

# PSALMS



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## Chapter 1

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# Psalms: Introductory Observations

The titles “Psalms” and “Psalter” come from the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT), where they originally referred to stringed instruments (such as harp, lyre and lute), then to songs sung with their accompaniment. The traditional Hebrew title is *tehillim* (meaning “praises”; see note on Ps 145 title), even though many of the psalms are *tephillot* (meaning “prayers”). In fact, one of the first collections included in the book was titled “the prayers of David son of Jesse” (72:20).

### **Collection, Arrangement and Date**

The Psalter is a collection of collections and represents the final stage in a process that spanned centuries. It was put into its final form by postexilic temple personnel, who completed it probably in the third century BC. As such, it has often been called the prayer book of the “second” (Zerubbabel’s and Herod’s) temple and was used in the synagogues as well. But it is more

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than a treasury of prayers and hymns for liturgical and private use on chosen occasions. Both the scope of its subject matter and the arrangement of the whole collection strongly suggest that this collection was viewed by its final editors as a book of instruction in the faith and in full-orbed godliness—thus a guide for the life of faith in accordance with the Law, the Prophets and the canonical wisdom literature (see chart, pp. 1048-1051). By the first century AD. it was referred to as the “Book of Psalms” (Lk 20:42; Ac 1:20). At that time Psalms appears also to have been used as a title for the entire section of the Hebrew OT canon more commonly known as the “Writings” (see Lk 24:44 and note).

Many collections preceded this final compilation of the Psalms. In fact, the formation of psalters probably goes back to the early days of the first (Solomon’s) temple (or even to the time of David), when the temple liturgy began to take shape. Reference has already been made to “the prayers of David.” Additional collections expressly referred to in the present Psalter titles are: (1) the songs and/or psalms “of the Sons of Korah” (Ps 42-49; 84-85; 87-88), (2) the psalms and/or songs “of Asaph” (Ps 50; 73-83) and (3) the songs “of ascents” (Ps 120-134).

Other evidence points to further compilations. Ps 1-41 (Book I) make frequent use of the divine name Yahweh (“the Lord”), while Ps 42-72 (Book II) make frequent use of Elohim (“God”). The reason for the Elohim collection in distinction from the Yahweh collection remains a matter of speculation. Moreover, Ps 93-100 appear to be a traditional collection (see “The Lord reigns” in 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). Other apparent groupings include Ps 111-118 (a series of Hallelujah psalms; see introduction to Ps 113), Ps 138-145 (all of which include “of David” in their titles) and Ps 146-150 (with their frequent “Praise the Lord”; see NIV text note on 111:1). Whether the “Great Hallel” (Ps 120-136) was already a recognized unit is not known.

In its final edition, the Psalter contained 150 psalms. On this the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT) and Hebrew texts agree, though they arrive at this number differently. The Septuagint has an extra psalm at the end (but not numbered separately as Ps 151); it also unites Ps 9-10 (see NIV text note on Ps 9) and Ps 114-115 and divides Ps 116 and Ps 147 each into two psalms.

Strangely, both the Septuagint and Hebrew texts number Ps 42-43 as two psalms whereas they were evidently originally one (see NIV text note on Ps 42).

In its final form the Psalter was divided into five Books (Ps 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150), each of which was provided with a concluding doxology (see 41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48; 150). The first two of these Books, as already noted, were probably pre-exilic. The division of the remaining psalms into three Books, thus attaining the number five, was possibly in imitation of the five books of Moses (otherwise known simply as the Law). At least one of these divisions (between Ps 106-107) seems arbitrary (see introduction to Ps 107). In spite of this five-book division, the Psalter was clearly thought of as a whole, with an introduction (Ps 1-2) and a conclusion (Ps 146-150). Notes throughout the Psalms give additional indications of conscious arrangement (see also chart, p. 1048-1051).

### **Authorship and Titles (or Superscriptions)**

Of the 150 psalms, only 34 lack superscriptions of any kind (only 17 in the Septuagint, the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT). These so-called “orphan” psalms are found mainly in Books III-V, where they tend to occur in clusters: Ps 91; 93-97; 99; 104-107; 111-119; 135-137; 146-150. (In Books I-II, only Ps 1-2; 10; 33; 43; 71 lack titles, and Ps 10 and 43 are actually continuations of the preceding psalms).

The contents of the superscriptions vary but fall into a few broad categories: (1) author, (2) name of collection, (3) type of psalm, (4) musical notations, (5) liturgical notations and (6) brief indications of occasion for composition. For details see notes on the titles of the various psalms.

Students of the Psalms are not agreed on the antiquity and reliability of these superscriptions. That many of them are at least pre-exilic appears evident from the fact that the Septuagint translators were sometimes unclear as to their meaning. Furthermore, the practice of attaching titles, including the name of the author, is ancient. On the other hand, comparison between the Septuagint and the Hebrew texts shows that the content of some titles was still subject to change well into the postexilic period. Most discussion centers on categories 1 and 6 above.

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As for the superscriptions regarding occasion of composition, many of these brief notations of events read as if they had been taken from 1,2 Samuel. Moreover, they are sometimes not easily correlated with the content of the psalms they head. The suspicion therefore arises that they are later attempts to fit the psalms into the real-life events of history. But then why the limited number of such notations, and why the apparent mismatches? The arguments cut both ways.

Regarding authorship, opinions are even more divided. The notations themselves are ambiguous since the Hebrew phraseology used, meaning in general “belonging to,” can also be taken in the sense of “concerning” or “for the use of” or “dedicated to.” The name may refer to the title of a collection of psalms that had been gathered under a certain name (as “Of Asaph” or “Of the Sons of Korah”). To complicate matters, there is evidence within the Psalter that at least some of the psalms were subjected to editorial revision in the course of their transmission. As for Davidic authorship, there can be little doubt that the Psalter contains psalms composed by that noted singer and musician and that there was at one time a “Davidic” psalter. This, however, may have also included psalms written concerning David, or concerning one of the later Davidic kings, or even psalms written in the manner of those he authored. It is also true that the tradition as to which psalms are “Davidic” remains somewhat indefinite, and some “Davidic” psalms seem clearly to reflect later situations (see, e.g., Ps 30 title-but see also note there; and see introduction to Ps 69 and note on Ps 122 title). Moreover, “David” is sometimes used elsewhere as a collective for the kings of his dynasty, and this could also be true in the psalm titles.

The word *Selah* is found in 39 psalms, all but two of which (Ps 140; 143, both “Davidic”) are in Books I-III. It is also found in Hab 3, a psalm-like poem. Suggestions as to its meaning abound, but honesty must confess ignorance. Most likely, it is a liturgical notation. The common suggestions that it calls for a brief musical interlude or for a brief liturgical response by the congregation are plausible but unproven (the former may be supported by the Septuagint rendering). In some instances its present placement in the Hebrew text is highly questionable.



## Psalm Types

Hebrew superscriptions to the Psalms acquaint us with an ancient system of classification: (1) *mizmor* (“psalm”); (2) *shiggaion*; (3) *miktam*; (4) *shir* (“song”); (5) *masvkil*; (6) *tephillah* (“prayer”); (7) *tehillah* (“praise”); (8) *lehazkir* (“for being remembered”-i.e., before God, a petition); (9) *letodah* (“for praising” or “for giving thanks”); (10) *lelammed* (“for teaching”); and (11) *shir yedidot* (“song of loves”-i.e., a wedding song). The meaning of many of these terms, however, is uncertain. In addition, some titles contain two of these (especially *mizmor* and *shir*), indicating that the types are diversely based and overlapping.

Analysis of content has given rise to a different classification that has proven useful for study of the Psalms. The main types that can be identified are: (1) prayers of the individual (e.g., Ps 3-7); (2) praise from the individual for God’s saving help (e.g., Ps 30; 34); (3) prayers of the community (e.g., Ps 12; 44; 79); (4) praise from the community for God’s saving help (e.g., Ps 66; 75); (5) confessions of confidence in the Lord (e.g., Ps 11; 16; 52); (6) hymns in praise of God’s majesty and virtues (e.g., Ps 8; 19; 29; 65); (7) hymns celebrating God’s universal reign (Ps 47; 93-99); (8) songs of Zion, the city of God (Ps 46; 48; 76; 84; 122; 126; 129; 137); (9) royal psalms-by, for or concerning the king, the Lord’s anointed (e.g., Ps 2; 18; 20; 45; 72; 89; 110); (10) pilgrimage songs (Ps 120-134); (11) liturgical songs (e.g., Ps 15; 24; 68); (12) didactic (instructional) songs (e.g., Ps 1; 34; 37; 73; 112; 119; 128; 133).

This classification also involves some overlapping. For example, “prayers of the individual” may include prayers of the king (in his special capacity as king) or even prayers of the community speaking in the collective first person singular. Nevertheless, it is helpful to study a psalm in conjunction with others of the same type. Attempts to fix specific liturgical settings for each type have not been very convincing. For those psalms about which something can be said in this regard see introductions to the individual psalms.

Of all these psalm types, the prayers (both of the individual and of the community) are the most complex. Several speech functions are combined to form these appeals to God: (1) address to God: “O Lord,” “my God,” “my deliverer”; (2) initial appeal: “Arise,” “Answer me,”

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“Help,” “Save me”; (3) description of distress: “Many are rising against me,” “The wicked attack,” “I am in distress”; (4) complaint against God: “Why have you forsaken me?” “How long will you hide your face from me?”; (5) petition: “Be not far from me,” “Vindicate me”; (6) motivation for God to hear: “for I take refuge in you,” “for your name’s sake”; (7) accusation against the adversary: “There is no truth in their mouths,” “Ruthless men seek my life” (“the wicked” are often quoted); (8) call for judicial redress: “Let them be put to shame,” “Call him to account for his wickedness”; (9) claims of innocence: “I have walked in my integrity,” “They hate me without cause”; (10) confessions of sin: “I have sinned against you,” “I confess my iniquity”; (11) professions of trust: “You are a shield about me,” “You will answer me”; (12) vows to praise for deliverance: “I will sing your might,” “My lips will praise you”; (13) calls to praise: “Magnify the Lord with me,” “Sing praise to the Lord”; (14) motivations for praise: “for you have delivered me,” “for the Lord hears the needy.”

Though not all these appear in every prayer, they all belong to the conventions of prayer in the Psalter, with petition itself being but one (usually brief) element among the rest. On the whole they reflect the then-current conventions of a court trial, the psalmists presenting their cases before the heavenly King/Judge. When beset by wicked adversaries, the petitioners appeal to God for a hearing, describe their situation, plead their innocence (“righteousness”), lodge their accusations against their adversaries, and appeal for deliverance and judicial redress. When suffering at the hands of God (when God is their adversary), they confess their guilt and plead for mercy. Attention to these various speech functions and their role in the psalmists’ judicial appeals to the heavenly Judge will significantly aid the reader’s understanding of these psalms.

It should be noted that reference to “penitential” and “imprecatory” psalms as distinct psalm “types” has no basis in the Psalter collection itself. The former (“penitential”) refers to an early Christian selection of seven psalms (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143) for liturgical expressions of penitence; the latter (“imprecatory”) is based on a misconstrual of one of the speech functions found in the prayers. What are actually appeals to the heavenly Judge for judicial redress (function 8 noted above) are taken to be curses (“imprecation” means “curse”) pronounced by the psalmists on their adversaries. See note on 5:10.

## Literary Features

The Psalter is from first to last poetry, even though it contains many prayers and not all OT prayers were poetic (see 1Ki 8:23-53; Ezr 9:6-15; Ne 9:5-37; Da 9:4-19)-nor, for that matter, was all praise poetic (see 1Ki 8:15-21). The Psalms are impassioned, vivid and concrete; they are rich in images, in simile and metaphor. Assonance, alliteration and wordplays abound in the Hebrew text. Effective use of repetition and the piling up of synonyms and complements to fill out the picture are characteristic. Key words frequently highlight major themes in prayer or song. Enclosure (repetition of a significant word or phrase at the end that occurs at the beginning) frequently wraps up a composition or a unit within it. The notes on the structure of the individual psalms often call attention to literary frames within which the psalm has been set.

Hebrew poetry lacks rhyme and regular meter. Its most distinctive and pervasive feature is parallelism. Most poetic lines are composed of two (sometimes three) balanced segments (the balance is often loose, with the second segment commonly somewhat shorter than the first). The second segment either echoes (synonymous parallelism), contrasts (antithetic parallelism) or syntactically completes (synthetic parallelism) the first. These three types are generalizations and are not wholly adequate to describe the rich variety that the creativity of the poets has achieved within the basic two-segment line structure. When the second or third segment of a poetic line repeats, echoes or overlaps the content of the preceding segment, it usually intensifies or more sharply focuses the thought or its expression. They can serve, however, as rough distinctions that will assist the reader. In the NIV the second and third segments of a line are slightly indented relative to the first.

Determining where the Hebrew poetic lines or line segments begin or end (scanning) is sometimes an uncertain matter. Even the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT) at times scans the lines differently from the way the Hebrew texts now available to us do. It is therefore not surprising that modern translations occasionally differ.

A related problem is the extremely concise, often elliptical writing style of the Hebrew poets. The syntactical connection of words must

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at times be inferred simply from context. Where more than one possibility presents itself, translators are confronted with ambiguity. They are not always sure with which line segment a border word or phrase is to be read.

The stanza structure of Hebrew poetry is also a matter of dispute. Occasionally, recurring refrains mark off stanzas, as in Ps 42-43; 57. In Ps 110 two balanced stanzas are divided by their introductory oracles (see also introduction to Ps 132), while Ps 119 devotes eight lines to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For the most part, however, no such obvious indicators are present. The NIV has used spaces to mark off poetic paragraphs (called “stanzas” in the notes). Usually this could be done with some confidence, and the reader is advised to be guided by them. But there are a few places where these divisions are questionable-and are challenged in the notes.

Close study of the Psalms discloses that the authors often composed with an overall design in mind. This is true of the alphabetic acrostics, in which the poet devoted to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet one line segment (as in Ps 111-112), or a single line (as in Ps 25; 34; 145), or two lines (as in Ps 37), or eight lines (as in Ps 119). In addition Ps 33; 38; 103 each have 22 lines, no doubt because of the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet (see Introduction to Lamentations: Literary Features). The oft-voiced notion that this device was used as a memory aid seems culturally prejudiced and quite unwarranted. Actually people of that time were able to memorize far more readily than most people today. It is much more likely that the alphabet-which was relatively recently invented as a simple system of symbols capable of representing in writing the rich and complex patterns of human speech and therefore of inscribing all that can be put into words (one of the greatest intellectual achievements of all time)-commended itself as a framework on which to hang significant phrases.

Other forms were also used. Ps 44 is a prayer fashioned after the design of a ziggurat (a Babylonian stepped pyramid; see note on Ge 11:4). A sense of symmetry is pervasive. There are psalms that devote the same number of lines to each stanza (as Ps 12; 41), or do so with variation only in the introductory or concluding stanza (as Ps 38; 83; 94). Others match the opening and closing stanzas and balance those between (as Ps 33; 86). A particularly interesting device is to place a key thematic line at the very center, sometimes constructing

the whole or part of the poem around that center (see note on 6:6). Still other design features are pointed out in the notes. The authors of the psalms crafted their compositions very carefully. They were heirs of an ancient art (in many details showing that they had inherited a poetic tradition that goes back hundreds of years), and they developed it to a state of high sophistication. Their works are best appreciated when carefully studied and pondered.

### **Theology of the Psalms**

The Psalter is for the most part a book of prayer and praise. In it faith speaks to God in prayer and of God in praise. But there are also psalms that are explicitly didactic (instructional) in form and purpose (teaching the way of godliness). As noted above (Collection, Arrangement and Date), the manner in which the whole collection has been arranged suggests that one of its main purposes was instruction in the life of faith, a faith formed and nurtured by the Law, the Prophets and the canonical wisdom literature. Accordingly, the Psalter is theologically rich. Its theology is, however, not abstract or systematic but doxological, confessional and practical. So a summation of that “theology” impoverishes it by translating it into an objective mode.

Furthermore, any summation faces a still greater problem. The Psalter is a large collection of independent pieces of many kinds, serving different purposes and composed over the course of many centuries. Not only must a brief summary of its “theology” be selective and incomplete; it will also of necessity be somewhat artificial. It will suggest that each psalm reflects or at least presupposes the “theology” outlined, that there is no “theological” tension or progression within the Psalter. Manifestly this is not so.

Still, the final editors of the Psalter were obviously not eclectic in their selection. They knew that many voices from many times spoke here, but none that in their judgment was incompatible with the Law and the Prophets. No doubt they also assumed that each psalm was to be understood in the light of the collection as a whole. That assumption we may share. Hence something, after all, can be said concerning seven major theological themes that, while admittedly a bit artificial, need not seriously distort and can be helpful to the student of the Psalms.

## Theology: Major Themes

1. At the core of the theology of the Psalter is the conviction that the gravitational center of life (of right human understanding, trust, hope, service, morality, adoration), but also of history and of the whole creation (heaven and earth), is *God* (Yahweh, “the Lord”; see Dt 6:4 and note). He is *the Great King* over all, the One to whom all things are subject. He created all things and preserves them; they are the robe of glory with which he has clothed himself. Because he ordered them, they have a well-defined and “true” identity (no chaos there). Because he maintains them, they are sustained and kept secure from disruption, confusion or annihilation. Because he alone is the sovereign God, they are governed by one hand and held in the service of one divine purpose. Under God creation is a cosmos-an orderly and systematic whole. What we distinguish as “nature” and history had for the psalmists one Lord, under whose rule all things worked together. Through the creation the Great King’s majestic glory is displayed. He is good (wise, righteous, faithful, amazingly benevolent and merciful-evoking trust), and he is great (his knowledge, thoughts and works are beyond human comprehension-evoking reverent awe). By his good and lordly rule he is shown to be the Holy One.

2. As the Great King by right of creation and enduring absolute sovereignty, *he ultimately will not tolerate any worldly power that opposes or denies or ignores him*. He will come to rule the nations so that all will be compelled to acknowledge him. This expectation is no doubt the root and broadest scope of the psalmists’ long view of the future. Because the Lord is the Great King beyond all challenge, *his righteous and peaceable kingdom will come, overwhelming all opposition* and purging the creation of all rebellion against his rule-such will be the ultimate outcome of history.

3. As the Great King on whom all creatures depend, *he opposes the “proud,” those who rely on their own resources (and/or the gods they have contrived) to work out their own destiny*. These are the ones who ruthlessly wield whatever power they possess to attain worldly wealth, status and security; who are a law to themselves and exploit others as they will. In the Psalter, this kind of “pride” is the root of all evil. Those who embrace it, though they may seem to

prosper, will be brought down to death, their final end. The “humble,” the “poor and needy,” those who acknowledge their dependence on the Lord in all things—these are the ones in whom God delights. Hence the “fear of the Lord”—i.e., humble trust in and obedience to the Lord—is the “beginning” of all wisdom (111:10). Ultimately, those who embrace it will inherit the earth. Not even death can hinder their seeing the face of God. The psalmists’ hope for the future—the future of God and his kingdom and the future of the godly—was firm, though somewhat generalized. None of the psalmists gives expression to a two-age vision of the future (the present evil age giving way to a new age of righteousness and peace on the other side of a great eschatological divide). Such a view began to appear in the intertestamental literature—a view that had been foreshadowed by Daniel (see especially 12:2–3) and by Isaiah (see 65:17–25; 66:22–24)—and it later received full expression in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. But this revelation was only a fuller development consistent with the hopes the psalmists lived by.

4. Because God is the Great King, *he is the ultimate Executor of justice among humans (to avenge oneself is an act of the “proud”).* God is the court of appeal when persons are threatened or wronged—especially when no earthly court that he has established has jurisdiction (as in the case of international conflicts) or is able to judge (as when one is wronged by public slander) or is willing to act (out of fear or corruption). *He is the mighty and faithful Defender of the defenseless and the wronged.* He knows every deed and the secrets of every heart. There is no escaping his scrutiny. No false testimony will mislead him in judgment. And he hears the pleas brought to him. As the good and faithful Judge, he delivers those who are oppressed or wrongfully attacked and redresses the wrongs committed against them (see note on 5:10). This is the unwavering conviction that accounts for the psalmists’ impatient complaints when they boldly, yet as “poor and needy,” cry to him, “Why, O Lord, (have you not yet delivered me)?” “How long, O Lord (before you act)?”

5. As the Great King over all the earth, *the Lord has chosen Israel to be his servant people, his “inheritance” among the nations.* He has delivered them by mighty acts out of the hands of the world powers, he has given them a land of their own (territory



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that he took from other nations to be his own “inheritance” in the earth), *and he has united them with himself in covenant as the initial embodiment of his redeemed kingdom*. Thus both their destiny and his honor came to be bound up with this relationship. *To them he also gave his word of revelation*, which testified of him, made specific his promises and proclaimed his will. By God’s covenant, Israel was to live among the nations, loyal only to her heavenly King. She was to trust solely in his protection, hope in his promises, live in accordance with his will and worship him exclusively. She was to sing his praises to the whole world-which in a special sense revealed Israel’s anticipatory role in the evangelization of the nations.

6. As the Great King, Israel’s covenant Lord, *God chose David to be his royal representative on earth*. In this capacity, David was the Lord’s “servant”-i.e., a member of the Great King’s administration. The Lord himself anointed him and adopted him as his royal “son” to rule in his name. Through him God made his people secure in the promised land and subdued all the powers that threatened them. What is more, *he covenanted to preserve the Davidic dynasty*. Hence forth the kingdom of God on earth, while not dependent on the house of David, was linked to it by God’s decision and commitment. In its continuity and strength lay Israel’s security and hope as she faced a hostile world. And since the Davidic kings were God’s royal representatives in the earth, in concept seated at God’s right hand (110:1), the scope of their rule was potentially worldwide (see Ps 2). The Lord’s anointed, however, was more than a warrior king. He was to be endowed by God to govern his people with godlike righteousness: to deliver the oppressed, defend the defenseless, suppress the wicked, and thus bless the nation with internal peace and prosperity. He was also an intercessor with God in behalf of the nation, the builder and maintainer of the temple (as God’s earthly palace and the nation’s house of prayer) and the foremost voice calling the nation to worship the Lord. It is perhaps with a view to these last duties that he is declared to be not only king, but also “priest” (see Ps 110 and notes).

7. As the Great King, Israel’s covenant Lord, *God* (who had chosen David and his dynasty to be his royal representatives) *also chose Jerusalem (the City of David) as his own royal city, the earthly*



*seat of his throne. Thus Jerusalem (Zion) became the earthly capital (and symbol) of the kingdom of God. There in his palace (the temple) he sat enthroned among his people. There his people could meet with him to bring their prayers and praise, and to see his power and glory. From there he brought salvation, dispensed blessings and judged the nations. And with him as the city's great Defender, Jerusalem was the secure citadel of the kingdom of God, the hope and joy of God's people.*

God's goodwill and faithfulness toward his people were most strikingly symbolized by his pledged presence among them at his temple in Jerusalem, the "city of the Great King" (48:2). But no manifestation of his benevolence was greater than his readiness to forgive the sins of those who humbly confessed them and whose hearts showed him that their repentance was genuine and that their professions of loyalty to him had integrity. As they anguished over their own sinfulness, the psalmists remembered the ancient testimony of their covenant Lord: I am Yahweh ("the Lord"), "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Ex 34:6-7). Only so did they dare to submit to him as his people, to "fear" him (see 130:3-4).

### **Messianic Allusions**

Unquestionably the supreme kingship of Yahweh (in which he displays his transcendent greatness and goodness) is the most basic metaphor and most pervasive theological concept in the Psalter-as in the OT generally. It provides the fundamental perspective in which people are to view themselves, the whole creation, events in "nature" and history, and the future. All creation is Yahweh's one kingdom. To be a creature in the world is to be a part of his kingdom and under his rule. To be a human being in the world is to be dependent on and responsible to him. To proudly deny that fact is the root of all wickedness-the wickedness that now pervades the world.

God's election of Israel and subsequently of David and Zion, together with the giving of his word, represent the renewed inbreaking of God's righteous kingdom into this world of rebellion and evil. It initiates the great divide between the righteous nation and the wicked

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nations, and on a deeper level between the righteous and the wicked, a more significant distinction that cuts even through Israel. In the end this divine enterprise will triumph. Human pride will be humbled, and wrongs will be redressed. The humble will be given the whole earth to possess, and the righteous and peaceable kingdom of God will come to full realization. These theological themes, of course, have profound religious and moral implications. Of these, too, the psalmists spoke.

One question that ought yet to be addressed is: Do the Psalms speak of the Christ? Yes, in a variety of ways-but not as the prophets do. The Psalter was never numbered among the “prophetic” books. On the other hand, when the Psalter was being given its final form, what the psalms said about the Lord and his ways with his people, about the Lord and his ways with the nations, about the Lord and his ways with the righteous and the wicked, and what the psalmists said about the Lord’s anointed, his temple and his holy city-all this was understood in light of the prophetic literature (both Former and Latter Prophets). Relative to these matters, the Psalter and the Prophets were mutually reinforcing and interpretive.

When the Psalms speak of the king on David’s throne, they speak of the king who is being crowned (as in Ps 2; 72; 110-though some think 110 is an exception) or is reigning (as in Ps 45) at the time. They proclaim his status as the Lord’s anointed and declare what the Lord will accomplish through him and his dynasty. Thus they also speak of the sons of David to come-and in the exile and the postexilic era, when there was no reigning king, they spoke to Israel only of the great Son of David whom the prophets had announced as the one in whom God’s covenant with David would yet be fulfilled. So the NT quotes these psalms as testimonies to Christ, which in their unique way they are. In him they are truly fulfilled.

When in the Psalms righteous sufferers-who are “righteous” because they are innocent, not having provoked or wronged their adversaries, and because they are among the “humble” who trust in the Lord-cry out to God in their distress (as in Ps 22; 69), they give voice to the sufferings of God’s servants in a hostile and evil world.

These cries became the prayers of God’s oppressed “saints,” and as such they were taken up into Israel’s book of prayers. When Christ

came in the flesh, he identified himself with God's "humble" people in the world. He became for them God's righteous servant par excellence, and he shared their sufferings at the hands of the wicked. Thus these prayers became his prayers also-uniquely his prayers. In him the suffering and deliverance of which these prayers speak are fulfilled (though they continue to be the prayers also of those who take up their cross and follow him).

Similarly, in speaking of God's covenant people, of the city of God, and of the temple in which God dwells, the Psalms ultimately speak of Christ's church. The Psalter is not only the prayer book of the second temple; it is also the enduring prayer book of the people of God. Now, however, it must be used in the light of the new era of redemption that dawned with the first coming of the Messiah and that will be consummated at his second coming.

# Classification of the Psalms

Psalms are divided into five books in the Hebrew Bible. The first three books were probably compiled earlier than the last two books. There are duplicate Psalms (53 & 14; 70 & 40:13-17; 108 & 57:7-11/60:5-12). Different manuscripts show different arrangements and combinations of Psalms.

### **Book One Psalms 1-41**

- ❖ Suggests Genesis in content - man is seen in a state of blessedness, fall, and recovery
- ❖ Davidic authorship (1 and 2 have not titles; 10 and 33 are continuations of the previous). This is probably an exclusive collection of Davidic psalms (i.e. not exhaustive because Davidic psalms appear throughout the book of Psalms). The only ones not attributed to David are Ps. 1, 2, 10 & 33. However, Acts 4:25 attributes Ps.2 to David; Ps. 10 is thought to have been split off from Ps. 9; LXX and 4QPsq

attribute Ps.33 to David. This leaves only the introductory Psalm 1 unattested.

- ❖ The name Jehovah predominates (usage: Jehovah 177; Elohim 48)

### **Book Two Psalms 42-72**

- ❖ Suggests Exodus in content - man is seen in ruin and redemption.
- ❖ This consists of 31 psalms. 18 are ascribed to David, 7 to the sons of Korah and 1 to Solomon (Ps.72) The rest are anonymous.
- ❖ This book uses the name *Elohim* (164), more than *Yahweh* (30).

