

Background

As David had been newly crowned King, the relocation of the Ark was a major act. It was significant that one of David's top priorities was related to Israel's spiritual life. David consulted with his officials and his proposal to move the Ark was met with enthusiastic agreement. The Ark had been at Baalah of Judah (also called Kiriath-jearim), according to 1 Chronicles 13:1-8. Before David could execute his plan, he was delayed by two unsuccessful Philistine attacks. He captured the city of Jerusalem and set up a government there. Once established in

Jerusalem, David returned his attention to the moving of the Ark.

At-A-Glance

1. Extracting the Ark (2 Samuel 6:1–5)
2. If At First You Don't Succeed (vv. 14–15)
3. Celebration and Criticism (vv. 16–19)

In Depth

1. Extracting the Ark (2 Samuel 6:1–5)

The Ark of the Lord symbolized God's presence and was the holiest of the items in the Tabernacle. At one point, the Ark had been captured by the Philistines in battle. Even after its return, the Ark of the Lord had been neglected under Saul.

The extraction of the Ark from Kiriath-jearim required extensive planning. David selected a large force of 30,000 men in case they were attacked by the Philistines. This force was accompanied by a large number of Israelites who wanted to be included in the procession.

This was an occasion for great celebration for the people of Israel. They had a new cart to transport the Ark. The sons of Abinadab were selected to guide the cart that would transport the sacred Ark (cf. 1 Samuel 7:1). There was singing and the music of various instruments as they prepared for the successful moving of the Ark.

It is easy to get swept up in all this pomp and celebration, however, even though the Israelites want to do a good thing, they have not discussed the matter with God. Had they taken a moment to do so, they would have known all their preparations were for nothing.

Read Psalms 127:1. How does this advice relate to David's careful preparation to move the Ark the first time?

2. If At First You Don't Succeed (vv. 14–15)

Verses 6–13 describe the tragic death of one of the Israelites in the first attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. While not the focus of this lesson, this knowledge gives crucial insight to the remaining verses. David makes a second attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem three months later (vv. 14–15).

The people of Israel did not dwell on past failures. In the three months that passed, David learned that placing the Ark on a cart was forbidden. The Ark and all other sacred items were to be carried on the shoulders of Levite priests (Numbers 7:9). Keeping the Lord's commands in mind, David made a second attempt to move the Ark.

Again, he did so with a great celebration. David wore priestly garments and danced before the Lord with all his might. The people of Israel shouted for joy and offered sacrifices (2 Samuel 6:13) as the instruments played.

When has taking time to consult the Lord changed your plans for the better?

3. Celebration and Criticism (vv. 16–19)

Though his first attempt did not go as planned, David's second attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem was a success. After seventy years of neglect, the Ark was again publicly hailed as the sacred object it was. The Ark, symbolizing God's presence with His people, had been brought to Jerusalem, making it the religious and governing center of the nation. After a tragic first attempt, the success of the second attempt must have been that much sweeter. All of Israel celebrated with him.

In the midst of the celebratory entry into the city, Michal, David's wife and the daughter of Saul, looked at David's display of praise with disdain. David, however, was focused on worship, praise and the fellowship of God's people. He offered sacrifices to God and blessed the people, both men and women,

with gifts of food and wine to take home with them. It was a joyous day, and David's praise for God's grace was not to be diminished.

How do we articulate doubts without antagonizing others?

Search the Scriptures

1. What are the various forms of worship employed when Israel moved the Ark (2 Samuel 6:5, 14–15, 17)?

2. Once the Ark made it safely to Jerusalem, what did David do (2 Samuel 6:17–18)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. David made both attempts to move the Ark with great praise and celebration. Israel's acts of worship showed great reverence for the ark, which was among the holiest things in the Tabernacle. In a culture that does not value God, how can we maintain reverence and awe for the Lord?

2. Michal had contempt for David based on his demonstrative worship. The church can be a setting in which people from different generations, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic status are worshipping together. How can we respect everyone's freedom to worship?

Liberating Lesson

Bringing the ark to Jerusalem was no easy task. It required planning, a tremendous amount of resources, and great effort. David was not deterred by what this endeavor would require. His commitment to Israel's spiritual health was such that he committed himself to bringing the symbol of God's presence to Jerusalem despite the cost.

Similarly, spiritual growth requires effort on our part. We may not need to assemble 30,000 people to take a dangerous journey, but we must be intentional about the things of God. We must actively swim against the pull of modern culture

and its endless supply of empty pursuits to live the life that God intends.

Application for Activation

David was intentional about bringing the symbol of God's presence to Jerusalem. Likewise, we must be intentional about cultivating God's presence in our own lives. Do you have a plan for your spiritual growth? Do you have times devoted to prayer, study, and personal worship each week? Are there certain times of the year when you fast or spend an extended period of time alone with God?

When moving the ark, David had the support of Israel. In addition to 30,000 warriors, a large company of Israelites went with him to retrieve the ark. They sang, danced, and offered sacrifices. The church exists as a community to encourage and equip. As a body, let us support one another as we pursue the things of God and create an atmosphere of sincere worship.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Ephod. EE-fode
Kiriath-jeariam. KEAR-ee-ath
JEAR-ee-am.
Beth-shemesh. beth SHEH-mesh.
Abinadab. ah-BIN-ah-dab.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

David Prepares to Transport the Ark
(2 Samuel 6:1–5)

TUESDAY

The Holiness of the Sanctuary
(Hebrews 9:1–7)

WEDNESDAY

Uzzah Disregards the Ark's Holiness
(2 Samuel 6:6–11)

THURSDAY

The House of the Lord
(Psalm 122)

FRIDAY

Go to God's Dwelling Place
(Psalm 132:1–12)

SATURDAY

The Ark in the Heavenly Temple
(Revelation 11:15–19)

SUNDAY

David Dances Before the Ark
(2 Samuel 6:12–19)

Notes

Glorifying God

Bible Background • MARK 10:46-52; LUKE 18:35-43

Printed Text • MARK 10:46-52 | Devotional Reading • JAMES 5:13-18

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will COMPARE and contrast spiritual and physical blindness, APPRECIATE how God is attentive and responds to our needs, and PRACTICE reaching out to those who are marginalized by society.

In Focus

Herman and Shelly Johnson had just moved to the area two months ago. They hadn't even been able to find a church family yet before the tornado hit. The Johnsons had lost so much. Their roof had blown off, drenching everything inside, as Herman and Shelly huddled in the re-enforced basement.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, the Johnsons prayed for a few things they specifically needed. There was no way they could pay to repair the damages without a steady income, which was proving difficult since both the beauty shop where Shelly had worked and Herman's instruments had been destroyed in the tornado. Daily, they prayed together for a guitar so Herman could perform at gigs again and an open chair where Shelly could continue work as a beautician. God came through with just what they needed. The woman who worked in the chair next to Shelly invited them to her church where the Johnsons were welcomed into the new church family.

Now, a year later, Herman and Shelly were finally finished recovering their losses. It had required persistence with their insurance company to get them to pay all they were supposed to, but the Johnsons had stood up for themselves. They could never replace the exact things the storm had blown away, but they were going to praise God for helping them back to their feet. They would live their lives here on out more thankful for God's blessings.

How has God answered a specific prayer of yours?

Keep in Mind

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight."

(Mark 10:51, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Mark 10:46** And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging.

47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.

48 And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.

49 And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man,

saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.

50 And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.

51 And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight.

52 And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

The People, Places, and Times

Jericho. A city about fifteen miles east from Jerusalem, near the Jordan River, Jericho was the home of a large population of priests who served the temple in Jerusalem. The tax collector Zacchaeus also lived in Jericho (Luke 19). It was the first city Joshua's forces destroyed as they occupied the Promised Land (Joshua 6:20). Joshua spoke a curse upon anyone who dared to rebuild it, but it was rebuilt anyway, again becoming an important trading center.

Jesus' Titles. The crowd calls Him "Jesus of Nazareth" (v. 47), recognizing His humanity and the city of His upbringing. Bartimaeus calls Him "Son of David" (vv. 47–48), recognizing His Jewish heritage and perhaps His royal lineage. Bartimaeus also calls Jesus "Rabboni" which means "my teacher" (v. 51). Rabbi is the highly respected position of a master spiritual teacher in Jewish society. Bartimaeus calls himself Jesus' pupil, even though they have not met before. The only other time this title is used in Scripture is when Mary Magdalene first recognizes Jesus after the Resurrection.

Which of Jesus' names and titles are striking to you and why?

Background

As He leaves Jericho, Jesus is closing the second phase of His ministry. He is on His way to Jerusalem where, as He has prophesied, He will be condemned by His own people and then handed over to the Roman authorities who will treat Him cruelly and crucify Him. However, Jesus assured His disciples that His death was not His final destiny and that on the third day He would be resurrected (Mark 10:33–34).

In a sense, Bartimaeus's blindness is a metaphor that can be applied to all of Chapter 10. In the discussion of divorce in 10:1–12, the Pharisees and the disciples were blind to God's view of the importance of the family. In 10:13–16, the disciples were blind to the significance of children; in 10:17–31, the rich, young ruler and the disciples were blind to the importance of the kingdom; and in 10:32–34 the disciples were blind to the meaning of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (see Luke 18:34).

Immediately before Bartimaeus's account, the disciples again display their blindness in their desire for supremacy in the kingdom of God (Mark 10:35–45). So the healing of

Bartimaeus's blindness is a fitting close to this whole chapter on blindness.

In what ways is spiritual blindness like physical blindness? Where does spiritual blindness leave you?

At-A-Glance

1. Faith Uses Available Resources (Mark 10:46–47)
2. Faith Answers Objections (vv. 48–50)
3. Faith Makes Specific Requests (vv. 51–52)

In Depth

1. Faith Uses Available Resources (Mark 10:46–47)

We do not know if Bartimaeus was expecting Jesus or if he just happened to be in the right place at the right time to exercise his faith. It seems obvious that he knew who Jesus was and had probably heard about His healing powers. Jesus was already known to heal diseases with seemingly no cure, like the deaf and mute man from Decapolis (7:31–37). He had even cured the blindness of another man in Bethsaida (8:22–26).

