

A Heart Filled with Gratitude

SCRIPTURE: 1 Chronicles 16:7-36

KEY VERSE: **O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.** —1 Chronicles 16:8

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

- to analyze the psalm sung when David brought the ark to Jerusalem;
- to rejoice in the wonderful things God has done on behalf of God’s people; and
- to express thanks for God’s greatness and provision.

Introducing the Scripture

The Scripture passage for this session is sometimes called “The Song of Asaph” by scholars, but the author of Chronicles makes it clear that David was the director and producer of the thankful musical procession that accompanied the ark of the covenant to its new home. In **1 Chronicles 16:7** we read, “**Then on that day David first appointed the singing of praises to the LORD by Asaph and his kindred.**” Although the Song of Asaph is presented here as a unity, it quotes from three psalms: **Psalm 105:1-15 (1 Chronicles 16:8-22)**; **Psalm 96:1-13 (1 Chronicles 16:23-33)**; and **Psalm 106:47-48 (1 Chronicles 16:35-36)**. The use of these psalms tells us that these and many of the psalms were in use in the worship setting at the time of the Chronicler (perhaps mid-fifth century BC). It will be useful to compare these source psalms with our passage here in **1 Chronicles 16**. Notice what the Chronicler modified and omitted as a clue to the points he was trying to make in his narrative. We will look more closely at this in the commentary section.

1 Chronicles 16 is set in the midst of the Chronicler’s ark narrative. We learn how the ark was brought by King David out of the obscure past into the midst of the community of God’s people once more. The account of this occasion stresses the joy and hope that were expressed in music and worship.

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David’s role as a military leader fades into the background in this narrative, and we are encouraged to see him as the leader of Israel’s faith. The king not only appointed the worship leaders, such as Asaph, but also provided the music that was to be sung.

Recall that the Chronicler’s audience lived in a time after the Babylonian exile had come to an end. No king sat on the throne of Israel. The temple of Solomon no longer existed. The people were fewer in number.

Inevitably the question of identity arose in the Chronicler’s postexilic community. They asked, “Are we still God’s people? Do God’s promises to earlier generations still apply to us?” The Chronicler’s response was that Israel was chosen and still beloved of God. The story of the Exodus is downplayed, but God’s gathering God’s people from the nations is stressed and would have resonated with the Chronicler’s audience. We might say that the Song of Asaph is sung in a major key, full of joy and celebration, meant to inspire hope.

Examining the Scripture

1 CHRONICLES 16:4-7, 37-43. Recall that in **1 Chronicles 15** the Chronicler gave attention to the musical and gatekeeping roles of the Levites. At the time in David’s reign when the movement of the ark of the covenant took place, there was no temple and

no permanent altar, and the music ministry of the Levites is stressed in the narrative. This must have resonated with the Chronicler’s audience, who did not have the glorious temple of Solomon and whose own worship spaces were still being rebuilt. **First Chronicles 16:4** tells us, “[David] appointed certain of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel.” Verse 7 says that the king appointed Asaph as the music

director: **“Then on that day David first appointed the singing of praises to the LORD by Asaph and his kindred.”**

As noted earlier, the long psalm at the heart of **1 Chronicles 16** is called the “Song of Asaph” in scholarly circles. Asaph is traditionally credited with the authorship of twelve psalms in the Bible: **Psalms 50** and **Psalms 73–83**.

In **1 Chronicles 16:7** the Chronicler used the phrase **“on that day”** to mark not only the time of the ark’s movement into Jerusalem but also to indicate the beginning of an ongoing ministry of praise and music led by Asaph and the Levites. That David was providing for the continuation of this ministry of praise and worship is made clear in **1 Chronicles 16:37-43**. **Verse 37** says, **“David left Asaph and his kinsfolk there before the ark of the covenant of the LORD to minister regularly before the ark as each day required.”**

The Chronicler’s account of the removal of the ark of the covenant to its new home in the city of David runs parallel to the account of the same events in **2 Samuel 6:12-19**. However, in **2 Samuel 6** the sequence is as follows: The ark was moved in procession to its new home. The king blessed all the people and shared a portion of food with them. Following the feast, the people returned to their homes (**2 Samuel 6:19**). In **1 Chronicles 16**, however, following the blessing of the people and the communal meal, the celebration is extended by the psalm in **verses 8-36**. Since worship had not yet been centralized completely with the relocation of the ark, we are told in **verse 39** that David made provision for ongoing sacrifice at Gibeon: **“And he left the priest Zadok and his kindred the priests before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high place that was at Gibeon.”** The ark of the covenant, newly housed in the tent that David set up for it, was the worship space for corporate praise and thanksgiving. Finally, in **verse 43** we are told that the people returned to their homes: **“Then all the people departed to their homes, and David went home to bless his household.”**

1 CHRONICLES 16:8-12. The hymn contained in **verses 8-36** represents the core of **1 Chronicles 16**. As we noted

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earlier, this hymn quotes from three psalms: **Psalms 105:1-15** (**1 Chronicles 16:8-22**), **Psalms 96:1-13** (**1 Chronicles 16:23-33**) and **Psalms 106:47-48** (**1 Chronicles 16:35-36**). We might think of this hymn as a medley, like some of the anthems our church choirs sing today. The Chronicler stressed the important role that the Levitical singers and musicians played in corporate worship and accounted for this role by an appeal to the work of King David centuries before. That these psalms are quoted by the Chronicler suggests that the original psalms were well known

by the time **1 Chronicles** was written. This narrative also makes the case that not only was David a dynamic, successful military and political leader, but he also played a large part in the formation of Israel’s spiritual life.

Joyful thanksgiving and praise are the major themes running through this hymn. **Verses 8-9** set the tone:

O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works.

The hymn picks up one of the Chronicler’s key themes in **verses 10-11**—the need to seek the Lord:

Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his presence continually.

This hymn ties seeking the Lord to a joyful heart in **verse 10**. We recall that King Saul’s reign ended unhappily because he had not sought God’s will, nor had he been obedient. David’s initial failure to move the ark of the covenant was attributed to not seeking the Lord’s guidance first. In session 3 we will encounter this theme again when we study **1 Chronicles 17**, in which David proposed to build a house for God and neither the king nor his prophet Nathan thought first to seek God’s will in the matter. Seeking God entails more than simply seeking God’s will. **Verse 11** urges that the Lord’s presence and strength be continually sought.

Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

1 CHRONICLES 16:13-22. One place where the hymn diverges from the original psalm is verse 13, which reads, “**O offspring of his servant Israel, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.**” Psalm 105:6 reads, “**O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.**” The emphasis throughout is on God’s faithfulness over the centuries and the fact that all of Israel is still chosen by God and precious. Referring to Israel rather than Abraham would underscore this point.

Referring to God, Psalm 105:8 reads, “**He is mindful of his covenant forever.**” The Chronicler altered this wording in verse 15: “**Remember his covenant forever,**” thereby making it an exhortation to God’s people to remember God’s covenant with them across the generations.

Verses 19-22 complete the quotation from Psalm 105:1-15.

**When they were few in number,
of little account, and strangers in the land,
wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people,
he allowed no one to oppress them;
he rebuked kings on their account,
saying, “Do not touch my anointed ones;
do my prophets no harm.”**

Although these verses originally referred to the Exodus generation, in 1 Chronicles they would have resonated with the postexilic generation. During the Babylonian exile and afterward, the people were few in number, aliens in the land, and wandering. What was their identity? The Chronicler sought to reassure them that they were still God’s chosen people, and God’s loving hand was still on them even though they were few in number and of little account by the world’s standards. The apostle Paul’s words to the Corinthian Christians centuries later echo this theme:

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in

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the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.
—1 Corinthians 1:26-29

1 CHRONICLES 16:23-36. The remainder of Psalm 105, which recounts the details of the Exodus story, is omitted from the hymn in 1 Chronicles 16. Passages from Psalm 96 are quoted next with the encouragement to sing to the Lord and to tell the story.

**Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.**
—1 Chronicles 16:23-24

Again, we encounter some variation from the original psalm. Verse 27b of our text says, “**Strength and joy are in his place.**” Psalm 96:6 reads, “**Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.**” The replacement of “beauty” with “joy” is in keeping with the overall joyous tone of the hymn in 1 Chronicles 16. The replacement of “sanctuary” with “place” may widen the circle of God’s presence rather than focusing on the beauty of a temple or elaborate house of worship. Another variation is found in Psalm 96:8b where we read, “**Bring an offering, and come into his courts.**” That reference would be appropriate if there was a temple with courts. The Chronicler, however, made this a more general exhortation in verse 29 of our text: “**Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come before him.**”

The Chronicler’s quotation of Psalm 96 ends at verse 33 of 1 Chronicles 16. Verse 34 quotes Psalm 106:1: “**O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.**” Again, the stress is on God’s constancy of purpose and love throughout the generations.

The theme of being wanderers and aliens is picked up again in verse 35 of our text, which contains a plea to God for rescue of God’s people scattered throughout the nations: “**Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather and rescue us from among the nations.**”

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Psalm 106:47 does not address God as “**God of our salvation**” but merely says “**O LORD our God.**”

Finally, **Psalm 106:48b** is a call to the congregation to say, “Amen.” **Verse 36b of 1 Chronicles 16**, however, states that the assembly spontaneously said, “Amen!” at the end of the hymn and praised the Lord.

In our text the Chronicler sought to encourage the postexilic community, who must have wondered how their present life related to the glory of past generations. Many of the members of our churches will be able to relate to this sense of being few in number and vulnerable today.

Applying the Scripture

One of the themes in today’s lesson concerns who we are and how we are to behave when the glory days are far behind. Some of our churches remember bygone years when the Sunday school was bursting at the seams. That was the case for many congregations while the Baby Boom cohort was working its way through the Sunday school. But what about now? If your church’s worship services are not overflowing with people, does that mean you have not been faithful to God? Does it mean that God no longer has a purpose and a mission for your congregation? The people to whom the Chronicler was writing lived in a time of rebuilding. Their present experience did not match the amazing stories they had heard about God’s mighty acts of redemption from the past.

In David’s psalm, worshipers are encouraged to “**seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually**” (**Ps. 105:4**). David’s life story demonstrates the need to seek God’s will before acting. This fits well with the congregational polity that we practice, and class members may want to discuss times when the church has sought God’s direction together.

The Chronicler’s decision to recast the narratives concerning David’s ascent to the throne and the discovery and reclamation of the ark of the covenant is similar to what preachers do in sermon preparation. Knowing the needs of the present generation, and knowing that we cannot travel back in time, we seek

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to appropriate the power and meaning of stories from our past to encourage and challenge us in the present. The Chronicler sought to appropriate the stories of the past to reassure and encourage the postexilic community. The psalm in this session’s text acknowledged God’s people as “**few in number, of little account, and strangers in the land, wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people**” (**1 Chronicles 16:19-20**). Encourage the members of your class not only to share stories of past glories but also to

explore the ways in which God is working in, with, and through us today with fewer resources.

Another central theme in **1 Chronicles 16** concerns the significant place music, poetry, and movement play in celebrating the important actions that we take as a church (e.g., installing a new pastor, dedicating a building, welcoming new members into the community, etc.). This session’s Scripture emphasizes the role King David played in organizing the worship experience that attended the moving of the ark of the covenant to its new home in Jerusalem. You may have some class members who write poetry. Some of it may even be appropriately set to music and sung in worship.

Session Plans

These session plans are given as suggestions. The words **AND, OR, or AND/OR** between activities indicate alternate activities. Choose activities best suited for your particular group and time schedule. Feel free to adapt the suggestions to meet the needs and interests of your group.

GETTING READY FOR THE SESSION

- **Read 1 Chronicles 16**, focusing on **verses 8-12 and 19-27**.
- Also **read** session 2 in *Journeys* and this leader’s guide.
- **Read 2 Samuel 6, Psalms 96, 105, and 106** as background texts for this study.
- **Arrange** ahead of time for any members of your class who write poetry to bring a poem about worshiping God to share with the class in “Closing the Session.” If you

do not have a poet in the group, **select** and **bring** a choral anthem to class.

- **Find** recent pictures of your church's activities as well as pictures from the past (if available).
- **Have available** Bibles, hymnals, index cards, paper, pens or pencils, and either chalkboard and chalk, a dry-erase board and markers, or newsprint and markers.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

(5-10 MINUTES)

Sounds of Joy

- **Ask** the class to call out occasions in life that are sources of great joy. Your list may include such events as graduations, weddings, ordinations, promotions, election victories, sports victories, and recoveries from serious illnesses.
- **List** responses on the board or newsprint or in some way that the class can see the list together.
- **Encourage** a brief discussion on the role music plays in the celebration of any of these events.
- **Open** the class with prayer, giving thanks to God for these many sources of great joy.

OR

Traditions

- **Ask** participants to reflect on their families' Advent or Christmas traditions that have been passed from one generation to another.
- **Ask:**
 - Who in the family makes it happen each year?
 - How does it enrich your experience of the special season?
- **Open** the class with prayer, giving thanks to God for family and traditions.

DEVELOPING THE SESSION

(35-40 MINUTES)

Read the Scripture (5 min.)

- **Ask** for two volunteers to read aloud this session's Scripture as printed in *Journeys*:
 - **1 Chronicles 16:8-12** (p. 10)
 - **1 Chronicles 16:19-27** (p. 12)

AND

Church Celebrations (5-10 min.)

- **Show** the pictures of church celebrations and activities. Encourage the group to discuss what was happening in each picture. What was the feeling that people experienced in each of the activities?

- **Ask** the class to think of a meaningful practice from your church's past that they would like to carry into the present.
- **Compile** a list on the board or newsprint.
- **Discuss:** Whose help would you need to do this? If you are a member of a new church, what tradition would you like to begin?

AND/OR

Past and Present (5-10 min.)

- **Make** two columns on the board or newsprint with these headings: "Glory Years" and "Present Reality."
- **Encourage** participants to call out conditions that apply to each column in the life of your church (or churches in the United States generally). Examples might include a full Sunday school under the first column and empty pews under the second column.
- **Continue** the discussion and **list** under each heading the conditions faced by the Chronicler's audience. **Discuss** how the Chronicler sought to encourage and reassure them of God's continued presence with them.

AND/OR

Seeking God's Will (5-10 min.)

- **Point out** that the hymn in today's text encouraged the people to "**seek the LORD and his strength, seek his presence continually**" (v. 11).
- **Ask:**
 - What prompts you to seek the Lord's strength and presence?
 - What difference does it make in your life?
 - Recall a time when our church sought God's will before taking action. How was God's will made known to the congregation in that situation?

CLOSING THE SESSION

(5-10 MINUTES)

- If you arranged for a class member to bring a poem to share, **ask** that person to read or recite the poem now. **Encourage** the poet to share a little about how the poem came to be written. If you do not have a poet in the group, look together at the choral anthem that you brought to class. **Ask**, "Was it composed for a special occasion? What is the emotional tone?"
- If your class enjoys singing, **use** hymnals to sing two or three verses of "Joy to the World."
- **Close** the session in prayer.