

I Will Sing to the Lord!



SABBATH—MARCH 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 134; Psalm 33:3; Psalm 15; Psalm 96; Psalm 40:6–8; Psalm 50:7–23; Psalm 51:16–19.

When we worship together as a church, our private worship grows strong, too.

MEMORY VERSE: “I will sing to the LORD for the rest of my life. I will sing praises to my God as long as I live” (Psalm 104:33, ERV).

OUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GOD grows as we experience His mercy. As we grow as Christians, our hearts fill with thankfulness to God for His many blessings. We will ask, “What can I give the LORD for all that he has done for me?” (Psalm 116:12, ERV). The answer is that we must give ourselves fully to God and live for Him in faith.

In the Book of Psalms, Israel is more than a people group or country. Israel is the big crowd who meets together to worship God (Psalm 22:22, 25; Psalm 35:18). Israel’s meeting together shows us that God wants His people to come together to praise Him. God wants the rest of the people on earth to join Israel. The Lord asks His children to tell other people the good news about His mercy. Then more people will come to worship God.

Praise is part of our worship together as a church. Our worship in church doesn’t replace our private prayer and praise. Personal worship makes our public worship grow strong (Psalm 22:22, 25). When we worship together as a church, our private worship grows strong, too. The people who meet together to worship God are named the people “who are right [accepted] with God” (Psalm 111:1, NLV). They know God (Psalm 36:10), and God knows them (Psalm 37:18, NLV). Their experience with God fills every part of their lives.

LIFT YOUR HANDS IN THE TEMPLE AND GIVE THANKS (Psalm 134)

How do the people worship God in Psalm 134? What happens when the people worship the Lord in this way?

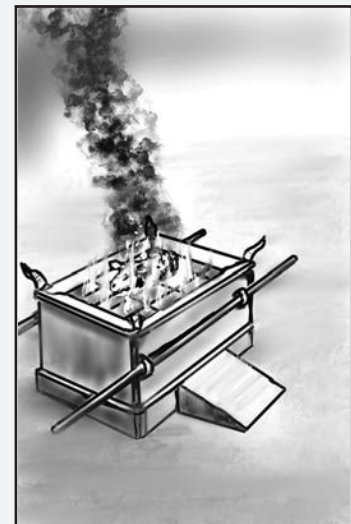
Psalm 134 helps us remember the blessing Aaron gave the Israelites (Numbers 6:24–26; also read Psalm 67:1). Blessing is an important part of the relationship between God and His people. The people bless God in His temple. God blesses His people from Zion. God is the One who made them, so His blessings touch every part of His people’s lives. The people are under God’s promise of mercy. As part of this promise, the people may bless the Lord and get blessings from Him.

Read Psalm 18:1; Psalm 36:1; Psalm 113:1; Psalm 134:1, 2; and Psalm 135:1, 2. What do these verses tell us about the people who worship God?

Another name in the Book of Psalms for people who worship God is the Lord’s servants. The poet says, “Praise the LORD, all his servants who serve in the Temple at night” (Psalm 134:1, ERV). These night workers may have guarded the temple at night for the Levites (1 Chronicles 9:23–27). The Levites offered praise to God both day and night (1 Chronicles 9:33).

The temple helped Israel to know and understand the God they couldn’t see. This help was important because God commanded His people not to make statues of Him or bow down to them. The temple showed the people the Lord’s glory. The temple also was a safe place for sinners to come to meet with their holy King. The Lord gave His people important rules to follow for meeting with Him in His temple.

“The Lord Jesus is the living stone. . . . He is the one God chose as one of great [important] value [worth]. So come to him. You also are like [the same as] living stones, and God is using you to build a spiritual house. You are to serve God in this house as holy priests [spiritual leaders], offering him spiritual sacrifices [gifts] that he will accept because of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4, 5, ERV). In these verses, Peter teaches the same ideas that we read about in the Book of Psalms. God’s people are a group of holy priests. They offer their praise and thanks to Jesus, who made them and is their Savior. His people thank Him for all the wonderful things He did, and does, for them.