When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he used his available resources to get Jesus' healing. He could not see, but he could hear. So he used his ears. He could not see, but he could think. So he used his brain to recall Jesus' reputation. He could not see, but he could use his voice. So he cried out loudly, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me" (10:47).

2. Faith Answers Objections (vv. 48–50)

Some people in the crowd tried to quiet Bartimaeus. He was a lowly beggar in their eyes, and Jesus was an important teacher. But Bartimaeus would not be quiet, primarily because he knew that the people who were shushing him

could afford to be quiet because they could see! He continued calling until Jesus responded. When Jesus answers by sending Bartimaeus a call of his own, the blind man immediately tosses his outer garment aside, putting away any hindrance or extra baggage that might slow him from rushing to answer the Master's call.

Even though many on the outskirts of society ask for help, we are often too busy to help them. Praise God that He is so grand and important that He can always make time for the lowly.

Bartimaeus boldly ignored the crowd and sought Jesus. How do you do this in your life?

3. Faith Makes Specific Requests (vv. 51–52)

Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" (v. 51). Brother Bart didn't hem and haw; he said immediately, "I want to see again." Actually, this was Bartimaeus's second request. His first request was for mercy (v. 48). Now that his cry for mercy had caught Jesus' attention, he proceeded to ask for healing.

When we want Jesus' attention, we should not scream about our virtues, talents, resources, or assets. Ask Him for mercy. If He gives you mercy, as He certainly will, He will surely give you everything that goes along with it.

Search the Scriptures

1. What were Bartimaeus's two requests (vv. 47–48, 51)?
2. What was Bartimaeus's response when he received his sight (v. 52)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Are you quick to tell others what the Lord has done for you? Practice telling a story about how God blessed you recently.
2. Do you follow Jesus out of gratitude for what He has done or merely out of religious obligation? Is Christianity just an easy path for you or do you follow it with purpose?

Liberating Lesson

Immediately upon receiving his sight, Bartimaeus follows Jesus. People who were once marginalized by society became powerful witnesses for Jesus after an encounter with Him (Mark 1:45; 5:20; John 4:39–42; 20:18). How do we as the Church uplift those in the margins—the learning challenged, the differently-abled, the disadvantaged—so that they can know the love and power of God? Let us seek to introduce people with both physical and spiritual challenges to Jesus, for Jesus says those who have been forgiven much love much.

Application for Activation

Read today's key verse: "And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight" (Mark 10:51). How would you answer Jesus' question? Pray silently, voicing that desire to God.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

African Study Bible, New Living Translation. Oasis International Limited. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016.

"Biblical Commentary (Bible Study) Mark 10:46–52." Sermonwriter.com. Accessed April 8, 2020.

Life Application Study Bible. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan Publishing House, 2005.

Say It Correctly

Bartimaeus. bar-tih-MAY-us.

Perea. peh-RAY-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Blind Eyes Shall Be Opened
(Isaiah 35:1–6)

TUESDAY

Declare God's Glory Among the Nations!
(Psalm 96)

WEDNESDAY

Glory to God's Name Alone
(Psalm 115:1–3, 9–18)

THURSDAY

Only God Is Good
(Mark 10:17–22)

FRIDAY

Greatness through Servanthood
(Mark 10:42–45)

SATURDAY

Praise the Lord, O My Soul
(Psalm 146)

SUNDAY

Praise God for Healing
(Mark 10:46–52)

Believers Praise God

Bible Background • ACTS 2:32-33, 37-47

Printed Text • ACTS 2:32-33, 37-47 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 134

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives, DISCERN how the Holy Spirit inspires believers to share a life of worship, and PLAN opportunities for people to begin a relationship with Jesus through our ministries.

In Focus

For years, the church had prayed for a new building to house a soup kitchen and beds for the homeless in the community. As head of the homeless ministry, Jessica was devastated by the pastor's decision to divert funds from the new building to missions work in India.

"How could you use the building funds like that? Some of them are not even Christians. Pastor, we need a bigger building. This community deserves our help," Jessica stated.

"We are getting a bigger church every time we save a soul or feed a body. It doesn't matter if it's here at home or throughout the world. Come with us next month and see for yourself," said Pastor Whitaker. Jessica agreed.

One month later, Jessica and the members of her church arrived in Mumbai, India. The riverbanks overflowed, and the city was dirty and desperate. Pastor Whitaker shared the Gospel and held prayer meetings. They passed out medication, prepared meals, and sterilized linens and clothing for people left homeless by the monsoons.

When Jessica returned home, the size of the church building was insignificant. She realized that because of the sacrifices she and the rest of the mission team made, God's Church was increased. The community of faith is much larger than the four walls of her local church body. These people needed help, too.

Are you willing to sacrifice and share for the improvement of the entire church body? What are some elements of what makes a great church?

Keep in Mind

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 2:32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The People, Places, and Times

Pentecost. The Old Testament Feast of Weeks, which occurred on the fiftieth day (seven weeks) after Passover, is called the Pentecost in Greek (meaning "fifty"). A harvest festival, it marked the beginning of the time when the people brought their offerings of firstfruits. Leviticus 23:15–21 provides the most detailed account of the ritual observed during the feast. The observance is also known as the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16) and Day of Firstfruits (Numbers 28:26).

For the church, Pentecost has become a time to celebrate God's bestowal of the gift of the Spirit. It celebrates the birth of the New Testament church when thousands were filled with God's Spirit, the Gospel was proclaimed to every nation, and the first missionaries were anointed for service.

Background

The events in our lesson today take place after Jesus had appeared to the apostles and specifically instructed to wait for the promised Holy Spirit, which would be given to them so they might have effective witnessing. In obedience to Jesus' command, the apostles went to the upper room in Jerusalem and devoted themselves to prayer and supplication.

At-A-Glance

1. The Call to Community (Acts 2:32–33)
2. The Community Forms (vv. 37–43)
3. The Community Grows (vv. 44–47)

In Depth

1. The Call to Community (Acts 2:32–33)

Peter has been giving his audience the full story of God's history-spanning plan of salvation. He concludes with the exciting news, only 50 days old: Jesus Christ is risen, and ascended to glory, power, and honor. The Father gave Him the Spirit to pour out on His followers. This is the explanation for the speaking in tongues that had astonished everyone.

In this explanation, we see that the very basis of Christianity is grounded in community between the Persons of the Trinity. Each has a role, each affirms the others' powers. It is a communion of love that naturally calls others to join in its love.

What is your response to hearing the Good News of vv. 32–33?

2. The Community Forms (vv. 37–43)

After listening to Peter's convicting message, the Scriptures affirm that the people were ready for a change in their lives (v. 37). In essence, they tell Peter, "Whatever that is you have, we want it in our lives today." The apostle tells the people that all they have to do to receive God's power is repent of their sins, receive Jesus Christ as their Savior, and they will receive the precious Holy Spirit.

Many people believe that Peter's words were only applicable to the people whom he addressed. But Peter makes it clear that the promise of God's power is available to all who would believe in Jesus Christ throughout this age ("unto you, and to your children") and the age to come ("to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call"). The Holy Spirit's presence and power for the believer did not cease at Pentecost (Acts 8:5; 10:44–46). The Holy Spirit is the birthright of every true born-again believer in Christ (Joel 2:28; Matthew 3:11; Luke 24:49).

Those in the crowd whose hearts had been "pricked" by Peter's words accepted his call to repentance and were baptized that same day. On the birthday of the New Testament church, 3,000 people were converted to Christ and formed the first Christian community. Once the people had received Peter's word, they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine. It is evident that the people needed to be taught how to live for God and how to effect change in the lives of their community, and they were willing to sit at the apostles' feet to feast on the Word of God.

What keeps the modern church from such diligent fellowship and discipleship in Christ?

3. The Community Grows (vv. 44–47)

The 3,000 new converts joined together with the original 120 believers (Acts 1:15) to form a community of believers who "had all things [in] common" (2:44; 4:32). This meant that everyone in the community was ready and willing to sacrifice for the good of the whole. They shared a commonality of participation, prayer, and purpose. They regarded their material blessings as a means of being a blessing to others. All their possessions, talents, and time were dedicated to furthering the mission of the Church and meeting the needs of the brothers and sisters.

The group continued to meet daily in the Temple and at various homes after the services to share meals and companionship. The table of fellowship provided members of the early church with an opportunity to gather together in small groups and discuss the day's teachings.

As the church was faithful in its mission, God demonstrated His faithfulness to the church. Not only did God continuously provide for the needs of His people, He "added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). The church did its job, and God did His.

What helped the early church grow so quickly?

Search the Scriptures

1. The church took on the responsibility of meeting the material needs of some of its people. How did they finance this ministry and how did they determine what a person received (Acts 2:45)?

2. What words and/or phrases in Acts 2:47 demonstrate the love and unity among the new Christians?

Discuss the Meaning

1. The church assumed the responsibility of meeting the needs of its less fortunate members. Should our modern-day churches assume this responsibility? If so, how should this ministry be funded? Should this ministry be more than just a “giveaway” program? If so, what programs would you suggest?

2. Lifestyle and active evangelism were key elements of the early church. Do you believe that every Christian is called to active evangelism, or are some people called on just to let the light of their lives shine?

Liberating Lesson

During the reconstruction period and through the period of Jim Crow segregation, the church was the spiritual, social, and political center of the Black community. In modern times, the church has become far less influential. What are some of the social and political factors that may have contributed to this decline? What are some of the implications of the church's decline in influence? What can the church do to improve its relevance to Black society? To society in general?

Application for Activation

Spend some time this week contemplating the lives of the early Christians. Think about their devotion to learning doctrine, their commitment to the church, and the willing sacrifices they made for each other. Ask God to point out areas where you and your church may need to improve. Then determine to work on those areas. Be prepared to share your experiences with the class next week.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.

Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.

Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book Company, 1889.

Say It Correctly

Triune. try-YUNE.

Sporadic. spur-AH-dik.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Priestly Kingdom, a Holy Nation
(Exodus 19:1-8)

TUESDAY

Worship God Alone
(Exodus 20:1-6)

WEDNESDAY

When Kindred Live in Unity
(Psalms 133)

THURSDAY

Praise in the Heavenly Community
(Revelation 4)

FRIDAY

The Day of Pentecost
(Acts 2:1-12)

SATURDAY

Jesus Is Lord and Messiah
(Acts 2:22-36)

SUNDAY

A Community of Praise
(Acts 2:37-47)

Notes

Make a Joyful Noise

Bible Background • PSALM 100

Printed Text • PSALM 100 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 66:1-7

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND why and how God is to be worshiped, as found in Psalm 100, APPRECIATE that God is worthy to be praised, and CREATE a psalm of praise for the Lord.

In Focus

As Noah strode forward from the stadium tunnel onto the football field, he resisted the urge to look for his parents in the stands. He needed to put his full focus on the choreography and his positioning in the band formations. The crowd was too big for him to be able to spot Mom and Dad anyway.

He knew exactly where they would be, anyway—in tier 2, section 34, their favorite spot. They would be singing and cheering along with the marching band in the halftime show. Proud alums of the school, Mom and Dad never missed a game and were more than thrilled that Noah chose to go to the same college where they had met and married.

Noah's childhood lessons turned his musical interest in into a passion. His college studies broadened his understanding of how music was constructed, but he already knew instinctively how music worked—how it can change one's mood and buoy the spirit. And there was hardly a greater joy than being on the field with over 200 band members, all polished and precise. The visual elements of that week's show dove-tailed perfectly with the songs.

The drum major blew her whistle, and Noah lifted his trumpet. Then the snare drummers tapped out the roll-off for their first number. Noah felt a happy smile welling up inside him as the players strutted across the field and the crowd—40,000 strong—roared with excitement.

Why is music integral to so many public events and celebrations?

Keep in Mind

“Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” (Psalm 100:3, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Psalm 100:1 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.

2 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

The People, Places, and Times

Gates and Courts. The gates and courts seem to be a reference to the First Temple and its complex built by Solomon (1 Kings 6). Yet there was not a true gate for the complex that could open or close. Instead, the gates seem to be a reference to entering the city of Jerusalem—the city in which the Lord chose to place His name.

Sheep. To this day sheep are a common animal in Israel. They are a commodity for their wool, and lambs are a commodity for their meat.

The simple nature of these flock animals allows them to be a useful analogy for human life in the Scriptures. In Psalm 77:20, the writer recognizes Moses as one who shepherded Israel. False shepherds—false leaders—abounded in Israel and took advantage of God's people (Ezekiel 34:1-6; Jeremiah 23:1-4). The people of Israel are God's flock of sheep who have leaders who fail to tend to them.

In Psalm 23, King David views himself as a sheep before God, his shepherd. More than in any other psalm, one sees here the care the Lord has for His sheep and the great privilege it is to be part of the flock under God's care.

What are some other ways we are like sheep and God is like a shepherd?

Background

Psalm 100 invites God's people to join together in worshiping the Lord. It is both a hymn—a liturgical psalm (or a call to worship)—and a kingship psalm. As is common in such psalms, the people gather in Zion ("gates" are a reference to the city), the city of the Great King.

Three times each year, all of Israel was commanded to gather and feast together (Exodus 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16). The pilgrimages reminded Israel that they were the people of God united by their worship of the one true God. It also served as a reminder that they were looking forward to a day when they would meet God in Zion (Jerusalem) and enthrone Him as King forever. The pilgrimage made them long for their King, as did each call to come worship inside the gates of the Lord.

In what ways does your worship remind you of God's kingship?

At-A-Glance

1. The Call for all the Earth to Enter the Lord's Presence (Psalm 100:1)
2. Scenes of Celebration (vv. 2, 4)
3. Knowledge of the Greatness of God (vv. 3, 5)

In Depth

1. The Call for all the Earth to Enter the Lord's Presence (Psalm 100:1)

This psalm begins with a summons to worship: "Make a joyful noise... come ... enter into his gates... [and] into his courts with praise." These are commands of exhortation, not imperatives. They are not part of the Law (e.g. "do not steal"). Yet the expectation is that the members of Israel will answer the summons with their presence.

The exhortation goes to Israel and the nations. The full earth receives this summons. No one was excluded from this call, just as no one is excluded from the call of the Gospel. This was an Old Covenant call to all to meet with the one true God. Many other psalms of this type have the same call for a corporate body to worship the Lord (e.g., Psalm 46; 95; 124; 135).

Why is it important to gather as a group to worship God instead of worshiping individually?

2. Scenes of Celebration (vv. 2, 4)

"Joyful noise," "gladness," "singing," "thanksgiving," "praise," "thankful," and "bless." The expectation was that the experience in the Temple would be a celebratory meeting with God. This would be a greater celebration than any post-election party for a winning candidate, or any ticker-tape parade for a national sports championship team. This is a call to celebrate the King of all.

Those coming would not need to wait on any musician or priest to worship. They themselves, were exhorted to worship with specific commands.

3. Knowledge of the Greatness of God (vv. 3, 5)

"Know" (v. 3) is the motivation for the celebration in verses 1–2. We worship that we might know Him relationally. The call for Israel

to worship was not detached from personal intimacy with God.

Likewise, "for" (v. 5) introduces the reason for the celebratory acts of verse 4: The Lord is good, His covenantal love is eternally secure, and He is faithful to His covenant people forever despite themselves. God's love and faithfulness are the most paired traits of God praised in the psalms. It is only in knowing God as Creator and Shepherd, as one always good toward us, that our individual hearts will be stirred to celebrate Him. When everyone who has this knowledge comes together to speak, sing, and learn of Him, a celebration of great magnitude should take place.

What characteristics of God draw you to worship Him?

Search the Scriptures

1. What does the psalm writer mean by "come before his presence" (v. 2)?
2. What is the Lord's "mercy" (v. 5) and what does it mean that this mercy is everlasting?

Discuss the Meaning

The Lord intends for worship of Him to begin before we get to His courts and gates. Yet we often are quite casual in our approach to our corporate worship gathering each week. How does our daily interaction with God contribute to how we approach our weekly gathering to Him?

Liberating Lesson

Because of the culture's emphasis on personal comfort and freedom, we carry a strong sense of personal autonomy with us into both our walk with God and our worship of Him. It is common for us to think worship is something that should be guided by preference or feelings rather than being guided by the Scriptures. However, it should not seem surprising that God would dictate to us how to worship Him. By following God's teachings in the psalms, we will worship

in a way that honors Him rather than simply in a way that pleases ourselves.

Application for Activation

Make Saturday evening count by setting aside time to meditate on the Scripture to be preached the following morning (or a few verses of some psalms if the Sunday Scripture passage is unknown). Also try to go to bed early rather than late so that you will be rested enough to get to worship service long before it starts, and so that you can give your fullest bodily attention to worship without fatigue. Pray, too, for the morning service, for all who will participate in making the service honor the Lord, and for you and your family members' hearts to worship in spirit and in truth.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.
Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book Company, 1889.

Say It Correctly

Shema. shuh-MAH.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Praise the Rock of Our Salvation
(Psalm 95)

TUESDAY

Stones Shout Out!
(Luke 19:28, 36-40)

WEDNESDAY

Indescribable and Glorious Joy
(1 Peter 1:3-9)

THURSDAY

Sing to God a New Song
(Psalm 98)

FRIDAY

A Continuous Sacrifice of Praise
(Hebrews 13:12-16)

SATURDAY

Rejoice in God's Mighty Rule
(Psalm 66:1-7)

SUNDAY

Enter God's Courts with Praise
(Psalm 100)

Praise God for Justice and Righteousness

Bible Background • PSALM 9; ECCLESIASTES 3:16–22

Printed Text • PSALM 9:1–12 | Devotional Reading • DEUTERONOMY 10:17–21

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONTRAST God's justice with humanity's injustices, VALUE how God listens and responds to our needs, and PRACTICE God's justice in difficult situations.

In Focus

For years, a group of concerned residents in Rucker Heights fought to remove their complacent village president and his cronies. These officials were re-elected every cycle because no one was willing to put themselves on the line to run against them.

However, this time around, the people had enough. Elder Timothy Shields convened a group of homeowners, generating a groundswell of community engagement and activism. From Elder Shields' example, other leaders emerged so that for the next election cycle, they came together, raised money, and campaigned for change. The president and his cronies had deep pockets, but it was no match for the will of the people. Elder Shields galvanized the community.

As a result, not only did the community rid themselves of an ineffective board of trustees, but they also saw a turnover in leadership for their school boards. The people took back their community, and surrounding communities welcomed the opportunity to partner for the growth of the region.

The media took notice of the change in the Rucker Heights community. In an interview, Elder Shields said, "God is a God of justice. When people with one heart and agenda come together, there is nothing we cannot accomplish with His help. It was a long hard road, but we knew this day would come. We had to be the change we wanted to see."

Why is it important for Christians to lead others in believing God's justice will prevail?

Keep in Mind

"And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness." (Psalm 9:8, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Psalm 9:1 I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works.

2 I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High.

3 When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence.

4 For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right.

5 Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever.

6 O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them.

7 But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment.

8 And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness.

9 The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

10 And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.

11 Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings.

12 When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble.

The People, Places, and Times

Psalms. Music played an important role in the worship practices of ancient Israel. The psalms were Israel's hymns. Unlike most of our modern western poetry and songs which are written in rhyme or meter, Old Testament poetry and songs were based on a parallelism of thought in which the second (or succeeding) line(s) of poetry essentially restates, contrasts with, or progressively completes the first. All three forms of parallelism characterize the psalter.

