

Psalms



**Learning from the Psalms
of the majesty of God,
the grandeur of His works,
and the greatness of His Word.**

Charles Speer

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

The Psalms

by Charles Speer
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The Psalms

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Cover Design by Beth E. Miller & Richard Cravy

Editing: Darlene Morris

ISBN 0-9768698-3-7

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publisher except in the case of brief quotations within critical
articles and reviews, including translation.

This book is dedicated to

Ted and Evelyn Kell

who taught and lived before so many of us the
heart and soul of this great book of Psalms



Special Acknowledgment

A special “*thank you*” to

Rusty and Sue Russwurm and
family for

making the printing of this book possible.

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Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a world-wide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now in printed form that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students, thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a videotaped course. The voice track of the videotape was first transcribed then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Bible Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil

Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, and to the staff of Sunset Translation Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

In addition to the English version, this book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible study library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders and grow churches that plant other churches.



A companion workbook on the study of Psalms by Charles Speer is available for purchase through Sunset International Bible Institute External Studies: 1(800) 687-2121.

FOREWORD

Mankind desires to worship a supreme being. The Bible claims that there is only one God. He is the Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. Jehovah, as he was known to the Jews of the Old Testament covenant period, specified how his people were to worship him. To remain in covenant relationship with him, they must worship him with heart, mind, and rite. Again, the LORD told them how to do that.

The Psalms appear to be a Jewish songbook. Originating in the days of David and Solomon, the poems were put to music and served the Israelites as a means to express thanks, concern, anger, and devotion to their God. Today, we too desire to worship our God. Although Christians, made up of all nationalities, live under the New Covenant, we still need thoughts and emotions put in words and set to music with which we can communicate with our Father in heaven. Psalms have been a part of Christian hymnals for centuries. They get to the heart of the man and the God whom he worships.

This study of the Psalms takes a topical approach rather than verse by verse or chapter by chapter. Psalms have been categorized into certain subjects. For instance the Messianic prophecies in the psalms is next to Isaiah in amount.

We will get a clearer view of God in this book than any other book in the Bible. We will also learn the deeper meaning of worship and adoration to the all powerful, all loving God and His Son. As the first and second lessons indicate, this will be a study of music appreciation and worship in Scripture.

Introduction to the Psalms

The Music Appreciation Course in Scripture

Introduction

This book in the Sunset International Bible Study Library series will serve only as an introduction to the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms contains 150 chapters, but there will be sufficient material within these pages to get a good overview of its contents by looking at representative psalms from the various types of psalms. The Book of Psalms expresses deep feelings and emotions. It is hoped that this study of the Book of Psalms will stimulate the reader's appetite for this kind of biblical literature which can become a source of refuge.

Typically, the content of most prayer is heavily request-oriented rather than containing a balance of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession. Many see God as the great benefactor and prayers as the means to gain every request. Perhaps this is because the one who is praying does not know and understand the heart of God. Knowing God intimately, and being able to relate to Him on a more personal level, can become a great source of joy which will alter the Bible student's prayer life forever.

This study of the Book of Psalms might be called the "Music Appreciation" course of study. The term "music appreciation" for courses offered in college usually implies that most students do not fully appreciate the genius of classical music, probably due to the lack of exposure or proper explanation. For many Bible readers, a study on the Book of

Psalms may fit that same parallel. This **biblical music book** is long and poetic in style. It is unique biblical literature, and thus, takes time to properly understand and appreciate.

The second part of this introductory chapter will look at some of the different topics in the Psalms, or groupings of Psalms, according to subject. Then it will look at the inscriptions on many of the Psalms, study some of the theology in the Psalms, and then close with some quotes by scholars concerning the beauty, the uniqueness, and the usefulness of the Psalms.

Juan Carlos Ortiz, in his book Disciple wrote a chapter entitled “The Language of the Kingdom.”¹ He says that reading the Psalms can help develop the language of the Kingdom, which is the language of praise. He likens the Book of Psalms to a symphony. Psalm 1 begins the symphony with a few violins, but the symphony ends in the last few psalms with a thunderous refrain by the whole orchestra in creation. The resounding language of praise is because of God’s awesome and impeccable nature and character. It is because of His mighty deeds in times past and in the present. To be able to adopt the language of the Kingdom, Christians must learn to praise the Lord. This does not involve simply repeating the word “praise” over and over again or endless refrains of “Hallelujah’s.” It is important to know the “why” and the “how” of praise. Only then will “. . . *his praise . . . always be on my lips*” (Psalms 34:1).

When someone learns to praise the Lord, a new vocabulary will replace the old complaining and murmuring. Unlike the ungrateful and disbelieving Israelites in the wilderness who constantly complained, Christians must learn to speak a language of praise. Blessings and cursings should not come out of the same mouth (cf. James 3:10): “The coffee is too hot . . .

¹ Juan Carlos Ortiz, Disciple (Altamont, Fl: Creation House, 1975), 65.

The grass is too wet . . . Unfortunately, it's raining . . . Hallelujah! Hallelujah . . . Why don't I get paid more? . . . This is the day the Lord hath made. We will criticize and complain about what God has done in it."

Christians need to add praise to their spiritual vocabulary. How long can two people carry on a conversation if neither one of them knows the other's language? Christians need to replace the language of the world with the language of praise which is the language of God's Kingdom. The world uses a language of complaining and murmuring which is not in harmony with praising God.

Some people may think that a study of Psalms is too boring because it is not a "doctrinal" study, and it is not something that can be easily preached. Christians fail to realize that the Book of Psalms has great personal value. They contain meditative and reflective readings. They contain passages that will cause personal pondering. If a Christian is looking only for something to teach or preach, he is neglecting areas that need to be contemplated. If a Christian is struggling with his intimacy with God, he needs to stop and take an inventory of his relationship with God. Psalms is the place to go to meet God in all His glory.

The Psalms, Their Names and Nature

The Name of the Book

The name of the book is "*Psalms*." Martin Luther called it "Psalter." The Hebrew Bible entitles it "*Book (or Songs) of Praise*," but only Psalm 145 uses this Hebrew word in its title. According to the contents of some the psalms, this Hebrew title is limited in its accuracy. Some have called the Psalms "The Prayers of David," but this is also limited. Only Psalm 70 has this title; not all the psalms are by David and not all are prayers. The English word "psalm" simply means poems that are put to music. The Old Testament equivalent, *mizmor*, is used 57 times in the titles of these poems.

The Structure of the Book

The format of the Book of Psalms in the English Bible is of ancient origin. The Septuagint, the second century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew text, broke the psalms down into five divisions called Books. These have been retained in most English translations: Book I: 1–41; Book II: 42–72; Book III: 73–89; Book IV: 90–106; Book V 107–150. The format of most Bibles for the Book of Psalms is the result of a compilation of psalms by the Jews of old. Several periods of Israelite history are represented in the Psalms from the period of David (1000 B.C.) to post-exilic days (530–430 B.C.). There are certain duplications from one Book to another indicating they may have been compiled at different times.

The divisions of the Books come about as a result of doxologies (statements of praise and glory to God) at the end of each psalm. Book I ends with, “*Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen*” (41:13). Book II ends with a doxology that is similar to Psalm 41:13 and then adds, “*This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse*” (72:20). Books III and IV end with doxologies also, and Book V ends with a whole psalm of praise. These similar endings for the first four Books seem to be the work of a compiler or editor.

Each Book has its own particular idiosyncracies (a style of expression that is highly individualized to that one section, Ed). Book I (1–41), with the exception of four psalms, contains what are known as “The Psalms of David.” It is also the group of psalms that most frequently uses ***Yahweh*** (Jehovah) instead of ***Elohim*** (God). Because of the Davidic dominance in these psalms, it has been suggested that these were written and compiled during the reign of David.

Book II (42–72) is dominated by psalms with the inscription “*A psalm of the Sons of Korah.*” A few psalms by David and one by Asaph are also included. The lack of Davidic

influence and the prominence of Korah has influenced some scholars to conclude that this Book of Psalms was composed and compiled during the time of Solomon. Korah was a Levite, and the sons of Korah may have constituted a temple guild of musicians. One other unique feature of this book is the prominence of *Elohim* over *Yahweh*, which is the opposite of Book I.

Book III (73–89) uses both *Elohim* (73–83) and *Yahweh* (84–89). The particular characteristic of Book III is the frequent inscriptions that were put there by Asaph. He could have been a choir director or musician for temple worship. It is suggested by the biblical scholar and commentator Stuart Perowne that these psalms fit the time of King Hezekiah.²

Books IV (90–106) and V (107–150) may be post-exilic (536–430 B.C.). *Yahweh* is definitely dominant in these two books. In these last two books there are some groupings of psalms. Psalms 113–118 notes the worldwide kingship of *Yahweh*. Psalms 120–134 are *Hallel* songs for the Passover night. *Hallel* songs are called “Songs of Ascents” because they were sung as the people neared Jerusalem at the end of their pilgrimage. These songs will be studied in more detail in Chapter 7.

There does not seem to be sufficient information on some of these matters for a dogmatic conclusion to be pushed. Gregory of Nyssa³ even tried to proffer that the Psalms lead up to five stages of moral perfection. I think one can see the fallacy of that thought, so any approach to the meaning of these psalms needs to be considered with humility.

² J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 84–103.

³ The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VII, © 1910 by Robert Appleton Company.
[http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07016a.htm//Gregory of Nyssa](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07016a.htm//Gregory%20of%20Nyssa)

The Forms of Hebrew Poetry in the Psalms

God communicates the truths of His nature and the sensitive and delicate emotional struggles and joys a man feels in relation to his God through men inspired by the Holy Spirit. He chose a form of literature called poetry. Derek Kidner, in his commentary on Psalms, says, "Hebrew poetry was of a flexible variety. Instead of matching syllables for rhyme, or even rhythm, it matched along the lines of 'stresses.' . . . all slip into its rhythms almost effortlessly."⁴ A **stress** is an emphasis of a thought, not necessarily words. Thus this form permitted some spontaneity and freedom which allowed it to take the form of a riddle, an orator's appeal, an earnest prayer, or a thanksgiving.

The more frequent length of a poetic unit consisted of two lines. Each line had three stresses, for example: Psalm 26:2, "*Test me (one), O LORD (two), and try me (three), examine (one) my heart (two) and my mind*" (three). There are also three-two arrangements, for example, Psalm 27:1: "*The LORD (one) is my light (two) and my salvation (three)—whom (one) shall I fear?*" (two). The 3–2 beat is usually a lament (cf. Lamentations; Isaiah 14:12ff). The uniformity, then, is in the lines themselves, not so much in whole stanzas. Stanzas can be of variable length. The author is primarily matching thoughts. This kind of poetry translates better because it is not simply dependent on sound or words. It is well suited for God's purpose—to share it with all people everywhere in all generations!

Before we discuss the main characteristics of Hebrew poetry, take note of some minor points. **First**, some psalms have recurring refrains or choruses at the end of stanzas. For example, Psalms 46:7 and 46:11 both say the same thing: "*The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*"

⁴ Derek Kidner, Psalms 1–72, An Introduction and Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p.2 in footnote.

Psalms 49:12 and Psalm 49:20 both say, “*But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.*” Both of these psalms demonstrate the varied length of stanzas within the same psalm.

Second, an occasional feature of Hebrew poetry is the acrostic or alphabetic form. This technique uses the letters of the Hebrew alphabet to begin consecutive lines, verses, or stanzas. For instance, the first word of every line in Psalm 111 (ten verses) begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first word of every verse in Psalms 25 and 34 (each with 22 verses) begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet using all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalms 9 and 10, which may have originally been one psalm, begin every other verse with a new letter. Finally, the largest of the acrostic psalms is Psalms 119. It contains 176 verses made up of 22 sections, eight verses in each section, with each section beginning with a successive Hebrew letter. In other words, each of the eight verses in the stanza begins with a single Hebrew letter. The next stanza has eight verses that begin with the next Hebrew letter. This psalm goes all the way through the Hebrew alphabet using this alphabetic format.

Third, another minor feature of Hebrew poetry is the fact that it uses a large amount of alliteration, paronomasia, and onomatopoeia. **Alliteration** is the combination of several words which all begin with the same letter. **Paronomasia** is using the play on words. **Onomatopoeia** is using the sound of words—when the word is pronounced, it sounds like the sound that is described by the word. It is easy to see that much was lost in the translation from the Hebrew to English in these features, but not nearly as much is lost in the main feature of Hebrew poetry.

Parallelism Illustrated

Parallelism is the main feature of Hebrew poetry. It is the technique of putting two or more lines of poetry together for the purpose of comparison or contrast. One classification divides

Hebrew poetry into two kinds of parallelism: (1) word-for-word correspondence when the second line matches up word-for-word with the first line as in Psalm 103:3, “. . . *who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,*” (2) no word-for-word correspondence as in Psalm 103:8: “*The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.*”

Another way to classify the various forms of parallelism is according to the number of lines in the unit of thought. Parallelism falls under two categories: Internal parallelism involves only two lines of poetry. External parallelism contains more than two lines. Under these two general classifications there are several subgroups:

1. Internal Parallelism (only two lines)

- a) Synonymous Parallelism has two lines stating similar thoughts but in different words. This way of classifying does not take into account word-for-word correspondence. This most popular form of parallelism can be illustrated by Psalm 27:1: “*The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?*” As you can see and hear, the second line repeats the thought of the first line.
- b) Antithetic Parallelism has two lines presenting opposite (antithetic) thoughts. The second line is the antithesis (opposite) of the first one. Psalm 37:21: “*The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.*”
- c) Synthetic Parallelism has a second line that does not repeat the thought of the first line but advances the first thought. For example, Psalm 2:6: “*I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.*” Synthetic is sometimes called Constructive Parallelism because it can complete, compare, or conceptualize the thought in the first line.

d) Climactic Parallelism has a first line that presents an incomplete thought, which is then repeated and completed in the second line. Psalm 29:1 says, *“Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.”*

e) Emblematic Parallelism uses a simile or metaphor to compare something in line one to something else in line two. For example, Psalm 42:1 uses the simile’s word “as.” *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.”*

f) Inverted Parallelism has an A-B-B-A arrangement. The first part of line one and the second part of line two match, while the second part of line one and the first part of line two match. An example of this is seen in Psalm 91:14: *“Because he loves me, says the LORD, I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.”* The outer two lines are a pair and the inner two lines are a pair.

2. External Parallelism (more than two lines)

a) Synonymous Parallelism has to have more than two lines that all contain similar thoughts. Psalm 18:4-5 is an example: *“The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.”*

b) Antithetic Parallelism contains two synonymous lines and then two lines that are opposites. Psalm 37:10–11 is an example: *“A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.”* The first line states something and then the next line is antithetic.

c) Inverted Parallelism has the A-B-B-A construction with a full line for each A or B. Psalm 37:5–6 is a good example: *“Commit your way to the*

LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.” Lines 1 and 4 are parallel (A and A), and lines 2 and 3 are parallel (B and B).

Internal Synonymous and Internal Antithetic are definitely the most common types of parallelism. Robert Lowth⁵ is credited for the “thought-rhyme” parallelism concept. Lowth, who lived in 1753, commented that this kind of poetry translates well and is indeed well suited for God’s purposes. A knowledge of parallelism is not only useful in interpreting and appreciating the Psalms, but also for statements elsewhere in Scripture written by Hebrew authors. Old and New Testament writers alike employ this technique. Because most people today are not familiar with it, they may, in their interpretation, attribute two distinct thoughts or points to some text, when in reality they are the same thought expressed in different words.

Psalms demonstrate some of these characteristics. This psalm can be classified as a psalm of Praise and Thanksgiving. The inscription at the beginning says, *“For the director of music. To the tune of ‘Do Not Destroy.’ A psalm of Asaph. A Song.”* This psalm speaks about God’s character and nature.

Index of Topics in the Psalms

The Psalms can be classified according to topics. In Chart One the noted scholar, John Walton,⁶ categorized the Psalms according to chronology. In this particular way of categorizing, the psalms of thanksgiving and adoration, individual praise,

⁵ Robert Lowth. Lecture XIX: Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (1753)(New York: Garland Publishing, 1971).

⁶ John H. Walton, Chronological Charts of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 73.

individual lament, and wisdom are the four largest groupings. Notice in Chart Two, which is taken from the Psalms course at Sunset School of Preaching taught by Ted Kell, it is apparent that these topics of division have to do with the heart—prayers, feelings, and worship. In Chart Three, the Psalms are divided according to the chapter titles within this book and how many chapters are devoted to that particular kind of psalm.

**Chart One – John Walton:
Chronological Charts of the Old Testament**

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Example</u>	<u>Quantity</u>
Thanks/Adoration	8, 19, 113	35
Individual Praise	23, 139	21
Individual Lament	3, 102	45
National Lament	79, 83	6
Royal	2, 45, 7	11
Enthronement	47, 96–99	6
Songs of Zion	42, 121	8
Penitential	38, 51	7
Imprecatory	109	6
Messianic	24, 110	7
Wisdom	1, 10, 119	21

**Chart Two – Ted Kell:
Psalms Course at Sunset School of Preaching**

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Examples</u>	<u>Quantity</u>
Attributes of God & His Kingdom	29, 72	13
Comfort	23, 121	11
Complaint	41, 74, 79	3
Corruption of Society	14, 53, 73	3
Ethical	1, 14, 112	9
Historical	78, 136	2
Imprecatory	10, 94	8
Lament for the Wicked	12, 64	4

Messianic	2,22,72,110	4
Penitential	6, 38, 51	3
Praise and Thanksgiving	8, 96, 148	45
Prayers of Deliverance/Protection	46, 141	22
Prayer for Help	13, 122	11
Prayer for Trust	3, 4, 11	8
Prayer for Mercy/Joy of Forgiveness	32, 102	4
Song of Love	45, 133	2
Suffering	22, 102	4
Thirst for God	42, 137	4
Vanity of Life	39, 49	2
Victory of Song	18, 107	4

**Chart Three – Charles Speer:
Lesson Studies for this Series on Psalms**

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Quantity</u>
The God of Psalms	2
The God of Israelite History	1
God's Revelation to Mankind	2
Praise and Thanksgiving	2
The Ethical or Wisdom Psalms	1
The Royal or Kingly Psalms	2
Protection and Deliverance	1
The Imprecatory Psalms	1
Songs of Ascent	2
Forgiveness in the Psalms	2
The "Messianic" Psalms	5
Using Psalms - Teaching / Personal Study	1

There are more subjects listed in Chart Two than in Chart Three, but there are a lot of similarities between the two commentators. It is apparent to the careful observer that these topics reflect subjects of the heart—prayers, feelings, and worship. Later chapters in this book will look at the psalms as they are grouped together by topics. The study will look at a few psalms individually and exegetically from each category.

This will give a feel for the kind of things being said about each topic.

The Headings or Inscriptions of the Psalms

The Significance of these Headings or Inscriptions

One of the more interesting, and yet, more difficult introductory matters concerns the headings and inscriptions of the different psalms. These headings are a part of the Hebrew Bible; they are **not** notes in the margins by Hebrew copyists, known as Massoretics. Though the inscriptions were indeed editorial notes put in some time after the Psalms were written, they are of significant consideration because of their ancient origin. The meanings of these titles were not even known in the second century B.C. when the Septuagint was developed, but their existence at that time establishes their antiquity. The New Testament writers mention some of these inscriptions and build theological arguments based on their veracity. In Mark 12:35–37 when Jesus was arguing with some Jewish leaders, He questioned them referring to David as the author of Psalm 110. It is the inscription before this psalm that states, “*Of David. A psalm.*” Jesus said:

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”

Jesus’ argument was based on David being the author of Psalm 110 and the Jews’ acceptance of that fact. If David was not the author of Psalm 110, then His argument had no meaning! Jesus Himself and all the Jews accepted the Davidic

authorship that is noted in the inscription of the psalm and, therefore, Jesus' argument has force and validity.

In Acts 2:25–28 Peter quotes Psalm 16:8–11 and attributes it to David. He follows the quote with an argument for the resurrection of Jesus. Because David is already dead and his body still entombed, Peter reasons he could not have been predicting his own resurrection. He was predicting Jesus' resurrection. Peter counts on the Jew's acceptance of that Old Testament Psalm inscription which attributes Psalm 16 to David. This very same argument is also made by Paul in Acts 13:35ff.

Kinds of Inscriptions

There are three kinds of headings and inscriptions:

1. Those that ascribe an author to the psalm.
2. Those that note a particular circumstance or historical event.
3. Those that give musical or liturgical directions to the director or singers.

In the first category of psalms with a noted author, there are inscriptions for 73 psalms that name David as their author: "*For David,*" "*Of David,*" and "*Belonging to David.*"

Chart Four – Authors of the Psalms

<u>Author</u>	<u>Number of Psalms</u>
David	73
Solomon	2
Moses	1
Heman, the Ezrahite	1
Ethan, the Ezrahite	1
Jeduthun	3
Sons of Korah	2
Asaph	2

It is no wonder the whole book is often represented as “Psalms of David.” The New Testament attributes certain psalms to him as well, agreeing with the headings found in the Psalms themselves. Solomon wrote Psalm 72 and 127; Moses wrote Psalm 90; Heman, the Ezrahite, wrote Psalm 88; Ethan, the Ezrahite, wrote Psalm 89; although Kidner suggests Ethan may be the same person as Jeduthun (cf. 1 Chronicles 15:19; 2 Chronicles 5:12). Jeduthun wrote three Psalms: 39, 62, 77. Even though Korah was a rebel in the desert (cf. Numbers 26:10–11), his descendants were doorkeepers and guardians of the temple (cf. 1 Chronicles 9:17ff; Psalms. 84:10). They were singers and musicians in the temple choir (cf. 1 Chronicles 6:31, 33, 39, 44). There are twelve psalms with the heading of “*Sons of Korah.*” There are also twelve psalms attributed to Asaph. He was a prophet who sang and played cymbals in the worship (cf. 2 Chronicles 29:30). He was an associate of Heman, another musician (cf. 1 Chronicles 6:39; 15:17). Asaph and Jeduthun were set apart to minister in prophecy and song in the temple (cf. 1 Chronicles 25:1,6). They led 285 others in this ministry (cf. 1 Chronicles 25:7).

The second category relates to circumstances or historical events surrounding the time and content of the psalm. Of course, the best known are the psalms which cover the episodes in the life of David.

Chart Five – Episodes in the Life of David

Psalm 3 – “*A psalm of David. When he fled from Absalom, his son.*”

Psalm 7 – “*A shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite.*”

Psalm 18 – “*For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD. He sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:*”

Psalm 30 – “*A psalm. A song. For the dedication of the temple. Of David.*”

Psalm 34 – *“Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.”*

Psalm 51 – *“For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.”*

Psalm 52 – *“For the director of music. A maskil of David. When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: ‘David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.’”*

Psalm 54 – *“For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A maskil of David. When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, ‘Is not David hiding among us?’”*

Psalm 56 – *“For the director of music. To the tune of ‘A Dove on Distant Oakes.’ Of David. A miktam. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.”*

Psalm 57 – *“For the director of music. To the tune of ‘Do Not Destroy.’ Of David. A miktam. When he had fled from Saul into the cave.”*

Psalm 59 – *“For the director of music. To the tune of ‘Do Not Destroy.’ Of David. A miktam. When Saul had sent men to watch David’s house in order to kill him.”*

Psalm 60 – *“For the director of music. To the tune of ‘The Lily of the Covenant.’ A miktam of David. For teaching. When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.”*

Psalm 63 – *“A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.”*

Psalm 142 – *“A maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer.”*

All but one of these fourteen psalms are located in Books I and II (1–72), and a number of them refer to David’s troubles while fleeing from King Saul before David became king himself. Some are simply dedication and temple psalms, and two are related to his sin with Bathsheba. Another group in this category is “Songs of Ascents” (120–134). Most commentators believe these psalms were often sung by pilgrims as they

approached Jerusalem for a feast or as a procession neared the temple itself when performing some ritual for a feast, such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Chapters 12 and 13 will cover these psalms specifically.

The third category is the largest and the most difficult. It consists of what are thought to be musical directions or liturgical notes. It is important to remember that all scholars are not united on their interpretation of these. There is considerable speculation in this area, but it does reveal a well-organized, structured song service in the temple worship. Notice that two of the inscriptions occur in the middle of psalms: “*Selah*” and “*Higgaion*.”

Chart Six – Musical Directions

“*Selah*” seems to call for an instrumental interlude. The word’s etymology (evidences of the formation and development of a word’s meaning, Ed.) is “to lift up,” in other words, to strike up with instruments or voices.

“*Higgaion*” occurs in connection with *Selah* in Psalm 9:16 and may call for quieter instrument play. Its root meaning refers to “murmur” or “meditate.”

“*Shiggaion*” is another musical directive. In Psalm 7 it probably infers a stirring rendition of the words in song.

“*Mikdam*” (16, and 56–60) comes from the root word “to cover,” but its meaning is unclear in relation to the Psalms. It may be a song of deep importance.

“*Maskil*” is another frequent direction, employed in 13 of the psalms, and may mean “meditatively” or “instructively.” Perowne, a well known commentator on the Psalms, suggests that the meaning is “in a skillful strain.”⁷

“*For the director of music*” is used in 55 psalms. This may indicate an official collection of psalms in the custody of the choir master of the temple.

⁷ J.J. Stewart Perowne, The Books of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 156.

“According to . . .” or *“To the tune of . . .”* is used a number of times. This inscription instructs singers and players as to the tune of the psalm (cf. 22). *“According to sheminith”* directs that only the males sing (cf. 6, 12). *“According to the Gittith”* is the inscription for winepress songs, perhaps indicating a lively strain (cf. 8, 84).

Theology in the Psalms

Believing What We Sing

The Psalter was a Jewish songbook. It has been said, “If we just believed and practiced what we sing, we would do much better than we do!” He obviously believed there is definitely doctrine in the songs Christians sing. How much more would this be true when singing the **inspired songs** of long ago!

Chart Seven: Theological Subjects Developed in Psalms

A list of theological subjects to which the Psalms contribute significantly in their systematic development of Scripture include the following and all of these topics will be studied in later chapters:

1. Sacrificial Worship
2. Yahweh as Creator
3. God in History
4. God of the Whole World (All Peoples)
5. The Nature of Sin and Its Consequences
6. The Suffering of the People of God
7. Rewards and Punishments
8. The Nature of the Messianic Hope

Use of the Psalter in Judaism and Christianity

Reference has been made to the fact that Heman, Asaph, the sons of Korah, and Ethan were all temple “ministers of music” during the time of David and Solomon. They, along

with David, are major authors and directors of the music in the Book of Psalms as well. This connection lends credence to the belief that Psalms was the hymn book and liturgy book of temple worshipers.

Later on, the Christians used psalms in their corporate worship: *“Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord . . .”* (Ephesians 5:19). *“Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”* (Colossians 3:16). The many references to the Psalms in the New Testament (over 100) attest to their usefulness and familiarity in Christian settings of the first century. Jesus and the apostles used them extensively. It is the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament and contains many Messianic prophecies.

Conclusion

Conclude this introduction study by reading the quotes by well known men of the ages. Their high esteem for the Psalms may inspire you as well. Then, as a final encouragement, read Psalm 112 before proceeding to the next chapter.

Martin Luther:

This is the great excellence of the Psalter; that other books, indeed, make a great noise about the works of the saints, but say very little about their words. But herein is the pre-eminence of the Psalter, and hence the sweet fragrance which it sheds, that it not only tells of the works of the saints, but also of the wordswith which they spake to God and prayed, and still speak and pray.⁸

⁸J. J. Stewart Perowne, The Book of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 22-23.

Martin Luther:

Where will you find words more aptly chosen to express joy, than in the psalms of praise and the psalms of thanksgiving? There thou mayest look into the heart of all the saints, as into fair delightful gardens, yea, even into heaven itself, and note with what wonderful variety there spring up therein, like so many exquisite, hearty, delightful flowers, sweet and gladsome thoughts of God and His benefits. On the other hand, where canst thou find deeper, sadder, more lamentable words of sorrow than are to be found in the psalms of complaint? There again thou mayest look into the heart of all the saints, as into death, yea, as into hell. How dark and gloomy it is, thee with the manifold hiding of God's countenance! So likewise when the Psalms speak of fear or hope, they speak in such manner of words that no painter could so paint the fear or the hope, and no Cicero or master of oratory could express them to the life more happily.⁹

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century:

He who takes this book in his hands, with admiration and reverence, goes through all the prophecies concerning the Saviour which he finds there as in the other Scriptures; but the other psalms he reads as if they were his own words, and he who hears them is pricked at the heart as if he said them himself¹⁰

Ambrose, another Bishop of the fourth century:

Although all divine Scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of

⁹Ibid, p. 27-28.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

Psalms.” . . . “History instructs, the Law teaches, Prophecy announces, Rebuke chastens, Mortality persuades; in the Book of Psalms we have the fruit of all these, and a kind of medicine for the salvation of man.” . . . “What is more delightful than a psalm? It is the benediction of the people, the praise of God, the thanksgiving of the multitude. . . . the voice of the Church, and the harmonious confession of our faith.”¹¹

¹¹ Ibid, p. 26.

Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving

Introduction

Psalm 8

Psalm 8 is certainly one of the best known and best loved psalms. It fits into the category of the “Praise and Thanksgiving” psalms, which is one of the largest groups of psalms. This category includes one-third of the total number in the Book of Psalms—approximately 50 in number. This number only seems appropriate since so many of the psalms were used in the corporate assembly for worship. The Israelites wished to express their adoration for who God was, to praise Him for what He had done, and to thank Him for His present attention to their needs. Psalms helped to keep them from being an ungrateful and disrespectful people.

The distribution of the “Praise and Thanksgiving” psalms is generally at the beginning of the book and at the end. Book I (Psalms 1–41), Book IV (Psalms 90–106, and Book V (Psalms 107–150), contain the most of this type of psalm, while Books II (Psalms 42–72) and III (Psalms 73–89) contain only a few. Many of the “Praise and Thanksgiving” psalms are of unknown authorship, particularly in Books IV and V, but the ones whose authors or circumstances are noted in the inscriptions, are those written by David. There are twenty of these in Books I, II, and V. If David is the author, then he appears as a man who appreciated his God and expressed it. If the psalm is related to an incident in his life or to his kingship, then the nation was thankful to God for him. That says a lot

about the David's reign as king. No wonder his reign became the standard, and the shadow of, Messiah's kingdom to come.

The approach in the following two chapters on "Praise and Thanksgiving" psalms will be to select representative psalms from the fifty to see the variety in poetic language and style. The focus will be on the reasons **why** the people of Israel chose to give glory to God.

Kinds and Categories of Psalms

Speakers in the Psalms

Besides the classifications of where they are situated in the book and besides the large number attributed to David, there are other generalities about the "Praise and Thanksgiving" psalms that deserve mention. These extra details give added dimension to this category of psalms. The first detail to consider is **who** is speaking in the psalm. There are two kinds of speakers: individual and congregational.

The Recipients of the Psalms

The second detail to consider is to **whom** was the psalm written. The Thanksgiving and Praise psalms were written to stimulate different ones to praise God. Sometimes a psalm was written for the individual writer; sometimes it was the whole nation of Israel as represented by the congregation gathered to praise; sometimes it was written for the king, and sometimes it was for the meek and lowly.

The Themes in the Psalms

The third detail to consider is **why** Jehovah is to be praised? There are a number of "whys," or **themes** in these Psalms written to bring forth praise to God. The approach will be to study representatives of several themes. However, all these themes fit into the plan of God for Israel. Some of the various themes that cause God's people to praise Him are:

creation, protection and deliverance from enemies, judgment on enemies, the king, and the covenants. All of these relate to God's special relationship to the nation of Israel, based on the covenants and promises made hundreds of years before. All of these relate to God's eternal plan to redeem man from sin through a Jewish born Messiah.

A major detail to remember when studying the Psalms is that the psalms were written to be read and sung. They were not written to be analyzed and outlined for sermons.

Theme One: "The God of Creation"

The Name Above All Names (Psalm 8)

Psalm 8 begins and ends with the refrain, "*O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth*" (8:1, 9). The psalmist mentions the expansiveness of the sky, "*You have set your glory above the heavens*" (8:1), and the incredible miracle of a new born babe nursing at its mother's breast—the biggest and the littlest declare God's majesty. No adversary can match that kind of strength and power. The first two verses of this psalm set up the main thought which is the fact that God's entire creation made for His greatest creation, man. Man has great dignity! Picture King David as he remembers the many nights he spent in the open field shepherding his father's flock. In the silence of the night while the sheep slept, he would peer into the illuminated heavens. There would be no city lights and no sounds, except the bleating of sheep and the whisper of the wind in the trees. Man becomes a philosopher when he is in that environment. David's first thoughts must have been about how little man is compared to the huge expanse of sky:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? (8:3–4).

How insignificant man seems! He is infinitely small. How could he be important to the rest of creation and especially to God? David answered his own doubt with the assertion that man is the supreme creation by the fact that he is only a little lower than God. Man is made in God's image (cf. Genesis 1:26–27). Nothing else rises to that level in all of creation. That is dignity! Mankind is the most like God Himself! God gave man authority over the rest of creation (cf. 8:6–8). Creation has been made for man's benefit—food, transportation, housing, etc. It is all there for his use. He is allowed to subdue it for his purposes. That is the command God gave in Eden:

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground (Genesis 1:28).

God has made mankind king over the rest of creation. God made creation for man. Creation is magnificent, in and of itself, and should cause man to praise Him, but God's greatest creation, Man, is the greatest reason to praise Him.

Before moving onto the next psalm in this study, the words of Stewart Perowne from his commentary on Psalms are well worth quoting:

A thousand years later other shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night on the same hills of Bethlehem, while the same stars looked down on them from heaven. But a brighter glory than the glory of the stars shone round about them; and they knew better than David himself the meaning of David's words, "Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him? For to them it was said by the angel, 'Unto you

is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!”¹²

The Hebrew writer quotes Psalm 8:4–6 and applies it to Christ (cf. Hebrews 2:6–9). Jesus was crowned with glory and honor in His resurrection. He will complete man’s glory and honor by bringing him to heavenly perfection and glory (cf. Hebrews 2:10).

The God of the Storm (Psalm 29)

One of the most popular psalms about God and creation is Psalm 29. Perhaps that is because in many areas of the world thunderstorms build and roll in, asserting tremendous power against the land and its inhabitants, and then pass on, leaving everyone to marvel and contemplate.

However, there are some questions to ask about this psalm. One is its similarity to Phoenician and Canaanite poems about their storm god, Baal-Hadad. It is possible that the psalmist was using a take-off of that heathen work to show the uniqueness and sovereignty of Jehovah God. Paul did something like this in his speech to the Athenians on Mars Hill when he quoted one of their poets (cf. Acts 17:28). He quoted a Cretan poet in his writings to Titus (cf. Titus 1:12). Using the literature of a heathen nation and making a point about God is not unknown to biblical literature.

Another problem for some interpreters is the use of the word “*temple*” in Psalm 29:9. This could be a reference to the Jerusalem temple where worshipers gathered after the storm to praise Jehovah. Or it could be a reference to heaven, where the “*sons*” are glorifying God (cf. 29:1, ASV). It could also be the whole universe in which all creation extols God for His glory.

¹² J.J. Stewart Perowne, The Book of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 1976, 156.

This psalm opens with a call to the “*sons of the mighty*” (29:1, ASV). These are probably the angels; so the heavenly chorus is called together to confess God’s glory by worshipping Him, perhaps in the heavenly temple. They are not told, however, until verse 3 why the praise is to be rendered. Psalm 29:3–9 likens God’s powerful voice, which is mentioned some seven times, to the thunder of a Palestinian storm. Following the typical path of a storm in that area, the psalmist claims God’s thunder “*is over mighty waters*” (29:3), which would be the Mediterranean Sea. That huge dark mass of clouds slowly moves inland near Lebanon, which is where the “*cedars*” are (cf. 29:5). A powerful thunderstorm could seem to snap those huge stately symbols of stability. It could make Mt. Lebanon and Mt. Hermon (or Sirion) dance! The similes say it well, “*He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox*” (29:6). As the wind reduces the cedars to splinters, the lightning darts through the mountains, the thunder rumbles, echoing back and forth, causing even the eternal mountains to jump in fear! The Lord’s voice is that powerful in creation. A storm would usually turn south and make its way down the Jordan River Valley, past the Dead Sea, and finally fizzle out near Kadesh, some 5 miles south of Beersheba, in the Sinai Desert. Along its way it “*strips the forests bare*” (29:9a), and “*shakes the Desert of Kadesh*” (29:8). From the top to the bottom, Israel was forced to notice the power of God’s storm, which is representative of His power.

Once the storm is over, the people are left to contemplate. Does not a violent storm make man contemplate? Perhaps men of old gathered in the temple afterward to give glory to God. These are the thoughts the psalmist (and God) wants the worshiper to contemplate (cf. 29:10–11): **God is King over creation.** The power of the swelling flood left by a violent rainstorm in a dry land is another proof of that fact. God is King forever. The final meaning is: power and strength will be used by God to give strength and peace to His people. They do not have to fear Him or His strength if they are on His side.

God will use His strength and power **for** His people rather than against them. For these reasons, this “*flood*” mentioned is probably not the flood of Noah’s day, though, if it were, the faithful would be safe from it because the flood is to bring judgment on the wicked. It bears up and saves the faithful.

God’s Care for Creation (104)

Another psalm in the God of Creation theme is Psalm 104. It has 35 verses so the study of it will be reduced to a few overall observations and points. This psalm has correctly been likened to Genesis 1 because there are so many references to the days of creation. Psalm 104:2 says, “*He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heaven like a tent . . .*” which could easily be compared to the creation of light, heavens, and the firmament.

Certainly one of the main emphases of Psalm 104 is God’s care for His creation. He sends forth springs into the valley and they flow between the mountains, giving drink to every beast of the field. The wild donkeys quench their thirst from these springs (cf. 104:10–11). God not only created all things initially, but “*He makes grass grow for the cattle . . .*” (104:14); “*The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; . . .*” (104:16–17a). God sustains everything He created. John Willis¹³ points out that the writer of this psalm uses a lot of present participles which confirm that God continues to sustain His creation. He **still** “*looks at the earth*” (104:32a). He **still** “*touches the mountains*” (104:32b). All creation looks to God “*. . . to give them their food at the proper time*” (104:27b). God **still** “*. . . makes springs pour water into the ravines*” (104:10a). This psalm refutes the philosophical approach called

¹³ Dr. John T. Willis, Insights From The Psalms Vol I (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1974), 53.

Deism, which says God was the initial Creator, but then He left the universe to wind down without His intervention.

Psalm 104 also serves as a reminder of three other passages. Job heard God speak similar words in Job 38–41. In those verses, the two-fold emphasis of God’s initial creation and His continual sustaining of all creation is apparent. In the New Testament there are two interesting descriptions of Christ in this regard. Colossians 1:16–17 claims, *“For by him all things were created: . . . and in him all things hold together.”* The Hebrew writer states, *“But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe . . . sustaining all things by his powerful word”* (Hebrews 1:2–3).

All of this discussion about creation shows that everything God made is for man! Psalm 104:14–15 says, *“He makes grass grow . . . bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.”* All of creation is a well-ordered system designed for man’s well being. Therefore, just as the creation waits for Him (cf. 104:27), so man should develop the same dependency. Mankind, unlike the animals, is unique in all creation in such a way that they can praise God. Psalm 104:31–35 utters such praise:

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works . . . I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD . . . Praise the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD.

The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 104:4 in Hebrews 1:7 *“speaking of the angels.”* Angels are like *“the wind, flames of fire his servants.”* Angels serve as ministers of God, who are at man’s disposal. They are *“. . . sent to serve those who will*

inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). Even the heavenly creations are for man’s benefit! Praise God!

Psalm 136 is very unique because it has a refrain after each line, which is to be the answer of the congregation to each line’s assertion of God’s goodness to Israel. Perhaps a reader at the front of the assembly would read the first lines, “*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,*” and then the congregation would respond with the refrain each time, “*His love endures forever.*” What an incredible statement of the whole congregation’s belief that God was good to them and that His expressions of power and guidance were for them.

An example of this kind of psalm can be heard in the songs written with phrases from Psalm 108 or Psalm 57. Both of these psalms express a commitment to giving God the glory in song, prayer, life, and conversation. This part on the subject explores two more groups of “Praise and Thanksgiving” psalms. The first group has a large number of psalms that thank God for deliverance from an enemy. The second group expresses praise to God for keeping His covenant promises to Israel. We begin by looking at the deliverance from enemies psalms.

Deliverance from Enemies

God Gives Us Aid (Psalm 34)

Praise God because He delivers His people from their enemies. A large group of psalms beg God for His protection, help, and deliverance. Others psalms proclaim that He does give that aid to His people, and they praise and thank Him for it. Psalm 34 is such a psalm. The heading of this psalm refers to the occasion recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10ff. Fleeing from King Saul, David sought refuge among Israel’s archenemy, the Philistines. He feigned madness before King Abimelech so he would not be killed. Some time later, David wrote this psalm in retrospect.

In Psalm 34:1–3 David praises the LORD, claiming that he will praise the LORD “*at all times*” not only when peace and prosperity dominate his life, but also when pressures mount. He will retain his joy in the Lord. Paul said, “*Rejoice in the Lord,*” (Philippians 3:1). David’s praise came from a humble heart (34:2). He knew Who had delivered him!

Psalm 34:3 says, “*Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.*” What reason did David offer for issuing this call to glorify God? David explained his reasons in Psalm 34:4–10. David was a man who had been “*delivered . . . from all my fears*” (34:4b). He was “*poor*” and troubled (34:6), fearful (34:4), afflicted (34:19, ASV), “*brokenhearted . . . crushed*” (34:18) . . . *but the LORD delivers him for them all*” (34:19b). David had a reason to glorify God because He had delivered him from all his fears. David cried to the “*LORD, and he answered me; . . . the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles*” (34:4–6). Psalm 34:7–8 is particularly beautiful: “*The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*”

One cannot help but recall other Old Testament passages and events that are similar. The captain of the LORD’s host of angels appeared to Joshua in Joshua 5:12–13 and assured him that he would help Israel take Jericho and the rest of the Promised Land. Elisha asked the LORD to show His unbelieving servant something, and God did! The servant saw what was probably the angelic army in the mountain tops (cf. 2 Kings 6:17). Daniel referred to Michael, the archangel, as the prince who protects God’s people (cf. Daniel 12:1). Like the angel of the LORD who led Israel through the wilderness, God also continued to camp around His people. Even though they were already in the Promised Land, Israel was not abandoned. The angel still protected them. Once the angel had done His work, David said, “*Taste and see that the LORD is good*” (34:8). Peter referred to this verse in 1 Peter 2:3 as a motivation to grow in salvation. The psalmist was inviting others to put the

LORD to the test. God will always live up to His promises in a magnificent way! He will not fail His children, “. . . *for those who fear him lack nothing*” (34:9), and “*The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing*” (34:10). James echoes this sentiment also in the context of trials, when he says, “. . . *so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*” (James 1:4).

The second half of this psalm gives instructions for what leads to such heartening experiences—chiefly living “*in the fear of the LORD.*” The psalmist says, “*Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days.*” (34:11–12). Psalm 34:15 says, “*The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous . . .*” but, “. . . *the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth*” (34:16). Peter quoted these verses in 1 Peter 3:10–12 to prove his case urging Christians to live holy lives even in the face of suffering. This seems to be the context in this psalm also.

Certainly, when trials come, the temptation is greater to loosen the restraints on the flesh and to let the flesh do whatever it wants to do. A person’s speech and conduct can become very worldly under such circumstances. The psalmist said, “*Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it*” (34:14). While holding onto his purity, the believer should be assured that “*The eyes of the LORD are (indeed) on the righteous*” to do them good. He will cut off the memory of those who do evil. Meanwhile, the righteous “*are never covered with shame*” (34:5), they are never wanting (cf. 34:9–10), they will enjoy “*many good days,*” (34:12), they will be delivered “*from all their troubles*” (34:17) and “*no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him*” (34:22). The singer has become the teacher teaching God’s children to rely upon Him and praise Him at all times, even in times of trial, because He is the Deliverer!

God Leads His People (Psalm 68)

Another psalm in the deliverance category is Psalm 68. Psalm 68:28–35 suggests that Jerusalem is in danger: “*Summon your power, O God; . . . as you have done before . . . Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations*” (68:28, 30). Egypt and Ethiopia may be the oppressors (cf. 68:31).

In this setting, the psalmist does two things. First, he calls on God for help. Second, and more importantly, he praises God for His protection in times past. **First**, notice the plea for help:

*May God arise, may His enemies be scattered;
may his foes flee before him.
As smoke is blown away by the wind,
may you blow them away;
as wax melts before the fire,
may the wicked perish before God.*

Psalm 68:1–2

Second, notice the praise to God for His past care for Israel. The overall picture is this: He is a King riding on His chariot throughout the land. From this vantage point, He sees what is happening to Israel and can come against its enemies: “*Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds – his name is the LORD – and rejoice before him*” (68:4). “*Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the LORD, to Him who rides the ancient skies above*” (68:32). Psalm 104:3 comments similarly: “*He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.*” Psalm 68:17 says, “*The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; . . .*” It is for the downtrodden, the outcast, and the oppressed that He acts. David wrote, “*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows . . . God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoner with singing; . . .*” (68:5–6). God is to be praised as the keeper of the little guy.