The temple helped Israel to know and understand the God they couldn’t see.

SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG (Psalm 33:3)



Their new experiences of faith cause the people to announce that God is their King and the One who made them.

Read Psalm 33:3; Psalm 40:3; Psalm 96:1; Psalm 98:1; Psalm 144:9; and Psalm 149:1. What same idea do you read about in the verses from each of these poems?

These poems ask the people to sing a new song. The reason for the new song is because the Lord controls the earth. Also, the people are thankful to the Lord for His care. The people are thankful that the Lord made them. The people are grateful to the Lord for being the Judge of the whole earth. The people are thankful to God for many other reasons. God saved them from their enemies and from death. The Israelites are grateful for God's special favor. Other songs and poems in the Book of Psalms praise God for His love and wonderful miracles. But the new song is different. The new song is a special song. It is a song of joy.

The new song is also a promise from the people to God. The people promise to give their lives to God again. Their new experiences of faith cause the people to announce that God is their King and the One who made them. The new song is about trust in God. The new song also praises God for His wonderful works. In the new song, the people thank God for saving them from their enemies.

Read Isaiah 42:10–12; Revelation 5:9; and Revelation 14:3. What do these verses teach us about the new song?

The Bible says Israel is God's "precious people" (Psalm 148:14, ERV). The Israelites are "the people closest to his heart" (Psalm 148:14, ICB). So, the Israelites have a special experience with God. This experience gives them a very special honor. They get to praise God in a special way that no one else on earth gets to do. The Bible encourages all of God's people in every age to sing the new song in praise to their Savior. A new song can be a song no one sang before. A new song can be about an experience we have of God's mercy. We can sing a new song about the hope we have in God. The new song is worship. Worship is more than offering gifts. Worship is about our loving God and accepting His love for us. A new song is a new way to share our love and thankfulness to God for everything He does for us.

If you were to sing a new song, what would it be?

LORD, WHO MAY LIVE IN YOUR TEMPLE? (Psalm 15)

Who is worthy of worshiping the living God in His temple? Read Psalm 15 for the answer.

In short, the answer to the question above is the people who have holy hearts (read Deuteronomy 6:5; Micah 6:6–8). The lives of these people show they obey God. God’s love is in their hearts. God’s temple in Jerusalem was a holy place. Everything in the temple, including God’s priests or spiritual leaders, was an offering to God. So, everyone who entered the temple needed to be holy, too. God’s people needed to be holy in every part of their lives. God gave His people the law to help them become a kingdom of royal priests. God’s royal priests need to be holy when they come to worship God. Their lives must be holy so that they can share the blessings of God’s promise with other people.

What does it mean to be holy? Read Psalm 24:3–6 and Psalm 101:1–3 for the answer.

What makes us holy? God gives us perfect hearts. The word “perfect” comes from the Hebrew word “**tamin**.” “**Tamin**” means something that is “whole” or “complete.” A perfect vine is whole and healthy (Ezekiel 15:5). Animals offered to God as gifts must be “**tamin**” (Leviticus 22:21–24). These animals must not be sick, blind, crippled, or have any broken bones. “Perfect” words are filled with truth. These words do not lie (Job 36:4). So, a “perfect” heart is a holy heart or a heart that is clean from sin (Psalm 24:4; Psalm 15:2). A person with a “perfect” heart seeks God (Psalm 24:6) and is made clean with God’s forgiveness (Psalm 51:2–10). God’s mercy helps His servants to live an obedient life. When we live holy lives, we give praise to God and not ourselves.

How can we make choices to stay away from doing things that separate us from God? What are some of these things? How can we stop doing them?



God gave His people the law to help them become a kingdom of royal priests.

ANNOUNCE GOD'S GLORY TO ALL PEOPLE (Psalm 96)

What does worship include? Read Psalm 96 for the answer.