### **Book Three Psalms 73-89**

- ❖ Suggests Leviticus in content - emphasizes the sanctuary, tabernacle, temple, house, assembly, and the congregation. Largely liturgical, these psalms reveal how God in His holiness deals with His people
- ❖ Mostly ascribed to Asaph
- ❖ Both names Jehovah Elohim predominate (usage: Jehovah 43; Elohim 59)

### **Book Four Psalms 90-106**

- ❖ Suggests Numbers in content - peril and protection are prominent. Many are prophetic in looking to the time when wanderings for Israel will cease
- ❖ Mainly anonymous
- ❖ The name Jehovah predominates (usage: Jehovah 101; Elohim 19)

### **Book Five Psalms 107-150**

- ❖ Suggests Deuteronomy in content - the Word of God, perfection, and praise are predominant. The heart of the section ends with the “Hallelujah chorus” of Psalm 150
- ❖ Various authors 3. The name Jehovah predominates (usage: Jehovah 226; Elohim 28)

### **Classification of Psalms**

Many attempts to classify the psalms fail to consistently distinguish between categories related by form and categories related by content. These charts give each psalm both a preliminary classification “By Form,” and “Content” (wisdom, confidence, repentance, imprecation, kingdom, royal coronation, etc.). The following are the major classifications:

## Psalms

Lament Psalms	
Community	12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89*, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129
Individual	3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31, 36*, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89*, 120, 139, 141, 142
Specialized Lament Psalms	
Penitential	6, 32*, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
Imprecatory	35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140
Thanksgiving (Todah) Psalms	
Community	65*, 67*, 75, 107, 124, 136*
Individual	18, 21, 30, 32*, 34, 40:1-11, 66:13-20, 92, 108*, 116, 118, 138
Specialized Thanksgiving (Todah) Psalms	
Salvation History	8*, 105-106, 135, 136
Songs of Trust	11, 16, 23, 27*, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131
Hymnic Psalms	
Hymn and Doxology	8*, 19:1-6, 33, 66:1-12, 67*, 95, 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150
Liturgical Psalms (for Public Worship)	
Covenant Songs	50, 78, 81, 89*, 132
Royal/Enthronement	2, 18, 20, 21, 29, 45, 47, 72, 93, 95*, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 110, 144
Songs of Zion	46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122
Temple Liturgies	15, 24, 68*, 82, 95*, 115, 134
Community Psalms	
Wisdom Psalms	1*, 36*, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133
Torah Poems	1*, 19:7-14, 119

*\*These Psalms are difficult to classify because they could fit into more than one group or are mixed types.*

## Form and Evolution

Early in the 20th cent., German scholar Herman Gunkell being convinced of the inadequacies of personal historical methods noted the many references in the Psalter to liturgical activities and places. He concluded that the psalms were much or more related to the corporate worship of Ancient Israel and Judah than to the meditation of pious persons. Thereby, pioneered a method known as form criticisms. One of the most important tool of this method is this as it attempts to determine the various literary forms or genres that appear in the biblical texts.

Literary Classifications of Psalms: Different literary types of psalms are:

### 1. Hymns or Songs of Praise

Psalms 8; 19; 29; 33; 65; 67;68;96; 98;100;103-105; 111; 113; 114; 117; 135; 136; 139; 145-150. In Jewish tradition the entire Psalter has received the name, *tehillim*, or praises, the hymn designate a specific literary type of praise.

#### Form

- ◆ Introduction: A call to praise, sing, and rejoice to Yahweh in some form.
- ◆ Body: The reasons why Yahweh should be praised (often introduced by “for”).
  - a) His qualities and attributes.
  - b) His regular or repeated actions, including his works in creation and conservation of cosmos and his works in history, especially for Israel.

#### Conclusion: renewed summons to praise

**Sitz im Leben:** Hymns were sung as part of worship on diverse occasions, including sacred festivals as well at other times, (e.g. victory after battle, thanksgiving for the harvest, relief from drought and plague) perhaps by a choir or an individual singer. According to Claus Westermann, the so-called hymn praises God for his actions and His being as a whole.

## 2. Songs of Zion

Psalms 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; 122. These psalms tend to lack a proper introduction. They praise Yahweh by praising Jerusalem, addressing the holy place, and calling down blessings upon it. They were sung at particular occasions that celebrated Jerusalem's majesty and future eschatological significance.

## 3. Psalms of Yahweh's Enthronement

Psalms 47; 93; 96:10-13; 97; 99. These awe inspiring majestic psalms describe the majesty of God's

sovereign rule over all his creation and the providential care by which he sustains, controls, and directs all he has made.

### Form

- ◆ Often begin with the words "Yahweh has become king."
- ◆ Contain many calls to rejoice
- ◆ Have brief references to Yahweh's deeds, depicted as just now taking place.
- ◆ Give descriptions of what his reign will mean to Israel and the world.<sup>5</sup>) present the idea that a new world kingdom is coming.

### Sitz im Leben

These psalms were used as part of Israel's worship, likely including an enthronement festival in which Yahweh is glorified as king. These psalms were given a prophetic, eschatological, reinterpretation in their final stages. Sigmund Mowinkel focused attention on these psalms by reconstructing "a feast of Yahweh's enthronement". This festival was connected with the harvest and the New Year celebrations usually called the feast of tabernacle. Established in early monarchy, this feast enacted enthronement of Yahweh as king of all creations, relieved his victory over chaos at the first creation and his conquest of pharaoh and others in the Exodus, consecrated in the temple and commemorated David's Sovereignty over Israel and his settlement in Jerusalem. A major challenge to Mowinkel's reconstruction has come from H.J. Kraus, who questioned Mowinkel's interpretation:

- ◆ Grammatically, Kraus argued against the translation of "Yahweh Melek", "Yahweh has become king", which was a very basic



element of Mowinkel's interpretation, by showing that thereference is to a state and not an act. Thus "Yahweh is King".

- ◆ Cultically, how could God have been elevated to a throne when there was no image or representation as in the Babylonian and Canaanite cults?
- ◆ Theologically, Israelites' view of the living God could not assume any mythic rhythm in which Yahweh dies annually or it weakened during the summer like pagan fertility gods.
- ◆ Exegetically, Kraus cites the way in which the unchangeable and eternal Kingship of Yahwehis extolled.

Both Mowinkel and Kraus note that the enthronement psalms have historical (remembering Gods past deliverance) and eschatological (anticipating God's future mystery) dimension. Kraus stresses both their historical and eschatological character where as Mowinkel's chief concern was their use in the cult to express the present reality of God's exaltation as King.

#### **4. Lament/Complaint Psalms**

These highly emotionally charged psalms record the writer's heart cry to God for divine deliverance from trouble and pain. The Lament/Complaint Psalms can be subdivided into two categories1) the individual and 2) communal lament. The difference between the two subtypes can be distinguished by the use of the singular "I" or the plural "We". However, the "I" could also be characterizing an individual's personal experience that was reflective of the entire community.

##### **A. Communal Laments**

Psalms 44; (58); (60); 74; 79; 80; 83; 85; 90; 126.

##### **Form**

- ◆ Calling upon Yahweh by name (usually in the vocative)
- ◆ Lamenting complaints over the misfortune; almost always political in nature.
- ◆ Supplications and petitions to Yahweh to transform the misfortunes.
- ◆ Thoughts aimed to excite confidence in the suppliant or to move Yahweh to action, such as his honour or the sake of his name.

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- ◆ Often end with a certainty of hearing.

Sitz im Leben: The setting of these psalms are days of national fasting and/or complaint festivals brought on by various national calamities, such as war, exile, pestilence, drought, famine, and plagues.

### **B. Individual Complaint Psalms**

#### 1) Individual Laments in General

Psalms 3; 5; 6; 7; 13; 17; 22; 25; 26; 27:7-14; 28; 31; 35; 38; 39; 42-43; 54-57; 59; 61; 63; 64; 69; 70; 71; 86; 88; 102; 109; 120; 130; 140; 141; 142; 143.

Form Laments will typically include the following element, though not necessarily in the same order:

- a. Summons to Yahweh.
- b. Complaint/Lament proper, often preceded by a description of the prayer.
- c. Considerations inducing Yahweh to intervene, whether by challenging Yahweh's honour, exciting his anger by citing the enemies' words, or by the nature of the complaint itself.
- d. Petition/Entreaty. This is the most significant part of the complaint psalm. May be of a general nature or may be quite specific (confessional petitions, petitions of innocence, etc.). Conviction of being heard (present only in some Psalms) and/or a vow.

Sitz im Leben: The setting in life is difficult to determine due to the formulaic character of the language in laments. Originally derives from the worship service and then later were used as spiritual songs of the individual. These psalms were occasioned by apparently life-threatening situations rather than everyday life; such situations may include illness, misfortune, and persecution from enemies - though one needs to be careful about taking the images too literally.

### **5. Royal Psalms**

Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 101; 110; 132; 144:1-11; cf. 89:47-52. Describing the coming messianic rule of the Christ, these regal psalms portray him as the undisputed sovereign King over heaven and earth.

**Form:**Formally Royal psalms are of different types, though in all cases they are “concerned entirely with kings.” Some of their distinguishing elements include:

- Praises of the king.
- Affirmations of Yahweh’s favor to the king.
- Prayers for the king (or his own prayer) and royal oracles.
- Portrayals of the king’s righteousness and piety.

Sitz im Leben: These psalms were performed at some sort of court festivity, where they were performed in the presence of the king and his dignitaries. Specific occasions may be enthronement/ accession festivals and anniversaries, victory over an enemy, healing from an illness, among others.

## 6. Thanksgiving Psalms

These psalms express a profound awareness of deep gratitude for God’s abundant blessings, whether individual or national.

### A. Thanksgivings of the Individual

Psalms 18; 30; 32; 34; 40:2-12; 41; 66:1-7; 92; (100); (107); 116; 118; 138.

#### Form

1. An expanded Introduction, declaring the intention to thank God.
2. Narration of the trouble, usually to the guests of the celebration. The psalmist usually recounts:
  - a. His trouble (thus they are akin to Laments)
  - b. His calling upon God
  - c. His deliverance
3. Acknowledgement/proclamation of Yahweh’s deliverance; usually directed towards others.
4. In many cases, the psalm ends with an Announcement of the thank-offering.

Sitz im Leben : Since the word usually translated “thanksgiving” is the same word used for “thank offering” (todah; e.g.,Ps 50:14, 23; Jonah 2:9), it is clear that these psalms were intended to be used in a

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cultic setting. It is thought that the individual, in the presence of the worshiping congregation (e.g., 22:22; 26:12), would testify personally to God's saving deeds, accompanied with a ritual act and meal. Eventually, these psalms freed themselves from the actual sacrifice.

### **B. Thanksgivings of the Community**

Psalms 66:8-12; 67; 124; 129. These psalms are parallel in form to the individual thanksgiving psalms.

The life setting for these psalms was likely a cultic celebration at the temple in remembrance of God's help and intervention.

## **7. Wisdom Psalms**

Psalms 1; 37; 49; 73; 91; 112; 127; 128; 133. These instructive psalms provide practical guidelines for

godly living and give direction for righteous living in the pursuit of God's will. These psalms do not

exhibit a single formal pattern, but share a number of characteristics, including:

- Psalmist speaks of his words as wisdom, instruction, etc.
- He describes the "fear of Yahweh."
- He addresses his hearers as "sons."
- He warns, teaches, and uses figures, question and answer techniques, beatitudes, descriptions of Yahweh's ways.

## **8. Smaller Genres and Mixed Types**

### **A. Pilgrimage Psalms**

Pss. 43; 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; 120-134 These festive psalms foster celebration and praise for God as

Israel recalled the Lord's goodness to them as they traveled to Jerusalem for their annual feasts. These psalms were used at the beginning of a pilgrimage as well as once the pilgrim had reached his or her destination.

### **B. Psalms Using Ancient Stories (Legends) of Israel**

Psalms 78; 105; 106. These psalms are subsumed under other literary types (e.g., Ps 105 is a hymn), but may be grouped together because they share a number of common characteristics:

- 1) The Narration of Yahweh's deeds and/or the sins of Israel
- 2) The Exhortation (as in Deuteronomy)

### **C. Psalm Liturgies**

Psalms 15; 20; 24; 14/53; 66; 81; 82; 85; 95; 107; 115; 118; 121; 126; 132; 134. These psalms are characterized by their antiphonal structure, particularly suited for corporate worship, probably are storation psalm which served as a entrance liturgy for pilgrims about to enter the temple.

### **D. Mixed Psalms**

Psalms 9-10; 12; 77; 90; 94; 119; 123; 137.

### **E. Prophetic Liturgies**

Psalms 50;81;95. These are often called prophetic exhortations. Here, the instructional intent is evident.

These psalms challenge the reader to take a decision regarding God's sovereign claim. The dating of these psalms is contemporances with the influence of the prophets in the period between the late monarchy and early restoration.

## Chapter 3

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### **Psalms 1: Two Ways of Life**

The various Psalms which now comprise the book of Psalms were written over a period of 1000 years by various authors. It has been generally recognized that the Psalms can be broken down into 5 general groupings or books on the basis of “seam” psalms: 1) 3-41; 2) 42-72; 3) 73-89; 4) 90-106; 5) 107-150. It is possible that the “seam” psalms (i.e., 41, 72, 89, 106) suggest that the purpose for the organization of the material (i.e., all 150 psalms) centers on David and the Davidic covenant, as well as how people respond to Israel’s national disasters in light of the covenant God made with David.

Psalms 1-2, which are obviously not in our list here as part of the five books proper, stand at the front of the Psalter as an introduction to Israel’s worship songs. It seems that there is some evidence from both Jewish and Christian sources to indicate that Psalm 1 and 2, though distinct compositions in their own right, were at some time in the past joined together, and stood as the

first psalm of the Psalter. In any case, they make a fitting entrance to this material. Psalm 1, a wisdom psalm, demonstrates that the way to happiness is through a life well lived according to the guidelines set down by the Lord, and the way to destruction is to lead an evil, lawless life—a life in disregard of Torah. King David was the perfect example of the righteous person envisioned in Psalm 1. Psalm 2 speaks about God’s enthronement of his king and the futility of the nations to thwart it. Obedience is required. So Psalm 1 focuses on obedience no matter what is happening all around one (a wisdom approach to life), and Psalm 2 focuses on trusting God to fulfill his promises of justice on the earth some day by installing his king (a prophetic approach to life). David was the perfect example of God’s king. Christ is the ultimate example, par excellence, of what this psalm envisions (cf. Acts 13:33) and the final fulfillment as well.

Now, let’s turn our attention to a more detailed look at Psalm 1. Mortimer J. Adler, in *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, makes the astute observation that “people generally espouse the mistake made by most modern philosophers—that happiness is a psychological state rather than an ethical state, i.e., the quality of a morally good life.” Psalm 1, in its presentation of an ethically upright lifestyle, has much to say about the nature of true happiness.

## Structure

The psalm can be broken down into three distinct yet related parts: 1) the way of the righteous (v.1-3); 2) the way of the wicked (v. 4-5); 3) the final word on the two lifestyles (v. 6). There is also the possibility that there may be a deeper chiasmic structure (AB-B’A’): A = 1-2, B = 3/ B’ = 4, A’ = 5. Further, the final verse seems to be structured chiasmically as well: A = “the Lord watches over,” B = “the way of the righteous/ B’ = “the way of the wicked,” A’ = “will perish.” In this structure “to perish” means not to have “the Lord watching over.”

### 1. The Way of the Righteous (1-3)

*1:1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, who does not stand in the place of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.*

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The psalmist says that a person is blessed if he does not do one kind of thing, but instead does another. The person who wants to be blessed must not walk the road of those who rebel against God, have no fear of him, and constantly consider themselves above Him and his Law. No, instead a person who wants to be blessed must live wisely in his relationship with YHWH, delighting in and meditating on the Torah (i.e., obeying it). The person who follows the way of the wicked will experience God's judgment, while God watches over and preserves the righteous man.

"Blessed" or "blessed is the man" is a formulaic statement/pronouncement found on numerous occasions in the psalms and three times in Proverbs (3:13; 8:34; 20:7; 28:14). It is always used in connection with people and not God. This is the kind of blessing one experiences as he/she lives a righteous life in the context of his/her relationship with God, not the priestly blessing. Four passages in the psalms use the term/phrase in ways similar to Psalm 1:

Psalm 89:15 says: "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord. Psalm 94:12 speaks about blessing and obedience to the Law: "Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, the man you teach from your law." The same idea is found in Psalm 112:1: "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands." Finally, Psalm 128:1 also connects the idea of blessing with one's "walk": "Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways." The bottom line, then, in each of these passages and in Psalm 1, is that blessing is for those who live a certain way. They are happy, not as the result of feeling a certain feeling (which may refer more to contentment), but because they have lived life well, that is, according to Biblical truth.

The reference to does not walk, does not stand, and does not sit is probably not a reference to increasing sinfulness, per se, since the lines are synonymously parallel, but is intended instead to cover some of the various possible scenarios in life wherein one can be tempted to follow sinful people in their attitudes and actions. These are the kind of people who take counsel with themselves in the abundance of their own wisdom and scoff at the word of God and have no place for those who live according to it. 1:2 But in the Torah of Yahweh is his delight and on his Torah he meditates day and night.



The psalmist now gets to the positive quality and action of one who is blessed. This person delights in the Torah and meditates on it day and night.

The reference to the Torah of YHWH could refer to just the Mosaic Law or to the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy). At a later time it came to refer to the entire Old Testament. It is probable here, though, in the context of the psalmist's discussion of the ethics of the wicked and the righteous, that what he has in mind is any and all instruction given by God to benefit men by guiding him in the proper course of life. It is a law that has certain demands, i.e., one cannot live like sinners, but it is also very freeing for it arouses pleasure and delight in the one who meditates on it.

The term delight occurs some 126 times in the Old Testament with several slightly different nuances. It can indicate something as precious or valuable, as for example in the case of the stones for the walls of the future Zion predicted by Isaiah (54:12); they will be precious stones established by the Lord himself. The land of Israel is said to be a delightful land as a result of the rich and exorbitant blessing of God in Malachi 3:12. It can also refer to a person's longings and desires: 2 Samuel 23:5 provides an interesting parallel to our passage in Psalm 1. David is giving his last words before his death and he contrasts himself with wicked men. He says that God has made an everlasting covenant with him which He will fulfill in every detail, but wicked men will be set aside. He says that God will bring to fruition his salvation and grant him his every desire. The term can also refer to YHWH's delight, good pleasure, purpose, or will (Is 46:10). Further, it can also refer to a person's business or work (cf. Prov 31:13). In the context of Psalm 1 the term has the obvious connotations of "delighting and enjoying" God's law so much that the person meditates on it day and night. This is not so much something that the psalmist feels he has to do as much as it is something he loves to do. He has chosen not to go down the path of the wicked, but instead to go down the path of meditation on God's truth.

The term meditates in our culture often conjures up the idea, associated with eastern mysticism, of some kind of dreamy revelry or incantation. This is not the point at all, but rather meditation means to think about the instruction God has given for life with a view to

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understanding it and allowing it to shape one's thoughts and actions. It is hard thinking about God and his ways and what he desires of us. It may well involve the process of reciting the portion being meditated upon until one knows it by heart so as not to forget it. A good illustration of the principle of meditation can be seen in Joshua 1:8. God says to Joshua to meditate (same Hebrew word as used in Psalm 1) on the book of the Law so that he might be careful to do everything written in it (cf. James 1:22). And this, of course, is the same point that the psalmist is making; think on God's words, understand them, remember them, and live by them. Meditation, the writer says, is to be done day and night. That is, it is never to cease. The sect of the Jews living at Qumran felt that incessant meditation on Torah was very important, as the following words make plain:

And in the place where the ten are, let there not lack a man who studies the Law night and day, continually, concerning the duties of each towards the other. And let the Many watch in common for a third of the all the nights of the year, to read the Book and study the law and bless in common (1QS 6:6-8a).

How are we doing in our meditation on God's word? It is difficult, but here are a few suggestions: 1) start with a psalm or a paragraph of scripture; 2) read through the passage repeatedly until you can basically work your way through it from memory, i.e., without looking at the passage in the Bible; 3) summarize the main point of the psalm and try to fit each verse into that main point; 4) summarize principles from the psalm; 5) think through how the various truths in the psalm might apply to you; 6) ask God to help you apply a particular truth to your life; 7) apply the truth to your life and watch the difference God can make!!!

*1:3 But he shall be like a tree transplanted near streams of water—a tree which gives its fruit in its season and whose leaves do not wither. All that he does prospers.*

For the one who takes delight in the Torah of YHWH, who meditates day and night on it and shapes his/her life by what is found, there is prosperity, here envisioned as a tree which yields its fruit in season. Jeremiah used a similar expression in his discussion of the blessed man (see Jeremiah 17:7-8). The reference to the idea of a tree which is transplanted, rather than just "planted" may indicate

divine favor in the bringing of the person from a place of barrenness to a place of blessing. The streams of water probably refers to artificial irrigation channels which secured a continuous source of water for vegetation. A tree deliberately placed near this water source would as a matter of course produce fruit. It is inevitable that it should prosper. As Craigie correctly points out, the simile of the tree and the righteous man makes clear that the blessing on the righteous is not a reward, but is part and parcel of living a life within the revealed will of God. The person who is blessed will bring forth fruit in season-not necessarily immediately upon being planted-and when circumstances get difficult (as many of the psalms indicate that they do) they will not perish and wither away. The blessing in their experience is evidenced not necessarily monetarily or externally, but by the strong character of their lives and the presence of God.

The point of the simile, then, is to give a picture of the blessedness of the person who turns away from ungodly counsel and lifestyles and turns instead to a life with God based on the Torah. All that he does prospers in the sense that God blesses his life as a life directed by Torah.

## **2. The Way of the Wicked (4-5)**

*1:4 Not so the wicked who are like chaff that the wind blows away.*

In contrast to the blessed state and strong character of the righteous stands the character and plight of the wicked. The Hebrew term for wicked here, *myuvr* probably refers to those who live their lives outside of covenant relationship with YHWH and evidence this in their animosity toward God and his people (e.g., Num 16:26; Ps 12:8). It involves the distinction between those who serve God and those who think that such a lot in life is futile: God, speaking through Malachi, says: "And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not." Finally, the term can refer to gross acts of sin and wickedness or simply to a life characterized by wanton disregard for God and his law.

The wicked are like chaff that the wind blows away. The psalmist has in mind the practice of winnowing grain which is tossed into the

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air; the chaff is blown away in the evening wind and the grain is left to fall to the threshing floor and gathered. Chaff pictures the light and useless character of the wicked and the fact that God will deal with them easily. This is clearly brought out in the following verse. We must be careful to think seriously about the nature of wickedness and wicked people and what their outcome will be. This will be a theme developed at length in the rest of the Psalter and one that deserves serious consideration.

*1:5 Therefore the wicked will not rise up in judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

One of the biggest interpretive problems in this verse concerns the meaning of judgment. Craigie suggests that the term refers to the “important areas of human society... the pursuit of justice and government.” In these areas, he says, the wicked will not be recognized. This would mean, of course, that there is no future aspect to the term in Psalm 1 and that the judgment is purely human, involving societal affairs. Others, such as A. A. Anderson understand the term to refer to God’s judgment, including both present manifestations of it, as well as its future consummation when the wicked will be fully and completely dealt with. Because the writer says (i.e., in verse 6) that the way of the wicked will perish, not just the wicked themselves, and because wicked people do corrupt government and society, we understand the latter interpretation to be much more likely with an emphasis on the eschatological aspect of God’s judgment. The statement, then, that the wicked will not rise up or stand means that they will not endure God’s judgment in the end. But it is a judgment that YHWH has already begun, for the psalmist can already see God separating the wicked from the righteous like chaff from wheat (v. 4).

The reference to nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous indicates that just as sinners will not endure God’s judgment so they will not ultimately be found in community with the righteous. God is in the process of separating between the righteous and the wicked now and will some day completely judge all the wicked and remove them from among the righteous. In the context of the Psalter as a whole the final righteous community will be Messiah’s community where all unrighteousness will be quickly and permanently done away with (cf. Ps 2).

There is only one way to be a part of the righteous community of Messiah and that is by attaching oneself to Messiah. The New Testament writers unequivocally referred to Jesus as the promised Messiah and that there is salvation in him and no one else (see John 14:6; Acts 4:11) and that it comes through faith in him (John 5:24; 1 John 5:11-13). Have you trusted Christ as your Savior?

### **3. The Contrast Completed (6)**

*1:6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of sinners will perish.*

How is it that God can ensure the presence of a community of righteous people who know the “Torah” and keep it, and who separate themselves from those who have refused to obey YHWH? The answer is because he knows the way of the righteous, but the way of sinners will perish.

How is it that the psalmist can say that God knows the way of the righteous and seem to imply, at the same time, that he does not know the way of the wicked? Obviously, for the psalmist, God knows everything, so that what he means by knowing entails more than just mental assent to a fact. In that case he knows both the way of the righteous and the wicked. What the psalmist means, however, is that God is involved in caring for the righteous and enabling them to obey him and bear fruit. We saw that in the case of the tree in verse 3 which was deliberately transplanted and placed near a fresh water source. In a similar way, Jesus said God was a gardener who helped his children bear fruit (15:1-11; see also Phil 2:12-13). So God knows the way of the righteous in that he promotes their lives in accordance with his revealed will. This he does not do for the wicked.

### **Concerning the wicked, Anderson says**

Since the godless have no regard for the Law of God, God cannot have a real regard for their way, because the Law is the God-given guide to his people, and consequently those who reject that guidance also repudiate God’s concern for them, and thereby they cut the very ground from under their own feet.

Several principles for life can be garnered from this portion of God’s word. First, the psalmist says that there is a place where one

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can live where there is blessing. We do not all have to live without the sense of spiritual well being in our lives. Unfortunately, most of us do not really believe this to be true. Either we demand more from God than he has promised us in the present life (we want heaven now, immediately) or we ask him for nothing, believing all the time that our lot in life is to endure this present existence. But, if we sought to obey him we would find a sense of his presence hitherto unknown in our experience (cf. John 14:21).

Second, there is a place of blessing and spiritual vitality, but it does not come without a cost. If Jesus had to pay a cost to walk with God in this world, then so will we (cf. e.g., Heb 5:7-8). He said, “take up your cross daily and follow me (Luke 9:23). The cross was an instrument of suffering and death. The cost in this psalm involves turning from sin and those who lure us into it. This may lead to our being ridiculed at some level, whether it be only mild on the one hand, or sometimes even intense on the other. Persecution may result, but it is the price of blessing and walking with God according to his revealed will. Paul said that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

There is also the cost of not doing what we want, but when there is a conflict, doing what He commands instead. While there is a sense in which his commands are not burdensome for those with the Holy Spirit (1 John 5:3), they are nonetheless demands, that we struggle with at times—commands which involve our dying to ourselves so that others may live (cf. John 12:24). We do this in emulation of our savior who did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45; 2 Cor 4:5). The more our society is committed to the preservation of self, the more difficult it is to convince ourselves that God’s will, not our own, is the way to blessing. God help us.

Third, as Christians we need to be meditating on the truth of God as often as we can, day and night if you will (cf. Col. 3:16). Again, scripture memory is exceedingly helpful in this regard. The more we meditate on God’s truth the more we delight in it. The less we do so, the less we enjoy it. We are not just referring here to knowing a lot about the Bible. Such a goal is rather easy to accomplish. We are,

instead, talking about thinking hard about the truth of God and how it applies to my life. The goal of meditation is to know God better and to apply his word to our lives. This reaches well beyond just knowing facts about the Bible. It calls us to trust the God of the Bible.

Fourth, growth in character and righteousness takes time. The psalmist says that the tree will bear fruit in its season, perhaps not right away. We have to be patient and continue to maintain an honest and pure heart as well as commit ourselves to doing what is right. Paul said it this way: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." The harvest Paul is referring to is a harvest of righteousness.

Fifth, there is a cost at the present time for those who engage in wickedness and there will be a cost to pay in the future as well. At the present time men and women do experience the wrath of God as Paul discussed in Romans 1:18-32. In the future men and women who have not trusted Christ as savior will be permanently separated from God. The good news in the book of Romans and indeed the entire NT is that God's wrath has been completely satiated by the sacrifice of Christ and anyone who trusts in Christ can be forgiven for his/her sin and moved out from under the judgment of God into the sphere of his blessing.

Finally, for those who love the Lord and want to live a life pleasing to him, they need to know that God is the one who will keep them to the end and present them in his presence blameless and free from accusation (Jude 24-25). Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). We know that "the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

### Psalm 2: Messianic Hymn

As the foregoing psalm was moral, and showed us our duty, so this is evangelical, and shows us our Saviour. Under the type of David's kingdom (which was of divine appointment, met with much opposition, but prevailed at last) the kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, is prophesied of, which is the primary intention and scope of the psalm; and I think there is less in it of the type, and more of the anti-type, than in any of the gospel psalms, for there is nothing in it but what is applicable to Christ, but some things that are not at all applicable to David (v. 6, v. 7): "Thou art my Son" (v. 8), "I will give thee the uttermost parts of the earth," and (v. 12), "Kiss the Son." It is interpreted of Christ Acts. 4:24 Acts. 13:33 ; Heb. 1:5 . The Holy Ghost here foretells,

- The opposition that should be given to the kingdom of the Messiah (v. 1-3).
- The baffling and chastising of that opposition (v. 4, v. 5).



- The setting up of the kingdom of Christ, notwithstanding that opposition (v. 6).
- The confirmation and establishment of it (v. 7).
- A promise of the enlargement and success of it (v. 8, v. 9).
- A call and exhortation to kings and princes to yield themselves the willing subjects of this kingdom, (v. 10-12). Or thus: We have here,
- Threats denounced against the adversaries of Christ's kingdom (v. 1-6).
- Promises made to Christ himself, the head of this kingdom (v. 7-9).
- Counsel given to all to espouse the interests of this kingdom (v. 10-12).

This psalm, as the former, is very fitly prefixed to this book of devotions, because, as it is necessary to our acceptance with God that we should be subject to the precepts of his law, so it is likewise that we should be subject to the grace of his gospel, and come to him in the name of a Mediator.

### **Threats to the Adversaries**

Verses 1-6 We have here a very great struggle about the kingdom of Christ, hell and heaven contesting it; the seat of the war is this earth, where Satan has long had a usurped kingdom and exercised dominion to such a degree that he has been called the prince of the power of the very air we breathe in and the god of the world we live in. He knows very well that, as the Messiah's kingdom rises and gets ground, his falls and loses ground; and therefore, though it will be set up certainly, it shall not be set up tamely. Observe here, I) The mighty opposition that would be given to the Messiah and his kingdom, to his holy religion and all the interests of it, v. 1-3. One would have expected that so great a blessing to this world would be uersally welcomed and embraced, and that every sheaf would immediately bow to that of the Messiah and all the crowns and sceptres on earth would be laid at his feet; but it proves quite contrary. Never were the notions of any sect of philosophers, though ever so absurd, nor the powers of any prince or state, though ever so tyrannical, opposed with so much violence as the doctrine and government of Christ - a sign that it was from heaven, for the opposition was plainly from hell originally.