The theme of deliverance is further enhanced by what appears to be a description of God's care from Mt. Sinai to Jerusalem. David said, ". . . *the LORD has come from Sinai into his sanctuary*" (68:17). Sinai is where everything began for God's people. In Psalm 68:7–27 the psalmist remembered some of the work God had done for Israel between Sinai and Jerusalem. God had gone before them in a cloud and a pillar of fire. It may be that the movement of the Ark of the Covenant in this psalm represents the movement of God from Sinai to Jerusalem, and through that movement, His presence and care for the entire journey. John T. Willis¹⁴ suggests that the phrase, "*May God arise . . .*" (68:1) is like Moses' call to Israel when it was time to move from one desert location to another. In other words, "Lead us on! Show us the path of peace and protection."

Psalm 68 gives the details of what God did for the people of Israel on their journey from the wilderness to the land of Canaan. The psalmist describes the journey:

*When you went out before your people, O God,
when you marched through the wasteland,
Selah
the earth shook,
the heavens poured down rain,
before God, the One of Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel.
You gave abundant showers, O God;
you refreshed your weary inheritance.
Your people settled in it, and from your bounty,
O God, you provided for the poor*

Psalm 68:7–10

¹⁴ John T. Willis, Insights From the Psalms I (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1974), 67.

God is the King, leading His armies to defeat of the enemies: “*The LORD announced the word . . . Kings and armies flee in haste . . . when the Almighty scattered the kings in the land, it was like snow fallen on Zalmon*” (68:11, 12, 14). Psalm 68:13 may refer to the conquest of Canaan. The Canaanite people might have considered the peaks of Hermon (Mount Hermon, which is snow-covered for most of the year, is part of the “*mountains of Bashan,*” just as is “*Zalmon.*”) as very special, perhaps even divine (cf. 68:15). David urged the people to look to Mount Zion rather than Mount Hermon. It is on Mount Zion, where the LORD dwells in His temple, “. . . *where the LORD himself will dwell forever*” (68:16). This long line of defeats for their enemies proves He “. . . *daily bears our burdens*” (68:19).

Psalm 68:24–27 seems to describe a celebration procession, perhaps at one of the annual feasts. The worshipers are praising God, and the psalmist even mentions four of the tribes involved. Two are from the North and two from the South, as if to include all of Israel. All Israel could remember specific occasions when God had accomplished His glorious work of redemption from dire circumstances.

In the rest of this psalm, David called on God to act again, as He had in the past, for His people: “*Summon your power, O God; show us your strength, O God, as you have done before. Because of your temple at Jerusalem . . .*” (68:28–29). The psalm closes with another call to the people to praise God and His care of Israel.

Paul quoted Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8. Just as the LORD took the Israelites captive up to the temple and gave them gifts of blessing, so Jesus, when He ascended to heaven, took Christians captive spiritually. They are now God’s children. The gifts He has given to the church are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. These gifted people are gifts given to the church for the sake of unity and strength.

Hallel Psalms (Psalms 95, 96, 97)

Psalms 95, 96, and 97 seem to form a triad within the group of what are called “Hallel Psalms” (92–100). These three psalms revolve around the same theme we have been considering, “the God of deliverance defeats the enemies of His people.” Psalms 96–98 all call upon Israel to praise God “. . . *because of your judgments, O LORD*” (97:8); “. . . *He will judge the peoples with equity*” (96:10); “*Let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity*” (98:9); “*He will judge the world in righteousness and the people in his truth*” (96:13).

The **first** reason to praise God within these three psalms is **His glory**. Psalm 96:1–6 speaks of God’s glory that is seen in His creation of the heavens (96:5–6) and in sharp contrast to the “gods” or “idols.” In fact, the same word for “idols” (96:5) is translated “*false divinations*” in Jeremiah 14:14 and “*worthless physicians*” in Job 13:4. Idols can do nothing; they are useless when it comes to helping the people. Jehovah God, however, is shrouded in His sanctuary with “*splendor and majesty*,” and “*strength and glory*” (96:6). The sanctuary may be the temple, or it may be the universe, which are the heavens God created as His backdrop, where man can see “. . . *his marvelous deeds among all peoples*” (96:3). This is the God that is to be proclaimed among the nations (cf. 96:2). The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, LXX) uses the word for “*evangelize*” in this verse. It is good news that God is great for His people’s sake. Thus, the triple crescendo: Psalm 96:1–2 says, “***Sing to the LORD . . . sing to the LORD . . . Sing to the LORD.***” The psalmist is not talking to the angels this time. He is calling for mankind to be the ones who sing. Perhaps the apparent crescendo matches the ever-increasing nearness as they approach the temple in the festival procession.

The **second** reason to praise Yahweh is **God coming in judgment**: “. . . *for he comes, he comes to judge the earth*”

(96:13). Do not be confused about this judgment. This is not eschatological in nature. It does not refer to the end of time. The illustration of the coming of the LORD is a way used to describe God's judgment on any wicked nation throughout the Old Testament. Every time a nation falls, it is because He has come! His coming is usually in the form of another nation as a conquering army. Thus, the LORD has come many times in history, as many times as nations have fallen. God dispensed justice to exonerate Himself and vindicate His oppressed people. The "*Day of the LORD*," as it is also called, is two-fold in effect: judgment of the evil and salvation of the righteous. It is true that each and every one of these comings is a type of the final Judgment Day, the last "*Day of the LORD*." It, too, will be a Day of Judgment upon the wicked and salvation for the righteous.

The message to the nations is "*The LORD reigns*" (96:10; 97:1). Things are firmly set in place. He is in control of it all. Nothing escapes His notice or His justice: ". . . *he will judge the peoples with equity*" (96:10). Then in Psalm 96:11–12, David called on all creation to join the crescendo:

*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
Let the sea resound, and all that is in it;
let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them.*

The King is coming! Sing a new song! Make up new words if that is what it takes to sing a song of praise to match the mercies of His hand. God's "*compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is (His) faithfulness*" (Lamentations 3:23).

Psalm 98 opens with the same refrain: "*Sing to the LORD a new song . . .*" (98:1). Therefore, it is a close companion to Psalm 96, except that it excludes any comparisons to idols or the heathens and concentrates on praise. Another issue of importance is that, though not authorized under the new covenant regulations, and therefore, unacceptable in our

worship, instruments were commanded and employed in the temple worship. Thus, the psalmist calls for the fullness of musical praise from the Jewish worshiper.

On either side of Psalms 98:4–6 are two other songs: The Victory Song of Man (98:1–3) and The Chorus of Nature (98:7–9). The Victory Song tells of God’s wondrous deeds in bringing about man’s salvation. This salvation is physical deliverance from the enemy. God has gained the victory (98:1). He is able to win because of “. . . *his right hand and his holy arm.*” (98:1)

Psalm 98:2–3 tells of God publishing the victory abroad: “. . . *all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God*” (98:3). A chorus of nature’s sounds closes the psalm. The chorus is like a crowd at an exciting sporting event—the sea roars, the rivers clap, and the mountains sing while watching the LORD judge the earth and bring about righteousness and equity. Nature is ruled by God in righteousness and equity, so it celebrates when God demonstrates that is the way He will rule among men also.

Some scholars believe Psalm 98 was composed following the deliverance of Israel from Babylonian Captivity in about 536 B.C. Several similarities exist between its verses and references in Isaiah 40–66 (check a good commentary if you are interested in these details). If this is the occasion (and even if it’s not, the sentiment would be the same, regardless of the particular deliverance), what joy and exultation would be felt and expressed by Israel! Once again, the people of God are exonerated and their God is seen to be powerful. He felled the “*tree*” of Babylon (cf. Daniel 4:4–33; Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel’s interpretation of it—“. . . *you, O king, are that tree!*” [vs. 22]) and put a Mede named Cyrus on the throne in order to allow Judah to rebuild and inhabit the temple, restoring their fellowship with God.

God Keeps Covenant

The Eternal and Holy King (Psalm 93)

Psalm 93 moves into the area of praise offered to the God of Covenant. This is the God who keeps His promises to His people, Israel. Psalm 93 begins by asserting that God's nature is eternal and He is a holy King.

The proclamation from Psalms 93–100 is, “*The LORD reigns!*” It is a fact—God rules all! Does He look like a king? Indeed! His garments, figuratively speaking, are “*majesty*” and “*strength*” (cf. 93:1). God is not just dressed in kingly robes; He is wearing the character of His rule. As a result, “*The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved*” (93:1). In other words, the world is in God's control. It is not going to do anything or be anything that God does not desire or choose to allow. No force, no person, and not even Satan, who is called the “*prince of this world*” by Jesus (cf. John 12:31, 14:30; 16:11), can undermine God's control. Remember how God intervened by limiting what Satan could do to Job?

Psalm 93 is not talking about a recent ascension to the throne (cf. 93:2). Whatever glorious event in Israelite history came before the writing of this psalm only accentuated, publicized, and authenticated His rule. There has never been a time when the full rule of God was ever in question. It is just that His effective rule has again become apparent: “*Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity*” (93:2). He has always reigned; therefore, this world is never and never will be out of His control.

This is the behind-the-visible reality, the unseen truth of the matter. The world, however, appears to be in tumult (cf. 93:3–4). Floods and pounding waves, many waters and mighty breakers, toss man's life back and forth. These waters may even represent antagonistic nations in their hostility against the people of God (cf. 46:3; 89:9). Whatever comes man's way, however, God is still “*on high*” and is “*mighty*” (cf. 93:4).

Psalm 93:5 is the key verse in this psalm that ties in the God of Covenant. It says, “*Your statutes stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days, O LORD.*” God is true to His word. He does not change His mind in the middle of the stream. No enemy or tumultuous circumstance will cause Him to alter His unbreakable word. He is holy. Holiness and eternity are two characteristics of God, and therefore, also characteristics of His reign. Holiness will not allow Him to alter His promises to mankind. His majestic, strong, eternal rule will allow Him to always fulfill His promises and to keep the conditions of the covenant with His people under which He has placed Himself.

A Holy Kingship (Psalm 99)

Psalm 99 repeats the emphasis of a holy kingship. It also begins with “*The LORD reigns*” (99:1), but it adds the concept of the cherubim as God’s throne and war wagon (cf. Ezekiel 1). A fuller picture is found in Psalm 18:6–19. The psalmist may also have in mind the Ark of the Covenant in the inner sanctuary of the temple. The LORD is enthroned there above the cherubim (cf. Exodus 25:22; 2 Samuel 6:2). The psalmist’s statement “*Great is the LORD in Zion; . . .*” (99:2) emphasizes that idea, because “*Zion*” is where the temple is. Being this kind of King and as One who is enthroned over the covenant in the ark, He will and can keep the covenant.

The holiness of God is emphasized more than once in this psalm. The end of each section has a statement that confirms His holiness: “. . . *he is holy*” (99:3); “. . . *he is holy*” (99:5); “. . . *for the LORD our God is holy*” (99:9); “. . . *and worship at his holy mountain*” (99:9). In the middle (99:4–5) there is an emphasis on His justice in dealing with “*Jacob*” and the enemies. Therefore, there is the call issued to all the people of the earth to worship Him: “*Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy*” (99:9).

Psalm 99:6–9 covers the covenant material. Using Moses, Aaron, and Samuel as examples of all Israelites (perhaps

because they represent the first official priests and prophet of Israel), the psalmist noted how God dealt with His creation according to the terms of the covenant. The conditions of the covenant were: offer sacrifices, which Moses and Aaron did; call on God, which Samuel and the prophets helped Israel do; and keep the statutes, which, once again, was the prophet's job. God's part of the covenant is described in Leviticus 4–5 and Deuteronomy 28–30. If Israel was faithful, God would bless them richly; but if they sinned, and yet, offered the appropriate sacrifices from the heart, He would forgive them. If they were rebellious, however, He would punish them. Psalm 99:8–9 says, “. . . *you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds. Exalt the LORD our God . . . for the LORD our God is holy.*” God has kept the covenant conditions. At times in Israel's history, the people forgot the punishment part of the covenant. They chose to believe that God would only bless them and never punish them. The covenant conditions demanded otherwise. Had they realized that their trials were a sign from God that the covenant relationship was in jeopardy, they might have repented more often!

God in Israelite History (Psalm 105)

Remember All That God Has Done (Psalm 105:5)

God's holy, righteous, and eternal rule is the basis of His covenant keeping. Psalm 105 is a lengthy psalm, detailing moments in Israelite history where God's faithfulness to the covenant is proven. Note the verses that illustrate these various historical references in the rest of the psalm (105:8–11). The psalmist called on the worshipers to remember all that God has done to keep His covenants, particularly the Abrahamic land covenant (cf. Genesis 12:7): “*Remember the wonders he has done, His miracles, and the judgments he pronounced*” (105:5).

Examples From Israelite History (Psalm 105:12–45)

The rest of Psalm 105 tells of the times in Israel's history when God was active in keeping the land covenant promise. God protected the original patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—as they wandered about in foreign lands. They were aliens, but, *“He allowed no one to oppress them; . . .”* (105:14). The book of Genesis records how God protected Abraham and kept an Egyptian monarch and the Philistine ruler from taking his wife through whom a son of Abraham must be born. The latter fourth of Genesis records God's providential care of His chosen tribe of Jacob, by placing Joseph in such an influential position in Egypt (cf. 105:17–22). After Jacob's clan grew into a huge number in Egypt, the LORD extracted them from the bondage of slavery by sending the plagues (cf. 105:28–36). The psalmist added some interesting details that are excluded in Exodus. For instance, the frogs invaded even the *“chambers/bedrooms”* of their kings (cf. 105:3). Through the desert, God provided leadership in the cloud (cf. 105:39), money from the plunder (cf. 105:37), food with manna and quail (cf. 105:40—*“bread of angels/bread of heaven”*), and water from the rock (cf. 105:41). All of this occurred as He brought them into the land which He had promised them (cf. 105:44): *“For He remembered His holy promise given to his servant Abraham”* (105:42).

These illustrations can be multiplied over and over again in Israelite history. God has always worked to keep His end of the bargain. Therefore He deserves praise, **praise Him!**

The God of the Psalms

Introduction

This chapter will cover “The God of the Psalms.” How could anyone compress and explain the God of the Psalms in only one chapter? This is an overwhelming topic! These were the psalms used for temple worship, so God is surely at the center of their language. Everything that is revealed about the nature of God in Psalms must agree with all other Scripture, but the kind of literature that the Psalms are makes them uniquely able to expound upon His character and deeds.

The following verses from some of the psalms are but a mere sample of the psalms that show that God truly is **the God** of the Psalms. These phrases should stimulate any student’s appetite in preparation for this study:

- “*The LORD is my Shepherd . . .*” (23:1).
- “*O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*” (8:1).
- “*The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge*” (18:2).
- “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*” (22:1).
- “*Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty – he is the King of glory*” (24:10).
- “*The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?*” (27:1).

- *“The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic . . . The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning” (29:4, 7).*
- *“How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!” (47:2).*

The Psalms are the inspired record of the feelings and thoughts of men. For the most part, they constitute reactions to events or circumstances. Thus, the hearts of men are exposed as they speak and sing of God, sin, creation, hurt, anger, victory, history, and self. They were real men, speaking about real life, with real feelings, and a real relationship with God. This is not just temple music and cathedral praise. This is praise that came from on-the-job praise—kitchen praise, fun praise, trial praise, youth praise, old age praise—real life praise! When life is as real as these descriptions of trial, then the real person is revealed. The soul is naked before God and the true view of God is revealed.

Survey of Images and Descriptions Already Covered

God Seen in Other Topical Studies in This Series

In other topical studies, some of God’s nature has already been revealed. The two chapters on “Praise and Thanksgiving” dealt in part with the God who created all things and who now sustains them. Those chapters also speak of God as the Deliverer of His people. In the chapter on “The Royal Psalms,” God is seen as the first and ultimate King of Israel, even though a son of David was literally sitting on the throne of Israel in Jerusalem. God’s reign is characterized by righteousness and justice. In the chapter on “The Imprecatory Psalms” God’s wrath is seen. He will not tolerate rebellion and unchanging evil. On the other hand, in the chapter on “Forgiveness in the Psalms,” the forgiving spirit of God is seen. David was assured

that God had forgiven him for his sins. “The Ethical Psalms” reveal that God has instituted a system of right and wrong for mankind and holds him accountable. God will pardon man only if he has a contrite spirit. In the “Messianic Psalms” God is seen in the flesh as the person of Jesus.

Every study from Psalms reveals the nature, character, and work of God even though the emphasis is not always on God in each chapter. The focus on Him in these two chapters begins with Psalm 8.

The Majesty of God, the Dignity of Man (Psalm 8)

One cannot help but begin with Psalm 8. Its message about God through creation shows that He is so majestic. Imagine David walking alone at night. As he reflected upon the affairs of state that pressed on him, or as he walked the fields at night as a shepherd, he must have gazed up into the heavens. J. J. Stewart Perowne says:

In such a country as Palestine, in that clear Eastern atmosphere, “the moon and the stars” would appear with a splendor and a brilliancy of which we can scarcely conceive; and as he fixes his eyes upon them, awed and solemnized and yet attracted and inspired by the spectacle, he breaks forth into admiring acknowledgment of the God, who, as the God of Israel, has set His glory so conspicuously in the heavens, that it is seen by all eyes and confessed even by the lisping tongues of children. They praise Him, and their scarcely articulate homage is a rebuke to wicked men who disregard or resist Him.”¹⁵

¹⁵ J. J. Stewart Perowne, The Book of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 149.

As David gazed into the dark depths of that starry sky, an overwhelming force of the sense of his own insignificance came upon him. In sight of all that vastness, before all that evidence of creative power, how insignificant is man! The natural utterance from man's heart is, "*What is man that you are mindful of him . . . ?*" (Psalm 8:4a). What is man in his frailty and littleness and sin? What is man in the sight of the One who made the heavens and planted them in the sky?

Insignificance may have been David's first feeling, but it was immediately swallowed up in another feeling—the consciousness of man's true greatness and dignity. Man has been put in charge of all the living things on the earth. Therefore, God has exalted him to the highest position among all created things in the universe. The subject is boldly and briefly handled, and then, the psalm is brought to a fitting close with the same ascription of praise with which it opened. What does this psalm say about God? He is a paradoxical Being—majestic and high and powerful—and yet condescending to meet man on his own level.

God's Glory Revealed in Nature and in the Word (Psalm 19)

Psalm 19 follows closely on the thoughts in Psalm 8. The first part (19:1–6) speaks of God's glory as seen in the heavens. David is perhaps strolling outside when the first flush of an Eastern sunrise appears. All day and all night and every day and every night the creation of God is like a chorus, singing out the message of God's glory and greatness. This is figurative language because creation does not really talk, but by being so beautifully and wonderfully made, and by doing what their Creator appointed them to do, they speak an internationally understood message that is more beautiful than any language of man. Anyone can read it and understand that there is a powerful, eternal, and intelligent Supreme Being. It is as if God pitched a show tent and every human being is inside as a spectator to view the "performance" of God in nature. This is

the revelation of God—*El* (Hebrew name for God, meaning “mighty one”).

The second half of Psalm 19 (vs.7–11) declares that Jehovah the LORD, who is the covenant God, is revealed through His Word. The written record reveals Jehovah by telling man what to do to be in fellowship with Him and by telling man the secrets to a joyful and peaceful life on earth. The synonyms for God’s Word are descriptive of its effect – law, statutes, precepts, commands, and ordinances. And then, the real effect – reviving the soul, making wise the simple, giving joy to the heart, giving light to the eyes, enduring forever, and giving righteousness.

The conclusion is an appeal to God to help man respond to these revelations of glory (19:12–14). He is especially concerned about his sin and purity in God’s sight.

The Names and Images of God

Two other ways to look at God besides through an entire psalm are through the **names** of God. The figures or images used to describe Him paint a picture of who He is. There are three names for God used more than any other in the Psalms: *Adonai*, *Elohim*, and *Yahweh*.

Names of God in the Psalms

These names are not new to the Old Testament, but the proportion of each as it is used in the Psalms is interesting. *Adonai*, the Hebrew word for Lord (spelled L-o-r-d in most English versions in contrast to *LORD*), means “Sir” or “Master.” It is the word that refers to “Lordship.” *Adonai* is the least used of the three.

Jehovah or *Yahweh* (*YHWH* in Hebrew) is the next most frequently used name for God in the Psalms. The word means “being one.” He is eternal and that eternal nature is the basis of his covenant relationship to God (first explained in Exodus 3:13ff; 6:2–5). Just the name *Yahweh* communicates to the

Jews a God who is eternal, unchanging, and one who will keep Covenant. The fact that He is a covenant-keeping God is definitely emphasized in the Psalms. "The Royal Psalms" portray this characteristic of God.

The last name is *El* or *Elohim*. *El* means "mighty one." *Elohim* is plural, but also refers to the Object of our worship. Both of these meanings fit the purposes of the Psalms. His power and might are exalted repeatedly. The fact that God is the object of man's praise and adoration is obvious in the Psalms. The Psalms are intended as praise to Him who is worthy, in contrast to anything or anyone else.

Images of God in the Psalms

The images portrayed to describe God are many and communicate so much. These images and figures are both inanimate and animate.

God is **Light**: "*The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?*" (27:1). "*You are resplendent with light, more majestic than mountains rich with game*" (76:4).

God is the **Sun**: "*For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor*" (84:11).

God is a **Rock**: "*The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock!*" (18:46). "*To you I call, O LORD my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me . . .*" (28:1).

God is a **Refuge**: "*In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness*" (31:1). "*. . . he is my mighty rock, my refuge*" (62:7). "*I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge . . .*" (73:28).

God is a **Fortress**: "*The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress*" (46:11). "*O my Strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God*" (59:9).

God is a **Shield and Deliverer**: "*I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and*

the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (18:1–2). *"Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues people under me"* (144:1–2). These are images of stability and security in the LORD. He is unmovable and always there for His people. He will aggressively rescue them to bring them into His solace and peace.

The animate or human figures describing God are numerous also. These psalms assign God many different types of human qualities—fingers, voice, hands, laughter. These are known as "anthropomorphisms" (attributing human qualities, characteristics, or features to a spiritual being or deity, Ed.). Beyond that, however, are the descriptive symbols. Of these, the King imagery is most notable and includes the most references.

God is the **King**: *"The LORD is King for ever and ever"* (10:16). *"Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory"* (24:10). *"For God is the King of all the earth . . . God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne"* (47:7–8). God is pictured as the Sovereign ruler of heaven and earth, especially of Israel. God is our KING!

God is the righteous **Judge**: *"And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for God himself is judge"* (50:6). *"O LORD, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up, O Judge of the earth . . ."* (94:1–2). He is the One who will not let the enemies of His people get away with oppression and wickedness. He is the Advocate (43:1) of the righteous and the Judge of the wicked.

God is the **Deliverer, Redeemer, and Savior**: *"My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you—I, whom you have redeemed"* (71:23). These images are grouped together because of the similarity of connotation. They describe a God who rescues His people from straits of disaster. God is Israel's Deliverer, Redeemer, and Savior. In New Testament literature

these same images take on a spiritual connotation. God rescues His children from sin's penalty and power. In the Psalms, however, these images usually convey the meaning of rescue from troubled circumstances and or attacking enemies. Psalm 71 speaks of deliverance from enemies, not salvation from sin. The concept of redemption originated with the Israelites when God redeemed the Israelite nation from Egyptian slavery (cf. Exodus 6:6; 15:13).

The image of a **Deliverer** is found in Psalm 143:9: *"Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you."* The word or concept of a Savior is frequently used in the Psalms: *"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken"* (62:1-2). Moses told the fearful Israelites, who heard the rumble of chariot wheels of Pharaoh's army behind them and the crash of waves of the Red Sea in front of them, *"Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today"* (Exodus 14:13). Our God is **Savior, Deliverer, Redeemer!**

Other less used images are **Doctor** or **Healer** (6:2), **Bird** or perhaps more specifically, **Eagle** (57:1; 91:1; cf. Exodus 19:1), **Guide** (48:14), **House** or **House Builder** (90:1; 127:1; 147:2), and **Teacher** or **Discipliner** (94:12).

God is a **Warrior**: *"If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows"* (7:12-13). The term warrior is not specifically used, but the picture is certainly in the Psalms with the use of shields, bow and arrows, and chariots as His tools of warfare as He comes from Zion to fight against the enemies of His people (Psalm 35:1-3; Psalm 68:1-4, 17; Psalm 18:7-14; Psalm 144:5-7).

God fights for His people and He always wins! This same picture is in Revelation as Christ and His army of believers are shown in triumphal procession (cf. Revelation 19:11ff.). Not even the mighty Roman Empire could conquer the Lord's church! Rome is in ruins now, but the church lives on!

What have you learned so far in this study of “The God of the Psalms?” Psalm 8 and 19 show a God who is grand and glorious, full of majesty and splendor. All creation sang His tune of glory; but even in all His glory, He is not a God who is so distant that He cannot and will not relate to mankind. He is mindful of man. He knows the activities of man, his comings and goings. He put all creation in place and gave man an exalted position over it. Creation is for man’s benefit! God gave man guidelines for how to live in creation.

The Psalms include the three basic Old Testament designations for God in terms of His names. *El* and *Yahweh* are the predominant ones, because these two emphasize the power and covenant-keeping aspects of His nature. This fits the theme of most psalms.

Many figurative ways are used by the poets to describe God. These figurative pictures fit the message of the Psalms. Most convey God’s strength and might as either a place of quiet rest and protection or as a fully dressed warrior to fight for God’s afflicted people. He is rest and protection and an avenger for His people.

The next chapter will look at two psalms that are old favorites to many people. Instead of systematizing the bits and pieces from many psalms, as has been done in earlier chapters, this next chapter will look in close detail at Psalm 23 and 139.

In looking at God’s names and the various figures used to describe Him, there is a partial picture of God as the Psalms view Him. It is a picture of power and might, protection and refuge. He was Israel’s God and if the other nations wanted to get to know Israel’s God, they would find that He was more formidable than any of their gods. Because we have used the survey method of study, the very personal picture of God may have been left untouched in the study of some of the psalms. God is not just a dashing, flashing warrior to the whole nation. He is also a personal God to each individual Israelite. Our study now will show the more personal side of His character.

The Good Shepherd (Psalm 23)

There is one more figurative image to be studied, and perhaps, the best has been saved for last. Just by hearing the words, “The LORD is my Shepherd,” a person knows immediately the discussion will be about one of the best known psalms. Psalm 23 is also one of the most beautiful in content. To be able to focus on the content more thoroughly, each part of the psalm will be considered looking at it from the role of a shepherd. Each part will be labeled to describe the kind of Shepherd that God is.

Personal Shepherd—“*The LORD is my Shepherd*”

This psalm begins with the words “*the LORD*” which would be *Yahweh*, not *Adonai*. This is the word that means He is the Covenant God of Israel. As the **Shepherd** of Israel, God is eternal and, therefore, able to keep His covenant conditions with Israel.

Supplier Shepherd—“*I shall not want*”

David and Israel and God’s children will not want for anything. God is the “Shepherd Supplier.” He knows the things His children need before they ask Him (cf. Matthew 6:8, 32). He is committed to meeting all their needs “. . . *according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:19).

Feeder Shepherd—

“He makes me lie down in green pastures”

Sheep lie down when they have had enough to eat. God is the “Shepherd Feeder.” Jesus said, “. . . ‘*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*’” (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4; cf. Deuteronomy 8:3). Psalm 119 emphasizes over and over the usefulness of the Word of God in feeding and sustaining His people.

Rester Shepherd—“*He makes me lie down*”

Emphasizing the phrase “*makes me lie down*” from this psalm gives the message that God is the “Shepherd Rester.” Christians, like sheep, do not always know when they need rest or a change. God providentially will slow His children down to stop their fast pace. He surrounds His children with the atmosphere and opportunity for peace and quiet.

Leader Shepherd—“*He leads me beside quiet waters*”

The phrase “*quiet waters*” parallels the “*green pastures*.” God gives His children food, water, and fulfills their needs. The “*leads*,” however, adds a new dimension. God is the “Shepherd Leader.” Sheep and Christians know little about finding water and food. They need a Leader.

Restorer and Forgiver Shepherd—“*He restores my soul*”

God is the “Shepherd Restorer.” He leaves the ninety-nine sheep who are safe in the fold and goes over the hills to find the lost sheep; when He finds it, He puts it on His shoulders and brings it home (cf. Luke 15:4-6). Men get lost easily too, because as humans they do not know how to direct their own steps (cf. Jeremiah 10:23). In restoring His children, God forgives them; thus He is the “Shepherd Forgiver.”

Guider Shepherd—**“*He guides me in paths of righteousness*”**

God is the “Shepherd Guide.” Some great songs have this theme:

“He **leadeth** me, O blessed thought . . .”

“Savior, like a shepherd **lead** us . . .”

“**Guide** me, O Thou Great Jehovah . . .”

The Lord’s prayer, “*And **lead** us not into temptation . . .*” (Matthew 6:13). Paul told the Romans, “. . . *those who are **led** by the Spirit of God are the sons of God*” (Romans 8:14).

Calmer and Protector Shepherd—“*For you are with me*”

God is the “Shepherd Calmer and Protector.” He is always there, even “*through the valley of the shadow of death.*” A good shepherd never leaves a helpless sheep alone to face the dangers of the world, especially when it is hurt. When a Christian faces hurts like death, God will be there: “*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5).

Comforter Shepherd—**“*Your rod and your staff, they comfort me*”**

God is the “Shepherd Comforter.” Paul calls Him “. . . *the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles . . .*” (2Corinthians 1:3–4). The Spirit that lives within Christians is called “*Comforter*” and “*another Comforter*” by Jesus in the American Standard and King James Versions (cf. John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). This Spirit produces “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*” within Christians (Galatians 5:22–23). Just as the sheep finds comfort in the touch of the shepherd through his rod or staff, Christians find comfort in the assurance of the Lord’s presence and care: “*But God, who comforts the downcast . . .*” (2 Corinthians 7:6). A shepherd uses his staff and rod to protect the sheep from wild animals and to rescue them from danger. God has many “tools” that He uses in the same way with His children.

Sustainer Shepherd—“*You prepare a table before me*”

God is the “Shepherd Feeder and Sustainer” is a repeat of the previous thought.

Vindicator Shepherd—“*In the presence of my enemies*”

God is the “Shepherd Vindicator.” A Christian has many enemies and every one of them has the support of Satan. However, none of them will be successful against the faithful child of God. Many psalms echo this truth. The New Testament confirms this as well. The book of Revelation is a good

example. Hit by persecution of several kinds, the churches of Asia were shaken mentally and physically. John, by revelation, assured them they would be protected by God and the enemy would be defeated. Riding on His white horse going forth to conquer, Jesus leads His armies against the enemies of the church (cf. Revelation 19:11). Satan and his cohorts are defeated over and over again.

Honoror Shepherd—“*You anoint my head with oil*”

God is the “Shepherd Honoror.” He honors His children with dignity, identity, and purpose. That honor comes because He calls them—sons, children, army of God, etc. The honor also comes because God’s children preach and exhibit Christ to the world. God’s children are also honored because of their destiny, which will be eternal habitation with the Shepherd in heaven.

Blessor Shepherd—“*My cup overflows*”

God is the “Shepherd Blessor.” One verse of a popular Christian song says, “He keeps blessing me over, and over, and over, and over, and over again.” Christians do indeed enjoy all spiritual blessings in Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:3). It is not just forgiveness—though, that would be enough. Not only are Christians blessed with salvation from sin through Jesus, but they are also blessed with prayer, the fellowship of other Christians, providence, the Spirit, and on and on.

Companion Shepherd—

“*Surely goodness and love will follow me*”

God is the constant benevolent “Shepherd Companion.” What a lovely way to say this! “*Goodness and love* (“*mercy*” in the other versions and songs) *will follow me all the days of my life . . .*” (23:6). “*Goodness and love*” are personified as people who follow the child of God around for the specific purpose of blessing him. God continually wants to help His

children through blessings and His presence. James writes, “*Come near to God and he will come near to you*” (James 4:8).

Hope Shepherd—

“And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever”

God is the “Shepherd Hope.” He waits for and desires the day when His children will dwell in His house. What a Shepherd! That is the **God of the Psalms**! The God of the Psalms is the God of every child of God.

My God and I (Psalm 139)

Introduction to the Psalm

Another great psalm about God is Psalm 139. This psalm is a favorite of many because one of man’s strongest desires is to walk close to God and to know Him intimately. Adam and Eve must have enjoyed such a relationship with Him in the Garden as they walked with Him in the cool of the evenings (cf. Genesis 3:8). Abraham often had those “friend-to-friend” conversations with the Father (cf. Genesis 18:33). The Scripture says “*Enoch walked with God*” (cf. Genesis 5:22) and “*Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD*” (cf. Genesis 6:8). Moses had that special time in the tent with the LORD (cf. Exodus 33:7-11). Jesus, of course, spent a lot of time in prayer and being close to His Father. When all God’s children get to heaven (paradise), they will walk with God in the closest of fellowship.

Psalm 139 is one psalm that describes that closeness of fellowship and walking with the Father. The basis of a Christian’s closeness with God is His knowledge of His children and His presence on earth in such a way that He knows each child intimately and all the circumstances that surround every one. Christians should ask themselves how their personal walk is with God.

Background of the Psalm

Psalm 139:7–10 is one of the most familiar and most loved passages because of its comforting message. It has been a favorite of commentators and common folk for a long time. The probable situation is that the author was under attack (139:19–20). Whether physical harm is intended, or just accusations that cause ridicule and hurt (139:2, 4), the effect upon the victim is the same. The writer finds solace and strength in the personal omniscience, omnipresence, and care of his LORD.

Though expressing some theology of the nature and character of God, this psalm was not written for that purpose, or is it filled with hard to understand terminology. The poem throbs with warm emotion and strong feelings for the Friend of friends. It is a remarkable exposure of the feelings and thoughts of a man for his Creator. It has such a variety of ideas and thoughts: the grand thoughts of God's omniscience and omnipresence, but also the personal side of God; the greatness of God's control, but also man's individual responsibility; and God as a Judge, but also as a friend.

The psalm appears to be broken down into four-six-verse stanzas in such a way that each group of six verses goes together and presents a certain thought.

The Teaching of the Psalm

God Knows Me

*O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
You perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
You are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.*

*You hem me in – behind and before;
You have laid your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.*

Psalm 139:1–6

There is the possibility of fear being produced in the hearts of some as they read this, but that is not the case for the writer of this psalm, nor for the faithful child of God. God “*searched me and . . . know(s) me!*” This first phrase is a little more intense in meaning than just “knows me.” Actually, the word “*search*” in Psalm 139:1 and 3 are different words. The word in verse 1 literally means to dig for precious metals. The word in verse 3 means to winnow (the act of blowing the chaff [trash] from the grain by means of an air current, to sift and separate, Ed.). Putting these two meanings together, there is the idea that God thoroughly examines man’s heart and separates the good from the bad.

To show the extent to which God knows mankind, the writer says God knows the daily, minute details of “*my*” life (cf. 139:2). God is not unmindful of anything that goes on in a man’s life, no matter how small or insignificant it seems. Jesus said, “*Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows*” (Luke 12:7). God knows man so well that He knows his every thought (cf. 139:2). He knows the words man is going to say before he speaks them (cf. 139:4). God is not just acquainted with the outward but the inward also. He never misjudges or misinterprets man because He knows each one inside out. Man is transparent before God, and He knows each one better than we know ourselves.

The main thought in the psalmist’s mind concerning God’s omniscience is the fact that God personally cares for him—“*You hem me in . . . you have laid your hand upon me*” (139:5). God surrounds His children; He hems them in just as

Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman armies. God is “*behind and before*” His children; He foreknows all their deeds (cf. 139:16). He protects His children from enemies that would attack; He provides for all their needs. He has laid His hand upon the psalmist in such a way that he perceives the closeness of God. God is not a far-away, uninterested, incapable Deity. He is a personal companion.

Man’s mind is unable to comprehend and grasp all that is involved in being in relationship with God. It is so deep and inexplicable that it overwhelms him. He tries to climb the mount, but gets dizzy when he reaches the top. No matter how high he climbs, the top is always out of reach. That is good; man does not need to understand God completely. Man is left in awe of God because of his ignorance and finite nature. God has revealed Himself to man, but man will never thoroughly understand the infinite nature of God. Man needs to relish the finite thoughts of God’s grandeur and love and care for him. By inspiration Moses said, “*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law*” (Deuteronomy 29:29). God’s secrecy inspires awe in mankind.

God Surrounds Me With His Presence

*Where can I go from your **Spirit**?*

Where can I flee from your presence?

*If I go up to the **heavens**, you are there;*

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

*If I rise on the **wings of the dawn**,*

if I settle on the far side of the sea,

Even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me

and the light become night around me,”

Even the darkness will not be dark to you;

*the night will shine like the day,
For darkness is a light to you.*

Psalm 139:7–12

When reading this passage in the past, I have taken it to beautifully describe the omnipresence of God, but still viewed it with a rather fearful attitude. I initially thought it sounded like the writer had really tried to escape the presence of God, like Jonah when he tried to run away from God (cf. Jonah 1:3). This was not written as a reminder to the psalmist to scrutinize his actions, however, because he knows that God will see all his sins regardless. The intent of the psalm was not that the psalmist was trying to hide from God. He simply used this literary device to show that no one can escape the all-pervading presence of Jehovah. Remember the author is being attacked so he rests in his confidence that God knows him and is always with him. God's presence is a comfort to the faithful child of God. He is protected and clean before God and that is all that matters.

There are some interesting details in this portion of the psalm:

1. "*Spirit*" is equivalent to God's presence. Some have thought it ought to be a small "s," but a big "S," indicating the Holy Spirit seems more appropriate. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the Christian's life. He is the Lord's presence in other circumstances, as evidenced by His work at Pentecost and in the conversion of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10).
2. "*Heavens*" is the antithesis to *Sheol* (the Hebrew underworld abode of the dead, Ed), which is the contrast that the psalmist is making. Heaven and hell as man thinks of them is not the contrast the psalmist is referring to. He is referring to the heights as represented by "*heavens*" and the "*depths*" represented by the underworld.

3. *“The wings of the dawn”* are the rays of the sun at dawn as they spread over the earth. If anyone could ride the rays of the sun to the ends of the earth, God would be there.

4. Men and women of God have found God everywhere! He is on the mountain tops, *“on the far side of the sea”* in a boat, in the desert, in caves, in crowds, in solitude, in friends, in the workings of foes, in gardens, in temples, in tabernacles, in war, and in peace. There is no place or situation into which the child of God can enter without God beside him.

5. An amazing thought occurs in Psalm 139:11–12: *“Darkness”* is not *“dark”* to God. *“Darkness”* is not any darker to God than light! He can see the same in both! Therefore, the illustration says that God cannot be lost by someone being in darkness. There is no corner of the world where anyone can be out of His sight. What a comfort to the Christian!

6. Not only is God everywhere, He also *“guide(s)”* and cares enough to *“hold me fast”* (139:10). There are many scriptures that mention this theme: *“He lifted me out of the slimy pit . . . he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand”* (40:2), He is *“the Rock of our salvation”* (95:1), *“my rock of refuge, to which I can always go”* (71:3), and He is the Shepherd who *“leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul”* (23:2). These verses are surely a comfort to many missionaries who are located far from home, but also to Christians in any circumstance.

God Made Us Just the Way We Are

*For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and*

*wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
your eyes saw my uniformed body.
All the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.*

Psalm 139:13–16

The psalmist contemplates God's involvement in his conception and formation in his mother's womb. The text says, "*For you created my inmost being . . . knit me together in my mother's womb.*" God gave each person a special set of intellectual and emotional tendencies, as well as a special look in the flesh. Each person is unique. God knit each one as a skilled artisan weaves a basket together. God weaves each child into the person He intends him to be. What a thought!

The psalmist's reaction in Psalm 139:14 is indicative of his belief that God thought of him as a person before he was fully developed physically or delivered as a baby into this world. He considers God's work in this area not only from the control that He has over the ways of nature, but also the personal involvement of God with each individual. This surely indicates God would not want babies He had formed in the womb to be aborted! Every baby is a person as far as God is concerned! God made each one exactly the way He wanted them to be. He was not turning out assembly-line style people.

The Psalmist's Reactions

*How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand.
When I awake, I am still with you.*

If only you would slay the wicked, O God!

*Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!
They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD,
and abhor those who rise up against you?
I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.*

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Psalms 139:17–24

The psalmist has a deep desire to know God and please Him because of what has preceded him (139:17–18). He knows an immeasurably small part of the depth of God's thoughts which are revealed in this psalm. He is in awe of God, and therefore, humble before Him.

The psalmist offers a prayer of vindication as God's child for God's sake (139:19–22). The "wicked" not only hate the individual, they hate God also. The psalmist was not being selfish or hateful, but he had a great desire to see God's dignity upheld. When man is exonerated, then God will be exalted. The psalmist leaves himself in God's hands. The psalmist closes this psalm with his desire to be in close fellowship with God. There is complete openness toward God and willingness for God to continue to "search" his heart. He wants to be led "in the way everlasting" (139:24).

Conclusion

This is only a partial picture of the God of the Psalms. The other psalms studied in this book concerning other topics in the Psalms could well be considered from the standpoint of what each one of them says about God. Every psalm has a message about God. That is what makes the book of Psalms such a rich source of material for a personal relationship with Him.

God's Reveals Himself in Creation and the Word

Introduction

How is it that God makes Himself known to man? This has long been an important question of mankind. From the standpoint of the Psalms, men of all cultures and generations seem to want to know this God whom they worship. To be able to worship Him, give Him praise, call on Him for help, and desire to live with Him eternally, the worshiper must know Him. The Book of Psalms does speak to the question of God's revelation to mankind.

When the Apostle Paul arrived in Athens on his second missionary journey, he experienced religious culture shock. The people of Athens had filled their city with idols because they did not want to miss or offend any supreme being. Why would such a heathen culture have so much religion? Paul's approach to the Athenians centered in God's revelation of Himself through creation. Seizing the opportunity to speak about their "unknown god," he said:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they

should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring" (Acts 17:24–28).

Paul was trying to tell the people of Athens that their “unknown god” was Jehovah God. He is the One who created all things and put them in their rightful and respective places in creation so that men would see them and seek their Creator. When Paul wrote to the Romans, he said:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (Romans 1:18–20).

God reveals His eternal existence, powerful capacity, and divine nature through two means: the very intricate design and order in creation and the judgments He brings on people for their sin. These two instruments of God's revelation were employed by Him throughout Israel's history. Israel was called to respond to these two revelations. The theme of some psalms focuses on God's work in creation and His revelations through those works of creation.

Pieces of the “Creation Theme” in the Psalms

Little pieces from different psalms reveal the use of references to Creation. The psalmists employed these

references to God's revelation through creation in two ways: **God's nature** and **God's judgments**. Usually the reference to creation proved some other point the psalmist was trying to make, and creation was the basis for an argument or an appeal. One such psalm is Psalm 29. The psalmist pictured a great thunderstorm forming over the Mediterranean Sea, coming inland in the north of Palestine, gliding down the Jordan River valley, and dissipating in the Sinai desert. God's powerful Word is the parallel to the storm. His Word is as powerful in its affect on man as a Palestinian thunderstorm marching through the Promised Land.

The psalmist was speaking of creation when he said: "*By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses*" (33:6–7). It was through the mere spoken Word that creation came to be. He spoke and it was! Power of the highest magnitude! Something spoken into existence! His strength set the mountains in place: "*who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength*" (65:6). The Word that created also sustains. His strength in the lives of His children is proved by His strength in creation. The *LORD's* powerful answers to prayers are like His power in creation.

In Psalm 74 Asaph confessed his faith in God to be able to deliver him and the Israelite nation. He wondered where God was and how long He would wait to deliver Israel, but he did not doubt God's power. He knew that God's power was, and still is, displayed in creation. The psalmist believed that God was able, and hopefully, willing to deliver him:

*It was you who split open the sea by your power;
you broke the heads of the monster in the waters.
It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan
and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.
It was you who opened up springs and streams;
you dried up the ever flowing rivers.*

*The day is yours, and yours also the night;
you established the sun and moon.
It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth;
you made both summer and winter.*

Psalm 74:13–17

A similar appeal based on God's power in creation is found in Psalm 89. Ethan, the writer, acknowledged God's power and rule in creation:

*The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth;
you founded the world and all that is in it.
You created the north and the south;
Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name.*

Psalm 89:11–12

His rule in creation had always been for Israel's sake, and Ethan hoped and prayed God would make the throne of David firm forever. He emphatically trusted the promise God made to David because he was sure God's Word had created the earth, and even now, controls it.

Turning to the theme of God's **judgment** on man through creation, the writer of Psalm 95 said:

*Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the desert,
where your fathers tested and tried me,
though they had seen what I did.*

Psalm 95:7b–9

He was referring to an incident recorded in Exodus 17. While the Israelites were in the wilderness they murmured about the lack of water, so God had Moses strike the rock to bring forth water for them. Since God was not pleased with their murmuring, He "*called the place Massah (testing) and*

Meribah (quarreling) *because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD . . .*” (Exodus 17:7). Israel tested God’s goodness, and He provided for them through nature, but He judged them because of it. They paid a high price for their lack of trust.

