

October 31 Lesson 9 (NIV)

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS GREATNESS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 150

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalms 147–150

PSALM 149:1–5

¹ Praise the LORD.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.

² Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
let the people of Zion be glad in their King.

³ Let them praise his name with dancing
and make music to him with timbrel and harp.

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

⁵ Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor
and sing for joy on their beds.

PSALM 150

¹ Praise the LORD.

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

² Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³ Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,

⁴ praise him with timbrel and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,

⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD.

KEY VERSE

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.—Psalm 150:6a

CELEBRATING GOD

Unit 2: Called to Praise God

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON OUTLINE

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- A. Flash Mob
- B. Lesson Context: Book V
- C. Lesson Context: Praise Conclusion
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 - A. Call to Praise (vv. 1–3)
The Value of a Tune
 - B. Reasons for Praise (v. 4)
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Conclusion

- A. Count Your Blessings
- B. Prayer
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HOW TO SAY IT

Babylonian Bab-ih-low-nee-un.

Corinthians Ko-rin-thee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

Ezra Ez-ruh.

Haggai Hag-eye or Hag-ay-eye.

Judah Joo-duh.

Nehemiah *Nee-huh-my-uh*.

Persian *Per-zhun*.

Titus *Ty-tus*.

Yahweh (Hebrew) *Yah-weh*.

Zion *Zi-un*.

Introduction

A. Flash Mob

Food courts at shopping malls seem to be favorite targets of flash mobs. These are groups of people, usually well-rehearsed, who perform a song, dance, etc., from and for an unsuspecting crowd.

One such flash-mob appearance began in the typical way: a large crowd was eating amid the normal hubbub of a crowded food court and background music when different music began playing. The music was the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Händel’s *Messiah*.

A young woman holding a cell phone in the crowd stood up, as is customary during that chorus. No surprise there. But then she began singing in a beautiful, operatic soprano. After her, a tenor sang a few bars. More singers joined in, then several more, and then more yet. Finally, an entire choir of professional singers, scattered throughout the court, was performing a magnificent version of that beautiful hymn of praise. Many diners recorded the unique scene on their phones.

The performance was so unexpected and so beautiful that it moved some to tears. But unexpected professional performances of stirring music aren’t the only opportunities to wonder in awe in sensing the presence of God. Heartfelt prayers and personally sung hymns have their place too.

B. Lesson Context: Book V

Much of the material in the Lesson Contexts of lessons 5–8 applies here as well, so that information need not be repeated. What is different is that we are moving again into Book V of the Psalter. Whereas lesson 7 took us to the beginning of that segment, today’s study takes us to its very end. The visual for lesson 5 notes many psalms of praise here, and two such are the subject of this lesson’s study: Psalms 149 and 150.

The five “books” of the psalms are not disconnected from one another—quite the opposite! A theme of Book IV is that no matter what the problem, God is king (Psalms 96–99); Book V follows that with assurances that he will one day make all things right (Psalm 145). These facts called for praise on the part of the psalmists. The final psalm within each of the five books concludes with an extended doxology: an expression of joyful praise to the Lord.

C. Lesson Context: Praise Conclusion

Psalms 149 and 150 are two of the five psalms that are known collectively as “the praise conclusion” to the Psalter as a whole, namely Psalms 146–150. These five have three things in common in that all (1) are anonymous, (2) were likely composed after the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s temple and walls (about 515 and 444 BC, respectively), and (3) begin and end with the phrase “Praise the Lord.” That phrase unites them with a shared theme. Even given that unity, the five offer different emphases in regard to that praise.

<u>Psalm</u>	<u>Praise Emphasis</u>
146	The suffering have hope
147	God cares for his people
148	God’s light is for everyone
149	God protects his people
150	Ways to praise

Set in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, this was the time of Persian dominance (about 539–330 BC). Jewish life was difficult during this period (examples: Ezra 4:24; Nehemiah 4:10–11; Haggai 1:6). But despite the challenges, this new beginning and the thrill of restoration resulted naturally and appropriately in the need for new songs of praise. These five psalms—the last two of which are the subject of today’s study—reveal some important things.

I. A New Song

(PSALM 149:1–5)

A. Call to Praise (vv. 1–3)

1a. Praise the LORD.

Praise the Lord, a plural command, is a translation of only two words in Hebrew; millions of people all over the world know this as the single, compounded word *hallelujah*. The first word, *hallelu*, is a command to praise. The *jah* that follows is a shortened version of Yahweh, the Hebrew name of God—the object of the praise.

The two words *hallelu* and *jah* occur adjacent to each other 24 times in the psalms, beginning in Psalm 104:35 and ending in the last line of 150:6—the final phrase of the Psalter. Scripture also has longer forms of this phrase in Isaiah 62:9; Jeremiah 20:13; and Psalms 117:1; 148:1b, 7.

In the New Testament, the Hebrew is transliterated (not translated) into Greek, so it sounds the same whether one is speaking Greek or Hebrew. The result is the four occurrences of our English “Hallelujah” (also a transliteration, not a translation) in Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6. So whether we say English “Praise the Lord” or the original Hebrew and adapted Greek “Hallelujah,” we are saying the same thing!

1b. Sing to the LORD a new song,

Sing is also a plural command, occurring in that form 15 times in the Old Testament—10 of which are in the psalms (here and Psalms 33:3; 68:4, 32 [twice]; 96:1, 2; 98:1; 105:2; and 137:3). The last is in a context of oppression: captors requesting songs of the defeated who were in captivity (compare Romans 15:9; Ephesians 5:19; Hebrews 12:12; and James 5:13).

A *new song* suggests that circumstances have changed in such a way that the old songs are no longer sufficient (compare Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9). In this case, the people have returned from their Babylonian captivity (see Lesson Context). Being something of a “second exodus,” this return certainly called for new words of celebration! Isaiah speaks of the Messiah to come, and a new song is called for because of the new things God will do on the earth (Isaiah 42:10; 43:19). Similarly in Revelation, songs are composed because of the new circumstances of the saints in Heaven (see Revelation 4:9; 14:3).

1c. his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.

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

2. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King.

Again, we see parallelism that often characterizes Hebrew poetry.

Such parallelism means that it’s a mistake to see *Israel* and *the people of Zion* referring to different groups. In the same way, *rejoice* and *be glad* repeat one another.

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

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

3. Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp.

Here the psalmist provided means for expressing *praise* and *joy*. *Dancing* to the sound of musical instruments indicates boisterous, unrestrained worship. On the identities of the *timbrel and harp*, see Psalm 150:3–5, below.

B. Reasons for Praise (v. 4)

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

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

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

Victory (which can be translated “salvation”) in the Old Testament often describes the deliverance from enemies (example: Exodus 14:13; 15:2). For the vulnerable population newly returned to Jerusalem and Judah, God’s protection would indeed have been a comfort. The word translated *victory* can also be used of deliverance from sin, though this is much more prevalent in the New Testament as the word comes over from Hebrew into Greek (compare Psalm 3 with Revelation 7:10).

C. Another Call to Praise (v. 5)

5. Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds.

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

Such celebrations are called for elsewhere: in anticipation of an enemy’s defeat (Psalm 5:8–11), in sheer wonder at God’s greatness (Psalm 95), and in instances of personification (96:12; 98:8), etc. *In ... honor* refers to having been favored with a change of circumstance, from exiles to people living once again in their homeland. The Greek word used to translate the Hebrew is *doxa*, from which we get the word *doxology*.

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

II. The Setting of Praise

(PSALM 150)

A. Where (v. 1)

1a. Praise the LORD.

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

1b. Praise God in his sanctuary;

Here we see mention of a location where it is especially appropriate to *praise God*. The Hebrew word translated *sanctuary* occurs more than 500 times in the Old Testament. As a noun, it can take 20 different meanings, by one count, according to context. The big-picture idea is one of “sacredness” or “apartness.” The context here seems to require that the sacred space in view is where God’s people gather for worship (as in Psalms 68:24–26; 134:2; and 138:2).

1c. praise him in his mighty heavens.

The word *heavens* reflects the conception of people in Old Testament times, who considered the sky to be a vault over the earth. It is the place where the stars are located, the place that separates the earth from the abode of God beyond (see Ezekiel 1:22–26; Daniel 12:3; compare 2 Corinthians 12:2). The phrase *in his mighty* describes the magnificence of the heavens; the almighty God created it (Genesis 1:6–18; Psalm 19:1).

B. Why (v. 2)

2. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Two reasons for praising the Lord are given: his works and his character. *Acts of power* are things God has done in the past. Some psalms very clearly celebrate specific works God has done by recounting his deeds in Israel’s history. For example, Psalm 136 recounts the acts of the Lord in creation (vv. 5–9), in delivering Israel from Egypt (vv. 10–16), in conquering enemies and giving Israel the land (vv. 17–24), and for providing food for all creatures (v. 25).

The phrase *his surpassing greatness* summarizes the Lord’s character. God is perfect in his knowledge (Deuteronomy 29:29), in his ethics (Psalms 18:25; 92:15; Mark 10:18), in his works (Deuteronomy 32:4), and in his words (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2).

C. How (vv. 3–5)

3. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,

Here begins a three-verse list of several musical instruments the readers were encouraged to use to *praise him* (compare 1 Chronicles 15:28). Metal horns were known in the Old Testament world (example: Numbers 10:1–10), but *the sounding of the trumpet* signifies the blast of a ram’s horn. These were used in worship (Leviticus 25:9), as a signal in war (Joshua 6:4–9, 20), to warn of danger (Joel 2:1), to express joyous celebration (2 Samuel 6:15), to herald news (1 Samuel 13:3), at the installation of a king (1 Kings 1:34), and to call to assembly (Jeremiah 4:5).

The harp and lyre are stringed instruments, mentioned together seven times in the psalms (here and Psalms 33:2; 57:8; 71:22; 81:2; 92:3; and 108:2). These two instruments therefore stand parallel with one another and indeed are essentially the same instrument. The main difference is that one was larger (and less portable) than the other. Evidence from ancient drawings indicates curved yokes and jar-shaped sounding boxes to be features.

4a. praise him with timbrel and dancing,

The timbrel is similar to a modern tambourine, being small enough to be held in the hand. Use of this rhythm percussion instrument is associated with dances of joy several times in the Old Testament (examples: Exodus 15:20; Psalm 149:3, above), even joy that has the wrong focus (Isaiah 5:11–12). An absence of timbrels is associated with a lack of joy (Isaiah 24:8).

4b. praise him with the strings and pipe,

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

Pipes are first mentioned in Genesis 4:21: “Jubal ... was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes.” It was probably a type of wind instrument; the 1984 *NIV* translated this word “flutes.”

5. praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.

Cymbals, in the category of percussion instruments, would be struck together to make their sound. The Hebrew behind the translation *resounding* occurs five times in the psalms (here and Psalms 27:6; 33:3; 47:5; and 89:15). The translations in those other four instances are all in terms of volume, and that is the sense here. Thus *clash* and *resounding* are parallel terms. There’s no holding back with these instruments!

The following two lists reveal that of the (at least) 14 named instruments or types of instruments recorded in the Old Testament, Psalms 149 and 150 feature the most frequently mentioned.

In Psalms 149–150

Not in Psalms 149–150

<u>Name</u>	<u>Times in OT</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Times in OT</u>
trumpet	74	horn	14
harp	43	flute	4
harp	27	zither	4
timbrel	22	lyre	4
stringed instruments	4	harp	3
pipe	4	pipe	3
cymbals	3	lyres	1

Note: Although English designations are repeated in some cases above, the underlying words in the original language are all different. The repeated English designations reflect uncertainty in precise translation.

D. Who (v. 6)

6. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

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

Conclusion

A. Count Your Blessings

When life becomes turbulent, it is easy to forget the Lord’s might and character. That happens when we drop our gaze from him to focus on the problems themselves and nonbiblical solutions to them (compare Psalm 73:1–3). But when we return from that “exile,” we realize our foolishness. In the process, we find new opportunities to sing for joy to the Lord, realizing that our old songs are inadequate in light of the Lord’s new blessings.

No matter our situation, we should praise the Lord. We can do so by recalling past blessings—the great things he has done. We can praise him for future blessings—things God has promised when we are in his presence for all eternity. If celebrating the Lord’s greatness will not give us joy and peace during the storms of life, what will?

B. Prayer

O Lord, our God, you are great, and you are good. In all circumstances, may we ever praise you for your care for us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Praise the Lord—always!¹