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We are here told who would appear as adversaries to Christ and the devil's instruments in this opposition to his kingdom. Princes and people, court and country, have sometimes separate interests, but here they are united against Christ; not the mighty only, but the mob, the heathen, the people, numbers of them, communities of them; though usually fond of liberty, yet they were averse to the liberty Christ came to procure and proclaim. Not the mob only, but the mighty (among whom one might have expected more sense and consideration) appear violent against Christ. Though his kingdom is not of this world, nor in the least calculated to weaken their interests, but very likely, if they pleased, to strengthen them, yet the kings of the earth and rulers are up in arms immediately. See the effects of the old enmity in the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman, and how general and malignant the corruption of mankind is. See how formidable the enemies of the church are; they are numerous; they are potent. The unbelieving Jews are here called heathen, so wretchedly had they degenerated from the faith and holiness of their ancestors; they stirred up the heathen, the Gentiles, to persecute the Christians. As the Philistines and their lords, Saul and his courtiers, the disaffected party and their ringleaders, opposed David's coming to the crown, so Herod and Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jews, did their utmost against Christ and his interest in men, Acts. 4:27. 2) Who it is that they quarrel with, and muster up all their forces against; it is against the Lord and against his anointed, that is, against all religion in general and the Christian religion in particular.

It is certain that all who are enemies to Christ, whatever they pretend, are enemies to God himself; they have hated both me and my Father, Jn. 15:24. The great author of our holy religion is here called the Lord's anointed, or Messiah, or Christ, in allusion to the anointing of David to be king. He is both authorized and qualified to be the church's head and king, is duly invested in the office and every way fitted for it; yet there are those that are against him; nay, therefore they are against him, because they are impatient of God's authority, envious at Christ's advancement, and have a rooted enmity to the Spirit of holiness. 3) The opposition they give is here described.

- ❖ It is a most spiteful and malicious opposition. They rage and fret; they gnash their teeth for vexation at the setting up of Christ's

kingdom; it creates them the utmost uneasiness, and fills them with indignation, so that they have no enjoyment of themselves; see Lu. 13:14 ; Jn. 11:47 ; Acts. 5:17, Acts. 5:33 Acts. 19:28. Idolaters raged at the discovery of their folly, the chief priests and Pharisees at the eclipsing of their glory and the shaking of their usurped dominion. Those that did evil raged at the light.

- ❖ It is a deliberate and politic opposition. They imagine or meditate, that is, they contrive means to suppress the rising interests of Christ's kingdom and are very confident of the success of their contrivances; they promise themselves that they shall run down religion and carry the day.
- ❖ It is a resolute and obstinate opposition. They set themselves, set their faces as a flint and their hearts as an adamant, in defiance of reason, and conscience, and all the terrors of the Lord; they are proud and daring, like the Babel-builders, and will persist in their resolution, come what will.
- ❖ It is a combined and confederate opposition. They take counsel together, to assist and animate one another in this opposition; they carry their resolutions nemine contradicente-unanimously, that they will push on the unholy war against the Messiah with the utmost vigour: and thereupon councils are called, cabals are formed, and all their wits are at work to find out ways and means for the preventing of the establishment of Christ's kingdom, Ps. 83:5.
- ❖ We are here told what it is they are exasperated at and what they aim at in this opposition (v. 3): Let us break their bands asunder. They will not be under any government; they are children of Belial, that cannot endure the yoke, at least the yoke of the Lord and his anointed. They will be content to entertain such notions of the kingdom of God and the Messiah as will serve them to dispute of and to support their own dominion with: if the Lord and his anointed will make them rich and great in the world, they will bid them welcome; but if they will restrain their corrupt appetites and passions, regulate and reform their hearts and lives, and bring them under the government of a pure and heavenly religion, truly then they will not have this man to reign over them, Lk 19:14. Christ has bands and cords for us; those that will be saved by him must be ruled by him; but they are records of a man, agreeable to right reason, and bands of love, conducive to our true interest: and yet

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against those the quarrel is. Why do men oppose religion but because they are impatient of its restraints and obligations? They would break asunder the bands of conscience they are under and the cords of God's commandments by which they are called to tie themselves out from all sin and to themselves up to all duty; they will not receive them, but cast them away as far from them as they can.

- ❖ 5. They are here reasoned with concerning it, v. 1. Why do they do this? (1.) They can show no good cause for opposing so just, holy, and gracious a government, which will not interfere with the secular powers, nor introduce any dangerous principles hurtful to kings or provinces; but, on the contrary, if universally received, would bring a heaven upon earth. (2.) They can hope for no good success in opposing so powerful a kingdom, with which they are utterly unable to contend. It is a vain thing; when they have done their worst Christ will have a church in the world and that church shall be glorious and triumphant. It is built upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The moon walks in brightness, though the dogs bark at it.

The mighty conquest gained over all this threatening opposition. If heaven and earth be the combatants, it is easy to foretell which will be the conqueror. Those that make this mighty struggle are the people of the earth, and the kings of the earth, who, being of the earth, are earthy; but he whom they contest with is one that sits in the heavens, v. 4. He is in the heaven, a place of such a vast prospect that he can oversee them all and all their projects; and such is his power that he can overcome them all and all their attempts. He sits there, as one easy and at rest, out of the reach of all their impotent menaces and attempts. There he sits as Judge in all the affairs of the children of men, perfectly secure of the full accomplishment of all his own purposes and designs, in spite of all opposition, Ps. 29:10. The perfect repose of the Eternal Mind may be our comfort under all the disquietments of our mind. We are tossed on earth, and in the sea, but he sits in the heavens, where he has prepared his throne for judgment; and therefore, 1) The attempts of Christ's enemies are easily ridiculed. God laughs at them as a company of fools. He has them, and all their attempts, in derision, and therefore the virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised them, Isa. 37:22 . Sinners' follies are the just sport of

God's infinite wisdom and power; and those attempts of the kingdom of Satan which in our eyes are formidable in his are despicable. Sometimes God is said to awake, and arise, and stir up himself, for the vanquishing of his enemies; here is said to sit still and vanquish them; for the utmost operations of God's omnipotence create no difficulty at all, nor the least disturbance to his eternal rest. 2) They are justly punished, v. 5. Though God despises them as impotent, yet he does not therefore wink at them, but is justly displeased with them as impudent and impious, and will make the most daring sinners to know that he is so and to tremble before him.

- ◆ Their sin is a provocation to him. He is wroth; he is sorely displeased. We cannot expect that God should be reconciled to us, or well pleased in us, but in and through the anointed; and therefore, if we affront and reject him, we sin against the remedy and forfeit the benefit of his interposition between us and God.
- ◆ His anger will be a vexation to them; if he but speak to them in his wrath, even the breath of his mouth will be their confusion, slaughter, and consumption, Isa. 11:4 ; 2 Th. 2:8. He speaks, and it is done; he speaks in wrath, and sinners are undone. As a word made us, so a word can unmake us again. Who knows the power of his anger? The enemies rage, but cannot vex God. God sits still, and yet vexes them, puts them into a consternation (as the word is), and brings them to their wits' end: his setting up this kingdom of his Son, in spite of them, is the greatest vexation to them that can be. They were vexatious to Christ's good subjects; but the day is coming when vexation shall be recompensed to them.
- ◆ They are certainly defeated, and all their counsels turned headlong (v. 6): Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. David was advanced to the throne, and became master of the strong-hold of Zion, not with standing the disturbance given him by the malcontents in his kingdom, and particularly the affronts he received from the garrison of Zion, who taunted him with their blind and their lame, their maimed soldiers, 2 Sa. 5:6. The Lord Jesus is exalted to the right hand of the Father, has all power both in heaven and in earth, and is head over all things to the church, notwithstanding the restless endeavours of his enemies to hinder his advancement.

1) Jesus Christ is a King, and is invested by him who is the fountain of power with the dignity and authority of a sovereign prince in the kingdom both of providence and grace.

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2) God is pleased to call him his King, because he is appointed by him, and entrusted for him with the sole administration of government and judgment. He is his King, for he is dear to the Father, and one in whom he is well pleased.

3) Christ took not this honour to himself, but was called to it, and he that called him owns him: I have set him; his commandment, his commission, he received from the Father.

4) Being called to this honour, he was confirmed in it; high places (we say) are slippery places, but Christ, being raised, is fixed: "I have set him, I have settled him."

5) He is set upon Zion, the hill of God's holiness, a type of the gospel church, for on that the temple was built, for the sake of which the whole mount was called holy. Christ's throne is set up in his church, that is, in the hearts of all believers and in the societies they form.

### **Promises to the Messiah (v. 7-9)**

We have heard what the kings of the earth have to say against Christ's kingdom, and have heard it gainsaid by him that sits in heaven; let us now hear what the Messiah himself has to say for his kingdom, to make good his claims, and it is what all the powers on earth cannot gain say.

- ◆ The kingdom of the Messiah is founded upon a decree, an eternal decree, of God the Father. It was not a sudden resolve, it was not the trial of an experiment, but the result of the counsels of the divine wisdom and the determinations of the divine will, before all worlds, neither of which can be altered-the precept or statute (so some read it), the covenant or compact (so others), the federal transactions between the Father and the Son concerning man's redemption, represented by the covenant of royalty made with David and his seed, Ps. 89:3. This our Lord Jesus often referred to as that which, all along in his undertaking, he governed himself by; This is the will of him that sent me, Jn. 6:40. This commandment have I received of my Father, Jn. 10:18 Jn. 14:31.
- ◆ There is a declaration of that decree as far as is necessary for the satisfaction of all those who are called and commanded to yield themselves subjects to this king, and to leave those inexcusable who will not have him to reign over them. The decree was secret;

it was what the Father said to the Son, when he possessed him in the beginning of his way, before his works of old; but it is declared by a faithful witness, who had lain in the bosom of the Father from eternity, and came into the world as the prophet of the church, to declare him, Jn. 1:18. The fountain of all being is, without doubt, the fountain of all power; and it is by, from, and under him, that the Messiah claims. He has his right to rule from what Jehovah said to him, by whose word all things were made and are governed.

Christ here makes a two-fold title to his kingdom:-1. A title by inheritance (v. 7): Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. This scripture the apostle quotes (Heb. 1:5) to prove that Christ has a more excellent name than the angels, but that he obtained it by inheritance, v. 4. He is the Son of God, not by adoption, but his begotten Son, the only begotten of the Father, Jn. 1:14. And the Father owns him, and will have this declared to the world as the reason why he is constituted King upon the holy hill of Zion; he is therefore unquestionably entitled to, and perfectly qualified for, that great trust. He is the Son of God, and therefore of the same nature with the Father, has in him all the fullness of the godhead, infinite wisdom, power, and holiness. The supreme government of the church is too high an honour and too hard an undertaking for any mere creature; none can be fit for it but he who is one with the Father and was from eternity by him as one brought up with him, thoroughly apprized of all his counsels, Prov. 8:30. He is the Son of God, and therefore dear to him, his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased; and upon this account we are to receive him as a King; for because the Father loves the Son he hath given all things into his hand, Jn. 3:35 Jn. 5:20. Being a Son, he is heir of all things, and, the Father having made the worlds by him, it is easy to infer thence that by him also he governs them; for he is the eternal Wisdom and the eternal Word. If God hath said unto him, "Thou art my Son," it becomes each of us to say to him, "Thou art my Lord, my sovereign." Further, to satisfy us that his kingdom is well-grounded upon his sonship, we are here told what his sonship is grounded on: This day have I begotten thee, which refers both to his eternal generation itself, for it is quoted (Heb. 1:5) to prove that he is the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person (v. 3), and to the evidence and demonstration given of it by his resurrection from the dead, for to that also it is expressly applied by

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the apostle, Acts. 13:33. He hath raised up Jesus again, as it is written, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

It was by the resurrection from the dead, that sign of the prophet Jonas, which was to be the most convincing of all, that he was declared to be the Son of God with power, Rom. 1:4. Christ is said to be the first-begotten and first-born from the dead, Rev. 1:5; Col. 1:18. Immediately after his resurrection he entered upon the administration of his mediatorial kingdom; it was then that he said, All power is given unto me, and to that especially he had an eye when he taught his disciples to pray, Thy kingdom come. 2. A title by agreement, v. 8, v. 9. The agreement is, in short, this: the Son must undertake the office of an intercessor, and, upon that condition, he shall have the honour and power of a universal monarch; see Isa. 53:12, Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, because he made intercession for the transgressors. He shall be a priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both, Zec. 6:13.

(1) The Son must ask. This supposes his putting himself voluntarily into a state of inferiority to the Father, by taking upon him the human nature; for, as God, he was equal in power and glory with the Father and had nothing to ask. It supposes the making of a satisfaction by the virtue of which the intercession must be made, and the paying of a price, on which this large demand was to be grounded; see Jn. 17:4, Jn. 17:5. The Son, in asking the heathen for his inheritance, aims, not only at his own honour, but at their happiness in him; so that he intercedes for them, ever lives to do so, and is therefore able to save to the uttermost.

(2) The Father will grant more than to the half of the kingdom, even to the kingdom itself. It is here promised him,

- ✓ That his government shall be universal: he shall have the heathen for his inheritance, not the Jews only, to whose nation the church had been long confined, but the Gentiles also. Those in the uttermost parts of the earth (as this nation of ours) shall be his possession, and he shall have multitudes of willing loyal subjects among them. Baptized Christians are the possession of the Lord Jesus; they are to him for a name and a praise. God the Father gives them to him when by his Spirit and grace he works upon them to submit their necks to the yoke of the Lord Jesus. This is in part fulfilled; a great



part of the Gentile world received the gospel when it was first preached, and Christ's throne was set up there where Satan's seat had long been. But it is to be yet further accomplished when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, Rev. 11:15. Who shall live when God doeth this?

- ✓ That it shall be victorious: Thou shalt break them (those of them that oppose thy kingdom) with a rod of iron, v. 9. This was in part fulfilled when the nation of the Jews, those that persisted in unbelief and enmity to Christ's gospel, were destroyed by the Roman power, which was represented (Dan. 2:40 ) by feet of iron, as here by a rod of iron. It had a further accomplishment in the destruction of the Pagan powers, when the Christian religion came to be established; but it will not be completely fulfilled till all opposing rule, principality, and power, shall be finally put down, 1 Co. 15:24 ; Ps. 110:5, Ps. 110:6.

Observe, How powerful Christ is and how weak the enemies of his kingdom are before him; he has a rod of iron wherewith to crush those that will not submit to his golden sceptre; they are but like a potter's vessel before him, suddenly, easily, and irreparably dashed in pieces by him; see Rev. 2:27. "Thou shalt do it, that is, thou shalt have leave to do it." Nations shall be ruined, rather than the gospel church shall not be built and established. I have loved thee, therefore will I give men for thee, Isa. 43:4. "Thou shalt have power to do it; none shall be able to stand before thee; and thou shalt do it effectually." Those that will not bow shall break. In singing this, and praying it over, we must give glory to Christ as the eternal Son of God and our rightful Lord, and must take comfort from this promise, and plead it with God, that the kingdom of Christ shall be enlarged and established and shall triumph over all opposition.

### **Counsels (Verses 10-12)**

We have here the practical application of this gospel doctrine concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, by way of exhortation to the kings and judges of the earth. They hear that it is in vain to oppose Christ's government; let them therefore be so wise for themselves as to submit to it. He that has power to destroy them shows that he has no pleasure in their destruction, for he puts them into a way to make

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themselves happy, v. 10. Those that would be wise must be instructed; and those are truly wise that receive instruction from the word of God. Kings and judges stand upon a level with common persons before God; and it is as necessary for them to be religious as for any others. Those that give law and judgment to others must receive law from Christ, and it will be their wisdom to do so. What is said to them is said to all, and is required of every one of us, only it is directed to kings and judges because of the influence which their example will have upon their inferiors, and because they were men of rank and power that opposed the setting up of Christ's kingdom, v. 2. We are exhorted, I. To reverence God and to stand in awe of him, v. 11. This is the great duty of natural religion. God is great, and infinitely above us, just and holy, and provoked against us, and therefore we ought to fear him and tremble before him; yet he is our Lord and Master, and we are bound to serve him, our friend and benefactor, and we have reason to rejoice in him; and these are very well consistent with each other, for,

a. We must serve God in all ordinances of worship, and all instances of a godly conversation, but with a holy fear, a jealousy over ourselves, and a reverence of him. Even kings themselves, whom others serve and fear, must serve and fear God; there is the same indefinite distance between them and God that there is between the meanest of their subjects and him.

b. We must rejoice in God, and, in subordination to him, we may rejoice in other things, but still with a holy trembling, as those that know what a glorious and jealous God he is, whose eye is always upon us. Our salvation must be wrought out with fear and trembling, Phil. 2:12. We ought to rejoice in the setting up of the kingdom of Christ, but to rejoice with trembling, with a holy awe of him, a holy fear for ourselves, lest we come short, and a tender concern for the many precious souls to whom his gospel and kingdom are a savour of death unto death. Whatever we rejoice in, in this world, it must always be with trembling, lest we grow vain in our joy and be puffed up with the things we rejoice in, and because of the uncertainty of them and the damp which by a thousand accidents may soon be cast upon our joy.

To rejoice with trembling is to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, 1 Co. 7:30 .II. To welcome Jesus Christ and to submit to him, v. 12.

This is the great duty of the Christian religion; it is that which is required of all, even kings and judges, and it is our wisdom and interest to do it. Observe here, 1. The command given to this purport: Kiss the Son. Christ is called the Son because so he was declared (v. 7), Thou art my Son. He is the Son of God by eternal generation, and, upon that account, he is to be adored by us. He is the Son of man (that is, the Mediator, Jn. 5:27), and, upon that account, to be received and submitted to. He is called the Son, to include both, as God is often called emphatically the Father, because he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him our Father, and we must have an eye to him under both considerations. Our duty to Christ is here expressed figuratively: Kiss the Son, not with a betraying kiss, as Judas kissed him, and as all hypocrites, who pretend to honour him, but really affront him; but with a believing kiss. (1) With a kiss of agreement and reconciliation. Kiss, and be friends, as Jacob and Esau; let the quarrel between us and God terminate; let the acts of hostility cease, and let us be at peace with God in Christ, who is our peace. (2) With a kiss of adoration and religious worship. Those that worshipped idols kissed them, 1 Ki. 19:18 ; Hos. 13:2. Let us study how to do honour to the Lord Jesus, and to give unto him the glory due unto his name. He is thy Lord, and worship thou him, Ps. 45:11. We must worship the Lamb, as well as him that sits on the throne, Rev. 5:9-13. (3) With a kiss of affection and sincere love: "Kiss the Son; enter into a covenant of friendship with him, and let him be very dear and precious to you; love him above all, love him in sincerity, love him much, as she did to whom much was forgiven, and, in token of it, kissed his feet," Lu. 7:38. (4) With a kiss of allegiance and loyalty, as Samuel kissed Saul, 1 Sa. 10:1. Swear fealty and homage to him, submit to his government, take his yoke upon you, and give up yourselves to be governed by his laws, disposed of by his providence, and entirely devoted to his interest.

2. The reasons to enforce this command; and they are taken from our own interest, which God, in his gospel, shows a concern for. Consider, (1) The certain ruin we run upon if we refuse and reject Christ: "Kiss the Son; for it is at your peril if you do not." "It will be a great provocation to him. Do it, lest he be angry." The Father is angry already; the Son is the Mediator that undertakes to make peace; if we slight him, the Father's wrath abides upon us (Jn. 3:36), and not only so, but there is an addition of the Son's wrath too, to whom nothing is more displeasing than to have the offers of his grace slighted

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and the designs of it frustrated. The Son can be angry, though a Lamb; he is the lion of the tribe of Judah, and the wrath of this king, this King of kings, will be as the roaring of a lion, and will drive even mighty men and chief captains to seek in vain for shelter in rocks and mountains, Rev. 6:16. If the Son be angry, who shall intercede for us? There remains no more sacrifice, no other name by which we can be saved. Unbelief is a sin against the remedy. It will be utter destruction to yourselves: Lest you perish from the way, or in the way so some, in the way of your sins, and from the way of your vain hopes; lest your way perish (as Ps. 1:6), lest you prove to have missed the way to happiness. Christ is the way; take heed lest you be cut off from him as your way to God. It intimates that they were, or at least thought themselves, in the way; but, by neglecting Christ, they perished from it, which aggravates their ruin, that they go to hell from the way to heaven, are not far from the kingdom of God and yet never arrive there. (2) The happiness we are sure of if we yield ourselves to Christ. When his wrath is kindled, though but a little, the least spark of that fire is enough to make the proudest sinner miserable if it fasten upon his conscience; for it will burn to the lowest hell: one would think it should therefore follow, "When his wrath is kindled, woe be to those that despise him;" but the Psalmist startles at the thought, deprecates that dreadful doom and pronounces those blessed that escape it. Those that trust in him, and so kiss him, are truly happy; but they will especially appear to be so when the wrath of Christ is kindled against others. Blessed will those be in the day of wrath, who, by trusting in Christ, have made him their refuge and patron; when the hearts of others fail them for fear they shall lift up their heads with joy; and then those who now despise Christ and his followers will be forced to say, to their own greater confusion, "Now we see that blessed are all those, and those only, that trust in him." In singing this, and praying it over, we should have our hearts filled with a holy awe of God, but at the same time borne up with a cheerful confidence in Christ, in whose mediation we may comfort and encourage ourselves and one another. We are the circumcision, that rejoice in Christ Jesus.

## Chapter 5

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### Psalm 8: Glory of Man

Psalm 8 is a hymn of praise. It explores the theme of God's majestic splendor and our puny insignificance by way of comparison. And yet at the same time, God has created us in His image and graciously crowned us with glory and majesty. He has assigned us the role of ruling over His creation. All of these thoughts should lead us, as the psalm both begins and ends (Ps. 8:1, 9), to declare in worship, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!" This psalm is an unsurpassed example of what a hymn should be, celebrating as it does the glory and grace of God, rehearsing who He is and what He has done, and relating us and our world to Him; all with a masterly economy of words, and in a spirit of mingled joy and awe.... The range of thought takes us not only "above the heavens" (1) and back to the beginning (3, 6-8) but, as the New Testament points out, on to the very end.

#### **Commentary**

There are many examples of this type of psalm in the book of Psalms (for example, Psalms 93, 136, 150). But Psalm 8 is unique in at least two ways.

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First, it is the first hymn one encounters when reading the Psalms straight through. The psalms that immediately precede it are prayers spoken by people who are suffering or who are persecuted (Psalms 3-7). Psalm 8 reveals that those suffering at the hands of evil forces are those made in the image of God and valued highly by their creator. Indeed, the psalm proclaims that humans are God's agents on earth. Second, this psalm is the only hymn in the Psalter spoken entirely to God. It emphasizes God's sovereignty (8:1, 9) and proclaims that humans exercise their legitimate authority within the rule of God.

The first half of verses 1 and 9 are identical. They give structure to the psalm and draw attention to the majesty and sovereignty of God. The opening of the psalm seems to express what was promised at the end of Psalm 7, "I will sing praise to the name of the Lord" (Psalm 7:17). "Name" refers to God's essence and character. In this psalm, that character pertains primarily to the divine power over the created order. Psalm 8:1a and 9a declare that the whole created order gives evidence of God's sovereignty. It is not that the psalmist admires elements of creation as though God is in them. Rather, the psalmist wonders at the natural world because of the majesty of God who stands over them and has put them in place.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in interpreting Psalm 8 is the question of how verse 1b relates to verse 2. This second section of the psalm seems to expound on verse 1a, but what exactly does it intend to say? The expression "you set your glory above the heavens" (8:1b) probably indicates that God is sovereign and thus sits as king over the creation. From above God subdued chaos and made the world with order and regularity.

Verse 2 is an exaggerated statement that further makes the point. Even the weakest creatures (babes and infants) give voice to the power of God that overcomes all forces that would thwart God's will. The "avenger" and "enemy" here most likely refer to the chaotic forces God overcame when creating the world (see Genesis 1:1-2:4).

The next section of the psalm (verses 3-8) focuses on human beings and their place within the created order. But as it does, the psalmist presents the high place of humans in creation as a marvel in the face of the magnificence of the rest of God's work. The question, "What are humans?" has two important features that are keys to the meaning of the psalm.

First, the word “human” translates the Hebrew expression *ben adam* (“son of man”). Adam is closely related to the word for earth or soil (*adamah*; Genesis 2:7). “Son of man” therefore connotes humanity’s finitude and fallibility. The human is from the earth, not from the heavens.

Second, it is important to note that the question (“What are humans?”) is not an abstract query about the nature and identity of humankind. Rather, the question puts the human in relation to God’s greatness: “What are humans... that you would pay attention to them?” Hence, although the answer to the question is quite positive in Psalm 8, the same question appears in Psalm 144:3-4 and Job 7:17; 15:14 in a way that casts negative light on humanity (see also Psalm 144:2).

Despite the lowliness of humans before God, verse 5 declares God made humans “a little lower than God.” The word for God, however, is a general word (*elohim*) that may be translated “angels” or “gods.” Only context can determine if the word refers to the one God, to the attendants around God’s throne, or to the gods of the nations. In Psalm 8 it is impossible to tell the exact intention. The point, however, is not so much the identity of *elohim*, but the difference between the heavenly and earthly realms. God put humans in charge of the earth. The dominion of humans extends to all living creatures. Here they are classified as domestic and wild, birds and fish.

The portrait of humans in this section is much like the one in Genesis 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-25. The image of God bestowed on humans in Genesis 1:26-28 is defined by human dominion. In Genesis 2:15 God makes the human the caretaker of the earth. So also Psalm 8 describes the unique place of humans in terms of the human place over other creatures.

The language of Psalm 8:5-8 suggests humans are royal creatures. In Egypt pharaoh was described as the “son of God,” as one who represented the deity on earth. In other parts of the Old Testament the Israelite king is described in similar ways. Second Samuel 7 calls David God’s son when God appoints him to his office. Psalm 89:25 presents David as the earthly representative of God’s reign from heaven.

Psalm 8, like Genesis 1:1-2:4a, seems to present all humans in the royal office. This may be due in part to the fact that kingship came to

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an end in Israel in 587 BCE. When the monarchy ended the royal office once reserved for the king was transferred to humankind as a whole. Glory and honor are words used to describe monarchs, but here they describe all human beings.

The final verse contains the same words as the first line of the psalm (8:1a). But the repetition of these words adds emphasis and says something that the first occurrence of the words alone does not say. By repeating the words at the end the whole psalm is given a structure that calls attention to God's sovereignty. Just as God's majesty begins and ends the psalm, so also it creates the context for human glory.

### **Fulfillment in Jesus Christ**

Man since the fall has accomplished some remarkable feats in gaining dominion over creation. Think of all of the wonders of modern science, including the advances in medical science. And yet, all of these accomplishments are tainted by sin. Proud man boasts in them and does not acknowledge that the ability to discover scientific facts has been given to him by God. Like the builders of the Tower of Babel, proud modern man uses his scientific breakthroughs to proclaim his independence from God. With a few more breakthroughs, we can cure all our diseases and live forever!

But science cannot reconcile us to God. So what did God do? He sent His own Son, the Son of Man, to provide the sacrifice for our sins and to fulfill Psalm 8 in a way that we cannot. Hebrews 2 cites Psalm 8:4-6 and then applies it to Jesus (Heb. 2:9): "But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." Leupold summarizes (p. 101), "man as created reflects God's glory. But the Son of man, in whom the original pattern is more fully realized, reflects this same glory far more perfectly."

So David tells us to worship the Lord because although we are puny and insignificant, He has graciously thought of us and cared for us. Although we marred God's image through sin, God has restored it in Jesus Christ. In Him, we are again crowned with glory and majesty.

How can we apply this psalm? I could elaborate extensively on each of these points, but I can only list them and trust that you will think through the applications more fully:



1. We should bow in awe before our majestic creator! This psalm should humble us and cause us to marvel at God's grace and love in caring for us by sending His Son as our Savior.
2. We should treat each person with value and respect as beings created in god's image. John Piper has said, "You cannot worship and glorify the majesty of God while treating his supreme creation with contempt." Christians must oppose all racism. We must treat all people with respect.
3. We should stand firmly against the horrors of abortion, which treats god's majestic creation as trash. From the point of conception, the only difference between the baby in the mother's womb and you and I is time and nurture. To kill children simply because it is inconvenient to care for them, is a horrible sin that we must confront.
4. We should stand firmly against the absurdity of evolution, which denies that we are created in god's image. Evolution is simply a way for sinful people to attempt to avoid their Creator. It is one of the greatest scientific frauds that the enemy of our souls has ever foisted on the human race!
5. We should rear our children to love, fear, and serve god as the only way to make life count. When we are rightly related to God through Jesus Christ, our lives take on eternal significance.
6. We should be good stewards of god's creation. While modern man worships the creation rather than the Creator, we should not neglect the fact that we are the stewards over God's creation. We should oppose the greed that often destroys creation with no regard for its beauty and preservation.
7. We should take pleasure in whatever work god gives us to do, doing it heartily as unto him.  
As the Puritans emphasized, every legitimate occupation is a God-given vocation. No matter what you do to earn a living, you can do it for the Lord (Col. 3:22-24).
8. We should enjoy god through his creation. Forget the mall or the movies. Take a hike and enjoy God through the wonders that He has made!

