

AUGSBURG ADULT BIBLE STUDIES

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# Honoring God

I Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, I 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.

Writer: Melinda A. Quivik

Editors: Andrea Lee  
Laurie J. Hanson  
Julie O'Brien

Typesetter: Eileen Engebretson

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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, 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.

# David Worships God in Jerusalem

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

<sup>1</sup> David built houses for himself in the city of David, and he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. <sup>2</sup> Then David commanded that no one but the Levites were to carry the ark of God, for the LORD had chosen them to carry the ark of the LORD and to minister to him forever. <sup>3</sup> David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the LORD to its place, which he had prepared for it.

<sup>14</sup> So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>15</sup> And the Levites carried the ark of God on their shoulders with the poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD. <sup>16</sup> David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kindred as the singers to play on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise loud sounds of joy.

<sup>25</sup> So David and the elders of Israel, and the commanders of the thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the house of Obed-edom with rejoicing. <sup>26</sup> And because God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams. <sup>27</sup> David was

clothed with a robe of fine linen, as also were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the leader of the music of the singers; and David wore a linen ephod. <sup>28</sup> So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres. <sup>29</sup> As the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing.

## Theme Statement

Worship is a community event that requires careful preparation. As David the leader gathers the people and determines who will take on various aspects of the pageant, we see that individuals have agency. But it is God who determines that the house of Levi, the Levites, will carry the ark. “All Israel brought up the ark of the covenant” (v. 28) with shouts and loud music. It takes a whole people to make a festival.

## Exploring the Word

*Chapter 15 presents the culmination of a long journey in which the ark of the covenant, which had accompanied the people in the wilderness as a guide for forty years, had been stolen in war and retrieved but abandoned into the safekeeping of a stranger (1 Chronicles 13:5-14), and finally was brought to rest in Jerusalem with much pageantry.*

*The ark was a chest that held the tablets containing the ten commandments (Deuteronomy 10:2, 5). The ark’s cover was a slab of gold called the “mercy seat.” Seated on the cover facing each other were two cherubim—semidivine creatures that were both holy and terrifying (Exodus 25:17-22). When the ark traveled with the people in their exodus from slavery into freedom (Numbers 10:33), wherever the people stopped, they would set up the tent, or tabernacle, for the*

*ark to rest inside. The ark had tremendous power for the people as the seat of God. The ark was instrumental in bringing down the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6).*

*When the ark fell into the hands of Israel's enemies, the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:1-18), the prophet Eli fell over and died when he heard of the capture. The power that the ark had for the Israelites was not lost on the Philistines. Such great calamities are said to have befallen them that they ended up returning the ark in an elaborate ritual of repentance (1 Samuel 6:1—7:1).*

*The passage for study in this session can be divided into two parts: David's preparations for this event in verses 1-24 and the actual event in verses 25-29a.*

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

In this chapter, we see the care and order required for worship of God. Verses 1-3 show David's diligence in settling himself in Jerusalem and pitching a tent (a tabernacle) also for the ark. He and his people have arrived home, but they are missing the presence of the Lord because they do not have the ark of the covenant.

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

In verses 14-16, David names the Levites and priests as the ones who will be responsible for shouldering the ark into its new home. This task requires purity that comes from specific actions that rid them of sin, making them holy and acceptable to God so that they can be fully prepared to take on such a huge responsibility. And those who will carry the ark—the Levites and priests—are to appoint musicians “to raise loud sounds of joy.”

### **1 Chronicles 15:[17-24], 25-28 Worship requires order**

Verses 17-24 are crucial to understanding the culmination of the ark's return. David finally has seen he must attend carefully to all aspects of this holy event, instead of letting the



music be played by anyone who is willing or available. Thus, three “singers” are named by the Levites to be the leaders and to play the bronze cymbals (v. 19): Heman, Asaph, and Ethan. Their kindred “of the second order” were to play harps; the next group, lyres. There is order in the naming of the instruments involved. Worship requires order. Finally appointed are the priests who were to blow trumpets and to serve as gatekeepers. Individuals with skill must be called upon to honor God.

