

1. Whenever I start writing on a particular book of the bible, I usually make it a point to discuss the who's, what, when and why's of that book. The idea is to give a little bit of background in order to explain the big picture of why that particular book of the bible is there.
  - a) Now that we are at my final lesson of the psalms, the interesting thing to note here is these last five psalms give us the "who, what, when and why's" of the psalms. If you are curious about what the book of psalms are all about this lesson covers those questions.
  - b) So why explain at the end of the book, its purpose? Like life itself, the journey is usually the key to appreciate the ending. The psalms give us reasons to praise God. These last five explain well the who's, what's, when's and why's of praising Him.
2. Since this is the last lesson in the psalms, let me pause, give my traditional thank-you greeting to all you loyal readers and then I'll come back to discussing this last group of psalms.
  - a) This is the final lesson of a two-year journey through the psalms. For those of you who have read through many of these lessons, my thanks for bearing with me through them. I hope it has helped you like it has helped me grow closer to God through this journey.
  - b) Also know that on the last page of this lesson is a list of my sources that I have used to throughout my studies of the psalms. Please read if you would like further references.
  - c) I remember two years ago, when I prayed about what to teach next. God made it clear to me that He wanted me to teach the psalms. I remember responding with "all of them?"
    - i) I believe God then said to me, "You heard me, now get going." Here we are two years later, finishing this book and God has already made it clear to me what to teach next. The good news is the next project is not nearly as long as this one.
3. With that said, let me get back to these last five psalms. Scholars like to call these last five psalms the praise psalms. They are also called the "hallelujah" psalms, which is the Hebrew word that literally means to praise God. That term hallelujah, which is translated here "praise the Lord" is used a total of fifteen times in these five psalms. Each of these five psalms start and finish with that particular praise. To put it another way, if you are not interested in how, why, when and who praises God, this study is not for you.
  - a) If you have any interest at all why people should praise the God who created everything, this is a great study placed here at the end of the book.
  - b) Let me start this "Praise the Lord" discussion with the key question of why we should.
    - i) The easy answer would be to just say: Study the first 145 bible psalms and that would explain why it is we should praise Him. Now let me do better than that:
      - a) Let's just say we should be grateful to the creator of the universe for all of the blessings we have in our life. If you can't think of a reason at the moment to be grateful to God, don't worry, these five psalms gives us many reasons why we should praise Him.
  - c) This also leads me to my lesson title, which I've already hinted at: "Understanding the who's, when's, why's and how of praising God." As one reads through these five psalms, it will become obvious as they do focus on those particular questions.
  - d) As opposed to giving my usual lecture on how this particular psalm focuses on this issue and the next psalm focuses on that issue, let me just say that all five of these psalms have unique purposes on the topic of praising God. Together, they form a wonderful discourse on why we should pause every so often to show gratitude to God for our lives.
4. Let me end my introduction by answering the "why" question: Jesus said the two most important bible commandments are in effect, "Love God and love others". (See Luke 10:27.) To obey those commands, we need to draw upon His power to do so in the first place. That is one of many reasons, but a key one at that, of why we should pause and praise Him on a regular basis.

5. Know that we are going to cover a lot of text in this lesson. Since all five of these psalms cover a single topic, I thought it would be best to take them all in one lesson. With that said, let's start with Psalm 146 and see what we can learn here about praising God.
6. Psalm 146, title: None
  - a) Let me state right now that none of the psalms in this lesson have a title. We don't know who wrote them or when they were written. I believe whoever organized the entire book of psalms wanted to end this book on the topic of praising God. That is probably why this group of psalms was placed here to get us to focus on this topic.
7. Psalm 146, Verse 1: Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul.
  - a) Let me first discuss the phrase "Praise the LORD". Again, all five of the psalms in this lesson begin and end with that phrase, which is one word in Hebrew. Since it is stated so often, I thought it would be best to discuss it now to understand it's meaning.
  - b) To explain it, let's begin by focusing on whom it is we are praising. As I have been stating a number of times in the past few lessons, when the word "LORD" is in all capitals, it is the most holy name of God. It essentially means, "I am who I am". (See Exodus 3:14.) The idea is that God does not have the desire to explain where He came from or why He exists. He just exists and we have to accept that fact. To expand on God's name here: "I am who I am, and we have to accept that fact in order to have a relationship with Him."
  - c) OK, let's say we accept His existence. Why praise Him? The first thing to understand is that God does not need to hear our praise. It is not for His ego's sake. We praise Him in order to remind ourselves of our dependency upon Him. We praise Him in order to draw upon His power to live the life God desires us to live.
