

**PSALM 150:1-6 ESV**

1 Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! 2 Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! 3 Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! 4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! 5 Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! 6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!

STRUCTURE

- I. *General call to praise Yahweh (1a)*
- II. **WHERE:** Praise Him in all places (1b)
- III. **WHY:** Praise Him for His person and work (2)
- IV. **HOW:** Praise Him with every instrument (3-5)
- V. **WHO:** Praise Him, everything that breathes (6a)
- VI. *General call to praise Yahweh (6b)*

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Psalm 150 concludes the Psalter with an exclamation point. Maintaining high energy from beginning to end, it parallels the other four concluding doxologies of Psalms 146-149 (a doxology is a burst of praise to God), rounding out Israel's hymn book with a universal call to exuberant adoration. If the rest of the Psalter conveys the depth of human emotion, Psalm 150 reflects the height of praise. Worship carries us through our lows, but it doesn't leave us there. Our journey ends in praise.

But this raises questions—where, why, how, and who? The psalmist answers them succinctly and poetically, bookending them with a general call to praise Yahweh (1a, 6b). The bookends remind us of what's most important—not where, why, how, etc.—but whom we direct our praise to: Yahweh, Israel's personal and covenant-making God, who desires a relationship with us. Outside of relationship, melodies of praise fall flat. Worship springs from joy in God's friendship.

As the middle verses escort us along, we learn the mechanics of praise, which highlight its nature. Where do we praise God? In all places, because God is not limited. Why do we praise God? Primarily, for His person and work. How to we praise Him? Other verses highlight myriads of ways, but Israel's Psalter emphasizes one: music. Finally, who does Israel's God call to worship Him? Not just Israel, and not just everyone, but "everything that has breath"—because God deserves glory from all creation. God of the universe is no less personal than He is universal. He is both.

Therefore, let us all praise Him. Let us praise Him in all places, for all things, by all means, and with all creation. To reject this universal call is to reject the God who is personal. It is to stand outside, only to be left outside, forever. Even there, however, the Psalms elsewhere warn that "the wrath of man shall praise you" (Ps. 76:10). Even those who refuse to praise God—who angrily reject Him—will unintentionally praise Him by the judgment they receive, which redounds to God's glory.

But that is not God's heart. God's heart is to redeem all. God's heart is that everything that has breath praise the LORD joyfully, today, not begrudgingly in eternity. Psalm 150 serves as a catalyst toward this end. May all of us praise God joyfully, today. Insofar as we do, we will also praise Him joyfully, forever.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!

—"Praise the LORD":

- "Praise": in Hebrew, the word is "Halal" (and the imperative, "Halelu"), from which we derive, "Hallelujah." The "jah" at the end of "Hallelujah" is an abbreviated form for "Yahweh" (or "Jahweh"). Hallelujah means "Praise Yahweh."

- Since the verse begins with "Praise the LORD"—and "LORD" in all-caps means "Yahweh," the divine name—the psalmist is saying, "Hallelujah," or "Praise Yahweh."
- The CSB renders these first words, "Hallelujah". Many translations say it as a footnote.
- Piper on Hallelujah: *To shout, "Hallelu Jah!" — "Praise Jah" — is like standing in the council of the gods and boldly saying, "Not to you, Molech!" "Not to you, Baal!" "Not to you, Dagon!" "Not to you, Artemis!" "Not to you, Zeus!" But to Jah, and Jah alone, I give praise. And I call you to join me! Praise Jah! And not only is Jah God's personal name, but it is the one he gave himself to distinguish himself from all the gods. And it is thrilling in meaning. When Moses asked God what name he should use to identify God in Egypt, God said, "I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). The name Yahweh is built on the words "I am". So God put his absolute, transcendent, self-sufficient being at the center of his identity. "All the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but Yahweh made the heavens" (Psalm 96:5). So, the next time you sing "Hallelujah" pause for a split second between "hallelu" and "Jah" and say it like a name. We praise you . . . Jah! You are above all gods . . . Jah! Join me, all you heavenly hosts, and praise . . . Jah! He is! He simply, eternally, absolutely, independently, gloriously Is! Hallelu . . . Jah!*
- "Praise" occurs 13 times in this song and clearly represents the theme. While the psalter contains songs of lament, judgment, history, and more, this final song elucidates the theme of all: praise.
- "Hallelujah" is how the final song in the psalter begins (v. 1) and ends (v. 6). The journey in between—from Pss. 2-149—leads us through many twists, but lands us where it began. Life is a journey, sometimes through hell, but also from hallelujah to hallelujah.

