



Psalm 150 - Praise for God's Surpassing Greatness

Introduction

This hymn closes the Psalter with its call for 'everything that breathes' to praise the Lord with every kind of jubilant accompaniment. This psalm may have been intended for some particular liturgical use, for example, the opening of a joyful service of celebration, but it now also serves as the final doxology of the whole book. The list of musical instruments in vv.3-5, with its mixture of wind, strings, percussion, and rhythmic dance, gives the impression of loud song and ceaseless motion – the worshipper's whole body offering praise to God.

Each of the five books of the Psalms closes with a doxology (Psalm 41:13, 72:18-19, 89:52, and 106:48). This entire Psalm can be seen as a doxology that not only closes the fifth and final volume of the collected psalms, but also closes the entire Book of Psalms.

Psalm 150 contains no argument, no real teaching, no real explanation. It is an eloquent, passionate cry to all creation to give Yahweh the praise due to him. Alexander Maclaren commented, "The psalm is more than an artistic close of the Psalter: it is a prophecy of the last result of the devout life, and, in its unclouded sunniness, as well as in its universality, it proclaims the certain end of the weary years for the individual and for the world."

Psalm 150:1-2 - Praise God in the Sanctuary.

The members of the congregation invite one another to praise God in his sanctuary, where they are gathered to worship; the call to praise him in his mighty heavens may be addressed to the angels and heavenly lights, inviting them to join in: <<***Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and***

you waters above the heavens!>> (Psalm 148:1-4). The reasons given in v.2 – his mighty deeds for his people (refer to the comment made on Psalm 145:10-13a), and the excellent greatness of his character – indicate that, with this topic of praise, the voices of human worshippers alone are too feeble; let the heavenly host help!

¹ Praise the Lord!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament!

Psalm 150:1

Praise the Lord! This last of the five ending psalms shares the same beginning and ending line as the previous four. Yahweh is praised, and his people are encouraged, exhorted to praise him. There is no crisis or enemy in view; this is pure praise.

Praise God in his sanctuary. The sanctuary of God is a most fitting place for his praise. It is a place set apart for his honour, and in special recognition of God's presence. If Yahweh is to be praised anywhere, it should be in his sanctuary.

In light of the New Covenant, Christians realise that God's sanctuary is not fixed to a particular building in Jerusalem:

- **Jesus serves his people in a sanctuary in the heavens:** <<*Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up*>> (Hebrews 8:1-2).
- **Jesus makes his sanctuary among his people collectively:** <<*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'*>> (2 Corinthians 6:16).
- **Jesus makes his sanctuary in the individual believer:** <<*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*>> (1 Corinthians 3:16).
- **Ultimately Jesus himself will be the sanctuary of God among his people:** <<*I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb*>> (Revelation 21:22).

Adam Clarke commented, "In many places we have the compound word *halelu-yah*, praise ye Jehovah; but this is the first place in which we find *halelu-el*, praise God, or the strong God."

Praise him in his mighty firmament! The wide expanse of sky, with all its might in storms and weather, is also a fitting place for God's praise. Since the firmament stretches from horizon to horizon, it reveals that God should be placed in every place under the sky.

Derek Kidner commented, "His glory fills the universe; his praise must do no less." And Clarke added, "Through the whole expanse, to the utmost limits of his power. As *rakia* is the firmament of vast expanse that surrounds the globe, and probably that in which all the celestial bodies of the solar system are included, it may have that meaning here. Praise him whose power and goodness extend through all worlds; and let the inhabitants of all those worlds share in the grand chorus, that it may be universal."

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

Psalm 150:2

Praise him for his mighty deeds. This is reason to praise God in every place. He has done great and powerful things, and none greater than what Jesus accomplished at the Cross and the empty tomb. The singer of Psalm 150 had only shadowy knowledge of it, but the ultimate demonstration of God's power would come in the resurrection of Jesus: *<<so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places>>* (Ephesians 1:18-20). For this and all his mighty deeds, all humanity should praise him. Alexander Maclaren noted, "'His mighty deeds' might be rendered 'His heroic or, valiant acts.' The reference is to his deliverance of his people as a signal manifestation of prowess or conquering might."

Praise him according to his surpassing greatness! It is right to praise God for the mighty things he does; there is perhaps something greater in praising him for who he is, in all the excellence of his greatness. It is a greatness that surpasses all else in the entire universe, excellent above all.