David’s preparations for returning the ark are paramount because his previous attempt ended in disaster. That failed attempt to bring the ark back into safety with the Israelites (1 Chronicles 13) stands in contrast to 1 Chronicles 15. The first attempt had been poorly prepared. Rather than considering the move to be an event of worship, David had been careless (vv. 12-13) and did not attend to “proper care” for the ark. One indication of the need for attention to details is that when David directs the Levites to appoint the musicians, they name Chenaniah as the one who will be responsible for directing the music.

Finally, in verses 25-28, we see the procession that brings the ark to its new home. The participant leaders are robed in fine linen and accompanied by joyous music from many musicians and instruments.

### **1 Chronicles 15:29a The world’s contempt**

Almost as an ominous, reality-creating afterword, verse 29 tells us what the celebration looks like—from a distance, through a window in the city—to Saul’s daughter Michal, who hated David for defeating her father in battle and recapturing the spoils of war. Such great rejoicing is viewed with revulsion by an outsider who does not know the presence of the Lord.

# The Word Today

In some parts of the church today, where certain ideas have been planted about worship, people think that worship is not something to plan and learn about, to rehearse or prepare to do. They may hold a romantic notion that for worship to be “authentic,” it should leap fully formed from the heart. Anything that is practiced ahead of time is somehow inauthentic. This passage about David’s careful preparation for returning the ark to Jerusalem demonstrates how important it is to think ahead of time about the ritual action (whether it is a full-blown pageant, Sunday morning worship, or an occasional service like a funeral or a baptism). Someone has to invite and give direction to the persons who will make it “happen” and see to the visuals and the sound.

None of us can imagine a birthday party without celebratory food (cake, ice cream, special ethnic dish), a song of joy over the one who was born, and indeed, inviting friends to come. It takes more than one person to make a festival event. Just as Jesus told us that he is present wherever two or three are gathered (Matthew 18:20), the import of a celebration is magnified where more are gathered together.

Voices that cry for creative and imaginative responses to God may be failing to see the creativity and imagination already present in traditional rituals. (Let’s call them worship or liturgy, too.) Here in David’s pageant we find vestments of “fine linen” (reminding us of contemporary albs, stoles, chasubles, and other adornments) and a whole host of musical instruments, a procession of many people carrying various worshipful items, and a special place toward which the parade is aimed: the tent David had erected to house the ark.

Not only does David direct who shall carry the ark into the holy city, but he also determines who shall make music. The longest list of names in this chapter of 1 Chronicles is of

musicians who will play instruments: bronze cymbals, harps, lyres, trumpets. The person who understands music will be the one to direct it. Not just anyone can lead the singing; it has to be someone who knows the purposes of music in the worshiping assembly. Music brings voices and thus persons together, creating a community from a motley assortment.

Worship that is worthy deserves careful focus so that the ritual meaning to honor God expresses what it intends. Slapdash does not carry enough respect. Last-minute arrangements do not make for a moment that speaks enough profundity. Writing a sermon late on Saturday night without previous study and forethought does not show respect either for God or for the Sunday morning assembly. David planned ahead for every part of the day that would finally return the ark of the covenant to its rightful place amid the people of Israel.

## Questions for Discussion

### **Beginnings**

1. What are the important festive events in your family, church, or community? Tell a bit about the ritual and how it developed.

### **Exploring the Word**

1. David's first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem so angered God that the offender, who failed to treat the ark properly, died (1 Chronicles 13:9-10). What does God's anger show about God? What difference would it make if God never disapproved of human actions?
2. Which of David's actions show him to be a leader?
3. To what might you compare the ark in your church's own worship?

4. On a scale of one (not very important) to ten (very important) rank music as a component of worship. Explain your ranking.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10  
Not important Very important

## The Word Today

1. How is your congregation organized to prepare for worship on Sunday? Who does the planning? Who are the leaders?
2. What hymn most nourishes your faith?

## Closing Prayer

*Holy and abiding God, you challenge us to love you every day, and you give us rest when we are weary. Open our ears to hear your call to worship. Make us grateful for every gathering of your people. Amen.*

## Further Study

2 Samuel 5–6

## Daily Readings

M. Deuteronomy 18:1-5	F. 1 Chronicles 16:37-43
T. 1 Chronicles 13:5-8, 13-14	S. Romans 12:1-8
W. 1 Chronicles 15:4-13	S. 1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16,
T. 1 Chronicles 16:1-6	25-29a

## Memorization

### 1 Chronicles 15:28

So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres.