Notes on
Psalms

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Introduction

TITLE

The title of this book in the Hebrew Bible is *Tehillim*, which means "praise songs." The title adopted by the Septuagint translators for their Greek version was *Psalmoi* meaning "songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument." This Greek word translates the Hebrew word *mizmor* that occurs in the titles of 57 of the psalms. In time the Greek word *psalmoi* came to mean "songs of praise" without reference to stringed accompaniment. The English translators transliterated the Greek title resulting in the title "Psalms" in English Bibles.

WRITERS

The texts of the individual psalms do not usually indicate who wrote them. Psalm 72:20 seems to be an exception, but this verse was probably an early editorial addition, referring to the preceding collection of Davidic psalms, of which Psalm 72 was the last.[1] However, some of the titles of the individual psalms do contain information about the writers. The titles occur in English versions after the heading (e.g., "Psalm 1") and before the first verse. They were usually the first verse in the Hebrew Bible. Consequently the numbering of the verses in the Hebrew and English Bibles is often different, the first verse in the Septuagint and English texts usually being the second verse in the Hebrew text, when the psalm has a title.

> ". . . there is considerable circumstantial evidence that the psalm titles were later additions."[2]

However, one should not understand this statement to mean that they are not inspired. As with some of the added and updated material in the historical books, the Holy Spirit evidently led editors to add material that the original writer did not include. Two examples are the city name "Dan" in Genesis, and the city name "Rameses" in Exodus. Some critics of the Psalms have concluded that the titles are not reliable. Conservative scholars have adequately refuted these views[3] This is the only really reliable information that we have as to who composed these psalms, though the commentators have their theories. Only Psalms and Proverbs in the Old Testament claim composite authorship for themselves.

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[1]See Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 439.
[2]Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 241.
[3]E.g., Archer, pp. 440-45.

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> "The best solution is to regard the titles as early reliable tradition concerning the authorship and setting of the psalms. The titles, however, should not be taken as original or canonical."[4]

Not all the titles contain information about authorship. Students of the psalms sometimes refer to those without writer information in their titles as anonymous or "orphan" psalms. The ones that do contain this information refer to the following writers. Moses wrote Psalm 90. David composed at least 73 psalms, mostly in the first two books of the Psalter (i.e., Pss. 1—72). Asaph wrote 12 (Pss. 50, 73—83). Korah's descendants were responsible for 10 (Pss. 42, 44—49, 84, 87—88). Solomon wrote one or two (127 and perhaps 72). Heman the Ezrahite wrote one (Ps. 88), and Ethan the Ezrahite composed one (Ps. 89). There is some difference in the numbering of the psalms among versions. This is because some translations, such as the Protestant English versions, come from the Masoretic (Hebrew) text. Others, such as the Roman Catholic English versions, followed the Latin Vulgate translation, which was based on the Septuagint (Greek) text.

HEBREW NUMBERING	GREEK NUMBERING
1—8	1—8
9—10	9
11—113	10—112
114—115	113
116:1-9	114
116:10-19	115
117—146	116—145
147:1-11	146
147:12-20	147
148—150	148—150

DATES AND ORGANIZATION

Of these psalms, the earliest would have been the one Moses wrote (Ps. 90), and it probably dates from about 1405 B.C. Those David composed would have originated between about 1020 and 975 B.C. Asaph was a contemporary of David, so we can date his in approximately the same period. Solomon's psalm(s) seem to have been produced about 950 B.C. Korah's descendants, as well as Heman and Ethan, probably lived after Solomon, but exactly when we cannot identify. Since Heman and Ethan are connected with Ezra as Ezrahites, they probably lived and wrote after the Babylonian exile.

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[4]Longman and Dillard, p. 242.

We can date some of the psalms that do not contain information about their writers in the title, if they have a title, by their subject matter. For example, David seems to have written Psalms 2 and 33 even though his name does not occur in the superscriptions (cf. Acts 4:25). Likewise Psalms 126 and 137 must have been late compositions dating from the time the Jews returned from Babylonian exile or shortly after that.

> "An analogy between the Psalter and a contemporary hymnbook is instructive. Many modern hymns arose as a result of a specific event in the life of a hymn writer, but the event remains hidden (at least without historical research) from the person who sings the song today. The hymn was written in such a way that it allows all who sing it to identify with it."[5]

> "The Psalms have more to say about Christ than they have to say about any other person. It is a H-I-M book—it was a hymn book of the temple, but it is all about Him; it is praise to Him."[6]

Most of the Psalms, then, were written between 1000 and 450 B.C. Eugene Merrill narrowed these dates to 970 and 550 B.C.[7] The one by Moses was composed considerably earlier and a few may have been written later, but probably not much later, than 450 B.C.

There is some internal evidence in the Book of Psalms that the Jews collected the individual psalms and compiled them into groups in various stages and that this process took many years.[8] We would expect this because some psalms date hundreds of years after others. Psalm 72:20, for example, seems to mark the end of a collection of David's psalms that antedated the Psalter we now have, but which editors incorporated into the larger work. Psalm 1 appears intended to introduce this collection and, probably later, the entire Psalter.

The writer of most of the first 72 psalms (Books 1 and 2 of our modern editions) was David. Editors may have added those by Asaph and Korah's descendants (Pss. 42—50) to this collection later. Seventeen psalms after Psalm 72 claim that David wrote them.

Solomon (2 Chron. 5:11-14; 7:6; 9:11; Eccles. 2:8), Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:21-22), and Jehoiada (2 Chron. 23:18) all organized temple singing, and may have had a hand in compiling some of the psalms.

Hezekiah (715–686 B.C.; 2 Kings 18—20; 2 Chron. 29—32), one of Judah's best kings and one who led his people in returning to Scripture, may have added to and organized part of the Psalter (cf. 2 Chron. 29:25-28, 30; 30:21; 31:2; Prov. 25:1). So may Josiah, another reforming king of Judah (640–609 B.C.; 2 Kings 22:1—23:30; 2 Chron. 34—35; cf. 2 Chron. 35:15, 25).

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[5]Ibid., pp. 244-45.

[6]J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:510.

[7]Eugene H. Merrill, "Psalms: Human Response to Divine Presence," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 404.

[8]See Duane L. Christensen, "The Book of Psalms within the Canonical Process in Ancient Israel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:3 (September 1996):421-32.

The last two books (sections) of Psalms (chs. 90—106 and 107—150) contain more miscellaneous psalms dating from Moses to the return from exile. It seems likely that Ezra, the great renovator of postexilic Judaism, may have been responsible for adding these and perhaps putting the whole collection in its final form.[9] The oldest record we have of the fivefold division of the Psalter comes from a Dead Sea scroll that dates to the first century A.D.: the time of Christ.

As is true of modern hymnals, there are smaller collections of Psalms within the larger collections. These smaller collections include songs of ascent (Pss. 120—134), the writings of Asaph (Pss. 73—83), the psalms of Korah's descendants (Pss. 42—49), and the hallelujah psalms (Ps. 113—118, 146—150).

> "The picture that emerges is a mixture of order and informality of arrangement, which invites but also defeats the attempt to account for every detail of its final form. There is some chronological progression, with David most in evidence in the first half, and a clear allusion to the captivity towards the close of Book V (Ps. 137). But David reappears in the next psalm (138), and by contrast, the fall of Jerusalem had been lamented as far back as Psalm 74."[10]

Each of the five books or major sections of the Psalter ends with a doxology, and Psalm 150 is a grand doxology for the whole collection. The earliest evidence of the fivefold division of the Book of Psalms comes from the Qumran scrolls, which scribes copied early in the first century A.D. At least 30 partial or complete manuscripts of the Book of Psalms were found, the largest manuscript collection of any Bible book found there. Undoubtedly the Psalter was in its final form by the close of the Old Testament canon, namely, by 400 B.C. The fivefold division may have been an intentional attempt to replicate the fivefold division of the Torah (Law, Pentateuch), which was the foundation of Israelite life and faith.[11]

SCOPE

Historically the psalms cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.).

SUBJECT MATTER

In terms of subject matter, the psalms deal with selected events of that millennium (1400–450 B.C.). They provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded, especially their God-directed thoughts and feelings.[12]

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[9]*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 873.

[10]Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1—72*, p. 6.

[11]C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, p. 58.

[12]For a survey of approaches to the Psalter that view it holistically, see S. Jonathan Murphy, "Is the Psalter a Book with a Single Message?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:659 (July-September 2008):283-93.

> "Of all the books in the Old Testament the Book of Psalms most vividly represents the faith of individuals in the Lord. The Psalms are the inspired responses of human hearts to God's revelation of Himself in law, history, and prophecy. Saints of all ages have appropriated this collection of prayers and praises in their public worship and private meditations."[13]

GENRE

The psalms are all prayers written in Hebrew poetry.

> "The leading characteristic of poetry is terseness or conciseness. . . .
>
> "Parallelism is almost always present in poetry, but it is also a linguistic ornament that is occasionally found in prose contexts. Thus parallelism alone is not a sufficient criterion to define poetry. Wherever there is a high proportion of parallel lines, however, we can be certain that we are dealing with a poetic passage. . . .
>
> "Terseness, parallelism, and imagery are the most common characteristics of Hebrew poetry.[14]

The most frequent types of parallelism are the following:

In *synonymous parallelism*, the writer repeats the thought of the first line in the following line (e.g., 1:2; 24:1-3; 25:4).

Antithetic parallelism is the reverse: the second line expresses a contrasting thought compared to the first line (e.g., 1:6; 20:8; 37:9).

In *synthetic parallelism*, the second line explains or expands the thought expressed in the first line (e.g., 1:1; 19:7-9; Prov. 1:7). When the second line completes the thought of the first line, we have climactic parallelism (e.g., 29:1; 96:7).

In *emblematic parallelism*, the first line contains a figure of speech, and the following lines expand or explain the figure (e.g., 1:3).

It is important to observe parallelism, because failure to do so can result in erroneous interpretation. For example, one might conclude that the writer is making an important distinction when all he is doing is restating the same idea in different words, in the case of synonymous parallelism.[15]

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[13]Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 779.
[14]Longman and Dillard, pp. 26, 27, 28.
[15]For further discussion of Hebrew poetry see S. C. Yoder, *Poetry of the Old Testament*, and G. B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry*.

TYPES

Types of psalms are sub-genre classifications. What is now the most common way of classifying the psalms originated with the German scholar Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932) at the beginning of the twentieth century.[16] He was one of the founders of the form critical school of scholarship that sought to understand a given portion of Scripture by analyzing the form in which the writer composed it. Scholars then compared that form with other biblical and contemporary literature from the ancient Near Eastern countries that were Israel's neighbors, particularly Egypt and Mesopotamia. Gunkel classified the psalms into various categories or types (Germ. *gattungen*) by trying to identify the general situation in life (Germ. *sitz im leben*) that brought them into existence, rather than by their content. He proposed seven types: hymns, community laments, songs of the individual, thank offering songs, laments of the individual, entrance liturgies, and royal psalms.[17] Gunkel concluded that most of the psalms were postexilic. Many scholars have followed this form critical approach in their study of the Psalms as well as in other portions of the Old Testament. More recent scholars of the form critical school include Mowinckel, Eissfeldt, Bentzen, Engnell, Oesterley, Robinson, Leslie, Westermann, and Gerstenberger.

Sigmund Mowinckel followed Gunkel but took a more radical approach and proposed that virtually all of the psalms were composed for liturgical or cultic purposes.[18] Claus Westermann, following Mowinckel, took a more mediating position and simplified the types of psalms into two: psalms of lament and psalms of praise. He further subdivided the psalms of lament into either communal or individual, depending on the speaker, and he subdivided the psalms of praise into declarative (communal or individual) or descriptive, depending on the subject matter.[19] Walter Brueggemann refined this form critical approach further. He divided the psalms into those that express orientation to the status quo, those that express disorientation with it, and those that present a new orientation to a better, future life.[20] Longman and Dillard, though not form critics, followed the same basic division but labeled these three types: hymns of joy, laments, and thanksgivings. Other less common types they called psalms of confidence, psalms of remembrance, wisdom psalms, and kingship psalms—which they further divided into psalms that extol God as king, and psalms that extol the ruler of Israel as king.[21]

Most form critical scholars speculated about the origins of the various psalms and concluded that priests wrote most of them late in Israel's history. This has led many conservatives to reject form criticism completely. Nonetheless this school of interpreters has given us some helpful information, namely, the various literary types of psalms that appear in the book.[22]

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[16]Hermann Gunkel, *Ausgewahlte Psalmen*; ibid., *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Approach.*

[17]See Bruce A. Baker, "A Biblical Theology of the Royal Psalms," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 16:49 (December 2012):7-34.

[18]Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*.

[19]Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*.

[20]WalterBrueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*.

[21]Longman and Dillard, pp. 246-52.

[22]See Appendix 1 at the end of these notes for a chart of the psalms by type as understood by several conservative commentators.

Some of the more important types of psalms by literary form are the following. Individual laments are psalms by individuals calling on God for help from distress.[23] National or communal laments are similar but voice a corporate cry for help in view of some national situation. Typically laments begin with an introductory cry, followed by the complaint proper, then a confession of trust, reasons for God to act, petitions, and they end with a vow to praise God.[24]

> "Laments outnumber every other kind of psalm in the Psalter; almost a third of the psalms belong to this category."[25]

> "The psalms of lament are not just random screams in the night; they are the real expressions of pain of real people who exercise real faith in the living God."[26]

> "The psalms of lament are a model of godly response to suffering. The Lord does not expect us to remain stoic when we face suffering. We can pour out our souls to the Lord. However in the middle of our cry, we must remember God's loving care for us in the past so we can willingly trust Him with the future. With this type of response, we can renew our hope in the living Lord."[27]

An individual, rather than a group, spoke the great majority of the psalms. Thanksgiving psalms—sometimes also called psalms of declarative praise—center on some act of deliverance God granted His people. Descriptive praise psalms offer praise to God for Himself or for His general working rather than for a specific instance of His working. The poets wrote the pilgrim psalms, also called songs of ascent, for singing by the Israelites as they made their thrice-yearly pilgrimages up to Jerusalem for the required festival observances there. Royal psalms are those in which the king of Israel is the chief character. Some event in his reign is being described, such as his coronation, wedding, or departure for battle. The enthronement psalms speak of the Lord as the great king fulfilling His role in some way such as reigning or coming to judge.

The messianic psalms are perhaps the most commonly known type. They predict the coming of a messiah. Traditionally interpreters have considered a psalm messianic if, having little or no relationship to its historical context, it anticipated the Messiah or predicted the Messiah.[28] Franz Delitzsch broke these psalms down into five kinds. The first is the purely prophetic, which predicts that a future Davidic king would be the Lord (Ps. 110). Second, the eschatological psalms predict the coming of Messiah and the consummation of His kingdom (Pss. 96—99, et al.). Third, we have the typological-prophetic in which the writer describes his own experience but goes beyond that to

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[23]See Brian L. Webster and David R. Beach, "The Place of Lament in the Christian Life," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:656 (October-December 2007):387-402.

[24]See *The Nelson . . .*, p. 887.

[25]Edward M. Curtis, "Ancient Psalms and Modern Worship," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:615 (July-September 1997):290.

[26]Ronald B. Allen, "Suffering in the Psalms and Wisdom Books," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 142.

[27]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 887.

[28]Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms*, p. 67.

describe what became true of the Messiah (e.g., Ps. 22). Fourth, there are the indirectly messianic psalms composed for a contemporary king but having ultimate fulfillment in Messiah (Pss. 2: 45; 72). Fifth, we have the typically messianic in which the writer was in some way typical of Messiah, but all he wrote in the psalm did not describe Him (e.g., Ps. 34:19-20; 69:25 and 109:8 as used in Acts 1:20).[29] The following seem to be messianic psalms in whole or in part: 2 (cf. Matt. 3:17; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; 7:28; 2 Pet. 1:17); 8 (Matt. 21:15-16; Heb. 2:6-9); 16 (Acts 2:25-28; 13:35); 22 (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34); 34; 40; 41; 45 (Heb. 1:8-9); 68; 69 (John 2:17; 15:25); 72; 96—99; 102; 109; 110; and 118 (Matt. 21:42).[30] Other psalms that some writers identify as messianic include 23, 24, and 89.[31]

Some interpreters think of the imprecatory psalms as a distinct type on the basis of their subject matter. These psalms contain imprecations, or curses, on God's enemies. Most of the imprecations in the psalms occur in only one or two verses in a given psalm. However, there are a few psalms that are almost entirely imprecatory (e.g., Pss. 35, 69, and 109). Bullock wrote that there are at least seven psalms that fall into the category of imprecatory psalms: 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, and 137.[32] Of these, 35, 69, and 109 are the most intense. One writer argued that the imprecations were prophetic judgment proclamations.[33]

The imprecatory psalms have created a problem for some Christians, since Jesus Christ taught His disciples to bless their enemies and not to curse them (Matt. 5:43-44; Luke 6:27-28; cf. Rom. 12:14). In the progress of revelation, it was not easy for the writers of the psalms to see the details of the future distinctly. They could not feel the peace about God's ultimate establishment of justice that modern believers who know their Bibles do. Consequently, when they witnessed injustice and oppression, they did not usually know how God would deal with it, so they called on Him to vindicate Himself immediately. With the coming of Jesus Christ and the added revelation He provided, believers now have a fuller picture of how God will balance the scales of justice. It is therefore inappropriate for us to pray imprecations of the sort we find in the Old Testament.[34] God has recorded them for our benefit, not as examples to follow in their wording but in their spirit of zeal for God's glory. Another writer believed that at times it is legitimate for Christians to pray prayers of imprecation.[35] Some people believe that the psalmists sometimes (not always) went "over the top" and said things they really should not have said in their anger and zeal. We have other examples of such language in Job. The fact that Scripture records what people said and did, even though this went beyond God's will, does not mean that God approved their words and deeds.[36]

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[29]Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:68-71.

[30]See Archer, p. 452.

[31]See also H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, pp. 20-22; *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 601.

[32]Bullock, p. 228.

[33]Alex Luc, "Interpreting the Curses in the Psalms," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:3 (September 1999):395-410.

[34]See Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 880.

[35]John N. Day, "The Imprecatory Psalms and Christian Ethics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:634 (April-June 2002):166-86.

[36]For further study of imprecations see Leupold, pp. 18-20; Kidner, pp. 25-32; Archer, pp. 452-53; Chalmers Martin, "Imprecations in the Psalms," in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament*

Another type of psalm, based on the form in which the writer set it rather than on the subject matter, is the acrostic. In these psalms each verse, or group of verses in the case of Psalm 119, begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalmists adopted this style so the Israelites could memorize and remember the psalm easily. This form also suggests a complete or exhaustive expression of the psalmist's mind on his subject. The acrostic psalms are these: 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145.[37]

QUOTATIONS

The New Testament writers quoted the Book of Psalms more frequently than any other Old Testament book.[38] The "Index of Quotations" in the United Bible Societies' fourth edition of the *Greek New Testament* lists just over 400 quotations from the Psalter, including phrases as well as complete verses. In comparison, this New Testament identified 47 quotations from Isaiah, the second most frequently quoted Old Testament book. Of the 150 psalms, the New Testament quotes 35 of them.

THEOLOGY

The psalms deal primarily with God, man (especially Israel as a covenant community and the individuals in that community), and the resolution of the tension between a holy, transcendent God and sinful, alienated, finite human beings.[39]

VALUES

In addition to the Psalms' value to the New Testament writers, their value as Old Testament texts persists today.

> "The Psalms mirror the faith of Israel. In them we receive windows that enable us to look out on our brothers and sisters in the faith of more than twenty-five hundred years ago. The Psalms invite us to experience how God's people in the past related to Him.[40]
>
> "The Psalter bridges the gap between then and now, the ancient world and the present world, probably better than any other book of the Bible."[41]

Interpretation, pp. 113-32; Roy B. Zuck, "The Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1957); J. Carl Laney, "A Fresh Look at the Imprecatory Psalms," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:549 (January-March 1981):35-45; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of the Psalms," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 257-304; Bullock, pp. 228-38; and Ramesh Richard, *Prayer Against Terrorism?*, pp. 2-15.

[37]Ross, p. 781.

[38]Delitzsch, 1:38, wrote that it is the second most quoted, after Isaiah.

[39]Merrill, pp. 405-6. See also Leupold, pp. 22-26.

[40]Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *Psalms-Song of Songs*, vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 5.

[41]Patrick D. Miller Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms*, p. 22. See Greg Parsons, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Psalms," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:586 (April-June 1990):169-87.

> "If God's people before the Incarnation could have such a faith in the Lord, witnessing to his greatness and readiness to help, how much more should this be true among twentieth-century Christians? The Book of Psalms can revolutionize our devotional life, our family patterns, and the fellowship and the witness of the church of Jesus Christ."[42]
>
> "We are in danger of losing the Psalter in our churches; indeed, many have already lost it, and so it is no accident that many people in our congregations do not know how to pray."[43]
>
> "The distinguishing feature of the Psalms is their devotional character. Whether their matter be didactic, historical, prophetical, or practical, it is made the ground or subject of prayer, or praise, or both."[44]

STRUCTURE

Some scholars have attempted to explain a single holistic structure that they believe the entire Book of Psalms demonstrates.[45] These attempts have so far not convinced most other Psalms scholars.[46]

OUTLINE

I. Book 1: chs. 1—41 (the book of personal experience)
II. Book 2: chs. 42—72 (the book of Elohim)
III. Book 3: chs. 73—89 (the dark book)
IV. Book 4: chs. 90—106 (the book of the King)
V. Book 5: chs. 107—150 (the book of praise)

MESSAGE

The Book of Psalms is an inspired collection of Hebrew poems intended for use in worship. Spirit-directed compilers put them in their present order for several reasons, including authorship and affinity of ideas. The compilers did not organize them in the order in which the psalmists wrote them. Each psalm is the expression of a writer who responded to God in the light of his particular circumstances when he wrote. Consequently, there is no argument or logical progression of thought as the reader makes his or her way through the book. There are connecting or contrasting ideas, and words and phrases that sometimes link two or more psalms together, however. Franz Delitzsch

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[42]VanGemeren, p. 5.

[43]Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Preaching from the Psalms," *Review and Expositor* 81 (1984):443.

[44]Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, pp. 405-6.

[45]E.g., G. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*; idem., *Psalms*, in The NIV Application Commentary.

[46]See the discussion in Longman and Dillard, pp. 252-55. For a deeper though not overwhelming discussion of introductory matters, see VanGemeren, pp. 3-39.

has suggested the connecting link or links of each psalm, with the one that preceded it, in his commentary on the Psalms.

The subject of the Book of Psalms is worship. Worship is the act of offering to God what is due to Him because of who He is. The Hebrew word translated "worship" (*shachah*) means to bow oneself down, or to do obeisance. The psalmists used it to describe prostration before God, or some angel, or another human being. It pictures an attitude of submission to a superior person. This word occurs only 15 times in Psalms with God as the object, but the idea of worshipping God is present in every psalm.

In Psalms, the object of worship is God. Its practitioners are people. Its center is Jerusalem: the place of God's manifest presence. Its primary method is song. The psalmists referred to God as Yahweh, Elohim, or Adonai primarily, though many other titles appear in the book. Those worshipping Him are individuals, kings, nations, and all the earth. His temple (Israel's central sanctuary) and His holy hill (Mt. Zion) were the central places of worship. Fear, awe, and joy are the primary attitudes prominent in this worship.

God's people throughout history have loved the Psalter. There are a number of reasons for its popularity. First, it is a collection of songs that arise out of experiences with which we can all identify. It is very difficult to find any circumstance in life that does not find expression in some psalm or another. Some arose out of prosperity, others out of adversity. Some psalms deal with holiness, and others with sinfulness. Some are laments that bewail the worst of situations, whereas others are triumphant hymns of joy and thanksgiving. Some look back to the past while others look forward to the future.

The psalms are great because their writers composed them out of their most profound experiences. Great poetry arises out of great living. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). They are also great because the writers brought these profound experiences into God's presence. They show how people behave when they are conscious of God—the only truly realistic way to live. Therefore, the permanent value of the psalms lies in their revelation of worship.

There are three great revelations regarding worship in the Book of Psalms: the object of worship, the attitudes of worship, and the activities of worship.

First, the Psalter reveals the person of God, who is the object of worship. The primary revelation of God's character in the psalms is His names. The writers employed dozens of titles and figures of speech to describe God, but the three names of God that they used most are Yahweh, Elohim, and Adonai.[47] Simply from understanding these names, we will want to worship God.

The name "Yahweh" captures the essential being of God. He is who He is (Exod. 3:14). This name occurs more often than any other in the psalms. Essentially it means that God is the eternally self-existent Person who becomes all that His people need. God's being is

[47]See Appendix 2 at the end of these notes for an explanation of some of the more common figures of speech used in the Bible; or see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, for explanations of and references to 217 figures of speech in the Bible.

never the subject of debate in the psalms; the writers assumed His existence. As Yahweh, God is always an adequate resource for whatever His people need, whenever they have needs. That is because the Name Yahweh describes God in covenant relationship with His people. Translators normally render it LORD in English translations. Psalm 139 is perhaps the greatest exposition of the essential being of God, and Psalm 23 the chief revelation of His becoming all that His people need.

The second great name of God in the Psalter is "Elohim." Normally this Hebrew word translates as "God" in our English Bibles. It is a plural word in the Hebrew, which does not necessarily signify plurality of number but immensity. God, as He reveals Himself, is so infinite that no singular word can express Him adequately. "Elohim" suggests God's essential might and the fact that He is extremely powerful. God's strength is not just potential, but kinetic (i.e., in motion). It is latent, but also active. Such power elicited the awe of the psalmists. Psalm 68 is perhaps the greatest revelation of God's essential might in the Psalter, and Psalm 46 sets forth His great power at work most impressively.

The title "Adonai" (Lord in the sense of *Master*) does not occur frequently in the psalms, but the idea it expresses is constantly present. This title expresses the sovereignty of God, the fact that there is no one higher in authority than He. He is the King over the whole universe and the ultimate ruler over Israel. Perhaps Psalm 86 sets forth the sovereignty of God more magnificently than any other psalm.

Whenever a person, king, nation, or race conceives of God as Yahweh, Elohim, or Adonai, the result is worship. We can do nothing else but prostrate ourselves before such a One. That is what the writers of these psalms did as they reflected on their experiences in the light of who God is.

The second great revelation of the Psalter is people's attitudes in worship. Briefly, we see people responding to the revelation of God joyfully, trustfully, and submissively (but occasionally angrily, disappointedly, or quizzically). When we understand that God Himself is an adequate resource for us, regardless of our needs, we should worship by rejoicing. When we appreciate God's mighty power, we should worship Him by trusting Him. When we learn that God is sovereign, we should respond in worship by submitting to Him. When we appreciate God's grace in providing all we need, we should rejoice.

In the psalms, we see joy manifesting itself in love and gratitude. Love and gratitude manifest joy in the following way. We have God's promises of forgiveness if we confess when we sin. Forgiveness for sin is one of God's greatest gifts to humankind. It is not something that we can earn or deserve. It is a gift of God based ultimately on a work that God has done for us through His Son. The penitential root attitude blossoms into adoration for God's grace. The sweetest music comes out of hearts broken by sin, hearts aware of their total bankruptcy before God. The most glorious praises spring from the lips of those who most sense the great gifts God has given to them. This is the reason some of the most radiant Christians are those who suffer the most.

Trust in God's almighty power expresses itself in honesty and courage in the psalms. Fear is the internal response to power, and courage should be its external manifestation. The person who really fears God's power will be open and honest because he or she believes

God will exercise His power to defend him. He will be willing to take risks because he is relying on God's supernatural power to sustain and uphold him. The psalmists expressed themselves, and behaved honestly before God and people, because they believed in His sovereignty. They also faced danger courageously because they believed God could and would provide adequate help for them.

Submission to the sovereignty of God expresses itself in reverence and obedience in the psalms. Reverence is the external evidence of submission to God, and obedience is the core proof of it. The person who really believes that God is the ultimate authority will respect Him. He or she will also yield to God's superior authority submissively. We see the psalmists expressing their reverence for God and bowing humbly to His will throughout the Psalter. Their commitment to trust often followed their frustration.

The third major revelation concerning worship in the psalms is the activities of worship. As we have observed, one's conception of God leads to worship, and one's attitudes shape worship. One's activities also demonstrate worship.

The psalms reveal that worship grows out of something God has done for man. Man does not worship because there is something intrinsic within him that must come out. Worship is always a response to something that God has done. God elicits worship. Man does not initiate it on his own. Throughout the psalms, the psalmists responded to God's dealings with them. God is always the initiator and man the responder. This fact helps us see that God is worthy of worship.

Human response in worship involves opening the soul to God. David's confession in Psalm 32 is a good example of this (cf. 51). He rejoiced in his open relationship with God, especially when he acknowledged his sin. He also received God's gift of pardon. Then he offered praise to God. These are the essential human activities of worship: confession, praise, and thanksgiving.

After God initiates worship, and man responds by worshipping, God becomes to the worshipper all that he or she needs. God is true and faithful in His dealings with worshippers. He becomes for us everything we need when we worship Him. Thus the activities of worship begin and end with God. They begin with His initiating situations in life. They end with His drawing us to Himself. In between we bare our souls, receive His gifts, and offer our praise.

The message of the Psalter then is, "Worship God!" Turn every situation into an occasion for worship. If we are sad, we should worship. If we are glad, we should worship. If we are in the dark, we should worship. If we are in the light, we should worship. The Apostle Paul expressed it this way in Philippians 4:4 and 7: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice. . . . And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." The Book of Psalms closes with this word of exhortation: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord" (Ps. 150:6).[48]

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[48]Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:2:27-39.

"But the dominant message in the Book of Psalms is twofold: (1) God is good, and (2) life is difficult. The life of faith is lived between these two realities."[49]

[49]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 881.

Exposition

As we read the psalms, we should pay attention to what the psalmists said about God. We should notice too what they said about themselves and the people of God. Third, we should look for how the psalmists expressed their emotions to God. Sharing what we feel is important in communicating intimately as well as sharing what we know and think. This will help us to become more transparent people.

I. BOOK 1 CHS. 1—41

Most of the psalms in book 1 are David's. This collection was probably the first and was later included in the canonical Book of Psalms. One might think of this book as "the book of personal experience" since there is so much of that in psalms 1—41. Another feature of this group of psalms is that the name "Yahweh" appears 272 times, whereas the name "Elohim" appears only 15 times in the Hebrew text.[50]

> "It may safely be maintained that the Hebrew text of the Psalter has come down to us in a rather good state of preservation."[51]

PSALM 1

> "The Book of Psalms opens with two psalms without headings. Judging from their general character, it would appear that they were prefixed to the book with the specific purpose of emphasizing certain fundamentals that are of importance in approaching this book. It is plain to those who read the Old Testament Scriptures that law and prophecy are fundamental to the spiritual life of Israel. One is the basis, the other is the essential superstructure. One lays the foundation, the other builds on what is thus laid.
>
> "The first two psalms touch respectively on these two points, emphasizing what the essential attitude on both issues ought to be. Psalm 1 can rightly be said to exemplify the proper attitude toward the law of the Lord. Psalm 2, as it were, gives the essence of prophecy and indicates what place it plays in the life of the true Israel. He who has grasped these two issues aright is well on the way that leads to a right reading of the Psalter."[52]

The first psalm is one of the best known and favored in the Psalter. It summarizes the two paths of life open to people, the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked (cf. Deut. 30:11-20; Jer. 17:5-8). It also deals with God, godly living, and the hope of the godly in view of the Mosaic Covenant promises. Therefore it is an appropriate one to open the

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[50]Leupold, p. 3.
[51]Ibid., p. 15.
[52]Ibid., p. 31.

collection of 150 psalms, and in early times, it was considered to be a prologue to them.[53] The editors probably intended it to be an introduction to the whole Psalter for this reason. Its figures of speech recur throughout the rest of the book. In view of its content, it is a wisdom psalm and a didactic psalm designed to give understanding to the reader (cf. Prov. 2:12-22).

> "Only three psalms, Psalms 1, 19, and 119, can be called Torah psalms in the true sense of the word; that is, their major concentration is the Torah. Torah psalms do not comprise a literary genre of the Psalms, since there is no standard literary pattern comparable to what we have seen with some other literary genres. On the basis of their content, however, they nevertheless form a legitimate category.
>
> "Other psalms dealing with the notion of Torah, although it is not their key idea, are Psalms 18, 25, 33, 68, 78, 81, 89, 93, 94, 99, 103, 105, 111, 112, 147, and 148."[54]

This psalm contrasts the righteous person, who because of his or her behavior, experiences blessing in life, with the unrighteous whose ungodly conduct yields the fruit of sorrow and destruction. VanGemeren gave a structural analysis of each of the psalms.

> "Bible history seems to be built around the concept of 'two men': the 'first Adam' and the 'last Adam' (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15:45)—Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, David and Saul—and Bible history culminates in Christ and Antichrist. Two men, two ways, two destinies."[55]
>
> "The Psalmist saith more to the point about true happiness in this short Psalm than any one of the philosophers, or all of them put together; they did but beat the bush; God hath here put the bird into our hand."[56]

1. The blessed person 1:1-3

1:1 A trilogy of expressions describes the person who is blessed or right with God. The Hebrew word for "man" in this context describes a person, without specifying gender. Each of these is more intense than the former one. These descriptions proceed from being casually influenced by the wicked to cooperating with them in their wickedness. However, this is probably a case of synonymous parallelism describing the totality of evil rather than three specific types of activities in a climactic development (cf. Deut. 6:7).[57]

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[53]E.g., Delitzsch, 1:82.
[54]Bullock, p. 214.
[55]Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry*, p. 85.
[56]John Trapp, quoted in C. H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1:13.
[57]VanGemeren, p. 54.

> ". . . when a man once begins to live in the company of men who are separated from God, both will find themselves becoming involved ever more deeply. But far heavier emphasis is laid on the fact that in his aversion to sin a godly man shuns every form of it at all times and in all places."[58]

"Happy" is a better translation than "blessed" since the Hebrew language has a separate word for "blessed." "Happy" was the Queen of Sheba's exclamation when she saw Solomon's greatness (1 Kings 10:8). It appears 26 times in the Psalter. This blessedness is not deserved but is a gift from God. Even when the righteous do not feel happy they are blessed from God's perspective because He protects them from judgment resulting from the Fall (cf. Gen. 3:15-19). "Blessed" in this verse also occurs in 2:12 forming an *inclusio* binding these two psalms together. Likewise the reference to the "way" in this verse occurs again in 2:11-12.

"Wicked" people willfully persist in evil, "sinners" miss the mark of God's standards and do not care, and "scoffers" make light of God's laws and ridicule what is sacred.

1:2 From describing what the godly person does *not* do, the psalmist proceeded to point out what he *does* do. The godly allows the Word of God (Heb. *torah*, i.e., instruction that comes from God) to shape his conduct rather than the wicked. One expositor saw Jesus Christ as the ultimately godly person profiled in this psalm.[59] His meditation (lit. "to mumble" or "speak to oneself") on it involves prolonged thinking about it that takes place in study and review throughout the day (cf. 4:4).

> "To meditate in God's word is to discourse with ourselves concerning the great things contained in it, with a close application of the mind, a fixedness of thought, till we be suitably affected with those things and experience the savour and power of them in our hearts."[60]

> "Meditation is not the setting apart of a special time for personal devotions, whether morning or evening, but it is the reflection on the Word of God in the course of daily activities (Josh 1:8). Regardless of the time of day or the context, the godly respond to life in accordance with God's word."[61]

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[58]Leupold, p. 34.
[59]Harry A. Ironside, *Studies on Book One of the Psalms*, pp. 8-13.
[60]Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 578.
[61]VanGemeren, p. 55.

> "What digestion is to the body, meditation is to the soul."[62]

The motivation of the godly in this activity is delight; he or she has a desire to listen to and understand what God has revealed (cf. Phil. 2:13). Jesus expounded this idea in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-10).

> "My friend, God has no plan or program by which you are to grow and develop as a believer apart from His Word. You can become as busy as a termite in your church (and possibly with the same effect as a termite), but you won't grow by means of activity. You will grow by meditating upon the Word of God—that is, by going over it again and again in your thinking until it becomes a part of your life. This is the practice of the happy man."[63]

1:3 All who delight in and meditate on God's "law" (i.e., the Word of God; cf. Josh. 1:7; 2 Kings 17:13 21:8; Ps. 78:5; et al.) will prosper like a flourishing fruit tree (cf. 35:5; 92:12-14; Job 21:18; Isa. 29:5; 41:2; Jer. 17:8; Ezek. 47:12; Hos. 13:3; Matt. 3:12). Their fruit will appear at the proper time, not necessarily immediately, and their general spiritual health, represented by the leaves, will be good. Usually the fruit God said He would produce in the lives of most Old Testament believers was physical prosperity (cf. Deut. 28:1-14). The fruit a Christian bears is mainly a transformed character and godly conduct (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). In both cases it is God's blessing on one's words and works. His prosperity is from God's viewpoint, not necessarily from the world's.

> "The man who delights in God's Word, being taught by it, bringeth forth patience in the time of suffering, faith in the day of trial, and holy joy in the hour of prosperity."[64]

The most important part of a tree is its hidden root system because it draws up water and nourishment that feeds the tree. Without a healthy root system a tree will die, and without a healthy "root system" a believer will wilt. Fruit, in biblical imagery, is what is visible to other people, not just what is hidden within a person. It is also what benefits other people, what others can take from us that nourishes them (cf. John 15:1-11). In contrast, leaves are what others simply see and admire.

> "The green foliage is an emblem of faith, which converts the water of life of the divine word into sap and strength, and the fruit, an emblem of works, which gradually ripen

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[62]Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* [NT], 2:542.
[63]McGee, 2:662.
[64]Spurgeon, 1:14.

> and scatter their blessings around; a tree that has lost its leaves, does not bring its fruit to maturity."[65]

2. The wicked 1:4

The term "wicked" (Heb. *rasa'*) usually describes people who do not have a covenant relationship with God. They have little regard for God but live to satisfy their passions. They are not necessarily as evil as they could be, but they have no regard for the spiritual dimension of life, so they are superficial. Chaff is the worthless husk around a head of grain that is light in weight and blows away in the winnowing process. It is neither admirable nor beneficial to others.

> "Here is their character—intrinsically worthless, dead, unserviceable, without substance, and easily carried away."[66]

> "What a drastic picture of futility when life yields nothing more substantial than useless remains scattered so completely as not even to be found when sought!"[67]

3. The judgment 1:5-6

1:5 In the future there will be a winnowing judgment of people in which God will separate the righteous from the wicked (cf. Matt. 13:30). Then He will blow the wicked away (cf. Isa. 2:10-21).

1:6 The instrument of the judgment that will determine the ultimate fate of these two basic kinds of people is God's knowledge (cf. Matt. 7:23). He knows (has intimate, loving concern about) what they have done (cf. Exod. 2:25; 19:4; Rom. 8:29-30). The "way" refers to the whole course of life including what motivates it, what it produces, and where it ends. "Knows" (lit.) or "watches over" (NIV) is the antithesis of "perish" (cf. 31:7; Prov. 3:6).

This whole psalm is a solemn warning that the reader should live his or her life in view of ultimate judgment by God. Not only will the godly way prove the only adequate one then, but it also yields a truly beneficial existence now.[68]

> "It [this psalm] announces that the primary agenda for Israel's worship life is obedience, to order and conduct all of life in accordance with God's purpose and ordering of the creation. The fundamental contrast of this psalm and all of Israel's faith is a moral distinction between righteous and wicked, innocent and guilty, those who conform to God's purpose and

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[65]Delitzsch, 1:86.
[66]Spurgeon, 1:15.
[67]Leupold, p. 37.
[68]See Charles R. Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind, Book I*, pp. 3-15.

> those who ignore those purposes and disrupt the order. Human life is not mocked or trivialized. How it is lived is decisive."[69]

PSALM 2

In this "second psalm" (Acts 13:33), one of the most frequently quoted in the New Testament, David (Acts 4:25) exhorted the pagan nations surrounding Israel to forsake their efforts to oppose the Lord and His anointed king (cf. Acts 4:27-28). He urged them to submit to the authority of the son (Son) whom God has ordained to rule them (cf. 2 Sam. 10). The first and second psalms were always united as one in the rabbinical traditions.[70] As Psalm 1 deals with two ways that individuals may follow, Psalm 2 deals with two ways that nations may follow.[71] Psalm 1 deals with the blessed man, and Psalm 2 deals with the rebellious man.

This is a royal psalm and, more specifically, a messianic psalm. The New Testament writers quoted from the royal psalms at least 27 times: from Psalm 2, 18 times, from Psalms 18 and 45, once each, and from Psalm 110, seven times.

> "Obviously many years and various levels of hope intervened between the psalm and the first-century application. The messianic vision, while not complete in the Psalms, develops somewhere in between. We can see this development more clearly in the prophets than in the Psalter. In fact, there is a self-contained messianism in the prophets that we do not find in the Psalms. In contrast, the messianic application of the Psalms develops within the interpretive process of the Jewish and Christian communities, although it is important to recognize that the raw material for the messianic vision is already laid out in the Psalms and is not merely an invention of those communities."[72]

The messianic psalms may be divided into two groups: the typically messianic and the directly messianic. The directly messianic psalms are prophecies about Christ alone and do not have reference to any preceding person. The typically messianic psalms refer to an actual situation that existed in the days of some Israelite king, who ruled as Yahweh's representative and typified some aspect of Christ or His reign. Psalm 2 seems to be typically messianic, and the king in view is David.[73]

> "If you are thinking only of yourself as you read these Psalms you will never see what the book is really taking up, but once you understand something of God's prophetic counsel, once you enter into His purpose in Christ Jesus for the people of Israel and the Gentile nations, you will realize how marvelously this book fits in with the divine program."[74]

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[69]Brueggemann, pp. 38-39.
[70]See Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, p. 59.
[71]Kyle M. Yates Jr., "The Psalms," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 496.
[72]Bullock, p. 183.
[73]See Leupold, pp. 42-44, for a defense of this interpretation.
[74]Ironside, p. 16.

1. The nations' rebellion 2:1-3

David expressed amazement that the nations would try to overthrow the Lord and the king He had placed on Israel's throne to serve as His vice-regent. If Israel's kings submitted to the throne in heaven, they enjoyed God's blessing and power. To the extent that they proved faithful to God, they carried out the will and plan of God on earth.

2:1 David set forth his amazement in the form of a rhetorical question. He could not believe that the nations would try to do something that was sure to fail. It was senseless to reject God's rule and ruler (cf. Acts 4:25-28; Rom. 1:20-32). The people in the first part of Psalm 1 delight in the law, but the people in the first part of Psalm 2 defy the law.

2:2 When the nations opposed God's vice-regent, they set themselves against the Lord Himself (cf. Acts 4:25-26). The term "Anointed" is really "Messiah" (Heb. *masiah*), which in Greek translates to "Christ" (*christos*). Every Israelite king anointed by a prophet was a messiah. Though we usually think of Jesus as the Messiah, He was the most faithful of many "messiahs" in Israel's history. Since this psalm deals with Israel's king it is a royal psalm, as are psalms 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, and 144. The godly meditate on God's words (1:1), but these wicked rulers meditated on rebellion.

> "Oh, that men were half as careful in God's service to serve Him wisely as His enemies are to attack His kingdom craftily."[75]

2:3 The nations did not want to continue to submit to the rule of God's vice-regent, who was originally probably David himself (cf. 2 Sam. 8; 10). They wanted to be free of the restraints that bound their freedom: the taxes and limitations on them that David had imposed.

> "All of David's wars were defensive."[76]

In the last days, the nations will be in rebellion against all of God's imposed restraints. Today, people want to break the marriage bands that God has imposed on humanity. They want to cast away the cords of the Ten Commandments that restrict their conduct. They want to do as they please.

2. The Lord's resolution 2:4-6

"This psalm is divided more like a television program than a play. It is presented as if there were a camera on earth and one in heaven."[77]

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[75]Spurgeon, 1:16.
[76]Leupold, p. 47.
[77]McGee, 2:665.

2:4 David envisioned God as ruler over all, sitting relaxed on His royal throne in heaven—not having risen from it in angry distress—not at all threatened or worried about the plan of the nations, but laughing at their futility. The figure of God sitting as sovereign ruler of all on His throne is a common personification that the psalmists used (cf. 9:11; 22:3; 29:10; 55:19; 102:12; 113:5; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26; Rev. 4:2; 5:1). This is the only place in Scripture where the writer described God as laughing.

> "This tautology, or repetition of the same thing ["He who sits in the heavens laughs, The LORD scoffs at them"], is a sign of the thing being established: according to the authority of the patriarch Joseph (Gen. 41:32), . . ."[78]

2:5 God also spoke to the nations. What He said, He spoke in anger, because they had refused to submit to the authority of His king, who was an extension of Himself.

2:6 Because God had installed His king on the throne of Israel, any rebellion against David would prove futile ultimately. God established the kings of Israel—with greater or less stability on their earthly thrones—depending on their submission to the throne in heaven. David was very faithful to represent God, though not completely faithful, so God established his throne quite solidly, which involved ability to control the nations around him. Jesus Christ was completely faithful to carry out God's will on earth. He will, therefore, completely dominate His enemies. Other prophets also referred to the coming Messiah as David (cf. Is. 55:3-4; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:24-25; 37:24-25).

"Zion" is the name of the Canaanite city built on Mount Moriah that David conquered (2 Sam. 5:7). It became known as Jerusalem. Later, "Zion" was the term used to refer to the top area of that mount where the temple stood. It occurs frequently in the psalms as a poetic equivalent of Jerusalem, especially the future Jerusalem.

3. The king's declaration 2:7-9

Verses 6 and 7 are the climax of the psalm, the answer sought in verses 1-5 and expounded in verses 8-12.[79]

2:7 David's reference to the Lord's decree declaring David "God's son" goes back to the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:5, 14). There the Lord described the relationship He would have with David and the kings that would succeed him as that of a father with a son. This communicated to David his legitimate right to rule over Israel. The figure connotes warm affection rather than simply a formal relationship. In the ancient world a king's son

[78]Martin Luther, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:17.
[79]Kidner, p. 51.

usually succeeded his father on the throne. In Israel, God wanted the kings to regard Him as their Father. From the giving of the Davidic Covenant onward, the term "son," when used of one of the Davidic kings, became a messianic title. David saw himself as the object of God's paternal love and expressed that in this verse. It was in this sense that Jesus spoke of Himself as the Son of God. That was a claim to be the Messiah.[80]

> "The two names of the future One in use in the time of Jesus, *ho Cristos* ["the Christ"] and *ho huios tou theou* ["the Son of God"], John i. 50 [*sic* 49], Mat. xxvi. 63 (in the mouth of Nathanael and of the High Priest) refer back to this Ps. and Dan. ix. 25, just as *ho huios tou anthropou* ["the Son of Man"] incontrovertibly refers to Ps. viii. 5 [*sic* 4] and Dan. vii. 13."[81]

The "today" in view then is not the day of David's birth but his coronation, the day he became God's "son" by becoming king (cf. Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). Since this psalm deals with a royal coronation, scholars often refer to it as a coronation or enthronement psalm. God begot David in this metaphor, not by creating him, though He did that too, but by setting him on the throne of Israel. The Apostle Paul taught that Jesus fulfilled this "day" on the first Easter, when Christ arose from the dead (Acts 13:33; cf. Rom. 1:4).

> "This is a verse that the Jehovah Witnesses use a great deal. I wish they would listen long enough to find out what it means. It would help them a great deal to find it has no reference to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ—which they would see if only they would turn to the New Testament and let the Spirit of God interpret [Acts 13:33]."[82]

2:8 The Father invited His son, David, to ask for his inheritance. As the great universal King, God promised to give him all the nations of the earth for his inheritance (cf. v. 1; 2 Sam. 7:10-11, 15-16). David personally never ruled the whole world, but David's Son who would be completely faithful to His heavenly Father will do so someday (i.e., in the Millennium).

> "The Old Testament knows no kingship to which is promised the dominion of the world and to which sonship is ascribed (2 Sam. vii. 14; Ps. lxxxix. 28), but the Davidic."[83]

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[80]See Gerald Cooke, "The Israelite King as Son of God," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 73:2 (June 1961):202-25; and Eugene H. Merrill, "The Book of Ruth: Narration and Shared Themes," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):136-37.

[81]Delitzsch, 1:91.

[82]McGee, 2:668.

[83]Ibid., 1:90.

A non-messianic interpretation, which I do not accept, sees God giving *the Jew* (David's descendant) "the nations as thy inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as thy possession" *in Christ*. In other words, with the breaking down of the barrier that separated Jew and Gentile, which Christ's death achieved, the Jews now have "inherited" and "possess" the Gentiles, and together—in one body—they make up the church.[84]

This verse is often used (inappropriately) as a challenge to participate in Christian missions.

> "Do you think this is the gospel of the grace of God we are to preach today? It is not. This passage hasn't any reference to Christ's first coming. This speaks of His second coming, when He comes to this earth to *judge*."[85]

2:9 God will deal with all rebellious peoples severely when He sets up the Messiah on His throne.[86] It was customary for the Egyptian Pharaoh to smash votive pottery jars that represented rebellious cities or nations with his scepter.[87] Perhaps that practice was the source of the imagery used in this verse. "Rule" (NIV) really means "break" (Heb. *ra'a'*). The emphasis in this verse is on the putting down of rebels rather than the rule that will follow that subjugation. "Rod" describes a shepherd's staff, a fitting scepter for Him who is the Shepherd of all humankind (cf. 23:4; Gen. 49:10; Rev. 2:27; 11:15-18; 12:5; 19:15).

> "Those who will not bend must break. Potters' vessels are not to be restored if dashed in pieces, and the ruin of sinners will be hopeless if Jesus shall smite them."[88]

4. The psalmist's exhortation 2:10-12

2:10 In view of the inevitability of judgment for rebellion, David exhorted all the nations to submit before the wrath of the great King led Him to smite them. The leaders of these nations would be wise to bow in submission not only to David, but, what is more important, to the King behind him in heaven.

> "The author [David] has no desire to see men suffer. He does not gloat over the destruction of his foes. He was

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[84]See J. Armitage Robinson, *St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 62. This writer later (p. 117) identified the Messiah as the "Son" in view.

[85]McGee, 2:669.

[86]See George A. Gunn, "Psalm 2 and the Reign of the Messiah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:676 (October-December 2012):427-42.

[87]Ross, p. 792.

[88]Spurgeon, 1:18.

> merely expressing in strong terms the certainty of the victory of the cause of the Lord."[89]

2:11 They should respond like the righteous: by worshipping (serving), reverencing (fearing), rejoicing, and trembling before "the LORD (cf. Heb. 12:28).

2:12 "Kissing" the son (NIV) describes an act of submissive homage to the king (cf. 1 Sam. 10:1; 1 Kings 19:20; Hos. 13:2).[90] The custom of kissing the pope's ring pictures the same thing.

> "The late Dr. George Gill used to tell us in class, "'Kiss the son" is the Old Testament way of saying, ". . . Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved . . ." (Acts 16:31)."'[91]

The human king and "the Son" of God enjoy close association in this whole psalm. Their wrath and their pleasure are different only in the spheres in which they operate, the local and the cosmic. The nations would serve the Lord as they served His son, the king of Israel. Only by taking refuge in His anointed, rather than rebelling against him, could they avoid the wrath of God.

"'Trust' is the characteristic Old Testament word for the N.T. 'faith' and 'believe.' It occurs 152 times in the O.T., and is the rendering of Hebrew words signifying *to take refuge* (e.g., Ruth 2:12); *to lean on* (e.g., Ps. 56:3); *to roll on* (e.g., Ps. 22:8); *to wait for* (e.g., Job 35:14)."[92]

Psalm 1 opened with a benediction, and Psalm 2 closes with one.

The Apostle Peter saw in the opposition of Israel's leaders to Jesus a parallel with the refusal of the nations' leaders in David's day to submit to David's authority (Acts 2:22-36). The writer to the Hebrews also saw a fulfillment of the coronation of God's "son" in Jesus' resurrection and ascension (Heb. 1:5; cf. Heb. 5:5). By that exaltation, Paul wrote, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God (cf. Rom. 1:4). In another eternal sense, of course, Jesus was always God's Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; 2 Pet. 1:17). When God the Father instructs His Son to ask for His inheritance, He will then send Jesus back into the world (i.e., back to earth; Heb. 1:6). Then the Anointed One will smash His enemies and rule over them with absolute control (cf. Rev. 19:11-21), but those who submit to Him will experience His protection and great joy (cf. Rev. 20:1-7).

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[89]Leupold, pp. 53-54.

[90]See Chisholm, p. 266, n. 16, for discussion of the textual problem involving "son."

[91]McGee, 2:670.

[92]*The New Scofield* . . ., p. 602. See also Ronald B. Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy: A New Song for a New Kingdom*, pp. 155-72.

> "The 2nd Psalm gives the order of the establishment of the kingdom. It is in six parts: (1) The rage and the vain imagination of the Jews and Gentiles against the LORD and His Anointed (vv. 1-3). The inspired interpretation of this is in Acts 4:25-28, which asserts its fulfillment in the crucifixion of Christ. (2) The derision of the LORD (v. 4), that men should suppose it possible to set aside His covenant (2 Sam. 7:8-17) and oath (Ps. 89:34-37). (3) The vexation (v. 5) fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70, and the dispersion of the Jews at that time; yet to be fulfilled more completely in the tribulation (Mt. 24:29 [*sic* 15-20]) which immediately precedes the return of the King (Mt. 24:30). (4) The establishment of the rejected King upon Zion (v. 6). (5) The subjection of the earth to the King's rule (vv. 7-9). And (6) the present appeal to the world powers (vv. 10-12)."[93]

PSALM 3

> "After certain fundamental issues such as the importance of the law of the Lord in the life of a man of God (Ps. 1) or the ultimate victory of the Messiah (Ps. 2) have been set into the foreground, it is very proper that a prayer book offer a morning hymn (Ps. 3) and an evening hymn (Ps. 4)."[94]

The title of this individual lament psalm identifies the writer as David. It also uses the word "psalm" (Heb. *mismor*, i.e., a poem set to musical accompaniment) for the first of 57 times in the psalm titles. All but four of the psalms in Book 1 of the Psalter identify David as their writer, all except Psalms 1, 2, 10, and 33. The occasion of his writing this one was his flight from Absalom (2 Sam. 15—18). Fourteen psalms record the historical episodes from which they sprang (Pss. 3, 7, 18, 30, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142).

> "Is any afflicted with undutiful disobedient children? David was; and yet that did not hinder his joy in God, nor put him out of tune for holy songs."[95]

In 1905, J. W. Thirtle proposed the theory that some of the titles, which appear at the beginning of some of the psalms, were originally postscripts at the end of the preceding psalm. He believed copyists unfortunately moved them. He based this theory on the fact that some Egyptian and Akkadian hymns ended with postscripts that contained the kinds of notations found in some of the psalm titles. Not many conservative Bible scholars have agreed with Thirtle's theory.[96]

In Psalm 3, David voiced his confidence that God would protect him, since he was the Lord's chosen king. This is the first of many prayers in the Psalms. In Psalm 2 the

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[93]*The New Scofield* . . ., pp. 601-2.
[94]Leupold, p. 58.
[95]Henry, p. 580.
[96]J. W. Thirtle, *The Titles of the Psalms*.

enemies are foreign nations and kings, but in Psalm 3 they are the rebellious people of Israel.

Ironside, who believed there was a great deal of prophecy in the Psalms, wrote that in psalms 3—7 "we have set forth in a peculiar way the sufferings that the remnant of Israel will endure in the days of the great tribulation. But they also apply to God's people at any time while waiting for the coming again of the rejected King."[97]

> "This psalm may be divided into four parts of two verses each. In the first two verses, you have David making a complaint to God concerning his enemies; he then declares his confidence in the Lord (3-4), sings of his safety in sleep (5-6), and strengthens himself for future conflict (7-8)."[98]

1. Present danger 3:1-2

David began by lamenting his situation: enemies surrounded him. His threefold complaint is synthetic parallelism. In synthetic parallelism, the parts of a statement complement one another to create a harmonious desired effect. Here it seemed to David that everyone was against him. As David grew older, people in Israel increasingly turned away from him, believing that God had abandoned him (cf. 2 Sam. 15:13). Absalom had won the hearts and support of many in the kingdom (2 Sam. 15:6).

"Deliverance" is literally "salvation" (Heb. *yeshua*) and appears about 136 times in Psalms. Most references to "deliverance" or "salvation" in the Old Testament have physical deliverance from some bad situation in view, rather than spiritual deliverance to eternal life. Probably one of the most distressing things for David was that so many of his people had turned against him is such a short time.

> "The assumption is that all men are agreed that David had himself done things whereby he forfeited the right to expect help of God, and so God will not consider his petitions."[99]

The word "Selah," which occurs 71 times in the psalms, was probably a musical notation. Israel's leaders may have added it sometime after David wrote the psalm when they incorporated it into public worship, or the writer himself may have included it as part of his original composition. "Selah" evidently indicated when the worshippers were to "lift up" their voices or their hands, since "Selah" seems to come from the Hebrew word *salah*, meaning "to lift up" or "to elevate." Another view is that it means the joining in of the orchestra, or a reinforcement of the instruments, or even a transition from softer to louder.[100] For us, it is a notice to "stop, look, and listen."[101]

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[97]Ironside, p. 27.
[98]Spurgeon, 1:20.
[99]Leupold, p. 61.
[100]Delitzsch, 1:103; Leupold, p. 61.
[101]McGee, 2:672.

2. Present deliverance 3:3-6

3:3 David believed that God had not abandoned him, and he regarded Him as his real source of protection, his "shield." This figure of God as Protector is common in the psalms (cf. 7:10; 18:2, 30; 28:7; 33:20; 59:11; 84:11; 115:9-11; 119:114; 144:2). "My glory" reflects the honor of serving the eternal God who ruled gloriously over His kingdom. The king felt confident that God would restore him to his throne. The expression "lift the head" means to restore to dignity and position and reflects confidence in the Lord (cf. Gen. 40:13, 20; 2 Kings 25:27 [AV]). The opposite occurs in 2 Samuel 15:30. The basis for David's confidence was the Lord's choice of him as Israel's king and His not choosing Absalom. It was not his knowledge of the future or his military might.

3:4-5 David viewed God's preservation of him through the night, before he wrote this psalm, as a token confirmation of God's complete deliverance from Absalom. The king had petitioned God in prayer for safety, and the Lord had answered from Mount Zion—where David had pitched a tent for the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6:17; cf. Ps. 2:6). The Lord's answer was His protection through the night (cf. 2 Sam 17:16, 21-22). Perhaps David wrote this psalm the morning after his band crossed the Jordan River (cf. 2 Sam. 15:17).

3:6 On the basis of past deliverance, David received confidence that God would give him final victory over his thousands of enemies.

> "The thing that gives you courage is to fear God. If you fear God, then you have no man to fear."[102]

> "A Selah here would have savored of proud boastfulness."[103]

3. Ultimate victory 3:7-8

3:7 The writer continued to pray for complete deliverance. One meaning of the Hebrew word translated "save" (salvation) is "room to breathe." David was asking God to give him room to breathe. Evidently David was so certain that God would save him that he described his enemy as already defeated. Perhaps he was referring to God's faithfulness in defeating former enemies. The Hebrew verbs permit either interpretation. The imagery is very graphic and even somewhat grotesque from the viewpoint of a modern reader, but Hebrew poets often expressed their thoughts in strong, vivid terms.

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[102]Ibid., 2:673.

[103]Leupold, p. 63.

> "The enemies are conceived of as monsters given to biting, and the picture of their fate is fashioned according to this conception."[104]

3:8 The conclusion contains a testimony from the writer that should serve as a lesson to the reader (cf. Jon. 2:9), and a final prayer. In view of the content of this psalm, the *blessing* on God's people that David may have had in mind could be rescue from their enemies when they call on Him. Rather than ending this psalm with a curse on his enemies, David interceded for God's people, even those of them who had been led astray and deceived (cf. Luke 23:34). In this he proved himself to be a faithful servant leader.

This encouraging psalm teaches us that when God's elect call on Him for deliverance from enemies who are behaving contrary to the will of God, they can count on His salvation.

PSALM 4

Many students of the psalms have recognized that Psalm 4 is very closely akin to Psalm 3 in both subject matter and structure.[105] It is an individual lament with motifs characteristic of psalms of confidence. Bullock saw this type of psalm as a distinct genre (including psalms 4, 16, 23, 27, 62, and 73) and called these psalms individual psalms of trust.

> "Unlike the psalms of thanksgiving, which state the crisis and also add a word of assurance that the crisis has passed, this group of psalms makes their declaration of trust in the Lord, but do not always clarify the occasion that provoked the statement of confidence."[106]

> "Somewhere in the shadows of the psalms of trust trouble is lurking."[107]

David may have written this psalm on the same occasion as the previous one or near then. It is an evening hymn (v. 8). Perhaps it occurs after Psalm 3 in the Psalter because of these similarities.

Many of the psalms begin with instructions concerning how the Israelites were to use the psalm in public worship, as this one does. As mentioned previously, these notations are very old. They usually constitute the first verse of the psalm in the Hebrew Bible. This authority suggests their divine inspiration.

In this psalm, David warned his enemies not to sin against God by opposing His anointed king.

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[104]Delitzsch, 1:108.
[105]See Appendix 3 at the end of these notes for a list of structural markers.
[106]Bullock, p. 166.
[107]Ibid.

1. Prayer to God 4:1

David called on God to hear and answer his prayer. He appealed to God as the righteous One who had delivered him from former distress. God is righteous in Himself, but He also does what is right for His children, namely, come to their rescue when they are in need (cf. 25:4-5; Isa. 45:13). The terms used to describe relief from distress picture moving out of a tight corner into an open space. The NASB, "Thou hast relieved me," is a better translation of the Hebrew perfect tense than the NIV, "Give me relief."

> "All the notice God is pleased to take of our prayers, and all the returns he is pleased to make to them, must be ascribed, not to our merit, but purely to his mercy."[108]

2. Warning for enemies 4:2-5

4:2 David's enemies stand in contrast to God; they were sinners, but He was righteous. If they were the aristocrats who supported Absalom,[109] or whoever they were, they were trying to turn David's honor as a godly king into a bad reputation with their lies (cf. 2 Sam. 15:3). They seem to have been despising his position as king. They pursued vanity and deception. "Deception" (NASB) refers to their lies and is preferable to the NIV translation "false gods." David's questions reflect his amazement at their foolishness.

> "Those that love the world, and seek the things that are beneath, love vanity, and seek lies."[110]

> "The *Selah* or 'forte' that follows here does not appear so much to mark a division of strophes, as is so frequently the case, but a pause in the development of the thought that would allow his warning to sink home."[111]

4:3 David was godly (Heb. *hasid*) because he was the object of God's election for a special purpose. His godliness was the result of God's calling, not the reason for it. Because the Lord had set him aside for a special purpose of His own (i.e., sanctified, "set apart," him) David was confident God would hear his prayer.

4:4 David urged his enemies on the basis of his calling by God (v. 3) not to give way to sin in their anger against the king (cf. Eph. 4:26). They needed to tremble with fear and stop sinning. They would be wise to remain still as they meditated on their opposition to David, while lying in bed at night,

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[108]Henry, p. 581.
[109]Delitzsch, 1:113.
[110]Henry, p. 581.
[111]Leupold, p. 68.

rather than getting up and opposing him. Opposing the Lord's anointed would constitute sin. It would be better for them to submit to God by submitting to His agent, King David.

4:5 Righteous sacrifices are those offered with a proper spirit of submission to God and His king (cf. 2 Sam. 15:12). Rather than opposing, David's adversaries should trust.

3. Confidence in God 4:6-8

4:6 The comment of many people, possibly including some of his own faithful followers, that David quoted reflects the spirit of discontent with present conditions that had led the enemies to oppose the king (cf. 3:2).

> "The Jewish Publication Society version reads, 'O for good days!' It's well been said that 'the good old days' are a combination of a bad memory and a good imagination."[112]

The desire of these complainers for good was legitimate. David asked God to show them good by blessing them. Causing God's face to shine on His people is a figure of speech for bestowing His favor on them (cf. 31:16; 44:3; 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19; 119:135). Promised covenant blessings would accompany God's presence (cf. Num. 6:25).

4:7 Knowing he was God's chosen servant and that those who sought to overthrow him were acting contrary to the will of God brought great joy to David's heart. He said he felt more joy than he experienced during Israel's harvest festivals, that were some of the happiest occasions in the year.

> "Christ in the heart is better than corn in the barn or wine in the vat."[113]

4:8 He could rest and sleep peacefully with this knowledge (cf. 3:5). Even though many sinners opposed him, he was right with his righteous God.

> "A quiet conscience is a good bedfellow."[114]

> "My friend, do you need a sleeping pill at night? Have you ever tried Psalm 4? It is lots better than any brand of sleeping pill you have used."[115]

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[112]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 95.
[113]Spurgeon, 1:24.
[114]Ibid.
[115]McGee, 2:674.

> David knew that God would protect him (cf. 5:12). David's name means "beloved," and his words in this verse express his appreciation for the fact that he was beloved by the Lord.

The elect of God can experience true joy and peace—even though the ungodly may oppose them—because He will protect and provide for them (cf. Gal. 5:22; Rom. 14:17).

> "As an expression of confidence in God, the psalm helps the reader to meditate on God's fatherly care and to leave the troubles and causes of anxiety in his hands. Here the psalmist teaches us that in our walk with God he can bring us to the point where we can sleep without fear."[116]

PSALM 5

This is another prayer of David that arose out of opposition by enemies (cf. Pss. 3, 4), as is clear from the content. In contrast to Psalm 4, this one is a morning prayer. The Jews regarded each new day as beginning with sundown. Both are individual laments that contain elements of confidence, but this one also has characteristics of a community lament (vv. 11-12) and an imprecation. It was written in the *qinah* meter (3+2), which gives the psalm a limping or awkward feeling when read. This feature adds emotional impact to the words.

1. Prayer to be heard 5:1-3

David cried out to God to listen to his prayer that arose out of great concern. His references to praying in the morning show the earnestness of his petition and his felt need for God's help. The first thing David did when he awoke was to pray to God because he sensed his need for God's assistance very keenly.

> "Prayer to Him is his first work as he begins the day. . . . As the priests, with the early morning, lay the wood and pieces of the sacrifices of the *Tamid* upon the altar, so he brings his prayer before God as a spiritual sacrifice and looks out for an answer . . ."[117]

> ". . . we are the fittest for prayer when we are in the most fresh, and lively, and composed frame, got clear of the slumbers of the night, revived by them, and not yet filled with the business of the day. We have then most need of prayer."[118]

The implication of David's words is that an injustice had been committed. He viewed Yahweh as his King, who could deliver him, and as his God, who was his Father. VanGemeren regarded "my God" as the Old Testament equivalent of "Abba Father."[119]

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[116]VanGemeren, p. 80.
[117]Delitzsch, 1:121.
[118]Henry, p. 582.
[119]Ibid., p. 87. See also his excursus on Yahweh as God, pp. 91-96.

2. Praise for God's holiness 5:4-7

5:4-6 David was aware that the One whom he petitioned was absolutely upright. Consequently those who are boastful and presumptuous cannot count on standing before Him and finding favor in His eyes.

> "Rest assured, Christ will not live in the parlor of our hearts if we entertain the devil in the cellar of our thoughts."[120]

God hates and destroys liars, deceivers, and murderers.

> "The LORD 'hates' the wicked in the sense that he despises their wicked character and deeds and actively opposes and judges them for their wickedness. See Ps 11:5."[121]

> ". . . if He did not hate evil (xi. 5 [*sic* 4]), His love would not be a holy love."[122]

> "If the Jews cursed more bitterly than the Pagans, this was, I think, at least in part because they took right and wrong more seriously. For if we look at their railings we find they are usually angry not simply because these things have been done to them but because these things are manifestly wrong, are hateful to God as well as to the victim."[123]

5:7 David did not claim a right to stand before God and to present his petitions on the basis of his own righteousness. He believed God would be merciful to him because God had made promises to bless David and his house (2 Sam. 7). The king believed God would be loyal to His servant. "Lovingkindness" (NASB) or "mercy" (NIV) means "loyal love" (Heb. *hesed*). The house and temple in view refer to the tabernacle David had pitched for the ark in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:17; cf. 1 Sam. 1:7, 9). Rather than behaving arrogantly like the wicked, David prostrated himself before the Lord in worship. This posture expressed an attitude of humility and vulnerability in God's presence.

3. Prayer for guidance 5:8-12

5:8 Essentially what David asked for was guidance in the righteous path God trod; he did not want to walk in the way of the wicked (vv. 4-6; cf. Ps. 1). He wanted to clearly see the righteous way to live so he would not wander from it. Departure from it was a possibility because of the influence of the wicked.

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[120]Spurgeon, 1:27.
[121]The NET Bible note on 5:5.
[122]Delitzsch, 1:122.
[123]C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 30.

5:9 David mentioned a few of the sins of the wicked. They were untrustworthy in their speech. They determined to destroy rather than to edify. Their words led to death, and they were deceitful flatterers (cf. Rom. 3:13).

5:10 The king asked "God" (Elohim, the "Strong One") to hold the wicked guilty rather than let them escape the consequences of their sins. He asked that they be snared in their own traps, and that they be thrust out, probably from their positions of influence and even ultimately from God's presence. This was a legitimate request because they had rebelled against the King in heaven by behaving contrary to His will.

> "His prayer for their destruction comes not from a spirit of revenge, but from a spirit of prophecy, by which he foretold that all who rebel against God will certainly be destroyed by their own counsels."[124]

5:11-12 On the other hand, those who love God can count on His blessing and protection (cf. 4:8). They will respond to His care with joyful singing in praise of Him. This is the first of many references to singing in the Book of Psalms. "Thy name," an expression found over 100 times in the Psalter, refers to the character and attributes of God as He has revealed these to human beings. The whole psalm finds its focus in the faith expressed in verse 12. The Hebrew word for "shield" here (v. 12, *sinoh*) describes a very large shield, like the one Goliath's shield-bearer carried (1 Sam. 17:7).

> "A shield, in war, guards only one side, but the favour of God is to the saints a defence [*sic*] on every side; like the hedge about Job, round about, so that, while they keep themselves under the divine protection, they are entirely safe and ought to be entirely satisfied."[125]

We who are God's people should seek God's help in prayer diligently, so we may perceive and walk in God's ways of righteousness. When we do so walk, we will experience His joy, protection, and fellowship—rather than sharing the fate of the wicked.[126]

PSALM 6

Many interpreters consider this one of the penitential psalms in which David repented for some sin he had committed and for which he was suffering discipline (cf. Pss. 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).[127] However, it is an unusual penitential psalm in that it does not mention sin. This is the first of the seven penitential psalms.

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[124]Henry, pp. 582-83.
[125]Ibid., p. 583.
[126]See Swindoll, pp. 16-26.
[127]E.g., Leupold, p. 83; Spurgeon, 1:31. See the excursus on the penitential psalms in Chisholm, pp. 301-2.

> "It was the practice of the early Christians to sing and read the [penitential] psalms on Ash Wednesday as part of their penance for sin. In a strict sense, however, it is not a penitence psalm, for there is no confession of sin or prayer for forgiveness. The psalm is now categorized as an *individual lament* psalm."[128]

Other individual lament psalms are 3—5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 22—23, 27, 31—32, 35, 38—39, 41, 51, 57, 63, 69, 71, 88, 102—103, and 130.

> "The enmity of the ungodly on this occasion awakens in this man David a sense of his being under the wrath of God. This conviction then weighs so terribly upon his mind that he fails in health and becomes physically much distressed. The physical ailment seems definitely to be the outcome of his spiritual pain."[129]

> "If the previous psalms and prayers had to do with morning [Ps. 3] and evening [Ps. 4], this psalm has to do with the darkest night."[130]

We do not know what David did to bring on this illness that almost resulted in his death or how this incident fits into the Scriptural record of his life. Having been chastened by the Lord, David asked for forgiveness. Then, with the assurance that God had heard him, he warned his adversaries to leave him alone because God was about to shame them.

> ". . . the psalm gives words to those who scarcely have the heart to pray, and brings them within sight of victory."[131]

> ". . . it expresses at once the sorrow (verses 3, 6-7), the humiliation (verses 2, 4), and the hatred of sin (verse 8), which are the unfailing marks of the contrite spirit when it turns to God."[132]

1. Plea for relief 6:1-3

6:1 A more literal translation of this verse would be, "O Lord, not in Your anger rebuke me; not in Your wrath chasten me." By putting the negative first, David emphasized the manner of the Lord's discipline. David knew his was no ordinary illness, but God had sent it as the consequence of some sin. He felt God was dealing with him very severely and despaired of enduring much more suffering. Sometimes the Lord's discipline can be so harsh that we may conclude, falsely, that He is angry with us. Sometimes He chastens us to punish (discipline) us for our sins, but sometimes He does so to purify and to prove our love for Him (e.g., Job 1—2).

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[128]VanGemeren, p. 96.
[129]Leupold, p. 83.
[130]McGee, 2:677.
[131]Kidner, p. 61. Cf. John 12:27.
[132]Spurgeon, 1:31.

> "Whither else should a child go with his complaints, but to his father?"[133]

6:2 The king then expressed his request positively. He begged for relief from his extreme discomfort. David spoke of his bones as representing his whole body (cf. 31:10; 32:3; 38:3; 42:10; 102:3, 5). This is a figure of speech called synecdoche in which the writer uses a prominent part in place of the whole. It is a sad condition when one feels pain in his body and in his soul at the same time.

6:3 His suffering was not just physical. It had led to the distress of his soul (Heb. *nephesh*, entire life) as well. "How long?" expresses the frustration he felt. This figure of speech is called *aposiopesis* (cf. 90:13; 35:25 [margin]; 75:6).

2. Prayer for deliverance 6:4-5

6:4 David first appealed for deliverance from his ailment, claiming God's loyal love to him. God had promised to bless David and had delivered him many times before. The king besought Him to prove faithful to His character and save him again.

6:5 The second reason David cited was this. If he died, he could not give God public praise for delivering him, and God would therefore not receive as much honor among His people as He would if He spared David's life. Believers in David's time had some revelation of life after death (cf. Job 19:25). David's expression here does not deny that knowledge. He was saying God would lose praise among the living if David died. Sheol was the place where Old Testament saints believed the spirits of the dead went. This term often occurs in the Old Testament as a synonym for death and the grave.

3. Lament over illness 6:6-7

David described his condition in extreme (hyperbolic) language to indicate how terrible he felt.

> "Few men have taken their sins so seriously."[134]

Evidently David's adversaries had been responsible for his condition to some extent, perhaps by inflicting a wound.

> "From my own experience and pastoral ministry, I've learned that sickness and pain either make us better or bitter, and the difference is *faith*."[135]

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[133]Henry, p. 583.
[134]Leupold, p. 88.
[135]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 100.

4. Assurance of recovery 6:8-10

Apparently David received an answer to his petition. It may have come through a prophet or just the inner conviction that he would recover (cf. 20:6; 22:21; 28:6; 31:19; 56:9; 69:30; 140:13). In any case, he closed the psalm with a warning to his adversaries (v. 8) to get out of his way. He was on the mend and would frustrate their attempts to supplant him. Jesus may have quoted the first part of this verse to Satan (Matt. 7:23).

Physical sickness is sometimes, but not always, chastening from the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16; Job 1—2). God does not always grant recovery to His saints. Consequently believers should not use this psalm to claim physical healing from the Lord. Nevertheless, sometimes God does remove His hand of chastening in response to prayer (cf. Exod. 32:9-14; James 5:13-16). This psalm is a good example of a prayer for deliverance based on the grace (v. 2), loyal love (v. 4), and glory (v. 5) of God. God will or will not grant all such petitions, ultimately, on the basis of His sovereign will (Mark 14:36).

PSALM 7

In the title, "shiggaion" probably means a poem with intense feeling.[136] Cush, the Benjamite, received no other mention elsewhere in the Bible. The Benjamites were, of course, King Saul's relatives who were hostile to David before and after David became king. Probably Cush was one of Saul's kinsmen who, like Doeg and the Ziphites, supported Saul and tried to do away with David.[137]

David prayed for deliverance from his enemies on the ground that he was innocent, and he asked God to vindicate him by judging them. Elements of an individual lament (vv. 1-2), an oath (vv. 3-5), a psalm of Yahweh's kingship (vv. 6-12), and a thanksgiving hymn (v. 17) make designating this psalm's genre very difficult. Spurgeon called this psalm "the song of the slandered saint."[138]

1. Petition for rescue 7:1-2

On the basis of God's protection of those who trust in Him, David asked for protection from those who were pursuing him, perhaps Saul's men (cf. 1 Sam. 22:8; 24:9; 26:19). He felt like a helpless lamb that a powerful, ferocious lion was about to tear apart (cf. 10:9; 17:12; 22:13, 21; 35:17; 57:4; 58:6). He believed no one but God could rescue him. The idea of God rescuing His own is a common one in the psalms.

2. Protestation of innocence 7:3-5

7:3-4 David couched his claim to be innocent of the offenses for which his enemies were pursuing him in terms of an oath ("If . . . if . . . then . . ."). This was a strong way to declare his freedom from guilt. Evidently his

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[136]A. F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. xx; Ross, p. 796.
[137]Delitzsch, 1:138.
[138]Spurgeon, 1:35.

enemies had charged him with injustice, paying a friend back evil for good, and robbery. David may even have rescued or helped his enemy. Verse 4 can be translated: "I have delivered him who without cause was my adversary."[139]

> "To do evil for good is human corruption; to do good for good is civil retribution; but to do good for evil is Christian perfection. Though this be not the grace of nature, yet it is the nature of grace."[140]

7:5 He was willing to die at his enemy's hand if guilty. The terms "soul," "life," and "glory" (NASB) are synonyms restating the fate of David in parallel terms.

3. Appeal for vindication 7:6-9

7:6-7 David called on God—as the Judge of everyone–to act for him by executing justice in his case. He assumed that God would be angry with his enemies, since David was innocent and his adversaries were guilty. As a result of God's just judgment, the nation of Israel would rally around Him. Moreover, He would enjoy honor when the people realized that He was ruling over them as their true King.[141]

7:8-9 One of God's functions as Judge is to vindicate the righteous and condemn the guilty. David called on Him to do so in his case. To vindicate means to show a righteous person to be righteous when others have accused him or her of being wicked. It is fitting for God to establish the righteous and to destroy the wicked because He is righteous Himself.

> "As we pray that the bad may be made good, so we pray that the good may be made better."[142]

4. Description of justice 7:10-16

7:10-11 David counted on God to defend him as a shield, since God saves the upright in heart, and David was upright. His confidence lay also in God's righteous character. God would judge justly, and injustice touches His heart as well as His head. Even though God does not always judge as quickly as His people want, injustice does not escape His eye, and one day He will judge righteously (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). In view of this, we can leave vengeance up to Him (Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30).

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[139]Leupold, p. 93.
[140]William Secker, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:35.
[141]Cf. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 409.
[142]Henry, p. 584.

> "This Psalm is the key to all Psalms which contain prayers against one's enemies."[143]

7:12-13 David painted God as a warrior going to battle against the wicked who refuse to repent. God always gives people opportunity to judge their own sinful behavior and turn from it, but if they refuse to judge themselves, He will judge them (cf. 1 Cor. 11:31).

> "Turn or burn is the sinner's only alternative."[144]

> "One Felix. Earl of Wartenberg, one of the captains of the Emperor Charles V, swore in the presence of divers [various people] at supper that before he died he would ride up to the spurs in the blood of the Lutherans. Here was one that burned in malice, but behold how God works His arrows against him; that very night the hand of God so struck him that he was strangled and choked in his own blood; so he rode not, but bathed himself, not up to the spurs, but up to the throat, not in the blood of the Lutherans, but in his own blood before he died."[145]

7:14-16 The evil plots the wicked conceive in their minds and give birth to in their actions will not turn out the way they hoped (cf. Mark 7:21-22; James 1:14-15). Rather than snaring the righteous in their traps, they themselves will be caught in them. What they sow they will reap (cf. Exod. 21:24-25; Matt. 26:52; Gal. 6:7).

> "I have been astonished at the recklessness with which wells and pits are left uncovered and unprotected all over this country [i.e. Palestine]. It argues a disregard of life which is highly criminal. I once saw a blind man walk right into one of these unprotected wells. He fell to the bottom, but, as it was soft sand, he was not so much injured as frightened."[146]

> "Ashes always fly back in the face of him that throws them."[147]

5. Promise to praise 7:17

David closed his psalm with a vow to thank and praise God for His righteousness.

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[143]Delitzsch, 1:143.
[144]Spurgeon, 1:36.
[145]Jeremiah Burroughs, quoted in ibid.
[146]W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1:519.
[147]Spurgeon, 1:37.

> "The attribute of God's righteousness is what he does or will do on behalf of his own."[148]

Even though God had not yet vindicated him, David's reflection on the character and activities of the Lord encouraged this psalmist to believe that He would do so at the proper time. He described God as the "Most High," a title used three times in this psalm in the NIV (vv. 8, 10, 17) that pictures Him as sovereign, exalted on His heavenly throne (cf. Gen. 14:18-24).

Reflection on God's character and ways of working can encourage God's people to trust in Him and praise Him when we experience injustice and hostility from the wicked.

> "Someone has suggested that over this psalm should be written: 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?'"[149]

PSALM 8

In this psalm of creation praise (cf. Pss. 33, 104, 145) David marveled at the fact that God had committed the dominion of the earth to man, and he reflected on the dignity of man. Other commonly recognized psalms of praise are 19, 29, 33, 47, 65—66, 68, 93, 96—100, 104—106, 111, 113—114, 117, 134—136, and 145—150. Some students of this psalm have called it a nature psalm, and some see it as messianic (cf. Matt. 21:16; Heb. 2:6-8).[150] One called it "the song of the astronomer."[151] The poet commented on Genesis 1:26-28 by clarifying the importance and role of humanity in creation.[152] Thus this psalm also has elements present in wisdom psalms.

> "These psalms of creation provide a sure and bold beginning point for the full world of psalmic faith."[153]

> "This psalm is an unsurpassed example of what a hymn should be, celebrating as it does the glory and grace of God, rehearsing who He is and what He has done, and relating us and our world to Him; all with a masterly economy of words, and in a spirit of mingled joy and awe."[154]

1. Introductory reflection on God's majesty 8:1-2

8:1 This psalm begins and ends with the same expression of wonder (*inclusio*) as David reflected on the splendor and magnificence of God as Creator. He addressed God as LORD (Yahweh, the covenant keeping God of Israel)

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[148]VanGemeren, p. 106.
[149]McGee, 2:678.
[150]E.g., Leupold, p. 100-1.
[151]Spurgeon, 1:38.
[152]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 411.
[153]Brueggemann, p. 38.
[154]Kidner, pp. 65-66.

our Lord (*Adonai*, the sovereign over all His creation, including His people). In the second line (Gr. *stich*; Lat. *colon*) David meant God's revealed character ("name," cf. 7:17) is high above all creation; He is much greater than anything He has made. The third line expresses a parallel thought. Not only is God above the heavens, but His splendor exceeds that of the heavens.

8:2 In addition to the earth and the heavens, even the weakest human beings bring praise to their Creator. David's point was that even small children acknowledge and honor God, whereas older, more sophisticated adults often deny Him (cf. Matt. 21:16). God has chosen to use the weak things of this world to correct the strong (cf. 1 Cor. 1:27). Reportedly the young child of an atheist couple once asked his parents, "Do you think God knows we don't believe in Him?"

> ". . . unbiased and uncorrupted minds recognize God without difficulty from His creation."[155]

2. Man's place in God's creation 8:3-8

In view of God's greatness and man's relative lowliness, it was marvelous to the psalmist that God would entrust His creation to humankind.

8:3-4 In view of the insignificance of mankind compared with the rest of creation, especially the heavenly bodies, David marveled that God would even think about human beings (cf. 62:9; 144:3-4; Job 7:17; 25:4-6; Isa. 40:6; Ezek. 16:1-5).

> "The Creator has established two spheres of rule: heaven and earth. He has established the celestial bodies in the firmament and has given them the rule over day and night (Gen 1:17-18), whereas he appointed man to govern the earth (Gen 1:28)."[156]

Whenever the psalmist looked up into the heavens—during the day or at night—he was reminded of God's greatness. David spoke of the sun, moon, and starry host as God's "finger-work." This figure stresses God's care and skill, comparing Him to a sculptor. It was as easy for God to create the *universe* with His fingers, as it is for a human being to make something with his fingers, rather than by using his arms and whole body—it required so little effort. Genesis 1 describes God as creating the whole material universe with just a few words.

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[155]Friedrich Noetscher, quoted by Leupold, p. 102.

[156]VanGemeren, p. 112.

> "In contrast to God, the heavens are tiny, pushed and prodded into shape by the divine digits; but in contrast to the heavens, which seem so vast in the human perception, it is mankind that is tiny."[157]

The Hebrew word translated "man" is *'enosh* that elsewhere describes man as a weak mortal being.

> "God's remembering always implies his movement toward the object of his memory."[158]

8:5 The NIV and AV versions have interpreted the Hebrew word *elohim* as meaning "heavenly beings" or "angels." However, this word usually refers to God Himself, and we should probably understand it in this sense here, too.[159] God made man a little lower than Himself, in His own image that no other created beings bear. David did not say that God made man a little higher than the animals. Many scholars believe the image of God includes what God has enabled man to do, as well as what he is essentially. This includes ruling over lower forms of life (Gen. 1:26) as God rules over all. God has crowned man with glory and majesty by giving him the authority to rule over creation as His agent. Of course, man has failed to do what God created him to do (Heb. 2:6-8). Jesus Christ, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45, 47), will fulfill mankind's destiny when He returns to earth and brings all creation under His control (1 Cor. 15:27-28).

> "Nowhere is man's dignity asserted more clearly and boldly than in this passage. But we again remind the reader that the reference is to man before the fall."[160]

8:6-8 God placed all living creatures under the control of Adam and Eve before the Fall, and when they fell He did not withdraw this privilege (cf. Gen. 9:1-3, 7). But because they sinned, man has never been able to fulfill the destiny for which God created him, namely, to be king of the earth. Man's responsibility is to maintain order in creation, not to let it control him. Man may use any animals, domesticated or wild, for his purposes, including food (Gen. 9:3; 1 Tim. 4:3-5). Man has tamed and even domesticated many kinds of animals, but he finds it impossible to control himself without divine assistance (James 3:7-8).

> "In Ps. 2 Christ is seen as God's Son and King, rejected and crucified but yet to reign in Zion. In Ps. 8, while His Deity is fully recognized (v. 1; Ps. 110 with Mt. 22:41-46), He is seen as Son of man (vv. 4-6) who, 'made

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[157]Craigie, p. 108.

[158]B. S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, p. 34.