Psalm 150:3-6 - Praise Him with Music and Dance.

Not only is the topic too great for merely human voices to do it justice; it also deserves the full expression of human energy and devotion, with instruments as varied as trumpet, lute, harp, strings, pipe, and various cymbals. The tambourine is commonly coupled with dance in a joyful procession: *<<Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women*

went out after her with tambourines and with dancing>> (Exodus 15:20), <<*As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the Philistine, the women came out of all the towns of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments*>> (1 Samuel 18:6), <<*Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre*>> (Psalm 149:3), and: <<*Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers*>> (Jeremiah 31:4). This builds to the final wish, let everything that breathes praise the Lord, i.e. all Israel, all mankind, and all animals: <<*Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!*>> (Psalm 148:10-11); here is where they are most fully alive. Hallelujah!

- 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 clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

Psalm 150:3-5

Praise him with trumpet sound. The psalmist looked at an orchestra of God's people and conducted their music in praise to God. There was to be no instrument left out. Brass, string, wind, and percussion must all join in the praise of a God so great.

There was good reason to mention the trumpet first in this long list. Charles Spurgeon commented, "The sound of trumpet is associated with the grandest and most solemn events, such as the giving of the law, the proclamation of jubilee, the coronation of Jewish kings, and the raging of war. It is to be thought of in reference to the coming of our Lord in his second advent and the raising of the dead."

Adam Clarke described what he believed each musical instrument here mentioned to be:

- Trumpet: "*Sophar*, from its noble, cheering, and majestic sound."
- Lute: "*Nebel*; the nabla, a hollow stringed instrument; perhaps like the guitar."
- Harp: "*Kinnor*, another stringed instrument, played on with the hands or fingers."

- Timbrel: “*Toph*, drum, tabret, or tomtom, or tympanum of the ancients; a skin stretched over a broad hoop; perhaps something like the tambourine.”
- Dance: “*Machol*, the pipe. It never means dance; refer to the comment made on Psalm 149:3.”
- Stringed instruments [strings]: “*Minnim*. This literally signifies strings put in order; perhaps a triangular kind of hollow instrument on which the strings were regularly placed, growing shorter and shorter till they came to a point.”
- Flutes [pipe]: “*Ugab*. Very likely the syrinx or mouth organ; Pan’s pipe; both of the ancients and moderns.”
- Loud cymbals [clanging cymbals]: “*Tsetselim*. Two hollow plates of brass, which, being struck together, produced a sharp clanging sound.”
- Clashing cymbals: “What the high-sounding cymbals meant I know not; unless those of a larger make, struck above the head, and consequently emitting a louder sound.”

James Montgomery Boice observed, “The list of instruments is not meant to be comprehensive, though it may be. We do not know what instruments the ancient Jews had. The point is actually that everything you have can be used to worship God.”

The broad list of musical instruments demonstrates that God wants every class and group of people to praise him, because these instruments were normally played by different types of people. Maclaren commented, “The horn was the curved ‘*Shophar*,’ blown by the priests; harp and psaltery were played by the Levites, timbrels were struck by women; and dancing, playing on stringed instruments and pipes and cymbals, were not reserved for the Levites.”

Praise him with clanging cymbals. The individual instruments must be played with strength and celebration, and the collection of them together fills the room with sound. This was not halting or hesitant praise, because the love and goodness of God is not halting or hesitant toward his people in any way. Boice remarked, “Let’s be done with worship that is always weak and unexciting. If you cannot sing loudly and make loud music to praise the God who has redeemed you in Jesus Christ and is preparing you for heaven, perhaps it is because you do not really know God or the gospel at all. If you do know him, hallelujah.”

⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150:6

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! This is a remarkably fitting conclusion to this Psalm and to the entire Book of Psalms. Everything that breathes should give its praise to the one who gave it breath. Every breath is the gift of God and praise is the worthy return believers make for that gift. Derek Kidner noted that the literal phrase is, “Let all breath praise the Lord.” The word *nesamah*, that breathes, denotes all living creatures, endowed with life by the creator (Genesis 1:24-25 and 7:21-22), but always in distinction from the creator.

Scripture reveals that this will happen: <<*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!’*>> **(Revelation 5:13).**

Praise the Lord! The last line of the Psalter could be nothing else than *Hallelujah!* Yahweh is to be praised and honoured, and will be so among his people and all creation.