God’s plagues on Egypt delivered the people of God from their Egyptian slave masters. Exodus 12:12 calls the plagues “*judgment upon all the gods of Egypt.*” God’s power over nature was used as a judgment upon the sin and idolatry of Egypt. Look at Psalms 136:10–15; 146:5–6; and 105:28–36 for references to the great curses on Egypt. In the end, because God created it all by His powerful Word, because He sustains and cares for it by that same powerful Word, because He employs creation to supply the needs of the righteous or to punish the sins of the wicked, and because His creation speaks of His majesty and glory and eternity, all creation, and especially mankind, should praise Him!

God’s Revelation in Creation and in His Word (Psalms 19 and 104)

Psalm 19

Familiar words from this psalm are often quoted by preachers, learned by children in Bible classes, and sung occasionally as songs in the worship assemblies. They are favorites for many people:

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

*. . . May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

Psalm 19:1, 14

Psalm 19 consists of what appears to be two distinct parts, representing two kinds of revelation. Verse one begins with, *“The heavens declare the glory of God . . .”* That is one kind of revelation called “General.” Verse seven begins a second section: *“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.”* This indicates a second kind of revelation called “Special.”

Revelation Through Creation and the Spoken or Written Word

Before we go on with this interpretive approach, attention needs to be given to a different revelation; instead of two distinct kinds of revelation, only one may primarily be meant—the Word of God. Some commentators feel the first section of this psalm (cf. 19:1–6) is a glorification of the Lawgiver God, not an emphasis on creation’s voice from God. The first section introduces the Lawgiver, and then section two (cf. 19:7–11) focuses on that Law, which is God’s Word. This interpretation should be considered, especially because of the way Paul uses Psalm 19:4 in Romans 10:18. Undoubtedly his point in Romans 10 was that the Jew of his day had been given sufficient revelation through the written Word (not through creation) to choose to believe in Jesus. In support of that assertion, he quoted from Psalm 19 and others. Psalm 19:4 has been offered as referring to Creation’s voice rather than the voice of the Word.

On the other hand, Paul could have been using that verse because of its appropriate wording, *“Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world”* (Psalm 19:4), knowing that the specific words refer to creation’s voice, but are in a psalm where the revelation through the Word is emphasized also. Paul can proof-text (using scripture to prove a point, Ed), because he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is a good thought to keep in mind, but I am personally still persuaded that Psalm 19 speaks of both kinds of revelation—General and Special, Creation and the Word, the Skies and the Scriptures.

Psalm 19:1–6

The first six verses are truly beautiful and almost defy explanation. Verse one states the fact that all creation is represented here by the heavens and all that they contain: the sun, moon and stars; all creation declares God is glorious. Actually, the very existence of God is assumed, but creation's order, uniqueness, and design witness to God's existence as well. Romans 1:19–20 says:

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Mankind, in all places and in all times, has had the opportunity to hear the witness of creation to God's existence, His divinity (that He is God and not just a super man), His eternity (only someone infinite could antecede, make, and then follow, the finite creation after it goes its way), and His power (no one can challenge the fact that the power in the universe would have demanded a powerful originator and sustainer).

When it comes to evidence from the universe, many examples could be offered. Bert Thompson writing for the magazine "The Spiritual Sword" offers the following in his article on "God's Revelation in the Psalms:

God speaking through Moses (Genesis 15:5) and Jeremiah (33:22), mentioned that 'the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured . . .' Little did we know how true those statements were. Men before and after Bayer tried to count the stars. The astronomer Hipparchus, in 128 B.C., counted the stars and found 1,026. In A.D. 150, the famous astronomer Ptolemy counted the stars and

arrived at the number of 1,056. Years later, in A.D. 1575, the renowned Danish astronomer, Tyco Brahe, counted the stars and said there were 777. In A.D. 1600, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler counted the stars and gave the number as 1,005. At last count (and we are nowhere near finished yet) the number of stars stood at 25 septillion! That's a 25 with twenty-four zeroes after it! There are an estimated one billion galaxies. And most of them contain billions of stars (the Milky Way galaxy in which we live, for example, contains over 100 billion stars). Its size is so immense that traveling at the speed of light (186,317 miles per second) it would take 100,000 years just to cross the diameter of the galaxy. Light travels in one year approximately 5.87×10 to the 17th miles, or 587+ quadrillion miles! Our nearest neighboring galaxy is the Andromeda galaxy, an estimated 2,000,000 light years away, which is so far that a radio wave traveling around the earth approximately 8.2 times in one second would require over 1 million years to get there. The observable universe has an estimated diameter of 20 billion light years!

But it is not simply the size of the universe that is so marvelous. The size is impressive, of course, but so is the design. The earth, for example, in orbiting the sun, departs from a straight line by only one-ninth of an inch every 18 miles—a very straight line in human terms. If the orbit changed by one-tenth of an inch every 18 miles, it would be vastly larger and we would all freeze to death. If it changed by one-eighth of an inch, we would come so close to the sun that we would be incinerated. Are we to believe that such precision 'just happened?' The sun is burning at approximately 20 million degrees Celsius at its

interior. If we were to move the earth away 10%, we would soon freeze to death. If we were to move the earth closer by 10%, we would be incinerated. The sun is poised at 93 million miles from the earth, which happens to be just right—by accident?

This kind of scientific fact analysis shows that the exact design and order of the universe for man's sake is abundant. Creation proclaims this glory of God. Notice the features of the first four verses of Psalm 19. The heavens ***“declare”*** the glory of God. They ***“proclaim”*** His glory like a preacher preaches. They ***“pour forth,”*** gushing like a flood. They ***“reveal”*** and ***“display”*** like an exhibitionist that God is great and good! They do it all day and ***“night after night.”*** They never tire of their job. Creation is like a new father who has been up for 24 hours straight but feels no tiredness. Instead he feels only joy, as he goes up and down the halls of the hospital telling anyone and everyone about his new baby.

There is not a place on the globe that escapes this “preaching.” It goes to the ends of the earth. Neither dust nor smog, concrete jungles, enclosed malls nor the lights of Las Vegas shut out the beauty or the voice of Creation. Psalm 148 is a marvelous parallel psalm. It pictures every thing in creation praising God. Listen to the chorus Creation sings: He lives! He is powerful! He is eternal! Find Him!

Psalm 19:7–11

The second part of the psalm (19:7–11) focuses on “Special Revelation”—the revealed Word through inspired speakers. There are certain things about God, especially His will for man, which cannot be revealed through creation; it takes words. The psalmist exalted the quality of the Word to supply all man's spiritual needs. He used a number of descriptive words to give the properties of divine law and the results it brings to mankind.

Note the words used as **synonyms** for the spoken or written revelation:

“Law of the LORD” (19:7)—indicating God’s revealed will. This is the word **Torah**, which came to be a synonym for the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament, especially the Law of Moses given on Mt. Sinai).

“Statutes / testimony of the LORD” (19:7)—indicating the truthfulness of it. It works because it is true. God cannot and would not lie to man to mislead Him.

“Precepts” and **“commands of the LORD”** (19:8)—indicating specific ways of thinking about things (attitudes) and doing things (actions). The precision and authority of God are indicated.

“Judgments/ordinances of the LORD” (19:9) —the fact that His word deciphers right and wrong seems to be the connotation. It makes discernment, a decision between good and bad, better and best.

These synonyms give a glimpse of where the psalmist is going with this stanza, but then he added adjectives to further describe the Word. Notice the **adjectives** and their meanings:

“Perfect” (19:7)—always right, never wrong, blameless in the sense that nothing can be found to be wrong with them.

“Sure” (19:9)—steadfast and immovable, always there, always applicable, always working.

“Right” (19:8)—same as *“perfect,”* maps out a correct course for man.

“Pure” (19:9)—thoroughly, completely purified, is unadulterated with man’s faulty ways of thinking.

“Clean” (19:9, KJV)—same thought as *“pure.”*

“True” (19:9, KJV)—utterly dependable, rock solid, can put your full weight down on it.

Summing it all up, *“The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous”* (19:9).

Then there are the **descriptive phrases**, which may be the main emphasis here. They note the effects of the Word on man's spiritual well being:

“Reviving the soul” (19:7)—calls it back from its wanderings down the worldly pathways of thinking and acting.

“Making wise the simple” (19:7)—the man who is open but ignorant will be made wise. Psalm 119:98-100 says the Word gives more wisdom than worldly enemies, teachers, and older people.

“Joy to the heart” (19:8)—bringing joy to the inner man.

“Light to the eyes” (19:8)—remember the story of Jonathan whose eyes were brightened for the battle when he ate the honey (cf. 1 Samuel 14:24). The Word gives man that same strength and renewal to fight the battles of life.

“Enduring forever” (19:9)—never loses its value, timeless and culture-less, always applicable.

“More precious than gold . . . sweeter than honey” (19:10)—more valuable than all the gold in the world; great reward is found in them.

Do you believe this? Is the Word this special and important and valuable to you?

Psalm 19:12–14

In personal application the psalmist closed with a plea to God to use that implanted Word to save his soul (cf. Psalm 19:12–14; James 1:21) and to help him respond properly to these revelations. He asked for forgiveness of hidden, ignorant sins and protection from deliberate or presumptuous sins (or sins of the “high hand” as they were called). The last verse was a final humble plea, *“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer”* (Psalm 19:14).

Psalm 104: The God Who Cares For His Creation

This psalm has already been covered in Chapter 3 under “The Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving” in this book as a part

of the “Creation” theme, but it is also a psalm that fits into the area of “Revelation.” God made everything and everything serves His purpose, but He made it all for man. All creation, including mankind, should praise Him.

In general the psalmist argues the following points:

1. God glorifies Himself through all creation (104:1–4).
2. God sustains creation (104:27).
3. God rules creation for a purpose (104:24).
4. All creation should glorify God (104:31).

By using the present tense in Psalm 104:1–4, the psalmist said God figuratively clothes Himself in creation.

This psalm sounds like Psalm 19:1—*“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”* Each flower, planet, and sea creature proclaims the glory of God each day as they stroll down the runway of God’s fashion show. This psalm says God uses the light of the heavens to clothe Himself (cf. 104:2). The Apostle John says, *“God is light”* (1 John 1:5). He dwells in unapproachable light (cf. 1 Timothy 6:16), so light is the appropriate garment. It reveals His majesty and splendor even though He is invisible. He makes the heavens the top of a tent which He stretches out every day. In that tent, God “performs” His mighty works. The clouds are His chariot and the winds as His messengers are judgment figures.

Psalm 18 pictures the Holy One parting the heavens and coming down on the clouds (His chariot) in order to fight against His enemies. God has employed creation as His instrument of wrath more than once. Consider the flood or Sodom and Gomorrah. When God gave the Jews the Covenant of Blessing and Cursing (cf. Deuteronomy 28–30), He warned them of plagues, pestilence, and disease if they were unfaithful. Some of the same judgments of nature used on Egypt are applied to Israel later in its history (cf. Ps. 105:28–34). Isaiah said, *“When God’s judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants learn righteousness”* (Isaiah 26:9).

Changing to a past tense in Psalm 104: 5, the psalmist takes those who would sing this song back to the time of

creation: “*He set the earth on its foundations, it can never be moved.*” God made the land and sent the waters into their storehouses—“*the place you (God) assigned them*” (104:8). Those boundaries can only be crossed by the Sovereign God.

God is not deistic. His constant attention to the needs of animate creation testifies to His care for all creatures:

*He makes grass grow for the cattle,
and plants for man to cultivate—
bringing forth food from the earth.*

Psalm 104:14

*The trees of the Lord are well watered,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
There the birds make their nests;
the stork has its home in the pine trees.*

Psalm 104:16–17

*The lions roar for their prey
and seek their food from God .*

Psalm 104:21

*These all look to you
to give them their food at their proper time.*

Psalm 104:27

God sustains all of creation. These all have a higher purpose. Man is the center of earth’s created beings. God does what He does in creation for man’s good:

*wine that gladdens the heart of man,
oil to make his face shine,
and bread that sustains his heart.*

Psalm 104:15

Man is the most important of God’s creations—“*In wisdom you made them all. . .*” (104:24). The closing lines for this psalm say:

*May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
 may the Lord rejoice in his works—
 he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,
 who touches the mountains and they smoke.*

*I will sing to the LORD all my life.
 I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
 May my meditation be pleasing to him,
 as I rejoice in the LORD.
 But may sinners vanish from the earth
 and the wicked be no more.*

*Praise the LORD, O my soul.
 Praise the LORD.*

Psalm 104:31–34

The psalmist promises to sing of God's greatness forever and asks that God's antagonists vanish forever.

God, the Creator! He did it to glorify Himself. He did it for man. He makes it in such a way that it reflects His glory and points all men to a Creator. It shows His nature in many ways. If man refuses to see Him, God has often used creation to judge man. In so doing He makes a last attempt to cause man to repent and see a higher being. The next chapter will cover more on God's revelation.

The Book of Psalms reveals God to mankind through creation in two ways. **First**, the sheer power, design, and order of creation proclaims that He exists, that He is eternal, and that He is all-powerful. **Second**, God's use of creation's calamities, like the plagues on Egypt (lice, murrain, frogs, etc), proclaim His righteousness in the earth. Isaiah said, “. . . *when your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness*” (Isaiah 26:9). People pay attention to the life-stopping events caused by God. God also reveals Himself

through His Word. Psalm 19 combined God's revelation through creation with revelation through His Word. The psalmist closed that psalm with this statement: *"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer"* (19:14).

Good Attitudes Toward God and His Word

The words from man's mouth reflect the state of his heart. His words will only be pleasing to God if he has the proper attitude toward God and His Word. With 176 verses Psalm 119 is the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible. The length of this psalm may be the reason it has been so neglected, but it is a magnificent poetical piece with enduring lessons for every believer. Psalm 119 contains these verses: *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you"* (119:11) and *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path"* (119:105).

Character and Makeup of Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is long, but has been arranged in twenty-two stanzas each containing eight verses. Each stanza has one letter from the Hebrew alphabet preceding it. Every verse within that stanza begins with a word that begins with that specific letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This is called an acrostic. A good way to tackle this psalm and renew your attitude toward God and His Word is to read three stanzas a day. The psalmist used ten different synonyms for the Word of God in this psalm making it similar to Psalm 19:7–11.

The Setting for Psalm 119

The setting for this psalm seems to indicate that the psalmist is suffering persecution. A number of verses describe his affliction: *"My comfort in my suffering is this . . ."* (119:50), *"I have suffered much . . ."* (119:107), and *"I have*

strayed like a lost sheep" (119:176). Apparently the affliction was viewed as an instrument in God's hands to bring him to his senses: "*It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees*" (119:71). These afflictions came in the form of enemies and persecution:

The arrogant mock me without restraint . . .
(119:51).

How long must your servant wait?
When will you punish my persecutors?
The arrogant dig pitfalls for me,
contrary to your law.
All your commands are trustworthy;
help me, for men persecute me without
cause.
They almost wiped me from the earth,
but I have not forsaken your precepts.

Psalm 119:84–87

The psalmist described himself as someone who had wandered away from God. His relationship to the Father had grown cold. God loves His children, and sometimes He punishes them to get their attention. In his affliction, the psalmist called out to God for help. He pleads for deliverance: "*. . . do not utterly forsake me*" (119:8) and "*. . . O LORD; do not let me be put to shame*" (119:31). The psalmist knows he needs to return to God to be able to make his life right. He must cooperate with God's providential protection from his enemies. That means he must return to God's Word so that it can guide his life. God's Word is the only guide to a life of righteous living and a close relationship with God.

Psalm 119:78 is an example of a number of antithetic parallelisms (cf Chapter 1): "*May the arrogant be put to shame for wronging me without cause; but I will meditate on your precepts.*" God will take care of His part in shaming the

arrogant, but the psalmist must do his part with the Word in his life.

Good Attitudes Toward God

Good attitudes toward God and His Word go hand-in-hand and both are often expressed in the same verse almost as if they are two prongs on the same fork. It all begins with a good attitude toward God. Developing a relationship with God must be the reason for studying the Word. The Word is not meant to be an end within itself.

First, man must have a desire to seek God with his whole heart: *“Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart”* (119:2). The thought behind seeking God is to come to know Him and be known by Him (cf. Galatians 4:9), to want to have fellowship with Him, to want to be owned by Him, and to love Him. Jeremiah 9:23-24 says:

This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.

The primary way to come to know the LORD is through the Word. Man must have an attitude of wanting to know God and His Son, Jesus. According to John 17:3 knowing God is eternal life. The search for God and Jesus must be done with the whole heart. The psalmist repeats the phrase, *“with all my heart”* many times in Psalm 119:

I seek you with all my heart . . . (119:10).

*Give me understanding, and I will keep your law
and obey it with all my heart* (119:34).

. . . I keep your precepts with all my heart (119:69).

I call with all my heart . . . (119:145).

The **second** attitude toward God is a desire to seek understanding from Him. The psalmist said, *"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me"* (119:18–19). Man must have a strong sense of need and dependency upon God. The psalmist was saying, "I need you, God." He said, *"How I long for your precepts!"* (119:40) and *"Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands"* (119:66). The psalmist knew how much he needed the LORD. He did not dare to take a step without the LORD's direction through His Word.

There must also be a strong sense of expectancy about what one will receive from this relationship with God through His Word. Psalm 119:18 says, *"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."* People sometimes say, "The Bible is boring!" The person with this attitude does not know the nuggets of truth that can be found in the Bible if you know how to find them. The psalmist said, *"Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insights than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes"* (119:98–99). A graduate degree from an institution of higher learner is not the only thing that guarantees wisdom. God who made the universe holds the secrets to a fulfilling life on earth. Those secrets are revealed in His Word.

Man's study of God's Word must be preceded by a sense of expectancy that causes the student to ask: "What will He reveal today? What will I learn about my Father today? What problems will He help with?" Knowing God through His Word is exciting. The psalmist said, *"Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I delight"* (119:35); *"Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold . . ."* (119:127); *"I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil"* (119:162).

A **third** attitude toward God is a reverent awe of God. Psalm 119:161 says, *"Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word."* The psalmist said, *"My flesh*

trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws" (119:120). The writer of Proverbs said, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge"* (Proverbs 1:7) and *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"* (Proverbs 9:10). Before a person approaches the Word of God, there must be a healthy respect of God. One needs to be in awe of Him and have a holy trembling for His Word.

The student of God's Word must tremble when He speaks just as Moses did at Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 3:6; Acts 7:32), as Daniel did when he heard the messenger of the LORD (cf. Daniel 8:17), or as John did when he was shown the grandeur of God's heavenly abode (cf. Revelation 1:17). Even though the words on the page are in black and white and not speaking loudly, it is still the LORD speaking! His words are as thunder! It is not a magazine or a math book or a television special. God speaks and He says, *"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground"* (Exodus 3:5). Man cannot afford to treat God's Word or his relationship with God as if he can take it or leave it. His Word is the proclamation of the *LORD* Almighty! He is a consuming fire (cf. Hebrews 12:29)! He is holy (cf. 1 Peter 1:16)! The Words of God will judge all men (cf. John 12:48). In a world that sometimes denies the existence of God and other times renders Him the product of human invention and description, the true disciple allows God to be what His Word says He is. When God speaks through His word, true worshipers listen. Man must have a healthy respect for Him and His Word.

The **fourth** attitude must be an attitude of thanksgiving and praise. The psalmist is joyful over the spoil he obtains from his study and relationship with God: *"I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws"* (119:7); *"I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches"* (119:14); *"At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws"* (119:62); *"Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws"* (119:164). He even arises at midnight and praises God for His laws. You cannot help but be

impressed with his devotion and appreciative attitude. Apparently, he knew God and His Word and realized how precious that relationship was. Perhaps he realized that God did not have to tell man anything about Himself or life or eternity, yet He did in His Word. That the Creator of the universe would desire a relationship with mankind is very humbling and should cause all men to burst forth in praise.

It is interesting to note that this psalm is 176 verses long. The theme of the longest chapter in the Bible is the **Word of God**. It is as if the author cannot say enough to extol the merits of the Law of the LORD and of the LORD Himself! The psalmist closed this psalm with *"Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me. I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands"* (119:175–176).

Good Attitudes Toward the Word

This is repetitive material because often a person's relationship to God and his relationship to the Word are mentioned in the same verse. **First**, man needs to desire to understand the Word. Just as man needs to have a desire to know God Himself, so he needs to want to know His Word. The psalmist wrote: *"My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times"* (119:20); *"Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors"* (119:24); *"Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart"* (119:111); *"For I delight in your commands because I love them"* (119:47).

These verses express an attitude which should dwell in all searchers. A desire to comprehend will motivate the reader to concentrate on what he is reading. He will employ objective methods of interpretation to comprehend God's mind. In a world where individual and multiple interpretations were championed, Peter said, *"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation"* (2 Peter 1:20). Paul added:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Man must recognize that the Word is inspired and profitable for all his needs. Therefore, he should rightly handle and interpret it—“*. . . a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15). A desire to understand the Word will prevent the projections of one's own subjective views into the message. With this kind of attitude, the interpreter will say, “Speak to me, God, so that I know what You desire of me as your servant.”

Second, man needs a dependence on the Word of God. The psalmist wrote: “*Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands*” (119:66); “*Then I will answer the one who taunts me, for I trust in your word. Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws*” (119:42–43); “*Yet you are near, O LORD, and all your commands are true*” (119:151).

Jesus said, “*. . . Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4). He also proclaimed His own dependency on God when He said, “*My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work*” (John 4:34). The Word of God truly is man's food and drink. It is what sustains him day in and day out. That is why the Lord says the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is blessed (cf. Matthew 5:6). God said through the prophet Hosea, “*My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge*” (Hosea 4:6). God's people no longer knew right from wrong; they had lost their way. Without God's wisdom that is revealed through His Word, a pilgrim has no compass or map to chart his course through the dry and weary lands. The

psalmist would not dare to plot his course in life without the wisdom of the Word of God in his mind and heart. Nor should any man in today's world!

The **third** attitude is that man needs a desire to obey the Word of God. The psalmist wrote: *"I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands"* (119:60); *"Away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commands of my God!"* (119:115). Is the command of the LORD a "take it or leave it" proposition? Is Christianity a cafeteria style religion where the adherent is permitted to choose his own personal set of likeable commands? Does not that approach to religion make man the god and God the servant? The psalmist possessed a different attitude. He pleaded with God to tell him what to think and do, and then assured Him of His obedience. Part of the motivation to obey is also the desire to please Him. Paul said, *"So we make it our goal to please him . . ."* (2 Corinthians 5:9). Just as people in love try so hard to please their mates, so the psalmist (the bride) tries to please her husband, the LORD.

The **fourth** attitude is a reverent respect for the Word of God. The psalmist said: *"You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word"* (119:114); *"Yet you are near O LORD and all your commands are true"* (119:151); *"My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws"* (119:120). The psalmist believed God says what He means and means what He says.

God does not voice empty threats. Man needs to respect God's Word in all areas of his life. When God's Word is read in worship assemblies, it should be read by competent, expressive readers. People need to be trained to read the Scriptures well. It should not be done hurriedly, without expression, or without preparation. When God's Word is being read, the audience should pay close attention. Not doing so betrays a relatively low respect for the reading of God's Word. Congregations should not allow poor reading from the Word any more than they would allow shabby preaching from the pulpit. Christians must not place more emphasis on what is said about the Word than on what the Word itself says. The fact that

Bible readings in worship assemblies are short in comparison to sermon length may reflect the same attitude.

The psalmist had left His LORD. His Father came to look for him and used affliction to get his attention. In his despair the man realized that he was in sin and out of relationship with God. He turned to God's Word and put all his spiritual weight down on the principles in that Word. It led him back to the God he needed so badly. God has revealed Himself through His Word to all men. Man needs to look at his attitude toward God and His Word.

God's Word in Covenant Form

God's Word is necessary because it spells out the conditions of a covenant relationship with God. Man's sin separates him from His Maker. It is then up to the Holy One to set out the conditions by which man will be allowed again to fellowship the Perfect One. Through the centuries the covenants established with man have been designed and proffered by God. He has communicated those covenants to man through the spoken and written Word. Thus the written Word to Israel was so important.

This covenant relationship with God is important enough to warrant a review. **First**, the Abrahamic Covenant served as the foundation for all other Israelite covenants. God promised to give Abraham's descendants the land of Palestine (cf. Genesis 12:7). The psalmist recalled God's commitment to that Abrahamic promise in Psalm 105:8–10, "*He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac.*" Fulfilled when Joshua's armies conquered Canaan land (cf. Josh. 21; 23), God promised to keep the Israelites in the Promised Land as long as they were faithful.

The Covenant of Blessings and Cursings included warnings of pests, pestilence, and removal from the land if the people rebelled (cf. Deuteronomy 28). Deuteronomy 29: 1 says:

These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in

Moab, in addition to the covenant he made with them at Horeb.

The psalms repeatedly reminded the Israelites that their present distress was in regard to their breaking of covenant:

- *“Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice,” (50:5).*
- *“But to the wicked, God says: ‘What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips?’” (50:16).*
- *“They did not keep God’s covenant and refused to live by his law,” (78:10).*
- *“But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children’s children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts” (103:17–18).*

The Davidic Covenant was also important to Israel. God’s promised to keep David’s descendants on the throne of Israel (cf. 89:3, 28, 34, 39). He said, *“If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever” (132:12).* The psalmists recalled these covenants as the terms of Israel’s relationship with God. The LORD through the psalmists verbalized again the covenant conditions. This emphasizes the importance of the written Word. God is revealing Himself and His will for mankind.

Conclusion

God reveals Himself through the design of creation, through judgments, and especially through His Word. These same messages should be clear to all men. God is speaking! The psalmist said, *“The heavens **declare** the glory of God; the skies **proclaim** the work of his hands” (19:1); “**Your word** is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (119:105).* In an age where many people live in huge cities, God’s voices in creation are sometimes drowned out by honking horns or blocked out by

high rise buildings. Man must find the time and place to hear His voice in creation. His Word is also blocked out of man's life by the busy-ness that drains him and the entertainment that captures him. God's promises in His Word of a covenant relationship with man collect dust on his bookshelves: "*My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge*" (Hosea 4:6). Good attitudes toward God and His Word are essential! Take time—make the time to listen to God's revelations. Man's eternal destiny depends on it!

The God of Israelite History

Introduction

This chapter presents “The God of Israelite History” as He is seen in the Psalms. A proper view of history is a cog in the wheel of a proper world-view. World-view includes one’s perceptions of reality about God, Man, Universe, Sin, Time, and History. Looking at any of these elements with an improper view causes wrong thinking and wrong behavior. For instance, if one views God as a cruel tyrant who destroys anyone who even slightly steps out of line, he will possess a particular mindset, emotional makeup, and a way of living that would accompany such a view.

People who are religious know how important a correct view of God is. It not only affects a person’s eternal destiny, but every facet of his life. What might not be so obvious is the effect of an improper view of history. An improper view of history can have a drastic effect on an individual. Today’s culture focuses on the here and now. Many modern cultures view history as irrelevant to a society facing today’s challenges. Faith in developing technology tricks people into believing that they have the knowledge and power to escape any problem. When this is the case, the past teaches little because people in the past did not have the technology used today. More likely, however, modern cultures just want to do whatever they want. When that involves a wasteful and corrupt lifestyle, people do not want to hear the voice of history saying, “You better watch out! What you are doing has brought dire consequences in the past, and it will today too!” A society that does not listen to history and pay attention to the mistakes made in the past is

bound to repeat those mistakes. Listen to history! That is a biblical principle which is seen in a number of Scriptures including the Psalms. The Bible is the best history book because it gives God's interpretation of history.

God continually used history to speak to the Jewish mind. This is seen in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus, Stephen, Peter, Paul, James, Jude, and the Hebrew writer all used history to teach lessons to Jewish people. This technique of using Israelite history to exemplify and motivate the people is not unique to the New Testament. The Lord wanted to keep Israelite history in the forefront of each generation's thinking. When Deuteronomy was periodically read to the people, it included, along with a repetition of the Law of Moses given at Sinai, a slice of history. The Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are also frequently called to mind. There are numerous references in Samuel, Kings, and the Chronicles to Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The Prophets also call this to the minds of their hearers (cf. Hosea 11:12). Historical references are to be expected in the liturgy of the Israelite's worship especially those that were written during the time of David and Solomon.

The piece of history most often rehearsed in the Psalms is the Israelite's deliverance from Egypt. That is often carried through to the time when the Israelites inherited Canaan, the Promised Land. This emphasis is significant, because it is the time of fulfillment of the Nation and Land promises from the Abrahamic covenant. God redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage to become His people. The Book of Exodus tells that this redemption became official at Mt. Sinai when they received the Law. The Israelites became a nation. The land promise was fulfilled when they conquered Canaan (cf. Joshua 21:43-45). The psalmists sang about the history in Canaan onto the time of David's reign. David's reign as king was the height of Israel's prosperity and notoriety. The rescue from Egypt and the reign of David became the two pylons of Israelite history

upon which so much else in Israelite thinking and acting was to be built.

There are three psalms that record parts of Israel's history that show what aspects of their history was emphasized and what impact that history had upon the Israelites during the psalmist's days. In each psalm the psalmist attempted to make a point for the present by calling upon the past. Each psalm has a theme or purpose that applies to all generations.

The Mistakes Israel Made in the Past (Psalm 78)

The Problems of Israel (78:1–8)

The **theme** for this psalm is the mistakes Israel made in the past. The **purpose** is to teach all the children and the children's children not to make those same mistakes because the mistakes Israel made stemmed from unbelief. Psalm 78:7–8 notes the specific problems:

1. Lack of trust in God.
2. Forgetting the works of God in the past.
3. Failure to keep His commands.
4. A stubborn and rebellious spirit.
5. Israel was not loyal and faithful to God.

Israel should have chosen to trust in God by remembering His works in the past. Verses throughout this psalm develop the same thought: *"In spite of all this, they kept on sinning* (that is being stubborn and rebellious); *in spite of his wonders, they did not believe"* (78:32); *"They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them"* (78:11); *"They did not remember his power—the day he redeemed them from the oppressor,* (78:42); *"But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep his statutes"* (78:56). Israel continually forgot God's awesome deeds and did not keep His commands.

Examples From Israelite History (78:9–17)

The **first** example in this psalm is Ephraim, who was remembered for his cowardice in the time of battle. Ephraim was a son of Joseph whose tribe assumed land in the northern half of Palestine. Later in Israelite history, during the times of the prophets, the name Ephraim became synonymous with the Northern Kingdom of Israel to distinguish it from Judah, the tribe whose name came to represent the Southern Kingdom. Later, Ephraim, the tribe, came to represent a large segment of the Israelite nation. However, Ephraim has a blot or two on its record. The psalmist may have had these in mind when he wrote this psalm. When Gideon and Jephthah were chasing the enemies of Israel, Ephraim seemed hesitant to join the battle because they were uncertain of the outcome (cf. Judges 8:1–12:13). Jephthah said, “. . . *I and my people were engaged in a great struggle with the Ammonites, and although I called, you didn’t save me out of their hands. When I saw that you wouldn’t help, I took my life in my hands . . . and the Lord gave me the victory . . .*” (Judges 12:2–3). The Ephraimites wanted in on the glory of the victory, but had been afraid to join in the fight when great faith was demanded. Ephraim did not display great faith then or later in Israelite history as the Northern Kingdom slipped into idolatry and immorality: “*they did not keep God’s covenant and refused to live by his law*” (Psalm 78:10).

The **second** example of history referred to in Psalm 78 is the deliverance from Egypt and God’s provisions to the Israelites in the desert (78:11–16). The emphasis here is “*They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them*” (78:11). God had performed “*wonders*” and “*miracles*” for His children. He showed His power by splitting the Red Sea: “*He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall*” (78:13). God’s control over nature is also shown in the pillar of cloud that led lead them by day and the pillar of fire by night (cf. Exodus 13:21–22). Through Moses God split ageless rocks and made water pour from them to

quench the thirst of two million people. It is as if God borrowed water from the oceans (cf. 78:15). What power He used to show His love for them! He proved Himself again and again! He was continually powerful and loving on Israel's behalf!

The Unbelief of Israel (78:18–31)

The **third** example from Israel's history deals with their unbelief. The Israelites “. . . *willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved*” (78:18). Numbers 14:22 says they tested Him ten times in the wilderness. Doubting God's ability to give them sufficient food in the desert, they brashly said, “. . . ‘*Can God spread a table in the desert? . . . Can he supply meat for his people?*’” (78:19–20). God gave them manna and quail which shows more of God's control over nature for His benevolent purposes. The people called it “*manna*” which means “*What is it?*” (cf. Exodus 16:15, 31). The psalmist referred to it as “*bread of angels*” (78:25).

Numbers 11 tells of another instance when the Israelites murmured and God gave them quail—three feet deep and twenty-five miles in any direction (cf. Numbers 11:31). The Israelites wailed and wished for other foods, “*but while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague*” (Numbers 11:33). Once again they tested God “*by demanding the food they craved*” (78:18).

The Hypocrisy of Israel (78:32–39)

The **fourth** example from Israel's history in Psalm 78:32–39 focuses on their hypocrisy. They would sin; God would punish them; they would appear to repent, when in reality, “. . . *they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant*” (78:36–37). With their lips they praised Him, but their hearts were far from Him (cf. Matthew 15:8). In vain they worshiped Him. God is never

fooled, nor is He one to be mocked. God used wonders, miracles, plagues, pestilence, and fire to show His power. At one time during Korah's rebellion, *"14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who died because of Korah"* (Numbers 16:49) when God opened up the earth and swallowed the people and *"everything they owned"* around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (cf. Numbers 16). The LORD forgave them time after time and refrained from judging them at times (Psalm 78:32–39).

Finally, however, God had to keep the children of Israel out of the Promised Land. He killed them all in the desert, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb (78:33; cf. Numbers 14:28ff.). They tried to go up into the land, but God's power manifested itself through the inhabitants of Canaan, and Israel was repelled back into the desert. What power! Did Israel believe? Did they continue to ignore His wonderful works from the past?

The Redemption Process From Egyptian Bondage (78:40–64)

The **fifth** example from Israel's history, after the sinful generation had died in the desert, tells how the LORD allowed a new generation to go into the land. Psalms 78:40–56 describes the whole redemption process from Egypt by the plagues, provision in the desert, and conquest of the land for this new generation. The psalmist mentions six of the plagues and their incredible power, but notes, *"They did not remember his power—the day he redeemed them from the oppressor"* (78:42). The plagues devastated the greatest nation on God's earth at that time, reaching even into the family of the most powerful monarch of the time: *"He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, the firstfruits of manhood in the tents of Ham"* (78:51).

Then, with the *"hornet"* before them (cf. Exodus 23:27–28), the Israelites drove out the inhabitants of Canaan

and received a land flowing with milk and honey. More rebellion and unfaithfulness followed during the time of the judges, especially during the time of Eli, the high priest. This led to more judgment, and God allowed the Philistines to capture “*the ark*” (78:56–64). Israel was defeated and devastated (cf. 1 Samuel 4).

The LORD Still Loves Israel (78:65–72)

In spite of all this history of unfaithfulness, the LORD still loved Israel. He had not abandoned the Jews at the time the psalmist was writing. In Psalm 78:65–72 the psalmist described God as if He is awakening “*as from sleep*” to again deliver and bless Israel. God raised up David as His servant to defeat the Philistines and other enemies of Israel. This same David brought the reclaimed ark to Jerusalem. David ruled from a posture of power. He shepherded the people with integrity and skill (78:72). Once again, Israel was the beneficiary of God’s power and blessing.

Psalm 78 ends describing David’s reign over Israel which was a time of peace and prosperity. Surely after all they had been through this generation would not repeat the sins of their forefathers. Surely they had learned the lessons from their past mistakes and would avoid future judgment. Surely they would teach future generations these lessons. This psalm ends with the historical event of the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem. Psalms 105 and 106 are psalms of thanksgiving written to commemorate the return of the Ark of the Covenant of God to the City of David (cf. 1 Chronicles 15:29; 16:7).

Psalm 105: An Exhortation to Worshipers to Praise God and Trust Him

Old Testament Background

The emphasis of Psalm 105 seems to be an exhortation to the worshipers to praise God and trust Him because He has

fulfilled the **land** part of the Abrahamic covenant. God made that agreement with the patriarchs, beginning with Abraham: *“The LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’”* (Genesis 12:7). This promise was repeated to Isaac (cf. Genesis 26:4) and to Jacob, the grandson of Abraham (cf. Genesis 28:4). When the Israelite nation, under Joshua’s leadership, conquered the land of Canaan, the land promise was fulfilled: *“So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there”* (Joshua 21:43). To the Israelites the existence of a tabernacle, and later a temple, with the sacrificial system in place was proof that they were the nation whom God had specifically chosen to fulfill the **nation** part of the Abrahamic covenant. Their continual possession of the land of Canaan was proof to them that the **land** part of the Abrahamic covenant was also fulfilled. It is this promise that is celebrated in Psalm 105. God had sustained that promise throughout the Israelites history up to this point.

The Call to Sing (105:1–7)

The introduction of Psalm 105 called on the *“descendants of Abraham”* to sing praises and thanks to God: *“Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced”* (105:5). Israel was instructed to *“make known among the nations what he has done”* (105:1b).

Description of the Historical Development of the Abrahamic Covenant (105:8–43)

The **first** description in Psalm 105:8–11 speaks of the Abrahamic covenant made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: *“To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit”* (105:11). The **theme** is that the LORD has used His power throughout history to give Israel the land and to retain it for them. The first three patriarchs were protected by God because *“they believed his promises and sang his praise”* (106:12). The psalmist referred to the land promise, the

wanderings from nation to nation, and “*He allowed no one to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings: ‘Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm’*” (105:14–15). Abimelech, the Philistine, wanted to take Abraham’s wife, but the LORD protected Sarah and proclaimed to Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet (cf. Genesis 20). God also protected Isaac under almost identical conditions (cf. Genesis 26).

The **second** series of verses in this psalm describes Israel’s descendants in Egypt and how God through Joseph preserved the Israelite nation (105:16–24; cf. Genesis 27–50). Again, God’s great power is shown. He used the jealousy of ten brothers, the lust of Potiphar’s wife, the faulty memory of Pharaoh’s butler, an unusually bad famine, and two dreams to cause a young Joseph to be exalted to the second highest position in Egypt! The years under Pharaoh and as slaves in Egypt may have been hard on the Israelites physically, but it was also a part of God’s shaping of the nation preparing them for the blessings of the Promised Land. God used those years as strange tools to mold the clay that was the Israelite nation.

The **third** portion of this historical development describes the events recorded in Exodus 3–16 (cf. 105:25–38). God raised up a leader named Moses. Eight of the ten plagues are specifically mentioned. God used the plagues to judge the Egyptian gods (cf Exodus 12:12) and to build faith in the Israelites. The **fourth** section describes God’s care for His children in the desert (cf 105:39–41). There are numerous manifestations of God’s power during this time that the psalmist could have mentioned: water from a rock, bread from heaven, fire from heaven, and quail up to their hips for twenty-five miles in every direction. God sent snakes that bit and a bronze snake that healed. There was a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night to guide them. At Mount Sinai there was smoke, thunder, lightning, fire, cloud, and an earthquake.

The **fifth** and last event described in this psalm records the arrival of the Israelite nation to Canaan: “*he gave them the lands of the nations . . .*” (105:44). All Israel had to do was

remain faithful to the Mosaic covenant given on Mount Sinai “. . . *that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws*” (105:45). When the people first arrived at Sinai, Moses went up on the mountain. The LORD told him to go back down and ask the people if they were willing to live by the conditions of the covenant He was about to give them: “*The people all responded together, ‘We will do everything the LORD has said’*” (Exodus 19:8).

Psalm 106: Not One Lesson Was Learned

National Confession (106:3–5)

The commentator Derek Kidner makes Psalm 105 and 106 a pair: 105 emphasizes “God, the Unfailing” and 106 emphasizes “Man, the Intractable.”¹⁶ He titles Psalm 105 “Not One Thing Has Failed,” but titles Psalm 106 “Not One Lesson Was Learned.” Israel did not learn the lessons from history. Two verses sum it all up: “*We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly*” (106:6), and “*Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin*” (106:43). This psalm accentuates Israel’s mistakes and rebellion in the past. It contains a confession of sin, a national lament over that sin, and a plea for restoration of blessings. It praises God’s goodness (Psalm 106:3–5).

The Proof of Their Failure (106:6–46)

Israel’s record of failure is contrasted with a special emphasis on God’s restoration and blessing (cf. 106:6–46). There was rebellion at the Red Sea because they had quickly forgotten the plagues, but God saved them (cf. 106:7–12). There was discontent at Massah and Meribah, but God gave

¹⁶ Derek Kidner, Psalms 73–150 Commentary (Downer Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 373–377.

them over to their lust and then punished them (106:13–15). Korah and Dathan, jealous of Moses' authority, led a revolt against the leadership of Moses (cf. 106:16–18). Only four months after God had struck down Egypt's firstborn and delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh, they were making a golden calf to worship and involving themselves in all kinds of revelry. Moses intervened and prevented the LORD from destroying them completely (106:19–23).

On and on the Israelites failed: lack of faith in taking possession of the land that was already theirs (106:24–27); idolatry and immorality with the Moabites (106:28–31); complaint at Meribah (106:32–33); and letting foreigners live among them in Canaan (106:34–39).

The theme of the chapter is found in Psalm 106:40–46:

*Therefore the LORD was angry with his people
and abhorred his inheritance.*

*He handed them over to the nations,
and their foes ruled over them.*

*Their enemies oppressed them
and subjected them to their power.*

*Many times he delivered them,
but they were bent on rebellion
and they wasted away in their sin.*

*But he took note of their distress
when he heard their cry;
for their sake he remembered his covenant
and out of his great love he relented.*

*He caused them to be pitied by all who held them
captive.*

The Application (106:47–48)

The application is a confession, a lament, a praise, and a plea all in one: "One more time, LORD, save us, even though we do not deserve it."

Conclusion

This chapter concerning “The God of Israelite History” closes with an antiphonal (a reading where a hymn or psalm is chanted or sung in responsive, alternating parts) reading of Psalm 136. The refrain clearly states the emphasis—God’s love towards Israel is never ending. Creation and history both prove that! This psalm is known as the “Great Hallel.”

Psalm 136

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.
His love endures forever.*
*Give thanks to the God of gods.
His love endures forever.*
*Give thanks to the Lord of lords:
His love endures forever.*
*to him who alone does great wonders,
His love endures forever.*
*who by his understanding made the heavens,
His love endures forever.*
*who spread out the earth upon the waters,
His love endures forever.*
*who made the great lights—
His love endures forever.*
*the sun to govern the day,
His love endures forever.*
*the moon and stars to govern the night;
His love endures forever.*
*to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt
His love endures forever.*
*and brought Israel out from among them
His love endures forever.*
*with a mighty hand and outstretched arm;
His love endures forever.*
*to him who divided the Red Sea asunder
His love endures forever.*

*and brought Israel through the midst of it,
His love endures forever.
but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea;
His love endures forever.
to him who led his people through the desert,
His love endures forever.
who struck down great kings
His love endures forever.
and killed mighty kings—
His love endures forever.
Sihon king of the Amorites
His love endures forever.
and Og king of Bashan—
His love endures forever.
and gave their land as an inheritance,
His love endures forever.
an inheritance to his servant Israel;
His love endures forever.
to the One who remembered us in our low estate
His love endures forever.
and freed us from our enemies,
His love endures forever.
and who gives food to every creature.
His love endures forever.
Give thanks to the God of heaven.
His love endures forever.*

The Royal Psalms

Introduction

People's Request (1 Samuel 8)

Recall from 1 Samuel 8 the fact that the people of Israel requested a king. The LORD granted their request, but the conditions were that God reserved the right to choose the man who would be king. History records that Saul was the man to serve as the first king. Humble at first, he later became arrogant and independent of God's help. God chose another king, David, who became the elite model for all subsequent Israelite kings. He also typified the Messianic King.

Even though the psalms were primarily used for temple worship, there is a significant emphasis on the king. In fact, over half of the psalms deal with the King or some aspect of the kingly office. With such a large number of the "King Psalms," as they are sometimes called, there is a great deal of overlapping with other types of psalms. The kingly psalms often fit into the Protection and Deliverance Psalms. They are also part of the Praise and Thanksgiving Psalms. The Messianic Psalms will also include some of the kingly psalms, since Jesus was a King. God used some of the kingly psalms to prophecy about the coming kingdom and the Kingship of the Christ.

Although the Royal Psalms fit into some of these other groupings, they have some features and emphases all their own that deserve singular attention in this chapter. There are two reference points to consider in Old Testament history: 1 Samuel 8 concerning God's allowance of an earthly king for the Israelite nation and 2 Samuel 7 concerning the special covenant God made with King David. As Samuel grew older and his

sons grew more wicked, the Israelites begged for a king. They wanted to be like the other nations, whose king would lead them into battle (cf. 1 Samuel 8:5, 20). Instead of trusting God, they desired a visible person in which to put their confidence. When Samuel angrily took their plea to the Lord, God said, “. . . ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king’” (1 Samuel 8:7).

