

AUGSBURG ADULT BIBLE STUDIES

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Honoring God

1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, 1 Kings,
Ecclesiastes, Matthew, Luke

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AUGSBURG ADULT BIBLE STUDIES

A note from Augsburg Fortress

The covers and pages of Augsburg Adult Bible Studies have an inviting, new look as we move into 2020. The sessions, however, continue to provide the same type of material you look for in these studies based on the Uniform Series of International Bible Lessons.

With this issue we welcome Andrea Lee, the new editor for Augsburg Adult Bible Studies. We also give thanks for Rebecca Grothe, editor since 2006, and wish her God's blessings in retirement.

About the cover image: Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him and become fishers of people (Matthew 4:18-22). In the waters of baptism, we too are called to new life in Christ and sent out to share the good news of God's love with all the world.

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Introduction to Honoring God

A boy asked his mother, “What is the purpose of my life?” She wasn’t sure how to answer, so she said she would get back to him on that. She could have said what Christians believe, based on Jesus’ answer to the questioner asking which commandment is the most important. Jesus summed up God’s law by saying: Love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28). We honor God through love. To honor is to hold someone or something in high esteem, to show great respect. To love is to want to be near, to be in relationship and enlivened by the object of your love, to cherish.

This study explores how worship in its many forms honors God. When we gather for worship or set ourselves individually to pray, we enter into a relationship with God and with God’s people. By exploring some of the first people who heard the word of God, the Hebrew people, we can see that caring for the law and the commandments by housing them in the ark of the covenant was the beginning of a long history of honoring God. The stories of David and his people bringing the ark to Jerusalem and then Solomon housing God’s name in the temple reveal careful ritual practices. Looking at the dedication of the temple and God’s specific requirements about its design and proportion and the presence of the ark as God’s throne, we comprehend that nothing is arbitrary; nothing haphazard.

The New Testament biblical passages for this quarter fill out the picture of what it means to honor God by reminding us of Mary's visit to Elizabeth and the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' conception and birth. Finally, we consider Jesus' own teachings on worship as prayer and care for those in need. Worship, then, becomes not only public gatherings centered in word and sacraments but private listening to and address to God through prayer.

Woven through this study is the breadth of practices that constitute honor toward God, including care for God's creation and for those in distress. While there is no expectation that we will see God's reign on earth in just the way we imagine it ought to be, we are admonished by Jesus to persist in honoring God. Even when it feels as if our prayers are not answered, prayer itself orients us toward love outpoured for us, building our faith by acknowledging the presence of the one who calls us to pray. Perseverance reaps its own rewards, focusing us not solely on our own desires but on God's desire to bring us the kingdom of God.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to help adult learners engage biblical passages in order to see how worship is shaped by faith and how worship nurtures faith. Faith is formed by worship, and the ways we worship determine to a great extent what we believe about God, ourselves, and our relationships with our neighbors. The aim of giving honor to God is to increase our love for God and for our neighbors.

Our Writer

Melinda Quivik has served as a seminary professor of worship and preaching, as president of the North American Academy of Liturgy, and as a pastor in Montana, Michigan,

and Minnesota. Her Augsburg Fortress books include *Remembering God's Promises: A Funeral Handbook* (2018), *Leading Worship Matters* (2013), and *Serving the Word* (2009).

Supplementary Resources

Harper's Bible Dictionary (San Francisco: Harper, 1994) is a good source of information on topics, places, and characters.

Consult several Bibles with varied English translations so you can compare the passages for words that differ.

David Worships God in Jerusalem

1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-29a

Session Objectives

The objectives of this session are to help participants:

- examine the ceremony by which the ark was brought to Jerusalem.
- appreciate the diversity of emotional responses that flow from authentic worship.
- embrace physical activity and sensory input as important aspects of worship.

Session Preparation

During the week before the session, hold each participant in prayer.

If your available Bibles have maps in them, find one that shows where the Philistines lived relative to Jerusalem.

Harper's Bible Dictionary (San Francisco: Harper, 1994) is a good source of information on the ark, David, Jerusalem, the temple, and other aspects of the story.

Some participants might resist the idea that worship leaders ought to be chosen based on their skills. People sometimes

balk at the notion that worship needs rehearsal. Be ready to speak to the importance of authenticity and that it does not necessarily come without preparation. Bring 1 Chronicles 15:22 into the discussion. David makes a point of naming someone to direct the music because the person “understood it.”

Read 1 Chronicles 13–15 and 2 Samuel 5:11—6:20.

For David’s story, see 1 Samuel 16:13—1 Kings 2:12 and www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/king-david.

For more about the ark of the covenant, see www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-ark-of-the-covenant.

For replicas of the ark, see <https://arkcovenant.com/life-size-ark-covenant>.

Have available Bibles, chart paper or whiteboard, pens or pencils, and markers. For the Closing, bring *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* or the worship book your church uses.

Before the group begins to read and discuss the biblical text, take time to discuss the Beginnings question on page 11 in the participant book, as suggested on page 12 in this leader guide.

Bible Text Overview

We know about King David from the stories in 1 Samuel 16:13—1 Kings 2:12 covering the years 1010–970 BCE. While we cannot rely on the biblical witness as historically factual, we do know that David was a real historical person. The stories about him, like so many leaders throughout history, were written for a particular time and a particular audience in order to emphasize certain qualities and character traits exemplified in that person. The 1 Chronicles 15 passage

delineates the elements of ritual honor toward God, orchestrated by David and showing, therefore, his attention to this important moment. He put in place all the people and instruments of music that were needed to appropriately bring the ark to its home in Jerusalem. To care for the ark was to care for God's presence among the people.

The Israelites believed that God abided in their midst between the cherubim whose outstretched wings made a space for God to be invisibly present (1 Chronicles 13:6). The golden top, the *kapporeth*, which is translated "mercy seat," was understood to be where God would sit, as on a throne, atop the wings of the cherubim (2 Samuel 6:2; 1 Samuel 4:4; Psalm 80:1; Ezekiel 10:1). The ark was God's footstool—where the divine came to dwell with Earth.

Other places in the Bible refer to the ark as the presence of God. In the wilderness, Moses and Aaron encountered God in the ark (Exodus 25:22). Moses speaks to the ark as if speaking to God (Numbers 10:35-36). David insisted on returning the ark to its place at the center of Israel's life. God's presence would be enthroned in Jerusalem.

In order to grasp how this story depicts what it means to "honor God," it is necessary to know the story told in 1 Chronicles 13. There, David's renown had attracted 120,000 of the best fighters, all ready to support him as their king. He called the commanders and all the people together to propose returning the ark to Jerusalem. But this first attempt—following Israel's defeat of the Philistines who "abandoned their idols" (2 Samuel 5:21), including the ark—failed. David's army carried the "idols" away.

We find discrepancies in the stories told about the ark in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, but the important point is not the chronology. In order to honor God, not only is the task (such as returning stolen property to its rightful owner)

important but just as vital is the manner in which that task is accomplished, the intention behind the ritual movement.

1 Chronicles 15:1-3 Home at last in Jerusalem

When David is ready to bring the ark to Jerusalem, he assembles all the people. The commanders of the army are not named as the parties who will conduct the move. Instead, David announces that the Levites will handle the ark. This is in accord with the Levites' role (Deuteronomy 10:8) to minister to the Lord, to carry the ark, and to bless God's name. In the first attempt, the ark had been put on a cart driven by persons who were not Levites.

Unlike the first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem, this time David has prepared a place for the ark to reside. These preparations announce his purpose as religious rather than military. He does not move with expedience to achieve his goal but attends to what is proper according to the religious strictures (1 Chronicles 15:11-15). Jerusalem would become the religious center of the kingdom he would establish. His rule would come from God's power, not from military might.

1 Chronicles 15:14-16 Preparations for the ark's return

So important was carrying the ark, that the Levites had to be made holy, sanctified. The role required purification, and so the priests and Levites (all priests) did what was proper. The mode of carrying is also mentioned in 2 Chronicles 35:3 and Numbers 7:9. Although we do not know whether the word in Hebrew refers to "poles" or to another sort of "carrying frame" (the word used in translations other than the NRSV), the point again is proper practice. Furthermore, the accompanying music was not random but organized. David appointed the Levites to determine who would play. Nothing was taken for granted.

I Chronicles 15:[17-24], 25-28 Worship requires order

In verses 17-24, the musicians are named along with the gatekeepers who guard the entrance to the inner court where the ark would rest. The clarity about who would be sounding which instruments is a further witness to orderly preparation. But chief for our purposes is that David chose the one who would serve as the music director because “he understood [the music].” If a ritual event is to be successful for its purposes (that is, to honor God in worship), competence and skill are vital. David knew that the proper way to honor God was with people who are trained.

All the people are included in the move to bring the ark to its new home. Sacrifices are made in the manner common to the Israelites. Fine linens robed all the Levites and musicians and the leader, David, who wore an ephod that designated his role in the procession as a priest. The ephod is believed to have been a breastplate of fabric with strong purple, red, and gold threads. It was tied over the fine linen robe. It looked a bit like what some traditions use for deacons’ stoles. Such vestments distinguish worship leaders so that they are readily identified, but the clothing also honors God by showing special care. We dress up for momentous occasions with tuxedos and long gowns, fine fabrics, and sparkling jewels. In the same vein, worship vestments denote the import of the event.

Accompanied by brass and cymbals and stringed instruments, the return of the ark made a mighty visual and auditory impression.

I Chronicles 15:29a The world’s contempt

Saul’s daughter, Michal, watched this procession with the emotion of a woman who has lost everything (keeping in mind the situation of women at that time, even a king’s daughter). Her father, who is no longer in power, neglected

the worship life of Israel (1 Chronicles 13:3). David, who dances with joy and religious fervor, is the one responsible for the deaths of her father and her brothers.

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. To get in touch with the spirit of the celebration described in this session's passage, it may help to bring to mind our own special ritual events: birthdays and anniversaries, births and deaths, times when we mark accomplishments. You might begin with recounting a recurring family celebration. Who first called everyone together? How was it organized? Who participated?

Exploring the Word

1. The fact that the first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem showed an angry God who causes someone to die (for failure to treat the ark properly, 1 Chronicles 13:9-10) may run counter to the image of God as compassionate and merciful. Engage the question of what God's anger shows about God, or at least about how people often want to picture God's power. The last question is the most important: If God never disapproved of what we do, would that mean God did not ultimately care?
2. The story describes David's attention to naming certain persons to lead the procession. The purpose in reviewing these parts of the organization is to highlight the attention we pay (or should pay) to all aspects of our worship: who leads, who assists, the leaders' worthiness, what is worn on the body of leaders, who determines the music, how is the music played, who participates in the whole event.

3. This is an open-ended question. If needed, guide the discussion to what is most central in worship—as the source or place where, in a Christian assembly, we are met with the presence of Christ. The shorthand answer to that question for many will be that the ark is analogous for us to the word of God (the Bible reading and preaching) and the sacraments that baptize (bringing each person into the body of Christ) and feed us (the meal of holy communion).
4. Wide-ranging discussion might ensue regarding how individuals respond to the worship music.

The Word Today

1. Sometimes people know what goes into preparing worship for each Sunday; sometimes, not. For those who have been involved in preparations, this is a good opportunity for everyone to hear something of the actual work required. This is also a time to list the various roles that laity take on (greeter, usher, lector, prayer-writer, assisting minister, communion assistant, choir member, crucifer, and others). Describe each of these so that people can consider whether to volunteer and learn a new role.
2. This is a second question focused on music, but this time the question asks people to name a specific hymn which, in its text or its tune, is most meaningful. Have hymnals available, and give the group time to remember hymns. Ask what is most important to the person about the hymn they name.

Closing

Sing “Blessed be the God of Israel” (ELW 250). Pray together the prayer on page 12 of the participant book.