Concerning authorship of the Psalms, the superscriptions ascribe 73 psalms to David, 12 to Asaph (a musically and prophetically gifted Levite), 10 to the sons of Korah (a musically gifted family), 2 to Solomon, 1 to Heman, 1 to Ethan, and 1 to Moses. Fifty psalms are anonymous. Biblical and historical references suggest that David, Hezekiah, and Ezra were each involved at different stages in collecting the psalms for corporate use in Jerusalem.

Background

The Psalms were the soundtrack of David's life, and he left them for generations to come to laud over the greatness of God (Psalm 145:4). Psalms 9 and 10 are considered one song, a single acrostic poem using every letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which is believed to support memorization. Together these two psalms express the highs, lows, and highs again of David's posture of trust in God's ability to execute power and justice. This particular psalm is not attributed to a specific event in David's life, but he uses it to lead the worship of the Most High God. David provides the tune for the psalm "to be sung to the tune 'Death of the Son,'" which is believed to be a popular composition of his day. This psalm, as several other psalmists also do in 54 other songs throughout the book, is specially dedicated to the choir director.

What songs do you sing to praise God's justice?

At-A-Glance

1. A Reason to Praise (Psalm 9:1–6)
2. A Reason to Believe (vv. 7–12)

In Depth

1. A Reason to Praise (Psalm 9:1–6)

Opening with adoration is a common theme in the psalms of David. David was a skillful musician and writer who spent intimate time in God's presence. In this hymnal expression of thanksgiving and praise, David opens by acknowledging God's power, which is how he ended the previous song (Psalm 8:9; 9:1–2). He will praise with his whole heart, declare all of His wonderful works, and make his boast in Him.

David then illustrates the activity of God on the earth and why God is to be praised. He experienced numerous victories that he declared were given by the hand of the Lord. In David's lifetime, after numerous battles, the nation of Israel gained prominence because of God's defense and David's submission. We can learn from David how God, in His righteous judgment, administers justice and defends what is right. David reminds his hearers that God upholds and defends His people against wickedness. God is so complete in dealing out vindication that He erases the very memory of those who come in opposition to His people.

How can you call to mind the activity of God in your life as an expression of praise and thanksgiving?

2. A Reason to Believe (vv. 7–12)

David magnifies that the Lord sits on the throne and that He is established forever in righteous judgment. As owner and possessor of the heavens and the earth (Psalm 24:1), God is the one qualified to decide how His creations should live. Further, David expresses that God,

without partiality, executes justice toward all the people of the earth with honesty and integrity. He is a shelter for those experiencing trouble and oppression. Here is a promise Christians can stand on: God will answer those who seek after Him. We can trust God in His timing to bring an expected end when we come to Him in prayer and a believing heart (Jeremiah 29:12–13).

David calls on those assembled in worship to sing and proclaim God's activity and deeds, for He is tuned into their cry. The Lord vindicates those who are afflicted and will not forget those who caused harm to the ones He loves.

How can you use the Word of God as your reason to believe in God's timing to dispense justice?

Search the Scriptures

1. How does David approach God in worship and why is it important (Psalm 9:1–2)?
2. How does God rule the nations (vv. 7–8)?
3. How does God care for the troubled and oppressed (vv. 9, 12)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. As we reflect on the history of Black people in America, how did enslaved people hope in God's justice and righteousness to persevere through adversity?
2. What artifacts can we pass on to the next generation so that they trust in God's care for the oppressed and troubled?

Liberating Lesson

"Deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome someday" was the mantra of the Civil Rights Movement. To overcome is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process of transformation. To actualize systemic and systematic change, each generation must pick up the mantle to move toward a just society.

David used our text and other psalms to remind the people of God's faithfulness, power,

justice, and righteousness to keep them going in the times of opposition. He turns the people's attention to God's ability to deliver, for He sits on the throne administering justice to those who trust Him. The call to action for this generation and generations to come is to be God's hands and feet in fighting injustice for the long haul.

Application for Activation

Seek the heart of God for what He wants to do in your community. How can you, your church, or a team of community members reflect God's heart for the troubled and oppressed? Look for opportunities to provide someone or a group of people with hope in God's ability to administer justice on their behalf. You could meet a need, help solve a problem, or hold those in power accountable to be honorable in their decisions on behalf of many. Get involved in a civic or charitable effort that allows His power to work through you and bring Him glory.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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- Zodhiates, Spiros. *Key Word Study Bible King James Version*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1991. 1607, 1632, 1652.

Say It Correctly

Satest. SAT-est.
Psalter. SALL-ter.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Where Is Justice?
(Ecclesiastes 3:16–22)

TUESDAY

A Prayer for Justice
(Psalm 7:8–17)

WEDNESDAY

Let Justice Roll Down
(Amos 5:21–25)

THURSDAY

God's Servant Proclaims Justice
(Matthew 12:14–21)

FRIDAY

God Has Executed Judgment
(Psalm 9:13–20)

SATURDAY

Jesus Pronounces Release and Recovery
(Luke 4:14–21)

SUNDAY

God Judges with Righteousness
(Psalm 9:1–12)

Notes

Give Thanks for Deliverance

Bible Background • PSALM 107

Printed Text • PSALM 107:1-9, 39-43 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 68:1-6

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE the importance of having a relationship with God, the Deliverer, PLACE value on the role of giving thanks to God, and PRAY for those who need God's deliverance.

In Focus

"Thank You, Heavenly Father," Dorcas said as she rested on the gurney.

Dorcas was so weak she could barely raise her voice above a whisper, so she whispered. It was difficult to collect her thoughts after the emergency surgery, but the one thing she knew was that she was grateful to be alive. Since that morning, she had been gasping for air as if she had run a marathon, even though she hadn't exerted herself more than she would have at any other time.

Even so, it wasn't until Dorcas had lunch with her best girlfriend Sylvia, and her back started hurting, that she called her doctor. When Dr. Patterson heard her description of how she was feeling—like the air was being squeezed out of her from her upper back—he told her to go to the hospital ASAP! When she came to the hospital, her neck was in terrible pain and she didn't understand why. It seemed like within moments of entering the doors, Dorcas was in an operating room.

Dorcas was woozy now, and could barely focus on what the emergency room physician was telling her—about the cardiac arrest she had suffered, about the symptoms that women can have that men don't, about the arterial blockage that was uncovered and removed, about the stent that was put in. The only thing on Dorcas' mind was "Thank You, Heavenly Father," and she said it again and again.

What stories can you tell about when the Lord has delivered you from great trouble or hardship?

Keep in Mind

"Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses." (Psalm 107:6, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Psalm 107:1 O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;

3 And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.

4 They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.

5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.

6 Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.

7 And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.

8 Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

9 For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

39 Again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow.

40 He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way.

41 Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock.

42 The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth.

43 Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.

The People, Places, and Times

Composition of Psalms. The songs in Psalms were written over a period of 1,000 years by various authors including prophets (Moses), kings (David and Solomon), and Levites (Asaph and the sons of Korah). The first psalm composed is Psalm 90 and was written by Moses around 1400 BC after leading Israel out of Egyptian bondage. One of the last psalms to be written was Psalm 89, authored by Ethan around 400 BC after Israel returned from Babylonian captivity. Psalm 107 is most likely written after the Israelites' return from exile as well (v. 3).

Background

Psalm 107 voices examples of God's steadfastness. Written when the Israelites were permitted to return and resettle in their homelands of Canaan, they were likely filled with excitement, having endured the onerous Babylonian exile. No longer in captivity, the Israelites had been redeemed. They were

experiencing true freedom coupled with the ability to finally worship God for His ongoing steadfastness toward them. Some believe the setting of this psalm is at a festival in the Temple in Jerusalem.

What prompted the writing of Psalm 107?

At-A-Glance

1. Praise the Lord (Psalm 107:1-3)
2. Love in Action (vv. 4-9)
3. Recognize God's Steadfastness (vv. 39-43)

In Depth

1. Praise the Lord (Psalm 107:1-3)

The psalm begins by admonishing everyone to give thanks and praise because their period of exile was finally over. The psalmist extends an invitation for all who have been redeemed to

give thanks. His reasoning behind such a praise break: the Lord is good, and His steadfast love endures forever. Even though the Israelites had been in enemy or Babylonian territory, God rescued them. Dispersed throughout the four compass points—north, south, east, and west—now they could reassemble out of those foreign countries and return to Canaan. Therefore the psalmist admonished the Israelites that this was enough to offer thanks. They know firsthand how good God has been.

Why must we learn to always give thanks to God, regardless of our situation?

2. Love in Action (vv. 4–9)

The psalmist takes the reader on a picturesque journey to showcase God's steadfast love. First, he highlights God's goodness to a group of weary wanderers crossing through the desert. Lost, famished, and parched, they resign to do what costs them nothing: pray. This prayer is spoken four times in the psalm, a refrain that should come more quickly to the lips of all God's people (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28). They cry out to the Lord and He not only hears them, but also delivers them out of their distress. Then, He provides them with a direct route to a safe city where they could settle, Jerusalem. God is good to them. Their every need is supplied. The same God who leads them also feeds them! The Israelites give thanks to the Lord for His steadfast love and His wonderful deeds toward them.

How do we show God we love Him through our actions?

3. Recognize God's Steadfastness (vv. 39–43)

As the old adage goes, "What goes up must come down." The psalmist concentrates on the reverse angle of God's providence. Those who rise despitefully will be humbled. By "oppression, affliction, and sorrow" (v. 39), humiliation is guaranteed. Those who exalt themselves and

demean others will be brought low themselves and will wander aimlessly in waste.

Equally, they will see the lowly advance in all ways over them. Those who were once afflicted will be rewarded with deliverance far away from evil's way. God will aid them in establishing families of their own, which is viewed as the ultimate blessing during biblical times (Exodus 1:1–21; Psalm 127:5). The haughty will be made silent and envy their good fortune. This is one example of God's divine providence. He does this to convince the wise to heed and to rely on Him. His steadfast love is for all who are willing to rely upon, repeatedly call on, and abide in Him.

In what ways has God shown His steadfast love in your life?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why should the Israelites offer thanks and praise to God (Psalm 107:1–3)?
2. Why is it important to understand affliction does not last forever (v. 41)?

Discuss the Meaning

Ecclesiastes 1 tells us there is a time for everything. It is important for believers to know that affliction does not last always. After years in exile, the Israelites were delivered. What a reason to praise God! Why is it important to have a relationship with God, the Deliverer?

Liberating Lesson

In a world where confusion and calamity reign, our hopefulness is oftentimes deflated. Imagine spending 30 years in a 5-by-8 foot cell for a crime you did not commit. That was Anthony Ray Hinton's story. With all evidence showing his innocence, Hinton was still jailed for a double-murder. It was not until he connected with Attorney Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative that his plight changed. They were able to prove the evidence against Hinton was incorrect. Hinton persisted in his faith and

was awarded complete exoneration. His reunion with his family was filled with shouts of, “Thank you, Lord!” Remain resilient and thankful!

Application for Activation

Prayer is one of the most powerful and effective resources believers have. From a monetary vantage point, though, it costs us nothing to execute. Pray for individuals who need deliverance. Like the Israelites, God can deliver them too, even from self-made troubles. From an addiction, abuse, or an attitude, God can set any form of captive free. If a relationship or re-dedication is required, believe for an encounter with Jesus, the ultimate Deliverer. Identify one person, whether you know their name or not, and pray for God’s deliverance.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Benson, Joseph. *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*. Omaha, NE: Patristic Publishing, 2019.
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Say It Correctly

Asaph. AY-saff.
Korah. KORE-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Delivered from Hunger and Thirst
(Psalm 107:1-9)

TUESDAY

Delivered from Darkness and Gloom
(Psalm 107:10-22)

WEDNESDAY

Delivered from Storms
(Psalm 107:23-32)

THURSDAY

Delivered through Jesus Christ
(Ephesians 1:3-14)

FRIDAY

Delivered from Sin
(Ephesians 2:1-10)

SATURDAY

Delivered and Reconciled
(Ephesians 2:11-22)

SUNDAY

Delivered by God's Steadfast Love
(Psalm 107:33-43)

Notes

The Joy of Worship

Bible Background • PSALM 84

Printed Text • PSALM 84 | Devotional Reading • 2 CHRONICLES 29:25–30

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DISCOVER why the psalmist expressed joy in worship, FEEL the joy of worship, and PROCLAIM the living presence of God throughout creation.

In Focus

“Make a left turn up here,” Mardelle told the driver.

It had been nearly 40 years since she had been back to the family home in South Carolina. After college, she got married to Theodore, who soon became a Foreign Service Officer for the U.S. State Department.

Over their life together, Theodore had been given multiple postings outside the United States, all over Africa, Central America, and South America. They had only a few short years together after Theodore retired and passed away, Mardelle decided to return to her hometown and live in her parents’ house.

She found herself wide-eyed on the way from the airport, taking in all the ways the neighborhoods had changed. But she was happy to see the things that were still standing, unchanged by time—the fountain in the square across from city hall, the restaurant where Theodore had proposed to her, the middle school where she first developed her love of French, which served her well in several of the places they had stayed.

And now, a warm, joyful feeling washed over Mardelle as she heard leaves crunching under the tires as the car made the turn onto the path leading to her family’s house. Ahead, she could see the gabled roof, the bay window at the front, and the wide wraparound porch. Mardelle breathed a word of thanks to God for all that had led to this moment, and a happy welcome home.

Where have you felt most at home? Have you ever had that feeling during worship?

Keep in Mind

“Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.”
(Psalm 84:4, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Psalm 84:1 How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!

2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.

4 Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.

6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

7 They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.

9 Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.

10 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

The People, Places, and Times

Korah. The sons of Korah (who wrote this psalm and others) were the remnant left after their ancestor was destroyed for rebellion against Moses. The rebellion of Korah angered the Lord, and He caused the Earth to open and consume Korah and those that rebelled with him (Numbers 16:1–33). Then fire was sent to consume 250 men. The children of Korah, however, survived the judgment of God (Numbers 26:9–11). This remnant and their descendants proved faithful to God and are listed among their fellow Levites in various positions at the Tabernacle and Temple, often as singers or instrumentalists (1 Chronicles 6, 23–26).

Background

The sons of Korah were porters (1 Chronicles 9:17) and musicians (2 Chronicles 20:19) for the priests. These positions meant that they dwelt in God's house. This physical closeness to God's house prompted their love and desire of God in ways that others may not have felt. The sons of

Korah long for the Lord's house because they long for the presence of the Lord. Those who can live in God's house should always respond in praise because nothing is better than being in God's presence. There is joy experienced in worship in God's presence, and the benefits of joyfully worshiping God are immeasurable.

At-A-Glance

1. The Tabernacle of Worship (Psalm 84:1–4)
2. The Valley of Baca (vv. 5–7)
3. Reverential Worship (vv. 8–9)
4. Joy in Worship (vv. 10–12)

In Depth

1. The Tabernacle of Worship (Psalm 84:1–4)

The Tabernacle was a sacred place where God manifested His presence and communicated His will. The physical Tabernacle of God is

“amiable” or beloved because God dwells there (v. 1), and the psalmists’ souls long to unite with God. They so intently desire the courts of the Lord, that they are weakened. Their committed love for God is passionate, so their flesh cries out for God. There is an insatiable desire to dwell in the house of God, as a bird desires a nest (v. 3). The Tabernacle of God is an honored place. Those who dwell in the presence of God should perpetually praise, worship, and adore God (v. 4).

How does your desire for the presence of God compare to the psalmists’?

2. The Valley of Baca (vv. 5–7)

Our definition of blessed should align with the Word of God. We are blessed only in God. The valley of Baca is the place of weeping or a valley of tears. Finding strength in God and having a heart fixed on God is the source of the greatest blessing (v. 5). Even in sorrow and times of weeping, which we all experience in life, with God those places are made easier (v. 6). Faithful believers in God will experience the journey and grow from strength to strength (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18). We all become stronger as we grow with God, never weaker (v. 7).

In your valley of tears, how did you keep your heart fixed on God?

3. Reverential Worship (vv. 8–9)

Recognizing God in all of His splendor should dictate how we approach Him. The reverence for God as the “LORD God of hosts” indicates the writers’ honor for God being Lord over heaven and Earth’s armies. God is so vast, yet the psalmists approach God requesting attention to their prayer (v. 8). In the midst of His sovereign rule, they desire God’s ear to be attentive to them. They recognize God is their shield and protector (v. 9). We want God to look upon us when we call to Him. We must give humble attention to the majesty of God in the

midst of our prayer requests. God is attracted to our reverential worship.

How do you approach God in reverential worship?

4. Joy in Worship (vv. 10–12)

Any day in God’s presence is more precious than a thousand days anywhere else (v. 10). Time with God should be the most dedicated and valued of all the time we have. No time on Earth is more valuable. Our time should not be more concentrated on temporal moments than moments with eternal significance. The Lord our God is both our guiding light and our protector (v. 11). God gives us both grace and glory. He guarantees that we have grace in difficult times and glory in times of success in Him (v. 11). As God’s grace and glory is given to us, we are compelled to walk uprightly. And as we walk uprightly, God bestows wonderful things upon us (v. 11). When we trust God, we are blessed and have everything we need (v. 12).

How have God’s grace and glory caused you to walk uprightly?

Search the Scriptures

1. How did your desire for God’s presence change at your conversion (Psalm 84:2)?
2. Differentiate the respect for God’s Tabernacle and Temple, and the respect for God’s house now (v. 4).

Discuss the Meaning

1. How does the reverential worship of the psalmist impact your thoughts of expressing worship currently?
2. How do personal views of God impact how people embrace time spent in the sanctuary?

Liberating Lesson

Churches, worship settings, and liturgical styles are changing. By following what’s trending or what might appeal to multiple generations,

we can find ourselves compromising the tangible presence of God. Worship is a lifestyle, though, and our lifestyle of worship should be reverential. Time spent with God impacts our lives. Rationed time in God's presence hinders the grace and glory we receive from dwelling in God's presence. When insatiability for God wanes, so does personal worship. We must revive our craving to worship God; it is the catalyst for revival in the global Church.

Application for Activation

Social Media. Family Gatherings. Work and domestic obligations. These often compete with time in the presence of God. The psalmists longed to be in the house of the Lord; the absence of God's presence weakened them. Consider your time. Consider your ways. How much does your soul long for God's presence? Has your longing of worship grown cold? What actions must be taken to return to worship in God's presence?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.
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Say It Correctly

Selah. SAY-lah.
Baca. baw-KAW.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Has Done Great Things
(Psalm 126)

TUESDAY

Joy Fulfilled in Love
(John 15:9–17)

WEDNESDAY

God's Joy is Your Strength
(Nehemiah 8:9–12)

THURSDAY

Joy Fulfilled in Christ's Sacrifice
(Philippians 2:1–11)

FRIDAY

Rejoice in the Lord Always
(Philippians 4:4–9)

SATURDAY

Fullness of Joy
(Psalm 16)

SUNDAY

How Lovely is God's Dwelling Place
(Psalm 84)

Notes

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)

Focal Verses

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.

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*, tseh-lah-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:

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Say It Correctly

Timbrel. TIM-brul.
Yom Kippur. YOM ki-POOR.

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)

All People Praise God

Bible Background • REVELATION 7:9-17

Printed Text • REVELATION 7:9-17 | Devotional Reading • REVELATION 1:1-8

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will UNDERSTAND how God's salvation and justice for all people inspires praise and worship; EMBRACE the significance of praising God in unity; and RESPOND to God's love, goodness, and grace with joy and exaltation.

In Focus

"I hate you, Mom!" Seventeen-year-old Curtis shouted as he slammed the door behind him. Patricia sank down in a kitchen chair, too weary to engage in another battle with her headstrong teenager. Her head was throbbing, and her heart was aching. First, her husband had lost his job. Then, her mother was diagnosed with cancer. And now, her son was rebelling against everything he had been taught.

Whom could she call? Where could she go? In a panic as she paced the floor, she called Sister Gladys from church.

Gladys listened to the whole rant and worry before saying, "Yep. That sounds about right. Have you tried praising God?"

"Oh, I've been praying..." Patricia said.

"No, no, no, not praying. Praising! Praise Him for being with you in these trials."

Patricia stopped in her pacing around the kitchen, and began to think back over the last few years of her life. She had been through many difficult times before. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. God had been with her, helping her through all of those times. Patricia's heart lifted as she remembered God's faithfulness. She could trust Him to do what He said He would do.

How do we find the faith to trust God in difficult times? When we remember God's track record of grace and mercy, our faith is strengthened, giving us the courage to trust Him again. In times of trouble, we can count on God to keep His promises.

Keep in Mind

"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

(from Revelation 7:14, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Revelation 7:9** After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The People, Places, and Times

Authorship. The author of Revelation identifies himself as “John” (1:4). Most of the early church scholars identified this “John” as the apostle John, son of Zebedee and brother of James. John, the writer of Revelation, was exiled to the island of Patmos as a consequence for spreading the Word of God and testifying to the existence and ministry of Jesus Christ. It was during this time of exile that he received the vision from God, the “revelation,” which he faithfully recorded according to Jesus’ instruction and for future generations (1:11).

Living Water. The multitude will enjoy eternal blessings, including “living fountains of waters” (7:17). “Living” water is water that is not stagnant; it is flowing from some source such as a spring or a river. It is constantly being renewed. Spiritually speaking, Jesus is the source of “living water” to those who are believers. When it is the right time, this living

water will flow through the world, cleansing it (see Isaiah 35:5–10; Zechariah 14:20–21).

Compare and contrast these “living fountains of waters” (Revelation 7:17) with David’s “still waters” (Psalm 23:2).

Background

In Revelation 5, John saw God holding a scroll that was sealed with seven seals. Jesus, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” was the only one in heaven who was worthy to open the seals (5:5). Each time Jesus opened one of the seals, a corresponding judgment was visited upon the earth. Revelation 7 opens with four angels holding back the wind, signaling an interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. The events of our text today concerning the “great multitude” (7:9) take place during this lull.

At-A-Glance

1. The Great Multitude
(Revelation 7:9–10)
2. The Great Choir (vv. 11–12)
3. The Great Promises (vv. 13–17)

In Depth

1. The Great Multitude (Revelation 7:9–10)

John sees a new scene before him: a “great multitude” of people—so many that no one could count them (v. 9). They are of all different races, different cultures, and different languages. Nevertheless, all of these people have much in common with one another. All are wearing the white robes of the redeemed, waving the palm branches of the victorious, crying out: “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (v. 10).

In ancient times, dusty streets and manual labor mandated sturdy, functional clothing, not something that would show dirt quickly. This meant white garments were reserved for special occasions such as religious ceremonies and celebrations (2 Chronicles 5:12; Ecclesiastes 9:8). Festive palm branches were waved in conjunction with singing hymns and psalms, usually to celebrate a victory, but also during the reading of certain portions of Scripture and during feast days at the Tabernacle.

What would a modern crowd wear or wave to show celebration for God?

2. The Great Choir (vv. 11–12)

Joining in the praises of the great multitude are the rest of God’s heavenly inhabitants—the angels, elders, and the “four beasts” (Revelation 7:11). These heavenly beings are constantly around the throne, worshiping and singing praise to God. In response to the worship of the great multitude, this heavenly choir leads the

inhabitants of the throne room in a doxology, consisting of seven specific attributes of God and beginning and ending with an “amen” (v. 12). According to some scholars, there being seven items on this list implies their praise is complete or perfect.

3. The Great Promises (vv. 13–17)

During the great praise celebration around the throne, one of the elders explains that these are God’s redeemed who have overcome. They have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, all of their sin washed away. They remained faithful through great tribulation and trials (vv. 13–14). Because of this, they would now receive eternal rewards.

They forever enjoy the presence of God. Jesus, the Lamb of God, will be our Shepherd. He will lead us to those springs of living water—His very life, flowing through us. And there will be no more cause to mourn (v. 17). God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. What joy! Our God loves us with an everlasting love! And because God keeps His promises, we have the courage to be faithful to a faithful God.

What are some rewards mentioned throughout Scripture for those who overcome trials in God’s name?

Search the Scriptures

1. John saw a “great multitude” standing before the throne. What was the multitude doing (Revelation 7:9–10)?
2. Who else was standing around the throne besides the multitude (v. 11)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. The great multitude was enthusiastically worshiping God around the throne after coming through great trials and tribulation. How can their example help us live the life to which God has called each one of us?
2. The angels, elders, and creatures sang a doxology, ascribing praise to God in seven

different ways. What are some specific aspects of God's nature for which Christians should praise Him? Why should we do this?

Liberating Lesson

Many people in our world today are concerned about the future. They wonder and worry about the economy, the environment, world peace, and their own families and friends. Christians are not excluded from the troubles and trials of this fallen, flawed world in which we live. But we have what the rest of the world does not—we have hope. Because of God's record of faithfulness in His Word, and to us personally, we have hope to face life's uncertainties.

Application for Activation

We, too, face these same trials in our own lives as believers. Satan wages a war against every person who chooses to follow Jesus Christ as Lord. We may not face an executioner's sword, but we will be tested and tried as we live out our lives of service to God. How can we worship God in the middle of a difficult, pain-filled situation?

The key is this: God is always faithful to His own. When we are faced with an untenable situation, we must look back to what God has already done on our behalf. When we start to meditate on God's faithfulness, we will begin to feel our faith rise to meet the challenge of the day. Keep a journal to aid you in remembering and rejoicing in God's faithfulness to you personally.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.
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Say It Correctly

Patmos. **PAT**-moce.
Ishmael. **ISH**-may-el.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

May God's Ways Be Known
(Psalm 67)

TUESDAY

The Nations Flock to Mount Zion
(Isaiah 2:1-5)

WEDNESDAY

Make Disciples of All Nations
(Matthew 28:16-20)

THURSDAY

Gentiles Seek the Lord
(Zechariah 8:18-23)

FRIDAY

All the Nations Will Glorify God
(Psalm 86:1-11)

SATURDAY

God's Servants Sealed
(Revelation 7:1-8)

SUNDAY

Multitudes Praise God
(Revelation 7:9-17)

Notes

Praise for God's Eternal Reign

Bible Background • REVELATION 11

Printed Text • REVELATION 11:15–19 | Devotional Reading • REVELATION 1:9–17

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will **DEFINE** the nature of God's reign for eternity; **REFLECT** on how God's eternal reign affects our faith; and **ENGAGE** in activities that reflect the sovereignty of God in healthy, powerful, and transforming ways.

In Focus

There was a lot of buzz in the halls; the merger had been publicly announced, and the company's new owner was visiting each of the recently acquired subsidiaries. Today, he was in town to meet the staff at this site.

Phil tried to concentrate on the report he was writing on a looming deadline, but he had to stop. An announcement came instructing everyone to go to the large multipurpose room for a question-and-answer session.

At the front of the room, Phil saw the division vice president looking both grim and relieved. Grim because financial pressures had made the company vulnerable to the takeover, but relieved because the new owning company had a track record of adding resources to help its acquisitions grow.

For his part, Phil liked where he worked; the job fulfilled him professionally and offered time to continue his outside interests, like volunteering at his church's food pantry and singing with the choir. He had left his previous job because it didn't respect his need to devote time to serve the Lord through these activities. But this new company had a reputation for honoring its employees' work-life balance—a directive from the top.

When the new owner entered the room, the vice president stood and applauded, leading the group of employees to do likewise. It was a new day at the company, and Phil smiled with hope that it would be a better one.

When have things worried you, but then turned out for the better?

Keep in Mind

"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." (from Revelation 11:15, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Revelation 11:15** And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,

17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O LORD God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

The People, Places, and Times

The Trumpet. In this section of Revelation 11, an angel sounds a trumpet and the ongoing worship around the throne enters a different phase. The sounding of the trumpet first represents God's judgment (Revelation 8:6–13). In ancient times, the trumpet would sound to call the Israelites to order and draw their attention to what may be happening at the Temple. There is even a Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23–25). The blowing of the trumpet is a signal to draw attention to God. First, His holiness, His victory, His liberty, and His guidance are all acknowledged by the trumpet. Then, of course any time there is an acknowledgment of God, there must be praise!

What are some of the things that we see or hear, that immediately call us to worship?

Background

While many traditions have encouraged a reaction of fear of this book, its actual purpose is not to elicit fear, but rather to incite an unadulterated and unhindered worship to Almighty God. The Book of Revelation largely tells the drama of the completion of God's plan

played out in three separate acts: Act I featuring seals being opened, Act II featuring trumpets heralding the arrival of God's eternal kingdom, and Act III featuring bowls of judgment on those who reject God. Each act contains songs celebrating the action. Revelation 11 describes the action ending Act II, the blowing of the seventh trumpet.

In verse 16 we see the four and twenty elders giving worship to God, their consecrated purpose. Not only is their position notable for seniority and designation, but the level of their praise is so intent that it sets a high standard for anyone endeavoring to attain position within the contemporary terrestrial church. Leadership is not about the robes, titles, or positions. Leadership is ultimately about worship and providing an example of complete devotion to God.

At-A-Glance

1. The Worship (Revelation 11:15–18)
2. The Wonder (v. 19)

In Depth

1. The Worship (Revelation 11:15–18)

Who are these four and twenty elders? How were they selected for their choice roles in the holiest arena, serving solely to honor, worship and adore God? This is the beauty of the Revelation. While scholars and skeptics alike may dither about the individual identities of each being that is presented here, the point is not who they are, but who God is. Whether beast, elder, or angel, their purpose is to acknowledge God, exemplifying what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Their worship begins with thanksgiving. They honor the eternal God, and they submit themselves as subject to God's judgment. They also recognize that the wicked works of this world may seem to have success for a time, but they confirm that God has the final say. This worship is not only intense, it is thorough.