Worship includes singing to the Lord (Psalm 96:1, 2) and praising His name (Psalm 96:2). Worship also includes announcing that God is wonderful and powerful (Psalm 96:3, 4). When we worship God, we also bring Him gifts (Psalm 96:8). There's another part of worship that's not so well known as singing, praising, and offering God gifts: we must announce the Lord's kingdom to other people (Psalm 96:2, 3, 10).

Singing, praising, bringing gifts, and announcing the Good News about Jesus are not separate from each other. When we share the good news, we praise and worship God at the same time. Our reasons for worship are the same reasons for sharing the good news with other people: (1) The Lord is wonderful (Psalm 96:4). (2) The gods of other people are statues. But our Lord made the skies and the earth (Psalm 96:5). (3) The Lord is the King. The whole earth is under His control (Psalm 96:10). (4) The Lord is coming soon. He will judge everyone on the earth (Psalm 96:13). We share the good news with people for these reasons so that they may join us in worshiping God (Psalm 96:11–13).

Worship starts with knowing that the Lord is the One who made us. The Lord is also our King and our Judge (Psalm 96:5, 10, 13). When we worship God, we also remember His acts in the past. We celebrate God's work for us now. We are filled with hope when we think about His work in the future. He will judge the earth and make life new.

What is God's work as Judge all about? God will bring peace to an earth that is now filled with suffering and pain. God will make things right in a life that is not fair now. That is why the whole earth is filled with joy for God's work as Judge (Psalm 96:10–13; Psalm 98:4–9). Because the Lord is a fair and holy Judge, His people want to worship Him in all His holy beauty (Psalm 96:9). Worship is about joy and trust (Psalm 96:1, 2, 11–13). Worship is also about respect for God (Psalm 96:4, 9).

Psalm 96 calls everyone to worship God, the Judge. This same announcement is part of the Three Angels' Messages in Revelation 14:6–12. In many ways, Psalm 96 announces this end-time message: worship the God who made you! He is your Savior and Judge.



Singing, praising, bringing gifts, and announcing the Good News about Jesus are not separate from each other.

WHAT DOES THE LORD REALLY WANT? (Psalm 40:6–8)

Read Psalm 40:6–8; Psalm 50:7–23; and Psalm 51:16–19. What important topic do these poems talk about? God in His law asks His people to give Him offerings and gifts (Exodus 20:24). Why does God take no pleasure in these gifts at times? What does God really want from His people?

The poets in the Book of Psalms want God’s people to understand the reasons why God is unhappy with their worship at times. The people’s sins separate them from God. So, their worship is fake. God hates fake worship.

God isn’t angry with His people for their gifts or burnt offerings. He is upset with their evil behavior and their sins. God’s people are not fair in court or holy in their personal lives (Psalm 50:8, 17–21). The Book of Psalms isn’t preaching against offerings and worship. The Book of Psalms preaches against empty offerings and empty worship. The worship of the people is empty and fake because their lives are filled with sin.

When our behavior doesn’t match our worship or faith, we will worship God for the wrong reasons. Then the things we do to worship God become more important than our relationship with God. We care more about our offerings than being close to Him in our hearts. The reason for our gifts and offerings is to bring us closer to God. But when our hearts are far away from God, our gifts and offerings have no meaning.

Read John 4:23, 24. What is Jesus saying in these verses? How do His words agree with what our psalms for today are warning against?

Offerings and gifts are not enough. What good are our gifts if the heart that gives them isn’t sorry for sin or filled with faith? When God’s people confessed their sins, their offerings pleased Him. Then He accepted their offerings as holy gifts (Psalm 51:19; also read Psalm 50:14). Jesus uses a quote from Isaiah: “ ‘These people honor me with their words, but I am not really important to them’ ” (Matthew 15:8, ERV). The problems that the poets saw were the same ones that Jesus had with some of the people, including the leaders, during His time on earth.

Why is knowing the truth not enough to save us?



What good are our gifts if the heart that gives them isn't sorry for sin or filled with faith?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “How to Pray,” pages 26–28, in *A Call to Stand Apart*.