[159]Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 41-42.

[160]Leupold, p. 104.

> [for] a little [while] lower than the angels,' is to have dominion over the redeemed creation (Heb. 2:6-11). Thus this Psalm speaks primarily of what God bestowed upon the human race as represented in Adam (Gen. 1:26, 28). That which the first man lost, the second Man and 'last Adam' more than regained. Hebrews 2:6-11, in connection with Ps. 8 and Rom. 8:17-21, shows that the 'many sons' whom He is bringing to glory are joint heirs with Him in both the royal right of Ps. 2 and the human right of Heb. 2."[161]

3. Concluding reflection on God's majesty 8:9

The psalm closes with a repetition of the psalmist's amazement at God's marvelous ways in entrusting so much responsibility to insignificant humans (cf. v. 1).

> "The God who can create such a being as man is must indeed be superlatively great."[162]

> "The universe testifies to the power and glory of God but somewhat as a foil against which to measure the centrality of humankind in the divine design. But beyond this is the perfect One of whom men and women at their best are only a dim foreshadow—Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord."[163]

The whole psalm extols the majesty of God. He is a remarkable sovereign because He has entrusted His magnificent creation to feeble humankind. While this psalm points out the frailty and failures of man as God's vice-regent, it also glorifies man as being the capstone of creation and God's chief concern in creation.[164]

PSALM 9

The Septuagint translators combined Psalms 9 and 10 into one psalm, even though they are separate in the Hebrew text. Consequently, from this psalm through Psalm 147, the numbering of the psalms in the Roman Catholic versions of the Bible differs from the numbering in the Protestant versions. The Roman Catholic versions follow the Septuagint (Greek) and Vulgate (Latin) versions, whereas the Protestant versions follow the Hebrew Bible. Twice the Septuagint translators combined or renumbered two psalms into one (Pss. 9 and 10 into 9, and Pss. 114 and 115 into 113), and twice they divided two psalms into four (Ps. 116 into 114 and 115, and Ps. 147 into 146 and 147).[165]

The Septuagint translators evidently combined Psalms 9 and 10 for two reasons. First, together they complete a somewhat modified acrostic in which each verse (almost) begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Second, the same unusual terms and

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[161]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 604.
[162]Leupold, p. 105.
[163]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 411.
[164]See Swindoll, pp. 27-36, and Ronald B. Allen, *The Majesty of Man: The Dignity of Being Human*.
[165]See the chart under "Writers" in the introductory section of these notes.

the same basic structure occur in both psalms, suggesting that they may have been linked originally (e.g., "in times of trouble," 9:9 and 10:18; "the nations," 9:5, 15, 17, 19-20 and 10:16; and a closing emphasis on man's mortality, 9:20 and 10:18). In spite of these similarities, the differences between Psalms 9 and 10 justify their separation. Each psalm is complete in itself and has its own purpose. Psalm 9 is a positive song of thanksgiving, whereas Psalm 10 is a negative complaint and petition dealing with the godless. Psalm 9 is very national, but Psalm 10 is very personal. Both psalms are individual laments.

J. Vernon McGee believed that Psalms 9 through 15 deal with the Great Tribulation and the people who figure during this time: Antichrist and the Jewish remnant.[166] Whereas these psalms may *apply* to this period, I do not think that they were written primarily as prophecy of this period.

David praised God for demonstrating His righteousness in judging wicked nations in Psalm 9. He expressed gratitude that the afflicted can trust in such a Judge. He concluded with a petition that the Lord would remove affliction from him so he could honor God by thanking Him for His deliverance. He did not identify his enemy specifically, perhaps to enable the Israelites to use this individual lament as a community lament.

In the title, the word "Muth-labben" (NASB) means "The Death of the Son" (NIV), which was evidently a tune name.

1. Praise for righteous judgment 9:1-12

This first section speaks of God as the righteous Judge in whom the afflicted may hope.

9:1-2 In view of the aspects of Yahweh's character that he would yet describe, David said he would thank God wholeheartedly. He would announce His extraordinary works publicly, rejoice in Him, and sing the praises of the Most High.[167]

> "Gratitude for one mercy refreshes the memory as to thousands of others. One silver link in the chain draws up a long series of tender remembrances. Here is eternal work for us, for there can be no end to the showing forth of all His deeds of love."[168]

9:3-6 Here are the reasons for David's delight. God had vindicated him by punishing the nations that had opposed him as God's vice-regent. God had given a thorough victory. The cities of some of his enemies and even their names had perished, suggesting the complete annihilation of these groups, perhaps tribes or smaller nations. Behind his own throne, David saw Yahweh ruling in heaven and granting him the victory.

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[166]See McGee, 2:689, 692.

[167]See VanGemeren's excursus on Yahweh as El Elyon, the Most High, pp. 123-24.

[168]Spurgeon, 1:41.

9:7-8 In contrast to those whose names had perished (v. 5), the Lord's name would abide forever because He will rule forever as a righteous judge. In view of this, those most in need of a righteous judge to give them justice, namely, the afflicted and the oppressed, may flee to Him in their distress. The basis of hope in prayer is the belief that the Lord rules.

9:9-10 The concept of God as a refuge occurs often in the psalms. A "stronghold" (Heb. *misgob*, lit. "mountain refuge," also translated "refuge" and "fortress") is a high place of security and protection. When David fled from Saul he often took refuge in strongholds (1 Sam. 23:14, 19, 29). However, he regarded the Lord Himself as the best of these (cf. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

> "To know the name of God was the Old Testament equivalent of saving faith in the New Testament."[169]

9:11-12 David closed this pericope of praise (vv. 1-12), by appealing to the afflicted and oppressed, to praise God and testify to others about God's care of them. The NIV and marginal NASB reading "avenges bloodshed" (v. 12) more clearly expresses David's thought than "requires blood" (cf. Gen. 9:5).

2. Petition for present deliverance 9:13-20

Since God had proved faithful to uphold the afflicted righteous in the past, David called on Him to deliver him from his present evil enemies.

9:13-14 The psalmist appealed for God's grace in defense from the attacks of those who hated him. God could save him from death. If He would do so, David promised to praise the Lord publicly among His people in Jerusalem. The "daughter of Zion" is a metaphor for the city of God (e.g., Isa. 1:8; 10:32) and the people of God (e.g., Mic. 4:8).

9:15-16 These verses are probably an expression of David's confidence that the Lord would deliver him in anticipation of that deliverance (cf. Rev. 18:2). The psalmist had already seen the wicked ensnared in their own traps many times, and he was sure this would happen again (cf. 7:15).

> "Perhaps the most striking instance on record, next to Haman on his own gallows, is one connected with the horrors of the French Revolution, in which we are told that, 'within nine months of the death of the queen Marie Antoinette by the guillotine, everyone implicated in her untimely end, her accusers, the judges, the jury, the prosecutors, the witnesses, all, every one at least whose fate

[169] *The Nelson . . .*, p. 883.

> is known, perished by the same instrument as their innocent victim.'"[170]
>
> "The wages that sin bargains with the sinner are life, pleasure, and profit; but the wages it pays him with are death, torment, and destruction. He that would understand the falsehood and deceit of sin must compare its promises and its payment together."[171]

"Higgaion" is probably a musical notation specifying quieter music.[172]

9:17-18 The psalmist contrasted the ends of the wicked and the oppressed needy. He set those who forget God opposite those who remember Him. In Old Testament thinking, remembering God is a term that describes continuing to have faith in God. Forgetting God pictures the opposite, namely, turning away from God. The Lord will not forget those who remember Him (trust in Him), but those who forget Him have no hope of escaping eternal punishment when they need deliverance from it (cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

9:19-20 David concluded this psalm with a request for God to remind the nations of their frail mortality—by judging them. Hopefully this would mean they would stop opposing the godly. Again (cf. 8:4), David used the word *'enosh* ("man" and "men") to emphasize man in his frail mortality (cf. Gen. 3:19; Ps. 8:4; 39:11; 144:4).

God's people should remember God's past acts of deliverance and praise Him publicly for these as we face the opposition of wicked enemies of righteousness. On the basis of God's past faithfulness, we can have confidence in His protection in our present and future distresses.

PSALM 10

This lament psalm is a prayer for immediate help in affliction. It contains a powerful description of the wicked who oppose God and attack His people. The focus of the previous psalm was on the judgment to come, but in this one it is on the present.

> "The problem in Psalm 9 is the enemy invading from without, while the problem in Psalm 10 is the enemy corrupting and destroying from within."[173]
>
> "There is not, in my judgment, a Psalm which describes the mind, the manners, the works, the words, the feelings, and the fate of the ungodly with so much propriety, fullness, and light, as this Psalm."[174]

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[170]Barton Bouchier, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:43.
[171]Robert South, quoted in ibid.
[172]Kidner, p. 37.
[173]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 106.
[174]Martin Luther, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:45.

According to Luther (just quoted), Augustine understood this psalm to be descriptive of Antichrist.

1. Description of the wicked 10:1-11

The emphasis in this part of the psalm is the problem of theodicy, the justice of God in the face of the prosperity of wicked Israelites. Like the Book of Job, the psalm does not resolve the problem but refocuses on God (v. 14).

10:1 The psalm begins with two questions that voice the psalmist's frustration as much as his ignorance. David could not understand why God did not act for His afflicted people. The word "why" occurs four times in this psalm, twice here and twice in verse 13 (as reflected in the NIV translation).

> "The frequent question beginning with 'why' always describes a situation of frustration and forsakenness."[175]

10:2-7 David colorfully pictured the wicked who oppress the righteous in graphic terms in this section of verses. They are proud, boastful, greedy, blasphemous, arrogant, haughty, self-sufficient, prosperous, careless about God, belligerent, self-confident, complacent, abusive, deceitful, oppressive, destructive, mischievous, and wicked. They opposed both God and His people with their speech, as well as in their actions (cf. Rom. 3:14).

> "'Pride' is a vice which cleaveth so fast unto the hearts of men, that if we were to strip ourselves of all faults one by one, we should undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off."[176]

10:8-11 Using the figures of a predatory animal, like a lion, and a hunter, like a fisherman, David described how the wicked cunningly pursue and ensnare the righteous in their traps. The fact that God does not punish them more quickly encourages them to continue their destructive work.

> "The thought of a personal God would disturb the ungodly in his doings, he therefore prefers to deny His existence, and thinks: there is only fate and fate is blind, only an absolute and it has no eyes, only a notion and that cannot interfere in the affairs of men."[177]

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[175]Yates, p. 499.
[176]Richard Hooker, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:45.
[177]Delitzsch, 1:182.

2. Cry for vengeance 10:12-18

10:12-15 David appealed to God to act for the righteous against the wicked (vv. 12, 15; an *inclusio*). He could not understand why God allowed the wicked to continue to spurn Him. It was not because their actions had escaped the Lord's notice. "Thou hast seen it" (v. 14) is a frequent expression of faith in God in the lament psalms. Beside this, the righteous were trusting in Him, and He had helped the helpless in the past. David wanted God to break the power (symbolized by the arm) of the wicked and to search out and destroy all their wickedness until it disappeared. Compare 9:12 where the same Hebrew word occurs. The translators have rendered it "requires blood" or "avenges" there, and "seek out" or "call to account" here.

10:16-18 These closing verses express the psalmist's confidence that God had heard his petition. Because Yahweh is sovereign, the ultimate authority in the universe, the nations that refused to submit to Him would perish. God's land was Canaan, but in a larger sense the whole world is His land since He is King of all creation. In view of who God is, David was confident that, even though God did not judge the wicked immediately, He would do so eventually.

> "He that protects us is the Lord of heaven; he that persecutes us is but a man of the earth."[178]
>
> "So the psalm which ran its course in a minor key ends in a major key."[179]

Some scholars believed that the "nations" here stand for the wicked in Israel who behaved like the heathen nations.[180] This is possible.

This psalm, as the preceding one, ends with a reference to the frail mortality of man (*'enosh*, v. 18; cf. 8:4; 9:19-20; et al.), who is bound to the earth, in contrast to God. In view of God's power it is not right for Him to allow frail man to terrorize his fellows. Nevertheless, since God is sovereign, only He can decide when to step in and judge the wicked.[181]

God's delay in executing justice frustrates the righteous. We can live with this frustration because we know God is powerful enough to avenge the defenseless. He is also sovereign and just. Furthermore, His past acts of deliverance should encourage us as we wait for Him to bring justice to pass in the world. This is a good psalm to read when you feel abandoned.[182]

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[178]Henry, p. 588.

[179]Leupold, p. 124.

[180]E.g., John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:155; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms*, 1:61; and VanGemeren, p. 129.

[181]See Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, pp. 89-107.

[182]This and several other suggestions for using the psalms, that will follow, come from *The Nelson* . . ., p. 940.

PSALM 11

David appears to have been fleeing from an enemy when he wrote this psalm, but we do not know the exact background incident. He expressed confidence that, even though lawful authority might perish, the godly can trust in the Lord to punish the wicked and deliver the righteous. The central issue in this psalm of individual lament, with emphases on trust and thanksgiving, is the persecution of the righteous by the wicked.

> "David, at the different periods of his life, was placed in almost every situation in which a believer, whether rich or poor, can be placed; in these heavenly compositions, he delineates all the workings of the heart. To assist us to remember this short but sweet Psalm, we shall give it the name of 'the Song of the Stedfast [*sic*].'"[183]

1. Counsel of despair 11:1-3

11:1 As a principle of life, David sought refuge from his enemies in the Lord, his Stronghold. Consequently, when his counselors urged him to run and hide in a physical stronghold, he refused to do so (cf. Matt. 16:22; Acts 21:12). He regarded Yahweh a much more secure refuge than any fortress. Fleeing as a bird describes quick escape to a distant and secure place (cf. 55:6; 124:7).

11:2 The wicked were attacking the upright and David in particular. He was the target of their deadly missiles. They may have been shooting at him or he may have been under verbal attack.

11:3 David's faint-hearted counselors evidently felt the very foundations of their nation were in danger of being destroyed, namely: the Mosaic Law and the institutions of Judaism.[184] They felt distressed to the point of distraction over this possibility. Many faint-hearted people behave similarly today when they see foundational elements of their society under attack.

> "Sinning times have ever been the saints' praying times. Yes, this they may and should do, 'fast and pray.' There is yet a God in heaven to be sought to, when a people's deliverance is thrown beyond the help of human policy or power."[185]

> "God sometimes 'shakes things' so that His people will work on building the church and not focus on maintaining the scaffolding (Heb. 12:25-29; Hag. 2:6)."[186]

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[183]Spurgeon, 1:49. Paragraph division omitted.
[184]C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:89-90.
[185]William Gurnall, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:51.
[186]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 109.

2. Confidence in God 11:4-7

11:4 David's perspective included God's throne in heaven, the symbol of His royal rule and authority to judge. There he visualized Yahweh sitting in perfect control over the nation He had created and promised to maintain (cf. Hab. 2:20). The pagans thought their gods dwelt in heavenly temples, but Yahweh really did. The anthropomorphic description of God's eyes and eyelids (parallelism) portrays His close scrutiny and precise awareness of all that was going on in Israel. He was not unaware of His people's plight.

11:5 The Lord's testing refers to Him examining the righteous and the wicked. He sets Himself against people who love what He hates, including violence, in opposition to His will. Normally I think it is appropriate to make the distinction that God loves the sinner but hates his sin (cf. John 3:16). But this is one place where we read that God hates sinners. I think He hates them in the sense that He hates their sin.

11:6 God will eventually punish those who oppose His will. He may use any of a multitude of traps and punishments at His disposal. David seems to have had the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in mind (cf. Gen 19:24; Ezek. 38:22).

11:7 God hates violence and will punish it (vv. 5-6), but He loves righteousness and will reward it with His fellowship, presence, protection, and favor. He will admit the godly to His presence, and they will enjoy His blessings. This is a greater prize than physical safety.

From time to time it seems as though society as we know it is crumbling around us. The prophets of doom counsel us to take drastic measures to preserve ourselves or we will perish, they say. The godly should remember that God is still in control, and He will take care of those who trust in Him and behave in harmony with His will.

> "Our Lord Jesus also had confidence in the Father when he faced the temptations of Satan and the hostility of people. When our hearts trust in him, he has promised to help us in crisis situations. Confidence in the Lord is a mark of Christian maturity."[187]

PSALM 12

David placed great confidence in the promises of God to deliver those who look to Him for salvation. This was not easy for the psalmist to do, since in his day powerful wicked people were taking advantage of the weak and vulnerable (cf. 11:3). The genre of this psalm is probably a community lament with a statement of confidence in God. Spurgeon titled it "Good Thoughts in Bad Times."[188]

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[187]VanGemeren, p. 131.

[188]Spurgeon, 1:54.

1. Plea for deliverance 12:1-4

The multitude of liars and deceivers that surrounded David moved him to cry out to God for deliverance for the godly minority.

12:1-2 It seemed to David, as it did to Elijah years later, that the godly had almost become extinct in Israel (cf. 11:2-3; 1 Kings 19:10). Liars and double-minded flatterers had gradually replaced people who were true to their word and commitments. This is hyperbolic language, but David used it to remind God indirectly of His covenant promises to bless the godly.

> "The death, departure, or decline of godly men should be a trumpet-call for more prayer."[189]

"Faithful" (v. 1) is *hasid* that relates to *hesed*, which means loyal love or covenant loyalty.

12:3-4 David wished the Lord would end the flattery and arrogant claims of those around him. They confidently believed they could accomplish anything they chose to do by their lies and deception. They also repudiated any restraint of their free speech (cf. James 3:5).

2. Assurance of deliverance 12:5

We do not know how David received the assurance that God would deal with the liars that troubled him. It was a prophetic insight, and it may have come directly from God or through another prophet. However, in view of the verses that follow, the psalmist perceived it as an authoritative promise from God. This is the first of several psalms that contain an answering oracle from the Lord (cf. Pss. 60, 81, 95).

3. Confidence in God's promise 12:6-8

12:6 In contrast to the promises of the liars that so frustrated David, the Lord's promise that he had received (v. 5) was absolutely pure (flawless) and very precious. He could rely on it completely. Seven was the number the Israelites associated with the perfect work of God, going back to the creation of the cosmos in seven days.

> "The Bible has passed through the furnace of persecution, literary criticism, philosophic doubt, and scientific discovery, and has lost nothing but those human interpretations which clung to it as alloy to precious ore."[190]

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[189]Ibid.

[190]Ibid., 1:56.

12:7 The "them" and "him" in verse 7 in the NASB probably refer to the vulnerable godly of verse 5. The NIV calls them "us." Alternatively, David may have meant God's promises (v. 6), but this seems less likely. David received encouragement and confidence from the Word of God that assured him of divine protection from the smug liars he found on every hand.

12:8 When people pursue lives of vanity and vile conduct, verbal deception abounds, but God will preserve the godly. "The sons of men," repeated from verse 1 and so an *inclusio* for this psalm, stresses the mortality of the wicked (cf. Isa. 2:22). David did not resolve the problem of evil, but he recognized that evil is under the full sovereignty of Yahweh who will care for His children.

> "Vileness ('cheapness') is promoted and exalted in the media: immorality, brutality, murder, lies, drunkenness, nudity, the love of money, the abuse of authority. The things that God condemns are now a means of universal entertainment, and the entertainment industry gives awards to the people who produce these things. People boast about things they ought to be ashamed of (Phil. 3:18-19)."[191]

Some believers live and work in environments very similar to the one David pictured in this psalm. This psalm should be a comfort when they feel that speaking the truth is futile. God will preserve those who purpose to follow Him when they must live in atmospheres polluted by deceit and corrupt speech. Though no one else's word may be reliable, His is.

> "The church is always one generation short of extinction, so we must be faithful to win the lost and teach the believers, or vileness will conquer the land."[192]

PSALM 13

Like several of the preceding psalms, this one is also a prayer that the psalmist offered in the midst of affliction. David rested in confidence in the Lord even though he saw no immediate relief from his predicament, possibly illness or mental distress. This individual lament psalm designed for community use begins with sobbing and ends with singing.

> "We have been wont to call this the 'How-Long Psalm.' We had almost said the Howling Psalm, from the incessant repletion of the cry, 'How long?'"[193]

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[191]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 111.
[192]Ibid., p. 112.
[193]Spurgeon, 1:57.

> "The Psalm consists of . . . three groups of decreasing magnitude. A long deep sigh is followed, as from a relieved breast, by an already much more gentle and half calm prayer; and this again by the believing joy which anticipates the certainty of being answered. This song as it were casts up constantly lessening waves, until it becomes still as the sea when smooth as a mirror, and the only motion discernible at last is that of the joyous ripple of calm repose."[194]

1. Lament over prolonged suffering 13:1-2

Rhetorical questions expressed David's frustration and sought to move God to action (cf. 6:3). God had apparently forgotten His servant or was hiding from him (cf. Exod. 2:24-25). Having no word from the Lord, David had to listen to his own reasoning that he regarded as a poor substitute. In the meantime, his enemy continued to enjoy the upper hand.

> "Psalm 13 is indeed a speech of disorientation. Something is terribly wrong in the life of the speaker, and in the life of the speaker with God."[195]

> "It is a common temptation, when trouble lasts long, to think it will last always; despondency then turns into despair, and those that have long been without joy begin, at last, to be without hope."[196]

We are all familiar with a similar kind of testing in everyday experience. What dog owner, for instance, has not measured and extended his pet's obedience by training him to sit and wait? What parent has not nurtured his child's trust by telling him to stay in a certain place until he returns? And what parent has not also been distressed when that same child was unwilling to wait but quickly ran off on his own?

2. Petition for an answer 13:3-4

David needed information and wisdom in view of his need. If he did not receive them from the Lord soon, he despaired of life. "Lightening the eyes" refers to refreshing one's vital powers (cf. 1 Sam. 14:27, 29; Ezra 9:8).[197] If he died, his enemy, who was also the Lord's enemy, since David was God's representative, would conclude he had overcome him and would rejoice. The "sleep of death" may be a metaphor for deep depression and suffering.[198]

> "His thought is dominated by one anxiety only, the anxiety that he might waver in his faith and lose confidence in God and so might provide for his

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[194]Delitzsch, 1:199.
[195]Brueggemann, p. 58.
[196]Henry, p. 590.
[197]Leupold, p. 136.
[198]VanGemeren, p. 140.

> adversaries the opportunity of gaining an easy victory [cf. Num. 14:15-16]."[199]

> "Awareness of God and the enemy is virtually the hallmark of every psalm of David; the positive and negative charge which produced the driving-force of his best years."[200]

> "We do not need to engage in any ontological speculation about whether God knows this [problem] before the speech is spoken. Inside the psalm the speech proceeds on the assumption that Yahweh is now being told what Yahweh needs to know. And that, of course, is the premise on which all serious prayer operates."[201]

3. Trust in eventual deliverance 13:5-6

In spite of God's lack of response, David continued to trust in the Lord's loyal love. He was confident that Yahweh would eventually deliver him and that he would rejoice in the Lord and sing praises to Him. The basis of this confidence was God's bountiful goodness to him in the past. The goodness of God is a recurring theme in the psalms.

> "The actual song of praise would burst forth once deliverance had been accomplished, but the knowledge that deliverance was coming created an anticipatory calm and sense of confidence."[202]

When God is not responding, we need to focus on His goodness. David focused on God, and this enabled him to praise God.

> "The three pairs of verses climb up from the depths to a fine vantage-point of confidence and hope. If the path is prayer (3f.), the sustaining energy is the faith expressed in verse 5. The prospect from the summit (5) is exhilarating, and the retrospect (6) overwhelming."[203]

When the heavens seem to be brass and we feel God has departed from us, we should continue to trust Him and wait for His salvation. We can find encouragement by remembering His past loyal love and goodness to us.[204]

PSALM 14

This reflective psalm and Psalm 53 are almost identical.

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[199]A. Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, p. 163.
[200]Kidner, p. 78.
[201]Brueggemann, p. 59.
[202]Craigie, p. 143.
[203]Kidner, p. 77.
[204]See Swindoll, pp. 37-46; and Ronald B. Allen, *And I Will Praise Him*, pp. 150-65.

> "The simplest explanation for the double occurrence of the psalm in the Psalter seems to be that it appeared in each of two earlier collections, which were later combined."[205]

The commentators take differing views concerning the genre since elements of individual lament, wisdom, prophetic, communal lament, and philosophical psalms are all present in this one. Merrill called it a psalm of exhortation.[206]

The failures of human beings that he experienced, and the knowledge that God will judge folly and corruption, led David to long for the establishment of God's kingdom on the earth. The psalmist's perspective was very broad in this psalm. He spoke of the godly and the ungodly, and he noted their antagonism throughout history.

1. David's appraisal of humanity 14:1-3

14:1 A fool (Heb. *nabal*) is a person who has a problem in his or her heart more than in the head. He does not take God into account as he goes about living and is therefore morally insensitive (cf. 1 Sam. 25:25; Isa. 32:4-7). He may or may not really be an atheist, and he is not necessarily ignorant, but he lives as though there is no God.

> "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy."[207]

> "Knowing what we do about the universe today, only a madman would say that there is no God."[208]

> "On earth are atheists many,
> In hell there is not any."[209]

The fool's conclusion leads him to disregard the revelations that God has given of Himself, attention to which are essential for wise living (cf. Prov. 1:7; Rom. 1:22). Instead, he gives himself over to corrupt living and deeds that are vile in the sight of God. Really, David observed, there is no one who does what is good in the sight of God on his own (unmoved and unaided by the Spirit of God). If we did not have the Apostle Paul's exposition of the depravity of man in Romans 1—3, we might conclude that David's statement was emotional hyperbole (cf. Rom. 3:11-18).

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[205]Leupold, p. 141.
[206]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 414.
[207]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:3:1.
[208]McGee, 2:690.
[209]T. Brooks, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:59.

14:2 God does indeed look down on all people to assess our condition (cf. Gen. 6:5; 11:5; 18:21). The Hebrew verb says that God *bent over* to look. The arrogant materialist of verse 1 is only one example of humanity in general.

14:3 All human beings have turned aside from the wise way of fearing the Lord (cf. Gen. 6:5-6; 11:1-9). The result is that they have become corrupt (Heb. *alah*, lit. sour, like milk) morally. Not one solitary individual does good in the sight of God on his own initiative and in his own strength (cf. Rom. 3:23). It is for this reason that no one can be acceptable to God on the merit of his own works. All need the goodness (righteousness) that only God can provide for us.

> "Sin is the disease of mankind, and it appears here to be malignant and epidemic."[210]

2. God's punishment of the wicked 14:4-6

> "Three things he [the psalmist] shows them [the sinners], which, it may be, they are not very willing to see—their wickedness, their folly, and their danger."[211]

14:4 David marveled at the ignorance of the wicked who disregard God and consequently have no regard for His people.

14:5 The wicked are in a dangerous position because God is in the midst of His people. When evildoers persecute the godly, they bring God's punishment on themselves.

> "'Generation,' as so often, has here gone over from the meaning of people of a given period to a special class of people even as we also use the word."[212]

14:6 They may seek to frustrate the plans of those they afflict, but God will vindicate His own because they trust in Him. The figure of God as the refuge of His people occurs also in 46:1; 61:3; 62:7-8; 71:7; 73:28; and 91:2 and 9.

3. David's longing for God's kingdom 14:7

In the context, the enemy of God's people is all the ungodly of the world from the beginning of history. David longed for God to save His people from these wicked antagonists. Zion was the place where the ark of the covenant and the Lord resided. David spoke of God Himself delivering His people from all their godless enemies. When

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[210]Henry, p. 590.
[211]Ibid., p. 591.
[212]Leupold, p. 141.

David wrote, the godly were captive to the wicked in the sense that the wicked were devouring them (v. 4). Nevertheless the psalmist was confident that the Lord would deliver Israel from the wicked and restore their fortunes. When He did, Israel would rejoice and be glad. Premillenarians believe this will take place when Jesus Christ returns to earth and sets up His righteous rule for 1,000 years (cf. Zeph. 3:14-16; Matt. 6:10; Rom. 11:26-27; Rev. 20:1-6).[213]

The time is coming when God will put down all wickedness and judge all the ungodly. That revelation helps His people maintain hope as they continue to experience the antagonism and persecution of those who choose to disregard God.

> "The intent of Psalm 14 is to counter the temptation that humankind can manage the world in ways better than Yahweh's way (cf. Isa. 55:8-9). The alternative of the haughty ones is to reorder life's good for their own benefit at the expense of the vulnerable ones (cf. Ezek. 34:20-24). The psalm asserts and guarantees that life will not be so easily reorganized. God's will endures. God has made the world with some built-in protections for the weak against the strong, and that must not be mocked (cf. Isa. 10:12-14)."[214]

PSALM 15

In this psalm, David reflected on the importance of a pure character for those who would worship God and have an intimate relationship with Him. Stylistically, it begins with a question and ends with a promise (cf. Isa. 33:14-16). This style marks the wisdom literature, and many scholars consider this a wisdom psalm.[215] Brueggemann classified it as a Torah psalm.[216] The godly person in this psalm contrasts with the ungodly in the previous one.

> "The pattern of question and answer here may possibly be modelled [*sic*] on what took place at certain sanctuaries in the ancient world, with the worshipper asking the conditions of admittance, and the priest making his reply. But while the expected answer might have been a list of ritual requirements (*cf.* Ex. 19:10-15; I Sa. 21:4f.), here, strikingly, the Lord's reply searches the conscience."[217]

> "The ascent to Mount Zion is a question of increasing ethical perfection as well as geography."[218]

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[213]See Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, pp. 129-49.
[214]Brueggemann, p. 45.
[215]E.g., Dahood, 1:83; and VanGemeren, pp. 147-48.
[216]Brueggemann, p. 42.
[217]Kidner, pp. 80-81.
[218]Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry Into the Jewish Bible*, p. 173.

> "It [this psalm] certainly fits into the life and activity of David. Its time may be fixed more precisely as being that period of his life when he manifested an interest in the restoration of the ark and thus the establishment of public worship."[219]

1. David's question 15:1

In his prayer, the psalmist asked Yahweh who could have fellowship with Him, namely, what kind of person. "Abiding in the Lord's tent" or sanctuary (i.e., the tabernacle David had pitched) and "dwelling on His holy hill" (i.e., Mt. Zion) picture a person who is the guest of God. Guests in the ancient Near East were those who had an intimate relationship with their host, who had extended his protection and provisions to them (cf. 5:4). David meant, "Whom will you accept when he comes to your house?"

2. David's answer 15:2-5

15:2a-b In this section, the psalmist summarized what was necessary to have an intimate relationship with the Lord (cf. John 4:23-24). First, he or she must have a pattern of life that is blameless (Heb. *tamim*). This word means genuine, free from moral or ethical spots, corruption, and inconsistencies, though not morally perfect, since this is humanly impossible. In other words, such a person is a man or woman who is above reproach: of upright integrity (cf. Job 1:1). The Apostle Paul began his lists of qualifications for elders in the church with "above reproach" as well (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6).

Second, this person's actions are righteous. He lives in harmony with God's will and standards.

15:2c-5a Eight characteristics describe this kind of person in more detail. Together they picture a person of integrity.

1. He speaks the truth sincerely, rather than being double-tongued, i.e., not saying what is true some of the time and lying at other times (2c).
2. He does not slander other people by saying things that are untrue and destructive about them (3a).
3. He does not do evil to his neighbor (i.e., anyone with whom he comes in contact, 3b; cf. Prov. 14:17-24).

> "If an ill-natured character of his neighbor be given him, or an ill-natured story be told him, he will disprove it if he can; if not, it shall die with him and go no further [cf. 1 Pet. 4:8]."[220]

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[219]Leupold, p. 142.
[220]Henry, p. 591.

4. He does not initiate or propagate information that would discredit others (3c).
5. He does not approve of those who turn away from the Lord but honors others when they choose to follow God's ways (4a-b).
6. He keeps his promises even when it costs him to do so (4c).

> "His honor is more important than his wallet."[221]

7. He does not charge interest on money he loans to his brethren, thus taking advantage of their weakness (5a; cf. Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:36).
8. He does not pervert justice for his own advantage and so bring hardship on others (5b; cf. Deut. 27:25).

15:5c In conclusion, David observed that such a person will experience stability in his life, as well as enjoying intimate fellowship with God.

> "'To [not] be moved' scarcely means never to be visited by any calamity. That would give the worshiper's virtues too mercenary a cast. A higher result is envisioned: Such a one will never be shaken from the fine position of godliness that he now occupies, either by temptation or by adversity."[222]

The fact that David listed a total of 10 moral qualities in this psalm may indicate that he wanted to suggest a comparison with the Ten Commandments. Though the contents of these lists are not the same, they both identify traits that mark a person who is walking in the will of God. The rabbis identified 613 commands in the Mosaic Law. Isaiah mentioned six that are very important (Isa. 33:15-16), Micah listed three (Mic. 6:8), and Habakkuk boiled them down to one, namely, faith (Hab. 2:4).

A believer needs to make sure he is walking in the will of God consistently to enjoy fellowship with God and stability in his life.[223] When we are wondering what God expects, this is a good psalm to read.

PSALM 16

This psalm voices the joy David experienced in his life, because of his trust in God and fellowship with God, even though he faced distressing physical dangers—possibly even death.[224] David appears in this psalm as the type of person that he described in the previous psalm.

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[221]VanGemeren, p. 152.
[222]Leupold, p. 146.
[223]See Swindoll, pp. 47-55.
[224]Delitzsch, 1:217.

> "There is, perhaps, no statement of prophet or poet that more beautifully and consistently traces down to its final consequences what it means when a man commits himself fully into the hands of God and abides in Him."[225]

Chisholm classified this psalm as indirectly Messianic (cf. Acts 2:22-31; 13:35-37),[226] and Merrill called it a psalm of confidence.[227]

The meaning of "mikhtam" (NASB) in the title is not clear. All the suggested explanations that I have read (engraved in gold, to cover, secret treasure, pithy saying, mystery poem, etc.) seem unconvincing. Fortunately we do not need to know the sure meaning of this term to understand and appreciate the psalm. Ironside believed there is some correspondence between Psalm 16 and the meal offering in Israel's worship (Lev. 2). He also saw these connections: Ps. 40 and the burnt offering, Ps. 85 and the peace offering, Ps. 22 and the sin offering, and Ps. 69 and the trespass offering.[228]

1. Joy in present distress 16:1-8

In this first section of the psalm, David reflected on what he had come to know about the Lord and how this knowledge comforted him.

16:1 This verse is a kind of topic sentence for the section. It is a prayer for protection in some unidentified distress based on the psalmist's confidence in the Lord's protection.

16:2 David had told the Lord that He was his only hope. The writer had no good beside Yahweh, probably in the sense that he knew that he had no goodness of his own apart from God (cf. 73:25). Another view is that "good" refers to whatever made David truly happy.[229]

16:3 An evidence of David's confidence in the Lord was his choice to keep company with others who trusted in and walked with God. He respected them because they shared the majestic quality of their God.

16:4 In contrast to these godly saints are those who trade worship of the true God for what they think they will gain from following other gods (i.e., apostates). However, *they* only receive multiplied sorrows. David refused to join them in worshipping false gods, or even mentioning them, because he found what they were doing so distasteful.

16:5-6 David spoke with satisfaction of the Lord as something that someone had given him. He compared God to a valuable inheritance passed on to him

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[225]Leupold, p. 147.
[226]Chisholm, pp. 293-95.
[227]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 414.
[228]Ironside, p. 77.
[229]Delitzsch, 1:220.

by his ancestors, and to wine in a cup that brings great joy and satisfaction to the one who drinks it. He also gave God credit for supporting him in his lot in life.

The "lines" marking the boundaries of David's inheritance (i.e., God's will) had turned out to be good lines since they prescribed a great inheritance. Compared to a piece of real estate such as the ones given to the Israelite tribes when they entered the Promised Land, David had received a "pleasant lot (place)." He viewed his inheritance as a beautiful piece of property. Obviously, he was pleasantly content with God and found great delight in Him.

> "Discontented spirits are as unlike Jesus as the croaking raven is unlike the cooing dove."[230]

16:7 In view of this delight, David purposed to bless or praise the Lord. This is the first of many references to blessing or praising the Lord in the Book of Psalms. To bless God means to speak well of Him and thus to praise Him.

God had counseled David through His Word. David received counsel from God through the previously written books of the Old Testament, through other prophets such as Nathan and Gad, and through personal revelations. David himself was a prophet as well as a king. It is probably to these personal words from the Lord that David referred in the second part of this verse.

> "All this [vv. 1-7] may be applied to Christ, who made the Lord his portion and was pleased with that portion, made his Father's glory his highest end. We may also apply it to ourselves, in singing it, renewing our choice of God as ours, with a holy complacency and satisfaction."[231]

16:8 Because the Lord Himself was the main focus of David's attention and satisfaction, he knew no one would shake him in any major way from his stability in life (cf. 15:5c). David described giving God first place in his life as having placed God at his right hand, the place of greatest honor and authority in the ancient East. Since David was a king, the place he gave God was especially honorable. Because David had delegated his defense to God, he knew his "right hand Man" would not fail him.

Peter quoted verses 8-11 on the day of Pentecost as a messianic prophecy (Acts 2:25-28). These words were true of Jesus Christ. They apply to Him.

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[230]Spurgeon, 1:68.
[231]Henry, p. 592.

2. Confidence in future deliverance 16:9-11

16:9-10 Evidently David had received a special revelation from the Lord that he would not die then, but would escape from whatever distress he was enduring (cf. v. 7a). The phrase "my glory rejoices" (NASB) means David rejoiced that his glory as a living person blessed by God would continue to be a source of joy for him. God would spare his life. Of course, David did not mean he would live forever, by bypassing death. He only meant that he would not die then. David was God's "holy one" (v. 10) in that God had set him apart for a special purpose and because his life was indeed God's, as he described earlier in this psalm.[232]

16:11 The psalmist counted on God giving him further revelation about what path to take so he would experience life rather than death. This path would take him eventually into God's presence where David's joy would be complete. Endless pleasures would come from God's right hand (cf. v. 8b).

> "The refugee of verse I finds himself an heir, and his inheritance beyond all imagining and all exploring."[233]

Peter and Paul saw in verses 8-11, and in verse 10b, respectively, prophecies concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2:25-28; 13:35-37). What David was confident that God would do for him, namely, deliver him from death, was what God also did for David's greatest son, the Lord Jesus. In David's case, God did this by postponing his death, but in Jesus' case He did it by resurrecting Him. What David was confident that God would do for him, God also did for Christ, only in a different way. This is one of the few clear references to resurrection in the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2).[234]

> "The 16th Psalm is a prediction of the resurrection of the King. As a prophet, David declared that, not at His first advent but at some time subsequent to His death and resurrection, the Messiah would assume the Davidic throne. Cp. Acts 2:25-31 with Lk. 1:32-33 and Acts 15:13-17."[235]

As Christians reading this psalm today, we too can rejoice as David did—that the Lord will preserve those who take refuge in Him. He will even deliver us from death, perhaps by prolonging our lives temporarily as He did in David's case, but definitely by resurrecting us as He did Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23).

PSALM 17

The content of this lament psalm is similar to that of the preceding one, except that the danger David faced when he wrote this psalm was more threatening. Again he viewed himself as a person committed to God who lived among many others who lived for the

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[232]See Gregory V. Trull, "An Exegesis of Psalm 16:10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):304-21, for three interpretive options.
[233]Kidner, p. 86.
[234]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 414.
[235]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 606.

present. He prayed for deliverance from their oppression and anticipated the future in God's presence. A strong concern for righteousness pervades the entire psalm (cf. vv. 1-2, 15).

> "I Sam. 23:24ff. fits the situation of the psalm rather well."[236]

This is one of five psalms that identify themselves as prayers (cf. 86; 90; 102; and 142; see also 72:20 and Hab. 3:1.). There are at least a dozen Hebrew words for prayer, and the one used here, *tepilla*, means "to intervene." Since most of the psalms were prayers, it is unusual that only five call themselves "prayers." Perhaps this Hebrew word had other connotations as well, possibly indicating a tune to be used in corporate worship. Another view follows:

> "This Psalm is termed a prayer because the language of petition is predominant."[237]

1. The plea of the righteous 17:1-5

17:1-2 The urgency with which David called on God to heed his petition suggests that he was in a very difficult position. He claimed to be representing a just cause as he made his request, and he assured God he was speaking the truth in what he was about to say. He visualized God as the celestial Judge and asked for a fair ruling in His court. In what follows, the cry for investigation of David's situation (vv. 3-5) and vindication of David's person (vv. 6-15) continues.

17:3 David was not asking for acceptance by God because of his own righteousness. He claimed that in the present conflict, in which evil people were opposing him, he had done nothing worthy of their antagonism. God had examined David's attitudes, as well as his actions, and had no basis for condemning him. Furthermore, David had previously made a strong commitment not to sin.

> ". . . he requests God to 'test' his 'heart' (see 7:9), i.e., to put him through every conceivable examination. The probing (*bahan*, see 7:9) of 'the heart' (v. 3a) is a determination of the purity and integrity of the heart. Even as silver and gold underwent a refining process and were tested until the smith was satisfied with the purity of these precious metals, so the psalmist asks for an examination of his purity of devotion to God."[238]

17:4-5 David also claimed to have kept free from sinners' ways with the help of God's Word. He had pursued God's revealed way to live consistently.

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[236]Leupold, p. 154.
[237]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 413.
[238]VanGemeren, p. 162.

> "No trace of self-righteousness is to be detected in these claims. But they are strongly made because the writer knows that God will not heed the prayers of the evildoer."[239]

2. The petition for protection 17:6-12

David asked God to keep him from the wicked in the world who are vicious and proud.

17:6-7 The psalmist based his request on God's loyal love for him as seen in His deliverance of those who take refuge in Him. He called on God to deliver him immediately.

17:8 The apple of the eye evidently refers to the pupil, the source of sight. With this figure, David was asking God to keep him in the center of His vision, not to let him out of His sight but to keep His eye on him. David also expressed his need for God's careful protection, using the image of a bird protecting its young under its wings (cf. Deut. 32:10-11; Ruth 2:12; Matt. 23:37).

> "'God's wings' are the spreadings out, *i.e.* the manifestations of His love, taking the creature under the protection of its intimate fellowship, and the 'shadow' of these wings is the refreshing rest and security which the fellowship of this love affords to those, who hide themselves beneath it, from the heat of outward or inward conflict."[240]

17:9-12 Whatever the situation in David's life was to which he referred in this psalm, it is clear from these verses that David's enemies were surrounding him (figuratively if not literally, cf. 22:12-18). They determined to kill him. They appear to have been confident of their success, too. Their eyes were on David even as the Lord's were (v. 8a), but there was hatred in their gaze. Rather than protecting him lovingly as a mother bird (v. 8b), they were out to tear him apart and devour him as a lion does its prey, by sneaking around and attacking. The lion is a symbol of brute strength and a ferocious appetite (cf. Judg. 14:14), and so provides a fitting picture of the wicked (cf. 7:2; 10:9; 22:13).

3. The prospect for the future 17:13-15

17:13-14 David's mention of the Lord's sword may mean he expected God to use a human army to deliver him, or this may be just a metaphorical way of speaking about deliverance.

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[239]Leupold, p. 156.
[240]Delitzsch, 1:239.

> "The fact that such prayers do not exclude the thought of a possible repentance and restoration of the ungodly enemies appears, for example, in 83:16. However, since such an outcome is scarcely likely, it is seldom expressed in the psalms; cf. also Ps. 2:10ff."[241]

David's description of the wicked draws attention to the fact that they live only for the present. They are content with the many blessings God gives all people in this life through His "common grace." They occupy themselves entirely with their families and estates to the exclusion of spiritual matters.

17:15 In contrast to the wicked, David found his greatest delight in God, not in the temporal things of this world (cf. Phil. 3:19-20). Some readers have assumed this verse refers to David's hope of seeing God after he died.[242] However, the preceding verses may point to a contrast: the preoccupation of the wicked with earthly things versus the preoccupation of David with God during their lifetimes. The awaking in view, then, would not be a reference to life after death and or resurrection, but to waking up from sleep day by day. Of course, David would one day really see God, but this verse may not be describing that event. It may speak rather of David's enjoyment of God's presence before death (cf. Matt. 5:8; Titus 1:15). David's concern, in this view, was more God's face and God's likeness than his future resurrection.

In times of opposition from godless people whose whole lives revolve around material matters, God's faithful followers can enjoy God's fellowship now. They can also look forward to divine deliverance and to seeing the Lord one day. David's hope lay in a continuing relationship with God, and so does ours. He did not have the amount of revelation of what lay beyond the grave that we do. He found comfort in his relationship with God in this life as being superior to what the wicked enjoyed. We do too, but we also know that in addition, when we die, we will go into the Lord's presence and from then on be with Him (2 Cor. 5:8; 1 Thess. 4:17).

PSALM 18

As the title indicates, David wrote this psalm after he had subdued his political enemies and had established the kingdom of Israel firmly under his control. In this poem, David expressed his delight in the Lord and thanked Him for giving him the victories he enjoyed. This royal thanksgiving psalm also appears in 2 Samuel 22. The slight variations may be due to changes that Israel's leaders made, under divine inspiration, when they adapted this poem for use in Israel's public worship.[243] Other individual psalms of thanksgiving are 30—32, 40, 66, 92, 116, 118, and 120.

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[241]Leupold, p. 159.

[242]E.g., *The Nelson . . .*, p. 891; Leupold, p. 160.

[243]See ibid., p. 163 for a brief discussion of the differences, and Delitzsch, 1:269-78, for analysis of the differences.

> "The two components essential to the [individual thanksgiving] genre are: (1) the psalmist's report about his crisis, and (2) the statement or declaration that the crisis has passed and his deliverance is an accomplished fact. The latter element is that which distinguishes these psalms from the lament."[244]

Delitzsch called this the "greatest of the Davidic hymns" and "the longest of all the hymnic Psalms."[245]

1. God's character 18:1-3

David began his praise by verbalizing his love for God for being so good to him. He proceeded to describe how much the Lord meant to him by using many metaphors. Yahweh was the source of his strength, stability, safety, and salvation. He was the one in whom David sought refuge, his defense, his power, and his protection. Because God had proved to be such a reliable Savior, the psalmist regarded Him worthy of his praise.

> "One of the great tragedies of the human spirit is to become a prisoner of ingratitude, for ingratitude shuts the human spirit up in a world lightened only by the self, which is no light at all."[246]

2. God's deliverance 18:4-29

In this extended section, David reviewed how God had saved him in times of danger. In verses 4-19 he described God's supernatural deliverance, and in verses 20-29 he explained it as he saw it through the lens of his faith in God.

18:4-5 Death had previously had him in its grip, as rope binds a prisoner. The forces of ungodliness terrified David, as when one finds himself in a wadi (dry stream bed) during a spring thunderstorm and discovers a wall of water coming toward him. He pictured himself trying to pick his steps through a field full of traps that hunters had set to trap animals.

18:6-15 David cried out in terror, and in His heavenly temple God heard his call for help. The Lord came rushing to the psalmist's defense. His deliverance was as a thunderstorm in that it was the supernatural invading nature. The figures of speech in verses 7-15 picture a violent storm with lightning, thunder, high winds, torrential rains, black skies, and flooding.[247] All of this illustrates God's dramatic intervention for David, punishing those who opposed His anointed.

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[244]Bullock, p. 152.
[245]Delitzsch, 1:252, 249.
[246]Bullock, p. 162.
[247]See Michael E. Travers, "The Use of Figures of Speech in the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:655 (July-September 2007):277-90.

> "The most vivid descriptions of God as warrior occur in so-called theophanic passages, which depict the Lord coming in splendor and power to fight for His people. . . .
>
> "Psalm 18:7-16 is the most detailed of these theophanic texts."[248]

18:16-19 God delivered the writer as a lifeguard rescues a drowning man from the water that threatens to overwhelm him. David's host of enemies almost swallowed him up, but God removed him from their clutches and brought him to a place of safety out of their reach.

> "Why Jehovah should delight in us is an answerless question, a mystery which angels cannot solve. Believer, sit down, and inwardly digest the instructive sentence now before us, and learn to view the uncaused love of God as the cause of all the lovingkindness of which we are the partakers."[249]

18:20-24 As God had promised to bless those of His people who walked in obedience to His will (Deut. 28), so he blessed David who followed the Lord faithfully. By recounting his own righteousness David was not implying that he merited God's favor simply because of his good works. He was showing God's faithfulness to His covenant promises to Israel. These verses would have encouraged the Israelites to follow David's example of righteous behavior so they, too, would experience God's favor (cf. 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

> "The statements of innocence, righteousness, etc., refer, doubtless, to his personal and official conduct and his purposes, during all the trials to which he was subjected in Saul's persecutions and Absalom's rebellions, as well as the various wars in which he had been engaged as the head and defender of God's Church and people."[250]
>
> ". . . David could quite properly use this language within a limited frame of reference, [but] the Messiah could use it absolutely; and the psalm is ultimately Messianic . . ."[251]

18:25-29 God responds in kind as people act toward Him (cf. Gal. 6:7). He deals with each individual according to his or her attitudes.[252] He rewards them because of their characters and deeds. He is always just. Those who try to

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[248]Chisholm, p. 296. Cf. Ps. 18; 29:11; 68:4, 33; 77:16-19; 97:3-5; 104:3-4; 114:3-7; 144:5-7.
[249]Spurgeon, 1:80.
[250]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 414.
[251]Kidner, p. 93.
[252]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 893.

twist God to make Him serve their ends will find that He will bend them to fulfill His will (cf. Jacob and Balaam).[253] He saves the humble and humbles those who think they can save themselves.

> "The psalmist does not say that God shows himself 'shrewd' ([NASB "astute"] v. 26) in the sense that he deals wisely with the wicked but that he 'acts corruptly' ('crooked') with those who are 'crooked.' Even as God deals lovingly with those who love him, he lets the crooked acts of the wicked boomerang on their own heads. They receive their just deserts."[254]

> "Nothing more is said than this: since man insists on going devious ways in his dealings with God, God outwits him, as that man deserves."[255]

> "The way we relate to the Lord determines how the Lord relates to us (vv. 25-27)."[256]

God kept the lamp of David's life burning by delivering his life from the hands of his enemies. Moreover He enabled His servant to advance against his foes and to overcome their defenses.

3. God's blessings 18:30-50

The psalmist rejoiced over God's character and His blessings to him (vv. 30-45), and he vowed to continue to praise Him forever (vv. 46-50). The purpose of the psalm is praise, not boasting.

18:30-31 God's way is perfect, and His Word is trustworthy. He is the only true God, a reliable defense and a solid foundation for His people (cf. Deut. 32:4, 31).

18:32-42 We should probably read verse 32 with verse 33 rather than with verse 31. David gave the Lord credit for enabling him to be a strong and effective warrior. God was responsible for David's successes in battle.

> "What service God designs men for he will be sure to fit them for."[257]

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[253]See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Does God Deceive?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:617 (January-March 1998):11-28.
[254]VanGemeren, p. 174.
[255]Leupold, p. 169.
[256]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 124.
[257]Henry, p. 595.

18:43-45 "Enlarge[ing] my steps" (v. 36) means giving room for freedom of motion.[258] God had even extended David's victories beyond the borders of Israel. The king had been able to subdue other kingdoms and bring them under his control. David's greatest Son will be able to echo these sentiments when He rules on earth during the Millennium.

18:46-50 Only a living God could do all this for David. Consequently the king promised to praise Him among those who did not know Yahweh.

Oliver Cromwell, wrote the following to the Speaker of the House of Commons in England, after his victory in the Battle of Naseby:

> "Sir, this is none other than the hand of God; and to Him alone belongs the glory, wherein none are to share with Him. The General served you with all faithfulness and honor; and the best commendation I can give him is that I dare say he attributes all to God, and would rather perish than assume to himself."[259]

God's deliverance and His loyal love are the final gifts David mentioned as those he treasured above all others. He was confident, because of what God had done for him, that Yahweh would prove faithful and deliver David's descendants, as He had promised as well (2 Sam. 7).

God's people should always acknowledge the magnificent multifaceted character of our God. We should also recount His awesome acts of deliverance for us. Furthermore, we should continue to rely on His future faithfulness in view of who He is and what He has done for us.

PSALM 19

David observed in this wisdom hymn that under the influence of the sun, the heavens make God's handiwork in creation known to humanity. Likewise, people learn of God's plan to bless humankind under the influence of God's Law. In view of this dual revelation, in nature and in Scripture, David prayed that God would cleanse his life so he would be acceptable to God. Psalms dealing with the Creation and those dealing with the Torah are both subgroups of the wisdom psalms.

Another interpretation of this psalm views the first six verses, which deal with creation, as simply an introduction to the main subject, which is the law of the Lord.[260] This is a minority opinion.

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[258]Delitzsch, 1:265.
[259]Quoted in Spurgeon, 1:84.
[260]E.g., Leupold, pp. 177-82.

In the polytheistic ancient Near East, this psalm was a strong polemic against the pagan sun gods whom their worshippers credited with executing justice. The psalmist claimed that Israel's God was the Creator of the heavens, including the sun, and He established justice on the earth.

1. Revelation from nature 19:1-6

19:1 This verse is a summary statement. The "heavens" refers to what appears in the sky above us. The "firmament" or "sky" is the canopy that seems to cover the earth from our vantage point as we look up. It is a synonym for "heavens" (synonymous parallelism). The glory of God in this context points to the splendor of the Creator. As we look up, we see the amazing handiwork of God.

> "During the French Revolution, Jean Bon St. Andre, the Vendean revolutionist, said to a peasant, 'I will have all your steeples pulled down, that you may no longer have any objects by which you may be reminded of your old superstitions.' 'But,' replied the peasant, 'you cannot help leaving us the stars.'"[261]

19:2-4b Every day and every night, this revelation of the power and greatness of the Creator communicates, since human beings observe it daily. The presence of the heavenly host is a non-verbal testimony to God's existence that reaches every part of the planet. Everyone, regardless of his or her language, can understand it (cf. Rom. 1:18-20).[262] This is "the paradox of wordless speech."[263] It is also an oxymoron.

19:4c-6 God has placed the sun in the heavens. He, not it, is supreme. The figures of the bridegroom and the runner picture the glory and power of this centerpiece of God's creation. Since it is so glorious, its Creator must be even more glorious. The pagans used the same figures of speech to describe the sun, which they worshipped as sovereign.[264]

The name of God used in verses 1-6 is *El*, a title that describes the power of God. *El* is "the strong one." In verses 7-9 and 14 the psalmist wrote that *El* is *Yahweh*, the name of God that stresses His covenant relationship to Israel. Thus he claimed that the Creator is Israel's God, not some pagan nature deity.

2. Revelation from Scripture 19:7-11

19:7 The revealed Word of God has the same dominant influence over humankind as the sun does over nature. Whereas the sun restores natural

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[261]John Bates, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:86.
[262]See Harry Torczyner, "The Riddle in the Bible," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1 (1924):141-49.
[263]Kidner, p. 98.
[264]Ross, pp. 807-8.

life, God's law restores the life of the human soul. The sun dispels physical darkness, but the Word of God removes the darkness of ignorance from our understanding. It is flawless and reliable.

> "The great means of the conversion of sinners is the Word of God, and the more closely we keep to it in our ministry the more likely are we to be successful. It is God's Word rather than man's comment on God's Word which is made mighty with souls."[265]

19:8 Furthermore, it brings joy and wisdom to people because it is correct and enlightening. The terms "testimony" (v. 7; "statutes, NIV), "precepts," "commandment" ("commands," NIV), and "judgments" (v. 9; "ordinances," NIV) all refer to various parts of God's law.[266]

19:9 The special revelation of God in Scripture is also free from any mixture of truth and error; it is consistent with reality. Consequently it is enduring and completely righteous. The word "fear" refers to the whole of divine law. Knowledge of God's law puts the fear (reverential trust) of God in people's hearts (cf. Deut. 4:10 AV).

> "'Fear' is strictly not a synonym for the law but rather emphasizes a reaction that it calls forth, namely, a wholesome reverence of the will of the Lawgiver, emphasizing that no one who deals with the law dare regard it merely as an abstraction or in a spirit of absolute objectivity but should rather feel the need of his submitting to it."[267]

19:10-11 David regarded the words of God as more valuable than gold, the most expensive substance in his day, and more pleasing and satisfying than honey, the sweetest substance. God's words warned him of error and danger, and they brought him rewards of many kinds as he followed them.

> ". . . the mark of a true Bible student is a burning heart, not a big head (Luke 24:32; 1 Cor. 8:1)."[268]

3. Prayer for cleansing 19:12-14

19:12-13 David's rhetorical question expresses the impossibility of knowing if or when we violate God's will without the light that His Word provides. It can bring to light faults hidden otherwise and can warn us of what

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[265]Spurgeon, 1:87.

[266]See VanGemeren, pp. 184-87, for explanations of the various words that describe God's Word that appear primarily in Psalms 19 and 119, but also elsewhere in other psalms.

[267]Leupold, p. 181.

[268]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 128.

displeases God so we can confess and avoid these offenses. David asked God to use His Word to bring these sins to his attention so they would not dominate him. This would result in his being blameless in God's sight and free from the huge mass of sin that would be his without the revelation of Scripture.

19:14 In closing this psalm, David prayed that his words and thoughts would please God. In view of the context, this takes place as we allow the Word of God to affect our lives. David viewed his words and thoughts as sacrifices to God (cf. Heb. 13:15). This is the implication of "acceptable" or "pleasing." As he closed this psalm he evidently regarded God not as his judge but as the foundation of his life and the One who had purchased him for a special purpose.

> "The Word in the hand is fine; the Word in the head is better; but the Word in the heart is what transforms us and matures us in Christ (119:11; Co. 3:161-7)."[269]

God has revealed Himself in nature and in Scripture. This revelation should move us to bow in humble adoration and willing obedience before our Creator.[270] Psalms 1, 19, and 119 all deal significantly with the Word of God.

> "I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world."[271]

PSALM 20

Before a battle with an enemy, David found encouragement in the intercession of his people to trust God for victory.

> "This psalm gives a good example of what it means to intercede for another."[272]

In this psalm, David instructed his people how to pray for him.

> "David and Solomon repeatedly functioned as teachers of Israel (cf. especially Ps. 122 and 127); and surely, in the case of a king of Israel it cannot be regarded as an undue preoccupation with one's self when he instructs his people to pray for him."[273]

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[269]Ibid.
[270]See Swindoll, pp. 56-66; and Allen, *And I . . .*, pp. 129-49.
[271]Lewis, p. 63.
[272]Carl Armerding, *Psalms in a Minor Key*, p. 52.
[273]Leupold, p. 185.

1. The intercession of the people 20:1-5

20:1-4 The people lifted their voices to God concerning their king (v. 6) and prayed that God would give him success in this royal psalm (cf. 21:2). Meal and burnt offerings of worship often accompanied prayers for God's help in Israel's worship. Their purpose was not just to atone for sin but also to seek God's favor and consecrate oneself for war (cf. 1 Sam. 7:9-10; 13:9-12).

20:5 The people anticipated victory in the upcoming battle. When the soldiers went out to war they marched according to their tribes, and each tribe had its own distinctive banner (cf. Num. 2:2).

2. The assurance of the king 20:6-8

20:6 David was confident he would be successful in the coming conflict because he was the Lord's anointed. Of course, if David had been guilty of sin, God might not have given him victory. However, the king believed that he was clean, and with the intercession of his people, he felt even more certain that he would emerge the victor.

20:7 He repudiated confidence in the most sophisticated physical implements of warfare available, but he affirmed his reliance on the Lord Himself for victory (cf. Exod. 14; Judg. 4).

> "The children of this world trust in second causes [i.e., horses and chariots] . . ."[274]

The name of the Lord refers to His character, reputation, and nature. David gained confidence as he meditated on his God.

20:8 The king was sure of success. Often in the psalms the writers expressed strong confidence by describing an event yet future as already having taken place with the desired result, as here.

3. The repeated intercession of the people 20:9

In view of the similarity between this petition and the one that opens this psalm, it is probable that the Israelites prayed it too. They looked to Yahweh as their ultimate authority and the One from whom victory must come.

The elect can appeal to God for victory against their spiritual enemies confidently, when they are walking with Him, because He is willing and able to subdue the powers of darkness. God has assured us of our ultimate victory (cf. 2 Cor. 2:14). The psalm presents three essentials for victory as God's people fight against the forces of evil. First, there

[274]Henry, p. 597.

must be a praying people (vv. 1-5). Second, there must be a confident leader (vv. 6-8). Third, there must be a sovereign Lord (v. 9).[275]

PSALM 21

This royal psalm is a companion to the preceding royal psalm in that it records David's thanksgiving for giving him his heart's desire. All of the royal psalms anticipate the rule of the Great King: Jesus Christ. Like the preceding psalm, this one was evidently written by David to direct his people's prayers for him—this time in thanksgiving. Leupold argued convincingly that the setting may have been David's reception of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7).[276] Liturgical churches often read this psalm to commemorate Christ's ascension on Ascension Sunday.[277]

1. Joy in God's strength 21:1-7

21:1-6 Speaking of himself in the third person, King David gave thanks to God for giving him his heart's desire. His heart's desire could have been victory over an enemy, or it may have been the desire that God would establish his dynasty. He acknowledged that it was the Lord's strength, not his own, that had brought him great honor and glory. God had given David glory as a gift. The crown (v. 3) may refer to the literal crown of an enemy that victorious kings appropriated for themselves in David's time. Metaphorically it could refer to a fresh coronation that David believed he had received from the Lord by granting him this victory. David's life was safe, and much glory and joy had come to him as a result of God's blessing.

21:7 David saw his blessing as a reward for his trust in Yahweh. Because the Most High King was faithful to His promises, David could be confident that he would remain securely on his throne.

2. Anticipation of further blessing 21:8-12

21:8-10 The change in person indicates that David's subjects now addressed him. Because he trusted in the Lord and received divine honor, the people were sure he would continue to defeat his enemies. The right hand refers symbolically to power and authority. David's enemies would perish as in a fiery oven and as by a hungry animal. Scripture often uses fire as a metaphor for the wrath of God (e.g., Exod. 19:18; Heb. 12:29; Rev. 1:14; et al.).

> "These are terrible words, and those teachers do not well who endeavor by their sophistical reasonings to weaken their force. Reader, never tolerate slight thoughts of hell or

[275]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, pp. 129-31.
[276]Leupold, pp. 190-93.
[277]McGee, 2:703.

> you will soon have low thoughts of sin. The hell of sinners must be fearful beyond all conception or such language as the present would not be used."[278]
>
> "If you don't believe there is a hell, you are in disagreement with the Bible."[279]

God would cut off the posterity of the enemies, so the defeat of David's foes would be final.

21:11-12 Even though David's enemies opposed him, they would fail. David would make them flee in retreat and would hand them a devastating defeat—described as shooting them in the face with his arrows.

3. Vow to praise 21:13

Evidently David joined his people in lifting up the Lord because of His strength. They promised continued worship for His power that had brought blessing.

When God's people experience victory over their spiritual enemies, they should acknowledge that their success is the work of God for them. We can look forward to future victories in the will of God because God is loyal to His promises and strong enough to overcome every foe.

PSALM 22

The mood of this "noblest of the passion psalms"[280] contrasts dramatically with that of Psalm 21. In this one, David felt forsaken by God, and the threats of his enemies lay heavily on his heart. He evidently felt death might be close. He described his condition as facing execution. Nevertheless the Lord answered his prayer for help.

> "No Christian can read this without being vividly confronted with the crucifixion. It is not only a matter of prophecy minutely fulfilled, but of the sufferer's humility—there is no plea for vengeance—and his vision of a world-wide ingathering of the Gentiles."[281]

The righteous sufferer motif that is so prominent in this individual lament psalm finds its fulfillment in the Messiah (cf. Ps. 69; et al.).[282]

> "The Psalm so vividly sets before us not merely the sufferings of the Crucified One, but also the salvation of the world arising out of His

[278]Spurgeon, 1:98.
[279]McGee, 2:705.
[280]Leupold, p. 194.
[281]Kidner, p. 105.
[282]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," pp. 289-90.

> resurrection and its sacramental efficacy, that it seems more like history than prophecy . . ."[283]

Most evangelical interpreters would agree with the perspective expressed by Delitzsch above. But some scholars have understood this psalm to describe the writer's sufferings alone. Others believe that the sufferer is the nation of Israel, while still others hold that the writer was describing the sufferings of an ideal godly person, not any specific individual. Some interpreters hold combinations of these views. I believe that David wrote of his own experiences, but that he spoke as a prophet and also predicted the sufferings of Christ. Spurgeon appropriately titled this psalm "The Psalm of The Cross."[284]

> "In a general and modified sense (cf. Ps. 16), the experience here detailed may be adapted to the case of all Christians suffering from spiritual foes, and delivered by divine aid, inasmuch as Christ in His human nature was their head and representative."[285]

1. Frustration and faith 22:1-10

David felt forsaken by God and ridiculed by his enemies, yet his confidence was in the Lord's continuing care.

David's frustration and God's faithfulness to his forefathers 22:1-5

22:1-2 Again David felt frustrated by God's lack of response to his cries (cf. 13:1-4). God would not answer David regardless of when he prayed.

> "The question . . . is not an expression of impatience and despair, but of alienation and yearning."[286\

> "To cry out, 'My God, why am I sick? Why am I poor?' would give cause to suspect discontent and worldliness. But, *Why hast thou forsaken me?* is the language of a heart binding up its happiness in God's favour."[287]

The Lord Jesus quoted David's words as He hung on the cross (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

> "There are two ways in which we may understand Jesus' use of these words, either as *fuller sense* (*sensus plenior*) or *typology*. . . . Franz Delitzsch well illustrates what we mean

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[283]Delitzsch, 1:307.
[284]Spurgeon, 1:99.
[285]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 415.
[286]Ibid., 1:309.
[287]Henry, p. 598.

> by fuller sense in his comment on Psalm 22: '. . . David descends, with his complaint, into a depth that lies beyond the depth of his affliction, and rises, with his hopes, to a height that lies far beyond the height of the reward of his affliction'[288] The fuller meaning can be understood in the *comprehensive sense* as well. That is, the suffering on this occasion was insufficient to qualify for these gigantic terms of the text, so we understand David as summing up the suffering of his entire life. . . . In comparison to the fuller sense, the *typological* interpretation sees Jesus as the *type* of sufferer in Psalm 22, and the psalmist becomes the model. James Mays's interpretation of this psalm belongs in this category, although he prefers to see Jesus as setting himself in its *paradigm*: 'He joins the multitudinous company of the afflicted and becomes one with them in their suffering.'[289] When the fuller sense method is applied, it recognizes that a future fulfillment is built into the language and meaning of the text, whereas typology looks back to a person or event as representative of a future event or person. It may or may not be a prophetic element built into the text."[290]

22:3 In spite of God's silence, David's confidence in Him was strong because he knew God is holy, set apart from all the idols as the only true and living God. Furthermore, God was still Israel's real King enthroned in heaven and praised by His people for who He is.

22:4-5 Furthermore, David found encouragement as he remembered God's answers to the prayers of the Israelites' forefathers when they prayed in distress and experienced deliverance. Since God rewarded their trust, David believed He would honor his, too.

David's humiliation and God's faithfulness to him 22:6-10

The pattern of David's thoughts in this section is very similar to that expressed in verses 1-5. It is a second cycle of the same lament and confidence expressed there.

22:6-8 By comparing himself to a worm, David was expressing his feelings of worthlessness, vulnerability, and contempt in the eyes of his enemies. The figure pictures feeling less than human (cf. Job 25:6; Isa. 41:14). These foes were insulting him, despising him, and mocking his faith in God because the Lord was not rescuing him (cf. Matt. 27:39, 44). Shaking the

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[288]Delitzsch, 1:307.
[289]James L. Mays, "Prayer and Christology: Psalm 22 as Perspective on the Passion," *Theology Today* 42 (1985):323.
[290]Bullock, p. 44.

head can signify rejection (cf. 109:25) or astonishment (cf. 64:8: Lam. 2:15). The Lord Jesus' enemies spoke these very words as He hung on the cross (Matt. 27:42-43).

22:9-10 Nevertheless, David drew strength by remembering that God had sustained him all his life, even from his birth. When David was only a small boy he had learned to trust in the Lord, who had sustained him to the present day.

> "Throughout the Old Testament there is never any mention made of a human father, or begetter, to the Messiah, but always only of His mother, or her who bare [*sic*] Him."[291]

2. Foes and fatigue 22:11-18

This section of the psalm emphasizes the psalmist's miserable condition.

David's cry for help 22:11

David cried out to God to be near him with saving help since he was in great danger and there was no one to assist him. He felt very much alone and vulnerable.

David's enemies and agony 22:12-15

22:12-13 The psalmist felt he was at the mercy of his enemies, as a person is in the presence of a dangerous bull or lion. Cattle grew large and strong in Bashan (or Gilead), the territory east of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee; cf. Num. 32:1-5; Amos 4:1).

22:14-15 With many other graphic word pictures David described how distressed he felt because of the attacks of his enemies. As water poured out on the ground, he could not gather himself to resist them. He felt pained and incapable of defending himself, as when bones become dislocated. His spirit, rather than remaining firm, had melted away like hot wax. He felt as devoid of energy as a broken shard of pottery. He was in need of refreshment, as a thirsty person craves water when his mouth is dry. He concluded that he was almost in the grave, almost dead, because the Lord had not helped him.

David's enemies and agony restated 22:16-18

22:16 David compared his enemies to wild dogs that had him surrounded and were waiting to finish him off. Already he felt as though they had begun to tear him apart by biting his extremities, his hands and feet. Years later, the

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[291]Delitzsch, 1:314.

enemies of the Lord Jesus *actually did pierce* His hands and His feet when they nailed Him to the cross (cf. Isa. 53:5; Zech. 12:10; Luke 24:39-40).[292]

22:17-18 Again, David followed a metaphor of his enemies with a description of his own agony (cf. vv. 12-15). He was evidently weak and emaciated; his bones were showing prominently under his skin due to loss of weight produced by his distress. Apparently his enemies were so sure that David would perish they were already invading his wardrobe and dividing his clothes among themselves. This also happened when Jesus Christ's enemies crucified Him (Matt. 27:35).

> "Psalm 22 is a graphic picture of death by crucifixion. The bones (of the hands, arms, shoulders, and pelvis) out of joint (v. 14); the profuse perspiration caused by intense suffering (v. 14); the action of the heart affected (v. 14); strength exhausted, and extreme thirst (v. 15); the hands and feet pierced (see v. 16, *note*, but cp. Jn. 20:20 also); partial nudity with the hurt to modesty (v. 17), are all associated with that mode of death. The accompanying circumstances are precisely those fulfilled in the crucifixion of Christ. The desolate cry of v. 1 (Mt. 27:46); the periods of light and darkness of v. 2 (Mt. 27:45); the contemptuous and humiliating treatment of vv. 6-8, 12-13 (Mt. 27:39-44); the casting lots of v. 18 (Mt. 27:35), were all literally fulfilled. When it is remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish, form of execution, the proof of inspiration is irresistible."[293]

3. Prayer for freedom from death 22:19-21

The psalmist pleaded with God to rescue his life from the fatal attacks of his foes, to whom he referred again as wild animals. He cried to God to be near him and to act swiftly to save him.

A marked change in David's attitude took place in the middle of verse 19. Evidently he received assurance of the Lord's help because the last part of this verse expresses confidence in His deliverance. This confidence may have come to the prophet by direct revelation. To "save . . . from the horns of the wild oxen" (v. 21) is equivalent to being delivered from fatal danger.

> "This could well mean that the victim envisions himself as being caught up on the oxen's horns and about to be further tossed or gored to death when he is suddenly snatched away and set beyond the pale of danger."[294]

The rest of the psalm continues this theme of confident assurance of salvation.

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[292]See Conrad R. Gren, "Piercing the Ambiguities of Psalm 22:16 and the Messiah's Mission," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:2 (June 2005):283-99.
[293]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 610.
[294]Leupold, p. 203.

4. Praise and encouragement 22:22-31

22:22 In view of the Lord's deliverance, David vowed to praise God publicly. God later saved His Son from death just as He now delivered the psalmist from it. In David's case, He did so by prolonging his life, and in Christ's, by resurrection. The writer of Hebrews quoted this verse in Hebrews 2:12 as an expression of the Lord Jesus' praise to God for delivering Him from death in answer to His prayer (cf. Heb. 5:7).

22:23-26 David next called on the congregation of Israel to join him in praising God because He had come to his aid (cf. vv. 1-2). David had evidently made vows to God during the time of his distress that he now promised to pay. Vows in Israel were promises to give God something if God would do a certain thing for the person vowing, or because He had already done a certain thing for him or her. People sometimes vowed material things, but often they promised to give praise.

Verse 26 describes a reversal of the bad conditions previously referred to as characteristic of David in his misery (cf. vv. 14-15, 17). These words would have encouraged God's people to keep praying and trusting in the Lord.

22:27-31 God's purpose for Israel was that she be a kingdom of priests by mediating the knowledge of God to all people, and by bringing all people into a relationship with God (Exod. 19:6). David had an unhindered view of this purpose, as is clear from this expression of his concern that God's deliverance of him would result in the Gentiles turning to Yahweh in faith. After all, Yahweh is the sovereign King who rules over all nations, not just Israel (v. 28). All people will bow before Him, whether they are rich or dying (v. 29). David believed his testimony of God delivering him from death would influence later generations of people to trust in the Lord. Because God has preserved this record in Scripture, it has encouraged all succeeding generations to do so. The record of God delivering Jesus Christ when He cried for salvation from death (Heb. 5:7) and God hearing and resurrecting Him has encouraged many more to put their confidence in David's God. The last phrase (v. 31), "He has performed it," is similar to our Lord's cry, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

This is one of the Messianic psalms (cf. vv. 27-30 with Acts 2:30-31 and Phil. 2:8-11; and vv. 22, 25 with Heb. 2:12). VanGemeren considered it an individual lament that contains thanksgiving.[295] It became clear later, that it not only recorded actual events in the life of David, but also predicted events in the life of David's greatest Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. David probably described many of his own sufferings figuratively, but his descriptions happened literally in the sufferings, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some commentators believed that David did not experience anything

[295]VanGemeren, p. 198.

like what he described in this psalm, but that his words were totally predictive of Messiah.[296] Interestingly, there is no confession of sin or imprecation on enemies in this psalm. Our Lord's cross sufferings were also free of these elements.[297]

God's people of all ages can learn from this psalm. Even though it may appear that the Lord has forgotten and forsaken us in times of extreme persecution, we can count on Him delivering us from death in answer to our prayers. Our rescue may come through the prolongation of our lives, as in David's case, or through resurrection, as in the case of our Lord. With this assurance of deliverance, we can praise God even today, and encourage others to trust in and worship Him as well.[298]

PSALM 23

David reflected on God's many blessings to him and concluded that God would continue to be faithful to him and grant him fellowship in the future. This is a psalm of trust and confidence in God's goodness in the present and in the future. It is a good one to read when we are afraid.

> "Depth and strength underlie the simplicity of this psalm. Its peace is not escape; its contentment is not complacency: there is readiness to face deep darkness and imminent attack, and the climax reveals a love which homes towards no material goal but to the Lord Himself."[299]

Delitzsch believed that he found reasons in this psalm to believe that David wrote it during the period of Absalom's rebellion.[300] Expositors have proposed theories of two, three, or four persons in the psalm, but most, including myself, hold to only one: the shepherd.[301] Leupold outlined the psalm as the Lord (Shepherd) providing rest and guidance (vv. 2-3), protection (v. 4), food (v. 5), and fellowship with God (v. 6b).[302]

Is this psalm messianic? Jesus claimed to be the "Good Shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). Perhaps He was alluding to the Good Shepherd (God) in this psalm. On the other hand, there are no direct quotations of this psalm in the New Testament that link Jesus with the shepherd in this psalm. Leupold concluded:

> "The psalm is not Messianic, but it suggests thoughts that point in the direction of the Messiah."[303]

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[296]E.g., Kidner, p. 105.

[297]See Richard D. Patterson, "Psalm 22: From Trial to Triumph," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:2 (June 2004):213-33, for further interpretation of the grammatical, historical-cultural, literary, and theological data in this psalm.

[298]See Ronald B. Allen, *Lord of Song*, pp. 103-30; and Mark H. Heinemann, "An Exposition of Psalm 22," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990):286-308.

[299]Kidner, p. 109.

[300]Delitzsch, 1:329.

[301]See Leupold, pp. 208-9, for discussion.

[302]Ibid., p. 209.

[303]Ibid., p. 215.

Several expositors have compared Jesus to the Good Shepherd in Psalm 22 (cf. John 10:11), the Great Shepherd in Psalm 23 (cf. Heb. 13:20), and the Chief Shepherd in Psalm 24 (cf. 1 Pet. 5:4).

> "To put it succinctly, in Psalm 22 we see the *cross*, in Psalm 23 the *crook* (the Shepherd's crook), and in Psalm 24 the *crown* (the King's crown). In Psalm 22 Christ is the *Savior*; in Psalm 23 He is the *Satisfier*; in Psalm 24 He is the *Sovereign*. In Psalm 22 He is the *foundation*; in Psalm 23 He is the *manifestation*; in Psalm 24 He is the *expectation*. In Psalm 22 He *dies*; in Psalm 23 He is *living*; in Psalm 24 He is *coming*. Psalm 22 speaks of the *past*; Psalm 23 speaks of the *present*; and Psalm 24 speaks of the *future*. In Psalm 22 He gives His *life* for the sheep; in Psalm 23 He gives His *love* to the sheep; in Psalm 24 He gives us *light* when He shall appear. What a wonderful picture we have of Christ in these three psalms!"[304]

1. God as leader 23:1-4

23:1 David compared Yahweh to a shepherd as he reviewed His blessings on his life (cf. 28:9; 80:1). This was a familiar role for David who had been a shepherd of sheep as a youth and who later became a shepherd of God's people as their king. Other ancient Near Eastern kings also described themselves as the shepherds of their nations.[305] Even some pagan gods were spoken of as shepherds.[306] Isaiah later referred to Messiah as a shepherd (Isa. 40:11). This title was one that Jesus Christ claimed for Himself (John 10:14) and that the New Testament writers used for Him (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4).

> "Whatever be the believer's position, he is even now under the pastoral care of Jehovah ["The LORD *is* my shepherd"]."[307]
>
> "The sweetest word of the whole is that monosyllable, *My*."[308]
>
> "Sheep do not 'just take care of themselves' as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care."[309]
>
> ". . . the lot in life of any particular sheep depended on the type of man who owned it."[310]

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[304]McGee, 2:711.
[305]E.g., King Hammurabi. See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 164.
[306]Ibid., p. 388.
[307]Spurgeon, 1:107.
[308]Ibid.
[309]Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, pp. 20-21.
[310]Ibid., p. 17.

As David's shepherd, the Lord provided all David needed.[311]

> "More is implied than is expressed, not only, *I shall not want*, but, 'I shall be supplied with whatever I need; and, if I have not everything I desire, I may conclude it is either not fit for me or not good for me, or I shall have it in due time.'"[312]

23:2a As his shepherd, God provided David with spiritual rest and nourishment. Food for the soul is the Word of God (Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:2) that the Lord's under-shepherds are responsible to give His people (Ezek. 34:1-10; John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2).

> "It is significant that to be at rest there must be a definite sense of freedom from fear, tension, aggravations and hunger."[313]

> ". . . whenever I came into view and my presence attracted their attention, the sheep quickly forgot their foolish rivalries and stopped their fighting. The shepherd's presence made all the difference in their behavior."[314]

> "Green pastures did not just happen by chance. Green pastures were the product of tremendous labor, time, and skill in land use. Green pastures were the result of clearing rough, rocky land; of tearing out brush and roots and stumps; of deep plowing and careful soil preparation; of seeding and planting special grains and legumes; of irrigating with water and husbanding with care the crops of forage that would feed the flocks."[315]

All this the Good Shepherd does for His sheep.

23:2b-3a The Lord also provides spiritual refreshment and restoration. These benefits come to us as we take advantage of God's provision of the water of life, which is the living and written Word of God (John 4:10-14; Eph. 5:26). God renews our strength and cleanses us through these instruments.

> "A 'cast' sheep is a very pathetic sight. Lying on its back, its feet in the air, it flays away frantically struggling to stand

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[311]See Thomas A. Golding, "The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:649 (January-March 2006):18-28.
[312]Henry, p. 600.
[313]Keller, p. 35.
[314]Ibid., p. 40.
[315]Ibid., p. 45.

> up, without success. Sometimes it will bleat a little for help, but generally it lies there lashing about in frightened frustration."[316]
>
> "During my own years as a keeper of sheep, perhaps some of the most poignant memories are wrapped around the commingled anxiety of keeping a count of my flock and repeatedly saving and restoring cast sheep."[317]
>
> "Many people have the idea that when a child of God falls, when he is frustrated and helpless in a spiritual dilemma, God becomes disgusted, fed-up and even furious with him. This simply is not so. One of the great revelations of the heart of God given to us by Christ is that of Himself as our Shepherd. He has the same identical sensations of anxiety, concern and compassion for cast men and women as I had for cast sheep."[318]

23:3b God also gives His sheep guidance in the proper path of life so we do not wander aimlessly. He does so in part for the sake of His own reputation, as One who has promised to direct His people.

> "A commonly held, but serious misconception about sheep is that they can just 'get along anywhere.' The truth is quite the reverse. No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detailed direction, than do sheep."[319]
>
> "The greatest single safeguard which a shepherd has in handling his flock is to keep them on the move."[320]
>
> "As soon as the point was reached where I felt the maximum benefit for both sheep and land was not being met, the sheep were moved to a fresh field. On the average this meant they were put onto new ground almost every week."[321]

23:4 Protection is the fourth blessing for which David gave God praise. The promises of the Lord's presence assure us of His protection in times of danger when we fear (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

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[316]Ibid., p. 60.
[317]Ibid., p. 62.
[318]Ibid., p. 64. Paragraph divisions omitted.
[319]Ibid., p. 71.
[320]Ibid., p. 72.
[321]Ibid., p. 73.

> "Observe that it is not walking *in* the valley, but *through* the valley. We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. . . . And then, it is not 'the valley of death,' but 'the valley of *the shadow* of death,' for death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Someone has said that when there is a shadow there must be light somewhere, and so there is. Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path; let us then rejoice that there is light beyond.
>
> "Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not, therefore, be afraid."[322]
>
> "It is said, when a bee has left its sting in anyone, it has no more power to hurt. Death has left its sting in the humanity of Christ and has no more power to harm His child."[323]
>
> "Most of us do not want valleys in our lives. We shrink from them with a sense of fear and foreboding. Yet in spite of our worst misgivings God can bring great benefit and lasting benediction to others through those valleys. Let us not always try to avoid the dark things, the distressing days. They may well prove to be the way of greatest refreshment to ourselves and those around us."[324]
>
> "Let come what may. Storms may break about me, predators may attack, the rivers of reverses may threaten to inundate me. But because He is in the situation with me, I shall not fear."[325]

The shepherd's rod (a cudgel worn at the belt) beat off attacking animals, and his staff (walking stick) kept the sheep away from physical dangers such as precipices.[326] It may be that the Palestinian shepherd carried only one crook, which he used as both a rod and a staff.[327] Likewise, God

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[322]Spurgeon, 1:110.
[323]Viscount Powerscourt, quoted in ibid., 1:112.
[324]Keller, p. 87.
[325]Ibid., p. 90.
[326]See Thomas A. Golding, "The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:650 (April-June 2006):158-75.
[327]Leupold, p. 213.

comes to the defense of His people when our spiritual enemies attack us. He also prevents us from getting into spiritually dangerous situations that would result in our destruction (cf. Matt. 6:13).

> "Whereas the rod conveys the concept of authority, of power, of discipline, of defense against danger, the word 'staff' speaks of all that is longsuffering and kind."[328]

> "Just as the rod of God is emblematic of the Word of God, so that staff of God is symbolic of the Spirit of God."[329]

2. God as provider 23:5

In this verse, David described the Shepherd (God) in the role of a host. As a gracious host, God provides hospitality for His people. He supplies us with what we need and desire lavishly, and He does so, not by removing us from the presence of our spiritual enemies, but in their presence.

> ". . . what David referred to as a table was actually the entire high summer range. Though these 'mesas' may have been remote and hard to reach, the energetic and aggressive sheep owner takes the time and trouble to ready them for the arrival of his flocks."[330]

> ". . . just before the sheep arrive [on the mesa] he will make another expedition or two to prepare the tableland for them. He takes along a supply of salt and minerals to be distributed over the range at strategic spots for the benefit of the sheep during the summer. The intelligent, careful manager will also decide well ahead of time where his camps will be located so the sheep have the best bed grounds. He goes over the range carefully to determine how vigorous the grass and upland vegetation is. At this time he decides whether some glades and basins can be used only lightly whereas other slopes and meadows may be grazed more heavily."[331]

> "The parallel in the Christian life is that Christ, our great Good Shepherd, has Himself already gone before us into every situation and every extremity that we might encounter."[332]

In the ancient East, a thoughtful host would welcome an honored guest into the protection of his home by pouring some oil on his head (cf. 45:7; 92:10; 133:2; Amos 6:6; Luke 7:46). This refreshed and soothed a weary traveler. Anointing with oil in Scripture

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[328]Keller, p. 99.
[329]Ibid.
[330]Ibid., p. 105.
[331]Ibid.
[332]Ibid., p. 110.

pictured God's bestowal of His Holy Spirit on the believer (Exod. 40:9-16; Lev. 8:10-12; 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39; et al.).[333]

> "As one meditates on this magnificent poem it is helpful to keep in mind that the poet is recounting the salient events of the full year in a sheep's life. He take us with him from the home ranch where every need is so carefully supplied by the owner, out into the green pastures, along the still waters, up through the mountain valleys to the high tablelands of summer."[334]
>
> "Only the strictest attention to the behavior of the sheep by the shepherd can forestall the difficulties of 'fly time.' At the very first sign of flies among the flock he will apply an antidote to their heads. I always preferred to use a homemade remedy composed of linseed oil, sulphur and tar which was smeared over the sheep's nose and head as a protection against nose flies.
>
> "What an incredible transformation this would make among the sheep. Once the oil had been applied to the sheep's head there was an immediate change in behavior. Gone was the aggravation; gone the frenzy; gone the irritability and the restlessness. Instead, the sheep would start to feed quietly again, then soon lie down in peaceful contentment."[335]
>
> "Only one application of oil, sulphur and tar was not enough for the entire summer. It was a process that had to be repeated. The fresh application was the effective antidote."[336]
>
> "Perhaps it should be mentioned that in Palestine the old remedy for this disease was olive oil mixed with sulphur and spices."[337]

David's "cup" symbolized his lot in life that overflowed with abundant blessings. A "cup" is often a metonymy for what is in it (cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).

3. The believer's response 23:6

David realized that God's good loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) would pursue him throughout his life. To follow here does not mean to bring up the rear but to pursue vigorously (cf. 83:15).[338] The phrase "goodness and lovingkindness" (NASB) or "goodness and love" (NIV) is a figure of speech (hendiadys) that we could render "good lovingkindness."