## Chapter 6

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### Qualities of a Believer

Psalm 15 refers to a single subject, but that the most important which can come before the human mind. It is the question. Who is truly religious? who will enter heaven? who will be saved? The psalm contains a statement of what real religion is; one of the most explicit and formal of the statements which we have in the Old Testament on that subject. The form in which the matter is presented is that of a question in the first verse, and of the answer to that question in the other verses of the psalm.

1. The question. Psalm 15:1. The question is, who shall be permitted to reside with God in his tabernacle? who shall be entitled to the privilege of dwelling on his holy hill (that is, Zion, regarded as the dwelling-place of God, and the emblem of heaven)? In other words, who has such a character as to be entitled to hope for the favor and friendship of God?
2. The answer, Psalm 15:2-5. The answer embraces the following particulars:

- 1) The man who is upright, just, honest, truthful, Psalm 15:2.
- 2) The man who treats his neighbor properly; who does not slander or reproach him; who does not readily listen to calumnious reports in regard to him, Psalm 15:3.
- 3) The man who regards the righteous and the wicked as they should be regarded; who looks with proper disapprobation on all who are “vile” in their character, and with true respect on all who fear the Lord, Psalm 15:4.
- 4) The man who is faithful to an engagement, though it proves to be against his own interest, Psalm 15:4.
- 5) The man who does not take advantage of the necessities of others, who does not put out his money “to usury,” and who, if a magistrate, does not take a bribe to induce him to condemn the innocent, Psalm 15:5.

These are characteristics of true religion everywhere, and it is as true now as it was when this psalm was composed that it is only those who possess this character who have a right to regard themselves as the friends of God, or who have a well-founded hope of dwelling with him in heaven.

The psalm purports, in the title, to be “A Psalm of David.” It is not known on what occasion it was written, nor is it material to know this in order to understand the psalm. It has been supposed by some that it was composed on the occasion when the ark was carried up from the house of Obed-edom (2 Samuel 6:12 ff), but there is nothing in the psalm itself which should lead us to refer it to that occasion, or to any other special occasion. It seems rather - like Psalm 1:1-6 - to be adapted to all times and all places. It contains a general illustration of the nature of true religion, and there has been no state of things in the world in which such a psalm might not be appropriately composed; there is none in which it may not be appropriately read and pondered.

**Psalm 15:1:** *A Psalm of David. LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?*

Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? - Margin, “sojourn.” The Hebrew word means properly to “sojourn;” that is, to abide in a place as a sojourner or stranger; not permanently, but only for a while. The idea in this place is taken from the word “tabernacle” or “tent,” with

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which one naturally associates the thought of sojourning, rather than that of a permanent abode. Compare Hebrews 11:9. It should not be inferred, however, that it is meant here that the residence with God would be “temporary.” The idea of permanency is fully expressed in the other member of the sentence, and the language here is only such as was customary in speaking of the righteous - language derived from the fact that in early times men dwelt in tents rather than in permanent habitations.

Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? - Zion, regarded as the dwelling-place of God, and the type of heaven - the eternal abode of the Most High. See the note at Psalm 2:6. The question is equivalent to asking, who is qualified to dwell with God? who may properly be regarded as his friend? who has a title to his favor? who is truly pious? By us the same question would be put in another form, though implying the same thing: Who is qualified to become a member of the church; who has evidence of true conversion and real piety? who is he who is prepared for heaven?

**Psalm 15:2:** *He that walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart.*

He that walks uprightly - Hebrew, “walking perfectly;” that is, one who walks or lives “perfectly.” The word “walk” in the Scriptures is often used to denote the manner of life; life being represented as a journey. See the note at Psalm 1:1. The word here rendered “uprightly,” or, in the Hebrew, “perfectly,” means that which is complete in all its parts; where no part is missing or is defective. See the word explained in the notes at Job 1:1. The Word is not used in the sense in which it is often employed now, as denoting absolute freedom from sin, but as meaning that the character was complete in all its parts; or that the person referred to was upright alike in regard to God and to man. See the sentiment here expressed explained in the notes at Isaiah 33:15.

And works righteousness - Does right. That is, he does what is proper to be done in relation to God and to man. Compare Micah 6:8. The doctrine is everywhere laid down in the Scriptures that no man can be a friend of God who does not do habitually what is right. See 1 John 3:6-10.

And speaks the truth in his heart - He uses language that is sincere, and that is in accordance with his real belief. This is opposed to all mere outward professions, and all hypocritical pretences. His religion has its seat in the heart, and is not the religion of forms; his acts are the expressions of upright intentions and purposes, and are not performed for selfish and hypocritical ends. This is everywhere the nature of true religion.

**Psalm 15:3:** *He that backbites not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbour.*

He that backbites not with his tongue - The word “backbite” means to censure; slander; reproach; speak evil of. The Hebrew word - ragal - a verb formed from the word foot, means properly “to foot it,” and then “to go about.” Then it means to go about as a tale-bearer or slanderer; to circulate reports unfavorable to others. It is not improperly rendered here “backbite;” and the idea is, that it is essential to true piety that one should “not” be a slanderer, or should “not” circulate evil reports in regard to others. On the use of the “tongue,” see the note at James 3:2-11.

Nor doeth evil to his neighbor - That does his neighbor no harm. This refers to injury in any way, whether by word or deed. The idea is, that the man who will be admitted to dwell on the holy hill of Zion, the man who is truly religious, is one who does no injury to anyone; who always does that which is right to others. The word “neighbor” usually refers to one who resides near us; and there it denotes all persons who are near to us in the sense that we have business relations with them; all persons with whom we have anything to do. It is used in this sense here as referring to our dealings with other persons.

Nor takes up a reproach - Margin, “or receives,” or, “endures.” The idea is that of “taking up,” or receiving as true, or readily giving credit to it. He is slow to believe evil of another. He does not grasp at it greedily as if he had pleasure in it. He does not himself originate such a reproach, nor does he readily and cheerfully credit it when it is stated by others. If he is constrained to believe it, it is only because the evidence becomes so strong that he cannot resist it, and his believing it is contrary to all the desires of his heart. This is true religion every where; but this is contrary to the conduct of no small part of

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the world. There are large classes of persons to whom nothing is more acceptable than reproachful accusations of others, and who embrace no reports more readily than they do those which impute bad conduct or bad motives to them. Often there is nothing more marked in true conversion than the change which is produced in this respect. He who delighted in gossip and in slanderous reports of others; who found pleasure in the alleged failings and errors of his neighbors; who gladly lent a listening ear to the first intimations of this kind, and who cheerfully contributed his influence in giving circulation to such things, augmenting such reports as they passed through his hands - now sincerely rejoices on hearing everybody well spoken of, and does all that can be done consistently with truth to check such reports, and to secure to every man a good name.

**Psalm 15:4:** *In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honours them that fear the LORD. He that swears to his own hurt, and changes not.*

In whose eyes a vile person is contemned - That is, who does not show respect to a man of base or bad character on account of his wealth, his position, or his rank in life. He estimates character as it is in itself, and not as derived from rank, relationship, or station. While, as stated in the previous verse, he is not disposed to take up a false or evil report against another, he is at the same time disposed to do justice to all, and does not honor those who do not deserve to be honored, or apologise for base conduct because it is committed by one of exalted station or rank. Loving virtue and piety for their own sake, he hates all that is opposite; and where conduct deserves reprobation, no matter where found, he does not hesitate to avow his conviction in regard to it. The sentiment here is substantially the same as in Psalm 1:1. See the notes at that verse.

But he honors them that fear the Lord - No matter in what rank or condition of life they may be found. Where there is true piety he honors it. He is willing to be known as one that honors it, and is willing to bear all the reproach that may be connected with such a deeply cherished respect, and with such an avowal. Compare Psalm 1:1.

He that swears to his own hurt, and changes not - Who has made a promise, or entered into a contract, that is likely to turn out contrary to his expectations, to his own disadvantage; but who still adheres to

his engagement. If the thing itself is wrong; if he has made a promise, or pledged himself to do a wicked thing, he cannot be under obligation to execute it; he should at once abandon it (compare the notes at Matthew 14:9); but he is not at liberty to violate an agreement simply because it will be a loss to him, or because he ascertains that it will not be, as he supposed, to his advantage. The principles here laid down will extend to all contracts or agreements, pecuniary or otherwise, and should be a general principle regulating all our transactions with our fellow-men. The only limitation in the rule is that above stated, when the promise or the contract would involve that which is morally wrong.

**Psalm 15:5:** *He that put not out his money to usury, nor takes reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*

He that put not out his money to usury - The word "usury" formerly denoted legal interest, or a premium for the use of money. In this sense the word is no longer used in our language, but it always now denotes unlawful interest; "a premium or compensation paid, or stipulated to be paid, for the use of money borrowed or retained, beyond the rate of interest established by law." "Webster." The Hebrew word used here - *neshek* - means "interest," that is, a premium or compensation for the use of money in any manner, or to any extent. The reference is to the law of the Hebrews, which forbade such a loaning of money to the poor, and especially to poor Israelites, Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-37. Although this was forbidden in respect to the Israelites, yet the lending of money on interest, or "usury" in a lawful sense, was allowed toward "strangers," or toward the people of other nations.

See Deuteronomy 23:19-20. The ground of the distinction was, that the Hebrews were regarded as a nation of brethren; that, as such, they should be willing to accommodate and aid each other; that they should not do anything that could be regarded as unbrotherly. In respect to other people it was allowed, not because it was proper to take advantage of their wants, and to oppress them, but because this special reason did not exist in regard to them. That might be improper "in a family," among brothers and sisters, which would be entirely proper toward those who did not sustain this special relation; and we

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may conceive of cases - such cases in fact often occur - when it would be unkind in the highest degree to exact interest of a brother, or an intimate friend, while it is perfectly proper to receive the ordinary allowance for the use of money in our business transactions (that is, the ordinary rate of interest) of those who do not sustain to us this special relation.

The fact that it was allowed to the Hebrews to take interest of the people of other nations, shows that there was nothing morally wrong in the thing itself; and, in fact, there can be no reason why a man, to whom it is an accommodation, should not pay for the use of money as well as for the use of any other property. The thing forbidden here, therefore, is not the taking of interest in any case, but the taking of interest in such a way as would be oppressive and hard - as of a Hebrew demanding it from his poor and needy brother; and, by consequence, it would forbid the exacting of unusual and unlawful rates of interest, or taking advantage of the necessities of others - by evading the provisions of law, and making their circumstances an occasion of extortion. In one word, the thing forbidden is a harsh, grasping, griping disposition; a disposition to take advantage of the embarrassments of others to increase our own gains. Kindness, and an accommodating spirit in business transactions, are as much demanded now by the principles of religion as they were when this psalm was written, or as they were under the law which forbade the taking of interest from a poor and needy brother.

Nor takes reward against the innocent - Who does not take a bribe; that is, does not accept a pecuniary consideration, or any other consideration, to induce him to decide a cause against justice. He is not, in any way, to allow any such considerations to influence him, or to sway his judgment. The taking of bribes is often expressly forbidden in the Scriptures. See Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19; Deuteronomy 27:25; Proverbs 17:23.

He that doeth these things shall never be moved - That is, in answer to the question in Psalm 15:1, he shall be permitted to “abide in the tabernacle” of God, and to “dwell in his holy hill.” He shall have a solid foundation of hope; he is a friend of God, and shall enjoy his favor forever. In other words, these things constitute true religion; and he who has such a character will obtain eternal life. His foundation



is sure; he will be safe in all the storms of life, and safe when the cold waves of death beat around him. Compare Matthew 7:24-25.

### **Psalm 20: *Experiencing the Presence of God***

The world that we so closely see condemned and judged in the Book of Revelation is the same secularism that we see today. She is characterized by immorality, pride and most of all a spirit of independence. Do you know what this is called in that book? It is the harlot, Babylon. And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.” (Rev 14:8).

The great city Babylon is opposed to the city of God. We see the climax of history unfold before our eyes as these cities come and make their demands upon one another. What we have not realized is how the tentacles of Babylon have cleverly infiltrated the church. This is what she is accused of here in Revelation 14:8. She has released her poison into the world.

Psalm 20 is rare in the way it so commonly speaks of God. We can calculate how many times God or His name, LORD, is used. We can then add into the sum how the many verbs that have the subject as God. The theme of God’s presence flows through the nine verses of Psalm 20.

If secularism describes a heart or society operating without God’s presence, surely Psalm 20 proves to be the opposite. Here we find God. There is no place we cannot find Him. Indeed this is the hallowed place that His true believers have been searching for all the time. So while we investigate the mindset of the godly man, we can also clearly discern the marks of the world.

#### **A. The Petitions unto God (Psalm 20:1-4)**

As we start scanning the verses of Psalm 20, we instantly notice the pattern that prevades over the whole Psalm. There is possibility that this poem is broken apart in places that it shouldn’t. We will notice that some of these are double petitions. The “May He” clause is used only once but two petitions are brought to mention connected by an ‘and.’ Most of the time the Lord’s name is not used but a pronoun. Perhaps we can look at this more closely if we look at all the Psalmist’s wishes.

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All these verbs use the Hebrew imperfect tense indicating something which is yet completed. English would put them in the future tense though the NASB puts it in the petitional form of “may.” Prayer for the most part is based on the needs of man. He recognizes that without God’s special grace, he will suffer. Prayer is the expectation that things will change for the better. It is not yet completed, but having God hear their prayer. there is hope of its completion.

For this reason prayer is based on faith. We do not need much faith to see what has been done.(2) However, we need a lot of faith to shape our expectations and confidence to face the future. The context here speaks of a prayer and offering before David’s army went out. Whether it is going into a battle or stepping into a new job, we must realize the importance of our trust in God.

The reason for the above emphasis is chiefly to help us realize that though these men stood ready for war, the battle would depend on God rather than them. We might think this demeans the efforts of the valiant soldiers, but on the contrast, it places the soldiers in the right heart where they: gain a vision of God’s mission, see their part in God’s mission, and then wholeheartedly commit themselves to it.

New Testament faith is the same as in the Old Testament. Our main battle weapons is a holy life by which the enemy loses ground. But first we must gain a vision of God’s call to share His holiness, see how we can do it and then commit ourselves to the task. Like the soldiers, we gain a true understanding of what it is to live in dependence upon God. We are not to sponsor any movement, hold any thought, or voice any words that come not from God’s heart. These soldiers were fighting God’s war, but they realized God actually went with them.

How many of us know what God wants to accomplish through our lives? How many of these individuals have committed themselves to accomplish it? Those that do are the men and women of prayer. They know it cannot be accomplished apart from God’s power.

There are many people who simply say prayers. Although Psalm 20 could become liturgical in the lips of others, it was not a liturgical prayer of these who called upon God. This original prayer was said by and depended upon David’s faith as indicated in the Psalms first

line. The strong faith of David radiates through the scriptures. He depended upon God and observed God's awesome works. We need to check our prayers too. Many say their prayers, but few know and believe God hears their prayers like David did.

### **Let's note several ways they prayed**

- ❖ They prayed to the True God: They came to the true God, Yahweh, who had consistently revealed Himself to His people. We will not go into detail as to how He revealed Himself to His people for that would be a summary of the whole Bible! Instead we will note five times LORD or Yahweh, God's Name, is used in this short psalm. If His name is not familiar to the reader, the psalmist describes this more by the phrase 'God of Jacob.' Clearly He is the God who revealed Himself to Jacob at different times in His life. Jacob was his old name which reminds of his desperate sins of deceit. The LORD remade him and gave him a new name, Israel.
- ❖ They depended upon God: We see their dependence upon God through their recognition that He could and desired to help them. Their repeated petitions shows how they needed God's help from on high.
- ❖ They sought God's blessing: Their words were not empty words of petition. They made the needed special offerings before they went off to war. They remembered prayer was not magic. They went according to God's prescribed ways. These offerings had more to do with readying their hearts than manipulating God. We are sadly reminded that many people think that 'saying prayers' makes the difference. What deception! They do not understand the relationship between God and His covenant people. They walk boldly into God's presence without faith and without necessary heart preparations.
- ❖ They depended upon God's wisdom: They understood how God worked. Many people do not. They think that God would work out any foolish thought that a person might have. This verse might be understood this way out of context, but the context is much more demanding. David went out to war in the LORD's name. He fought God's battle. As he spent time with God, God would so speak to his heart. We can see what a man of prayer

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David was from all the Psalms. He was a man who worshiped God. From defeating Goliath to the many large enemy armies spread across the fields, David knew it was God who empowered him. God made him such a general. Yes, King David had ideas and counsel, but he found this by being close to God.

Summary and application: And so we conclude this first section by seeing faith, prayer, intimacy and obedience are all wrapped together in this psalm of dedication. We understand that the Lord wants to bless us too, but we need to first be revived and reformed. We seek God not to do our will but to have Him do His will in and through us. These are the men of God He seeks to rise up.

### **B. The Thanks with Petition (Psalm 20:5-8)**

Anybody can ask but few are able to give thanks. Many people cannot figure out God's solution for anxiety and worry. Paul says it goes beyond stating your requests. It must come down to giving thanks.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4: 6).

Why is this? Sincere thanks require a faith in God's promises and a confidence that He is able and willing to fulfill His promises. Notice the spirit generated in Psalm 20:5. It is full with confidence in God's ability. We will sing for joy over your victory, And in the name of our God we will set up our banners. May the LORD fulfill all your petitions. (Psalms 20:5)

Man is never so free then when he is able to ultimately trust God to do His best for him. As long as there is doubt, then worry leaks in and threatens to sink the biggest boat. It doesn't take more than one worry to chase peace away. Verses 6-8 continue in the same vein. They change from the previous requests style but still the same faith is relayed forward in a powerful way. Let's take a look at a couple of these ways.

### **Sensing victory before it comes (5)**

Faith is the assurance of what is not. This practically shows up on how we are glad, joyous and even living in a spirit of victory. The

greatest celebrations of God's works begin even before the great work is done. I did this once with our children. We were very low on cash - I mean we had only a few literal dollars left. We were using our coins to buy milk. No reserves. I decided to break protocol and have an ice cream sundae to celebrate God's good care for our lives. Fortunately, we didn't have to buy any of the supplies to celebrate!

We remember the story in the Old Testament. Once the king figured God was going to give the victory, he sent the singers in front of the army! 2 Chronicles 20:20-24 says,

And they rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the LORD your God, and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed." And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to the LORD and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, "Give thanks to the LORD, for His lovingkindness is everlasting." And when they began singing and praising, the LORD set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed. For the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir destroying them completely, and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another. When Judah came to the lookout of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and behold, they were corpses lying on the ground, and no one had escaped. (2 Chronicles 20:20-24, NASB).

### **Those who have faith smell victory before it is even there**

*God is willing to save (6a)*

We could not run into a more definite statement of faith than we have here in verse 6. *"Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed."* He is saying these things before the king comes back with the army. As long as the army is carrying out God's purposes in His way, they can trust Him for victory. The key to this is that God is on their side. Sometimes in a war, we might wonder which side God is on. It is an awkward statement but truly at times we have such times of revelation. No one should be fighting. We can have lots of false confidence that God is on our side especially if one is in a row

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of victories. But be careful and humble, God lets the foolish run ahead at times only to be able to show off their folly to all.

**God is able to save (6b):** God's ability to save does not depend on how well trained the army is. Our battles as Christians depends less on experience and more on how much we have been close to the Lord. If experience counts, it will help shape our dependence upon the Lord. In this case we see God has extra resources. He "*answers from His holy heaven.*" What can man say to this?! Nothing. God uses all the might He needs to accomplish His great purposes.

**Revealing of our trusts (7):** What we boast in betrays our trusts. When we have races, it is "Wow, he ran like ..." When we have a sports game, it is "He was a terror." True enough we see men excel at times. But are we sensitive to what God is doing? Or is our confidence in what a batter has averaged through a season? Or have you ever been in a tough spot? Right after you get out, what do you say? "Sure am lucky!" Very few of us truly believe in God. The psalmist fully realizes what most soldiers put their confidence in - it is their weapons, their numbers, their advantage, etc. Few believe if is God. He says, "*We will boast in the name of the LORD our God.*"

**They win (8):** The key test is to see who wins. If God is really on your side, then you will win. One might face enormous odds against them, but this doesn't mean anything when God stands on one side.

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith. (1 John 5:4). In verse 8 we clearly see that one side falls and rises not. The other, the victors, rise up from the battle and stand erect. They have won. Yes, they fought hard perhaps. In the end, they stood up while the other stayed put.

Summary and Application: We can say we have faith but we never know whether we have true faith until it is tested and proved. We can never know what we really trust until after the battle and see what we say where we go. Do we go to a pub and tell everyone what happened or do we go and humble worship the Lord? Do we tell others the special way I got this or do we sit their humbled at the way God empowered everyone? We can make our petitions but most

important is the way we believe. Do we really have faith or not? Faith can never be made up out of determination. Faith is a gift from God to accomplish His purposes we never could without.

### **C. A Cry of Petition (Psalm 20:9)**

Those who live by the grace of God often find themselves crying out to God. One might think that they really don't have faith. In fact, this is not true. Crying out to God shows that the person is in total dependence upon the Lord for help. The situation is that if the Lord does not come through, then they are done with. This is true in our passage no matter what translation you use. There are two plausible ones and in the end it doesn't matter.

Either one thinks that Yahweh is the king and the king is submitting himself to Him such as the NASB or in other traditions on how people say to King David, "Long live the King" or more accurately, "O Lord, save the king..." In either case they are crying out for God to give them victory. We do not deny Yahweh to be the true king but they only wonder if this is the meaning.

The Christian life is like this. We do not work out of our strengths but our weaknesses. It is through our weaknesses that we are able to bring most glory to God. Who cares if we can do it on our own strength. But when God intervenes through some miracle, people are touched with God's presence rather than man's. Some people scoff at miracles as if they only happened back then if at all. Ironically, some of those that say such things boast of God's sovereign power. They only believe He did them back then. They cannot see that God wants to do so much more but that our faith constrains Him.

We tolerate a lesser life because we live in doubt and fear. God is looking for those who will fight secularism with its boasts that God is not real or applicable to their lives. The world taunts God just as the harlot of Babylon snorts at God's challenge.

The true Christian living by faith knows without delivery that evil will assume his place. He is desperate for victory not just for himself but also for others. God is looking for others who will stand the tide flow of secularism and cry out for faith. Crying out is not a sign of weakness but the complete giving of ones last hope on self to find a

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solution. No one likes to be in such situations but it is here that God creates situations that need miracles. God has never changed His ways. But unfortunately, there are so few to follow and believe.

Summary & Application: Have you cried out to God before? Have you been emptied of your own resources to which only God could save you? Those that truly depend on God often cry out to God out of faith. They see that their resources mean nothing and that if God doesn't hear them for some reason, then they will fall. This happened to the Israelites soon after they entered the Promised Land. They fought and defeated Jericho. But they failed to beat Ai. True faith is always built on obedience. It is our close and intimate relationship with God that we have the confidence in His Word.

Jesus has come into the world and destroyed the root of secularism. God's people need to come alive and begin to allow God's extra grace to be poured forth on the earth just as in Jesus' day. We have too much man in church and too little God. Make sure that where you worship, God is there too.



### Psalm 22: Prayer of Passion

Psalm 22 is a prayer of complaint that, perhaps more than any psalm, serves as a link between the Old Testament and the story of Jesus' passion. Indeed, this psalm is an appropriate lectionary reading for Good Friday because the Gospels cite and allude to it at least five times in the crucifixion account. It is important to recognize, however, that Psalm 22 is not important simply because it appears in the New Testament. Rather, the New Testament writers drew from it because of its profound expressions of suffering and faith.

Psalm 22 has “an intensity and a comprehensiveness” that is almost unequaled among psalms of this type.<sup>1</sup> The psalm has two main parts:

- (1) Prayer for help in verses 1-21a;
- (2) Song of praise in verses 21b-31.

Both of these sections have two prominent divisions in which repetition of a main theme, sometimes with

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exact vocabulary, strengthens the psalm's expression of both complaint and praise. A detailed structure of the Psalm is given below.

### **Part 1 : David is Suffering ( 22:1 - 5)**

This is a very sad psalm until verse 21. We do not know when David wrote this psalm. Verses 1 and 2 tell us that David was in agony. We do not know where the pain was. Perhaps it was all over his body. He asked God for help. God did not answer. "You send me no peace" means "I am still crying because you give me no help". David thinks that God has forgotten him! But David remembered in verses 3 - 5 that God always gave help. He gave help to the fathers of Israel. This means all the Jews that lived before David. This made David sad. God always gave help to his people. Why did God not give help to David? So the psalm begins, "Why have you left me by myself?"

### **Part Two Psalm (22:6 - 11)**

As in verses 1 - 5 , there are 2 parts here:

- \* in verses 6 - 8 people say bad things about David
- \* in verses 9 - 11 David tells God that he still trusts God

In Psalm 22:1 - 5 it was God that made David sad. God did not answer David. Here, it is people that make David sad. They say bad things about him. It makes David feel very small, like a worm. People say, "He trusted in the LORD. The LORD can give him help". People do not mean it. They are really laughing at David. They are mocking him. But David does trust in God. He has trusted in God since he was a baby! Isaiah wrote about the suffering servant. He wrote the book of the Bible that we call Isaiah. We now know that Jesus was the suffering servant that Isaiah wrote about. In Psalm 22 it was Jesus also, though part of it was true for David.

### **Part 3 : Trouble is All Round Me (22:12-21)**

In Psalm 22: 12 - 21 again there are two parts:

- \* in verses 12 - 18 there is trouble round David
- \* in verses 19 - 21 David prays to God about it

Here we find 2 ideas. There are things that happened to David. Also there are things that happened to other people. There

are many pictures of suffering. The important part is “you heard me”. David has “prayed through”. This means that he prayed until he knew that God heard him.

#### **Part 4 : David Praises God (22:22-25)**

**Psalm 22:22** From here to the end the psalm changes. It is not about suffering. It is full of praise. This is because God heard when David prayed. This psalm is not only about David. It is also about Jesus. Near the end of the Bible is a book called Hebrews. In it, Jesus says: I will tell your name to my brothers. I will sing praises to you in the church. (Hebrews 2:12) This is wonderful! Jesus sings praises to God with us in church.

**Psalm 22:23** People in awe of God love him, but also know how great he is. They do not become too friendly. Seed is a special Bible word. In the Old Testament it sometimes means the Jews. In the New Testament it often means Christians.

**Psalm 22:24** “the man” and “him” mean David. David suffered. David prayed. God answered David. This is also true of Jesus. Jesus suffered when he died for us. But God raised Jesus from the dead. God answered when Jesus prayed. Jesus died for us so that God would save us!

**Psalm 22:25** Jesus will keep his promises to us. We must believe!

#### **Part 5 : The Congregation Thanks God (22:26-31)**

**Psalm 22:26 - 31** One rule is in Leviticus 7:16. It says, “Eat your sacrifice on the day that you make your promise”. A sacrifice was an animal that the Jews killed. They burned part of it. This was God’s part. They ate the other part. Verses 26 and 29 are about this. The rich and the poor will eat the sacrifice. As a result people will praise God (verse 26) and worship God (verse 29). On the evening before he died, Jesus ate supper with his friends. To us, this was Thursday evening. To the Jews it was the start of Friday! We call this supper the Last Supper. On that Friday, Jesus was the sacrifice. He went to heaven, where God lives. That was God’s part. Our part is the Lord’s Supper. When we eat the Lord’s Supper:

\* we remember that Jesus died for us

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- \* we tell everybody that Jesus died for us
- \* we remember that Jesus will come back to the earth

At the other end of this section the psalmist complains, “I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people” (verse 6). In both cases, however, the complaint is followed by an extended confession of trust that recalls God’s protection in the past (verses 3-5, 9-11). The first confession of trust is corporate (“In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them,” verse 4) and second individual and personal (“Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast,” verse 9).

### Commentary

Verses 1-11 has two complaints (verses 1-2, 6-8), each of which contains some of the most striking language in the Psalms. The psalm opens with the famous cry of dereliction, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The prayer for help in verses 12-21a focuses on the nature of the psalmist’s trouble. Verses 12-13 and 16a include images of animals that circle the psalmist waiting to devour and destroy (“bulls encircle me,” verse 12; “dogs are all around me,” verse 16a). These images are followed in both cases by complaints of physical weakness: “I am poured out like water” (verse 14); “my tongue sticks to my jaws” (verse 15a); “I can count all my bones” (verse 17). The section concludes with a concatenation of petitions for God to be near and to save from the sword, the dog, and the lion (verses 19-21a).

The second major portion of the psalm turns to praise and assurance that God has heard and answered. This section offers praise and thanksgiving that matches the repeated calls for help in verses 1-21a. Verse 21b responds tersely to the complaints of verses 1-18 by saying “From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.” The rest of the psalm then promises praise to God, promises that progress from the psalmist’s profession before worshippers (verses 22-25) to the praise of those who “sleep in the earth” (verse 29).

