

Introduction: Psalm 150 sets before us the priority of praise.

The last five joyous psalms of praise form an elaborate and comprehensive doxology to the whole Psalter. Each begins and ends with “Hallelujah!” The final psalm is a “piece of pure praise” and “brings the entire Psalter to its crescendo. It is as though everything has been said and all that remains is this responsive outburst of praise” [C.J. Williams]

Some churches have a designated time for praise and worship. Songs that are short and contain repetition are common. Psalm 150 is short and does have repeated phrases. The exhortation to “praise” is used 13 times. Psalm 150 has been used to approve a wide variety of expression and participation in praise and worship. How about praising God with timbrel and dance (150:4)?

While Psalm 1 is an intentional introduction to the Psalter, Psalm 150 is an appropriate conclusion, as it states the outcome of such a life formed by God’s word. The final purpose is more than obedience of life; it is praise from the heart. God’s word directs to unencumbered praise of the living and true God. The expectation of the Old Testament is not finally *obedience*, but *adoration*. The Psalter leads and nurtures us to a freedom that finds its proper life in full communion with God.

The last five psalms in the Psalter function as conclusions to each of the five books of the Psalter, culminating the entire Psalter in an exaltation of praise.

Psalm 146 concludes Book One as a praise for God’s care.

Psalm 147 concludes Book Two as a praise for God’s kingdom.

Psalm 148 concludes Book Three as a praise for God’s promises.

Psalm 149 concludes Book Four as a praise for God’s faithfulness.

Psalm 150 concludes Book Five as a praise for God’s salvation. [Godfrey]

Outline of Praise – Places (v. 1); Passions (v. 2); Practices (v. 3-5); Participants (v. 6); Predominance (v. 1, 6)

A. PLACES OF PRAISE (150:1) -- WHERE are we to praise the Lord? (All locations)

1. **Focused expression** -- His reign [sanctuary] -- both holy place and holiness
 - a. Refers to His being -- revelation of holy, clean, pure, separation
 - b. Refers to His bearing -- throne of power and mercy-seat of reconciliation
 - c. Refers to His people -- communal character of worship
 - 1) Call for concentrated and collective worship
 - 2) Contrast to casual and private devotions
 - 3) The Lord who knows our weakness and waywardness calls us to appointed day of worship
2. **Exploded expression** -- His realm [mighty firmament] vault of heaven
 - a. Refers to His sovereignty under heaven (over earth)
 - b. Refers to His glory in heaven
 - c. Refers to His recognition from all creatures
 - 1) Our life is to be filled with praise
 - 2) Praise is to characterize our life

B. PASSIONS OF PRAISE (150:2) -- WHY are we to praise the Lord? (All manifestations)

1. **His products** -- What He does -- His mighty acts
 - a. Creation and providence
 - b. Revelation and inspiration
 - c. Redemption and glorification
 - 1) Think about what God has done, is doing, and will do
 - 2) Think about the gift manifestation of God in the Lord Jesus Christ

2. **His person** -- Who He is -- His excellent greatness
 - a. He is infinite, eternal, unchangeable
 - b. In His being, wisdom, power holiness, justice goodness, truth [WSC 4]
 - 1) We usually think of what God has done and thank Him
 - 2) We should think of who God is and praise Him

^{NKJ} Job 13:15 = Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.

^{NKJ} Luke 23:46 = And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." Having said this, He breathed His last.

C. PRACTICES OF PRAISE (150:3-5) -- WHEN are we to praise the Lord? (All situations)

- * Not what instruments to use for praise, but when we are to praise. Naming the musical instruments is a summary way of naming the events in which they were used.

1. **Why does the Psalmist direct us to the sounds of praise, rather than the words of praise?**

We should not look at these instruments as abstractions, as without any background, history or character. We should not conclude that if we really want to worship God, we must have trumpets, tambourines, and cymbals. The Israelites would have remembered the occasions these instruments were used in the life of God's people. Naming these musical instruments was a summary way of naming the events in which they were played. ["Let's play football" has a different American and European meaning and context, and implies a well-defined athletic event.] These instruments are so richly attached to crucial experiences in Israel's worship and national life that as the people read or sang this psalm, their thoughts would have gone back to those events.

2. **On what occasions were musical instruments used?**

- a. Percussion instruments
 - 1) Tambourine (timbrel) was played at many occasions and by certain groups of players, women (Exo. 15:20-21), military bands, and groups of prophets (1 Sam. 10:5). From its rare mention in connection with the temple (1 Chr. 13:8), it appears that its use was restricted to outside the temple worship, possibly because of its association with Baal worship.
 - 2) Cymbals had a more clearly defined place in the temple worship.
- b. Wind instruments
 - 1) Horn makes few sounds and was useful for giving a signal, as on special holy days (Psa. 81:3). The coronation of a king was broadcast by the blowing of the

horn at designated places (1 Kgs. 1:34, 39-42; 2 Kgs. 9:13). The Lord's rule is celebrated with the blowing of the horn and trumpets (Psa. 47:5; 98:6).