Who Rules Israel? The Kingdom and Its King

God Is the Ultimate King of Israel

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He made them into a great nation, called them “*my people*,” and told them He would be their God. Balaam’s prophecy said, “*The LORD their God is with them (Israel); the shout of the king is among them*” (Numbers 23:21b), meaning God, their King, was among the Israelites. Before he died, Moses blessed the people by saying, “*He (God) was king . . .*” (Deuteronomy 33:5). The LORD chose their first king, Saul (cf. 1 Samuel 10:24) and David, the second king (cf. 1 Samuel 16:12–13). At that time the King became God’s representative over the Israelite nation. God did not abdicate the throne, but He did acquiesce to the people’s desires to have an earthly representative of His leadership.

Psalm 97: The LORD Reigns

In the Psalms there is a duality of leadership expressed. The group of Psalms 92–99 emphasize God’s reign. Psalms 93, 97, and 99 each open with the phrase “*The LORD reigns*.” This is a fact! He reigns over creation, over Israel, and over all their enemies. He is a “*great King*” (Psalm 95:3). Keep these thoughts in mind, because the first six verses of Psalm 97 accentuate the righteousness and resulting judgment of His reign. The “*clouds and thick darkness*” (97:2), the “*fire*”

(97:3), the “*lightning*” (97:4), and the trembling earth all conjure up judgment pictures from other passages in the Old Testament. All creation trembles and shakes simply from the approaching presence of Jehovah, but more so, because God comes to judge His enemies. In that judgment, God may choose to strike the land with blight or locusts or flood. No wonder the earth figuratively trembles and generally groans even today and suffers the pains of its futility (cf. Romans 8:22). “. . . *because of your judgments, O LORD. For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods*” (97:8–9).

Psalm 97:7–10 challenge all people to serve this King: “*All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols—worship him, all you gods!*” (97:7). Those who have been worshiping idols are to stop. No idol or so-called god is anything. God is higher; He is King (cf. 97:9). People who love the LORD need to stay on course. Hate what He hates and be upright in heart (cf. 97:10–11). Remember He is the One who preserves and delivers (cf. 97:10). He is the “*light*” (97:11). The psalmist instructed the readers then and today, “*Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name*” (97:12). Is there any doubt that the psalmists and the worshipers were acknowledging God as their real and ultimate King?

Psalm 72: The People’s Intercession for the King

Psalm 72:1 illustrates the fact that the physical king became God’s representative: “*Endow the king with justice (or principles of righteous judgment), O God, the royal son with your righteousness.*” **Synonymous parallelism** demands that “*king*” in line one equals the “*royal son*” in line two. Any king in Judah/Israel was to be of royal stock in a lineage with God being the ultimate ancestor. He is the King’s son (with a capital K). He is God’s son! Any king in the lineage of David was referred to as “*son*”: “*He will call out to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.’ I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.*”

(Psalm 89:26–27). All of this was fulfilled in Jesus as the antitype as it is stated in one of the Messianic psalms: *“I have installed My King on Zion, my holy hill. I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’”* (Psalm 2:6–7; cf. Hebrews 1:5). These verses are referring to Jesus.

The **first** part of the prayer of the people as worshipers is that God bestow on His son the ability to rule and judge as justly as God does: *“He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice”* (72:2). Thus *“the king”* imitates God.

The prayer continues by calling for a long and successful reign, a righteous rule that affords the blessing of peace. **Second**, they ask for blessings *“... like showers watering the earth”* (72:6) and *“... prosperity will abound till the moon is no more”* (72:7).

A **third** petition in Psalm 72:8–14 concerns the extent of His rule. Verses 8–11 mention the particulars of the domain he should rule over: *“He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth”* (72:8), the River being the Euphrates River to the outer limits of the Promised Land. From there, his rule extends to the ends of the earth. To make it plain, the psalmist said, *“The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust.”* (72:9). He was referring to the desert tribes that wander about in nomadic fashion usually free from localized government. He would rule from *“Tarshish and of distant shores . . . (to) Sheba”* in the Arabian desert—*“All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him”* (72:10–11).

This plea for universal rule is for the sake of the oppressed (cf. 72:12–15). Even in modern day democracies, the oppressed and poor do not always get a fair shake, much less extra privileges that they may need to survive. It was even worse in most Bible day cultures. The afflicted, *“... who have no one to help”* (72:12) would have had this benevolent and just ruler looking out after them. They would have a chance to escape

“... *oppression and violence*” . . .” from unscrupulous rich people (72:14).

The **fourth** petition for such a king is in Psalm 72:15–17: “*Long may he live*” (72:15), similar to the British wish, “Long live the King!” This prayer is for the King’s long life so that the land and its inhabitants will flourish: “*Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway*” (72:16). Grain does not usually grow on the mountains in such a high altitude, but it does in this realm! The grain is so big, it looks like the cedars of Lebanon (cf. 72:16). The worshipers ask that the King’s life, the land, and his name “... *endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun*” (72:17). His name represents everything about him—his whole character, nature, and work. May it last forever!

Concluding Thoughts on Psalm 72

God is Israel’s ultimate Ruler and King. His physical representative on earth is the king who sits on the throne in Jerusalem. That king was to lead the nation against enemies and to protect the needy and the lowly individuals in the nation just as God would. These things might be considered his foreign and domestic policies.

Psalm 72:18–27 appears to be an added doxology to all of Book II. Similar doxologies close other Books in the Psalms.

Psalm 20: About the Earthly King

Occasion of the Psalm

Psalm 20 is a prayer by the people, the congregation of worshipers of Israel, for the king. It is a day of distress (cf. 20:1) that occasions the psalm. Perhaps the scene is that the king is set to lead his armies off to war against the oppressor. 2 Samuel 11:1 says, “*In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war . . .*” indicating that there was a time for battle against enemies of the state. We do not know if an initial threat

from an enemy occasioned the writing of this prayer, but its place in the psalter seems to indicate its abiding role as a piece of liturgy for the people on any occasion of threat from an external enemy.

Prayer for a Faithful and Trusting King

Though a mighty leader, and though commanding the respect of the people, the King needs help from above. This prayer assumes their belief in the King's trust in God, and asserts their faith in God, too. Their faith is expressed in Psalm 20:2: "*May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion.*" But most of their petitions assert his faithfulness and trust. For example, Psalm 20:1 says, "*May the Lord answer you when you are in distress.*" while 20:3 says, "*May he remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings.*" This king sacrifices and prays (if the inscription is accurate, this king is David.) The meal and burnt offerings are self-surrendering, sweet smelling, and savoring sacrifices.

Confession of Need

The King was renouncing all he had and all that he was. He was confessing that he, and those under his rule, belonged to God. He was admitting bankruptcy of strength and wisdom to win the battles and to lead his people successfully. (We will look at the King's own personal petitions in Psalm 61 and 63 later.)

Pledge and Victory

The worshipers pledged to raise their banners and voices in a victory shout (cf. Psalm 20:5). Would not the LORD be pleased with a vow that said that the subjects of the king were willing to acknowledge God's power and His role in the victory and exult in the king as God's instrument of protection and justice? They stood ready to form a victory parade—flags and all.

Confidence

Even before the fray ensues, the people expressed confidence that God would indeed answer theirs and the King's petitions in this regard: "*Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed (the king) . . .*" (20:6). Why? Because the nation of Israel and their king trusted in God rather than in the war machines of the day, the "*chariots*" and "*horses*" (20:7). Remember Pharaoh at the Red Sea! It is interesting that Psalm 20:6 is translated in the past tense in the King James Version as if it should be translated, "Now I know that the LORD hath saved." It could be a reflection on past history or an assurance that in the future in the case before them, it is as good as done. Either interpretation asserts the faith of the people.

Concluding Petition

One last petition is seen in the last verse of Psalm 20: "*O LORD, save the king! Answer us when we call!*" (20:9). The whole psalm has expressed this trust. Help comes "*from the sanctuary*" (where God dwells), "*from Zion*" (20:2), and "*in the name of our God*" (stated three times throughout the Psalm).

The King's role, as God's representative on earth, was to protect Israel from external enemies and to protect those who were less able to protect themselves in his country from unscrupulous fellow citizens. This is stated best in Psalm 72:12–14:

*For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.
He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight.*

Psalms 61 and 63: Petitions of the King Himself

A Psalm of Petition, Praise, and Pronouncement of Assurance (Psalm 61)

There are two different debates concerning Psalm 61. The first one is the question of whether a king wrote it himself or perhaps someone wrote it for him. I prefer the first proposition, based on the inscription, “*To the chief Musician upon Neginah, A Psalm of David*” (KJV) and the language of verses 1–4. The second debate concerns whether or not the psalmist was in exile based upon the phrase, “*From the ends of the earth I call to you,*” (61:2). This seems to be a figurative expression indicating the extent of the difficulty he could be in. The psalmist called out to the LORD; he was heard and helped. The psalm is a petition for deliverance (cf. 61:1–4) and a pronouncement of assurance:

*For you have heard my vows, O God;
you have given me the heritage of those who
fear your name.
Increase the days of the king's life,
his years for many generations.
May he be enthroned in God's presence forever;
appoint your love and faithfulness to protect
him.*

Psalm 61:5–7

The psalmist was sure God had seen and respected his vows of dedication. He was sure that God would give him the inheritance, the land of Israel, long life, fellowship with God, and the favor of God. Naturally, praise must follow: “*Then I will sing praise to your name forever and fulfill my vows day after day*” (61:8). It sounds like the King’s vows were to praise God continually.

Psalm 61:1–4 contains the unique feature describing the figures of strength and protection from God: “. . . *lead me to*

the rock that is higher than I" (61:2). This phrase has even been made into a song. God is the Rock above all rocks. He is especially above the rock of human effort and strength, even that of David: *"For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe"* (61:3).

The citadel or city *"tower"* was the place of refuge and strength in any city. In this psalm it is another figure of God's strength. It also refers to the strength of the king. The fortress or *"tower"* was a refuge for the king from all enemies. The phrase *"I long to dwell in your tent forever . . ."* (61:4) refers to the Tabernacle. That was where God dwelled and where safety was: *" . . . and take refuge in the shelter of your wings"* (Psalm 61:4). This is probably the picture of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her protective wings (cf. Psalm 57:1; Luke 13:34). God is seen as the Protector of the king who trusts in Him.

Psalm 63: The Thirsting Soul Satisfied in God

The phrase *"shadow of His wings"* is repeated in another Royal Psalm: Psalm 63:7. The psalm itself seems to break down into three parts: 1–5, 6–8, and 9–11. The first part speaks of the psalmist's desire for a close personal relationship with God.

Note two particular sentences that are extremes of before and after: *"My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water"* (63:1), and *"My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you"* (63:5). The petition is answered 63:5—*"My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you."* Psalm 63:6–8 expresses more satisfaction in that fellowship and uses poetic figures once again.

The third part of the psalm expresses the confidence of the psalmist that God had delivered him from his enemies and they have received their just due: *"They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth. They*

will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals” (63:9–10). The enemy was pictured as lying dead on the battlefield. There was no one left to give them a decent burial. The jackals were the land scavengers who feasted on these dead.

The psalmist closed with *“But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God’s name will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced”* (63:11).

Psalm 113 — God Loves the Needy

Psalms 113–117 are known as the “Egyptian Hallel.” They were sung at the Passover feast each year as part of Israel’s continual celebration of freedom from Egyptian bondage. This first psalm in the group praises a God who looks out after the needy:

*The LORD is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.*

*Who is like the LORD our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,
who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?*

*He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes,
with the princes of their people.*

*He settles the barren woman in her home as a
happy mother of children.*

Praise the LORD.

Psalm 113:4–9

If it is God’s role as the King of Israel to perform these functions, it was also David’s role as King of Israel to perform these functions. No wonder when Jesus came to earth, He as Messianic King in the mode of David, fulfilled Isaiah 61:1–2. The prophet foretold a Messianic King who would “. . . *preach*

good news to the poor . . . proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19). These are those who are the less fortunate, the needy in society. Jesus in Luke 4 announced that this prophecy described the recipients of His ministry's efforts.

Praise God for His concern for the lowly, the downcast, the poor, and those less fortunate. As the famous song states, "O Worship the King." Christians do this because of His love and compassion. Thank God for this study and the insights to His nature.

Israel did acknowledge God as their ultimate King and the man on the throne as God's representative in his role as the king of the nation. Every king was to be from the lineage of David, and he was to carry out God's work especially in taking care of the needy and lowly. In other words, he was God's man on the throne over Israel (cf. 1 Samuel 8). A number of the psalms in the Book of Psalms were offered either by the King himself or by the nation as a whole. Many of them were offered for the King's health and his victory as he went forth to fight for the people of Israel.

The Promise (1 Samuel 7)

At one point during his reign, David was convinced that he should build a house for the LORD. Nathan, the King's prophet, encouraged him in this noble venture, until the LORD told him otherwise. Nathan's vision from the LORD (cf. 2 Samuel 7:5–17) revealed that David's son was to be God's choice to build the Temple, God's house. At this same time, however, it was revealed to David that God would enter into a special covenant with him. The LORD would build David's "*house*" instead of vice-versa (cf. 2 Samuel 7:11). An offspring from his own body would build a kingdom that would last forever (cf. 2 Samuel 7:12–13, 16). This was a Messianic passage foretelling the coming of Jesus and the establishment of His spiritual and eternal kingdom. Peter interpreted this prophecy as having

found its fulfillment when Jesus ascended to the right hand of God and sat down on David's throne (cf. Acts 2:29–36).

However, there was a long line of kings (men) who assumed the throne of David in between Jesus and David. They, like David, became types of Jesus. The most significant one in terms of this typology was David's son, Solomon. Remember the context and promise of 2 Samuel 7. God promised David that his son would build the house of the LORD. The son who accomplished this was Solomon.

When David addressed the people about building the Temple, he repeated the promise about Solomon (cf. 1 Chronicles 28:4–8). Not only did Solomon continue the kingly line of David, but he also built the Temple. Jesus fulfilled the Davidic covenant—the King promise—and is the antitype of Solomon in terms of building the house of the LORD, the church, which is the spiritual kingdom (Matthew 16:18–19).

Continuation of the Davidic Covenant in the Psalms

The Abundance of “Davidic” Psalms

Remembering the basis of the Davidic Covenant, it is easy to see a continuation of that covenant spoken of in the Psalms. **First**, note the abundance of “Davidic” psalms. Almost half (approximately 72) of the Psalms have specific references to David in their inscriptions or headings. Fifty-nine of the Psalms have “Of David,” and a few in this group have added phrases such as “A Song of Ascents” (Psalms 122, 124, 131, 133) or “To the Tune of ‘Lilies’” (Psalm 69), or some other well known tune. Thirteen other psalms have inscriptions noting some specific historical event, most before David became king and relating to escaping from King Saul. There is no way to know how many of these psalms were written by David himself. The ones that do not specifically say “Of David” might still refer to him since he is of major importance in the Psalms.

God's Throne and David's Throne are the Same

Second, be aware that Scripture frequently interchanges God's throne and David's throne. David said in 1 Chronicles 28:4–5 that Solomon would sit “. . . *on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.*” 1 Chronicles 29:23 says, “*So Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king in place of his father David.*” Both David and Solomon sat on the throne as Israel's king, but many times it is simply referred to as “David's throne” or the “*throne of the LORD.*” Abijah, a later king of Judah, challenged Israel's king with this statement in 2 Chronicles 13:8: “*And now you plan to resist the kingdom of the LORD, which is in the hands of David's descendants.*”

God's throne and David's throne became synonymous in literature. Solomon “. . . *sat on the throne of his father David*” (1 Kings 2:12), but the Queen of Sheba said,

“Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on his throne as king to rule for the LORD your God. Because of the love of your God for Israel and his desire to uphold them forever, he has made you king over them, to maintain justice and righteousness” (2 Chronicles 9:8).

David Is the First King Who Is Said to Assume That Throne of Justice and Righteousness

Third, David was the first king who assumed the throne of justice and righteousness. God rules Israel with this kind of reign: “*The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice*” (Psalm 9:7–8).

Some commentators have linked Psalms 20 and 21 together; twenty as the petition in a time of trouble, and twenty-one as the celebration after the victory. Others suggest that twenty-one sounds like a coronation ode or perhaps a royal anniversary celebration. Psalm 21:3 may indicate this, “*You*

welcomed him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head.”

Psalm 45 is not labeled as a “Davidic” psalm, but it is definitely a “royal” psalm. It appears to have been written in celebration of the King’s marriage. If the psalm was used during the reign of Solomon, then it was used many times (cf. 1 Kings 11:3)! The King was addressed and praised for his handsome looks (cf. 45:2). Remember that David was handsome (cf. 1 Samuel 17:42). He was praised for his military prowess (cf. 45:3–5). 1 Samuel 18:7 says, “. . . ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.’” He is praised for his high character in judging and ruling the people (45:6–7). The last verses are similar to the description of God’s rule in Psalm 97:2, 6, 11, and are quoted in Hebrews 1, where the Hebrew writer applied the words of the psalmist to the rulership of Jesus. Thus, this psalm could well be of David, who is the type of Jesus in kingship. Psalm 45:6–7 says, “*Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.*”

After addressing the bride-to-be in Psalms 45:10–15, the psalmist closed with this statement to the King: “*Your sons will take the place of your fathers; you will make them princes throughout the land. I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.*” (45:16–17). Apparently the King’s dynasty would last a long time. Some think these verses were Messianic, but I prefer to interpret them as part of the Davidic Covenant which promises David a descendant on the throne for ever, or as long as the age shall last. Of course, ultimately that does translate into the Messianic rule.

King David Is God’s Representative

All the kings, David in particular, were to be God’s representative, upholding justice and protecting the needy. This

can be seen in Psalm 101. It is inscribed as being “Of David” and seems to be David’s commitment to God to be that kind of king.

The Psalms speak of a king crowned, wedded, and committed to the throne of Israel. With that in mind, look at the statements in the Psalms relating to the Davidic Covenant itself. First, there are a couple of statements to consider: “*He chose David His servant and took him from the sheep pens*” (Psalm 78:70); “*He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever*” (Psalm 18:50). These two scriptures are very similar to the words of the LORD when He spoke to Nathan in 2 Samuel 7.

God’s Covenant With David (Psalm 132)

The occasion for the writing of Psalm 132 is not known. Some have suggested that it was written by Solomon in commemoration or dedication of the Temple. Its historical point of reference is the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant into the city of Jerusalem. The Philistines had captured the Ark during the time of Eli. The foolish Israelites had taken the ark into the battle zone, mistakenly thinking that its presence would insure them a victory. After God had toppled the Philistine idol, Dagon, and afflicted them with painful tumors, the Philistines returned the ark to Israel. It stayed in Kiriath-Jearim for twenty years before David learned it was there and decided to bring it to Jerusalem.

Psalm 132 is listed as a “Song of Ascents,” which was a pilgrim’s song, either as he neared the city of Jerusalem for a feast, or as he proceeded through the streets of the city on the way to the Temple to offer sacrifice. Thus there is similarity of content between the bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem in the first place, the dedication of the Temple, and the ascent of pilgrims to the Temple in later years.

The Psalm is a prayer to God for the kingship. What does kingship have to do with the Temple and the Ark? Remember

the context of 2 Samuel 7. David wanted to build the Temple, but instead, God promised to build his house. David's desire and vow to God was repeated in Psalm 132:3–5: *"I will not enter my house or to my bed—I will allow no sleep to my eyes, no slumber to my eyelids, till I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."* Psalm 132:6–9 describe David's desire to bring the ark to Jerusalem. The word *"Jaar"* in verse six is probably the same as Kiriath-Jearim, where the ark had been kept. The word *"Ephrathah"* in verse six is the same as Bethlehem (cf. Micah 5:2).

After referring to moving the Ark, the psalmist turned to write about David's kingship (132:10–12). These verses recall the promise by God to David concerning his descendants:

*"One of your own descendants
I will place on your throne –
if your sons keep my covenant
and the statutes I teach them,
then their sons will sit
on your throne for ever and ever."*
Psalm 132:11b–12

From that promise, the psalmist shifted back to the sanctuary in Zion (132:13). The LORD had declared Zion as His residence on earth. Therefore He would provide for Zion's needs, meaning Jerusalem, all Israel, and the priesthood in particular. This had resulted in Israel rejoicing: *"I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints will ever sing for joy"* (132:16).

Then, once more the psalmist returned to David: *"Here I will make a **horn** grow for David and set up a **lamp** for my anointed one. I will clothe his **enemies** with shame, but the crown on his head will be resplendent"* (132:17–18). The blessings upon David were several: The *"horn"* is an Old Testament figure of authority and strength, originating from the

wild ox or bull. In other words, God promised to keep David's sons on the throne. They would be a mighty victorious set of rulers. "*A lamp*," or light, probably referred to the continuation of the line of descendants itself. Son after son would ascend the throne of Israel. Finally, God would continually protect David's sons from their "*enemies*." All of these blessings are for the sake of the Temple. The Davidic covenant and kingly line were put in place by God to protect the dwelling place of God! What a type this is of Christ who protects the New Testament temple, the church!

The Davidic Covenant (Psalm 89)

One last psalm to consider in this section is Psalm 89. This is the only psalm that Ethan, the Ezrahite, wrote. It is a didactic or teaching type of psalm and longer than most.

The situation pictured in Psalm 89:38–45 is one of devastation and despair. Apparently, some invading force had overrun the city of Jerusalem or all Israel. Walls had been broken down; strongholds had been ruined; cities had been plundered by passersby; enemies were rejoicing in their victory and gloating over Israel's shame (89:39–42). It was not just a loss by Israel, but by the King, a son of David, one of Jehovah's "*anointed*" (89:38). Because of his connection to the Davidic covenant, the psalmist interpreted this invasion as the work of God personally against the anointed of David. Look at some of the statements from verses 38–45: "*. . . you have been very angry with your anointed one*" (89:38); "*You have renounced the covenant with your servant and have defiled his crown in the dust*" (89:39); "*. . . and cast his throne to the ground*" (89:44).

The psalmist felt like God had abandoned His commitment to the Davidic Covenant. He acknowledged the existence of the original covenant in Psalm 89:1–4. The psalmist was committed to singing praise about God's love in regard to "*the*

LORD's great lover forever" (89:1). Psalm 89:4 is a paraphrase of 2 Samuel 7. Praise continues especially for God's faithfulness to His covenants: "... *your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones*" (89:5); "*O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you*" (89:8); "*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you*" (89:14). This same faithfulness theme is repeated in verses 24, 33, 37 and 49.

God's faithfulness and love are first of all seen in His rule over creation (89:9–14). God had been strong in His rule over creation for Israel's benefit. One allusion in Psalm 89:9 could refer to His parting of the Red Sea to allow Israel to escape from the Egyptian armies: "*You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.*" Another allusion in 89:10: "*You crushed Rahab like one of the slain; with your strong arm you scattered your enemies.*" is probably another reference to Egypt (cf. Psalm 87:4). God protected Israel through many acts of nature—water turned to blood, swarms of locusts, darkness, etc. The last allusion is seen in 89:12: "*You created the north and the south; Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name.*" referring to two mountains of the land of Palestine that are under His control, too. God ruled Israel and mankind with a strong arm, a mighty hand, and with righteousness, justice, loving kindness, faithfulness, and truth (89:13–14).

The psalmist petitioned God to help His people because they were walking in "*the light of your presence*" (89:15–18) and because of His covenant with David (89:19–37). These verses are a paraphrase of 2 Samuel 7:8–16. The psalmist wrote as if God was the speaker telling about finding David, choosing him, and anointing him to be king (cf. 89:20). God promised to support and protect David (cf. 89:21) and make sure that no enemy would ever be victorious over him (cf. 89:22–23). Many

of these verses sound like Jesus, but the type reference is mainly in Psalm 89:24–29:

*My faithful love will be with him,
and through my name his horn will be exalted.
I will set his hand over the sea,
his right hand over the rivers.
He will call out to me, “You are my Father,
my God, the Rock of my Savior.”
I will also appoint him my firstborn,
the most exalted of the kings of the earth.
I will maintain my love to him forever,
and my covenant with him will never fail.
I will establish his line forever,
his throne as long as the heavens endure.*

The kingdom would be extended “*over the sea*,” but the king would still acknowledge the LORD as his “*Father*.” David and Solomon were both pre-eminent, “*my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth*.”

David’s kingdom was perpetuated through his sons (89:28–29). God did this because He had to keep the Davidic Covenant: “*I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail*” (89:28). The covenant applied to David and his descendants. Part of that covenant involved discipline if they sinned (89:30–32). Thus the psalmist acknowledged that the present king had sinned and deserved the punishment he received. The rest of the covenant, however, states that God will never quit loving the king (89:33). Surely, the psalmist thought that this meant an end to the oppression and a return to peace and blessing. God was sworn to this part of the covenant as well (89:33–37), specifically 89:34 says: “*I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered*.” Just as sure as the sun and moon will rise forever as “*the faithful witness in the sky*” (Psalm 89:37), God will

remain as “*the faithful witness*” to keep this part of the Davidic Covenant.

The last part of the Psalm (89:46–52) was an impassioned plea for the LORD to get the pain over with and restore peace. He called on God not to forget that man’s life was determined by time, and it was slipping away in the trial of fire (89:47–48). Surely God did not want His people to suffer for an extended period of time. Death comes soon unless the LORD delivers.

H.C. Leupold in his commentary on the Psalms says that Psalm 89:52 is a doxology which closes the third book of the Psalter and has no direct connection with the rest of Psalm 89¹⁷.

¹⁷ H.C. Leupold, D.D., Exposition of The Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 639.

The Songs of Ascents

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter and the next one is to look at the Psalms of Ascents. Psalms 120–134 are commonly called the “Songs of Ascents.” There are four different views as to what these particular psalms were. The **first** view, espoused by such distinguished Old Testament scholars as Gesenius and Delitzsch, is based on the possible translation of “Songs of Steps.” The word “steps” refers to the internal cadence or rhythm of a line of verse. Within **some** of the psalms in this category, there is a structure of a repeated word or expression which develops in an ascending beat. An example of this happens in Psalm 121:1–2:

*I lift up my eyes to the hills—
 where does my **help** come from?
 My **help** comes from the LORD,
 the Maker of heaven and earth.*

The word “**help**” is used in the second line of the first verse, and then repeated in the first line of the second verse. The “ascent” is in the rhythmical progression up the steps of the poetic ladder. The key point to remember is that this repetition only applies to **some** and not **all** of the psalms in this category. Not all the “Songs of Ascents” have this characteristic.

The **second** view also relies on the word “steps.” Some Jewish expositors believed that the 15 poems which make up the “Songs of Ascents” corresponded to the 15 steps from the Court of the Men to the Court of the Women in the Temple.

They believed that a psalm was sung on each step as the worshipers ascended. The coincidence of the numbers is about all that this interpretation has going for it though.

A **third** view is based on the translation of “ascents” or “goings up.” The interpretation states that these may have been the psalms sung by the pilgrims who were coming up from Babylonian captivity to their home in Jerusalem (after 536 B.C.). However, the word “ascents” is plural which gives less support to this view.

A **fourth**, and the favored interpretation, is that these psalms were “pilgrims’ songs.” Caravans of pilgrims approaching Jerusalem did sing songs (cf. Isaiah 30:29). A closely related application is that they sang these psalms as they proceeded through the streets of Jerusalem, led by priests, to the Temple to offer sacrifices. Psalm 122:2 says, *“Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.”* and 125:2 states, *“As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people.”* These two psalms give hints of pilgrims in and around Jerusalem.

The Israelites were commanded to come to Jerusalem several times a year for particular feasts and Sabbaths. There were three specifically named feasts that all the men “*of age*” (between the ages of 30–50 [Numbers 4:3–47]) were required to attend: *“Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the **Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles** . . .”* (Deuteronomy 16:16). The Passover Feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread which immediately followed Passover are sometimes referred to as one feast (cf. Luke 22:1) The Passover Feast was celebrated beginning at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month in the Jewish year. This feast was observed in the first month because it commemorated the children of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and the beginning of Israel as a nation. The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the fifteenth day of the first month and lasted for seven days. It also was celebrated to recall the

redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The Feast of Weeks celebrated God's graciousness in sending the rains to make the crops grow. It especially celebrated the fruits of the Abrahamic Land Promise. The Feast of Tabernacles was also a celebration of the harvest. It was celebrated in the middle of the seventh month.

Other gathering times would have also called for pilgrims to have to travel to Jerusalem at different times throughout the year including the Sabbaths. The Feast of Trumpets was observed on the first day of the seventh month; the Day of Atonement was observed on the tenth day of the seventh month, and the Feast of Tabernacles was observed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. It is possible that travelers would come to Jerusalem for all three feasts during that one month.

Each one of these feasts recalled significant moments in Israelite history and centered on the conditions of their covenant relationship with God. Of course, for most Jews, participating in these feasts meant traveling from their homes to the city of Jerusalem. Thus, the city of Jerusalem, where God dwelt, and where these festival sacrifices could be offered, became a very important city. The feelings in the "Songs of Ascents" would have been emphasized as these pilgrims headed toward the Jerusalem to celebrate their relationship with God Almighty.

The "Songs of Ascents" were not written initially to be put together in a book for the purpose of aiding traveling pilgrims. Some of these psalms were individual in scope and application; some were national. Some were written about David and four have "Of David" in the inscription. One has "Of Solomon." Another one is part of Solomon's Temple Dedication speech. That psalm also talks of the Davidic covenant between God and David and his sons. The remaining psalms are unknown in terms of authorship, though some may be attached to the Babylonian exilic period (cf. Psalm 120, 126). Sometimes Haggai and Ezra have been credited with writing psalms during

the exilic or post-exilic period. One of these men could surely have authored one or more of these psalms.

General observations about the “Songs of Ascents” are: **First**, these psalms are relatively short in length, with the exception of Psalm 132 which has 18 verses. All the other psalms in this section range from 3 to 9 verses. **Second**, many of these psalms cover deliverance from oppression. Some of the pleas are on a personal level and some on a national level. Psalms 120, 123, 124, and 125 include prayers for help. **Third**, there is a piece of imprecatory prayer (praying for evil or a curse to fall on a person or people) found in Psalm 129. **Fourth**, God is seen in a number of ways or roles. The individual breakdown of each psalm will outline the roles and characteristics of God. Other notes of interest will be noted in the pilgrimage through the lovely scenery of the “Songs of Ascents.”

The Theology of God in the Songs of Ascents

Reference	Psalm #
Maker of heaven and earth	121, 124, 134
Yahweh—Covenant Keeper	121
Dwells in Zion—Attendant to Israel	122, 125, 126, 132
Surrounds people—Protector	121, 125, 129, 132
Blessings on Israel—Supplier	126, 127, 128, 132, 134
Keeps David’s line going—Sustainer	132
Keeps vigil over Israel—Watcher	121
House of God—Temple Builder	127, 132
Pardons Sins—Forgiver	130

Introduction

The Book of Psalms is a great source of strength for bolstering a fainting heart. What great praise language to be adopted by kingdom occupants! What a panorama of spiritual emotions—the indescribable joy of a man of dust reveling in

his fellowship with an eternal spirit named Yahweh, the groans of the blackest and deepest despair, and the angriest anger of a spiritual zealot against the enemies of God. Every worshiper of God will experience all of these emotions at one time or another.

The Songs of Ascents include these thematic emotions. There is longing in Psalm 120 in the heart of the pilgrim. He was far away from Jerusalem and the Temple and yearned to be back in God's Holy City again. As the pilgrim made his way towards Jerusalem, he prayed for protection from the enemy (Psalm 121 and 125) and even included bringing a curse and a hope of evil to overtake his enemies in Psalm 129. Near the city, he saw its hills and was assured of God's protection. God surrounds His people as the mountains surrounded the city. Psalms 126–128 speak of the blessings, either anticipated by being in Jerusalem or already received from God's hand, from being God's child in fellowship with Him.

Individual Songs of Ascents

Psalm 120

Cause to Turn My Eyes Toward Zion and the Holy Temple

The psalmist began this psalm by remembering a time in the past when he had been in trouble and prayed towards Jerusalem, and had been heard by God. In trouble once again, he called out to God for the LORD's vengeance. His enemies were slandering him to the point that their deceitful tongues had caused him a lot of heartache. Wagging tongues call for the LORD's vengeance. The two judgment figures are "*sharp arrows*" and "*burning coals*." Arrows were used to pierce the body and coal to burn the head. Apparently, the roots of the "*broom tree*" burn fast and hot.

The psalmist apparently was expressing “*woe*” because he felt alone. This may not have been a literal separation from Jerusalem, because he mentioned Meshech and Kedar and these two countries are separated from each other by quite a distance. He could not possibly “ *dwell*” in one and “*live*” in the other at the same time. He was expressing a “feeling” of separation. It is possible that he was feeling separated from God by having to live among people of sin who hated peace. The implication is that he longed to travel to Zion.

Psalm 121

The LORD of the Hills, Israel’s Protector

This psalm is an expression of confidence in the LORD knowing that He will help. This psalm goes beyond the thought of Psalm 120 to point to Jerusalem and the Temple as the source of the people’s help. Some commentators (Leupold¹⁸ and Perowne¹⁹) believe that the first line of this psalm portrays the thoughts and actions of the pilgrims as they neared the city of Jerusalem. As the city came into view, the pilgrims lifted up their eyes to the hills of the city, thinking especially of Mount Zion where the Temple was located. It was not the city itself or a specific hill that exudes strength and deliverance. It is God who lives there. He is Yahweh (cf. 121:2, 5, 7). Therefore, He is committed to keeping His covenant promises, which includes deliverance. He is the God who created everything (cf. 121:2). He is the God who never sleeps (cf. 121:3–4). He keeps constant vigil. He stands at His children’s right hand, the place of closest association. He is the God who can protect His children from harm.

¹⁸ H.C. Leupold, D.D., Exposition of The Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker House, 1959), 867.

¹⁹ J.J. Stewart Perowne, D.D., The Book of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing House, 1878), 374.

Psalm 122

Jerusalem, the City of the Great King

Psalm 122 focuses on Jerusalem, the center of the Israelite's religious focus. Psalm 122 builds on 121, telling why Jerusalem was so important to a Jew. While other pilgrims suggested that they as a group go up to Jerusalem, the psalmist has already pictured himself within the gates of the city (cf. 122:2). He commented: "*Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.*" Perhaps by the time this psalm was penned, the Temple and palace of the king, and perhaps other buildings of distinction, had been completed. These gave the city a look of dignity, a picture of pride, stateliness, and solidarity. Jerusalem was a fortress for the LORD's people.

The most important part of this psalm is in verses 4–5 where two reasons are given for why Jerusalem was so significant. **First**, it was the place of worship for the people. **Second**, it was where David's throne for judgment resided. Jerusalem was the heart of religious, civil, and covenant life for all Israel. No wonder the psalmist closed with a prayer to God asking for peace for the city (cf. 122:6–9). The worshipers also commit themselves to promote peace in the city.

Psalm 123

Looking to the LORD

H.C. Leupold titles this psalm "Looking to the Lord," and begins the chapter on it in his book by quoting from Alexander MacLaren—"The spirit of this little attractive psalm is caught rather well in a sentence written by MacLaren: 'A sigh and an upward gaze and a sigh!'"²⁰ The psalm reflects an attitude of submission, humility, and dependence. As the psalmist turned his eyes towards God, he pleaded for the gracious blessing of God. God blessings were especially needed because of all the

²⁰ H.C. Leupold, Exposition of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1959), 878.

contemptuous, scoffing people who did not care for Zion or its worshippers. Thus, the LORD and Zion became a true refuge and a haven from evildoers.

Psalm 124

Psalm of Praise for Deliverance From Enemies

The psalmist's prayer in Psalm 123 was quickly answered in Psalm 124. God was praised for having delivered Israel from His detractors. The uniqueness of this psalm lies in the metaphors and similes which are used to describe both the seriousness of the oppression and the difficulty of escape. If it had not been for the LORD, Yahweh, the covenant God, Israel would have been drowned in the waters of a flood, had its teeth yanked out by someone trying to drag them off, or caught in the snare of an enemy like a helpless bird. The psalmist called on the pilgrims to remember, rehearse, and reverberate the saying, "*If the LORD had not been on our side . . .*" (124:1a), we would have been dead. Psalm 124:8 closed the psalm with a statement very much like 121:2, "*Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.*"

Psalm 125

The Encircler Psalm

Psalm 125 continued the thought of God's protection of His people. This protection centered on Mount Zion and Jerusalem as the place from which the LORD came to render justice to the enemy. It was impossible to remove God from His dwelling place. Just as immovable and sure as Mount Zion is, so was the stability of the believer. His strength was Jerusalem which was surrounded by mountains (cf. 121:1–2). If God cannot be moved off Mount Zion and His followers were there, then they could not be defeated either. No foreigner will ever be able to raise his scepter of rule over the lot or land of Judah. The land was Judah's by lot and inheritance from the LORD.

The prayer was for God to respond to this expression of faith. The psalmist asked Him to protect the faithful and wear out the wicked, so that peace would be upon Israel.

These first six Songs of Ascents expressed the need to be in Jerusalem, at Mount Zion. The trials and tribulations of life made the trek necessary. But why Jerusalem? Because that was where God dwelt and where David's throne of justice was. It was the place where one praised the God of deliverance and protection.

Psalm 126

Prayer and Thanks For a Return From Captivity

Psalm 126 continued the thoughts of the previous psalms except for a different circumstance. Most commentators believe it was written after the return from Babylonian captivity in 536 B.C. The first half of the psalm reflected upon the initial joy of returning from exile. The returnees were giddy with laughter, and the Gentiles were aware of what Jehovah had done for His people (126:1–3). They may not have been happy for Israel, but they had to be honest and recognize the LORD's providential work in behalf of His people. Meanwhile Israel recognized the same thing and was happy: “. . . *and we are filled with joy*” (126:3).

The last half of the psalm seems to plead for completion of that restoration. Perhaps the initial laughter is over and the hard work of putting Jerusalem back together had set in. Read the books of Haggai and Zechariah in this regard. Sixteen years after their return from Babylonian captivity, the Israelites still had not succeeded in rebuilding the Temple. The people were discouraged because of opposition from surrounding nations. Instead, they had turned their attention to building their own houses. Perhaps a piece of these prophets' preaching stirred up the spirit of this psalm.

Psalm 127**Unless the LORD Build His House**

Psalm 127 is said to be “Of Solomon.” Remembering that Solomon built the Temple, verse 1 sets the tone of the psalm. Using the background of Solomon having built the Temple, he strived to make the point that without the LORD’s help and blessing, nothing of significance could be accomplished. The LORD must be trusted; He must be obeyed, or the house will not be built well, if at all, and will afterward fall prey to invaders (cf. 124:1). However, if a house—any house, temple or personal—is built upon trust in the LORD, He will bless the builder(s) with descendants. To a Jew, children, and especially sons, are a sign of blessing from the LORD, and in this psalm, they are said to be “*arrows*” in a man’s hand. Having children to stand by your side in defense of your inheritance was indeed considered a blessing from the LORD. You are blessed if your “*quiver is full of them*” (Psalm 127:5).

Psalm 128**Count Your Many Blessings**

As is noted in the title, this psalm continues the “**blessings**” theme. Those who fear the LORD are the recipients of seven blessings, according to this psalm. **First**, he will be allowed to partake of the fruit of his labors, “*You will eat the fruit of your labor . . .*” (128:2a). Yes, people work for the “*fruit of your labor,*” but it is still the gift of God, a grace from His hand. This was part of the conditions of the Covenant of Blessings and Cursings (cf. Deuteronomy 28).

The **second** and **third** blessings state that those who fear God will live a happy and pleasant or healthy life, “. . . *blessings and prosperity will be yours*” (128:2b). Followers of God avoid many pitfalls which the wicked impose on themselves because of their choice of lifestyle.

Fourth, a man’s wife will bear him healthy children (cf. 128:3a). The wife is compared to a fruitful vine inside his house. Once again, this blessing is part of the promises in the

Covenant of Blessing. The **fifth** blessing is that those children will be a blessing (cf. 128:3b). They are a gift and reward from God (cf. 127:3). Malachi 2 talks about God's displeasure with the Jewish man who puts away the wife of his youth to secure a wife of foreign origin with attachments to foreign gods. Why? It prevents "*godly offspring*" (cf. Malachi 2:15). In other words, Jewish sons cannot be born to such a union; they can only be born as sons who will worship Jehovah God.

The **sixth** blessing was Jerusalem's prosperity being preserved (cf. 128:5). The circle was drawn wider than just around the individual Israelite. It encompassed the city of Jerusalem. The **seventh**, and final blessing listed, was that the Jews would see their grandchildren grow up in this time of peace and prosperity (cf. 128:6). The scene of old men whittling and talking on the county courthouse lawn is a familiar picture, one which a well-known American artist, Norman Rockwell, would have used to picture peace and serenity. Likewise, this scene was of elderly Jewish men watching their grandchildren playing in the streets. It is a picture of peace, one that the prophet Zechariah adopted and used to describe the days of the Messiah (cf. Zechariah 8:4–5). These blessings are known only by the man who fears the LORD and walks with Him: "*Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. . . . Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD*" (cf. 128:1, 4).

Psalm 129

Preserve Zion, O LORD!

Zion needed to be preserved, but Psalm 129 noted the enemies of Zion and its people and prayed for the downfall of those foes. This psalm has much in common with Psalm 124 in that it emphasizes the same theme. The psalm was a prayer for the demise of Zion's enemies. Its uniqueness is in its picture of how Israel had been treated by surrounding nations. They had treated Israel like a field, something to be plowed deep and long! What a picture! They plowed Israel's back! Perhaps Israel, like a mistreated captive or slave, was made to lie down

and was run over with a plow or beaten with stripes which looked like furrows made by a plow.

However, the Lord had never let Israel's enemies prevail, so once again, He was called upon to put them down. The last half of the psalm is imprecatory (bringing a curse or a wish for evil) in nature (129:5–8). The picture was to make the enemies like grass that was of no value except to serve as a roof for a house. Certainly they would not be harvested for food or given any kind of praise: *"May those who pass by not say, 'The blessings of the LORD be upon you; we bless you in the name of the LORD'"* (129:8).

Psalm 130

God, Be Merciful to Me, a Sinner!

Psalm 130 takes the reader in a different direction, but it was still a psalm that was crucial to the temple worshiper. He recognized his need for forgiveness of his sins. In fact he probably realized that his afflictions were a result of his sins. But he acknowledged God's willingness to forgive the person who was penitent, and since he was penitent, he wanted forgiveness and encouraged Israel to take the same steps. The Lord alone was able to pardon Israel.

This psalm addresses the sin problem, which was of major importance in the sacrificial system performed at the Temple. The people dared not approach the Temple in a festive mood if sin was present in their lives! But God stood ready to forgive in order to facilitate that kind of celebratory worship.

So the psalmist humbly waited on the Lord, for forgiveness first, and then for help from distress. How could the psalmist (or anyone else for that matter) presumptuously demand (even plead for) deliverance without having repented and humbly pled for forgiveness! The individual must wait, as a watchman waiting for morning light. The night seemed long, the wait an anxious one, because night time was when the enemy struck.

There was some tension for the pilgrim at this point in his ascent, because he wondered if he would be forgiven, but at the end he was sure that God would grant him forgiveness (cf. 130:8). God Himself redeemed Israel from all their sins. Psalm 130 is a blessed statement of the forgiveness that is needed and received from God.

Psalm 131

Safe in the Arms of God

Being assured of forgiveness from God, the worshiper rested like a child in his mother's arms—all because of his trust in God. Psalm 131 is a short gem—a psalm “Of David” (although this inscription is missing in a number of versions). A possible scenario for this psalm is that the psalmist at one time pursued the “great matters” of life. It is possible that he had been lost in the fast pace of life, but had come to rest quietly in humility and the simpler affairs of life. Like a weaned child held by his mother resting quietly and contentedly, so he rested humbly and contentedly in his present state. He trusted God and lived close to Him, and that was all that mattered to him. He did not long for the “great matters” of life, nor did he need to clamor for the breast. He had been well nourished on the milk of God, and now was growing up in his faith. He urged this trust and hope on Israel as well (cf. 131:3). What a great thought for a pilgrim as he left the “great matters” of the world and drew near to the breast of God, the Temple.

Picture David, the great king, as he laid down the great matters of state and laid contentedly in the Father's arms. Call to mind the picture of a small child who lies quietly in his mother's arms, gazing up into her eyes of love—totally content and at peace and safe. Safe in the arms of God! For the Christian, he is safe in the arms of Jesus!

Psalm 132

God Dwells in Zion

In this, the longest “Song of Ascents,” the psalmist recounted the story of the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (cf. 132:1–5). The Ark had been taken captive by the Philistines during the time of Eli and Samuel. When it was finally returned to Judah, it was kept in the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-Jearim (cf. 1 Samuel 7:1–2). The “*Jaar*” of Psalm 132 is probably the same as Kiriath-Jearim. David brought the ark to Jerusalem and wanted to build a house for God to dwell in (2 Samuel 6–7).