The psalmist’s promise of praise dominates verses 22-26. Twice the psalmist pledges to honor God by recalling God’s goodness (verse

22) and by making vows in the midst of the congregation (verse 25). After both promises of praise the psalmist then declares God's past goodness to those in trouble and those of lowly estate ("the afflicted," verse 24; "the poor" and "those who seek him," verse 26; the word translated "afflicted" and the word translated "poor" are actually the same, *?an?*). Verses 27-31 then expand the promise of praise so that every person in human history is included: "all the families of the nations" (verse 27), "all who sleep in the earth" (verse 29), and "future generations" (verse 30).

### **Psalm 22 and the Passion of Jesus**

The connection between Psalm 22 and the story of Jesus' suffering and death is natural given the extensive description of suffering the psalm contains. Perhaps the most obvious connection between the passion story and Psalm 22 is Jesus' cry of God-forsakenness: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1; Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46). Other portions of the psalm provide an outline of the experience of Jesus on the cross.

1. Matthew 27:35, They crucified Jesus.
2. Matthew 27:43 also frames the taunts of the religious leaders with an allusion to Psalm 22:8: "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver - let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"
3. Matthew 27:41, 43, The leaders of the priests mocked Jesus. They said, "He trusted in God. We want to see God save him!" (the priests worked in the Temple in Jerusalem).
4. Mark 15:29 (Matthew 27:39) implies the language of Psalm 22:7 in the description of passersby at the crucifixion: "All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads."
5. Mark 15:34 At 3 o'clock in the afternoon Jesus said, "My God! My God, why have you left me by myself?"
6. Luke 22:35 All the people stood and watched Jesus.
7. John 19:24 ,They said, "Don't tear his coat. Throw the dice for it. The winner will have the coat". In all four Gospels (Mark 15:24; Matthew 27:35; Luke 23:34; John 19:24) the description of the soldiers' activity beneath the cross draws on Psalm 22:18: "they

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divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

8. John 19:29 (Before he died,) Jesus said, “I am thirsty”.
9. John 19:34 (After he died,) one of the soldiers pushed a spear into Jesus. Immediately blood and water came out. (a spear is a long stick with a sharp end).

Though the original setting of Psalm 22 had nothing to do with the passion of Jesus, a Messianic reading is a natural result of the psalm’s extensive expression of suffering and its far-reaching declaration of hope. The psalm “explodes the limits” of poetic expression and thus expands the Old Testament understanding of God, human life, and death.

Not only does the psalmist cry out to God with unparalleled expressions of pain and loss (verse 1), but the writer also expresses hope in something close akin to resurrection (verses 29-30). Thus, Psalm 22 is appropriate for the hope that accompanies Jesus’ passion as well as the grief. It anticipates a vision of God who holds the believer even after death that will only be expressed fully centuries later.

We do not know when David wrote Psalm 22. He was very ill, or he was hurt badly. He writes about his suffering. But he also writes about the sufferings of other people. Here is an example. People often torture other people. Torture means hurt very much. Near Judah was a place called Tyre. In Tyre this is how they tortured people: they fixed them to wood with nails. The nails went through their hands and feet. A nail is a piece of sharp iron, a few inches long. Psalm 22:16 talks about this.

So Psalm 22 is more than a psalm about the sufferings of David. His own agony made him think about the agony of other people. Christians believe he wrote about the agony of one very special person. We call that person the Messiah, or Christ. The Bible has 2 parts. The Old Testament tells us what happened before Jesus came to earth. The New Testament tells us about Jesus and the Church. One of the books in the New Testament is Acts. In Acts 2 is something that Peter said. He said it 7 weeks after Jesus died and rose again. In

Acts 2:30 Peter said, "David was a prophet. He wrote about Christ". Christ is another name for Jesus. A prophet says what will happen in the future.

In the New Testament are 4 Gospels. They all tell us about the death and resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection was when God raised Jesus from the dead. Someone said, "Psalm 22 is like the story of the death of Jesus in a 5th Gospel!" People killed Jesus by crucifixion. This means that they fixed him to a cross of wood. They fixed him to it with nails. He hung on the cross until he was dead. 2 days before Easter is Good Friday. On Good Friday Christians remember how Jesus died. Many of them read (or sing) Psalm 22 on Good Friday. They believe that it is not only about the suffering of David. It is about the suffering of Jesus. Though he was God, Jesus was also a servant. We call him the suffering servant. From Psalm 22:22 to the end the psalm becomes happy. This is because God raised Jesus from the dead. Because Jesus died for us, we believe that God will raise us from the dead too. We must thank God for the death of Jesus for us!

# Psalm 23: Lord is the Shepherd

No single psalm has expressed more powerfully man's prayer of confidence 'out of the depths' to the God whose purpose alone gives meaning to the span of life, from womb to tomb. While few of us understand the life of the shepherd in the ancient Near East, most have been able to grasp the message of comfort and assurance conveyed in the psalm. Especially in times of distress, such as the death of a loved one, we instinctively turn to the assuring words, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

The purpose of this message is to help us more clearly understand the imagery used to convey comfort and calm to the soul of those who are a part of God's flock by faith in Jesus Christ. Additionally, we will explore new ways in which the truth of this psalm can be applied to our lives. Furthermore, since we are all to be shepherds of God's flock in the broadest sense, we can learn a great deal not only about our Shepherd, but also about shepherding.



## Author

David is identified in the superscription as the author of the psalm. We are hardly surprised. After all, David was a shepherd in his youth (1 Sam. 16:11; 17:15, 28, 34-36). David's shepherding days (like those of his predecessor Moses, cf. Exod. 3:1) served to prepare him for shepherding God's flock, the nation Israel: "He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance" (Ps. 78:70-71).

It may appear at first glance that David would have written this psalm as a boy while tending his flock. No doubt David did write psalms as he spent lonely hours with his flocks in the field, but it is difficult to imagine that a psalm of such depth could have been written by a young lad. A young lad knows little of the dangers and disappointments of life or of the opposition which is referred to in verses 4 and 5. If the "house of the Lord" in verse 6 is a reference to the temple, it was only a future hope later in David's life, not in his youth (cf. 2 Sam. 7).

There is a fair amount of disagreement about the structural divisions of Psalm 23, based upon differences of opinion in the number of poetic images employed. Some see only one image—the shepherd's, which underlies the entire psalm. Others believe there is also the image of the hospitable host or the friend in verses 5 and 6. Some even see the imagery of a guide in verses 3 and 4. I am inclined to see two images in the psalm, that of the shepherd (vv. 1-4) and that of the host (vv. 5-6). With this background in mind, let us begin our study of Psalm 23.

### **The Sheep and the Shepherd (23:1-4)**

Knowing David was a shepherd in his early years, we may be inclined to interpret this psalm from the perspective of the shepherd. Phillip Keller has written a book on Psalm 23 entitled *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, which has many helpful insights. He writes from the background of growing up in East Africa and later making his living as a sheep rancher for about eight years. However as Keller points out, the vantage point of the psalm is from the perspective of the sheep, not that of the shepherd. I am tempted to entitle these verses, "A Sheep Looks at his Shepherd in Psalm 23." Let us then consider our Great Shepherd from the viewpoint of the sheep.

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The shepherd theme is introduced in the first verse: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” The shepherd image was very common in the ancient Near East and very obviously based upon one of the principal occupations of that day. The Israelites, in particular, were known as shepherds (cf. Gen. 46:28-34). The term “shepherd” came to be used in a much broader way, describing leadership either of an individual or a group. Jacob spoke of God as “The God who has been my shepherd all my life ...” (Gen. 48:15; cf. 49:24). The title of shepherd was given to kings, especially David (2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7; Ps. 78:71), and the Messiah who was to come, of whom David was a type (Ezek. 34:23-24; Mic. 5:4). Thus the Lord Jesus identified himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11; cf. Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4).

When David spoke of Yahweh as his shepherd, he thought of Him not only as his provider and protector but also as his king. He thought of God as his shepherd with the breadth of meaning this term conveyed in the ancient Near East (in general) and in the Law (in particular). Because God was David’s shepherd, he lacked (wanted) nothing. A good shepherd is all a sheep needs since a good shepherd, by his very nature will always supply all of the sheep’s needs. In a similar way, a good father will provide for every need of his child.

“I shall not want,” meant that David didn’t want the shepherd. David meant that since he had the Lord as his shepherd, he had no other want; he was lacking nothing. The significance of this statement can hardly be overemphasized. All through the ages Satan has attempted to portray God as a begrudging giver who only provides when He must. Satan desires to deceive those who trust in God, and wants them to believe they are lacking and deprived of the good things in life. This is the picture Satan tried to paint in suggesting that God had withheld the fruit of every tree of the garden from Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1). God is also portrayed as a begrudging giver in the temptation of our Lord (Matt. 4:1-11) and in the warning of Paul concerning the doctrine of demons (1 Tim. 4:1-4).

The mentality behind David’s words is completely opposed to the Madison Avenue propaganda where we are constantly being told that we have many needs, all of which can be met by buying some new (or old) product. We need “sex appeal” so we must buy a new toothpaste, a new kind of mouthwash and a new brand of soap. We

need self-confidence and a better self-image, therefore we must wear stylish clothing determined by the garment industry. Our whole mode of thinking is “want-centered.” David tells us that to have God as our shepherd is indeed to have everything we want. He who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-caring, is enough; He is sufficient. With Him we need nothing else (cf. Ps. 73:25-26).

Israel had found God to be a faithful provider of their needs during their years in the wilderness: “For the Lord your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing” (Deut. 2:7).

The Israelites also had God’s assurance that they would lack nothing when they possessed the land of Canaan: For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you shall eat food without scarcity, in which you shall not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper (Deut. 8:7-9). We must be very careful here, however, that we do not go too far. We should not understand David to mean that with God as his shepherd he had everything one could possibly desire or possess; this would be as wrong as to think that Israel never did without anything while in the wilderness (cf. Deut. 2:7, above). In Deuteronomy 8 Moses told the Israelites that God “let them be hungry” to test them and to teach them (vv. 2-3). The clear implication of David’s statement in Psalm 23:1 is that as one of God’s sheep he will lack nothing which is necessary for his best interest. Verses 4 and 5 confirm this as well. As David wrote elsewhere: The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing (Ps. 34:10, emphasis mine; cf. also Ps. 84:11).

In verses 2-4 David describes those things for which he, as God’s sheep, will never lack. It is necessary to give a word of caution as we approach these verses filled with poetic imagery and therefore susceptible to abuse. David is describing God’s relationship to him in terms of a kindly shepherd’s relationship to one of his sheep. It is to be expected that he will speak of God’s care in sheep-like terms. We

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must be careful, however, not to restrict David's meaning only to a literal, non-spiritual sense. Conversely, we must not let the imagery be carried too far so that we begin to see too much. There is a very delicate balance required when we attempt to interpret this kind of poetic imagery.

I am inclined to think that the emphasis of verses 2-3a falls upon the rest which the Good Shepherd provides for his sheep. This seems to be the point of the key terms in each line. The expression "lie down" speaks of rest (cf. the use of the same term in Gen. 29:2; Isa. 17:2; Ezek. 34:15). Leupold reminds us that sheep do not graze lying down. From Ezekiel 34:15 I understand that the sheep would lie down to rest after having been fed. The adequate provision of lush pasture land, or "grassy meadows" and "quiet waters" (literally, "waters of rest," margin, NASB) to which the shepherd has led his sheep, causes them to lie down in rest.

The first line of verse 3, "He restores my soul," continues this same thought of the rest which God provides for his sheep. Taken in its most literal and restricted sense, this expression conveys David's thought that God "renews and sustains my life." As David's shepherd, God provides him with rest and restoration. He does this by supplying him with the necessary provisions of food and water, which sheep require. Rest is certainly related to the required physical provisions of food and water, but rest is also related to restoration. In order to be refreshed and renewed in spirit, rest is a prerequisite.

Psalm 23 cannot be fully appreciated apart from the word of God spoken to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel. Against the backdrop of the false shepherds who had abused and oppressed God's flock, God promised to return to His people as their shepherd and to give them rest:

For thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in

a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing ground, and they will feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord God (Ezek. 34:11-15).

It appears that there is a spiritual meaning implied in Psalm 23:2-3a which presses beyond the literal meaning of physical nourishment and rest. This is strongly suggested by David’s use of the same expression “to restore the soul” in Psalm 19: “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7).

While a shepherd provides his sheep with food, rest, and restoration, God provides His sheep with His Word, which is the principle means of giving spiritual nourishment, rest, and restoration.

The second and third lines of verse 3 remind us that as a shepherd leads his flock, so God guides His people: “He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”

Guidance is recognized as one of the principle tasks of the shepherd. He leads his sheep to places of nourishment and rest (v. 2), but he also leads them in the proper paths. Often it is necessary for the shepherd to lead his flock great distances to find both pasture and water. Some paths are dangerous and should be avoided. The good shepherd leads his sheep in the right paths.

God’s guidance in the life of a believer is more than just a matter of leading us in the “right path”; it involves His leading us in “paths of righteousness.” What a wonderful word of comfort for those who seem to think that God’s will is some kind of mystery, known only to the few who are so fortunate to find it. One of the assurances the psalmist is confident he will never lack is the leading of God in his life. Let us learn from David that we can be confident of God’s leading in our lives when the Lord is our Shepherd, for the shepherd always leads his flock.

Verse 4 gives us yet another reason why God can be relied on to guide His sheep. He guides us “for His name’s sake.” A. A. Anderson has correctly caught the force of this expression when he renders it, “he acts for the sake of his reputation.” The measure of a shepherd

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is the condition of his flock. God's reputation rests upon His ability to guide and care for His people. Just as parents are evaluated by the way they care for their children, shepherds are judged by the condition of their flocks. God's reputation as seen by His care of His people is the basis of Moses' appeal for mercy when God threatened to wipe out the nation for the incident involving the golden calf (Exod. 32:1-14, esp. vv. 11-12). Paul tells us that God's work of saving men by grace was for the purpose of bringing praise "to the glory of his grace" (cf. Eph. 1:5-6, 12, 14). We can be confident that God will guide His people because their lives reflect on Him as their Shepherd. What a wonderful assurance!

Verse 4 further qualifies the "I shall not want" of verse 1b. The fact that God was David's shepherd did not keep him from many trials and tribulations. His life was sought without cause by king Saul, who became jealous of David's success (cf. 1 Sam. 18:6-9). In addition David sinned and suffered the painful consequences (cf. 2 Sam. 11-12; 1 Chron. 21). David was truly a "man of sorrows." Nowhere did God promise David (or any other saint) freedom from the suffering and trials of life. Even though God is our shepherd we will still go through trying times, but we will never "want" for the comfort which comes from His presence and His power.

In order for God's sheep to be led to grassy meadows and restful streams, they must pass through dark and dangerous places. The "paths of righteousness" (v. 3) are not always peaceful paths. While we are never promised there will be no evil, we can be assured that we need "fear no evil" (v. 4), for we will always be in the Shepherd's presence if we follow Him in His paths.

There is a subtle but significant change which occurs in verse 4. Did you notice the change of pronouns? The more impersonal "he" of verses 2 and 3 is now the much more intimate "Thou" in verse 4. As someone has observed, God goes before us when the path is smooth, but He stands beside us when the way is dangerous and frightening. It is His presence which dispels our fears. Furthermore, His "rod" and "staff" (v. 4c) give us comfort. Whether there are two distinct instruments indicated by these two terms or just one is open to discussion. The "rod" and the "staff" serve here as instruments of protection and assistance. They were used both to ward off enemies and to rescue straying sheep. Perhaps the disciplinary use of the "rod"

is implied as well. Discipline may seem unpleasant at the moment, but it is a comfort in the long term (cf. Heb. 12:5-12) and a motivation for us to “make our paths straight” (Heb. 12:13). While God may not always use His power to keep us out of trials, His presence and His power will always be with us to keep us through our trials. As He Himself said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Heb. 13:5; cf. Deut. 31:6; Josh. 1:5).

### **The Guest and the Hospitable Host (23:5-6)**

David has described his relationship to God using the imagery of the shepherd and his sheep. He now describes this same relationship employing the imagery of a hospitable host. The relationship of a host with his guest is even closer than that of a shepherd with his sheep. The shepherd motif need not be prolonged as some suggest. Just as well known in the ancient Near East was the significance of the hospitality offered to a traveler:

According to the Bedouin law of hospitality, once a traveler is received into the shepherd’s tent, and especially once his host has spread food before him, he is guaranteed immunity from enemies who may be attempting to overtake him. In pastoral circles no human protection is greater than that afforded by the hospitality of a Bedouin chief.

No greater security or comfort could be obtained by a traveler in the ancient Near East than to be offered the hospitality of a home. It was understood that this was a provision of shelter and food, but even more it was a guarantee of protection from harm. We can sense this from Old Testament passages such as Genesis 18:1-8, where Abram graciously entertained three “men” who passed by as strangers. More enlightening (and distressing!) is the passage in the 19th chapter of Genesis, where Lot took the two “men” (angels) into his house as guests when the men of Sodom threatened to assault them:

But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, and said, “Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof” (Gen. 19:6-8).

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Whether or not we are able to grasp how a father could offer his virgin daughters to such a mob, we must at least gain some appreciation for the strong sense of obligation Lot felt to the two men in view of his hospitality. Psalm 23:5 describes this type of protective hospitality.

To sit as a guest at the table of a host was to be assured of food, housing, fellowship and protection. The table prepared in the presence of David's enemies was the host's public announcement to them not to attempt to molest David in any way. This offered great security, especially since the host was a man of influence and generosity. The amount of security which any host could provide depended upon his prestige and power. The abundance of his provisions indicated that he was a prosperous, powerful, and generous man. To have the hospitality of such a host was to be secure indeed!

The psalmist's head was anointed with oil, a generous gesture which bestowed honor on him as an esteemed guest. The cup was likewise a gesture of generosity. It was not half-filled, but running over. David was not served "leftovers," but was abundantly given the finest provisions in the house. Satisfaction, significance, and security are all abundantly supplied to the believer by God, as indicated by the imagery of the hospitable host. An even greater fellowship and graciousness is suggested by the hospitality motif than by that of the pastoral imagery.

As a result of the provisions of verse 5 David can confidently summarize his security in the words of verse 6: "Surely goodness and loving kindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Goodness and loving kindness are probably the two most comforting attributes of God's character for the Christian. They are especially consoling in times of distress. These characteristics of God are linked to His covenant with Israel. In contrast with the wicked man, who is beset by judgment and calamity (Ps. 35:6; 140:11), the righteous man is not just followed by goodness and kindness, but pursued by it. As a guest at God's table, his enemies no longer stalk David; instead God's goodness pursues him. God not only walks before us, leading us to places of rest and refreshment, but His goodness follows us from behind as well.



Most significantly, David is not a guest for a few days at the home of his gracious host; he is a permanent part of this household. There is an old Greek saying that goes something like this: “A guest is like a fish... After three days, he stinks.” To be a guest in God’s house is not limited to three days. David is assured that he will “dwell in the house of the Lord” forever.

The temple was not yet built in David’s day. Although he desired to build the temple, this task was left to his son Solomon (2 Sam. 7). David may have been looking forward to that future day in eternity when he could fellowship with God in the temple. It may well be, however, that David is simply looking forward to continued fellowship and communion with God as he has already experienced it in his life. God’s care in the past is but a sample, a kind of first-fruits of what is yet ahead.

The blessings and the calmness of soul which David experienced in his life and expressed in this psalm would be a delight to anyone, but how can we be assured of them in our lives? The answer is almost too simple to believe: in order to enjoy the benefits of the care of the Good Shepherd we must be one of His sheep. In the words of the Good Shepherd Himself: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27-28).

Those who enjoy the benefits of being cared for by the Good Shepherd (John 10:14) are those who know the Shepherd’s voice and who follow Him. They understand that He has laid down His life for them (John 10:15). They enter into eternal blessings through Jesus Christ who is the door to the sheepfold (John 10:1ff.). Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Shepherd are not sheep, but “dogs” and “hogs” (cf. 2 Pet. 2:22).

It is amazing to ponder that in order to become the Good Shepherd our Lord first had to become a sheep—the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29). If you would experience the comfort and consolation of Psalm 23, you can only do so as a sheep, as a guest who has been invited to sit at the Lord’s table. Christian comfort is only for Christians.

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One of the lessons of Psalm 23 is that every person who is one of God's flock (by personal faith in Christ) is individually cared for as one of God's sheep. In our church we emphasize "body life," and I believe this is rightly so. Never forget that while you are also one of God's flock, His care for you is an individual type of care, not merely as a number or as a series of perforations in a computer card. David never lost his sense of individual pastoral care from the hand of his Shepherd.

Two doubts tend to make us question this kind of personal and individual care. The first is tribulation. Some seem to feel that God cares about them only when everything is going well. In sheep-like terms, they think God is with them only when they are lying in grassy meadows alongside restful waters. However, once they find themselves in a dark valley they question the presence and the pastoral care of their Shepherd. David never lost his assurance of God's care and His keeping. In fact, in times of distress, God's care and keeping was more certain than ever. The second cause of doubt is when our "under-shepherds" fail us. God cares for us individually, but He also cares for us through others. When human shepherds fail us, we may begin to question the concern of the Good Shepherd. Let us learn that God Himself never fails us, never leaves us, and never will forsake us.

While this message does not dwell on this area of application, allow me to suggest that Psalm 23 not only describes the Good Shepherd, but also good shepherding. Let us see this psalm not only as a superb text on the Shepherd, but as a model for all shepherds. That which makes God a Good Shepherd also serves as a model to us of proper shepherding. Let us seek to study God's shepherding and to strive to shepherd others as God shepherds us.

In conclusion, let me note also the providence of God in the life of David. How insignificant it must have seemed to David to be a "mere" shepherd boy. That seems to be the inference of his older brothers who were off doing more important work such as fighting wars (cf. 1 Sam. 17:28). Yet David's was a very important task. It readied him for battle (cf. 1 Sam. 17:33-37) and even more, helped prepare David to be a shepherd of God's flock (Ps. 78:70-71) and to write about the Good Shepherd. The seemingly insignificant tasks and experiences of our lives are of great importance. Let us do them well.

## Chapter 9

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### Psalm 27

Psalm 27 is one of those which have been called “composite,” and certainly it falls into two parts which offer the strongest possible contrast the one to the other.

- ❖ Part 1. (Psalms 27:1-6) is altogether joyous and jubilant. It records, as has been said, “the triumph of a warrior’s faith.”
- ❖ Part 2. (Psalms 27:7-14) is sad and plaintive. It pleads for mercy and forgiveness (Psalms 27:8-10). It complains of desertion (Psalms 27:10), calumny (Psalms 27:12), and imminent danger (Psalms 27:11, Psalms 27:12). It still, indeed, maintains hope, but the hope has only just been saved from sinking into despair by an effort of faith (Psalms 27:13), and a determination to “wait” and see what the end will be (Psalms 27:14). It is thought to “express the sorrows of a martyr to the religious persecutions at the close of the monarchy”.

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For these reasons the psalm has been supposed to be “composite;” but the question arises-If the two parts, being so entirely unlike, were originally distinct and unconnected, what should have led any arranger or editor to unite them? To this question there seems to be no possible answer; and thus the very diversity of the two parts would seem to show an original union.

According to the statement of the title, the psalm was written by David. It has many characteristics of his style, the sudden transition and change in the tone of thought being one. It is quite conceivable that during the rebellion under Absalom, having obtained some important success, he may have considered it an occasion for thanksgiving; and that, after his thanks were paid, his thoughts may have reverted to the still-continuing difficulties of the situation, the danger which impended (Psalms 27:11, Psalms 27:12), the calumnies to which he was exposed (Psalms 27:12), the desertion of those near and dear to him (Psalms 27:10), the fact that the chastisement had been provoked by his own sin (Psalms 27:9); and so the strain, which began in jubilation, may not unnaturally have ended in a plea for mercy.

The psalm consists of a strophe (Psalms 27:1-6), an antistrophe (Psalms 27:7-12), and a brief epode (Psalms 27:13, Psalms 27:14).

### Commentary

#### Part 1: (27:1-6)

Psalms 27:1, The Lord is my Light (comp. John 1:7-9; John 12:35, John 12:36, John 12:46; 1 John 1:5). The statement does not occur in any other place in the Old Testament, though the idea may be found in Isaiah 60:1, Isaiah 60:20; Micah 7:8; and elsewhere. Light has been well called “this profoundly beautiful name of God” (Delitzsch). And my Salvation (comp. Psalms 18:2; Psalms 62:2, Psalms 62:6). Whom shall I fear? ”If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Who can be to be feared? (see Psalms 118:6). Not man certainly; for” what can man do unto us?” Not other gods; for they are nonentities. Not devils; for they can do nothing but by God’s permission. The Lord is the Strength of my life; literally, *the stronghold* (comp. Psalms 28:8; Psalms 31:4; Psalms 71:2; Psalms 144:2). Of whom shall I be afraid? The question is superfluous, but is repeated to complete the balance of the clauses.

Psalms 27:2 - When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. A special occasion seems to be intended. Some unrecorded event in the war with Absalom before the final struggle, is probably alluded to. There is an emphasis on “*mine* enemies,” which implies that the adversaries were not the foes of the country, but David’s personal foes.

Psalms 27:3 - Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. In the first burst of joy at his recent victory, the ‘host’ which remains unconquered seems of light account—let them advance—let them “encamp against him”- his heart will not be afraid; but when the joy has had full vent, there is a reaction; the enemies then appear more formidable, and God’s aid is besought against them (see Psalms 27:9-12). Though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. “In this” may be either “in the fact that the Lord is my Light and my Salvation” (Psalms 27:1), or “in case of such an event as war and attack on the part of the enemy.”

Psalms 27:4 - One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after. A most emphatic introduction of the new topic! Amid all my joy and jubilation, there is still one thing which I need, which I entreat Jehovah *to grant* that thing I shall continue to seek after until I obtain it, viz. that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. The psalmist is evidently debarred access to the sanctuary; he feels his exclusion from it a terrible privation; he longs to be there—to “dwell” there (comp. Psalms 26:8); to offer there “sacrifices of joy” (Psalms 27:6); to sing there psalms of thanksgiving. He would fain also behold the beauty of the Lord- doxa LXX.” all that is engaging and gracious in his revelation of himself” (Kay); “not the outward beauty of the sanctuary, but the gracious attributes which its ritual symbolized” (‘Speaker’s Commentary’). And to inquire in his temple. It has already appeared, from Psalms 5:7, that the word “temple” or “palace” (*heykal*) was applied in David’s time to the tabernacle.

Psalms 27:5 - For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me. This is not to be understood literally. David means that his *spirit* will find a refuge with God in times of trouble, not (as some Jewish expositors argue) that he will actually hide from his enemies inside the tabernacle. From such a sacrilege he would have shrunk. He shall set me up upon a

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rock (comp. Psalms 18:2; Psalms 61:2). The “Rock” is God himself, who is always David’s final Refuge.

Psalms 27:6 - And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me. A further and final triumph is confidently anticipated. God will complete his work. He will repulse the “host” by which David is about to be attacked (Psalms 27:3), give him victory over it, bring him back from exile, and grant him once more free access to the sanctuary. Therefore, says the psalmist, will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; or, “sacrifices of joyful sound,” accompanied with singing and instrumental music (comp. Psalms 89:15). I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord (comp. Ephesians 5:19).

### **Part 2: (27:7-14)**

The strain now entirely changes. The rhythm alters from a jubilant double beat to a slow and mournful cadence. A cry is raised for mercy and pity-the wrath of God is deprecated-rejection and desertion are contemplated and prayed against (Psalms 27:7-10). The danger from the enemy appears great and formidable (Psalms 27:11, Psalms 27:12). With an effort of faith, the writer just saves himself from despair (Psalms 27:14), and then, in brave words, braces himself up for further endurance.

Psalms 27:7 - Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. There is no “when” in the original. The clauses are short, and broken, “Hear, O *Lord*; with my voice I call; pity me, and answer *me*.”

Psalms 27:8 - When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. The order of the words in the original is as follows: “To thee said my heart-Seek ye my face-thy face, Lord, will I seek.” And the full meaning seems to be, “To thee said my heart-Hast thou said unto men, Seek ye my face? I for one will obey thee-Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” The command, “Seek ye my face,” had been given by David to the people on the day that he set up the ark upon Mount Zion (1 Chronicles 16:11). It was probably regarded as implied in Deuteronomy 4:29.

Psalms 27:9 - Hide not thy face far from me. It would be useless for David to “seek God’s face,” if God should determine to “hide his face” from him. David felt from time to time as if God’s face was

hidden from him, as we see in other psalms (Psalms 10:1-18 :1; Psalms 13:1; Psalms 69:17, etc.); and so also did other saints (Psalms 44:24; Psalms 88:14). In most instances, probably, God sends the feeling as a chastisement, that the heart may turn with more sincerity to him. Put not thy servant away in anger; *i.e.* reject me not-cast me not off. The verb used is very strong and emphatic. Thou hast been my Help. Ever in the past I have had thee for Helper (comp. Psalms 3:3-7; Psalms 4:1; Psalms 6:8-10;Psalms 18:2, etc.). God's goodness to us in the past must ever be our chief ground of confidence in him for the future. Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation (comp. Psalms 94:14).

Psalms 27:10 - When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. We are not to gather from this that David's father and mother had forsaken him. They were probably dead at the time of his flight from Absalom. What David means is that, even if forsaken by his nearest and dearest, he would not be forsaken by God. The expression is proverbial.