- 2) Trumpet was used to signal a convocation (Num. 10:1-10) of any type, whether for worship, coronation of a king (1 Kgs. 1:34, 39, 41-43; 2 Kgs. 12:13), or battle (Hos. 5:8). This instrument was regularly used in the temple worship.
 - 3) Flute was a pipe rarely used in Israel's worship. It was used at festive occasions or celebrations (1 Kgs. 1:40; Isa. 5:12).
- c. String instruments -- Harp, a type of lyre, was used in temple worship. Lyre is parallel in use with harp and they may refer to the same instrument. Some had as many as 10 strings.

3. What is the significance of the musical instruments?

- a. Calls for assembly -- for worship, for battle, for coronations.
- b. Compliments to sacrifices -- assignment to Levites (1 Chr. 15:16; 25:6; 2 Chr. 5:12-13; 29:25-28). The greatest description of the use of instruments was when the Ark was taken up to Jerusalem.

1 Chronicles 13:8 = And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.

Like David, we are to praise the Lord with all our might. Our praise of God is not to be casual or incidental, but wholehearted.

- c. Celebrations of blessings -- victories, festive occasions (like harvest). Instruments were associated with the powerful acts and the greatness of the Lord. Not long after the destruction of the Temple [70 AD], the use of instrumental music in worship fell into disuse and was never revived. Vocal tradition and practice continued, and as such became the central musical feature of synagogue worship.

If the sacrificial system, the Levitical priesthood, the central sanctuary, the holy days, the new moon celebrations, and the use of musical instruments in the temple all passed away in practice because they anticipated and depicted the reality secured by Christ's ministry, why have not the Psalms also passed away? Because the Word of the Lord stands for ever.

Isaiah 40:8b = ... but the word of our God shall stand for ever

1 Peter 1:25a = But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.

4. What is the significance of dance?

Dancing is contrasted regularly with mourning (Ecc. 3:4). Dance and the tambourine especially recognized those times of happiness, those times of celebrations, those times preeminently of triumph (Psa. 30:11; Jer. 31:4, 13). Miriam danced and led the women in dance and playing the tambourine as they celebrated the drowning of Pharaoh and the deliverance of Israel (Exo. 15:20). Women danced to celebrate the victories of Saul and David over the enemies of God (1 Sam. 18:6; 21:11; 29:5). Women danced at times of the harvest celebration (Jud. 21:21).

Dance was not used in worship nor was it a regular part of worship, except on two important occasions. The first was when Israel danced before the golden calf (Exo. 32:19) naked (Exo. 32:25). The second was when David "danced before the Lord with all his might" (2 Sam. 6:14) as the Ark was being taken up to Jerusalem. His wife, Saul's

daughter, criticized him for that dance in which she said he “uncovered himself” (2 Sam. 6:20). The Lord cursed her for her criticism (2 Sam. 6:23).

“This event is interesting because the Scripture says that David danced naked before the ark. This might raise the question whether the only legitimate kind of liturgical dancing we find in Scripture is naked dancing. ... When the Scripture says that David was naked, it does not mean that he was bare. It means that he had put aside his royal robes and insignia. He had put aside the royal vestments that the king ordinarily wore in a triumphal moment. He had divested himself and had humbled himself before the people and before the Lord.

“What David’s wife criticized was that he took upon himself this humble role. He did not measure up to her image of a king and soldier when he joined with the women, removing his royal insignia, dancing before the ark. But he gave proper glory to God in this celebration of the great victory that the Lord had given the people of God in conquering the city of Jerusalem. He did not claim glory for himself. He celebrated his joy humbly in this triumphant moment of the people’s existence. So David danced preeminently as a celebration of this victory that the Lord, his great God, had given to His people.” [Godfrey]

When we gather for worship or when we are mindful of God’s blessings, we need to be praising the Lord, acknowledging the benefits we receive are credited to Him.

D. PARTICIPANTS OF PRAISE (150:6) -- WHO are we that praise the Lord? (All populations)

1. **Command for adoration**

- a. All who have been created and have the breath of God breathed into us
- b. All who have been made in God’s image for fellowship with Him

2. **Command for evangelism**

- a. Prospect is not only for ancient Israel
- b. Expectation is for people from all nations

E. PREDOMINANCE OF PRAISE -- “Hallelujah” (150:1, 6)

There is a story about two ancient Briton commanders who, in the year 420, opposed an attack from the Picts and Saxons near Mold, in Flintshire. The two Briton commanders ordered their little army to shout Alleluia three times. At that sound, the enemy was suddenly struck with terror and ran away in great confusion. A stone monument is said to perpetuate the remembrance of the Alleluia victory [Cp. Charles Buck in Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*]. The story may be more misleading than helpful. What do we mean when we shout “Hallelujah”?