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[333]John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 21-22.
[334]Keller, p. 114.
[335]Ibid., p. 116.
[336]Ibid., p. 117.
[337]Ibid., p. 119.
[338]Kidner, p. 112.

> "Just as God's goodness and mercy flow to me all the days of my life, so goodness and mercy should follow me, should be left behind me, as a legacy to others, wherever I may go."[339]

Dwelling in the LORD's "house" (i.e., the sanctuary in Jerusalem) was a picture of enjoying full communion and fellowship with the Lord. The Amplified Old Testament translates this clause: "I will dwell in the 'presence' of the LORD forever."

> "Yet it is not the *place* but the vitality of the *relationship* which transforms."[340]

The word translated "dwell" in the Hebrew text implies dwelling after returning there, rather than dwelling already being there. Evidently, David was not in the sanctuary when he composed this psalm, but looked forward to returning to it again and often.

> "It is . . . unlikely that Psalm 23 refers to an afterlife in God's presence, though verses 4 and 6 in particular have sometimes been so understood. Verse 4 refers to the divine shepherd guiding his lamb (the psalmist) through a dangerous dark valley (a symbol for the danger posed by his enemies, cf. v. 5). In verse 6 the psalmist expressed his confidence that he would have access to God's presence (the 'house of the Lord' refers to the earthly Tabernacle or Temple; cf. Judg. 19:18; 1 Sam. 1:7, 24; 2 Sam. 12:20; 1 Kings 7:12, 40, 45, 51) throughout his lifetime. NIV's 'forever' translates a Hebrew phrase (*'orek yamim*, lit. 'length of days'), which, when used elsewhere of men, usually refers to a lengthy period of time (such as one's lifetime), not eternity (cf. Deut. 30:20; Job 12:12; Ps. 91:16; Prov. 3:2, 16; Lam. 5:20). . . .
>
> "While the psalmist may not have been speaking specifically of an afterlife in God's presence, in the progress of revelation his words come to express such a hope for God's people, who now understand the full ramifications of the psalm's affirmation that God protects His own. In the same way the statements in Psalms 17:15; 49:15; and 73:24 become, on the lips of a Christian, a testimony of faith in God's final vindication of the righteous, even beyond the grave."[341]

The Lord's goodness to His people, as seen in His leading and providing for us, should motivate us to appreciate our security in Him and to abide in fellowship with Him.[342]

If you anticipate or are presently doing pastoral ministry, try putting your name in the place of the shepherd as you read this psalm. This exercise will help you evaluate your effectiveness.

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[339]Keller, pp. 130-31.

[340]Brueggemann, p. 156.

[341]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," pp. 287, 288.

[342]An excellent brief booklet (61 pages) to give someone in need of the comfort spoken of in this psalm is Haddon Robinson's, *Psalm Twenty-Three*. See also Swindoll, pp. 67-82; and Allen, *Lord of . . .*, pp. 71-86.

PSALM 24

Only people characterized by righteous deeds and pure thoughts may enter the place where the glorious King of the Universe dwells. Psalm 23 expresses a longing for the Lord's house on Zion (23:6), and psalm 24 celebrates His entrance into His house and the character of those who may enter with Him.

The occasion that inspired the composition of this psalm is unknown. However, in view of its content, many interpreters believe David may have written it when he brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6).[343] Perhaps he wrote it when he returned from some victory in battle.[344]

During the Exile, the Jews developed the tradition of reading this royal psalm every Sunday, celebrating the first day of Creation. They also read other psalms on the other days of the week: 48 on Monday, 82 on Tuesday, 94 on Wednesday, 81 on Thursday, 93 on Friday, and 92 on Saturday.[345]

Spurgeon called this psalm "The Song of the Ascension" and paired it with Psalm 50.[346]

1. Ascent to the sanctuary 24:1-6

24:1-2 David affirmed Yahweh's sovereignty over all things. He is over all because He created all. Paul appealed to this verse to support his doctrine that the Christian may eat anything, provided doing so does not cause someone else to stumble (1 Cor. 10:26).

The pagans viewed their gods as limited to certain regions and functions, but Yahweh is sovereign over all. Verse 2 looks back to the creation of the world. The "rivers" (NASB) or "waters" (NIV) is a synonym for "seas." It probably describes the watery chaos out of which Moses described the world emerging in the Genesis account of creation (Gen. 1:10).

> "Though in the first two verses, the emphasis might seem to be on the sovereignty of the Lord, it appears to be much more to the point to regard what is said as a protest against the idea that God is or can be limited to a certain area like Jerusalem or like the sanctuary in which He is thought by some to be confined."[347]

24:3-4 The psalmist then wondered who could go into the sanctuary of such a great God on Mt. Zion (cf. 23:6). Who could have the courage to do so? Right actions (clean hands) and right attitudes (a pure heart) are necessary

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[343]E.g., Delitzsch, 1:334; Spurgeon, 1:115; Leupold, p. 215.
[344]Craigie, pp. 213-14.
[345]See Roy A. Rosenberg, "Yahweh has become King," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966):297-307.
[346]Spurgeon, 1:115.
[347]Leupold, p. 217.

if one hopes to attain admission to His presence. Idolatry and bearing false witness, perhaps representing all sins God-ward and man-ward, disqualify any potential worshipper.

24:5-6 God will bless those individuals—who seek God's fellowship by pursuing the ways of righteousness—by granting their desire.

> "Whatever is functioning as it should is 'righteous': in court, the man in the right; in character, the honest man; in the run of affairs, success. Probably all three are present in this context. This man has the smile of God upon him: he is accepted, he is helped to live an upright life, his affairs under God's *blessing* will run as they should [cf. 23:3b; 65:5]."[348]

The "generation" of those who seek Him probably refers to the group who seek God's face (i.e., seek God). The psalmist referred to the God of Jacob (NIV) here. This reference to Jacob brings to mind Jacob wrestling with the Lord to receive a blessing from Him (Gen. 32:24-32). All who similarly struggle to obtain the Lord's blessing by pursuing righteousness will receive His favor, as Jacob did.

2. Entry of the King 24:7-10

24:7 Evidently David pictured in his mind the closed gates of Jerusalem as though they were heads bowed. He called on these personified gates to lift their heads so the great King could enter. Normally people bowed their heads as majesty passed, but in this figure the gates did the reverse. Lifting up the gates refers to making the gates higher, larger, so such a glorious God could enter.

24:8 David explained that this glorious King was Yahweh in response to the question of the personified gates, and perhaps the people. The Lord is glorious because He is omnipotent, as seen in His victory over His enemies and His provision of salvation. Israel's divine King was fully glorious because He was unconquerable. The "hosts" picture the heavenly armies that accompany and support Him.

24:9-10 To underline the glory of Yahweh as the great King, David repeated the exhortation and the explanation contained in verses 7 and 8 respectively. These verses restate, in synonymous parallelism, the same thought, and all four verses serve as a victory shout. "Long live the King!" "Long live the King!"

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[348]Kidner, p. 114.

God's people should honor and glorify the Lord because He is the strongest of all Kings. We should realize that communion with such a One requires purity in thought, word, and deed. This will be an appropriate psalm to recite when the Lord Jesus returns to earth to set up His kingdom for 1,000 years.[349]

> "Psalms 22, 23, and 24 form a trilogy. In Ps. 22 the *good* Shepherd gives His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11); in Ps. 23 the *great* Shepherd, 'brought again from the dead . . . through the blood of the everlasting covenant' (Heb. 13:20), tenderly cares for His sheep; in Ps. 24 the *chief* Shepherd appears as King of glory to reward His sheep (1 Pet. 5:4)."[350]

> "What a wonderful trilogy we have here in these three Psalms. The Psalm of the Cross, 22; the Psalm of the crook, the Shepherd's crook, 23; the Psalm of the crown, 24."[351]

PSALM 25

David appealed to God for wisdom and forgiveness because of His goodness to Israel. This is one of the acrostic psalms in which each verse in the Hebrew Bible begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet, here with an occasional irregularity. Two verses begin with the letter *resh*, the letters *waw* and *qof* are absent, and the last verse begins with the letter *pe*, which is out of normal alphabetical order. The psalm is an individual lament, with elements of penitence, that transforms at the end into a communal lament (cf. Ps. 34). It pictures life as a difficult journey that we cannot make successfully by ourselves.[352]

> "It is a calmly confident prayer for help against one's foes, and for God's instructing, pardoning, and leading grace."[353]

> "David is pictured in this Psalm as in a faithful miniature [small picture]. His holy trust, his many conflicts, his great transgression, his bitter repentance, and his deep distresses are all here; so that we see the very heart of 'the man after God's own heart.' . . . It is the mark of a true saint that his sorrows remind him of his sins, and his sorrow for sin drives him to his God."[354]

1. Requests for guidance and pardon 25:1-7

25:1-3 David lifted up his soul to Yahweh in trust, confident that God would not let him down or let his enemies overcome him. He believed no one who put his hope in God would suffer disappointment, though the treacherously wicked would.

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[349]See Allen, *Lord of . . .*, pp. 131-45.
[350]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 610.
[351]Ironside, p. 151.
[352]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 140.
[353]Delitzsch, 1:340.
[354]Spurgeon, 1:122.

> "The mood changes from confidence in God's justice to submission to God's guidance. The heart of the believer is never confident without also being submissive to his God."[355]

25:4-7 The psalmist sensed his need for divine guidance and instruction. He wanted to walk in the Lord's righteous ways but needed help in discerning them.

> "Do what you know to be your present duty, and God will acquaint you with your future duty as it comes to be present. Make it your business to avoid known omissions, and God will keep you from feared commissions."[356]

David also requested forgiveness for the sins of his youth, asking God to remember His compassion and loyal love, but not to remember his transgressions.

> "When God pardons sin he is said to *remember it no more*, which denotes a plenary remission; he forgives and forgets."[357]

Since God is omniscient and knows everything, we should probably understand God's "forgetting" to mean that He does not hold our sins against us. When He pardons us, it is as though He forgets our sins.

2. Repetition of the request 25:8-22

The same petitions for guidance and pardon recur, but this time the basis of David's request is the character of God. Verses 8-10 develop the psalmist's prayer for instruction and guidance in verses 4-5, and verse 11 develops his prayer for forgiveness in verses 6-7.

25:8-10 God is good, upright, loving, and faithful. Because He is this way, He teaches sinners and guides the humble, those who sense their need for His help. He does so through His covenant (the Mosaic Law) and testimonies.

25:11 For the sake of the good reputation of Yahweh, David asked that God pardon his sins, which he viewed as great. God had promised to pardon the sins of His people who acknowledged them, so God pardoning David's sins would show Him faithful to His Word.

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[355]VanGemeren, p. 228.

[356]Samuel Annesley, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:124.

[357]Henry, p. 602.

> "Sin, by committing it, brings God a great deal of dishonor, and yet, by forgiving it, God raiseth to Himself a great deal of honor. Since God forgiveth sins for His Name's sake, He will be ready to forgive many sins as well as few, great and small; indeed, the more and greater our sins are, the greater is the forgiveness, and consequently, the greater is God's glory . . ."[358]

25:12-14 According to Proverbs 1:7 the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That is, to become wise, a person must first submit to God and what He has revealed as he or she lives life. Fearing the Lord will result in listening to His Word. The person who listens to the Lord's Word will prosper, as will his or her descendants (cf. Deut. 6).

25:15-22 The psalmist proceeded to ask the Lord to deliver him out of his distress. He was trusting in God's deliverance (v. 15). "Eyes . . . continually [looking] toward the LORD" pictures continual prayer.[359] Evidently David regarded his present sufferings and the affliction of the nation he led, whatever those troubles may have been, as due to his own sins in some measure.

To experience God's guidance and deliverance, God's people must confess their sins and appeal to Him to be faithful to His promises to forgive. They will find direction in His revealed Word, and will experience deliverance in His appointed time. Therefore, we who are believers can take courage while repenting.

> "This whole approach to divine guidance is personal and mature, unlike the basically pagan search for irrational pointers and omens (*cf.* Is. 47:13)."[360]

PSALM 26

In this individual lament psalm, which is similar to Psalm 25 but does not contain confession, David asked for God's vindication because of his personal integrity. He protested his innocence (cf. Pss. 17; 35; 43; and 69). Psalms 26 (vv. 6-8), 27 (vv. 4-7), and 28 (v. 2) all reveal David's love for God's sanctuary and so uncover his love for the Lord.

1. Assertion of integrity 26:1-3

When David asked God to vindicate him, he was praying that the Lord would show to others that he had not been guilty of things with which others had charged him. To prove him guiltless, the psalmist asked God to be fair with him, and he invited Him to examine his claim. He was confident that when the Lord did this He would find David not guilty.

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[358]Nathanael Hardy, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:127.
[359]Delitzsch, 1:346.
[360]Kidner, p. 116.

> "He does not self-righteously hold himself to be morally perfect, he appeals only to the fundamental tendency of his inmost nature, which is turned towards God and to Him only."[361]

2. Proof of integrity 26:4-8

26:4-5 David cited his separation from sinners and their assemblies as evidence that he was not wicked and deceitful (cf. 1:1). He was not speaking so much of his social preference as of his spiritual commitment. These were enemies of the Lord.

> "As good men, in concert, make one another better, and are enabled to do so much the more good, so bad men, in combination, make one another worse, and do so much the more mischief."[362]

> "A man who does not hate evil terribly does not love good heartily."[363]

26:6-8 He preferred the sanctuary of the Lord to the meeting places of the wicked (cf. v. 5). Washing the hands in innocence is a figurative way of saying that his actions were righteous (cf. Matt. 27:24). He offered sacrifices to God in worship, and praised God, rather than ignoring Him as the wicked did.

3. Prayer for reward 26:9-12

26:9-10 David asked God to spare him from a premature death in the company of the wicked. Evidently he expected God to judge the wicked this way, and wanted God to separate him from them in His judgment (cf. Gen. 18:23), as David had separated himself from them in his behavior. It appears that some people were grouping David together with others who were wicked in their thinking, but he did not want God to do that.

26:11-12 Having called on God to do right, the psalmist promised to do the same. He would continue to do right as he waited for God to redeem him from his trouble. "Redeem" (Heb. *padah*) means to ransom or purchase out of trouble. This word often refers to the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt in the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 7:8; 2 Sam. 7:23; Mic. 6:4). David felt he was on solid footing in his request, and looked forward to praising God publicly for saving him from his accusers.

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[361]Delitzsch, 1:350.
[362]Henry, p. 603.
[363]Spurgeon, 1:132.

> "Only when a man has thoroughly and consistently shunned the ways of evil and completely detests them can he speak as this man does."[364]

The people of God can appeal confidently for vindication from the false accusations of spiritual enemies because they have a righteous standing before Him. This is not a claim to being sinless but to being righteous because of God's work for them. The upright behavior of the righteous is evidence that they are, by God's grace, different from the wicked.[365]

PSALM 27

Many of the psalms begin with a lament and end in trust. This one begins with trust, then sinks into a lament, and finally rises again to confidence in God. Themes in common with the preceding psalm include God's tabernacle, dependence on the Lord, and hope in divine deliverance. The setting could well have been the time when David fled before Absalom (cf. 3:5). This may be a royal psalm with features of a lament psalm.[366] It is a good one to meditate on when you face a daunting challenge.

1. Confidence in spite of danger 27:1-3

27:1 David expressed great confidence as he looked to the future because Yahweh was his light, salvation, and defense (stronghold). Light connotes understanding, joy, and life (cf. 18:28). It is also a common figure for comfort.[367] According to Warren Wiersbe, this is the first time in Scripture that a writer used light as a metaphor for God.[368]

> "*Light* is a natural figure for almost everything that is positive, from truth and goodness to joy and vitality (*e.g.*, respectively, Ps. 43:3; Is. 5:20; Ps. 97:11; 36:9), to name but a few. Here it is the answer to *fear* (1, 3) and to the forces of evil."[369]

> "It is not said merely that the Lord gives light, but that He 'is' light; not that He gives salvation, but that He 'is' salvation."[370]

> "The phrases 'my light' and 'my salvation' mean essentially the same thing."[371]

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[364]Leupold, p. 232.
[365]See Swindoll, pp. 83-93.
[366]J. H. Eaton, *Psalms*, pp. 85-86; idem, *Kingship and the Psalms*, pp. 39-40.
[367]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 417.
[368]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 145. Cf. Yates, p. 505.
[369]Kidner, p. 120.
[370]Spurgeon, 1:135.
[371]VanGemeren, p. 243.

The answer to his rhetorical questions is, of course, no one (cf. Rom. 8:31-39).

27:2-3 In the past, when David's enemies advanced against him, they stumbled and fell because God defended him. Therefore, David said that in the future he would not fear if an entire army were to pitch camp and prepare to attack him.

> "It is a hopeful sign for us when the wicked hate us; if our foes were godly men it would be a sore sorrow, but as for the wicked, their hatred is better than their love."[372]

> "Hosts cannot hurt us if the Lord of hosts protect us."[373]

2. The source of security 27:4-6

27:4 The greatest gift that God could give David would be the privilege of spending his time contemplating and reflecting on the wonderful features of his God.[374] The psalmist could achieve this well in Israel near the ark of the covenant, where God localized His presence in a special sense. There the priests read and studied the Mosaic Law and worshipped God with prayers and songs. The temple in view here was not Solomon's since Solomon had not yet built it. It was probably the tent that David had constructed in Jerusalem to house the ark—that was a successor to the Mosaic tabernacle—that stood at Gibeon during David's reign. Or David may have been referring to God's heavenly temple.

> "As so often, especially also in 23:6, dwelling in the house of the Lord means personal spiritual fellowship with Him, being assured of His favor and loving-kindness."[375]

> "As in the well-known 23:6, this is not an ambition to be a priest or Levite but to enjoy the constant presence of God which is typified by their calling. Note the singleness of purpose (*one thing*)—the best answer to distracting fears (cf. 1-3)—and the priorities within that purpose: *to behold* and *to inquire*; a preoccupation with God's Person and His will. It is the essence of worship; indeed of discipleship."[376]

J. Vernon McGee, under whom I did a pastoral internship while I was in seminary, gave a testimony about his enjoyment of his retirement.[377] I would like to give mine: I retired from teaching the Bible for 45 years at

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[372]Spurgeon, 1:135.
[373]Henry, p. 604.
[374]See Lewis, pp. 44-53.
[375]Leupold, p. 235.
[376]Kidner, pp. 120-21.
[377]McGee, 2:719.

Dallas Theological Seminary in 2011. One of my reasons was that, even though I had a wonderful ministry of training future leaders for the church, I learned that I was reaching more people through these notes. So I believe the Lord led me to devote most of my time and attention to studying His Word to enrich these notes for the benefit of my readers—people just like you. These have been the most wonderful years of my life, as I have had the opportunity and privilege to "dwell in the house of the LORD . . ., to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to meditate in His temple." The Lord has given me the time to concentrate on His Word and to get it out to people around the world. Thank you, Lord!

27:5-6 By seeking the Lord, David would obtain His protection from his enemies and a firm foundation for his life. These foes would not pursue him into the sanctuary. The psalmist's real security came in seeking refuge in the Lord Himself—that His tabernacle only symbolized. David was sure the Lord would exalt him above his enemies eventually. When this happened, he promised to worship the Lord with sacrifices and verbal praise.

3. Prayer for speedy help 27:7-14

27:7-10 Apparently David was not getting the help he needed, so he appealed earnestly to the Lord. In the Mosaic Law, God told His people to remember Him and to draw near to Him rather than abandoning Him. David was doing just that, so he asked God not to abandon him or remain silent when he requested deliverance. He reminded the Lord that he was His servant because lords did not normally deny their servants access to their presence. God could reject David's plea because he was a sinner, so the psalmist acknowledged the possibility that God would turn him away.

Verse 10 could be a conditional statement: "If my father. . . ." If so, David's point in this verse was that even if those who were most supportive of him on earth would forsake him, he knew even then that the Lord would not abandon him. Another possibility is that David was referring to his parents' absence from him, since he had placed them in safekeeping in Moab (1 Sam. 22:3-4). In this case, he meant that even those closest to him were not with him (through no fault of theirs). Either interpretation is possible, since the Hebrew *kai* can be translated both "if" and "for."

27:11-12 David needed directions from God since his enemies were trying to catch him. He feared they would falsely condemn him if the Lord allowed him to fall into their hands.

27:13-14 David's confidence in God returned, and he rejoiced in the prospect of the Lord's deliverance. He encouraged himself and his readers to wait (hope) for that rescue, and to strengthen themselves with faith in God (cf. Deut. 31:7; Josh. 1:6-7, 9, 18; 10:25; 1 Cor. 16:13).

> "In heaven is that land that may truly be called *the land of the living*. This earth is the land of the dying. There is nothing like the believing hope of eternal life to keep us from fainting under all the calamities of this present time."[378]

> "Wait at His door with prayer; wait at His foot with humility; wait at His table with service; wait at His window with expectancy."[379]

Believers can remain positive and confident about their spiritual safety as they delight in the Lord. When fear raises its head, the way to defeat it is to return to trust in Yahweh.[380]

PSALM 28

This psalm is similar to Psalm 26, except that in this one, David's distress was imminent. Some situation like Absalom's rebellion probably precipitated this psalm. David believed God would not punish him with the wicked, and he asked Him to save and shepherd His people. The combination of confidence in Yahweh and prayer to Yahweh, that appears in Psalm 27, appears again here but in reverse order. Verses 1-5 are lament, and verses 6-9 are thanksgiving.

1. Urgent petition for deliverance 28:1-4

28:1 David cried out in prayer for the Lord's deliverance from his enemies so he would not die. The "pit" refers to the grave.

> "Prayer is an expression of sole dependence on the Lord for help."[381]

28:2-4 The psalmist begged God to hear and respond to his petition. Lifting up the hands in prayer symbolized utter dependence on God (cf. 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; 1 Kings 8:35, 38, 42). The sanctuary (Heb. *debir*) is where the ark abode. David asked that the Lord not judge him with the sinners who opposed him. Moreover he requested that God would punish the wicked as they justly deserved.

2. Confident praise for deliverance 28:5-8

28:5 David was sure the wicked would fail in their purposes since they did not acknowledge the Lord's works.

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[378]Henry, p. 605.
[379]Spurgeon, 1:138.
[380]See Swindoll, pp. 94-105; and John Mark Soden, "Whom Shall I Fear? Psalm 27," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):1-24.
[381]VanGemeren, p. 249.

28:6-8 Consequently, David praised the Lord. He believed God had heard his prayer because the Lord had promised to hear the prayers of the godly. The Lord was David's source of strength and defense, so he knew his attackers would fail. Furthermore, Yahweh consistently saved and defended His people and His anointed king.

3. Final request for deliverance 28:9

Having expressed his confidence in the Lord's salvation, David repeated his request for deliverance. He wanted divine salvation and guidance for Israel from her Shepherd forever. This is a long-range petition for God's sustenance in the years that lay ahead.

God's people can appeal for help in distress to their great Shepherd and can rely on His guidance and salvation in view of His commitment to them. The leaders of God's people should intercede for the Lord's blessing on the people under their charge, as David did (cf. 1 Sam. 12:23).

PSALM 29

David praised God for His awesome power as a consequence of contemplating a severe thunderstorm, either a real storm or one in his mind's eye.

> "David was an outdoorsman who appreciated nature and celebrated the power of Jehovah the Creator. Jewish worshipers today use this psalm in the synagogue as a part of their celebration of Pentecost."[382]

Israel's pagan neighbors gave the credit for storms and other natural phenomena to their gods. Consequently, this creation psalm was a polemic against belief in these idols, as well as a tribute to the uniqueness of Yahweh. Some have called this a worship and royal psalm,[383] others a nature psalm.[384]

> "Whether David was building the psalm out of an ancient fragment, or turning to a style that would recall the old battle-hymns of God's salvation, the primitive vigour of the verse, with its eighteen reiterations of the name Yahweh (the Lord), wonderfully matches the theme, while the structure of the poem averts the danger of monotony by its movement from heaven to earth, by the path of the storm and by the final transition from nature in uproar to the people of God in peace."[385]

I suggest reading this psalm aloud during a thunderstorm, as well as at other times.

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[382]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 147.
[383]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 904.
[384]Leupold, p. 244.
[385]Kidner, pp. 124-25.

1. A call to praise Yahweh 29:1-2

The phrase "sons of the mighty" (NASB) or "mighty ones" (NIV) probably refers to the angels. The Old Testament writers called Israel "God's son," but they did not refer to individual believers that way. The idea that every believer is God's son was a revelation that Jesus Christ introduced for the first time (Matt. 6:9; et al.).

These verses are an excellent example of climactic parallelism. In climactic parallelism, the writer makes a statement, and every time he repeats the same idea in a succeeding line, he does so more forcefully. Holy array was the dress morally, more than physically, with which the Israelites were to worship God when they assembled for their national festivals at the sanctuary.

> "The poets of the Bible delighted in taking the ideas of the Canaanites and then stripping them of their essentials. See the scathing attacks on idolatry in 115:4-8; Is. 41:21-29. Here the poet takes a treasured image of Canaanite thought—Baal with other gods bowing before him—and turns it inside out. It is not Baal, but the true God who is worshiped. He is worshiped not by gods who do not even exist, but by His own angels."[386]

2. Reasons to praise Yahweh 29:3-9

This section pictures a thunderstorm.

29:3-4 David evidently saw the storm first over a large body of water, perhaps the Mediterranean Sea. He spoke of the thunder as God's voice. This is an apt comparison, since thunder is a noise that comes from "heaven," i.e., the sky. However, he may also have used this figure to imply Yahweh's control over His creation. God brought the creation into existence with a word (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24).

> "Natural causes, as men call them, are God in action, and we must not ascribe power to them."[387]

29:5-7 David's description of the progress of the storm pictured it moving inland over Lebanon to the north of Israel. The Lord's voice (thunder) seemingly split the mighty cedars of Lebanon and tossed them about like matchsticks. Of course, the lightning and wind were probably the actual agents of this devastation, but the psalmist described it as the result of Yahweh's decree. Likewise, he said God called forth flames of fire (lightning). Both Old and New Testaments speak of lightning as God's tool of judgment (e.g., 2 Sam. 22:15; Job 28:26; Matt. 24:27; et al.). Lebanon and Sirion (Mt. Hermon, Deut. 3:9) are names of mountains in the Anti-Lebanon Range, Baal's supposed territory.

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[386]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 904.

[387]Spurgeon, 1:141.

29:8-9 As the storm moved eastward into the wilderness area near Kadesh north of Damascus, it shook the earth. It made the deer give birth to their calves prematurely and blew the leaves off the trees. Consequently, all God's angelic host glorified Him for His great power.

It is probably significant that the phrase "voice of the Lord" occurs seven times in verses 3-9. The Israelites often regarded things done seven times as perfect acts of God, such as the creation that God accomplished in seven days.

3. The sovereignty of Yahweh 29:10-11

29:10 The present storm reminded David of the inundation of the whole world in Noah's day. The Hebrew word for flood here occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament only in Genesis 6—11. As Yahweh ruled over His creation then, so He did in David's day, and so He does forever. Thunderstorms reminded the psalmist of this truth.

29:11 The same power Yahweh employs in storms is available to His people. As He can cause a storm to subside, so He can bring peace into our lives (cf. Mark 4:37-39). Thus the Lord is not just transcendent over all and able to control the forces of nature. He is also a resource for those to whom He has committed Himself with covenant promises.

> "The subject of the psalm is the demonstration of God's glory in nature, but its impact is the opposite. It gives a sense of tranquility and awe. Yahweh, our God, is powerful in his glory. He can and does protect his people. He opens heaven up to unleash his blessings of protection, victory, and peace (cf. 28:8-9; 46:1-3; Num 6:24-26). There is quietness within the storm for those who belong to the people of God."[388]

Believers should see in nature the attributes of God and glorify Him for His mighty power (cf. 19:1-6). We should also remember that His power is a resource for us. The God of creation is also the God who saves His people.

PSALM 30

David had emerged from an experience of chastening by the Lord for some sin he had committed, and he praised Him that His anger is temporary but His favor is permanent.

> "This psalm is a quite clear example of the thanksgiving song, which Westermann labels as a declarative narrative.[389] That is, the psalm tells the story of *going into the trouble* and *coming out of the trouble*."[390]

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[388]VanGemeren, p. 257.

[389]Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content, and Message*, chs. 2 and 4.

[390]Brueggemann, p. 126.

The title of this psalm is subject to two interpretations. It may mean that the psalmist composed it for the occasion of the dedication of the Lord's house. This would not be the dedication of Solomon's temple since David had already died when Solomon dedicated it. It could mean the tent that David erected in Jerusalem to house the ark of the covenant when he brought it into the city (2 Sam. 6:17). Or perhaps this occasion was the dedication of the temple site (1 Chron. 21:26; 22:1). The Lord's chastening of the king preceded both of these events. The writer referred to this discipline in the psalm.

> "We feel that the psalm fits this historical situation as a glove fits the hand."[391]

Another possibility is that the title did not refer to the occasion of writing but to those occasions on which the Israelites were to use this psalm in national worship. This seems less likely to me in view of the references to chastening. There is evidence from the Talmud, however, that the Jews recited this psalm during Hanukkah, their commemoration of the rededication of the temple in 165 B.C.[392]

1. David's deliverance from God's chastening 30:1-5

The psalmist began by acknowledging the Lord's deliverance of him, and he called on the congregation of Israel to praise Him. Promises to praise the Lord frame this individual thanksgiving psalm (vv. 1, 12).

30:1 The reason David wanted to praise God was that the Lord had restored him (cf. Isa. 38:10-20). Had God not done this, the psalmist believed his enemies would have been able to rejoice over his death.

30:2-3 God had answered David's prayer for deliverance by restoring him to health and keeping him alive (cf. Ps. 41).

30:4-5 David called God's people to praise Him because His punishments are short-lived, but His blessings are perennial.

> "Personal worship that doesn't enrich our corporate worship may become selfish and lead to more pride."[393]

David used the night as a figure for a time of distress. He had experienced no understanding, comfort, joy, or fellowship because of God's chastening. Release from these conditions is like the dawning of a new day with all its prospects for blessing.

> "'The victorious Christian life,' wrote the noted Scottish preacher George Morrison, 'is a series of new beginnings.'"[394]

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[391]Leupold, p. 252.
[392]VanGemeren, p. 257.
[393]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 150.
[394]Ibid., p. 149.

2. The reason for David's discipline 30:6-10

30:6 David had evidently become self-confident and had forgotten his complete dependence on the Lord (cf. John 15:5). Prosperity often tempts us with a false sense of our security (cf. Prov. 1:32; Jer. 22:21), and David slipped here. We should never conclude that, because we are presently experiencing peace and prosperity, these conditions will inevitably continue.

30:7 Now that David had regained a more realistic view of his dependence on God, he acknowledged that it was only the Lord's blessing that made him secure. The figure of a mountain to represent a kingdom occurs often elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Isa. 2:2; 41:15; Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:35, 44; Rev. 17:9). God hiding His face pictures the removal of blessing and watch-care.

30:8-10 David had prayed for the Lord to be gracious to him. He had based his request on the fact that, if God allowed him to die, he would not be able to glorify the Lord with his public praises any longer. Consequently, David would not be able to honor God among His people. David based his petition on the glory of God, not on his own selfish desires (cf. James 4:2-3).

> "The ultimate end of God's mercies to us is our praise to Him."[395]

3. David's thanksgiving for God's mercy 30:11-12

The psalmist described the change God had brought into his life by restoring him to health in terms of the joyous celebrating that took place at Israel's annual feasts. He regarded his deliverance as taking place so he could continue praising God as long as he lived (cf. v. 9), and he vowed to do just that.

> "What is praise? The rent we owe to God; and the larger the farm the greater the rent should be."[396]

When we experience chastening from the Lord for disregarding Him, we should return to him in prayer. If we appeal to Him for mercy so we may change our ways and continue to glorify Him, He may grant us restoration. This deliverance should then lead us to rededicate ourselves to praising Him more consistently the rest of our lives.[397]

> "Every difficult experience of life—and David had many of them—is an opportunity to have a 'pity party' or attend a rehearsal for singing in the

[395]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 418.
[396]G. S. Bowes, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:147.
[397]See Allen, *Lord of . . .*, pp. 149-56.

> choirs of heaven! We have a lifetime of grace (v. 5) to prepare us for an eternity of glory."[398]

PSALM 31

This lament-thanksgiving (or lament-trust) psalm grew out of an experience in David's life in which his foes plotted to kill him. That incident reminded David that the Lord would protect those who trust in Him. He urged others who might encounter similar affliction to love and trust in God as well. Perhaps David composed this psalm when, after defending the town of Keilah, its inhabitants proved ungrateful and would have delivered David to Saul (1 Sam. 23). What David wrote here would fit that occasion.

1. David's cry for rescue 31:1-2

Because David was trusting in the Lord he called on Him to defend him. He could do this because God had promised to aid those who looked to Him for help in troubling times (e.g., Deut. 28:1-14). David used many figures of speech that picture God as a secure fortress in these verses. (Verses 1-3 also appear in 71:1-3.)

> "We generally put our ear near to the lips of the sick and dying that we may hear what they say. To this the text appears to allude ["Incline thine ear to me," v. 2]."[399]

> "If God be our strength, we may hope that he will both put his strength in us and put forth his strength for us."[400]

2. David's confidence in God's love 31:3-8

The psalmist's confidence that the Lord would protect him was strong.

31:3-4 David believed God would free him from his present entangling problems because the Lord had promised to help the righteous in their afflictions (cf. 71:1-3). This is another scriptural "rock song"—a song that compares the LORD to a rock.

31:5 David committed his life to God's care. He did so confidently because God had faithfully delivered him in the past and had proved true to His promises. The Lord Jesus prayed the first line of this prayer on the cross (Luke 23:46). We should also follow this example in our times of suffering (1 Pet. 4:19).

> ". . . Martin Luther said, 'Blessed are they who die not only for the Lord, as martyrs; not only in the Lord as believers,

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[398]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 151.
[399]Adam Clarke, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:148.
[400]Henry, p. 607.

> but likewise *with* the Lord, as breathing forth their lives in the words, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.'"[401]
>
> "Many think that while they are perplexed about their worldly affairs, they may be excused if they neglect their souls; whereas the greater hazard our lives and secular interests lie at the more we are concerned to look to our souls, that we may keep possession of our souls when we can keep possession of nothing else, Luke xxi 19."[402]

31:6 The opposite of trusting in Yahweh is putting confidence in an idol, a vain object of hope, whatever that object might be (cf. Jon. 2:8).

31:7-8 Even though the psalmist had not yet experienced deliverance, he delighted in the loyal love of his God. God had not handed him over to his enemy, so the prospects for the future were encouraging. Even though final deliverance was yet to come, David could praise God as he waited for it since he believed God would be faithful to His promises to help His afflicted. Paul and Silas sang praises to God in the Philippian jail with the same confidence (Acts 16:25).

3. David's lament over his danger 31:9-13

In the preceding verses, David appealed to God's righteousness; now he appealed to His mercy. David recounted some of the reasons he needed God's help. Among other things, he admitted his own sins were partly responsible for his sufferings (v.10). Mainly it was the opposition of evil people that accounted for his distress. They had resisted, slandered, and schemed against him. He felt alone in standing for what was right.

> "Such swallow-friends the world is full of, that are gone in winter."[403]
>
> "In the psalmists' world the righteous and the wicked do not peacefully coexist in the name of pluralism. Rather the wicked marshal all their cunning and power in an effort to annihilate the righteous (31:13; 56:5-6; 71:10; 143:3)."[404]
>
> "When the psalmist describes the misery in which he finds himself he does so because he rightly believes that the Lord is much interested in the well-being of His children. A statement of their wretchedness will touch His heart. There may be something naive about this—the assumption that the Lord does not know what the situation is unless we tell Him. But if one carries that approach through logically, a person would never present a

[401]McGee, 2:727.
[402]Henry, p. 607.
[403]Ibid.
[404]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 279.

> petition to God: why tell Him; He knows? Here the trusting confidence of the child of God speaks out of the necessity that is upon men to get relief of their distress by uttering it."[405]

> "Dim and sunken eyes [v. 9] are plain indicators of failing health."[406]

4. David's prayer for deliverance 31:14-18

Reaffirming his trust in the Lord, David called on Him to silence his enemies and to save him from their hateful hands. He asked God to shut their slanderous mouths also. "My times are in Thy hand" (v. 15) means that whatever happens to me is under God's providential careful control.

> ". . . not more surely does the moon sway tides than God sways souls."[407]

> "Many people go to fortune-tellers and have their palms read. They are told that this line means this and another line means something else. All of it is perfect nonsense, but it affords a living for some people; and for others who are trying to get rid of money it provides another way of getting rid of it. But our times are in Christ's hands."[408]

> "The last two verses of the section offer what is commonly described as an imprecation or curse upon the enemies of the author. To pray for the overthrow or the just punishment of the wicked is not wicked. It is generally a vigorous desire that the iniquity of evil men might be brought to an end. A number of arguments could be offered to show that these Old Testament saints would have far preferred to see the conversion of these their enemies (cf. the close of Ps. 2); but since, in most cases, this was out of the question, they prayed earnestly that God would put an end to their ungodly career and so to the harm that they sought to bring upon the godly."[409]

5. David's praise of God 31:19-22

The psalmist extolled Yahweh for His goodness to those who seek refuge in Him.

> "I find that people like to talk about their neighbors or their children or their father and mother or relatives or their boss or their preacher, but not many people like to talk about the goodness of God. My, how good He is! When was the last time you told someone how good God is?"[410]

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[405]Leupold, p. 260.
[406]Spurgeon, 1:150.
[407]Ibid., 1:152.
[408]McGee, 2:728.
[409]Leupold, pp. 261-62.
[410]McGee, 2:728.

God protects those who seek refuge in Him from evil conspiracies and verbal attacks. The Lord had been faithful to David under attack. The reference to the besieged city (v. 21) could be figurative or literal.

> "To him Ziklag was indeed the turning-point between his degradation and exaltation."[411]

Even though David's faith had faltered, God still supported and saved him.

> "In this part [of the psalm] well-grounded hope expands to triumphant certainty . . ."[412]

6. David's exhortation to the godly 31:23-24

David urged those who hope in God to love Him purposefully because He is faithful to save the godly. He wanted to encourage others as they waited for Yahweh's salvation.

What about the godly who have perished at the hands of evil oppressors? Our lives do not end when we die. In the light of New Testament revelation we know that God will vindicate the righteous after death if He allows us to fall before the wicked in this life. When David lived he had the promises of the Mosaic Covenant that guaranteed the godly long life in the Promised Land (e.g., Exod. 20:12; et al.). God will vindicate the godly who die prematurely—after death (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:10).

In view of God's consistent faithfulness to His promises to bless the righteous and punish the wicked, the godly can endure periods of persecution and suffering with strong confidence. We can trust in the Lord's eventual deliverance, and even praise Him as we endure rough times.

PSALM 32

In this psalm of wisdom and thanksgiving, David urged those who sin against the Lord to seek His pardon, with the encouragement that He is gracious with the penitent. He will, however, chasten the unrepentant.

Different scholars have identified different psalms as wisdom psalms. Bullock regarded 32, 34, 37, 47, 73, 112, 127—28, and 133 as wisdom psalms. Some literary distinctives of wisdom psalms are proverbs, admonitions (often taken from nature), similes, "blessed," "son" or "children," and "better."[413] They are not prayers as such but reflections on life and life's problems. The wisdom psalms are a subset of the didactic psalm genre, other subsets being Torah psalms and historical psalms. Wisdom psalms can be subdivided into psalms of proverbial wisdom and psalms of reflective wisdom.

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[411]Delitzsch, 1:391.
[412]Ibid., 1:390.
[413]Bullock, p. 202.

> "The proverb represents a concentrated expression of the truth. It teaches the obvious because it is a slice out of real life. . . . This proverbial type of wisdom teaching is sometimes called *lower* wisdom.
>
> "The second type of wisdom, the type represented by Job and Ecclesiastes, is basically reflective. This reflective wisdom puts forth problems that arise out of real life, but it does not have the pat answers that proverbial wisdom offers. . . . This type of wisdom teaching is sometimes called *higher* wisdom. The Psalms actually contain both types."[414]

Students of this penitential psalm have often linked it with David's adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Uriah (2 Sam. 11). While that identification seems probable in view of the content of the psalm, the connection is not indisputable. Psalm 51 was David's prayer for pardon for having committed those acts. If Psalm 32 looks back on these very sins, David probably composed it later than Psalm 51. Psalm 32 stresses God's forgiveness and the lesson David learned from not confessing his sin quickly. Other penitential psalms are 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.

> "While they are not all strictly 'penitential,' Psalms 51 and 130 are definitely prayers of penitence, and Psalms 32 and 102 are laments related to an illness, perhaps stemming from the psalmist's sin (32:3). The tone of all seven penitential psalms, however, is one of submission to the almighty God, a necessary disposition for anyone who would seek God's forgiveness"[415]
>
> "It is told of Luther that one day being asked which of all the Psalms were the best, he made answer, *Psalmi Paulini*, and when his friends pressed to know which these might be, he said, 'The 32nd, the 51st, the 130th, and 143^{d}. For they all teach that the forgiveness of our sins comes without the law and without works to the man who believes, and therefore I call them Pauline Psalms.'"[416]
>
> "When Galileo was imprisoned by the Inquisition at Rome for asserting the Copernican system, he was enjoined as a penance, to repeat the Seven Penitential Psalms every week for three years."[417]

Thirteen psalms contain the word "Maskil" in their titles (Pss. 32, 42, 44—45, 52—55, 74, 78, 88—89, and 142; cf. 47:7). The meaning of this term is still uncertain.

> "The word is derived from a verb meaning 'to be prudent; to be wise' (see BDB 968). Various options are: 'a contemplative song,' 'a song imparting moral wisdom,' or 'a skillful [i.e., well-written] song.'"[418]

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[414]Ibid., p. 200.
[415]Ibid., p. 207.
[416]Spurgeon, 1:155.
[417]M. Montague, quoted in ibid.
[418]The NET Bible note on the title of Ps. 32. "BDB" is Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*.

1. The blessing of forgiveness 32:1-2

This psalm begins like Psalm 1. "Blessed" (happy) means having received blessings from the Lord, one of which is joy.

> "In the First Psalm we have the blessing of innocence, or rather, of Him Who only was innocent: here we have the blessing of repentance, as the next happiest state to that of sinlessness."[419]

David described divine forgiveness in several ways in these verses. Regardless of the type of offense one may have committed ("transgression" [Heb. *pesha*, "passing over a boundary"] "sin" [*chataah*, "missing the mark"] "iniquity" [*avon*, "turning from something's proper course"] or "deceit" [*remiyah*, fraud, deceit, or guile"]), divine pardon is a blessed experience.

> "In general our happiness consists in the favour of God, and not in the wealth of this world . . ."[420]

> "Holy David, in the front of this Psalm, shows us wherein true happiness consists: not in beauty, honor, riches (the world's trinity), but in the forgiveness of sin."[421]

Under the Mosaic economy an innocent animal that suffered death, the punishment for sin, took the guilt of the sinner in his or her place. This provision was only temporary, however, until God would provide a perfect human being whose substitute death would atone for sin fully (Heb. 9:11-14; cf. Rom. 4:7-8).

> "The fundamental idea of sacrifice in the Old testament is that of substitution, which again seems to imply everything else—atonement and redemption, vicarious punishment and forgiveness. . . . This idea of substitution, as introduced, adopted, and sanctioned by God Himself, is expressed by the sacrificial term rendered in our version 'atonement,' but which really means covering, the substitute in the acceptance of God taking the place of, and so covering, as it were, the person of the offerer."[422]

2. The chastening of the unrepentant 32:3-5

32:3-4 David's failure to confess his sin immediately resulted in internal grief and external weakness for him. God oppressed him severely with discipline (cf. Heb. 12:6). Consequently David felt drained of energy. Evidently this is a description of how he felt in every aspect of his being—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

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[419]Lorinus, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:155.
[420]Henry, p. 608.
[421]Thomas Watson, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:156.
[422]Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 107.

> ". . . he who does not in confession pour out all his corruption before God, only tortures himself until he unburdens himself of his secret curse."[423]

32:5 David finally confessed his sin to God rather than refusing to admit it. Confessing involves acknowledging that what one has done violates the will of God (cf. 1 John 1:9). The Old Testament saint had the same responsibility to confess his sins to God that we do, and he also enjoyed the same promise of forgiveness we do (cf. Lev. 5:5, 10; 16:21-22; 26:40-42). However, God punished more sins with execution under the Old Covenant than He does under the New. If the background of this psalm is David's sins against Bathsheba and Uriah, he evidently refused to acknowledge these sins for some time after he had committed them (2 Sam. 12:13-15).

3. The counsel of the forgiven 32:6-11

32:6 David initially advised the godly to confess their sins quickly, so God would not remove Himself from them because of their sin, and seem harder to find later on. If one keeps short accounts with God, calamities that God sometimes uses to bring people to repentance will not overwhelm him.

> "Guilt is to the conscience what pain is to the body: it tells us that something is wrong and must be made right, or things will get worse."[424]

32:7 David paused to praise God for being a refuge for him when such a flood of trouble had overwhelmed him. The Lord not only sustained him but also gave him occasion to praise His name. Charles Wesley's hymn "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" drew on verses 6 and 7: "While the nearer waters roll, While the tempest still is high; Hide me, O my Saviour, hide . . ."

> "In verses 3 and 4 David was hiding *from* God, but in verse 7 he is hiding *in* God."[425]

32:8-9 The psalmist instructed the godly further, as a teacher who carefully watched over their welfare. His counsel was to yield to the Lord quickly rather than resisting Him. It is better for the godly to walk in the moral will of God willingly than for God to put pressure on them to do so.

32:10-11 The wicked can count on having much sorrow in life normally. On the other hand, those who trust in the Lord will experience His loyal love and will be able to praise Him.

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[423]Delitzsch, 1:395.
[424]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 154.
[425]Ironside, p. 191.

> "When the poet Carpani enquired of his friend Haydn how it happened that his church music was so cheerful, the great composer made a most beautiful reply. 'I cannot,' he said, 'make it otherwise. I write according to the thoughts I feel: when I think upon God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance and leap, as it were, from my pen: and, since God has given me a cheerful heart, it will be pardoned me that I serve Him with a cheerful spirit.'"[426]

Believers who sin are wise to confess their sins to God as soon after we commit them as possible. This will minimize the discipline God sends to bring us to repentance.[427]

> "The case can be made that great men and women throughout the Bible and church history have been men and women of repentance. The more we see of God and his glory, the more we become aware of indwelling sin, and therefore the more we find repentance to be a way of Life. As George Whitefield said, 'The indwelling of sin in the heart is the burden of a converted person; it is the burden of a true Christian.'[428] Therefore it follows that the so-called penitential psalms were often on the lips of great people of God. Psalm 32 was Augustine's favorite, even setting it above his bed that he might immediately see it upon waking.[429] Of this psalm he said, 'The beginning of understanding is to know thyself a sinner.'[430] Even on his deathbed he asked that the penitential psalms be written out and placed where he could see them.[431] According to Martin Luther, the greatest of psalms were the 'Psalmi Paulini' (Pauline Psalms). He considered these to be Psalms 32, 51, 130, and 143, which were all penitential psalms.[432] Of course, Scripture does not attach these psalms to the apostle Paul, yet its propriety cannot be doubted for the man who considered himself the chief of sinners."[433]

> "The psalm could lead us to think through the ways in which our culture denies and suppresses and covers up all in the name of competence, prosperity, and success. For what the psalm finally commends is *yielding*. Against that, our social values are oriented to *unyielding control*."[434]

PSALM 33

This psalm of declarative praise calls the godly to praise Yahweh for His dependable Word and His righteous works, specifically His creative activities in nature and human

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[426]John Whtecross, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:160.
[427]See Swindoll, pp. 106-17.
[428]George Whitefield, *Select Sermons of George Whitefield*, p. 81.
[429]Rowland E. Prothero, *The Psalms in Human Life*, p. 38.
[430]John Ker, *The Psalms in History and Biography*, p. 58.
[431]Prothero, p. 18.
[432]Ker, p. 58.
[433]Bullock, p. 207.
[434]Brueggemann, p. 98.

history. The psalmist also assured the readers that He will be faithful to those who trust in Him.

> "If the purest form of a hymn is praise to God for what He is and does, this is a fine example. The body of the psalm is occupied with the Lord as Creator, Sovereign, Judge and Saviour, while the beginning and end express two elements of worship: an offering of praise, doing honour to so great a King, and a declaration of trust, made in humble expectation."[435]

The Hebrew text does not identify the writer of this psalm, though the Septuagint translators believed he was David. Perhaps they concluded this because other psalms that David composed surround this one (cf. Ps. 72:20). The occasion of writing appears to have been a national victory.

> "This psalm corresponds to the nationalistic psalms of Book V. At first glance it appears to be out of place in Book I, but it is placed here as an answer to the invitation of verse 11 in the preceding psalm."[436]

1. A call to praise the Lord skillfully 33:1-3

The psalmist appealed to the righteous to praise God because it is proper to do so in view of who He is and what He has done. Furthermore, we should praise Him in a manner suitable to His greatness, with beautiful musical accompaniment. Moreover, our praise should be fresh and skillful, not hackneyed and sloppy. God is worthy of the best in expressions of praise as well as in all we do for Him.

> "The 'new song' is new in the sense that it celebrates a new act of God's redemption (v. 3; cf. 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10; Rev 5:9; 14:3)."[437]

> "Psalm 33 is *a new song* (v. 3) that sings about *a new world*. It is the world about which Israel always sings, the new world that Yahweh is now creating. It is a world ordered by God's justice over which God presides with faithfulness. To such a world the only appropriate response is confident and sure praise to the one who makes that world available to us."[438]

2. Reasons to praise the Lord 33:4-19

33:4-5 Two qualities of God that the writer stressed in this second section of the psalm are that Yahweh is dependable and righteous. We can rely on everything He says and does, and He does what is right in loyal love for His people.

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[435]Kidner, p. 136.

[436]Yates, p. 507.

[437]VanGemeren, p. 277. Cf. Delitzsch, 1:402.

[438]Brueggemann, p. 33. See also Richard D. Patterson, "Singing the New Song: An Examination of Psalms 33, 96, 98, and 149," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:656 (October-December 2007):416-34.

> "What a pity it is that this earth, which is so full of God's goodness, should be so empty of his praises, and that of the multitudes that live upon his bounty there are so few that live to his glory!"[439]

33:6-11 These verses expand the idea that God is reliable (v.4). Verses 6-7 describe creation as coming into existence by the word of God. Verses 8-9 draw a conclusion from these facts, that, since by His word God created the world, everyone should reverence Him. Verses 10-11 depict God's word as determining what has happened in history since the creation. What the Lord says takes place regardless of the plans of people and nations. His works prevail.

33:12-19 This section expounds the thought of the Lord's righteousness and loyal love (v. 5). The psalmist rejoiced that he and his nation were the elect of God and the recipients of His covenant faithfulness (v. 12). Some people do not experience more divine blessing than others because God is more aware of some people than He is of others (vv. 13-15). He is equally aware of everyone. He does not grant victory to some armies more than to others because one army is stronger than another (vv. 16-17).

> "At the Battle of Arbela, the Persian hosts numbered between five hundred thousand and a million men, but they were utterly put to the rout by Alexander's band of fifty thousand; and the once mighty Darius was soon vanquished. Napoleon led more than half a million of men into Russia, but the terrible winter left the army a mere wreck, and their leader was soon a prisoner on the lone rock of St. Helens. All along the line of history, this verse has been verified. The strongest battalions melt like snowflakes when God is against them."[440]

God normally chooses to bless those who fear Him and rely on His promised love (vv. 18-19). The "eyes of the Lord" is a figure for His all-seeing, loving care (cf. 34:15).

3. A fresh commitment to trust in the Lord 33:20-22

The psalmist saw the faith of God's elect in three activities in this section.

33:20 The righteous wait for God to deliver them and regard Him as their help and protector.

33:21 They rejoice in Him because they have confidence in His holy character.

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[439]Henry, p. 609.
[440]Spurgeon, 1:164.

33:22 They also pray to Him, asking that He reward their confidence with faithfulness to His commitment to love them.

God's people can rejoice that our God is faithful to His commitment to continue to love us. His words have proved powerful and faithful throughout history, and His works are consistently righteous and just. Therefore we can continue to trust Him.[441]

PSALM 34

In this combination individual thanksgiving and wisdom psalm, David glorified God for delivering His people, and he reflected on the Lord's promise to bless the godly with long life.

The title identifies the occasion on which David composed this psalm (cf. 1 Sam. 21:10-15). In 1 Samuel 21:10, the name of the king of Gath is Achish, but here it is Abimelech. "Abimelech" may have been the title of the kings of Gath, or "Achish" may have been the Philistine name of the king, and "Abimelech" the Semitic name.[442] This is another acrostic psalm with all but the last verse beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet and with the omission of a verse beginning with the letter *waw*.

1. God's goodness to His people 34:1-10

34:1-3 David exulted in the Lord and called on his people to praise God with him using their mouths, not just their minds. In other words, he referred to public praise, not private praise.

> "The purpose of praise is not to make God's people feel good but to acknowledge in a communal way the greatness of our God (v. 3; cf. 30:1; 69:30; 99:5, 9; 107:32; 145:1)."[443]

34:4-7 The psalmist's recent experience of God answering his prayer for help and delivering him (vv. 4, 6) was only one example to him. Those who trust in the Lord never experience disappointment (vv. 5, 7).

> "If the sequence in verses 2 and 3 was in essence 'I have reason to praise Him; join me', here [in verses 4 and 5] it is 'This was my experience; it can be yours'."[444]

"The Angel of the Lord" (v. 7) is undoubtedly a reference to the Lord Himself (cf. Gen. 16:13; 22:11-12; 31:11, 13; 48:16; Judg. 6:11, 16, 22; 13:22-23; Zech. 3:1-2). He is, specifically, the pre-incarnate Christ (cf.

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[441]See Russell Yee, "The Divine Imperative to Sing," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):28-44.
[442]John J. Davis, in *A History of Israel*, p. 236.
[443]VanGemeren, p. 282.
[444]Kidner, p. 139.

Gen. 18:1-2; 19:1; 24:7; 2 Sam. 24:16; Zech. 1:12). David saw Him, with the eyes of faith, surrounding and protecting His trusting people.

34:8-10 David called on the people to experience the Lord's goodness personally by relying on Him in their times of distress. He assured them that if they did, He would not disappoint them.

> "David gave a threefold witness of what the Lord does for His own: He saves (vv. 4-8), He keeps (v. 7), and He satisfies (v. 8)."[445]

Young, self-reliant lions occasionally cannot provide for their own needs adequately, but people who trust in the Lord never suffer such a fate (cf. Matt. 6:33).

> "It is not an empty promise of affluence but an assurance of His responsible care . . . [cf. Deut. 6:24; 8:3; Rom. 8:28, 37]. This theme is now pursued in the next section, especially verses 12-14."[446]

2. God's blessing of the righteous 34:11-22

This section of verses records David's instructions to the people concerning how they could experience a full, long life. This is didactic wisdom literature similar to what we find in the Book of Proverbs.

34:11 David addressed his people as a parent instructs his children. He promised wise counsel on the subject of trusting God.

The story is told of a teacher named Pestalozzi who lived in a Swiss village. He was highly esteemed by his peers and deeply loved by the children, whose lives were molded by the strength of his character. After he died, a statue of him was erected in the town. When the sculpture was unveiled, everyone was amazed to see how much it resembled the old master. The teacher was shown kneeling down, with a little child looking up into his face. But those who knew him best felt the sculptor had missed the dominant desire of the teacher: to have his students look up to the challenging heights of learning, and to God, not to him. So the statue was re-sculpted, and a second unveiling revealed the child peering toward heaven rather than looking at the teacher. Someone has said that a good teacher captures a student’s attention so he can direct it toward God.

34:12-14 God had promised long life to the godly in Israel as a reward for righteous behavior (cf. Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:33). Therefore the psalmist urged truthful speech, good deeds, and peaceful conduct.

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[445]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 158.
[446]Kidner, p. 140.

> "Anger is murder to one's own self as well as to its objects."[447]

34:15-16 Righteous people can look forward to the Lord's favor and His awareness of their needs, but the wicked can expect His antagonism and resistance.

34:17-18 God grants the petitions of the righteous when they pray for deliverance out of broken hearts.

34:19-21 The Lord also delivers the righteous out of his troubles. Keeping his bones from breaking (v. 20) expresses complete protection in spite of cruel opposition. The Apostle John used this verse in John 19:36 to describe God's care of His Son during His crucifixion.

34:22 This verse summarizes the reasons the godly should praise the Lord. This fact might not be clear from the content of the verse. We could understand it as another repetition of the thoughts expressed elsewhere in different terms. However, in the Hebrew Bible, this verse breaks the sequence of the acrostic structure of the psalm. It does not begin with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet, as all the preceding verses do. There is an omission of a line beginning with the letter *waw*, however, between verses 5 and 6. Perhaps an ancient copyist overlooked this line.

We who are believers should be careful to give God praise for His deliverance from our spiritual enemies. We should view instances of His deliverance as opportunities to remind ourselves and one another to continue to walk in the ways of righteousness faithfully.

PSALM 35

David lamented the unjustified opposition of his enemies in this psalm and called on God to deliver him. It is really a combination of three laments with a protest of innocence (cf. Pss. 17; 26; 43; 69). The language alternates between legal and military terminology.

> "Whether or not this psalm was written as a companion to Psalm 34, it is well placed next to it, not only because of some verbal affinities and contrasts (notably 'the angel of the Lord', 34:7; 35:5, 6, found nowhere else in the Psalter), but because it speaks out of the kind of darkness which has just been dispelled in the former psalm. The deliverance celebrated in that psalm is now seen to be not invariably swift or painless, but subject, if God wills, to agonizing delays."[448]

> "Beyond a doubt, David's Lord may be seen here by the spiritual eye."[449]

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[447]Spurgeon, 1:167.
[448]Kidner, p. 142.
[449]Spurgeon, 1:169.

1. A prayer for deliverance 35:1-10

In this section David asked God to deliver him from enemies who were trying to kill him without cause.

35:1-3 David appealed to the Lord for defense, as to a champion who goes out in battle for another (cf. Josh. 5:13-15).

35:4-6 He asked God to rout his enemies and humiliate them. He wished God would blow them away like chaff and remove their stability so they would fall. The Angel of the Lord is the leader of God's heavenly army, the pre-incarnate Christ (cf. 34:7). David wanted Him to do to his enemies what they intended to do to him. This is in keeping with how God usually deals with the wicked.

35:7-8 The reason for David's request was his enemies' unwarranted attempts to kill him. He prayed that they might experience the fate they hoped would be his.

35:9-10 If God granted deliverance, David promised to rejoice in the Lord and to praise Him.

> "*My soul* (9) and *my bones* (10) are two emphatic ways of saying 'I' or 'myself,' as in 6:2, 3; *cf.* our own expression 'I know it in my bones'."[450]

2. A lament over unjust opposition 35:11-18

In the first section of the psalm, the emphasis is on petition, but in this one it is on lament.

35:11-12 The psalmist's malicious enemies were repaying him evil for the good he had done them (cf. 1 Sam. 24:17). They were evidently also charging him falsely.

35:13-14 When they were sick, David prayed for their recovery and mourned over their condition. He even fasted, which shows the extent to which he sacrificed so they would recover.[451]

35:15-16 Conversely when David experienced trouble, rather than showing concern for him, they mocked and really made his condition worse.

35:17-18 David called on God to stop waiting and to act for him. When He would, David would give Him public praise.

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[450]Kidner, p. 143.

[451]On the practice of fasting, see Kent D. Berghuis, "A Biblical Perspective on Fasting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):86-103.

> "Most men publish their griefs; good men should proclaim their mercies."[452]

3. A petition for justice 35:19-28

In this section the emphasis lies on the need for God to act for David.

35:19-21 Winking at one another, David's enemies communicated their sneaky intention to trap the psalmist in their plot. They were lying to turn others against him. They were also giving false testimony concerning his actions.

35:22-26 Their claims of having seen David do something bad were groundless, but God had seen their evil actions. David called God to end His silence and act for him. By vindicating David, God would frustrate the attempts of the wicked to triumph over the upright.

35:27-28 In closing, David asked God to cause his supporters to give glory to the Lord for vindicating His righteous servant. When deliverance came, David too would praise God for His righteous dealings.

The people of God can appeal for vindication when others falsely accuse them of doing evil, and can count on God's deliverance in the future because He is just.

PSALM 36

This primarily wisdom psalm, with elements of individual lament and praise, contains an oracle that David received from the Lord concerning the wicked. In contrast to them, he rejoiced in the loyal love and righteousness of God. One writer titled his exposition of this psalm, "Man at His Worst, God at His Best."[453]

> "This is a psalm of powerful contrasts, a glimpse of human wickedness at its most malevolent, and divine goodness in its many-sided fullness. Meanwhile the singer is menaced by the one and assured of victory by the other. Few psalms cover so great a range in so short a space."[454]

> "The coexistence of three literary types within a poem of thirteen verses points up the limitations of the form-critical approach to the Psalter."[455]

1. Revelation concerning the wicked 36:1-4

36:1 The NIV translation, "An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked," is preferable. That of Leupold is even clearer: "A divine oracle about transgression has been heard in my heart with

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[452]Spurgeon, 1:173.
[453]Armerding, p. 76.
[454]Kidner, p. 145.
[455]Dahood, 1:218.

reference to the wicked."[456] An oracle is a message from God. The Lord had given His prophet special revelation concerning how the wicked look at life and how they live. They do not dread (Heb. *pahad*, rather than *yirah*, the usual word for "fear") the Lord. That is, they feel no uneasiness as they should since God will judge them for their sins. This is the climactic characteristic of sin in Romans 3:18.

> "When a man has no fear of God, he is prepared for any crime."[457]

36:2-4 Without this dread of the Lord, the wicked boldly pursues evil continually. He silences his conscience and goes on speaking deceptively and acting vainly without any inner restraint.

> "He who makes little of God makes much of himself."[458]

> "'Listen to your heart!' the world tells us, forgetting that 'The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?' (Jer. 17:9, NASB)."[459]

2. Reflection concerning the Lord 36:5-9

36:5-6 David delighted in meditating on God's attributes rather than disregarding Him. Instead of pushing God out of his worldview, the psalmist made Him the center of it. He gloried in God's loyal love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice.

> "A little sidelight on that remarkable judgment is brought into the picture by way of a brief reminiscence: 'man and beast dost Thou save, O Lord,' Noah and the beasts in the ark. The one striking instance is recalled when iniquity was rampant but God's well-tempered and righteous judgment was able to cope with the situation."[460]

> "When men sin so impudently, who does not admire the divine longsuffering?"[461]

36:7-9 The result of this philosophy of life contrasts with that of the wicked (vv. 2-4). Because God is lovingly loyal, His people can find refuge in Him (cf. Ruth 2:12; Matt. 23:37). They also enjoy the provisions of His house.

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[456]Leupold, p. 293.
[457]William S. Plumer, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:174.
[458]Spurgeon, 1:174.
[459]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 163.
[460]Leupold, p. 295.
[461]Sebastian Munster, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:175.

> They experience a virtual paradise on earth, as Adam and Eve did in Eden before the Fall. God provides life and the light of understanding for those who take Him into account.

"Knowing the character of God is essential to a balanced Christian life, and these five verses are a concise systematic theology."[462]

3. Request concerning the future 36:10-12

David prayed in closing that God's loyal love and righteousness would continue to captivate his affections so that the evil philosophy of the wicked would not win his heart. He wanted to abide in humble submission to the Lord rather than rising up in pride and disregarding Him. The ultimate end of the wicked would be destruction from which they could not recover.

"Our best defense against violence is still prayer."[463]

We may contemplate the two philosophies of life, espoused by the wicked and the God-fearing, as well as their consequences. The godly should appreciate the superiority of recognizing God and living in the light of His revealed character. Nevertheless, we should realize that the wicked person's viewpoint is attractive, and we should guard against slipping into it.

PSALM 37

This wisdom psalm advances the thought of Psalm 36. Note the mention of doers of iniquity in 36:12 and the reference to evildoers in 37:1. Here David urged the righteous not to let the prosperity of the wicked upset them but to continue to trust in God's justice. Similar encouragements characterize Psalms 49 and 73. Here the psalmist used several proverbial expressions to convey his exhortation.

> "In a moving way the psalmist deals with the issues of life and death, wisdom and folly, and reward and punishment. He is most sensitive to the question of the future and its rewards and sufferings. The psalmist affirms that the Lord will sustain the righteous and that they will fully enjoy the blessings promised to them. The sage sets before the reader or hearer the highway of wisdom, even as our Lord called on his followers to learn from him the way that pleases our Father in heaven (Matt 5:2-10)."[464]

"David's personal history abundantly illustrates the Psalm."[465]

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[462]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 163.
[463]Leupold, p. 297.
[464]VanGemeren, p. 297.
[465]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 420.

> "It contains eight great precepts, is twice illustrated by autobiographical statements, and abounds in remarkable contrasts."[466]

This is also an acrostic psalm, but in this case each strophe (every other verse) begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. A strophe is a logical unit determined by either the subject matter or the structure of the poem. It is a poetic paragraph.

> "This is the most obviously sapiential [having, providing, or expounding wisdom] of all the psalms. Indeed it is a collection of sayings that might easily be found in the book of Proverbs. It appears to be a rather random collection of sayings without any order or development. However, there is an important qualification to that statement, for this psalm is acrostic and so is crafted with pedagogical purpose. That carefully ordered arrangement corresponds to the claim made for the substance of the psalm; that is, the world is exceedingly well ordered, and virtue is indeed rewarded."[467]

1. A call to continuing trust 37:1-8

37:1-2 Righteous people should not envy those who practice evil, nor fret because they prosper. Their success will be only temporary. Even though they may prosper all their lives, their success is brief in the light of eternity.

37:3-4 Positively, we should center our lives on God. We should continue to trust in the Lord to do what is right and persist in doing right ourselves. For the Israelite this meant staying in the Promised Land rather than leaving it for greener pastures elsewhere. Those who take delight in the Lord will receive their hearts' desires. The righteous who delight in the Lord will want to see His will done, and that will happen eventually for them.

> "We must make God our heart's delight and then we shall have our heart's desire, v. 4."[468]

37:5-7a Committing one's way to the Lord means submitting one's life and its daily events to the will of God.

> "The original says, 'Roll your way,' the figure being: dislodge the burden from your shoulders and lay it on God, who has bidden you follow this course."[469]

If we do this, we will experience what He wants for us. Eventually God will reward our righteousness and show that our confidence was wise.

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[466]Spurgeon, 1:178.
[467]Brueggemann, p. 42.
[468]Henry, p. 613.
[469]Leupold, p. 301.

> "An obsession with enemies and rivals cannot be simply switched off, but it can be ousted by a new focus of attention . . . It includes a deliberate redirection of one's emotions (4a, *take delight*; *cf.* Paul and Silas in prison, singing as well as praying), and an entrusting of one's career (*your way*, 5) and reputation (*your vindication*, 6) to Him."[470]

> "If we take care to keep a good conscience, we may leave it to God to take care of our good name."[471]

> "Give God time. He will work things out in your life."[472]

> "Creative silence is a rare commodity today, even in church worship services. People cannot tolerate silence. . . . But unless we learn to wait silently before God, we will never experience His peace."[473]

37:7b-8 David concluded this opening section of the psalm by returning to the idea with which he began. The righteous should not allow the success of wicked people to distract us to the point where we depart from God's will.

2. The assurance of just punishment 37:9-22

37:9-11 Perhaps the wicked were grabbing land that did not belong to them. David assured the people that the wicked would not succeed long. Those who submitted to God's authority would eventually possess the land He had promised them (cf. Matt. 5:5). The meek are those who choose the way of patient faith rather than self-assertion, as the preceding verses make clear.

37:12-22 David proceeded to give a basis for confidence in the assurance he had just given in verses 9-11. Five contrasts provide this security. The Lord, whose strength far exceeds that of the wicked, opposes them (vv. 12-13). The evil that the wicked do will come back on them (vv. 14-15). The Lord will sustain the righteous (vv. 16-17).

> "He whose arms are broken [v. 17] can neither injure others nor help himself."[474]

The righteous are the special objects of God's careful attention (vv. 18-20). Finally, God will reward the unselfishness of the righteous but punish the selfishness of the wicked (vv. 21-22).

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[470]Kidner, p. 149.
[471]Henry, p. 613.
[472]McGee, 2:738.
[473]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 165.
[474]Delitzsch, 2:14.

3. The assurance of God's care for the just 37:23-31

37:23-24 The Lord delights in how a good person lives, and He blesses his or her activities. Even though such a person may stumble as he goes through life, he will not experience a fatal fall from which he cannot rise.

37:25-26 God is faithful to His promises to provide for His faithful followers. David could testify that he had never seen the Lord forsake the righteous nor had he observed any of their descendants unable to get food. God promised the Israelites that He would bless the descendants of those who obeyed Him (Deut. 7:9).

It is possible to account for the fact that some believers have starved to death. They may not have followed the Lord faithfully, or they may have been part of a larger group, even all humanity, that did not follow Him faithfully and was under His judgment (cf. v. 4). David did not say the righteous never starve to death, only that he had never seen any that did. His point was that God takes care of the righteous.

37:27-29 The Lord loves justice and does not forsake the godly. He preserves them but cuts off the wicked.

37:30-31 The righteous live in the light of God's law and so advocate wisdom and justice. This trait brings stability to their lives.

4. The conflict between the wicked and the righteous 37:32-40

37:32-34 The wicked really tries to overcome God when he sets himself against the righteous. The wicked will inevitably fail because God's power is much greater than his own. Consequently, the righteous person only needs to wait for God to act for him.

37:35-36 David again gave a personal testimony, this time of a very prosperous wicked person's destruction (cf. v. 25).

37:37-38 The posterity of the righteous will remain but that of the wicked will pass away. David said we can count on that. Good people leave blessings behind them, but evil individuals leave nothing of real value.

37:39-40 In conclusion, David focused again on the Lord. He is the salvation of those who take refuge in Him. He is their strength, help, and deliverer. Therefore the righteous should continue to trust in Him even when the wicked prosper and oppose them.

God's people should not stop trusting in the Lord because the wicked prosper temporarily, nor should we despair when they seem to prevail against us. Rather, we should continue to trust in the Lord, take refuge in Him, and rely on His faithfulness to His promises. Reviewing His past faithfulness will enable us to do this. This is a helpful psalm to read whenever we feel discouraged by the apparent prosperity of the wicked.

> "This poem, more explicitly than the torah psalms, articulates a close and predictable connection between *deed* and *consequence*. The purpose of such instruction (which indirectly attests the authority of the sovereign Creator) is to instill in the young socially acceptable modes of behavior. Such behavior contributes decisively to the well-being of the entire community. Thus the argument refers to God, but the case is made largely on utilitarian grounds—it works!"[475]

PSALM 38

In this individual lament psalm, which has been called "the penitent's plea,"[476] David expressed penitence that he had sinned against God and had thereby incurred His discipline. This discipline came in the form of opposition from enemies that the psalmist asked God to remove. David's adultery may have been the occasion for writing this psalm. Delitzsch suggested that the proper chronological sequence of the penitential psalms may be 6, 38, 51, and 32.[477] Leupold held a different sequence: 51, 32, and 38.[478]

The title "memorial" (NASB) or "petition" (NIV) literally means: "to bring to remembrance." It also occurs in the title of Psalm 70.

> "Since with God to remember is to act, this word speaks of laying before Him a situation that cries out for His help."[479]

1. God's discipline 38:1-12

38:1-2 David viewed his present suffering as an indication that God was very angry with him (cf. 6:1). He pictured God shooting arrows at him as though God were his enemy in battle and as pressing down on him with His cosmic hand.

38:3-8 These verses articulate the psalmist's lament over his sufferings. He had evidently lost good health and was in pain (cf. 6:2). His agony extended to his spirit as well as to his body. His sickness was punishment for his sin (vv. 3, 5).

> ". . . sure am I that when a man is laboring under the burden of sin, he will be full of complaint. The Bible records hundreds of the complaints of God's people under the burden of sin."[480]

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[475]Brueggemann, p. 43.
[476]Ironside, p. 222.
[477]Delitzsch, 2:20.
[478]Leupold, p. 308.
[479]Kidner, p. 153.
[480]J. C. Philpot, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:184.

> "In many thins, our estimates are extravagant; but we never overestimate the evil of sin. It is as corrupting as it is damning. It covers the soul with plague-spots, with leprosy (Isa. 1:5-6)."[481]

38:9-12 His sufferings had also affected others. The Lord knew his condition (vv. 9-10), his friends were avoiding him (v. 11), and his enemies were taking advantage of his weakness. They were trying to disparage and destroy him.

2. David's hope 38:13-22

38:13-16 David paid no attention to the threats of his enemies because he believed God would vindicate him in response to his prayers.

> "How different is this sufferer from Job! This man is silently absorbed in his suffering, whereas Job was all too anxious to protest against his friends and to argue with God."[482]

David was remarkable for his ability to wait for God (v. 15). His years of suffering at Saul's hands, his critics in the tribe of Benjamin, and his treatment by Absalom taught him to do this.

38:17-20 Evidently the psalmist felt as if he were at the end of his rope. He wanted God to respond to his calls for help very soon. David had confessed whatever sin had led to his painful condition (cf. James 5:15). He was anxious about its consequences, but there was nothing more he could do except wait for God to deliver him.

38:21-22 The psalm closes with a supplication. David pleaded with God to come to his rescue soon. The Lord had forsaken him and had stood aloof from his suffering long enough. Now it was time to save.

Sometimes believers bring physical, emotional, and interpersonal suffering on themselves by sinning. In such cases, God may discipline us with pain so we will learn not to do the same thing again. In the process, we should reaffirm our trust in God as our deliverer from all our woes.

PSALM 39

David seems to have composed this wisdom psalm, in the form of an individual lament, during a prolonged illness that almost proved fatal, or as the result of the prosperity of the wicked (cf. Ps. 60; Job). He petitioned God to extend his days rather than to continue the

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[481]William S. Plumer, quoted in ibid., 1:185.

[482]VanGemeren, p. 310.

chastening. This psalm is quite similar to the preceding one, but in this one David did not mention opposition from his enemies.

> "This psalm has been used at funerals a great deal, and it can be used so properly."[483]

Jeduthun, mentioned in the title, was one of David's chief musicians (1 Chron. 16:41-42). He may be the same person as Ethan (1 Chron. 15:19). Perhaps David wrote the psalm for Jeduthun to perform or lead, or for the group of musicians under his direction.

1. The brevity of life 39:1-6

39:1-3 David harbored some strong feelings that he refrained from expressing publicly. As a fire within him they burned to come out, but he held them in fearing that he might regret his words. His feelings arose out of his discipline at God's hand (v. 9).

39:4-6 David finally found relief in expressing his frustration to God. He prayed that God would teach him to appreciate the brevity of human life (cf. 90:10, 12). Evidently David was an old man at this time. His life seemed very short looking back on it. People measured short distances with handbreadths in David's time (v. 5). The pursuits of life are relatively insignificant in view of the short time we live.

> "Before the Eternal, all the age of frail man is less than one ticking of a clock."[484]

> "This term [Selah, v. 5] is derived from the verb *salal*, 'to lift up.' It occurs in 39 psalms and in the 'psalm of Habakkuk' (Hab. 3). No one is certain of the exact meaning of this word—that is, what is to be lifted up. Some think that *Selah* is an emphatic word, marking a point in the psalm for 'lifting up' one's thoughts to God. But most scholars think it is simply some form of musical notation, such as a marker of a musical interlude, a pause, or a change of key."[485]

2. The importance of faith in God 39:7-13

39:7 The psalmist threw himself on the Lord, trusting Him to make the rest of his life enjoyable.

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[483]McGee, 2:741.
[484]Spurgeon, 1:189.
[485]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 917.

39:8-9 David's suffering was due to God's chastening. Perhaps he had sinned with his mouth and therefore felt compelled to guard his speech closely (cf. vv. 1-2).

> "If the King of kings lays His hand on our backs, let us, beloved, lay our hands on our mouths."[486]

39:10-11 David needed relief. He spoke as though he felt God was chewing up his life as a moth eats a garment. The long duration of his affliction made him sense the brevity of life. God was disciplining him (cf. Heb. 12:5-11).

> "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to arouse a deaf world."[487]

> "It is not to consume us, but to consume our sins, that the Lord aims at in His chastisements."[488]

39:12-13 In closing, David asked God to remove His chastening, whatever it was, so he could enjoy his final years of life.[489]

> "Man in his corrupt state is like Nebuchadnezzar—he hath a beast's heart that craves no more than the satisfaction of his sensual appetite; but when renewed by grace, then his understanding returns to him."[490]

The brevity of life impresses one increasingly as he or she grows older. People are usually more conscious of this in times of sorrow than in happy times. It is natural for a believer to want God to teach him or her to live wisely, and want Him to be patient with one's sinfulness in view of life's shortness.

PSALM 40

In this psalm, David offered himself as a sacrifice to God because the Lord had delivered him. He also lamented his distress and prayed for salvation. The psalm is a combination of thanksgiving (vv. 1-10) and lament (vv. 11-17), and it is messianic (vv. 6-8; cf. Heb. 10:5-9).[491]

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[486]Nicholas Estwick, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:191.
[487]C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 81.
[488]Spurgeon, 1:191.
[489]See W. A. M. Beuken, "Psalm 39: Some Aspects of the Old Testament Understanding of Prayer," *The Heythrop Journal* 19 (1978):1-11.
[490]William Gurnall, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:192.
[491]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 171.

1. Thanksgiving for salvation 40:1-10

40:1-3 The psalmist testified to his people that the Lord had answered his prayer for deliverance after a long time in which David had waited solely on the Lord. God had, at last, reestablished His servant. Consequently David had a new song of praise for the Lord. His praise would encourage others to renew their confidence in Yahweh.

40:4 The person who does not rely on the self-sufficient or liars but puts his complete trust in the Lord experiences great blessing.

40:5 The Lord's wonderful acts for the righteous are too numerous to recount fully, much less His beneficent thoughts. No one can compare with Yahweh regarding His gracious plans to bless.

40:6 Animal and meal offerings were not of primary importance to God under the Mosaic Law. More important than sacrifices for either worship or expiation was the believer's true commitment of himself or herself to the Lord (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22-23).

The phrase, "my ears Thou hast opened (or pierced)," may mean David viewed God as having made him His willing slave by being so gracious to him (cf. Exod. 21:6). This would harmonize with verse 8, where David voiced his delight in being God's servant. However, it may be that David meant that God had given him the ability to comprehend and obey His Word (cf. v. 8).[492]

40:7-8 Because God had been so good to David, the psalmist yielded his life as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2). As the Lord's anointed king, David was responsible to follow the directions handed on to him in the scroll of the Mosaic Law. Because God had captured his affections, David could say the Law was in his heart, not just in his hands. He delighted to do God's will rather than just doing it out of obligation.

In Hebrews 10:5-7, the writer of that epistle quoted verses 6-8 concerning Jesus Christ's attitude at His incarnation. The sacrifices of the Mosaic system could never satisfy God's high demands. They only removed sin temporarily and expressed worship superficially. The offering that fully satisfied God was the willing self-sacrifice of the sinless Son of Man. Jesus Christ offered Himself to God as David did, as he expressed in this psalm.

40:9-10 Part of God's will for David, as a person and as Israel's king, was that he should praise the Lord. The psalmist said he carried out this duty joyfully. He spoke publicly of God's righteousness, faithfulness, salvation, loyal love, and truth.

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[492]Delitzsch, 2:38-39.

2. Petition for salvation 40:11-17

> "It appears that the lament is composed with precise reference to the thanksgiving song so that the thanksgiving song adds weight to the complaint."[493]

40:11-12 The upbeat spirit of this psalm changes dramatically at verse 11.

> "Now, in accordance with the true art of prayer, petition develops itself out of thanksgiving."[494]

David appealed to the Lord for continuing deliverance on the basis of God's past salvation and the psalmist's personal dedication to God. He referred to his troubles as arising out of his many sins (v. 12). He had praised God for His loyal love and truth in the past (v. 10). Now he counted on those qualities to sustain him in the future (v. 11).

> "He was so deeply troubled that he lost perspective . . ."[495]

40:13-15 David cried out for quick deliverance (cf. 35:4). As the Lord's anointed who was serving Him sacrificially with a pure heart, the psalmist could make such a request boldly.

> "It must be remembered that the enemies were probably not known personally. They were Israel's national enemies who hated Israel, David, and Yahweh, the God of Israel. The psalmist no doubt knew the admonition to love one's enemies (cf. Prov 25:21; Matt 5:44), but these enemies destabilized the rule of God on earth! As long as the kingdom of God suffers persecution and harassment, we pray for God's kingdom to come, which includes the petition that the Lord will come to vindicate his own and avenge his enemies (cf. 2 Thess 1:5-10). The enemies liked taking potshots at God's people, shouting contemptibly, 'Aha! Aha!' (v. 15; 35:21, 25). The psalmist prays that the Lord will quickly and suddenly change their fortunes so that they will know who is God (v. 14; cf. 35:4, 26 . . ."[496]

40:16 A speedy deliverance from King David's enemies would move the people of Israel to rejoice, feel encouraged, and praise the Lord.

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[493]Brueggemann, p 131.
[494]Delitzsch, 2:41.
[495]VanGemeren, p. 323.
[496]Ibid., p. 324.

40:17 The Lord's "living sacrifice," i.e., David, cried out again, in conclusion, that the One to whom he looked for help would save him soon (cf. 35:10; 37:14). Verses 13-17 are very similar to Ps. 70.

We who are believers should present ourselves as living sacrifices to the Lord with a willing heart because of His grace to us. Having done so we can appeal to Him for help against our spiritual enemies and expect His aid. Nevertheless we should base our appeal on what will glorify God.[497]

PSALM 41

David assured the godly in this thanksgiving psalm that those who help the needy would experience deliverance themselves from the Lord. He had learned this lesson through a difficult experience, to which he referred. There is lament in this psalm, but it begins and ends with praise.

1. God's blessings on the merciful 41:1-3

41:1 This verse succinctly states the lesson this whole psalm teaches. God blesses people who take care of those who cannot care for themselves, and He delivers them when they need help.

> "How foolish are they that fear to lose their wealth by giving it and fear not to lose themselves by keeping it! He that lays up his gold may be a good jailer, but he that lays it out is a good steward."[498]

"Blessed is" begins and closes the first book of Psalms (cf. 1:1), forming an *inclusio* or envelope for this part of the collection.

41:2-3 More specific blessings are protection, long life, a good reputation on earth, protection from enemies, sustenance in sickness, and restoration to health.

> "The miser, like the hog, is of no use till he is dead—then let him die; the righteous, like the ox, is of service during life—than let him live."[499]

In the Mosaic Law, God's promised blessings for the righteous were mainly physical, though there were spiritual blessings too. Under the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), most blessings are spiritual, though some are physical.

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[497]See Allen, *Lord of . . .*, pp. 43-56.

[498]Francis Raworth, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:199.

[499]Spurgeon, ibid.

> "When I vis[i]ted one day, as he was dying, my beloved friend, Benjamin Parsons, I said, 'How are you today, Sir?' He said, 'My head is resting very sweetly on three pillows—infinite power, Infinite love, and Infinite wisdom.'"[500]

2. God's punishment of the treacherous 41:4-9

David continued to address the congregation of Israel, and he presented the alternative to caring for the helpless with its consequences. He did this by relating a personal experience.

41:4 David had been in need of help at some time in the past. Apparently he had sinned and God had punished him with sickness. He then cried out to God for help.

41:5-8 His enemies, rather than being merciful, took advantage of his weakness. They hoped for his death, spoke hypocritically to him when they visited him, and spread gossip that he would not survive.

41:9 Even a former genuine friend of David had turned against him. Ahithophel, who betrayed David and then hanged himself (2 Sam. 16:20—17:3, 23), did this.[501] Yet it is not certain that he was the person the psalmist had in mind here. David had more than one friend who later turned against him. Jesus quoted this verse and applied it to Judas (John 13:18).

> "Nay, have not we ourselves behaved thus perfidiously and disingenuously towards God? We *eat of his bread* daily, and yet *lift up the heel against him*."[502]

3. God's deliverance of the upright 41:10-13

41:10 David had asked God to restore his health so he might repay his enemies.

> "This is not a prayer that God will punish those who took advantage of him. He asks for strength to do it himself!"[503]

This may seem to be an unworthy motive in view of the Lord Jesus' instruction to love our enemies and do them good (Matt. 5:44). However, individuals in David's time who opposed the Lord's anointed king were opposing the Lord. The king was God's agent of judgment in Israel. This situation has no direct parallel in the church.

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[500]Paxton Hood, quoted in ibid.
[501]Delitzsch, 2:45.
[502]Henry, p. 619.
[503]Yates, p. 510.

41:11-12 The psalmist regarded his continuing success over his enemies as a sign that God was pleased with him. God had upheld him because he continued to do right. He was confident this situation would continue forever.

41:13 David concluded with a doxology. He was sure God would show mercy to those who were merciful. This consistency is in harmony with God's character, and it had proved true in David's personal experience. "Blessed" (Heb. *baruk*) means praiseworthy.

This verse also appropriately concludes the first major section of the Book of Psalms (chs. 1—41).

II. BOOK 2: CHS. 42—72

In Book 1, all the psalms except 1, 2, 10, and 33 claimed David as their writer. It is likely that he wrote these four as well, even though they do not bear his name (cf. Acts 4:25). In Book 2, the titles identify David as the writer of 18 psalms (Pss. 51—65, 68—70). He may also have written those bearing the notation, "of the sons of Korah" (Pss. 42, 44--49). The sons of Korah (cf. Num. 26:10-11) were distinguished musicians (1 Chron. 6:31-48). Korah was a great-grandson of Levi who rebelled against Moses' leadership (Num. 16:1-2). Some scholars believe David wrote these psalms for the sons of Korah to perform. Others believe the sons of Korah composed them. There is great similarity between the content of these psalms and the ones David wrote. Asaph wrote Psalm 50, and Solomon composed Psalm 72. Psalms 43, 66, 67, and 71 are anonymous.

The name "Elohim" occurs 164 times in this section of the Psalms, and the name "Yahweh" ("LORD") appears only 30 times.[504] Thus one might think of this book as "the book of Elohim." In the first book of Psalms, the name "Yahweh" appears 272 times, and "Elohim" occurs only 15 times.

J. Vernon McGee believed that the five books of Psalms correspond to the five books of the Pentateuch.[505] This similarity is not as clear to me as it was to him, but it may be somewhat valid.