Why do the elders praise God for dealing out deadly judgments?

2. The Wonder (v. 19)

In our time, extremes in weather are usually measured for their disruption to the normal flow of activities. The idea of great lightnings, thunder, earthquakes, and hail can be frightening, inconvenient, and might even ultimately prove disastrous to human or financial collateral. Yet, this worship of God precedes an eruption of what appears to be harsh weather. This is not, however, the purpose.

By recognizing God as almighty, eternal, and all powerful, the elders actually have invoked God to demonstrate His authority over all creation. Who can make lightning but God? Who can move the earth and the sky, and wring from them all their treasures? Echoing scenes from the Psalms (Psalm 96–98), John's report covers any questions on whether God is

confined to heaven or restricted on earth. He is neither. He alone is God!

When have you seen evidence of God's miraculous power in your life?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why do the elders give thanks to God at this moment (Revelation 11:17)?
2. Who will be rewarded? Who will be destroyed (v. 18)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What are some examples of the angel's trumpet today, things that draw our attention back to God (Revelation 11:15)?
2. Why did the reveal of the Ark of the Covenant spark such an explosive reaction from the elements of nature (v. 19)?

Liberating Lesson

With so many people trying to fight systemic racism, generational poverty, and mass incarceration, it can be discouraging to see little progress being made. Worry and helplessness can distract us from the good news that in the end, God will bring ultimate justice. Despite what may make noise and distract us from time to time, we can be sure that only God will reign in the end. Better to start our worship now rather than to wait.

Application for Activation

We know that the powers of evil will attempt to subvert the work of God's kingdom, waging a losing battle against Him. However, we also know that only God through Christ can bring eternal peace. Believers await a time at the end of this age when evil will no longer exist, and the faithfulness of Christ's followers will be rewarded. Until that day, we must work to make God's will be done on earth as it is in His heavenly kingdom.

Begin by seeking new ways and reasons to worship God. He has proven Himself worthy in the past, and continues to do so today. If we are truly committed to exercising a lifestyle of praise and adoration to God, this world had better watch out for the worshipers!

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.

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Say It Correctly

Terrestrial. tuh-RESS-tree-al.

Enoch. EE-nok.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Clap Your Hands, All You Peoples
(Psalm 47)

TUESDAY

An Everlasting Kingdom
(Daniel 4:34-37)

WEDNESDAY

Glory to God Now and Forever
(Jude 1:20-25)

THURSDAY

The Lord is King Forever
(Psalm 10:12-18)

FRIDAY

God's Faithful Witnesses
(Revelation 11:3-10)

SATURDAY

The Lord is Robed in Majesty
(Psalm 93)

SUNDAY

A Crescendo of Praise
(Revelation 11:11-19)

Rejoicing in Heaven

Bible Background • REVELATION 19

Printed Text • REVELATION 19:1-8 | Devotional Reading • REVELATION 5:1-14

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DISCUSS believers' understanding of the implications of God's judgment, BELIEVE that God's judgment is inclusive of God's justice and mercy, and ENJOY the love of Christ for all.

In Focus

Odetta fingered the prayer beads wrapped around her wrist as she looked at the charging documents one more time. She had read them numerous times over the past several months. Indeed, she had drafted them, meticulously, making certain that each charge was supported by more than enough facts, evidence, and testimony to prove the allegations of a criminal conspiracy. But she remembered something she learned in school about writing, something that had served her well even after she went to college, graduate school, and law school: Explain things well, because the reader can't ask you questions.

Odetta knew the defendant sitting across the courtroom was responsible for a multitude of bad acts. She knew it was her responsibility as state's attorney, representing the people, to bring him to account. Slowly, firmly, deliberately, day after day during this trial, she laid out the state's case, making sure all of the jurors could be as certain in their minds as she was in hers that this danger to the community needed to be removed, for the safety and betterment of all. And as she thumbed through the folder and scanned the charging documents one last time, she breathed a quick prayer, as she always did, for the Lord's justice to be served, quickly and fairly.

"The prosecution rests, your honor."

Can we trust God to propagate justice in the world? Or is His justice primarily to be served at the end of days?

Keep in Mind

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." (Revelation 19:7, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Revelation 19:1** And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:

2 For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

3 And again they said, Alleluia And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

The People, Places, and Times

Bride. The imagery of the bride is used widely in the Bible as a description of the people of God. In the Old Testament, the prophets presented Israel (the Old Testament church) as a bride who had committed repeated adulteries (Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 3). The prophets also proclaimed that God was faithful to His unfaithful bride and would restore her (Jeremiah 33:10–11; Isaiah 61:10; 62:5). In the Book of Revelation, bride imagery is used often of the Church (the New Testament Israel) and her relationship to Christ. The bride belongs to Christ, who is the Bridegroom (John 3:29). In Revelation 21, the great wedding is portrayed with the Church prepared for her Bridegroom (vv. 2, 9).

Background

All of Revelation 18 is about the fall and destruction of Babylon. Throughout Revelation, John uses Babylon as emblematic of all evil empires, powers, and people. John's immediate audience in Revelation was the faithful Christ followers of his day, being persecuted and

marginalized by the Roman Empire. Here in Revelation 19, John gives us a window into a future event in heaven where a "great multitude" is gathered in worship and praise of God for what He has done for them, and what He has done to those who have done evil.

What systems and empires today act against God's people as Babylon and Rome did?

At-A-Glance

1. The Demise of the Prostitute (Revelation 19:1–3)
2. The Beautiful Bride (vv. 4–8)

In Depth

1. The Demise of the Prostitute (Revelation 19:1–3)

God's people in heaven praise God and worship Him for having brought judgment and destruction on Babylon, "the great prostitute" (v. 2, NLT). God's justice can be viewed as a two sided coin. God's ultimate judgment of His

enemies is one side of God's justice. His mercy and grace toward those who follow Him is the other. His love for all humanity is the common element of His justice.

God warns again and again that all sin must be punished (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23). Yet God loves all humanity (John 3:16) and desires that all would turn to Him and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). Each time God declares sinners must die, He follows that with an offer of eternal life if the sinner will turn away from their sins and follow Him (Ezekiel 18:21–22; John 3:16; Romans 6:23). Those who choose evil, however, who willfully reject Him and choose to persist in their sin, on them He passes the ultimate judgment of eternal death.

Babylon symbolizes all such evil people. That is why the worshipping multitudes are able to say, "true and righteous are his judgments" (v. 2). They, and we, are comforted to know that God will eventually destroy all who oppress His people.

To what extent can human society exact godly judgments?

2. The Beautiful Bride (vv. 4–8)

The next verses describe those same people praising God in worship for what He has done for them, specifically bringing them into His presence for the wedding supper of the Lamb in which they are the bride, holy and spotless. This section shows the other side of the coin of God's justice, His mercy and grace, again because of His great love. John uses familiar imagery to portray the absolute joy of those present at this glorious time of worship. In all cultures, weddings are a time of great joy for all involved. Weddings are also a time of new beginnings, and a time when the couple commit to a permanent joint bond.

Here, the bride is emblematic of the Church, all faithful believers from all time (Ephesians 5:32). A bride who is preparing for her wedding will wash herself carefully and thoroughly and

put on a beautiful new white dress. Jesus has done this for His faithful. He has cleansed His Church by taking their sin on Himself. Jesus paid the price of our sin on the Cross, bearing our punishment, so that we could be made holy and blameless in His sight.

God shows mercy (not giving us what we rightly deserve) and grace (giving us what we don't deserve) when we declare our faith in and allegiance to Him. His righteousness is then given to us, and we can be presented to Him in a radiant new white linen gown. Is that not reason for joyful worship and loud hallelujah?

How do you react to the imagery of being a bride to Christ?

Search the Scriptures

1. Read Revelation 19:2–3. How does this affect your understanding of God's justice?
2. Read Revelation 19:7–8. It is important to remember that the bride (the Church) is not made ready by her own actions. How does this contribute to your understanding of the image of the bride in Revelation 19?

Discuss the Meaning

These verses show clearly that God's judgment includes two distinct elements. He will judge, condemn, and destroy all who reject Him and do evil. He also will show mercy and grace to all who follow Him. He is just and right in doing all this. How does knowing this affect your efforts to pray for and show the love of God to others who may not yet know Him?

Liberating Lesson

We often struggle with our desire to get even with those who oppress us. Sometimes it seems that there is no justice for marginalized communities. We must find comfort in the first three verses here where we learn that God will exact vengeance for us in the end. He will judge all the world's evil people and systems. He will

deliver on His promise to effect judgment on those who oppress His people.

Application for Activation

It is so hard to turn the other cheek when we see injustice around us. God's Word and His love should guide our responses to injustice. Our actions should show the world the grace and mercy that have been shown to us. We can show our desire for justice through peaceful protest, not through violence and vengeance. Write a letter this week to an elected official about an injustice close to your heart. Pray for them to use their power to help the most people.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.

Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.

Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book Company, 1889.

Say It Correctly

Debauched. deh-BOCH-t.
Curtailling. cur-TALE-ing.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Vision of Praise
(Isaiah 6:1-8)

TUESDAY

Let the Heavens Be Glad
(1 Chronicles 16:23-34)

WEDNESDAY

Let All God's Angels Worship Him
(Hebrews 1:5-14)

THURSDAY

King of Kings, Lord of Lords
(Revelation 19:9-16)

FRIDAY

God Judges the Wicked
(Revelation 19:17-21)

SATURDAY

The Lord Rejoices Over You
(Zephaniah 3:14-20)

SUNDAY

The Lord Almighty Reigns
(Revelation 19:1-8)

Good News for All

Bible Background • ACTS 10:34–47

Printed Text • ACTS 10:34–47 | Devotional Reading • ACTS 15:6–18

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will EXPLORE the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives, VALUE the leadership of Peter in the early church and his relationship with Christ, and SPREAD the Good News that Christ is for all who want to know Him.