    - i) As I stated in the introduction, Jesus said the two most important commandments are to love God and love others. I am convinced we can't do that without drawing upon His power in order to obey those commandments in the first place.
    - ii) To put it another way, we don't praise God in order to "fire us up". We praise Him in order to remind ourselves of who it is we depend upon to guide our lives.
  - d) Notice the verse asks our "soul" to praise Him. Let me describe exactly what a soul is.
    - i) The soul is the unseen part of us that will live forever. As I explained some lessons back, think of a blank DVD disk. Now imagine that same disk filled with a movie. What may surprise you is that the weight of that disk with a movie on it (without a label) is the exact same weight as it is if that same disk was blank.
      - a) The real us like that movie has no measurable weight. When we die, the real us, called the "soul" spends eternity in heaven or hell. The point is the real us, the soul, lives forever as we have no measurable weight.
    - ii) OK John, explain to me how my soul praises God as opposed to my mind? When we make the effort to praise Him for the blessings in our life, the "real us" (again, the part that lives forever) is part of that praise when we do give praise to God. Our souls are praising Him when we make that effort to praise Him.
8. Verse 2: I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
  - a) Verse 1 established whom it is we should praise and whom it is (us) giving the praise.
  - b) Verse 2 now focuses on how long one should be praising God. The idea is that we should never stop showing gratitude to Him our whole lives. We praise Him to remind ourselves that He is there guiding our lives.
  - c) Let me talk a little about singing praises. What if we don't have a great singing voice? Nowhere in the bible does it say that only those with a good singing voice should sing. God is not interested in our ability to sing, but in the effort on our part to praise Him.
  - d) One of my favorite bits of bible trivia is the fact that singing to God is a privilege only for believers. If you study the bible carefully, it never says angels sing. My point is singing to God is a privilege that He has given only to people. We should take advantage of that gift, not for His benefit, but for our own privilege.

9. Verse 3: Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. <sup>4</sup> When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.
- a) While the first two verses focused on praising God, these next two verses teach us what to avoid in order to live a life that is pleasing to Him and have more reasons to praise Him.
  - b) To explain this concept another way, political leaders or military leaders have their proper place and function. However we should not be dependant upon them for the "salvation" of our countries as an example. Such people may be blessed with leadership skills, but if such leaders are not putting their trust in God, eventually they will die off and all of their leadership skills will come to nothing.
  - c) In the New Testament, Paul teaches us to pray for our leaders. (See Romans 13:1-3.) It can also apply to the leaders at any organization as well as government leaders. When Paul made that statement he was referring to the Roman leaders who, to put it mildly, were not pro-Christian.
    - i) So why pray for them? Without God's guidance, their leadership is ultimately a waste of time. Even if such leaders are not believers, there is a God who rules over the world, and He manipulates things based on His desires for the world.
    - ii) But John, what about all of the tragedies that occur around the world? Are you saying God allows that? Evil is a hard thing to explain, but in essence, God allows evil as a motivational tool to keep us close to Him and trust in Him. As I like to say, if this world is all that there is, life would be very unfair.
  - d) Coming back to these two verses, the main point is we must obey our leaders, but we should not put our trust in them to give us the internal peace we desire.
10. Verse 5: Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, <sup>6</sup>the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them-- the LORD, who remains faithful forever.
- a) The psalmist continues the thought that blessed are people who put their trust in the God and not human leaders to guide how we should live our lives.
  - b) These verses are describing the God who created all things. How do we know that the God of the bible is not the same god as say, the one's that Muslim's worship, or say the one's Buddhists believe in? Don't most religions believe in a god that created everything?
    - i) The key difference is not the creation story but the resurrection story. No other religion requires trust in God's payment for one's sins as a necessity for salvation.
    - ii) As I like to say, if God is perfect, we have to be made perfect in order to know we are saved. To put it another way, we can never know if we are good enough to be saved unless we know what is God's standard for salvation. All people can grasp the concept of perfection. Only Christianity requires the concept of a perfect God already paying the price for sin so that we can be perfectly forgiven.
  - c) There is another way to explain why this concept is so important: Think about how much text in the bible is dedicated to the concept of explaining the creation story. The answer is a few chapters in Genesis, some references here in the psalms, plus a few other places.
    - i) Now think of how much of the bible is dedicated to the concept of resurrection: Most of the bible focuses on the issue of our relationship with God and how it is we are "redeemed" so we can spend eternity with Him. That in effect is the good news of the Gospel message. We can be perfectly forgiven of our sins, so that we can now have a relationship with God as being perfectly forgiven creatures based on what He did for us, not what we have done for Him.
  - d) OK, I've wandered away from the text in order to make some important points. The thing to get out of these two verses is that the God is the one who created everything we know about our world. The question is why mention the fact that God created everything?