The procession of those who brought the Ark to Jerusalem, and God’s subsequent promises to David about establishing his kingly house, were rehearsed in verses 6–12. Psalm 132:8–10 were used by Solomon in his Temple Dedication speech as recorded in 2 Chronicles 6:41–42. There were two reasons why Jerusalem was so important: **first**, God was there, represented by the presence of the Ark, dwelling above the cherubim which were part of the Ark. **Second**, the throne of David was there. God had promised to sustain his kingly line, and in so doing, would bless and protect the nation of Israel. This psalm reminded God of this crucial covenant, crucial because Israel’s survival depends on it.

God committed Himself to the conditions of that covenant. That implied that there would be blessings upon the Levites: the blessing of salvation by which they in turn could minister for the people to insure their salvation as well; the blessing of sustenance upon the poor—the essentials of life; and the blessing of supremacy for the descendants of David who sat on the throne and acted in behalf of God’s cause for His people.

Psalm 133

How Sweet, How Heavenly is the Sight

Psalm 133 is well known for its theme and illustration of the unity of brethren. Believers, Jews, worshipers in Jerusalem, all together around the Temple! What a lovely picture of unity,

especially since these pilgrims had traveled to Jerusalem from all over Palestine and perhaps from beyond its borders. They had left their jobs, nations, and hometowns, and had come to Jerusalem to join every other Jew in worship to God. What a blessed sign of unity!

Four reasons are given in the psalm for the importance of unity. **First**, it is good! **Second**, it is pleasant (cf. 133:1)! Anyone who has lived in turmoil knows the truth of that. Peace is pleasant and good! **Third**, it is like the oil of the consecration of Aaron to the Levitical priesthood (cf. Exodus 29–30; Leviticus 9). Perhaps the oil symbolized the peace between God and man, and between Jew and Jew. Perhaps the covering of the head and body is symbolic of unity of the entire person, or in this case, the whole nation. **Fourth**, unity is life-giving (cf. 133:3). Like the life-giving dew on Mt. Hermon, so unity gives life to the people of God. A lovely blanket of morning dew makes all the ground look like one covering—unity! Or, as the dew descended and refreshed the verbiage, so unity descended on Israel and watered the spirits of all the worshipers.

Psalm 134

A Call to Praise God

The last “Song of Ascents” called upon the priesthood to praise the Lord day and night. The Levitical priests were originally commissioned to do that very thing (cf. Deuteronomy 10:8). David later reaffirmed the charge, “*They were also to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD. They were to do the same in the evening . . .*” (1 Chronicles 23:30). Unceasing praise! Day and night! Bless the Lord (134:1) and He will bless you from Zion (134:3).

Conclusion

The pilgrimage songs began from far away. They proceeded to bring the worshiper closer to Jerusalem—to the Temple, to David’s throne, and to God’s dwelling place. As

they came closer, they were reminded, through these psalms, of God's protection, illustrated by the mountains that surrounded the city. There was a mix of calls for help, praise for protection, and projected blessings from the LORD for having been faithful. The pilgrimage came to a close as a unified body of believers moved toward the Temple, led by the priests to engage in unceasing praise of God at the Temple itself!

The **steps** in the Songs of Ascents are:

**Yearning – Protection – Blessing – Forgiveness
Peace – Covenant – Unity – Praise!**

Picture Jesus at age twelve coming to Jerusalem for the first time as a human being. He had watched Jerusalem and its people from heaven in Old Testament times going through all kinds of ups and downs. As a boy, He had heard these psalms read in the synagogue in Galilee. But at age twelve He headed towards Jerusalem for the first time, singing these great songs that He Himself had helped write by inspiration. What He must have felt as He came over the hill and Jerusalem came into view for the first time!

Do you long for Zion? Are Christians pilgrims, too? Are they not on their way to Zion? If you are a Christian, then you are already in Zion (cf. Hebrews 12:22)! But Christians are headed for the ultimate Zion—Heaven! Many of the songs that Christians sing describe these steps, these feelings shared by all Christians. These are some of the songs we sing today as our “Songs of Ascents:

“We’re marching to Zion . . . the beautiful city of God.”—**Yearning;**

“Here we are but straying pilgrims; here our path is often dim . . .”—**Yearning;**

“Unto the hills, around do I lift up my longing eyes”—**Protection;**

“When upon life’s billows . . . count your many blessing . . .”—**Blessing**;

“Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.”—**Forgiveness**;

“When peace like a river attendeth my way . . . it is well with my soul.”—**Peace**;

“Standing on the promises of Christ my King . . .”—**Covenant**;

“How sweet how heavenly is the sight when those that love the Lord in one another’s peace delight and so fulfill the Word.”—**Unity**;

“There is a habitation . . . O Zion, lovely Zion, I long thy gates to see . . .”—**Praise**.

Psalms of Deliverance and Imprecation

Introduction

Many years ago one of the more popular television shows in America was “Rescue 911.” Sometimes an episode began with the recording of the call to the 911 (the telephone number used for emergencies in the United States, Ed.) operator. Often times the caller was frightened and hysterical. About all he or she could do was shout “Help,” and often times that shout was accompanied with tears and grief. When I reach the home of someone who has just lost a loved one, I often hear words of anger and frustration on their part. Grief sometimes causes the grieving one to blame others. When under duress, people sometimes say some pretty harsh things.

These two illustrations set the stage for the next two studies in Psalms. One of the largest groups of psalms is that of “Deliverance Psalms.” Perhaps as many as fifty, or one-third, of the total number of psalms, fit in this category. These Psalms are the supplications of hurting people. They are petitions for deliverance or rescue from afflictions. Like the callers to 911, these afflicted people were in agony and begging for help. Psalm 13:1–4 says:

*How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

*Look on me and answer,
O LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;
my enemy will say, 'I have overcome him,'
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

The “Deliverance Psalms” only lack one feature from the “Imprecatory Psalms.” The missing feature would be for the “afflicted” one to call upon God to afflict the “afflicter.” Just as the person who has lost a loved one sometimes blames the loved one, the psalmist is blaming someone. Remember this difference, as well as the similarities.

The “Deliverance Psalms” were written by people in different kinds of pits! Affliction came from several sources. A king of Israel and his nation may have been set upon by an enemy from outside the country. An individual may have been facing the foes within his own society. He may have even had a close friend turn into an enemy (cf. Psalms 41, 88). He may have been old (cf. Psalm 71) or young. The afflicted seemed not to be of just one class of people. These psalms could also be broken down into individual and national laments. A “lament” is the normal terminology used by the commentators, but “lament” does not convey the full content of these Psalms.

Though a pattern does not hold true in every psalm, certain component parts seem to recur frequently. Often the psalm will begin with a cry for help, deliverance, hearing, or for vindication. Then, grief or pain may be described. The psalmists can be very descriptive! The psalm may also describe the enemy in no uncertain terms. Sometimes there is another prayer and then the psalm finishes with praise for God and assurance that the righteous will indeed flourish. The psalmist might also proclaim his dedication, consecration, or vows based on the expected deliverance.

Why Are You In Despair? Psalms 42 and 43

The Setting

Psalms 42 and 43 may originally have been one psalm. Psalm 42 and Psalms 44–49 all have the heading, “For the Choir Director: A Maskil of the Sons of Korah.” Psalm 43 is the only one that does not have that heading, yet it contains the same recurring refrain as found in 42:5: “*Why are you so downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God*” (42:5; cf. 42:11). Psalm 43 seems to bring the hurt of Psalm 42 to a completion with a plea for vindication (cf. 43:1) and one last expression of confidence and hope (43:5).

Psalm 42 begins Book II in the Psalter and begins the predominance of psalms about God **Elohim** in the Book of Psalms. The author is probably one of the sons of Korah, who probably belonged to a guild of singers at the Temple (2 Chronicles 20:19). A particular individual author is not singled out for these two psalms, but they are “Individual Laments.”

Some scholars have suggested that the author of these two psalms was writing for David to express for him what was going on inside his soul. This view may be due to the identity of the oppressor as “*an ungodly nation*,” perhaps a foreign nation. Others have suggested that this is a son of Korah expressing pain over the oppression of wicked Israel. This view is supported by the descriptive phrases in Psalms 42:4: “. . . *I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God,*” and 43:4, “*I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.*” Instead of the King, it could have been a temple musician who had led the people in praise. He may have been forced out of Jerusalem and was now longing to return to the sanctuary, or he may have simply desired the presence and fellowship of God.

The two psalms themselves will be treated as one in this study. They appear to be in three stanzas of five to six verses each: 42:1–5; 42:6–11; and 43:1–5. Each stanza ends with the refrain, “*Why are you downcast, O my soul?*”

My Soul Is Dying of Thirst

Psalm 42:1–5

The psalmist began this psalm with the strong image of a deer that was running away from the stalker. Even though the killer had given up pursuit, the deer did not stop for food or water or glance back until it could go no further. It panted uncontrollably, desperately needing air and water. The psalmist likewise panted for fellowship with God with the same ache of this animal for water. In pain of spirit, he cried, “*When can I go and meet with God?*” (42:2). But the psalmist had water—the water of salty tears; salt and water, that was his food and water! It was not very nutritious or satisfying, but it did satisfy his physical needs for a time because his desires had temporarily left him. After all, if he did not have God, he had nothing anyway. He had no appetite, only tears. All this pain was accentuated by the jabs of enemies who called “*all day long, ‘Where is your God?’*” (42:3). (Remember people at the foot of Calvary questioning Jesus? How that must have increased His pain!) Then, the pain in the soul was flooded with thoughts of good times from the past. The psalmist recalled those festive celebrations at the Temple with throngs of happy pilgrims, rejoicing and celebrating God’s presence, and Israel’s good fortune. And the psalmist recalled, “I used to be their leader.” Perhaps he thought he would lead again. That thought gave him hope, and so the refrain: “*Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God*” (42:5).

At Least I See the Water**Psalm 42:6–11**

Psalm 42:6 may indicate the place of banishment near Mt. Hermon or the Anti-Lebanon Mountains east of the Jordan River. Some have suggested because of this, that the psalmist may be David fleeing from Absalom. Or it may simply be a figurative way of expressing his feelings at that time. This would go along with the water imagery of verse one. The author saw the water that seemingly his soul needed. That water was found in “*waterfalls*” (“*cataracts*” in the Septuagint translation), but then he saw the breakers and waves as troubles that rolled over him and not as water to quench his thirst. Perhaps his head drooped in despair for a moment, before he renewed his hope by remembering—“*By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life*” (42:8). When troubles molest a person, the correct therapy includes rejoicing in the Lord (cf. Philippians 4:4). The psalmist made a conscious effort to recall the things that were still true about God. Those thoughts enabled him to continue to sing and pray, even though he still did not comprehend the “why”: “*Why have you forgotten me?*” (42:9b). Also, though adversaries still reviled and chided, “*Where is your God?*” (42:10b), the psalmist mustered the courage in his spirit to challenge the despair in his soul: “*Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God*” (42:11).

Show Them, O God, Show Them! Please!**Psalm 43:1–5**

The psalmist’s plea was for vindication: “*Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation . . .*” (43:1). The problem included lying. He may have been the victim of deception. Thus, he asked God for vindication and advocacy in a court of justice. He wanted his name cleared and his integrity upheld (sounds like Job!). He continued this thought: “*Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide*

me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell" (43:3). He believed there was a good chance this might happen because God was his strength (cf. 43:2) and his joy (cf. 43:4). Yet, in spite of that truth, he was still hurting and asking "Why?": *"Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"* (43:2). Such are the bantering of emotions when in turmoil! He vowed to God that if He would deliver him, he (the psalmist) promised to return to his love of worshiping in the house of the LORD. He would not offer animal sacrifices, but would offer himself in joyful praise: *"Then will I go to the altar of God, to God my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God"* (43:4). Thus, once more he expressed hope: *"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God"* (43:5). Hope at last had conquered even though the deliverance had not yet been seen or felt.

Prayers for Deliverance

Two other psalms that are similar to one another in this category are Psalm 56 and 57. Both psalms have headings related to David's fleeing from Saul and include what seems to be a specified time, known to the worshipers.

David's Cry for Help When He Was Held Captive

Psalm 56

Psalm 56 is supposed to be David's cry for help when he was held captive by the Philistines at Gath. The historical book of 1 Samuel does not reveal this detainment aspect, so there is some question as to the accuracy of the heading. The psalm breaks down into three stanzas: the first two with the same basic message and a closing one of vows and confidence.

Stanza one constituted a plea for deliverance from determined foes. The plea is for mercy and grace: *"Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me. . ."* (56:1) and ". . .

many are attacking me in their pride” (56:2). The psalmist felt like a herd of buffalo were running back and forth across his back! The psalmist made a choice to trust in God, even when times were at their worst (56:3–4). Psalm 56:4 is repeated at the end of stanza two (56:10–11) and is also used in Psalm 118:6. The Hebrew writer quoted these verses in Hebrews 13:6 to encourage the Christians he was writing to. The psalmist was applying the same principle as he cried out, “*Be merciful to me, O God, . . .*” (56:1). He encouraged himself with a thought provoking question: “*What can mortal man do to me?*” A mortal man can do nothing to take away another man’s relationship with God. The only thing a mortal man can do to another mortal man is to take his life and that simply sends the one who fears God home to be even closer to his Father.

Stanza two (Psalm 56:5–11) repeats the confident plea of stanza one and ends with the same statement (56:11). The psalmist began by describing who the enemy were (56:5–6). They were deceivers, liars, conspirers, and those who were eager to be murderers. They were out to get him, one way or the other. To live in fear of one’s life is bad enough, but for someone to lie about you behind your back and destroy your reputation and influence is almost as bad as losing life itself. The psalmist pictured his enemies as robbers and thieves, lying in ambush, just waiting for an opportune time to pounce on him (cf. 56:6). Psalm 56:7 is a difficult verse, but it could be a note of imprecation called down upon the enemies. It is interesting to remember that David was not willing to be the instrument of God’s wrath upon King Saul even though he had unjustly sought David’s life during this time (cf. 2 Samuel 24:1–13).

There is a lovely and touching figure in Psalm 56:8:

*Record my lament;
list my tears on your scroll—
are they not in your record?*

God had collected every tear that David had ever shed because of his troubles. He had not let a single tear fall to the ground unseen and unheeded. Those tears became the ink for God's pen as He recorded the wicked deeds of David's enemies. Is the Father not tenderhearted, to note and save every tear from His children? It hurts Him when His children hurt.

Psalm 56:9–11 close stanza two with a burst of hope, and that confidence is followed by the conclusion of the psalm verses. The way some translations read, one might think the vows in 56:12 were God's. They seem, however, to be the psalmist's. Because of his confidence in God's deliverance, he made vows that were binding, even before the deliverance was seen. What faith! These vows included thank offerings. He was not trying to influence God to deliver sooner, or at all, but he was expressing his confidence and gratitude. These are very different from the vows people make when they are in dire straits, and then forget their vows when they have been delivered!

Be wary of the promises you make to God! It is important to keep them. The psalmist was so confident of God's care that he put the future deliverance in the past tense: *"For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life"* (56:13). May the LORD grant all His children that kind of faith, especially when they are hurting.

David Was Hiding From Saul

Psalm 57

Psalm 57 supposedly was written when David was hiding from Saul. Once again there is a refrain that guides in identifying the stanzas. That refrain is an acknowledgment of God's exalted glory: *"Be exalted, O God above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth"* (57:5, 11).

The first part of stanza one is an initial expression of confidence in God's deliverance (cf. 57:1–3). Note two things in these verses: first, is the opening line, *"Have mercy on me,*

O God, have mercy on me.” This is very similar to Psalm 56:1. Also, note the figure of God’s refuge, “. . . *the shadow of your wings.*” Once again, this is probably the picture of a baby chick under the protective wings of the mother hen. Jesus used that imagery in Luke 13 to refer to God’s constant attempt to treat Israel with this kind of care, but Israel refused it.

The second part of stanza one is the description of the enemy (cf. 57:4). Apparently, their real sin was the use of their tongues against Him (as before in Psalm 56), but note the imagery. They are “*lions*” who had come to devour him, “*ravenous beasts,*” and “*men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords*” (57:4). Stanza two continues the description of the enemy and his treachery. They had prepared a trap for him treating him like an animal, “*spread a net for my feet . . . They dug a pit in my path—but they have fallen into it themselves*” (57:6). Man’s inhumanity to man is sometimes hard to believe.

The rest of stanza two is of such noteworthy proportion that it’s repeated in Psalm 108. Not only did he praise God, but he called upon himself to awaken, to be aroused, to strike up the instruments and have them accompany his voice in praise. He spread the tidings far and wide—“God is the Deliverer!” If only Christians today were as excited and motivated to proclaim to the world, and praise God for His salvation of souls from sin, a deliverance of eternal dimension.

A National Lament: Psalm 60

Disaster as a Judgment From God Psalm 60:1–5

A good example of a “National Lament” is Psalm 60. Apparently there had been a national disaster. Psalm 60:1–5 described the disaster as a judgment of God: “*You have rejected us, O God, and burst forth upon us; you have been angry—now restore us! You have shaken the land and torn it*

open; mend its fractures, for it is quaking” (60:1–2). Rightly so, the psalmist interpreted invasion as their punishment for sin. Israel had been made to drink the cup of God’s wrath (cf. 60:3). This imagery in the prophets (and from Genesis 15) pictured each nation with a cup for collecting its sins. When the cup was full, it became the wrath of God, a wine made from each nation’s own blood. God made that nation drink it; they reeled and staggered in a drunken stupor; and eventually they died.

Recall the Ancient Land Promise

Psalm 60:6–8

The second part of this psalm recalled the ancient land promise which God had given the patriarchs concerning the land of Canaan—that the land would be given to their descendants. This occurred when Israel conquered the land under Joshua. The Covenant of Blessing and Cursing (cf. Deuteronomy 28–30) insured the retention of the land as long as Israel was faithful. If Israel was unfaithful, however, they would lose it. The psalmist called on God to renew the promise and give Israel back the land. He had always considered Israel above Moab, a mere washbowl, and Edom, a mere resting place for His dirty sandals.

Expression of Concern and Plea for Help

Psalm 60:9–12

The last part of this Psalm expressed concern; the psalmist pled with God to help. He also confessed that there was no strength to be found in man, but only in God: *“Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies”* (60:11–12).

God’s commentary on this sort of incident is found in Psalm 81:1–16. (Read the Psalm)

Conclusion

A few observations need to be made here. **First**, hurt is real in the lives of people. The Psalms reveal the intensity of that pain and the helplessness the person feels. The sheer number of psalms in this category attests to the fact that trials and sufferings are normal, frequent, and intense. For Christians, it includes real enemies, not just ill circumstances.

Second, the psalmists were driven to God by these trials. The time of trials is not the time to turn away, get bitter, and blame God. It is time to repent if necessary and cast all burdens on the Lord, then wait for Him to lift up. Thank God for trials! They create an opportunity for intense fellowship with God. These psalmists were going through trials as Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane. Christians have “gardens” of trial, too. Use them for agonizing in prayer.

Third, and finally, notice the praise at the end of the Psalms. God was praised in all circumstances, not just when deliverance actually arrived. These bursts of praise should include statements of confidence that He will deliver. Praise should reflect a resolve to praise Him and share the good news of deliverance with others.

Continuing with this study of the Book of Psalms, this chapter will also cover “The Imprecatory Psalms.”

“Imprecation” means the act of invoking evil upon or calling down curses upon another individual. An illustration would be when Jesus and His disciples were refused entry into a Samaritan village and James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven on the people (cf. Luke 9:51–55). That is called an imprecation.

The Book of Psalms contains a number of “Imprecatory Psalms.” They go a step beyond simply calling on God for help and deliverance from the enemy. They usually contain a plea that God destroy the enemy. Some examples from the Book of Psalms are:

*“Break the teeth in their mouths, O God;
tear out, O LORD, the fangs of the lions” (58:6).
“Break the arm of the wicked and evil man” (10:15).
“May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow”
(109:9).*

Sometimes the language is very strong, but do not draw any conclusions until the end of this chapter. There will be answers at the end of the chapter.

As in the case of “The Deliverance Psalms,” there are common elements in most of the “Imprecatory Psalms.” Be aware that not all of these will be in every imprecatory psalm: (1) A prayer for protection and deliverance. (2) A lament of grief and anguish. (3) A request for vengeance. (4) A praise and thanks for expected results. (5) A pledge of the psalmist’s response.

What Has Happened to the Faithful?

Psalm 12

The psalmist began with a plea for “Help!” and the reason why that help was needed (12:1–2). “Help, LORD” includes the term *Yahweh*, the covenant name of God. Just the use of that name presumes the psalmist’s trust in God to keep covenant with the faithful.

The Godly Are Surrounded

Description of the Ungodly (12:1–2)

There were, however, very few godly and faithful people left during this time. The godly that were left were surrounded by wicked people who were bent on destroying those godly few. Three verses describe these evil ones, their methods, their countenance, and their feelings:

- *“Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception” (12:2).*

- “. . . *‘We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips—who is our master?’*” (12:4).
- *“The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men”* (12:8).

Lies and flattery concealed their treachery. This society had lost its honest ethics. Their countenance was brazenly bold and arrogant. They did not feel threatened, so they boldly proclaimed self-determination in their ways. They felt that no one could tell them what to do. This was the time when it was written: *“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit”* (Judges 21:25). Their pride was openly demonstrated. They strutted about and openly flaunted their evil ways. They talked big in a society that exalted vileness, called good evil, and evil good.

The Imprecation (Prayer) of the Godly (12:3–4)

An imprecation is also found in 12:3: *“May the LORD cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue . . .”* Since their mouths were part of the problem, the psalmist used a synecdoche (a figure of speech in which a part is used for a whole) to request their destruction. He called on God to cut off their flapping lips, a part of the whole body that needed and deserved cutting off. This was a strong request, but remember that pride is the opposite of faith. Thus, the person deserved destruction. But, is it right for a Christian to request something like this? This question will be asked many times—how can this kind of request be right for a Christian? The answer to this question will be given later in the chapter.

Assurance That God Will Act

The psalmist was confident God would act:

*Because of the oppression of the weak
and the groaning of the needy,*

I will now arise, says the LORD.

“I will protect them from those who malign them.”

*And the words of the LORD are flawless,
like silver refined in a furnace of clay,
purified seven times.*

Psalm 12:5–6

The LORD was pictured seeing the needy in trouble and arising to do something about it. This assurance was based on two things: **first**, God’s covenant relationship conditions required this action on behalf of the needy righteous. He was bound by covenant to help them. **Second**, His word is pure and will always be true. His word is so pure and faithful that it is compared to silver refined by fire seven times. Man makes promises, but is not always trustworthy, but God is always faithful. So, even though the psalmist had not yet seen the deliverance or the judgment, he knew it would be done because God had promised that it would be done—“*O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever*” (12:7).

Vindicate You and Me, LORD!

Psalm 17

A Plea to Be Heard (17:1–5)

Psalm 17 is both an individual lament and an imprecatory psalm. The first part of the Psalm was a plea to be heard by God because the psalmist was upright. He claimed: (1) To pray without hypocrisy. (2) To possess a clean heart. (3) To withhold his tongue from sin. (4) To avoid the companionship and ways of the wicked. (5) To tread the straight and narrow pathway of God.

He had not slipped, he was still on course. He was not being prideful; he was merely asserting his faithfulness to God

with sincerity of heart. Assurance helped him to do that: “*Hear, O LORD, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer—it does not rise from deceitful lips*” (17:1–2). Vindication came later in the psalm, but the first reason God should hear him was because of his integrity.

A Plea for Protection

The second part of the Psalm reinforced the plea for help but added a different reason—the nature of the wicked. First the plea:

*I call you, O God, for you will answer me;
give ear to me and hear my prayer.
Show the wonder of your great love,
you who save by your right hand
those who take refuge in you from your foes.
Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings.*
Psalm 17:6–12

Several phrases deserve explanation. The first is “. . . *you who save by your right hand . . .*” (17:7). The right hand is the place of authority and strength. Because it was His right hand, the psalmist expected a wondrous display of loving kindness. He expected God to do something big to rescue His people.

The second phrase is “*Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings . . .*” (17:8). This was a reference to Deuteronomy 32:10–11. The song of Moses concluded the Covenant of Blessing and Cursing by acknowledging God’s care for Israel. Thus, the psalmist was depending on God keeping His covenant.

Note the description of the wicked. Note just how bad they were! Psalm 17:9–11 says:

*. . . from the wicked who assail me,
from my mortal enemies who surround me.*

*They close up their callous hearts,
and their mouths speak with arrogance.
They have tracked me down, they have surrounded me,
with eyes alert, to throw me to the ground.*

In their hearts they were about to have a spiritual heart attack! Psalm 17:10 literally reads, “They were enclosed in their own fat.” This phrase may refer to their luxuriant lifestyle and extremely carnal mindedness. It may, as most translations indicate, mean a condition of an unfeeling heart. The fat lifestyle had closed in around the spiritual heart and prevented it from feeling for the needy. With their proud mouths and deviant ways, they planned and carried out their destruction of the righteous. It was their desire to overthrow and cast the righteous to the ground (cf. 17:11). One picture sums it all up: “*They are like a lion hungry for prey, like a great lion crouching in cover*” (17:12). Like ravenous beasts, they lurked in shady places, waiting to pounce on and devour innocent prey. They were no better than carnivorous, brute beasts.

One other description from the following paragraph is insightful: “*O LORD, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life*” (17:14). They lived for the day, for the flesh, for whatever it was that was part of life at that moment. No thought of afterlife or judgment and, therefore, no restraint. They deserved to be judged, but was it okay to call on God the way he did here?

Intensified Prayer for Vindication

In Psalm 17:13–14 the psalmist said:

*Rise up, O LORD, confront them, bring them down;
rescue me from the wicked by your sword.
O LORD, by your hand save me from such men,*

from men of this world whose reward is in this life.

The prayer grew intent and insistent at this point. God must act—to deliver and to judge: “*Rise . . . confront . . . rescue me . . .*” (17:13). Confront, bring them low. Give back to them what they had been doling out, a taste of their own medicine (cf. 17:14). Take it into the next generation and afflict their children, too (cf. 17:14), even the generation beyond that!

Conclusion to Psalm 17

As for the psalmist, he expressed confidence: “*And I—in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness*” (17:15).

Individual Lament

Psalm 35

Earnest Prayer for Divine Judgment on Enemies (35:1–10)

One other psalm in the individual lament category of imprecatory psalms is Psalm 35. This psalm is longer than the previous two, but its uniqueness lies in the intensity of the imprecatory statements. For example:

*Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;
fight against those who fight against me.*

*Take up shield and buckler;
arise and come to my aid.*

*Brandish spear and javelin
against those who pursue me.*

Say to my soul, “I am your salvation.”

*May those who seek my life
be disgraced and put to shame;*

*may those who plot my ruin
be turned back in dismay.
May they be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them away;
may their path be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them . . .*

*may ruin overtake them by surprise—
may the net they hid entangle them,
may they fall into the pit, to their ruin . . .*

*May all who gloat over my distress
be put to shame and confusion;
may all who exalt themselves over me
be clothed with shame and disgrace.*

Psalm 35:1–6, 8, 26

This was pretty strong language, but why the anger? The author had enemies who contended with him (35:1). “*Contend*” is a legal term meaning that the conflict resembled a lawsuit, but he wanted God to take the conflict outside the courtroom and settle it on the battlefield. This is characteristic of youngsters who disagree in the schoolhouse and want to continue the fight outside on the playground. These enemies spoke maliciously against the psalmist seeking to repay him evil for good (cf. 35:11–12). This behavior was “*without cause*” (35:7). They falsely accused (cf. 35:20), and gloated over his misfortune (cf. 35:15–16, 26). Indeed they deserved to be punished.

Note the particular roles God was called on to fill in this first section. He was called to be a fully dressed warrior (cf. 35:2–3), to be the wind that drives away the chaff (cf. 35:5), to be the one who trips the enemy in the dark (35:6), and is supposed to send the angel of the LORD in pursuit of them (35:6).

Foundation for the Request – How They Have Treated Him (35:11–16)

The second part of the Psalm described how the psalmist had been treated. Apparently he was sympathetic when they were hurting, but they only gloated and rejoiced when he was down. What else is a man to do but pray that God will deliver him and at the same time defeat the evildoers?

National Laments Psalms 79 and 83

Occasion of Both Psalms – Invasion

Psalms 79 and 83 are “National Laments,” but they also include imprecatory pleas. In Psalm 79, the occasion was an invasion; in Psalms 83—the threat of it. The occasion was an invasion in Psalm 79 and the threat of it in Psalm 83. Psalm 79 describes a fairly thorough destruction of Jerusalem (Psalm 79:1–4).

The city was in ruins, the Temple was defiled. Many were dead in the streets, in rivers of their own blood. Scavenger birds picked at their flesh. Meanwhile scornful enemies, probably Edom and Moab, and their like, gloated over her downfall.

Psalm 83 described a threatening situation, which when implemented, would result in the same devastation described in Psalm 79. Israel was encircled by hostile nations and these nations had been joined by the cruel Assyrians.

Prayer of Imprecation

The prayer of imprecation in Psalm 79 says: “*Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name . . .*” (79:6). There was an acknowledgment of sin on Israel’s part by the psalmist (cf. 79:5). God would not have allowed this devastation had He not been angry with Israel. He would not have been angry if Israel had not sinned by breaking covenant. Israel deserved to be punished. The psalmist implied their sinful state: “*How long,*

O LORD? Will you be angry forever?” (79:5). The psalmist was pleading for God to refocus His anger and turn his instruments of justice against the enemy who has also sinned by being cruel to God’s children. The psalmist was begging for “mercy.” The “pour out” imagery in Psalm 79:6 is similar to the bowls of wrath poured out in Revelation 16:12: “The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East.”

The imprecatory part of Psalm 83 is very strong and much longer:

*Do to them as you did to Midian,
as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon,
who perished at Endor
and became like refuse on the ground.
Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb,
all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna.*

Psalm 83:9–11

The psalmist requested that God treat the enemy as Gideon had treated the Midianites (cf. Judges 7–8). Oreb and Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna were captured and killed, two of them were beheaded! Sisera was defeated at Megiddo by Deborah and Barak, and as he retreated, he stopped to rest in the house of Jael. While he slept, Jael drove a tent peg through his temple (cf. Judges 4)! The other figures in 13–17 were typical Old Testament judgment figures.

Strong Imprecation

Psalm 109

The last psalm to be studied in this chapter is Psalm 109. It is an Individual Lament. It has been saved until last, because of its extraordinarily strong imprecatory section.

Battered State of the Author (109:1–5, 22–25)**Plea for Help (109:1, 26)****Vow of Praise (109:30)**

The psalmist began this Psalm describing his battered state which is similar to the other psalms. There was the normal plea for help, the vow of praise, and an expression of confidence.

Imprecation (109:6–20)

The primary interest in this particular psalm is the request for God to hurt the adversary. The language used by the psalmist calling upon God is enough to make most people cringe, but it is all committed to His care and His decisions.

*Appoint an evil man to oppose him;
let an accuser stand at his right hand.
When he is tried, let him be found guilty,
and may his prayers condemn him.*

*May his days be few;
may another take his place of leadership.
May his children be fatherless
and wife a widow.*

Psalm 109:6–9

The psalmist was pleading with God to make sure his enemy had to face his day in court before an “accuser.” He begged God to shorten his life and shame his family name (cf. 109:8–10). Let the creditors take all his widow’s possessions and leave the family shamed and helpless (cf. 109:11–15). The psalmist begged God to let his enemy reap what he had sown (cf. 109:16–20). Can a Christian pray for that to happen to someone, even an enemy?

Reflection

Can a Christian pray to God in the same way the psalmists prayed to God asking Him to bring harm to their enemies?

This question spawns two other questions which need to be answered: **First**, is it acceptable to God that I hate any person for any reason? **Second**, is it ever right to call down God's wrath on others?

Various Answers

Derek Kidner in his commentary on Psalm 109 calls the imprecation cruel, horrific, on the dark side, and of ugly motivation.²¹ Thus, though the recording of the words is by inspiration, the content is not recommended for imitation by the righteous. It is true that Scripture does include untruths, e.g., Job and his friends make inaccurate statements. However, these psalms are liturgical pieces for regular use in worship in the Temple! Would such error and unjustifiable anger be sung and read over and over? To clearly distinguish between righteous themes and this one would have been difficult for the worshiper.

Another suggested answer is that the Old Covenant allowed and sanctioned retaliation, an eye-for-an-eye ethic, but the New Covenant is different. I have trouble with this one, too. When Jesus referred to a number of Old Testament Scriptures in Matthew 5 and then commented, "*But I say unto you . . .*" He was not differentiating between covenants so much as reinterpreting the originals which had been distorted by rabbinical perversion. The Old Testament did indeed teach that God's people were to return good for evil (cf. 1 Samuel 24:16; Jeremiah 17:16; 18:20) and love their enemies (cf. Exodus 23:4–5). They should not rejoice over an enemy's calamity or misfortune (cf. Job 31:29–35). There is no difference in New and Old Covenant injunctions in this regard.

Yet another suggested answer is that this language was more typical of Israelite culture. It was the outpouring of a

²¹ Derek Kidner, Psalms 73–150 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 390.

hurting heart, and Israelites were given to expressing their feelings strongly, a sort of cultural way of venting their anger, blowing off steam and frustration. There may be some truth to the cultural explanation. It may also have to do with the fact that poetry tends to be more prone to express strong feelings. I still feel dissatisfied with such an explanation because these psalms are to be used in worship. Can the Christian sing one of these imprecatory psalms just as he would sing any other song?

Preferred Explanation

My own suggestion toward an answer, or at least a partial one, may be somewhat hard to accept because of cultural bias. **First**, review the character of Israel's enemies. Were they really evil? Were those foreign nations really guilty of cruel treatment toward Israel? The answer to both questions is an unequivocal, "Yes." Were they then deserving of judgment? "Yes," again! Look at the verses in Romans 3:10–18 where Paul was finishing his three chapter argument on all have sinned and are falling short of God's glory. All are without excuse for their sins (cf. Romans 1:20; 2:1). In his final argument to establish the fact that all men are evil and deserve condemnation, Paul quoted from different scriptures and four of his quotations came from the Psalms (10:7; 53:1–3; 36:1; 140:3). All four Psalms have imprecatory statements of the plight of these wicked ones. Paul, by the implication of quotations, agreed with the imprecatory psalmists that these wicked people deserved and should get death! It is a truth—the wicked will be judged severely.

The cultural bias is with man calling down judgment on his enemies rather than just saying that they will indeed be judged. Actually, there is not a lot of difference between the two if the motive is unselfish. Since the Psalms are inspired worship material, I am persuaded that the psalmist's motives were pure. As pure inspired writing, they can teach in areas that Christians are deficient. Notice some of the key imprecatory statements:

*Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times
the reproach they have hurled at you, O LORD (79:12).*

*Cover their faces with shame
so that men will seek your name, O LORD . . .
Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD—
that you alone are the Most High over all the
earth (83:16,18).*

*Let them know that it is your hand,
that you, O LORD have done it (109:27).*

*When your judgments come upon the earth,
the people of the world learn righteousness
(Isaiah 26:9b).*

Notice the motives of the psalmists—exaltation of God, His people, and His righteous standard of ethics. Christians should want that, too. They should desire that God and His ways prevail and triumph in this world. Yes, many will get hurt in the judgment, and that is awful, but the outcome is the exaltation of God. Sometimes Christians would prefer that nothing hurtful happened even to the defiantly wicked, but this defeats the exaltation of God and the vindication of His people and His cause.

Do you really want righteousness to win out? What if it costs lives? Are you really on God's side desiring that He get the glory and the credit? Are you willing that He should be spit upon and His people derided in place of anything hurtful happening to the wicked? When you pray for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (cf. Matthew 6:10), is not that the same wish that the psalmist prayed for? There should never be a spirit of selfishness or revenge. There should be a desire to see all men come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. There should be a spirit that is willing to give men the chances they need for this to happen. But at some point, when all mercies have been rejected, God must be just. Goodness must prevail! Evil must be punished.

The Ethical Psalms

Introduction

The Book of Psalms is the foremost of inspired poetic “Wisdom Literature” ever written. This chapter will cover the “The Ethical Psalms,” which are sometimes called “The Wisdom Psalms.” Ethics has to do with what is right and wrong, good and bad, moral and immoral. It defines the standard of what is correct and what is best. The Law, the Torah part of the Old Testament, thoroughly covers the ethic portion of God’s revelation. Because the Israelites were prone to slip away from God, however, the prophets continually preached repentance and a return to the Law. Because people needed to be reminded of those fundamentals, the Psalms restate many of the things they had already heard.

Worship is not just praise and adoration, prayer and supplication. It includes instruction from God’s Word. That is the function of the Ethical or Wisdom Psalms. These Psalms may have also been used for personal meditation. They might be classified better with other wisdom literature such as Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. There are noticeable likenesses. Leslie Allen comments on their purpose:

Wisdom teaching had a theology and ethical system all its own; these overlapped with the covenant traditions of Israel. It investigated the questions posed by human experience and endeavored to relate the individual to society, and both to God. It possessed distinctive forms of expression, which makes it

practicable to recognize wisdom terminology and themes in the Psalter.²²

Allen categorizes the “Wisdom Psalms” into three groups: “Wisdom Psalms Proper”—perhaps for personal use (37, 49, 112, 127); “Wisdom Temple Psalms”—for the assembly (32, 34, 73, 111); “Wisdom Torah Psalms”—the Law and Wisdom literature characteristics (1, 19, 119).

An Israelite worshiper could not offer the burnt offering until he had made the atonement or sin offering. Once cleansed of iniquity by the lamb’s blood, he, then, was allowed to offer the burnt offering, which represented the surrender of self to God. Now, in fellowship with the LORD and surrendered to His purposes, the worshiper came to the assembly to praise His God, plead his problems, and hear the Word of the LORD which would have included the Ethical Psalms.

Introduction to the Ethical Psalms

Psalm 1

Prologue to the Rest of the Psalter

Psalm 1 is an introduction to the rest of the Psalter. It presents the theme of the entire book: true piety is the source of blessedness or happiness. The writer, who is unknown because there is no inscription on it or tradition that surrounds it, presents a contrast of the wicked and the righteous. That theme is a fitting prologue, because the Psalter is the “Yes” and “Amen” in hymn form of the Torah, the Law of Moses. The man who loves the Law is blessed, and the man who does not is wicked and will be judged.

The Psalm can be broken down into three contrasts of the righteous and wicked: the way of life (1:1–2); results (1:3–4);

²² Leslie C. Allen, Word Biblical Themes — Psalms (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1987), 31–32.

and judgment (1:5–6). Sometimes it is broken down into two sections of contrast: the righteous (1:1–3) and the wicked (1:4–6).

The psalmist began with a beatitude. When Jesus delivered the Beatitudes in the opening of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, He was really just using Jewish expressions and poetical features of their literature. There are a number of beatitudes in the Psalter. They are usually just an exclamation or a burst of strong emotion: “Oh, the happiness!,” “Oh, how very happy is the man!” There are no verbs in this type of writing in the Psalms or in Matthew 5 in Greek. *Makarios* is the Greek word. It described the state of bliss for the Greek gods, but the Bible says Christians can partake of the divine nature of Jehovah God. Therefore, there is a way to be God-like, blissful, and blessed; however, only the righteous attain it.

The Righteous (1:1–3)

The psalmist began by explaining the way to be blessed, but in a negative form:

Blessed is the man

*Who **does not walk** in the counsel of the wicked
or **stand** in the way of sinners
or **sit** in the seat of mockers.*

Psalm 1:1

The three negative phrases can be summed up in the statements: “*Bad company corrupts good character*” (1 Corinthians 15:33), or “*He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm*” (Proverbs 13:20). The psalmist seems to have built the phrases in words of evil and degrees of habit. “***Walk**(ing) in the counsel of the wicked*” might be considered an **association**. The “*man*” is too close to “*the wicked*.” He stays in their presence and listens to their corrupt talk. The New Testament is filled with exhortations to **walk** properly: “*That ye might walk worthy of the Lord . . .*”

(Colossians 1:10, KJV) and “. . . *as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk*” (1 Corinthians 7:17, KJV).

The phrase “. . . ***stand*** in the way of sinners . . .” might show **identification** and **participation**. Christians need to stand in the grace of God and in faith and in liberty, rather than standing with sinners. The phrase “. . . ***sit*** in the seat of mockers” is **fellowship**. The “*man*” who sits down with mockers is in open rebellion against God and His people. The man who “*does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers*” is blessed. He does not associate with those who have ungodly minds or associate with the vicious life of a sinner or delight in the company of those who scoff at religion.

Then, the psalmist stated positively what blesses a man’s life:

*But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.*

Psalm 1:2–3

“*The man*” forsakes the fellowship with the wicked and seeks the LORD’s Word. Psalm 1:2 literally says, “In only the law of Jehovah is his delight.” The word “*delight*” conveys more than just a passing interest in something. It refers to having knowledge of the contents and adhering to its import. That means being inclined to follow His way of doing things because His ways are precious. To be able to do this, man must meditate on the Word of God. With a proper attitude of “*delight*” and a proper method of meditation (“*meditates*”), man will reap the benefits of God’s Word and fellowship.

The psalmist described how blessed man could be with this illustration: “*He is like a tree planted by streams of water*

which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (1:3). There are five descriptions in this verse: (1) “*Planted*”—stable, grounded, so that no wind could uproot it; (2) *Watered*—sustained so it can live and not die (water was and still is a very important commodity in that land); (3) *Fruitful*—always makes a difference, an impact on life; (4) *Evergreen*—“*leaf does not wither,*” trials and the hot sun do not wilt a healthy plant; and (5) *Prosperous*—more fruit, vivacious, growing!

The Plight of the Wicked (1:4–6)

Not so the wicked!

They are like chaff

that the wind blows away.

*Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

*For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

The plight of the wicked is stated in sharp contrast to the man who is blessed. The psalmist used the well known Jewish judgment figure of “*chaff*.” A farmer would take his wheat to the top of a hill, where the wind would aid him in separating the grain from the hulls. He would throw the grain up in the air with a winnowing fork and the wind would blow the lighter chaff to the side while the heavier seeds would fall back to the ground. When the process had been completed, the grain was gathered into the barn and the chaff was burned. What a sad commentary on a man’s life. What a drastic picture of futility when his life had produced only that which was blown away or burned up. The two pictures are opposites: no roots, no leaves, no fruit, a wasted life that was worthless.

The wasted life cannot be a witness in the “*assembly of the righteous*” saints. One who had wasted his life would not be

allowed into the “*assembly of the righteous*.” His life would have nothing good to say. He could not “*stand*” before God in judgment. He could not maintain himself or stand his ground when judgment comes. He was drunk from drinking the cup of God’s wrath (cf. Isaiah 51:17–22). He reeled and staggered in that stupor (cf. Psalm 107:27; Isaiah 24:20).

The contrast between the wicked and the righteous is summarized in Psalm 1:6: “*For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*”

Contrast of Evil and Good Continued

Affliction of the Righteous By the Wicked

Psalm 14

This ethical contrast of good versus evil is continued in Psalms 14 and 15. Psalm 14 describes the wicked one, Psalm 15, the righteous one. Leupold²³, a well known Old Testament scholar, entitles Psalm 14, “God’s Reaction to the Universal Corruption of Mankind,” while Kidner²⁴ calls it “Serpent’s Blood” (referring to the effect of Satan on mankind).

The context of this psalm seems to portray an affliction by the wicked upon the righteous. Psalm 14:4 says, “*. . . those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on the LORD.*” When this is translated literally it means “*. . . eaters of my people, they eat bread.*” These people had no concern for human life. The righteous were taken advantage of as Micah described the people of his days: “*. . . who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; who eat my people’s flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?*”

²³ H.C. Leupold, Exposition of Psalms (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 137.

²⁴ Derek Kidner, Psalms 1–72 An Introduction & Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 78.

(Micah 3:2-3). The psalmist was calling out for deliverance by the LORD in Zion from these oppressors (cf. 14:7).

The psalm begins with, *“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’”* (14:1). The *“fool”* is not a philosophical atheist; he is a practical atheist. He shows by his lifestyle that he denies God’s justice even exists! He is gambling against moral sanctions being existent. An illustration of this *“fool”* during the time of Jesus would be the Jewish rulers who denied the authority of God and Christ so that they could live any way they wanted to live.

Psalm 14 uses a lot of perfect tenses, which infers that a process or an event began in the past, but the effect continued. Psalm 14:1 could read, “The fool has always said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” It is interesting that Paul took this passage in Psalm 14:1, 3 (and other Old Testament passages) to make a case for the lost condition of all men (cf. Romans 3:9–20): “. . . *there is no one who does good*” (14:1b). Paul’s Roman letter interprets this to mean no one is *“good”* in the sense of perfection as it can be attributed to God. All have sinned and are continuing to fall short of perfection. Psalm 14:3 says, *“All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt.”* Paul quoted this verse also to establish his statement, *“We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin”* (that is, sin’s penalty of spiritual death) (Romans 3:9b). All are *“corrupt.”* The root word connotation of *“corrupt”* suggests something that has spoiled like soured milk. God has surveyed it all (cf. 14:2) and will rescue His afflicted people by taking vengeance on the evildoers (cf. 14:7).

