

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: July 9, 2017
Lesson Title: "The Creator"
Lesson Passage: Psalm 95:1-11

ABOUT THIS LESSON

During the Festival of Shelters (referred to in Leviticus 23:33-36), there was a ritual in which Yahweh (Jehovah) was represented as seated on his throne as king. Psalm 95, praising God as King of the earth, was probably used on such an occasion. This psalm (like Psalms 47 & 93) is one of the "enthronement psalms" that were used on such occasions. The first part of Psalm 95 (vv. 1-7a) is a call to worship, sung by pilgrims coming to the Temple; and the second part (vv. 7b-11) is a message from the Lord, delivered by a priest or a prophet, warning against rebellion and disobedience.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain the original setting in which Psalm 95 was used.
- (2) Explain what Psalm 95 teaches us about true worship

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Ask your class to imagine a throng of worshipers crowding into the Temple courtyard during one of the great annual festivals in Jerusalem as you read the first two verses of Psalm 95. Observe that "Come into his presence" in verse 2 means "Let us go into the Temple and worship Him," and "make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise" tells us that the Temple is filled with vocal music, sung by a choir or, perhaps, by the worshipers themselves. Suggest that we should keep this setting in mind as we read through Psalm 95.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Explain that the reference to God as "a great King above all gods" in v. 3 does not acknowledge the existence of other gods. Rather, it implies, "Yahweh is greater than all your imagined deities."*

2. *Note that verses 4 and 5 emphasize Yahweh's sovereignty over the whole created order: (1) The psalmist uses the phrases "depths of the earth" and the "heights of the mountains" to describe the whole earth. (The Septuagint has "the far places.") (2) "In his hand" (v. 4a) indicates not only that the world is God's possession, but, also, that he is sovereign over all of it. (3) Verse 5 uses different word pictures to express the same truth. Yahweh (Jehovah) has power over both the sea and the dry land, for he created both. (Note that this same truth is emphasized in somewhat different language in Psalm 24:1-2.)*

ILLUSTRATION: The Navy hymn, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" expresses the truth in v. 5a, in beautiful language--"Eternal Father, strong to

save, Whose arm hath bound the restless wave, Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep Its own appointed limits keep..."

3. *In Ps. 95:6-7 the people gathered at the Temple are exhorted once again to worship Yahweh, who is praised as their Creator and Lord:* (1) The verb "O Come" in v. 6 means "Enter in," calling upon the worshipers to enter the Temple. (2) In v. 7 God is depicted as a Shepherd who cares for his flock. FOR DISCUSSION: The Shepherd motif appears numerous times in the Psalms (23:1, 28:9, 79:13, 80:1, 100:3) and in other O. T. writings (Isa. 40:11, 53:6; Ezek. 34:31), because the people of ancient Israel would have been quite familiar with a flock's dependence upon the shepherd for sustenance, guidance and protection. QUESTION: Do you think that our relatively easy access to food, health care and security lessens our sense of dependence upon our Shepherd?

4. *Comment on the sudden shift of emphasis that is introduced by the last line of verse 7 and the first line of verse 8: "O that today you would hearken to his voice! Harden not your hearts as your ancestors did."* FOR DISCUSSION: Up to this point the psalmist has emphasized a call to worship God, who is "a great King above all gods." But now it's "time for the sermon." In true worship, more than songs of praise and acts of worship are needed. BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: The opening chapter of Isaiah contains a scathing denunciation of worship without obedience: "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices" says the Lord...When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings...I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly" (Isa. 1:11-13).

5. *To explain the reference to Meribah and Massah in Ps. 95:8, read Exodus 17:1-7 (NOTE: "Meribah" means "quarrel" and "Massah" means "testing. According to Exodus 17:7 the two names were given to the one place where the people put God to the test by demanding water; but it is possible that two separate incidents were combined into this one account.)* COMMENT: The murmuring of the forefathers (Exod. 17:2-3) was evidence that their hearts were hard and unresponsive to the Lord's gracious dealings with them in their deliverance from Egypt.

6. *Comment on Psalm 95:10-11: (1) The verb "loathed" in v. 10 expresses revulsion and disgust. (2) For an explanation of "forty years" in v. 10, refer to Numbers 14:33-34. God was angry with them and swore that that generation (all the adults who had left Egypt) would never enter the Promised Land, Canaan (i.e., "my rest").*

CLOSING THE LESSON

A final comment: For us, the most relevant lesson in Psalm 95 (the "take away learning") is that true worship must be backed up by authentic devotion to God not only in church but, also, in everyday life. (As a sign in one church's vestibule says to departing worshipers, OUR WORSHIP IS OVER; NOW THE SERVICE BEGINS.