    - i) The answer is if we can't think of anything about our own lives to praise God for, we can always praise Him for the world we live in.

- e) Let me try this one more way: Suppose one is having a really difficult day and one is in a horrible mood. How can we be grateful to God when life is going that badly? Sometimes in those situations, we have to start with something simple like giving God gratitude for the world we live in before we can even focus on our own lives.
    - i) If things are that bad, why not blame Him for our troubles? Blaming God won't make our problems go away. Seeking Him is the best way to improve our attitude during such times. Remember that loving God and loving others is based upon drawing upon His power in order to do so. Therefore, we praise Him in bad times in order to draw upon His power to help us through such difficult times.
  - f) Verse 6 ends with the reminder that God is "faithful forever". Why end on that point?
    - i) It does not mean the world, as we know it goes on forever. It means that God is faithful to keep His promise to us forever. What promise is that? That by trusting in His payment for all our sins, past present and future, we are saved.
    - ii) In context to the creation, it includes His promise that no worldwide flood would ever happen again. It is that His love for us does not change if we are trusting in Jesus as our sin payment. God still desires obedience, but that is obedience based on our gratitude to Him, and not based on a need to please Him by our effort.
11. Verse 7: He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, <sup>8</sup> the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. <sup>9</sup> The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
- a) While I was busy focusing on God's relationship with believers in the last two verses, the psalmist is focusing on God's relationship with all people. The point is if we can't be grateful for specific things in our own lives, we can always be grateful for the good things that happen in the world around us. That is the main point of these three verses.
  - b) It would help here to explain the specific's of these verses and then tie them together.
    - i) Verse 7 says that God "upholds the cause of the oppressed". In other words, a perfect God knows who is suffering. He may rescue them in their lifetime or He may rescue them through salvation. God never promises to end all suffering. He does promise we can have joy through the worst of times if we trust in Him for the ultimate outcome of our lives.
    - ii) Meanwhile, Verse 7 says God gives food to the hungry. The point is God put a need in people to care for others and their well being. God also made it possible to grow food and raise animals for consumption. The point is we can be grateful we live in a world were food can consistently be grown for our own benefit.
    - iii) Verse 8 mentions, "give site to the blind". Yes, the bible does have its occasional miracle of the blind seeing. I think the bigger picture is that those who don't care about God at some point in their life can one day "get it". Once we learn to trust in God it opens our eyes to His existence and His guidance of our lives.
    - iv) Notice in Verse 8, the term "bowed down". That is describing those who humble themselves before God. The "righteous" is about those people who trust in Him and not their own ability to do the right thing. In both cases, it is about humbling ourselves before God for our lives.
    - v) Verse 9 mentions the fatherless (orphan) and the widow. The idea is that God cares for those who can't easily provide for themselves. So how does God watch them more than He watches everyone else? The point is God chooses to work through people to care for those who are less fortunate than others.
    - vi) Finally it says, "God frustrates the way of the wicked". The idea is that in the end, those who don't trust in God will eventually lose as they die or their plans fail.
  - c) The point of this whole exercise is that if one can't think of anything to be grateful for in one's own life, one can always look at the world around us, and see how God is working.

12. Verse 10: The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.
  - a) The psalm ends on the reminder that God will reign forever and we praise Him for that. If we can't think of any other reason to praise God, we can always praise Him how His love for people goes on forever. By studying our bible one can see that He has been involved in the lives of people for thousands of years. By realizing that history, we can have faith that this relationship will continue through believers for all generations.
13. Psalm 147, Verse 1: Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!
  - a) The first this psalm tells us to praise God and it tells how "good it is to do so". We will get to the reasons why it is good to praise Him in the next few verses. Here the psalmist is just reminding us how good, pleasant and fitting it is to do so.
  - b) I've already discussed the benefits of praising God in that we depend upon His power in order to praise Him and in order to make a difference in the world around us. God is our power source through prayer and praise to love Him and love others.
  - c) As to "pleasant and fitting", the point is it should not be a burden to praise God. We do it out of appreciation for the good He has done for our lives and the good He has done for the world around us. It should not be a struggle for us to praise Him, but something that just comes out of us naturally of our gratitude for what He has done for our lives.
14. Verse 2: The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel.
  - a) Let's start here with a quick discussion of what it means to build up Jerusalem. Some scholars argue that this verse refers to the physical rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. That would make sense as a historical application to this verse.
  - b) While that is an interesting historical truth, it does not affect us very much today. With that said, let me explain why we should be grateful for this concept:
    - i) About 20-30 psalms ago, a psalm line said to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Know that this is the city that Jesus will rule the world from when He returns.
  - c) This does not mean that all believers will one day live in Jerusalem. When the bible says, "build up Jerusalem", think of it as building up all believers to learn to trust God with their lives. It is about realizing that He is working in this world to get believers to trust in Him. That's the "gathering of exiles" which collectively refers to all believers.
  - d) OK John, are you saying I am a block in a city wall in Israel? ☺ No, but we are a "block" in that we are all part of a body of believers. I don't think any of us can ever fully grasp that concept. It is a little like the idea of "God is three in one". Each God "entity" is unique and each is part of a single "whole". In that sense we are individuals and yet united at the same time. All believers are unique and at the same time we are one in our trust in God to guide our lives. With that confusing thought done, I'll sneak over to the next verse.
15. Verse 3: He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
  - a) The idea here is about being grateful to God in that He does heal our wounds. Think about the fact that He designed our bodies so that they heal by themselves over time. Yes doctors and nurses make a difference and we can be grateful to God for those people and the treatments that have been invented to help us recover. Even with that said, it is about appreciating the fact that God designed our bodies with a self-healing mechanism.
  - b) What about emotional wounds? Through God's guidance and good counseling those too can be healed over time. The big picture idea is that we should show gratitude to Him for the healing He does do in our own lives as well as in the lives of people around us.
16. Verse 4: He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.
  - a) Scientists estimate there are a total of about 2,500 visible stars on a very clear night (both hemispheres). They also estimate there are 200 to 400 billion stars in our galaxy alone. I also read there are "3 followed by 16 zeroes" stars in the universe. That number is roughly equal to a trillion stars in existence for every person alive today. Now consider all of those stars and look at Verse 4, where it says that God calls each of these stars by name.

- b) Just so you know, the exact number of stars in existence is not on the final exam. ☺ We should know that God is so powerful He is aware of all of them, and created all of them.
  - c) Remember I said this psalm is about why we praise God. One reason we praise Him is that He cares about our individual lives and at the same time is big enough to create our universe that is beyond our ability to fathom. As I like to quote every so often, "Whenever I think about how big God is, all I do is get a headache". David Hocking.
17. Verse 5: Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.
- a) Speaking of knowing how God is beyond our ability to comprehend, I present Verse 5. The logical question becomes, if He is so powerful that we can't comprehend all He has done or is capable of doing, why try? The point is not to try, but simply to appreciate His power. It comes back to God's most holy name of "I am who I am". We must accept that fact that "He is" even though we can't grasp the size and scope of His power.
18. Verse 6: The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.
- a) OK John, why transition from how big God is, to the fact that He sustains the humble and casts the wicked to the ground (i.e., brings down their plans and sends many to hell)? The idea again is to consider that this God who is this powerful, cares about our world and gets involved in our world in order to bring Him glory over time.
    - i) To explain it another way, He uses those of us who humble ourselves before Him, whether we realize it or not. If we choose to let God guide our lives, again, He will do so whether we realize it or not. OK John, I accept that, now what?
      - a) The answer to that question leads us perfectly to Verse 7.
19. Verse 7: Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp.
- a) If God is guiding us, does that mean we ignore our duties and just praise Him all day like this verse suggests? Of course not. The point is we should pause every now and then, and show gratitude to the one (God) who gave us our lives. More importantly, He gave us a purpose for living, which is to bring Him glory through our lives. That is one big reason why we praise Him.
    - i) Another reason we praise Him, as I have stated, is because when we praise Him, we are then drawing upon His power to make that difference in our world.
    - ii) It is not a matter of praising God for exactly 10 minutes and that provides say, 10 hours of power to do His will. It is a matter of humbling ourselves before Him and that realization that He is guiding our lives gives us the ability not only to praise Him but also to use our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - b) OK John, you keep talking about "making a difference". How do I do that for God?
    - i) Ask yourself, what do I enjoy doing so much I would do it even if money was not an issue?" Even if we can't do that now, it should be the goal to work toward that desire. My point is to use that talent or passion we have in some way to make a difference for God. If we seek Him through prayer and through His word, and I find that God does guide us and teach us how it is we can glorify Him.
    - ii) That little speech does lead me back to this verse. The point is we not only show gratitude for God for what He has done in our lives, but also for what He is going to do in our future. We don't know our future, but God does. Therefore we show our thanksgiving to Him for guiding our lives.
20. Verse 8: He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. <sup>9</sup> He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call.
- a) While I was busy focusing on how God guides our individual lives, the psalm writer is still focusing on the big picture idea that He designed our planet so that it "works".
  - b) The psalmist has moved from discussing the stars in the sky down to the smaller scale of thinking about our specific planet. If one has nothing else to be grateful for in life, one can appreciate how God created our planet, so that it sustains life.

