

LIVING THE LIVING WORD
Bible-Based Bible Study and Application

Grace Chapel
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DAVID

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two weeks, we have seen some foundational truths about God's Word:

- it corresponds to reality ("Let there be light")
- its meaning is stable (contract) and accessible to us (law)
- only by starting with what God has told us can we hope to understand our world and live lives pleasing to God (Adam and Eve in the Garden)

Those foundational truths are necessary to show us why we *ought* to reflect on God's Word. In this session, we will begin to engage the question of *how* we should go about reflecting on God's Word. As with all other pursuits, if we want to really understand it, we need to start with God's Word. In the inspired works of David, we find sample reflections on Scripture that we can use as a model.

2. DAVID'S POETIC REFLECTION AND WORSHIP

The Setting

Historical Backdrop (1 Samuel 4-7, 1 Chronicles 13)

In the days of Eli the high priest, when Samuel was a young man, Israel went out to battle the Philistines. On this occasion, God did not fight for them, and they were soundly defeated, losing about 4,000 men on the first day of the battle. In an attempt to force God to fight for them, they brought the ark of the covenant from Shiloh to the battleground. The next day, God still did not fight for Israel. The Philistines routed the Israelite army, killed 30,000 men, and captured the ark.

The Philistines took the ark back to their pagan temple, but discovered that they could not keep it there. Every city they sent the ark to was struck with plague. Finally, they simply put it in a cart, hitched two milk cows to it, and let them go wherever they would go. The cows took the road back to Israel, and brought the ark to Beth Shemesh, an Israelite city along the border of Judah in the western lowlands. However, the men of Beth Shemesh looked into the ark, and God attacked them, killing 50,070. In their fear, the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh sent to the nearby city of Kirjath Jearim, asking them to come and take the ark.

Kirjath Jearim did come and take the ark, consecrated someone to care for it. The ark remained there until David was ready to bring it up to Jerusalem. However, when David first tried to bring up the ark, he did not observe the proper protocols. The ark was to be carried by the Levites, but David put it in an oxcart. When the oxen stumbled, one of the men, Uzza, touched the ark to stabilize it, and God killed him. David was afraid to continue his project of bringing the ark up to Jerusalem, so he left it at the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite (i.e., a Gentile) for three months.

The Davidic Tabernacle (1 Chronicles 15:1-16:6, 16:37-34, 23:27-32)

David did finally bring the ark up to Jerusalem, and installs it in a tabernacle (tent) in Jerusalem. Bear in mind that the Tabernacle itself is still in Shiloh, but as we learn in 1 Chronicles 17, David had ambitions of building the temple in Jerusalem, and apparently was planning to reunite the Tabernacle furniture with the ark at that time.

In the meantime, however, David would not allow the ark to just languish in a tent. He designed a musical service “to commemorate, to thank and to praise the Lord God of Israel.” It is worth noting that there is nothing about such a musical service in the Law; the closest the Law gets to music is blowing a trumpet every 50 years (Leviticus 25:8-10).

However, the story of the Red Sea crossing gives a precedent for musical worship (Exodus 14-15). When Israel had passed through the Red Sea, the whole congregation worshipped the Lord. They composed a song for the occasion, and Moses and the men sang the verses of the song, while Miriam and the women played timbrels and danced and sang the refrain. To summarize, while the legal portions of the Torah neither command nor regulate musical worship, the historical portion of the Torah clearly teaches that there is a place for it.

David was a talented musician, and the king of Israel, so he took it upon himself to organize musical worship in the tabernacle of the ark. This raises an interesting question: in the absence of any kind of guidance in the Law about how to organize musical worship, how did David do it? Briefly, he designed the musical service to parallel the sacrificial service, and the language of 1 Chronicles 16 is designed to show the parallels. We don’t have time to go into all the details of it, but here are a few notable points of comparison:

- The Hebrew word used for the “musical instruments of God” in 1 Chronicles 16:42 is the same word used for the “utensils” of sacrifice at the Tabernacle in Exodus 25:9, 39, 27:3, 19, etc.
- The musical service occurred “regularly,” “as every day’s work required” (1 Chronicles 16:6, 37); the sacrificial service occurred “regularly, morning and evening, and according to all that is written in the Law” (1 Chronicles 16:40).
- The musical service is performed by “Asaph and his brothers before the ark of the covenant of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 16:37) and the sacrificial service is performed by “Zadok the priest and his brothers the priests, before the tabernacle of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 16:39).