Psalms 27:11, Teach me thy way, O Lord (comp. Psalms 25:3, and the comment *ad loc.*). And lead me in a plain path; literally, a *level path*-a path traversing a fiat and smooth country, not one where the ground is rugged and beset with rocks and precipices. Because of mine enemies. David's enemies are ever at hand, to swallow him up (Psalms 56:2). If his way be not plain and smooth, it will be to their advantage and to his detriment.

Psalms 27:12 - Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies; literally, *the soul of mine enimies*; *i.e.* their *desire*(see Psalms 35:25; Psalms 41:2), which was no doubt to capture him, and. bring him a prisoner to Jerusalem. For false witnesses are risen up against me. The party which attached itself to Absalom accused David of cruelty to the house of Saul (2 Samuel 16:8), and probably of other crimes and misdemeanors. Absalom himself accused him of a failure in his kingly duties (2 Samuel 15:8). And such as breathe out cruelty; or, *violence*. To "breathe out" violence, threats, slaughter, malice, etc; is a common metaphor in many languages.

Psalms 27:13 - I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. In the original, by the figure *aposiopesis*., the apodosis is omitted, "had I not believed that I

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should see the goodness of Jehovah in the land of the living *i.e.* in this present world], then... “He shrinks from stating the consequences, He would have fainted, or despaired, or lost all faith in religion (compare, for similar uses of the figure *aposiopesis*, Genesis 3:22; Genesis 31:41; Genesis 50:15; Exodus 32:32; Daniel 3:15; Zechariah 6:15; Luke 13:9). By an effort of faith, the psalmist saved himself from the despair which threatened to seize upon him, and assured himself that he would yet experience “the goodness of the Lord” in some merciful interposition and deliverance, while he still remained on earth, before he “went whence he should not return-to the land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness” (Job 10:21, Job 10:22).

Psalms 27:14 - Wait on the Lord. This is an exhortation, not to others, but to himself (comp. Psalms 62:5; and see also Psalms 42:5, Psalms 42:11; Psalms 43:5). His stronger self exhorts his weaker self not to despair, but to wait upon God-to tarry, *i.e.* the Lord’s leisure-and, meanwhile to be of good courage; or, be *strong* (comp. Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:6; 1 Chronicles 22:13), as the phrase is elsewhere generally translated. “Be strong,” he says to himself, and he (*i.e.* God) shall strengthen thine heart. “Aide-tot, le ciel l’aidera.” Make an effort to be strong, and the strength will be given thee, as thou makest it. Then in this strength, thus given, continue till waiting-Wait, I say, on the Lord.



## Chapter 10

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### Psalm 32: The Pursuit of Happiness

The Book of Psalms has a good deal to say about happiness. Psalm 1 opens the Book by speaking of the happiness of those whose “delight is in the teaching (Hebrew *torah*, NRSV law) of the Lord.” The *Jewish Publication Society* translation catches the sense of verse 2, saying that those who delight in the Lord’s teaching “study that teaching (again, *torah*, NRSV law) day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). Other expressions of the “happiness” theme are found in Psalms 33:12, 34:8; 41:1-2, 84:5, 12; 112:1; 119:1; 127:5; 128:1-2. In each of these cases the Hebrew word translated “happy” is *asherey*.

Psalm 32 makes its own contribution to this theme of happiness. The theme is important for the psalm; the word “happy” (again *asherey* in Hebrew) appears twice, in verses 1 and 2. And the Psalm ends on a positive note with a call to be glad, to rejoice and even to shout for joy (verse 11).

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### Genre and Structure

The church has ranked this as one of the *Penitential Psalms* (along with 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143), thus suggesting that it should be used in connection with being sorry for sins. The lectionary has understood the psalm this way, linking it with the story of the repentant prodigal (Luke 15:11b-32, 4 Lent C) or the forgiven woman (Luke 7:36-8:3) or David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, both for 3 Pentecost C).

There is however a certain tension between the use of the psalm at a time of repentance and the rejoicing, happy theme that occurs at the beginning and the end. The structure or story that runs through the psalm explains that tension:

1-2 Four pictures of happiness

3-5 Confession is good for the soul-and body

6-11 Instruction on how to live a guilt-free, joy-filled life

### Commentary

**1-2:** Happiness is... The heading associates the psalm with David. Careful readers have often suggested that it would fit well into the time after the affair with Bathsheba (see the heading to Psalm 51 as well as the lectionary). These opening verses give voice to the experience of forgiveness of sin, expressed in a gathering of the four major Old Testament words for sin. Verse 1 speaks of *transgression*, from the Hebrew *pasa*. The sense is rebellion, like the rebellion of one treaty party against another (2 Kings 1:1) or of children against parents (Isaiah 1:2). According to this picture, happiness is a life no longer being lived in rebellion against God.

The word *sin* translates the Hebrew *hata* which has the sense of missing a target. The same Hebrew word appears in Judges 20:16 which tells of the seven hundred left-handed marksmen who could “sling a stone at a hair, and not *miss*.” Happiness, according to this picture, is having one’s life headed in the right direction, on course, no longer wrongly aimed off target.

The third word is *iniquity*, the Hebrew *awon* (verse 2; translated “guilt” in verse 5). The sense of this word is to be bent over, twisted or crooked. The word also occurs in Isaiah 24:1, speaking of the Lord *twisting* the earth and in Psalm 38:6 where a sick person says “I am utterly *bowed down* and prostrate...” According to this word,

happiness is being no longer twisted or bent out of shape, but straightened out.

Finally, *deceit* translates the Hebrew word *remiyah*, which has the sense of being treacherous, or not reliable, like a weapon that backfires or cannot be depended on (Hosea 7:16 speaks of a “*defective bow*”). This word defines happiness as living in a manner that is honest and forthright.

In sum, according to this psalm, the person is happy who is not rebelling against God, whose life is on track, straightened out and marked by integrity. The word *selah* most likely means a musical interlude; the word should not be read aloud.

**3-5** Confession is... This section provides a before and after picture of the psalmist’s life. *Before* confessing the wrongdoing of which the psalmist was guilty, that bottling up of guilt took a terrible physical toll. The symptoms here are psychosomatic, brought on by the person’s own decision to keep the wrongdoing to himself or herself. Verse 4 indicates the psalmist’s realization that a part of the problem was theological as well as psychological; things with God were not as they should be. Verse 5 points back to the joy that comes with confession and forgiveness (verses 1-2).

**6-11** Instructions on how to live. Of key importance for understanding this section are verses 8 and 9. Verse 8 indicates that the psalmist is going to engage in teaching. That teaching comes to expression in verse 9 which says essentially, “Don’t be stupid! Use your God-given intelligence!”

What then would be the shape of a God-directed life? There are a number of clues: Pray in times of distress (verse 6). Trust in God as a secure, safe place to put your life (verse 7). Know that God’s steadfast love (*hesed*) surrounds you. And then, rather than groaning your life away, you will be glad in the LORD (*simchah* as in the fall festival celebrating God’s teaching, *simchat torah*). You will rejoice and you will no longer waste away and brood in silence (verse 3) but will shout for joy!

### **Toward Teaching and Preaching**

The line in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America speaks of the Creator endowing every person with certain

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inalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The psalms, which speak much about happiness, do not speak of pursuing happiness. According to the psalms, God's steadfast love is on the hunt, chasing after me. Another psalmist put it this way (translating the Hebrew more literally than usual) "Surely goodness and mercy (*hesed*) shall chase after me all the days of my life..." (Psalm 23:6).

The forgiveness and freedom from guilt which Christ offers changes lives. I heard Ron Blanc, now a pastor in Phoenix, tell how he was called to visit a 14-year-old boy who was in a catatonic state in the psychiatric ward of a hospital. The boy was lying on his bed as stiff as a board. Nothing had helped. The nurse, thinking Ron to be a doctor, said, "I think the boy is suffering from too much religion." He went in and began to talk and the boy finally began to open up. He was under a pile of guilt.

Ron shared the forgiveness Christ offers. Before he could invite the boy to pray, the boy began to pray on his own. Ron bowed his head. The boy asked Jesus to come into his life and forgive his sins. When he finished praying, Ron looked up to find the boy sitting on the edge of the bed, freely swinging his legs. Ron asked, "What's this?" The boy exclaimed, "I'm free, man! Jesus has forgiven me!" They walked out to a little patio area to chat some more. Ron got great delight in watching the surprised expressions on the nurses faces as they saw the boy moving around.

You can be free from guilt before God today and every day! There is no greater blessing than that of having your transgressions forgiven, your sins covered, and your iniquities not counted against you by the Lord. That blessing is available to you right now if you will confess your sins.

## Chapter 11

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### Psalm 41

The title of Psalm 41 reads: *To the Chief Musician, A Psalm of David*. This title has frequently occurred before, and serves to remind us of the value of the Psalm, seeing that it was committed to no mean songster; and also to inform us as to the author who has made his own experience the basis of a prophetic song, in which a far greater than David is set forth. How wide a range of experience David had! What power it gave him to edify future ages! And how full a type of our Lord did he become! What was bitterness to him has proved to be a fountain of unfailling sweetness to many generations of the faithful.

Jesus Christ betrayed by Judas Iscariot is evidently the great theme of this Psalm, but we think not exclusively. He is the antitype of David, and all his people are in their measure like him; hence words suitable to the Great Representative are most applicable to those who are in him. Such as receive a vile return for long kindness to others, may read this song with much comfort,

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for they will see that it is alas! too common for the best of men, to be rewarded for their holy charity with cruelty and scorn; and when they have been humbled by falling into sin, advantage has been taken of their low estate, their good deeds have been forgotten and the vilest spite has been vented upon them.

### **Division. The psalmist in**

- ❖ Psalms 41:1-3 , describes the mercies which are promised to such as consider the poor, and this he uses as a preface to his own personal plea for succour:
- ❖ Psalms 41:4-9 he states his own case
- ❖ Psalms 41:10 , , proceeds to prayer,
- ❖ Psalms 41:11-13 . and closes with thanksgiving

### **Exposition**

Verses 1-4 In these verses we have, I. God's promises of succor and comfort to those that consider the poor; and, 1. We may suppose that David makes mention of these with application either,

- ❖ To his friends, who were kind to him, and very considerate of his case, now that he was in affliction: Blessed is he that considers poor David. Here and there he met with one that sympathized with him, and was concerned for him, and kept up his good opinion of him and respect for him, notwithstanding his afflictions, while his enemies were so insolent and abusive to him; on these he pronounced this blessing, not doubting but that God would recompense to them all the kindness they had done him, particularly when they also came to be in affliction. The provocations which his enemies gave him did but endear his friends so much the more to him. Or,
- ❖ To himself. He had the testimony of his conscience for him that he had considered the poor, that when he was in honour and power at court he had taken cognizance of the wants and miseries of the poor and had provided for their relief, and therefore was sure God would, according to his promise, strengthen and comfort him in his sickness.

We must regard them more generally with application to ourselves. Here is a comment upon that promise, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Observe

- ❖ What the mercy is which is required of us. It is to consider the poor or afflicted, whether in mind, body, or estate. These we are to consider with prudence and tenderness; we must take notice of their affliction and enquire into their state, must sympathize with them and judge charitably concerning them. We must wisely consider the poor; that is, we must ourselves be instructed by the poverty and affliction of others; it must be Maschil to us, that is the word here used.
- ❖ What the mercy is that is promised to us if we thus show mercy. He that considers the poor (if he cannot relieve them, yet he considers them, and has a compassionate concern for them, and in relieving them acts considerably and with discretion) shall be considered by his God: he shall not only be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, but he shall be blessed upon the earth. This branch of godliness, as much as any, has the promise of the life that now is and is usually recompensed with temporal blessings. Liberality to the poor is the surest and safest way of thriving; such as practise it may be sure of seasonable and effectual relief from God, In all troubles: He will deliver them in the day of evil, so that when the times are at the worst it shall go well with them, and they shall not fall into the calamities in which others are involved; if any be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger, they shall. Those who thus distinguish themselves from those that have hard hearts God will distinguish from those that have hard usage.

Are they in danger? he will preserve and keep them alive; and those who have a thousand times forfeited their lives, as the best have, must acknowledge it as a great favour if they have their lives given them for a prey. He does not say, "They shall be preferred," but, "They shall be preserved and kept alive, when the arrows of death fly thickly round about them." Do their enemies threaten them? God will not deliver them into the will of their enemies; and the most potent enemy we have can have no power against us but what is given him from above. The good-will of a God that loves us is sufficient to secure us from the ill-will of all that hate us, men and devils; and that good-will we may promise ourselves an interest in if we have considered the poor and helped to relieve

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and rescue them. Particularly in sickness (v. 3): The Lord will strengthen him, both in body and mind, upon the bed of languishing, on which he had long lain sick, and he will make all his bed - a very condescending expression, alluding to the care of those that nurse and tend sick people, especially of mothers for their children when they are sick, which is to make their beds easy for them; and that bed must needs be well made which God himself has the making of. He will make all his bed from head to foot, so that no part shall be uneasy; he will turn his bed (so the word is), to shake it up and make it very easy; or he will turn it into a bed of health. Note, God has promised his people that he will strengthen them, and make them easy, under their bodily pains and sicknesses. He has not promised that they shall never be sick, nor that they shall not lie long languishing, nor that their sickness shall not be unto death; but he has promised to enable them to bear their affliction with patience, and cheerfully to wait the issue. The soul shall by his grace be made to dwell at ease when the body lies in pain. II. David's prayer, directed and encouraged by these promises (v. 4): I said, Heal my soul. It is good for us to keep some account of our prayers, that we may not unsay, in our practices, any thing that we said in our prayers.

Here is, His humble petition: Lord be merciful to me. He appeals to mercy, as one that knew he could not stand the test of strict justice. The best saints, even those that have been merciful to the poor, have not made God their debtor, but must throw themselves on his mercy. When we are under the rod we must thus recommend ourselves to the tender mercy of our God: Lord, heal my soul. Sin is the sickness of the soul; pardoning mercy heals it; renewing grace heals it; and this spiritual healing we should be more earnest for than for bodily health. 2. His penitent confession: "I have sinned against thee, and therefore my soul needs healing. I am a sinner, a miserable sinner; therefore, God be merciful to me," Lu. 18:13 . It does not appear that this has reference to any particular gross act of sin, but, in general, to his many sins of infirmity, which his sickness set in order before him, and the dread of the consequences of which made him pray, Heal my soul.



### Verses 5-13

David often complains of the insolent conduct of his enemies towards him when he was sick, which, as it was very barbarous in them, so it could not but be very grievous to him. They had not indeed arrived at that modern pitch of wickedness of poisoning his meat and drink, or giving him something to make him sick; but, when he was sick, they insulted over him (v. 5): My enemies speak evil of me, designing thereby to grieve his spirit, to ruin his reputation, and so to sink his interest. Let us enquire, I. What was the conduct of his enemies towards him. 1. They longed for his death: When shall he die, and his name perish with him? He had but an uncomfortable life, and yet they grudged him that. But it was a useful life; he was, upon all accounts, the greatest ornament and blessing of his country; and yet, it seems, there were some who were sick of him, as the Jews were of Paul, crying out, Away with such a fellow from the earth. We ought not to desire the death of any; but to desire the death of useful men, for their usefulness, has much in it of the venom of the old serpent. They envied him his name, and the honour he had won, and doubted not but, if he were dead, that would be laid in the dust with him; yet see how they were mistaken: when he had served his generation he did die (Acts. 13:36), but did his name perish? No; it lives and flourishes to this day in the sacred writings, and will to the end of time; for the memory of the just is, and shall be, blessed. 2. They picked up every thing they could to reproach him with (v. 6): "If he come to see me" (as it has always been reckoned a piece of neighborly kindness to visit the sick) "he speaks vanity; that is, he pretends friendship, and that his errand is to mourn with me and to comfort me; he tells me he is very sorry to see me so much indisposed, and wishes me my health; but it is all flattery and falsehood." We complain, and justly, of the want of sincerity in our days, and that there is scarcely any true friendship to be found among men; but it seems, by this, that the former days were no better than these. David's friends were all compliment, and had nothing of that affection for him in their hearts which they made profession of. Nor was that the worst of it; it was upon a mischievous design that they came to see him, that they might make invidious remarks upon every thing he said or did, and might represent it as they pleased to others, with their own comments upon it, so as to render him odious or ridiculous: His

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heart gathereth iniquity to itself, puts ill constructions upon every thing; and then, when he goes among his companions, he tells it to them, that they may tell it to others. Report, say they, and we will report it, Jer. 20:10 . If he complained much of his illness, they would reproach him for his pusillanimity; if he scarcely complained at all, they would reproach him for his stupidity. If he prayed, or gave them good counsel, they would banter it, and call it canting; if he kept silence from good, when the wicked were before him, they would say that he had forgotten his religion now that he was sick. There is no fence against those whose malice thus gathers iniquity. 3. They promised themselves that he would never recover from this sickness, nor ever wipe off the odium with which they had loaded him. They whispered together against him (v. 7), speaking that secretly in one another's ears which they could not for shame speak out, and which, if they did, they knew would be confuted.

Whisperers and backbiters are put together among the worst of sinners, Rom. 1:29, Rom. 1:30 . They whispered, that their plot against him might not be discovered and so defeated; there is seldom whispering (we say) but there is lying, or some mischief on foot. Those whisperers devised evil to David. Concluding he would die quickly, they contrived how to break all the measures he had concerted for the public good, to prevent the prosecution of them, and to undo all that he had hitherto been doing. This he calls devising hurt against him; and they doubted not but to gain their point: An evil disease (a thing of Belial), say they, cleaves fast to him. The reproach with which they had loaded his name, they hoped, would cleave so fast to it that it would perish with him, and then they should gain their point. They went by a modern maxim, *Fortiter calumniari, aliquid adhaerebit*—Fling an abundance of calumny, and some will be sure to stick.” The disease he is now under will certainly make an end of him; for it is the punishment of some great enormous crime, which he will not be brought to repent of, and proves him, however he has appeared, a son of Belial.” Or, “It is inflicted by Satan, who is called Belial,” the wicked one, 2 Co. 6:15 . ”It is”(according to a loose way of speaking some have) “a devilish disease, and therefore it will cleave fast to him; and now that he lies, now that his distemper prevails so far as to oblige him to keep his bed, he shall rise up no more; we shall get rid of him, and divide the spoil of his preferments.” We are not to think it

strange if, when good men are sick, there be those that fear it, which makes the world not worthy of them, Rev. 11:10.

There was one particularly, in whom he had reposed a great deal of confidence, that took part with his enemies and was as abusive to him as any of them (v. 9): My own familiar friend; probably he means Ahithophel, who had been his bosom-friend and prime-minister of state, in whom he trusted as one inviolably firm to him, whose advice he relied much upon in dealing with his enemies, and who did eat of his bread, that is, with whom he had been very intimate and whom he had taken to sit at the table with him, nay, whom he had maintained and given a livelihood to, and so obliged, both in gratitude and interest, to adhere to him. Those that had their maintenance from the king's palace did not think it meet for them to see the king's dishonour (Ezra. 4:14 ), much less to do him dishonour. Yet this base and treacherous confidant of David's forgot all the eaten bread, and lifted up his heel against him that had lifted up his head; not only deserted him, but insulted him, kicked at him, endeavoured to supplant him. Those are wicked indeed whom no courtesy done them, nor confidence reposed in them, will oblige; and let us not think it strange if we receive abuses from such: David did, and the Son of David; for of Judas the traitor David here, in the Spirit, spoke; our Saviour himself so expounds this, and therefore gave Judas the sop, that the scripture might be fulfilled, He that eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me, Jn. 13:18, Jn. 13:16. Nay, have not we ourselves behaved thus perfidiously and disingenuously towards God? We eat of his bread daily, and yet lift up the heel against him, as Jeshurun, that waxed fat and kicked, Deu. 32:15 .II. How did David bear this insolent ill-natured conduct of his enemies towards him?1. He prayed to God that they might be disappointed. He said nothing to them, but turned himself to God: O Lord! be thou merciful to me, for they are unmerciful, v. 10. He had prayed in reference to the insults of his enemies, Lord, be merciful to me, for this is a prayer which will suit every case. God's mercy has in it a redress for every grievance, "They endeavour to run me down, but, Lord, do thou raise me up from this bed of languishing, from which they think I shall never arise. Raise me up that I may requite them, that I may render them good for evil" (so some), for that was David's practice, Ps. 7:4 Ps. 35:13.

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A good man will even wish for an opportunity of making it to appear that he bears no malice to those that have been injurious to him, but, on the contrary, that he is ready to do them any good office. Or, "That, as a king, I may put them under the marks of my just displeasure, banish them the court, and forbid them my table for the future," which would be a necessary piece of justice, for warning to others. Perhaps in this prayer is couched a prophecy of the exaltation of Christ, whom God raised up, that he might be a just avenger of all the wrongs done to him and to his people, particularly by the Jews, whose utter destruction followed not long after.<sup>2</sup> He assured himself that they would be disappointed (v. 11): "By this I know that thou favourest me and my interest, because my enemy doth not triumph over me." They hoped for his death, but he found himself, through mercy, recovering, and this would add to the comfort of his recovery, (1) That it would be a disappointment to his adversaries; they would be crest-fallen and wretchedly ashamed, and there would be no occasion to upbraid them with their disappointment; they would fret at it themselves. Note. Though we may not take a pleasure in the fall of our enemies, we may take a pleasure in the frustrating of their designs against us. (2) That it would be a token of God's favour to him, and a certain evidence that he did favour him, and would continue to do so. Note. When we can discern the favour of God to us in any mercy, personal or public, that doubles it and sweetens it.<sup>3</sup> He depended upon God, who had thus delivered him from many an evil work, to preserve him to his heavenly kingdom, as blessed Paul, 2 Tim. 4:18. "As for me, forasmuch as thou favourest me, as a fruit of that favour, and to qualify me for the continuance of it, thou upholdest me in my integrity, and, in order to that, settest me before thy face, hast thy eye always upon me for good;" or, "Because thou dost, by thy grace, uphold me in my integrity, I know that thou wilt, in thy glory, set me for ever before thy face." Note,

- ❖ When at any time we suffer in our reputation our chief concern should be about our integrity, and then we may cheerfully leave it to God to secure our reputation. David knows that, if he can but persevere in his integrity, he needs not fear his enemies' triumphs over him.
- ❖ The best man in the world holds his integrity no longer than God upholds him in it; for by his grace we are what we are; if we be left to ourselves, we shall not only fall, but fall away.

- ❖ It is a great comfort to us that, however weak we are, God is able to uphold us in our integrity, and will do it if we commit the keeping of it to him.
- ❖ If the grace of God did not take a constant care of us, we should not be upheld in our integrity; his eye is always upon us, else we should soon start aside from him.
- ❖ Those whom God now upholds in their integrity he will set before his face for ever, and make happy in the vision and fruition of himself. He that endures to the end shall be saved.

The psalm concludes with a solemn doxology, or adoration of God as the Lord God of Israel, v. 13. It is not certain whether this verse pertains to this particular psalm (if so, it teaches us this, That a believing hope of our preservation through grace to glory is enough to fill our hearts with joy and our mouths with everlasting praise, even in our greatest straits) or whether it was added as the conclusion of the first book of Psalms, which is reckoned to end here (the like being subjoined to Ps. 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48), and then it teaches us to make God the Omega who is the Alpha, to make him the end who is the beginning of every good work. We are taught,

- To give glory to God as the Lord God of Israel, a God in covenant with his people, who has done great and kind things for them and has more and better in reserve.
- To give him glory as an eternal God, that has both his being and his blessedness from everlasting and to everlasting.
- To do this with great affection and fervour of spirit, intimated in the double seal set to it-Amen, and Amen. Be it so now, be it so to all eternity. We say Amen to it, and let all others say Amen too.

## Chapter 12

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### Psalm 42: Seeking God

With these psalms we have the beginning of Book II of the Psalter. “This book includes Psalms 42-72, a total of 31, only eighteen of which are attributed to David. Book I which we have just concluded ascribes all 41 of them to David.” We accept the proposition that Psalms 42 and Psalms 43 are actually one Psalm for the following reasons:

- ❖ Psalms 42 has no title whatever in the Psalter;
- ❖ the sentiment is exactly the same throughout both;
- ❖ the whole composition consists of three stanzas, each ending in a kind of refrain in almost identical language in Psalms 42:5; 42:11; and 43:5;
- ❖ Psalms 42:9 and Psalms 43:2 are virtually identical; and
- ❖ As Ash observed: “The general consensus is that they are actually a single psalm; the meter, thought, language and problems are the same. We do not know for sure why they were divided.”

In the study of these psalms we are somewhat embarrassed to find ourselves in disagreement with the interpretation advocated by the vast majority of the scholars whose works are available to us. Nevertheless, integrity demands that we interpret them as they appear to us, confessing at the same time that, of course, we might be wrong. Many are sure that this is a psalm written by David, as usually explained, during his exile to some land beyond the Jordan river, during which time the tabernacle services were being conducted. Psalms 42:6 is understood to teach that David's place of exile was somewhere east of the Jordan headwaters in the vicinity of Mount Hermon. All of this is alleged to point to a time during the rebellion of Absalom when David was an 'exile.'

The big objection that we have to this is that, according to the Old Testament, the rebellion of Absalom was a brief affair; and, that although David did indeed leave Jerusalem for a short while, there is nothing in the text to suggest any period when the king found it "impossible" to return to Jerusalem. There is no superscription assignment of the psalm to David. Upon what grounds, then, are the scholars so sure that David wrote it? Maybe they all have such excellent noses that, like Spurgeon, they can smell it! Spurgeon wrote that, "It is so Davidic that it smells of the Son of Jesse." We must confess that, although it could be due to the defective nature of our olfactory equipment, there is no detectable odor of David in either of these psalms.

Another reason for placing these psalms in the times of David was cited by Dummelow, who pointed out that, "The Psalms belong to a time when the Temple worship was in full activity." He apparently overlooked the fact that during the long reign of the Babylonian puppet king Zedekiah over Judaea (during the Babylonian Captivity) the Temple worship continued without interruption. Therefore, the psalms could have been written, as we believe, during that captivity.

Also, Psalms 42:6 is often understood to give the 'residence' of the psalmist in Trans-Jordan near Mount Hermon. And we admit that it is true that, "Most people who read Psalms 42:6 would understand it to mean that he was living in Northern Palestine near the source of the Jordan." We do not believe that the verse says that;

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and, as Baigent admitted, “The Psalmist could have been one of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia.”

Then, what are the positive reasons why we understand the psalms to be identified with the times of the captivity of Israel either in Assyria or in Babylon?

- ❖ The superscription has, “Praising God in Trouble and Exile.” The only “exile” of which we have any knowledge is that of Israel,
  - \* first in the person of the Northern Israel who were made captives by Assyria, and
  - \* again, from the beginning of the reign of the puppet king Zedekiah until the “seventy years” of the Babylonian captivity were fulfilled for Judah. In our view, during any of this period from 722 B.C. (The fall of Samaria) till Cyrus authorized the end of the Captivity in Babylon, could have been the time when some devoted psalmist composed these remarkable psalms.
- ❖ The psalmist states in Psalms 43:1 that “an ungodly nation” is against him. It appears to us that neither David, nor any other Jew would thus have designated the Israel of God in a prayer. Yes, Jeremiah, and others, sternly denounced the wickedness of whole generations of Jews, but not “the nation” as ungodly. This means that whoever wrote the psalms was in the midst of an “ungodly nation” when he did so; and Babylon or Assyria will fit that designation better than any other people.
- ❖ Psalms 42:6, as we read it, says that, “I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and the Hermons from the hill Mizar.”

**“From the land of Jordan”** (Psalms 42:6): This may be understood as saying that he remembered God from the times when he lived in the land of Jordan (The Holy Land), and not that he was at the time that he wrote living there. The last clause here denies that he was then living in Palestine.

**“The Hermons from the hill of Mizar”** (Psalms 42:6): The American Standard Version margin gives “the little mountain” as an alternative reading for “the hill of Mizar”; and there is no reason whatever why it might not be a reference to Mount Zion (Jerusalem).



Yes, this Mount Mizar is listed by all the scholars as “unknown,” “unidentifiable,” etc.; the expression “from the hill of Mizar” simply means that Mount Hermon could be seen from the top of Mizar; and that meaning certainly does not rule out Jerusalem as the place indicated. All of the suppositions of many writers that it might have been in the vicinity of Hermon, or one of the lesser peaks in that region, would make the passage meaningless. It would not have been worth any mention whatever that a man could remember seeing Hermon from one of the foothills; but if he remembered seeing it from Jerusalem, that would have been worthy of inclusion in the psalm.

(4) One other reason for our assignment of these psalms to the period of Israel’s captivity is the reasonableness of Clarke’s comment. “This is the first of the Psalms assigned unto the sons of Korah; and it is probable that they were composed by descendants of Korah during the Babylonian Captivity, or by some eminent person among those descendants, and that they were used by the Israelites during their long captivity, as a means of their consolation. Indeed most of these Psalms are of the consoling kind; and the sentiments expressed appear to belong to that period of Jewish history, and to no other.”

### **Psalms 42:1-4**

**“As the hart pants after the water brooks”** (Psalms 42:1). This metaphor compares the heart-hunger of the psalmist to the physical pangs of a deer suffering from acute thirst, running from place to place seeking water in the dry season.