- c) Let me explain this another way: No matter what any of us do, clouds will form so that rain comes down and grass will then grow. That grass provides food for animals.
  - d) Ok then, what is the deal with "young ravens" in Verse 9? There is an ancient belief that ravens abandon their children and those raven children have to survive on their own. Remember that Jesus Himself said that God provides for these ravens. (See Luke 12:24).
    - i) The point is not to understand about cows and ravens. The point is to appreciate this world that God has created and His ability to sustain life here.
21. Verse 10: His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; <sup>11</sup>the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.
- a) We continue to work our way from a big view of our world down to a smaller scale in each of these verses. The point here is to consider the strength of some strong animals or the strongest muscles in our own bodies, our legs. Obviously that does not mean we can't use any of our muscles or use these animals. This comes back to the idea that in order to make a difference for God, He delights in those of us who trust in Him with our lives.
  - b) Think of it this way: Do the armies that are best equipped or are the largest always win battles? Not that I have observed. The point is that God desires to guide our lives and He can give us victories in situations that appear to be sure losses without His help.
    - i) Again, that doesn't mean we win every battle we face in life. It means that over time, God's will gets done and He uses people in order to accomplish His will.
22. Verse 12: Extol the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion, <sup>13</sup> for he strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you. <sup>14</sup> He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat.
- a) In this psalm, we continue to work our way from the really big scale down to a finer scale. We started with considering the size of the universe. Then this psalm focused on God's blessings on our own planet. In the last few verses, the psalm focused on the true source of power. That would be God, as opposed to our own strength or that of strong animals.
  - b) Now we get back to Jerusalem. One has to remember that for a Jewish believer, the city of Jerusalem represents the specific location where those Israelites gathered to worship God. Those Israelites were dependant upon Him to give peace to that city and provide for the people who gather there. As I have also taught in past lessons, Jerusalem is a city with no natural resources. In effect, it depends upon tourism (people visiting the city to worship) in order for that city to survive. The idea is that as Jewish people gathered there in order to worship God, He provides for the resident's needs and protections.
  - c) This does not mean that we Christians are required to go to Jerusalem in order to worship God. However, I still recommend going there, if one gets the opportunity and the means. Jerusalem historically, represents the place where believers are gathered to worship God.
  - d) Let me comment on the phrase "finest of wheat" in Verse 15. Obviously, this does not mean God will put food literally in our mouths. It means that if we trust Him, He will provide through our effort for our own physical as well as our emotional needs.
23. Verse 15: He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.
- a) The idea here is about appreciating the fact that God gives commands to His believers.
  - b) Well John, God has never spoken audibly to me. How do I know He sends commands for us to obey them? Yes, it starts with understanding His word and learning how to apply it to our lives. From there God at times, does speak to individuals.
  - c) Let me speak from experience: I've never heard God speak to me audibly. Yet, somehow I just know He has made His will known to me. Can I explain it? No. Am I sure it was God and not my imagination? Yes, in that my imagination would never in my wildest dreams ask me to do the things He has asked me to do. Know that this guidance would never violate His word. For example, if we have a feeling to go steal our neighbor's stuff, we know that such a feeling did not come from God. It becomes obvious over time as to what to do. Often, God's guidance is simply the next logical step to take in our lives.

24. Verse 16: He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. <sup>17</sup> He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast?
- a) OK, here we are praising God and all of a sudden, the topic switches to snow, frost and hail. The idea is not to appreciate how God "spreads cold weather around". ☺ It is about appreciating how He is in control of the weather. Let me at this point add the final three verses of this psalm and that will help to explain these particular verses better.
25. Verse 18: He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow. <sup>19</sup> He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. <sup>20</sup> He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD.
- a) Verse 18 says that God's "word" melts them. Verse 19 then states in a colorful way that God has revealed His word to the nation of Israel. Verse 20 then states that no other nation has had the privilege of God revealing His word to them the same way that He has revealed it to Israel. Remember that the New Testament was not written at this time.
  - b) OK, John, I can read too. Explain all of these bad weather references in the last few verses and how they tie to God's word being revealed? Another good question.
    - i) Verse 16 and 17 were images of bad weather covering the land. Verse 18 has references to the fact that God "stirs up breezes" and the waters melt and flow.
      - a) Think of that snow melting and becoming drinking water.
    - ii) OK, that's nice, but what does it have to do with us? The point is that God's word "melts our heart" in that it gives us understanding of how to live our lives. Snow melting is similar to our hearts "melting" when we begin to understand what God desires for our lives and how He wants us to live for His will.
    - iii) God allowed His word to come into this world and come into our lives so that it could be melted (understood) for us to learn.