Hallel (Praise) u (ye) jah (Jehovah), a transliterated Hebrew compound, occurs as an interjection 23 times in 15 psalms as either the first word (111; 112), or the last word (104; 105; 115; 116; 117), or the first and last word (106; 113; 135; 146-150). It appears in psalms whose author is unknown. It is used only in Psalms of praise, and 4 times in the songs of Revelation 19.

No other single word holds so much weight of divine truth. Hallelujah is a plural imperative. It is a command given to all men, all men without distinction, all men without

exception. It means, "Praise the Lord." It is not an invitation. It is not a suggestion. It is an authoritative, divine commandment. As such it reveals something about God. It reveals the fact that He has every right and He has all the authority to command the praise that He deserves. This command also reveals our singular purpose and our duty to praise Him so long as we have breath. The sovereign character of God and the chief end of man are both comprehended in this one magnificent word, hallelujah. [C.J. Williams]

1. Three wrong uses of Hallelujah

- a. IS THIS an **annoying acclamation**? Does God disdain our acclamations like a superior disdains an inferior (among siblings, athletes, professionals)?
- b. IS THIS a **self-serving pronouncement**? Do we voice our acclamations ...
 - 1) To draw attention to our piety?
 - 2) To congratulate the Lord?
 - 3) To voice our approval (just as we voice our disapproval)?
 - 4) To encourage the Lord to provide more favorable treatment?
- c. IS THIS a **sacred password** or spiritual chant?
 - 1) Is this a special word that if repeated enough will lead to another world (as in "My Sweet Lord" by the Beatles, a phrase from their mantra).
 - 2) Is this a special formula, a magic spell, or a power word containing mystical potential?

2. Three strong uses of Hallelujah

- a. THIS IS an **amazing exhortation**, in that God ...
 - 1) Desires our praise, we who are sinful creatures
 - 2) Accepts our praise, we who are indebted, limited creatures
 - 3) Instructs our praise, we who are simple creatures
 - 4) Commands our praise, we who are dependent creatures
- b. THIS IS an **urgent summons** (repeated), in that ...
 - 1) God always deserves our praise
 - 2) We frequently forget His praise
 - 3) We need to be moved to offer His praise
- c. THIS IS a **comprehensive inclusion** (first/last), the sum and substance of our duty. Inclusion is a literary device where the beginning and the end close the unit by the restatement of the same motif or words or by a contrastive statement.

It is saddening to remember how this majestic word has been trailed in the mire of late. Its irreverent use is an aggravated instance of taking the name of Jehovah our God in vain. [Spurgeon]

It is a poor business if we solely exhort others, and do not stir up our own soul. It is an evil thing to say, "Praise ye," and never to add, "Praise, O my soul." When we praise God let us arouse our innermost self, our central life: we have but one soul, and if it be saved from eternal wrath, it is bound to praise its Savior. [Spurgeon]

Through every period of my life / Thy goodness I'll pursue;
And after death, in distant worlds, / Thy glorious theme renew.
Through all eternity to Thee / A joyful song I'll raise;

But, oh! eternity's too short / To utter all thy praise. -- Addison [Barnes]

Conclusion: Praising the Lord is total, comprehensive, and all-inclusive. It is at all locations, from all manifestations, in all situations, by all populations.

Places of praise (v. 1); Where? – All locations; Praise Him everywhere, and particularly with thoughtful devotion when in the assembly.

Passions of praise (v. 2); Why? – All manifestations; Praise Him for what He has done and for who He is.

Practices of praise (v. 3-5); When? – All situations; Praise Him with all of your focused energy.

Participants of praise (v. 6); Who? – All populations; Praise Him now and always.

The opening hallelujah announces our supreme duty -- the priority of praise.

The closing hallelujah expresses our supreme delight -- the priority of praise.

Prayer: Most worthy are you, O good and gracious God, of all praises, even for your own sake, surpassing all things in holiness. By you alone are we made holy and sanctified. We praise you for our glorious redemption, purchased for us in your dearly loved Son, Christ Jesus, as our duty continually bids us. Give us your Holy Spirit to govern us. And grant that all things which breathe with life may praise you as the true life of all creatures, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen. [*Prayers on the Psalms: From the Scottish Psalter 1595*, The Banner of Truth Trust, p. 149 (edited)]

Resources: C.J. Williams, **Hallelujah**, Psalm 150, 02/06/2005, Providence RP Church, www.sermonaudio.com

W. Robert Godfrey, **Learning to Love the Psalms**, Reformation Trust Publishing, Sanford, FL, 2017, p. 232.

W. Robert Godfrey, **Praise the Lord**, Psalm 150, *Modern Reformation*, January/February, 1996, Reprinted in *The Outlook*, January 1996 by Reformed Fellowship, Inc. www.reformedfellowship.net.

Psalter Selections: 138A, 145A, 145B, 145C, 150B [*The Book of Psalms for Singing*]