All this music also raises another interesting question: what did they sing? Happily, we don't have to guess. The chronicler has recorded for us a song that David wrote especially for the day that the ark was installed in its tabernacle in Jerusalem.

The Songs

The Tabernacle Psalm (1 Chronicles 16:7-36)

The psalm is worth a sermon or two all by itself, but let's hit some of the key themes.

- Notice that the psalm opens with a call to thank the Lord and proclaim His deeds—which is exactly what the psalm does. It not only calls us to worship, it also presents us with a model for worship.
- It really does call *us* to worship; notice the prominence of Gentiles in the psalm (vv. 8, 24, 28-30). This is not an accident; Israel was always intended to be a missionary nation, and there were a number of Gentiles who served David.
- Notice the prominence of history in the psalm. David reflects on what God has done, and brings Him praise. The moral reasoning from God's act to a need to praise Him is particularly evident in vv. 25-26.
- Not only does the psalm present a vision of the past, it also presents a vision of the future (v. 33) and a prayer appropriate to that vision (v. 35).

Considered overall, David is praising the Lord, drawing on creation, Israel's history, God's future return to judge the earth, Israel's mission to the Gentiles, and so on. A key question you need to consider here: *what has David said in this psalm that has not been previously revealed in the Scripture that he has (i.e., Torah, almost certainly Job, probably Joshua, and possibly Ruth)?* Answer: nothing. Not one thing in this psalm is new.

So, since this is a course in how to study and use the Bible, let's consider what is happening in this passage from that angle. How does David know the history that he refers to in the psalm? From the Torah. David is reflecting on previous revelation. By the way, notice that he interprets it all quite literally. (Ask yourself: how much sense would it make to thank God for all these things if they never *really* happened?) The history of the world is in this psalm: Creation, the call of Abraham, confirmation of the covenants to Isaac and Jacob, Israel's nomadic years from the patriarchs to the conquest of Canaan (which just about brings it up to current with the time of writing), and God's future return and judgment.

But David doesn't stop with the history lesson. It is personally relevant, and he explores that relevance. If this is what God is doing in history, what does it mean, ethically? What should we *do* about it? This is particularly visible in the reasoning chain in vv. 25-26: God created the universe, but all the gods of the nations are idols, therefore the Lord is great, therefore we should greatly praise Him.

This should give us some sense of what good reflection on Scripture looks like. In a little less than a page, David has summarized Scripture's account of human history, explored the personal, ethical relevance of that for himself and his people, *and shown the reasoning that connects the facts with the ethical conclusions*. If we learned nothing else in this course, we could spend the rest of our lives trying to catch up to his example here.

Other Psalms (Psalm 19, Psalm 139)

There are other things to reflect upon besides history. Psalm 19 reflects on the created world, specifically the sky. A famous section of Psalm 139 reflects on the intricacies of the human body. In both cases, David glorifies God and thanks Him for these things. For an enlightening contrast, compare David's thoughts in these two psalms with the pagan's thought pattern in Romans 1:18-23. The moral reasoning that we see in 1 Chronicles 16:25-26, and in Psalms 19 and 139 is precisely what the pagan does not do, and God holds him accountable for it.

3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES

Your Daily Walk

Two weeks ago, I challenged you to start asking yourself a question about everything in your life, especially the trials and perplexing situations: what does God have to say about this? It's the question that Eve didn't keep in the front of her mind, and if we want to stay out of trouble, we need to avoid that mistake. Of course, you don't always know what God has to say. As we saw last week, God gave the Law to Israel so they would know what He had to say, and God had them propagate the Law so it would always be available. We have God's Word as well, and last week, I challenged you to go and look in Scripture to see what God has to say if you don't know.

This week, let me challenge you to reflect on the facts of Scripture that you do know. You can't just say "Hey, that's a really interesting concept; let me write it down in my notebook." It's not okay to stop there; all this is personally relevant and very relational. If you haven't worked out how it should impact your life and the way you relate to God, *you're not done yet*.

Any time you read Scripture, whether it's the genealogy in Genesis 5, the story of Deborah, or a psalm, reflect on what you have read. In its own halting way, your reflection should resemble what David did in 1 Chronicles 16:25-26—that is, acknowledge the truth, figure out what you should do on that basis, and clearly see the reasoning from the one to the other. Of course, the psalm in 1 Chronicles 16 is inspired, so it's unlikely that you'll generate that caliber of reflection on your very first try. That's okay; it's a lifetime endeavor. The sooner you get started, the better you'll get. Keep practicing.

Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

Begin to memorize Psalm 139. Yeah, I know, it's a *lot* of verses. That's okay. Don't try to learn it all word for word at this point; the goal right now is familiarity with the overall structure and content of the psalm. Try to get it into your head at the level of the thoughts. Go ahead and talk through it in your own words, but try not to leave out anything bigger than a verse.

I suggest that you don't cram. Concentrated time helps for some people, but most of us do memory work best in small doses spread throughout the day. If you're like most people, a few minutes morning and evening all week long will do wonders.

Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Try to complete the section on observation. Continue to use the insights Hendricks provides in your work with Psalm 139.

Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

This week, we're going to study the topic of meditation. Don't jump to conclusions about what the word means. The way our culture uses "meditation" isn't necessarily the way the Bible uses it.

Using a concordance (electronic is easier),¹ locate all the passages you can that bear on the subject of meditation. A concordance is nearly always a good starting point for a topical study: just look up the word and see what you find. You won't have time to interpret every passage in depth, but at least answer these questions: What is meditation? Who should meditate? On what? When? Where? For what purpose? In case you don't have a concordance, the passages below will make a good start.

Gen. 24:63	Ps. 19:14	Ps. 119:23	Ps. 145:5
Jos. 1:8	Ps. 49:3	Ps. 119:27	Isa. 33:18
1 Ki. 18:27	Ps. 63:6	Ps. 119:48	Mal. 3:16
Ps. 1:2	Ps. 64:1	Ps. 119:78	Lk. 21:14
Ps. 4:4	Ps. 77:6	Ps. 119:97	Phil. 4:8
Ps. 5:1	Ps. 77:12	Ps. 119:99	1 Tim. 4:15
Ps. 7:1	Ps. 104:34	Ps. 119:148	
Ps. 9:16	Ps. 119:15	Ps. 143:5	

4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES

Your Daily Walk

What should you do when you don't know what God has to say about something? Go and look, right? That was last week's challenge. Did anything arise last week where you needed to know what God thought, and you had to look it up?

¹ See <http://www.biblegateway.com> for an easy-access online concordance. With electronic concordances, you can use wildcard searches, which also helps. (Search on "medit*" rather than "meditate" and it will also get you "meditates," "meditating," "meditation," etc.)

Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

What gaps did you identify between yourself and the original audience of the psalm? What questions do you have about the psalm?

Reading (1-2 hrs.)

What did you learn from your reading? Did it help to approach the text from different angles, as Hendricks suggests? How did your reading help you to grapple with Psalm 139?

Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

You traced the theme of blessing and cursing through Genesis 12-50. When were Abraham and his family a blessing, and to whom? When were they a curse, and to whom? Does this give some coherence to the overall account as we have it in Genesis? If so, then why are the rape of Dinah (Genesis 34) and the infamous Tamar incident (Genesis 38) in the account? What purpose do these two subplots serve within the story as a whole?