  - c) This psalm begins and ends with Praise the LORD like all the psalms do in this group. The idea here is about being grateful for the world He has created for us.
    - i) OK, after comparing our "melting hearts" to "melting snow", it's time to move on.
26. Psalm 148, Verse 1: Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. <sup>2</sup> Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts.
- a) I stated in the introduction to this lesson that the focus of these psalms are on the "who's, what, when and why" of praising God. Psalm 148 focuses on the "who's". In the first two verses, the text focuses on those in the heavens praising God. Let me explain:
    - i) This is not a reference to people who have died. This is about other entities that God has created and these verses ask them to praise Him. But John, you said that angels couldn't sing. The text does not ask them to sing, but just to praise Him.
  - b) OK, why should I care whether or not angelic beings praise God? The idea is that if we all are to be grateful for this world that He has created, we ask that whatever entities do exist in God's world (i.e., heaven) also appreciate the world He has created.
    - i) Know that these verses are not a demand, but a request. God wants us to glorify Him and the psalmist is asking us to ask angelic creatures to join that praise.
    - ii) So why should those angels join us? It is for them to appreciate the world God has created in the same way He asks us to appreciate the world He has made for us.
  - c) What's the difference between an angel and a heavenly host? I suspect they are in effect different ranks of angelic entities. I'm sure we will find out one day when we get to heaven. The text is saying in effect, may all the angels and other things God has created in heaven appreciate the work He has done and praise Him for His work.
    - i) If you think that is no big deal, remember that Satan himself was once a top angel. The bible teaches that one third of the angels choose to rebel with Satan. Why did they rebel? That is debated, but I believe they wanted to glorify the creation (including themselves) over the creator. For references to these facts see Ezekiel 28:13-15 and Revelation 1:20 and 12:4.

27. Verse 3: Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. <sup>4</sup> Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. <sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. <sup>6</sup> He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.
- a) The psalmist is not literally asking stars to sing. The idea is for us to appreciate the physical world God has created for us. It is like saying, "Look up in the sky and see how beautiful it is. Let us thank God for creating such a beautiful sky for us to appreciate."
  - b) Notice the phrase "waters above the skies" in Verse 4. In Genesis 1:7, there is a reference to waters being above the sky that came down when the flood happened. Scholars believe there was a water vapor that was part of the earth's atmosphere at one time.
    - i) My question of the moment is why praise God as if it is still there? The point is the psalmist understood that waters did and maybe still exist outside of the world that we can touch or see. The psalmist asks us to be grateful for the way God did create the world, for our benefit, both how it was, and how it is.
  - c) Finally, Verse 6 says that, "they will never pass away". It is important to state that this does not refer to God's creation, but to His word. If our world had a beginning, then it will also have an ending one day. However, the word of God lives longer than that long time span. We should appreciate His word, if for no other reason, because it lasts forever.
28. Verse 7: Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, <sup>8</sup> lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, <sup>9</sup> you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, <sup>10</sup> wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds,
- a) If you recall, I said that this psalm focuses on who should praise God. After moving from what is in heaven, to discussing what is in the sky, we now focus on the earth itself.
  - b) To paraphrase, "Look at this wonderful world God has made for us to appreciate. Let us take a moment and say a thank you to Him." To misquote a movie line, "If you don't stop to appreciate life every now and then, it will pass right by us before we even notice." (Taken from the movie, "Ferris Bueller's Day Off".)
29. Verse 11: kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, <sup>12</sup> young men and maidens, old men and children. <sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.
- a) Here we move from inanimate objects and lower life forms in our world to real people. These verses are asking all people learn to appreciate the God who created our world.
  - b) Obviously, there are multitudes of people who never appreciate God. Remember this is not a demand, but a request. It is like yelling out, "Don't you people realize that God created all of this? Instead of complaining about how bad life is, appreciate all that He has done for us. We will live with Him forever if we choose to, and we should praise Him for the world around us and for the lives He has given us".
    - i) Grant it, if I yelled that out, people would just think I am strange. The point is His word is telling us who should appreciate this wonderful world that He has made. That "who" is us. Yes most of this world doesn't want to submit to God, but that should not stop those of us who trust Him, to praise Him.
    - ii) In effect, these verses are a plea for us to spread the word about Him to others. It is about asking others to join us in honoring Him as the God with our lives.
30. Verse 14: He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD.
- a) The final verse of this psalm focuses on believers themselves. It is encouraging us to praise Him in effect, even if no one else wants to join us.
  - b) Let me explain the "horn" reference. For animals, a horn is their main source of strength. The point here is God strengthens us (i.e., gives us the power) to spread the word about Him to others. Now notice that the "horn" is something God raises up for His people. Yes, I believe this is a reference to the Messiah, (Jesus) who is to come into this world.

