

Youth Teaching Resources

January 2, 2022



Season after Christmas

Psalm 147:1-20—"A Good Beginning"

In Christ We Have ...

Season of Epiphany

Acts 8:4-17 (RCL 8:14-17)—"Amazing Grace"

1 Corinthians 12:1-11—"Amazing Gifts"

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a—"Amazing Oneness"

1 Corinthians 13:1-13—"Amazing Love"

www.nurturingfaith.net

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson.
Find links and videos related to this lesson.

“A Good Beginning”

Psalm 147:1-20

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Robert Tackett-Evans

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

Opening Exercise

We just celebrated New Year's.

- How did you spend New Year's Eve?
- Did you take any time to reflect on the past year or the coming year?

At the beginning of a new year people often set goals for themselves.

- Have set any personal goals for yourself for this year? If so, what are some of those goals?
- Why have you set these goals for yourself?

(Allow time for people to share some their goals. Depending on what they share, you may consider the following questions.)

- Have you set any spiritual goals for the coming year? If so, what are some of those goals?
- If not, are there goals you might consider setting for yourself when it comes to your walk with Jesus?

Listening to the Scripture

Read Psalm 147 aloud. If you have individuals in your group that enjoy reading, consider going around the room, allowing each person to read one line of the Psalm in turn. Once you have read the passage, begin by asking a question like the following:

- What details stand out to you in this reading? *(Students are invited to name details they find confusing, interesting, troubling etc.)* Why does this stand out to you?

You will want to consult Tony's commentary to help address any questions students may raise about the text. This is a Psalm of praise. In fact, the psalmist begins by proclaiming: *"Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God..."*

- What comes to mind when you hear the word "praise?"
- What types of things do you hear the psalmist praising God for? *(Use Tony's commentary to help highlight these things if necessary.)*
- What types of things do you have to praise God for?
- The Psalmist says *"...the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him..."* What do you think it means to "fear God?"

Listening to the Scripture *continued*

(I am reminded of a definition Dr. Paul Redditt gave when I was in college, which has stuck with me through the years. “To *‘fear the Lord’* is to reverence God in such a way as to obey Him.”)

- Could it be that our praise of God involves more than what we do on Sundays? Could it be that how we live our daily lives is also an act of praise to God?
- What are some practical ways that you can praise God in your everyday life? (*This doesn’t just include what you say, but your actions as well.*)

If the group would like to go deeper with the biblical text, see Tony’s section titled *Digging Deeper*.

- This Psalm is often ascribed to a period after the exiles have returned to Jerusalem. (See *Tony’s commentary to help with details of the setting.*) Aside from praising God for their return, and being able to rebuild, they also were re-educated on the covenant they had with God. In what way is their return to covenant faithfulness an act of praise?

If your group would like to continue the discussion, consider asking what Tony says is *the hardest question*.

- What was God’s “word” to Israel?

Application

Earlier we talked about goals we had set for ourselves for this new year. Challenge students this week to take at least one aspect of their daily lives (sports, hanging out with friends, time with family, etc.) and consider what they do, and how they do it, as an act of praise. Make this a goal for your life not just for the coming week, but for the whole year. Allow students who are willing, to name what area of their lives they will choose for the coming week before leaving. Have students reflect on the following question over the course of the week:

- How does considering this aspect of your life to be praise or worship of God change how you approach the activity? Why?

Make sure students know that when you return the following week, you will take a few moments to share insights from this week’s reflection question.

Close with prayer.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

One psalm, or two, or three?—The Revised Common Lectionary text for the Sunday after Christmas is Psalm 147:12-20. Some commentators believe Psalm 147 is a combination of what were originally two or three psalms, and the LXX (an early Greek translation) divides it into two parts, with the first 11 verses numbered as Psalm 146 and vv. 12-20 as Psalm 147 (other psalms in the LXX are also numbered differently).

All of Psalms 146-50 begin and end with the word “Hallelujah,” as does Ps. 147. There is an essential unity in Psalm 147 as it appears, so we will include a brief look at all three sections in today’s lesson.

Rebuilding the temple—The account of the temple’s rebuilding can be found mainly in the book of Ezra, along with the prophetic works of Haggai and Zechariah.

The Second Temple—The dedication of the rebuilt temple in 515 BCE marks the beginning of what scholars call the “Second Temple Period.” Most scholarly references to the Second Temple, however, focus on the temple of the late first century BCE and the first 70 years of the first century CE, after Herod remodeled and greatly expanded the temple and rabbinic Judaism was reaching its greatest influence. That temple was razed by the Romans in 70 CE, and has never been rebuilt.

