# Adult Teaching Resources

*January 13, 2019*

## Epiphany (January 6-March 3)
## What Are We Praying For?

Psalm 72 (RCL 1-7, 10-14) – "A Prayer for Justice"

**Psalm 29 – "A Prayer for Peace"**

Psalm 36 (RCL 5-10) – "A Prayer for Love"

Psalm 19 – "A Prayer for Goodness"

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# A Prayer for Peace

*Psalm 29*

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support The Bible Lesson by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

## Bible Background

*"May the LORD give strength to his people!*
*May the LORD bless his people with peace!"*

No matter what part of the country you live in, you know the power of a storm. In the moments of experiencing a storms mightiest power, it's only natural to feel small and insignificant. Storms have a way of showing us how little and powerless we are.

Even with a feeling of insignificance, we turn to God, the One who is with us always, for comfort and peace. Today we explore a psalm of peace for people experiencing a great storm.

## Opening

After everyone arrives, ask each person to find a partner to share conversation. Ask each couple to share a time when they experienced a powerful storm.

What kind of storm was it?

Where were you?

How old were you?

What did you fear would happen because of the storm?

What ended up happening?

What did you learn about nature?

What did you learn about yourself?

What did you learn about God?

Give each couple time to talk with each other, then ask for volunteers to share their experience with the larger group.

## Reading the Bible

To what does the psalmist say we are to ascribe to the Lord? (glory and strength, the glory of God's name)

In what ways is the voice of the Lord described? (over the waters, thunders over the mighty waters, powerful)

In what ways does the voice of the Lord take action? (flashes forth flames of fire, shakes the wilderness, causes the oaks to whirl, strips the forest bare)

Where and how does the Lord sit? (enthroned over the flood, enthroned as king forever)

What is the hope for the Lord? (strength to his people, bless his people with peace)

## Making Connections

What is your favorite hymn or song of praise? What does it say about God?

With all you know about God, what do you think others should recognize or understand about God? How can you help facilitate that understanding?

Describe watching a storm come closer. What do you see? What do you smell? What do you hear? How does the experience make you feel?

When have you heard God's voice? How would you describe it?

When have you experienced the power and might of God at work? How would you describe it?

What "storm" have you experienced when the earth shook, your foundation was threatened, and you weren't sure you would survive? Who helped you through that time? What did they do? How did God help with through?

When you praise God, how do you end your praise? What words do you use? What do you affirm about God?

## So What?

Ask everyone to gather back with their partner from the beginning of the lesson.

Our Lesson Writer asks this important question, "How do we read this psalm today? Some might see in it a promise that the all-powerful God will provide perfect protection for those who trust, but if so, they miss the point. The psalm reflects the setting of a frightening storm – an awe-inspiring manifestation of God's power over nature, which can be destructive."

With your partner, talk about how we can read this psalm today.

What storms do we face?

Where is God in the storms?

## So What? *continued*

Where are we in the storms?

Where do we find peace?

Where do we find safety?

Where do we find comfort?

How do we get through the storm to sunnier, calmer days?

Share with each other, then ask for volunteers to share with the larger group.

Spend time talk about the inevitability of storms in life and the ever-present God who is with us.

## The Challenge

This week when you face challenges, pray for God to be with you and help you, no matter how big or how small the storms might be.

## Prayer

*Loving God, storms are going to come our way. We know that to be true. We also know that you are with us. We know that to be true, too. Bless us and give us strength as we go through our days. Amen.*

## Digging Deeper
by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support The Bible Lesson by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the "shovel" icon in the The Bible Lesson, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Early Epiphany**—While the church's season of Epiphany is designed mainly to commemorate the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, texts from the lectionary also reflect the manifestation of God's power and presence in other ways – as in powerful storms.

**Storm gods**—The Sumerians honored Isshkub as the storm god, while the Assyrians called their weather god Adad (or Addu), and the Hurrians named theirs Tesshub. The Syrians worshiped Hadad as the god of storms, and most familiar to Bible readers, the Canaanites believed that Baal was the power behind the storms.

This uncleaned bronze image (left), which I excavated from a Late Bronze Age stratum at Lachish, is an example of what archaeologists call a "Smiting God." A number of similar images found at various sites are characterized by an upraised right hand, which probably held a thunder club. More intact images sometimes hold a staff or spear in their left hand, symbolizing a bolt of lightning. This can be seen more clearly in a Late Bronze stele found in Ugarit, in northern Syria. It is now in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

**Heavenly beings**—Ancient Near Eastern peoples commonly believed that earthly events were directed by a heavenly council of gods, presided over by the chief god. For the Canaanites, the chief god was El. For the Babylonians, it was Marduk. The Israelites also envisioned a heavenly council, but in a demythologized fashion: in their minds the council was composed of angelic "sons of God," presided over by Yahweh, who had created them along with everything else in heaven and earth.