True Worshiper of Jehovah (Psalm 15)

In sharp contrast to Psalm 14, Psalm 15 describes the “True Worshiper of Jehovah.” The psalmist began with the parallel questions, *“LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?”* (15:1). The answer to these questions comes in the following descriptions: **first**, the one who can dwell on God’s holy hill is the righteous man. He is a man or

woman of true character: *“He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous”* (15:2). The psalmist uses the word *“walk”* again, this time describing the righteous in a positive way (cf. Psalm 1:1). He is above reproach, blameless (like the New Testament elder who is also to be blameless—cf. 1 Timothy 3:2). Blameless does not mean he is without sin; it means there is no major flaw or stumbling block in his life. He goes about doing good. The word *“righteousness”* is similar to its use in Matthew 5:20: *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”* This is the man who knows and understands the truth of later New Testament statements: *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers”* (Galatians 6:10), and *“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased”* (Hebrews 13:16).

Second, the righteous person has control over his tongue (15:2b–3), a major thing for any man as James 3:2 attests: *“We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.”* This man’s speech is described as *“... from his heart ...”* (15:2), so he is sincere and honest. He is what he appears to be; no facade or flattery. He does not slander others in order to build up self. The language indicates that the slanderer is one who spies out the faults of others and spreads that gossip around. Similarly, the righteous man *“... does his neighbor no wrong ...”* (15:3). *“Taking up a reproach”* (KJV) means casting a slur, or picking something undesirable about others and spreading it around.

Third, the righteous man’s allegiance is clear: *“... who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD ...”* (15:4). He is on God’s side. He hates what God hates and loves what God loves. Both are important and essential. Sometimes people do not have a sense of hate for the sin and evil that God hates. Society’s normal is to accept everybody in the world,

regardless of their moral stance. Sin is sometimes labeled “good,” and that which is good, is sometimes called “sin” or “evil.” Anybody who takes a stand against sin and sinners is a bigot in modern society! Psalms implants a holy and righteous indignation against evil.

Fourth, the righteous man is honorable in his dealings with others (cf. 15:4c–5). He would rather be hurt himself than take advantage of others. He is never dishonest or power oriented. The church in Corinth needed this lesson. Paul criticized their willingness to go to secular courts to assert their rights, rather than being defrauded if necessary to preserve Christian relationships (cf. 1 Corinthians 6).

The righteous man will be immovable and unshaken (cf. 15:5c)! He is on rock solid ground. He can stand there through thick and thin. A popular song words that thought this way: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name. On Christ, the solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand.”²⁵ Where do you stand right now? Hopefully, not “*in the path of sinners*” (Psalm 1:1), but on the rock of God’s Word and your relationship to Him in Jesus Christ.

When Wickedness Triumphs On Earth (Psalm 37)

Another psalm that is in this “Ethical” or “Wisdom” psalm category is Psalm 37. It is an acrostic psalm, which means that every other verse has a word at its beginning that begins with a succeeding letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

The Setting

The setting for this psalm seems to be a word of wisdom from an old man to a younger man: “*I was young and now I am*

²⁵ See Alton Howard, Ed. Songs of Faith and Praise (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Company, 1994), #538.

old . . .” (37:25). The older gentleman was encouraging others to know the importance of trusting in God.

Do Not Get Heated Up

The psalmist made his point by showing what will happen to the rich and wicked. Before he addressed that point, however, he said, “*Do not fret . . .*” (37:1, 7, 8). Another way to say this would be, “Don’t get heated up.” He was urging his readers not to become angry or frustrated about the wicked (rich) who seemed to get away with evil. Be assured that in the end, God will make all things right (cf. 37:1, 9–10). In this section, however, the emphasis is more on how to cope regardless of what is happening with the wicked. Take your eyes off of the wicked and quit thinking the grass looks greener on the evil side of the fence! Note the key words and phrases: “*Trust in the LORD,*” “*Delight yourself in the LORD,*” “*Commit your way to the LORD,*” “*Trust also in Him.*” (cf. Proverbs 37:5–6). Concentrate on the LORD. Keep your eyes fixed on Him and His promises, not on the prosperity of the wicked. That word “*commit*” literally means “to roll.” Roll your burdens to the Lord.

Psalm 37:12–20 forms a second section, which focuses on “why” God’s children should not “*fret*” over the apparent success of the wicked. The psalmist said the LORD would fight against the wicked and use the swords they had used to build their own fortunes against them (cf. 37:14–15). He would break their bows (cf. 37:15) and their armies (cf. 37:17). In Psalm 37:1–11 the battlefield was actually the mind of the righteous man, but in 37:12–20 the battlefield was something that was more visible in the form of the LORD against the wicked. The wicked would vanish like a puff of smoke (cf. 37:20). The theme of this Psalm is: “*The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him*” (37:40). Trust and faith are the most basic elements of one’s relationship to God.

References to the “*Land*”

One last note on this Psalm is the repeated references to the “*land*”—“... *dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture*” (37:3), “*But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace*” (37:11) and 37:9, 22, 27, and 29. “*The meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace*” is the one that is the basis for Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:5. To the Jew, the land of Palestine was part of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:7. Keeping and having the land was symbolic of covenant relationship with God. If a Jew lost his land, they could be sure the Lord was unhappy with him. The psalmist tied the fact of keeping the land and staying in covenant relationship to God, with faithfulness, trust, humility, and meekness. Jesus reasserted that the covenant relationship to God was still tied to trust, faith, and humility.

The Rewards of Good Ethics

This study of the “Ethical Psalms” closes with a cursory glance at three psalms. These psalms tell of the fortunes of those who live wise lives! They are Psalms 49, 112, and 128.

“*Be Perfect*”

Psalm 112

Psalm 112 may have been a companion to Psalm 111. Both have 10 verses and a number of other poetic similarities, besides similar verses. What Psalm 111 says about God, Psalm 112 says about the righteous man. Because of this, Leupold sums up Psalm 112 with the comparison, “*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48).²⁶

²⁶ H.C. Leupold, Exposition of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 785.

Psalm 112:1 praised God for the blessed state of the man who fears God. It is another “Beatitude” Psalm! Subsequent verses note the specifics of his blissful state. His family and descendants will reap the blessings of his life (cf. 112:2). Wealth and riches follow him (cf. 112:3). His attitude and actions toward others is unselfishness (cf. 112:4). When he stands in judgment—whether here or on the final day—he will be upheld (cf. 112:5). He is immovable (112:6). He will be remembered (cf. 112:6). He is not afraid of life and its challenges (cf. 112:7). He will conquer the adversaries (cf. 112:8). His heart is filled with benevolence (cf. 112:9). He will be honored (cf. 112:9).

A Righteous Man and His Reward

Psalm 128

Psalm 128 covers one particular area of blessedness, which in turn affects all of society. The psalmist began by comparing one who fears the LORD to a farmer who gets to “*eat the fruit of your labor . . . your wife will be like a fruitful vine . . . your sons will be like olive shoots . . .*” (128:2–3). A righteous man will see and enjoy the fruit of his life. When the husband is loving and attentive, the family prospers. A righteous man prioritizes his life beginning with God first, home second, and society and all else, third. The fruit will be seen first in the family when a loving, attentive husband cares for his family and brings about fruitful plants in the form of his wife and children. A righteous man plants, cultivates, and waters plants just like a farmer does, and he sees the results because of his efforts. Paul urged Christians to have this same kind of care when he wrote to the Ephesian brethren (cf. Ephesians 5–6). He said:

*. . . wives should submit to their husbands . . .
Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the
church and gave himself up for her . . . Children, obey*

your parents in the Lord . . . “Honor your father and mother” . . . (Ephesians 5:24b–25a, 6:1–2a).

Parents need to love their children enough to teach and discipline them in the things of God. There is nothing more precious to a righteous man than to see his family love and obey God as he does!

Will any of this make any difference in the world? Oh, yes, indeed! 128:5–6 states: *“May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel.”* The righteous and fruitful family is the salt of society. Good families prevent evil and insure God’s blessing on Israel. There will be a future world for grandchildren.

The Great Equalizer, Death **Psalm 49**

One last look at the righteous man comes from Psalm 49. It, like the others, sounds like other wisdom literature—Job and Proverbs. The main thrust of this psalm has to do with the great equalizer, Death! In talking to the righteous, the psalmist urged him not to envy the wicked or fear days of personal poverty and adversity because all men die (cf. 49:5). Both the wise and the foolish die (cf. 49:10). It does not matter how much money a man has, *“No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him . . . no payment is ever enough—that he should live forever and not see decay”* (49:7–9). All men die, but for the righteous there is redemption:

*The upright will rule over them in the morning;
their forms will decay in the grave,
far from their princely mansions.
But God will redeem my life from the grave;
he will surely take me to himself.
Do not be overawed when a man grows rich,
when the splendor of his house increases;*

*for he will take nothing with him when he dies,
his splendor will not descend with him.
Though while he lived he counted himself blessed—
and men praise you when you prosper—
he will join the generation of his fathers,
who will never see the light of life.
A man who has riches without understanding
is like the beasts that perish*

Psalm 49:14b–20

The last reward of the righteous will be eternal life with the Lord!

Forgiveness in the Psalms

Introduction

People are to be commended for their desire to know God and how to relate to Him in their personal lives. This pursuit can be enhanced by studying Psalms. The Book of Psalms will draw all men nearer to God. Drawing nearer to God can bring a special kind of joy. Christians know this kind of joy as a popular song says: “And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own; And the **joy** we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known.”²⁷ Intimacy with God is achieved through the combination of prayer life (man talking to God) and reading and meditating on Scripture (God talking to man).

This chapter will investigate the topic of “Forgiveness in the Psalms.” Many people believe there are two different sides of God emphasized in Scripture; that they are opposites and set against each other in some sense. There is the God of wrath in the Old Testament, and His opposite, the God of love in the New Testament. Because of this misconception, some might question whether forgiveness was even available in Old Testament times. Christians live under a different covenant than the one that was given through Moses at Mt. Sinai.

Occasionally, people will say because the payment for sin on Calvary was not made during the Old Testament times, the Israelites’ sins were rolled forward each year on the Day of

²⁷ Alton Howard, Editor, Songs of Faith and Praise (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Company, 1994), # 595.

Atonement. The writer of Hebrews said: “*But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins*” (Hebrews 10:3). However, the “*reminder*” was not in a rolling forward of sins to the next year, but, rather, a “*reminder*” to the people of their sin and need for cleansing. The LORD granted forgiveness throughout the Old Testament on the basis of the prospect of Jesus’ sacrifice for sin on the cross. Abraham was declared righteous (cf. Genesis 15:6). If there is no forgiveness, there is no righteousness. The Law stated provisions for attaining forgiveness for certain sins in Leviticus 4. Nathan told David, “*The LORD has taken away your sin.*” (2 Samuel 12:13). Forgiveness was available and received by many, both before the Law was given on Sinai and during the time of the Law’s effectiveness.

The Book of Psalms supports these teachings and combines the concept of forgiveness of sins with other things relating to life’s sustenance. It is also significant that when Paul wrote to the Romans he used Psalm 32 to establish the concept of justification by faith, a concept which certainly includes forgiveness. The Psalms are often quoted by New Testament writers in reference to a Savior, a Kingdom, and a People, all of which are primarily concerned with the forgiveness of sins. The Psalms are witnesses to salvation from sin through Jesus Christ and His body, the church.

This chapter will cover five different areas: **first**, certain key words in the Book of Psalms that are related to forgiveness; **second**, isolated verses in some psalms which speak of forgiveness; **third**, the penitential psalms which imply the availability of forgiveness; **fourth**, a few specific psalms on the matter of forgiveness; and **fifth**, the psalms that accompany David’s sin against Bathsheba and Uriah and the resultant forgiveness.

Words of Forgiveness in the Psalms

The Concept of Sin and Personal Accountability

Think about the word “forgiveness” and what words come to mind. The words that refer to forgiveness in the New Testament are the same words used in the Psalms. The psalmists had a very clear conception of sin and personal accountability. The three words typically used for sin and accountability are:

- “*Sin*”—a missing of God’s intended standard for life.
- “*Transgression*”—stepping over the boundaries established by God’s law.
- “*Iniquity*”—violation of an established standard.

The word “*iniquity*” is the predominant word used in Psalms. It is used 55 times. All three words for sin are used in Psalm 32:1–2 and 51:1–2. Both of these psalms are associated with David’s spiritual downfall. These words are used to confess personal error, point out the wickedness of an enemy, or admit national mistakes. When these words are used there is the sense of guilt for one’s own sins: “. . . *my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see*” (Psalm 40:12); of need for justice and wrath against enemies: “*Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them . . . Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation*” (Psalm 69:24, 27); and need for forgiveness from God: “. . . *forgive my iniquity, though it is great*” (Psalm 25:11).

The Concept of Forgiveness and Release for the Penitent

Think about the kind of words that convey the thought that God has released the penitent from his sins: mercy, love, rescue, deliver, salvation, redemption, righteousness, pardon, and forgiveness. Depending on the translation, each one of these is used in the Book of Psalms. “*Love*” is used to describe

man's response to God, but "mercy" is the more prevalent word to describe God's attitude and actions toward His contrite children. Psalm 103:8 says, "*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy*" (KJV). He is willing and able to give man mercy when what he really deserves is justice. Today we use the word "save" most of the time, but the more frequent used words in the Psalms are "deliver," "redeem," or "redemption." Psalm 40:13 says, "*Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me . . .*" (KJV). David used the word in reference to forgiveness in Psalm 51:14, "*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation . . .*" (KJV).

Redemption takes on two meanings in the Psalms. The word and concept had its roots in God's removal of the people of Israel from the bondage of Egyptian slavery to become His people (cf. Exodus 6:3–7). The concept of release from evil circumstances was retained in Psalms, but those circumstances were both physical and spiritual. Psalms 69:18 says, "*Come near and rescue me; redeem me because of my foes.*" Then, in relation to sin, Psalms 25:22 says, "*Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!*" Psalm 25 reveals a number of different kinds of troubles, including sin: "*For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.*" (25:11). The word "righteous" is used in the Psalms to describe those who are faithful, but "righteousness" is used approximately 50 times to refer to God's perfection and rightness, which apparently can be man's because the psalmists frequently talked of their own righteousness: "*I will give thanks to the LORD because of according to his righteousness . . .*" (Psalm 7:17). The same psalm says, "*Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High*" (7:8). When Phinehas, the son of Aaron, stopped the sin in the Israelite camp, "*This was credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come*" (106:30–31, cf. Numbers 25:6–8). Paul said the same type of thing about Abraham and

David, and Christians receive the same privilege (cf. Romans 4:22–25).

It is obvious that the psalmists believed in a God whose mercy and righteousness toward the faithful granted salvation from numerous kinds of circumstances including being lost in sin. The people during the Old Testament times had a similar concept of personal sin and accountability. The Psalms also reveal a developed concept of God's judgment on the wicked, but with an understanding of the forgiving, merciful, assuring nature of God toward the faithful.

Pieces of Psalms

There are some isolated statements in various psalms that teach forgiveness even though their primary content is not forgiveness from sin.

Beseeching the LORD for Mercy

Psalm 25

In Psalm 25 David was beseeching the LORD for mercy. He needed the LORD for *“all their troubles”*—*“Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles”* (25:22). He was lonely and afflicted (cf. 25:16). He was under attack (cf. 25:20). He needed teaching about life (cf. 25:4–5). In all of this, he needed forgiveness too: *“Remember not the sins of my youth, and my rebellious ways . . . For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great”* (25:7, 11).

Praise God Who Hears

Psalm 65

David, who is also probably the author of Psalm 65, praised the God *“. . . who hear(s) prayer . . .”* (65:2). He proceeded to name all the ways in which God had answered prayer requests: *“You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness . . .”* (65:5). Psalm 65:5–13 lists the ways God answered, but also notes the conditions necessary to bring

about a harvest of crops. This was the promise of the LORD to Israel under the Law and the Covenant of Blessing and Cursing (cf. Deuteronomy 28–30). The psalmist also said: “*When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions*” (65:3). God answered prayers including the forgiveness of sin under the Law.

Historical Forgiveness

Psalm 78

Psalm 78 is longer than most of the others because it is an historical psalm. It emphasizes the patience and blessing of God toward Israel from the time of the Exodus from Egypt, to the present reign of King David. In spite of recurring rebellion and stubbornness of heart on the part of Israel, God was willing to keep protecting, delivering, blessing, and forgiving! Psalm 78:38 states: “*Yet he was merciful, he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath.*” This is an example of national forgiveness, similar to what Jesus said on Calvary, “*Father, forgive them, for they do know not what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34).

Forgive Us, LORD

Psalm 79

Asaph, one of the temple musicians and singers, probably penned Psalm 79. He described the city of Jerusalem in ruins. The Law had predicted that if Israel persisted in unfaithfulness, this would be her fate. Asaph properly connected the destruction of Jerusalem to God holding Israel accountable for their sins. He pleaded for a reprieve.

Deliver Me From Danger and From Sin

Psalm 86

Psalm 86 sounds as if an afflicted and needy suitor was approaching God. His troubles stemmed mainly from arrogant and ruthless men who hated him (cf. 86:14, 17). In other words,

he needed relief from oppression: *“Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you”* (86:2). Along with this request for physical deliverance was this statement: *“You are forgiving and good, O LORD, abounding in love to all who call to you”* (86:5). The supplicant seemed to realize that forgiveness needs to be a part of any request, even if it is for a physical thing, such as deliverance from an enemy. Whether the oppression is a judgment of God or not, the psalmist does not say. If it is, he claimed to be righteous and godly, which should persuade the LORD to lift the affliction and forgive any wrongdoing.

Call to the Forgiven to Exalt Jehovah **Psalm 99**

Psalm 99 calls for all worshipers to exalt Yahweh because He is holy. He sits on the chariot of the cherubim (cf. 99:1) from where He can whisk away to any place that needs judgment. Of course, such a holy and just God has had to punish the evil deeds of Israel along with the Gentile nations (cf. 99:8). People like Moses and Samuel called on Him for help and forgiveness, and the LORD obliged: *“O LORD our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds”* (99:8). There is both judgment and forgiveness; they are compatible. Paul commented: *“Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off”* (Romans 11:22). The Hebrew writer said, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8). God has always dealt justly with the impenitent and always forgiven the faithful. It was true in Old Testament times, and it is still true under the new covenant.

The Penitential Psalms

Beseeching God for Relief

Preceding the LORD's forgiveness is the humble recognition of sin and true repentance on the part of the sinner. A number of psalms are classified as either "An Individual Lament," or "A National Lament." The person or country was in trouble and called on Yahweh for help. Even though it is not usually discussed, sin is what had caused the withdrawal of the LORD's care and blessing. The main emphasis of the Lament Psalms seems to be beseeching God for relief. These types of psalms will be studied in more detail in another chapter. There are one or two psalms that specifically mention the guilt of sin along with the cry for restoration and relief.

I'm Hurting!

Psalm 38

Psalms 6 and 38 begin with exactly the same words: "*O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath*" (38:1; 6:1). Some scholars have connected Psalm 38 with Psalms 32 and 51 and the event of David's sin with Bathsheba. In the heading, it is said to be "of David," and the sin with Bathsheba would surely be a low spot in his life. However, the mention of enemies gloating (cf. 38:16–20) raises the suspicion that it might be a different circumstance. Regardless of the circumstance, the effect of unresolved sin in one's life is the same! **First**, note the open admission of sin and guilt in 38:4, 18: "*My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear . . . I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.*" **Second**, and most important in this study, note the effects previously unconfessed sin had on him. He felt or sensed the pressure of God upon him, "*For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me*" (38:2). His relationship to God had suffered. God was not his friend right now! How can it be otherwise? Guilt prevents prayer and honesty with God. How can you successfully and in all good

conscience talk to Him in praise or request when you know that He knows your hidden sin?

Apparently the psalmist's sin had affected his physical health, too:

*My wounds fester and are loathsome
because of my sinful folly.
I am bowed down and brought very low;
all day long I go about mourning.
My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body .*
Psalm 38:5–7

Even today doctors say that many physical ailments are a result of worry and guilt. Ulcers and back pain are not uncommon. The emotional stability of a person is upset by unresolved guilt also. Listen to the psalmist's consternation:

*I am bowed down and brought very low;
all day long I go about mourning . . .
I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart . . .
My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my eyes."*
Psalm 38:6, 8, 10

He was torn up inside! He was depressed: "*My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away*" (38:11). He had no ambition (cf. 38:10).

When someone has been taught well and his conscience has been properly trained, then when he violates that conscience and does not receive forgiveness, the guilt eats him up inside. Everyone has experienced that truth. The whole person—body, mind, emotions, and soul—is affected. The person's relationships—to self, God, friends, and family—are severely impaired. In agony, the psalmist cried out:

- “O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger . . .” (38:1).
- “All my longings lie open before you, O LORD; my sighing is not hidden from you” (38:9).
- “O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior” (38:21–22).

What Sin Does to Man

Psalm 130

One of the “Songs of Ascents” (Psalm 130) is also a “Penitential Psalm.” It was so striking to Martin Luther in its likeness to Pauline theology that he made it into a hymn. It does indeed describe what sin does to a man’s relationship to God and what is needed to correct it. Man needs justification! Psalm 130:3–4 states, “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.” The individual who was caught in the trap of sin began the psalm by crying out to the LORD for attention to his plight: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy” (130:1–2).

The word “depths” is used to describe a man caught in dangerous and deep waters. He is drowning! He acknowledged Jehovah God as the source of justification and forgiveness. Because He holds the key in His hand to restoration, man should fear (cf. 130:4) and wait and hope:

*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I put my hope.*

*My soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.*

Psalm 130:5–6

Oh, what sin does to a man—it makes him fear His maker! He knows the LORD to be a God of forgiveness, but will God apply it to him this time? He waits for what seems to be an eternity. He waits through the night when all others sleep. There is anxiety about whether the LORD will grant forgiveness. That is what sin and guilt will do—they produce doubt.

At the end of this psalm there appears to be a note of assurance—a sermon to Israel from the psalmist's own experience:

*O Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.*

Psalm 130:7–8

Never doubt the forgiving nature of God. As a “Song of Ascents,” the Israelite congregation would have sang this song on their way to Jerusalem or to the Temple to sacrifice. It signified the perilous position that sin put them in with God. But it also emphasized God's readiness to forgive. The issue of sin was emphasized again as they would go to sacrifice. In most of the sacrifices the shedding of blood would have been seen emphasizing the sin-atonement concept.

Christians have “*every spiritual blessing in Christ*” (cf. Ephesians 1:3), but suppose you could only have one. Which one would it be? Surely everyone would choose **forgiveness**. Without forgiveness, man cannot retain any kind of relationship with God.

Two psalms, 51 and 32, were written by David following the time he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered her husband, Uriah, and then tried to cover it up (cf. 2 Samuel 11–12). While David's armies were “*off to war*,” he stayed home. This was in the spring when kings were supposed to be

on the battlefield leading their armies against the enemy. From the roof of his palace, he saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing. His lust for her was so great that he sent for her, committed adultery with her, and their union conceived a child. After his attempts to cover up his sins, David decided to kill her husband, Uriah. He was able to suppress the entire episode until Nathan, the prophet, exposed the deed. Nathan told David the story about a rich man who stole a poor man's only lamb. David was enraged against the lustful and greedy rich man. Then, Nathan said, "*You are the man!*" (2 Samuel 12:7). David penitently confessed, "*I have sinned against the LORD*" (2 Samuel 12:13). Nathan assured him, "*The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die*" (2 Samuel 12:14).

David's Cry to God for Forgiveness

Psalm 51

His Plea and Confession

Psalm 51 was David's cry to God for forgiveness and restoration. Forgiveness and restoration are two different things in this psalm. David pled for grace and mercy, both of which are undeserved favor from God (Psalm 51:1–5).

David certainly did not want justice. Under the Mosaic Law that would mean that he would have been stoned. He admitted that his error fell in all three categories: sin—missing the mark; transgression—stepping over the boundary; and iniquity—violating the standard (cf. 51:1–3). That required God to blot out, cleanse, and wash away the sin.

First, David confessed God's omnipotence—"*my sin is always before me*" (51:3) and that any sin is a personal affront to God—"*Against you, you only, have I sinned . . .*" (51:4). Then, he acknowledged God's perfection and right to punish sin (cf. 51:4) and his own tendency to sin (cf. 51:5).

Psalm 51:5 does not indicate the doctrine of "original sin" or "total depravity"—"*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from*

the time my mother conceived me.” That was not the point David was trying to make. There are no other Scriptures that support this idea. However, Scripture does attest to the fact that all men do choose to sin (cf. Romans 3:9, 23; 5:12). That is the way man is, and therefore, it is a good way to describe his life in this world—life lived in a sinful world from birth.

Steps to Recovery

Recognize the Sin and Admit It Plainly (51:6)

First, sin demands honesty with God and self, concerning the nature and consequences of the sin. This is especially hard when it is a secret sin. Admitting sin means seeing the rebellion—*‘For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me’* (51:3). David’s conscience continually bothered him, because he knew the Law of Moses. Once Nathan pointed out David’s sin, he had to face it and he admitted it more publicly. James said: *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective”* (James 5:16). In David’s case, he had a prophet and friend who confronted him, and then he repented. It is so important to have brothers and sisters in the church who are willing to share and help. The plan of Matthew 18:15–17 facilitates this recognition of sin, too. It is important to have brethren who are committed to confronting and helping each other deal with the pride in facing sin. The story of the Prodigal Son is an appropriate example (cf. Luke 15:11–32). The son in the pig pen finally recognized what a sinner he was. It may take a “pig pen experience” to bring some people to a recognition of their sins.

Ask God’s Forgiveness and Receive It (51:7)

Second, David repeated the thought of asking for and receiving God’s forgiveness several times (51:1–2, 7, 14). He was pleading with God indicating his intensity in receiving

forgiveness. The word “*blood-guiltiness*” (cf. 51:14) is an intense word in the Hebrew, probably referring to the murder of Uriah. God will forgive because of His love and pity. To doubt God’s forgiveness is to challenge His power and ability. It is a lack of faith on the sinner’s part. If God can supply the physical needs of His children, then there should be no doubt that He can supply their spiritual needs which would include forgiveness. Some people seem to believe He can forgive the “little sins,” but not the “big” ones. Many people are plagued by unresolved guilt. That is their own inability to believe that God can and will forgive them. Once again, the Prodigal Son is a good example. He came to his father asking for forgiveness realizing that he had sinned against his father and against heaven (cf. Luke 15:21).

Believe That God Has Forgotten as Well as Forgiven (51:9)

Third, the sinner wants God to totally disregard the sin and do away with it. It embarrasses him that God knows. When the sinner sins against other people, he wants them to disregard the sin also. When he sees the people he has sinned against, he does not want them to remember what he did. The child of God knows that nothing can be “*concealed*” from God’s eyes (cf. Jeremiah 16:17). The writer of Hebrews said: “*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account*” (Hebrews 4:13), but he also said, “*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more*” (Hebrews 8:12). The Hebrew word “*remember*” in “*For I will forgive their wickedness and will **remember** their sins no more*” (Jeremiah 31:34) was not a mere mental effort. It involved more; it entailed the thought of doing something to the advantage or disadvantage of the person remembered. If he had sinned and did not repent, God would not only note it, He would actively bring judgment to that person. If the one who had sinned did humbly repent, then God would forgive it and

would actively give favor to that person! What a wonderful thought, that God does not remember my sin!

Create A New Heart and A Steadfast Spirit Within (51:1, 10)

Fourth, creating “*a new heart*” and “*a steadfast spirit within*” means moving from despair to hope and from fluctuation to a steady assurance of God’s grace and pardon. Christians have been “*created in Christ Jesus to do good works*” (Ephesians 2:10), but they cannot do good works if there is a nagging conscience and a hurting heart. How can a Christian share God’s message with others when he is hurting himself? He has nothing to offer! Hebrews 9:14 says, “*How much more then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death.*” A Christian cannot, and will not, do good works until he has a cleansed conscience. A good conscience only comes from the assurance of God’s forgiveness and forgetfulness. Paul said Christians are cut off from the “*old self*” by the renewing of the mind (cf. Ephesians 4:22–24; Romans 12:2). Only then can man be an effective worker for the Lord.

How does God renew? The Word and the Spirit are the renewing powers. Christians are saved by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (cf. Titus 3:5). The Spirit wields His sword, the Word of God, and plants all kinds of good, wholesome thoughts, which will guard the hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (cf. Philippians 4:7–8). The Word brings peace to the troubled heart. Then, the Christian must use the spiritual weapons of warfare to bring every thought into captivity, to the obedience of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:5). That is a picture of the mind subjugating rebellious thoughts like Rome crushed the fortifications of enemies. The guilt is removed and the walls are rebuilt to withstand further attacks from the Devil. Paul was able to mention the fact that he had sinned when he wrote to Timothy,

but those sins did not keep him from forging ahead in sharing the gospel and progressing in his own personal spiritual life (cf. 1 Timothy 1:11–16).

Believe in God's Presence

Fifth, David wrote, *“Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me”* (51:11). David may have been thinking of Saul when he said this. 1 Samuel says that the LORD gave His Spirit to Saul when he became king, but took it away from him when he rebelled (cf. 1 Samuel 10:9; 1 Samuel 16:14). 1 Samuel 18:12 says, *“Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with David but had left Saul.”* David feared the same thing might happen to him. Jehovah would withdraw His Holy Spirit when His people rebelled (cf. Isaiah 63:10). The Holy Spirit is *“a seal . . . who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance with the redemption of those who are God's possession . . .”* (cf. Ephesians 1:13–14). Whenever someone grieves or quenches the Spirit, then God's presence within them leaves (cf. Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Knowing that God's Spirit lives in him assures the Christian of His presence, His approval, and His help. Christians do not have to face the world without God. David did not want to go out against the Philistines without God (1 Samuel 17:45–47). Besides the Spirit within, Christians need the assurance that the providence of God works for them. If someone is not for God, then he is against Him. The reverse of that is also true—if God is not for that person, then He will be against him because that person stands on the side of evil.

Restore Assurance and Joy (51:12)

Sixth, *“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.”* Assurance comes through study (especially about grace and faith) and a closer relationship with God through prayer, fellowship with saints, and involvement in His work. That assurance gives two results: *“joy”* and *“a willing spirit.”* It is hard to rejoice in salvation if

you do not know whether or not you have it. It is hard to sing about a heavenly home if you do not know that is where you are going. “*A willing spirit*” is a spirit that wants to work for the Lord. People who have no assurance of their salvation will not work for the Lord for a sustained period of time. Someone who knows that he is saved will be a willing, spirited worker for the Lord.

When these **steps** are accomplished, recovery is possible. Recovery is complete when others are taught. The psalmist’s writings are a witness to the congregation of his recovery from sin:

*Then **I will teach** transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.
Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me,
and **my tongue will sing** of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.*
Psalm 51:13–17

After a person has been cleansed from his sins, he can offer the “burnt offering.” It signifies the giving of self to God. The prerequisite for giving one’s self to God is holiness—righteous before Him. When these things have been accomplished, recovery is complete.

The Joy of Forgiveness

Psalm 32

Setting

Psalm 32 is the follow-up psalm by David which shows the result of being forgiven and his rejoicing in the forgiveness of his sins. This Psalm is called a “maskil,” which means that the psalm is didactic—a teaching psalm. Paul used a portion of this psalm to teach the Romans and all Christians. Romans 4:7–8,

a quotation of Psalm 32:1–2, validates justification by faith under the Law. These two verses are a beatitude (something that states a blessing). These state the blessing, favor, and joyful bliss of being forgiven. David actually said it in three ways, denoting three theological concepts. The term “*forgiven*” means to cancel an unpayable debt. The phrase “*whose sins are covered*” alludes to the concept of propitiation or atonement. The phrase “*does not count against him*” refers to the justification or reconciliation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19–21).

Effects of Not Being Honest About the Sin

Having blurted out the joyful statement of Psalm 32:1–2, the psalmist then recalled the effects of not being honest with God when he was actively participating in sin. Psalm 32:4–5 are a microcosm of the whole Psalm. Psalm 32:5 is a confession and David’s exclamation of relief from the pressure of sin and guilt. As one who had been healed, he became an “evangelist,” bearing good tidings and exhortation to other children of God who might be caught in the trap of sin.

The psalmist knew from experience that if a person fails to confess their sin, God withdraws. There is a time when He is not to be found, but there does come a time when He “. . . *may be found* . . . *You are my hiding place; you will protect me* . . . *and surround me* . . . ” (32:5–6). The time that God can be “*found*” is when a person is penitent. In that time, God becomes a “*hiding place*”—a shelter in the time of storm. David “*acknowledged*” his sin and admitted it as a fact. He said, “*I confess my transgressions to the LORD*” (32:5), which means that he agreed with what God thinks about sin. He prayed and reached out to God.

Psalm 32:9 contains a solemn warning: “*Do not be like the horse or the mule (stubborn) which have no understanding but must be* . . . ” (32:9). Do not let pride keep you from returning to God. Do not wait too long to repent either, or God may not be easy to find!

The final two verses (32:10–11) proclaim that joy is found in the LORD, and only sorrow awaits the impenitent. This is a sober warning indeed! Make sure and run quickly to the LORD with your sin. The longer one hesitates, the harder it is to run to Him, and the sorrow, guilt, and worry are overwhelming.

Tests of Forgiveness

After the sinner has received forgiveness from God, he needs to ask himself six questions. This short test will help the sinner to decide if he has forgiven himself:

- **First**, “Is the anger, hurt, and resentment still there in force?”
- **Second**, “Am I praying at least as much, and more, than before the sin was committed?” If not, I have to question my belief in being forgiven.
- **Third**, “Can I thank God for the lessons learned and the character gained from the painful experience?” Or is it too painful to ever bring up again, especially to anyone else? That is the power of what Paul did time after time in his writings. He was able to talk about his sin without guilt.
- **Fourth**, and closely related to the above, “Can I talk about the hurt and the situation, without recurring bad feelings and thoughts?”
- **Fifth**, “Do I accept fully the responsibility for the sin, or am I still looking for an excuse to excuse my conduct?”
- **Sixth**, “Do I still love myself, and treat myself the same way as before, or am I punishing myself?”

Conclusion

Willis writes concerning sin and forgiveness:

Sin has multiple consequences that not only destroy the all-important relationship which man has with God, but also wrecks other relationships as well. It ruins our relationships with our fellow man, finding its way into human relationships as diverse as those between nations and those seen in the family. But not only does sin destroy our communion with God and our fellow man, it also colors our relationship with ourselves. Sin is a spiritual disease which rots our intended wholeness. As modern medicine has shown, the human may not easily be divided into separate physical and mental compartments. The physical and mental are very closely linked together. Sin not only influences us ‘spiritually,’ it also has far reaching consequences on our psychological and physical health.

Any effective cure of sin will have equally multiple consequences. First and foremost, forgiveness changes our damaged relationship with God. Forgiveness is God’s re-establishment of communion with us. In this act, however, some other consequences of sin are also repaired. The forgiven are placed in a new relationship with their fellow man. They are no longer separated from fellowship – their hearts filled with jealousy, pride, insincerity, lust, and the various fruits of sin. The forgiven become forgiving, showing their new health in their actions.

Finally, God’s forgiveness heals the damage which sin works on our relationship with our self. We become whole, enjoying a completeness and totality, which is only possible when we are in proper communion with God. This aspect of forgiveness is in

many ways the most difficult to make a reality in our lives. But the forgiveness of God is able to empower us and enable us to forgive ourselves. It is not by minimizing our guilt, or by rationalizing it, and certainly not by ignoring it – that we experience forgiveness on one of its deepest levels. Self-forgiveness is possible only after humbly repenting and accepting the forgiveness which the Creator and Sustainer of life offers those returning to Him.”²⁸

²⁸ John T. Willis, Basic Christian Beliefs, (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1968), 57–58.

Psalms In The Gospels and The Epistles

Introduction

This study of the Psalms has been focused on the historical situations such as David running from Saul and the feelings, thoughts, prayers, and praise of the men who were under those conditions. This chapter will take a new direction which points to the New Testament and straight to Jesus. These are the Messianic Psalms.

Isaiah is often called the “Messianic Prophet,” because his book contains so many references to the coming Messiah. However, the Book of Psalms is also important in this area. It is the most often quoted Old Testament book by the New Testament writers. Many of these quotations are references to Christ. The following **chart** shows the number of quotations in the New Testament—book by book.

<u>Book</u>	<u>Number of Quotes</u>
The Gospels	26
Acts	8
Romans	15
1 & 2 Corinthians	4
Ephesians	2
Hebrews	17
1 Peter	2
Revelation	5
Total:	79

A total of twelve New Testament books quote and/or allude to the Psalms. As the chart indicates, there are at least 79 easily identifiable quotes from the Psalms in these twelve books. That number goes higher when certain aspects of the Book of Revelation are taken into account. Henry Barclay Swete, a well respected scholar, believed that the Apostle John, in Revelation, was quoting from 27 psalms, based on the similarity of John's Greek and the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint.²⁹ If these are indeed quotes, that puts the total number of quotes from Psalms in the New Testament at about 100, which is the most of any Old Testament book.

The fact that some of the New Testament books may **allude** to the Psalms means that the New Testament passage is not an exact quote, but contains similar language and/or content as a particular psalm. Scripture seems to have a number of allusions to Psalms. Revelation is significant in this regard again. The commentator James Strauss suggests that the Apostle John quoted from seven Psalms and alluded to seven others³⁰. The New International Version Reference Edition by Zondervan lists references to 32 Psalms, 46 times in its center reference column. Most of the quotations that are considered allusions are quite different from the list of quotes compiled by Swete.

The other section of Scripture that heavily relies on the Psalms is Luke 1. Luke recorded the two "songs" by Mary and Zechariah (Luke 1:46–55, 67–79). These two beautiful songs allude to approximately 17 different psalms (see the chart). The best count for all the allusions in the New Testament is 81. Add

²⁹ Henry Barclay Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1908/1968), cxi–clviii.

³⁰ James D. Strauss, The Seer, The Saviour, and The Saved (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1972), 503-509.

the allusions to the 80–100 quotes and that makes over 150 New Testament references to the Psalms. The most quoted Psalms are 2 (6), 22 (5), 69 (5), 110 (5), 118 (9) (see chart). Most of the allusions are found in 79 (4), 111 (4), 115 (5). The psalms alluded to are not considered Messianic, but most of the quoted ones are! Thirty-nine psalms are quoted, 46 are alluded to; 71 different psalms are either quoted or alluded to! That is almost half the psalms! The majority of the quotations from Psalms in the New Testament occur in four areas: the Gospels and Acts, Romans, Hebrews, and Revelation. Two of these are heavily Messianic while the other two are not.

Psalms in the Book of Revelation

Most References Are Allusions

Most of the references to the Psalms in the Apostle John's apocalyptic book of Revelation are allusions or simply similar language usage. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel join the Book of Psalms as being the most frequently referred to books in the New Testament. Those three books seem to have the most symbolism used, whereas Psalms contributes to the poetic, descriptive language and style of the writing. The main role of the Psalms may have been to embellish the concepts with beautiful language.

Two Messianic Psalms in Revelation

There are only two Psalms used in the Book of Revelation that are considered Messianic and both of those deal with the kingly aspect, Psalm 89 and Psalm 2. The verses in Psalm 89:27 and 37 may have been the basis for John describing Jesus as “. . . *the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead*” in Revelation 1:5. These two verses from Psalm 89 say: “*I will also appoint him my firstborn . . . It will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky is faithful.*” This is the only New Testament reference to Psalm 89, with the possible exception of Luke 1:69 where Zechariah may have

been alluding to Psalm 89:17 in presenting Jesus as “*a horn of salvation in the house of his servant David.*”

Psalm 89 was a prayer for deliverance of the Davidic son that was sitting on the throne of Israel. In Psalm 89 the psalmist repeatedly praised God’s faithfulness to the Davidic covenant and was hopeful that God’s faithfulness would return (cf. 89:49). It appears that David and his kingly line were seen as types of the Messiah to come, who is Christ exalted in Revelation 1. John, the revelator by inspiration, borrowed those descriptions of the Davidic line that fit Jesus, and then, applied them to Him. This is, a “Dual Prophecy,” applicable equally well to both the type (David or his sons) and the antitype (the Messiah or Jesus).

The other Psalm referred to in Revelation is Psalm 2. It is different from Psalm 89 in that it appears to be totally Messianic. It could be a “Dual Prophecy” —David and Messiah—but it is so often quoted that it can be judged to be solely Messianic in its description. Psalm 2:9 was quoted twice in Revelation (2:27; 19:15) to establish Jesus’ authority over the nations to requite them for their fury against God and His people. Messiah is a warrior in the Book of Revelation and the use of Psalms contributes to that picture.

Psalms in the Book of Romans

Quotations from the Psalms in the Book of Romans are not used primarily to describe the Messiah or His kingdom. Paul quoted from fifteen different Psalms, but only once did he specifically quote a Psalm which referred to Jesus.

Quotes from Psalms in Romans

<u>Reference In Psalms</u>	<u>Quoted In Romans</u>
62:12	2:6
51:4	3:4
14:1–3	3:10–12

5:9; 53:1-3	3:13a
140:3	3:13b
10:7	3:14
36:1	3:18
32:1-2	4:7-8
44:22	8:36
19:4	10:18
69:22-23	11:9-10
69:9	15:3
18:49	15:9
117:1	15:11

There are two features found in the Psalms which Paul quoted. **First**, the Psalms he quoted are usually unique to Romans. This may be because they were not Messianic and as such they were not necessarily used by other New Testament authors to refer to Jesus. It could also be that Paul's purpose for writing to the Romans was not necessarily to establish or describe the Messiah concept. He used the quotations from Psalms in a different way. The fact that he did use quotations from the Book of Psalms does indicate that he was writing to a Jewish audience in part, who would have been more likely to be persuaded by Paul's arguments if he included Old Testament quotations.

Second, Paul often quoted from a psalm to state or to prove a principle. All but one of his quotations from the Psalms were quoted to make a specific point using the quotation itself. The verse or verses that Paul quoted may not have had the same principle within the Psalm that Paul wished to make, but by inspiration, Paul knew the principle implied by the Old Testament quotations, and by inspiration, he used the Psalms for that purpose. These would be called "principle prophecies."

The only quotation that Paul used to describe Jesus was from Psalm 69:9. Psalm 69:4 was quoted by John in his gospel (cf. John 15:25), and Psalm 69:9a was quoted by John in John 2:17. Both are used to describe Jesus. Paul quoted the last half

of verse 9 to describe Jesus' unselfish and sacrificial spirit: "*For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me'*" (Romans 15:3). The Psalm itself appears to be a "Type Psalm." It is an imprecatory psalm, which described David in distress. He cried out for help and expected to receive it because of his innocence (cf. 69:4) and his zeal for God's house (cf. 69:9). These two verses are quoted and applied to Jesus. Psalm 69:25 was used by Luke to describe what would happen to Judas and all such enemies of God's people (cf. Acts 1:20). David, then, was seen by the New Testament writers in those particular ways to be a type of Jesus; he was in distress and cried for and expected help because he was innocent.

Psalms in Paul's Other Epistles

Application of Psalm 8:6 in 1 Corinthians 15:27

Paul's use of the Psalms in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Ephesians is basically the same as in Romans—to establish and prove true principles. However, there are two specific prophecies of Jesus within those three books. In 1 Corinthians 15:27 Paul quoted Psalm 8:6. Psalm 8 is descriptive of man's dignity in, and authority over, creation. The Hebrew writer took this one step further in Hebrews 2, and Paul did the same when he wrote to the Corinthians. Paul said, "*For he has put everything under his feet*" (1 Corinthians 15:27), which may be applied to God having subjected all things, even death, to Jesus. Even death will be subjugated and destroyed by the resurrection of the saints.

Application of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8

Another Messianic passage is Ephesians 4:8, which like 1 Corinthians 15, describes the Messiah after He was raised from the dead. Paul quoted Psalm 68:18: "*This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men'*" (Ephesians 4:8). Paul said this explained His

resurrection and ascension to heaven. When the Messiah sat down at the right hand of God, He poured forth the Holy Spirit on all flesh on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). The Holy Spirit indwells all obedient believers at the point of their baptism (cf. Acts 2:38; 5:32; 2 Timothy 1:14). The immersed, forgiven Christian is also the recipient of some spiritual gift, or gifts. The Spirit was the giver of both miraculous and non-miraculous gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11, 13; Romans 12:3–8; 1 Peter 4:10). The point Paul was making in Ephesians 4:11–16 was that non-miraculous gifts are still given by the Spirit to Christians for the building up of the body. That is the reason he quoted Psalm 68:18. Jesus is the great Giver of all spiritual gifts. This one verse is the only quotation from Psalm 68.

About Psalm 68

Psalm 68 praises God for being the One who came to conquer the enemy (cf. 68:1–6), who kept His promise of giving them the land of Canaan (cf. 68:11–14), who chose Zion as His dwelling place (cf. 68:15–18), who defeated all enemies (cf. 68:19–23), who was worshiped in His sanctuary (cf. 68:24–27), and who deserves the praise of all the earth (cf. 68:32–35). The picture in Psalm 68:15–17 is one of God choosing to come and dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem’s temple. In so doing, He led Israel “captive” from that point and gave them the gifts of being in the Promised Land. That deliverance from Egypt and dwelling in Canaan is a type of the Christian’s experience. Even though there is only one quote from this Psalm, it is tempting to categorize it as a “Type” Psalm. In so many ways it foreshadows the Christian’s spiritual relationship with God.

Psalms in the Gospels

Introduction

The remainder of this chapter will be spent in beginning a look at the two heaviest concentrations of quotations from the

Book of Psalms that describe the Messiah. These quotes are found in the Gospels and Acts (Acts being included because of what Acts 1:1 says: "*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach . . .*"), and in the Book of Hebrews.

In the Gospels, quotations from the Psalms are used frequently to describe some aspect of Jesus' life or character. He was the fulfillment of a number of Messianic prophecies in the Psalms. Twenty-three different psalms are quoted, or alluded to, and the total number of references is about 45 (see chart). Looking briefly at the allusions and quotes, it can be seen what the psalmists prophesied concerning the coming Messiah, as interpreted by the inspired Gospel writers.

Allusions in Luke Chapter One

Most of the allusions seen are in the songs of Mary and Zechariah in Luke 1. If perceptions of the allusions in Mary's song are correct, she alluded to about 9 psalms. Most of these psalms were pleas for help, deliverance, rescue, and forgiveness. Some included special mention of the meek and lowly, those who needed His special help because of their destitute situations. These psalms also included praise to God for the attention He would give them, though at the time of writing, God had not yet given them that help.

The theme of Zechariah's song was related to the keeping of covenant. The probable allusions in his song were to psalms that spoke of the covenant which God made with David's household to put one of his descendants on the throne forever. Thus, the allusions basically tell two things about the Messiah. **First**, He would be of humble origin. His parents would be like the lowly of old, who called continually upon God for help. **Second**, He would not be born in Herod's household or Caesar's palace, but He would be a king. This Messiah would be the fulfillment of the promise to King David. He would be a king in the line of David. There are other descriptions of the

Messiah in Zechariah's song, but this is the emphasis he borrowed from the Psalms.

Specific Quotes

Matthew 4 and Luke 4 both record the temptations of Jesus. In an attempt to deceive Jesus, Satan quoted Psalm 91:11–12: *“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”* Jesus did not deny that this was a specific prophecy about God's care for Him; in fact, He quoted another Old Testament passage to assert that Satan should not use this promise to test God's providential protection. But Satan stated that because God promised angelic care, Jesus should throw Himself off the Temple heights simply to make a sensational point. The truth was, however, that the Messiah would have angelic care as seen in the Garden of Gethsemane (cf. Luke 22:43; Matthew 26:53–54).

Is Psalm 91 wholly Messianic or only typically Messianic? Is Psalm 91:11–12 a dual prophecy or a two-fold prophecy? Psalm 91 could be entirely Messianic. It has no inscription, no internal circumstances, and no human limitations on the subject to prevent it from being entirely about Jesus. The psalm seems timeless and is widely applicable. The way the *“I’s”* and *“You’s”* of the psalm appear suggests that the psalm is a confession of God's care for the king, and specifically David, by the worshipers. The psalmist acknowledged God's protection in the first verse, then pledged to make God his refuge in the second verse. The bulk of the psalm appears to be directed at another person who was urged to assume the same stance before God. The psalmist even spoke for God at the end pledging His protection and care (cf. 91:14–16). Therefore, I tend to take the psalm typically. Christ is the antitype of the type king of Israel, whom God would protect even with His angels.

The second quote is in Matthew 13:35. Jesus had been speaking in parables which apparently hid the true message from worldly-minded people. Matthew recorded: "*So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world' "*" quoting from Psalm 78. **First**, Psalm 78 was indeed the words of a prophet, so it was inspired and, therefore, the Word of God. **Second**, the main point seems to be that it had been prophesied, specifically so that the Messiah would use parables as a teaching method. The original use of the word "*parables*" in Psalm 78:2 refers to use of stories from the past to make a point for the people of the present. Jesus did not always use stories from the history of Israel, but He did use stories to make a point. Matthew's point in quoting Psalm 78:2 was to show that Jesus' method of teaching had been prophesied. But, in what way was it prophesied? Psalm 78 seems totally historical, not Messianic. Matthew took one isolated verse and recorded it to say that Jesus' teaching methods "*fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet.*" The word "*fulfilled*" did not mean the primary fulfillment of this verse, but the typical fulfillment or even just in principle. In other words, the parables from the psalmists were a foreshadow of the way Jesus would do his teaching. Matthew mentioned this method of teaching in the psalms from the Old Testament times to say that Jesus also used this technique. Psalm 78 was "a maskil of Asaph." Jesus was a type of Asaph; He perfected to the utmost the method of teaching through parables.

Most of the quotations from the Book of Psalms in the Gospels are found in the narrative about the Passion Week. As Jesus entered Jerusalem on the donkey, the crowds shouted, "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!*" (Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9–10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13). All four Gospel writers quoted Psalm 118:26 as the words of the adorers. Jesus was seen as the King entering His city. John 12:13 adds: "*Blessed is the King of Israel,*" and follows that with another

Old Testament quote from Zechariah 9:9: “*Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt*” (John 12:15). Jesus came to Jerusalem to assume the throne of David. That is exactly what Amos 9:11–12 prophesied and what Peter said was accomplished in the resurrection and ascension (cf. Acts 2). As for the psalm itself, it is the final psalm of what is known as the “Egyptian Hallel” which was sung in celebration at the Passover Feast. How typical it is then of the Christ! Psalm 118 will be studied in a subsequent lesson.

In Matthew 21:42 (also quoted by Mark, John, and other New Testament writers), Matthew quoted Psalm 118:22–23: “*The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.*” The context of this quote in the Gospels was the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders. Following the parable of the Tenants, Jesus quoted this as being a prophecy of His rejection. However, the quote adds, “. . . *has become the capstone.*” The picture is one of building the house of the LORD, the Temple. Jewish scribes, priests, and Pharisees—those who knew the Law, supposedly—should have been expert builders. They were so misinformed, however, that they tossed away the most important building block, the capstone, which was Jesus. Jesus is the Temple builder.

Psalm 110 is another Psalm that is often quoted. In the exchange of questions in Matthew 22, Jesus asked the Pharisees, “*What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?*” He complicated their answer by quoting Psalm 110:1, “*The Lord said to my Lord; ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.’*” Jesus used this passage to establish one thing about the Messiah—He is the Lord of David, which makes Him more than just David’s son in the flesh (also accepted by Jesus). The Messiah was superior to David, because He was David’s Lord. The word “*Lord*” in the New Testament is **KURIOS** (Greek) and in the Old Testament is **ADONAI** (Hebrew), both of which mean “Master.” The

Messiah must be Deity, Jesus asserted (cf. Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42).

Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 quote Psalm 22:1: “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*” This, of course, is Jesus’ cry of agony on Calvary being prophesied. He was crying out for the LORD’s presence, fellowship, and help, because the LORD had withdrawn from the One who was the sin-bearer.

Conclusion

Review the following facts confirmed in the Book of Psalms about Jesus in the Synoptics.

- Jesus was specially, and particularly, protected by God’s angelic band (91:11-12).
- Jesus spoke in parables to communicate His saving and condemning message (78:2).
- Jesus is a King, the King of Israel, who came to Jerusalem to sit on David’s throne and to save Israel (118:25–26).
- Jesus was the Temple Builder, but the Jews, who should have been helping with the building of the Temple, rejected Him (118:22–23).
- Jesus was the Lord of David, and therefore, David’s Master and King, the preeminent one (110:1).
- Jesus was the One hanging in agony on Calvary, saying, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

All of these psalms offer encouragement to the reader through their message of the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Psalms in John’s Gospel

Introduction

The Gospel of John contains seven quotations from the Psalms, two of which have already been discussed. Those two

psalms were quoted by synoptic authors, which leaves five quotes in John's Gospel that are unique, not only from the other Gospels, but also from the rest of the New Testament. Each one of them says something about Jesus.

John 2:17 — Psalm 69:9

John 2:12–22 records Jesus' cleansing of the Temple. John's commentary about the disciples' response included this statement: *"His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'"* This quote is from Psalm 69:9, one of the most frequently quoted Psalms in the New Testament. Apparently, the disciples feared for Jesus' safety. When He boldly rebuked the Jews with this humiliating move, they recalled this passage about David and wondered if it did not also apply to Jesus. The fact is that it did apply to Jesus. The opposition opposed Jesus continually and eventually killed Him, so their fears were well founded.

Psalm 69 reveals that David was aware that his uprightness provoked opposition. He endured scorn and shame for His choice to follow God (cf. 69:8). Thus, David's treatment prefigures that of Jesus, not only when He cleansed the Temple, but throughout His life and in His death.

John 6:31 — Psalm 78:24–25

In John 6 the crowds were following Jesus around the Sea of Galilee. They wanted another free meal, like the one Jesus had miraculously provided them. It became necessary to teach them that discipleship is more than a free meal. If they wanted to be His disciples, they would have to eat His flesh and drink His blood. In other words, they needed to participate in His lifestyle and mindset, and yes, even His death to become a part of His kingdom. In that context the disciples asked for one more sign from Him, and quoted what appears to be part of Psalm 78:24–25: "... *'What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our*

forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: "He gave them bread from heaven to eat"'" (John 6:30–31). Psalms is the only Old Testament reference to refer back to this incident which was recorded in Exodus 17. The psalmist's reference was interpreted by Jesus to be a prophecy in type of Himself. Psalm 78 itself is an historical psalm. It relates a record number of incidents and people in that history, especially from Exodus, which were types referring to Jesus and Christians. This was one of them. Jesus said that a person could not live unless He ingested this new bread from heaven, which was Himself. John 6:33 and 35 says, *"For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* and *"... 'I am the bread of life'"* (John 6:35).

John 10:34 — Psalm 82:6

Another quote from the Psalms by Jesus is found in John 10:34. Previous to this verse Jesus claimed unity with the Father (cf. John 10:30). The Jews were enraged *"... because you, a mere man, claim to be God"* (10:33). Jesus quoted from Psalm 82:6 and then argued from the lesser to the greater. John 10:34 reads, *"... 'Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods...?'"* Seemingly, the best possible interpretation of Psalm 89 is that the LORD was unhappy with the appointed Israelite judges. Due to the fact that these judges were supposed to stand in the place of God as administrators of justice and law, they were referred to as *"gods"* (*Elohim*, which is the same word for the God of heaven). This was the same as when Moses was told he would be a *"God"* to Aaron and Pharaoh (cf. Exodus 4:16; 7:1). It was the same as when David was like God the King to Israel and when the judges were like God before Israel. In this sense, they were termed *"gods."* Psalm 82 was not Messianic, but the judges as *"gods"* were typical of Jesus.

Jesus' argument in John 10 was that since God was willing to call mere men "*gods*," then, these angry Jews should not immediately condemn Jesus for asserting that He was God. In fact, His teachings and miracles proved His testimony to be true. These Jews asserted, however, that they were not stoning Him for the miracles, meaning they had accepted the miracles as real. Jesus, then, demanded that they let those miracles validate His claim to Deity. He was God the Judge, as typified by Psalm 82, which He made even clearer in John 12:48–50.

John 13:18 — Psalm 41:9

The next verse to look at from John's gospel is John 13:18. When Jesus was eating the Passover Feast with the Apostles, just after He had washed their feet, He made this statement: "*I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to **fulfill** the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'*" This is interpreted in John 13:21 to be a prophecy of Judas' betrayal. Psalm 41 from which the quote comes, was a plea for mercy from God. David had been betrayed by a "*close friend*" who had eaten bread with David (cf. 41:9). They had been in close fellowship. It is as if such a one suddenly lifted his foot and kicked his friend. This "*close friend*" had hurt David. Some commentators suspect this described the betrayal by Ahithophel, who was a double-crosser (cf. 2 Samuel 15:12; 16:23). What more appropriate type could be found for what Judas did to Jesus? (Note: The word "*fulfill*" has the meaning here of a type-antitype relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament passages. We usually think of a specific foretelling kind of prophecy as one to be "fulfilled," but it can be a type-antitype kind, too. A type finds its ultimate fulfillment in the New Testament antitype.)

John 15:25 — Psalm 35:19 or 69:4

There is also a type-antitype quote from Psalms in John 15:25. Jesus had been discussing the hate that the world had for Him and His followers. Then he quoted from either Psalm 35:19 or 69:4: *“But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’”* Hendriksen says of Psalm 35:

The author of Psalm 35 had bestowed many favors on those who now are his enemies. Their suffering had been his suffering, their sorrows his sorrow. He had treated them like brothers (13–14). But they had rewarded evil for good.³¹

The rejection the psalmist wrote about is typical of the reaction Jesus received from His Jewish enemies. This is also a typical reaction experienced by Christians.

Notice the different meanings when the word **“Law”** is used in the Bible. In John 15:25 when Jesus referred to *“their Law,”* he was referring to the Psalms. This term is sometimes used to refer to the Pentateuch, which is the first five books of the Old Testament. Others times when the word **“Law”** is used, it refers to the entire Old Testament, and still other times, it refers to everything but the Prophets. The word has different meanings depending on the context. The Psalms were not just Temple songs. They were based on the Law of Moses; therefore, they could rightfully be called **“Law.”**

Summary

Summing up what the Psalms said about Jesus as recorded in John’s Gospel: He was One who was zealously devoted to

³¹ William Hendriksen, The Gospel of John (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 313.

righteousness, but He was killed because of it (cf. John 2:17); He was the Manna of spiritual life to all who would partake (cf. John 6:31); He is indeed God (10:34); He was betrayed by a close friend (cf. John 13:18); and the Jews hated Him for no justifiable reason (cf. John 15:35). The two other Psalms in John, referred to earlier as being in the other Gospels as well, tell of His kingship (cf. John 12:13) and of the parting of His garments at Calvary (cf. John 19:24).

Psalms in Acts

Introduction

The Book of Acts is a continuation of Jesus' life as it is seen in His church (cf. Acts 1:1). It contains eight references from six different Psalms. Five of the six are heavily Messianic, while the other (Psalm 109) is quoted only here in the New Testament. That one quote, however, was attached to a quote from another psalm which is heavily Messianic.

Acts 1:20 — Psalm 69:25

These two quotes occur in Acts 1:20. Peter said that David prophesied of Judas' betrayal. He quoted Psalm 69:25, "*May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents.*" This passage was a prayer that the dwelling place of certain enemies would become a ruin. Peter then quoted Psalm 109:8: "*May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership.*" This established the precedent for picking a successor. Psalm 69 is Messianic, so the enemy of the psalmist was typical of the enemy of Jesus, who would be Judas. Psalm 109 is only quoted here, so it appears that Peter saw a principle that was applicable. It may not be considered a specific prophecy of picking Judas' replacement, but in principle it was. Thus, Jesus was the betrayed one.

Acts 2:25–28 — Psalm 16:8–11

A second Messianic quote is found in Acts 2:25–28. This well known passage is a part of Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost quoting from Psalm 16:8–11:

David said about him:

“I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.

*Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue
rejoices;*

my body also will live in hope,

because you will not abandon me to the grave,

nor let your Holy One see decay.

You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence”

(Acts 2:25–28).

Peter interpreted this passage as David having foreseen the resurrection of Jesus—that He would not decay in body, nor would His soul remain in Hades (cf. Acts 2:31). This was a prophecy of Jesus’ resurrection.

Acts 2:35 — Psalm 110:1

In the same sermon, Peter quoted Psalm 110:1 to establish that Jesus had ascended, sat down at the right of God, and that He sits there even now on David’s throne (cf. Acts 2:33–36). Peter quoted twice from major Messianic Psalms to witness to Jesus’ resurrection, ascension, and kingship.

Acts 4:11 — Psalm 118:22

In Acts 4:11 Luke recorded the first wave of opposition to Peter and his Gospel. He and John were put in jail, and the next day when asked to explain their actions, Peter said,

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:8–12).

Acts 4:11, a quotation from Psalm 118:22, is often quoted. The persecution of the Apostles was an extension of the persecution of Jesus before His death. Thus, this prophecy was still finding fulfillment. In Psalm 118 the rejected one was probably the Israelite nation, God's chosen people, rejected by the other nations. Its ultimate fulfillment, however, was in Jesus' experience at the hands of the Jewish rulers.

Acts 4:24–26 — Psalm 2:1–2

When Peter and John were released after standing before the Sanhedrin, they rejoined the rest of the believers in the city of Jerusalem. After their story was told, Peter and John led the congregation in a prayer of praise to God (cf. Acts 4:24–26). A quote from Psalm 2:1–2 was included in that prayer:

*Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together against
the Lord
and against his Anointed One*
(Acts 4:25b–26).

This prayer acknowledged God's sovereignty over creation, particularly those who were in positions of leadership and authority. Those listening to and praying this prayer would have interpreted their persecution as being a result of the prophecy in Psalm 2. The Romans put Jesus, who was the Messiah, to death. That same rage continued against His body, the church. Thus the Christians interpreted their persecution as a sign of their Divine origin.

Acts 13:33 — Psalm 2:7

Two other quotes from the Book of Psalms occur in Paul's speech given in the Jewish synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (cf. Acts 13). The first one is Psalm 2:7 quoted in Acts 13:33: ". . . *'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'*" Paul said that this scripture was fulfilled when God raised Jesus; not in the sense of the resurrection of the dead, but in the sense of bringing Him to earth in human form. There are some statements in the Gospels that are related to this. Matthew 2:15 states, "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*" At Jesus' baptism, God said, ". . . *'This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'*" (Matthew 3:17). The same heavenly declaration came ringing down when Jesus was transfigured (cf. Matthew 17:5). God had begotten Jesus by birth through a virgin named Mary to be His Son.

Acts 13:35 — Psalm 16:10

Some take the statement of Acts 13:33 to be a prophecy of Jesus' physical resurrection, but that seems to be the subject of the following verses, 34–35:

The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David."

So it is stated elsewhere: “You will not let your Holy One see decay.”

Acts 13:35 was a quote from Psalm 16:10, which was joined to Isaiah 55:3 to establish that Jesus’ resurrection was foretold by Old Testament prophets. Psalm 16:10 is the same verse used by Peter in Acts 2 to make the same point—Jesus was raised! David said that He would be raised and Paul asserted that Jesus’ whole life, and even His resurrection, were foretold by the psalmists.

Jesus is the Betrayed One; He is the Raised One; He is the Rejected One; He is the Son of God, both in His life and in His resurrection. That is how Acts uses Psalms to describe the Messiah.

Psalms In Hebrews

Setting

The Book of Hebrews addresses a situation among Jewish Christians at the time it was written. They were older in the faith (cf. Hebrews 5:11–6:6), but had not progressed in their knowledge and faith. Seemingly some pressure or persecution had come their way. They had suffered before and endured it successfully, but the present crisis seemed to be causing more problems. They were tempted to return to the Jewish religious system, which included the sacrificial system and temple worship. They did not comprehend the consequences of such a compromise—crucifying Christ all over again, subjecting Him to public disgrace (cf. Hebrews 6:6), and losing the benefit of the one efficacious sacrifice for sin (cf. Hebrews 10:26). The writer of Hebrews convinced his readers by presenting the preeminent Christ in all His glory as he pointed out these consequences.

Previously, as Luke recorded in Acts, New Testament Christians began with the Old Testament and reasoned with the Jewish people to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. The Hebrew writer used the same method. In all the Old Testament imagery, detail, types, and quotes that he used seventeen references to the Psalms are included (See chart in chapter 18). Twelve different psalms are referred to, one of which was quoted from four times. Familiar psalms that are distinctively Messianic are: 2, 22, 110, 118.

Hebrews 1:5; 5:5 — Psalm 2:7

Psalm 2:7, which was also quoted in Acts 13:33, was quoted twice in Hebrews (1:5; 5:5). Hebrews 1 shows and proves Jesus' superiority to the angels. This quote most likely represented the crowning of King Jesus as He sat down on David's throne following His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. The Father was officially declaring His Son. No angel, despite their great splendor, has ever heard those words spoken to him. Hebrews 5:5 repeated these words, this time emphasizing the Father's part in declaring Jesus to be preeminent. Jesus did not just take upon Himself the right to the throne, the Father declared Him preeminent:

No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your father" (Hebrews 5:4–5).

Hebrews 1:6 — Psalm 97:7

Hebrews 1 contains six of the book's seventeen references from the Psalms. All of them were used to prove the superiority of Jesus to the angels just as Psalm 2:7 was (Note the chart on Hebrews 1 in Chapter 18 of this study). Psalm 97:7 was quoted

in Hebrews 1:6 to show that Jesus was to be worshiped by the angels. That meant that He was superior to them. The theme of Psalm 97 is “The Lord reigns.” Jehovah is pictured in all His glory in this psalm and was given as the reason for Israel to trust Him and to live upright lives. Reading this psalm without knowing that verse seven was quoted in Hebrews to describe Jesus, the reader might conclude that the psalmist was talking about God the Father, but Jesus is Jehovah also. Thus, the angels should worship Him as well. The Spirit is also to be worshiped because He, too, is Jehovah. The entire Psalm is not predicting descriptions of the Messiah, but the truth of Jehovah’s superiority applies to Jesus and thus can rightfully be used to make the point of Hebrews 1. The angels are always pictured as worshipers, not as those being worshiped. Jesus, however, is to be worshiped.

Hebrews 1:7 — Psalm 104:4

To further contrast the angels and Jesus, the Hebrew writer quoted Psalm 104:4 to describe angels as the Lord’s servants. Like the winds, the angels are His tools, used as instruments to carry out His will. In that sense, they fit into the category of created things. Jesus does not. He is the Creator. This is the only New Testament reference to Psalm 104, and it is not used to describe Jesus, so it is obviously not Messianic. A quote from Psalm 45 follows though, and that Psalm does seem to be Messianic, at least in type.

Hebrews 1:9 — Psalm 45:6–7

Hebrews 1:8–9 says that Psalm 45:6–7 describes the righteous reign of King Jesus:

But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness

and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy” (Hebrews 1:8–9).

If Jesus is a King, and in contrast, the angels are servants, then He is superior. Even the Psalm says, “. . . *God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy*” (Psalm 45:7). “*Your companions*” referred to the angels in this context. Taking a quick look at Psalm 45 reveals that it tells of a royal wedding, perhaps of a king in the Davidic line. It is not foreign to the Old Testament for a Davidic king to be called “God,” in the sense of his being God’s vice-regent to Israel. This is an Old Testament type of Christ as the antitype.

Hebrews 1:10–12 — Psalm 102:25–27

The Hebrew writer was attempting to show that Christ is superior. He was trying to show Jesus’ superiority to the angels with his argumentation in Hebrews 1–2. The Hebrew writer quoted from Psalm 102:25–27:

He also says,

*“In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of
the earth,*

and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you remain;

they will all wear out like a garment.

You will roll them up like a robe;

like a garment they will be changed.

But you remain the same,

and your years will never end”

(Hebrews 1:10–12).

This is the only New Testament reference to this Psalm. Psalm 102 is the prayer of an afflicted man, but includes a good

bit of confession and praise for God's greatness. The Hebrew writer said that these verses applied to Jesus. It is comparable to Psalm 45. Everything said about Yahweh in this Psalm could be said of any member of the Godhead because each one is Jehovah. The portions quoted by the writer of Hebrews for his purposes described Jesus as eternal. He created the heavens, and when they are old and need to be removed, Jesus will still be there. He will simply roll them up. He never changes. If He is eternal, then He must be Deity, and certainly be above any of the angels.

Hebrews 1:13 — Psalm 110:1

There is one more quote in Hebrews 1 which has been quoted before: "*To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?*" (Hebrews 1:13). The quotation was taken from Psalm 110:1. It was the conversation between the Father and the Son upon the Son's ascension to heaven. The Father did not give any angel a place on the throne, but He did give it to Jesus. Jesus is King. The Hebrew writer said it; the psalmist said it, too.

Hebrews 2:6–8 — Psalm 4:6

Hebrews 2:6–8 is the last quotation from Psalms in this first argument concerning Jesus' superiority. The context that includes this quote is:

It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified:

*"What is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the angels;
you crowned him with glory and honor*

and put everything under his feet.”

In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him . . . But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone (Hebrews 2:5–9).

The quotation is from Psalm 8. It is a beautiful expression of a man's awe in view of God's creative genius. The universe is the work of His fingers, the sun and moon and stars serve as an example. David was in awe of the creative beauty. Because of the overwhelming nature of all that God created, it seems that man himself should not have any significance to God, but he is significant to God!

In his psalm David applied this thought to all mankind. Man's dignity is shown by his exalted place in creation. He has been given precedence over all creation. The Hebrew writer said this precedence fits Jesus, too. In taking on flesh, He was made a little lower than the angels, but with God exalting Him to His right hand and promising to subject all things to Him, even His enemies and death, Christ is seen to be exalted over all things. That cannot be said of angels. Thus, the Psalm is not Messianic at its core, but that passage was used to describe a similar role for Jesus that had originally been given to man in the Garden of Eden.

Hebrews 2:12 — Psalm 22:22

This same Jesus has power to exalt mere men to the status of divine family, or to brother status. Hebrews 2:11–12 says:

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says,

*“I will declare your name to my brothers;
in the presence of the congregation I will sing
your praises.”*

This quotation from Psalm 22:22 is one of several New Testament quotes from this particular psalm. Psalm 22:1 says, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” Psalm 22:22 says that Jesus calls all Christians “*brothers.*” He is the “Big Brother” in the spiritual family of all believers. As for the psalm itself, I take it to be wholly Messianic and will look at it in a later chapter.

Hebrews 5:5–6 — Psalm 110:4

Other psalms are quoted in Hebrews as well. Psalm 95 is quoted four times in Hebrews 3–4 to make a point about faithfulness, but it is not descriptive of Messiah. In Hebrews 5:5–6, however, there are two quotes from the Psalms: “*So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’*” This quotation is from Psalm 2:7. Hebrews 5:6 is a quotation from Psalm 110:4, and it is quoted again in Hebrews 7:17 and 21: “*You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*”

In this section of Hebrews, the writer was attempting to prove the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood to the Levitical priesthood. He quoted Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews 5:6 to establish that Jesus was indeed a high priest. He did not explain the connection to Melchizedek until Hebrews 7. Hebrews 7:11–17 makes the argument that Jesus’ priesthood is superior because it is eternal, based on the figurative likeness of Melchizedek’s priesthood. Jesus’ indestructible life was the basis of that claim

of superiority (cf. Hebrews 7:16–17). The Hebrew writer went on to add the rest of the verse when he quoted it again in Hebrews 7:

And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:

*“The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind:*

‘You are a priest forever.’”

Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:20–22).

In this verse the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood was based on the fact that God swore with an oath that Jesus’ priesthood would be eternal. No other priesthood was accompanied by an oath, and although God did establish the Levitical priesthood, it was not established with a promise that it would last for eternity.

Hebrews 10:5–7 — Psalm 40:6–8

The next quote of a Psalm that applies to Jesus is found in Hebrews 10:5–7:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

*“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.*

The I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—

I have come to do your will, O God.’”

The Hebrew writer quoted Jesus to say that the sacrifices of the Levitical sacrificial system could not take away sin (cf. Hebrews 10:4). Then he borrowed a part of a Davidic psalm (cf. 40:6–8) to summarize what Christ’s incarnation said—He did not come to offer more bulls and goats because those could not atone for sin. He came to present His body as a complete sacrifice for sin, for consecration, for peace, and fellowship with man. Jesus did God’s will perfectly. He was holy and thus able to make God’s children holy and cleansed from sin.

Looking back at Psalm 40, it appears that David realized that sacrifices, in and of themselves, could not atone for sin. His life must have been one of faith, consecration, and obedience. Only then would the sacrifices be viewed as typical of Christ’s sacrifice and be accepted by God as walking by faith, upon which basis God could credit righteousness to David’s account. The Hebrew writer applied it to Jesus and said in Jesus’ case, it means that He is the efficacious sin offering.

Hebrews 13:5–6 — Psalm 118:6–7

One last quote from the Psalms will be Psalm 118:6–7 as it is quoted in Hebrews 13:5–6. The context of Hebrews 13 is God the Father as Protector. This quote, however, comes from a Messianic Psalm that is frequently referred to in the New Testament. Thus, I feel it is acceptable to attribute the characteristic of Caretaker to Christ as well as to the Father.

In summary, the Hebrew writer quoted from the Psalms in order to establish Jesus’ superiority over the angels and Levitical priests. He is shown to be a King and an eternal High Priest. He is also the single atoning sacrifice for sin, as well as a personal Protector and Caretaker.

THE PSALMS DESCRIBE THE MESSIAH TO COME

Introduction

James E. Smith in his book, “What The Bible Says About The Promised Messiah,” exegetes what he believes are “directly Messianic” Psalms. These are psalms that do not have some event or person in Hebrew history as a type of Christ.³² Smith believes these psalms are 2, 16, 22, 40, 45, 68, 69, 102, 109, 110 and 118. I disagree with all of these being “directly Messianic,” but could agree in most cases that they are “wholly Messianic,” meaning that the whole psalm can, and does, refer to Christ, but in some cases the Psalm presents the type-antitype approach, wherein David, or some other author, wrote about a situation that typifies/foreshadows Jesus and His condition. I certainly have not exhausted my study in this area and would rather not dwell on the dilemma in these studies. The goal is to find the descriptions of Messiah in the Psalms, whether they are typical or direct references to Him.

Psalm 2: The Reign of the LORD’s Anointed

Psalm 2 Is Quoted Seven Times in the New Testament and Applied to Jesus Every Time

The focus of this study is going to shift now to some psalms which seem, in all their parts, to be descriptions of the

³² James E. Smith, What the Bible Says About the Promised Messiah (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1984), 204.

Messiah. Psalm 2 is quoted seven times in the New Testament and applied to Jesus every time. This brief chart for Psalm 2 shows that the New Testament writers believed this psalm applied to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Psalm 2:1–2

Acts 4:25–26

Psalm 2:7

Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5

Psalm 2:7

Hebrews 5:5

Psalm 2:9

Revelation 2:26–27;
12:5; 19:15

Directly Messianic?

There are different opinions on whether Psalm 2 is “directly” Messianic or “typically” Messianic. Directly Messianic means that Psalm 2 was a prophecy referring only to Christ and did not have any Old Testament setting at all. Typically Messianic means that the psalm referred to an actual situation in the days of the kings of Judah, but it also served as a type of the Messiah to come. There are commentators on both sides of this question. E. W. Hengstenberg, a well known writer on Christology elements in the Old Testament, espouses the “directly” Messianic view,³³ but John Willis of Abilene Christian University³⁴ and H. C. Leupold,³⁵ another well known Old Testament commentator, both believe Psalm 2 is “typically” Messianic. I prefer the latter because of the general

³³ E.W. Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament Volume 1 & 2 (MacDill AFB, FL: MacDonald Publishing Company), 41–45.

³⁴ John T. Willis, Dr., Insights From The Psalms Volume 2 (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1974), 31.

³⁵ H.C. Leupold, D.D., Exposition of The Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 43.

use of Old Testament Psalms by New Testament writers as typical of the Christ. This does not mean that no psalm could be “directly” Messianic. For example, Psalms 22, 45, 72 and 110 are sometimes considered “directly” Messianic.

Exegeting Psalm 2

Psalm 2 breaks down into four strophes (a group of lines forming a section of a lyric poem, Ed.) of three verses each. In rhetorical fashion the writer notes the antagonism of the enemies of the king in the **first strophe**:

*Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together
against the LORD
and against his Anointed One.
“Let us break their chains,” they say,
“and throw off their fetters.”*

Psalm 2:1–3

John Willis suggests this increased revolt by nations in the Near East is characteristic of a time of the coronation of the new king. Perhaps insurgents and enemies felt like it was a time of transition and insecurity during which time they could cause problems and get away with it. The revolt appears to be widespread. “*The nations*,” “*the peoples*,” “*the kings*,” and “*the rulers*” are all mentioned. This is a severe uprising; listen to the wording: “*uproar*,” “*devising a vile thing*,” and “*against His anointed*.” What makes it so serious is that it is directed against “*his Anointed One*.” The kings of Judah in the line of David were God’s anointed. (The word “*anointed*” is

the translation of the name “Messiah.”) These enemies did not want to be submissive to the king of Judah any longer.

Through the Messianic interpretation and application, it is easy to see that the Jewish opposition to Jesus during His life and the Roman crucifixion are the fulfillment of Psalm 2:4–6—the **second strophe**:

*The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
Then he rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
“I have installed my King
on Zion, my holy hill.”*

This psalm prophesied all the opposition, rejection, and persecution of Jesus by the Jews, which culminated in His death on Calvary. It can be seen in the rebellion against His kingship. That is why the Jews could not stand Pilate’s plaque over Jesus’ head proclaiming “*King of the Jews*” (cf. John 19:19–22). The psalm is further fulfilled in the continual centuries of rejection of Christ and His rule by nations and leaders throughout time (cf. Acts 4:25–26).

It is important to understand that the rebellion was not only against the Son, but against God as well. How did God, the Father of the King, react to this insurrection? He was personally affected by this adverse behavior. God’s response was laughter (cf. 2:4), anger (cf. 2:5), and resolve (cf. 2:6). This feeble plot caused God to laugh: “*The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them*” (Psalms 2:4). He viewed their rebellion as senseless and bound to fail. How could they succeed against Him? The prophets asked this question repeatedly and spelled out the futility of such a rebellion. It would utterly fail because God is invincible and has never lost a battle. After He laughed, He became righteously angry: “*Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath . . .*” (Psalm 2:5). His laughter did not imply that He was laughing at their conduct or simply dismissing their behavior.

It was not funny in the sense of one being hilarious; He was angry over how funny His enemies were acting. He personally brought judgment on them. The prophets described God's judgment as an invasion, economic downturn, or natural calamity. He rebuked them and resolved to keep His anointed King safely in power. He sustained His Kingship: "*I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill*" (Psalm 2:6). Man cannot stop it or prevent it.

The New Testament fulfillment of these passages brings to mind passages like Hebrews 12:22 ff., which talks about the eternal, rock solid kingdom of Christ. Jesus Himself confirmed that nothing could overcome His church: "*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it*" (Matthew 16:18). Not even death (**Hades**) could knock down the walls of the kingdom of Christ. Other scriptures like Matthew 21, Mark 13, and Luke 21 all describe the destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism for its resistance to Christ's kingdom. The Book of Revelation vividly describes and predicts the downfall of Rome when they attempted to wipe out Christianity and exalt Caesar as Lord.

The **third strophe** identified the King as God's Son and amplified the promise of God to install and protect His King/Son:

I will proclaim the degree of the LORD:

*He said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.*

*Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.*

*You will rule them with an iron scepter;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery."*

Psalm 2:7-9

Psalm 2:7 is quoted three times in the New Testament. In Psalms it described what happened at the coronation of a king. When a son of David was anointed the king of Israel, the LORD

anointed him as king and adopted him as His son. The fact that the literal kings of Israel were called “*sons of God*” is attested to in 2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 22:10; 28:6; Psalm 89:26–27. He became a begotten son at his coronation. When applying this verse to Jesus, it is related to His resurrection, ascension, and coronation. Hebrews 1 uses it to describe the kingship of Jesus. The Father officially begat Jesus as His King/Son when He was raised from the dead to ascend into heaven and sit down at the right hand of God (cf. Acts 13:33).

As the son, the king was entitled to the rights and privileges of sonship. He was the rightful heir. In actuality the king of Israel was the king over the nations as well. Jesus was given that power, too. Psalm 2:9 is quoted three times in Revelation to prove Jesus’ power over His enemy, Rome. He mounted the white horse and led His armies against the foe and was victorious (cf. Revelation 19). The picture in Psalm 2 is the ease with which He smashed His enemies—“*an iron scepter*” crushing the enemies like “*pieces of pottery*.” The enemies will be as easily destroyed by the King’s anointed as by God Himself (2:5). Jesus is the warring King here.

The Psalm closes with a **fourth strophe** (2:10–12) that includes a summons (2:10–11), a warning (2:10, 12a), and a blessing (2:12b). Psalm 2:10–12 called upon the rebels to think again about what they were doing. They should refrain from rebelling simply because of the futility of the exercise and the danger to their lives. They needed to submit themselves to the benevolent rulership of the “*Anointed One*.” Submission is described in several ways: “*Serve the LORD with fear*” (2:11, NIV, KJV) and “*Worship the LORD in reverence*” (2:11, ASV, NAS). A second phrase says: “*and rejoice with trembling*.” A third phrase says, “*Do homage to the Son*” (2:12, NAS) or another version says, “*Kiss the Son*” referring to the custom of kissing the feet of the one who is superior. Homage, worship, service, kiss, submit—Why? Because the king might become angry and destroy anyone who did not honor him. He had the power to do that.

The psalm closes with a beatitude (2:12c): “*Blessed are all who take refuge in him*.” Those who were submissive would

benefit from the benevolent reign of the God-appointed King instead of being dashed to pieces by an iron rod. Those who take refuge in Him are also co-heirs with Christ (cf. Romans 8:17). Christians share in the inheritance from His Father. He is even willing to call them brothers, which also conveys the inheritance concept. What a blessing to be on the Lord's side, but, oh, how fearful to be the object of His wrath!

The Messiah From Psalm 16

View of the Psalm

It is certain that Psalm 16 contains Messianic descriptions, because Psalm 16:10 was quoted by Paul in Acts 13:35 and Psalm 16:8–11 was quoted by Peter in Acts 2:25–28. Both New Testament preachers said the verses quoted referred to the Messiah. When Peter was addressing the crowd on Pentecost, he said:

David said about him:

*"I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will live in hope,
because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence."*

Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay (Acts 2:25–31).

Peter claimed that David foresaw the resurrection of Jesus and spoke of it. Whether David consciously knew he was predicting Christ's resurrection is debatable. I prefer Leupold's view:

Peter, making effective use of this passage in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:25 ff.) points out that, having said he would not die, David did lie down and die, and so in a sense this statement was never fulfilled; and the best statement of the case is offered by Peter (vs 31): David "foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ." Again, to what extent he did this consciously we are unable to fathom. Shall we say with Hengstenberg: 'David in Christ could very properly speak as he here does?' Rightly understood, this could be the case. Better, however, seems to be the approach which says in effect that in the providence of God it pleased Him so to guide the spirit of the writer by His own Holy Spirit that he gave shape and form to his utterance in such a way that what he concluded in the logic of faith reached a marvelous fulfillment in the resurrection of Christ for every believer.³⁶

For this reason, I, too, am persuaded it's a typical, wholly Messianic psalm.

Setting and Background of the Psalm

The title of this psalm is "Jehovah Is My Portion in Life and My Deliverer in Death." It is a psalm expressing confidence in the LORD. The Psalm's inscription is "A miktam of David." "Mikdam" has a root meaning of "gold," perhaps indicating "A Golden Poem." "Of David" probably indicates

³⁶ H.C. Leupold, D.D., Exposition of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 153.

that David was describing a personal situation, which typified the Messiah.

The psalmist was apparently being confronted with a distressing situation, perhaps even the threat of death.

Psalm 16:4 indicates that the problem was coming from persecutors. The psalm was a plea to God for help and yet an expression of assurance that he would be delivered. Verse one is the shortened plea: “*Keep me safe, O God . . .*” God is taken from the Hebrew word **El**, meaning “the mighty One.” With that word **El**, David began his confession of assurance that God would be able to deliver him. The rest of the psalm seems to go back and forth between the psalmist’s confession of who God is and what he will do based upon that confession. He will be committed to God, his protector, his refuge, and his hiding place. Notice the organization of these confessions as they are presented as a group.

The Confessions of Who God Is and What He Does

Besides being the Mighty One, God was David’s refuge (cf. 16:1). David’s fellowship with God was his hiding place; God was the One to whom David fled to escape danger. He acknowledged God as **Yahweh** and **Adonai** (both words are used in 16:2). God is **Yahweh**, the One who always keeps His promises to the ones with whom He is in covenant relationship. He is also **Adonai**, the Lord, the Master, the controller of life. In Psalm 16:2, David confessed that God was the One who supplied all things: “. . . *apart from you I have no good thing.*” As part of that first phrase, this means that nothing could ever mean anything to David if God was not truly the Lord.

Psalm 16:5 says, “*LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure.*” This is a figure taken from the days when the LORD, through Joshua, divided the land among the tribes. Each family had ample room to live. Retaining that piece of property was very important to an

Israelite. The threat of losing it through thievery or conniving or invasion would have upset them considerably. That piece of land represented his fellowship with and favor from the God of covenant. David confessed that the LORD can and does keep that piece of land securely in his hands. Psalm 16:6 expounds upon that same thought: “*The boundary lines*” were the boundary lines of the psalmist’s allotment. The partitioning of the land had left him a pleasant and beautiful piece of Palestine. It was indeed a gift from God.

Psalm 16:10–11 expresses David’s confidence that even in death God will deliver. He said, “. . . *because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*” This is all synonymous parallelism, which has the second line repeating in different words the thought of the first line. The psalmist believed that his close fellowship with God would stretch even into death. Even though death is a possibility, and may be viewed by many as undesirable, David was assured that God would not allow Sheol to engulf him completely. David had bold confidence in his God. He concluded his psalm with a statement of assurance about life: “*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*” Living life with the LORD’S blessings is the opposite of death. Deliverance from death? Yes! But more than that—God holds those gifts in His right hand, ready to give them to His children.

Peter’s Interpretation

Such confidence about victory over death reaches beyond David’s experience. The Apostle Peter quoted Psalm 16:8–11, applying that passage to Jesus’ resurrection. Peter’s interpretation **seems** to be that Jesus’ body would not see corruption in the ground because of the short time it would be there, and that His spirit would not stay in Hades, the abode of the souls of the disembodied (cf. Luke 16:16–31). **But, no,** Jesus’ soul returned to His body, was reunited with it, and then,

He was raised on the third day. Psalm 16:11 applied to Jesus, speaks of His state in heaven with the Father. He ascended to the Father's right hand and received the crowning gift of sitting down on David's throne. Joy eternal for the Messiah.

“I Take Refuge in Thee”

The commitment part of Psalm 16 says that because of who God is, David could say, “. . . *for in you I take refuge*” (16:1b). He trusted the LORD to be a place of safety from all enemies and trials. He made a decision to put his full faith in God. Another part of his commitment was taking the side of the people who loved God, “. . . *the saints who are in the land*” (16:3). They were the psalmist's delight. The psalmist was, however, further persecuted because of his association with the lovers of God. The pressure of persecution did not cause him to desert the saints. Further, he refused to enter into idolatrous practices. Nor did he offer a libation of blood for them. This could be a reference to an idolatrous practice, or to the offering of a blood sacrifice in the Temple for their sins. As much as he delighted in the fellowship of the saints, he detested the fellowship of the unrighteous. He was further committed to blessing the Lord. He said, “*I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me*” (16:7). His conscience was clear about this. He had made the right decision. He eulogized the Lord publicly. There was no shame and no hiding it. He proclaimed that he was on the Lord's side. There is one last statement of commitment in Psalm 16:8: “*I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*” He was determined to keep the LORD and His will in a prominent place, a place of honor in his mind and thinking. He was committed to making God's will his course and mindset. He believed that would make him unshakable, immovable, and able to stand in his time of persecution.

The Messianic Fulfillment

The Messianic fulfillment of Psalm 16, in general is seen in Jesus' expressions of confession and commitment. Jesus

acknowledged His belief in God over and over again. He said, “. . . *the Father is greater than I*” (John 14:28). He also stated, “*My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all . . .*” (John 10:29). He wanted people to realize that God had sent Him (cf. John 11:42). He acknowledges that God the Father had given Him authority to do what He was doing (cf. John 17:2; Matthew 28:18), and that He was and is the only true God (cf. John 17:3).

Based on His beliefs about the Father, Jesus the Messiah committed Himself to the Father’s will and to His saints. In John 4:34 Jesus said, “*My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*” He also said, “*For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me*” (John 6:38). And, “. . . *I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him*” (John 8:28–29). He kept His focus on the Father, “. . . *who for the joy set before him (that joy being the fellowship with the Father) endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*” (Hebrews 12:2). He was willing to call the saints “*brothers*” (cf. Hebrews 2:11), and told everyone from the beginning of His ministry—He came to preach to the receptive, the ones who would be God’s children (cf. Luke 4:18–19; 5:31–32; 17:10). They were His delight—and still are! From a young age He knew He needed be about His Father’s business (cf. Luke 2:49), and even in His death, He committed His spirit to God’s safe keeping. His is the ultimate example of confession and commitment, from start to finish.

The Royal Priest In Psalm 110

Introduction

James E. Smith in his book “What The Bible Says About The Promised Messiah” says that Psalm 110 “. . . has been

styled the pearl of the Messianic psalms.”³⁷ Perhaps the unusual combination of King and Priest roles noted in the Psalm account for this accolade. Perhaps it is the fact that it is considered the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament; it is quoted ten times.

- Psalm 110:1 Matthew 22:41–46; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44; Acts 2:34–35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 1:3.
- Psalm 110:4 Hebrews 5:6

The inscription on the psalm states “Of David. A Psalm.” and the New Testament ascribes it to David as well. His authorship is a key element in the use of this quote by Jesus in Matthew 22:41–46.

Directly Messianic

Psalm 110 seems directly Messianic to me. Leupold³⁸ and Smith³⁹ and Perowne⁴⁰ agree. There was no Old Testament king

³⁷ James E. Smith, What the Bible Says About The Promised Messiah (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1984), 184.