“God does not live in temples built with human hands. But He honors His people when they meet together. God made His people this promise. He will send His Spirit to meet with them. But first, they must come together to seek Him. They must confess their sins. They must pray for each other. Those people who come together to worship God should stop doing evil. God’s people must worship Him with holy hearts. They must obey His law and Bible truth. If God’s people refuse to do these things, their coming together to worship will be empty and useless. Jesus said these words about this group of people: ‘These people honor me with their words, but I am not really important to them. Their worship of me is worthless [worth nothing]’ Matthew 15:8, 9 [ERV]. Those people who worship God must worship Him ‘in spirit and truth. That time is now here. And these [people] are the kinds [types] of worshipers [people who worship God] the Father wants.’ John 4:23 [ICB].”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 50, adapted.



“These people honor me
with their words,
but I am not really
important
to them”
(Matthew 15:8, ERV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What is the best gift that we can give to God when we come to worship Him? Read Psalm 40:6–10 and Romans 12:1, 2 for the answer.
- ② How are public and private worship connected? Why do we need both? How do both types help our worship experience and faith to grow and become strong?
- ③ Many people think that worship includes only prayer, singing songs, Bible study, and reading other religious books. These things are very important to worship. At the same time, why is worship more than songs, Bible study, and reading religious books? What else does worship include? Give some examples.
- ④ Ellen G. White wrote: “We should feel pleasure when we worship the Lord and do His work.”—*Steps to Christ*, page 103, adapted. What can we do to make worshipping the Lord a pleasure?

SEKULE'S STORY (PART 8): NO HAIR, BUT A HAT

Sekule was a Seventh-day Adventist in the army. He soon learned about two other Sabbath-keeping soldiers. One soldier was an assistant commander. The war in Bosnia was happening at that time. The assistant commander tried to convince Sekule that they could break some of God's rules because they were in hard times: "We're in a war. You must eat the food you can get. You can practice your religion after you leave the army. But now you need to eat army food to stay healthy."

Sekule decided that the assistant commander wasn't really an Adventist in his heart. The assistant commander talked the same as Sekule's parents, who weren't Christians!

Sekule wanted to meet the other Sabbath-keeping soldier. This soldier was born in an Adventist home. A little later, Sekule was in the army's dining room. One of the soldiers pointed to the other Seventh-day Adventist man. Sekule watched as the man sat down with a plate of pork sausages and brown beans. The beans were fried in lard. The man removed the sausages from his plate, then ate the beans.

Sekule thought, "See? That man is Adventist, and he eats food that's not clean. Am I stupid? I've lost so much weight. I don't have strength because I won't eat army food. That man is smart. When you leave the army, you can follow God."

Sekule stepped into the cafeteria line. He wasn't just hungry. He was starved after eating only bread with tea for 20 days!

A few steps from the food, Sekule stopped. He thought, "I won't eat this food. Jesus died for me. I'll stay loyal to Him."

A few months later, spring arrived. Sekule was so hungry. So, he ate some of the new leaves growing on the trees. He also ate grass that he learned in childhood was safe to eat.

Four months after Sekule became a soldier, he left army headquarters to eat his first real meal. A Seventh-day Adventist pastor invited him to his home for dinner.

Not long after, the army sent Sekule to Serbia's capital, Belgrade. In Belgrade, Sekule served the army's top general. Sekule's new job was near an Adventist college. So, Sekule went to the college almost every day to eat vegetarian meals.

Sekule had good health in the army. He never got sick. He only lost his hair. He jokes that he joined the army with hair and left with none! He says, "It's as if God said, 'Be loyal to Me, and I will take care of you. Yes, you will have problems. Yes, you lost your hair. But don't worry. I have a hat for you.'"

Read about Sekule Sekulić's life after the army in the third quarter 2023 Mission quarterly at bit.ly/adult_mission. Thank you for your Sabbath School offerings for the work in Montenegro.

INSIDE Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



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