- c) Think of it this way: God could have some big sign in the sky of His existence. Instead, He chooses to work through believers to spread the word about Him.
  - d) Remember that we are special to God simply because He has chosen us and not because of any special talent or ability we have. Because we are chosen, He desires not only that we praise Him for that fact, but also that we share His love for people with others so that they too, may learn that they are chosen by God to be with Him forever.
    - i) If that doesn't deserve a "Praise the Lord", nothing does.
  - e) OK, two more short psalms to go. We will make it through them both in this lesson.
31. Psalm 149, Verse 1: Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. <sup>2</sup> Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King.
- a) This psalm continues the discussion of who should praise God. The difference between the last one and this one is the last one focused on that all people should appreciate Him. This psalm (149) focuses specifically on believers. The idea is in effect, "Let all of us who understand that He guides our lives and have some understanding of what He desires of our lives take a moment, praise Him and appreciate all He does for our lives."
  - b) As I said in the introduction, if you want to know what we should be grateful for, that is what the first 145 psalms are about. If you know nothing else about God, then appreciate the fact that we are saved based on Jesus' complete payment for our sins. Be grateful that He knows everything about our lives and desires to guide us to do His will. There, that a quick summary of all the psalms so far. ☺ Let's move on to the next verse.
32. Vs 3: Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.
- a) This is the only verse in this psalm that focuses on how we should praise God. This verse says in effect it is acceptable to praise God by dance or music.
    - i) How any particular church decides to organize their praise is up to that church. We should respect different churches having different styles of worship.
  - b) These verses are not saying we have to praise God these particular ways. They are just giving ways that are acceptable to Him. If we have a particular talent to honor God with dance or with a musical instrument, we are welcome do so with our church's permission.
33. Verse 4: For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation.
- a) It is sort of strange to picture the God who created everything taking delight in us. This does not mean there is an old man sitting somewhere smiling at us as we dance and play musical instruments for Him. It is that God appreciates the fact that we honor Him and trust Him with our lives.
  - b) It means what the second half of the verse says: He delights in us and delights in our humbleness before Him by giving us eternal salvation. Think of it this way: What does it take to get saved? First we have to acknowledge that God exists and that He is in charge of our lives and we are not. Even before we can accept Jesus' payment for our sins, we have to acknowledge our need to humble ourselves before Him, and that is the point here.
34. Verse 5: Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds.
- a) Now for another strange transition. From discussing being humble before God, we move on to a reference to having joy with this privilege of praising Him. We should even sing for joy in our beds (that's the strange part.) Let me explain:
    - i) The idea is that we don't just honor God when we gather in groups to worship Him. It is also something we can do when we are alone and even in bed.
    - ii) In other words, this verse gives us the "when" of when we should praise God.
35. Verse 6: May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, <sup>7</sup> to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, <sup>8</sup> to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, <sup>9</sup> to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the LORD.
- a) OK, if you thought Verse 5 was strange, Verses 6 to 9 should lose you completely. ☺
  - b) I would say that these verses would require a little commentary:

- i) At first glance, it appears they are discussing aspects about Jesus in His Second Coming. That is because it describes taking vengeance upon nonbelievers. It sort of reads like Jesus coming back in His role to rule over the world.
  - ii) Here's the problem: Notice the word "their" in Verse 6. Who is "their"? Based on the previous few verses, it is talking about believers. My point is these verses are describing believers with swords in their hands to carry out God's vengeance.
  - c) Let me explain the sword reference some more at this point. It has to do with believers using weapons for God's glory. Let me explain:
    - i) I've hinted through this lesson, that God gives the privilege to believers to lead others to Him. It also appears that based on these verses, that God uses believers in order to take out His vengeance on those who don't trust in Him.
    - ii) The classic example is when the Israelites first conquered the Promised Land as taught in the book of Joshua. God used the Israelites to judge those who lived there. My point is God uses His people in order to carry out judgment.
    - iii) Even if that is true, when do we punish nations and put their leaders (kings) in fetters? Yes, the Israelites have conquered enemies throughout their history, but how does this apply to us? The answer comes back to the concept that evil always lose in the end. Sometimes evil men and armies win battles, but eventually those who stand up for Him eventually conquer over those who oppose Him.
    - iv) In short, God uses believers as part of His way of judging nonbelievers.
    - v) The point is in effect that God's will, will get done, through people. No matter how bad a situation may look in our lives or in the life of a society, God finds a way for His people to win out if collectively, they are putting their trust in Him.
  - d) OK one more psalm, which is rather short.
36. Psalm 150: Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.
- a) I said in the introduction that each of these psalms are about the who's, why's when and how's of praising God. That is especially true for this psalm. Let me explain:
    - i) Verse 1 is about where we praise God. Verse 2 is about the "why". Verses 3-5 are about "how". Verse 6 focuses on "whom" again and it ends with another "what".
      - a) OK, now that I have cleared that up, ☺ let me explain some of the specifics about these verses starting in Verse 1.
    - b) Here in Verse 1, it starts with a "Praise the LORD". That would be a "what" question in "What does God call us to do? Praise Him."
      - i) The rest of the verse talks about where to praise Him. I could paraphrase this verse by stating we should praise God on earth and in heaven. Yes that is another call for all creatures, including angels to praise God. I also see this as reminder to us that we should praise Him now, because we will continue to do so in heaven.
    - c) Let me come back to a question I pondered in my introduction: In heaven, do we praise God around the clock? I don't think so. However, I think we should get used to the idea of praising Him now, to regularly remind ourselves that He is there and He is not only guiding us, but providing us with the ability to do His will by that praise.
37. Verse 2: Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.
- a) Speaking of why we should praise Him, I present Verse 2. Actually a better question for Verse 2 is not "why", but "for what reason" should we praise Him.
    - i) That first reason for praise is for His acts of power. It is not just for the bible miracles, but because He has drawn us out of this world and called us to salvation. That alone is a mighty act of power we can appreciate. Next, it is to consider the good things He has done for our lives since we were saved.
  - b) Next the verse says to praise Him for His "surpassing greatness". My translation: God can do things that no other so called god or no other creature including man can do. In other words, be grateful for the good things that God has done in our lives.

38. Verse 3: Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, <sup>4</sup> praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, <sup>5</sup> praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.
- a) In these three verses we have various musical instruments and even dancing listed as ways one can praise God. One commentator I read stated that all of these instruments originated outside of Israel. If the Israelites can incorporate foreign instruments into their praise, then we shouldn't have any problems adding any instruments that we use today.
  - b) As to what instruments or dance is appropriate in our church that is up to our churches to decide. I don't think any particular style is as significant as the fact we are taking the time to praise Him with those instruments and even dancing.
  - c) I also believe it is important to organize the music. If all of these musical instruments were just being played with any organization, it won't sound very nice. My point is that yes, any and all instruments are acceptable, but it is also necessary to organize our praise to Him when we do so collectively.
39. Verse 6: Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.
- a) The psalms end with the request that everything (all people and creatures) make the effort to praise God. Obviously, the psalms are written for believers. The plea here is for others to join in that praise. As I have stated earlier in the lesson, creatures praise God by their existence and the fact that He provides for them a place to live and exist. The point for us as believers is that if all creatures in effect acknowledge Him by the fact they have a place to live. We with our knowledge of God should all the more take time out of our lives to be grateful to Him not only for our existence, but for the good He has done for us.
  - b) I can't think of a more appropriate way to end the psalms other than by giving praise to God for our lives. Therefore, let me do a little of that in my closing prayer.
40. Heavenly Father, We are grateful for how You have blessed our lives. We are grateful for the world You have created. We thank You so that we can focus for a moment on the fact that You are responsible for the blessings we have in life. We know the joy we have is not based on our circumstances, but solely based on our trust in You. We ask that You bless our lives, so that we continue to live to make a difference for You in the world around us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

On the next page, is a list of credits for my sources for these psalm lessons. Again my thank you for reading these lessons and I hope God blesses your lives as you continue to study His word.

## Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted *me* to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in this study. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV). Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) and The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189. "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. I also read the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #7 below. All the bible text (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these psalm lessons. The specific commentaries on the Psalms are listed first, and then the bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on Psalms by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
2. Commentary on Psalms by Bob Davies. They are available for free in MP3® format at [http://northcountrychapel.com/audio\\_studies/tapelist.php?book\\_id=19](http://northcountrychapel.com/audio_studies/tapelist.php?book_id=19).
3. Commentary on Psalms by David Guzik. It is available for free in text and audio format. He wrote a detailed commentary on Psalm 119, that I am particularly grateful for that one as well as other particular psalms. The web address is <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/19.htm>.
4. Commentary on Psalms by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>.
5. The Treasury of David by Charles Spurgeon, written in 1885. Considered the greatest commentary on the Psalms. Available to read for free at <http://www.spurgeon.org/treasury/treasury.htm>
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8. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every bible verse. It is available through Zondervan. Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this same source.
9. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: [www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm](http://www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm).
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11. When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties -- Norman L. Geisler, Thomas Howe; Baker Book House 1999.
12. I also refer to Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org).