Haggai and Zechariah?—The LXX adds the names Haggai and Zechariah after the introductory “Hallelujah” in vv. 1 and 12. It does not include words of attribution, such as “by” or “according to,” but simply reads “Hallelujah, Haggai and Zechariah; sing praises....” The awkward construction may indicate a belief that Haggai and Zechariah had something to do with the writing of the psalm, or it may be a tribute to them for their role in promoting the postexilic rebuilding of the temple, referenced in v. 2. In either case, the addition adds support for a postexilic setting for the psalm.

Build, or rebuild?—Translating v. 2 calls for a bit of interpretation. The verb translated as “build up” in the NRSV simple means “to build.” If we are correct in setting the psalm in the postexilic period, however, the translation “rebuilds” (as in NET) would be appropriate.

Likewise, the word NRSV translates as “outcasts” could refer to anyone who had been banished or driven away from their homes. To emphasize the postexilic setting, the NET translates the word as “exiles.”

Gates and dates—The reference to God’s strengthening Jerusalem’s city gates suggests that Psalm 147 was written during or after the governorship of Nehemiah, who not only led efforts to rebuild the city’s protective walls and gates (Nehemiah 2-6), but (with Ezra’s help) to re-educate the people on the history and significance of the covenant ordinances guiding their relationship with God (Nehemiah 8-9).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

What was God's "word" to Israel?

The psalmist's various references to God's "word" in Ps. 147:15-20 are interesting in their variety, and in what they suggest to us about our own use of the term "God's word." Some Bible readers and interpreters through the years have tended to take virtually every mention of "God's word" as a reference to the Bible, but the Bible as we know it did not exist in the time of the psalmists or the prophets—or even the time of Jesus. No biblical author wrote with a conscious awareness that he or she was contributing to something that would later be considered holy scripture.

Hebrew has two primary terms that can be translated as "word," *amar* and *dabar*. Both can also take on the meaning of "command" or "order." The word *dabar* can also be translated as "thing."

The poet behind Psalm 147 used both terms, often in the sense of a "command." The NRSV translation of v. 15 says "He sends out his command (*amar*) to the earth; his word (*dabar*) runs swiftly." Later, God "sends out his word (*dabar*)" to melt the ice and snow (v. 18). In these verses, God's word is God's command to the forces of nature.

When we come to v. 19, we find two lines in synonymous parallel: "He declares his word to Jacob" is equivalent to "his statutes and ordinances to Israel." Here the psalmist would have had in mind things like the covenant commands found in the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, as well as in other legal materials scattered throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, all of which claim to be words from God.

The heart of the covenant with Israel, as taught in the book of Deuteronomy, is that God's people should love the Lord with all of their being and teach their children to do the same (Deut. 6:4-9). The understanding was that God promised blessings to those who lived in covenant obedience, and trouble to those who chose idolatrous ways instead.

The books of Joshua through 2 Kings built on the teachings of Deuteronomy to relate Israel's history from that singular perspective, noting the times when either individuals or the nation prospered or floundered, based on their willingness to live within the covenant and honor Yahweh. When prophets like Samuel, Elijah, or Elisha reminded them of the covenant, they used terms like "thus says (*amar*) the LORD" (Judg. 6:8, 1 Sam. 10:18, 2 Sam. 12:7, 1 Kgs. 20:42, 2 Kgs. 7:1, and many others).

Pre-exilic prophets like Amos, Micah, and Isaiah warned the Hebrews that trouble would come if they did not honor God, speaking in oracles that likewise claimed to be words from the LORD (Isa. 7:7, Amos 5:4, Mic. 4:6, plus scores of other examples). The exilic prophets

The Hardest Question *continued*

Jeremiah and Ezekiel explained to the exiles—as a word from God—how they had rebelled and why they deserved their fate, but could still have hope through repentance (Jer. 2:5, Ezek. 5:5, et. al.). Post-exilic prophets like Haggai and Zechariah urged the Hebrew remnant that returned to Jerusalem to be a faithful and holy people if they expected to prosper (Hag. 1:2, 5, 7; Zech. 1:3; and many more).

Psalmists such as the author of Psalm 147 reflected this same theology in calling the former exiles to not only praise God for blessings given, but to live in such love and obedience that future benisons would be assured.

The Bible speaks often of the “word of the LORD,” or “God’s word,” always in the sense of God sending a prophetic word or declaring a command that the people should follow. Modern readers should be skeptical of taking that term and automatically applying it to the Bible as a whole. Rather, we should take the Bible seriously enough to recognize what it claims to be God’s word, and what it does not.