In Focus

One evening Aisha and Malik hosted their adult Bible study group at their house to watch Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*. Their son Damon was home from college for the weekend and asked if he could join them with a teammate of his, Kyle, whom Damon had been trying to witness to. Kyle would be the only white guy there, but he liked movies, so it seemed like a good way to spark a spiritual conversation with him. Afterward the group ordered pizza and discussed the movie's emotional impact.

Kyle had really appreciated the movie's cinematography, but raised a question about the casting. "I wonder if it would have been as successful if Mel Gibson had portrayed Jesus as a brown-skinned Jewish Israeli instead of a white guy. What do you think?"

Malik chose his words carefully as he answered the question. "No doubt it would have made a difference for Mel Gibson's bank account. But personally, I have a problem with any portrayal of deity. Scripture states that we are not to create a graven image of God because images can divide and cause confusion. Yet since Jesus is both God and man, portraying Him based on His Jewish, non-White ethnicity is justified."

Aisha nodded and said, "God is no respecter of persons. He knows the differences in gender and race and utilizes those differences to His glory, but He limits no one because of it! If we dwell on things like the skin color of Jesus, it limits the message of Christ."

Are you constrained by culture or can you witness to someone regardless of race or ethnicity?

Keep in Mind

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34–35, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

The People, Places, and Times

Cornelius. With the possible exception of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39), Cornelius was the first Gentile cited in Scripture to hear the Gospel, receive salvation, and influence many to believe. Cornelius adhered to Jewish customs but was a Roman centurion, a high-ranking army official. Evidence of his piety was in the conversion of his whole household, giving alms to the poor, and praying to God in accordance with the Jewish ritual. However, because he was not a circumcised Jew, he could not worship in the inner sanctuary of the Jewish synagogue. He worshiped God on the fringes of his religious culture, but he still worshiped God, and God heard his prayers (v. 4).

Peter's Vision. In a vision at a time of fasting and prayer, the Lord spoke to Peter. After showing Peter animals given for food of all species, God commands Peter to rise, kill, and eat. However, as a devout Jew, Peter refuses to eat that which his culture has deemed common and unclean. The Lord rebukes Peter, declaring that which God calls clean is no longer subject to being called unclean. Peter did not immediately understand the meaning of the vision; but as he thought about it more, the Spirit of the Lord gave him revelation.

Background

God used Cornelius to minister to Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. Peter was surrounded by the cultural divisions between the Jews and

Gentiles. Although he had heard Jesus preach salvation to all nations, Peter struggled to think outside the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. The contrast between Jew and Gentile was great and buttressed by many barriers—culture, language, prejudicial hatred, and geography.

Through a vision and instructions to join Cornelius's entourage, the Lord helps Peter understand that His gift of salvation is available to the Jews, the Greeks, and all who believe. From this revelation, Peter vows never again to call any man common, unclean, or unworthy of the Gospel.

Why are all people—Jew, Gentile, male, female, any race—equal before God?

At-A-Glance

1. The Witnesses (Acts 10:34–39)
2. The Facts (vv. 40–43)
3. The Baptisms (vv. 44–48)

In Depth

1. The Witnesses (Acts 10:34–39)

Peter declares that God shows no partiality but accepts all people who revere Him and do what is right (vv. 34–35). The same Peter who considered non-Jews, and especially Greeks, as unclean now stands preaching the Gospel to a Greek congregation. He confesses the truth that God does not play cultural favorites, but that He favors people from any nation who reverence Him in righteousness.

Peter preaches the Good News of Christ to the people gathered with Cornelius (vv. 36–39). He tells them of the Gospel, John's water baptism, Jesus' anointing of the Holy Spirit and of the good works, healings, and crucifixion which would follow.

2. The Facts (vv. 40–43)

But praise God, the crucifixion is not the end of the story. Peter affirms himself as an eyewitness to the truth that Jesus came to life again. Following Christ's command, he preaches that Jesus "was ordained of God to be the Judge" (v. 42). The Good News does not consist of judgment only, though. Peter further affirms that Jesus—in fulfillment of prophecy—takes away the sin of those who believe Him, who submit to His leadership. The simple message, based on then recent historical facts, must have immediately moved the hearers to belief, because the next thing that happens is a sign of such.

How would you present a simple Gospel message to someone who had not heard it before?

3. The Baptisms (vv. 44–48)

While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon the people who heard him (v. 44). As the Word was preached, the hearers believed and were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Jewish believers were amazed as they watched the Gentiles speak in tongues and worship God (vv. 45–46). This evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles could not be denied.

The Jewish believers had questioned the possibility of regarding the Gentiles as full members of the Christian church—namely, including them in the ceremony of baptism. Peter settles the questions, saying that any who received baptism in the Holy Spirit could not be denied the baptism by water. The baptism in the Spirit was indicative of an inward conversion; the baptism by water was indicative of an outward inclusion into the family of God. Therefore, Peter commanded that Cornelius, his family, and his friends—the Gentile converts—be baptized with water in the name of Jesus as they had been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Recall and share the story of your own baptism. Was it joyous? Bittersweet? Solemn?

Search the Scriptures

1. What happened as the people listened to Peter preach? (vv. 44–45)
2. After the Gentiles were baptized in the Holy Spirit, evidenced with speaking in tongues and magnifying God, what question arose among the believers? (vv. 47–48)

Discuss the Meaning

Divisions in the Church have led to the formation of new denominations, or worse, schisms within the professing Body of Christ that dilute our unified testimony and preaching of the Gospel. The circumcised Jewish believers questioned the extension of water baptism to Gentile believers who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. What do you believe are the purposes of the water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit? What does your church or denomination practice regarding them both?

Liberating Lesson

Like trees in a forest, Christians need to support one another. When we find Christians of dissimilar races, cultures, classes, genders, callings, and expressions of worship, we should become like a forest of trees and link up to nourish one another in the faith. Through our inclusion of all believers, the Church is fortified and God is glorified. Instead of excluding Christians who do not look like us or worship like us, we must extend our roots of righteousness to give what we have and get what we need to grow as the church until Christ returns.

Application for Activation

When was the last time you or your church had worship or fellowship with another body of Christian believers that you know has doctrinal differences? A good place to begin to know others in the body of Christ is through neighborly relationships. If someone in your family, workplace, or neighborhood belongs to a different church or denomination, ask them if you might accompany them to a fellowship or worship service, and extend a reciprocal invitation. Resist the temptation to rank or condemn the various styles of expressions of worship; but rather, seek to experience God through the eyes of another.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.

Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.

Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book Company, 1889.

Say It Correctly

Cornelius. core-NEE-lee-us.

Centurion. sin-TUR-ee-on.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Speaks to a Pagan King
(Genesis 20:1-7, 14-16)

TUESDAY

An Angel Speaks to Cornelius
(Acts 10:1-8)

WEDNESDAY

A Vision of Inclusion
(Acts 10:9-22)

THURSDAY

The Queen of Sheba Blesses God
(1 Kings 10:1-9)

FRIDAY

A Centurion Comes to Jesus
(Luke 7:1-10)

SATURDAY

Peter Enters Cornelius' House
(Acts 10:23-33)

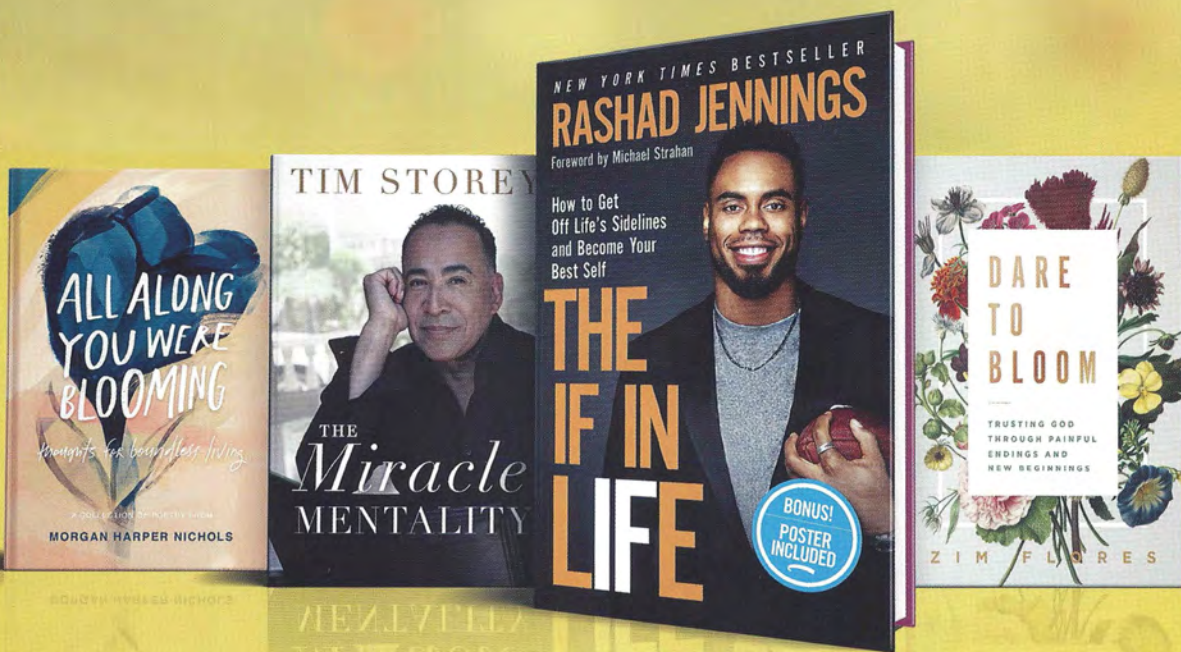
SUNDAY

God Shows No Partiality
(Acts 10:34-47)

Notes

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