—"Praise God":

- The psalmist shifts from the personal to generic name, from Yahweh to God.
- By beginning and ending with God's personal name, the psalmist emphasizes God's desire for friendship. Our friends know our name.
- By shifting to the generic name for God, the psalmist appeals universally—to friends, enemies, and "everything that has breath"—to worship the Creator.
- All creation owes worship to its Creator, but God wants us to worship not only because we "owe" it but because we know Him intimately and praise Him joyfully.

—"sanctuary... mighty heavens":

- Scholars debate whether "sanctuary" references the earthly or heavenly temple. Both can be called "sanctuary", depending on context. However, this precise word for "sanctuary" (Heb. *qodesh*) is only used in the Psalms of the earthly sanctuary.
- "heavens" is the word "firmament," reminding us of God's creation of the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1. There, the firmament (Heb. *raqia*) is portrayed as a dome or expanse that separates the waters above from the waters below. The firmament was believed in ancient cultures to hold back the "waters above," which could be interpreted as celestial waters or a cosmic ocean. It also served to support the heavenly bodies and was seen as a part of the ordered cosmos created by God.
- There are times where the Psalms call on inanimate creation to praise God (Ps. 65:12-13; 96:11-13; etc.). At other times, the Psalms call on angels to praise God. The question is: does "praise him in the mighty heavens" refer to celestial bodies (stars, moon, etc.) or to angels?
 - A cross reference with Ps. 148:1-4 reveals how closely the authors of Scripture linked angels with celestial bodies, associating both with "the heavens": *1 Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! 2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts! 3 Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! 4 Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!*
 - Nehemiah 9:6 articulates ancient cosmology in terms of layers within the heavens, where celestial bodies dwelt in the closer layers, while the further / higher layers contained God's dwelling place, where angels lived. In this verse, "heaven of heavens" refers to the "highest" level—what we commonly think of as heaven: *"You are the LORD, you alone. You have made*

heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you."

- This makes sense of Ps. 148:1-4, where the psalmist calls for praise "in the heights," which includes angels, sun, moon, and stars. It also mentions the "highest heavens," reminding us that they thought in terms of layers.
- This does not mean that you could travel to heaven in a spaceship. It's hard for westerners to wrap our mind around this, but scholars refer to it as cosmic geography.

Cosmically/spiritually speaking, Heaven is up. Sheol is down.

- "mighty" might emphasize angels more than stars, but stars could be understood as "mighty" also. Given the cross-reference with Ps. 148, which belongs in the same family of doxologies that conclude the Psalter, I believe the psalmist is calling on both the celestial bodies and heavenly creatures to praise God.
- When Solomon dedicates the temple, he prays thus: "But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built" (2 Chron. 6:18). Again, we see the "layering" of heaven and "the highest heaven." Solomon's prayer acknowledges a truth of Psalm 150: God cannot be contained. Neither the sanctuary nor the highest heaven can hold Him.
- Therefore, we should not restrict our worship to a sanctuary.
- At the same time, the Scripture says, "Praise him in the sanctuary." God can be worshiped on a barn roof in North Dakota, but that doesn't diminish the specialness of the sanctuary. In the Old Testament, the sanctuary referred to the tabernacle or temple where Levites made sacrifices. In New Testament times, through the work of Christ, the church became God's new temple. Obedience to Psalm 150 would mean that we don't neglect corporate worship since we, together, are God's temple. It would also mean that if we ever find ourselves on a barn in North Dakota, we should worship there too. The proper place to worship is: everywhere—but especially, together.
- Kidner: "His glory fills the universe; his praise must do no less."

2 Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!

—Here, we move from the "where" to the "why" of worship.

—We worship God for two reasons: His mighty deeds, and His excellent greatness. In other words, for who He is and what He has done.

—The Psalms emphasize two mighty deeds above all others: the creation story and the Exodus. As believers in Jesus, we look to our Greater Exodus—that is, our greater redemption from slavery—which is the Cross. There, Jesus subjected Himself to earthly and spiritual tyrants to liberate us from both. When we receive Christ by faith, He sets us free from slavery to sin and the devil. Upon His return, He will deliver us from every earthly tyrant by toppling their thrones in real time and replacing them with His own.

—We should meditate often on God's creation by getting out in it, pondering it, and worshiping God for it. We should also dwell often on God's redemption by repenting daily for sins, thanking God for His forgiveness in Jesus, taking communion, etc. Dwelling often on creation and redemption inspires enduring worship.

—"excellent greatness": translated as "unequaled greatness" (NLT), "surpassing greatness" (NIV, NET), "abundant greatness" (CSB), "exceeding greatness" (RSV).

3 Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! 4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! 5 Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

—We've answered where and why to praise the LORD. Now, we turn to how.

—Essentially, we worship God with every musical means. This does not discount that we worship God with our lifestyle, with silence, or with other non-musical means also. But the Psalms are musical. Music carries our praise to heaven on wings of rhythm and beat.

—"trumpet":

- Levi. 23:24: "*Speak to the people of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation.'*" (Announcing the Feast of Trumpets)

- 1 Chron. 15:24: *"Shebaniah and Jehoshaphat and Nethaneel and Amasai and Zechariah and Benaiah and Eliezer the priests blew the **trumpets** before the ark of God. And Obed-edom and Jehiah were gatekeepers for the ark."* (Procession of the Ark)
- 2 Chron. 29:27: *"And Hezekiah commanded that the burnt offering be offered on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the song to the LORD began also, and the **trumpets**, accompanied by the instruments of David king of Israel."* (General praise)
- Israel used trumpets to announce solemn assemblies for dedication and also for loud bursts of high praise associated with victory.
- The totality of our worship experience should include special moments and seasons of dedication. Generally, trumpets were associated with special moments. In Christian culture, Christmas and Easter come to mind. But we can also dedicate special seasons that don't necessarily fit the liturgical calendar. For instance, I always go on a long fast at the beginning of the year and sometimes toward the end of summer or if I really need God's deliverance on some matter.

—"lute and harp": these are stringed instruments, as common as guitars in modern worship. They are softer sounding than other instruments in the psalm.

—"tambourine and dance":

- Tambourines were often used in association with dancing in celebration. Examples:
 - Ex. 15:20: *"Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a **tambourine** in her hand, and all the women went out after her with **tambourines** and **dancing**."*
 - Jdg. 11:34: *"Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with **tambourines** and with **dances**. She was his only child..."* (this story ends awkwardly)
 - 1 Sam. 18:6-7: *"As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and **dancing** to meet King Saul with **tambourines**, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.'"*
 - Ps. 149:3: *"Let them praise his name with **dancing**, making melody to him with **tambourine** and lyre!"*
 - These dances often related to recent victory or breakthrough.
- It is right to dance in corporate worship. The Psalms command us to. Since Psalm 150 sounds the final note of the Psalter, it is almost like God's final word on worship—at least, as far as Israel's liturgy was concerned. For this reason, we should view music and dancing as essential aspects of corporate worship.
- Ross: "The word [for dance] indicates the dancing was whirling or turning, perhaps dancing in circles."

—"strings and pipe":

- The "lute and harp" have already been mentioned from the string family, but here the psalmist includes stringed instruments as well as wind instruments.
- In Genesis 4:21, we learn that someone named Jubal "was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe." That section of Genesis depicts man's cultural development, albeit in a negative context. Jubal was a descendant of Cain the murderer and first city-builder (a precursor to Babel). He was also the relative of Lamech, who made Cain look like Mother Teresa. Genesis is making the subtle point that culture "images" God, but man distorts God's image by developing culture that corrupts.
- We see this same mix today. People use music to praise God but also to curse Him. They use music to magnify holiness but also perversion.

—"sounding cymbals... loud crashing cymbals": there's a place for "loud" in worship music. This does not mean that we should endeavor to damage peoples' hearing, but it does mean that exclusively quiet worship cannot sufficiently offer God the praise He deserves.

—Some of these instruments parallel those in 1 Chronicles 15:16: *"David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy."*

—Whereas Moses instituted a liturgy of sacrifice, David introduced a liturgy of music. This is why we so often see in Israel's history, in times of reformation, a return to David's order:

- Jehoida the high priest heeds David's liturgy in 2 Chronicles 23:18: *"And Jehoiada appointed the officers of the house of the LORD under the direction of the Levitical priests, whom David had organized to be in charge of the house of the LORD, to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, as it is written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the command of David."*
- Hezekiah heeds David's liturgy in 2 Chronicles 29:25: *"He stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer and of Nathan the prophet, for the commandment was from the LORD through his prophets."*
- Josiah heeds David's liturgy in 2 Chronicles 35:4: *"Prepare yourselves according to your fathers' houses by your divisions, as prescribed in the writing of David king of Israel and the document of Solomon his son."*
- Ezra heeds David's liturgy in Ezra 3:10: *"And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel."*
- Nehemiah heeds David's liturgy in Nehemiah 12:45: *"They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon."*
- Each of these leaders led Israel back to God by reinstituting musical worship via priestly rotation as David prescribed.
- In David's day, the two most prominent worship leaders were David and Asaph. About a dozen psalms were written by Asaph, and most of the rest were written by David. Yet for as prominent as these men were in the world of worship leading, they didn't see their job as just having a bunch of big concerts. This was not the David-and-Asaph show. Their vision was to train and equip worship leaders, which is why—by the end of David's reign—they had 288 of them, and 4000 musicians (1 Chron. 23:5; 25:1-7).

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

—We conclude with the "who" (or "what") of worship: "everything that has breath"!!

—In Gen. 1:30, we read a similar phrase: *"And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so."*

—This must be an allusion to Genesis 1:30, which means "everything that has breath" is more than a poetic way of referring to humans; it refers to all creatures. Psalm 148:7-10, which belongs to the same family of doxologies as Psalm 150, expands on that thought: *"Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds!"*

—But what does it mean for animals to praise God? And why must the psalmist command them to do so?

- God created all things, not just humans, to reflect His glory and heed His leadership. By calling even animals to praise God, the psalmist reminds us of God's universal reign, as well as His purpose that all things bring Him glory.
- Prophetically, the command envisions a day when "everything that has breath" will no longer suffer the "futility" (Rom. 8:20) associated with our fall and will instead be redeemed alongside us—never again to suffer, die, or cause suffering in others. Instead, the king of the jungle will exhale praise to the King of Heaven. King cobras will do the same. Predators will no longer kill but rather praise Him who was killed to renew all things, including our vocation: to worship in perfect harmony with creation.

—By calling on “everything that has breath” to praise “the LORD”—Yahweh—and not just “God” confirms what I just said about the prophetic nature of Psalm 150. Right now, fallen creation worships God in the sense that eagles fly like they were designed to, and snakes slither. Creation operating as designed brings God glory. At the same time, creation doesn’t operate perfectly as God originally designed due to sin entering the world. Death, disease, and destruction have entered the animal world, and they have also entered through the animal world. Psalm 150 foreshadows: it won’t always be so. One day, creation will bring glory not just to “God”—in an impersonal way and in their fallen state—but to “Yahweh”. In some special way, it seems that God will be in relationship with the animal world. God’s personal name implies such.

—What could it mean that animals will have a personal relationship with God in the age to come? In the least, it means that God will so disinfect their bodies of sin and death that they operate perfectly by design, and they are in that sense more aligned with God. But could it mean more? Might our eternal experience resemble something like the Garden of Eden, with a talking serpent, and like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, where animals and humans dialogue? Maybe.

—It blesses my heart to meditate on how God concludes his one-hundred-fifty-chapter book of hymns with the command, “Praise the LORD!” or “Hallelujah!” God, why do I feel so touched by this? Having studied so many of the psalms, I’ve journeyed with them into “the valley of the shadow of death” (Ps. 23), the confusion of “Why have you forsaken me?” (Ps. 22), and the warzone of “Why do the nations rage” (Ps. 2). I’ve felt the stab of David’s betrayal (41:9), the sting of his guilt (51), the weight of his sadness (42), and the fire of his rage (10). The emotions of the psalmists pours out like water, but Psalm 150 reminds us of their destination: praise. I believe this is why it blesses me so much. I used to view negative emotions as an impediment to praise, but now I see them as a river, which—if I only let it flow—carries me through every bend to God’s heart. Hardship need not impede worship. On the contrary, worship leads to hardship because friendship with God is enmity with the world. The preponderance of enemies in the Psalms make this impossible to deny. Psalm 150 reminds us that the hardship of prior psalms leads us back to where we began. Worship leads to hardship, which in turn leads back to worship. By the time we arrive at verse 6, our praise has been seasoned through pain.

—Ross: “The word ‘breath’ is critical to this psalm; it is a term that is essentially a provision from God for human life. In addition to describing the breath of life, i.e., that which makes the human a living being (see Gen. 2:7), the word is used in different places in Scripture to indicate that when God imparted breath to humans they received the capacity for spiritual understanding (Job 34:8) and for distinguishing between what is right and wrong (Pr. 20:22), aspects necessary to the praise of God. Every person, not just Israel, must praise the LORD. Here then is the glory of creation. God gave humans breath, and so they owe their breath to him, making praise the primary reason they have it. The call is for the breath to be used in this way.”