**“My soul thirsts for God, the living God”** (Psalms 42:2). One of the features of the Second Book of Psalms is the use of the word [~’Elohiym] for God, whereas in Book One, it was Jehovah that was used most frequently. Delitzsch tells us that “In Book I, Jehovah is used 272 times, and [~’Elohiym] is used only 16 times; whereas, in Book II, [~’Elohiym] is used 164 times, and Jehovah is used only 30 times.”

There is no thirst like that of the soul for the knowledge of God. Only the knowledge and assurance of God and the maintenance of our human relationship with Him can save an intelligent soul from

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insanity. God is our Life; he is the Light of the world; he is the fountain of living waters; He is our All in All; as Augustine said it, "Our souls, O God, were made for Thee; and never shall they rest until they rest in Thee." These words are engraved upon the tomb of William Rockefeller in Tarrytown Cemetery, New York.

**"tears ... my food day and night ... they say, Where is thy God?"** (Psalms 42:3). These words seem much more appropriate as the tearful expression of Babylonian captives than the walls of the king of Israel. One can hardly imagine the friends who accompanied David when he fled before Absalom as taunting him with such words as, "Where is thy God?" Furthermore, on that alleged 'exile,' David was accompanied by and surrounded by friends; and his enemies had no access whatever to him during that time. This was not the case with the captives who continually received the taunts of their Assyrian or Babylonian captors.

**"These things I remember ... I led them to the house of God"** (Psalms 42:4). The words here seem to imply the passage of a considerable amount of time; and, as we pointed out, there was no such time featured in the so-called 'exile' of David.

Moreover, the leading of the multitude to the Temple worship was not usually done by the king, but by the priests or Levites. "We do not therefore in the least doubt that Psalms 43 is the poem of a Korahite Levite who found himself in exile beyond the Jordan." (Delitzsch believed the place of exile was merely in Trans-Jordan and that the psalmist was at the time an attendant on King David in flight before Absalom; but we disagree with that).

These first four verses register a complaint of tears, separation from God, inability to worship in the Temple, and the taunting remarks of oppressors, and as Matthew Henry said, "These are aggravated by the remembrance of former enjoyments."

### Verse 5

**"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, For the help of his countenance."** This verse, as Henry noted,

finds, “Faith silencing the complaint with the assurance of good times at last.”

**“Hope thou in God”** (Psalms 42:5b), etc. These last two lines are repeated almost verbatim in Psalms 42:11 and in Psalms 43:5, concluding each of the three stanzas which comprise these two psalms. McCaw has understood the meaning of these three ‘refrains’ as, (1) “Being Faith’s rebuke to dejection in Psalms 42:5, (2) Faith’s exhortation in bewilderment in Psalms 42:11, and (3) Faith’s triumphant declaration of certainty in Psalms 43:5.”

### Verse 6

**“O My God, my soul is cast down within me:** Therefore do I remember thee from the land of the Jordan, And the Hermons from the hill Mizar. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of thy waterfalls: All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet Jehovah will command his lovingkindness in the daytime; And in the night his song shall be with me Even a prayer unto the God of my life.”

**“All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me”** (Psalms 42:7). The psalmist here remembers the experience of Jonah, making the same determination that God will yet bless him, just as he blessed Jonah. The passage recalled here is: “All thy waves and thy billows passed over me ... the waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the deep was round about me. Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple” (Jonah 2:3-5). It is easy to see that the psalmist here was appealing to God, that just as he had blessed Jonah, so might the same blessings come to the psalmist.

**“Jehovah will command his lovingkindness in the daytime; and in the night his song shall be with me”** (Psalms 42:8). The future tenses here, “will command,” and “shall be with me” are changed to the present tense in the RSV which reads, “By day the Lord commands his stedfast love; and at night his song is with me.” “Owing to the flexibility of the meaning of Hebrew tenses, it may be legitimately translated either way.” If we translate the passage as present (RSV) it means that the psalmist is at the present time receiving comfort and consolation from his confessed sense of God’s overruling; and, if we translate it future as in ASV, then the psalmist is “stating

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his assurance that God will enable him to triumph in the midst of storms.”

### Verse 9

“I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me?  
Why go I mourning before the oppression of the enemy?  
As with a sword in my bones, mine adversaries reproach me,  
While they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?”

Again we find it difficult indeed to suppose that such words as these could belong to anyone other than some sufferer in the kind of sorrow and oppression that belonged to captive Israelites. These verses outline the psalmist’s intention to go on with his praying, telling God of his oppression, and the arrogant taunts of his captors, and asking God why he is still suffering as if God has forgotten him.

### Verse 11

**“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; For I shall yet praise him. Who is the help of my countenance, and my God.”**

We have already commented upon the meaning of this verse in the three locations where it appears in these psalms, giving the particular meaning in each case. See under Psalms 42:5, above. The evidence of the influence of the words of Jonah in this passage is overwhelming.

**“I shall yet praise him (God)”** (Psalms 42:10). Jonah prayed, “I am cast out from before thine eyes, yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.” (Jonah 2:4). And again, he prayed, “The earth with its bars closed upon me forever, yet hast thou brought up my life from the pit ... and my prayer came in unto thee” (2:6-7). Note the recurrence of the word “yet” and its position here in Psalms 42:10.

The way to forget our miseries, is to remember the God of our mercies. David saw troubles coming from God’s wrath, and that discouraged him. But if one trouble follow hard after another, if all seem to combine for our ruin, let us remember they are all appointed and overruled by the Lord. David regards the Divine favour as the

fountain of all the good he looked for. In the Saviour's name let us hope and pray. One word from him will calm every storm, and turn midnight darkness into

the light of noon, the bitterest complaints into joyful praises. Our believing expectation of mercy must quicken our prayers for it. At length, his faith came off conqueror, by encouraging him to trust in the name of the Lord, and to stay himself upon his God. He adds, And my God; this thought enabled him to triumph over all his griefs and fears. Let us never think that the God of our life, and the Rock of our salvation, has forgotten us, if we have made his mercy, truth, and power, our refuge.

Thus the psalmist strove against his despondency: at last his faith and hope obtained the victory. Let us learn to check all unbelieving doubts and fears. Apply the promise first to ourselves, and then plead it to God.

## Chapter 13

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# Psalm 51: Create in Me a New Heart

Psalm 51 may be the greatest chapter in the Bible about repentance. If you want to know what true repentance is, check out this commentary and Bible study on Psalm 51.

### **Context of the Psalm**

From the title that says, “A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba,” it is obvious that the Psalm is dealing with the theme of repentance. Supplied by the editors of the Book of Psalms, these headings often point the way to interpreting and applying the psalm. In this case, the heading is saying, “Imagine this as the sort of prayer that David prayed after being convicted of his sins by the prophet Nathan” (2 Samuel 11 and 12). We begin by recalling that story.

This is a famous psalm. David wrote it after he had done something very wrong. He saw a woman bathing

and he wanted to have sex with her. But she was the wife of Uriah. Her name was Bathsheba. Uriah was away in the army, so David sent his servants to bring Bathsheba to his palace. The palace was the big house where he lived as king. David and Bathsheba had sex together. Later Bathsheba told David that she was going to have his baby. So David brought Uriah home. He tried to make Uriah have sex with Bathsheba so that Uriah would think that the baby was his. When Uriah would not do it, he sent Uriah to a dangerous place in the war with the Philistines. The Philistines killed Uriah. Then David married Bathsheba. When the baby was born it only lived for a week.

Then Nathan the prophet came and told David that he had done wrong. At first, David did not say that he was sorry. This made him feel very bad. So he wrote Psalm 32. Later he wrote this psalm as well. Psalms 32 and 51 are 2 of the 7 Penitential Psalms that the Church often sings during Lent. Lent is the 40 days before Easter. “Penitential” means being sorry for your sins, asking God to forgive them, and promising not to do them again. The other 5 Penitential Psalms are 6, 38, 102, 130 and 143.

We put a space in the psalm between verses 17 and 18. This is because many Christians think that verses 18 and 19 came later. The Jews wrote them when they came back from exile in Babylon. This exile was when the King of Babylon took them away from their own country and made them live in Babylon. The prophets told the Jews this. God let the King of Babylon do it because the Jews had not obeyed God. The Jews wanted a psalm that told God that they had sinned. They chose Psalm 51. They put two verses on the end that said:

- ❖ They wanted the walls of Jerusalem built again (the King of Babylon had destroyed them)
- ❖ They wanted the Temple in Jerusalem built again so that they could sacrifice animals on its altar (did they not see that David thought that this was not important?)

David is devastated. And this psalm, says our heading, is the sort of prayer that fits such a situation. When there’s big time trouble, you call in Psalm 51.

## Commentary

In verses 1- 5, the psalm begins with a cry for forgiveness, emphasizing the urgency of the situation with a series of imperative verbs: have mercy, blot out, wash, and cleanse. The picture behind the Hebrew word translated “transgressions” in verses 1, 3, and 13, is one of rebellion, as when children rebel against parents (see also Isaiah 1:2). The literal sense of the Hebrew translated “iniquity” (verses 2, 9) is “to be bent out of shape.” For example, in Psalm 38:6, the *Jewish Publication Society Bible* gives the translation “I am all bent.” The word translated “sin” (Hebrew *hata’* in verses 2, 3, 4, 9) or “sinner” (5 and 13) in non-theological contexts means “to miss the target.” Judges 20:16 tells of 700 left-handed sling-shotters who could “sling a stone at a hair and not miss (*hata’*).”

Balancing these words for sin are three Hebrew picture-words for forgiveness. The Hebrew translated “blot out” in verse 1 is also used to “wipe” a dirty dish (2 Kings 21:13). To “wash” in verses 2 and 7 could better be translated “scrub,” as one scrubs dirty clothes (Exodus 19:10, 14). “Cleanse” in verse 2 and “be clean” in verse 7 is the same word used for washing clothes in a river (Leviticus 13:6, 34, 58).

**Psalm 51:1-2:** This psalm was written shortly after Nathan the Prophet told David, “You are the man” who committed adultery and murdered Bathsheba’s husband. Obviously, he had repented and now wanted God cleanse him from all his sins and iniquities and have mercy on him. Anyone who wants to know more about what real repentance looks like, read this entire psalm.

**Psalm 51:3-4 :** Here is where David admits that his sin is not going away and “is ever before” him, meaning that un-confessed sin is sin that is not forgiven. David does eventually confess in his repentant state of mind. He admits that his sins are primarily (but not only) against God and by confessing, he wants to be justified and be seen as blameless in God’s sight.

**Psalm 51:5-6 :** David states a theological truth here; that we are all born into sin or we are born sinners. Even in conception because the fall in the Garden of Eden spread to all men (Gen 2:17). This is what Paul taught to the church at Rome, writing “*just as sin came*



*into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*" (Rom 5:12) and just as in Adam all are destined to die, in Christ, all can be made alive (1 Cor 15:22).

Verses 6 - 12 offer another request for forgiveness. The verb "create" (verse 10) in the Hebrew Bible always has God as its subject, and the result of the activity is always something entirely new (see Genesis 1, for example). The psalmist is praying for a brand new beginning, a fresh start, a new, clean spirit. Psalm 51:7-10: Hyssop was a plant that had cleansing properties and David desired to be purged, washed, and completely cleansed so that we would "be whiter than snow." He asked God to blot out every sin and iniquity (inequality between man and God) and create in him a clean heart and put a right spirit back in him, indicating that regeneration and even repentance, is a work of God (2 Tim 2:25).

**Psalm 51:11-13:** David seriously worried that God might take His Holy Spirit from Him and desperately desired to have the joy of his salvation restored. This didn't mean that David had lost his salvation, only the joy of it was gone. If God would cleanse him, then David would use the rest of his life to "teach transgressors" His ways in the hopes that "sinners will return to" Him in repentance. He never lost his salvation; only the joy of it and thus, he prayed to God to restore the joy of his salvation that he once had. David did have his joy restored and later, through the psalms, David did teach transgressors about God's ways.

In verses 13 - 17, the one praying looks forward to being happy and right with God once again (verses 8, 11-12). Once he/she experiences the joy of being forgiven, he/she vows to witness and teach others about it and sing and praise God (verses 13-15). In verses 16 and 17 the psalmist says, "The sort of sacrifice the Lord desires is not something I bring as an offering. Rather, the Lord wants me, broken spirit, broken heart and all" (see also Micah 6:6-8).

**Psalm 51:14-15:** David asked God to deliver him "from blood-guiltiness" because he had committed murder and conspiracy to murder by having Uriah murdered, who was Bathsheba's husband so his blood-guiltiness was no exaggeration. By this forgiveness, not only would

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David sing praises about God's righteousness, he would write a large number of the psalms which are really poetry put to music.

**Psalm 51:16-17:** Here is where we get down to real repentance. God doesn't desire our offerings or sacrifices as much as He does our obedience. The best sacrifices we can offer God are "a broken spirit [and] a broken and contrite heart." A contrite heart is a crushed heart and a broken spirit is brokenness over our sins. God accepts that more than a hundred sacrifices.

**Psalm 51:18-19:** David is not saying that he did away with all of the animal sacrifices because in the end of this psalm, he talks about these offerings being given to God but David is saying that God will delight in the right sacrifices, after we have asked for forgiveness and been forgiven by God and had our relationship with Him restored to what it was before we had sinned.

There are none without sin (1st John 1:8, 10) since we've all fallen short of God's glory (Rom 3:23) and none of us really do any good at all (Rom 3:10-12) so the need for repentance is a critical step in our salvation. When we repent, we are forsaking and turning away from our sins and then putting our trust in Christ. Jesus said that the kingdom of God requires repentance and belief (Mark 1:15).

This is one of those psalms that can reach into the depths of a difficult situation. The second interpretive key from church tradition is the fact that this prayer, "Create in me a clean heart" from Psalm 51, has long been a part of the church's weekly worship. Thus Psalm 51 is a prayer for individuals in distress, but it is also a prayer for the community on Ash Wednesday and for the worship of God's People each week.

## Chapter 14

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### Psalm 53: Confronting Atheism

The sentiments of atheists and deists, who deny Divine Providence; their character: they are corrupt, foolish, abominable, and cruel, Psalm 53:1-4; God fills them with terror, Psalm 53:5; reproaches these for their oppression of the poor, Psalm 53:5. The psalmist prays for the restoration of Israel, Psalm 53:6. The title, To the chief Musician upon Mahalath, an instructive Psalm of David. The word *îçîû machalath*, some translate the president; others, the master or leader of the dance; others, hollow instruments; others, the chorus. A flute pipe, or wind instrument with holes, appears to be what is intended. “To the chief player on the flute;” or, “To the master of the band of pipers.”

God speaks once, yea, twice, and it were well if man would even then perceive it; God, in this psalm, speaks twice, for this is the same almost verbatim with the fourteenth psalm. The scope of it is to convince us of our sins, to set us a blushing and trembling because

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of them; and this is what we are with so much difficulty brought to that there is need of line upon line to this purport. The word, as a convincing word, is compared to a hammer, the strokes whereof must be frequently repeated. God, by the psalmist here,

1. Shows us how bad we are (v. 1).
2. Proves it upon us by his own certain knowledge (v. 2, v. 3).
3. He speaks terror to persecutors, the worst of sinners (v. 4, v. 5).
4. He speaks encouragement to God's persecuted people (v. 6). Some little variation there is between Ps. 14, and this, but none considerable, only between v. 5, v. 6, there, and v. 5 here; some expressions there used are here left out, concerning the shame which the wicked put upon God's people, and instead of that, is here foretold the shame which God would put upon the wicked, which alteration, with some others, he made by divine direction when he delivered it the second time to the chief musician.

In singing it we ought to lament the corruption of the human nature, and the wretched degeneracy of the world we live in, yet rejoicing in hope of the great salvation. To the chief musician upon Mahalath, Maschil. A psalm of David.

### **Commentary**

#### **Verses 1-6**

This psalm was opened before, and therefore we shall here only observe, in short, some things concerning sin, in order to the increasing of our sorrow for it and hatred of it. The following eight major themes are obvious in the psalm.

1. The fact of sin: Is that proved? Can the charge be made out? Yes, God is a witness to it, an unexceptionable witness: from the place of his holiness he looks on the children of men, and sees how little good there is among them, v. 2. All the sinfulness of their hearts and lives in naked and open before him.
2. The fault of sin: Is there any harm in it? Yes, it is iniquity (v. 1, v. 4); it is an unrighteous thing; it is that which there is no good in (v. 1, v. 3); it is an evil thing; it is the worst of evils; it is that which makes this world such an evil world as it is; it is going back from God, v. 3.

3. Fountain of sin: How comes it that men are so bad? Surely it is because there is no fear of God before their eyes: they say in their hearts, "There is no God at all to call us to an account, none that we need to stand in awe of." Men's bad practices flow from their bad principles; if they profess to know God, yet in works, because in thoughts, they deny him.
4. The folly of sin: He is a fool (in the account of God, whose judgment we are sure is right) that harbours such corrupt thoughts. Atheists, whether in opinion or practice, are the greatest fools in the world. Those that do not seek God do not understand; they are like brute-beasts that have no understanding; for man is distinguished from the brutes, not so much by the powers of reason as by a capacity for religion. The workers of iniquity, whatever they pretend to, have no knowledge; those may truly be said to know nothing that do not know God, v. 4.
5. The filthiness of sin. Sinners are corrupt (v. 1); their nature is vitiated and spoiled, and the more noble the nature is the more vile it is when it is depraved, as that of the angels. *Corruptio optimi est pessima* - The best things, when corrupted, become the worst. Their iniquity is abominable; it is odious to the holy God, and it renders them so; whereas otherwise he hates nothing that he has made. It makes men filthy, altogether filthy. Willful sinners are offensive in the nostrils of the God of heaven and of the holy angels. What decency so ever proud sinners pretend to, it is certain that wickedness is the greatest defilement in the world.
6. The fruit of sin. See to what a degree of barbarity it brings men at last; when men's hearts are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin see their cruelty to their brethren, that are bone of their bone - because they will not run with them to the same excess of riot, they eat them up as they eat bread; as if they had not only become beasts, but beasts of prey. And see their contempt of God at the same time. They have not called upon him, but scorn to be beholden to him.
7. The fear and shame that attend sin (v. 5): There were those in great fear who had made God their enemy; their own guilty consciences frightened them, and filled them with horror, though otherwise there was no apparent cause of fear. The wicked flees

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when none pursues. See the ground of this fear; it is because God has formerly scattered the bones of those that encamped against his people, not only broken their power and dispersed their forces, but slain them, and reduced their bodies to dry bones, like those scattered at the grave's mouth, Ps. 141:7. Such will be the fate of those that lay siege to the camp of the saints and the beloved city, Rev. 20:9. The apprehensions of this cannot but put those into frights that eat up God's people. This enables the virgin, the daughter of Zion, to put them to shame, and expose them, because God has despised them, to laugh at them, because he that sits in heaven laughs at them. We need not look upon those enemies with fear whom God looks upon with contempt. If he despises them, we may.

8. The faith of the saints, and their hope and power touching the cure of this great evil, v. 6. There will come a Saviour, a great salvation, a salvation from sin. Oh that it might be hastened! for it will bring in glorious and joyful times. There were those in the Old-Testament times that looked and hoped, that prayed and waited, for this redemption. (1) God will, in due time, save his church from the sinful malice of its enemies, which will bring joy to Jacob and Israel, that have long been in a mournful melancholy state. Such salvations were often wrought, and all typical of the everlasting triumphs of the glorious church. (2) He will save all believers from their own iniquities, that they may not be led captive by them, which will be everlasting matter of joy to them. From this work the Redeemer had his name-Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins, Mt. 1:21.

### Psalm 65: Praise to the Lord Who Blesses

One of those God-arranged features of our planet, without which life, as we know it, would be impossible is the expansion of water when it freezes, that quality being unique among all liquids. Others are the exact distance of the moon from our planet, the exact angle of the earth's tilted inclination upon its axis, etc. All such marvelous providential arrangements of the earth are dramatically stated in this psalm, "Thou hast so prepared the earth" (Ps 65:9).

The assignment of the psalm to David in the superscription is denied by many scholars who admit at the same time that they have no idea who wrote it; and we continue to remain unimpressed with that kind of 'information.' The grounds upon which the Davidic authorship is denied include:

- ❖ The mention of the temple and its courts (Psalms 65:4). However, we have repeatedly noted that this terminology is scripturally applied to the "tabernacle"

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as well as to the temple. Besides that, as Leupold observed, “Spiritual fellowship is intended here rather than physical presence in some public sanctuary.”

- ❖ Another ground of denying David as the author is in the allegation that “the style” here is not that of David, to which the reply should be made that there are no “experts” on the alleged “style” of David’s writings, whose testimony is any more dependable than the affirmations of the superscription.
- ❖ A third basis of denying Davidic authorship was stated by Delitzsch. “It is uncritical to assign to David all the Psalms ascribed to him in the superscriptions.” This statement is nothing more than an admission that it is very popular among critics to deny Davidic authorship of psalms ascribed to him, whenever it is possible to do so. This also, in our opinion, constitutes no valid grounds whatever for such denials.

In this light, “We are content to let the heading stand as it is.” No, of course, we cannot prove it, but what difference does that make? “On the basis of material in the Psalm itself, David’s authorship can be neither proved nor disproved.” There are three natural divisions of the psalm.

- (1) God is praised for his moral qualities (65:1-5).
- (2) God is praised for his preparation of the earth as a dwelling place for mankind (65:6-9).
- (3) God is praised for an abundant harvest (65:10-13).

### **Commentary**

All the praise the Lord receives from this earth is from Zion, being the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, and acceptable through him. Praise is silent unto thee, as wanting words to express the great goodness of God. He reveals himself upon a mercy-seat, ready to hear and answer the prayers of all who come unto him by faith in Jesus Christ. Our sins prevail against us; we cannot pretend to balance them with any righteousness of our own: yet, as for our transgressions, of thine own free mercy, and for the sake of a righteousness of thine own providing, we shall not come into condemnation for them. Observe what it is to come into communion with God in order to



blessedness. It is to converse with him as one we love and value; it is to apply ourselves closely to religion as to the business of our dwelling-place. Observe how we come into communion with God; only by God's free choice. There is abundance of goodness in God's house, and what is satisfying to the soul; there is enough for all, enough for each: it is always ready; and all without money and without price. By faith and prayer we may keep up communion with God, and bring in comfort from him, wherever we are. But it is only through that blessed One, who approaches the Father as our Advocate and Surety, that sinners may expect or can find this happiness.

That Almighty strength which sets fast the mountains, upholds the believer. That word which stills the stormy ocean, and speaks it into calm, can silence our enemies. How contrary so ever light and darkness are to each other, it is hard to say which is most welcome. Does the watchman wait for the morning? so does the labourer earnestly desire the shades of evening. Some understand it of the morning and evening sacrifices. We are to look upon daily worship, both alone and with our families, to be the most needful of our daily occupations, the most delightful of our daily comforts. How much the fruitfulness of this lower part of the creation depends upon the influence of the upper, is easy to observe; every good and perfect gift is from above. He who enriches the earth, which is filled with man's sins, by his abundant and varied bounty, can neither want power nor will to feed the souls of his people. Temporal mercies to us unworthy creatures, shadow forth more important blessings. The rising of the Sun of righteousness, and the pouring forth of the influences of the Holy Spirit, that river of God, full of the waters of life and salvation, render the hard, barren, worthless hearts of sinners fruitful in every good work, and change the face of nations more than the sun and rain change the face of nature. Wherever the Lord passes, by his preached gospel, attended by his Holy Spirit, his paths drop fatness, and numbers are taught to rejoice in and praise him. They will descend upon the pastures of the wilderness, all the earth shall hear and embrace the gospel, and bring forth abundantly the fruits of righteousness which are, through Jesus Christ, to the glory of the Father. Manifold and marvelous, O Lord, are thy works, whether of nature or of grace; surely in loving-kindness hast thou made them all.

## Chapter 16

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### Psalm 84

One of Satan's most insidious lies is that the Christian life is void of pleasure, whereas pursuing sin brings real satisfaction. The Bible itself repeatedly proclaims the soul-satisfying joy of knowing God. As we saw, David exults (Ps. 16:11), "In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever." The list could go on for pages, but here are a few more: Psalm 34:8: "O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!"

The pleasures that God gives to satisfy our souls should fuel our desire to be in His presence.

We can't be sure about the author of Psalm 84 or the historical circumstances in which he wrote it. Some respected commentators (Calvin & Spurgeon) think that David wrote it. I do not agree. The picture of the swallows building their nests in God's house would point toward Solomon's temple rather than the tabernacle. Swallows build their nests under the eaves

of permanent buildings, but not on tents. So it was written after David's time.

J. J. S. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* [Zondervan], 2:115) suggests that the parallels between those psalms and this one point to the same author. For example, in 84:2, the psalmist says, "My soul longed for and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy [or, cry out] to the living God." In 42:1, 2 we read a similar cry, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" Psalms 84:2 and 42:2 are the only times in the Psalms that God is referred to as "the living God." In 84:4, the psalmist says of those who dwell in God's house, "they are ever praising You." In 42:5 he cries, "for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence." In 84:7, he mentions concerning these pilgrims, "Every one of them appears before God in Zion." In 42:2 he asks, "when shall I come and appear before God?" In 84:1, he mentions God's dwelling places. In 43:3, he asks God to send out His light and truth so that they will lead him "to Your dwelling places."

There are a few differences between Psalms 42-43 and Psalm 84. In the earlier psalms, the psalmist was being taunted by his enemies, whereas in Psalm 84 there is no mention of this. In the earlier psalms, the author was battling depression, whereas here his mood seems to have changed to joy. But in both the earlier psalms and in Psalm 84, the author strongly wants to be at God's temple, and more, to be in the presence of the living God Himself.

### **Blessings of Knowing God**

Let's look at the three blessings, which show us the pleasures that God uses to fuel our desire to be in His presence:

1. The pleasure of being in God's house should fuel our desire to be in His presence (84:1-4).

The plural, "dwelling places," may refer to the various parts of the temple where God manifested Himself, or it may just be a poetic form (the plural is also in Ps. 43:3 & 46:4). "How lovely" is an expression of love poetry (Kidner, p. 303), expressing the attractiveness of God's house. "O Lord of hosts" (see also 84:3, 8, 12) designates

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God as the Sovereign over all the spiritual forces in the universe, who can easily defend His people.

Verse 2 indicates that the psalmist longs to be at the temple, but is not able to be there. In the context, the verb translated “sing for joy” might better be rendered, “cry out” (Kidner, *ibid.*). The psalmist’s total being (soul, heart, and flesh) are crying out to the living God that he might join the worshipers at the temple.

In verse 3, he recalls being in the temple and seeing the swallows flitting around the courtyard. They made their nests high on the temple buildings. The psalmist now envies these little birds, because they are at the temple, but he is not. Although they were insignificant creatures who could not rationally worship God, they had found the right place for their nests, there in the temple. Spurgeon preached an entire sermon on verse 3 (“The Sparrow and the Swallow,” Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit [Pilgrim Publications], 53:253-264), developing the idea that just as these little birds found homes for themselves and nests for their young, so Christians find the same in Christ and His church.

After again addressing God as the Lord of hosts (84:3), the psalmist reflects his personal relationship with this Sovereign, “my King and my God.” Although God is the awesome power who commands all the powerful angels of heaven, He is also our personal King and God through Jesus Christ. Then the psalmist exclaims, “How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You.” Perowne (p. 119, *italics his*) comments, “The blessedness of God’s house is that there men praise Him. This it was that made that house so precious to the Psalmist. And what Christian man can climb higher than this—to find in the praise of God the greatest joy of his life?”

The Bible reveals that we may enjoy God’s presence individually or corporately, in any location. It may be in a church building or it may be at a beautiful outdoor scene. We may be alone or we may be with a stadium full of believers. As New Testament believers, we need to be clear that there are no longer any sacred buildings. God doesn’t dwell in cathedrals, but rather in His people, who are now His temple, both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; Eph. 2:21-22). But the psalmist’s point here is that he longed to gather corporately with God’s people so that he could praise God with them and experience God’s presence together.

Do you share his longing? Do you look forward to gathering with the saints in worship, with the desire to be in God's presence? I think that we tend to be too laid back about gathering with the church. Do you come really looking for God to show up? We should come eagerly with the prayer that we might encounter the living God in the midst of His people, His temple!

2. The pleasure of experiencing God's strength in our weakness should fuel our desire to overcome hindrances to get to God's house (84:5-9).

Instead of putting his "how blessed" at the end of the section (as in 84:4, 12), the psalmist leads with it (84:5-7): "How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Zion! Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring; the early rain also covers it with blessings. They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion." These verses make the point that...

### **God Gives Us His Strength**

The psalmist pictures a band of pilgrims making their way towards the temple through difficult terrain. The last phrase of verse 5 is difficult (literally, "in whose heart are the ways"), but in the context it seems to mean that these pilgrims have such a desire to be at God's temple that they make the rough desert paths into highways (see Isa. 35:8). They pass through the valley of Baca, which probably means, "tears." It is symbolic for a place of affliction or difficulty. But their anticipated joy at being at the temple turns this desert valley into a place of springs. God sends rain to provide for them as they travel. As a result, they go from strength to strength (God's strength, not their own), arriving safely to appear before God in Zion. Meeting with God in the company of His people is the joyous goal.

Regarding the blessing of having God as our strength, John Calvin observes (Calvin's Commentaries [Baker], p. 358), "To lean with the whole heart upon God, is to attain to no ordinary degree of advancement: and this cannot be attained by any man, unless all his pride is laid prostrate in the dust, and his heart is truly humbled." In other words, we won't know God's strength until we see our own weakness. As long as we proudly think that we can live the Christian life in our own power, we will not know God's power.

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Calvin (pp. 359-362) goes on to apply these verses as a rebuke to those who are too lazy to inconvenience themselves to go to church. In his day, people either had to walk or ride a horse to get to church, often in stormy weather. He might be a bit more forceful in rebuking those today who can drive to church in comfortable cars! I was touched when I was in Nepal and Barney asked the men how long it had taken them to come to the meetings. Some of them had walked for hours and then ridden on their crowded busses for more hours to get there! They sat on the hard floor for hours to listen to the teaching of God's Word. And yet we often skip church because we don't want to be inconvenienced to get out of bed and drive across town to sit in our comfortable chairs!

Verses 8 & 9 seem to be a parenthesis in the flow of the psalm: "O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Behold our shield, O God, and look upon the face of Your anointed." But they may fit into the context by showing that...

### **Prayer is the Means**

There seems to be some sort of national crisis behind this psalm (Willem VanGemeren, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelin [Zondervan], 5:545). Some think that the psalmist was the king, praying here for himself. But he just as well could have been a member of the Korahites, unable to get to the temple because of some national crisis. Perhaps a foreign army was threatening the land, so he couldn't travel. So he cries out to the Lord God of hosts, the God of Jacob, to behold their shield and to look upon the face of His anointed. The shield and the anointed both refer to the king (see Ps. 89:18). The psalmist and his fellow pilgrims needed the king's protection in order to make their journey to the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus Christ is God's supreme Anointed One (Christ means anointed one). He is our Shield and King, through whom we have access to the God of Jacob. Jacob was a weak, undeserving man who wrestled with God and prevailed. Thus the God of Jacob is the God of weak and undeserving people who put their trust in Him. His house (now, His people) should be a house of prayer (Matt. 21:13), where we appropriate His strength for our weakness.

Thus the pleasure of being in God's house should fuel our desire to be in His presence. The pleasure of experiencing His strength in

our weakness should fuel our desire to overcome hindrances to get to God's house for worship and prayer.

3. The pleasure of enjoying God Himself and His abundant goodness should fuel our desire to be in His house (84:10-12).

The psalmist makes three points in these wonderful verses:

### **The Pleasure of Being at the Doorstep of God's House**

“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (84:10). As Spurgeon puts it (The Treasury of David [Baker], 4:66-67), “The lowest station in connection with the Lord's house is better than the highest position among the godless... God's worst is better than the devil's best.” H. C. Leupold (Exposition of Psalms [Baker], p. 608) astutely observes: “It may seem to be a strong statement to describe those who are disinclined to worship the Lord as being guilty of wickedness. But that is where the root of all wickedness lies, shunning fellowship with God.”

In a day when Christians frequently skip church to pursue recreation, I wonder how many could honestly say that one day of gathering with God's people to worship Him is better than a thousand days of other pursuits? Was the psalmist using hyperbole? Maybe, but don't shrug off his point: His pleasure in enjoying God in the company of God's people was greater than anything that the world has to offer. If we can't join him in these feelings, may be we need to re-examine our values!

### **The Pleasure of Enjoying God Himself**

“For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (84:11). There are probably several sermons in this one rich verse (Spurgeon has three!). I can only touch on it:

#### **1. the Lord God is a sun to us**

This is the only time in the Bible that God is directly referred to as the sun (but see Mal. 4:2; Luke 1:78-79). In Psalm 84, the metaphor is in the context of travelers. There were no lighted streets or cars with headlights. When you were traveling in the wilderness and it got dark, you had to stop. It got cold when the sun went down. Wolves

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howled in the darkness. So the travelers huddled together and waited for the dawn. The rising sun meant that you could see your way again. It brought warmth and cheer. It brought a new day that would take you closer to God's lovely dwelling place, the temple.

The sun sustains all life on earth. It is a never-ending source of energy. It cheers our sagging spirits when it breaks through the clouds after a storm. Even so the Lord God is a sun to us.

### **2. The LORD GOD is a Shield to Us**

The sun gives light and nourishes life, but the shield gives protection from enemies. Without the shield, we would be vulnerable to all sorts of dangers in our pilgrimage to heaven. The sun and the shield balance each other. With the sun only, a band of pilgrims would be more conspicuous to their enemies. So God also is a shield for them, keeping them safe to their journey's end.

### **3. The LORD gives grace to Us**

Grace humbles us because God only gives grace to the undeserving. If you earn it or deserve it, it is not grace, but a wage that is due (Rom. 4:4-5). Salvation is entirely due to God's gracious choice, apart from any foreseen faith or works, which would nullify grace (Rom. 11:6). We receive God's grace at salvation, but we also need His grace daily in order to walk with Him. God's abundant grace in Christ motivates us to serve Him (1 Cor. 15:10).

### **4. The LORD gives glory to Us**

This may refer to the future glory of heaven, but here it probably means (as Calvin explains it, p. 364-365), "that after God has once taken the faithful into his favor, he will advance them to high honor, and never cease to enrich them with his blessings."

### **5. The LORD will not withhold any Good thing from Us**

Maybe you're thinking, "No good thing? How about a million dollars, Lord?" But that may not be a good thing for you! "How about good health?" That may not be a good thing, either! We have to interpret this promise in light of the many trials that the Bible shows God's saints enduring (Heb. 11:35b-39). This is where faith must operate. Although we may not understand God's purpose for our trials, "we know that God causes all things to work together for good



to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). In that sense, He does not withhold any good thing from us. But, there is a condition in our text:

**The Requirement for Enjoying GOD and His Abundant Blessings is to Walk Uprightly and to Trust in Him**

The promise of God’s not withholding any good thing is for those who walk uprightly (84:11). His blessing is on those who trust in Him (84:12). To walk uprightly is to live before God with integrity. It does not imply perfection, but it does mean that you walk openly before God, confessing your sin. You trust in His grace and strength to overcome sin. You seek to please God by obeying His commandments. To such people, the Lord will not withhold any good thing. They will join the psalmist (84:12) in exclaiming, “How blessed is the man who trusts in You!”

In 1714, Matthew Henry, the well-known pastor and Bible commentator, was on his deathbed at age 52. He was relatively young and had not finished his commentary (others finished it from his notes). He had endured the loss of his first wife and of three of his nine children. He could have complained about his hard life. But he said to a friend, “You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men. This is mine—that a life spent in the service of God, and communion with Him, is the most comfortable and pleasant life that one can live in the present world” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible [Revell], p. 1:xiv).

Don’t believe Satan’s lie that following God is a drag. Following the Lord is the most blessed life possible. The many pleasures that the Lord gives to satisfy your soul should fuel your desire to be in His presence, both individually and when His people gather to worship Him.

## Chapter 17

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### Psalm 121: Restful Confidence

This Psalm 121 bears no other title than “A Song of degrees”. It is several steps in advance of its predecessor, for it tells of the peace of God’s house, and the guardian care of the Lord, while Psalm 120 bemoans the departure of peace from the good man’s abode, and his exposure to the venomous assaults of slanderous tongues. In the first instance his eyes looked around with anguish, but here they look up with hope. From the constant recurrence of the word keep, we are led to name this song “a Psalm to the keeper of Israel”. Were it not placed among the Pilgrim Psalms we should regard it as a martial hymn, fitted for the evensong of one who slept upon the tented field. It is a soldier’s song as well as a traveller’s hymn. There is an ascent in the psalm itself which rises to the greatest elevation of restful confidence.

#### **Verses 1- 2, I will lift up my eyes to the mountains**

The inspired writer, whoever he was, seems, in the opening of the Psalm, to speak in the person of an

unbelieving man. As God prevents his believing people with his blessings, and meets them of his own accord, so they, on their part, immediately cast their eyes directly upon him. What then is the meaning of this unsettled looking of the Prophet, who casts his eyes now on this side and now on that, as if faith directed him not to God? I answer, that the thoughts of the godly are never so stayed upon the word of God as not to be carried away at the first impulse to some allurements; and especially when dangers disquiet us, or when we are assailed with sore temptations, it is scarcely possible for us, from our being so inclined to the earth, not to be moved by the enticements presented to us, until our minds put a bridle upon themselves, and turn them back to God. The sentence, however, may be explained as if expressed in a conditional form. Whatever we may think, would the Prophet say, all the hopes which draw us away from God are vain and delusive. If we take it in this sense, he is not to be understood as relating how he reasoned with himself, or what he intended to do, but only as declaring, that those lose their pains who, disregarding God, gaze to a distance all around them, and make long and devious circuits in quest of remedies to their troubles. It is indeed certain, that in thus speaking of himself, he exhibits to us a malady with which all mankind are afflicted; but still, it will not be unsuitable to suppose, that he was prompted to speak in this manner from his own experience; for such is the inconstancy natural to us, that so soon as we are smitten with any fear, we turn our eyes in every direction, until faith, drawing us back from all these erratic wanderings, direct us exclusively to God. All the difference between believers and unbelievers in this respect is, that although all are prone to be deceived, and easily cheated by impostures, yet Satan bewitches unbelievers by his enchantments; whereas, in regard to believers, God corrects the vice of their nature, and does not permit them to persevere in going astray. The meaning of the Prophet is abundantly obvious, which is, that although all the helps of the world, even the mightiest, should offer themselves to us, yet we ought not to seek safety anywhere but in God; yea, rather, that when men shall have long wearied themselves in hunting after remedies, now in one quarter and now in another, they will at length find from experience, that there is no assured help but in God alone. By themountains, the Prophet means whatever is great or excellent in the world; and the lesson he teaches is, that we ought to account all such favor as nothing.

Farther, these two verses ought to be read connectedly, bringing out this sense: When I shall have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, then I will at length experience that I have fallen into a rash and unprofitable mistake, until I direct them to God alone, and keep them fixed upon him. It is at the same time to be observed, that God in this place is not in vain honored with the title of Creator of heaven and earth; it being intended hereby tacitly to rebuke the ingratitude of men, when they cannot rest contented with his power. Did they in good earnest acknowledge him as Creator, they would also be persuaded, that as he holds the whole world in his hand, and governs it as seemeth good in his sight, he is possessed of infinite power. But when, hurried away by the blind impetuosity of their passions, they have recourse to other objects besides him, they defraud him of his right and empire. In this way ought we to apply this title of God to the case in hand. The amount is, that whilst we are naturally more anxious than is needful in seeking alleviation and redress to our calamities, especially when any imminent danger threatens us, yet we act a foolish and mistaken part in running up and down through tortuous mazes: and that therefore we ought to impose a restraint upon our understandings, that they may not apply themselves to any other but God alone. Nor is the opinion of those unsuitable, who think that the Hebrew word *ḏū*, *el*, which we translate to, namely, to the mountains, is put for *ā*, *al*, which signifies above, giving this sense, That men, however high they may look, will find no true salvation except in God.

### **Verse 3 He will not suffer thy foot to stumble**

Here the Prophet, in order to recall the faithful to the right path, and to defeat the influence of all the allurements which are wont to distract their minds, affirms that whatever advantages worldly men are accustomed to desire or hope for from the world, true believers will find abundantly and at hand in God alone. He not only attributes power to God, but also teaches that He is so affectioned towards us, that he will preserve us in all respects in perfect safety. As often as the power of God is extolled, there are many who immediately reply, It is very true that he can do such and such things if he is so inclined, but we do not certainly know what is his intention. In this passage, therefore, God is exhibited to the faithful as their guardian, that they may rest with assured confidence on his providence. As the Epicureans, in imagining that God has no care whatever about the world, extinguish

all piety, so those who think that the world is governed by God only in a general and confused manner, and believe not that he cherishes with special care each of his believing people, leave men's minds in suspense, and are themselves kept in a state of constant fluctuation and anxiety. In short, never will the hearts of men be led in good earnest to call upon God, until a persuasion of the truth of this guardianship is deeply fixed in their minds. The Psalmist declares that the purpose for which God is our keeper, is, that he may hold us up. The Hebrew word, *ḥōṣ*, mot, which is here used, signifies both a sliding or falling, and a trembling or staggering. Now, although it often happens that the faithful stagger, yea, are even ready to fall altogether, yet as God sustains them by his power, they are said to stand upright. And as amidst the many dangers which every moment threaten us, it is difficult for us to get rid of all anxiety and fear, the Prophet at the same time testifies, that God keeps watch unceasingly over our safety.

**Verses 4-5. Behold! he who keepeth Israel will not slumber nor sleep**

To recall each individual to the consideration of the common covenant, he represents the Divine providence as extending to the whole body of the Church. In order that each of us for himself may be assured that God will be gracious to him, it behooves us always to begin with the general promise made to all God's people. This form of expression, he will not slumber nor sleep, would be improper in other languages, according to the idiom of which it should rather be, He will not sleep, yea, he will not slumber: but when the Hebrews invert this order, they argue from the greater to the less. The sense then is, that as God never slumbers even in the smallest degree, we need not be afraid of any harm befalling us while he is asleep. The design of the Prophet is now obvious. To persuade true believers that God has a special care of each of them in particular, he brings forward the promise which God made to the whole people, and declares God to be the guardian of his Church, that from this general principle, as from a fountain, each might convey streams to himself. Accordingly immediately after, (Psalm 121:5,) addressing himself to each in particular, he repeats, Jehovah is thy keeper, that no person might hesitate to apply to himself that which belonged to the whole community of Israel. Besides, God is called a defense at the right hand, to teach

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us that it is not necessary for us to go far in seeking him, but that he is at hand, or rather stands at our side to defend us.

### **Verse 6-7, The sun shall not smite thee by day**

By these forms of expression the Psalmist magnifies the advantages which result to us from our having God present with us; and, by the figure synecdoche, under one particular, he declares in general that the faithful shall be safe from all adversities, defended as they are by Divine power. The language is metaphorical, the cold of night and the heat of day denoting all kind of inconveniences. The sense then is, that although God's people may be subject in common with others to the miseries of human life, yet his shadow is always at their side to shield them from thereby receiving any harm. The Prophet does not, however, promise the faithful a condition of such felicity and comfort as implies an exemption from all trouble; he only, for the purpose of assuaging their sorrows, sets before them this consolation - that being interested in the Divine layout, they shall be secure from all deadly harm; a point which he unfolds more distinctly in the following verses, where he tells us that God will so keep his own people from all evils, as to maintain their life in safety. The statement in the text before us is indeed general, but he afterwards specifies the chief parts of human life.

### **Verse 8. Jehovah will keep thy going out and thy coming in**

The sense is, Whatever thou shalt undertake or engage in during thy life shall come to a happy and successful termination. God no doubt directs by his Holy Spirit the deliberations of his servants; but it appears to me, that this passage is rather to be referred to prosperous issues. If, however, any one would give it a more extended meaning I have no objection. It is enough for me to embrace that sense which is indisputably certain and solid, That God will be the continual guide of his people, so that stretching out his hand to them he will conduct them according to their hearts' desire from the beginning even to the end. Farther, it is of importance to mark the reason why the Prophet repeats so often what he had briefly and in one word expressed with sufficient plainness. Such repetition seems at first sight superfluous; but when we consider how difficult it is to correct our distrust, it will be easily perceived that he does not improperly dwell upon the

commendation of the divine providence. How few are to be found who yield to God the honor of being a keeper, in order to their being thence assured of their safety, and led to call upon him in the midst of their perils! On the contrary, even when we seem to have largely experienced what this protection of God implies, we yet instantly tremble at the noise of a leaf falling from a tree, as if God had quite forgotten us. Being then entangled in so many unholy misgivings, and so much inclined to distrust, we are taught from the passage that if a sentence couched in a few words does not suffice us, we should gather together whatever may be found throughout the whole Scriptures concerning the providence of God, until this doctrine—"That God always keeps watch for us" - is deeply rooted in our hearts; so that depending upon his guardianship alone we may bid adieu to all the vain confidences of the world.

## Chapter 18

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### Psalm 137: Imprecatory Psalm

Psalm 137 is not the kind of psalm that lends itself to easy preaching. Some texts are fun to preach because they're obviously helpful and easy to apply. Not Psalm 137. It contains difficult words. In fact, verse 9 is probably the most difficult verse in the book of Psalms. It shocks us. It's a verse that may cause some to doubt the inspiration of the Bible. How can the Bible be inspired by a God of love when it contains a verse like, "How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock"? How can such a verse be reconciled with Jesus' command to love our enemies? Psalm 137 is one of several psalms called imprecatory psalms. In these psalms, the author (usually David, although not in Ps. 137) invokes God to bring down judgment or punishment on his enemies. Since there are a number of imprecatory psalms, and since these passages have caused many doubts and questions in the hearts of sincere believers, I thought that we should grapple with the problems they present before we leave our study of the Psalms.



At the outset, I must say that there is no simple, concise solution to the problems raised by such psalms. Usually I try to boil my thoughts down to one statement which gives you my main idea. I can't do that today. You're going to have to roll up your sleeves and do some hard thinking!

### **How do we explain the imprecatory psalms?**

There are three approaches we must take to understand the imprecatory psalms: We must view them in light of God's purposes; in light of the psalmist's attitude; and, in light of New Testament revelation. None of these by itself will give a complete answer, but hopefully all three woven together will clarify the solution.

#### **1. We Must View the Imprecatory Psalms in Light of God's Purposes**

There are three broad purposes of God which, when understood, help us to see why the psalmist would invoke God to call down such awful judgments:

##### **A. God Purposes to Punish Sin and Reward Righteousness**

God is righteous and just. Indeed, He would not be God at all if He were not. Since God has revealed Himself to His creation as righteous and just, it is necessary that He punish sin and reward righteousness. If men could commit horrible crimes and never pay or if nations were allowed to perpetrate atrocities and never be called to account, we could rightly conclude that there is no righteous God in heaven. There comes a point at which not to judge sin would be to condone it. And so God must judge sin.

He does this in two ways. First, there will be a future judgment on all nations and on every person. This period in the Bible is called "the day of the Lord." God's Word is abundantly clear on this point (e.g., 2 Thess. 1:6-9). Even though sinners seem to prosper now, a day of judgment is coming. None outside of Christ will escape His wrath. Every sinner must stand before the bar of God's justice.

Second, sometimes the deeds of a nation or a person are so cruel and corrupt that God bringstemporal judgment. To allow certain atrocities to go unpunished would violate the moral fiber of the universe

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and encourage other evil people to perpetrate similar evils. In such cases, the temporal judgment is not the final judgment, but it brings the particular evil reign to its end on earth.

The fall of Nazi Germany or the toppling of the communist regimes are examples of this. The fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 on account of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah is another example. I believe that our nation currently stands in grave danger of God's judgment because of our immorality and violence, unless there is widespread repentance and revival. We need to understand that God's timing is not our timing. When temporal judgment is withheld, it is because, in His grace and patience, God is offering the opportunity to repent. But if grace is spurned long enough, temporal judgment will fall.

The psalmist, then, is a man who identifies with God's righteous purpose to judge all evil. So he cries out for God to act. It is a cry every righteous person can identify with.

### **B. God Purposes to Bless the Earth through His Chosen People**

God's plan is to bless all families on the earth through Abraham's seed, which refers broadly to the nation Israel and specifically to the Messiah, who is a direct descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Just as God's purpose to punish sin and reward righteousness is a revelation of His righteous character, so His purpose to bless the earth through His chosen people is a revelation of His love and mercy.

The entire human race has rebelled against God. He could have righteously judged us all. But because of His love and mercy, He purposed to bless us through His plan of salvation. To prepare the world for the coming of Messiah, God chose Abraham and his descendants through Jacob. The nation Israel was to be a people under God's rule. To such a people, God would send the Savior of the world.

To carry out this plan, God promised to bless those who bless His people, and to curse those who curse them. When the psalmist cries out for judgment on Babylon, he is appealing to God to carry out His covenant with Abraham so that ultimately all peoples would be blessed. Even though God's chosen nation had sinned and was reaping God's temporal judgment through the Babylonian captivity, the psalmist is

asking God to overturn that judgment by cursing the nation that had cursed them, in line with God's greater purpose to bless the world through the seed of Abraham.

### **C. God Purposes to Fulfill His Word**

God's Word can and must be trusted. When God says that something will happen, you can count on it. Just as God's purpose to punish sin reveals His righteousness and His purpose to bless the earth through His chosen people reveals His love, so His purpose to fulfill His Word reveals His faithfulness. You can trust God to do what He promises.

What had God promised concerning Babylon? He promised to fully repay Babylon and to level its walls (Jer. 51:56, 58). Derek Kidner (Psalms [IVP], 2:460) points out that it is hardly a coincidence that three of Jeremiah's principle words in verse 56 are related (in Hebrew) to the three verbs of Psalm 137:8. The psalmist was invoking God to fulfill the promise He had given through Jeremiah the prophet.

God's promise to level the walls of Babylon was no small thing! Babylon was surrounded by an outer wall between 42-56 miles in circumference (depending on the source), 11 feet thick, and 75 feet high, with watchtowers and a moat outside it! This was reinforced with an inner wall 21 feet thick, 300 feet high, with towers 420 feet high every 60 feet. And there were other inner walls! (Information from D. J. Wiseman, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1:441-442.) Who could imagine that such a mighty city would become a heap of ruins? But God prophesied that it would happen and it did!

Also, in Isaiah 13:16, in the context of a prophecy of God's judgment on Babylon for her sins, Isaiah specifically prophesied that their little ones would be dashed to pieces before their eyes. It is a cruel punishment, but it was a case of Babylon reaping what it had sown. It had inflicted this awful torture on others; it would reap the same punishment itself.

If God has promised something in His Word, He will fulfill it. But He fulfills it in response to the prayers of His people in line with His Word (see Dan. 9:2, 3). Thus when the psalmist invokes God to destroy Babylon, he is asking God to fulfill His prophetic word and thus prove Himself faithful.

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Thus an understanding of God's purposes to punish sin and reward righteousness, to bless the earth through His chosen people, and to fulfill His Word through His prophets helps explain the psalmist's harsh words against Babylon.

### **2. We Must View the Imprecatory Psalms in Light of the Psalmist's Attitude**

We need to consider two aspects of the psalmist's attitude to understand the imprecatory psalms:

#### **A. The Psalmist Was not Seeking Personal Vengeance, but Rather Was Asking God to Take Action**

His prayer was not, "Give me an opportunity to get even with those scoundrels!" Rather it was, "Lord, You avenge the evil done to your people." That is a significant difference. We see this difference in practice when we compare David's imprecatory psalms with his personal actions. He often prayed that God would take action against his enemies. His passion for justice often caused him to be outraged when he heard of injustice and evil (2 Sam. 3:26-39; 4:1-12; 12:1-5). But when he had a chance to kill his personal enemies, such as Saul, he refused to do it.

The imprecatory psalms are not rooted in a spirit of personal vengeance, but rather in a passionate desire for God to vindicate His people by judging the wicked. It is the same kind of righteous anger that would cause us to pray that a murderer or child molester be brought to justice.

#### **B. The Psalmist Was Not Concerned about His Own Cause, But Rather about God's Cause**

There is no taint of personal jealousy, spite, or ambition in these psalms. Rather, there is a deep concern for God's people. There is a desire for God's glory to be displayed. In the case of David's imprecations, those who opposed the king opposed God, because the king was God's anointed. In the case of the other imprecatory psalms, they are all national, not personal in character. The psalmists in every case had a deep desire that God's plan might be fulfilled through His people for His glory.

Thus it helps to understand the imprecatory psalms if we view them in light of God's purpose and in light of the psalmist's attitude. He was not seeking vengeance or being selfish. Rather, he was asking God to vindicate His people who had been mistreated and to fulfill His plan through them.

### **3. We Must View the Imprecatory Psalms In Light of New Testament Revelation**

Some people erroneously think that Jesus abolished or contradicted the Old Testament Law. But Jesus said, "I did not come to abolish [the Law or the prophets], but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). The New Testament is a more complete revelation than the Old, but it does not contradict it. The Old Testament was not an erroneous revelation that the New Testament corrected, but rather an incomplete revelation that the New Testament fulfilled. To view these psalms in light of the New Testament, we need to understand four things:

#### **A. Personal Vengeance Is Not Taught In Either The Old Testament Or The New Testament**

Some think that the *lex talionis* (law of retribution, "eye for an eye"; Exod. 21:24-25; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21) meant that personal revenge was prescribed by the Law. The Pharisees in Jesus' day used it that way. But this was not the intent of that law. In fact, it was just the opposite. The "eye for an eye" principle applied to civil law in the sense, "Do not avenge yourself, but let justice be administered." On the personal level, the Law stated (Lev. 19:18), "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord." The apostle Paul quoted from the Old Testament when he commanded Christians not to take vengeance (Rom. 12:19-20; Deut. 32:35; Prov. 25:21).

#### **B. Judicial Punishment of the Wicked is Taught in The Old Testament And In the New Testament**

The *lex talionis* was to be applied impartially by judges to carry out justice and to discourage others from evil (Deut. 19:20-21). In the New Testament, the authority to punish and avenge evil is given to the state (Rom. 13:3-4). On a broader level, God uses governments to bring about judgment on other nations through war.

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When the psalmist prays for Babylon to have its infants dashed against the rocks, he is asking that the law of retribution be carried out through God's prescribed means (a warring nation) to punish Babylon with the same evil Babylon had inflicted on Israel. He is invoking God for the judicial punishment of the wicked.

### **C. Love for Personal Enemies is Implicit in the OT and Explicit in the NT**

As we have seen, the Old Testament forbade revenge. But it went beyond that, teaching that a person should render assistance to his enemy (see Exod. 23:4-5; Prov. 25:21). There are a number of examples of love for one's enemies, such as Joseph's love for his brothers who had sold him into slavery, and David's kindness toward King Saul who was trying to kill him.

In the New Testament, Jesus corrected the common mistaken notion that the law taught hatred for enemies. He showed that the true interpretation of the law requires us to love even our enemies (Matt. 5:44). Paul said to bless those who persecute you (Rom. 12:14). And yet Jesus blasted the Pharisees with strong words (Matthew 23). Paul wished that those who perverted the gospel might be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9). Paul cursed Elymas and called down blindness on him (Acts 13:9-11). On a personal level, Jesus and Paul both showed love for their enemies. But on a judicial level, they called down God's judgment upon men who perverted God's truth. The psalmist is doing the latter when he prays for judgment on Israel's enemies.

### **D. In Light of the Cross, We Offer to God's Enemies**

*A Message Of Reconciliation: If they will repent, But Of Awful Judgment If They Will Not.*

God has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Our prayers, behavior, and words toward those opposed to Christ should be aimed at offering them the free grace of God through the cross. If the chief of sinners could find mercy, none is beyond hope (1 Tim. 1:15-16). But the same blood of Jesus that offers mercy to those who repent brings condemnation to those who refuse to repent (John 3:18, 36). We should never take de-light in the thought of God's judging our enemies, because He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they repent and live (Ezek. 18:23, 32). If we

must warn them of judgment, we should do it with compassion, not with glee. Viewing the imprecatory psalms in light of God's purpose, the psalmist's attitude, and New Testament revelation helps explain them. But God's Word is profitable not only for teaching, but also for reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. Let's look briefly how can we practically apply Psalm 137? There are four practical lessons I'd like to note from Psalm 137. I don't have time to develop them thoroughly, but perhaps they will stimulate you to see the value of even such a difficult passage as this:

### **1. We Should Be Aroused into Viewing The Atrocities of Sin with a Holy Horror**

The psalmist is not simply trying to address us, but to shock us into seeing the awfulness of sin. Just as a scream in the night gets our adrenaline flowing and motivates us to action, the psalmist wants us to have an emotional reaction to the sin which has taken place. We are too mild in our hatred of sin. Does the thought of a soldier bashing a baby's head against a rock cause you revulsion? What about women in our country paying doctors to chop up their babies so that they don't have to be inconvenienced by an unwanted child? The abortion industry should anger us and shock us into action. To use violence to fight it is wrong; but so is passivity.

### **2. We Should See That There Is Total Incompatibility between the Child of God and the World**

Just as these faithful Jews could not sing Zion's songs in Babylon, so God's people today should not join in the frivolities of the world. The Babylonians might taunt the Jews, but they knew nothing of the solid joys of Zion. The world might taunt the Christian, but it knows nothing of the joys of being a child of God. Even though we live in Babylon, we need to be distinct people.

### **3. We Can Stand True to God in the Most Difficult of Circumstances**

The Jews refused to play their harps in Babylon (v. 2). They stood firmly for the Lord, yearning for worship in Jerusalem (vv. 4-6). In spite of their defeat and in spite of Babylon's great power, there could be rebuilding and hope. God's promises do not fail, even when the

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circumstances seem the blackest. Great Babylon was destroyed. God's people live on! No matter how difficult our situation, we can obey the Lord.

### **4. We Should Be Challenged to a Deeper Commitment to God's Kingdom and Righteousness**

The thought of Jerusalem in ruins brought these Jews to tears. They didn't have it all that bad in Babylon. They easily could have been assimilated into the Babylonian way of life. But they had an intense longing for God's city and God's worship. They would not settle for anything less.

How badly do you want to see God's church established? How earnestly do you yearn for righteousness for yourself and God's people? Could you say, with the psalmist, that you exalt God's church above your highest personal joy (v. 6)? What kind of difficult circumstances would it take to cause you to lay those desires aside? The difficult but true words of Psalm 137 should stir us to cast off our worldliness and apathy and to reaffirm our commitment to the living God and His church.