**The LORD**—A brief reminder: as we often point out, the ancient Hebrews often addressed God by the name "Yahweh," which they believed God had revealed to Moses as God's personal name. "Yahweh" is rendered in most English translations by "the LORD," using all upper-case letters.

**Incremental repetition**—The pattern of "incremental repetition" in vv. 1-2 is characteristic of older Hebrew poetry like the Song of Deborah in Judges 5, suggesting that this might be one of Israel's oldest psalms.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Controlling chaos**—Job 38:8-11 speaks eloquently of God's power to control the powerful seas and bring order from chaos:

*"Or who shut in the sea with doors*
*when it burst out from the womb?—*
*when I made the clouds its garment,*
*and thick darkness its swaddling band,*
*and prescribed bounds for it,*
*and set bars and doors,*
*and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,*
*and here shall your proud waves be stopped'?*

Laboring deer, or twisting oaks? The preserved words of v. 9 are problematic: they don't seem to fit precisely, and most translations depend on some speculative emendation of the text. The word "oaks" (NRSV), for example, is not in the text. The word is "deer," which may or may not make sense. Taking note of the parallel word "forest" in the next line, the NRSV translators arrived at "oaks" by emending the word "deer" (*'ayyalot*) to *'elot*, which means "large trees." The word "writhe" can be used of a female animal in labor, however, so a number of scholars have proposed that Yahweh's voice "causes the deer to writhe," creating such a fright that the animals go into premature labor. The problem there is that the form of the verb means "give birth" rather than "cause to give birth," so the reading remains uncertain.

**The flood**—The word translated as "flood" (*mabbul*) appears only here and in the stories of the Noahic flood in Genesis 6-8. We can't be sure if the psalmist intended for worshipers to recall the story of God's power over that ancient flood, or if his description of "surging waters" (an alternate translation) primarily goes back to the stormy waters of v. 3. In either case, it is a reminder that Yahweh is Lord over all creation, including the mighty waters that humans cannot begin to tame.

# The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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## Was Psalm 29 adapted from a hymn to Baal?

Two words found in v. 1 have sparked all manner of speculation. They are "*beney ʻelim*" which could be translated either "sons of God" or "sons of gods," with a lower-case "g." The NRSV's translation ("O heavenly beings") obscures the underlying text.

What's unusual is that this form is more characteristic of the Ugaritic language than ancient Hebrew. The political state of Ugarit, which was centered in the coastal city of Ras Shamra in northern Syria, came to an end in the 12th century, about the same time Israel was emerging as a state. Although conclusions must be tentative, many scholars see strong similarities between the people of northern Syria and related people groups further south. Their languages are similar enough that some consider Ugaritic and Canaanite to be dialects of the same tongue. Both cultures praised Baal as one of the leading gods.

When biblical writers describe heavenly beings in other texts (e.g., Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6, 2:1), they typically use the Hebrew expression "*beney haʼelohim*," because Israel's more generic name for God was *ʻelohim*. The spelling used in v. 1, found also in Ps. 89:6 (and possibly in Deut. 32:8, according to some ancient versions), is closer to the spelling found at Ugarit, *bn ʻilm*, for "sons of El."

Both Hebrew and Ugaritic are Northwest Semitic languages, with Ugaritic being the older of the two. Hence, though there are identifiable differences between them, they are quite similar in many ways, and much of the vocabulary – like that of Romance languages such as Italian and Spanish – overlaps.

The opening "*beney ʻelim*" is the first of several phrases in the psalm that are similar to vocabulary found in Ugaritic, possibly Canaanite mythology. The combination of parallel terms and northern place names led H. L. Ginsberg to propose in 1935 that the psalm was originally a Canaanite hymn to the storm god Baʼal that had been adapted for Yahwistic use.

Several reputable scholars have supported Ginsberg's contention, but most agree that firm evidence is lacking: while we do have some religious texts used by the people of Ugarit, we have no extant examples of Canaanite hymnody. So, while this hymn about Yahweh appearing in a thunderstorm can be expected to reflect the same sort of language that might be found in a hymn to Baal, we cannot assume that the authors have taken over an old Canaanite hymn and substituted "Yahweh" for "Baal."