PSALM 42

Some ancient Hebrew manuscripts united Psalms 42 and 43 as one. This is understandable since the same refrain occurs in both of them (cf. 42:5, 11; 43:5). Psalm 42 expresses the writer's yearning for God.[506] It consists of two stanzas, each of which ends with the same refrain. Both psalms are individual laments with expressions of trust.

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[504]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 428; Leupold, p. 3. See also Delitzsch, 2:51-55.

[505]McGee, 2:659, 745-46, 792, 814, 830.

[506]For the meaning of Maskil, see my note on Psalm 32.

The superscription identifies the sons of Korah as the writers (or recipients) of this psalm.

> "Korah, Asaph, Heman, and Ethan are all associated with the service and music of the sanctuary in David's reign. During Ezra and Nehemiah's time (fifth century B.C.), the temple singers were still called the 'sons of Asaph.' In view of the long and continued service of these temple servants, we cannot be absolutely sure when these psalms were composed, but whether they were written in the time of David or as late as Ezra, they are still Davidic associates, and that seems to reinforce the Davidic nature of these collections."[507]

1. The psalmist's longing for God 42:1-5

The writer suffered at the hands of tormenting enemies. He longed for God, whom he confidently expected to be able to praise in the future when the Lord would deliver him.

42:1-2 As water from a brook sustains a deer physically, so God Himself sustains people spiritually (cf. John 4:14). The psalmist was thirsty for God. He could not obtain the refreshment he needed yet, but he looked forward to finding it soon.

> "To appear before God is as much the desire of the upright as it is the dread of the hypocrite."[508]

42:3-4 Rather than drinking from God, he had to drink the water of his own tears. God was not providing for his needs just then. The writer remembered with great delight the times when he found spiritual refreshment at the sanctuary in Jerusalem, but he was not able to return there yet.

42:5 The psalmist encouraged himself rhetorically by reminding himself that he would again praise God. He needed to continue to hope in God until then.

> "To search out the cause of our sorrow is often the best surgery for grief. Self-ignorance is not bliss; in this case it is misery. The mist of ignorance magnifies the causes of our alarm; a clearer view will make monsters dwindle into trifles."[509]

2. The psalmist's lamentation because of his enemies 42:6-11

In this stanza the writer focused on his enemies rather than on God. However, he came back to the same expression of confidence with which he ended the first stanza.

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[507]Bullock, p. 63.
[508]Henry, p. 620.
[509]Spurgeon, 1:204.

42:6 The psalmist was far from Jerusalem and the central sanctuary. Evidently he was near the Hermon range of mountains that stood north of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee). The Jordan Valley is quite wide north of this sea and the mountains of Hermon rise up to the east from it. Mount Mizar is one of the hills in that area. It was a long way from Mount Zion where the ark dwelt in David's day.

In the Hebrew text "Hermon" is "Hermons." This is probably due to the fact that Mt. Hermon has two peaks, the north one being higher than the south one.[510]

42:7 The writer viewed his troubles like waves cascading down on him, as if he were standing under a waterfall. He compared the noise of the waves to his troubles, that he personified as calling to one another to come and overwhelm him.

42:8 Nevertheless he believed God would remain loyal to him. In the daytime the Lord would pour out His love to the psalmist, and in the night he would respond by praising God.

> "God's continual love is a comfort for the soul continually beset by questions and mourning (cf. v. 3)."[511]

42:9-10 In his prayer, he would also ask God the reason for his continuing physical and emotional distress. The repeated taunt of his enemies would hopefully move God to deliver him (cf. v. 3).

> "We may complain *to* God, but we are not allowed thus to complain *of* him."[512]

42:11 Again the psalmist encouraged himself with the rhetorical refrain (cf. v. 5).

When spiritually dry, we who are believers should remind ourselves that God is sufficient for all our needs. This remembrance will encourage us to continue to trust Him while we go through temporarily distressing periods.[513] This is also an excellent psalm to read when we want to get to know God better.

PSALM 43

In this prayer the psalmist asked God to lead him back to Jerusalem so he could worship God there and find refreshment and relief. As mentioned in my introductory comments concerning Psalm 42, this psalm may at one time have been the last part of that one. This psalm is the only one in Book 2 (Pss. 42—72) that does not have a heading.

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[510]See Thomson, p. 260.
[511]VanGemeren, p. 334.
[512]Henry, p. 621. Italics added.
[513]See Swindoll, pp. 118-29.

1. Prayer for vindication 43:1-3

43:1 The psalmist wrote as though most of the people in his nation had turned against him. He also referred to one opponent in particular. If David wrote this psalm, he may have done so when he fled from Absalom.

43:2 God had apparently deserted His servant who relied on Him for strength. His enemy had the upper hand.

43:3 God's light is probably the revelation of His will that brings understanding and life. Another view is that it is His mercy or steadfast love.[514] His truth rests in His Word that reveals that will. The psalmist prayed for God's guidance through His Word that would bring him back to Mt. Zion, the place where David's tabernacle stood.

2. Promise to praise 43:4

If God would bring him back to Jerusalem, he vowed to praise God publicly in the sanctuary.

3. Prompting to trust 43:5

The writer encouraged himself with the confidence that he would yet praise God for His deliverance. Therefore he should continue to hope in Him (cf. 42:5, 11).

When adversaries falsely accuse us, we who are believers can find comfort and encouragement in the fact that ultimately God will vindicate us and bring us into His presence. There we will serve and praise Him.[515]

PSALM 44

The writer spoke for the nation of Israel in this psalm. He lamented a national disaster, namely, defeat by enemies, and he called on the Lord to deliver (cf. 2 Sam. 8:13-14). Evidently he could not identify sin in the nation as the cause of this defeat. He attributed it instead to it being "for Your sake" (v. 22). Israel was apparently suffering because she had remained loyal to God in a world hostile to Him. The basis of the psalmist's request was God's faithfulness to the patriarchs and the people's present trust in Him.[516]

> "The spirit of disrespectful rebuke is found no where else in the Psalter."[517]

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[514]Leupold, p. 343.
[515]Swindoll, pp. 118-29.
[516]On the meaning of Maskil in the title, see my note on Psalm 32.
[517]Yates, p. 511.

> "Perhaps the Psalter's boldest appeal to God's faithfulness is found in Psalm 44, a communal lament psalm offered to God during an unidentified national catastrophe."[518]

Other communal or community lament psalms are 60, 74, 77, 79—80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, and 137.

> "Perhaps this psalm was used at a national 'day of prayer' with a worship leader speaking the 'I/my' verses and the people the 'we/our' verses."[519]

1. The reason for Israel's present trust in the Lord 44:1-8

The psalmist recalled God's past faithfulness to Israel's forefathers and affirmed the nation's present confidence in the Lord.

44:1-3 Speaking for the nation, the psalmist related the account of God giving the Promised Land to His people in Joshua's days that the forefathers had told. He stressed that God had given Canaan to them by defeating their enemies. The Israelites did not win it by their own strength. Next to the Exodus, the most frequently mentioned period of Israel's history in the Psalms is the conquest of the land.[520]

44:4-8 Israel needed God's help again in her present conflicts with enemy nations. On the basis of parallels between this psalm and Psalm 60, Wiersbe suggested that the enemies in view may have been the Edomites and the Arameans (cf. 44:3 and 60:5; 44:5 and 60:12; 44:9, 23 and 60:1, 10).[521] The writer led the nation in looking to Yahweh as her King and military commander (cf. Josh. 5:13-15). He not only affirmed his confidence in God but also renounced reliance on military armaments. He intended his statement that the nation had boasted in the Lord and would thank Him forever (v. 8) to move God to save His people again.

> "Only when the Israelites had put aside their confidence in weaponry and bravery could they become instruments in the hands of God."[522]

2. Israel's present defeated condition 44:9-16

44:9-10 God had allowed His people to suffer defeat recently for some reason. The nation had retreated and the enemy had taken spoils.

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[518]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 300.
[519]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 177.
[520]Bullock, p. 112.
[521]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 177.
[522]VanGemeren, p. 339.

> "God's people, when they are cast down, are tempted to think themselves cast off and forsaken of God; but it is a mistake."[523]

44:11-12 These verses describe the defeat figuratively. God had not protected His sheep but had allowed their enemy to ravage them. He had sold them to the enemy but had not profited from the bargain personally.

44:13-14 Israel's defeat had made her an object of ridicule among her neighbor nations. They laughed at God's people because the Lord had not defended them.

44:15-16 The psalmist's heart broke because Israel suffered such humiliation. He suffered because God's reputation suffered too.

3. The nation's continuing trust in the Lord 44:17-22

44:17-19 Even though the Lord had abandoned His people temporarily, the psalmist claimed that the nation continued to trust and obey Him. They had continued to remember Him, and they had not forsaken allegiance to the Mosaic Covenant. They had done so in the face of their disastrous defeat.

44:20-22 Their defeat and humiliation were not the consequences of apostasy. They suffered innocently for some unknown reason. It seemed as though God allowed Israel's enemy to slaughter some of His sheep for purposes known only to Him.

The Apostle Paul quoted verse 22 in Romans 8:36 as proof that even though God's people suffer, God does not forsake them.

4. A prayer requesting divine intervention 44:23-26

The psalmist cried out to God to act for His people. He pictured God as asleep and in need of arousing (cf. Mark 4:38).

> "God is said to sleep when He does not interpose in whatever is taking place in the outward world here below . . ."[524]

Yahweh could not be angry because His people had not sinned by turning to another god (vv. 18, 20). Israel had come to the end of her rope and was almost dead. Since Yahweh had pledged to protect His people, the writer concluded with an appeal to His loyal love.

Sometimes believers suffer through no apparent fault of their own. In such situations we should maintain our trust and obedience, and we should call on God to deliver us as He

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[523]Henry, p. 622.
[524]Delitzsch, 2:72.

has promised to do. Even if He allows us to perish in this life, we should still remain faithful to Him (cf. Job 13:15).

PSALM 45

This royal psalm glorified a king as he prepared for his wedding. The writer related the counsel that the bride had received as she anticipated the wedding. He then predicted that people would honor the king forever because of the descendants born to him. The psalmist also appears to have spoken prophetically of Christ (cf. Eph. 5:32-33; Heb. 1:8-9).[525]

> "Psalm 45 is another example of a royal psalm which reflects the historical situation of ancient Israel, but which ultimately applies to Christ in that He is the one through whom the primary aspects of its idealistic portrayal of the Davidic ruler are fully realized."[526]

"Shoshannim" in the title means "lilies." This may have been a hymn tune. The meaning of "Maskil" is still unclear. "A song of love" (lit., NASB) probably means "a wedding song" (NIV).

1. Praise for the bridegroom 45:1-9

45:1 The psalmist claimed to be full of joy and inspiration as he composed this song. He said what he did out of a full heart.

45:2 To him, the king was the greatest man he knew. One evidence of this was his gracious speech, for which God had poured out His blessing on the king.

45:3-5 The writer called on his king to champion the cause of truth, humility, and righteousness. He encouraged him to pursue the enemies of justice and defeat them. He was confident that, with the weapons of righteousness, the king would gain many victories.

45:6-7 The writer addressed his human king as "God" (Elohim). He did not mean that the king was God but that he stood in the place of God and represented Him. Compare Exodus 21:6; 22:8-9; and Psalm 82:1 where the biblical writers called Israel's judges gods because they represented God.[527] This is an extravagant expression of praise for the king. God had blessed this king because he had represented the Lord faithfully by ruling as Yahweh does. God had given the king a double anointing, the writer affirmed. He had made him king, and He had blessed him with great joy as king.

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[525]Kidner, p. 170; McGee, 2:750.
[526]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 270.
[527]See also ibid., p. 266, n. 17.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews used these verses to point out the superiority of the Son of God to the angels (Heb. 1:5-7). He also used them to argue for the exaltation and righteous rule of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:8-9). He viewed the anointing not so much as an event (Matt. 3:16-17) as the permanent state of the King (Isa. 11:1-2). He viewed these verses as prophetic of the eternal rule of David's greatest Son (cf. v. 6). What the writer of the psalm said of his king will happen when Jesus Christ returns to earth and sets up His kingdom that will endure forever. In this view, the queen would be Israel.

> "The end of the covenant history is that Israel and the nations together praise this love-worthy, heroic, and divine King . . ."[528]

45:8-9 The king's wedding garments were fragrant with aromatic spices. Perfumers made powdered myrrh out of a gum that a certain kind of Arabian tree secreted (cf. Prov. 7:17; Song of Sol. 1:13). Aloes apparently came from a good-smelling wood (cf. Num. 24:6; Prov. 7:17; Song of Sol. 4:14). Cassia was a dried cinnamon blossom used for incense.[529] Ancient oriental monarchs decorated their palaces with ivory, and the amount of it they displayed represented their wealth and glory (cf. 1 Kings 10:18; 22:39; Amos 3:15; 6:4). Kings' daughters were among the most prestigious attendants in weddings. The ancients considered gold from Ophir, probably situated in Arabia, to be the best (cf. 1 Kings 9:28; 10:11; 22:48; Job 28:16; Isa. 13:12). The total picture of this wedding ceremony is one of extreme elegance and beauty, fitting for such a good king.

2. Advice for the bride 45:10-15

45:10-11 The psalmist gave some good advice to the bride. She would be wise to make her husband her primary object of affection (cf. Gen. 2:24). This would make her even more attractive to him. She should also honor him because he was now her authority (cf. Gen. 2:18, 22).

45:12 If she followed this advice, she would enjoy the love and respect of other powerful people. Tyre was a Phoenician seaport. The Phoenicians were world travelers and traders. A gift from the daughter of the king of Tyre (or possibly the people of Tyre) would therefore be very desirable. Other powerful people would also court the bride's favor if she glorified her worthy husband.

45:13-15 The bride was the daughter of a king herself. In these verses the psalmist pictured her coming into the palace for her marriage to her husband. Delitzsch believed that the king and queen in view were King Jehoram (or Joram) of Israel and his Queen Athaliah.[530]

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[528]Delitzsch, 2:90.
[529]Laupold, p. 357.
[530]Delitzsch, 2:75.

3. Benediction on the couple 45:16-17

The memory of the king's ancestors would pale in comparison with that of his descendants. The king's sons would become famous princes who would occupy positions of authority far and wide because of the king's righteous rule. He would also enjoy a lasting reputation and the eternal gratitude of his subjects.

> "There can be little doubt that this psalm was in the mind of John as he wrote Revelation 19:6-21. As he looked forward to the marriage of Christ, the Lamb, in heaven, he recalled how the bride clothed herself with acts of righteousness in preparation for Him (Rev. 19:6-8). Then John described the royal groom going forth to battle in righteousness (Rev. 19:11-21). Psalm 45, then, is typological of the greater Davidic King, Jesus Christ."[531]

> "Words like these spoken at an ancient eastern wedding would be considered polite exaggeration, but when applied to Jesus Christ, they aren't strong enough!"[532]

We who are believers should rejoice in our glorious King who will one day experience full union with His bride, the church (Eph. 5:23-32). He is worthy of our praise because He is completely true, humble, and righteous. We should also submit to His authority in view of who He is. We can look forward with great anticipation to our union with Him and our glorious future with Him from then on. His kingdom will endure forever, and everyone will honor His name throughout eternity.

PSALM 46

The psalmist magnified the Lord as His people's secure defense. Some writers believed that King Hezekiah wrote this psalm after Yahweh's deliverance from Sennacherib.[533] Wiersbe also believed Hezekiah may have written psalms 47 and 48.[534] Just as Zion was secure because God dwelt there, so His people were safe because He resided among them. This psalm is a strong expression of trust in the Lord.

"To Alamoth" in the title probably means female voices were to sing this psalm since the Hebrew word *alamot* means "maidens."

1. God's defense of His people 46:1-3

God's people find safety and courage when they trust in Him. He is a shelter from danger and a source of strength for them. Consequently they need not fear even though they face many calamities. Martin Luther felt inspired to write the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our

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[531]Ross, p. 828.
[532]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 182.
[533]E.g., ibid; Leupold, p. 362.
[534]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 182.

God" because of this psalm.[535] The figure of the mountains sliding into the sea pictures a terrible disaster, as do those of the storm-tossed sea and the earthquake. "Utter Confusion, Unutterable Peace," is what one author titled his exposition of this psalm.[536]

2. God's presence in Zion 46:4-7

46:4-5 God's presence in Jerusalem was similar to that of a refreshing, life-giving river rather than the raging sea (v. 3; cf. Isa. 8:6; 33:21). Old Jerusalem, of course, had no literal river flowing through it (cf. Rev. 22:1-2). Because God abode in the city, it enjoyed great security. As time passed, however, God left the city because His people forsook Him (Ezek. 8; 10).

> "The imagery of the river and the streams is reminiscent of the description of the river with its four branches in the passage on the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:10-14). The restoration to the presence of God is likened to a restoration to the Garden of Eden of all those who are members of the City of God."[537]

46:6-7 When nations lifted themselves up in opposition to God and Israel, the Lord overthrew them (cf. Ps. 2:1-2). His mighty word even caused the earth to melt, a figurative description of the awesome power of God (cf. Gen. 1). Therefore the God who preserved Jacob would also protect the Israelites. He controls the unseen armies of heaven. He is a Person to whom His people can flee for refuge when enemies attack.

3. God's exaltation in the earth 46:8-11

This psalm of confidence now transforms into an eschatological psalm with the following prophetic oracle.

46:8-9 The psalmist invited the people to come with him and view with their mind's eye the Lord's deliverances of His people. His army had destroyed Israel's enemies many times.

46:10-11 The writer presented God Himself calling His people to rest their confidence in Him. Then he concluded by repeating his own expression of trust (v. 7).

The Lord's presence indwelling His own people should inspire trust and confidence. No external calamity or hostile adversary can overthrow the place where the Lord of Armies resides. Today the Lord does not reside in a tabernacle building but in His people.[538] Read this psalm when your world seems to be falling apart.

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[535]Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 270.
[536]Armerding, p. 86.
[537]VanGemeren, p. 352. See also his appendix on Zion theology, pp. 354-57.
[538]See Swindoll, pp. 130-40.

PSALM 47

The psalmist called on all nations to honor Israel's God who will one day rule over them. This is one of the so-called "enthronement" psalms that deals with Yahweh's universal reign (cf. Pss. 93; 95—99). These are prophetic psalms since the worldwide rule of Messiah was future when the psalmist wrote.

> "The enthronement festival is a scholarly extrapolation from a Babylonian festival in which the god Marduk was annually reenthroned in pomp and circumstance at a special event in the fall agricultural festival. The comparable occasion in Israel, or so thought Sigmund Mowinckel, was the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month. However, the direct biblical evidence for such an Israelite festival is virtually nil. It has essentially grown out of a 'parallelomania' in biblical studies that shapes Israelite religion in the form of the neighboring cultures' religions. One can identify parallels, to be sure, but the imposition of whole institutions on Israelite religion merely because echoes of such institutions from other cultures can be heard in the Psalms is questionable."[539]

A better title for this classification of psalms might be royal or "kingship of Yahweh" psalms.[540] They bear the following characteristics: universal concern for all peoples and the whole earth, references to other gods, God's characteristic acts (e.g., making, establishing, judging), and physical and spiritual protocol of the attitude of praise before the heavenly King.[541]

The Jews use this psalm on Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year's Day, and liturgical Christians use it as part of the celebration of Ascension Day.[542]

> "Some have applied this Psalm to Christ's ascension; but it speaks of His Second Coming."[543]

The historical occasion of its writing may have been King Jehoshaphat's victory over his allied neighbors (2 Chron. 20), though this is by no means certain.[544] Another possibility is God's deliverance of the Judahites in Hezekiah's day (Isa. 36—37).[545]

1. The sovereign King's homage 47:1-4

47:1-2 The psalmist called on all people to applaud Yahweh joyfully because He is the great universal sovereign enthroned on high. This is a call to willing submission to His authority.

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[539]Bullock, p. 181. See also Leupold, p. 12.
[540]Bullock, p. 188.
[541]J. D. W. Watts, "Yahweh Malak Psalms," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1965):341-48.
[542]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 184.
[543]Andrew Bonar, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:223.
[544]See Delitzsch, 2:97, for defense of this view.
[545]Leupold, p. 368.

> "Kings in the ancient Near East loved to designate themselves by this title [great king] because with it were associated superiority, suzerainty, and the power to grant vassal treaties (cf. 2 Kings 18:19; Isa 36:4). Any king assuming this title could not tolerate competition. So it is with Yahweh. He alone is the Great King over all the earth (cf. Mal 1:11, 14)!"[546]

47:3-4 God showed His sovereignty by subduing nations to give the Israelites their inheritance in Canaan. When Jesus Christ returns to the earth, He will again exercise authority over all nations and exalt Israel among them (Matt. 21:43; Rom. 11:1-32).

2. The sovereign King's reign 47:5-9

47:5-6 The writer viewed God as mounting His cosmic throne to rule over all the earth. Trumpets announced His ascent with a fanfare. The psalmist called all people to sing praises to God because He is the sovereign Lord.

47:7-9 Again he called for praise because the Lord reigns over all nations. He looked ahead in time to see this enthronement. It has not yet taken place, but the psalmist was sure it would happen. The King of the Universe will inevitably rule one day over all, and every knee will bow before Him (Phil. 2:9-11).[547]

As the saints experience discouragement, they can find hope and joy in the fact that, one day, Jesus Christ will subdue all His enemies and rule over all the nations.

PSALM 48

The psalmist praised God for delivering Zion from her enemies (cf. Pss. 46 and 47). Jerusalem was secure and glorious because God had blessed it with His favor. Some scholars classify this as another royal psalm, and some view it as a "Zion" psalm.

> "This is the last of a group of three millennial psalms. It celebrates the final and complete victory of the Messiah."[548]

The occasion of writing may again have been God's defeat of the Assyrians in Hezekiah's day (Isa. 36—37).[549]

1. Zion's privilege 48:1-3

48:1 Ancient peoples connected the glory of a god with the place where he dwelt. That association is clear in this psalm. The holy mountain where

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[546]VanGemeren, p. 358.
[547]See Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, pp. 217-30.
[548]McGee, 2:755.
[549]Leupold, p. 374; Yates, p. 513.

His Ark resided reflected God's greatness. This verse summarizes the theme of the psalm, namely, that God is worthy of great praise.

48:2-3 The lofty beauty of Jerusalem, situated on Mt. Zion in the northeast corner ("far north") of the city, gave all people reason to rejoice. The writer compared its beauty to that of Mt. Zaphon far to the north of Jerusalem, specifically some 25 miles to the northeast of Ugarit (cf. Isa. 14:13-14).[550] The NIV translation of verse 2 clarifies the reference to this second mountain. Yet what made Jerusalem truly great was the presence of the Lord in it.

> "Zaphon, located north of Israel, was the sacred mountain of the Canaanites from which their high god El supposedly ruled. However, Zion was the real 'Zaphon,' for it was here that the Lord God of Israel, the 'Great King' of the universe, lived and ruled (48:2)."[551]

The city was strong and safe because Yahweh resided there.

2. Zion's security 48:4-8

48:4-6 Besieging armies could not prevail against God's stronghold. They turned away unsuccessful. It was as though the presence of God terrified them. The psalmist may have written these words shortly after an invading army, perhaps the Assyrians, had attacked Jerusalem and failed (cf. Isa. 10:8; 33:3, 14).

48:7 The east wind can be very strong and hot in Israel. Tarshish probably refers to some nation to the west, possibly near modern Spain. Ships of Tarshish were probably large Mediterranean vessels. The writer pictured their destruction as symbolic of God's defeat of nations foreign to Israel. Delitzsch believed that the reference to these metaphorical ships helps us date the psalm to the reign of King Jehoshaphat of Judah.[552]

48:8 The psalmist could confirm earlier reports of God delivering Zion with his own eyewitness testimony. The Lord of Armies had indeed defended His capital with His mighty forces. Some of the Lord's troops were natural: Israel's fighting force. Some were supernatural: His angelic army.

3. Zion's joy 48:9-14

48:9-10 Meditation on Yahweh's loyal love and righteousness drew praise from the psalmist as he stood near God's house. People—who live as far as knowledge of His reputation extends—praise God.

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[550]See Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 198.
[551]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 264.
[552]Delitzsch, 2:102, 105.

48:11-14 Those who live near God's presence can rejoice in His decision to protect them. The psalmist invited the residents of Jerusalem to examine the unscathed condition of the city that God had defended. He also urged them to report God's protection to their children. The "daughters" of Judah (v. 11) probably refers to its cities and villages.[553] Since God had so faithfully and powerfully preserved His people, the psalmist led them in a commitment to continue following Him as their guide forever.

The people of God should view divine deliverance as an evidence of the Lord's faithfulness and power. We should remember the instances of His salvation and share them with other people. This information will fortify our own faith, and it will encourage others to trust in Him. As long as we trust and obey God, He will defend us. An intimate relationship with God is a very secure one.

PSALM 49

The writer reflected on the problem that the prosperity of the wicked poses in this didactic wisdom psalm (cf. Pss. 37, 73). He observed that there are many ungodly people who enjoy many physical blessings. Still, he concluded that the righteous are better off because they have a sure hope for the future.

> "The psalm is an encouragement to the godly who are haunted by the power and influence of the rich."[554]

> "Never does the psalmist address God, and only twice does he mention Him by name. His purpose is to present a meditation on the riddle of life."[555]

1. Invitation to hear wisdom 49:1-4

49:1-2 The psalmist urged all people to listen to what he had to say in this poem (cf. 50:1; Deut. 32:1; 1 Kings 22:28; Mic. 1:2). All kinds of people need to be aware of the insight he revealed here: both the low (with small estates) and the high (with large estates), the rich and the poor. This applies to the wicked as well as the righteous.

49:3-4 What follows is wisdom, but a person must have insight to appreciate it. It is a riddle or dark saying in this respect. Spiritual illumination helps us perceive the truth.

> "The help of the Holy Spirit was never meant to supersede the use of our own mental powers."[556]

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[553]Kidner, p. 181.
[554]VanGemeren, p. 366. See also Brueggemann, pp. 106-10.
[555]Yates, p. 513.
[556]Spurgeon, 1:227.

> "The language of the prelude, the call to mankind, uses many of the terms which open the book of Proverbs, and proclaims this a wisdom psalm, offering instruction to men rather than worship to God."[557]

2. Observation of the prosperity of the wicked 49:5-12

"The psalmist deals in a different way with the age-old problem of the prosperity of the wicked. He says, Why worry? With this premise he goes on to discuss the problem with a confident rather than a pessimistic attitude."[558]

49:5-6 This rhetorical question sets forth the folly of fearing when wicked people oppose the righteous. It introduces the revelation that the prosperous ungodly enjoy a false security (vv. 7-12).

> ". . . it is not men's having riches that denominates them worldly, but their setting their hearts upon them as the best things . . ."[559]

> "It's good to have things that money can buy, if we don't lose the things money can't buy. It's sad when people start to confuse prices with values."[560]

49:7-9 Material wealth cannot prevent death. No one has enough money to buy life back when God claims it in death. The point here is that we cannot buy our way, or anyone else's way, out of dying. The psalmist was not speaking of purchasing eternal salvation here.[561] That comes later in verse 15 (cf. Matt. 20:28).

49:10-12 Everyone dies eventually, even though some live with the illusion of immortality. The fact that people try to perpetuate their reputations on the earth forever shows that they want to live forever. However, man—like the animals—will eventually go into the grave. Of course, the psalmist did not mean that man's fate is identical to that of animals in all respects. He only meant that both die. Later revelation, that saints living at the time of the Rapture will experience translation without dying, does not negate the psalmist's point.

> "Years ago when one of the Astors died, some of the eager relatives were waiting outside. When the lawyer came out,

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[557]Kidner, p. 182.
[558]Yates, p. 513.
[559]Henry, p. 627.
[560]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 187.
[561]Leupold, p. 384.

> they asked, 'How much did he leave?' The lawyer replied, 'He left it *all*.'"[562]

3. Encouragement to trust in God 49:13-20

49:13-14 The writer marveled at the folly of the proud wicked. How silly it is to live only for the present! Death will bring to an end all the good things the wicked live for. The wicked may dominate the upright in this life, but a new day is coming in which God will turn the tables.

> "The Bible is not against riches per se but the attitude of self-sufficiency and self-confidence so often associated with riches. The rich come under condemnation for their insensitivity, scheming, deception, and attitude that they rule the world (v. 5; cf. James 5:1-6)."[563]

The Bible does not condemn the godly rich who received their wealth as a blessing from God (e.g., Job, Abraham, David, et al.).

49:15 > "The great *But God* . . . (15) is one of the mountain-tops of Old Testament hope."[564]

God will free the righteous from the power of the grave and will receive them on the other side of the grave. This is one of the Old Testament passages that reveal that believers living when the psalmist did had hope of life after death (cf. Job 19:25; Heb. 11:10; et al.).[565] Revelation of the bodily resurrection, however, was obscure until Jesus Christ's resurrection and His apostles' revelations on that subject (1 Thess. 4; 1 Cor. 15).

> "It is possible that the psalmist is looking at ultimate eschatological realities, anticipating his own resurrection and a time when the righteous, not the rich, will rule on earth. However, it is more likely that the ascendancy of the righteous refers to their vindication in this life, a well-attested theme in the Psalter, especially in the wisdom psalms (see, e.g., Pss. 1, 34, 37, and 112, as well as the discussion above). In this case verse 15 refers to God's preserving the psalmist through 'evil days' (cf. v. 5) by keeping him from premature, violent death at the hands of the oppressive rich and from the calamity that overtakes them. 'Morning' (v. 14), which brings to mind the dawning of a new day after a night of darkness, aptly symbolizes the cessation of these 'evil days.'"[566]

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[562]McGee, 2:758.
[563]VanGemeren, p. 370.
[564]Kidner, p. 182.
[565]See T. D. Alexander, "The Psalms and the Afterlife," *Irish Biblical Studies* 9 (1987):2-17.
[566]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 285.

49:16-19 It is foolish to be jealous of wicked unbelievers. Their prosperity is only temporary. The wise person should not allow the wealth of the ungodly to intimidate him or her.

> "Rich men are but like hailstones; they make a noise in the world, as the other rattle on the tiles of a house; down they fall, lie still, and melt away."[567]
>
> "We can't take wealth with us, but we can send it ahead.
>
> "It isn't a sin to have wealth, provided we earned it honestly, spend it wisely, and invest it faithfully in that which pleases the Lord."[568]

49:20 The psalmist repeated his concluding statement in the previous section (v. 12), but here he changed it slightly. Here he stressed the wicked person's lack of understanding. There he stressed his lack of endurance.

> "If a man is in honor *and has no understanding,* then he 'is like the beasts that perish,' that is to say, if he puts unseemly confidence in earthly possessions; if he fails to consider that wealth must fail a man in the end; if he leaves God out of the picture and does not make Him his confidence."[569]
>
> "The gloomy prospect of the future does not belong to the rich man as such, but to the worldly and carnally minded rich man."[570]

We who are believers should not envy the ungodly who prosper in this life. We should not feel inferior to them either. All that they are living for will perish with them. Those who fear God, however, can expect a glorious future with the Lord beyond the grave.[571]

PSALM 50

This psalm pictures God seated in His heavenly throne room. He has two indictments against His people Israel. The wicked among them were hypocritical in their worship, a violation of the first part of the Decalogue, and in their interpersonal relationships, a violation of the second part. They needed to return to Him wholeheartedly. This is a didactic wisdom psalm written to teach God's people an important lesson.

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[567]Thomas Adams, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:230.
[568]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 188.
[569]Leupold, p. 387.
[570]Delitzsch, 2:120.
[571]See Daniel J. Estes, "Poetic Artistry in the Expression of Fear in Psalm 49," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:641 (January-March 2004):55-71, for an analysis of how the psalmist expressed and overcame his fear.

> "This psalm is the speech of God, who addresses his covenant partner concerning matters of violated covenant. After the narrative introduction of verses 1-6, it is all one extended speech in the form of a decree with no room for negotiation."[572]
>
> "We are almost tempted to call it a thundering indictment of formalism."[573]
>
> "This didactic psalm is closer to the prophetic tradition than to the Wisdom emphasis."[574]

The Levitical musician, Asaph, evidently wrote this psalm, as well as Psalms 73—83 (cf. 1 Chron. 16:4-5).

> "If we read the twelve Psalms of Asaph in order one after the other, we shall . . . observe this striking characteristic, that mention is made of Joseph and the tribes descended from him more frequently than anywhere else (lxxvii. 16, lxxviii. 9, 67 sq., lxxxi. 6. lxxx. 2 sq.). Nor is another feature less remarkable, vis. That the mutual relationship of Jahve to Israel is set forth under the figure of the shepherd and his flock rather than any other (lxxiv. 1, lxxvii. 21, lxxviii. 52, cf. lxx.—lxxii., lxxix. 13, lxxx. 2). Moreover these Psalms delight in other respects to vary the designations for the people of God as much as possible."[575]

1. The heavenly Judge 50:1-6

50:1 Asaph pictured God as the cosmic Judge summoning all people to stand before Him. The titles Mighty One, God, and Yahweh, present the Lord as the greatest of all judges. His ability to command all of humanity also shows His greatness.

50:2-3 God came out of His holy habitation on Mt. "Zion, the perfection of beauty," to judge. (Delitzsch noted that the Scriptures nowhere describe God as "beautiful," because a glory that transcends all beauty belongs to Him.[576]).

Fire and storms frequently accompanied God in theophanies, and they symbolize irresistible judgment and awesome power.

> "His appearance (theophany) is attended by phenomena designed to inspire 'fear' in man: fire and a tempest. God is like 'a consuming fire' (cf. Deut 4:24; 9:3; Isa 66:16; Heb

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[572]Breuggemann, p. 89.
[573]Leupold, p. 389.
[574]Yates, p. 513.
[575]Delitzsch, 2:123-24.
[576]Ibid., 2:126.

> 12:29) when he comes in judgment. In his anger he may storm like a 'tempest' (cf. Isa 66:15)."[577]

50:4-6 Asaph described God summoning those living in heaven, the angels, and on earth, mortals, to serve as witnesses in the trial. Israel is the defendant. The covenant in view is the Mosaic Covenant, under which the nation had obligations to God. The writer called on the angels to declare the Judge righteous, a way of affirming that He is just.

2. Charge 1: formalistic worship 50:7-15

50:7 God spoke to His people as their God and as their Judge. They had sinned against Him.

50:8-13 He was not charging them with failure to offer the sacrifices He had prescribed. They had done that. They erred in thinking that offering sacrifices was all He expected. He reminded them that He did not need their offerings. He already owned everything they presented to Him. The pagans believed they maintained their gods by offering them food, but Yahweh reminded His people that He did not need their sacrifices.

> "There is a note of sarcasm in the use of the pronoun 'your' in 'your stall' and in 'your pens' (v. 9). It is as if God has heard them proudly say, 'This is my bull/goat from my stall/pen!' To this boastful claim God responds solemnly with an emphatic 'mine' (v. 10 . . .) and concludes his claim with a restatement of his ownership that would linger in the hearts of the hearers: 'mine' (v. 11). His rule extends to all creation."[578]

50:14-15 God wanted His people to give Him what giving their animals and produce represented, namely, their gratitude. Thank offerings expressed gratitude for something God had done for the offerer. Votive offerings were also expressions of thanks. God wanted His people to look to Him for their needs, and when He provided, He wanted them to honor Him with gratitude. In other words, He wanted them to enjoy a vital relationship with Himself, not just a formal one in which He was their God and they were His people.

> "Prayer is like the ring which Queen Elizabeth gave to the Earl of Essex, bidding him if he were in any distress sent that ring to her and she would help him. God commandeth His people if they be in any perplexity to send this ring to Him: *Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me*."[579]

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[577]VanGemeren, p. 374.
[578]Ibid., p. 375.
[579]George Swinnock, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:232-33.

3. Charge 2: hypocritical living 50:16-21

50:16-17 The Lord also charged the wicked in Israel with professing allegiance to Him while disobeying Him.

50:18-20 These verses contain specific instances of the Israelites' hypocrisy. They loved what God hated. Furthermore, they did not allow God's will to govern their speech (cf. James 3:1-12).

> "In the present verse [18] there may be an implication, too, of the hypocrisy of enjoying sin at second-hand while keeping out of trouble oneself; and this would be in character with the deviousness portrayed in 19 and 20 [cf. Rom. 2:17-24]."[580]

50:21 The people evidently concluded that because God did not judge them for their sinful ways, their sins did not matter to Him. Such was not the case. Their sins did not matter to *them*. Judgment was coming. They would have to account for their actions.

> "Sinners take God's silence for consent and his patience for connivance; and therefore the longer they are reprieved the more are their hearts hardened."[581]

> "Sinners do with God as the Ethiopians do with angels, whom they picture with black faces that they may be like themselves."[582]

4. A final warning 50:22-23

God let His people off with a warning. However, they should remember Him and the fact that He would judge them eventually. Heartfelt gratitude and obedience would honor God and bring His deliverance. Simply going through the motions of worshipping and giving a misleading appearance of godliness would incur His wrath.

> "Thanksgiving is a God-exalting work. Though nothing can add the least cubit to God's essential glory, yet praise exalts Him in the eyes of others."[583]

> "Thanksgiving is good, but thanks-living is better."[584]

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[580]Kidner, p. 188.
[581]Henry, p. 630.
[582]William Gurnall, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:235.
[583]Thomas Watson, quoted in ibid., 1:236.
[584]Henry, p. 630.

This psalm is a sober warning to God's people of all time. We may deceive ourselves into thinking external conformity and pious words please God. However, only reality in our relationships with Him and our fellow human beings wins His approval. We should remember that one day we really shall stand before the righteous Judge and give an account of our lives (2 Cor. 5:10). We should live now with that reality in mind. There are parallels between this psalm and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.[585]

PSALM 51

In this penitential individual lament psalm (cf. Pss. 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, and 143), David confessed the sins he committed against Bathsheba and Uriah. It is a model of confession that has become popular with God's people. Since we all sin so often and need to confess frequently, this psalm is a help and comfort to us all. We should read it especially when we feel guilty or have sinned.

Psalm 32 proposed the need to confess sin, and verse 5 of that poem is a brief statement of confession. But Psalm 51 moves closer to "the center of the crisis of alienation"[586] and gives us a model of confession. In it, David did not utter one word of excuse for the sins he had committed, nor did he seek to tone down the gravity of his offenses or blame others for what he had done.[587]

> "In contrast with the others of this type that have been considered (Ps. 6, 32, 38) this psalm bears the marks of deep inner grief over sin."[588]

The title explains the situation out of which this psalm arose (2 Sam. 11). Delitzsch called this psalm "the first of the Davidic Elohim-Psalms."[589]

1. Prayer for gracious cleansing 51:1-2

51:1 David appealed to God (Elohim) to cleanse him because of His loyal love and compassion. This is the first of David's psalms in which he addressed the Lord as Elohim, possibly reflecting the distance he felt from God as Yahweh.[590] He knew he did not deserve the Lord's forgiveness nor could he earn it.

> "David does not balance his evil deeds with his good deeds, nor can he think that his services will atone for his offences; but he flies to God's infinite mercy, and depends upon that only for pardon and peace . . ."[591]

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[585]Delitzsch, 2:132.
[586]Brueggemann, p. 98.
[587]Armerding, p. 96.
[588]Leupold, p. 398.
[589]Delitzsch, 2:133.
[590]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 433.
[591]Henry, p. 630.

> "If our sins be in number as the hairs of our head, God's mercies are as the stars of heaven; and as He is an infinite God, so His mercies are infinite; yea, so far are His mercies above our sins, as He Himself is above us poor sinners."[592]

Divine pardon comes to sinners by His grace alone. David asked God to blot out the record of his "transgressions," namely, rebellious acts that go beyond the limits that God has established for conduct.

51:2 The biblical writers often compared a person's deeds to the clothing he wears, because that is what other people see when they look at us. David asked God to wash away his "iniquity" (perverse, twisted moral evil) like dirt that was on his garment (behavior). Cleansing is a term that comes from the tabernacle ritual. Those who came into God's presence to worship and serve Him had to be clean. David correctly viewed his "sin" (falling short of the standard that God requires) as making the worship and service of a holy God impossible.

> "In the Jewish society of that day, to wash and change clothes marked a new beginning in life (Gen. 35:1; 41:14; 45:22; Ex. 19:10, 14), and David made such a new start (2 Sam. 12:20)."[593]

> "Nathan had assured David, upon his first profession of repentance, that his sin was pardoned [2 Sam. 12:13]. . . . God had forgiven him, but he could not forgive himself; and therefore he is thus importunate for pardon."[594]

> "Many a murderer is more alarmed at the gallows than at the murder which brought him to it. The thief loves the plunder, though he fears the prison. Not so David: he is sick of sin as sin; his loudest outcries are against the evil of his transgression and not against the painful consequences of it. When we deal seriously with our sin God will deal gently with us. When we hate what the Lord hates, He will soon make an end of it, to our joy and peace."[595]

2. Confession of gross sin 51:3-6

51:3 Probably several months passed between David's sin of adultery and the time when he acknowledged his guilt. We know this because Bathsheba had given birth to the child she had conceived illegitimately after David

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[592]Archibald Symson, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:238.
[593]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 191.
[594]Henry, p. 630.
[595]Spurgeon, 1:238.

confessed his sin (cf. 2 Sam. 12:13-18). David's sin had evidently been on his mind for many months. He had hardened his heart and refused to admit that what he had done was sinful. Perhaps he had tried to rationalize it somehow.

> "True penitence is not a dead knowledge of sin committed, but a living sensitive consciousness of it (Isa. lix. 12), to which it is ever present as a matter and ground of unrest and pain."[596]

A professional athlete was suspended from his team when his coach learned that he was addicted to cocaine. The player told reporters that his drug abuse was not his fault. He said he had the disease of chemical dependency. Some people may have a genetic predisposition to addiction, but we are not facing our problem honestly if we do not accept responsibility for the choices we make. It is easier to say, "I am sick," than it is to say, "I am wrong."

51:4 David had finally come to the place where he was willing, not only to call his sin what it was, but to admit that it was sin against God primarily. Obviously he had sinned against Bathsheba, her husband, and the nation that he ruled, but David rightfully admitted that the worst thing he had done was offending God. He made no attempt to blame God for what had happened but took full responsibility himself. He acknowledged that his Judge was guiltless and that he was guilty. Taking personal responsibility for our sins is an important part of true confession.

> "To say '*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned*' may invite the quibble that adultery and murder are hardly private wrongs. But it is a typically biblical way of going to the heart of the matter. Sin can be against oneself (I Cor. 6:18) and against one's neighbour; but the flouting of God is always the length and breadth of it, as Joseph saw long before (Gn. 39:9)."[597]

> "Once we understand that no sin is against a fellow human being alone and that all sin is transgression against God, we will no longer treat it so lightly."[598]

51:5 The king went on to confess the depth of his sinfulness. He had been a sinner from the time he came into existence as a human being, namely, at his conception.[599] This is one of the strongest indications in the Bible that

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[596]Delitzsch, 2:135.
[597]Kidner, p. 190.
[598]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 433.
[599]See Calvin, *Institutes of* . . ., 2:1:5.

human life begins at conception rather than at birth (cf. 139:13-16). He viewed sinful acts as the fruit of a sinful nature, not as the product of his environment or the situation that had triggered his acts. This verse does not mean David felt free of personal responsibility for his actions. He felt responsible, as is clear from his statements in the context. The sinful condition that he had inherited from his parents was the root of his actual sin.

> ". . . the fact of hereditary sin is here more distinctly expressed than in any other passage in the Old Testament . . ."[600]

> "It is to be sadly lamented by everyone of us that we brought into the world with us a corrupt nature, wretchedly degenerated from its primitive purity and rectitude. This is what we call *original sin*, because it is as ancient as our original, and because it is the original of all our actual transgressions. It is a bent to backslide from God."[601]

51:6 David also realized that God wanted him to be completely honest, not just to offer a sacrifice. He needed to get his heart right with God. His confession had to be genuine rather than the superficial repetition of some words. Wisdom in the Old Testament refers to living life in the light of God's presence and revelation. God wants people to be completely honest with Him and to deal with reality. David acknowledged this.

Occasionally in the newspaper we read a published correction. The editors admit that they had not reported the facts accurately. In one correction, they cleared the name of a person they had linked to a criminal case. This is a good example of acknowledging personal responsibility for one's mistake.

3. Petition for restoration 51:7-12

David's prayer for restoration included requests for God's forgiveness (vv. 7, 9), a renewal of his joy (v. 8), and a heart of wisdom and full restoration to divine favor (vv. 10-12).

51:7 Again David pleaded for purification and cleansing (vv. 1-2). In Israel, the priest sprinkled animal blood on the altar with a hyssop branch. This ritual symbolized cleansing by sacrificial death (cf. Heb. 9:22). If God would wash David morally, he would be thoroughly clean.

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[600]Delitzsch, 2:137.

[601]Henry, p. 630.

> "Cleansing in Scripture is twofold: (1) of a sinner from the guilt of sin—the blood (hyssop) aspect; and (2) of a saint from the defilement of sin—the water (wash) aspect. Under grace the sinner is purged by blood when he believes (Mt. 26:28; Heb. 1:3; 9:12; 10:14). Both aspects of cleansing, by blood and by water, are brought out in Jn. 13:10; Eph. 5:25-26 . . ."[602]

> "Snow soon gathers smoke and dust; it melts and disappears; Thou canst give me an enduring purity. Though snow is white below as well as on the surface, Thou canst work the like inward purity in me and make me so clean that only an hyperbole can set forth my immaculate condition."[603]

51:8 This verse is a request for renewed joy. "Joy and gladness" indicates deep joy. David's fractured relationship with God pained him as much as a broken bone (cf. 6:2).

51:9 The expressions in this verse picture God as a judge removing David's sins. The psalmist wanted God to put his sins in a place where He would not see them, and to blot out any record of them from His record books.

51:10 The psalmist's petition now turned to thoughts of spiritual renewal. In contrast to his natural sinful heart (v. 5), David sensed the need for a clean heart. He requested a spirit more faithful to the Lord than his natural spirit (inclination) to depart from the Lord.

> ". . . he does not say, 'Make my old heart clean'; he is too experienced in the hopelessness of the old nature. He would have the old man buried as a dead thing, and a new creation brought in to fill its place. None but God can create either a new heart or a new earth."[604]

51:11 Casting away from God's presence implies a rejection as God's servant. Saul had suffered such a fate for his continuing rebellion against Yahweh (1 Sam. 16:1, 7). In Old Testament times God gave His Holy Spirit selectively (to empower only some believers) and temporarily (primarily to empower them for special acts of service). Since the Day of Pentecost all believers enjoy the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9). Consequently the possibility of God withdrawing His Spirit from David was a real one for him, but it is not for us.[605] It is possible that a Christian may lose his or her opportunities to

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[602]*The New Scofield . . .*, pp. 624-25.

[603]Spurgeon, 1:239.

[604]Ibid., 1:240.

[605]For further study of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament times, see Walvoord, pp. 71-73; L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 6:66-79; or Leon Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*.

serve the Lord, however (1 Cor. 9:27). For example, a Christian who gets involved in gross sin will not lose his or her salvation (John 10:28-29), but he or she may lose the opportunity to serve God in a leadership capacity (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27).

51:12 Again David asked for renewed joy (cf. v. 8). He had not lost his salvation as a result of his sin, but he had lost the joy of it. The Lord was apparently not delivering him from his present distresses as He had done previously. He also requested a cooperative spirit, one that would cooperate with God and thereby sustain him.

> "As long as [gun]powder is wet, it resists the spark, but when it becomes dry it is ready to explode at the first touch. As long as the Spirit dwell in my heart, He deadens me to sin; so that if lawfully called through temptation, I may reckon upon God's carrying me through. But when the Spirit leave me, I am like dry gunpowder."[606]

4. Promise of grateful service 51:13-17

David's confession of his sins and prayer for inner renewal formed a basis for him to instruct sinners (v. 13), praise Yahweh (vv. 14-15), and deepen his own commitment to the Lord (vv. 16-17).

51:13 The promises David made in this section of verses gave God reasons to grant forgiveness, so they were indirect requests for pardon. If forgiven, David would show others how God deals with penitent sinners. He would do this as an example, as well as verbally. Then sinners would turn to the Lord for deliverance.

> "Penitents should be preachers."[607]

51:14-15 "Bloodguilt" refers to guilt as a result of killing someone without divine authorization. When God saved him from this guilt and opened his lips by forgiving him, David would joyfully praise the Lord. He would also enjoy personal peace.

> "A great sinner pardoned makes a great singer."[608]

51:16-17 Third, David promised to sacrifice to Yahweh if God would forgive him. He would offer sacrifices of worship, but he acknowledged that what God really wanted, and what he would also offer, was a different attitude (cf. 50:7-15, 23).

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[606]Robert Murray M'Cheyne, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:241.
[607]Henry, p. 631.
[608]Spurgeon, 1:242.

> "This [v. 17] is one of the statements of deepest spiritual insight found in the whole of the Old Testament."[609]

In David's case, there was no sin or trespass offering that he could present that God would accept. Since he had sinned with a high hand, in rebellious defiance of Yahweh and in repudiation of the terms of His covenant, his sentence was death (Num. 15:30-31; cf. 2 Sam. 12:9). The only reason he did not suffer this fate was that God pardoned him. The prophet Nathan brought the news of God's special pardon to David (2 Sam. 12:13).

> "Is a thing that is broken good for anything? Can we drink in a broken glass? Or can we lean upon a broken staff? But though other things may be the worse for breaking, yet a heart is never at the best till it be broken; for till it be broken we cannot see what is in it; though God loves a whole heart in affection, yet He loves a broken heart in sacrifice."[610]

God has already given His promise to pardon the guilt of any New Testament believer for any sin we may commit (1 John 1:9). The basis of this gracious pardon is the work of Jesus Christ on Calvary (1 John 1:7).

5. Request for Israel's prosperity 51:18-19

51:18 David extended his request for personal blessing to the nation under his authority. God had promised to protect David from death. He now asked the Lord to protect His people as well.

51:19 If God did so, His people could and would continue to worship Him in His appointed ways. This would bring delight to the Lord even as He had brought delight to His people by forgiving and preserving them.

When believers sin against God, they should confess their sins and repent (i.e., adopt a different attitude toward the Lord that results in changed conduct). They can count on His gracious, abundant forgiveness because He has promised to forgive the fellowship consequences of sin for those who confess their sins. Forgiveness should result in a renewed commitment to worship and serve the Lord.[611]

There are two types of forgiveness. There is judicial forgiveness that every person experiences when he or she trusts in Christ as Savior (Rom. 5:1). God will never condemn us to eternal damnation for our sins if we trust in His Son (Rom. 8:1). However, there is also familial forgiveness. This is the forgiveness believers need because they offend God (Matt. 6:12, 14-15; 1 John 1:9). In one sense, therefore, God has forgiven all

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[609]Leupold, p. 407.

[610]Richard Baker, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:242.

[611]For some interesting insights on this psalm, see John White, *Daring To Draw Near*, pp. 51-64.

our sins, but in another sense we need to confess our sins to receive forgiveness. Judicial forgiveness makes us acceptable to God, but familial forgiveness makes us intimate with God. Judicial forgiveness removes the guilt of sin, and familial forgiveness restores the broken fellowship caused by sin.

PSALM 52

David contrasted his trust in the Lord with the treachery of those who have no regard for Him in this lament psalm of trust. The historical background appears in the title (1 Sam. 21—22). Many commentators believed that Doeg the Edomite was in David's mind as he described the wicked, in view of the heading. But Leupold argued convincingly that Saul was the enemy in David's mind, and that the heading only furnishes the setting for the psalm.[612] Some commentators believed that Psalms 52 through 55 give a prophetic picture of Antichrist.[613]

1. God's destruction of the treacherous 52:1-7

52:1 David addressed the wicked man directly. He marveled that he would really boast about his evil since the Lord is so consistently loving. It is inconsistent to return evil to a God who loves loyally, and it is even worse to brag about one's wickedness.

52:2-4 The wicked who oppose God's faithful servants often use their words as weapons to cut them down (cf. James 3:6, 8). Their words are deceitful when they misrepresent the truth. They are "artists of deceit."[614] David stressed the fact that the treacherous really love their destructive activity. To destroy is bad enough, but to love to do it is worse.

52:5 Since God had promised to bless the righteous with long life and to punish the wicked with death (Deut. 28), David was confident He would slay the deceiver eventually.

52:6-7 The punishment of the wicked would delight the righteous, not because they had suffered, but because God would judge righteously. The person who does not trust in the Lord trusts in himself. He builds a refuge for himself often out of material things, but it always proves inferior to God Himself.

2. God's deliverance of the trusting 52:8-9

52:8 David repudiated the confidence of the wicked and reaffirmed his trust in the Lord. He pictured himself as a flourishing olive tree, in contrast to his uprooted enemy (v. 5; cf. 1:3; Hos. 14:6). Olive trees live unusually long,

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[612]See Leupold, pp. 409-10.
[613]E.g., McGee, 2:767
[614]Dahood, 2:11.

and they are productive and attractive. They were and are very numerous in Israel. The tree David saw was in the tabernacle courtyard, symbolic of his nearness to God.

52:9 The psalmist thanked God for making him like an olive tree in the Lord's house. He acknowledged that the reason he was the man he was, and not as Saul, was due to God's grace, not his own works. He purposed to continue to hope in the Lord, confident that he would praise Him in spite of the opposition of treacherous enemies. Those among whom David would wait were other believers.

We, the saints, need not despair when wicked people oppose us. God will deal with our enemies. In the meantime, we should continue to trust and praise God in the company of His people.

PSALM 53

This psalm is another version of the one that appears in Book 1 as Psalm 14. David wrote it, and "mahalath" is a tune name. One interesting difference between this psalm and Psalm 14 is that this one contains the name Elohim whereas Psalm 14 has Yahweh.

> "In both recensions of the Psalm the name of God occurs seven times. In Ps. xiv. it reads three times *Elohim* and four times *Jahve*; in the Psalm before us it is all seven times *Elohim*, which in this instance is a proper name of equal dignity with the name *Jahve*."[615]

> ". . . Psalm 53's position between Psalms 52 and 54 favors an ancient tradition relating to the life of David. Psalm 52 relates to the story of Doeg (cf. 1 Sam 22) and Psalm 54 to the incident of the Ziphites (cf. 1 Sam 23; 26). The term 'fool' (*nabal*, 53:1) is suggestive of Nabal, who acted foolishly to David and his men (cf. 1 Sam 25)."[616]

David reflected on the wickedness of the entire human race and voiced confidence that God would punish sinners. He longed for God to establish His kingdom on earth (cf. Matt. 6:10).

1. Reflection on the human race 53:1-3

53:1 A fool in the ancient Hebrew view of life was a person who did not acknowledge God's existence intellectually, practically, or both (cf. Rom. 1). He lived as though God does not exist. Such a viewpoint leads to unrestrained behavior. The fool's conduct is essentially corrupt, in addition to being abominable to God (i.e., vile). No one is completely or consistently good because everyone disregards God from time to time.

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[615]Delitzsch, 2:149.

[616]VanGemeren, p. 388.

53:2-3 David pictured God looking down from His heavenly habitation and examining human beings individually. Wise people acknowledge God's presence and pursue Him because He is the source of all goodness and blessing. Fools disregard Him and go their own way. God observed that everyone turns away from Him. The whole race has become sour like milk (Heb. *'alah*; cf. 14:3; Job 10:10; 15:16). When people do not use milk for its intended purpose, namely, to drink, it turns sour. Likewise when people do not use their lives for their intended purpose, namely, to honor and glorify God, they spoil. No one is completely good. Every individual has fallen short of this standard of perfection (cf. Rom. 3:10-12).

2. Anticipation of judgment 53:4-5

53:4 David expressed amazement that those who disregard God would take advantage of His chosen people and would not even pray to Him.

53:4 The psalmist may have had some specific instance of God's deliverance in mind, or he may have spoken of His future judgment as having already taken place because of its certainty. God Himself would terrorize and shame His enemies. Evidently David saw God's people as playing some role in their enemies' defeat.

3. Yearning for God's reign 53:6

David longed for the time when God would initiate salvation for Israel from Zion. When he wrote, Israel was at least partially under a hostile foreign power's control. The psalmist believed God would one day restore His people and cause them to rejoice. Because of other revelation, we know that when Jesus Christ comes back to reign He will reestablish Israel as His favored nation and will punish her enemies (cf. Ps. 2; Isa. 27:12; 43:5-7; Jer. 12:15; Ezek. 20:34-38, 42; 28:25-26; Dan. 7:13-14; Hos. 12:9; Joel 3:1-2; Amos 9:14-15; Mic. 4:6; Zeph. 3:20; Zech. 10:10).[617]

It is foolish to disregard God (cf. Prov. 1:7). Those who do so will experience present futility in their lives and future judgment for their folly.

PSALM 54

David composed this individual lament psalm after the Ziphites had told King Saul where he was hiding (1 Sam. 23:19; cf. 1 Sam. 26:1). He expressed great confidence in God's protection of him in it. The psalm is a fitting prayer for any believer who is maligned by others.

1. Prayer for deliverance 54:1-3

54:1-2 God's name and His power are virtually synonymous. Verse 1 contains synonymous parallelism. His name represents all that God is and what He has done (cf. Exod. 34:5-7).

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[617]See John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy*, pp. 115-31.

> "He [God] has a well-known reputation among His saints as being one who delights to save. To this well-established fact this phrase ["by Thy name"] appeals."[618]

David asked God personally to save him with His irresistible might. He also asked God to regard the prayer for help that proceeded from the psalmist's mouth.

54:3 The Ziphites were strangers to David, and Saul's soldiers were violent antagonists of David. David could expect divine assistance because their hostility was contrary to God's will. David was Israel's anointed king whom God intended to place on Saul's throne. This verse is almost identical to 86:14.

2. Confidence in God 54:4-7

54:4-5 David was confident that God would help and sustain him. He also believed God would punish those who opposed him, and he asked God to do so. He could pray this way because what his adversaries were doing was contrary to God's will.

> "The imprecation is not vindictive but expressive of trust in divine justice. Evil must be repaid."[619]

54:6-7 David was so sure that God would deliver him that he spoke of offering a freewill sacrifice of worship for God's deliverance. This would have been the peace (fellowship) offering (Lev. 3; 7). He believed God would deliver him because God is good (cf. 52:9). In verse 7, the psalmist spoke of his deliverance as already past, as a way of expressing his confidence in God. He would have found satisfaction in God punishing his enemies for their evil, not because he hated them personally.

When God's people experience opposition from others who seek to thwart His will, they can count on His eventual deliverance. It may not come this side of the grave, but God will punish evildoers and reward those who trust and obey Him.[620]

PSALM 55

The occasion that inspired the composition of this individual lament psalm was David's betrayal by an intimate friend. We do not know with certainty who he was, though some commentators have suggested Ahithophel (2 Sam. 15:31).[621] One manuscript of Jerome's

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[618]Leupold, p. 418.
[619]VanGemeren, p. 391.
[620]See Swindoll, pp. 141-51.
[621]E.g., Delitzsch, 2:156, 159; Leupold, p. 420.

Latin Version has the title "The voice of Christ against the chiefs of the Jews and the traitor Judas."[622]

David prayed that God would deliver him from his plight. He also lamented his distress that a trusted friend had betrayed him, and he voiced confidence in God who redeems His elect.

1. A cry out of agony 55:1-8

55:1-2a David began this psalm with a prayer in which he called on God to hear his petition.

55:2b-3 The pressure David's enemy had placed on him sprang from a grudge. Evidently David had offended this person previously and now he was getting even. His enemy's words had brought trouble down on the psalmist.

> "We may not complain of Him, but we may complain to Him."[623]

55:4-5 David expressed his anguish in a variety of expressions in these verses. His friend's betrayal had upset him greatly.

55:6-8 He wished he could escape his situation as a harmless dove flies away from a storm and hides in a remote and secure desert nest.

> "He wishes, *O that I had wings!* not like a hawk that flies strongly, but *like a dove* that flies swiftly; he wishes for wings, not to fly upon the prey, but to fly from the birds of prey, for such his enemies were. The dove flies low, and takes shelter as soon as she can, and thus would David fly."[624]

2. A request out of deceit 55:9-15

55:9-11 Specifically, David wanted God to confuse the person responsible for his suffering. His opposition had resulted in confusion in the city, perhaps Jerusalem. The manifestations of this confusion were violence, strife, iniquity, mischief, destruction, oppression, and deceit.

55:12 Such antagonism would have been easier for David to bear had it come from someone he disliked. However, his adversary had been an intimate friend who had just "stabbed him in the back."

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[622]Kirkpatrick, p. 308.
[623]Spurgeon, 1:249.
[624]Henry, p. 634.

> "We can bear from Shimei what we cannot endure from Ahithophel."[625]

55:13-14 David addressed his former friend. Not only had he and David been good friends, they had also shared their deepest commitments in life, as worshipping together indicates.

55:15 David called down God's judgment on his former friend and his ungodly allies. By opposing David, this traitor was also opposing God since David was the Lord's anointed. As he had deceived David by his treachery, so God should deceive him by putting him to death. Going down alive to the grave pictures a violent rather than a peaceful death, such as Korah and his followers experienced (cf. Num. 16:31-40).

3. A call out of confidence 55:16-23

55:16-19 Rather than practicing evil, as his enemies did, David said he would pray to God for deliverance (cf. Dan. 6:10). Rather than creating havoc in the city, he would petition the courts of heaven for justice.

> "The change of names of God in ver. 17 [*sic* 16] is significant. He calls upon Him who is exalted above the world, and He who mercifully interposes in the history of the world helps him."[626]

In place of a violent death, David anticipated a peaceful salvation. God, the eternal sovereign, will give to each person what he or she deserves. He will give peace to the guiltless and punishment to the guilty, eventually.

55:20-21 David further described the deceitfulness of his former friend's treachery.

55:22-23 The psalmist concluded this poem with a homily to the reader. He encouraged the righteous to roll their burdens on the Lord rather than bearing them themselves (cf. 1 Pet. 5:7). He trusted in the Lord's ability to sustain His own—having experienced it many times in his life (cf. Deut. 31:6; Heb. 13:5). However, he had also learned that sin leads to death (Rom. 6:23). Normally those who live by the sword perish by the sword and die prematurely (Gen. 9:6; Matt. 26:52). In view of these two alternatives, David reaffirmed his decision to trust in the Lord.

The opposition of ungodly people is difficult to bear, but the antagonism of formerly intimate friends is even harder. When friends prove unfaithful, believers should continue to remain faithful to the Lord and trust Him to sustain and vindicate them.

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[625]Spurgeon, 1:251.
[626]Delitzsch, 2:161.

PSALM 56

David wrote this psalm of individual lament when the Philistines seized him in Gath (1 Sam. 21:10-12; cf. Ps. 34). He composed it for singing to the tune of "A Dove on Distant Oaks." This melody was evidently common in David's day. (Note the recurrence of the "dove" from 55:6.)

The content of this psalm is similar to that of Psalms 54, 55, and 57. Again David determined to continue trusting in the Lord even though his enemies sought to destroy him.

1. The opposition of ungodly enemies 56:1-7

56:1-2 David began this prayer with a call for divine help and an explanation of why he needed it. His enemies were constantly attacking him. As the Lord's anointed, David had a right to expect God's assistance.

56:3-4 Because he trusted in God, who was on his side, David knew he did not need to fear the opposition of mere mortals (Heb. *basar*, flesh; v. 4).

> "It is possible, then, for fear and faith to occupy the mind at the same moment. We are strange beings, and our experience in the divine life is stranger still. We are often in a twilight, where light and darkness are both present, and it is hard to tell which predominates."[627]

Note the close connection David saw between the Lord and His Word (v. 4).

> ". . . trusting in the Lord requires a prior commitment to the revelation of God in his Word."[628]

56:5-6 David further described the wickedness of his oppressors. They continually twisted his words, dogged his steps, and plotted his downfall.

56:7 He asked God to bring them down and not let them escape. Because God hates wickedness, the psalmist trusted that He would punish the wicked.

2. The confidence of the psalmist 56:8-13

56:8-9 David was confident that God knew about all his experiences intimately. He knew wherever David had gone, and He had made note of all his painful sufferings. The psalmist asked God to remember his sufferings in a graphic way. He wanted the Lord to store his tears in His bottle so their volume might move Him to act for David.

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[627]Spurgeon, 1:253.

[628]VanGemeren, p. 399.

> "Archaeologists have unearthed small 'tear bottles' in which mourners collected their tears and then deposited the bottle at the gravesite."[629]

With reference to David calling to the Lord in prayer (v. 9), Matthew Henry wrote, "We fight best upon our knees, Eph. vi. 18."[630]

56:10-11 These verses rephrase the refrain to this song that appears in verse 4. The refrain is a strong affirmation of David's confidence in God.

56:12-13 As in other psalms, David spoke of his future deliverance confidently, as though God had already given it to him. The vows to which he referred were those David had made to God. He had promised to praise Him with thank offerings after God delivered him from his enemies.

The believer who is doing God's will can confidently appeal for His aid when evil people oppose him. Remembering that our Helper is the Lord of all and that our opponents are only mere mortals will strengthen our faith.

PSALM 57

David's hiding from Saul in a cave is the background of this individual lament psalm (1 Sam. 22; 24; cf. Ps. 142). The tune name means "Do not destroy." This psalm resembles the preceding one in its general theme and design. It, too, has a recurring refrain (vv. 5, 11). It is, however, more "upbeat."

1. The psalmist's need for God's help 57:1-5

57:1 David began by comparing himself to a little bird that takes refuge from a passing enemy by hiding under the wing of its parent (cf. 17:8; 36:7; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4). The overarching side of the cave in which David hid may have reminded him of a bird's wing, and Saul's threatening presence was similar to a rainstorm.

> "Athanasius said of Julian, furiously raging against the Lord's Anointed, *Nebecula est, cito transibit*—he is a little cloud; he will soon pass away."[631]

57:2-3 He said he would cry and God Most High would send help. "Most High" pictures God as exalted in His rule over all that He has created. In these verses, David pictured himself as an insignificant creature that a larger predator was about to step on.

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[629]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 198.
[630]Henry, p. 636.
[631]John Boys, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:256.

57:4 His enemies were similar to voracious lions (cf. 7:2), and their vehement words resembled lions' teeth. I wonder if Daniel thought of this verse when he was in the lions' den (Dan. 6). The soul represents the life of the psalmist. David's enemies used words as implements of warfare to attack him.

57:5 This refrain expresses David's desire that God would glorify Himself. Implicit in the desire is a request that God would deliver the just psalmist.

2. The psalmist's confidence that God would help 57:6-11

57:6 Now David spoke of himself as a wild animal that hunters were trying to snare. However, he believed that his hunters would fall into their own trap (cf. 7:15; 9:15; 35:8).

57:7-10 In anticipation of his deliverance, David promised to praise God (cf. 108:1-5). He returned to previous references to the Lord's loyal love and truth (v. 10; cf. v. 3).

57:11 The refrain closes the psalm (cf. v. 5). God's glory was David's greatest concern. Verses 7-11 appear again in 108:1-5.

Life sometimes seems similar to a jungle, with wild beasts threatening to devour us and hostile hunters trying to trap us. Nevertheless, the godly can count on supernatural assistance and can rejoice in ultimate salvation. In the meantime, we should live for the glory of God.

PSALM 58

In this prophetic lament psalm, David called on God to judge corrupt judges so the righteous would continue to trust in the Lord.[632] This is also an imprecatory psalm.

> "In no one Psalm do we meet with so many high-flown figures coming together within the same narrow compass."[633]

1. The marks of crooked judges 58:1-5

58:1 The psalmist introduced his condemnation of certain unjust judges with two questions. He questioned the integrity of these men. They may have been Saul's advisors or counselors.[634]

> "He who refrains from defending the right is himself an accomplice in the wrong."[635]

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[632]See Day, pp. 169-73.
[633]Delitzsch, 2:180.
[634]Leupold, p. 436.
[635]Spurgeon, 1:259.

The Hebrew word *elohim* (lit. strong ones) sometimes refers to rulers in the Old Testament. Of course, it usually refers to God, the strongest of all beings. Sometimes it refers to false gods, i.e., idols. Here, as elsewhere, powerful human beings are in view (cf. 82:1, 6). The context suggests that they were judges in Israel.

58:2-5 David proceeded to answer his own questions. Instead of practicing justice, these rulers planned injustice and violence (cf. Mic. 3:1-3, 9-11; 6:12). They spoke lies and did not respond to the warnings of others. Furthermore, they had a long history of destructive behavior.

> ". . . there are men in whom evil from childhood onwards has a truly diabolical character, *i.e.* a selfish character altogether incapable of love."[636]

2. The punishment of crooked judges 58:6-9

"With blistering language the psalmist creates a series of brief metaphors dealing with lions' teeth, streams, a snail, miscarriage, and thorns. Each of these is spoken as an imprecation against his unjust enemies. Thus there is here a sevenfold curse in the form of prayer [vv. 6-11]."[637]

58:6-8 David called on God to deal with these unjust men. Breaking the teeth symbolizes painfully removing their ability to devour the people they oppressed. David viewed them as lions and serpents whose teeth and fangs needed crushing. He also asked God to remove them like water rushing away. He requested that their words would lack the ability to penetrate. He wanted them to melt away as snails do in the heat. He wished they would die without any further influence, as a child who dies in its mother's womb.

58:9 The psalmist believed their destruction would be swift. Thorns used for firewood burn very quickly. David compared the unjust rulers to thorns. Their fiery evil would not last long enough to effect any change on the pot above them, a figure for other people whom they might influence. Regardless of whether these wicked men were young (green) or old (dry), their influence would be minimal because God would judge them.

3. The rejoicing of the just 58:10-11

58:10 When God judges crooked rulers by cutting them off, the upright will rejoice. David described their rejoicing in terms of a military victory in which the victors bathed their feet in the blood of their vanquished foes. This description is hyperbolic and symbolizes joy in victory.

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[636]Delitzsch, 2:181.

[637]Yates, p. 516.

58:11 Taking the longer view, the just would find encouragement to continue trusting in the Lord because He punished the wicked rulers. They would renew their purpose to continue to obey Him.

Why did David not punish the unjust judges in Israel himself? He certainly had the authority to do so since he was the king. Perhaps he did punish them. This psalm shows that as Israel's king, David looked to Yahweh as the ultimate authority in Israel. David's view of his own relationship to Yahweh was proper and admirable. Even though he had the authority to punish the wicked, he still looked to God as the Person who had final authority over them, and he appealed to Him to act.

Believers should pray about unjust rulers and ask God to deal with them righteously. Even when we have the authority to punish them, we should still look to God as the ultimate authority (sovereign) and express our submission to His will by praying.

PSALM 59

The occasion for this individual lament psalm was evidently the event the writer of 1 Samuel recorded in 19:8-14, namely: Saul's attempt to kill David in his bed at home. David asked God to defend him from the attacks of bloodthirsty men and to humiliate them so everyone might recognize God's sovereignty.

> "The focus of the psalm is on God—the Deliverer (vv. 1-9) and the Judge (vv. 10-17)."[638]

1. The conspiracy of David's enemies 59:1-5

59:1-2 David first called out to God in prayer, requesting deliverance from his attackers. The men who lay in wait for him intended to murder him.

59:3-4a The beleaguered psalmist explained the reason for his request. Violent men were laying a trap for him, even though he had done nothing to deserve their hostility.

> "Though our innocence will not secure us from troubles, yet it will greatly support and comfort us under our troubles."[639]

59:4b-5 David again cried out for divine help. He asked Yahweh as the God of armies and the God of Israel to come to his aid. He broadened his request to include his nation that suffered similarly at the hands of hostile Gentile neighbors.

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[638]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 201.
[639]Henry, p. 638.

2. David's triumph over his enemies 59:6-10

59:6-7 The psalmist compared his enemies to wild dogs that gain courage with the cover of night to threaten arrogantly and attack. Their offensive weapons included their words that were similar to swords in their destructive power (cf. 55:21; 57:4; 64:6).

59:8 David knew that God felt no intimidation when He heard their threats. Even the wranglings of the nations did not disturb Him (cf. 2:4).

> "From his perspective evil is ridiculous; it is self-destructive."[640]

59:9-10 The NIV translation, "O my Strength, I watch for you," expresses David's trust in the Lord very well. Rather than feeling terrified by his assassins, David trusted in his Avenger.

3. David's desire for God's glory 59:11-13

David did not just want God to frustrate the attacks of his enemies. He desired that God would use their aggression as a lesson to many people of how God deals with those who oppose Him and His anointed.

4. David's joy in view of certain deliverance 59:14-17

59:14-15 Returning to the thought of his enemies behaving like wild dogs (vv. 6-7), David reminded the Lord of their vicious attacks.

> "It is not poverty, but discontent, that makes a man unhappy."[641]

> "Nothing was more a subject of Oriental merriment than a case in which the crafty are deceived, and nothing more makes a man the object of derision than to be outwitted by a woman, as in this instance Saul and his base minions were by Michal."[642]

59:16-17 In contrast to their behavior, the psalmist voiced his confident trust that God would frustrate his antagonists, as He had done often in the past. He looked forward to singing praises to the Lord for His strength, loyal love, and protection.

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[640]VanGemeren, p. 411.
[641]Henry, p. 639.
[642]Spurgeon, 1:265.

Even when our spiritual enemies threaten our security, we who are believers can trust in the Lord with great confidence. He will allow nothing to separate us from His love (cf. Rom. 8:31-39). As we go through attacks, we should not only strengthen ourselves with reminders of His complete adequacy as our resource, but we should also pray for His glory.

PSALM 60

The occasion for this national (communal) lament psalm was Israel's victory over the Arameans and the Edomites (cf. 2 Sam. 8:13; 1 Kings 11:15-16; 1 Chron. 18:12; Ps. 44). Naharaim (lit. rivers) and Zobah were regions in Aram. In this battle, Joab was responsible for defeating 12,000 Edomites (2 Sam. 8:13). Joab's brother Abishai was the field commander, and the writer of Chronicles gave him the credit for the victory (1 Chron. 18:12).

This is a didactic psalm according to the superscription. That is, David wrote it to teach the readers to trust in the Lord when they encountered similar difficulties.

1. A cry for deliverance in battle 60:1-5

60:1-3 In the battle with the Arameans, Israel's enemy overcame her temporarily. David viewed this defeat as punishment from the Lord. He called out in prayer for national restoration. Since God had allowed the defeat, He was the One who could reverse it.

60:4 Apparently, David meant that God had led His people into battle (given them a banner) only to let them fall before their enemy—in order to teach Israel a lesson.

60:5 David now requested divine deliverance for the chosen people. God's right hand represents His might. Verses 5-12 are identical to 108:6-13.

2. A reminder of assured victory 60:6-8

The preceding laments give way to a closing oracle.

60:6 David quoted a prophecy that he had received assuring Israel's military success. God had said He would give Shechem and the valley of Succoth to Israel. Shechem is the site west of the Jordan where God first promised Canaan to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12). It was also where Jacob lived after he returned to Canaan from Paddan-aram and Laban's oppression (Gen. 33:18-20). Succoth was the place east of the Jordan where Jacob settled after God delivered him from Esau, when Jacob returned from Paddan-aram (Gen. 33:17). Both places had associations with past victories over Arameans and the fulfillment of God's promises concerning the land. Used together, these places represent victory on both sides of the Jordan.

60:7 Gilead was Israel's promised territory east of the Jordan River. The tribal territory of Manasseh straddled the Jordan. Ephraim, west of the Jordan, was one of Israel's strongest and most secure tribes. It lay in central western Canaan and was similar to a helmet in that it provided defense. God had promised Judah the right to rule the other tribes (Gen. 49:10), which the scepter symbolized.

60:8 Moab would serve God as a washbasin; namely, it would be reduced to the status of a servant. God's people would experience purification there as they fought this neighbor. God would throw His shoe toward Edom as a man threw his shoe toward his servant when he came home. Evidently this was commonly done in the ancient Near East.

> "The throwing of a shoe over a territory is a sign of taking forcible possession, just as the taking off of the shoe . . . is a sign of the renunciation of one's claim or right: the shoe is in both instances the symbol of legal possession."[643]

The Edomites, like the Moabites, were God's servants, not His sons in the same sense that the Israelites were. The NIV's translation, "Over Philistia I shout in triumph," pictures God announcing David's victory over the Arameans to this enemy.

> "The whole section [vv. 6-8] is an expression of exuberant confidence that God will fulfil [*sic*] His ancient promises to His people and will give them the land in possession. Therefore the present threat brought about by Edom's invasion must collapse as soon as Israel penitently seeks her help from God."[644]

3. An expression of confidence in God 60:9-12

60:9-10 David was confident in view of God's promises to subdue Israel's enemies and give her the Promised Land. He would lead the Israelites to ultimate victory, even though He had allowed them to suffer immediate defeat.

60:11-12 David acknowledged that victory had to come from God. The Israelites could not obtain it without His help. However, with His aid, they could and would overcome valiantly.[645] Verses 6-12 appear again in 108:7-13.

Both victory and defeat come from God. Consequently, believers should look to Him in both situations, and should rely on His supernatural strength and His covenant promises for success against their enemies.

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[643]Delitzsch, 2:199. See also the excursus by J. G. Wetzstein in ibid., 2:412-17.

[644]Leupold, p. 451.

[645]See Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, pp. 108-28.

PSALM 61

Several of the commentators believe David wrote this individual royal lament psalm when he was fleeing from Saul. Delitzsch concluded differently:

> "It is a Psalm of the time of Absalom, composed in Mahanaim or elsewhere in Gilead, when the army of the king had smitten the rebels in the wood of Ephraim."[646]

However, the text itself records no specific background information (cf. v. 6a). David strengthened himself in the Lord—when he felt faint and inadequate—by remembering his Rock and by relying on His promises.

> "The traditional use of the psalm, also in the hymn paraphrases that have been built upon it, makes it a psalm that teaches how God's people pray for their rulers and government."[647]

1. Request for salvation 61:1-2

David began this psalm, as he did many others, by asking God to give attention to his prayer. He evidently felt separated from his own people and his secure surroundings on this occasion.

> "Weeping must quicken praying, and not deaden it."[648]

The rock that David requested may have been a literal butte on which he could take refuge, such as Masada. On the other hand, he may have been speaking figuratively of God (cf. Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31, 37; 2 Sam. 22:2; Ps. 18:31, 46; 28:1; et al.). In this case, he was asking God to lift him to a secure place that he could not attain by himself.[649]

2. Confidence in God 61:3-7

61:3-4 David's desire for God's protection rested on the Lord's previous provisions of deliverance for him. God had proved to be his refuge and tower of strength.

> "Sweet is it beyond expression to remember the lovingkindness of the Lord in our former days, for He is unchangeable and therefore will continue to guard us from all evil."[650]

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[646]Delitzsch, 2:202.
[647]Leupold, p. 454.
[648]Henry, p. 640.
[649]Leupold, p. 455.
[650]Spurgeon, 1:269.

Now the psalmist longed to dwell in the Lord's tent or tabernacle and to enjoy the protection of His wings, as though he were a baby chick or bird (cf. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7; 91:4). References in the psalms to dwelling in the tent or tabernacle of the Lord sometimes mean dwelling in the Lord's presence in a state of continuous communion (e.g., 23:6).[651]

> "The psalmist's longing for God (vv. 1-5) is a familiar motif in the Psalms as an expression of deep love for God arising out of great adversity (cf. Pss 20; 21; 27; 42; 43; 63)."[652]

61:5-7 David knew that God had heard his prayer. The inheritance of those who fear God's name was prosperity under the promises of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 29:9). These promises included long life and abiding in God's presence. David asked God to deal with him in loyal love and truth so that he would indeed endure through his present trial.

3. Promise of praise 61:8

When God would deliver him, David would praise God with song and continue to pay his vowed offerings regularly in the future.

Believers can confidently petition God for deliverance on the basis of His promises and His former faithfulness. These resources can give strength when we feel vulnerable and alone.

PSALM 62

David, as a man of authority, expressed trust in the Lord in spite of opposition in this wisdom psalm of confidence. He contrasted the security that comes from trusting in God with the insecurity of hoping in human schemes. The background may be Absalom's rebellion.[653] This is a good psalm to read when one is tempted to lose faith in God.

> "There is scarcely another psalm that reveals such an absolute and undisturbed peace, in which confidence in God is so completely unshaken, and in which assurance is so strong that not even one single petition is voiced throughout the psalm. Men who were in distress have often longed that they might manifest a spirit of undismayed calm such as this writer possessed."[654]

1. David's example of trust in God 62:1-4

62:1-2 A literal translation of the first line would be, "My soul finds rest in God alone." That idea is the theme of this psalm (cf. v. 5). Rather than looking

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[651]Leupold, pp. 455-56.
[652]VanGemeren, p. 417.
[653]Kirkpatrick, pp. 347-48.
[654]Leupold, p. 458.

to other people for encouragement and security, David looked to God alone for these needs (cf. Exod. 14:14; Isa. 30:15). He did this because he had discovered that God Himself was responsible for his deliverance. He had been a rock and stronghold for the psalmist in the past.

62:3-4 David marveled that wicked enemies tried to topple him, as though he were a leaning wall or flimsy fence. These enemies had resorted to deceitful words to accomplish their ends.

2. David's encouragement to trust in God 62:5-8

> "Whereas in the first section complete resignation to God's will was asserted, in this section it is prayed for. This does not imply a weakening of the former position but rather that whatever vantage ground we hold we must continually recapture by prayer. Faith's battles are never finished, nor does struggle depart from our life."[655]

62:5-6 These verses repeat the idea of verses 1 and 2 with minor variations.

> "They trust no God at all who trust Him not alone. He that stands with one foot on a rock and another foot upon a quicksand will sink and perish as certainly as he that standeth with both feet upon a quicksand."[656]

62:7-8 The psalmist acknowledged God as the basis of his salvation and glory; unless God had provided them David would have had neither of these blessings. Because of this, David urged his people to trust in Him always and to pour out their hearts to Him in prayer.

> "We must lay our grievances before him, offer up our desires to him with all humble freedom, patiently submitting our wills to his: this is pouring out our hearts."[657]

3. David's entreaty to trust only in God 62:9-12

62:9-10 It is unwise to put one's ultimate confidence in other people, whether they are of low or high position. The reason for this is that all human beings are comparatively insignificant. They are as transitory and ephemeral as a breath of wind (lit. vapor; cf. 39:5, 11; 144:4; Eccles. 12:1, 7). Consequently the actions and products of human endeavor are poor objects in which to trust.

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[655]Ibid., p. 460.
[656]John Trapp, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:271.
[657]Henry, p. 641.

> "The point, then, is not so much that we have nothing to *fear* from man (as in 27:1ff.), as that we have nothing to hope from him."[658]

62:11-12 Human power is weak, but divine power is mighty. God's loyal love is likewise great. He will distribute justice to everyone repeatedly. Therefore it is important that human beings trust in God rather than in other people and their works.

> "It is a convention of wisdom literature to use a number and then raise it by one (Prov. 30:11-33). The point here is that David has heard the message with certainty."[659]

People are constantly deciding whether to trust in what they can see. In this psalm David helps us see that God Himself is a much better person to trust than any mortal man. We should trust God, who remains faithful forever, because human beings pass away quickly.

PSALM 63

King David wrote this individual lament psalm when he was in the wilderness of Judah away from the ark and the place of formal worship (2 Sam. 15:25). This could have been when he was fleeing from Saul (1 Sam. 23) or from Absalom (2 Sam. 15:13-30).[660] Some writers classify this as a royal psalm.

The theme of trust, which Psalms 61 and 62 emphasize, reaches a climax in Psalm 63. Even though David was miles away from the ark, he still worshipped God.

> "His deep desire to share in public worship is partially satisfied by his fellowship with God in meditation. This song is an excellent example of the highest type of personal and spiritual worship in Israel."[661]

> "There may be other psalms that equal this outpouring of devotion; few if any that surpass it."[662]

This psalm is particularly helpful when we want to get to know God better (cf. Ps. 42).

1. David's thirst for God 63:1-2

63:1 Evidently David's thirst for water in the wilderness led him to express his soul's thirst for God. "Earnestly" is literally "early." As soon as David arose in the morning, he became aware of his need for God—just as he

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[658]Kidner, p. 223.
[659]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 941.
[660]Kirkpatrick, pp. 352-53.
[661]Yates, p. 517.
[662]Kidner, p. 224.

needed water shortly after waking up. He was speaking of his sense of dependence on God.

> "Observe the eagerness implied in the time mentioned; he will not wait for noon or the cool eventide; he is up at cockcrowing to meet his God."[663]

63:2 The king had come to realize his need for God earlier as a result of what he had learned about God in the tabernacle. There he had become sure of God's great power and glory.

> "What life does to us depends on what life finds in us . . ."[664]

2. David's satisfaction with God 63:3-8

63:3-4 David's thirst for God found relief as he praised Him. He considered the Lord's loyal love even better than life itself.

> "We have better provision and better possessions than the wealth of this world can afford us, and in the service of God, and in communion with him, we have better employments and better enjoyments than we can have in the business and converse of this world."[665]

God's love nourished and refreshed David more than the water he needed. Lifting up the hands toward God was a gesture of prayer (cf. 28:2; Lam. 2:19) or respect (cf. 119:48).

63:5-6 Thinking about God's ability to satisfy his every need brought a sense of fullness into David's life. He compared this to the feeling of a stomach filled with the richest food. David's meditation on God overflowed in praise.

> "When sleep departs from our eyes (through pain, or sickness of body, or any disturbance in the mind) our souls, by remembering God, may be at ease, and repose themselves. Perhaps an hour's pious meditation will do us more good than an hour's sleep would have done. See xvi. 7; xvii. 3; iv. 4; cxix. 62."[666]

63:7-8 God's support and provision of safety were the immediate causes of David's meditation and praise. Again David pictured himself as a bird under the wing of its mother and as a dependent infant held by its parent.

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[663]Spurgeon, 1:274.
[664]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 206.
[665]Henry, p. 642.
[666]Ibid.

3. David's confidence in God 63:9-11

63:9-10 Reflecting on his God bolstered the king's confidence that the Lord would preserve him in his present situation. David knew God would deliver him because God had elected him and had blessed him for his submission to the Lord's will.

> "Every blow aimed against the godly will recoil on the persecutor; he who smites a believer drives a nail in his own coffin."[667]

"Foxes" (v. 10) should probably be "jackals" here, since jackals are the ultimate scavengers and eat the remains of a kill that the larger predators reject.[668] The same Hebrew word describes both animals.

63:11 Instead of anticipating destruction as the Lord's enemies could, David confidently rejoiced. Everyone who sides with God, as David did, can do the same. Glorying is the equivalent of rejoicing.

Meditation on the person and works of God can bring refreshment and invigoration to any believer. Meditation on God fills a basic need in the heart of every person, as basic a need as food and drink. It not only satisfies the believer but overflows in praise, making him or her a blessing to others.

