Youth 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

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

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

Parent Prep

Our students want control. They want to act on what they have decided. They want to go where they want to go, with whomever they want to go, and at whatever time they want to go. They want to watch whatever they want to watch and read what they want to read. This desire for control comes from their desire to figure out who they are; if someone else is making the decisions, how can they test who they are. So, how much control do you give to your students? Here's something to think about: would you rather have control or influence? You will have more influence if you have less control.

Teaching the Lesson

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip "Bruce Meets God" from *Bruce Almighty*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

1) Why does Bruce not believe God is God?
2) How does God reveal God's self to Bruce?
3) Why does God give Bruce all God's power?
4) What would you do with all of God's power?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Psalm 29. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

1) Who does the psalmist invite to worship God?
2) Why does the psalmist say we need to worship God?
3) How does the psalmist describe God? Is this how you would describe God?
4) What does God grant to the people?
5) How does this psalm speak to the Israelites who were experiencing storms in their life?

Information *continued*

If you group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

1) How was God compared to other storm gods of this time period?

2) Who were the heavenly beings that the psalmist speaks of in the passage?

3) Why is there so much repetition in Hebrew poetry?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": Was Psalm 29 adapted from a hymn to Baal?

Transformation

Conclude the session by creating small groups of three or four students. Have each of these groups ask and respond to the following questions:

1) What is the best storm that you have ever witnessed? Was it scary? Was it beautiful? How did it make you feel?

2) What storms can you have in your personal life?

3) How do you get through these storms?

4) How can you be present for others when their storms arise?

5) How can we rely on God when our storms come?

After the small groups have had a chance to share their responses with each other, allow time for groups to share what they talked about with the larger group.

Close with prayer thanking God for being ever present in our lives; when things are going wonderfully and when the storms come and shake us to our foundation.

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

The Hardest Question 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.

Was Psalm 29 adapted from a hymn to Baal?

Two words found in v. 1 have sparked all manner of speculation. They are "*beney 'elim*" 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 ha'elohim*," because Israel's more generic name for God was *'elohim*. 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 'ilm*, 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 'elim*" 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 Ba'al 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."