³⁸ H.C. Leupold, D.D., Exposition of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 20–21; 771.

³⁹ James E. Smith, What The Bible Says About The Promised Messiah (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1984), 398–400.

⁴⁰ J.J. Stewart Perowne, D.D., The Book of Psalms: A New Translation with Introduction and Notes (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 294–304.

of Israel, including David, who was allowed to be a priest. Royalty and priesthood came from two different tribes: Judah and Levi respectively. The only possible person who fits this combination of roles is Jesus, the Messiah. I conclude, then, that the psalm is directly Messianic.

The Four-Part Outline of the Psalm.

Psalm 110 only has seven verses, but it can be outlined in four parts, three of which describe Jesus' Kingly role and one His Priesthood role.

The Coronation

Psalm 110:1

The first verse speaks of His coronation and is apparently a conversation between Yahweh, the Father, and Jesus, David's Master. Peter quoted this verse in Acts 2 as proof of Jesus' resurrection and ascension to the throne of David. The throne is equated with sitting down at the right hand of the Father. Psalm 110:1 says:

*The **LORD** (Jehovah, God the Father) says to my **Lord**
(Adonai, Jesus the Son):
“Sit at my (the Father's) right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet.*

There are many New Testament references to the fact that Jesus is now sitting at the right hand of the Father. Note especially the ones in the book of Hebrews: 1:1–5; 8:1–2; 10:1–12; 12:1–3). At the right hand of the Father is where Jesus shares the throne with God. He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (cf. Matthew 28:18). That authority is validated by the Father's promise to subjugate all of Jesus' enemies. The last enemy to be conquered will be death (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:25–27).

The Kind of Rule of the Messiah

Psalm 110:2–3

*The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion;
you will rule in the midst of your enemies.
Your troops will be willing
on your day of battle.
Arrayed in holy majesty,
from the womb of the dawn
you will receive the dew of your youth.*

Messiah's sovereignty is displayed in two arenas: the arena of His enemies and the fellowship of His followers. He has been given a "*mighty scepter*," similar perhaps to "*an iron scepter*" (2:9) to rule over His rebellious enemies. They will be subdued (110:1) and made to submit to His rule. Paul had this mind in Philippians 2:9–10: "*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*"

Psalm 110:3 refers to the willing subjects of Messiah's rule. The phrase "...*from the womb of the dawn*" refers to the early morning when dew is prevalent. The followers of Messiah will be like the dew that falls every morning. Not only will the followers be willing servants, they will also bring refreshment to society. They will be the "*salt of the earth*" (cf. Matthew 5:13) and the "*light of the world*" (cf. Matthew 5:14). James Smith wrote that the phrase "'*the dew of your youth*' refers to Christ Himself. He will be forever young, the perfect man, bringing refreshment to all who meet him."⁴¹

⁴¹ James E. Smith, What The Bible Says About The Promised Messiah (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1984), 122.

His High Priesthood

Psalm 110:4

*The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind:
“You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.”*

This is the most striking part of this psalm. The other three portions explain the aspects of the Messiah's Kingship, but this verse stands out to explain the truth about His High Priesthood. The psalmist shouts this truth, and then suddenly, quietly returns to his kingly description of Messiah. What an amazing psalm! The Hebrew writer goes to great lengths using this verse to establish the superiority of Jesus as High Priest in comparison to the Levitical priests.

This verse has three things to say about the priesthood of Jesus. **First**, His priesthood is sure: *“The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind . . .”* God gave Messiah this role, man did not. Jesus did not assume that the role would be given to Him. God gave Him the role of Messiah and took an oath to show that He meant it. God did not have to do this, but He did it for emphasis sake, and more importantly, for man's sake. The Hebrew writer concluded, *“Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant”* (Hebrews 7:22).

Second, Jesus' priesthood is unique and singular. The LORD only swore about one person—Jesus. **Third**, Jesus' priesthood is eternal—*“. . . forever,” he says, “in the order of Melchizedek.”* In reality, Melchizedek was not literally without birth and death, or without beginning and end, but the Hebrew writer, as well as the psalmist, uses a literary technique to make Melchizedek a type of Jesus. Because his birth and death are not recorded in Genesis, from a figurative point of view, he may be seen as without beginning or ending, meaning eternal. Melchizedek was eternal only in the figurative sense, but Jesus is literally eternal. His eternal priesthood gives assurance to

man. There will be no changes; no new High Priest who will be different from the last one. Jesus, eternal High Priest, appointed by God, is sure, unique, singular, and eternal.

He Is Conqueror

Psalm 110:5–7

*The **Lord** is at your right hand;*

he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead

and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.

He will drink from a brook beside the way;

therefore he will lift up his head.

Messiah is still at the right hand of Jehovah (“*Lord*” is *Adonai*, who is Messiah in this Psalm). These verses seem to convey the idea that the **Messiah/Lord/Adonai** and the **Father/God/Jehovah** are joined in the battle. These verses describe the victory. Look at the devastation of the enemy: “*crush kings*,” “*judge the nations*,” “*heaping up the dead*,” and “*crushing the rulers*.” *Adonai* defeats them all, even the most powerful. Then, as if to convey the fact that the battle is won, the psalmist said, “*He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head*.” His head is held high in the pride of victory. He fought and won, and is able to take a peaceful drink from the stream.

Conclusion

This chapter will close with a reference to the prophet Zechariah. This apocalyptic book has another reference to the dual role of the coming Messiah. Zechariah was one of two prophets (Haggai being the other) who were sent by God to stimulate the people in and around the city of Jerusalem to finish rebuilding the Temple. Zechariah attempted to say that God was with them and would protect them in the first part of his book. God’s two instruments for getting the job done were Joshua, the High Priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor, who was

a descendant of David and in the lineage of Jesus. In this case, the Temple Builders were a combination of Priest and King. Zechariah 3:8–9 says:

“Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come; I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,” says the LORD Almighty, “and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.”

Jesus was to be like Joshua the High Priest. We know it is to be Jesus, because He is known to be the “Branch.” Thus, Joshua the High Priest is a type of Jesus. But the “Branch” is from the lineage of Jesse, who was David’s father (cf. Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 23:5). That means that there was a kingly connection also. Jesus was also an antitype of Zerubbabel:

“On that day,” declares the LORD Almighty, “I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,” declares the LORD, “and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,” declares the LORD Almighty (Haggai 2:23).

Zerubbabel, the type representing Christ, had the signet ring of kingly authority. That means that the prophets validate the psalmist’s assertion that Messiah will be both King and Priest. And they add that, in that role, He will build the Temple of the LORD, the church of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 22 and the Messiah

Proof of Its Messianic Nature

Psalm 22 is quoted or referred to five times in the New Testament, with every reference applied to Jesus’ life

experience and, primarily, His experience at Calvary. There are four different approaches that can be taken in studying this psalm: personal, ideal, national, and predictive interpretations.

The **personal interpretation** supposes that “some” individual, perhaps David, lived through the experiences in this psalm including the parts which typify Jesus’ experience on Calvary. The **ideal interpretation** says that this psalm is not a record of a real life experience, but a description of what every righteous person experiences at times in his life including the parts of it which typify Jesus’ life experiences. The **national interpretation** says that the psalm refers to Israel while they were in Babylonian exile. The **predictive interpretation** assumes that the psalmist was conscious of the fact that he was predicting the life and death of the Messiah meaning that the whole psalm describes Jesus. The predictive interpretation is basically the same as saying it is a **directly and wholly Messianic Psalm**.

I prefer somewhat of a mixture of some of these approaches. It appears to me to be wholly Messianic. In other words, it can all be applied to the Messiah. I base that conclusion on the fact that verses 1, 8, 15, and 22 are quoted in the New Testament as referring to Jesus and that the rest of the psalm is consistent with the thoughts in these quoted verses. In other words, the rest of the verses not quoted in the New Testament do not seem out of place in describing Jesus, nor do the quoted verses seem out of place in the psalm itself. Thus, it is **wholly** Messianic, but is it **directly** Messianic (not speaking of anything in the psalmist’s life but exclusively predictive of Messiah)? I prefer the wholly, but not directly, interpretative approach. This would make it wholly typical of Messiah, but referring to something in the author’s life as well. The fact that we cannot match something in David’s or the exiles’ lives to this psalm may only speak of our lack of knowledge in these areas. It could still be applicable to David (my preference because of the inscription) and typical of Jesus as well.

Setting

If this psalm was not Messianic, it would fit categorically into the “Deliverance Psalms.” The psalm naturally divides itself into two parts: 22:1–21 and 22:22–31. The first part speaks of the Messiah’s (and the psalmist’s) trials and His call to God for help. He was in agony: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” These words are recognizable as the ones Jesus uttered while on the cross (cf. Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). James E. Smith states, “Psalm 22 reads as if it were composed at the foot of the cross.”⁴² The agony Messiah endured was from three sources: the perception that God was not attentive to His present suffering, the ridicule of the wicked ones, and the physical and emotional hurt of Calvary.

The **first source** of Jesus’ agony and pain was the perception that God was not attentive to the present suffering—Psalm 22: 1–5:

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, and am not silent.
Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the praise of Israel.
In you our fathers put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
They cried to you and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not disappointed.*

The intensity of the pain caused Him to think that God was not attentive or that He was too long in coming. Christ had been on the cross all day and night. He was physically very

⁴² James E. Smith, What The Bible Says About The Promised Messiah (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1984), 122.

tired and weary. Perhaps someone who has been injured in a car accident and had to wait on an ambulance can identify with this kind of impatience. There was in this outcry a confession of God's holiness which would not allow pain in His children to go on unanswered for very long. Jesus also looked to past history for His assurance that God would come. Faithful forefathers had trusted in God and He came to their aid. It is a mix of trust and impatience that made Jesus cry out in agony, "*My God, my God, why . . . ?*"

The **second source** of agony was the ridicule of the wicked ones—Psalm 22:6–11:

*But I am a worm, and not a man,
scorned by men and despised by the people.
All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads:
"He trusts in the LORD;
let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him."
Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you even at my mother's
breast.
From birth I was cast upon you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.
Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.*

The psalmist was a reproach among men. The taunt from Psalm 22:8 is almost word for word what the detractors said at Calvary (cf. Matthew 27:39–44). The Messiah felt He had lost His dignity (cf. 22:6). People did not treat Him as a human being, but as a worm to be played with and smashed. Mockery and ridicule hurt the Son of God deeply. Yet there was still that

element of trust. From His birth until this moment in time He believed God had protected Him. Why should it change now? The agony caused Him to wonder, but history restored His trust. He could not help but cry out one more thought: “*Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help*” (22:11).

The **third source** of pain was the physical and emotional hurt of Calvary—Psalm 22:12–18:

*Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
Roaring lions tearing their prey
open their mouths wide against me.
I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted away within me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.
Dogs have surrounded me;
a band of evil men has encircled me,
they have pierced my hands and my feet.
I can count all my bones;
people stare and gloat over me.
They divide my garments among them
and cast lots for my clothing.*

There is an overlap between the agony of being ridiculed by men and the agony of the physical and emotional hurt of the cross. The oppressors were pictured as “*strong bulls of Bashan,*” “*roaring lions,*” and “*dogs.*” This shows the combination of ridicule and bodily injury. Psalm 22:18 is referred to in Matthew 27:35, Luke 23:23, and John 19:24. Imagine the humiliation of losing your last possessions to a

gambling game! Psalm 22:15 may have been alluded to in John 19:28 when John said, *"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'"*

The enemies of Jesus surrounded Him and taunted Him. They gored Him, as it were, like a strong bull of Bashan. The people yelped and nipped at him as if they were a pack of wild, hungry dogs. Emotional abuse was added to the physical suffering. The pain was certainly extreme, as expressed by 22:14: *"I am poured out like water; and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me."* This verse may refer to the feeling of utter helplessness and lack of emotional strength to continue on, but it could also refer to the physical agony of a crucifixion experience. The last half of verse sixteen and the first half of verse seventeen is certainly typical of Jesus' crucifixion: *"... they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones . . ."* The Hebrew translation is different, but the LXX (Septuagint), Vulgate, and Syria versions render it this way. While being crucified, besides the pull on His skin and bones, the enemies gloated over His plight.

Once again, as the psalmist had begun, now at the end of this section, he begged for deliverance:

*But you, O LORD, be not far off;
O my Strength, come quickly to help me.
Deliver my life from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.
Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.*

Psalm 22:19–21

Thanksgiving for Personal Deliverance

There is a mood change beginning in Psalm 22:22. H.C. Leupold says:

If the first half of the psalm could be captioned, “Forsaken by God,” the second half could quite properly have the title, “Delivered by God.” The tone is so notably different. . . . There is even a formal difference between the first half of the psalm and the second. In the first half the statements of the individual verses are shorter, like gasps breathed in distress. Now they are longer, for the speaker is delivered and free from pain.⁴³

Relief? Or confidence and assurance? Other commentators also agree that the speaker has been delivered at this point and is promising to praise God and convert the world. However, I prefer to think that this assurance was confessed **before** the deliverance was experienced. This is not atypical of these kinds of psalms (see the lesson on “The Deliverance Psalms”). For Him personally, Psalm 22:24 expressed His belief in God’s attentive care: *“For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”* His assurance of personal deliverance lead Him to believe that this protection would be for all who love God. Therefore, He made vows to share the news of His deliverance with others after His salvation had come.

Who are the ones being addressed by Him? The psalmist wrote:

*I will declare your name to my brothers;
in the congregation I will praise you . . .
before those who fear you I fulfill my vows.
The poor will eat and be satisfied;*

⁴³ H.C. Leupold, D.D., Exposition of The Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 203.

*they who seek the LORD will praise him—
may your hearts live forever.”*

Psalm 22:22, 25b–26

What is the message? The psalmist said:

*I will declare your name to my brothers;
in the congregation I will praise you . . .
For he has not despised or disdained
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help . . .
for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.
All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.*

Psalm 22:22, 24, 28–29

What are the results of His sharing the message? The psalmist said:

*All the ends of the earth will remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him, . . .
Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
They will proclaim his righteousness
to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.*

Psalm 22:27, 30–31

Christ's deliverance from ultimate and final humiliation and death was His message through the Apostles and prophets,

the New Testament writers. That message reaches those who are oppressed, those who fear the Lord and put their faith in Him as did the Messiah. They, too, will be delivered, and then, they, too, will become messengers to the world of the saving grace of God. It will be a universal result! *“All the ends of the earth”* and all their *“posterity”* will participate in this event. It is universal and age-lasting.

What does it really mean for these many people? Righteousness! The psalmist closed with:

*They will proclaim his righteousness
to a people yet unborn—
for he has done it.*

Psalm 22:31

The Messiah's deliverance resulted in righteousness for all. Paul wrote, *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Psalm 118 and the Messiah

One of the Most Frequently Quoted Psalms

Psalm 118 is one of the most frequently quoted psalms, quoted almost as many times as Psalm 10, although six of its ten quotes are in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and are repeats of the same instance. John has one quote; Acts has one; 1 Peter has one, and Hebrews has one quote, making up the other four quotes in the New Testament. The verses quoted in these New Testament references are Psalm 118:6–7 in Hebrews 13:5–6, Psalm 118:22 and 25. The verse that is specifically and frequently applied to Jesus is: *“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone . . .”* (118:22). In the New Testament quotes, the inspired speakers

(including Jesus Himself) interpret this verse to be a Messianic prophecy of Jesus' rejection by the Jews and of His vital part in building the spiritual temple of the Lord, the church.

Directly, Wholly, Typically, or Partially Messianic?

The question again must be raised, "Is this psalm directly, wholly, typically, or partially Messianic?" James Smith holds to the view that this psalm is directly and wholly Messianic. If verse twenty-two is Messianic, and other verses, like verse twenty-two, are spoken in the first person, why should they not also describe Messiah. He says that most conservative scholars, however, have not adopted this view.⁴⁴ John Willis, on the other hand, says:

Apparently, the speakers in vss. 22–25 are the members of the procession that accompanies the king into the temple to give thanks to God, or a choir of singers or priest (note "we," "us," and "our" in vss. 23, 24, 25). They begin with what seems to be a popular proverb used in connection with building great buildings:

*The stone which the builders rejected
has become the head of the corner (vs. 22).*

Masons were careful in choosing the stone that would determine the height, breadth, and length of the whole building and its symmetry (the cornerstone), but sometimes they laid aside the best stone for that function. . . . It is appropriate that the New Testament

⁴⁴ James E. Smith, What The Bible Says About The Promised Messiah (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1984), 122.

writers took the same proverb and reapplied it to Christ.⁴⁵

Since the psalmist had merely borrowed the proverb, the psalm as a whole was not in view. Thus, to Willis, the psalm is not wholly Messianic. I lean toward a mix of these two views, or a middle road view. Because of the first person voice in other parts besides verse twenty-two, I think it is wholly Messianic, but only typically, not directly as Smith contends. Either way, this Psalm is Messianic with more insights into the thinking and feelings of the Christ.

Giving Thanks for His Loving-kindness

The Psalm begins by giving thanks to Yahweh for His loving-kindness (cf. 118:1) and ends on the same chord (cf. 118:29). The soloist calls on other worshipers (perhaps in procession) to join Him in giving thanks (Psalm 118:1–4).

Reason for the Thanks

The reasons for the thanks from the psalmist was because the LORD had delivered Him and exalted Him. God had never failed to see him through. Psalm 118:5–6, perhaps carried over from Psalm 56:4, 11, is quoted in Hebrews 13:5–6. This is the motto of the confident Christian: *“The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”* Christians should learn this motto from the Christ as they attempt to emulate Him. Besides that conclusion, or insight, the Messiah learned that there was no refuge and no trust like that found in God (cf. 118:8–9). He, like all men, was tempted to trust in others or in His own strength, but He learned to trust the Father.

⁴⁵ John T. Willis, Insights From The Psalms II (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1974), 34.

Specific Distress

Psalm 118:10–12 talks about the specific distress that caused concern. It says:

*All the nations surround me,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.
They surround me on every side,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.
They swarmed around me like bees,
but they died out as quickly as burning thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off.*

Notice the reoccurring statement: “*In the name of the LORD I cut them off.*” The New American Standard Version puts this in the future tense, but other translations do not. The action of the enemy is in the past tense, so it seems that the psalmist was recounting the victory in the past tense. They were like a swarm of bees surrounding Him, but were gone quickly. Like a fire fueled by thorns that quickly dies down, so the heat of oppression from those enemies was extinguished. He cut them off because the LORD was His strength.

*I was pushed back and about to fall,
but the LORD helped me.
The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.*

Psalm 118:13–14

Messianic Import

From the Messianic standpoint, who are these enemies? Are they not the Jews and the Romans? Indeed, it looked as though the Messiah was surrounded at His trial and at Calvary, but did He not rise from the dead in victory? Did He not prophecy and carry out destruction on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (cf. Matthew 24)? Did He not prophecy and carry out destruction on Rome (read the book of Revelation, especially chapter 19)?

Indeed, He cut them off! Like the fire that is fueled by dry thorns goes out quickly, so does Rome. The same is said of Jerusalem.

The psalmist paused before proceeding to recall why he was talking about these things. Psalm 118:15–16 says:

Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous;

“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!

The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;

the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”

More rejoicing—in the LORD! It was His right hand that did these mighty deeds through the Messiah. That is the way God has always accomplished things (cf. Exodus 15:6, 12).

Situation Needing Deliverance

Psalms 118:17–18 says:

I will not die but live,

and will proclaim what the LORD has done.

The LORD has chastened me severely,

but he has not given me over to death.

The situation was a life and death struggle. The psalmist interpreted it as chastening from the LORD (118:18). Applying it to Israel as a nation or the king as a person, it was viewed as punishment for sin. That was part of the covenant relationship (cf. Deuteronomy 28–30). In Jesus’ case, the Hebrew writer said that Jesus had to learn obedience through the things He suffered (cf. Hebrews 6:8–9). He did not sin, but the Father allowed Him to experience suffering, in order that greater faith would be built in Him.

Procession to the Temple, Completing His Thanksgiving

Psalm 118:19 indicates that the procession had reached the temple, with the soloist requesting entry so he could complete his thanksgiving. He entered as the builders, the persecutors, rejected the stone as worthless, but as the stone which was the cornerstone of the new temple. Psalm 118:26 is recognized as part of what the people of Jerusalem said to Jesus as He entered the city. Jesus came into the city, but the Jews, the builders, rejected Him. Through His suffering at their hands, however, He became the cornerstone. Jesus' suffering was the way that He made His spiritual brothers holy, according to the Hebrew writer (cf. Hebrews 2:10). In order to accomplish that He had to enter the Most Holy Place with His blood and cleanse them with that blood (cf. Hebrews 9:11–14). Christians are allowed to enter the Most Holy Place in prayer through that same blood (cf. Hebrews 10:19–22). Thus, as the Messiah entered the Temple, so can the procession. They celebrated with these words:

*This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

*O LORD, save us;
O LORD, grant us success.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.
The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine upon us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.*

*You are my God, and I will give you thanks;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.
Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.*

Psalm 118:24–29

In summary, Leupold typifies the nation to Christ.⁴⁶ Thus the deliverance has been wrought. The Messiah and His people have been brought into the temple, the place of God.

Conclusion

We have seen many Messianic references in the Psalms. Those references describe many things about Him. They talk of His being protected by angels, using parables in His teachings, being welcomed triumphantly into Jerusalem, being rejected by the Jews and Gentiles, describing His physical and emotional and spiritual suffering on Calvary, foreshadowing the fact that He is the bread of life, predicting Judas' betrayal, assuring us of His resurrection, depicting His Kingship at God's right hand, telling us of His unselfish and sacrificial nature, prophesying that all things including death would be put under His feet, proving Him superior to angels, announcing His unique King-Priest role, assigning Him the job of temple-builder, and giving Him authority to crush all enemies. What a Savior, even before His birth! Surely Israel should have been excited about the advent of the Messiah. Surely we should be as excited about His return!

⁴⁶ H.C. Leupold, Exposition of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 819.

How to Use the Psalms

Introduction

Psalms is the longest book in the Bible in terms of chapters and total length, and yet this book is not used as much for teaching and preaching as the other books. Is that because it is of less value than the Pauline epistles? I do not think that can be justified though one might be tempted to think so. Is it because it is a book from the Old Testament, to which generally there is less attention given? Quite possibly this is true. Is it because Psalms is such a personal book? It was used in corporate assemblies and was intended for public use. Is it because many psalms are sung, so they are not used in a sermon format? This is also a possibility, but we do not sing that many of the psalms considering there are 150 of them. Very few of them have been put to music and few are put in most of the church songbooks (this is especially true in the area of other languages besides English, Ed).

This chapter is intended to give some general suggestions about how to use the Psalms in a more effective way. This includes public and private use. I hope that you will employ the Psalms more frequently in your personal and public worship and adoration of our great God.

Review of the General Characteristics of the Psalms

Psalms Is a Book of Feelings

Psalms is a book of feelings—those innermost thoughts, frustrations, angers, worries, sorrow, and hurts of a typical man

or woman. The Book of Psalms is the praise language of the kingdom of God and its occupants. It is the “why” and the “how” of the glorification of God.

Psalms Is the Praise Language of the Kingdom of God and of Its Occupants

The Psalms offer a way to express similar feelings. Christians need that! God caused inspired men to write in the form of poems and songs in a way to convey how they felt about themselves, about Him, about their enemies, their circumstances in life, and even in death. Psalms is the artistic side of man put down on paper in word format. It is important to know how to use the Psalms today to the best advantage.

Use of the Psalms in Preaching and Teaching

In Their “Natural Setting”

The first area of investigation will be how to preach and teach these poems. I have tried in this series of studies to abide by what I am getting ready to urge you to do when teaching and preaching the Psalms.

The probable reason for the lack of teaching and preaching of this book is that men are more attuned to the analysis/thought approach to Scripture than the feeling approach. This does not mean that man can use any kind of approach he wants to make the passage mean whatever he feels. The “feeling approach” has to do with the mood and atmosphere of the passage. Most Bible passages have a mood. It may be tension, sorrow, joy, love, fear, etc. It might help to think of the kind of background music that would accompany a passage if it was portrayed on a TV show or movie. Would there be flutes? Booming drums? Brassy trumpets or trombones? Clashing cymbals? Would it be quiet or loud? Fast or slow? Up and down or level? Discerning the mood and atmosphere of a passage will often help in the exegesis of a text. It alerts you to the kind of material being presented and the

tone of the writer, which can be a suggestion to the occasion for writing. For these reasons, feeling and thoughts are important—prose and poetry, literal and figurative, instructive and worshipful, controversial and philosophical.

The literary form of Scripture is important, too. God chose a certain kind of format through which to convey certain kinds of truths. Some of the Minor Prophets are written in poetic form, for example, Nahum, Habakkuk 3, and Zechariah. Proverbs is written in proverbial parallelism—a type of poetic device. Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation include picture forms. Be aware that these are the most neglected books in the Bible! Why? It is probably because Western mindset is attuned more to the straightforward, literal, and logical presentation. Paul's letters fit this mold well, so Western Christians preach and teach more from his writings. They are logical presentations of truths. Paul's letters are vital, but so are the other parts of scripture.

It is to man's benefit to learn and appreciate the different kinds of literature the Bible was written in, training himself to receive the impact of different kinds of literature, learning the appropriate means of interpretation of these different kinds of literature, and finally, learning good ways of presenting different kinds of literature.

To illustrate the last point concerning presentation, take Psalm 10, and put it into a three point sermon outline as an analytical analysis of its truths. That kind of outline presents propositional truths from the Psalm, but misses the "natural setting," the intended setting, of those truths as God presented them in Psalm 10. This may be likened to a courtship setting. A suitor will likely get a much better response if he sings or quotes poetry than if he makes a three point outline of the truths about his love for the maiden! Something is lost in the change of form in presentation of exactly the same truths. The truths are the same, but the framework is different. The framework makes a lot of difference. If God chose a certain kind of literature and format to present certain truths, then teachers and

preachers should do their best to give the audiences the benefit of that presentation.

The audience has the right to hear (which means that it is the presenter's obligation to present) the material in its "natural setting" first. Before a teacher analyzes and outlines the truths therein, he should present God's word as it was originally presented. For the Psalms, that mode of presentation is reading or singing. Through a good reading or singing, the audience is able to partake of the mood and the words of God in that "natural setting." Hearing the Psalms as God intended them to be is the best interpretation. It will make an impact on the emotions, the mind, and the will all by itself. That is the reason I have included the reading and singing of psalms in this study.

Good Reading of the Psalms

Presenting the Word in its original setting is important when considering any portion of God's Word. The audience needs to hear it from God the way He said it before any interpretation touches it. The obvious point is the importance of presenting the Word to the people. Paul told Timothy to "*Preach the Word . . .* (2 Timothy 4:2), but he also listed three ways to present the Word when he said, "*Until I come, devote yourself to the public **reading** of Scripture, to **preaching** and to **teaching***" (1 Timothy 4:13). The church today often emphasizes teaching and preaching and neglects the public reading of Scripture. Publically reading the scriptures presents the Word in its "natural setting," and following that with "our own words" is the chance to explain, exhort, and apply its truths. Scripture was intended to be understood and to also have its effect when read publically. Paul told the Colossians, "*After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea*" (Colossians 4:16). There were no commentaries written at that time, no multiple copies of letters for each family. The Scripture had to be obtained through

listening to inspired prophets in the congregation or from letters by inspired writers. Reading the Word was the most common method of communicating God's message. Christians have strayed away from reading the Word aloud.

Often when the Scripture is read or quoted, it is read poorly or quoted too fast by preachers or teachers who may think their comments are more important than the actual words of the Lord! People in most audiences tune out when the Word is read, especially if it is a lengthy reading. Readers need to be skilled and to have practiced before they get up to read. If **reading**, **preaching**, and **teaching** are equally important, then why let someone who is unskilled in reading aloud read the Word publicly, anymore than letting the unskilled preach and teach.

Audiences need to be retrained to listen to and appreciate the read Word. They must be exhorted to show reverence when God speaks. It is indeed a two-sided problem. Preachers and teachers must once again come to believe in the power of the read Word, and audiences must come to revere the reading of God's Word. Remember the case of Ezra reading the Word to the Israelites, as recorded in the book of Nehemiah. As Ezra began to read, the people stood up and listened all morning to the Law being read to them (cf. Nehemiah 8:5). Amazing! These people, however, had a respect for the Word. It was as if God Himself were standing there talking to them. Anyone aware of such a thing would stand!

This all becomes important when we consider the appropriate way to preach and teach the Psalms. The skilled reading of Psalms is a necessity. And at times, reading and singing may be all that is needed! The text does not always need an explanation, interpretation, and application. The reading or singing of a psalm is for an effect, gained solely through that means of presentation. In those cases exegesis may only detract from the intended effect, so at times it may be best to just leave the text alone and let it speak for itself!

Examples of Use of the Psalms in Worship Assemblies

I would like to share some examples of ways in which the Psalms might be presented to insure the retention of the intended effect mentioned above. First, the Psalms may be read in assemblies for worship. Many congregations have a place in their assembly time when someone reads Scripture. Usually the reading precedes the sermon and is the text that the preacher will be using as his main text. This sends the statement that if preachers rarely preach from Psalms, this book would rarely be read in the hearing of the congregation. Since the Psalms were the Jewish songbook, could they not be used more in present day worship assemblies?

If you have input into the organization of the worship assembly, perhaps you could suggest the incorporation of the reading of some psalms at the beginning of the song service or psalms of praise interspersed through the song service, a prayer psalm before or after the prayers, or as one of the prayers itself, a benediction type psalm instead of a closing prayer. Also, would not our Bible classes go well if they were begun with a song and a reading from the Psalms? Another suggestion would be to read the Psalms for a period of time during the Bible class period. A twist could be the reading of specific psalms with a particular emphasis—"Praise and Thanksgiving," "Petition," etc. Another twist might be the reading of specific psalms about a particular subject and then allowing people to share their reactions, feelings, and sense of identity with what is being read. The sharing of feelings is important just as is the exchange of thoughts about what the text says. Such a class could enhance the personal devotional life of the participants by encouraging the sharing of spiritual feelings and thoughts (which is a weakness for many Christians). This kind of class will work best in a small group during the regularly scheduled class time or in your home some time during the week.

Example One: “A Time of Praise”

Songs: “All Hail the Power of Jesus Name”
“Praise Him! Praise Him!”
“Worthy Art Thou”

Introduce the Service:

Reading: Psalm 118:1–9, 15–16, 28–29

Songs: “We Have An Anchor” or
“Shelter In the Time of Storm”

Reading: Psalm 111

Song: “Standing On the Promises”

Reading: Psalm 146

Song: “Be With Me, Lord”

Prayer of Praise:

Reading: Psalm 103:1–14, 20–22

Song: “Hallelujah, What A Savior!”

Reading: Psalm 144:1–10, 15

Song: “We Shall See the King Some Day”

Reading: Psalm 9:1–10, 19–20

Song: “Glory, Glory Hallelujah”

Reading: Psalm 46

Prayer Song: “Where No One Stands Alone”

As you can see from this “order of worship,” I have combined the reading of some Psalms with the singing of songs and praying. The whole service is centered on praising God. Some great general praise songs begin the assembly and immediately set the stage for the kind of service it will be. Then the preacher may introduce the service with some brief thoughts about the supplication or lament type psalms. Even these psalms contain praise for a number of things. After that brief introduction, the rest of the time could be spent in reading a Psalm or part of a Psalm and accompanying them with appropriate songs, which are not necessarily from the Psalms but possess a similar emphasis.

Example Two: “We’re Marching to Zion!”

Opening Song:	“We’re Marching to Zion!”
Reading and Talk:	Psalms 120 and 122 — “Yearning”
Song:	“Here We Are But Straying Pilgrims”
Reading and Talk:	Psalms 121, 125 and 129 —“Protection”
Song:	“Unto the Hills”
Reading and Talk:	Psalms 130—“Forgiveness”
Song:	“Whiter Than Snow”
Reading and Talk:	Psalms 131—“Peace”
Song:	“When Peace Like A River”
Reading and Talk:	Psalms 132—“Covenant”
Song:	“Standing on the Promises”
Reading and Talk:	Psalms 133—“Unity”
Song:	“How Sweet, How Heavenly”
Reading and Talk:	Psalms 134—“Praise”
Song:	“There Is A Habitation”

This example shows another use of the Psalms in an assembly. Remember that the “Songs of Ascents” consist of fifteen psalms (120–134), which were the songs Jewish pilgrims would sing on their way to a feast in Jerusalem or Zion, or as they made the trek across the city of Jerusalem to the Temple to worship. They were headed for Zion and Christians are living in Zion, which is the church (cf. Hebrews 12). Heaven is also Zion! The Christian’s journey through this life could be likened to the expressions in the “Songs of Ascents,” because he is ascending to the heavenly Zion to worship God eternally! Thus, interspersed between readings and songs are short talks which parallel the psalm to the Christian’s walk. This is a powerful message, but not necessarily preaching in the traditional mode.

Example Three: “A Festival of Praise to God”

Introduction:

Song: “This Is The Day” (from Psalm 118:24)

Reading: Psalm 95:1–5

Song: “Come, Let Us Sing” (from Psalm 95:1–5 in the NIV)

Reading: Psalm 96

Reading: Psalm 98

Song: “All People That On Earth Do Dwell” (from Psalm 100)

Reading: Psalm 100

Song: “I Will Enter His Courts” (from Psalm 100)

Reading: Psalm 29

Reading: Psalm 19

Song: “The Spacious Firmament” (from Psalm 19)

Song: “May the Words of My Mouth” (from Psalm 19)

Reading: Psalm 8 (harmonized reading)

Song: “How Majestic Is Your Name” (from Psalm 8:1,9)

Reading: Psalm 61

Song: “O Sometimes The Shadows Are Deep”

Reading: Psalm 121

Song: “Unto the Hills” (from Psalm 121)

Reading: Psalm 23 (harmonized reading or quoting)

Song: “The Lord’s My Shepherd” (from Psalm 23)

Song: “Surely Goodness and Mercy” (from Psalm 23:6)

Reading: Psalm 37:21–24

Song: “The Steps of A Good Man” (from Psalm 37:21–24)

Reading: Psalm 57:9–11

- Song: “Be Exalted, O God” (from Psalm 57:9–11)
Reading: Psalm 115:1
Song: “Not to Us” (from Psalm 115:1–8)
Reading: Psalm 92
Reading: Psalm 148; 150:1, 6
Song: “Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah!” (from Psalm 148)

This last example attempts to let the Psalms speak for themselves. The Psalms selected are psalms of praise to God. The songs that accompany them are from the preceding Psalm. I will readily admit to you my disappointment in the availability of songs from Psalms. Some of the ones I have included here are rather new and not in the normal church songbooks. Others are “chorus” songs and will often be seen in print without notes of music. It occurs to me that there is a need to put more psalms to music for the church of God to sing. They were originally set to music. Why should we not take advantage of that medium? If you are a songwriter, one of your greatest contributions would be putting some of the Psalms to music. Actually, that exhortation could be given concerning many other poetic pieces of Scripture, such as the songs in Revelation; the songs in Luke 1–2 about John and Jesus; Habakkuk 3; the dedication prayer of Solomon (cf. 2 Chronicles 6:12–42); the song of Moses and Miriam (cf. Exodus 15:1–21). There is no better way to learn and to teach Scripture than through music, especially to children.

Example Four: “Sermon on the Psalms”

This last example is a “performance” that is basically a combination of reading and commenting on some favorite psalms. The commentary is not really preaching; it is rehearsing the content of the Psalms with descriptions in your own words.

Psalm 8 – “God’s Glory Revealed in Man’s Dignity”

*O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

*You have set your glory
above the heavens.
From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.*

*When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.*

*You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.*

*O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

There are a number of verses in this Psalm that are quoted in the New Testament. Psalm 8:2 is quoted in Matthew 21:6 and Psalm 8:5 in Hebrews 2:6–8. This Psalm has an inscription, “For the Director of Music,” meaning that it was to be read by

the one leading the song. The inscription “According to the Gittith” is the direction itself given to the director. It was probably a musical term, which referred to a musical instrument invented in Gath or to a tune from that city. It could also be taken from “Gittoth” and could be a song sung to a vintage melody.

Creation did not happen by itself; God’s presence was there. It is almost pantheism (the belief that God is identifiable with the forces of nature and natural substances, Ed.). God fills the earth and there is no escape. There is a closeness of God to man. The heavens declare His glory. Stewart Perowne says, “The sun and moon are His witnesses and heralds; the light is His robe, the clouds are His chariot, the thunder is His voice, the flashes of the lightning are His arrows and His spear.”⁴⁷ Picture David looking up into the heavens one clear night, perhaps as a young man or a shepherd boy (cf. 8:2). There would be no city lights to disrupt the beautiful display. First, David would have been in awe, but then deeper thoughts probably came to him—how insignificant man is! God made man great, and invested in him a dignity that is second only to God’s. This picture of dignity comes from a knowledge of Genesis: “*So God created man in his own image . . .*” (Genesis 1:27). Man was made in the likeness of God Himself. The writer of Hebrews quoted Psalm 8 to include man as “*of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers*” which would make man also “*a little lower than the angels*” (Hebrews 2:5–11).

Creation is so magnificent that even children can see its import—God is the Creator! Creation is strong evidence against atheists (cf. 8:2). God made man a king over creation. Another way to look at it is to remember that God made creation for man. Perowne writes:

⁴⁷ J.J. Stewart Perowne, D.D., The Book of Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 149.

A thousand years later other shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night on the same hills of Bethlehem, while the same stars looked down upon them from heaven. But a brighter glory than the glory of the stars shone round about them; and they knew better than David himself the meaning of David's words, "Lord, we know what it means when David said, 'What is man that Thou art mindful of him?'" For to them it was said by the angel, "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."⁴⁸

Use of the Psalms in Funerals

Great Value of the Psalms in Funerals

Another area of ministry in which the Psalms are useful is funerals. The Psalms are used frequently in funerals, for readings or for texts for the funeral sermon or the grave side service. They can also be used to comfort mourners before and after the funeral itself.

The Psalms fit the occasion so well, because they are feelings oriented. The sorrow, anger, frustration, fatigue, and loneliness felt by mourners is seen in the Psalms. The inspired writers were inspired to be able to put similar feelings into words. Hearing someone else express the same hurtful feelings helps the mourners to grieve. Preachers who skillfully use the Psalms during a funeral truly minister to people in their worst times.

Psalm 23 is the best known psalm and is often used in funerals for that reason. It is particularly profitable when the family of the deceased is not that familiar with Scripture. More than likely, however, they have heard the 23rd Psalm. Using something familiar truly ministers to them and may build a

⁴⁸ Ibid, 156.

relationship or open a door for follow-up Bible study, which may lead to their salvation. If the family is not familiar with the Bible, they are probably not Christians. A funeral service is an opportunity to help some otherwise unresponsive people find the Lord. The death of a loved one usually strikes a spiritual cord that can become an open door for the Word of God. The passages within Psalms can become something which attracts the unbeliever to a secure relationship with God.

Another suggestion for using the Psalms during a funeral is to use Psalm 90 to emphasize the shortness of life and the need to make life count for the Lord. The death of a loved one forces people to pause and look introspectively. While in that pause, a person might be receptive to the exhortation Solomon made when he said, "*Teach us to number our days aright . . .*" (90:12). You cannot preach a non-Christian into heaven at the funeral or to give false security to the unbelieving survivors. The Psalms or any other scriptures should not be used to give comfort to unbelievers. However, the kind of God in Psalm 23 who cares for people and is able to comfort His child could surely be an enticement to a searching, hurting heart.

Psalm 23 is a great comfort for the child of God as well. When a faithful Christian dies, Psalm 15 might be appropriate to characterize that person's life and encourage the survivors to seek a similar path in life. This Psalm is in contrast to Psalm 14, which describes the fool. The person in Psalm 15 is the one who will dwell in Zion. His character is true (cf. 15:2); his words truthful (cf. 15:2–3); his allegiance to God clear (cf. 15:4); and his dealings with others honorable and honest (cf. 15:4–5). The psalmist said, "*He who does these things will never be shaken*" (cf. 15:5). Psalm 1 also presents a contrast between the wicked and the good in such a way that it can be used to comfort.

Psalm 73 is a good psalm to help hurting people. It pictures the frustration and anger of a man besieged by enemies. He was struggling with the reason why God would allow enemies to win against him. A key verse is Psalm 73:17: "*. . . till I entered*

the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.” Pointing people to God and His Word is a good way to bring comfort and relieve some of the questioning, doubt, anger, blaming, and frustration. Thus, the Psalms are most appropriate for comfort, exhortation, assurance, and challenge at a time when people are most sensitive and most vulnerable. Use them well to help people in their dark hours of grief.

Using the Psalms in One’s Own Personal Life

As Devotional Material

The author of Psalm 119 talked about his meditation upon God’s laws day and night (cf. 119:55, 97). All of Scripture serves as personal devotional material, but the Psalms are especially good for this. Because there is generally a weakness in most people’s personal devotional life, the Psalms can help. They comprise a segment of Scripture especially good for reflection, introspection, and meditation.

The Book of Psalms is a good text for a daily morning devotional. Since the Psalms are units within themselves, Psalms allows the Bible student to cover a complete piece of scripture in a relatively short time. Try working through the Psalms and writing reflections on each one of them. Begin with a prayer asking God to feed your soul on His Word and then read a Psalm every day. Read the psalm aloud and then meditate on the truthfulness of the words, the feelings being expressed, and the reality they have in your own life.

Identify how you feel with what is written in the psalm. Interact with the psalmist’s feeling, and then identify your own feelings as reflective material to examine yourself. There is a real openness and honesty in the Psalms. They will help you to become an open book before God. It is helpful to write your thoughts down, both from the psalm and from your heart. Prayer is a good way to open the reading and to follow it. Your prayer might include the use of the words of the psalm itself. Pray about your meditations to God particularly as they relate

to your feelings, strengths, and weaknesses. Keep a notebook of meditations for future reference. A devotional using the Psalms in this way provides a way to know yourself and to become more intimate with God.

Another way to use the Psalms as part of a daily devotional is to sing the Psalms. If you do not know any music to a psalm, make up a tune or use a tune you already know that fits. Memorizing the Psalms is also good. Recall different ones during the day to keep the psalms in your mind throughout the day.

Psalms as Used in the New Testament

Here is one last suggestion for using the Book of Psalms to help make them more significant in teaching and preaching. Since the Psalms are the most frequently quoted Old Testament scriptures quoted within the New Testament, a good study would be to preach, teach, and study the ways the New Testament writers used the Psalms. Study the quotations of the “Messianic Psalms” to gain a unique picture of Jesus from the perspective of the Psalms.

Not all the quotations from the Book of Psalms in the New Testament describe the Messiah. Paul used quotes from six different psalms in Romans 3:10–18 to establish the fact that without God all men are lost. It would be interesting to study how Paul used those specific quotations from the Psalms in Romans 3, and then turn back and study the whole psalm to see the original context for the quote. It would also be good to discover how the inspired New Testament writers saw and were allowed the use of the psalm in establishing their New Testament points of doctrine.

Another study might be to look at the way Satan used Psalm 91:11–12 when tempting Jesus (cf. Matthew 4:6). Consider Peter’s quotations of Psalm 69:25 and 109:8 to prove that another must be chosen to take Judas’ place (cf. Acts 1:20). Paul quoted Psalm 51:4 to establish the sovereignty of God (cf. Romans 3:4) and Psalm 32:1–2 to establish the fact

that righteousness was established by faith under the Law of Moses (cf. Romans 4:7–8). There are others and they all would make good study materials.

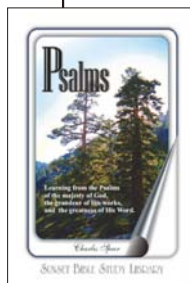
Conclusion

This exegetical, topical, and commentary study ends here. I truly hope you have gained a new and perhaps different appreciation for this great book. I hope that you have seen some new thoughts and have been drawn to the Book of Psalms for more study and meditation that will serve you for the rest of your life. I pray that it will become a friend. When you spend time with God in private may it serve as the avenue of praise and the stimulus for personal reflection. May it serve as an ever increasing means of facilitating public praise and prayer life. Hopefully more and more psalms will be put to music and incorporated into popular songbooks. I wish you well in your Christian walk and may the Psalms be your constant companion.

Charles Speer



Charles Speer received a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from Southern Methodist University in 1970. From there he went directly to Sunset School of Preaching in Lubbock, Texas. After graduation from there in 1972, Charles went to work with the Northside congregation in Dallas for five years. In 1977 Charles and Cara were married and moved to Weatherford, Oklahoma, where he preached for eight years. Their two children, Bryn and Jainin, were born in Weatherford. In 1985 the Speer family attended six months of mission training at Sunset School of Preaching before leaving for New Zealand where they worked for three and a half years training preachers for New Zealand, New Guinea, and other points in the south Pacific at South Pacific Bible College. Since 1989, Charles has been working full time with Sunset International Bible Institute. (Formerly Sunset School of Preaching.) Charles has a passion for the word of God and believes deeply that we need to have more respect and love for the word of God. He emphasizes the need for a strong family life and the need to take the gospel to the lost. This study will convince you of man's need to study the Bible to know God and His word.



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