PSALM 64

David asked God to judge (imprecate) the enemies of the righteous in this individual lament psalm. He requested divine protection and voiced confidence that God would judge his wicked foes.

1. A plea for protection 64:1-2

David opened his psalm with a complaint in which he asked God to preserve him from dreading the plots of wicked enemies who conspired in secret against him.

> "The plight of the psalmist is desperate, although there is no reference here to physical harm. His enemies scheme and slander secretly rather than coming out in open opposition."[669]

2. The ploys of persecutors 64:3-6

64:3-4 David's enemies were attacking him verbally. They were using their words as weapons to injure him (cf. 55:21; 57:4; 59:7).

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[667]Spurgeon, 1:276.
[668]G. S. Cansdale, *Animals of Bible Lands*, pp. 124-26.
[669]Yates, p. 518.

64:5-6 David's foes were evidently conspiring against him with a careful plan designed to humiliate him, and their purpose was evil and unjust.

3. A prediction of punishment 64:7-10

64:7-8a David's enemies had assailed him with words that they used like deadly arrows, but God would shoot these foes with His arrow of judgment. With it God would make them fall in battle. The NASB is a bit misleading in verse 8. The NIV is clearer. It reads, "He will turn their own tongues against them."

> "Their tongue shall cut their throats."[670]

64:8b-10 David identified the reactions of two groups of people to God's activity of judging his evil assailants. Those who observed the judgment would do two things. They would fear doing the same thing themselves and would declare to others what He did, having considered it themselves. Second, the righteous would also have a double response. They would rejoice in God's will being done and would renew their trust in the Lord.

The godly should commit their case to God in prayer when they become targets of malicious gossip. They can also rest in the assurance that God will eventually turn the antagonism of the wicked back on them (cf. 1 Sam. 25). He will do so for His own glory and for the welfare of those who trust in Him.[671]

PSALM 65

This communal song of thanksgiving celebrates God blessing His people with a bountiful land (cf. Pss. 66—68). Other communal or community psalms of thanksgiving are 66, 107, 118, 124, and 129. The element that distinguishes a communal psalm of thanksgiving from an individual psalm of thanksgiving is "the use of plural pronouns or some other clear indicator that the congregation of Israel, rather than the individual, has gone through the crisis."[672] Others view this as a wisdom psalm, a creation psalm, or a prophetic psalm.[673] David explained that God hears prayer and atones for sin. This results in bounty for His people. God also helps them by His supernatural power.

> "A spirit of universalism breaks the bounds of narrow nationalism is Israel."[674]

1. God's forgiveness 65:1-4

65:1-2 David began this song by declaring that people will pray to the Lord because He hears their prayers. They will be silent before Him out of

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[670]Spurgeon, 1:279.
[671]See Chun Leung Ho, "God Will Repay: An Exegetical Exposition of Psalm Sixty-four," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):34-44.
[672]Bullock, p. 163.
[673]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 942.
[674]Yates, p. 518.

respect. Sometimes the height of worship is to fall silent before God. Resignation or submission to God is a form of praise. His people will praise Him publicly and will fulfill their promised vows because He responds to His people's petitions. This thought is the keynote of this psalm.

65:3-4 A great national sin seems to have been the psalmist's concern, and he was grateful for the Lord's forgiveness (cf. Rom. 5:1). Those whom God forgives can approach Him and experience His blessing—even in His earthly habitation (cf. Rom. 5:2; 2 Cor. 9:8). The Hebrew word *hekal* (temple) is a synonym for tabernacle. It means a magnificent house and does not describe Solomon's temple necessarily (cf. 5:7).

> "For all that God's grace offers us we can give Him no better thanks than to hunger and thirst after it, and satisfy our poor soul therewith."[675]

2. God's power 65:5-8

David regarded answers to prayer as some of God's awesome works (v. 5a). These verses express God's great power by citing a number of specific divine acts (vv. 5b-8). People from all over the world trust in Him because of His revelation in creation and in history (vv. 5b, 8a).

> "This idealistic portrayal of universal worship is typical hymnic hyperbole, though it does anticipate eschatological reality."[676]

The raging seas (v. 7) represent the turbulent nations of the earth (cf. 46:2-3; Isa. 17:12).

3. God's bounty 65:9-13

65:9a Not only does God hear prayer, He also sends bountiful harvests.

> "O Lord, in this manner visit Thy church, and my poor, parched and withering piety. Make Thy grace to overflow towards my graces; water me, for no plant of Thy garden needs it more."[677]

65:9b-10 These descriptions view God tending the earth as a farmer would. God is the One responsible for the abundance of crops (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6).

> "In the Bible nature does not work autonomously [i.e., by itself, on its own]."[678]

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[675]Delitzsch, 2:227.
[676]The NET Bible note on 65:5.
[677]Spurgeon, 1:282.
[678]Leupold, p. 477.

> "The riches of the earth are abundantly more useful to man than those which are hidden in its bowels; we might live well enough without silver and gold, but not without corn and grass."[679]

65:11-13 David pictured the earth richly plentiful with God's blessing on fields and flocks, and he personified it as rejoicing in His goodness.

In spite of man's sin, God blesses his environment with many good things so people can prosper and rejoice (common grace). God delights to bless all people (Matt. 5:45). He is a good, as well as a great, God.[680]

PSALM 66

This is a psalm of thanksgiving or praise (both descriptive and declarative), as was the previous one. We do not know the writer or the occasion for sure, but Judah's deliverance from the Assyrians in Hezekiah's day seems to be a possible background (2 Kings 18—19; Isa. 36—37).[681] In this psalm, God's people acknowledged His deliverance and invited other people to join them in praising Him.

> "This psalm shows the move from communal affirmation to individual appreciation, which is what we always do in biblical faith."[682]

> "The exhortation to praise the Lord begins with the Gentile nations (vv. 1-7), moves to Israel (vv. 8-12), and concludes with the individual believer (vv. 13-20)."[683]

> "Israel was not oblivious of the fact that the things that were done to her were to be made known among all peoples."[684]

1. The nations' praise 66:1-12

66:1-4 The psalmist, speaking for his nation, called the other nations to join in praise of God by shouting, singing, and speaking. In verses 1-12 he wrote in the first person plural, but in verses 13-20 he used the first person singular. God's great acts made His enemies cringe before Him. "Feigned obedience" (v. 3, NASB) is hypocritical obedience. The psalmist meant that God's enemies would pretend to obey Him because they feared His wrath, even if they did not really obey Him.

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[679]Henry, p. 644.
[680]See Allen, *And I . . .*, pp. 198-213.
[681]Leupold, pp. 478-79.
[682]Brueggemann, p. 139.
[683]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, pp. 210-11.
[684]Leupold, p. 478.

66:5-7 God's great acts in nature and history demonstrate His sovereign authority over all the earth.

> "One must take time to consider what God has done otherwise he will not be impressed by the Lord's works."[685]

The Red Sea and Jordan River crossings demonstrated this authority to all the nations (cf. Josh. 2:9-11). Nations should therefore pause before rebelling against the Lord.

66:8-9 Again the psalmist called the nations to bless God because of what He had done in preserving Israel.

> ". . . praise unexpressed seldom grows to its full stature."[686]

66:10-12 God had also disciplined Israel to bring out the best in her. He had put her through trials of fire (the brick-kilns of Egypt) and trials of water (the Red Sea), two prominent testing media.

> "Fire and water are, as in Isa. xliii. 2, a figure of vicissitudes and perils of the most extreme character."[687]

Through all her tests God had not abandoned His people but had brought them through to greater blessing.

> "God had one Son without sin, but He never had a son without trial."[688]

2. The psalmist's praise 66:13-20

66:13-15 The psalmist now spoke to God for himself. He provided an example for the people. He personally would praise God by offering burnt and peace sacrifices in fulfillment of his promises to God. These sacrifices were primarily for worship rather than for the removal of sin.

> "When the eyes abhor lustful objects, the ear slanders, the foot erring paths, the hands wrong and violence, the tongue flattery and blasphemy, the heart pride and hypocrisy; this is thy holocaust, thy whole burnt-offering."[689]

66:16-20 In these verses the writer addressed the congregated nation, not God. This is declarative praise. God had answered the psalmist's petition that arose out of a pure heart. God will not listen to the prayer of a person who

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[685]Ibid., p. 480.
[686]Ibid., p. 481.
[687]Delitzsch, 2:236.
[688]Spurgeon, 1:284.
[689]Thomas Adams, quoted in ibid., 1:286.

> nurses sin in his or her heart. "Regards wickedness" (v. 18) is literally "see wickedness with pleasure."[690] God hears every prayer, of course, because He knows all, but He will not hear the prayer of such a person in the sense of answering it, under normal circumstances. The psalm closes with the psalmist's personal benediction to God for granting his petition and bestowing His loyal love.

When God's people are in need they should purify their hearts and pray. When they do, He will answer and bless them. This should cause other people to honor and praise God.

PSALM 67

This is another song that exhorts the nations to praise God that an unknown psalmist penned. Its theme is similar to that of Psalm 66. It can serve as a wonderful invocation and doxology in worship. Delitzsch called it a "harvest thanksgiving song."[691]

> "If a psalm was ever written round the promises to Abraham, that he would be both blessed and made a blessing, it could well have been such as this. The song begins at home, and returns to pause there a moment before the end; but its thought always flies to the distant peoples and to what awaits them when the blessing that has reached 'us' reaches all."[692]

> "The evidence for the early date of the psalm challenges the critical supposition that Israel's missionary outlook developed after the Exile. Clearly the psalm is a missionary psalm, since it looks forward to the rule of God over Jews and Gentiles (cf. Acts 28:28)."[693]

1. God's grace to His people 67:1-2

The psalmist began by repeating part of Israel's priestly blessing (cf. Num. 6:24-26) to request God's favor on His people. Causing one's face to shine on others means smiling on them with favor and approval (cf. 4:6). The writer requested God's blessing on Israel so that other nations would learn of His favor, turn to Him in faith, and experience His salvation themselves (v.2).

> "This passage anticipates the thrust of world mission that is found in the New Testament (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). The point in this psalm is clear: May God bless His people Israel in such a manner that the message of God's way would become known throughout the earth."[694]

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[690]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 431.
[691]Delitzsch, 2:238.
[692]Kidner, p. 236.
[693]VanGemeren, p. 440.
[694]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 944.

2. God's praise from His people 67:3-7

67:3-4 God's people should praise Him because He rules justly. Because He does rule justly all nations should look to Him for guidance.

> "The capricious kindliness which makes no moral judgments is as alien to biblical thought as the tyranny that rules without love."[695]

67:5-7 God's people should praise Him so He will bless them with bountiful harvests (cf. Lev. 26:4). This meaning is clearer in the NIV than in the NASB. Rich harvests would also direct the nations to the Lord.

> "Thus already in days of old God's people understood that truth was given both to save them and to have them spread it abroad among those that had it not."[696]

When people recognize God's blessings they tend to fear and worship Him.

PSALM 68

"In the style of Deborah,"[697] David reviewed God's dealings with Israel to memorialize God's faithfulness to His people (cf. Judg. 5). He traced Israel's history from the wilderness wanderings to his own capture of Jerusalem. As a mighty commander, God had led His oppressed people into the glorious future that He had promised them. In the process He overcame many strong foes. This psalm speaks powerfully of the glory of God.

> "The theme of this magnificent Psalm is the march of God to victory. It traces the establishment of His kingdom in the past; it looks forward to the defeat of all opposition in the future until all the kingdoms of the world own the God of Israel as their Lord and pay Him homage."[698]

> "Whereas we saw the kingdom in Psalm 67, here we see the King in His glory and strength."[699]

1. A prayer for God to scatter His enemies 68:1-6

68:1-3 David asked God to manifest His awesome power. The words he used recall Moses' prayer whenever the cloudy pillar moved (Num. 10:35). When God leads His people to fulfill His purposes, His enemies vanish as smoke and melt like hot wax. His people also rejoice greatly.

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[695]Kidner, p. 237.
[696]Leupold, p. 488.
[697]Delitzsch, 2:243.
[698]Kirkpatrick, p. 375.
[699]McGee, 2:785.

> "The words of the text contain a prayer for the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Never shall the honor of Christ be complete nor His people happy, nor the righteous be glad and rejoice exceedingly, until God arise and His enemies be scattered."[700]

68:4-6 The psalmist pictured Yahweh as a majestic warrior riding His chariot through the desert wilderness. The native Canaanites described Baal as riding a chariot through the sky. David may have intended his description of the Lord to be a polemic against Baal.

God's special care for the weak and vulnerable is praiseworthy. He led Israel, a nation of prisoners, into the prosperity of the Promised Land. Those who failed to follow His lead ended up dying in the wilderness. This group included Israel's enemies who opposed the nation during the wilderness march and the unbelieving Israelites who refused to follow Caleb and Joshua into the land.

2. The record of God scattering His enemies 68:7-18

68:7-10 The Canaanites also credited Baal with lightning, thunder, rain, and earthquakes. However, Yahweh sent these to confirm His presence among His people in their wilderness wanderings and to provide for them. In the Pentateuch, Moses did not record God sending rain in the desert. Nevertheless Deborah, as well as David, revealed that this was one way He met His people's needs (cf. Judg. 5:4). The Lord's inheritance (v. 9) was His people (cf. Deut. 4:20).

68:11-14 This section of the psalm describes the extended conquest of the Promised Land that continued into the period of the judges. Many people testified to God's great acts of deliverance during those years. God's supernatural power was at work indisputably for Israel. God defeated many Canaanite kings, and He gave His people much spoil. Verse 13 may refer to those Israelites who, as peaceful doves, refused to go into war against the Canaanites but who still enjoyed the spoils God gave the whole nation (cf. Judg. 5:16).

In verse 14, the snowing on Mt. Zalmon (Black Mountain) may be a figurative description of God's blessings, or David may have been referring to Abimelech's victory on Mt. Zalmon near Shechem (Judg. 9:48). In that case, he may have viewed the corpses of the victims and their weapons lying like scattered snowflakes on the mountain.[701]

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[700]Alexander M'Caul, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:290.
[701]VanGemeren, p. 447.

68:15-18 The NIV rendering of verse 15 is preferable: "The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains, rugged are the mountains of Bashan." As impressive as the mountains of Bashan were, namely, Mt. Hermon and its peaked neighbors, the mountain God had chosen for His special habitation was even more grand, namely, Mt. Zion. Topographically, Mt. Zion is not as impressive, but because God chose to dwell among His people there, it was most significant. David described God, accompanied by His angelic army, escorting Israel from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Zion.

The Canaanites believed Baal lived on Mt. Carmel. In describing Yahweh this way, David was using imagery common among his pagan ancient Near Eastern neighbors. He did so to portray Yahweh's greatness.

The historical events that most closely correspond to God's figurative ascension up Mt. Zion were David's capture of Jerusalem from the Jebusites (2 Sam. 5:6-8) and his bringing the ark into that city (2 Sam. 6). When David defeated the Jebusites, he led a host of them captive and undoubtedly took much spoil from them. The writer viewed the spoil as a kind of gift they gave him. Even the rebellious Jebusites gave gifts to David. Of course, God was the real Commander-in-Chief who took the mountain for His people, led the captives captive, and received the gifts from them.

The Apostle Paul referred to verse 18 in Ephesians 4:8, but he quoted it very loosely and even changed receiving gifts to giving gifts. One explanation for this difference is that Paul may have been following a popular Jewish interpretation of his day, the Targum, which attributed these actions to Moses. According to the Targum, Moses ascended into the firmament, led captivity captive, and gave gifts to the sons of men.[702] Another explanation is that Paul used this verse as a basis for what he said but went beyond it to make another point he wanted to stress. After all, he did not claim to quote this verse. He just cast his own words in the mold of this verse.[703]

Paul used this verse to illustrate Jesus' ascension into the heavenly Mt. Zion after His resurrection. He too ascended on high, led His enemies captive, and received gifts from men. These gifts may be praise or more tangible gifts. They may have already come to Him, or His reception of them may be primarily future. Paul went on to say Jesus also gave gifts to men, something God definitely did and David may have done, but which this psalm does not say they did. This point was the one Paul stressed in his following explanation, but God's and David's gift-giving to men was not David's emphasis here when he wrote this psalm.

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[702]This is the preference of Ross, p. 843.

[703]This explanation is similar to the one suggested by Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 634.

3. The effect of God's scattering His enemies 68:19-31

68:19-23 David moved from a historical review of God's giving Israel victory to confidence that He would continue to do so daily.

> "God's benefits are not few nor light; they are loads. Neither are they intermittent, but they come 'daily'; nor are they confined to one or two favorites, for all Israel can say, 'He loadeth us with benefits.'"[704]

Any who resist Yahweh can count on His powerful opposition and their own inevitable defeat. Additional references to victories over Og, the king of Bashan, the crossing of the Red Sea, numerous victories in battle, and the slaying of Jezebel (2 Kings 9:33-36) would have encouraged the Israelites further. The same God who gave them success in the past was ready to do so still.

> "When the parallel passage dwells upon 'the hairy crown' [v. 21] of certain ones it seems to refer to the custom of having men of distinction wear their hair exceptionally long (Deut. 32:42)."[705]

68:24-27 The Israelites witnessed Yahweh's glorious entrance into His sanctuary on Mt. Zion. David described the scene as what would have accompanied an earthly monarch and may have accompanied his own entrance into Jerusalem. The "fountain of Israel" (v. 26, NASB) pictures the nation of Israel as a fountain of blessing.

"Benjamin" was the smallest tribe in the south, but a leader nonetheless. "Judah" was the largest tribe in the south. "Zebulun" and "Naphtali" were northern tribes that David may have chosen because of their prominence in Deborah's song (Judg. 5:18). Together these four tribes represent all the Israelites, from the south and the north.

68:28-31 David next called on God to manifest His strength afresh. He foresaw that foreign kings would fear Yahweh when they heard about all the powerful victories He had won for His people and when they saw His magnificent temple. This in fact occurred during Solomon's reign, as attested by the Queen of Sheba's testimony (1 King 10:1-13). The beasts, bulls, and calves to which David referred probably represent foreign rulers. He saw them bringing tribute. This also happened when Solomon reigned.

> "The taxation of sin is infinitely more exacting than the tribute of religion. The little finger of lust is heavier than

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[704]Spurgeon, 1:295.
[705]Leupold, p. 496.

> the loins of the law. Pieces of silver given to God are replaced with pieces of gold."[706]

David predicted that the Lord would defuse rebellions and cause potential enemies to make peace with Israel out of respect for her God. Perhaps he mentioned Egypt and Ethiopia (v. 31) because these were two countries from which subjects and supplicants were least likely to be expected.[707]

4. The proper response to God scattering His enemies 68:32-35

In conclusion, David called on the nations to praise Yahweh, the sovereign ruler over all. His display of power and majesty, so beautifully set forth in this psalm, is ample reason to do so. This section anticipates the reign of Jesus (cf. Zeph. 3:14-17).

> "Again and again is God to be magnified; we have too much sinning against God but cannot have too much singing to God."[708]

In view of God's dealings with Israel, every nation under heaven should learn who the true God is and submit to His sovereignty. His record of prospering those who trust in Him and destroying those who oppose Him should move any people to bow before Him.

PSALM 69

In this imprecatory psalm of individual lament, David, who protested his innocence, sought God to deliver him from destruction. He was experiencing criticism and rejection from the Israelites because of decisions he had made to do God's will (i.e., his religious convictions). He asked God to deal with his oppressors, and he looked forward to relief and the renewal of praise to God. What David wrote here sounds so much like parts of Jeremiah that some writers have concluded that Jeremiah wrote it.[709]

Some scholars have labeled this psalm "indirectly messianic" because, while it does not specifically predict Messiah, Messiah fulfilled what the writer expressed (cf. Ps. 16; 22; 34; 40; 41; 109).[710] It reveals Messiah's emotional and spiritual sufferings. McGee wrote that it predicted "the silent years in the life of Christ."[711] After Psalms 110 and 22, this is the third most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament.

1. The unwarranted hatred of David's enemies 69:1-4

69:1-3 The psalmist likened his desperate condition to that of a drowning man. He also pictured himself hoarse from praying and losing his eyesight as he strained to see God's deliverance that had not yet appeared.

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[706]Spurgeon, 1:296.
[707]Henry, p. 649.
[708]Spurgeon, 1:296.
[709]E.g., Delitzsch, 2:277.
[710]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," pp. 290-91.
[711]McGee, 2:786.

69:4 David faced numerous critics that he described hyperbolically as innumerable. His enemies were very powerful people. He had to make concessions to them that were unwarranted.

> "David might well say this, but not David's Lord; unless it be understood as an appeal to God as to His freedom from the folly which men imputed to Him when they said He was mad. That which was foolishness to men was superlative wisdom before God."[712]

Jesus Christ suffered this type of opposition as well. He referred to His sufferings as a fulfillment of what David had written here and elsewhere (Ps. 35:19) in John 15:25.

2. The reason for and the results of David's condition 69:5-12

69:5 David did not pretend to be sinless, but he believed his enemies' present antagonism was not due to sins he had committed.

69:6-7 The psalmist did not want others who trusted in God to feel discouraged by the opposition of his critics. He seems to have had in mind those who stood with him in the decision that had drawn criticism.

69:8 Very few people sided with David. Even his closest relatives had turned against him.

69:9 Evidently it was David's preoccupation with building the temple that had turned popular opinion against him. Perhaps the majority of the Israelites considered this an extravagant project. Had he increased taxes to pay for it? We do not know.

The Lord Jesus' zeal for the temple that led Him to drive the moneychangers out of it brought this verse to His disciples' minds (John 2:17).

> "How industrious was Calvin in the Lord's vineyard! When his friends persuaded him for his health's sake to remit a little of his labor, saith he, 'Would you have the Lord find me idle when He comes?' Luther spent three hours a day in prayer. It is said of holy Bradford, preaching, reading, and prayer, was his whole life. 'I rejoice,' said bishop Jewel, 'that my body is exhausted in the labors of my holy calling.'"[713]

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[712]Spurgeon, 1:299.

[713]Thomas Watson, quoted in ibid., 1:300.

69:10-11 David had expressed his mourning over the opposition he faced by weeping internally, by going without meals, and by wearing sackcloth. His sorrow was genuine and deep.

69:12 From the most respected city judges who sat in the gate to the least respected drunkards, everyone was criticizing David.

3. David's appeal to God in prayer 69:13-28

69:13-15 David wanted deliverance from a premature death and a word from the Lord that would enable him to know what to do.

69:16-18 The king based his petition on the loyal love and compassion of God. He asked God to redeem him from his trouble by drawing him out of it. God had done this when He redeemed Israel out of Egyptian bondage.

69:19-21 David was confident that God knew his situation, and that because He knew it, He would help him. The opposition of his critics had wounded David's spirit. None of his friends stood with him when popular opinion turned against him. Instead of sustaining him with a good meal, they gave him poison to eat and vinegar to drink. This is probably a figurative description of their treatment of him. The Hebrew word *barut* (food) describes a meal that sympathetic friends gave to a mourner.[714] David's use of this particular word highlights the hypocrisy of his friends' actions.

One of Jesus' disciples treated Him hypocritically by betraying Him with a kiss (Matt. 26:48). Jesus was offered vinegar to soothe His thirst (Matt. 27:34). And Jesus' enemies gave Him real vinegar to drink as He hung on the cross (Matt. 27:48).

> "A criminal's draught was offered to our innocent Lord, a bitter portion to our dying Master. Sorry entertainment had earth for her King and Savior. How often have our sins filled the gall-cup for our Redeemer! While we blame the Jews, let us not excuse ourselves."[715]

69:22-28 > "Up to this point, Christ and His passion have been so evidently foreshadowed (see on verses 4, 9, 21) that we are almost prepared now for a plea approximating to 'Father, forgive them'. The curse which comes instead is a powerful reminder of the new thing which our Lord did at Calvary."[716]

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[714]A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, p. 219.
[715]Spurgeon, 1:302.
[716]Kidner, p. 248.

Most of these verses call down God's punishment on those who had opposed God's anointed who sought to do His will and glorify Him. David was not venting his personal hatred but was asking God to punish those who resisted him. A "snare" was a self-springing trap, and a "trap" may have had bait in it.[717]

The Apostle Paul applied verses 22 and 23 to the Jews who had opposed the Lord Jesus, in Romans 11:9-10 (cf. 1 Thess. 5:3). Judas Iscariot fulfilled the words of verse 25 (cf. Acts 1:20).

The reason David wanted God to deal with his adversaries so severely comes through in verse 26. They had poured salt in a wound that God had given him. Evidently David viewed his suffering as ultimately coming from God in the sense that He had permitted it. His human enemies were adding insult to injury by treating him the way they did.

Likewise, God was behind the crucifixion of His Son, but the human agents of Jesus' sufferings and death were also responsible and had to bear the punishment for their actions.

David asked that God blot out the names of his enemies from His book of life (v. 28). This probably refers to the book of the living (cf. Rev. 3:5). The term "book of life" in the Old Testament refers to the record of those who are alive physically (cf. Exod. 32:32-33; Deut. 29:20; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; cf. Exod. 17:14; Deut. 25:19; Isa. 4:3). It came to have a more specific meaning in the New Testament. There it usually refers to the list of the names and deeds of the elect (Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19; cf. Rev. 2:11, 17; 3:5, 12).[718] In other words, David asked God to cut the lives of his enemies short.

> "Many people struggle with the idea of divine retribution against unrepentant sinners. But Jesus' appeal to forgive one's enemies must be balanced by His role of Avenger, the One who will judge those who remain in obstinate rebellion against Him (Rev. 19:11-16)."[719]

4. David's resolution to praise God 69:29-36

69:29-33 Again David asked God to deliver him (cf. v. 13). Assured of salvation, he vowed to praise the Lord, confident that that would please Him more than animal sacrifices. Bulls with horns and hoofs (v. 31) were mature animals that made good offerings.

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[717]VanGemeren, p. 460.

[718]See Charles R. Smith, "The Book of Life," *Grace Theological Journal* 6:2 (Fall 1985):219-30.

[719]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 440.

> "There is a note of dry amusement in the glance at *horns and hoofs*—how useful to God!"[720]

When the poor and needy, who also trusted in God as David did, saw God's deliverance, they would rejoice. Such salvation would encourage them.

69:34-36 Anticipation of personal deliverance encouraged David to expect God to fulfill His promises to Israel as well. He called on the whole creation to praise God who would establish Israel as He had promised.

When the godly purpose to glorify God, many people will oppose their efforts and persecute them. This opposition should not drive us away from God, but to Him, in order to obtain the grace we need to remain faithful. God will reward this type of faithfulness greatly (e.g., James 1:12). We can see the truth of this in David's life and in the life of His greatest son, Jesus Christ.

PSALM 70

The superscription of this psalm, a "memorial" or "petition," literally means, "to bring to remembrance" (cf. Ps. 38).

> "Perhaps this was a note that the psalm was to be used in connection with the offerings (cf. 1 Chron. 16:4), which would help 'remind' the Lord of the petitioner's request."[721]

The subject matter of this lament psalm is very similar to that of Psalm 69, though the treatment is much shorter. It is almost identical to Psalm 40:13-17, except for the absence of the divine name (a characteristic of the "Elohistic Psalter," i.e., Psalms 42—72) and the addition of "hasten" at the beginning (v. 1).

> "Why repeat it here? Because my memory is not very good, and God knew it wouldn't be. I can imagine that God said, 'By the time McGee gets to this point in the Book of Psalms he will have forgotten all about Psalm 40, so I'll repeat it.'"[722]

1. A plea for immediate help 70:1-3

70:1 David needed and cried out for God's immediate help (cf. 31:2).

70:2-3 He needed help quickly because enemies were trying to ruin him. He prayed that God would bring shame on those who sought to shame David. His enemies were evidently trying to kill him.

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[720]Kidner, p. 248. Cf. Ps. 50:12-15.
[721]Ross, p. 845.
[722]McGee, 2:790.

2. A prayer for God's glory 70:4-5

As a result of God's deliverance, other righteous people would glorify God and rejoice in Him. The psalm ends as it began: with a request for fast relief. David was stressing how desperately he needed God's assistance by beginning and ending the psalm with these petitions.

Sometimes, when believers are under attack by others who oppose God's will, all they can do is cry out to God for help (cf. Neh. 2:4-5). Even in brief prayers such as this, we should base our petitions on God's glory, as this psalmist did.

PSALM 71

This individual lament psalm expresses the faith of an older person in need who had trusted in God for many years. This is a good psalm for senior citizens. The writer is unknown to us, though Delitzsch believed that he was Jeremiah.[723] The writer combined elements that we find in several other psalms to communicate his thoughts (cf. Pss. 22; 31; 35; 40).

> "No two commentators divide the psalm in the same way."[724]

1. A prayer for the Lord's help 71:1-4

The writer began by reaffirming his confidence in God, in whom he had trusted in the past (cf. 31:1-3). He wanted God's deliverance from the attacks of wicked people so that his confidence in God would not prove in vain. He spoke of the Lord as a refuge, a rock, and a fortress. We do not know if he was under verbal, or physical attack, or both types.

2. A review of the psalmist's faith 71:5-13

71:5-6 The writer had trusted in the Lord from his youth, since God had sustained him from the day of his birth. He had praised Him all his life.

71:7-8 The psalmist meant that onlookers regarded what was happening to him as an omen of things to come. Evidently they felt God was abandoning the righteous because He appeared to be abandoning this aged saint. Nevertheless the psalmist continued to praise God.

71:9-13 The writer appealed specifically to the Lord not to forsake him in his old age, especially since his adversaries were claiming that God had abandoned him. He had no other defender and cried out to God to do what was right. These verses contain an imprecation.

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[723]Delitzsch, 2:290.
[724]Leupold, p. 511.

3. A new commitment to continued trust 71:14-24

71:14-18 Regardless of the outcome in his case, the writer determined to continue trusting and praising God. The Lord had demonstrated His righteousness, salvation, and mighty deeds for a long time and in many ways. Therefore, the psalmist vowed to speak of them forever, even if he could not tally up all of God's faithful acts. If God forsook him, he could not fully relate these testimonials to the present generation of his people.

Presently, I identify with verses 17 and 18 more than with many verses in the Psalms. The Lord has "taught me from my youth," having had parents who were believers, who provided me with good biblical training and encouraged me to pursue it. As a senior citizen, I am still able to "declare" the Lord's "wondrous deeds," chiefly through these notes. I am confident that the Lord will not forsake me now that I am "old and gray" as I continue to "declare" His "strength" and "power" "to this generation" and "to all who are to come."

71:19-21 The great things of which the writer testified included God's salvation out of many personal troubles. The psalmist had been down before, but God had always lifted him up.[725] He prayed that this would be his experience again. His greatness, or honor, came from trusting in God and having that trust rewarded with deliverance.

71:22-24 In anticipation of God's help, the writer promised to praise Him with stringed instruments, as well as vocally. The title "Holy One of Israel" (v. 22) is common in Isaiah but rare in the Psalms, occurring only three times (cf. 78:41; 89:18). In conclusion, the psalmist spoke of his accusers' humiliation as already present, even though that is what he was requesting. This is probably another instance of expressing confidence that something would happen by describing it as having already taken place.

> "As we grow old, let's not talk about our aches and pains,
> let's rejoice in the Lord and sing His praises."[726]

When people have trusted in God over a lifetime and have seen Him deliver them from many trials, it becomes easier for them to trust Him in the present. Just as continual unbelief makes faith more difficult, continual trust makes unbelief more difficult.

PSALM 72

This royal psalm is one of two psalms that attribute authorship to Solomon in the superscription (cf. Ps. 127). Some interpreters, however, believe that David wrote it *for* Solomon.[727] It describes his reign but anticipates the rule of his successor, Jesus Christ,

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[725]See C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament.*

[726]McGee, 2:790.

[727]E.g., Henry, p. 653; McGee, 2:791.

on earth in the future.[728] The psalmist prayed for the prosperity of the Lord's anointed, ultimately Israel's Messiah. Isaac Watts wrote the hymn "Jesus Shall Reign" after meditating on this psalm.[729]

> "The psalm is quoted nowhere in the New Testament as referring to Jesus, but certainly it describes the elements that will make up the promised kingdom when Jesus returns."[730]

Solomon wrote of the blessings that God bestows through His anointed ruler. Because the Lord had appointed the king and because he ruled righteously, Solomon expected his reign to be far-reaching. He asked God to bless his reign with peace and prosperity because he protects the oppressed.

> "The psalm begins with a prayer for the messianic kingship of David's dynasty (vv. 1-2) and ends on an ascription of praise to the universal kingship of the Lord (vv. 18-19). The petition alternates between a prayer for the king, a prayer for the prosperity and justice associated with the rule, and a prayer for the extent of the rule."[731]

1. A plea for ability to rule well 72:1-7

72:1-4 This prayer for the ability to rule justly and righteously is similar to Solomon's request for wisdom, which he voiced at the beginning of his reign (1 Kings 3:9). His references to the mountains and hills are probably metaphorical allusions to his government (cf. Ps. 30:7; Isa. 2:2; 41:15; Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:35, 44; Rev. 17:9). Verse 4 describes basic justice.

72:5-7 In verse 5, the antecedent of "them" in the NASB is "the oppressed" of verse 4, and "Thee" refers to God. In the NIV the translators, following the Septuagint, felt that the king was the subject of the whole verse. The Hebrew text favors the NASB rendering. In verses 6 and 7, the king is the subject.

The effects of a just and righteous king, the type of person Solomon asked God to make him, are as beneficial to his people as rain and peace are to the landscape.

> "It is the other side of kingship to the 'rod of iron' of Psalm 2:9; yet the one is the true complement of the other, as verse 4 has shown already."[732]

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[728]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 270.
[729]Kidner, p. 253.
[730]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 219.
[731]VanGemeren, p. 469.
[732]Kidner, p. 255.

2. A plea for wide influence 72:8-14

72:8-11 It was not a sign of egotism that Solomon requested a universal dominion, as verses 12-14 make clear (cf. 1 Chron. 4:10). The "river" is the Euphrates, the most significant river in terms of the land promises God gave to Abraham and his descendants. "Tarshish" probably refers to Tartessus in southwest Spain, "Sheba" to modern Yemen in southwestern Arabia, and "Seba" to upper (southern) Egypt, which is now Sudan.

> "Extension, not limit, is the idea conveyed. The world belongs to God: may he confer on His representative a world-wide dominion! a hope to be realized only in the universal kingdom of Christ."[733]

72:12-14 Solomon wanted a wide-ranging kingdom so he might establish justice and righteousness in the whole earth. Then multitudes of people would benefit in the ways he described in these verses.

3. The consequences of a wide reign of justice 72:15-20

72:15-16 In return for his beneficent rule, the king would receive the blessing of his people. They would express their gratitude by bringing him wealth (cf. 1 Kings 10:10) and by praying for him. As a result of his good influence, his lands would enjoy prosperity, which Solomon compared to abundant crops, favored trees, and flourishing citizens.

> "This verse [16], and the Psalm as a whole, shows that what we call the 'moral realm' and the 'realm of nature' form one indivisible whole to the Israelites. A community which lives according to righteousness enjoys not only internal harmony, but also prosperity in field and flock."[734]

72:17 Such a king would enjoy lasting praise, not just the appreciation of the generation he served (cf. Gen. 12:2-3; Rev. 21:24).

72:18-19 Behind the earthly king, Solomon saw the Lord God. If praise came to Solomon, even more credit should go to the God of Israel for enabling the king to exercise such a marvelous reign. Solomon acknowledged God's sovereignty by appealing to Him for the personal equipment he needed to rule justly (vv. 1-11). He also did so by attributing blessing to the Lord here at the end of the psalm.

This closing benediction is a doxology similar to the one that ended Book 1 of the Psalter (Ps. 41:13). Probably the editors of the collection of psalms placed Psalm 72 here because of this doxology and because the whole theme of this psalm is so positive, optimistic, and God-honoring.

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[733]Kirkpatrick, p. 420.

[734]A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 525.

72:20 This verse was probably an editorial addition, rather than a part of Psalm 72, in view of what it says. At least 18 psalms that follow this one were David's (Pss. 86; 101; 103; 108—110; 122; 124; 131; 133; and 138—145). Consequently this verse may have ended an earlier edition of the Psalms rather than the present one.[735] However, this verse also separates the preceding psalms associated with David from those of Asaph that follow immediately (Pss. 73—83). Some scholars believe this verse refers to all the Davidic psalms in the first two Books,[736] but others believe it refers only to his psalms in Book Two.[737] Interestingly, the word "prayers" is a synonym for "psalms" as used here. Prayers and praises are the two most characteristic marks of the Psalter.

The theme of Psalm 72 is God's just and righteous rule over the earth. Solomon prayed that God might work through him and his administration to bring such a rule to pass. God answered Solomon's petitions for the most part. However, because Solomon proved unfaithful to God, his reign was not as great a blessing as it might have been. When Solomon's successor, Jesus Christ, returns to earth and establishes His reign, the conditions Solomon requested will find perfect fulfillment.[738] For us, Solomon's petitions constitute a model of what the godly should desire—and pray for—regarding God's just rule on the earth (cf. Matt. 6:10).

III. BOOK 3: CHS. 73—89

A man or men named Asaph wrote 11 of the psalms in this book (Pss. 73—83; cf. Ps. 50). Other writers were the sons of Korah (Pss. 84—85, 87), David (Ps. 86), Heman (Ps. 88), and Ethan (Ps. 89). Asaph, Heman, and Ethan were musicians from the tribe of Levi who were contemporaries of David. Book 3 of the Psalter has been called its "dark book."[739]

PSALM 73

In this psalm, Asaph related his inner mental struggle when he compared his life, as one committed to Yahweh, with the lives of his acquaintances who did not put God first. He confessed discouragement. On further reflection he realized the sinfulness of his carnal longings. Finally, he explained that the contrast between these two lifestyles enabled him to keep a proper view of life in perspective.

> "We come now to what may be the most remarkable and satisfying of all the psalms. We treat it last among the psalms of disorientation, because in the career of faith it seems to be the last word on disorientation, even as it

[735]Leupold, p. 2.
[736]E.g., Delitzsch, 1:22.
[737]E.g., Michael D. Goulder, *The Prayers of David (Psalms 51—72)*, p. 24
[738]See Walter Kaiser, "Psalm 72: An Historical and Messianic Current Example of Antiochene Hermemeutical *Theoria*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:2 (June 2009):257-70.
[739]Waltke, p. 886.

> utters the first word of new orientation. The very process of the psalm itself shows the moves made in faith, into, through, and out of disorientation, into new orientation, which is marked by joyous trust."[740]

> "Here is yet another approach to the problem of the prosperity of the wicked. Although the psalmist is troubled by his own suffering, he is more perplexed by the lack of punishment of the wicked. This psalm goes deeper into the problem than do Psalms 37 and 49, and the author finds peace in spiritual fellowship with God."[741]

Delitzsch titled this psalm "temptation to apostasy overcome."[742]

> "This great psalm is the story of a bitter and despairing search, which has now been rewarded beyond all expectation."[743]

This psalm is similar to Psalm 49. It is a wisdom psalm because of the wise insight it provides for the godly, including a model of trust, but the vehicle of communication is a lament.[744] It is also like Psalm 37, in that it is helpful to read when we feel discouraged by by the apparent prosperity of the wicked. It is also similar to the Book of Job.

> ". . . I have typed this psalm as a psalm of wisdom because it deals with a common problem found in wisdom literature, the prosperity of the wicked. But based on its strong affirmations of trust (vv. 1, 17, 18-20, 23-28), it can also be classified as a psalm of trust."[745]

> ". . . it is indisputably in Ps. 73 that this hope of communion with God, in spite of and beyond death, reaches its apogee."[746]

1. The present prosperity of the wicked 73:1-14

73:1-3 Asaph began this psalm by affirming God's goodness to His people, specifically those whose hearts are pure because they seek to follow God faithfully (v. 1). This verse provides the key to the psalm by highlighting attitude as most important. Purity of heart means being totally committed to God. References to the heart appear in verses 1, 7, 13, 21, and 26 (twice). One writer referred to this psalm as a meditation on the heart.[747]

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[740]Brueggemann, p. 115.
[741]Yates, p. 521.
[742]Delitzsch, 2:308.
[743]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 259.
[744]See James F. Ross, "Psalm 73," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, pp. 161-75.
[745]Bullock, p. 173.
[746]Jacob, p. 308.
[747]Martin Buber, *Right and Wrong*, pp. 37-38.

However, Asaph confessed that he almost stumbled in his walk as a faithful believer when he thought about the great material prosperity of the wicked. The wealth and easy living of those who do not follow God's will strictly tempted Asaph to abandon his commitment to living by God's Law.

> "Doubt comes from a struggling mind, while unbelief comes from a stubborn will that refuses surrender to God (v. 7). The unbelieving person *will not believe*, while the doubting person struggles to believe but cannot."[748]

Another distinctive feature of this psalm is the recurrence of the phrase "but as for me" (vv. 2, 28, and 22 and 23 in the Hebrew text).

73:4-12 The writer next described the ways the wicked behave. They seem more carefree (vv. 4-5), proud and violent (v. 6), as well as unrestrained (v. 7). They speak proudly (vv. 8-9), lead others after themselves (v. 10), and act as if God does not care how they live (v. 11; cf. Ps. 94:7). With few cares, they continue to prosper (v. 12; cf. vv. 4-5).

> ". . . [they] never concern themselves about God and at the same time get on better."[749]

73:13-14 After observing the wicked, Asaph felt his commitment to follow God faithfully was a mistake. Instead of prospering, he experienced more problems. God seemed to be punishing the pure in heart and prospering the proud (cf. Job 21:7-15).

> "He had not been guilty of bloodshed or oppressive activities; so he could say that his hands were washed 'in innocence' (cf. 26:6; Matt 27:24)."[750]

> ". . . we don't serve God because of what we get out of it but because He is worthy of our worship and service regardless of what He allows to come to our lives."[751]

2. The future destiny of the wicked and the righteous 73:15-28

73:15-20 The present condition of the wicked tends to make the godly question the wisdom of their strong commitment to the Lord. However, the future condition of those who disregard God's will now helped Asaph remain loyal to Yahweh.

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[748]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 222.
[749]Delitzsch, 2:316.
[750]VanGemeren, p. 479.
[751]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 222. Author's italics omitted.

> "If there were not another life after this, we could not fully reconcile the prosperity of the wicked with the justice of God."[752]

Had he proclaimed his former doubts publicly, he would have misled those who heard him because he was not considering all the facts. It was only when he viewed life in the light of God's revelation that he regained a proper perspective. Sitting in the sanctuary and reflecting brought the memory of the end of the wicked to mind again. The Lord allows the wicked to live as they choose, but their manner of life is similar to walking on ice: it can and will eventually result in a fall. Even though the wicked may prosper now, when they stand before God He will punish them. Their ultimate end will be bad even though their present life may be comfortable. Their present life will then seem to them to have been only a dream in view of that final reality.

73:21-26 Asaph also found encouragement as he reflected on his own future and the future of all the faithful.

The awareness of the relative prosperity of the godless led Asaph to become bitter toward God (v. 21). However, now he realized that he was wrong and his viewpoint was similar to an animal's, namely, ignorant of divine revelation (v. 22). Sober reflection reminded him that God had not abandoned him but would one day provide the good things He presently withheld (vv. 23-24).

The phrase "to glory" (v. 24) probably means "with honor." Asaph's generation of believers did not have much revelation concerning life beyond the grave. He was probably referring to future vindication during his lifetime rather than glory in heaven.[753] We know from later revelation that our vindication as Christians will come mainly the other side of the grave at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

Verses 25 and 26 are a great expression of faith and contentment with the spiritual blessings God has promised His people. Asaph was presently willing to go without anything material because he had a proper relationship with God. That was enough for him. God would be his strength (cf. 18:1) and his portion (cf. 16:5; 119:57; 142:5) forever (cf. Phil. 4:11-13).

> "What have we in heaven but God? What's joy without God? What's glory without God? What's all the furniture and riches, all the delicacies, yea, all the diadems of heaven, without the God of heaven? If God should say to

[752]Henry, p. 656.
[753]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 286.

> the saints, 'Here is heaven, take it amongst you, but I will withdraw Myself,' how would they weep over heaven itself, and make it a Baca, a valley of tears indeed? Heaven is not heaven unless we enjoy God. 'Tis the presence of God which makes heaven: glory is but our nearest being unto God."[754]

73:27-28 These verses contrast with 1-3. Asaph formerly envied the wicked, but now he pitied them. Those who do not follow God faithfully will suffer eventually. However, those who walk in close fellowship with Him will experience His blessing in the end. Therefore Asaph closed this "intricately crafted speech"[755] by reaffirming his commitment to stay close to God. This would benefit himself and others with whom he would share his testimony.

> "The problem of the suffering of the righteous has no clear resolution, but the 'pain' is relieved by the experience of God's living presence."[756]

What Asaph wrote about the wicked applies to unbelievers and to believers who do not follow God faithfully. Many believers in Asaph's day, and in ours, choose to live for the present rather than for the future (contrast Jacob and Esau). We, who have committed to following God faithfully and putting His priorities before our own preferences, face the same temptation Asaph described here. This psalmist's transparency will help us adjust our attitude when we, too, are tempted to become bitter because we do not have many of the things unbelievers and compromising Christians enjoy materially.

PSALM 74

The writer appears to have written this communal lament psalm after one of Israel's enemies destroyed the sanctuary.[757] The Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. may therefore be the background.[758] The writer asked the Lord to remember His people and defeat her enemies, as He had in the past, for His own glory (cf. Pss. 79; 137; Lam.). One of the meanings of *maskil*, in the title, is *didactic*. It is one of the "congregational complaint" (or communal lament) psalms.[759]

> "The temple has been violated. The key symbol of life has been lost. Things in all parts of life fall apart—precisely because the center has not held. This psalm of protest and grief does not concern simply a historical invasion and the loss of a building. It speaks about the violation of the sacral key to all reality, the glue that holds the world together."[760]

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[754]Joseph Caryl, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:318.
[755]Brueggemann, p. 121.
[756]VanGemeren, p. 476.
[757]See Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation*, pp. 19-20.
[758]Leupold, p. 533.
[759]Ibid., p. 534.
[760]Brueggemann, p. 68.

1. A call for God to remember His people 74:1-2

Evidently Israel was suffering under the oppression of a foreign foe. The writer prayed that God would stop disciplining His chosen people and remember (act) to bless the nation He had redeemed. The figure of sheep (v. 2) stresses the helpless, weak condition of the people (cf. 79:13; 95:7; 100:3). The reference to Israel's redemption recalls the Exodus (cf. Exod. 15:13). The word "tribe" (v. 2) also pictures Israel as small and vulnerable (cf. Jer. 10:16). God regarded Israel as His own inheritance (Deut. 4:20). The sanctuary stood on Mt. Zion in Asaph's day.

2. A lament over the enemy's destruction 74:3-9

74:3 There is no record that any of Israel's enemies ever destroyed Israel's central sanctuary in David's day, or the temple in Solomon's, to the extent that this verse implies. Perhaps Asaph was speaking hyperbolically, namely, describing the destruction in extreme terms for the sake of the effect. Probably this description is of what took place when the Babylonians destroyed the temple in 586 B.C. This would mean the writer was an Asaph who lived much later than David's day, or perhaps Asaph stands for the order of musicians he headed. Another possibility is that this psalm is a prophecy.

74:4-8 These descriptions of the destruction also picture a complete devastation of the sanctuary as the last of God's successive meeting places (v. 8; cf. Exod. 20:24; Ps. 78:60-64).

> "Though some terms and clauses here are very obscure, the general sense is that the spoilers destroyed the beauties of the temple with the violence of woodmen [i.e., lumberjacks]."[761]

74:9 The writer bewailed the fact that no prophet could give the people a revelation about the length of God's present judgment of His people. There were no prophetic signs that would indicate this.

3. An appeal for divine help 74:10-17

The psalmist pleaded for God to help His people and to subdue their enemy.

> "I have read of the crocodile, that he knows no *maximum quod sic*, he is always growing bigger and bigger, and never comes to a certain pitch of monstrosity so long as he lives. . . . Every habituated sinner would, if he were let alone, be such a monster, perpetually growing worse and worse."[762]

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[761]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 434.

[762]Thomas Brooks, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:321.

The Lord's reputation fell with the sanctuary in the eyes of Israel's neighbors. Ancient Near Easterners regarded a god's temple as the reflection of his glory. Now that the temple on Mt. Zion had suffered damage, the nations would have concluded that Yahweh was unable to defend His people.

Asaph recalled God's mighty acts in the past in order to motivate Him to act for His people by defeating their enemy in the present (vv. 12-17). God was not impotent or inactive, as the preceding verses seem to indicate, but more than able to restore His people. Verses 13 and 14 describe the crossing of the Red Sea during the Exodus.

> ". . . the language of Psalm 74:12-14, while tailored to reflect the redemptive character of the Exodus event, also alludes to God's victory over chaos at creation."[763]

The sea monsters refer to Pharaoh's soldiers, and Leviathan was a mythical monster that the writer used to describe Egypt here.

> "In Canaanite mythology, the sea and its serpents joined together as enemies of Baal. Supposedly Baal was victorious over these enemies and subsequently became king. The poets of the Bible used the language of Canaanite myth to describe the victories of God in the formation of the earth, in the deliverance of His people from Egypt, and in future battles (77:16-20; 93:1-5; Is. 27:1; 51:9, 10). The division of the waters described in Gen. 1:6-8 is viewed as a battle in which God was victorious over both sea and serpents.
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> "One of the enemies of Baal was the sea monster Lotan. In Hebrew literature this figure became the *Leviathan*. The name speaks poetically of various evil forces over which God has ultimate control and victory. Eventually the Leviathan became a symbol for Satan (Is. 27:1) who is 'the dragon, that serpent of old' (Rev. 20:2). In this context, *the people* refers to beasts."[764]

Verse 15 recalls events in the wilderness wanderings and the crossing of the Jordan. Verses 16 and 17 go back to God's creation of the cosmos.

> "The point here is that what Baal had claimed in the realm of myth, God had done in the realm of history—and done for His people, *working salvation*."[765]

4. An appeal to the covenant 74:18-23

The writer also appealed for action because of God's reputation ("Thy name," v. 18). He compared Israel to a harmless dove and the enemy to a raging wild beast (v. 19). God had promised to hear His people's cries for help and had done so in the past (cf. Judges), but

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[763]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 260.
[764]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 954.
[765]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 268.

now He was silent. Consequently Asaph asked God to remember His covenant promises to Israel (v. 20). This may be a reference to the promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) or to the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). Deliverance would lead God's people to praise Him (v. 21). The foolish man (v. 22) is the enemy who does not regard God's revelation of the fate of those who oppose His people. Israel's adversaries evidently mocked Yahweh as they devastated His sanctuary (v. 23).

> "The acts of God are primarily a vindication of his name and secondarily of his people."[766]

This psalm is a good example of prayer based on the person and promises of God. When God's people suffer for their sins, they can call out to Him for help, but He may continue the discipline even when they base their petitions on His character and covenant.

PSALM 75

> "In some ways, Ps. 75 may be regarded as the Lord's answer to the difficult questions of Ps. 74."[767]

This communal thanksgiving psalm anticipated a victory in Israel when God as Judge would destroy the wicked and establish the righteous (cf. 1 Sam. 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-53). In it, the Lord Himself speaks (cf. Pss. 12; 75; 87; and 91). The Assyrian invasion in the days of Hezekiah may be the historical setting (Isa. 36—37).[768]

> "This memorable ode may be sung in times of great depression, when prayer has performed her errand at the mercy-seat, and when faith is watching for speedy deliverance. It is a song of the second advent, 'Concerning the Nearness of the Judge with the Cup of Wrath.'"[769]

1. God's appointment of judgment 75:1-3

Asaph gave thanks to God for Israel because God was near His people and had performed wondrous works (v. 1).

He then put words in God's mouth that were appropriate in view of earlier revelation. God judges when He decides the time is right, and He judges fairly. His judgment can devastate the world, but He sustains it nevertheless.

2. God's character as Judge 75:4-8

75:4-6 These verses call the wicked to repent. The writer said they should stop boasting and acting proudly, as an animal does that defiantly wields its

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[766]VanGemeren, p. 490.
[767]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 953.
[768]Leupold, p. 542.
[769]Spurgeon, 1:324.

horn against a foe. The wicked refuse to bow before God, as an ox tossing its neck refuses the yoke. No help from any direction will deliver the ungodly when God judges them (cf. Dan. 2:20-22).

> "The poet, if we have assigned the right date to the Psalm, has Rabshakeh and his colleagues before his mind, cf. Isa. xxxvii. 23."[770]

75:7-8 As Sovereign Judge, God forces His enemies to drink from the cup that determines consequences. He forces them to drink all the wine of judgment that He has prepared for them (cf. 60:3; Isa. 51:17-23; Hab. 2:16). They cannot escape doing so, or the consequences of doing so, at His appointed time. In some nations kings made convicted criminals drink poisoned wine.

3. God's glory for judging 75:9-10

Asaph concluded by praising God publicly, and in song, for judging His enemies. The horns symbolize strength, and they picture animals. Israel's enemies would lose their strength, but God's people would grow stronger. God may be speaking again in verse 10.

This inspiring psalm pictures Yahweh in His role as Judge of all the earth. Its perspective is toward that day when He will act in justice for His people. This day will inevitably come, and we need to keep it in view since God waits to judge. The Judge of all the earth will do justly (Gen. 18:25).

PSALM 76

In this psalm of declarative praise, Asaph praised God for His power. He had destroyed the wicked and delivered the godly. Therefore the leaders of His people should follow Him faithfully. The psalm is in the form of a victory hymn, though it may not refer to one particular victory in Israel's history (cf. Pss. 46, 48, and 75). It emphasizes "the fear of the Lord."

> ". . . Ps. lxxv. prepares the way for the divine deed of judgment as imminent, which Ps. lxxvi. celebrates as having taken place."[771]

1. The manifestation of God's judgment 76:1-3

God made His great name known in Israel in a new way, by defeating an enemy of His people. Salem is Jerusalem (Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:1-2). Evidently Asaph composed this song after an enemy attacked Jerusalem unsuccessfully. Perhaps the miraculous defeat of the Assyrians in 701 B.C. is the background (2 Kings 18—19; Isa. 36—37).

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[770]Delitzsch, 2:339.
[771]Ibid., 2:343.

> "It is largely through the acts of God that we learn to know and understand Him."[772]

2. The justice of God's judgment 76:4-10

76:4-6 The description of God as resplendent pictures Him as radiating light. He illuminates and glorifies by His presence. He is also more majestic than the mountains of Israel that contained an abundance of wild game animals. God's defeat of Israel's enemies was so overwhelming that they appeared anesthetized (cf. Isa. 37:36).

76:7-10 No one is able to resist or oppose God when He decides to judge an enemy. Even the earth itself is quiet when He utters His judgments. Perhaps the psalmist referred here to the calm before a storm that represents God executing judgment. God's judgments cause the righteous to praise Him and the wicked to think twice before opposing Him.

The NIV translation of verse 10, "Your wrath against men brings you praise," was probably the writer's thought rather than the NASB's, "The wrath of man shall praise Thee." Both ideas are true, but the former appears to be in view here. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown clarified the second interpretation:

> "Man's wrath praises God by its futility before His power."[773]

Likewise, the last part of verse 10 probably refers to God's judgments restraining unbelievers, as in the NIV, rather than God girding Himself with wrath, as in the NASB. The emphasis is on God's providential control (cf. Acts 2:23).

3. The fearful character of God's judgments 76:11-12

Since God is such a fearful Judge, His people should be careful to pay the gifts they vow to give Him. Leaders should fear Him and submit to His authority rather than rebelling against Him.

An appreciation of God's power can and should produce submission and worship in those who can benefit or suffer from His judgment.

PSALM 77

Asaph described himself as tossing and turning on his bed, unable to sleep, in this individual lament psalm. He found that meditating on God's deliverance of His people in the Exodus brought him comfort. This led him to ask God to manifest His power for His people again.

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[772]Leupold, p. 549.

[773]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 435.

1. Asaph's problem 77:1-9

77:1-3 Some unspecified distress resulted in the psalmist's insomnia. In his restless condition he cried out to God, but he received no relief (cf. Heb. 5:7).

77:4-6 On other similar occasions Asaph said he received peace by meditating on God. However, in this one, that activity brought him no rest or joy. God was keeping him awake, but he found no satisfaction in praising God.

> "He counted the days of the past, instead of sheep."[774]

77:7-9 He wondered if God had abandoned him. He also questioned God's loyal love, six times. Evidently Asaph was awake because of a major problem he faced. In the darkness of night he could see no hope (cf. Hab. 3:2).

> "This is a clear example of the value of confessing one's doubts to God. As the broad misgivings of verse 7 are spelt out more precisely in verses 8f. their inner contradictions come to light, and with them the possibility of an answer."[775]

2. Asaph's solution 77:10-20

77:10-15 Verse 10 means the psalmist felt his sorrow stemmed from God withdrawing His powerful right hand from his life. In other words, God was not answering his prayers and coming to his aid as He had done in the past.

This remembrance led Asaph to concentrate on God's great acts for His people in the past.

> "The remembrance of the age-old acts of God is the basis for faith."[776]

God's way is holy (v. 13) in that it is different from the ways of men; it is perfectly correct. Yahweh is unique among the so-called gods of the nations. He had done mighty deeds and performed great miracles for Israel in the past. The greatest example of this is the Exodus, when the Lord redeemed the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Perhaps the writer described the Israelites this way to draw attention to their unworthiness.

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[774]Yates, p. 523.
[775]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 278.
[776]VanGemeren, p. 502.

77:16-18 These verses evidently describe the phenomena that accompanied the Exodus.

77:19-20 God used Moses and Aaron as shepherds to lead His people through the Red Sea to safety and liberty. However, it was God Himself who provided the deliverance.

Even though he felt distressed, the psalmist found comfort and encouragement during his sleepless nights by remembering God's powerful redemption of His people. This remembrance doubtless gave him hope for the future. God would again redeem His people from their enemies.

PSALM 78

This didactic psalm teaches present and future generations to learn from the past, and it stresses the grace of God. Didactic psalms offer wisdom to the reader; they are wisdom psalms. Some have called this a history psalm (cf. Pss. 105, 106, 114, 135, and 136).[777]

> "This could be sub-titled, in view of verses 12 and 68, *From Zoan to Zion*, for it reviews the turbulent adolescence of Israel from its time of slavery in Egypt to the reign of David. Like the parting song of Moses (Dt. 32) it is meant to search the conscience; it is history that must not repeat itself. At the same time, it is meant to warm the heart, for it tells of great miracles, of a grace that persists through all the judgments, and of the promise that displays its tokens in the chosen city and chosen king."[778]

This is the second longest psalm, Psalm 119 being the longest.

1. Introduction to the instruction 78:1-8

> "This introduction is quite similar in tone to the wisdom literature of Israel, especially the opening chapters of the book of Proverbs."[779]

Asaph appealed to his audience to listen to his instruction about God's acts, power, and wonders. He had received these teachings from former generations and was now passing them on to the next generation, as God had commanded (cf. Deut. 6:6-7). The purpose of this teaching was that the young would not forget the Lord but trust in Him and obey His Word (v. 7). This would enable them to avoid the mistakes of their ancestors who were stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful to Yahweh. Fathers need to communicate God's truth down through the generations.

> "'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it' (George Santayana)."[780]

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[777]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 230.
[778]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 280.
[779]Leupold, p. 563.
[780]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 232.

> "When v. 2 is quoted in the New Testament (Matt. 13:34, 35) it is rather by way of practical application than of fulfilment [*sic*] of prophecy."[781]

2. A notable defection 78:9-11

It is difficult to identify with certainty the occasion that these verses describe. Ephraim was not only the name of one tribe in Israel. It was also the name of the northern nation of Israel after the United Kingdom split in Rehoboam's day. Assuming the writer was a contemporary of David, Ephraim *the tribe* appears to be in view here. In any case, the writer used this incident as a bad example that his hearers should avoid.

> "Our forgetfulness of God's works is at the bottom [root] of our disobedience to his laws."[782]

3. The record of God's goodness and Israel's unfaithfulness 78:12-72

78:12-20 In his historical review, Asaph began with the plagues in Egypt (v. 12). He drew broad strokes on his verbal canvas, tracing God's faithfulness to the generation that left Egypt in the Exodus (vv. 12-16). Each verse in this section recalls stories in the books of Exodus and Numbers.

In spite of God's provisions the Israelites rebelled against Him. They put God to the test by demanding that He provide for them on their terms, rather than simply trusting and obeying Him (vv. 17-20).

78:21-33 In response to their murmuring, God sent fire that burned on the outskirts of the camp (Num. 11:1-3). This was a warning to the people. When they requested bread, He sent it to them abundantly (Exod. 16:14-31). Asaph called the manna angels' food (v. 25) because it came down from heaven, not that angels literally ate it.[783] When the people insisted on having meat, God sent abundant quail (Exod. 16:13; Num. 11:31). However, He also sent a plague that should have taught them to be content with His provisions (Num. 11:33).

> "Sometimes God's greatest judgment is to give us what we want."[784]

In spite of all these lessons, the generation of Israelites that left Egypt in the Exodus continued to disbelieve and disobey Yahweh. Consequently that generation perished in the wilderness (v. 33).

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[781]Leupold, p. 564.
[782]Henry, p. 661.
[783]Leupold, p. 567.
[784]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 232.

> "It is not want of evidence, but the want of right disposition that keeps men from believing God."[785]

78:34-39 When God killed some of that generation, others of them turned back to Him. However, they did not do so wholeheartedly or consistently. Still, God faithfully showed them compassion, forgave them, and did not destroy all of them at once. The contrast between Israel's unfaithfulness and Yahweh's loyal love stands out in this pericope.

> "This, too, is one of the deep enigmas of history, that the Almighty can be as compassionate as He is, man being so utterly undeserving of His mercy."[786]

78:40-55 The emphasis in this section is on how often the unfaithful generation rebelled against God despite earlier signs of His power and care. In the Pentateuch, there are 10 plagues on the Egyptians, and 10 subsequent occasions when Israel rebelled against the Lord, the last of which occurred at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13—14). Asaph recounted several of the plagues God brought on the Egyptians that should have taught His people to trust and obey Him. The order of the plagues in this passage, as in Psalm 105, is somewhat different from the record in Exodus, an indication of poetic license. In spite of repeated instances of murmuring and rebelling, God led that generation as a shepherd leads a flock of helpless sheep through the wilderness (vv. 52-53). He even brought them safely into the land He had promised to give them, and drove the Canaanites out before them (vv. 54-55).

78:56-64 After Joshua died, the people again tested God by failing to drive the inhabitants of the land out as He had commanded them to do. They turned from Him to worship false gods (vv. 56-58). Consequently God permitted the Philistines to capture the ark at Shiloh (cf. 1 Sam. 4:4-11). Many Israelites died on that occasion, including the priests Hophni and Phinehas (v. 64).

78:65-72 The writer pictured God waking up, though He was always awake and aware of His people's condition. He simply did not move to deliver them until David's time.

> "The Philistines never regained their position after their defeats by David."[787]

God rejected Joseph (i.e., the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh) and particularly Ephraim, the leader of the northern tribes, in the sense that He chose someone from Judah to lead Israel. He also chose Mt. Zion as the

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[785]William S. Plumer, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:336.
[786]Leupold, p. 568.
[787]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 436.

site of His sanctuary. David took it from the Jebusites. God's provision of David, the shepherd king, was the writer's climactic evidence of God's grace to Israel.

> "The one king whom the psalmists were interested in was David. For the most part the monarchy comes off very well in the Psalms because of the psalmists' great respect for David and his line. This reverence climaxes Psalm 78, where God's choice of David is a drastic change in history, a turn from the Rachel line, represented by Saul from the tribe of Benjamin, to the Leah line, represented by David from the tribe of Judah."[788]

Shepherding should always spring from personal integrity and wisdom (v. 72). A person of integrity is one who practices what he preaches. What a person *is* determines what he *does*. Relationship with God shapes character. Wisdom involves taking what God has revealed into consideration as we live.

> "Integrity and skill need each other, for no amount of ability can compensate for a sinful heart, and no amount of devotion to God can overcome lack of ability."[789]

In view of all His blessings, God's people should learn from history and remain faithful to the Lord who has been faithful to them (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13).[790]

> "If Israel's record is her shame, God's persistent goodness emerges as her hope (and ours) for the unfinished story."[791]

PSALM 79

In this national (communal) lament psalm: Asaph mourned Jerusalem's destruction and pleaded with God to have mercy on His people, despite their sins, for His name's sake (cf. Ps. 74). This Asaph may have lived after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. The writer's viewpoint seems to be that of the survivors left in Jerusalem, rather than that of the deportees, which Psalm 137 reflects.

> "Jeremiah is to be regarded in this instance as the example of the psalmist . . ."[792]

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[788]Bullock, p. 115.
[789]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 234.
[790]See Allen, *Lord of . . .*, pp. 57-70.
[791]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 286.
[792]Delitzsch, 2:378.

> "This psalm repeats the themes of Psalm 74, but seemingly with more venom. The situation is the same: the temple is destroyed, Israel is bereft, and the conquering enemy gloats. Yahweh cannot afford to be a disinterested party. Appeal is made to the partisan holiness of God which works beyond visible religiosity. Israel here presses Yahweh to decide what counts with him."[793]

1. A lament over Jerusalem's destruction 79:1-4

Enemies had invaded Israel, defiled the temple, destroyed Jerusalem, and left the bodies of Israel's soldiers unburied. To lie unburied, like an animal for which no one cared, was the final humiliation. Consequently, God's inheritance had become an object of derision for her neighbors.

> "The issue here is not God's justice in judging his people but the means used by the Lord [cf. Hab. 1—2]. The pagans must be held accountable for their desecration of the holy people and the holy temple so that they may be restored and God's people no longer experience defilement and disgrace (cf. Isa 35:8; 52:1)."[794]

2. A plea for deliverance 79:5-12

79:5-9 The psalmist wondered how long God would be angry with His people and allow them to suffer defeat and humiliation. Would He let His jealousy for Israel's affection burn as a fire forever? Asaph urged God to direct His rage at Israel's enemies who disregarded Him and devoured His habitation. He also asked God to forget the sins of the Israelites' ancestors and show compassion on His lowly people. He based his petition on God's glory as well as the Israelites' need.

> "An imprecation or curse on one's enemies is often found in the psalms of lament ([vv. 6-7; cf.] Ps. 137). Vengeance is left to the Lord, but such a call for vengeance is based in part on the covenant provisions God had established with Abraham. God had promised to curse those who cursed Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:2, 3)."[795]

> "As God desires the guilty to be punished, so does the psalmist. Must such a desire on man's part be wicked? Can it not rise to the level of God's thinking?"[796]

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[793]Brueggemann, p 71.
[794]VanGemeren, p. 519.
[795]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 961.
[796]Leupold, p. 576.

79:10-12 Asaph continued to appeal for physical salvation on the basis of God's honor. He asked for vengeance against the enemy that had slain many of God's elect. He urged God to answer the prayers of the prisoners who appealed to Him for deliverance. He wanted a thorough repayment of the reproach the enemy had heaped on Yahweh's name because the Lord had not given Israel victory. "Sevenfold" here means *complete* retaliation.

> "Such a prayer may trouble us, and we would not think to pray that way very often, but it is thoroughly biblical. The speaker is *honest enough* to know that yearning, and the speaker is *faithful enough* to submit the yearning to "God."[797]

3. A promise of future praise 79:13

The psalmist promised that God's people would reward Him with unceasing praise if He would give them deliverance. He viewed the people as God's helpless sheep. He said their praise for this salvation would be public from then on.

> "The cross of Jesus Christ is for us today the only evidence we need that God loves us (Rom. 5:8)."[798]

It is appropriate to petition God for vengeance when enemies defeat God's people and consequently make Him look bad. He will deliver eventually because He has promised to preserve His own. However, discipline may continue a long time if sin has been gross.

PSALM 80

Again Asaph called on God to deliver and restore Israel. The nation was downtrodden and needed Yahweh's salvation. This community lament psalm is unusual because of the figure the psalmist used to describe Israel. He pictured the nation as a grape vine (vv. 8-16). The fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. may be in view.[799] Psalms 77 and 81 also lament the destruction of Samaria, the former capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

> "Except for the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, the psalms have more to say about tears than any other book in the Bible."[800]

1. An appeal to Israel's Shepherd 80:1-3

80:1-2 The psalmist appealed to Yahweh as the Shepherd of His people Israel (cf. 23:1; 28:9); "shepherd" was a common title of the king in the ancient Near East (cf. 78:71). However, this is the only place in Scripture where the title "Shepherd of Israel" appears, though the figure occurs frequently. Asaph

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[797]Brueggemann, p. 72.
[798]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 235.
[799]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 288.
[800]Armerding, p. 116.

also referred to the Lord as sitting enthroned above the cherubim in the temple (cf. 99:1). Ephraim was the leading tribe in the north and Benjamin was the leader in the south. Manasseh was the leader in Transjordan in the east. Another explanation for the mention of these three tribes follows:

> "I think the answer can be found in Numbers 2:17-24. If you read this portion of Scripture, you will find that in placing the tribes around the tabernacle, these three tribes were immediately behind the ark in the order of the march. It was the ark that led the children of Israel through the wilderness. Just as God had led them once before, the cry comes to lead them again."[801]

80:3 This cry for restoration is a refrain that the writer also used in verses 7 and 19. The figure of the face shining on another suggests favorable inclination toward that one (cf. 4:6; Num. 6:25).

2. A lament due to divine discipline 80:4-7

The title "Lord of hosts" suggests God's ability to deliver His people whenever He chooses to do so. The Lord's silence in response to the people's cries for deliverance implied that He was angry with them. As a shepherd, God had fed His people, but He had given them tears to eat and to drink rather than nourishing food. Their condition led their neighbor nations to mock them.

> "National holiness would secure national happiness."[802]

This pericope also closes with the refrain (cf. vv. 3, 19).

3. Israel's downtrodden condition 80:8-14a

The psalmist now changed his figure and pictured Israel as a vine that God had transplanted from Egypt to Canaan (cf. Ezek. 17:6-10; Hos. 10:1). He cleared the land of Canaan for her by driving the native people out. Israel had taken root in the Promised Land and, as a vine, had spread out in all directions. It had become strong and luxuriant under God's blessing. However, God had broken down the wall that protected it, and its neighbors were now consuming it (cf. Isa. 5:5). This section closes with a refrain similar to, yet slightly different from, the one in verses 3, 7, and 19.

The figure of a vine to represent Israel is very old. It probably originated in Jacob's blessing of Joseph (Gen. 49:22). The prophets used it often (cf. Isa. 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15; 19:10-14; Hos. 10:1). The Lord Jesus also used it to describe Himself, the ideal Israel (John 15:1, 5). It is an appropriate figure because a vine is a source of blessing to others (cf. Gen. 12:3).

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[801]McGee, 2:801.
[802]Henry, p. 665.

> ". . . as the vine is a choice plant that requires much attention, so Israel is choice among the nations and is continually in need of God's providential care if she is to survive and bear fruit."[803]

4. An appeal for deliverance 80:14b-19

80:14b-16 Asaph called on God to give attention to the vine's condition. Verse 15 looks at the vine as root and branch with the parts representing the whole (a merism). The term "son" is a literal rendering of the Hebrew word that metaphorically means branch. It describes the new growth on the vine, the new generation of Israelites. Matthew applied this reference to Jesus Christ (Matt. 2:15; cf. Exod. 4:22; Hosea 11:1). The psalmist saw the vine of Israel burned and cut down by its enemies whom God had allowed to damage it.

80:17-19 Verse 17 refers again to the present generation of Israelites as "God's son." There is a play on words since Benjamin (v. 2) means "son of my right hand." The psalmist called on God to support with His strong hand the son of His right hand (i.e., the nation God used as His powerful right hand). He promised that the Israelites would follow God faithfully and call on Him for their needs if He would revive His vine. The psalm ends with a repetition of the refrain.

Various names of God heighten the appeal of the psalmist throughout this psalm: "Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel" (v. 1); "O God (Elohim)" (v. 3); "O LORD (Yahweh) God of hosts (Elohim Sabaoth)" (v. 4; "O God of hosts (Elohim Sabaoth)" (v. 7); "O God of hosts (Elohim Sabaoth)" (v. 14; and "O LORD (Yahweh) God of hosts (Elohim Sabaoth)" (v. 19).

God's people are similar to a grapevine, in that God has called them to be a blessing to others. However, if we who are God's people do not walk in trust and obedience, God may prune us back and limit our fruitfulness, with a view to increasing our ultimate productivity. The vine experiences blessing itself as it becomes a blessing to others. If we depart from God, we need to call on Him to restore our fruitfulness and commit ourselves to Him again. The figure of Israel as an olive tree in Romans 11:17-24 teaches similar lessons.

PSALM 81

This psalm of praise, with admonition, is a joyful celebration of God's deliverance of His people. The Israelites probably sang it at the Feast of Tabernacles, since it is a review of God's faithfulness and focuses especially on the wilderness wanderings.[804] The Feast of Tabernacles reminded the Israelites of this period in their history.

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[803]Leupold, p. 582.
[804]A. Ross, p. 853.

> "Psalm 81 is a close companion to Psalm 50. If anything, the lines of the argument are even clearer here."[805]

1. A call to the celebration 81:1-5

81:1-2 Asaph summoned the Israelites to sing joyfully to God their strength with musical accompaniment.

81:3-5 He called on them to participate in a festival. The Israelites blew trumpets and offered sacrifices at the beginning of each new month, and each month began with the new moon (Num. 10:10; 28:11-15). The Feast of Tabernacles was a joyous occasion that began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (September-October) when the moon was full (Lev. 23:34). God required the Israelites to observe these occasions. He began to specify these national festivals when He gave the Israelites instructions concerning the Passover (Exod. 12). Back then, this instruction was completely new to the nation, as though it was a voice they had never heard before.

2. A report of God's communication 81:6-16

81:6-7 God had told His people that He was freeing them from their bondage as slaves in Egypt. They had cried out to Him in their distress, and He answered them from heaven. The "place of thunder" may refer to the cloudy pillar by which God led Israel or to the cloud out of which He spoke on Mt. Sinai.[806]

> "To judge by this model, it is good to recall God's answers with some sharpness of detail."[807]

Then He tested them at the waters of Meribah to see if they would trust Him (Exod. 17:1-7), and in order to train them to do so.

Commenting on "Selah," Spurgeon wrote:

> "Hurried reading is of little benefit; to sit down a while and meditate is very profitable."[808]

81:8-10 These verses summarize God's revelation to Israel at Mt. Sinai, where He gave them the Mosaic Law. Opening the mouth signifies trusting in the Lord to provide, and filling it has in view the many blessings that God

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[805]Brueggemann, p. 92.
[806]Leupold, p. 588.
[807]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 294.
[808]Spurgeon, 1:350.

wanted to bestow on His people. Someone has suggested that "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it" is the dentist's motto.

81:11-12 Israel had not kept God's law, however. Consequently He let His people go their own way (cf. Rom. 1) so they would learn to return to Him.

> "All the wickedness of the wicked world is owing to the wilfulness [*sic*] of the wicked will."[809]

> "What a sad difference is there in the same person as to what he is when the Spirit leads him and as to what he is when the Spirit leaves him!"[810]

81:13-16 Asaph continued to relate God's account of Israel's history since the Exodus. If only His people would obey Him, He would subdue their enemies and adversaries. He would also bless them abundantly with prosperity (cf. Deut. 32:13-14).

> "None are found in the ways of God but those who have hearkened to His words."[811]

The last verse addresses Israel in the second person and constituted a call to the present generation of readers to follow God faithfully.

It is important to review God's past grace periodically and regularly, because recalling His faithfulness will challenge His people to remain faithful to Him. This is one of the values of attending church services regularly.

PSALM 82

In this wisdom psalm, Asaph warned Israel's judges to judge justly.[812] This is a psalm for judges especially.

> "As in Ps. lxxxi., so also in this Psalm . . . God is introduced as speaking after the manner of the prophets."[813]

1. The Judge of the judges 82:1

The writer envisioned God sitting as Judge over a gathering of human judges, the judges that lived in every town in Israel. The human judges in Israel served as God's judicial representatives among His people. The Hebrew word translated "rulers" (NASB) or

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[809]Henry, p. 666.
[810]Thomas Jacombe, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:351.
[811]Spurgeon, 1:352.
[812]For further discussion, see Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," pp. 275-76.
[813]Delitzsch, 2:400-1.

"gods" (NIV) is *elohim* (lit. strong ones). This word usually describes God in the Old Testament, but sometimes it refers to the strong ones in Israel, namely, the human rulers or authorities (cf. 45:6; Exod. 21:6; 22:8-9). It does not refer to angels here (cf. Eph. 6:12) as the Syriac translators thought. This is clear from the context. It does not refer to the gods of the heathen either (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20).

2. The indictment of the judges 82:2-7

82:2-5 Israel's judges were perverting justice. God called them to practice righteous justice. Chisholm believed the king is in view in verses 2-7 rather than God.[814] The essence of proper judging was making sure that the defenseless got justice. Israel's judges, who should have been the wisest of the people, were ignorant of the importance of fair judgment and the consequences of unfair judging. Consequently law and order, the foundations of life on earth, were unstable.

82:6-7 God warned the unjust judges that they themselves would suffer judgment for their injustice. God had appointed them as "gods" (i.e., individuals with power by God's authority). He had made them His sons in the sense of His representatives on earth (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14). Nevertheless because they had not behaved as God, who judges justly, they would die as mere men without honor as God's sons. They would die as all the other Israelites would. "Men" and "rulers" (v. 7) is a merism that signifies all mortals.[815]

Jesus' accusers charged Him with blasphemy when He claimed to be the Son of God (John 10:33). In replying to their accusation, Jesus quoted verse 6 to remind them that God called Israel's judges His sons. His point was that it was not inappropriate for Him to call Himself the Son of God. Jesus, of course, is God's ultimate Judge of all humankind, so it was especially appropriate for Him to call Himself the Son of God.

3. The call for divine judgment 82:8

Asaph concluded this psalm by calling for God to judge the whole earth, not just Israel. The world, then as now, needed righteous judgment that only God, the righteous Judge, can provide. God's provision of Jesus Christ, to whom He has committed all judgment (John 5:22-30), was His answer to this petition.

The need for righteous judgment and the cry for it will continue until Jesus Christ reigns and judges. He will judge at various times in the future. For the Christian, this will take place at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). For Tribulation saints and Old Testament saints it will be just after He returns at His second coming (Rev. 20:4, 6; Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). For all unbelievers it will be at the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

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[814]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 266, n. 17.
[815]Dahood, 2:270.

PSALM 83

Asaph prayed that God would destroy the enemies that threatened to overwhelm Israel, as He had done in the past. This is a psalm of national (communal) lament that gives particular attention to the wicked, and it contains imprecation (cf. Pss. 46, 47, 48, and 76). It is the last of the psalms attributed to Asaph (Pss. 50, 73—83). Delitzsch surmised its time of origin as being when neighbor enemies were besieging King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah (2 Chron. 20).[816]

> "The occasion cannot be identified with certainty, because at no period in Israel's history has such a confederation of nations existed. The psalm may refer to an event unrecorded elsewhere in Israel's history, or it may list tribal groups which merely gave moral support in a time of crisis."[817]

1. The danger of destruction 83:1-8

The psalmist cried out to God to act for His people by expressing the alternatives negatively (v. 1).

> "Is the Lord silent? Then be not thou silent; but cry unto Him till He breaks the silence."[818]

The writer described how Israel's enemies had conspired to oppose God by destroying His people. Asaph used a chiastic structure to connect God's interests with those of His nation (vv. 2-5). He then listed Israel's enemies (vv. 6-8). The Hagarites (Hagrites, NIV), or descendants of Hagar, were the Ishmaelites. "Gebal" is another name for Byblos, a strong town in Lebanon, or this may be the "Gebel" that lay in the mountainous region south of the Dead Sea.[819] . Lot's children were the Moabites and the Ammonites. These nations virtually surrounded Israel. If the background of this psalm is 2 Chronicles 20, the chronicler omitted several of these enemies.

2. The desire for deliverance 83:9-18

83:9-12 Asaph prayed that God would deliver His people, as He had in the past during the Judges Period. God had destroyed the Midianites with Gideon's small band of soldiers (Judg. 7—8). Oreb and Zeeb were the Midianite commanders (Judg. 7:25), and Zebah and Zalmunna were the Midianite kings (Judg. 8:5-6, 12, 18). God defeated the Canaanite coalition near the Kishon River, and the town of Endor, through Deborah and Barak (Judg. 4). Sisera was the Canaanite commander and Jabin the Canaanite king. These were both powerful victories that ended the domination of these enemies of Israel.

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[816]Delitzsch, 2:406.
[817]Yates, p. 525.
[818]Starke, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:355.
[819]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 965.

Commenting on "who became as dung for the ground" (v. 10), K. Arvine wrote:

> "In the year 1830, it is estimated that more than a million bushels of 'human and inhuman bones' were imported from the continent of Europe into the port of Hull. The neighborhood of Leipsic, Austerlitz, Waterloo, etc., where the principal battles were fought some fifteen or twenty years before, were swept alike of the bones of the hero and the horse which he rode. Thus collected from every quarter, they were shipped to Hull, and thence forwarded to the Yorkshire bone-grinders, who, by steam-engines and powerful machinery, reduced them to a granulary state. In this condition they were sent chiefly to Doncaster, one of the largest agricultural markets of the country, and were there sold to the farmers to manure their lands. The oily substance gradually evolving as the bone calcines, makes better manure than almost any other substance—particularly human bones."[820]

83:13-16 The writer wanted God to drive Israel's present enemies away as He had driven the Midianites in Gideon's day. His reference to the mountains may recall that Barak gathered his army on Mt. Tabor at the east end of the Jezreel Valley. He saw them blowing away as tumbleweeds, unstable and driven by the divine wind of God's judgment.

> "What disturbs men in our day is the fact that the terminology used is so strong. This is thought of as being indicative of a vindictive and utterly unrelenting spirit, a conclusion that is not necessarily valid. For the ultimate purpose that the writer has in mind is clearly set forth in v. 16b.: 'that they may seek Thy name, O Lord.'"[821]

83:17-18 Asaph could legitimately ask God to shame Israel's enemies in view of God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). However, his ultimate concern was God's reputation (v. 18).

> "Is it not correct to assume that also God desires to bring about the defeat of Israel's foes? Why not pray intensely for that which you well know God also wants?"[822]

Prayers based on God's reputation, His promises, and His past faithfulness are petitions that God will answer. However, He reserves the right to decide the correct time to act.

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[820]K. Arvine, quoted in Spurgeon, 1:356. Paragraph divisions omitted.
[821]Leupold, p. 601.
[822]Ibid., p. 602.

PSALM 84

This psalm, like Psalms 42 and 43, expresses the writer's desire for the Lord's sanctuary, so it is a psalm of Zion. Many interpreters believe that it is one of the pilgrim or ascent psalms that the Israelites sang as they traveled to the sanctuary to worship God (cf. Pss. 120—134). In it, the unknown writer declared the blessed condition of those who go to the temple to pray to Yahweh. It contains an unusually large number of compound names of God. The sons of Korah were those who arranged and or sang this psalm in Israel's public worship.

1. Longing for the Lord's presence 84:1-4

84:1-2 The dwelling places of the Lord of armies were His temple and its courtyards. This is where God abode in a localized sense during this period of Israel's history. He promised to meet with His people in a special way there, mainly through the mediation of the Levitical priests. The ordinary Israelite could not enter the temple building proper but could worship God in its courtyards.

84:3-4 The psalmist considered the birds that made their nests in the temple and its courts as specially privileged since they were always near God and protected by Him. The priests also had a great advantage because they worked in the rooms surrounding the temple. They could praise God always because they were at the center of His worship. The writer may have been referring to himself when he wrote about "the bird."[823]

> "He would rather live in a bird's nest nigh God's altars than in a palace at a distance from them."[824]

> "Three times he uses the word 'Blessed', or 'Happy': once wistfully (4), once resolutely (5), once in deep contentment (12). These can guide us in exploring the movement of the psalm."[825]

2. Travelling to the temple 84:5-7

The person who sets his or her heart on finding strength in the Lord experiences great blessing. Such a person looked forward to travelling to Mt. Zion to worship Him there. The word "baca" means "balsam trees." The Valley of the Balsam Trees was evidently an arid region that the writer used as an example of a spiritually dry state. The pilgrim whose heart anticipated temple worship joyfully found spiritual refreshment in situations others found parched. His spiritual experience was similar to the coming of the early spring rains on that valley's waterless ground. Such a person becomes stronger and stronger spiritually as he or she draws closer and closer to God.

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[823]Delitzsch, 3:4.
[824]Henry, p. 669.
[825]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 303.

3. Praying on the way 84:8-12

84:8-9 The pilgrim addressed God in prayer as he traveled. He interceded for the king, who was as a shield for the people, as well as the Lord's anointed vice regent.

84:10-12 He valued standing and serving in the temple because there he could experience intimacy with God. He could occupy himself with Yahweh and His worship intensively. That is all people usually did in the temple. Consequently, wickedness was less prevalent there than anywhere else.

> "God's worst is better than the devil's best."[826]

God's beneficent influence is sun-like, providing light and warmth on those below. (This is probably the only reference to God as the "sun" in Scripture, though some expositors believe that the reference to the "sun of righteousness" [Mal. 4:2] designates the Messiah.) God also protects those close to Him. He gives unmerited favor and divine enablement (grace) as well as honor (glory). He sends only good things to the lives of those who walk harmoniously with His will. Therefore the person who trusts Him experiences His blessing.

> "The essence of godliness is in submissiveness to the Great King, who will grant his blessings to those who find their refuge in him . . ."[827]

This psalm expresses the joy that comes through intimacy with God. In Israel, this took place in proximity to Yahweh's localized presence in the temple. Today, it takes place as the believer trusts and obeys God as He has revealed His will in Scripture. There are degrees of intimacy. This psalm visualizes getting closer to God by approaching the temple. Some believers choose to live close to God, and others prefer to live further away from Him. Of course, unbelievers have no personal relationship with Him.

PSALM 85

An anonymous psalmist thanked God for forgiving and restoring His sinning people. He prayed that God would remove His wrath from them and expressed confidence in the nation's future. Perhaps the genre is a national lament.

1. Thanksgiving and petition 85:1-7

85:1-3 The writer began by thanking God for delivering His people. The reference to restoration from captivity (v. 1) suggests that this psalm may date to the return from Babylonian exile. However, the psalmist may have

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[826]Spurgeon, 2:8.

[827]VanGemeren, p. 546.

been referring to a more modest captivity, perhaps at the hand of a neighbor nation. In any case, he viewed Israel's former enslavement to be the result of her sin and thanked God for pardoning that.

> "In ver. 3*a* [*sic* 2a] sin is conceived as a burden of the conscience; in ver. 3*b* [*sic* 2b] as a blood-stain."[828]

> ". . . God is pacified if we are purified."[829]

85:4-7 Even though Israel was free, she still needed spiritual restoration and revival. Because of this condition the psalmist petitioned God to put away all of His anger against His sinning people (cf. Isa. 28:21; Ezek. 18:32). They needed his loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) and His deliverance. They would rejoice when He provided these benefits fully.

> "The psalms often reflect on anger. This preoccupation may seem abnormal to us, but anger is a theological concern. The psalmists invite us to deal with anger rather than skirt negative human emotions. Hence the psalms invite us to pray through anger and thus to be cleansed of evil emotions and to be filled with hope in the full inauguration of God's kingdom."[830]

2. Trust and confidence 85:8-13

85:8-9 As the psalmist waited for God to respond, he was confident the Lord would send peace (Heb. *shalom*, the fullness of divine blessing). It was important, however, that in the meantime His people not return to their former sins.

> "It is good to hear the word of God, but His people must also govern their lives thereby."[831]

The basis of the writer's confidence was the Lord's promised deliverance of those who fear Him.

> "When the tale [total number] of bricks is doubled, then Moses comes. When trouble is nigh salvation is nigh, for God is a very present help in time of trouble to all who are his."[832]

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[828]Delitzsch, 3:10.
[829]Henry, p. 670.
[830]VanGemeren, p. 551. This writer provided an extended discussion of anger in the psalms on pages 551-56.
[831]C. B. Moll, "The Psalms," p. 468, in vol. 5 of Lange's *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*.
[832]Henry, p. 670.

The idea behind glory dwelling in the land is that God would again manifest His presence there by blessing the Israelites.

85:10-13 Lovingkindness (i.e., loyal love) and righteousness are what God provides. Truth and peace are what the objects of His blessing experience. They unite when God's people return to Him and He responds with blessing. Productive harvests are a blessing God promised His people if they walked in obedience to the Mosaic covenant (Deut. 28:1-14; 30:1-16).

This psalm is full of very important terms: righteousness, peace, loyal love, truth, fear, glory, and salvation—to name a few. When people get right with God in the fundamental areas of life, His choicest blessings are not far behind. However, we have to wait for Him to provide blessing after repentance, as God patiently waits before bringing judgment for sin.

PSALM 86

On the basis of God's goodness, David asked the Lord to demonstrate His strength by opposing the proud who exalted themselves against him. This is the only psalm ascribed to David in Book 3 (Pss. 73—89). It is an individual lament psalm that speaks out of a situation of disorientation. It is a virtual mosaic of other psalms, and its quotations are almost verbatim.

"'God does not give originality to every devout man.'"[833]

VERSES IN PSALM 86	SIMILAR VERSES ELSEWHERE
1	Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 35:10; 37:14; and 40:17
2	Ps. 25:20
3	Ps. 57:1-2
5	Exod. 34:6
6	Ps. 28:2
7	Ps. 17:6; and 77:2
8	Ps. 35:10; 71:19; 89:6; Exod. 8:10; 9:14; and 15:11
10	Ps. 72:18; and 77:13-14
11	Ps. 27:11
12-13	Ps. 50:15, 23; 56:13; and 57:9-10
16	Ps. 25:16

"Would David have used secondhand material that had previously been written by him in other psalms? Why not? Why should that be impossible or preposterous? Even musicians occasionally write scores by using

[833]Alexander Maclaren, quoted in Leupold, p. 615.

> phrases and combinations that they have keen known to use in other works of theirs. Even Christ Himself frequently quoted or re-employed materials that had been used by Him in other connections."[834]

1. A request for protection 86:1-10

David appealed to God for preservation as a dependent, needy believer who sought to walk in trust and obedience with his God. He viewed God's granting of his request as based on His grace, not something God owed him. He looked forward to rejoicing when the answer came.

> "Hope begins with submitting oneself fully to the protection of God."[835]

David's attitude of humility comes through in the terms he used in addressing God in this psalm. Seven times he called God his Lord or Master (Heb. *adonay*), a title that stresses His sovereignty over David (vv. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, and 15). This Hebrew title appears as "Lord" in most English translations whereas "Yahweh" translates as "LORD."

The psalmist was sure God would respond to his prayer (v. 7). The basis of his confidence was the fact that Yahweh is the only God and that He does great things.

2. A request for greater understanding 86:11-13

David's request to know God's way more fully is typical of the desire of any sincere believer who wants to walk humbly and obediently with his God (cf. Exod. 33:13; Phil. 3:8-10).

> "There are many Christian workers today who are not in open sin, but they sure are lazy. They kill time doing this and that, and they are busy here and there, but the main business remains undone. They are not guarding the stuff, and they are not alert in serving the Lord. How we need to pray, 'Unite my heart to fear thy name.'"[836]

The motive behind this request was God's glory (v. 12). The psalmist appreciated God's present loyal love for him and His spiritual salvation.

3. A request for strength 86:14-17

David's actual complaint appears in verse 14. Rebels against God and His anointed king were harassing David. He contrasted their characters with God's. Specifically, David needed strength of all kinds to deal with these opponents. The sign he requested would have been some physical, tangible proof that God was supporting His servant. God's deliverance would constitute such a sign.

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[834]Ibid., p. 616.
[835]VanGemeren, p. 557.
[836]McGee, 2:810.

This is a prayer for help from a very mature believer. It is especially helpful to read when we feel like we are barely hanging on. David's understanding of God resulted in his taking a humble place of submission to His Lord. His confidence during his trial was strong because he knew how great and loyal God is. Rather than exhibiting panic in the face of danger, David demonstrated peace, confidence, and even joy.

PSALM 87

This psalm speaks about the glories of Zion, where the temple stood. It develops more fully the thought of the universal worship of the Lord stated in 86:9. The presence of God reigning among His people at this site constituted a blessing to them and to all other nations. John Newton's great hymn "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" is a commentary on this psalm.

> "The language of the poet is anything but flowing. He moulds his brief sentences in such a daring and abrupt manner that only a few characteristic features are thrown into bold relief while their inner connection is left in the dark."[837]

1. The importance of Zion 87:1-3

God chose Zion as the place where He would meet with His people in a special sense. He met with them by residing in the temple and having fellowship with them through His priests. Among all the mountains near Mt. Zion, this one was His choice for habitation, and as such was the foundation of His dealings with the Israelites. There were some beautiful hilly sites in Israel, but this one was the best because God chose to make it His abode. Other ancient Near Eastern nations believed their gods lived in beautiful high mountains such as Mt. Carmel and Mt. Hermon. Zion was the city of God because God chose to make His earthly residence there in the temple.

2. The population of Zion 87:4-6

The English translators have rendered verse 4 as a quotation. Who is saying these words? Evidently these are the words of those who speak glorious things concerning Zion (v. 3). What are they saying? They appear to be ascribing equal glory to Zion with the other great nations mentioned. Rahab (lit. pride, tumult) is a nickname for Egypt (cf. 89:10; Isa. 30:7; 51:9). It may have been the name of a powerful demonic force thought to be behind Egypt.[838] (The name "Rahab" in Joshua 2:3-11 is spelled differently in Hebrew.) The statement, "This one was born there," means, "I was born there." In other words, people would take pride in having been born in Zion as they did in having been born in one of these other great nations. Another view is that people would boast of their connection with Zion like people take pride in being born in their native place.[839]

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[837]Weiser, pp. 579-80.
[838]A. Ross, p. 857.
[839]Leupold, p. 625.

Two kinds of people would trace their ancestry back to Zion in the future (v. 5). Verse 5 apparently distinguishes those physically born there and those with spiritual roots there. The latter group would include all the redeemed, since Zion was the home of their heavenly Father (to use New Testament terminology). This redeemed group would include both Israelites and Gentiles.

When God judges all people, He will note that every redeemed person stemmed from Zion spiritually (v. 6). Zion was not only the capital of the Israelites but it is also the home of many others who trust in Israel's God (cf. Gal. 4:26-27; Heb. 12:22-24; Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10). In this way the psalmist showed the surpassing glory of Zion.

> "These people who had come to faith in Yahweh as proselytes had been born in a variety of places, among ethnic peoples, across the known world. But in their coming to faith in the living God, He, Yahweh, declared them born 'again.' They were 'born there,' that is, in Zion. Here, then, is one passage in Hebrew Scripture to which Jesus may have alluded when He expected that Nicodemus knew about being 'born again' (John 3:3, 10)."[840]

3. The joy in Zion 87:7

Zion will be a place of joy and singing in the future. All those who rejoice will trace the source of their joy to this city because it is the habitation of God. All joy comes ultimately from God, and all joy will come from Zion because God dwells in Zion.

This psalm points prophetically to the time when all the redeemed will gather to Zion. This will take place in the Millennium when Jesus Christ makes it the world capital of His earthly kingdom. Then all nations will stream to it as the center of the earth (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1). However, one day a new Jerusalem will replace the present city (Rev. 21). It will be the home of the Lamb and His faithful followers throughout eternity.

PSALM 88

This is one of the saddest of the psalms. One writer called it the "darkest corner of the Psalter."[841] Another titled it the "plaintive prayer of a patient sufferer like Job."[842] It is as gloomy as Psalm 87 is cheerful. It is an individual lament, but it never resolves into statements of trust and praise that mark this kind of psalm. It relates the prayer of a person who suffered intensely over a long time yet continued to trust in the Lord.

> "Psalm 88 is an embarrassment to conventional faith. It is the cry of a believer (who sounds like Job) whose life has gone awry, who desperately seeks contact with Yahweh, but who is unable to evoke a response from God. This is indeed 'the dark night of the soul,' when the troubled person must be and must stay in the darkness of abandonment, utterly alone."[843]

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[840]Ronald B. Allen, "Psalm 87, A Song Rarely Sung," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:610 (April-June 1996):139-40. Cf. Henry, p. 672.

[841]R. E. O. White, "Psalms," in the *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, p. 388.

[842]Delitzsch, 3:21.

[843]Brueggemann, p. 78.

Heman was a wise man who was a singer in David's service and a contemporary of Asaph and Ethan (1 Kings 4:31; 1 Chron. 15:19; 16:41-42; 25:1, 6). The sons of Korah arranged and or sang this psalm.

> "The emotions and suffering expressed by the psalmist are close in spirit to those of Psalm 22. In the tradition of the church, these psalms were linked together in the Scripture reading on Good Friday."[844]

1. The sufferer's affliction 88:1-9a

88:1-2 These verses are an introduction to what follows. The psalmist announced that he prayed unceasingly to the God from whom he hoped to receive deliverance. He pleaded with God to entertain his request and act upon it by saving him (cf. Job 3:23; 10:21-22; 13:27; 19:13-19; 20:10).

> "In the midst of tribulation, faith holds on to the God who has promised to deliver."[845]

88:3-9a Evidently the psalmist's suffering had resulted in his friends separating from him. God, too, had apparently abandoned him. Heman felt very close to death. He viewed his condition as coming directly from God. He felt alone and miserable.

> "One of the first steps toward revival is to be completely transparent when we pray and not tell the Lord anything that is not true or that we do not really mean."[846]

> "Reader, never ridicule the nervous and hypochondriacal, their pain is real; though much of the evil lies in the imagination, it is not imaginary."[847]

2. The sufferer's prayer 88:9b-12

Even though Heman had prayed for relief and restoration every day, God had not delivered him. He asked for mercy by posing rhetorical questions, all of which expect a negative answer. If the writer died, he could no longer praise the Lord in the land of the living (cf. Job 10:20-22). What he said does not contradict revelation concerning conscious existence after death. It simply reflects Heman's desire to praise God this side of the grave.[848]

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[844]VanGemeren, p. 564.
[845]Ibid., p. 565.
[846]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 250.
[847]Spurgeon, 2:17.
[848]See the discussion of Sheol, the grave, and death in the Psalms in VanGemeren, pp. 569-73.

3. The sufferer's faith 88:13-18

For the third time, Heman cried out to God for help (cf. vv. 1-2, 13). He asked for an explanation of his suffering (v. 14). Then he described his sufferings further (vv. 15-18). Still, he kept turning to God in prayer, waiting for an answer and some relief.

> "With *darkness* as its final word, what is the role of this psalm in Scripture? For the beginning of an answer we may note, first, its witness to the possibility of unrelieved suffering as a believer's earthly lot. The happy ending of most psalms of this kind is seen to be a bonus, not a due; its withholding is not a proof of either God's displeasure or His defeat. Secondly, the psalm adds its voice to the 'groaning in travail' which forbids us to accept the present order as final. It is a sharp reminder that 'we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:22f.). Thirdly, this author, like Job, does not give up. He completes his prayer, still in the dark and totally unrewarded. The taunt, 'Does Job fear God for naught?', is answered yet again. Fourthly, the author's name allows us, with hindsight, to see that his rejection was only apparent (see the opening comments on the psalm). His existence was no mistake; there was a divine plan bigger than he knew, and a place in it reserved most carefully for him."[849]

When God does not relieve affliction, the godly continue to pray, trusting that He will eventually grant their petition if this is His will.

PSALM 89

The writer of this royal psalm was Ethan, and this is his only psalm. He was another wise Levitical musician in David's service (1 Kings 4:31; 1 Chron. 15:17-18). The occasion of writing is unclear. Judging from the content of the psalm it appears to have been a time after David had suffered defeat and some severe affliction. It begins with praise, but it ends with lament, and it is didactic (Heb. *maskil*).

Ethan interceded for the king, claiming the Davidic Covenant promises (cf. 2 Sam. 7:5-16; 1 Chron. 17). Why was God afflicting David so severely since He had promised to bless him so greatly? Ethan called on God to honor the Davidic Covenant and send the king relief.

1. God's character and covenant with David 89:1-4

Ethan announced two major themes of this psalm in verses 1 and 2. These are the loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) and faithfulness of Yahweh. References to God's loyal love occur in verses 1, 2, 14, 24, 28, 33, and 49. He referred to God's faithfulness in verses 1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33, and 49. He proceeded to appeal to God to honor His promises to David on the basis of these qualities.

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[849]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 319. See also Brueggemann, pp. 80-81.

The psalmist restated the Davidic Covenant promises in verses 3 and 4. Interestingly the word "covenant" does not occur in either 2 Samuel 7 or 1 Chronicles 17, the two places in the Old Testament where God recorded the giving of that covenant. Three key terms used in these two verses also recur throughout this psalm. These are "covenant" (vv. 3, 28, 34, and 39), "David My servant" (vv. 3, 20, and 50 where it is just "My servant"), and "throne" (vv. 4, 14, 29, 36, and 44). Obviously the Davidic Covenant was central in the writer's thinking in this psalm.

> "The background for the Davidic Covenant and the sonship imagery associated with it is the ancient Near Eastern covenant of grant, whereby a king would reward a faithful servant by elevating him to the position of 'sonship' and granting him special gifts, usually related to land and dynasty. Unlike the conditional suzerain-vassal treaty, after which the Mosaic Covenant was patterned, the covenant of grant was an unconditional, promissory grant which could not be taken away from the recipient.[850] Consequently God's covenantal promises to David were guaranteed by an irrevocable divine oath (89:3, 28-37; 132:11)."[851]

2. The character of God 89:5-18

89:5-14 These verses exalt the uniqueness of Yahweh. Ethan praised Him for His attributes (vv. 5-8) and works (vv. 9-14). Outstanding among His attributes are His faithfulness and His might. The "holy ones" (v. 7) are the angels. The works he cited were subduing the flood, defeating Egypt (Rahab, cf. 87:4) at the Exodus, and creating the heavens and earth. He personified Mt. Tabor, on the west side of the Jordan River, and Mt. Hermon, on the east side, rejoicing in God's great power.

> "*Tabor and Hermon* are possibly paired as works of God which praise Him in different ways: the lowly Tabor (1,900 ft.) by its history, as the scene of Deborah's victory, and the giant Hermon (9,000 ft.) by its physical majesty. The Creator's hand is both strong and high (13)."[852]

89:15-18 Ethan went on to speak of the blessings the Israelites who acknowledged and walked with God experienced. They had joy, exaltation, glory, strength, and security. "The joyful sound" (v. 15, NASB) refers to the shout of joy God's people uttered when they saw Him lifted up and honored (cf. 1 Sam. 4:5-6).[853] A better translation might be, "Happy the people who have learnt to acclaim thee" (NEB). "Our horn" (v. 17) means

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[850]Footnote 18: "See [Moshe] Weinfeld, 'The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,' [*Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 (1970):] pp. 184-203, for a thorough study of this type of covenant and its biblical parallels, including the Davidic Covenant. . . ."

[851]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 267.

[852]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 321.

[853]Ibid., p. 322.

"our strength." Ethan rejoiced that Israel's king, who was her defense, belonged to God (v. 18).

> "In many Jewish synagogues today, verses 15-18 are recited on their New Year's Day after the blowing of the shofar."[854]

3. The promises of God 89:19-37

89:19-20 The psalmist now reminded God that He had chosen David to be His anointed servant king (cf. 2 Sam. 7:8-16). God's "godly ones" (v. 19) were the godly in Israel.

89:21-25 God had promised to bless David with success and power. He had foretold that David would defeat his enemies and extend his influence greatly. Furthermore, He had pledged to be faithful and loyal to David.

89:26-29 God promised that David would enjoy a special relationship of intimacy with Yahweh, who would treat him as His firstborn son (2 Sam. 7:14). This involved double blessings and much authority under his Father. David would become the most highly exalted king on the earth. Moreover, God would bless him with a dynasty that would rule Israel forever (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-13, 16).

89:30-37 Sin and disobedience would not cancel God's promises to David in the covenant. They would bring discipline on the offenders, but God swore to deliver the blessings He had promised David (cf. Job 16:19; Jer. 42:5).

Since Jesus Christ, David's descendant, has not yet ruled over Israel as these promises guarantee, we should look for a literal fulfillment of them in the future. This means He will rule on the earth, since this is what God promised David (2 Sam. 7:5-16). For this reason we look for an earthly reign of Messiah, not just a heavenly reign over the hearts of all believers.[855] The hope of an earthly reign over Israel is what distinguishes premillennialists from amillennialists and postmillennialists. This hope rests on a literal interpretation of God's promises in the Davidic Covenant (cf. vv. 3-4, 27-29, 35-37, and 49).[856] The non-literal interpretation identifies David's house as the church.[857]

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[854]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 252.

[855]See the discussion of the messianic king in VanGemeren, pp. 586-91.

[856]See Ronald B. Allen, "Evidence from Psalm 89," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, pp. 55-77; and William C. Pohl IV, "A Messianic Reading of Psalm 89: A Canonical and Intertextual Study," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58:3 (September 2015):507-25..

[857]E.g., John Boys, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:20.

4. The appeal to God 89:38-52

89:38-45 Next, Ethan recounted what God had permitted to overtake David. He was now weak and defeated, rather than strong and successful. God had seemingly cut David off and gone back on His promises. The fall of Jerusalem is probably in view, and the Davidic king would have been Jehoiachin.

89:46-52 Ethan called on God to remember David and His promises before the king or his line died. In conclusion, he reaffirmed his belief in God's loyal love and faithfulness (v. 49). However, he asked God to remember His servants and His anointed before long (vv. 50-51). All the psalmist could do was wait for God to answer.

When God seems to be acting contrary to His character and promises, the godly should remember that He is loyal and faithful. They should call on Him to act for His own glory and for the welfare of His people. However, they must remember that appearances can often be deceiving, as they were in this case. God was disciplining David; He had not cut him off.

Verse 52 concludes Book 3 of the Psalter (Pss. 73—89).

IV. BOOK 4: CHS. 90—106

Moses composed one of the psalms in this section of the Psalter (Ps. 90), and David wrote two of them (Pss. 101 and 103). The remaining 14 are anonymous. Book 4 opens with a psalm attributed to Moses, and it closes with one in which Moses is the dominant figure. Prominent themes in this book include the brevity of life, Yahweh's future reign on the earth and proper human response to that hope, and Yahweh's creative and sustaining power. So one might think of Book 4 as the book of Moses, but perhaps a better title would be "the book of the King."

> "While the psalms in Book I were primarily personal and those in Books II and III were generally national, the remainder of the Psalter is basically liturgical."[858]

PSALM 90

The psalmist asked God to bless His people in view of life's brevity. This "one of the most magisterial of the psalms"[859] has been called a communal psalm of trust, but it also contains lament. Read it especially when you have lost your eternal perspective.

> "The psalms of trust are written for the express purpose of declaring the psalmist's trust in God. . . . A second element of the psalms of trust or confidence is the *invitation to trust* issued to the community. . . . A third

[858]Yates, p. 528.

[859]Brueggemann, p. 110.

> element of this group of psalms is *the basis for trust*. . . . A fourth element in the psalms of trust is *petition*. . . . Given the nature of the psalmist's faith, it is not surprising that in at least two instances a fifth element enters the psalm. The worshiper makes a *vow* or *promise to praise the Lord* (16:7; 27:6b; 115:17-18). . . . The sixth element, and next to the declaration of trust, the most frequent component of the psalms of trust, is the *interior lament*. It is not a lament as such, but the remnant of one."[860]

Bullock considered psalms 115 and 123-26 as other community psalms of trust.[861] The superscription attributes the authorship of this psalm to Moses (cf. Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6). It is evidently the only one he wrote that God preserved in the Psalms. The content suggests that he may have written it during the wilderness wanderings, possible at Pisgah (Deut. 34). In any case, it is probably one of the oldest of the psalms if not the oldest. Brueggemann believed that this psalm was attributed to Moses but not necessarily written by him.[862]

> "In an age which was readier than our own to reflect on mortality and judgment, this psalm was an appointed reading (with 1 Cor. 15) at the burial of the dead: a rehearsal of the facts of death and life which, if it was harsh at such a moment, wounded to heal. In the paraphrase by Isaac Watts, 'O God, our help in ages past', it has established itself as a prayer supremely matched to times of crisis."[863]

1. The transitory nature of human life 90:1-12

90:1-6 Moses began by attributing eternality to Yahweh. All generations of believers have found Him to be a protective shelter from the storms of life. God existed before He created anything, even the "world" (Heb. *tebel*, lit. the productive earth). This Hebrew word is a poetic synonym for "earth" (Heb. *'eres*, i.e., the planet).

God outlasts man. He creates him and then sees him return to "dust" (Heb. *dakka*, lit. pulverized material). From God's eternal perspective 1,000 years are as a day is to us (2 Pet. 3:8). This does not mean that God is outside time. Time simply does not bind or limit Him as it does us. All events are equally vivid to Him. Time is the instrument we use to mark the progression and relationship of events. God's personal timeline has no end, whereas ours stretches only about 70 years before we die.

Human life is therefore quite brief compared to God's eternality. A watch in the night was about four hours long. The years of our lives sweep past, as something a flood might carry off, before we can retrieve them. Our

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[860]Bullock, pp. 168-70.
[861]Ibid., p. 169.
[862]Brueggemann, p. 110.
[863]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, pp. 327-28.

lifetime is similar to one day from God's perspective or as a flower that only blooms for one day. Life is not only brief but frail.

> "When you bury your dead, you are planting seed. Your testimony is that you believe God meant what He said when He promised resurrection, and you are looking forward to being reunited with that loved one some day."[864]

90:7-12 Humans only live a short time because God judges the sin in their lives (cf. Rom. 6:23). God knows even our secret sins. They do not escape Him, and He judges us with physical death for our sins. Even though Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins, and freed us from eternal death, the consequences of our sins still lead to physical death.

Assuming Moses did write this psalm, it is interesting that he said the normal human life span was 70 years in his day. He lived to be 120, Aaron was 123 when he died, and Joshua died at 110. Their long lives testify to God's faithfulness in providing long lives to the godly, as He promised under the Mosaic Covenant.

Since our lives are comparatively short we should number our days (v. 12). Moses meant we should realize how few they are and use our time wisely for eternal purposes (cf. Eccles. 12:1-7). Notice how often Moses mentioned "our days" or the equivalent in this psalm (vv. 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15).

> "The pivotal point of the text, I suggest, is the goal of a 'heart of wisdom' (v. 12)."[865]

A heart of wisdom refers to discernment of Yahweh's purposes.

2. The compassionate nature of divine love 90:13-17

90:13-15 The psalmist asked God to have compassion on His sinful people. He wanted Him to balance judgment for sin with the loyal love He had promised them. Then they could live their brief lives with joy and gladness.

> "In spite of the 'black border' around this psalm, the emphasis is on *life* and not death."[866]

90:16-17 Moses also wanted God to display His majesty or splendor to His servants. He may have meant the splendor that God would demonstrate by extending mercy to them. When the Israelites saw God's work of showing

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[864]McGee, 2:816.

[865]Brueggemann, p. 111.

[866]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 256.

mercy they could proceed with their work knowing that God would bless it. Even though their lives would be brief, they could derive some pleasure from their work knowing that God would give it some relative permanence.

> "We come and go, but the Lord's work abides. We are content to die so long as Jesus lives and His kingdom grows. Since the Lord abides forever the same, we trust our work in His hands and feel that since it is far more His work than ours, He will secure it immortality. When we have withered like grass, our holy service, like gold, silver, and precious stones, will survive the fire."[867]

> "Oh, to do something in this life that will have value in eternity!"[868]

We might title this psalm, "Reflections on the Brevity of Life." Life is short because we are sinners. Even the most godly person dies eventually (except for Enoch, Elijah, and Christians alive at the Rapture). God removed the guilt of our sins when Jesus Christ died on the cross. He imputes the effects of that work to a person when he or she trusts in Christ as Savior. However, the consequences of sin still follow. Chief among these is physical death. Nevertheless God extends His mercy to humankind and allows us to live as long as we do. His mercy enables us to enjoy life and make a profitable contribution to our world.

PSALM 91

This wisdom psalm of trust focuses on security in life, an idea also present in Psalm 90.

> "However, it is in striking contrast with Ps. 90. The latter is somber and stately; this is bright and simple. The one breathes deep insight; the other cheerful trust."[869]

> "In the whole collection, there is not a more cheering Psalm; its tone is elevated and sustained throughout—faith is at its best—and speaks nobly."[870]

The writer of Psalm 91 knew that God provides security. It is a psalm for situations involving danger, exposure, or vulnerability. Like Psalm 23, it is a good one to read when we are afraid. One writer saw in it similarities to the second part of Isaiah (chs. 40—66).[871]

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[867]Spurgeon, 2:31.
[868]McGee, 2:816.
[869]Leupold, p. 650.
[870]Spurgeon, 2:32.
[871]Delitzsch, 3:62.

> "This remarkable psalm speaks with great specificity, and yet with a kind of porousness, so that the language is enormously open to each one's particular experience. Its tone is somewhat instructional, as though reassuring someone else who is unsure. Yet the assurance is not didactic, but confessional. It is a personal testimony of someone whose own experience makes the assurance of faith convincing and authentic."[872]

1. The security God provides 91:1-2

God Himself is the One who is the believer's security. The unknown psalmist described Him as the Most High (Sovereign Ruler) and the Almighty (One having all power). Those who rely on Him find that He is a shelter from the storms of life and a shadowy place of security, much like the area under a bird's wing. He is a refuge where we can run for safety in times of danger and a fortress that will provide defense against attacking foes.

> "The blessings here promised are not for all believers but for those who live in close fellowship with God."[873]

2. The deliverance God provides 91:3-13

91:3-8 God saves us from those who insidiously try to trap us and from deadly diseases. He does this as a mother bird does when she covers her young with her wings, namely, tenderly and carefully. He provides as sure a defense as a shield or large rampart can.

Consequently, the believer can be at peace and not fear attacks at any time (vv. 5-6). Those who fall by our side (v. 7) are those who do not trust in the Lord. The believer is invincible until his or her time is up. We will see the wicked fall around us, but God will sustain us. Nothing can touch us except what He permits, nor can any rebel escape His retribution (v. 8).

91:9-13 Those who trust in the Lord can rely on His protection. He will commission angels to watch over and protect His own. This is one of the passages in Scripture that reveals the existence and activity of "guardian angels" (cf. Matt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14).[874]

> "This does not say, as was sometimes thought in times past, that a special angel is assigned to each individual. It merely guarantees angelic protection as it may be needed."[875]

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[872]Brueggemann, p. 156.
[873]Spurgeon, 2:32.
[874]See Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 1:14:6 and 7.
[875]Leupold, p. 655.

The writer was using hyperbole when he wrote that the believer will not even stub his or her toe (v. 12; cf. Mark 16:18; Luke 10:19; Acts 28:1-6). Verse 13 also seems to be hyperbolic. It pictures overcoming dangerous animals. God has given some believers this kind of protection occasionally (e.g., Dan. 6; Acts 28:3-6), but the writer's point was that God will protect His people from all kinds of dangers.

Satan quoted verses 11 and 12 when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:6). He urged Him to interpret this promise literally. However, Jesus declined to tempt God by deliberately putting Himself in a dangerous situation to see if God would miraculously deliver Him.

Jesus referred to verse 13 when He sent the disciples out on a preaching mission (Luke 10:19). Again, it seems clear that His intention was to assure the disciples that God would take care of them. He was not encouraging them to put their lives in danger deliberately.

3. The assurance God provides 91:14-16

The writer recorded God's promise to deliver those who know and love Him. He will eventually answer the cries for help that His people voice (cf. 50:15; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13). He will not abandon them in their distresses (cf. Josh. 1:9; Matt. 28:20). The promises of rescue and honor normally find fulfillment in this life, but they always do the other side of the grave. God usually blesses people who follow His will by allowing them to live longer. This was a special blessing under the Mosaic Law (cf. Exod. 20:12). Furthermore, God promised the godly the satisfaction of seeing His deliverance.

> "It's one thing for doctors to add years to our life, but God adds life to our years and makes that life worthwhile."[876]

How can we explain the fact that God has apparently not honored these promises consistently? Some godly people have died young, for example. Others have perished at the hands of their enemies, as was and is true of some Christian martyrs. Does this indicate that God is unfaithful and His promises are unreliable? If we view life as extending beyond the grave, which it does, we should have no trouble with these promises. God will grant ultimate deliverance to His own, even if He allows them to suffer and die at the hands of enemies in this life. Even believers who die young have eternal life.

> "In life the Lord may permit many terrible things to happen to his children (cf. Job), as he did to his own Son, our Lord. But his children know that no power is out of God's control."[877]

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[876]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 259.
[877]VanGemeren, p. 601.

PSALM 92

In this psalm of descriptive praise, which contains wisdom themes, the unknown writer praised God for the goodness of His acts and the righteousness of His character.

> "The theme: God should be praised for His righteous judgments on the wicked and His care and defense of His people."[878]

> "Psalms 90—92 are united by the development of concepts and the repetition of vocabulary. These psalms lead the worshiper from a meditation on the transiency of life (Ps 90), a call for wisdom (Ps 91), to a climactic celebration of divine deliverance and protection (Ps 92)."[879]

Like Psalms 37, 49, and 73, this one deals with the ultimate overthrow of the wicked and the ultimate victory of the righteous.

1. Praise for God's goodness 92:1-7

92:1-3 It is appropriate to praise God because of the good things He has done for His people. He is faithful to His word and lovingly loyal to His people. Musical instruments contribute to the joy and rejoicing that characterize His people's praise.

92:4-7 The psalmist gloried in the Lord's goodness to him, which was evident in His acts for him. God's thoughts, as He revealed them to His prophets and in His Word, also drew the writer's praise (cf. 36:6; 40:5; 139:17-18; Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33-34). These revelations helped him understand what God was doing (cf. 73:22). He understood, as those who do not benefit from God's revelation cannot, that the prosperity of the wicked is only temporary.

> "Man can neither measure the greatness of the divine works nor fathom the depth of the divine thoughts; he who is enlightened, however, perceives the immeasureableness of the one and the unfathomableness of the other . . ."[880]

2. Praise for God's righteousness 92:8-15

92:8-9 In contrast to the wicked who will perish (v. 7), the Lord will reign forever. He will cause His enemies to die.

92:10-11 Rather than defeating the writer (v. 9), the Lord made him stronger, as strong as the horn of a wild ox. He had also refreshed him and made him glad. Refreshment and joy are what anointing with oil represented in

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[878]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 440.
[879]VanGemeren, p. 602.
[880]Delitzsch, 3:68.

Israel. Verse 10b does not necessarily mean the writer was a king or a priest in Israel, though he may have been. God had blessed him by allowing him to experience victory over his enemies rather than dying.

92:12-15 Palm trees produced tasty fruit, so they symbolized fruitfulness.

> "The richness of the inflorescence of the date-palm . . . is clear from the fact, that when it has attained its full size, it bears from three to four, and in some instances even as many as six, hundred pounds of fruit. And there is no more charming and majestic sight than the palm of the oasis, this prince among the trees of the plain, with its proudly raised diadem of leaves, its attitude peering forth into the distance and gazing full into the face of the sun, its perennial verdure, and its vital force, which constantly renews itself from the root—a picture of life in the midst of the world of death."[881]

> "The palm tree produces even to old age. The best dates are produced when the tree is from thirty to one hundred years old; three hundred pounds of dates are annually yielded: so the Christian grows happier and more useful as he become older."[882]

Cedars were not subject to decay, so they stood for long life in the ancient Near Eastern mentality (cf. v. 7). Both types of trees were also beautiful and desirable. The writer likened the godly to these trees planted in the temple environs. They represent people who delight in drawing near to God (cf. 1:3; 52:8). Such people praise God for His consistent righteousness. Because of His unwavering righteousness, He is a sure foundation—similar to a large rock—on whom people can build their lives (cf. Matt. 7:24-27).[883]

> ". . . God's trees are said to be planted in his house because it is from his grace, by his word and Spirit, that they receive all the sap and virtue that keep them alive and make them fruitful."[884]

Reflection on God's good acts and His righteous character gives His people optimism as they face life. As believers, we can see things in their proper perspective and go through life rejoicing.

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[881]Ibid., 3:71.

[882]J. Long, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:40.

[883]See Richard D. Patterson, "Psalm 92:12-15: The Flourishing of the Righteous," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:663 (July-September 2009):271-88.

[884]Henry, p. 679.

PSALM 93

The psalmist rejoiced in the Lord's reign in this royal psalm. This is one of the so-called "enthronement" or "theocratic" psalms that depict the righteous rule of God on earth (cf. Pss. 47, 95—99). They focus on God's sovereignty over His people Israel, but they also point prophetically to the future reign of David's greatest Son during the Millennium. Psalms 47 and 93—100 all affirm Yahweh's rule over the earth.

> "The reign of God in the Psalms is presented against the cultural backdrop of Canaanite thought and religion. The Canaanites regarded their chief deity El as king of the gods. But according to Canaanite mythology, El's rule was attacked by Baal, a god of storm and fertility. He defeated a number of the followers of El. These were the gods Yamm (the god of the sea), Lotan (a sea monster), and Mot (the god of death). Baal himself was mortally wounded in this conflict and Anat, the wife-sister of Baal, was associated with his resuscitation. With this victory, Baal became king. But there was always a lingering question: How long would Baal rule? How long would his enemies remain defeated? Could not Lotan surge anew and threaten Baal's position? The Canaanites who believed in these stories lived their lives on the brink of a heavenly catastrophe. Their gods were fragile; they were easily established and easily deposed.
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> "It is against this background that the words of Ps. 93 obtain their force. The living God is the King from the beginning of time; He is no recent claimant to power (vv. 1, 2). As King, He exercises authority over all. He does not have to fear a resurgent sea (vv. 3, 4). Not only is the Lord omnipotent, but He is truthful and holy, unlike any of the gods of the Canaanite imagination (v. 5).
>
> "In general, the royal psalms speak of the Lord as King in three different ways. He is King over creation, for He is the Creator (74:12-17). He is King over the Israelites (44:4), for He is their Savior. And He is the coming King, for He will eventually judge everyone (47:7, 8). Sometimes in people's minds God's kingdom is narrowly identified with the coming glorious rule of Jesus: God's present reign over creation is ignored. But sometimes the opposite is true. God's present rule can be emphasized so much that Jesus' coming is disregarded. The royal psalms consistently balance these two ideas: 'The LORD reigns" (93:1), but the Lord is also coming to establish His permanent rule (24:9)."[885]

1. The authority of Yahweh 93:1-2

The psalmist declared the sovereignty of Yahweh over the world. "The LORD reigns" is the key phrase in royal psalms (cf. 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). He described the Sovereign as clothed with strength rather than with ornate robes. Clothing says something about the

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[885]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 976.

person wearing it. That was true of this king too. The immovable condition of the world shows how absolutely God controlled it. However, this refers to life on the earth more than it does to the planet in the solar system. God will control all life on earth. God's universal authority has existed forever. Therefore there is no doubt it will continue.

> "This is a psalm that will really have meaning when He comes to reign on this earth."[886]

2. The power of Yahweh 93:3-4

God's power is greater than that of the tumultuous seas that move with irresistible force and great noise. The Canaanites believed Baal overcame the sea, which they called Prince Yamm. Here the psalmist pictured Yahweh as much mightier than the sea. The early readers of this psalm would have understood it as a polemic against Baalism. Yahweh has true authority over the sea that to ancient Near Easterners typified everything uncontrollably powerful and hostile.

> "The sea with its mighty mass of waters, with the constant unrest of its waves, with its ceaseless pressing against the solid land and foaming against the rocks, is an emblem of the Gentile world alienated from and at enmity with God; and the rivers (floods) are emblems of worldly kingdoms . . ."[887]

3. The holiness of Yahweh 93:5

In contrast to Baal's morally corrupt sanctuaries, the Lord's house was holy. What transpired in the temple contrasted strongly with what took place where the Canaanites worshipped their god. This behavior reflected the character of the two deities. God's holiness guarantees the trustworthy nature of His words. Unblemished holiness manifests itself in unlimited power.[888]

> "This statement ["Holiness befits thy house"] . . . does not tell man how he should behave in God's house; it rather tells what God guarantees regarding the endurance of His house. This is just another way of saying that the kingdom of the Lord endures forever."[889]

This psalm teaches the reader that God's power demonstrates that He is alive and active. Consequently, everyone should submit to Him and obey His commands. Psalms 93—99 all focus on the eternal reign of God.

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[886]McGee, 2:819.
[887]Delitzsch, 3:75.
[888]See Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, pp. 55-68.
[889]Leupold, p. 667.

PSALM 94

This psalm, which begins as a national lament (vv. 1-15) and ends as an individual lament (vv. 16-23), calls on God to avenge the righteous whom the wicked oppress unjustly. It manifests faith in the justice of God. It is also a royal psalm. It seems that wicked Israelites are in view, rather than wicked Gentiles.

1. A prayer for vengeance 94:1-7

94:1-3 The writer besought the Lord, as the Judge of the earth, to punish the wicked, who were boasting and rejoicing because they were getting away with oppressing the righteous (cf. 50:4-6).

> "I do not think that we sufficiently attend to the distinction that exists between revenge and vengeance. 'Revenge,' says Dr. Johnson, 'is an act of passion, vengeance of justice; injuries are revenged, crimes avenged.'"[890]

94:4-7 These verses contain the specific offenses of the wicked. They glorify themselves, afflict God's people, and think God will not do anything to oppose them (cf. Isa. 1:23; Jer. 22:3; Ezek. 22:7; Amos 5:10-13; Mic. 3:1-3; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5).

> "The big question is not whether God can avenge wrongs done, but *how long* it will be before he brings about justice."[891]

> "This was the reason of their arrogance and the climax of their wickedness: they were blindly wicked because they dreamed of a blind God."[892]

2. A warning for evildoers 94:8-15

94:8-11 The psalmist scolded the wicked for their stupidity. God, who created the eye and ear, surely can see and hear Himself. He knows what the wicked are doing and saying. If He disciplines nations, He will surely discipline individuals. If He teaches wisdom, certainly He is wise Himself. He knows the vapid thoughts of those who oppose Him, and He will judge them.

> "Thoughts are words to God, and vain thoughts are provocations."[893]

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[890]Barton Bouchier, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:42.
[891]Yates, p. 530.
[892]Spurgeon, 2:43.
[893]Henry, p. 680.

> "The thoughts of man's heart—what millions are there of them in a day! The twinkling of the eye is not so sudden a thing as the twinkling of a thought; yet these thousands and thousands of thoughts which pass from thee, that thou canst not reckon, they are all known to God."[894]

94:12-15 Oppression from the wicked is discipline that God permits for His people (cf. Hab. 1:5-11). Because of this the writer saw it had value. However, he also believed that God would relieve the godly and not forsake His faithful ones. Eventually God will execute justice, and this will encourage people to follow the path of righteousness.

3. A reason for consolation 94:16-23

94:16-19 After looking everywhere for some consolation during the temporary ascendancy of the wicked, the psalmist found it only in God. If God had not strengthened him he would have died, slipped in his walk with God, and become mentally distracted.

94:20-23 The power of the wicked could not endure because God's power will prevail—even though His enemies made alliances with other evil men to oppress the innocent.

> "They attempt to legalize their wicked course by passing statutes that would regularize what they are doing."[895]

The psalm closes with a reaffirmation of the writer's commitment to Yahweh. He would trust in the Lord until God executed vengeance on the wicked.

This psalm is a good example of not taking vengeance but waiting for God to take it in His own time and way (Deut. 32:35; 1 Sam. 24—26; Rom. 12:19; et al.). The writer committed the situation to God in prayer, called on Him to judge righteously, and continued to trust and obey the Lord. He did not take vengeance himself.

PSALM 95

> "There can be no question that Psalms 95 to 100 have a common theme in that they all begin with a summons to sing praises unto the Lord though each has its distinctive note of praise."[896]

The psalmist extolled Yahweh as the great King above all gods and urged the Israelites to worship Him alone rather than disbelieving Him. The Septuagint translators credited

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[894]Anthony Burgess, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:44.
[895]Leupold, p. 674.
[896]Ibid., p. 675.

David with writing this psalm, which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews followed (Heb. 4:7). This is another "enthronement" (royal) psalm (cf. Pss. 47, 93, 96—99). Read it when you feel like celebrating, along with Psalms 96—100.

1. Exhortation to praise the sovereign Lord 95:1-7a

95:1-2 These introductory verses call on the congregation to glorify the Lord in song for His salvation.

> "Spiritual joy is the heart and soul of thankful praise."[897]

The phrase "rock of our salvation" combines the ideas of security and deliverance (cf. 94:22). God is One who gives security by providing deliverance from danger.

95:3-5 The greatness of Yahweh comes through in His superiority over all the so-called gods the heathen worshipped. They venerated gods that supposedly ruled the caves of the earth and others that they thought lived in the mountains. Still others received credit for controlling the seas and others the land. However, Yahweh is the King of them all. That is, He is the real ruler.

95:6-7a God was Israel's Maker in a double sense. He created the nation and He redeemed it (cf. Deut. 32:6). He was also Israel's Shepherd, and the Israelites were His sheep.

> "Idolaters kneel before gods which they themselves made;
> we kneel before a God who made us."[898]

The clause "Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" recalls a sign that appeared on a church marquee: "A lot of kneeling will keep you in good standing." Another such sign read: "He who kneels before God can stand before anyone."

> ". . . we must not fall down and worship our *Lady*, but our *Lord*; not any *martyr*, but our *Maker*; not any *saint*, but our *Savior*."[899]

2. Exhortation to believe the sovereign Lord 95:7b-11

Israel, however, had been a wayward flock in the past. This led the writer to warn the people to avoid the sins that had resulted in the wilderness wanderings, "the world's longest funeral march."[900] At Meribah (lit. strife; Exod. 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13) and

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[897]Henry, p. 681.
[898]Ibid., p. 682.
[899]John Boys, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:48.
[900]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 265.

Massah (lit. testing; Exod. 17:1-7) Israel tested God by demanding that He provide for them on their terms. They should have simply continued to trust and obey God.

Perhaps the writer mentioned *these* rebellions, and not others, because they so clearly reveal the ingratitude and willfulness that finally resulted in God sentencing that generation to die in the wilderness. Their actions betrayed the fact that they had not learned God's ways, specifically, that He would do what was best for them in His own time and way. That generation could have entered into rest in the land of milk and honey. Likewise, believers who fail to follow their Good Shepherd faithfully can look forward to a life of hardship and limited blessing. In view of the urgency of this exhortation, the writer began it by calling for action "today."

> "The latter part of this psalm is an exhortation to those who sing gospel psalms to live gospel lives."[901]

> "When God speaks, it is the creature's duty to hear; but when He swears, to tremble."[902]

The writer to the Hebrews quoted verses 7-11 in order to urge Christians to believe God and move ahead in faith. Not obtaining rest, for the Christian, means failing to enter into all the blessings that could have been his (or hers) if he (or she) had faithfully trusted and obeyed God.

This psalm is a sober reminder that praise needs to connect with trust and obedience. It also anticipates the time when those who follow the Shepherd faithfully will reign with Him in His beneficent rule over the earth (cf. Ps. 2; 2 Tim. 2:12a; Rev. 3:21; et al.).

PSALM 96

Here is another royal psalm that focuses on the reign of God. In it, the psalmist called on all the earth to join Israel in honoring and rejoicing in Yahweh's sovereign rule.

> "By being incorporated into a larger unit in 1 Chronicles 16[:23-34], the psalm became associated with the glorious entry of the Ark of the covenant into Jerusalem"[903]

> "The substance of this Psalm, and portions of the 97th, 98th, and 100th, are found in 1 Chronicles 16, which was used by David's directions in the dedication of the tabernacle on Mount Zion?"[904]

1. An invitation to all people to honor Yahweh 96:1-6

96:1-3 The new song the people of the earth should sing is a song that praises God for His new blessings. These are fresh every morning (Lam. 3:22-23).

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[901]Henry, p. 682

[902]Robert South, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:50.

[903]VanGemeren, p. 620. Cf. 1 Chron. 16:23-33.

[904]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 441.

All people should hear about God's glory and deeds because they will bring blessing to them. This is good news.

> ". . . if one truly grasps the greatness of our God, that makes him vocal in letting others know what great things the Lord has done for him and is ready to do for all men."[905]

96:4-6 The reason everyone should praise the Lord is He is greater than all the so-called gods that are only lifeless idols. Yahweh is the creator of all things. Therefore He is strong and glorious.

2. An invitation to all groups of people to honor Yahweh 96:7-10

96:7-9 "Families" is literally "tribes." The Israelites invited all the Gentile groups to honor the true God. They invited them to bring offerings of worship to Him at the temple. There was a "court of the Gentiles" where non-Jews could worship Him. Contrast this attitude toward the Gentiles with that of Jonah or the Pharisees in Jesus' day. The psalmist invited non-Jews to submit to Yahweh and become His worshippers. Many did become proselytes over the years.

> "Praise takes the form of concrete expressions of submission to Yahweh."[906]

96:10 It is only reasonable that all tribes acknowledge Yahweh, since He reigns over all the earth. From later revelation, we know that Jesus Christ will judge the peoples fairly when He returns to this earth and sets up His millennial kingdom. Then every knee of every person will bow to His authority (v. 6; cf. Phil. 2:10).

> ". . . Christ's government will be the world's happy settlement . . ."[907]

3. An invitation to all to rejoice over Yahweh's reign 96:11-13

The writer returned to his former thought of all creation being under God's authority (vv. 4-5). He now summoned all creation to praise God at the prospect of His righteous rule. Verse 13 is one of the clearest and most thrilling revelations that God will rule on the earth, not just from heaven. He will do so in the person of His Son when He returns to earth. The Son came the first time to save the world, and He will come the second time to judge it. Therefore all creation may rejoice. Even the world of plants and animals will benefit from His righteous rule (cf. Isa. 35:1-2; 65:25; Rom. 8:20-22).

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[905]Leupold, p. 683.
[906]VanGemeren, p. 622.
[907]Henry, p. 683.

This favorite psalm glories in the righteous Sovereign of the universe. His kingdom will indeed come. He will one day accomplish His will on earth, as today others carry it out in heaven (Matt. 6:10).

PSALM 97

The writer of this royal psalm also saw the Lord coming to rule and reign on the earth. He exhorted his readers to prepare for that apocalyptic event by living appropriately in the present.

1. The announcement of God's earthly reign 97:1

How do we know that the psalmist was describing a future reign of God and not His eternal reign? The marginal translation, "has assumed kingship," captures the aspect of God's reign that this psalm presents. God will assume worldwide dominion when Jesus Christ returns, and that will provide occasion for the whole planet to rejoice as never before.

"The earth" and "the many islands" describe the earth as a whole and its smallest parts. This is a merism: a figure of speech in which two terms encompass everything in between.

2. The appearance of the King 97:2-9

97:2-5 These verses reveal the appearance of the Lord in terms similar to other visions God gave His prophets (cf. Isa. 6:1-4; Ezek. 1; Rev. 1). The psalmist's words describe God's glory in figurative language. Clouds and thick darkness picture awesome power (cf. Deut. 4:11; 5:22-23; cf. Zech. 14:6-7). Fire represents God's consuming judgment (cf. Heb. 12:29). Elsewhere in Scripture the shaking of mountains announced the Lord's coming to earth (Exod. 19:18; cf. Mic. 1:4; Nah. 1:5).

97:6-9 When He comes to reign, His messengers will announce His arrival (cf. Rev. 19:11). Everyone will see Him descend (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7). In view of this revelation, idol worshippers should realize their folly.

> "He who boasts of an idol makes an idle boast."[908]

The psalmist called all judges ("gods") to worship Yahweh. God's people can rejoice because He will rule over all the earth one day. "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20)!

3. The appropriate response 97:10-12

97:10 Since God loves righteousness, it is only fitting that those who love Him should hate evil. By doing so, they become the objects of His blessing rather than partakers of His discipline.

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[908]Spurgeon, 2:57.

> "To *hate* means to reject; to *love* means to choose. Since both are an expression of the will and not merely an emotion, the Bible commands both love and hatred."[909]
>
> "God has lightning for sinners and light for saints."[910]

97:11-12 Rejoicing and thanksgiving are also appropriate responses to God's gifts of understanding and joy.[911]

The vision that this psalm presents, of God coming to establish His kingdom, should move His people to prepare themselves for that great event (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10-12, 14).

PSALM 98

This is another royal psalm that calls the earth to praise God in view of His coming reign. This psalm inspired Isaac Watts to write the hymn, "Joy to the World!"[912]

> "It is a close companion to Psalm 96, but is wholly given up to praise. Here there are no comparisons with the heathen, no instructions in right worship: all is joy and exhilaration."[913]

1. God's past revelation of His salvation 98:1-3

Verse 1 anticipates a future victory for which the psalmist called on his readers to praise God. Already God had demonstrated His saving ability by redeeming Israel. All the world was familiar with what God had done for His chosen people, not only in the Exodus but throughout their history.

2. God's future judgment of the world 98:4-9

98:4-8 In view of the Lord's coming to judge the earth (v. 9), everyone and everything should praise Him enthusiastically.

98:9 The prospect of Yahweh balancing the scales of justice is good reason for universal rejoicing. His "coming" describes a literal visit to this earth, rather than just a heavenly judgment and reign.[914]

This psalm should help God's people view the Lord's coming to earth to reign as a blessing, rather than something they should fear. Even though He will rule with an iron rod (Ps. 2:9), His coming will be a good thing for humankind. We who are believers

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[909]*The Nelson . . .*, pp. 979-80.
[910]Spurgeon, 2:58.
[911]See Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, pp. 195-213.
[912]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 268.
[913]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 352.
[914]See Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, pp. 39-54. For a discussion of Yahweh as the Divine Warrior, see VanGemeren, pp. 630-35.

should rejoice greatly as we anticipate it, and we should pray for its arrival (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2).

PSALM 99

This royal psalm calls on God's people to praise Him for His holiness and because He answers prayer.

> "The emphasis in this hymn of praise is on the sublime nature of God, expressed by his holiness."[915]

> "This may be called the Sanctus, or 'the Holy, Holy, Holy Psalm,' for the word 'holy' is the conclusion and the refrain of its three main divisions. Its subject is the holiness of the divine government, and the sanctity of the mediatorial reign."[916]

1. The holiness of the King 99:1-5

99:1-3 Because the God who reigns is so great, everyone should tremble in reverential fear.

> "Then he ruled more by the power of holy fear; now he rules by the power of holy love."[917]

In the temple, God dwelt between the cherubim (1 Kings 6:23-28; cf. Ps. 80:1). The cherubim were representations of angelic beings that symbolically guarded the holiness of God. "Holy" means different. In particular, God is holy in that He is different from man whom sin saturates.

> ". . . He is removed from and far above all those limitations and imperfections that mark man."[918]

99:4-5 God is worthy of worship because He loves justice, equity, and righteousness. These are manifestations of His holiness.

Verse 5 is a double refrain. The statement, "Holy is He," repeats the end of verse 3. The whole fifth verse occurs again—with slight modifications—in verse 9.

> "Holiness is the harmony of all the virtues. The Lord has not one glorious attribute alone, or in excess, but all glories

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[915]Yates, p. 532.
[916]Spurgeon, 2:62.
[917]Henry, p. 684.
[918]Leupold, p. 696.

> are in Him as a whole; this is the crown of His honor and the honor of His crown. His power is not His choicest jewel, nor His sovereignty, but His holiness."[919]

2. The mercy of the King 99:6-9

One might suppose that such a holy God would not tolerate any sinner. However, God tempers holiness with mercy. Even though the Israelites sinned, God still answered the prayers of their intercessors, specifically Moses, Aaron, and Samuel. The picture of God speaking to His people from the pillar of cloud graphically combines the concepts of God's holiness and mercy. However, God was not so merciful that He failed to discipline the sinners. This balanced view of God gives hope for the future when sinners will stand before Him. Therefore, God's people should exalt Him and worship Him at His holy mountain—Zion.[920]

> "Worship is an act of submission to his kingship and is a proper response to his awe-inspiring presence."[921]

The prospect of a perfectly holy God ruling over sinful humans in undeviating justice is a terrifying one. This psalm helps the godly appreciate how God will reign. He will do so as He has dealt with His people throughout their history, namely: by extending mercy without compromising His holiness.

PSALM 100

An unknown writer invited God's people to approach the Lord with joy in this well-known psalm of descriptive praise. We can serve Him gladly because He is the Creator, and we can worship Him thankfully because He is good and faithful.

> "Known as the *Jubilate* ('O be joyful'), it is a psalm much used in liturgical worship; but William Kethe's fine paraphrase, 'All people that on earth do dwell', has even wider currency wherever English is spoken. Finer still, but somewhat freer, is Isaac Watts' version, 'Before Jehovah's aweful [*sic*] throne'."[922]

> "Its [this psalm's] position after the psalms proclaiming Yahweh's kingship (96—99) suggests the classification with these psalms. More than likely it functions as a hymnic conclusion of this collection."[923]

> "This Psalm closes the series of deutero-Isaianic Psalms, which began with Ps. xci. There is common to all of them that mild sublimity, sunny cheerfulness, unsorrowful spiritual character, and New Testament

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[919]Spurgeon, 2:63.
[920]See Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, pp. 69-84.
[921]VanGemeren, p. 638.
[922]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 356.
[923]VanGemeren, p. 638.

> expandedness, which we wonder at in the second part of the Book of Isaiah . . ."[924]

1. Happy service 100:1-3

100:1-2 All people should shout praises to the Lord joyfully. We should willingly serve Him with happy hearts. We should sing out with joy to honor Him.

> ". . . when God's own come into His presence, joy should never be absent."[925]

> "Can you bear to be waited upon by a servant who goes moping and dejected to his every task? You would rather have no servant at all than one who evidently finds your service cheerless and irksome."[926]

100:3 We should appreciate the fact that Yahweh is the sovereign God. We should acknowledge that He has created us and that we are not self-made individuals. We belong to Him, and we partake of what He graciously provides for us.

> "What a rare privilege that was to be singled out from among all the nations on the face of the earth to be in a very special sense God's people and His only people! No man who weighs this fact aright can remain cold and unresponsive."[927]

2. Grateful worship 100:4-5

The psalmist called on the Israelites to enter the gates of Jerusalem with thanksgiving in their hearts. They should enter the temple courtyard with praise on their lips. They should express their gratitude to Him for His many blessings and should bless Him. The reason for this behavior is that God is good to His people. His loyal love lasts forever, and He will continue to remain faithful to all generations of people.

> "The pilgrimage of all peoples to the holy mountain is an Old Testament dress of the hope for the conversion of all peoples to the God of revelation, and the close union of all with the people of this God. His Temple is open to them all."[928]

Every generation that benefits from Yahweh's goodness, loyal love, and faithfulness should carry out this psalm's exhortation to serve God happily and worship Him gratefully.

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[924]Delitzsch, 3:104.
[925]Leupold, p. 699.
[926]George Bowen, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:64.
[927]Leupold, p. 700.
[928]Delitzsch, 3:106.

> "If you go to church on Sunday to worship, make *sure* you go with thanksgiving and praise in your heart. If you fail to do that, you are not going to be very helpful to your church."[929]

PSALM 101

David voiced his desire and commitment to maintain holiness in his personal life, and in his court, in this royal psalm. One writer classified this as a psalm of dedication.[930]Others believed that it "belongs to the time during which the Ark was in the house of Obed-Edom, where David had left it behind through terror at the misfortune of Uzzah [cf. 2 Sam. 6:8]."[931]

> "The qualities of Jesus the Messiah, as given in Isaiah 11:1-5 and in this psalm, reveal a fulfillment of the theocratic ideal: concern for integrity, justice, and devotion. Similarly, the followers of Jesus must conform to his high standards (v. 6; cf. 1 Tim 3:1-16; 2 Tim 2:14-26; Titus 1:6-9)."[932]

> "We never praise the Lord better than when we do those things which are pleasing in His sight."[933]

1. David's appreciation for God 101:1

The psalmist focused his praise on God's loyal love and justice. These qualities are foundational to His rule (cf. 89:14). David proceeded to request that his own rule would have a similarly strong base.

> "Kindness prevents justice from becoming too harsh; justice saves kindness from becoming flabby."[934]

> "Whatever our outward condition neither the laughter of a prosperous condition nor the tears of an afflicted condition must put us out of tune for sacred songs."[935]

2. David's commitment to personal integrity 101:2

The writer next promised to live blamelessly before God. He was saying he would live in a way that would make it possible for God to bless him and his kingdom. His godliness would begin at home (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7). Most ancient Near Eastern monarchs indulged their sinful human natures by the way they lived.

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[929]McGee, 2:822-23.
[930]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 273.
[931]Delitzsch, 3:108. Cf. Leupold, p. 703.
[932]VanGemeren, p. 640.
[933]Spurgeon, 2:66.
[934]Leupold, p. 702.
[935]Henry, p. 685.

3. David's desire for purity in his court 101:3-8

101:3-4 More specifically, David promised God that he would guard his life and his court from sin. Worthless or vile things are things that make no positive contribution to godliness. Like God, David professed to hate departure from the right way. A perverse heart means a crooked or twisted affection, namely, one that turns away from the straight path of rectitude.

101:5-6 In verse 5, David promised to deal severely with even minor deviations from holiness in others' lives. This expressed his strong allegiance to righteousness. Positively the king promised to reward people who were faithful to God. He wanted to surround himself with godly people in his court.

101:7-8 Professional competence was not sufficient to qualify a member of David's staff for service. His courtiers also needed to maintain fellowship with God and walk in His ways.

> "Saul chose servants for their goodliness ([outward qualifications;] 1 Sam. viii. 16), but David for their goodness."[936]

The king would not tolerate lying. Moreover, he would extend his requirements to all the people who lived in his kingdom. In his daily administration of justice he would cut off the wicked who practiced iniquity. "Cutting off" might be in execution, but it could also mean ending their present course of life by sentencing them to some other penalty. McGee believed that this is a picture of Christ's millennial reign on the earth.[937]

Why did David tolerate a wicked man such as Joab in view of this prayer? Obviously, David went back on this promise to God, both in his personal life, and in his choice of government leaders to some extent. Nevertheless, this commitment to holiness is an admirable model for all of God's people. Perhaps David wrote this psalm early in his reign.

PSALM 102

Another anonymous writer poured out his personal lament to Yahweh (cf. Pss. 22, 69, 79). He felt overwhelmed due to an enemy's reproach. He called out for help from the God he knew would not forsake him. This is another penitential psalm as well as a personal lament (cf. Pss. 6; 32; 38; 51; 103; 143).

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[936]Ibid., 686.
[937]McGee, 2:824.

"This is a patriot's lament over his country's distress."[938]

"I like to think of Psalm 102 as the psalm of Gethsemane."[939]

1. Request for a quick answer 102:1-2

The writer felt a desperate need for the Lord's immediate intervention in his painful situation. His words reveal the intensity of his pain.

2. Description of the affliction 102:3-11

102:3-7 Several statements illustrate how the psalmist felt. He had lost many good days to suffering. His sorrow had made his bones ache; his emotional state was affecting his physical condition. He felt withered under the heat of his affliction. He had become so preoccupied that he would forget to eat. Consequently his stomach was growling and he was losing weight. He evidently felt very much alone, like a lonely pelican in the wilderness. He felt as isolated as an owl, and he could not sleep.

102:8-9 His enemies had also ridiculed him continually, even using him as an example of someone God had cursed. The ashes he had put on his head as a sign of his mourning had evidently fallen down on his food. He had eaten so many of them he could say he had consumed them like bread. Likewise his many tears had dropped into the cup from which he drank. Perhaps these are figurative ways of describing his grief.

102:10-11 He felt his condition was the result of divine discipline. He believed his life was ending, as the lengthening shadows signal the approaching end of a day.

3. Confidence in Yahweh's restoration 102:12-22

102:12-13 In contrast to his own brief life, the suffering psalmist voiced his belief that God would continue forever. The "thou" ("you," NIV) is emphatic in the Hebrew text, stressing the contrast. He believed God would shortly execute justice for His own.

102:14-17 The godly in Israel loved Zion and sorrowed over its destitute condition. The description of the city in verse 14 sounds as if it had suffered destruction. The writer was confident that God would restore the city as He had promised. This assurance gave him a more positive attitude.

102:18-20 Confident of eventual restoration, the psalmist spoke of future generations praising God for His faithfulness. He pictured God attentively looking

[938]Spurgeon, 2:68.
[939]McGee, 2:825.

down from heaven and observing His enslaved people. The writer may have been describing conditions as they existed during the Babylonian exile.

102:21-22 The psalmist looked forward to a gathering again in Zion. This took place to a limited extent after the exile, but it will occur on a worldwide scale in the Millennium.

4. Hope in God's ceaseless existence 102:23-28

It seemed as though God was killing the psalmist prematurely. He prayed for a continuation of his life (v. 24).

> "This is a prayer for the afflicted, that God would not *take us away in the midst of our days*, but that, if it be his will, he would spare us to do him further service and to be made riper for heaven."[940]

This request led the psalmist to reflect further on the duration of God's existence. To picture God's ceaseless continuance, he referred to the creation (Gen. 1) and then the consummation of the present heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1; cf. 2 Pet. 3:10). His point was that God will outlast His creation. This is a good reminder that everything that is only material is temporary. Really God is eternal, having no beginning or ending (v. 27). Therefore He will preserve the children of His servants who were then in danger of dying or had already died.

The writer to the Hebrews applied verses 25-27 to Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:10-12; 13:8). He is the Person of the Trinity who created and sustains all things (Col. 1:16-17). These verses are some of the clearest and most majestic revelations of God's eternal nature in Scripture. This revelation gave the psalmist hope in his personal distress. In the same way, knowledge of God's changeless character can be a great comfort to all of God's people when they suffer. It helps to view personal suffering in the context of eternity.

PSALM 103

> "The four psalms that close Book Four of the book of Psalms (90—106) emphasize praise to the Lord for several reasons: His benefits to His people (103), His care of His creation (104), His wonderful acts on behalf of Israel (105), His longsuffering with His people's rebellion (106)."[941]

This popular Davidic wisdom psalm of individual thanksgiving reviews God's mercies and expresses confident hope in His covenant promises. It contains no requests. Though there is no real connection between this psalm and the preceding one, this one expresses thanks for answered prayer, which Psalm 102 requested. It was the inspiration for H. F. Lyte's popular hymn, "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven."

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[940]Henry, p. 687.

[941]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 276.

> "This [Ps. 103] is perhaps the best-known and best-loved of all the hymns."[942]

Read it to be reminded of God's goodness.

1. Praise for God's mercy to individuals 103:1-5

103:1-2 David called on himself to bless the LORD wholeheartedly because of all His many blessings. To "bless the LORD" means to thank Him because He is the source of all blessings.[943]

> "This Hebrew word [*nephesh*, "soul"] occurs more than 750 times in the Bible. It has quite a number of meanings, but most of them can be reduced to the following three categories: (1) life or the life force, especially in connection with blood (Gen. 9:4, 5; Lev. 17:11, 14); (2) one's soul or the immaterial being, the seat of intellect and emotion (42:1, 2; 86:4; 1 Sam. 1:10; 2 Sam. 5:8; Prov. 23:7; Song 1:7); and (3) an individual or person (84:2; Gen. 2:7; Judg. 12:3; Ezek. 18:4). Originally the word probably referred to the breath (Job 41:21)."[944]

Note the many references to "all" and its equivalents in this psalm. Some groups of Christians (e.g., some Amish) give thanks to God at the end of their meals as well as at the beginning.

> "There is nothing the soul of man is so prone to forget as to render thanks that are due, and more especially thanks that are due to God."[945]

103:3-5 God's blessings that people enjoy as benefits include forgiveness of sins, healing from sickness, deliverance from death, enrichment of life, satisfaction, and rejuvenation.

> "If so much as the very smallest iniquity in thought, word, or act, were left unforgiven, we should be just as badly off, just as far from God, just as unfit for heaven, just as exposed to hell, as though the whole weight of our sins were yet upon us. Let the reader ponder this deeply."[946]

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[942]Brueggemann, p. 160.
[943]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 983.
[944]Ibid., p. 984.
[945]Delitzsch, 3:120.
[946]*Things New and Old*, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:74.

> "There are godly people who suffer illness, despite repeated prayers for healing. Even though God is not bound to heal every disease, every healing does come from Him."[947]

Eagles remain strong to the end of their lives. Likewise, God enables His people to remain spiritually vigorous until death.

> "The expression *your youth is renewed like an eagle's* may allude to the phenomenon of molting, whereby the *eagle* grows new feathers."[948]

2. Testimony to God's compassion to His people 103:6-18

103:6-8 Verse 6 is a topic sentence that introduces what follows. Verses 7 and 8 describe God's dealings with Israel at Mt. Sinai. The fact that God revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites indicates His great compassion and grace. Verse 8 quotes Exodus 34:6. It restates four great characteristics about God.

> "He is slow to anger, bears long with those that are very provoking, defers punishing, that he may give space to repent, and does not speedily execute the sentence of his law."[949]

103:9-12 These verses illustrate the truth of verse 8. God's compassion is clear in that He does not constantly accuse or antagonize us, even though we constantly sin (cf. Eph. 6:4). He is slow to anger and He does not maintain His anger continually. His gracious character is obvious in that He does not punish us for our sins immediately or completely, as we deserve. He does not pay us back what we deserve either. His loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) with those who fear Him is as limitless as the sky. Furthermore, He separates the guilt of our sins from us completely (cf. Rom. 8:1).

Many students of verse 12 have noted that if someone travels north or south he finally arrives at a pole from which he can proceed no farther north or south. However, if someone travels east or west, he never reaches such a point. God did not say He forgives (or removes) our sins as far as the north is from the south, but as far as the east is from the west, namely: to infinity—in degree or distance.

103:13-18 God's compassion is father-like in that He is mindful of our finite creaturely limitations.

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[947]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 983.
[948]The NET Bible note on 103:5. Cf. Henry, p. 688.
[949]Ibid.

"He knows us even better than we know ourselves."[950]

> Verses 15 and 16 beautifully describe the transitory nature of human life. It is both frail and short-lived. In contrast, God's loyal love to those who fear Him abides strong forever. It transcends generations and continues on to the descendants of those who obey His law (vv. 17-18; cf. Exod. 20:5-6).

3. Praise for God's sovereignty over all 103:19-22

God reigns from heaven as King over all. His universal authority extends to every created thing in time and space.

> "The central theme of the book of Psalms, which its prayers assume and its songs of praise affirm, is God's kingship. . . .
>
> "The book's theological message may be summarized as follows: As the Creator of all things, God exercises sovereign authority over the natural order, the nations, and Israel, His unique people. In His role as universal King God assures order and justice in the world and among His people, often by exhibiting His power as an invincible warrior. The proper response to this sovereign King is trust and praise."[951]

In view of His beneficent character, all creatures should bless the Lord. This includes his powerful angelic servants (cf. Heb. 1:14) and all His creation. David ended this psalm as he began it—by exhorting himself to bless the Lord.

This great psalm glorifies God by expounding His character. It teaches us what God is like. We should join the rest of creation in praising God because of who He is.

PSALM 104

This psalm of descriptive praise is quite similar to Psalm 103. Both begin and end with similar calls to bless God. However, God's dealing with people is the subject of praise in Psalm 103, whereas His creation and sustenance of the world are the theme of Psalm 104.

> "The poets of the Old Testament loved to describe the natural world. . . .
>
> "But in two important ways the biblical poets were different from their neighbors in the ancient Middle East. First, they resisted the temptation to deify nature. Their neighbors did not merely rhapsodize about birds and trees, hills and seas—they worshiped them. The biblical poets learned to do something truly new. Namely, they loved nature but did not bow to it. They enjoyed nature but did not worship it.

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[950]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 366.
[951]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 258.

> "The second distinctive of the biblical poets was their identification of 'nature.' For them, nature was always 'creation.' The word *nature* does not itself deify the world, but it still implies that the world has its own sense of being, its own power, and its own dynamic. On the other hand, the word *creation* is a term of faith. It expresses the belief that everything that exists is made by God. All the beauty and splendor of the universe comes from God's creative hands.
>
> "In some ways, the modern emphasis on 'Mother Earth' is simply a revival of the goddess cults of the ancient Middle East. However, the authors of the creation psalms have the right perspective. We can express our enjoyment of creation without worshiping it. We can love the earth because we first love its Creator. We can rejoice in the marvels of nature—the sparkling waterfall and the soaring eagle—because we know they are the handiwork of God. Any efforts to 'save' the earth should arise from our worship of its Creator and our knowledge that we are called to responsible stewardship because everything God creates is a gift from Him."[952]
>
> "The structure of the psalm is modelled [*sic*] fairly closely on that of Genesis 1, taking the stages of creation as starting-points for praise. But as each theme is developed it tends to anticipate the later scenes of the creation drama, so that the days described in Genesis overlap and mingle here. . . . One of our finest hymns, Sir Robert Grant's 'O worship the King', takes its origin from this psalm, deriving its metre (but little else) from William Kethe's 16th-century paraphrase, 'My soul, praise the Lord' (the Old 104th)."[953]

The monotheistic Pharaoh Ahkenaton (c.1370-c.1353 B.C.) evidently composed a hymn of praise that is similar to this psalm.[954]

1. Prologue 104:1a

The unnamed psalmist exhorted himself to bless God. The reasons he should do so follow.

> "When we magnify the Lord, let us do it heartily: our best is far beneath His worthiness; let us not dishonor Him by rendering to Him half-hearted worship."[955]

2. Praise for the creation 104:1b-23

104:1b-4 The writer pictured God creating the heavens. Splendor and majesty clothe God in the sense that they manifest Him as clothing makes a statement

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[952]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 985.

[953]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 368. See also Delitzsch, 3:127-37; and Leupold, pp. 724-32.

[954]See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 104-105, for the text.

[955]Spurgeon, 2:80.

about the person who wears it. Light is good because it brings life and blessing. When God created light He communicated part of His nature to His creation (Gen. 1:3-5). God created the sky as a tent above man's head.

> "As a camper readily pitches his tent somewhere, so God without exertion prepared the earth for habitation."[956]

The writer pictured God building a loft for Himself beyond the water above, namely, above the clouds. Riding on the clouds and wind symbolize God's majestic authority (cf. 68:4; cf. Job 38:4). Verse 4 is a poetic description of the angels (cf. Heb. 1:7). Angels do His bidding as wind and fire carry out the will of God on earth.

104:5-9 The psalmist described God creating the earth and then covering it with a blanket, as one would cover a new-born infant. He pictured the earth as though it were a building and stressed the stability of what God had made. He did not mean that the earth has literal "foundations" and is flat.

God proceeded to separate "the waters" on the earth from those above the earth ("mountains"; vv. 6b-7; cf. Gen. 1:6-8). Then he separated the dry ground from the waters on the earth (vv. 8-9; cf. Gen. 1:9-13). The seas ("deep") are humanly unmanageable, but God set their boundaries and prohibited the waters from crossing them. The frequent references to God controlling water in this psalm demonstrate His sovereignty over all that is difficult to manage in creation.

104:10-18 God also caused springs to gush forth in the valleys so that the animal world could find water and drink. In other words, God provided graciously for His creatures' needs. The song of the birds appears to be a song of praise to God for His provision (v. 12b). God causes the vegetable world to produce for the benefit of His creatures as well. Clearly man's ability to grow food depends on God's more basic provisions. Wine makes people feel good, olive oil makes them look good, and food enables them to produce good things of all kinds. All of God's provisions are for our welfare. He desires to bless humankind. He even provides for the welfare of trees, birds, and insignificant animals. God has indeed made the earth a remarkable habitat for humanity.

> "Baal was supposedly the source of life's staples, bread (Ugar. *lhm*), wine (*yn*), and oil (*smn*). In direct contradiction to this, the psalmists asserted that the Lord softens the earth with showers (65:10) and brings forth 'food [Heb. *lehem*] from the earth; wine [*yayin*] that gladdens the heart of man, oil [*semen*] to make his face

[956]VanGemeren, p. 658.

> shine, and bread [*lehem*] that sustains his heart' (104:14-15)."[957]

104:19-23 God's creation of daytime and nighttime were also provisions for God's creatures, especially humankind (cf. Gen. 1:14-17).

3. Praise of the Creator 104:24-32

104:24-30 The psalmist broke out in praise to Yahweh for His wisdom in creating as He did. He also acknowledged that all things God created belonged to Him. This even included the sea with all its hidden treasures. Leviathan probably refers to a large sea animal (cf. Job 41).[958] In the ancient Near East it symbolized chaotic evil.[959] This whole psalm is a polemic against the Canaanite gods who supposedly controlled the earth and the sea.

> "Rather than being viewed as forces that oppose God, the sea and its creatures, including Leviathan, are presented as prime examples of God's creative skill (104:24-26)."[960]

Verses 27-30 describe how dependent all of God's creatures are on Him for their lives. He supplies or withholds food. They live or die.

> "We have only to gather, for God gives [v. 28]. As to spirituals, the principle is true, most emphatically, we have, in the matter of grace, only to gather what God gives."[961]

The writer viewed God as creating new creatures whenever they come to life. This is the work of His Spirit (cf. Gen. 1:2). God is responsible for the birth of all animal life forms, indeed of all life forms. Whereas the Son of God is the agent of creation (Col. 1:16), the Spirit provides life. For this reason God often described the Spirit as His breath (Gen. 2:7). The translators have rendered the Hebrew word *ruach* "breath," "spirit," "air," and "wind," depending on the context.

104:31-32 The psalmist prayed that God's glory would continue forever since He wields such powerful control over creation. He also wanted God to rejoice in His great works of creation. Only a touch or even a look from God makes creation respond violently.

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[957]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 261.
[958]A. Ross, p. 869; Roy B. Zuck, *Job*, p. 180.
[959]Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, pp. 329-31. For an extensive study of the motif, see John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*.
[960]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 259.
[961]Spurgeon, 2:86.

4. Proper responses 104:33-35a

The psalmist vowed to praise God with his mouth and with his mind because of God's creative and sustaining sovereignty. He also prayed that wicked sinners would perish from the earth. They are out of harmony with all of creation that responds submissively to the Creator's commands.

> "The psalmist is not vindictive in his prayer against the wicked but longs for a world fully established and maintained by the Lord, without outside interference."[962]

5. Epilogue 104:35b

The psalm concludes as it began, with the psalmist reminding himself to bless the Lord by praising Him. "Praise the Lord" translates the Hebrew *haleluyah*. The translators often simply transliterated this Hebrew expression as "hallelujah." There are 23 occurrences of this term in the psalms, and this is the first (cf. 105:45; 106:1, 48; 112:1; 113:1, 9; 115:18; 116:19; 117:2; 135:1, 3, 21; 146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6).[963] The only four occurrences of "hallelujah" in the New Testament are in Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6, the context being the second coming of Christ.

> "The Psalm closes with an invocation of praise, the translation of a Hebrew phrase, which is used as an English word, 'Hallelujah,' and may have served the purpose of a chorus, as often in our psalmody, or to give fuller expression to the writer's emotions. It is peculiar to Psalms composed after the captivity, as 'Selah' is to those of an earlier date."[964]

This psalm is an exposition of Genesis 1. It stresses the sovereignty of Yahweh over all creation. All creatures should honor God and submit to Him because He is the source and sustainer of life.

> "We are astonished to find in a lyrical poem of such a limited compass, the whole universe—the heavens and the earth—sketched with a few bold touches."[965]

PSALM 105

This psalm praises God for His faithful dealings with Israel (cf. Pss. 78, 106, and 113). It reviews Israel's history from Abraham to the wilderness wanderings (cf. 1 Chron. 16:9-36), and the Abrahamic Covenant is its centerpiece. The Israelites needed to be faithful to God, because He had been faithful to them. The same is true of Christians today.

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[962]VanGemeren, p. 664.

[963]See O. Palmer Robertson, "The Strategic Placement of the 'Hallelu-YAH' Psalms within the Psalter," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58:2 (June 2015):265-68.

[964]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 443.

[965]A. Von Humboldt, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:87.

1. Praise for God's greatness 105:1-6

The unknown psalmist called on Israel (v. 6) to give thanks to the Lord in prayer, and to broadcast His deeds publicly. The people should sing His praises and take pride and joy in His character. They should also draw near to Him in prayer, seeking His help constantly. They should remember His works that inspire wonder and marvel in the beholder, and in the wise judgments that He has revealed.

> "Surprisingly in Hebrew, there is no verb that means 'to thank' in the way the English word *thank* is used as a common expression of gratitude between people. The meaning of the Hebrew word [*yadah*] is 'to make public acknowledgment,' and its association with the Hebrew noun *yad*, meaning 'hand,' suggests hands outstretched toward God. The word is used regularly in the Bible to depict public commendation of God's person and attributes, and the public testimony to what He has done for His people; this is the core meaning of *praise*. Old Testament believers such as Leah (Gen. 29:35), David (2 Chr. 7:6), the psalmists (7:17; 42:5; 118:21), and the prophets (Is. 25:1; Jer. 33:11) all give thanks, praising the Lord for His mercy toward them."[966]

2. The record of God's faithfulness to Israel 105:7-41

105:7-11 God remembered His people (v. 7, cf. v. 42), so His people should remember Him (v. 5). God had been faithful to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 15:18-21; 22:15-18; 28:13-15). He made this covenant with Abraham's descendants as well as with him personally. A "thousand generations" means innumerable generations (cf. Exod. 20:5-6). Note that the psalmist called this covenant an "everlasting covenant" (v. 10). That is, it would abide in effect as long at the earth abides. Of the three promises in the covenant, the writer mentioned only the land promise here.

105:12-41 Verses 12-15 describe God's care of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Gen. 12—36). Verses 16-23 summarize God's preservation of the chosen family through Joseph's protection (Gen. 37—50).

> "His brethren sold him, but God sent him."[967]

Verse 24 refers to God's increase of the Israelites during their Egyptian sojourn (Exod. 1). Verses 25-36 review how the Lord prepared His people to depart from Egypt with emphasis on the plagues He sent (Exod. 2—12; cf. Ps. 78:44-51).

> "In keeping with general OT thought, the psalmist ignores secondary causes."[968]

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[966]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 988.
[967]Spurgeon, 2:90.
[968]Yates, p. 534.

Verses 37-38 describe the Exodus itself (Exod. 13). The order of the plagues is somewhat different from the order in Exodus, as is also true in Psalm 78, another instance of poetic license. Verses 39-41 recount His faithful care of His chosen people in the wilderness (Exod. 14—Deut. 34).

> "From most unlikely sources, the all-sufficient God can supply His people's needs; hard rocks become springing fountains at the Lord's command."[969]

> "Given the prominent position of the first eleven chapters of Genesis in the Torah and the significant names that occur there, it is rather surprising that only one person from these chapters, Ham, is mentioned by name in the Psalter, and that one only incidentally [vv. 25, 29]."[970]

3. Praise for God's faithfulness 105:42-45

Again the psalmist reminded the reader of God remembering His unique promise to Abraham (cf. v. 8). The Lord brought Abraham's descendants into the Promised Land and dispossessed the Canaanite tribes. He even gave them food that the Canaanites had planted and cultivated. He did all this so the Israelites would obey His will for them and experience all the good things He had in store for them. The psalm closes with a final call to praise the Lord ("Hallelujah!"). This psalm may have been composed after the exile in Babylon.[971]

A key word in this psalm is "remember" (vv. 5, 8, 42). By remembering how faithful God had been in remembering His promise to their patriarch, the Israelites would remember to praise Him. God's people benefit from reviewing history because it reminds them of God's faithfulness. This reminder encourages us who are New Testament believers to trust in His promises given to us. We, too, can see that He has been consistently faithful to His word throughout history.

PSALM 106

This wisdom psalm recalls Israel's historical unfaithfulness to God, whereas Psalm 105 stressed God's faithfulness to the nation. Even though God's people proved unfaithful to Him, He remained faithful to them because of His covenant promises (cf. 1 Chron. 16:34-36; Neh. 9; Isa. 63:7—64:12; Dan. 9; 2 Tim. 2:13).

> "This Psalm gives a detailed confession of the sins of Israel in all periods of their history, with special reference to the terms of the covenant as intimated (Ps. 105:45)."[972]

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[969]Spurgeon, 2:99.
[970]Bullock, p. 100.
[971]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 988.
[972]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 445.

> "'Surely never but in Israel has patriotism chosen a nation's sins for the theme of song, or, in celebrating its victories, written but one name, the Name of Jehovah on its trophies."[973]

1. Introductory call to praise 106:1-5

The writer, whomever he may have been, urged his audience to praise the Lord by thanking Him for His goodness, loyal love, and powerful works. Thus some interpreters regard this as a psalm of praise. God promised to bless those who are consistently just and righteous. Therefore the psalmist asked God to bless him with prosperity, joy, and glory.

> "Thanks-doing is the proof of thanksgiving."[974]

> "We are too sick to visit our Great Physician, and therefore He visits us [v. 4]."[975]

2. The record of Israel's unfaithfulness to God 106:6-46

106:6 The psalmist confessed that Israel had been unfaithful to God (cf. 1 Kings 8:47). This was true of his generation as it had been true of former generations. This communal confession and penitence introduced a review of specific iniquities and wickedness.

106:7-12 The Israelites did not learn from the plagues that God could and would take care of them. Consequently, when there appeared to be no escape at the Red Sea, they complained rather than trusting and waiting (Exod. 14:11-12). They also failed to learn the folly of idolatry.[976] Nevertheless Yahweh saved them from the pursuing Egyptian soldiers for His reputation's sake. He led them safely across and drowned Pharaoh's soldiers (Exod. 14:26-30). This salvation moved His people to praise Him (Exod. 15).

106:13-33 The writer did not recount Israel's rebellions in the wilderness in strict chronological sequence. His concern was to build from less serious acts of rebellion to greater ones, evidently for the emotional effect this would produce in the reader.

Verses 13-15 describe the rebellion at Kibroth-hattaavah when the Israelites demanded meat and God sent them quails (Num. 11:4-34; cf. Lot, and the Prodigal Son). "They did not wait for His counsel" (v. 13) means they were not willing to go the way that God, in His wisdom, led them.

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[973]Alexander Maclaren, quoted in Leupold, p. 742.
[974]John Trapp, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:100.
[975]Spurgeon, 2:101.
[976]Henry, p. 692.

Verses 16-18 recall the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram against Moses (Num. 16). Verses 19-23 refer to the golden calf incident at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 32). "Their glory" (v. 20) refers to Yahweh.

> "The first failure involved the lusts of the flesh and the second involved the pride of life (see 1 John 2:15-17). The third failure, the worship of the golden calf (Ex. 32; Deut. 9:8-29), involved the lust of the eyes."[977]

Verses 24-27 speak of Israel's refusal to enter the Promised Land from Kadesh Barnea when the spies returned and gave their discouraging report (Num. 13:26-33). Verses 28-31 refer to Israel's participation in the pagan worship feast of the Moabites, another flagrant departure from faithful allegiance to Yahweh (Num. 25). Leupold interpreted verse 28 as referring to the Moabite idols as "dead," not that the Israelites participated in some cult that involved sacrificing to departed persons.[978] Despite being similar to Genesis 15:6, verse 31 probably refers to a righteous reward, not a justifying righteousness.[979]

Verses 32-33 describe the rebellion at Meribah Kadesh when the people so aggravated Moses that he struck the rock rather than just speaking to it (Num. 20:2-13).

> "In summary, except for Phinehas's action and God's patience and grace, the wilderness era, as the psalmists recall it, has few pleasant memories. Yet, it was a time from which Israel could receive much instruction, even from their ancestors' disobedience, for their ongoing history and relationship to God."[980]

> "As George Morrison wrote, 'The Lord took Israel out of Egypt in one night, but it took Him forty years to take Egypt out of Israel.'"[981]

106:34-46 Verses 34-39 relate Israel's unfaithfulness in the Promised Land. Rather than destroying the Canaanites and their altars, as God had commanded, the Israelites lived among these people, learned their customs, and worshipped their gods. They even participated in child sacrifice rites associated with pagan worship. These involved worshipping demons rather than the true God (cf. Deut. 32:17; 1 Cor. 10:20). Israel behaved as a harlot by being unfaithful to God (cf. Num. 25:2).

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[977]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 285.
[978]Leupold, p. 749.
[979]Ibid.
[980]Bullock, p. 112.
[981]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 285.

Verses 40-46 summarize the approximately 300 years of Israel's history that the Book of Judges records (cf. Judg. 2:11-23). The Israelites sank lower and lower spiritually during those years. It was God's faithfulness to His covenant with them and His loyal love that led Him to have mercy on them repeatedly. When they cried out to Him He delivered them (cf. Judg. 3:15; et al.). The truth of verse 46 stands documented in Israel's later history (cf. Ezra 9:9; Neh. 2:8; Esth. 8:7-12; et al.).

> ". . . the whole history of Israel has essentially the same fundamental character, viz. that Israel's unfaithfulness does not annul God's faithfulness."[982]

3. Concluding prayer for deliverance 106:47-48

This petition suggests that the psalmist lived and wrote during Israel's Babylonian Captivity. It is a simple request for deliverance, claiming no merit to obtain this favor. The writer relied exclusively on the Lord's covenant faithfulness and His loyal love for His people (v. 45).

The last verse blesses Yahweh and calls on God's people to praise Him. It is a fitting conclusion to Book 4 of the Psalter, as well as to Psalm 106.

Prayers of confession, such as this one, help us to maintain a realistic dependence on God's grace. They remind us that God is faithful—even though His people have not been—and thus they encourage faithfulness in us. Hopefully, we who are New Testament believers will learn from the mistakes of the Israelites and not repeat the same errors (1 Cor. 10:11).

V. BOOK 5: CHS. 107—150

There are 44 psalms in this section of the Psalter. David composed 15 of these (108—110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138—145), Solomon wrote one (127), and the remaining 28 are anonymous. Psalms 113—118 compose the so-called Egyptian Hallel, which the Jews used in their Passover (cf. Mark 14:26). Fifteen are Songs of Ascent (120—134), and five are *hallel* or Hallelujah psalms (146—150). The time of compilation for Book 5 of the Psalter may have been the exilic or postexilic period, perhaps as late as the time of Nehemiah (ca. 444–432 B.C.).[983] There is much emphasis on praise in this section of the Psalter, and one might think if it as "the book of praise."

PSALM 107

> "Psalms 105, 106, and 107 constitute a trilogy of praise and thanksgiving, in spite of the book division here."[984]

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[982]Delitzsch, 3:158.
[983]Bullock, p. 68.
[984]Yates, p. 535.

An unknown writer sought to motivate the Lord's redeemed people to praise Him by reviewing some of His mighty acts. This is another wisdom psalm (cf. Pss. 105; 106).

> "By setting forth examples of this sort, the prophet shows that what are thought to be chance occurrences are just so many proofs of heavenly providence, especially of fatherly kindness."[985]

> "The Psalms civ.—cvii. really to a certain extent form a tetralogy. Ps. civ. derives its material from the history of the creation, Ps. cv. from the preparatory and early history of Israel, Ps. cvi. from the history of Israel in Egypt, in the desert, and in the Land of Promise down to the Exile, and Ps. cvii. from the time of the restoration."[986]

> "Ps. 105, of a character all its own, leads the reader through Israel's history to the time of the Exodus. Ps. 106 carries him along to the time of the going into the Babylonian Captivity. Ps. 107 takes up the sequence referring to the Restoration from this exile. Thus it might also be noted that Ps. 106:47 prays for the Restoration; Ps. 107 thanks for the Restoration."[987]

1. A call to thanksgiving and testimony 107:1-3

God's people should thank Him because He is good and His loyal love endures forever (v. 1).

> "If you are a Christian, tell others how good God is. He *is* good, but He doesn't have a good name in the world today. God's reputation is bad—a reputation is what people think about you. God does not have many friends in court among the multitudes of people in the world—no champion, or defender, and few to testify on His behalf."[988]

Those whom God has redeemed should be especially grateful for His liberating work for them and should publicly testify to His salvation (v. 2). In view of verse 3, this psalm may date from the postexilic period of Israel's history (cf. vv. 10-16).

2. Specific instances of deliverance 107:4-32

The writer cited four times when the Israelites cried out to God for deliverance and He saved them (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28; cf. Judg. 2:18; Joel 2:32; Acts. 2:21; Rom. 10:13). These situations were answers to the prayer Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple (cf. 1 Kings 8:46-53). At the end of each section, the psalmist reminded the redeemed to thank God with the same refrain (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). The Gospels record Jesus producing the same kinds of deliverance during His earthly ministry.

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[985]Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 1:5:8.
[986]Delitzsch, 3:163.
[987]Leupold, p. 753.
[988]McGee, 2:830.

107:4-9 It is not possible to identify the specific occasion, during the wilderness wanderings, that the writer referred to here. The people were hungry and thirsty and cried out to Yahweh in their distress (cf. Matt. 14:13-21; 15:32-39). He delivered them and led them on safely to their destination. Consequently, His people should thank Him for His loyal love and for His wonder-inspiring works for them. Yahweh provided the basic necessities of life for His people.

107:10-16 Second, the Lord delivered his captive people when they cried out to Him (cf. Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 1:79; 4:18-19). God had set them free. He provided freedom for those held in captivity because of their sins. This is another clue that this psalm dates from after the Babylonian captivity. Perhaps this stanza inspired Charles Wesley to write "And Can It Be That I Should Gain?"

> "Long my imprisoned spirit lay
> Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
> Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
> I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
> My chains fell off, my heart was free,
> I rose, went forth, and followed Thee."

107:17-22 Third, when God's people were sick because of their sins and they cried out to Him, He restored them to health (cf. Matt. 9:1-8). The reference to God's Word having a part in their healing (v. 20) shows that spiritual nourishment plays a vital part in physical restoration (cf. Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4; James 5:14-16). Such salvation should move God's people to make sacrifices to express their gratitude and to tell other people about the Lord's goodness.

107:23-32 Fourth, God delivered sailors when they cried out to Him in storms. He calmed the seas and brought them safely to their ports (cf. Matt. 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25). This, too, demands public praise from those who were rescued.

> "We have a saying, 'Let those that would learn to pray go to sea'; I say, Let those that will go to sea learn to pray."[989]

"The thank offering of the Psalms appears to be one pledged by the worshiper during or after some zero hour of his life. On the basis of Psalm 107 the rabbis spoke of four occasions when the thank offering was appropriate: safe return from a voyage (vv. 23-32), safe return from a desert journey (vv. 4-9), recovery from illness (vv. 17-22), and release from prison (vv. 10-16)."[990]

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[989]Henry, p. 693.

[990]Bullock, p. 154. See also Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 219.

3. The providence of God 107:33-43

The following verses contain a second major reason for praising God, namely: His providential governing of the world.

107:33-38 God controls nature so that it becomes His instrument of cursing or blessing His people. The repetition of the phrase "an inhabited city" (v. 36, cf. vv. 4, 7) is a unique feature of this psalm. It may refer to the captives returning to Jerusalem—their long anticipated destination—in the three returns from Babylon that the Old Testament records.

107:39-43 The Lord also controls the experiences of people. He humbles the proud, but He also exalts the humble. The godly observe this and rejoice, but the unrighteous keep silent. A wise person will reflect on these matters and meditate on God's loyal love (*hesed*).

> "The conclusion to this psalm transforms the hymn of thanksgiving and praise to a wisdom psalm."[991]

This whole psalm exalts the loyal love of God (vv. 1, 8, 15, 21, 31). It teaches God's people to observe God's loyalty to them when He saves them after they call on Him. He does this providentially by controlling the forces of nature and by arranging the circumstances of their lives. The proper godly response to this grace is to give thanks to Him and to tell others about His wonderful works. This is a good psalm to read when we do not feel very thankful.

PSALM 108

This song of trust is evidently the product of someone who pieced together sections of other Davidic psalms for the Israelites to use in public worship.[992] Verses 1-5 are very similar to 57:7-11, and verses 6-13 are identical with 60:5-12.[993] The theme of this psalm is trust in God because of His promises, i.e., because of their past and future fulfillment.

> "We may here learn how to praise God from the example of one who was master of the art."[994]

1. A triumphant praise declaration 108:1-6

> "The wheels of a chariot revolve, but the axletree turns not; the sails of a mill move with the wind, but the mill itself moves not; the earth is carried round its orbit, but its center is fixed. So should a Christian be able, amidst changing scenes and changing fortunes, to say, *O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed* [v. 1]."[995]

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[991]VanGemeren, p. 688.

[992]Delitzsch, 3:173,

[993]See my comments on these verses elsewhere in these notes.

[994]Henry, p. 695.

[995]G. S. Bowes, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:114.

David praised God exultantly for His great love and His amazing faithfulness. He wanted God to exalt Himself over all the earth and to deliver him from his affliction (cf. 57:7-11).

2. A confident prayer request 108:7-13

The psalmist cited God's promise to subdue the nations around Israel (vv. 7-9). Then he expressed his confidence that victory was possible if God would grant it, but impossible if He would not. David was relying on Israel's Warrior, not his army, to defeat the enemy. He realized and confessed that if victory depended on the sinful people, they would fall in defeat (cf. 60:5-12).

This is a great expression of dependence on God and trust in Him for the deliverance He promised. We who are God's people should face our spiritual enemies with the same humility and confidence.

PSALM 109

This individual lament is one of the imprecatory psalms in which the writer called on God to avenge his enemies (cf. 3:7; 5:10; 6:10; 7:14-16; 28:4-5; 31:17-18; 37:2, 9-10, 15, 20, 35-36; 40:14-15; 54:5; 55:9, 15, 23; 59:12-13; 63:9-11; 64:7-9; 71:13; 79:6, 12; 139:19-22; 140:9-10).[996] It contains some of the strongest imprecations found in the Psalter.

> "Whereas Psalm 88 is preoccupied with the *absence* and *silence* of God, Psalm 109 is concerned for *vindictiveness* toward other human beings who have seriously violated the speaker. I group them together because I believe the two psalms embody the main problems of Christian faith: the problem of *trusting a God* who seems not available, and the problem of *caring for a neighbor* who is experienced as enemy."[997]

1. Lament over enemies 109:1-5

David asked God to respond to his prayer for vindication. He had shown love to an unidentified group of people, but they had returned hatred, lying, and evil. He did not avenge their injustice but pleaded with God to do so.

> "We believe that there is . . . an unspoken presupposition in all cases of this sort, namely, should the wicked opponent turn from his ungodliness and seek the Lord, no one would be happier than the writer of the psalm. But these opponents of his were apparently not very likely to give any evidence of repentance. Since these were men whose wickedness was deeply ingrained, it was but natural to wish for the total overthrow of these

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[996]See Day, "The Imprecatory . . .," pp. 176-80.

[997]Brueggemann, p. 81.

> men and what they stood for. A godly man could certainly not pray for their success."[998]

"But I am *in* prayer" (v. 4) is literally "But I am prayer." David's life was so full of prayer that he could equate prayer with his life. As Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21), so David meant, "For to me, to live is prayer." Prayer was the very atmosphere that he lived in, the very air that he breathed; he claimed to do everything with prayer.

2. Imprecations on foes 109:6-20

109:6-15 The psalmist prayed that God would do several specific things to avenge him. He asked God to return what his enemy was doing to him back on himself. He wanted a wicked man to oppose and accuse him. He wanted God to judge his enemy guilty and put him to death. He also asked that God punish his wife and children for his wickedness. In the future he hoped no one would remember him and that he would have no descendants. Having one's family name terminated was considered to be a great tragedy in the ancient Near East.[999]

It seems inappropriate for David to ask God to punish children for the sins of their fathers, since God specifically forbade this in the Mosaic Law (cf. Deut. 26:12-14). Perhaps David prayed contrary to God's will, allowing his hatred to get the better of him. Even though the Bible records many things that it does not condone, there is nothing in this text that would suggest that David was not praying in the will of God. Another explanation is that he was praying in hyperbole. In other words, he did not really mean what he was saying literally, but used extreme language to communicate his strong feelings.

However, David did not just make one statement about his enemy's wife and children, but developed this desire in considerable detail. This seems to indicate that he meant what he said. I think the best explanation is that David's concern in these requests was his enemy rather than his enemy's wife and children. He said what he did as a punishment on his enemy, not because his hatred of his enemy extended to the man's wife and children—though his enemy's wife and children may well have participated in the husband's hostility toward David.[1000] David seems to have been anticipating various consequences that his enemy would experience because of God's judgment.[1001]

> "One might think the punishment should be confined to the individual and that his family should not have to suffer for his crimes. However, in ancient Semitic thought a man and

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[998]Leupold, p. 764.
[999]See Childs, p. 71.
[1000]Leupold, p. 767.
[1001]See my comments on the strong language in the imprecatory psalms at the beginning of these notes.

> his offspring were inseparably bound together so that the actions of the former could influence the destiny of the latter. Of course, one sees this principle at work in the world every day and, not surprisingly, it permeates the Bible as well."[1002]

Peter quoted verse 8b in Acts 1:8 in reference to Judas Iscariot.

109:16-20 Here David gave reasons for his preceding requests. His enemy had practiced all the things David had asked God to do to this foe. He mercilessly persecuted the needy and the afflicted. He loved to curse other people rather than blessing them. Therefore the psalmist asked God to clothe him with cursing as with a garment and to make it as a belt that surrounded him always. Another interpretation is that the wicked man's love for cursing was so much a part of him that David described it as if he wore cursing as a garment.[1003] Verses 19-20 are probably a prophetic statement rather than a continuation of the imprecation.[1004]

> "Let God's cursing him be his shame, as his cursing his neighbor was his pride."[1005]

Sometimes David spoke of his "enemy" and sometimes of his "enemies" in this psalm. Evidently more than one person was in his mind. He may have spoken of an enemy in the singular when he thought of one of his enemies, perhaps the most hostile one. On the other hand, he may have used the singular to represent all of his enemies (a collective singular).

3. Request for help 109:21-31

109:21-25 David asked the Lord to deal with him in harmony with His loyal love: for the sake of God's reputation, David's need, and the sinfulness of the wicked. David had sought to follow the Lord faithfully, and God had promised to bless people who did that. However, David was not experiencing God's blessing. This made other people question God's justice and faithfulness. If God would again bless David and curse his enemy, this would show onlookers that God's promises are trustworthy. In these verses, David described how he felt in his downtrodden condition.

> "The locust [v. 23] or grasshopper (apart from the plague of the locusts) is proverbial as being a defenceless [*sic* defenseless], inoffensive little creature that is soon driven away, Job xxxix. 20."[1006]

[1002]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 280, n. 35.
[1003]VanGemeren, p. 694.
[1004]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 390; VanGemeren, p. 694.
[1005]Henry, p. 697.
[1006]Delitzsch, 3:181.

The Israelites usually practiced fasting (v. 24) for spiritual reasons, rather than for physical reasons like losing weight. They went without food and sometimes drink, temporarily, to spend that time in a more important activity, specifically: seeking God in prayer. Therefore we should probably understand David's reference to fasting as including prayer. He had prayed earnestly about the situation this psalm reflects. His extended prayer and fasting had made him physically weak.

The people who reproached David (v. 25) were evidently his enemies. These are the other people in view throughout the psalm.

109:26-31 David called on Yahweh to save him from the distress in which he found himself—in a way that would teach his enemies that God had delivered him. This would vindicate David, and all he stood for, in their sight.

> "If God bless us, we need not care who curses us."[1007]

Again he asked God to shame his accusers and thereby signal divine disapproval of their opposition to God's righteous servant. David concluded with a confident assertion that God would indeed vindicate him. This would result in the psalmist thanking and praising the Lord.

Believers can pray for the vindication of righteousness with good precedent in the psalms. With the light of later revelation, we understand better than David did, that God will not always vindicate the godly in this life, but He will do so eventually (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; et al.; cf. Acts 17:30-31; Rev. 7:17; 21:4). In David's day and in ours, God normally vindicates the righteous before they die, but His decision to postpone vindication often makes it appear that He is unjust (cf. Job). David's "bottom line" concern in this psalm was the vindication of God Himself (v. 31), but he also wanted relief from his oppressors.[1008]

David did what we should do: he turned his enemies over to God. We can pray that God will punish the wicked because He has promised to do so, but we should also ask Him to bring them to salvation (e.g., corrupt politicians, crooked business men, drug dealers, terrorists, et al.). Peter applied verse 8 to Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:20), to whom Jesus had previously extended grace.

PSALM 110

This is a prophetic, directly messianic, royal psalm that describes a descendant of David who would not only be his son but his Lord.[1009] This descendant would be both a king

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[1007]Henry, p. 697.

[1008]See E. Calvin Beisner, *Psalms of Promise*, pp. 161-82. See also Thomas L. Constable, "The Doctrine of Prayer" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1969), pp. 12-13.

[1009]See Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," pp. 271-73, for further discussion of this psalm's classification in the light of the New Testament's use of it. See also Waltke, pp. 887-96, for discussion of messianism, and the Messiah and the New Testament.

and a priest. David was a prophet, and in this psalm he revealed new information from God concerning the future. Such a prophetic message is an oracle (cf. Pss. 2; 16; 24).

> ". . . he that reads with understanding will see little enough of David here except as the writer. He is not the subject of it even in the smallest degree, but Christ is all."[1010]

There has been much speculation about the historical situation that formed the basis for what the psalmist wrote in this psalm.[1011] It is presently unknown, though David wrote it (cf. Mark 12:36). One view is as follows:

> "David prophetically spoke the psalm to his 'lord,' Solomon, when Solomon ascended to the Davidic throne in 971 B.C."[1012]

This writer concluded that the New Testament applied this psalm to Jesus Christ. The traditional Christian interpretation is that David wrote that God the Father spoke prophetically to His messianic Lord (i.e., His Son).

More important than this psalm's original historical context is its prophetic significance. The New Testament contains more references to this psalm than to any other chapter in the Old Testament (cf. Matt. 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42-44; 22:69; Acts 2:34-35; Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 5:6; 7:17, 21; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2). David Hay found 33 quotations of and allusions to the first four verses in the New Testament.[1013]

> "Psalm 110 is the linchpin psalm of the first seven psalms of Book Five of the Psalter. Besides occuring *[sic]* in the middle of the seven psalms (Pss. 107—113), Psalm 110 joins two different groups of psalms together. Psalms 107—109 express anguished pleas for deliverance; Psalms 111—113 overflow with praise for Yahweh. Psalm 110, the connecting psalm, reveals that the Messiah is both a King and a Priest who gives victory to His people . . . Thus because God more than meets the grief-stricken cries of His people, He is to be praised."[1014]

1. The oracle concerning Messiah 110:1-2

The psalmist wrote that he heard a conversation between Yahweh and David's Master. Clearly this distinguishes two members of the Godhead. LORD (Yahweh) refers to God the Father and Lord (*adonay*) refers to God the Son, the Messiah or Anointed of God.

[1010]Spurgeon, 2:124.

[1011]Elliott E. Johnson summarized 10 situations that various writers have suggested in "Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:596 (October-December 1992):430.

[1012]Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:596 (October-December 1992):453.

[1013]David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*.

[1014]Barry C. Davis, "Is Psalm 110 a Messianic Psalm?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:626 (April-June 2000):168.

Yahweh commanded Messiah to sit at His right hand, the traditional place of power and authority. He was to do so until Yahweh has subjugated Messiah's enemies (cf. Josh. 5:14). Then Yahweh would permit Messiah to rule over them (cf. 2:8-9; 1 Cor. 15:25).

> "Originally the victorious king placed his feet on the necks of his vanquished foe (cf. Josh 10:24; 1 Kings 5:3; Isa 51:23). From this practice arose the idiom to make one's enemy one's footstool."[1015]

Jesus Christ quoted verse 1 to prove that He was not only David's descendant but the Messiah of whom David wrote (Mark 12:35-37; cf. Matt. 22:44-45; Luke 20:42-44). The Jews of His day, and many Jews even today, believed that the verse means that Yahweh was speaking to David. Peter and the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews also quoted it to prove the deity of Jesus (Acts 2:34-36; 5:30-31; Heb. 1:13; 10:11-13).

> "So this single verse displays the divine Person of Christ, His power and the prospect before Him. Together with verse 4 it underlies most of the New Testament teaching on His glory as Priest-King."[1016]

2. The rule of Messiah 110:3-4

110:3 When Messiah comes to rule over His enemies, His people will willingly join in His reign (cf. Judg. 5:2). They will be holy, in contrast to the unholy whom Messiah will subdue. They will be as youthful warriors, namely, strong and energetic. They will be as the dew in the sense of being fresh, numerous, and a blessing from God. The expression "from the womb of the dawn" probably signifies their early appearance during Messiah's reign. Later revelation identifies these people as faithful believers (Rev. 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5).

110:4 Yahweh has made an affirmation in the most definite way possible and will not change His mind (cf. 2 Sam. 7:13; Ps. 89:3, 28-29, 34-35; 132:11).[1017] Messiah will be a priest forever in the order of (i.e., after the manner of) Melchizedek (lit. king of righteousness).[1018] This is the first reference in Scripture to this "order" of priests. Melchizedek ruled over Salem (lit. peace), the ancient name for Jerusalem, where David also ruled. Melchizedek was also a priest of the Most High God (Gen. 14:18; cf. Heb. 7:1). Thus he was both a king and a priest. Messiah would also be a king and a priest. In this sense, Messiah was a priest in the "order" of Melchizedek. He continued the type of priesthood Melchizedek had, namely, a kingly or royal priesthood.

[1015]VanGemeren, p. 697.

[1016]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 393. Cf. Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:25-26.

[1017]On the subject of God changing His mind, see Thomas L. Constable, "What Prayer Will and Will Not Change," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 99-113; and Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Does God 'Change His Mind'?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):387-99.

[1018]See M. J. Paul, "The Order of Melchizedek [Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:3]," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987):195-211.

> If Yahweh sets up Messiah as a priest "forever," the Aaronic order of priests must end as God's appointed order (cf. Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21). As both the Priest and the sacrificial Lamb, Messiah offered Himself as a substitute sacrifice on the cross (cf. Heb. 7:27-28; 10:10). Jesus was not of Aaron's line since He descended from the tribe of Judah (cf. Heb. 7:11-18). He is the new eternal High Priest (cf. Heb. 7:21-26, 28), and He mediates the New Covenant that replaces the Old Mosaic Covenant (cf. Heb. 8:13; 9:15).

3. The victory of Messiah 110:5-7

Messiah's victory over His enemies will be great. David saw Messiah presently seated at God the Father's right hand (cf. Heb. 8:1; 10:12). In the future He will wage war (cf. Joel 3:2, 11-14; Rev. 16:16; 19:13-15). Messiah drinking by a brook pictures Him renewing His strength. Yahweh will exalt Messiah because of His victorious conquest.[1019]

Later revelation helps us understand that Messiah will come back to the earth with His saints; He will not wage this particular war from heaven (Zech. 14:4; Rev. 19). He will fight against the nations that oppose Him at the end of the Tribulation. This is the battle of Armageddon (Dan. 11:36-45; Rev. 19:17-19). Following victory in that battle He will rule on the earth for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-10).

The Epistle to the Hebrews expounds this psalm. It clarifies especially how Jesus Christ fulfilled what David prophesied here about Messiah being a king-priest (Heb. 7:1—10:18; cf. Zech. 6:12-13).[1020]

PSALM 111

This wisdom psalm of praise is one of the acrostic psalms (cf. Pss. 9, 10; 25; 34; 37; 112; 119; and 145). Each successive line in the Hebrew text begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The writer evidently expressed his thoughts this way so the Israelites could memorize and recite the psalm easily. He recounted the Lord's great works of redemption that should draw out His people's praise.

> "Acrostic poems in general do not show logical development because of the arbitrary imposition of the alphabetic form."[1021]

> "Psalms 111–113 all begin with Hallelujah, and there is a specially close bond between 111 and 112. These two are . . . a matched pair in their subject-matter, which tells of God in this psalm, and of the man of God in the next, even sharing the same or similar phrases in one or two verses."[1022]

[1019]See Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, pp. 173-94.

[1020]On the subject of David and Solomon functioning as both a king and a priest, see 2 Sam. 6:14, 17-18; 1 Kings 8:14, 55, 62-64; and Merrill, "Psalms," p. 186.

[1021]VanGemeren, p. 700.

[1022]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 396.

> "But Psalms 111 and 112 are treated separately because they have a slightly different accent, an unqualified statement that the world is ruled by God with moral symmetry. That symmetry in the world is reflected in the disciplined acrostic structure of these two psalms. The world works so that persons receive the consequences of their actions (Gal. 6:7); this statement entertains no doubt about it."[1023]

This author called these psalms "songs of retribution."[1024]

1. Introductory praise 111:1-3

After a call to praise Yahweh, the unknown psalmist promised that he would praise God publicly. The greatness of God's works, which those who love them study, drew his praise. He also gloried in God's ceaseless righteousness.

> "Human things must be known to be loved, but divine things must be loved to be known."[1025]

2. Praise for specific works 111:4-9

Verse 4 states the theme of this section. God graciously helped His people, and consequently they remember to praise Him. Verses 5 and 6 cite examples of God's goodness. In verses 7-9, the writer praised God further for His redemption and His faithfulness.

3. Concluding wisdom 111:10

The writer may have quoted Job 28:28, Proverbs 1:7 or 9:10, or Ecclesiastes 12:13.

> "This famous saying is virtually the motto of the Wisdom writers, where its truth appears in various forms . . ."[1026]

> "Practical godliness is the test of wisdom. Men may know and be very orthodox; they may talk and be very eloquent; they may speculate and be very profound; but the best proof of their intelligence must be found in their actually doing the will of the Lord."[1027]

> "As though a man floating rapidly onward to the falls of Niagara should occupy himself in drawing a very admirable picture of the scenery. Men who are exceedingly great in the world's estimation have made the most signal blunders with regard to the most important things; and it is only

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[1023]Brueggemann, p. 45.
[1024]Ibid.
[1025]Blaise Pascal, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:128.
[1026]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 398.
[1027]Spurgeon, 2:129.

> because these things are not considered important by the world that the reputation of these men remains."[1028]

In view of God's great acts and faithfulness, fearing Him is the better part of wisdom. Obedience expresses reverential trust. Continuing worship is also appropriate. Some interpreters take the last clause as a prayer rather than a statement.[1029]

God's people should commit to memory the great characteristics and works of their God so they will remember to trust and obey Him.

PSALM 112

This wisdom psalm is also an acrostic (cf. Ps. 111). It focuses attention on the blessings those who fear God enjoy, especially their final exaltation.

> "However, the psalm gives a realistic portrayal of wisdom as it brings out, not only the blessings of honor, children, and riches, but also the reality of adversities ('darkness,' v. 4; 'bad news,' v. 7; 'foes,' v. 8)."[1030]

> "This Psalm may be regarded as an exposition of Psalm 111:10, presenting the happiness of those who fear and obey God, and contrasting the fate of the ungodly."[1031]

1. The blessed condition of those who fear Yahweh 112:1

This anonymous psalm begins with "Hallelujah," as do the ones immediately preceding and following it. They are all "Hallel" psalms. Then the writer stated the main idea he wanted to communicate.

2. The blessings the righteous enjoy 112:2-9

There are five blessings that normally come to the righteous. First, the righteous person (living under the Mosaic Covenant) receives physical and material prosperity (vv. 2-3). Second, he obtains light in his darkness (v. 4). Third, goodness comes to him for his generosity and justice (v. 5). Fourth, he enjoys stability and confidence (vv. 6-8).

> "Trusting in the Lord is the best and surest way of fixing and establishing the heart."[1032]

> "Contrast with the persecuted David's fearless trust, Saul's panic-stricken feeling at the Philistine invasion, inasmuch as he repaired for help to a witch. How bold were the three youths in prospect of Nebuchadnezzar's

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[1028]George Bowen, quoted in ibid., 2:130.
[1029]E.g., Dahood, 3:125.
[1030]VanGemeren, p. 706.
[1031]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 448.
[1032]Henry, p. 699.

> fiery furnace! How fearless Stephen before the council! Basilius could say, in answer to the threats of Caesar Valens, 'such bug-bears should be set before children.' Athanasius said of Julian, his persecutor, 'He is a mist that will soon disappear.'"[1033]

Fifth, he gets strength and honor from the Lord because he gives to the poor (v. 9).

> "In a way this psalm can be taken as a calculating guide on how to be happy. But its claim goes well beyond that. It asserts that giving life resources away to others in the community is the way to real joy. This psalm is echoed in Jesus' teaching, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied' (Matt. 5:6)."[1034]

3. The anxiety the wicked experience 112:10

God's goodness to the righteous fills the wicked with anxiety. Finally they perish.

God's people need to remember God's blessings to them and give God praise for these things—so that they won't envy the wicked, whose lot is much worse.

PSALM 113

Psalms 113—118 constitute the "Egyptian Hallel." The designation "Egyptian Hallel" originated because of the emphasis on Egypt in Psalm 114. *Hallel* is the imperative singular form of the Hebrew word (lit. praise, cf. Hallelujah) and is a command to praise. The Jews sang the "Egyptian Hallel" (113—118) and the "Great Hallel" (120—136), two collections of psalms, at the three yearly feasts that all the males had to attend: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Most of the "Great Hallel" psalms are pilgrimage songs. The Jews also used these psalms on other holy days, including their new moon festivals. At Passover it was customary to sing Psalms 113 and 114 before the meal and 115—118 and 136 after it (cf. Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26).[1035] A third collection of Hallel psalms (146—150) was incorporated into the daily prayers of synagogue worship after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

> "There was more relevance in these psalms to the Exodus—the greater Exodus—than could be guessed in Old Testament times."[1036]

This psalm of descriptive praise calls on God's servants to praise Him because, even though He occupies an exalted position, He has humbled Himself to lift up the lowly (cf. Phil. 2:7). It expresses thoughts similar to Hannah's prayer (1 Sam. 2:1-10) and Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).[1037]

[1033]A. R. Fausset, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:132.
[1034]Brueggemann, p. 47.
[1035]See The Nelson . . ., p. 998, "The Psalms of the Passover."
[1036]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 401.
[1037]J. J. Stewart Perown, *The Book of Psalms*, 2:322.

1. Call to praise the Lord's name 113:1-3

The person of God represented by His name deserves praise from all His servants forever. The rising and setting of the sun describe the east and west, not just daylight hours. In other words, God is worthy of universal praise.

2. Causes to praise the Lord 113:4-9

113:4-5 The first reason God's servants should praise Him is that He is the glorious sovereign ruler of all the earth.

113:6-9 The second reason is that He condescends to pay attention to His creatures. One example of this is the way He occasionally exalts very poor or underprivileged people to positions of wealth and influence. He did this literally for Job, and He does it spiritually for every believer. Another example is how He sometimes makes barren women conceive and bear children. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah received this blessing, to name a few individuals. In view of God's promises to make the Israelites numerous, the ability to bear children was one they valued greatly.

The psalm closes as it opened, with a call to praise the Lord. Psalms 115—117 end with the same exhortation.

> "Among those things which make God worthy to be praised the Psalm gives prominence to the condescension of the infinitely exalted One towards the lowly one. It is the lowliness of God lowering itself for the exaltation of the lowly which performs its utmost in the work of redemption [cf. Phil. 2:6-8]."[1038]

The Lord is worthy of praise because He graciously gives great blessings to those who have no hope of obtaining them from any other source.[1039]

PSALM 114

As mentioned previously, the Israelites sang this song at Passover. This was appropriate since it describes God delivering the nation in the Exodus, which event has cosmic implications. It is another psalm of descriptive praise, but it is also historical.

> "The power of Hebrew poetry at its best is illustrated by this lyric. The terse expression, the dramatic vividness, the excellent parallelism, and the imaginative exaggeration mark the psalm as a poetic masterpiece."[1040]

[1038]Delitzsch, 3:204.
[1039]See Allen, *And I . . .*, pp. 111-28.
[1040]Yates, p. 538.

> "This sublime 'Song of the Exodus' is one and indivisible. True poetry has here reached its climax: no human mind has ever been able to equal, much less to excel, the grandeur of this Psalm."[1041]

1. God's deliverance at the Exodus 114:1-6

114:1-4 When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He dwelt among them and ruled over them. The names Judah and Israel are in poetic parallelism here and refer to the same group, namely, the nation of Israel. Judah was its leading tribe.

The writer personified the Red Sea as seeing the Israelites coming and fleeing from them by parting its waters. Later when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the Jordan River backed up as far as the town of Adam, farther north in the Jordan Valley, to let them cross. The mountains around Sinai quaked when God came down on Mt. Horeb to meet with His people.

2. The proper response to God's deliverance 114:7-8

The writer instructed the earth to continue to tremble before the Lord. Here he used the earth to refer to people living on the earth. This is only fitting in view of God's awesome power that works for the welfare of His own.

> "The causing of water to gush forth out of the flinty rock [v. 8] is a practical proof of unlimited omnipotence and of the grace which converts death into life."[1042]

> "The same almighty power that turned waters into a rock to be a wall to Israel (Exod. xiv. 22) turned the rock into waters to be a well to Israel; as they were protected, so they were provided for, by miracles . . ."[1043]

Everyone should reverence the Lord, as His inanimate creation does, because He uses His great power to save and to provide for His people. Remembering His deliverance and provision should move us to fear Him.

PSALM 115

This anonymous communal psalm of praise instructs God's people to trust in the Lord rather than in idols.

> "Psalm 115 is one psalm with Psalm 114 in the LXX and the Vulgate. However, there is little doubt that they form two separate psalms. The motifs and genre of the psalms are too different. Psalm 114 is in the form

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[1041]Spurgeon, 2:137.
[1042]Delitzsch, 3:209.
[1043]Henry, p. 700.

> of a hymn describing the wonder of Israel's redemption from Egypt, whereas the literary forms of Psalm 115 are quite varied and include lament, liturgy, and confidence.
>
> "Psalm 115 may be classified as a psalm of *communal confidence*. The psalms of communal confidence are closely related to communal thanksgiving songs and to communal laments. The psalms of communal confidence convey a sense of need as well as a deep trust in the Lord's ability to take care of the needs of the people. There are three such psalms (115, 125, 129)."[1044]

Other scholars see Psalm 46 as one of these psalms and exclude Psalm 115.[1045]

1. The need for God to vindicate Himself 115:1-2

The psalmist called on God to glorify Himself for His own sake, in contrast to glorifying His people. Evidently the pagan nations were ridiculing Yahweh for His inactivity.

> "All the good we do is done by the power of his grace, and all the good we have is the gift of his mere mercy, and therefore he must have all the praise."[1046]

The Christian statesman William Wilberforce marked the passing of his bill to abolish the slave trade in England by meditating on verse 1.[1047]

2. The contrast between Yahweh and the idols 115:3-8

Israel's God was not on earth, as the idols were. He is in heaven, and He does whatever He pleases. The psalmist did not mean that Yahweh is capricious but that He is a free agent, independent of the actions of His worshippers. God is sovereign. In contrast, the gods Israel's neighbors worshipped were human products made, in some cases, out of metal, even though costly metal. They had some of the attributes of human beings but were totally impotent and lifeless.

> "The meanest insect has more power of locomotion than the greatest heathen god."[1048]
>
> "These idols are represented here as the most ridiculous things, a mere jest, fitter for a toy-shop than a temple, for children to play with than for men to pray to."[1049]

[1044]VanGemeren, p. 719. Cf. Bullock, p. 175.
[1045]E.g., H. Kraus, *Psalmen* 1:iii.
[1046]Henry, p. 701.
[1047]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 404.
[1048]Spurgeon, 2:143.
[1049]Henry, p. 701.

All human beings tend to become like their God or gods. Idol worshippers become as powerless as their gods. (This paragraph appears again, with only a few changes, in 135:6, 15-18.)

> "Ultimately divine revelation is the difference between the religions of man and the true religion of the Lord."[1050]

3. The need for God's people to trust Him 115:9-11

The psalmist called on all the Israelites to trust in the true God, rather than idols, because He alone can help and defend people. He addressed this charge to all Israel, then the priests who were mainly responsible for the purity of Israel's worship, and then all God-fearing people. He used repetition to impress the importance of trusting in the Lord on the reader.

4. The result of trusting in the Lord 115:12-18

115:12-15 Trust leads to blessing for all people. The writer made this connection by repeating the same groups (cf. vv. 10-11a and 12-13a). In bestowing blessing, God does not allow worldly greatness to influence Him; He is gracious to all. The psalmist wished God's blessing on all His people. Since He made heaven and earth, He is able to bless, and His blessing can be abundant.

115:16-18 The heavens are the Lord's domain, not that of pagan gods. He owns them, and He has given the earth to man for his habitation. It is important for God's people to praise Him while they live on the earth. After they die they cannot worship Him as they do now and so draw others to honor Him. Consequently the writer said he and the rest of the godly would bless the Lord forever. The final line calls everyone to praise Him.

> "The throne of God is in the heavens, and the promise, which is given to the patriarchs on behalf of all mankind, does not refer to heaven, but to the possession of the earth (xxxvii. 22)."[1051]

The contrasts between the true God and idols are indeed great. God's people should review and appreciate these differences, and in this way worship Yahweh for His unique individuality (cf. Exod. 20:3).

PSALM 116

An unnamed writer gave thanks to God for delivering him from imminent death and for lengthening his life. He promised to praise God in the temple for these blessings. This is a hymn of individual thanksgiving, and it is also messianic. This is a good psalm to read when you need to recommit yourself to serving God.

[1050]VanGemeren, p. 721.

[1051]Delitzsch, 3:213.

> ". . . if ever a psalm had the marks of spontaneity, this is surely such a one."[1052]

1. A promise to praise God from a loving heart 116:1-2

The psalmist loved God because the Lord had granted his prayer request. Consequently he promised to continue praying to Him as long as he lived. This expression of love for God is unusual in the psalms. More often the psalmists spoke of their respect for Yahweh. This writer was uncommonly affectionate.

> "It is wonderful condescension in God to hear prayer; it is bowing his ear."[1053]

2. The psalmist's account of his deliverance 116:3-11

116:3 Evidently the writer had been very close to death. He pictured Death as reaching out to him with cords and almost trapping him, as a hunter snares an animal.

Imagine how the Lord Jesus must have felt as He sang these words during His last Passover in the Upper Room. He knew He was facing death.

116:4-6 The psalmist cried out in prayer for physical deliverance from death, and the Lord granted his request. This led him to magnify God's graciousness, righteousness, and compassion. Verse 6 suggests that he may have been in danger of dying because he had been foolish or ignorant.

> "*The simple* is a revealing description to use, for in the Old Testament it has no trace of merit. 'The silly' would hardly be too strong a term for these gullible, feckless people who roam the pages of Proverbs drifting into trouble. It is humble of the psalmist to identify with them; it is humble of God to have time for them (if 'them' is the right pronoun for us to use)."[1054]

> "It is God's great mercy to us that we are alive; and the mercy is the more sensible if we have been at death's door and yet have been spared and raised up."[1055]

116:7-11 There are lessons people should learn from this deliverance. First, believers can rest because God delivers from death (vv. 7-8).

[1052]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 407.
[1053]Henry, p. 702.
[1054]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 409.
[1055]Henry, p. 702.

> "After a difficult, frustrating, pressure-filled day, we need to seek out a quiet place where we can confess our sins, read the Word, and talk with God. That is the sanctuary of the soul."[1056]

Second, people to whom God extends His grace should obey him the rest of their lives (v. 9). Third, only God is completely trustworthy (vv. 10-11). The writer said he believed he would live, having requested deliverance of God (cf. v. 9). This was his confidence, even though other people told him he would die. They were lying to him.

Read verses 8 and 9 again from the viewpoint of the Savior in the Upper Room. He not only knew He was facing death, but He also knew He would live again. The Apostle Paul quoted verse 10 in 2 Corinthians 4:13-15. He used it to assure believers that we will live again too.

3. Another promise to praise God 116:12-19

116:12-14 It is difficult to tell if the writer used "cup" in a literal or in a figurative sense. Perhaps it was a literal part of his thank offering to God. On the other hand, the cup may represent his reward in this life, which was physical salvation. Either way he would praise God. Israelites offered votive offerings when God answered their prayers regarding a vow they made. These were peace offerings (Lev. 7:16; 22:18-23) and public offerings that reminded other worshippers of God's goodness. The NIV rendering of the end of verse 14 is probably best. It reads, ". . . in the presence of all his people."

Think again of Jesus singing verses 12-14 and raising the cup as He sang. The Jews traditionally sang Psalm 116 after the Passover meal. It is probable that when He sang these verses, He raised the third of four cups of wine the Jews drank at that meal. They called the third cup "the cup of salvation." He knew that that cup would only become a true cup of salvation if He paid His vows to the LORD and proceeded to the cross.

116:15-19 The death of the godly is significant to God; it is costly to Him (cf. Matt. 10:29-31; John 10:28-29).[1057] He does not treat their dying as trivial. Consequently, the fact that He delivered the psalmist from dying meant that He had good reason for doing so. Leupold believed the fact that "the death of His godly ones" is "precious in the Lord's sight" involves at least two things:

> "One is that He is manifestly watching over what takes place even when His saints are not rescued but seemingly

[1056]McGee, 2:842.

[1057]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, pp. 410-11.

> perish. The other is that He frequently intervenes and will not allow them to perish. His saints can have assurance either way [cf. 72:13-14]."[1058]

> It is interesting that verse 15, which has brought so much comfort to believers who have lost loved ones through the centuries, rests in a context of deliverance. Again the writer promised to praise God publicly with the proper offering (v. 18, cf. v. 14). The psalm ends with an exhortation for all the living to praise the Lord.
>
> How comforting verses 15-16 would have been to the Lord Jesus as He celebrated His last Passover meal on earth. He would have thought of His own mother when he sang "the son of Thy handmaid" in verse 16. In verses 17-19, Jesus vowed to praise God after He fulfilled God's will by dying and after God had raised Him up.[1059]

Death is an enemy. Therefore, when God extends our lives, He is saving us from an enemy. The continuation of life is something we should never take for granted. God could take the life of any person at any time—and be perfectly righteous—since we are all sinners and deserve to die. However, He graciously extends life, and for this His people should give Him thanks publicly.

PSALM 117

This shortest of all the psalms focuses attention on the importance of praising God for two of His most wonderful qualities, namely: His loyal love and His faithfulness. It is a psalm of descriptive praise.

> "In its very brevity it is one of the grandest witnesses of the might with which, in the midst of the Old Testament, the world-wide mission of the religion of revelation struck against or undermined the national limitation. It is stamped by the apostle in Rom. xv. 11 a *locus classicus* for the fore-ordained . . . participation of the heathen in the promised salvation of Israel."[1060]

> "There is a great deal of gospel in this psalm."[1061]

1. A call for universal worship 117:1

The unknown psalmist summoned all people to praise Yahweh (cf. Rom. 15:11). To "laud" (Heb. *shavah*) means to glorify, to boast about, and to extol.

[1058]Leupold, p. 808.
[1059]See Allen, *Lord of* . . ., pp. 89-95.
[1060]Delitzsch, 3:220.
[1061]Henry, p. 703.

2. The cause for universal worship 117:2

Essentially all people, including the Gentiles (Heb. *goyim*, *'ummim*), should praise God because He is who He is. Two of the outstanding qualities that God demonstrates are loyal love and truth. His loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) to His people is very great, and His truth continues forever. Human loyalty often has limits, and we are not consistently truthful. The Hebrew word translated "truth" is *'emet*, which the translators frequently rendered "faithfulness." The relationship between these two English words is clear. Because the Lord is "true," i.e., 100 percent loyal, reliable, truthful, and trustworthy, He is a faithful God. *Hesed* and *'emet* often occur together in the psalms. God's faithfulness connects closely with His loyal love. This psalm closes as it begins: with an exhortation to praise the Lord.

Outstanding among all God's great qualities are His loyal love and faithfulness. His people should honor Him for these traits consistently and frequently.

PSALM 118

This psalm of declarative praise is the last in this series of the Egyptian Hallel psalms (Pss. 113—118). It describes a festal procession to the temple to praise and sacrifice to the Lord.

> "Clearly designed for antiphonal use, it employs solo voices, choruses, and congregational refrains."[1062]

The historical background may be the dedication of the restored walls and gates of Jerusalem in Ezra and Nehemiah's time, following the return from Babylonian captivity, in 444 B.C.[1063] Another view is that it was composed for the celebration of the completion of the Second Temple (Ezra 6:15).[1064] It contains elements of communal thanksgiving, individual thanksgiving, and liturgical psalms. The subject is God's loyal love for His people. The situation behind it seems to be God's restoration of the psalmist after a period of dishonor. This would have been a very appropriate psalm to sing during the Feast of Tabernacles as well as at Passover and Pentecost. The Lord Jesus and His disciples probably sang it together in the Upper Room at the end of the Lord's Supper (cf. Matt. 26:30). It was Luther's favorite psalm.[1065]

> "As the final psalm of the 'Egyptian Hallel', sung to celebrate the Passover . . ., this psalm may have pictured to those who first sang it the rescue of Israel at the Exodus, and the eventual journey's end at Mount Zion. But it was destined to be fulfilled more perfectly, as the echoes of it on Palm Sunday and in the Passion Week make clear to every reader of the Gospels."[1066]

[1062]Yates, p. 539.
[1063]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 306.
[1064]Delitzsch, 2:223-24.
[1065]Ibid., 3:223; Leupold, pp. 811-12.
[1066]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, pp. 412-13.

1. Praise for Yahweh's loyal love 118:1-4

The first verse is a call to acknowledge God's lovingkindness. Then the psalmist appealed to all Israel, the priests, and all those who fear God to acknowledge the limitless quality of His loyal love (cf. 115:9-13). Perhaps this call and response structure found expression in antiphonal worship in which a leader or leaders issued the call and the people responded out loud.

2. Praise for Yahweh's deliverance 118:5-21

118:5-9 The writer gave personal testimony to God's deliverance of him in answer to prayer.

> "There are many who, when they are lifted up, care not for speaking of their former depressions; but David takes all occasions to remember his own low estate."[1067]

Setting him in "a large place" (v. 5, NASB) pictures freedom to move about without constraint. Since God was with him, he did not need to fear what other people might do to him (cf. Heb. 13:6). Furthermore the Lord would be his helper, so he could expect to prevail over his adversaries. Therefore it is better to trust in Yahweh than to place one's confidence in men, even the most powerful of men. "Man" and "princes" (vv. 8-9) constitute a merism meaning all people, both lowly and exalted (cf. 146:3).

> ". . . this eighth verse of this Psalm is the middle verse of the Bible. There are, I believe, 31,174 verses in all, and this is the 15,587th."[1068]

118:10-13 Note how the Lord gave the psalmist confidence even when his enemies surrounded him. The Lord had cut off his enemies in the past, and he believed He would do so again (cf. 2 Tim. 4:17-18). The repetition of the phrase in verses 10b, 11b, and 12c expresses his trust in the Lord.

The Hebrew word for "cut them off" (vv. 10, 11, 12) literally means "circumcised them." This may be a prophetic reference to Messiah circumcising the hearts of the Gentiles. Circumcision was a physical procedure, but it came to symbolize a spiritual change, namely, trust in God (Deut. 30:6; cf. Rom. 2:29).[1069]

118:14-21 The psalmist had relied on the Lord as his strength and his source of joy, and He had saved him. Verse 14 repeats the first line of the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:2), the song the Israelites sang just after they crossed the Red Sea successfully (cf. Isa. 12:2). The psalmist rejoiced in God's saving

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[1067]Henry, p. 703.
[1068]Barton Bouchier, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:153.
[1069]A. Ross, p. 879.

strength (cf. Exod. 15:6). Temporary discipline had led to recent deliverance, and this provided hope for future salvation. The gates in view probably refer to the temple courtyard gates through which worshippers such as the writer entered to praise God.

What a comfort verses 15-18 would have been to the Lord Jesus as He sang them at His last Passover in the Upper Room! They assured Him that He would live again even though He would die.

3. Praise for Yahweh's triumph 118:22-29

118:22-24 The psalmist may have been comparing himself to the stone that the builders (his adversaries) had rejected, in view of the preceding context (cf. v. 18). Another view is that he was comparing Israel to this stone.[1070] The imagery is common. Whenever builders construct a stone building they discard some stones because they do not fit. The writer had felt discarded like one of these stones, but God had restored him to usefulness and given him a position of prominence in God's work. The other view sees Israel discarded by the nations, but used by God as the crucial piece in His program for the nations.

"Corner stone" (NASB) is more accurate than "capstone" (NIV). The cornerstone of a large building was the largest and or most important stone in the foundation. All the other foundation stones were laid and aligned in reference to this key stone. Only God could have done this (v. 23). The day of his restoration was obviously one God had brought to passpass or would bring to pass, depending on whether the stone is the writer or Israel. Consequently the writer called on everyone to rejoice with him in this restoration.

There are many New Testament references to the stone of verse 22. The Lord Jesus applied it to Himself (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17). Peter and Paul also applied it to Jesus (Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8). The "builders" (v. 22) were Israel's leaders. God's amazing resurrection of His rejected Son to the place of supreme universal authority is marvelous to say the least. The day of His resurrection is the greatest day the Lord ever made. It is indeed the basis for the Christian's joy and rejoicing.[1071]

118:25-27 The psalmist proceeded to pray for the salvation and prosperity of his people (vv. 25-26). The one who comes in the Lord's name refers to anyone who came to worship Yahweh at the temple. The psalmist and the people blessed such a one from the temple. The writer further glorified Yahweh as the giver of light to His people. The NIV of verse 27b gives a

[1070]Leupold, p. 818.
[1071]See Allen, *Lord of . . .*, pp. 95-101.

better rendering of the Hebrew text than the NASB. It reads, "With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar." This probably refers to a custom at the Feast of Tabernacles. The people waved branches to honor the Lord. Verse 29 repeats verse 1.

The phrase "bind the festival sacrifice with cords to [lit. 'unto'] the horns of the altar" (v. 27) is problematic. Nowhere else are dead sacrificial animals said to be tied to the horns of the (brazen) altar, and there does not seem to be any point in tying them down—since they were dead and not able to get off the altar. It has been suggested that this is a call to the worshippers to bind all their many sacrificial animals, since there were so many of them that they filled the temple courtyard—even crowding the altar.[1072] The psalmist then was encouraging the Israelites to bring all of their sacrifices—even though they crowded the altar—and offer them.

Another view is that the writer was calling the people to bind their living animals to the horns of the altar until the time came for them to be slain.[1073] According to Ezra 6:17, there were hundreds of animals offered at the dedication of the Second Temple. If this psalm was written for that occasion, such an exhortation would have been appropriate.

> "The American Board of Missions has for its seal an ox, with an altar on one side and a plough on the other, and the motto, 'Ready for either'—ready to live and labor, or ready to suffer and die."[1074]

The crowds who welcomed Jesus at His Triumphal Entry during Passover season repeated verses 25 and 26 (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9; Luke 19:38; John 12:13; cf. Matt. 23:39; Luke 13:35). "Hosanna" translates the Hebrew word for "save." The people believed Jesus was the promised Messiah. They regarded this psalm as predicting the Messiah, as is clear from their use of it at the Triumphal Entry. Evidently verse 27b, "with boughs in hand," led the people to lay their boughs at the feet of Jesus' donkey (Matt. 21:8). It was most appropriate for the people to do what they did since Jesus was entering Jerusalem to provide salvation. Jesus' application of the stone reference to Himself after he entered Jerusalem at His Triumphal Entry was a clear claim that He was the Messiah.

118:28-29

> "He [the writer] concludes this psalm as he began it (*v.* 1), for God's glory must be the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, of all our addresses to him."[1075]

[1072]Delitzsch, 3:231-32.
[1073]Leupold, p. 820.
[1074]Spurgeon, 2:158.
[1075]Henry, p. 704.

This psalm teaches us much about Messiah, but its primary significance, as the Israelites used it originally, was glorifying God for providing deliverance. This deliverance came after a period of evident defeat. God had reversed an apparent disaster and brought great joy and victory out of it. We should praise Him, as the writer called on His hearers to do, whenever He does that for us.[1076]

PSALM 119

The anonymous psalmist who wrote this longest psalm sought refuge from his persecutors and found strength by meditating on the Word of God. This psalm, the longest chapter in the Bible, is largely a collection or anthology of prayers and thoughts about God's Word. C. S. Lewis compared it to a piece of embroidery, done stitch by stitch in the quiet hours for the love of the subject and for the delight in leisurely, disciplined craftsmanship.[1077] Read this psalm when you feel the need for greater wisdom.

> "The author of Psalm 119 exemplifies an attitude toward the Mosaic law which was the ideal for all Israel (cf. also 19:7-11)."[1078]

> "It [this psalm] describes how the Word enables us to grow in holiness and handle the persecutions and pressures that always accompany an obedient walk of faith."[1079]

> "Essentially a didactic poem, this psalm takes the form of a personal testimony."[1080]

> "Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this psalm is its unusual length, 176 verses. The theme, generally speaking, is the Word of God. The primary emphasis of such lengthy praises of the Word must then be that the man of God cannot weary in extolling the merits of the Word of the Lord."[1081]

> "Many superficial readers have imagined that it harps upon one string and abounds in pious repetitions and redundancies; but this arises from the shallowness of the reader's own mind: those who have studied this Divine hymn and carefully noted each line of it are amazed at the variety and profundity of the thought."[1082]

[1076]For a summary discussion of the messianic psalms, see *The New Scofield . . .*, p. 659.
[1077]Lewis, *Reflections on . . .*, pp. 58-59.
[1078]Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," p. 263.
[1079]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 308.
[1080]Yates, p. 539.
[1081]Leupold, p. 821.
[1082]Spurgeon, 2:159.

This psalm contains a reference to God's Word in almost every verse (except verses 84, 90, 121, 122, and 132). (The Jews claimed that only one verse did not refer directly to God's Word: verse 122.[1083]) The psalmist used at least eight synonyms for the Word of God, each of which conveys a slightly different emphasis.[1084] However, sometimes it appears that the writer chose a synonym simply to avoid repetition.

"Way" and "ways" (Heb. *derek*) describes the pattern of life God's revelation marks out. It occurs 13 times in the psalm (vv. 1, 3, 5, 14, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37, 59, 168).

A frequently used term is "law" (Heb. *torah*, lit. teaching) that occurs 25 times (vv. 1, 18, 29, 34, 44, 51, 53, 55, 61, 70, 72, 77, 85, 92, 97, 109, 113, 126, 136, 142, 150, 153, 163, 165, 174). It denotes direction or instruction and usually refers to a body of teaching such as the Pentateuch or the Book of Deuteronomy. Jesus used this term to describe the whole Old Testament (John 10:34). The Apostle Paul often referred to the strict demands of the Law of God, but this psalmist usually meant the Word of God when he referred to "the law."

The word "testimony" (Heb. *'edot*) occurs 23 times, all but one time in the plural (vv. 2, 14, 22, 24, 31, 36, 46, 59, 79, 88 [sing.], 95, 99,111, 119, 125, 129, 138, 144, 146, 152, 157, 167, 168). It refers to the ordinances that became God's standard of conduct. Its particular shade of meaning is the solemnity of what God has spoken as His will. The English translations sometimes have "decrees" for this Hebrew word.

"Precepts" (Heb. *piqqudim*), a synonym for "injunctions" that occurs only in the psalms in the Old Testament, appears 21 times in this psalm (vv. 4, 15, 27, 40, 45, 56, 63, 69, 78, 87, 93, 94, 100, 104, 110, 128, 134, 141, 159, 168, 173). It always occurs in the plural.

Another common synonym in this psalm is "statutes" (Heb. *huqqim*, lit. things inscribed). It refers to enacted laws. The translators sometimes rendered the Hebrew word "decrees." It occurs 21 times (vv. 5, 8, 12, 23, 26, 33, 48, 54, 64, 68, 71, 80, 83, 112, 117, 118, 124, 135, 145, 155, 171).

"Commandments" (Heb. *miswot*) denotes a definite authoritative command. The writer used this word 22 times in Psalm 119, usually in the plural but once as a collective singular (vv. 6, 10, 19, 21, 32, 35, 47, 48, 60, 66, 73, 86, 96 [sing.], 98, 115, 127, 131, 143, 151, 166, 172, 176).

"Judgment" or "ordinance" (Heb. *mishpot*) refers to a judicial decision that establishes precedent and constitutes binding law. Often the English translators rendered this Hebrew word "laws." It sometimes means God's acts of judgment on the wicked. In this psalm it occurs 23 times in the plural and four times in the singular (vv. 7, 13, 20, 30, 39, 43, 52, 62, 75, 84 [sing.], 91, 102, 106, 108, 120, 121 [sing.], 132 [sing.], 137, 149 [sing.], 156, 160, 164, 175). In verse 84 it does not refer to the Word of God, however.

[1083]Delitzsch, 3:243.

[1084]Leupold, p. 822, claimed that there are 10 synonyms, but he did not list the Hebrew words.

The psalmist also identified many different responses he made to God's "Word" (Heb. *dabar*). One of these was keeping or obeying it (vv. 4, 5, 8, 17, 34, 44, 56, 57, 60, 67, 88, 100, 101, 129, 134, 136, 145, 158, 167, 168). This general term for God's revelation occurs 39 times.

> "This untiring emphasis has led some to accuse the psalmist of worshipping the Word rather than the Lord; but it has been well remarked that every reference here to Scripture, without exception, relates it explicitly to its Author; indeed every verse from 4 to the end is a prayer or affirmation addressed to Him. This is true piety; a love of God not desiccated by study but refreshed, informed and nourished by it."[1085]

> "The longest psalm in the Psalter, Psalm 119, is well known for its teaching on God's law. Yet the beauty of this psalm lies, not only in the recitation of devotion to the law, but in the psalmist's absolute devotion to the Lord."[1086]

In all but 14 verses, the psalmist addressed his words to the Lord personally.[1087]

This is one of the alphabetic acrostic psalms (cf. Pss. 111, 112). In each strophe of eight verses, each verse begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In verses 1-8 each line begins with the first Hebrew letter, in verses 9-16 each line begins with the second Hebrew letter, and so on. In some English versions, the translators have printed or transliterated the Hebrew letter that begins each line in the strophe at the beginning of that strophe. It may be no accident that the name "Yahweh" appears 22 times—the same number as the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.[1088]

> "Even the literary qualities of the 119th Psalm contribute to the development of its major theme—the Word of God in the child of God."[1089]

Psalm 145 is another acrostic psalm. In that psalm the intent of the acrostic structure seems to have been to encourage full *praise* of God. In this one, the intent seems to have been to encourage full *obedience* to God.[1090]

The genre of the psalm is primarily wisdom, though there are also elements of lament, thanksgiving, praise, and confidence in it.

As you read this psalm, note the consequences of obeying God's Word that the writer enumerated. These include being unashamed (v. 6) and giving thanks (v. 7).

[1085]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 419.
[1086]VanGemeren, p. 736. See also Yates, p. 540.
[1087]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 308.
[1088]Delitzsch, 3:243.
[1089]George J. Zemek Jr., "The Word of God in the Child of God: Psalm 119," *Spire* 10:2 (1982):8.
[1090]Brueggemann, p. 39.

> ". . . here we have set forth in inexhaustible fullness what the word of God is to a man, and how a man is to behave himself in relation to it."[1091]

> "The basic theme of Psalm 119 is the practical use of the Word of God in the life of the believer."[1092]

> "The lesson to be learned above all others is that knowledge and practical application of the Word will keep one from sin and thus enable him to know and serve God appropriately (119:9, 11, 92, 98, 105, 130, 133, 176)."[1093]

> "Oh, that you and I might put an emphasis upon the Word of God. As believers, we need to put the emphasis where God puts it. In our day there is too much emphasis upon programs and methods and ceremonies and church activities. Our emphasis should be on the Word of God, because that is the only thing He has promised to bless. He has never promised to bless me or my ministry or any other ministry, but He has promised to bless His Word."[1094]

1. The blessing of obeying God's Word 119:1-8

The writer rejoiced in the fact that people who obey God's Word ("law") wholeheartedly enjoy His blessing (vv. 1-3).

> "Slip they do, through the infirmity of the flesh, and subtlety of Satan, and the allurements of the world; but they do not ordinarily and customably [*sic*] go forward in unlawful and sinful courses."[1095]

> "A child of God may be occasionally carried away and act contrary to the inclination of the new nature; but when men are drowned and overcome by the return of every temptation, it argues a habit of sin."[1096]

Consequently the psalmist wanted to be more consistently obedient himself (vv. 4-6).

> "A child has no proper respect for a parent if he obeys him only as shall suit his whim or his convenience; and no *man* can be a pious man who does not purpose, in all honesty, to keep all the commandments of God; to submit to His will *in everything*."[1097]

[1091]Delitzsch, 3:243.
[1092]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 309.
[1093]Merrill, "Psalms," p. 466.
[1094]McGee, 2:847.
[1095]R. Greenham, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:161.
[1096]T. Manton, quoted in ibid.
[1097]A. Barnes, quoted in ibid., 2:162.

The poet promised to be more thankful as he continued to learn more about God's Word (vv. 7-8).

> "The love for God receives expression in doing the will of God."[1098]

> "He [the psalmist] knew much, but he was still pressing forward and desired to know more. As long as we live we must be scholars in Christ's school, and sit at his feet."[1099]

> "In practice you praise God by esteeming His Word so precious that you make it your business to learn it. Such learning is an act of praise [v. 7]."[1100]

2. The cleansing power of God's Word 119:9-16

A person can cleanse his or her conduct by obeying the Word of God (v. 9).

> "Young men must make the word of God their rule; that will do more towards the cleansing of young men than the laws of princes [i.e., lawmakers] or the morals of philosophers."[1101]

The writer testified that he had internalized and delighted in God's Word to maintain moral purity (vv. 10-14).

> "The surest mode of cleansing the way of our life is to seek after God Himself, and to endeavor to abide in fellowship with Him."[1102]

The psalmist made it a practice to think about God's revelation continually (vv. 15-16; cf. 17:4).

> "The act of 'hiding' God's word is not to be limited to the memorization of individual texts or even whole passages but extends to a holistic living in devotion to the Lord (cf. Deut 6:4-9; 30:14; Jer 31:33)."[1103]

> "Many people believe that this verse [v. 11] only means that Scripture should be memorized. I think memorizing God's Word is a wonderful thing, but some of the meanest little brats I have seen in Sunday school were the ones who could stand up and quote one hundred verses of Scripture. When the psalmist wrote, 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart,' I think he meant, 'I obey it.' That is the important thing."[1104]

[1098]VanGemeren, p. 739.
[1099]Henry, p. 705.
[1100]Leupold, p. 825.
[1101]Henry, p. 705.
[1102]Spurgeon, 2:163.
[1103]VanGemeren, p. 740. Cf. Delitzsch, 3:246.
[1104]McGee, 2:848.

> "As one has well said: Here is the best thing—'Thy Word'; hidden in the best place—'in my heart'; for the best of purposes—'that I might not sin against Thee.'"[1105]

> "Clearly this psalm probes beyond the simplistic formulation of Psalm 1. A life of full obedience is not a conclusion of faith. It is a beginning point and an access to a life filled with many-sided communion with God."[1106]

> "The whole Psalm is a prayer for stedfastness [*sic* steadfastness] in the midst of an ungodly, degenerate race, and in the midst of great trouble, which is heightened by the pain he feels at the prevailing apostasy, and a prayer for ultimate deliverance which rises in group *Kaph* to an urgent *how long!*"[1107]

The word "path" (Heb. *'orah*) is a synonym for "way." It occurs five times in this psalm (vv. 9, 15, 101, 104, 128).

Another important synonym for God's law is "word" (Heb. *dabar*) that I have found 23 times (vv. 9, 16, 17, 25, 28, 42, 43, 49, 57, 65, 74, 81, 89, 101, 105, 107, 114, 130, 139, 147, 160, 161, 169). It is a general term for God's revelation that proceeds from His mouth.

A poetical synonym for "word" is "saying" (Heb. *'imrah*) that the translators have sometimes rendered "promise." It occurs 19 times (vv. 11, 38, 41, 50, 58, 67, 76, 82, 103, 116, 123, 133, 140, 148, 154, 158, 162, 170, 172).

Other responses to God's Word that the writer mentioned and that occur first in this section are "rejoicing" (vv. 14, 74, 162), "meditating" (vv. 15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148), and "delighting" (vv. 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143, 174).

> "We must carefully treasure up the word of God, declare it to others, meditate on it, and heartily delight in it; and then by His grace we shall act according to it."[1108]

3. An appreciation for God's Word 119:17-24

The psalmist's prayer for God to illuminate his understanding concerning His Word is one that all God's people need to pray (vv. 17-18).

> "A man will never grow into the knowledge of God's Word by idly waiting for some new gift of discernment, but by diligently using that which God has already bestowed upon him and using at the same time all other helps that lie within his reach."[1109]

[1105]Spurgeon, 2:164.
[1106]Brueggemann, p. 41.
[1107]Delitzsch, 3:243-44.
[1108]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 450.
[1109]John Ker, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:165-66.

Verses 19 and 20 reflect the writer's great appetite for the Word.

> "A man's greatest care should be for that place where he lives longest; therefore, eternity should be his scope."[1110]

In contrast to the wicked, whom the psalmist asked God to remove, he delighted in God's Word (vv. 21-24).

> "The best way to deal with slander is to pray about it: God will either remove it or remove the sting from it."[1111]

The wicked who oppress those who love the Scriptures come into view quite often in this psalm (vv. 23, 53, 61, 69, 70, 78, 85, 86, 87, 95, 110, 115, 119, 122, 134, 155, 157, 158, 161).

One of the writer's favorite titles for himself in this psalm was God's "servant" (vv. 17, 23, 38, 49, 65, 76, 84, 124, 125, 135, 140, 176).

4. A prayer for greater understanding 119:25-32

The writer felt the need of the refreshment that God's Word can provide (v. 25; cf. 37, 40, 50, 93, 107, 149, 154, 156).

> "'*Quicken thou me according to thy word*. By thy providence put life into my affairs, by thy grace put life into my affections; cure me of my spiritual deadness and make me lively in my devotion.'"[1112]

The psalmist then called on the Lord for understanding, strength, and security (vv. 26-29). He promised to obey God when he received greater understanding because he valued the law highly (vv. 30-32).

> "The more comfort God gives us the more duty he expects from us, *v*. 32)."[1113]

5. Loyal commitment to God's Word 119:33-40

The psalmist professed wholehearted loyalty to God's statutes (vv. 33-35). He asked Yahweh to keep him from covetousness and vanity (vv. 36-37).

> "Sin first entered man's mind by the eye, and it is still a favorite gate for the incoming of Satan's allurements."[1114]

[1110]T. Manton, quoted in ibid., 2:166.
[1111]Spurgeon, 2:168.
[1112]Henry, p. 706.
[1113]Ibid.
[1114]Spurgeon, 2:172

The poet wanted God to root the Word deeply in his life (vv. 38-40).

> "Those that would have the love of God rooted in them must get the love of the world rooted out of them."[1115]

> "What God has promised we must pray for; we need not be so aspiring as to ask more; we need not be so modest as to ask less."[1116]

6. God's Word and salvation 119:41-48

The writer called for God to deliver him by His love and in fulfillment of His promise (v. 41). This would give him an answer for his adversary (v. 42). Then he prayed and promised that the Lord's Word would continue to direct him (vv. 43-46).

> "He who goes the beaten and right path will have no brambles hit him across the eyes."[1117]

> "The case [in verse 46] is hypothetical. He means: Should the opportunity ever present itself to testify to the excellency of God's Word and law, I shall by no means hesitate, and I refuse to be ashamed."[1118]

He said he loved God's commandments (vv. 47-48). Loving the Word of God is another frequently expressed response to it in this psalm (vv. 47, 48, 97, 113, 119, 127, 132, 159, 163, 165, 167).

> "Does it give you joy to read the Word of God? Do you love the Bible? If you don't love God's Word, ask Him to give you a love for it. I did that for years. I prayed, "Lord, give me a love for your Word.' I was not brought up in a home where I heard the Word of God, and it took me a long time to become interested in it."[1119]

I *was* brought up in a home where I heard the Word of God, but I did not enjoy reading any books until God gave me a hunger and thirst to know what He said. Then I began to enjoy reading, especially the Scriptures, but also books about the Scriptures, and other books as well.

7. God's Word as a source of hope 119:49-56

The poet next expressed his hope in God's Word (v. 49). He said it renews life (v. 50). He despised the proud who scorn faith in God and have no use for His law (vv. 51-53; cf. vv. 69, 78, 85).

[1115]Ibid.
[1116]Ibid.
[1117]Saxon proverb, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:175.
[1118]Leupold, p. 833.
[1119]McGee, 2:848-49.

> "If David was greatly derided, we may not expect to escape the scorn of the ungodly. There are hosts of proud men still upon the face of the earth, and if they find a believer in affliction, they will be mean enough and cruel enough to make jests at his expense. It is the nature of the son of the bondwoman to mock the child of promise."[1120]

> "Michal was barren, yet she hath too many children that scorn the habit and exercises of holiness."[1121]

In contrast, the psalmist sang and thought about God's precepts even at night (vv. 54-56).

> "Remembering [v. 49] is not recalling, for God never forgets; it is relating to His people in a special way."[1122]

8. Strong commitment to God's Word 119:57-64

The psalmist called on God for mercy because God was his chosen portion in life (vv. 57-58).

> "If God be yours, all His attributes are yours; all His creatures, all His works of providence, shall do you good, as you have need of them. He is an eternal, full, satisfactory portion. He is an ever-living, ever-loving, ever-present Friend; and without Him you are a cursed creature in every condition, and all things will work against you."[1123]

The writer professed having lived in keeping with what God had commanded (vv. 58-60), even when his enemies intimidated him (vv. 61-62).

> "If we can get our feet right as to holy walking, we shall soon get our hearts right as to happy living."[1124]

> "No itinerary to the heavenly city is simpler or fuller than the ready answer made by an English prelate to a scoffer who asked him the way to heaven, 'First turn to the right, and keep straight on.'"[1125]

The psalmist had made others his companions, who followed God's law as he did (vv. 63-64).

> "To understand and to keep God's word is his portion, the object of his incessant praying and thanksgiving, the highest grace or favour that can come to him."[1126]

[1120]Spurgeon, 2:176.
[1121]T. Adams, quoted in ibid.
[1122]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 317.
[1123]J. Mason, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:179.
[1124]Spurgeon, 2:180.
[1125]Neale and Littledale, quoted in ibid.
[1126]Delitzsch, 3:251.

> ". . . as the heaven is full of God's glory, so *the earth is full of his mercy* [v. 64]."[1127]

9. Confidence in the Word of God 119:65-72

The writer relied on the fact that God would deal with him according to what He had revealed (v. 65). However, he felt the need for further instruction to prevent him from wandering away from God's will (vv. 66-68).

> "Prosperity is the unhappy occasion of much iniquity; it makes people conceited of themselves, indulgent of the flesh, forgetful of God, in love with the world, and deaf to the reproofs of the word. See xxx. 6. . . . God often makes use of afflictions as a means to reduce those to himself who have wandered from him. The prodigal's distress brought him to himself first and then to his father."[1128]

The psalmist would trust in God even though other people slandered Him (vv. 69-70). Affliction had taught him to appreciate God's statutes more than he had previously done (vv. 71-72).

> "Our worst is better for us than the sinner's best."[1129]

> "As waters are purest when they are in motion, so saints are generally holiest when in affliction."[1130]

> "The Scripture is the library of the Holy Ghost. The Scripture contains in it the *credenda*, 'the things which we are to believe,' and the *agenda*, 'the things which we are to practice.' The Scripture is the compass by which the rudder of our will is to be steered; it is the field in which Christ, the Pearl of price, is hid. The Scripture is both the breeder and feeder of grace. How is the convert born, but by 'the Word of truth'? (Jas. 1:18). How doth he grow, but by 'the sincere milk of the Word'? (I Pet. 2:2)."[1131]

10. God's Word as an object of hope 119:73-80

God had fashioned the psalmist, who now called on the Lord to use him to encourage other godly people (vv. 73-74). He needed comfort, and asked God to frustrate the arrogant who opposed him (vv. 75-78). He prayed that other godly people would encourage him, and that he would continue to walk in God's ways (vv. 79-80).

[1127]Henry, p. 709.
[1128]Ibid.
[1129]Spurgeon, 2:186.
[1130]William Secker, quoted in ibid.
[1131]T. Watson, quoted in ibid., 2:187.

11. The reliability of God's Word 119:81-88

> "This portion of the gigantic Psalm sees the Psalmist *in extremis*. His enemies have brought him to the lowest condition of anguish and depression; yet he is faithful to the law and trustful in his God. This octave is the midnight of the Psalm and very and dark and black it is. Stars, however, shine out, and the last verse gives promise of the dawn."[1132]

The poet had almost given up as he waited for God to save him from his enemies, but he found God's revelation to be a reliable source of strength (vv. 81-82). Feeling similar to a wineskin shriveled up by the smoke of a fire, he asked God how much longer he would have to wait for salvation (vv. 83-86).

> "The contrast with the second half of the verse [v. 83] suggests that this wineskin represents a forgotten object, the point being that, even though God seems to forget His servant, he on his part has not forgotten the statutes of the Lord to which he is obligated."[1133]

In spite of severe attacks by his enemies, he had remained true to God's ways and requested safe keeping (vv. 87-88; cf. v. 159).

> "When the Father allows His children to go into the furnace of affliction,
> He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat."[1134]

> "*God help me* is an excellent comprehensive prayer; it is a pity that it should ever be used lightly and as a by-word."[1135]

12. The permanence of God's Word 119:89-96

The permanence of God's Word is evident in that God has preserved it in heaven and faithfully keeps it secure there (vv. 89-91).

> "Man's teachings change so often that there is never time for them to be settled; but the Lord's Word is from of old the same and will remain unchanged eternally."[1136]

Because the writer delighted in this firm Word, he could gain the victory over his affliction (vv. 92-95).

> "A Bible is a pleasant companion at any time [v. 92]."[1137]

[1132]Spurgeon, 2:190.
[1133]Leupold, p. 841.
[1134]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 322.
[1135]Henry, p. 710.
[1136]Spurgeon, 2:191.
[1137]Ibid.

Everything else that is good has limitations, but the Word of God is boundless in its value (v. 96).

> "David, in his time, had seen Goliath, the strongest, overcome, Asahel, the swiftest, overtaken, Ahithophel, the wisest, befooled, Absalom, the fairest, deformed; and, in short, he had see *an end of perfection*, of *all perfection* [v. 96]."[1138]

In 1542, Martin Luther wrote the words of verse 92 on his Bible with his own hand.[1139] At this time much of his reforming work was behind him, and he lived only four more years.

13. The sweetness of God's Word 119:97-104

The psalmist loved God's law because it gave him more wisdom than his enemies, his teachers, and the elderly sages who did not have it (vv. 97-100).

> ". . . humble believers who sit at the feet of Christ are often more skilled in the Word than a man who has a D.D. or a Ph.D. after his name."[1140]

God's Word had enabled the psalmist to maintain his personal purity (vv. 101–102, cf. vv. 9, 104).

> "He who is careful not to go an inch aside will not leave the road. He who never touches the intoxicating cup will never be drunk. He who never utters an idle word will never be profane. If we begin to depart a little, we can never tell where we shall end."[1141]

God's promises were particularly sweet to the writer (v. 103).

> "While God's truth is food for our souls, it is not a 'buffet' from which we select only the things we like."[1142]

> ". . . those for whom prophetic doctrine is tasteless ought to be thought of as lacking taste buds."[1143]

Understanding God's precepts resulted in hating "every false way" for this godly writer (v. 104).

> "Mercy to sin is cruelty to the soul."[1144]

[1138]Ibid.
[1139]Ker, p. 148.
[1140]McGee, 2:849.
[1141]Spurgeon, 2:195.
[1142]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 324.
[1143]Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 1:8:2. By "prophetic doctrine," he was probably referring to all Scripture.
[1144]Edward Reyner, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:196.

14. The illumination God's Word provides 119:105–112

God's revelation is a light that illuminates the path of life, and for this reason the poet determined to follow it (vv. 105–106; cf. v. 130; Prov. 6:23).

> "All depends on our way of using the lamp. A man tells that when a boy he was proud to carry the lantern for his Sabbath-school teacher. The way to their school led through unlit, muddy streets. The boy held the lantern far too high, and both sank in the deep mud. 'Ah! you must hold the lamp lower,' the teacher exclaimed, as they gained a firm footing on the farther side of the slough. The teacher then beautifully explained our text [v. 105], and the man declares that he never forgot the lesson of that night. You may easily hold the lamp too high; but you can hardly hold it too low."[1145]

The Scriptures give us the information we need to determine God's will. The writer had called on God for help while meditating on His Word (vv. 107–110). According to Jerome, the church father, "My life is continually in my hand" (v. 109) is a Hebraism, which the Greeks also used, "signifying a state of extremest [*sic*] peril."[1146]

The psalmist would continue to follow God's Word forever (vv. 111–112).

15. The reverence God's Word inspires 119:113–120

Double-minded people disregard God's revelation (v. 113), but those who value it make God their refuge and defense (v. 114). The writer wanted evildoers to depart from him so he could keep God's commandments (v. 115). He called on the Lord to sustain and deliver him (vv. 116–117), because He would judge those who despised His Word (vv. 118–119). God's judgments made him tremble because they are sure (v. 120).

> "Though David could not say that he was free from vain thoughts, yet he could say that he hated them; he did not countenance them, nor give them any entertainment, but did what he could to keep them out, at least to keep them under."[1147]

16. The vindication of those who keep God's Word 119:121–128

The first four verses of this pericope are a strong plea for protection from the antagonism of people who do not follow God's Word (vv. 121–124). The psalmist appealed to God for safety because he had faithfully observed His will (vv. 125–126). He claimed to value God's laws more highly than gold and to hate every false way (vv. 127–128).

17. The wonder of God's Word 119:129–136

The testimonies of the Lord are wonderful because they illuminate the understanding of the simple (vv. 129–130).

[1145]James Wells, quoted in ibid., 2:196-97.
[1146]J. Caryl, quoted in ibid., 2:197.
[1147]Henry, p. 711.

> "There are none so knowing that God cannot blind; none so blind and ignorant whose mind and heart He cannot open."[1148]

The psalmist felt a great need for them (v. 131). He asked God to favor him graciously by strengthening him in the Word and by redeeming him from his oppressors (vv. 132–135). One saint, commenting on verse 133, wrote:

> "I had rather be a prisoner to man all my life than be a bondage to sin one day."[1149]

The disobedience of the poet's enemies caused him to weep (v. 136).

18. The righteous character of God's Word 119:137–144

The righteous God has given us a righteous Word, but His righteousness is demanding (vv. 137–138).

> "David, when he intermeddled with forbidden fruit, was driven from his palace, his concubines defiled, his own son slain; a great many calamities did light upon him. Therefore, the children of God have cause to fear; for the Lord is a just God, and they will find it so."[1150]

The psalmist had a pure zeal for God's revelation, even though his enemies looked down on him for his commitment to it (vv. 139–142).

> "The world may look upon God's people as 'small and despised,' but when you stand on God's promises, you are a giant."[1151]

The writer found comfort in God's righteous testimonies when troubles overwhelmed him (vv. 143–144).

> "Men are good and bad as the objects of their delight are: they are good who delight in good things, and they are evil who delight in evil things."[1152]

19. The truth of God's Word 119:145–152

> "This section is given up to memories of prayer. The Psalmist describes the time and the manner of his devotions and pleads with God for deliverance from his troubles. He who has been with God in the closet will find God with him in the furnace. If we have cried, we shall be answered.

[1148]William Gurnall, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:204.
[1149]Michael Bruce, quoted in ibid., 2:206.
[1150]Neale and Littledale, quoted in ibid., 2:207.
[1151]Wiersbe, p. 329.
[1152]T. Manton, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:209.

> Delayed answers may drive us to importunity; but we need not fear the ultimate result, since God's promises are not uncertain, but are 'founded forever.'"[1153]

The psalmist called on God to deliver him because he promised to keep His commandments (vv. 145–149).

> "God looks not at the elegancy of your prayers, to see how neat they are; nor yet at the geometry of your prayers, to see how long they are; nor yet at the arithmetic of your prayers, to see how many they are; nor yet at the music of your prayers, nor yet at the sweetness of your voice, nor yet at the logic of your prayers; but at the sincerity of your prayers, how hearty they are."[1154]

> "If our first thoughts in the morning be of God they will help to keep us in his fear all the day long [v. 147]."[1155]

The writer contrasted his condition with that of his enemies (v. 150). He knew God was near him since His testimonies were true (vv. 151–152). Commenting on "Thou hast founded them ["Thy testimonies"] forever" (v. 152), Spurgeon wrote:

> "Bubbles please boys, but men prize those things which are solid and substantial with a foundation and a bottom to them which will bear the test of the ages."[1156]

20. Love for God's Word 119:153–160

Again the writer prayed for deliverance, appealing to his commitment to God's law (vv. 153–154). The wicked have little hope of salvation because they disregard God's Word (v. 155). However, the psalmist could have hope because He valued it (v. 156). The righteous have many enemies who despise God's revelation (vv. 157–158).

> "Oh, if you have the hearts of Christians or of men in you, let them yearn towards your poor, ignorant, ungodly neighbors. Alas, there is but a step betwixt them and death and hell: many hundred diseases are waiting ready to seize on them, and if they die unregenerate, they are lost forever."[1157]

The poet appealed for personal restoration because he loved the righteous law (vv. 159–160).

[1153]Spurgeon, 2:209.
[1154]Thomas Brooks, quoted in ibid.
[1155]Henry, p. 713.
[1156]Spurgeon, 2:211.
[1157]Richard Baxter, quoted in ibid., 2:212.

21. Joy in God's Word 119:161–168

The opposition of powerful individuals did not intimidate the writer (v. 161). He continued to love God's Word and to find it a ceaseless source of joy, but he hated falsehood (vv. 162–164).

> "The more reverence we have for the word of God the more joy we shall find in it [v. 162]."[1158]

> "'Seven [times,' v. 164] merely signifies a comparatively large number as Ps. 12:7 would also seem to indicate. . . . This frequent praising of the Word is what the writer regularly does . . ."[1159]

Great peace (Heb. *shalom*, the fullness of God's blessings) is the portion of those who love God's law and hope in His salvation (vv. 165–166). Love had motivated the writer to keep the Lord's commandments and to live openly before God (vv. 167–168).

> "The joy, devotion, and benefits of a godly life radiate through this strophe."[1160]

22. Salvation in God's Word 119:169–176

> "The Psalmist is approaching the end of the Psalm and his petitions gather force and fervency; he seems to break into the inner circle of divine fellowship, and to come even to the feet of the great God, Whose help he is imploring. This nearness creates the most lowly view of himself and leads him to close the Psalm upon his face in deepest self-humiliation, begging to be sought out like a lost sheep."[1161]

The psalmist called to the Lord again to hear his supplication and to save him (vv. 169–170). He wanted to praise God for His righteous commandments (vv. 171–172). He requested continued life because he loved God's law (vv. 173–175). Finally, he confessed to wandering away from God and being in danger, like a sheep, but he asked the Lord to seek him and bring him back to the fold, since he had not abandoned God's Word.

> "What an insight into our poor, wayward hearts does this verse [176] give us—not merely liable to wander, but every wandering, ever losing our way, ever stumbling on the dark mountains, even while cleaving to God's commandments! But at the same time what a prayer does it put into our mouths, *Seek Thy servant*—'I am Thine, save me.' Yes, blessed be God! There is One mighty to save. 'Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.'"[1162]

[1158]Henry, p. 714.
[1159]Leupold, pp. 858-59.
[1160]VanGemeren, p. 762.
[1161]Spurgeon, 2:216.
[1162]Barton Boouchier, quoted in ibid., 2:218.

This great and unique psalm should impress the importance of the Word of God on every reader. Apparently the writer worked his way through the Hebrew alphabet selecting key words that express the various aspects of human life. He then related each one to the Word of God and so showed how it touches every area of life and is essential to all of life. He did not just give us a catalogue of the values of Scripture. Instead he showed us how the Word is relevant and invaluable in all types of situations that the godly face.

The frequent references to *enemies*, *affliction*, *persecution*, and *adversaries* keep us in touch with real life as we read this psalm. In this way, the psalmist illustrated the absolute importance of what God has revealed as an adequate resource and indispensable guide through life. This psalm is not only a record of praise for God's revelation, but it is also a revelation of the importance of God's Word (cf. 138:2, NIV).

PSALM 120

> "Suddenly we have left the continent of the vast Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm for the islands and islets of the Songs of Degrees."[1163]

Psalms 120—134 are all "songs of ascent." This group, in turn, constitutes the major part of the Great Hallel psalms (Pss. 120—136). The psalms of ascent received this title because the pilgrim Israelites sang them as they traveled from their homes all over the land and ascended Mt. Zion for the annual feasts.

David composed at least four of these 15 psalms (Pss. 122, 124, 131, and 133). Solomon wrote one (Ps. 127), and the remaining 10 are anonymous. They may not have been composed for use by pilgrims, originally; they were probably written for other purposes. However, the pilgrims used them as songs of ascent and, according to the Mishnah, during the second temple period they were incorporated into the temple liturgy.[1164]

One scholar saw these psalms as falling into three groups of five psalms each (120—24; 125—29; 130—34). He noted that the central psalm in each group reflects royal or Zion theology: 122 (Jerusalem), 127 (the temple), and 132 (David). The effect of the total collection, therefore, is to focus on the temple and the Davidic monarchy.[1165] E. W. Hengstenberg proposed a different division that recognizes Psalm 127 as the central psalm surrounded by four groups of psalms (120—23; 124—26; 128—31; and 132—34) each of which contains the divine name 12 times.[1166]

In Psalm 120, an unknown composer asked God for protection from people who wanted to stir up war (cf. Ps. 42). This psalm has been called an individual lament that anticipates thanksgiving.[1167]

[1163]Spurgeon, 2:219.

[1164]*Middoth* 2:5.

[1165]Erich Zenger, "The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms: Psalms 107—145," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 80 (1998):92., proposed a different division that recognizes Psalm 127 as the central psalm surrounded by four groups of psalms (120—23; 124—26; 128—31; and 132—34) each of which contains the divine name 12 times.

[1166]E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 3:409.

[1167]Leslie C. Allen, *Psalm 101—150*, pp. 147-48.

> "Apart from the last clause in verse 1, there is not a glad note in the whole of Psalm 120."[1168]

1. God's deliverance from liars 120:1-2

The psalmist testified that he had prayed to God for deliverance from liars and that God had granted his request.

> "God's help is seasonable; it comes when we need it."[1169]

> "Lips are soft; but when they are lying lips, they suck away the life of character and are as murderous as razors."[1170]

> "After over fifty years of ministry, I am convinced that most of the problems in families and churches are caused by professed Christians who do not have a real and vital relationship to Jesus Christ. They are not humble peacemakers but arrogant troublemakers."[1171]

2. God's destruction of liars 120:3-4

The writer asked the liar what would befall him and then answered his own question. God would destroy him as a warrior who shot arrows at an enemy or as a fire devoured a dry broom tree.

> "His [God's] wrath is compared to burning coals of juniper, which do not flame or crackle, like thorns under a pot, but have a vehement heat, and keep fire very long even when they seem to be gone out."[1172]

3. God's dalliance with liars 120:5-7

The poet bewailed the fact that he had to continue living with people such as liars who continually stir up strife (vv. 5-6). Meshech was a barbarous nation far to the north of Israel by the Black Sea in Asia Minor (cf. Gen. 10:2; Ezek. 38:2; 39:1-2). Kedar in northern Arabia was the home of the nomadic Ishmaelites who periodically harassed the Israelites (Gen. 25:13; Isa. 21:16-17; Jer. 2:10; Ezek. 27:21). These people represented the kinds of individuals that surrounded the writer, namely, heathen liars and hostile barbarians. They seemed to be after war all the time, but he wanted to live in peace.

> "If the 'I' of the psalm is Israel personified, these two names will summarize the Gentile world, far and near, in which Israel is dispersed. Otherwise, unless the text is emended, they must be taken as the psalmist's

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[1168]Armerding, p. 134.
[1169]R. Mayhew, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:219.
[1170]Spurgeon, 2:220.
[1171]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 335.
[1172]Henry, p. 715. Cf. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 453.

> figurative names for the alien company he is in: as foreign as the remotest peoples, and as implacable as his Arab kinsmen (cf. Gn. 16:12; 25:13)."[1173]

The continual antagonism of people who stir up trouble by telling lies, and in other ways, leads the godly to pray for God to deal with them. God's will is for people to live peacefully with one another (Matt. 5:9; 2 Cor. 13:11, et al.).

PSALM 121

This psalm of trust directed the thoughts of the pilgrim to God as his source of help (cf. Ps. 23). It gives assurance that Israel's Keeper will maintain vigilant oversight and protect His people.

1. The source of help 121:1-2

The psalmist lifted up his eyes to the hills around Mt. Zion as he traveled to a feast there, evidently from some lower part of Canaan. As he did so, he reflected rhetorically on the source of his help. He also reminded himself that his help was the God who had made those hills, along with the whole heaven and earth (cf. 124:8). This was the God he was traveling to worship at the temple on Mt. Zion.

Another interpretation takes all of verse 1 as a question: "Shall I lift up my eyes to the mountains, from whence my help comes?"

> "'Does my help come thence? Shall I depend upon the powers of the earth, upon the strength of princes, who hold up their heads towards heaven? No; I never expect help to come from them; my confidence is in God only.'"[1174]

This reading has not appealed to most translators of this verse.

2. The assurance of help 121:3-8

121:3-4 "Allowing the foot to slip" was an appropriate imagery depicting a pilgrim who walked toward the temple over sometimes treacherous terrain. The imagery means God would keep His people stable and upright in their manner of life. Even though travelers sometimes journeyed after dark, God would never stop watching out for his worshippers.

> "Unless the psalmist addresses an observer (note the second person singular forms in vv. 3-8), it appears there are two or three speakers represented in the psalm, depending on how one takes v. 3. The translation [in the NET Bible]

[1173]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 431.
[1174]Henry, p. 715.

> assumes that speaker one talks in vv. 1-2, that speaker two responds to him with a prayer in v. 3 (this assumes the verbs are true jussives of prayer), and that speaker three responds with words of assurance in vv. 4-8. If the verbs in v. 3 are taken as a rhetorical use of the jussive, then there are two speakers. Verses 3-8 are speaker two's response to the words of speaker one."[1175]

121:5-6 Yahweh would guard His people as an animal keeper protects his charge. He would protect them from hostile influences that the blazing Palestinian sun represented. He would not allow danger to overtake them by day or by night. Perhaps the writer thought of the sun striking with heat (as in a great drought or heat wave, now known to be associated with solar flare), and the moon striking with cold and moisture (as during a vast snow blizzard or ice storm).[1176]

> "All verses except verse 6 employ the Hebrew word *shamar* to emphasize this idea of God's guardianship."[1177]

121:7-8 The Lord is the Protector of His people. He guards their lives from all evil influences (cf. Jude 24-25). He protects them when they go outdoors and when they return indoors, namely, always. Moreover He will provide this protection forever.

> "Did believers never suffer from sunstroke or fall into the hands of bandits? It is apparent that while the psalm speaks of such blanket protection, the pilgrim must understand that everything that invades his or her life is under God's watchful care and providence. The spirit of the psalm is to evoke trust in Yahweh, the Keeper of the pilgrim, and the Keeper of Israel, the Maker of heaven and earth. Often things that happen in the life of the pilgrim would not be his or her choice. But the psalm is not pointing in this direction. The direction is upward, toward God. The believer must recognize that life is a gift from God, the Giver of life. The pilgrim can rest confidently, knowing that God's glory will prevail, and that justice . . . and righteousness . . . will ultimately rule."[1178]

> "None are so safe as those whom God keeps; none so much in danger as the self-secure."[1179]

[1175]The NET Bible note on Psalm 121.
[1176]Henry, p. 715.
[1177]Yates, p. 541.
[1178]David G. Barker, "'The Lord Watches over You': A Pilgrimage Reading of Psalm 121," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):180-81.
[1179]Spurgeon, 2:224.

This psalm is a comforting reminder of God's continual protection from harm and danger of all kinds. It is especially appropriate for travelers to remind themselves of His watch-care.

> "In spite of the perils of one's pilgrimage, the believer can exercise trust in the Lord. God is neither too great to care, nor are God's people too insignificant to be noticed. This quiet psalm reflects on God who quells the anxiety of the pilgrim's heart, who watches over him or her with a shepherd's gentleness and a guardian's vigilance, and who gives thoughtful benediction to one's daily routines."[1180]

PSALM 122

David spoke of his delight in going up to the temple to worship God in this short psalm of Zion. He exhorted the Israelites to pray for the security of Jerusalem so that this blessing might continue. Such a condition, i.e., a peaceful state, would glorify God, as well as benefit His people. David wrote three other psalms of ascent (Pss. 124; 131; 133)

1. Joyful anticipation of worship 122:1-2

David related how happy he felt when it was time to worship God at the sanctuary in Jerusalem. It was a great privilege to stand within the gates of the city that God had chosen as the place where He would meet with His people.

2. Jerusalem's privileged condition 122:3-5

God had blessed Jerusalem by giving it a large, compact population. He appointed it the center of national life and worship, to which people from all the tribes of Israel resorted for festive occasions. They also traveled there for judicial verdicts from the righteous king, whom God had provided for His people.

3. Prayer for Jerusalem's peace 122:6-7

David called the Israelites to ask God to maintain Jerusalem (lit. foundation of peace) in peace. They were to pray for God's prosperity on all who wanted to preserve Jerusalem as the important center it was. They should also pray for the peace and prosperity of all who lived in the city. David himself prayed for the populace. He sought the welfare of Jerusalem chiefly because the house of Yahweh stood within it.

> "Jerusalem is and will remain the heart of all Israel as surely as Jahve, who has His house there, is the God of all Israel."[1181]

The welfare and continuity of places that are centers for the worship and work of God in the world should occupy the prayers of God's people.

[1180]Barker, p. 181.
[1181]Delitzsch, 3:279.

PSALM 123

The composer of this fourth psalm of ascent voiced dependence on the Lord and petitioned Him for grace, since Israel's enemies ridiculed her for her trust in Yahweh. It is a combination of individual and community lament.

1. Dependence on God 123:1-2

The writer looked up to the Sovereign of the universe and prayed for Him to send deliverance from His heavenly throne. He took a humble posture in making his request, comparing himself to a servant who can only wait for his master to act.

> "A traveler says, 'I have seen a fine illustration of this passage in a gentleman's house at Damascus. The people of the East do not speak so much or so quick as those in the West and a sign of the hand is frequently the only instructions given to the servants in waiting.'"[1182]

2. Desire for grace 123:3-4

The Israelites needed more grace because their pagan neighbors, who were leading comfortable lives, were ridiculing them for their trust in Yahweh.

It is appropriate to request additional divine enablement to bear the criticism and mocking of unbelievers who ridicule faith in God. However, we should maintain a realistic attitude of dependence on God as we petition Him and wait for Him to grant our request.

PSALM 124

David voiced praise to God for not allowing the pagan nations that surrounded Israel to defeat and assimilate God's people. This is a psalm of declarative praise.

1. The Lord's protection of His people 124:1-5

David reminded the people that God had been on their side in the battles that might have resulted in Israel's extinction. If He had not been, they would have perished. He used several graphic images to picture the total annihilation of the chosen people. Israel's enemies had attacked her viciously many times during her history.

2. Praise for the Lord's protection 124:6-8

David next praised Yahweh for not allowing Israel's enemies to tear her to pieces as a vicious animal tears its prey. "Blessed be the LORD" means acknowledging Him as the source of blessings (cf. 103:2). Israel had escaped as a bird that flies free when someone releases the trap that snared it. Israel's helper was Yahweh, not any human deliverer (cf. 121:8). He is the Maker of heaven and earth (cf. 115:15; 121:2), the strongest of all deliverers.

[1182]Michael de Montaigne, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:227.

> "When 'name' of the Lord is used for the plain term 'Lord,' [v.8] the aim is to include in one term all the marvelous revelation of His mighty power to help that the Lord has so amply demonstrated in the course of the history of His people."[1183]

This psalm and Psalm 121 both commemorate God's preservation of the Israelites. Psalm 121 is more personal and individualistic in its outlook, whereas this one is more national and corporate—perhaps a communal thanksgiving song. The preservation of God's people is a fit subject for praise in both respects. Israel has suffered from anti-Semitism for centuries, yet God has faithfully preserved His chosen people to the present day.

PSALM 125

The psalmist praised God that believers are secure in their salvation and that God will keep temptation from overwhelming them. However, he cautioned God's people to follow the Lord faithfully—or lose His blessing because they lived as unbelievers do. This psalm of ascent is a communal song of confidence and a communal lament.[1184] Some call it a psalm of trust and or a psalm of Zion.

1. The security of God's people 125:1-3

Believers in Yahweh are as secure in their position as the mountain God had chosen and established as His special habitation (cf. Rom. 8:31-39). The Lord forever surrounds His people as a protective army keeping overwhelming forces from defeating them (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13).

> "Mount Zion is not the highest peak in the mountain range around Jerusalem. To its east lies the Mount of Olives, to its north Mount Scopus, to the west and south are other hills, all of which are higher than Mount Zion. Surrounded by mountains, Mount Zion was secure, by its natural defensibility. So the psalmist compares the Lord to the hills around Jerusalem and the people to Mount Zion."[1185]

God promised not to let wicked authorities overcome the righteous totally. God did permit Israel's foreign neighbors to oppress and dominate her for periods in her history. However, verse 3 promises that they would never completely and finally defeat Israel. The NIV translators rendered the last part of verse 3, "For then the righteous might use their hands to do evil."

2. The choices before God's people 125:4-5

However, even though God's people are secure, they have a choice concerning how they will live. They can be faithful to the Lord, or depart from Him and live sinful lives. In verse 4, the psalmist asked God to bless those of His people who do good and remain upright in their attitudes and affections.

[1183]Leupold, p. 883.
[1184]Dahood, 3:214.
[1185]VanGemeren, p. 788.

> "O brethren, the good in us is God in us."[1186]

In verse 5, he warned that those believers who did not follow Him faithfully would suffer a fate similar to that of the wicked. They would cease to enjoy the privileges of intimate fellowship with Yahweh. For Israel, this meant banishment and captivity as an ultimate punishment. Nevertheless, they would never cease to be His people (vv. 1-3). The psalmist closed by praying for peace on Israel, which in the context required walking with God.

> "The life of faith is not easy, but the life of unbelief is much harder—in this life and in the life to come."[1187]

This psalm makes a distinction that is obvious in the history of Israel. The New Testament teaches that these principles apply to Christians as well. Those who trust in the Lord are eternally secure, but they can choose to follow Him faithfully and experience His blessing, or depart from Him and suffer His discipline.

PSALM 126

This community lament psalm of ascent appears to date from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah when the Israelites returned from Babylonian captivity. The writer rejoiced in the Israelites' return to the land (sometime after 538 B.C.) but prayed for a complete restoration.This psalm could also be called a psalm of Zion.

> "The psalm strikes a note of strong comfort and encouragement. It will always be treasured by those who have known adversity but have in the midst of it cast their burden upon the Lord."[1188]

On a flight to Newark from Chicago on Feb. 3, 2002, I sat across the aisle from a young Jewish woman. Before we took off, she read out of a book, which I noticed had Hebrew printing in it, and she prayed. Later, I asked her what she had prayed. She said it was a special prayer before flying. I thought it might have been a psalm of ascent, since she was ascending!

1. Praise for the return 126:1-3

The psalmist recalled initial impressions following return to the land, which God had effected. The returned captives felt as though they were only dreaming that they were back in their homeland. They evidently did not expect to see it. They were happy and praised God for His goodness to them as they spoke with non-Israelites.

2. Petition for complete restoration 126:4

The streams in the south of Israel, the Negev, dry up in the parched summer months—but they become raging torrents during the rainy season. The psalmist used these streams as a

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[1186]Charles Stanford, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:232.
[1187]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 344.
[1188]Leupold, p. 887.

figure of what the highways from Babylon could become with God's further blessing. They could become flooded with travelers moving back into the land that God wanted His chosen people to occupy.

3. Prospect for future richness 126:5-6

For the returned exiles, farming was a painful pursuit since the ground had become hard and wild, because no one had cultivated it. However, the farmer who worked hard could expect a rich harvest in the future. Future joy would replace present weeping. Undoubtedly the psalmist used this terminology to represent the restoration of the nation as well as its crops. This seems clear from the preceding verses. His point was that even though the Jews who had returned had a hard time reestablishing the life and institutions of Judaism, they could anticipate that God would reward their labor. It was as certain as reaping follows sowing (cf. Gal. 6:7).

> "The church must not only keep this seed in the storehouse for such as come to enquire for it, but must send her sowers forth to cast it among those who are ignorant of its value or too indifferent to ask it at her hands. She must not sit weeping because men will not apply to her, but must go forth and bear the precious seed to the unwilling, the careless, the prejudiced, and the profligate."[1189]

The initial flush of enthusiasm and success that those who seek to honor God experience, must continue, even if the work is slow, hard, and discouraging. God's people can look forward with hope to a rewarding harvest in the future if they faithfully persevere in carrying out the work He has ordained (cf. Matt. 13:1-8, 18-23; Gal. 6:9).

PSALM 127

Solomon spoke of God's blessing in family life in this ascent psalm that is also a wisdom psalm. Trust in God yields domestic benefits that hard work alone cannot provide. This psalm, and the next, are good to read when your family gets on your nerves.[1190] Delitzsch titled this psalm "everything depends upon the blessing of God."[1191] McGee wrote that "everything depends on the blessing of God" is an old German proverb.[1192]

1. The futility of labor without faith 127:1-2

These verses recall the spirit of Ecclesiastes with its emphasis on futility. It is foolish, frustrating, and futile to attempt projects without seeking God's blessing. This applies to building a house and building a household.

[1189]Edwin Sidney, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:237.
[1190]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 940.
[1191]Delitzsch, 3:291.
[1192]McGee, 2:856.

> ". . . sons and daughters build up a household, or constitute a *family*, as much and as really as stones and timber constitute a *building*."[1193]

This also applies to the much larger task of defending a city. Putting in long hours of hard work will only lead to weariness. Conversely, those who trust in the Lord—His beloved—experience rest. Solomon was not denigrating hard work but was advocating dependence on the Lord as one works.

> "I have lived for a long time—(eighty-one years); and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of man. . . . I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers, imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on our deliberations, be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business; and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service."[1194]

2. The providential blessings of God 127:3-5

The folly of working all the time and not trusting in the Lord should be obvious when one considers that much of what we enjoy does not come from working hard. Many of life's best blessings come as gifts from God. Children are one of these great gifts. God gives them to a couple or withholds them, as He chooses, regardless of how much a husband and wife may strive to obtain them. Under the Mosaic economy God promised to bless the godly with children (Deut. 28:4), but He gave no such promise to Christians. Therefore it is a mistake to conclude that the more children a Christian couple has the more godly they are.

In Solomon's day, grown children normally cared for their parents in their old age. They would defend them as the parents became increasingly dependent and vulnerable. That is what Solomon evidently had in mind in verses 4 and 5. Children (sons) can be a defense for their parents from exterior and interior foes. Arrows defend against attacking invaders.

> "Well doth David call children *arrows*; for if they be well bred, they shoot at their parents [*sic* parents'] enemies; and if they be evil bred, they shoot at their parents."[1195]

Negotiating in the gate pictures defending against enemies who would seek to rob the defenseless through legal maneuvering and bring shame on them. Thus children can be a kind of insurance policy, but not one that someone can work hard to buy. They are a gift from God.

> "Many children make many prayers, and many prayers bring much blessing."[1196]

[1193]Adam Clarke, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:239.

[1194]Benjamin Franklin, quoted in ibid., 2:239, 240. Paragraph divisions omitted.

[1195]Henry Smith, quoted in ibid., 2:242.

[1196]German proverb, quoted in ibid.

The godly need to recognize that people are never self-made. We owe all that we possess to God's providence ultimately. Consequently, we should avoid the trap of depending totally on ourselves for all we need in life. Instead, we should trust God as we work and acknowledge His good gifts.

> "No amount of human sacrifice or toil can accomplish much unless God's blessing is upon His people."[1197]

> "This psalm has been used on several important occasions. It was used at the inauguration of President Eisenhower. Two Bibles were used. One of them was George Washington's Bible, and it was opened at Psalm 127."[1198]

PSALM 128

In this didactic wisdom ascent psalm, the writer rejoiced in the Lord's blessings. He reviewed previously received blessings and then prayed for greater blessings (cf. Num. 6:24-26). Some classify this also as a psalm of Zion.

> "Whereas Ps. 127 showed how all blessings are attributable to God alone, this psalm shows what responsibility rests upon man if he would share in God's rich blessings."[1199]

> "In one form or another, the word 'bless' is used four times, but it is the translation of two different Hebrew words. In verses 1-2, it is the word *asher* which is often translated 'happy' (Gen. 30:12-13), and in verses 4-5, it is *barak*, which means 'blessed of the Lord.'"[1200]

> "The 8th chapter of Zechariah is a virtual commentary on this Psalm."[1201]

1. Summary statement of blessing 128:1

Everyone who fears Yahweh and obeys His precepts enjoys blessing.

2. Some specific blessings 128:2-4

The work of the person who fears and obeys God will be productive. It will yield joy and well-being to him (v. 2; cf. 127:1-2). Such a man's wife will also be fruitful. Vines were everywhere in Israel, and grape production was one of its chief industries. The implication of this statement is that the wife would bear children. Likewise, the children of the godly would make beneficial contributions symbolized by olives, another one of

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[1197]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 346.
[1198]McGee, 2:856.
[1199]Leupold, p. 895.
[1200]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 348.
[1201]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 454.

the most important crops in Israel. The psalmist pictured the family gathered around the dinner table (v. 3).

> "Before the fall, Paradise was man's home; since the fall, home has been his Paradise."[1202]

Verse 4 with verse 1 frame the thought of verses 2 and 3.

3. Specific supplications for blessing 128:5-6

The psalmist offered a general prayer for his readers' future, and then specified particular blessings following the form he used in verses 1-4. The petition concerning seeing Jerusalem prosper all of one's days is appropriate in a psalm of ascent. The prosperity of the city would extend to every family in the nation ultimately. Seeing one's grandchildren also expresses God's continued blessing for many years to come.

> "From bride and groom to grandparents in just six verses! How time flies! Three generations are represented in the psalm, and all of them walking with the Lord."[1203]

> "Luther called this a 'Marriage Song.'"[1204]

This psalm beautifully tied family and nation together in the thinking of the pilgrim Israelite who traveled with his family to Jerusalem for a national feast. It is a reminder of the importance of God's blessing on both home and nation that are mutually dependent. Families and nations can only succeed with God's blessing.

PSALM 129

God had delivered Israel from her enemies. The psalmist praised Him for doing so, and then asked Him to continue doing so, in this psalm of communal confidence. Others have called it a psalm of trust, with its roots in the psalms of lament.[1205] It contains some imprecation as well.

1. A tribute to past deliverance 129:1-4

129:1-2 This psalm begins, as Psalm 124 did, by calling on the pilgrim Israelites to speak for the nation. The writer urged the people to acknowledge that God had enabled Israel to survive the many persecutions she had experienced throughout her history. Israel had spent her "youth" in Egyptian bondage.

129:3-4 Israel's enemies had, as it were, plowed deep furrows on Israel's back. This was a vivid figure of speech in an agricultural economy. It pictures the land as a human being. However, righteous Yahweh had cut the cords to

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[1202]Augustus William Hare, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:245.
[1203]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 349.
[1204]McGee, 2:857.
[1205]E.g., *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1013.

Israel's oppressors. The cords in verse 4 may represent the reins that the plowman of verse 3 used, or they may simply stand for the things that bound Israel.

> "Never has God used a nation to chastise His Israel without destroying that nation when the chastizements [*sic*] has [*sic* have] come to a close: He hates those who hurt His people even though He permits their hate to triumph for a while for His own purpose."[1206]

2. A petition for future deliverance 129:5-8

The psalmist encouraged the Israelite pilgrims to pray for continuing deliverance. The mention of Zion, the pilgrim's destination, recalled the place where God dwelt, the most important place in Israel. Those who hated Zion would be hating and setting themselves against Yahweh (cf. Judg. 5:31). Grass and weed seeds often blew onto the flat roofs of the Israelites' houses, but they did not flourish long because they had little soil in which to root. In Israel it was customary to greet someone by wishing God's blessing on him or her (cf. Ruth 2:4). However, the psalmist prayed that Israel's enemies would receive no such greeting.

God's people should carefully thank Him for past deliverances, but should also continue to pray for His safekeeping in the future, since their enemies will continue to oppose and oppress them.

PSALM 130

The poet uttered a cry for God to show mercy to His people, and he encouraged his fellow Israelites to wait for the Lord to deliver them. This is one of the penitential psalms, as well as an individual lament and a psalm of ascent.

"No other psalm expresses quite so well what an evil sin itself is. At the same time . . . the psalm has a distinct gospel emphasis."[1207]

1. A desperate cry for mercy 130:1-2

The writer felt that he was at the very bottom of his resources, at the end of his rope (cf. 30:2-3; 71:20).[1208] This expression stresses the urgency of his request. The particular situation he faced is unknown, but in view of verse 8 it may have been oppression by an enemy.

> "Deep places beget deep devotion. Depths of earnestness are stirred by depths of tribulation."[1209]

[1206]Spurgeon, 2:247.
[1207]Leupold, p. 902.
[1208]See Delitzsch, 3:302.
[1209]Spurgeon, 2:249.

2. A strong expression of trust 130:3-4

The psalmist realized that if God gave people what they deserve, no one would be able to survive. To mark iniquities means to keep a record of them and hold the sinner accountable for each one. Fortunately God forgives. He does not "keep track" of every sin and exact punishment for it. The psalmist was speaking of how God deals with His redeemed people. The consequence of God forgiving should be that His forgiven people fear Him. Fearing God, a term that in the Old Testament virtually means trusting God, shows itself in obedience and worship.

> "If you take seriously the guilt of sin, you will take seriously the grace of forgiveness."[1210]

3. A deliberate decision to hope 130:5-8

130:5-6 The writer purposed to continue to wait for the Lord to deliver him while he reflected on God's forgiveness.

> "Waiting, we study the Word, believe the Word, hope in the Word, and live on the Word; and all because it is 'His Word'—the Word of Him Who never speaks in vain. Jehovah's Word is a firm ground for a waiting soul to rest upon."[1211]

The psalmist compared himself to a guard on duty late at night. He could only wait for the morning light when someone else would relieve him, and when all that was now dark would then be clear.

> "In the year 1830, on the night preceding the first of August, the day the slaves in our West Indian Colonies were to come into possession of the freedom promised them, many of them, we are told, never went to bed at all. Thousands, and tens of thousands of them, assembled in their places of worship, engaging in devotional duties, and singing praises to God, waiting for the first streak of the light of the morning of that day on which they were to be made free."[1212]

130:7-8 God's people should put their hope in Yahweh, in their present distress, because He is loyal in His love, and He will finally provide complete redemption. Ultimate deliverance was sure in the future, and this was to be the ground of the Israelites' confidence.

[1210]Wiersbe, p. 351.
[1211]Spurgeon, 2:252.
[1212]T. W. Aveling, quoted in ibid.

Today, God's redeemed saints can call to Him out of the depths of their affliction, too. We can find encouragement in the fact that God has forgiven us all sins past, present, and future. However, we can also look forward to our full, ultimate redemption when we see Him. Until then, we should hope in the Lord, as a watchman waiting for the dawning of our new day, namely: our glorification.

PSALM 131

In just a few words, David spoke of his humble trust in the Lord and his hope in Him. These are remarkable statements for a powerful king to have written. This is an individual psalm of confidence or trust that became a psalm of ascent.

> "In this brief psalm, he [David] tells us the essentials of a life that glorifies God and accomplishes His work on earth."[1213]

> "This psalm, modest and reserved in character, is one of the great gems of the Psalter. Because of its very unpretentiousness it may easily be overlooked. Yet it throws light upon one of the cardinal Christian virtues, which is always intimately linked with trust, the virtue of humility. It is parallel to passages like Matt. 19:3[*sic* 13-14]; Jas. 4:6; I Pet. 5:5."[1214]

> "It [this psalm] is one of the shortest Psalms to read but one of the longest to learn."[1215]

1. A model of humility 131:1-2

131:1 David claimed that he had not been proud. Pride is essentially a belief that one does not need God but is self-sufficient. Haughty or lofty looks with the eyes betray a proud attitude because they look down on other people with a feeling of superiority (cf. 18:27; 101:5; Prov. 6:17; 30:13). Pride also manifests itself in taking on projects for which one is not capable and thinking that one can handle them. The proud person overestimates his own abilities as well as his own importance. The humble person, however, has a realistic understanding of his or her capabilities and limitations (cf. Rom. 12:3).

> "The godly knows that true godliness begins in the 'heart' that is not proud (cf. Prov 18:12), with eyes that do not envy (cf. 18:27; 101:5; Prov 16:5), and with a walk of life (MT, 'I do not walk' for NIV, 'I do not concern myself') that is not preoccupied with 'greatness' (cf. Jer 45:5) and with accomplishments ('wonderful,' i.e., 'difficult' or 'arduous'; cf. Deut 17:8; 30:11)."[1216]

[1213]Wiersbe, p. 352.
[1214]Leupold, p. 907.
[1215]Spurgeon, 2:254.
[1216]VanGemeren, p. 803.

131:2 David had stopped being self-assertive and restless. Rather than constantly seeking self-gratification, he now rested in his lot. The ability to rest and be quiet, rather than struggling for what we want, is a sign of maturity as well as humility.

> "He [David] did not push himself forward, but suffered himself to be drawn forth out of seclusion."[1217]

> ". . . his soul, which is by nature restless and craving, is stilled; it does not long after earthly enjoyment and earthly good that God should give these to it, but it is satisfied in the fellowship of God, it finds full satisfaction in Him, it is satisfied (satiated) in Him."[1218]

> "Hebrew children were often not weaned till three years old."[1219]

2. A model of hope 131:3

David called on the nation to follow his example and rest in confidence that the Lord would provide what His people needed. This dependent trust is a need God's people never outgrow.

> "The piety reflected in this psalm is directly opposed to modernity with its drive toward independence, self-sufficiency, and autonomy. It is worth noting that the Psalms deny the Oedipal inclination that there can be freedom only if the controlling, authoritarian father-god be slain or denied. The myth of modernity believes that real maturity is to be free of every relationship of dependence. But when the metaphor is changed from a harsh controlling father to a gently feeding mother, it is evident that the human goal need not be breaking away, but happy trust."[1220]

This psalm is an excellent exposition of what it means to have faith as a child. We *can* trust God because He is who He is. We *must* trust Him because we are who we are.

PSALM 132

The writer of this psalm led the Israelites in praying that God would bless Israel for David's commitment to the Lord (cf. Ps. 89).

> "Because of its emphasis on the temple and on God's election of Zion, the psalm is here classified as a Song of Zion. The Songs of Zion have much in common with the royal psalms, as they celebrate the glories associated

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[1217]Delitzsch, 3:305.
[1218]Ibid., 3:307.
[1219]Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 455.
[1220]Brueggemann, p. 49.

> with Jerusalem: temple and kingship. Unlike the royal psalms, the Songs of Zion proclaim the glories of Zion in universal and eschatological terms . . ."[1221]

This is the longest of the songs of ascent, and some regard it as messianic. In view of its contents, it may have been composed for the dedication of the temple in Solomon's day.[1222]

1. The prayer to remember David 132:1-5

132:1 This verse expresses the theme of the psalm. It is a cry to God to remember David's afflictions that he experienced concerning his desire to glorify God by finding a suitable place for the ark of the covenant to dwell.

132:2-5 Specifically, David underwent personal discomfort because he wanted to build a temple for Yahweh (2 Sam. 7). This led him to make great personal sacrifices to prepare for its construction, even though the Lord did not permit him to build the building himself. His desire to erect a magnificent temple was a desire to glorify God.

In the ancient Near East, people associated the splendor of a temple with the greatness of the deity it honored. Therefore David wanted to build the most glorious temple he could. David's desire to build God a house resulted in God promising to build David a house or dynasty. The psalmist's prayer that God would remember David, then, involved His remembering and fulfilling His promises to David.

> "The first holy votary [i.e., a person who made a vow to God] that ever we read of was Jacob here mentioned in this text [v. 2], who is therefore called the father of vows: and upon this account some think David mentions God here under the title of 'the mighty God of Jacob' rather than any other, because of his vow."[1223]

2. The prayer to bless David's descendants 132:6-10

132:6-8 The antecedent of "it" (v. 6) is the ark (v. 8). Ephrathah (Ephratah) is an old name for the area around Bethlehem (Gen. 35:16, 19; 48:7). Jaar evidently refers to Kiriath-jearim, "Jearim" being the plural of "Jaar," the town where the ark rested for 20 years after the Philistines returned it (1 Sam. 7:1-2). Evidently some Israelites in Bethlehem heard that the ark was in Kiriath-jearim and went there to retrieve it. From there, David then

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[1221]VanGemeren, p. 804.

[1222]Leupold, p. 910.

[1223]Abraham Wright, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:256.

brought the ark into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6).[1224] (This is the only mention of the ark in the psalms.)

The Israelite pilgrims who sang this psalm resolved to go to worship God on Mt. Zion, to the place in Jerusalem where the ark rested (v. 7), referred to here as God's "footstool." That was where God dwelt in a localized way among His people. It was His earthly throne. They called on God to meet with them there. They spoke of "the ark of God's strength" because it represented God's strength in Israel's previous battles.

132:9-10 The Israelites also called on God to establish a righteous group of priests among them. and to enable the godly in Israel to rejoice because of His blessings. They asked God to remember His promises to David, His anointed king. In view of these requests, this psalm may date from the return from exile (cf. v. 16; Zech. 3:1-7).

3. The Lord's promises to David 132:11-18

132:11-12 God promised David—the oath being a poetic equivalent of a sure promise—that He would raise up a dynasty of David's descendants that would follow him on Israel's throne (2 Sam. 7:12-16). If they were faithful to the Lord, He would give them an unbroken succession. Of course this did not happen, because David's descendants did not all follow God faithfully. Nevertheless God preserved David's dynasty as He said He would.

132:13-16 God also promised to make Zion His special habitation (2 Chron. 6:6, 34-39). He said He would bless it by providing food for the poor, salvation for the priests (cf. v. 9), and joy for the godly.

132:17-18 The "horn of David" that God promised would spring forth refers to a ruler that He would raise up from David's descendants (cf. Dan. 7:24; Luke 1:69). The "lamp" is a figure for a leader (cf. 2 Sam. 21:17; 1 Kings 11:36). It refers to the same person God said He would prepare for His anointed, David.

> "Since, when a man died without children, his family line was stopped, his lamp was said to be put out; therefore a lamp symbolized offspring."[1225]

In other words, God promised to raise up one of David's descendants who would defeat his enemies. This promise found partial fulfillment in some

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[1224]For a proposal concerning the relationship of Psalm 132 to 1 Samuel 4—6 and 2 Samuel 6, see Aage Bentzen, "The Cultic Use of the Story of the Ark in Samuel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948):37-53.

[1225]Yates, p. 545.

of David's successors who followed him on the throne of Israel, but Messiah will fulfill it ultimately (cf. Isa. 4:2; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:18; 6:12).

> "Once again God's promises exceed what was asked for."[1226]

This royal psalm should encourage God's people to believe that He will fulfill His promises, specifically the promises regarding David's messianic descendant and capital.

PSALM 133

This wisdom psalm is a classic description of the beauty of believers' unity and brotherly fellowship (cf. John 17).

> "Psalm 133 reflects Israel's capacity to appreciate the common joys of life and to attribute them to the well-ordered generosity of Yahweh."[1227]

1. The desirability of unity 133:1

The psalmist called the Israelites to consider the beauty of the unity of brethren (cf. Eph. 4:3). He said it is essentially good and it is a pleasant condition. The brethren in view were believers in Israel. This was an appropriate thought for pilgrims to entertain as they anticipated meeting other worshippers in Jerusalem shortly.

2. The descriptions of unity 133:2-3

133:2 The writer compared brotherly unity to the oil that Moses poured over Aaron's head when he anointed him as Israel's first high priest (Lev. 8:12). That oil flowed down over his head and beard, and down onto the robe and breastplate that bore the names of the 12 Israelite tribes. As the consecrating oil covered everything, so unity among believers makes them acceptable to God as a kingdom of priests.

> "The specific reference to 'Aaron' should not be limited to him, as the whole priesthood was anointed with oil. Here Aaron is the 'head' of the priestly clan. His name is representative of all the priests."[1228]

> "Is the man a believer in Christ? Then he is in the one body, and I must yield him an abiding love. Is he one of the poorest, one of the least spiritual, one of the least lovable? Then he is as the skirts of the garment, and my heart's love

[1226]Leupold, p. 916.
[1227]Brueggemann, p. 48.
[1228]VanGemeren, p. 816.

> must fall even upon him. Brotherly love comes from the head, but falls to the feet. Its way is downward. It 'ran down,' and it 'went down': love for the brethren condescends to men of low estate, it is not puffed up, but is lowly and meek. This is no small part of its excellence: oil would not anoint if it did not flow down, neither would brotherly love diffuse its blessing if it did not descend."[1229]

133:3 Mt. Hermon to the north of Israel was the highest mountain in the land. As such it enjoyed unusually heavy dew. Dew was a great blessing in the parched land of Israel. As the dew freshened and invigorated Mt. Hermon, so the blessing of unity among believing Israelites would refresh and invigorate Mt. Zion as they gathered for worship there.

When unity characterizes believers, they can perform priestly work with divine approval, and they can enjoy God's blessings of refreshment and fertility.

> "Sometimes it is chosen, as the best expedient for preserving peace, that brethren should live asunder and at a distance from each other; that indeed may prevent enmity and strife (Gen. xiii. 9), but the goodness and pleasantness are *for brethren to dwell together* and so *to dwell in unity, to dwell even as one* (so some read it), as having one heart, one soul, one interest."[1230]

> "One day there will be the spiritual unity of God's people that this poem describes."[1231]

PSALM 134

This last pilgrim psalm called on the priests who served God at the temple to praise Him, and it called on God to bless them.

1. A call for God's servants to praise Him 134:1-2

Priests were on duty 24 hours a day at the temple. They served as guards, and they also offered sacrifices and carried out other sacerdotal functions during the daylight hours. The psalmist called on them to praise God even at night.

> "Is it your duty to spend the night in watching? Then spend the night in worship. Do not let the time of watching be idle, wasted time; but when others are slumbering and sleeping, and you are necessarily watchful, sustain the praises of God's house; let there be praise in Zion—still praise by night as well as by day!"[1232]

[1229]Spurgeon, 2:261-62. Paragraph division omitted.
[1230]Henry, p. 720.
[1231]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1016.
[1232]Spurgeon, 2:263.

Lifting up the hands in prayer was a common posture that symbolized the petitioners offering praise up to God and receiving blessings from Him. Blessing the Lord is equivalent to praising Him by recounting His mighty acts.[1233]

2. A prayer that God would bless His servants 134:3

The pilgrim then asked God to bless these special servants of His. The reference to God being the Maker of heaven and earth recalls His greatness (cf. 115:15; et al.). This verse is also an appropriate conclusion to the collection of ascent psalms (Pss. 120—134).

PSALM 135

This psalm of descriptive praise "in the Mosaic style"[1234] lauds God for His greatness and for blessing His people. Like Psalm 134, it calls on the priests to praise the Lord.

> "The status of Psalms 135 and 136 in relation to the Great Hallel psalms . . . in ancient Judaism is not clear. Some Jewish authorities include Psalms 135 and 136 as a part of the collection of Psalms 120—136, whereas others limit the Great Hallel psalms to 135—136, or even to Psalm 136 alone. Like the Songs of Ascents, Psalm 135 is related to one of the great feasts; but it is far from clear at which feast it was sung."[1235]

> "Every verse of this psalm either echoes, quotes or is quoted by some other part of Scripture."[1236]

As such, it is not only Mosaic (bearing the marks of Moses) but mosaic (arranging pieces of other psalms to form a new one). Alexander Maclaren described it as being like the collection of certain favorite flowers from various other floral arrangements to make up one new bouquet.[1237]

1. Introductory call to praise 135:1-3

This psalm begins and ends with, "Praise the Lord" (Hallelujah; cf. 104:35; 113:1; et al.). The call goes out in verse 3 again. The priests in particular should praise Him because He is good and because praise is pleasant (lovely).

2. The cause for praise 135:4-18

135:4-7 The sovereignty of God is what called forth the poet's praise in this psalm. The Lord chose Israel as His special treasure (cf. Deut. 7:6). He is also greater than all the pagan gods because He does whatever pleases Him (cf. 115:3). This is obvious in His control of nature.

[1233]Leupold, p. 922.
[1234]Delitzsch, 3:324.
[1235]VanGemeren, pp. 818-19.
[1236]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 455.
[1237]See Leupold, p. 923.

Samuel Kinns wrote fascinating information about the vast amount of water vapor that evaporates from the surface of the earth, to which the writer referred in verse 7.[1238]

135:8-12 God's sovereignty is also clear from His control over Israel's history. He sent the plagues on Egypt, even smiting Pharaoh's first-born. He also defeated many kings and subdued many nations to give Israel the Promised Land. Notable among these kings were Sihon and Og (Num. 21). God uses both nature (v. 7) and miracles (vv. 8-9) to accomplish His will.

135:13-14 The everlasting Lord would continue to vindicate His people in His sovereignty because of His compassion.

135:15-18 In contrast to Israel's sovereign God, the idols of the nations are impotent (cf. 115:4-8). Verses 15-18 illustrate verse 5 as verses 8-12 prove verse 4.

> "When our philosophical teachers deny that God has made any verbal revelation of Himself they also confess that their god is dumb."[1239]

3. Concluding call to praise 135:19-21

The psalm closes as it opened: with a call to God's people to praise Him. Particularly from Zion: the Israelites, the priests, the Levites, and the godly should praise the Lord who dwells in Jerusalem.

All God's servants should praise Him for His sovereignty as He demonstrates it in nature and history. Truly there is no other God like Him.

PSALM 136

This psalm is probably the last of the Great Hallel psalms (Pss. 120—136), though a few Jewish scholars viewed it as the only Great Hallel psalm.[1240] Many scholars believe that the Israelites sang this psalm at Passover when they celebrated the Exodus. Other *hallel* psalms are 113—118 and 146—150. This psalm is unique because it repeats the same refrain in each verse. The Israelites probably sang this song antiphonally, with the leaders singing the first part of each verse and the people responding with the refrain. The content and basic structure are similar to Psalm 135: they are both reminiscent of Deuteronomy.[1241] With this song, the Israelites praised God for His great acts and His loyal love that endures forever. Thus it is a psalm of descriptive praise. It is a good one to read when we need to be reminded of God's mercy.

[1238]Samuel Kinns, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:266-67.

[1239]Spurgeon, 2:269.

[1240]See the discussion of this issue in the introduction to Psalm 135 above.

[1241]Delitzsch, 3:329.

1. Invitation to thank God 136:1-3

Three times the psalmist called on the people to "give thanks" to God. To "give thanks" means to acknowledge publicly (cf. 35:18; 105:1; 122:4) The refrain here and throughout the psalm explains the reason for praising Him. The Hebrew word *hesed* has variously been translated "love," "faithful love," "steadfast love," "loyal love," "lovingkindness," "kindness," and "mercy" (cf. Eph. 2:4) The repetition of the refrain in each verse serves to cause the reader to applaud every divine act that the writer mentioned.[1242]

> "This [refrain: "His lovingkindness is everlasting"] appears four times in Ps. 118:1-4. This sentence is the wonder of Moses, the sum of revelation, and the hope of man."[1243]

2. Subjects for thanksgiving 136:4-25

136:4-9 Verse 4 expresses the theme of this thanksgiving, namely: God's wonderful acts. Then the psalmist mentioned specific acts. Verses 5-9 describe aspects of God's work in creating the world.

> "There are no iron tracks with bars and bolts to hold the planets in their orbits. Freely in space they move, ever changing but never changing; poised and balancing; swaying and swayed; disturbing and disturbed, onward they fly, fulfilling with unerring certainty their mighty cycles. The entire system forms one grand complicated piece of celestial machinery; circle within circle, wheel within wheel, cycle within cycle; revolutions so swift as to be completed in a few hours; movements so slow that their mighty periods are only counted by millions of years."[1244]

136:10-25 God's acts in this section of verses relate to His care for Israel (cf. Ps. 78; 105; 135:8-12). He humbled the Egyptians, brought His people out of Egypt in the Exodus, and led them through the Red Sea (vv. 10-15). He then defeated the Canaanite kings and gave their land to the Israelites (vv. 16-22). In summary, God remembered His people and rescued them from their adversaries (vv. 23-24).

> "For the Lord even to think of us is a wealth of mercy."[1245]

Finally, God provides food for all living creatures (v. 25).

[1242]J. F. J. van Rensburg, "History as Poetry: A Study of Psalm 136," *OTWSA* 29 (1986):86-87.
[1243]James G. Murphy, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:271.
[1244]*The Orbs of Heaven*, quoted in ibid., 2:273.
[1245]Spurgeon, 2:275.

> "It is good to enter into the detail of God's favours and not to view them in the gross, and in each instance to observe, and own, that God's *mercy endureth for ever*."[1246]

3. Reminder to thank God 136:26

This concluding exhortation contains a title for God unique in the Psalter: the God of heaven. It highlights His sovereignty and was a favorite of the postexilic community (2 Chron. 36:23; Ezra 2:1; 5:11-12; 6:9-10; 7:12, 21, 23 [twice]; Neh. 1:4-5; 2:4, 20; Dan. 2:18-19, 28, 37, 44). Its occurrence here suggests a postexilic origin of this psalm, though it does occur three times in pre-exilic writings (Gen. 24:3, 7; Jonah 1:9).

God's people should praise Him publicly by reviewing His great acts that prove His loyal love for them. This should be a part of their corporate worship experience.

PSALM 137

The psalmist mourned the plight of the exiled Israelites. He expressed strong love for Zion and strong hatred for Israel's enemies. This is an imprecatory psalm of Zion.[1247]

> "This psalm is better known, probably because it is one of the few psalms which contain a certain and explicit historical reference. It invites narrative specificity. It clearly comes out of the exiled community in Babylon after the destruction of 587 B.C.E., the community reflected in the pathos of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It reflects the need of those who have been forcibly removed by the Babylonian imperial policies of relocation and yet who cling to their memory and hope for homecoming with an unshakable passion."[1248]

> "Perhaps this psalm will be understood and valued among us only if we experience some concrete brutalization."[1249]

> "This psalm needs no title to announce that its provenance was the Babylonian exile. Every line of it is alive with pain, whose intensity grows with each strophe to the appalling climax."[1250]

1. Sorrow in exile 137:1-4

137:1 The writer related that he and his fellow exiles mourned over Zion's destruction as they thought about it in distant Babylon. The rivers of Babylon were the Euphrates and its canals. Even though their situation was pleasant, the exiles wept as they longingly remembered Zion.

[1246]Henry, p. 722.

[1247]See the appendix in VanGemeren, pp. 830-32, on imprecations in the psalms, and Day, "The Imprecatory . . .," pp. 173-76.

[1248]Brueggemann, p. 74.

[1249]Ibid., p. 77.

[1250]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 459.

137:2-4 The exiles could not bring themselves to sing about Zion even when their Babylonian neighbors urged them to sing songs about their native land. Normally this would have brought back pleasant memories, but the memories broke the Israelites' hearts. Their songs were about the Lord. The exiles could not sing at all, so they hung their harps on the poplar trees

> "They did not hide their harps in the bushes, or the hollows of the rocks; but hung them up in view, that the sight of them might affect them with this deplorable change. Yet perhaps they were faulty in doing this; for praising God is never out of season."[1251]

2. Love for Jerusalem 137:5-6

The poet promised to remember Jerusalem forever. He called down imprecations on himself if he ever were to forget the city that had been the scene of so much joyful worship in the past. The hand and tongue stand for all action and speech (by synecdoche). One reason the Israelites loved Jerusalem so much, was that *it* was the site of their annual festivals—that were mainly joyous occasions of praise and fellowship (cf. Lam. 1—2).

3. Hatred for enemies 137:7-9

137:7 The psalmist had previously said that he would remember Jerusalem. Now he called God to remember Jerusalem's destroyers. The Edomites had encouraged the Babylonians as they besieged and devastated the city (cf. Ezek. 25:12; Joel 3:19).

137:8-9 He also prayed that the Babylonians would experience destruction similar to the one they had inflicted on the Israelites (cf. Isa. 13:16). Evidently during the destruction of Jerusalem, the Babylonian soldiers mercilessly killed young Jewish children. Verse 8a should read, "O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction" (NIV). "Daughter of Babylon" is probably a collective personification of all of Babylon's inhabitants.[1252] God had promised to curse those who cursed Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:3). From the viewpoint of the victors over Babylon, the Persians, the fall of Babylon would be a blessing. Dashing the Babylonian children to pieces would prevent a new generation of Israel's enemy from rising up against her.

> "It is an act of profound faith to entrust one's most precious hatreds to God, knowing they will be taken seriously."[1253]

[1251]Henry, p. 722.
[1252]Leupold, p. 936.
[1253]Brueggemann, p. 77.

Believers who experience God's discipline for their sins may feel great sorrow. Sometimes discipline cuts us off from the blessings of corporate worship and the joy it brings. It is always appropriate to ask God to remain faithful to His promises.

PSALM 138

> "We come from Psalm 137, where we saw the harps hanging on the willow trees, to the psalm before us where the harps are again in the hands of the godly and are being used for the praise and worship of Jehovah. In the previous psalm the children of Israel were in captivity, down by the irrigation canals in Babylon. There they put their harps on the willow trees and wept when they remembered Zion. But in Psalm 138 we have a wonderful prophetic hymn of praise which looks into the future when the believing remnant will take up their harps again and sing praise unto God."[1254]

David thanked the Lord for His loyal love and faithfulness in answering his prayer. He hoped that everyone would acknowledge God's goodness and experience His deliverance.

> "As in other songs of thanksgiving, this prayer remembers a time of need that has now been resolved in deliverance. What is special here is that the circle of praise is expanded, both in heaven and in earth."[1255]

Leupold felt that the contents suggest that David wrote this psalm out of gratitude for the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7).[1256] This psalm of individual or communal thanksgiving, or declarative praise, begins a group of eight psalms of David, his last in the Psalter. Altogether he wrote nearly half the psalms.

1. Praise for answered prayer 138:1-3

The psalmist vowed to praise God wholeheartedly in the sanctuary for His loyal love and faithfulness.

> "One of the things which impressed me about Horatius Bonar was what he said when he went to God to repent of the coldness, the indifference, and the sin in his life. He said, 'Then I went back to God and repented of my repentance.' His first confession was merely lip service, and he repented of that. I think some of us ought to go to God in prayer on Monday morning and ask Him to forgive us for going to church on Sunday. We should pray, 'Lord, forgive me for going to church yesterday. I sang the hymns, but my heart wasn't in it. I prayed, but it was a mere formality. I listened to the Word of God, but it had no effect on me. I criticized the preacher and others who were there, but I did not criticize myself. God, forgive me for

[1254]McGee, 2:870.
[1255]Brueggemann, p. 131.
[1256]Leupold, p. 937.

> going to church like that.' This would be a good thing for many of us to pray."[1257]

The "gods" before whom David promised to give thanks may be judges and rulers (cf. 95:3; 96:4; 97:7) or perhaps the pagan idols that surrounded him (cf. vv. 4-5). God had exalted His Word equally with His reputation by being faithful to His promises (v. 2).

> "God has a greater regard unto the words of His mouth than to the works of His hand: heaven and earth shall pass away, but one jot or tittle of what He hath spoken shall never fall to the ground."[1258]

Another view of verse 2 is that David meant that God had given him a vast promise (God's "word," i.e., the Davidic Covenant) that exceeded all that David had previously known of God (i.e., His "name").[1259] God had answered David's petition and had strengthened him spiritually (v. 3).

2. Praise from all kings 138:4-5

David anticipated that when other monarchs heard about the Lord's greatness, they would worship Him too. This was the reaction of the Queen of Sheba in Solomon's day (1 Kings 10:1-13).

3. Praise for condescending mercy 138:6-8

The Lord is great because He judges justly. He condescends to lift up the lowly, even though His position is lofty. This gave David assurance that God would assist him when he was in trouble. He believed God would fulfill His purpose for his servant because He is loyal to those He loves (cf. Phil. 1:6). This led David to request God's continuing help, in conclusion.

> "All men love their own works; many dote upon them: shall we think God will forsake His?"[1260]

God's people should not only praise God themselves, but should also seek to lead other people to become worshippers of Him. Knowledge of the Lord should make us thankful, confident, and concerned for others.[1261]

PSALM 139

David praised God for His omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence in this popular wisdom psalm of descriptive praise (cf. Pss. 145; 146). It is a plea for God to search the life to expose sin. It consists of four strophes of six verses each.

[1257]McGee, 2:870.
[1258]Ebenezer Erskine, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:280.
[1259]Leupold, p. 939. Cf. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 456.
[1260]Joseph Caryl, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:282.
[1261]See R. B. Allen, *And I . . .*, pp. 166-80.

> "Though it is obviously a devout meditation, the thinking in evidence in this psalm is not formulated in theological abstractions but in terms of personal religious experience: the psalm throbs with warm emotion and deep feeling. Seldom has any man ventured to expose himself so fully to the searching gaze of the Almighty or meditated so fittingly on His nature and being."[1262]

> "The Gelineau version gives the psalm the heading 'The Hound of Heaven', a reminder that Francis Thompson's fine poem of that name owed its theme of flight and pursuit largely to the second stanza here (verses 7-12), which is one of the summits of Old Testament poetry."[1263]

> "From a theological point of view it is one of the most instructive of the Psalms, and both as regards its contents and poetic character in every way worthy of David."[1264]

> "From the standpoint of OT theology, this is the climax of thought in the Psalter on God's personal relationship to the individual."[1265]

1. God's omniscience 139:1-6

139:1 The opening verse expresses the theme of the psalm (cf. vv. 23-24). God knew David intimately because of His penetrating examination.

139:2-4 The psalmist employed a figure of speech (merism) to express completeness (v. 2). In merisms, the opposites named represent everything in between them. God knew every move David made. Furthermore, He understood his motives as well as his actions. "Afar" probably refers to time rather than space. The "Thou" or "You" is emphatic in the Hebrew text. God also knew David's daily activities (v. 3). This is another merism with going out and lying down representing a whole day's activities. Verse 4 presents the greatest proof of God's omniscience. Before David spoke, the Lord knew what he was about to say.

> ". . . He sees into not merely the thought that is fully fashioned and matured, but even that which is being evolved."[1266]

139:5-6 David responded to his own reflection by expressing the thought that God was confining him. This is often our initial reaction to God's omniscience.

[1262]Leupold, p. 942.
[1263]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 464.
[1264]Delitzsch, 3:343.
[1265]Yates, p. 547.
[1266]Delitzsch, 3:345.

> "God is acquainted with man, for He holds him surrounded on all sides, and man can do nothing, if God, whose confining hand he has lying upon him (Job ix. 23 [*sic* 24]), does not allow him the requisite freedom of motion."[1267]

The writer also felt out of control in the presence of such vast knowledge. "Wonderful" is at the beginning of the sentence in the Hebrew text, which is the emphatic position. This word means extraordinary or surpassing (cf. 9:1). Yahweh's omniscience is too amazing for humans to comprehend (cf. Rom. 11:33).

2. God's omnipresence 139:7-12

139:7 Evidently the confining awareness of God's omniscience led David to try to escape from the Lord. His two rhetorical questions in this verse express his inability to hide from God (cf. Jer. 23:24). David's thought becomes clearer if the reader substitutes "could" for "can."

> "Never has the pen of man more effectively described the omnipresence of God."[1268]

139:8-10 David gave hypothetical examples of where he might go to hide from God in these verses (cf. Rom. 8:38-39). Verse 8 is another merism (cf. vv. 2, 3) that expresses everywhere between heaven and hell. Even if he could travel as fast as the speed of light, he could not escape God, the universal Sovereign (v. 9; cf. 103:19; 1 Chron. 29:12; Dan. 4:17, 25, 32). Even there God's hand would lead him.

> "You won't get away from God even if you go to the moon. To me it was thrilling to hear those first three astronauts who went around the moon read the first chapter of Genesis on Christmas Eve. You don't run away from God, my friend, even if you go to the moon!"[1269]

Verse 10 pictures God gently leading and guiding David. This thought changes the fearful earlier image of God pursuing the psalmist.

139:11-12 David spoke of the night as bruising him (v. 11) because it is often at night that harm comes to people. The only other places in the Old Testament where the Hebrew word *sup,* translated "overwhelm" (NASB) or "hide" (NIV), occurs are in Genesis 3:15 and Job 9:17 where the translation is "bruise." However, since darkness and light are the same to God, David felt secure always. Darkness does not hide things from God's sight as it does from human eyes.

[1267]Ibid., 3:346.
[1268]Leupold, p. 945.
[1269]McGee, 2:872.

3. God's omnipotence 139:13-18

139:13-14 The word "For" indicates that what follows explains what precedes. Since God creates people, He knows them intimately, and He is always with them. The idea of God creating David arose from verses 11 and 12. Forming as a potter and knitting as a weaver describe the gestation process figuratively (v. 13). "Thou" or "You" is again in the emphatic first position in the Hebrew text. David marveled at God's amazing power in creating him by the embryonic process of fetal development.

139:15-16 These verses stress selected features of God superintending the process of human fetal formation in the womb. The reference to "frame" means skeleton of bones. The "depths of the earth" is a figure of speech for the womb. When God was forming David in his mother's womb he was as far from human view as if he were in the depths of the earth. His "unformed substance" is his embryo. The Lord's book is the book of the living. David said God predetermined the length of his life before birth. In view of verses 1-4, this probably included his activities as well.

God's knowledge of all things actual and possible—His omniscience—does not mean mankind's choices are only illusions. God knows what we will do, even though He gives us freedom to make decisions in some situations.

Verses 13-16 give strong testimony to the fact that human life begins at conception rather than at birth. This is a fact that should weigh heavily in the debate against abortion on demand.

> "Now hear it straight: abortion is murder unless it is performed to save the mother's life or even the child's life. Abortion to get rid of the little unformed fellow before he has an opportunity to utter a cry in order to cover up sin or escape responsibility merely enhances the awful and cruel crime. Do not blame me for this charge. Blame David—he wrote it. Blame the Holy Spirit—He declared it."[1270]

139:17-18 David concluded that God's plans for His people are very good and comprehensive. This meant that every day when David awoke from sleep, God was extending His thoughts toward him.

4. David's loyalty 139:19-24

139:19-22 With these thoughts in his mind, David turned his attention to his present situation. His enemies were attacking him. He prayed that the Lord would slay those who were trying to kill him (v. 19). These enemies were

[1270]Ibid., 2:873.

evidently hostile to God, as well as to David, and were using the Lord's name for an evil purpose. In loyalty to God, David affirmed his "hatred" for (i.e., rejection of) those who "hated" (rejected) God. By "hate" David meant he rejected them (cf. Mal. 1:3).

> "He was a good hater, for he hated only those who hated good."[1271]

139:23-24 The psalmist concluded with a prayer that God would search him, so it would be clear that he was not like these enemies (cf. 19:14). Thus he ended this psalm as he began it—with a reference to God's searching knowledge (cf. v. 1). David wanted God to test him, as a refiner tests metal, to show that he was loyal to the Lord. Since God knows all, he would know David's anxious thoughts. He would discover no pain that God's afflicting him for doing wrong had caused him, or any offensiveness in him that might lead to God's affliction. Consequently God would preserve his life.

> "Should the psalmist have harbored any thoughts that were not worthy of the noble subject that engaged his utterance, the prayer is that God might pardon such shortcomings and lead him to more wholesome insight."[1272]

Knowledge of God's attributes can bring great peace into the lives of believers. His comprehensive knowledge, personal presence, and absolute power are all working for the welfare of His people. Therefore we should commit ourselves to Him in loyalty and resist those who oppose Him. Read this psalm especially when you feel as if God has forsaken you.

PSALM 140

David prayed for God to frustrate his enemies' attempts to trip him up—with confidence that God would defend him—in this individual lament psalm of imprecation. Its background may be Absalom's rebellion.[1273]

> "Psalm 140 sets before us in prophecy the last days when the godly remnant of Israel will face the Antichrist—that false messiah, the Man of Sin."[1274]

1. Prayer for deliverance 140:1-8

140:1-5 Verses 1 and 2 are an introductory cry for help. David's enemies were evil, violent men who were stirring up trouble for him and his kingdom.

[1271]Spurgeon, 2:291.
[1272]Leupold, p. 949.
[1273]Delitzsch, 3:356.
[1274]McGee, 2:873.

> "The wicked assault the righteous with three weapons: with the heart, by conspiracy; with the tongue, by lying; and with the hand, by violence."[1275]

In verses 3-5 the psalmist lamented his condition. The words of his enemies were as a serpent's venom in their destructive power. David's adversaries had tried to trap him as a hunter snares an animal. Evidently David felt they were trying to kill him.

140:6-8 David repeated his call for God's help (cf. v. 1). He pictured God's protection of him in military terms (v. 7). Then he asked God not to permit his enemies' evil intentions.

2. Imprecation on enemies 140:9-11

David's request in verse 9 contrasts with his testimony in verse 7. Likewise, his petition in verse 10 recalls his description of his enemies' treatment of him in verse 5 (cf. Gen. 19:24).

> "They have heated the furnace of slander seven times hotter than it was wont to be heated, and they shall be devoured therein. Who would have pitied Nebuchadnezzar if he had been thrown into his own burning, fiery furnace?"[1276]

Verse 11 calls on God to deal with their words, to which David had referred in verse 3.

3. Confidence in Yahweh 140:12-13

> "The psalm has mounted to successive levels of confidence, the highest being reached in these last two verses. Faith grows with prayer."[1277]

David could be confident that God would deliver him because He had promised to help the afflicted and the poor in the Mosaic Law. This salvation would result in the righteous thanking God. They could then continue to live before Him in peace.

This psalm encourages God's people to call on Him in distress when wicked people oppress them. We can have confidence in His promises to vindicate the just in situations such as this. His destruction of the wicked will ultimately glorify His name, as well as provide salvation for His own.

PSALM 141

In this evening prayer, David asked God to protect him and enable him to continue living for God's glory. It is an individual lament, imprecatory psalm. Like the previous psalm, it is easy to imagine that David wrote this one when he was fleeing from Absalom.

[1275]John Lorinus, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:295.
[1276]Spurgeon, 2:296.
[1277]Leupold, p. 952.

> "Life is built on character and character is built on decisions. This psalm reveals David making a number of wise decisions as he faced the attacks of the enemy."[1278]

1. A request to be heard 141:1-2

Because David compared this prayer to the incense of the evening offering, he probably offered it at that time of the day (i.e., about 3:00 p.m.). He requested a speedy reply.

2. A request to walk in God's ways 141:3-7

141:3-4 David asked God to help him control his speech (v. 3). He also wanted the Lord to help him control his thoughts and actions (v. 4). "Eating the delicacies" of the wicked pictures enjoying the sensual pleasures of ungodly people.

> "All mortals tend to turn into the thing they are pretending to be."[1279]

141:5-7 The psalmist expressed openness to the constructive criticisms of the righteous, but he prayed for God to judge the wicked.

> "Some persons pride themselves on being blunt, or, as they call it, 'honest'; but very blunt people do little good to others and get little love to themselves. The Scriptures recommend gentleness and kindness. Reproof should fall like the dew, and not like the rushing hail-storm."[1280]

David believed the wicked leaders would fail, as when an attacking army throws the judges of their enemy from cliffs to destroy them (cf. 2 Chron. 25:12). The wicked would learn that David's words had been true when God ultimately destroyed them. They would testify that God had overturned them into the grave, as one who plows a field turns the earth over.

3. A request to give protection 141:8-10

David next petitioned the Lord for His defense. His enemies had set traps for him. He prayed that those who set the traps would themselves fall into them, and that God would deliver him.

We who are God's people should pray regularly for our own sanctification, and for protection from the evil individuals who oppose us, as we seek to walk with God.

[1278]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 369.
[1279]C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 54.
[1280]*Christian Treasury*, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:300.

PSALM 142

The superscription identifies the time when David wrote this psalm. He wrote it when he was "in the cave," evidently while Saul was pursuing him (cf. Ps. 57; 1 Sam. 22:1; 24:3). The psalmist spoke as one who had no other hope of deliverance but Yahweh. This is another individual lament psalm.

1. David's desperate cry to Yahweh 142:1-2

The psalmist spoke as though he was telling others how he had prayed on this occasion. He prayed audibly, probably out of a desire that God would surely hear him. He poured out what distressed him to God, like one pours water out of a pot, namely: completely.

> ". . . audible prayer reacts soothingly, strengtheningly, and sanctifyingly upon the praying one . . ."[1281]

> "Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you to conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bear your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself as to others.
>
> "If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back; neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart, without consideration, just what they think. Blessed are they who attain so such familiar, unreserved intercourse with Cod."[1282]

2. David's lament of his condition 142:3-4

Even when David could not see his way clearly, God knew what course he should take to reach safety. It seemed to the psalmist that the path he took was one that his enemy had booby-trapped. Evidently if David had had a human defender, that person would have been standing at his right hand, but no one was there. He felt totally forsaken by all other people, and without God's help, escape was impossible.

[1281]Delitzsch, 3:369.

[1282]François Fénelon, quoted in McGee, 2:876.

3. David's confident hope in God 142:5-7

142:5 When David had prayed to the Lord, he had expressed confidence that the Lord would defend him. God was his portion or allotment—all that he had.

142:6-7 Again the psalmist begged God to help him escape from his overpowering enemies. He felt imprisoned, with no escape possible if God failed to save him. If God did deliver him he would thank the Lord, and other godly people would join David in his praise because of God's abundant goodness.

When God's people feel forsaken by all other human allies, they may turn to the Lord—who is always with the righteous. God is able to deliver His own, even if there are no other helpers.[1283]

> "No matter the circumstances around us or the feelings within us, God cares for us (1 Peter 5:7)."[1284]

PSALM 143

In this penitential psalm, David prayed for deliverance and guidance. As in the previous psalm, he called out for help against evil adversaries. This psalm, too, is an individual lament (cf. Ps. 6).

> "The psalm sharply contrasts the *righteousness of Yahweh*, God's unconditioned inclination toward Israel, and *Israel's righteousness* which will carry no freight in time of trouble. The psalm understands the vast and unbridgeable distinction between the two parties."[1285]

1. The psalmist's complaint 143:1-6

143:1-4 David appealed to God to answer his prayer because God is faithful and righteous. Evidently part of David's suffering sprang from his own sin, since he asked that God not judge him. If He did, no one could stand because everyone is unrighteous.

> "Implied in that statement [v. 2] is the request that God would grant him that righteousness which He alone can impart out of pure grace."[1286]

[1283]See R. B. Allen, *And I . . .*, pp. 181-97.
[1284]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 372.
[1285]Brueggemann, p. 104.
[1286]Leupold, p. 964.

> "David, before he prays for the removal of his trouble, prays for the pardon of his sin, and depends upon mere [no more or less than; at least] mercy for it."[1287]

> "A young man once said to me: 'I do not think I am a sinner.' I asked him if he would be willing his mother or sister should know all he had done, or said, or thought—all his motions and all his desires. After a moment he said: 'No, indeed, I should not like to have them know; no, not for the world.' 'Then can you dare to say, in the presence of a holy God, Who knows every thought of your heart, I do not commit sin?'"[1288]

Another source of distress was an enemy who had ground David down so that he felt very depressed as well as afflicted.

> ". . . the poet seems to himself like one who is buried alive for ever."[1289]

143:5-6 In his distress David remembered former better days. He meditated on God's acts and works.[1290] He appealed to the Lord, like a desperate man dying from thirst cries out for water.

> "I have watched it rain out on the desert on that sandy soil when it has rained and rained and *rained*, and that thirsty land just drinks it up."[1291]

2. The psalmist's petition 143:7-12

143:7 David requested a quick reply to his prayer, since he felt he would die if one was not forthcoming immediately. Hiding one's face pictures making oneself inaccessible.

143:8-12 First, David wanted guidance from God (v. 8). This would be a fresh morning-like expression of the Lord's loyal love to His trusting servant. "Teach me" may imply a need for ability to *do* God's will, not just understanding of what that will is.[1292] Second, he asked for deliverance from his enemies (v. 9). Third, he needed teaching from God's Spirit who would provide safe direction (v. 10). Fourth, he requested restoration from

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[1287]Henry, p. 727.
[1288]John B. Gough, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:306-7.
[1289]Delitzsch, 3:374.
[1290]See Eugene H. Merrill, "Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):27-36.
[1291]McGee, 2:877.
[1292]Henry, p. 727.

the attacks of his enemies (vv. 11-12). Each of these petitions also contains some reference to trust in God.

Even when God's people sin, they can appeal to the Lord for help and restoration on the basis of His faithfulness and righteousness. This psalm beautifully combines humble requests and appreciation for God's character.

PSALM 144

This is a prayer that asks for deliverance before or during war. David praised God for granting victory in past battles and requested success in a present military encounter with an enemy. He was confident that God would save His people. This is a psalm of descriptive praise with overtones of lament and petition.

> "This psalm is a mosaic, not a monolith; most of its material, short of the final verses, is drawn from other psalms of David, most substantially Psalm 18."[1293]

1. Rejoicing over the Victor 144:1-2

David began this prayer by praising God for training him to be a successful warrior and for granting him victories in the past (cf. 1 Sam. 17). He used many synonyms to describe the Lord as his protector and deliverer.

> "Egyptian reliefs picture gods teaching the king how to shoot a bow."[1294]

> "Wherever a believer goes he carries his protection along with him."[1295]

2. Petition for present victory 144:3-11

144:3-4 The exalted description of God in verses 1 and 2 led David to reflect in amazement that God would take interest in mere mortals.

> "Infinite condescension can alone account for the Lord stooping to be the Friend of man. That He should make man the subject of election, the object of redemption, the child of eternal love, the darling of infallible providence, the next of kin to Deity, is indeed a matter requiring more than the two notes of exclamation found in this verse [v. 3]."[1296]

Man's existence is very brief compared to God's—He abides forever.

[1293]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 477.
[1294]The NET Bible note on 144:1.
[1295]Henry, p. 727.
[1296]Spurgeon, 2:311.

144:5-8 The psalmist described God's intervention—in the present battle David faced—in terms of nature. In the past, God had used rain, thunder, lightning, and hail to give His people victory (Josh. 10; Judg. 4-5; et al.). David seems to have been appealing for a similar deliverance. He viewed the enemy army as an overwhelming flood from which he requested deliverance.

144:9-11 David promised to praise God with a new song for the victory he believed God would give him. "New songs" in Scripture typically arose out of new experiences. Verse 11 is a kind of refrain (cf. v. 8).

3. Rejoicing for future conditions 144:12-15

144:12-14 David described three conditions that would exist when God gave him victory. First, the youth of the nation would continue to grow and thrive (v. 12). Second, prosperity would characterize national life (vv. 13-14a). Third, peace would prevail (v. 14b).

144:15 David began this royal psalm by blessing Yahweh and concluded it by ascribing blessedness on the people of Yahweh.

> "The psalmist has laid his finger on the true source of success and lasting happiness for a nation."[1297]

> "Nothing can make that man truly miserable that hath God for his portion, and nothing can make that man truly happy that wants [lacks] God for his portion. God is the Author of all true happiness; He is the donor of all true happiness; He is the maintainer of all true happiness, and He is the center of all true happiness; and therefore, he that hath Him for his God and for his portion is the only happy man in the world."[1298]

People who make the Lord their hope of deliverance will enjoy His blessing. They will experience His supernatural salvation and will enjoy the benefits of His saving grace.

> "We are to observe this, that while God in giving us meat and drink admits us to the enjoyment of a certain measure of happiness, it does not follow that those believers are miserable who struggle through life in want and poverty, for this want, whatever it be, God can counterbalance by better consolations."[1299]

[1297]Leupold, p. 974.

[1298]Thomas Brooks, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:314. Paragraph division omitted.

[1299]Calvin, *Commentary on . . .*, 3:271.

PSALM 145

This acrostic psalm (with the exception of the *nun* strophe) begins a series of six psalms, the last six in the Psalter, which are especially full of praise to God.

> "We are contented to see in the omission of the *Nun*-strophe an example of that freedom with which the Old Testament poets are wont to handle this kind of forms."[1300]

> "The Septuagint restores the missing verse, but with a dubious effort; for the verse produced to fill in the gap is like v. 17, with the exception of the first word."[1301]

F. W. Grant offered an unusual explanation for the missing *nun* strophe:

> "I cannot but conclude that the gap is meant to remind us that in fact the fullness of praise is not complete without other voices, which are not found here, and that these missing voices are those of the Church and the heavenly saints in general [cf. Rev. 19:1, 3, 6]."[1302]

The title, "a psalm of praise," occurs only here in the Book of Psalms. The word "praise" appears 46 times in the last six psalms.

> "Psalms are the praises of God accompanied with song; Psalms are songs containing the praise of God. If there be praise, but not of God, it is not a Psalm. If there be praise, and praise of God, if it is not sung, it is not a Psalm. To make a Psalm, there go these three: praise, God's praise, and song."[1303]

In this psalm David praised God for His powerful acts, for His mercy and grace, for His everlasting kingdom, and for His response to those who pray to Him. As such it resembles history and wisdom psalms, but its genre is most similar to the psalms of descriptive praise.

> "In the psalm there is no development of plot or building of intensity. Indeed, it is essentially static in form, articulating what is enduringly true of the world. What is true at the beginning of the psalm is still true at the end. What is true from beginning to end is that Yahweh securely governs, and that can be counted on. We are given a series of affirmations that could be rearranged without disrupting the intent. . . . This is Israel in its most trustful, innocent, childlike faith."[1304]

[1300]Delitzsch, 3:388.
[1301]Leupold, p. 974.
[1302]F. W. Grant, quoted in McGee, 2:879.
[1303]Augustine, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:315.
[1304]Brueggemann, pp. 28-29.

> "A note of universalism is particularly noticeable in this psalm. It thinks in terms of all of God's works and all of those that dwell on the face of the earth by seeing them as also coming to the knowledge of the God of Israel and singing His praises."[1305]

Observant Jews used to repeat this psalm three times a day: twice in the morning and once in the evening.[1306]

1. God's powerful acts 145:1-7

145:1-2 David resolved to praise the Lord daily and forever. The reasons follow.

> "When one has come to the point of knowing the Lord in a personal way, the desire to sing His praise and sing it often becomes very strong."[1307]

145:3-7

> "Verse 3 is the theme of his praise. Although this greatness is unsearchable, the psalmist does an admirable job of illustrating it."[1308]

> "His [God's] greatness indeed cannot be comprehended. When we cannot, by searching, find the bottom, we must sit down at the brink, and adore the depth, Rom. xi. 33."[1309]

David said parents would declare God's great acts to their children. He himself would meditate on the Lord's majesty and His wonderful works. People would retell His awesome deeds and would praise the Lord for His greatness, goodness, and righteousness.

> "The text calls for a sacred fluency, and I would exhort you liberally to exercise it when you are speaking on the goodness of God."[1310]

2. God's mercy and grace 145:8-10

145:8-9 These verses are a classic expression of praise for God's character. David moved from considering the greatness of God's acts to reflecting on His motivating attitudes.The same statement in Hebrew occurs in seven other places in the Old Testament (Exod. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). God's grace is His favor and divine

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[1305]Leupold, p. 975.
[1306]Ibid.
[1307]Ibid.
[1308]Yates, p. 549.
[1309]Henry, p. 728.
[1310]Spurgeon, 2:316.

enablement that He gives to those who do not deserve it. His mercy is the forbearance He demonstrates to those who deserve His wrath (cf. 86:5, 15; 111:4; 112:4). He is patient with those who arouse His anger with their sinning. His loyal love is amazingly strong and long-lasting.

> "What an ocean of compassion there must be since the infinite God is full of it!"[1311]

The Lord is good to everyone, even sending rain and many other blessings on the unjust as well as the just.

> "Wrath is only the background of His nature, which He reluctantly and only after long waiting . . . lets loose against those who spurn His great mercy."[1312]

145:10 Moreover, He exercises His powerful works under the constraints of His mercy (cf. 19:1-3). Because of these things, all of God's works and people will praise Him.

> "All God's works do praise him, as the beautiful building praises the builder or the well-drawn picture praises the painter . . ."[1313]

3. God's eternal kingdom 145:11-16

145:11-13a God's faithful and consistent control of all things, from one generation to the next, call for praise of His eternal reign. He rules over all with power and glory. People speak of the great King and His kingdom because of all His wondrous acts. The universal, eternal rule of God is in view here rather than the Davidic kingdom.

145:13b-16 The NASB translators did not translate the last portion of verse 13. It reads, "The LORD is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made" (NIV). The Septuagint translators supplied this verse to fill out the acrostic, the line beginning with the Hebrew letter *nun* being absent in the Hebrew text.

God consistently sustains the fallen, uplifts the oppressed, and provides for all. Therefore, every person looks to God for His provision of his or her needs. Since God's dominion is everlasting, He cares for His creatures faithfully and lovingly all the time.

[1311]Ibid.

[1312]Delitzsch, 3:390.

[1313]Henry, p. 728.

> "God openeth His hand and satisfieth all creation, but He must purchase the church with His blood . . . In what a variety of ways are our wants supplied!"[1314]

4. God's responsiveness to prayer 145:17-21

Everything the Lord does is right. Kindness also marks all His deeds. He is attentive to those who pray to Him sincerely. He will grant the petitions of believers and will deliver them in times of need. He will protect those who love Him, but will destroy those who do not.

> "God will fulfill the will of those who fear to disobey His will."[1315]

For these reasons, David said he would praise Yahweh, and all people will bless Him forever.

This psalm is a great catalogue of reasons to praise God. Like the other acrostic psalms, it is a model for us to use in recalling many of the things about God for which we should praise Him.

PSALM 146

An anonymous psalmist promised to praise the Lord forever because of His greatness and His grace. His faithfulness to the oppressed of the earth—as Creator—is the particular emphasis in this psalm. Each of the last five psalms in the Psalter (Pss. 146—150) begins and ends with a charge to "Praise the Lord!" ("Hallelujah!").

> "These five psalms are a short course in worship, and God's people today would do well to heed their message."[1316]

> "Psalms 146—150 constitute the last Hallel ('praise') collection. These five Hallelujah psalms have the characteristic genre of the *hymn of descriptive praise*. These psalms were used at some point as a part of the daily prayers in the synagogue worship. The other two collections are the Egyptian Hallel psalms (113—118) and the Great Hallel (120—136)."[1317]

1. Man's inability to save 146:1-4

146:1-2 The writer vowed to praise God the rest of his life.

> "Not only should we praise God with our lips, but we should genuinely praise Him from the heart."[1318]

[1314]Andrew Fuller, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:319.
[1315]Simon de Muis, quoted in ibid., 2:320.
[1316]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 377.
[1317]VanGemeren, p. 864.
[1318]McGee, 2:880.

146:3-4 He then warned against placing trust in human officials. They will die and their plans will perish with them. "Mortal man" (v. 3) is literally "a son of man."

> "He [an orthodox Jew who visited this writer, who was a Christian Jew] stated that he had read the New Testament and found the title of Jesus of Nazareth so often mentioned as 'the son of man.' He then declared that there is a warning in the Old Testament not to trust the son of man. As we asked him for the passage he quoted from this Psalm, 'Trust not . . . in the son of man in whom is no salvation.' We explained to him that if our Lord had been only the son of man and nothing else, if He had not been Immanuel, the virgin-born Son of God, if it were not true as Isaiah stated it, that He is the child born and *the Son given*, there would be no salvation in Him. But He came God's Son and appeared in the form of man for our redemption. His argument showed the blindness of the Jew. The statement is given in this psalm, that man is sinful, that there is no hope in man, he is a finite creature and turns to dust. There is but One in whom salvation and all man's needs is found, the God of Jacob, the loving Jehovah."[1319]

At death the spirit separates from the body, which returns to dust. Therefore it is foolish to put too much hope in what people can do (cf. 118:8-9; Jer. 17:5-8).

2. God's ability to save 146:5-6

In contrast to those who look to other people for deliverance, those who trust in Israel's God, Yahweh, will experience blessing. He is the Creator who even made the humanly uncontrollable sea and all its creatures. Yahweh is not only supremely powerful, but He is also faithful to His Word.

3. Examples of God's power and faithfulness 146:7-10

146:7-9 The poet cited nine examples. In each case, Yahweh provides the particular need of the individuals in view. He alone can do this.

146:10 The psalmist concluded by affirming that Israel's God will reign as long as human life endures. This was his conclusion in view of what he had said about God's abilities earlier in this psalm. Consequently people should praise the Lord.

[1319]A. C. Gaebelein, *The Book of Psalms,* pp. 500-501,

Whereas human life depends on man's need to trust his fellow man, we should avoid the temptation to trust in human beings entirely or even primarily. Yahweh is the only Person who is worthy of our absolute trust. Reflection on the differences between people and God makes this clear.[1320]

PSALM 147

God's greatness and His grace, as in Psalm 146, are also the theme of this psalm. However, in this one, an unnamed psalmist viewed God as Sustainer more than as Creator. He provides what His creatures need. Creation themes are prominent in this psalm.

> "This is a specially remarkable song. In it the greatness and the condescending goodness of the Lord are celebrated. The God of Israel is set forth in His peculiarity of glory as caring for the sorrowing, the insignificant, and forgotten. The poet finds a singular joy in extolling One Who is so singularly gracious."[1321]

> "When Nehemiah and his people finished rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, restoring the gates, and resettling the people, they called a great assembly for celebration and dedication, and it is likely that this psalm was written for that occasion (vv. 2, 12-14; Neh. 12:27-43). . . . The psalm presents three reasons why the people should praise the Lord, and each section is marked off by the command to praise God (vv. 1, 7 and 12)."[1322]

> "This is truly a hymn of praise from beginning to end without a word of complaint or a single petition."[1323]

1. God's objects of control 147:1-6

147:1 After the initial call to praise the Lord, the writer explained that such praise is pleasant and appropriate.

> "The flow of the broad river of the Book of Psalms ends in a cataract of praise."[1324]

147:2-3 The fact that God brought His people back to the Promised Land and enabled them to rebuild Jerusalem shows that He can and does heal the brokenhearted. He heals and restores those who repent and return to Him.

147:4-6 People count what they possess, and naming something expresses one's sovereignty over it. Thus verse 4 expresses God's sovereignty over the heavens (cf. Isa. 40:26). God's greatness is also obvious in His abundant

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[1320]See R. B. Allen, *And I . . .*, pp. 214-24, 225-38.
[1321]Spurgeon, 2:325.
[1322]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 379.
[1323]Yates, p. 550.
[1324]Spurgeon, 2:325.

strength and boundless understanding. He upholds the afflicted and brings down the wicked. In other words, He controls all the heavenly bodies and all human beings.

2. God's objects of delight 147:7-11

147:7-9 Verse 7 is a call to praise similar to verse 1. Verses 8 and 9 picture God providing for His creatures through the operations of His providence. The psalmist may have mentioned young ravens (v. 9) because they are especially vulnerable. Ravens do not provide for their young as other birds do. They are very selfish (cf. 1 Kings 17:4-6). Nevertheless God takes care of baby ravens.

> "Is it not wonderful how such numbers of little birds are fed! A bird in a cage under human care is in more danger of lacking seed and water than any one of the myriads that fly in the open heavens with no owner but their Creator and no provider but the Lord."[1325]

> "'Hallelujah' to Him Who both feeds the ravens and rules the Stars! What a God art Thou, O Jehovah!"[1326]

147:10-11 God does not take pleasure in the symbols of strength that impress humans. He sees and delights in what demonstrates true spiritual strength, namely, trust in Himself. This makes Him praiseworthy.

> "Our fear must save our hope from swelling into presumption, and our hope must save our fear from sinking into despair [v. 11]."[1327]

> "It is an awesome thought that we can bring pleasure to the heart of the heavenly Father (35:27; 37:23; 149:4)."[1328]

3. God's instrument of blessing 147:12-20

147:12-14 Verse 12 introduces a third round of praise (cf. vv. 1, 7). The psalmist called on the Israelites to praise God because He had brought security, stability, peace, and prosperity to Jerusalem again.

147:15-20 Verses 15-18 describe the powerful effect God's commands have on creation (cf. vv. 4, 8-9).

[1325]Ibid., 2:327.
[1326]Ibid.
[1327]Henry, p. 730.
[1328]Wiersbe, *The . . . Wisdom . . .*, p. 380.

> "Ice and snow and hoarfrost are quite infrequent in the Holy Land and are, therefore, thought of as evidences of the unusual which God is able to perform for the good of His people and as a destructive force against His enemies."[1329]

God also sent His Word to Israel (vv. 19-20; cf. vv. 2-3, 6, 11). This was a unique blessing since it involved a revelation of His gracious will. God's people should praise Him in view of all these things.

> "Shall we obey as does the wind? Or shall we be the only element of creation that is unresponsive to the divine will?"[1330]

> "It has been well pointed out that, purely as the means of getting things done, *statutes and ordinances*, or even appeals and encouragements, are most uncertain tools. So by addressing us, not programming us, God shows that He seeks a relationship, not simply a sequence of actions carried out."[1331]

God's greatness, as seen in His control over nature, and His graciousness, as seen in His dealings with His people, call for praise. God sustains both the creation and His creatures with His Word.

PSALM 148

Another anonymous psalm stresses the importance of praising God. This one calls on the heavens to praise Him for establishing them, and the earth to bless Him for exalting Israel. Each major section of the psalm begins with a call to worship ("Praise the LORD"), and the whole poem ends with the same call, forming an *inclusio*. "Praise" appears 13 times in the 14 verses of this psalm. This psalm combines the themes of wisdom, creation, and praise.[1332]

> "In this Psalm the loftiest consciousness of faith is united with the grandest contemplation of the world."[1333]

1. Praise for establishing the heavens 148:1-6

148:1-4 The psalmist summoned everything above the earth to praise God. This included the angels as well as the stars, planets, sun, moon, and clouds, to which the writer attributed the ability to praise by personification.

[1329]Leupold, p. 993.
[1330]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1027.
[1331]Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 486.
[1332]See Daniel J. Estes, "Creation Theology in Psalm 148," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:681 (January-March 2014):30-41.
[1333]Delitzsch, 3:405.

148:5-6 These heavenly entities should praise Yahweh because He created them all by His command. The order of creation in this psalm generally follows the order of Genesis 1, though the writer took some poetic liberty. Furthermore, these created things continue to exist as they do because God made a decree that they should endure as long as He wills. The Canaanites worshipped the stars and planets, so this psalm would have been a polemic against their idolatry.

2. Praise for exalting Israel 148:7-14

148:7-12 Parallel to the heavenly multitudes, the psalmist next called on all of the earthly multitudes to praise Yahweh. Again he personified inanimate objects and listed various representative groups.

> ". . . the method of His divine control in the Universal Kingdom, especially with reference to the earth, is quite generally providential, that is, through second causes: 'Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word' (Ps. 148:8)."[1334]

Commenting on "creeping things" in verse 10, Thomas Goodwin wrote:

> "In public worship, all should join. The little strings go to make up a concert, as well as the great."[1335]

Some merisms express the totality of the group, such as "old men and children" (v. 12), an expression that represents people of all ages. The pagans also worshipped creatures and natural formations, which this psalm shows are Yahweh's creations.[1336]

148:13-14 These earthly entities should praise Yahweh because He is greater than anything in heaven and on earth. Only *His nam*e is worthy of exaltation. In particular, God had raised up a king (strong one, horn) for His chosen people Israel. This person had become the praise of all His saints in Israel, the nation close to His heart.

> "Thus far the psalmist has not said anything about the people of God. He has made reference to the 'angels' of God (v. 2) in heaven but has left out any reference to the people who do his bidding on earth until the very end. This is a climactic development of the psalm. God loves and

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[1334]Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 29.

[1335]Thomas Goodwin, quoted in Spurgeon, 2:331.

[1336]On the subject of God's direct responsibility for all destructive windstorms, see Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "How a Hermeneutical Virus Can Corrupt Theological Systems," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:663 (July-September 2009):267-69.

> cares for all his creation, but he has a special affinity for 'his people,' 'his saints' . . ., 'Israel,' also known as 'the people close to his heart' . . ."[1337]

The whole creation should praise God because He is the Creator and Sustainer of all. Furthermore, He blessed Israel by giving His chosen people worthy leadership. The "horn" God raised up—who is worthy of *all praise*, i.e., all forms of genuine praise, the sum total of all collective praises, and praise from all created things, living and inanimate—is Jesus Christ, the descendant of David.

PSALM 149

The unknown writer called on Israel to praise God, who saves the submissive and punishes the nations that oppose Him. Since this psalm shares the language and hope of the imprecatory psalms, many scholars consider it an eschatological hymn.[1338] Like the previous psalm, this one also opens and closes with a call to worship: "Praise the LORD."

1. A call to rejoice in the Lord 149:1-3

The psalmist exhorted the Israelites to praise God enthusiastically and wholeheartedly. Their praise should be spontaneous and fresh, the connotations of a "new song" (cf. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9).

> "'A new song' is called for, for new mercies make us feel the inadequacy of our past efforts at praise (cf. Ps. 33:3; 96:1)."[1339]

They should also praise Him publicly, in company with the other godly (Heb. *hasidim*) in the nation, because He had done something new for them. He had restored them and given them hope of final eschatological victory (cf. vv. 6-9; Rev. 14:3). In common with Psalm 148 (especially v. 14), this one also uses several synonyms to describe the Israelites. The nation should remember its Maker, who formed the family of Abraham into a nation at the Exodus. Dancing and musical instruments were fitting accompaniments for such joyful celebration.

2. A reason to rejoice in the Lord 149:4-5

The reason for rejoicing and praising is God's care for His people, seen in His providing salvation for them. No specific deliverance is in view here. It is salvation in any and every form and occasion that the psalmist wanted to emphasize. Salvation is a theme for exaltation under any circumstance, even when one reclines on his or her bed.

[1337]VanGemeren, pp. 874-75.
[1338]E.g., Kidner, *Psalms 73—150*, p. 489; VanGemeren, p. 875; and L. Allen, pp. 319-20.
[1339]Leupold, p. 1002.

3. A way to rejoice in the Lord 149:6-9

The Lord's will for Israel was that she overcome and defeat God's enemies on the earth. This would establish righteousness in the world and exalt the God of Israel as the sovereign Lord (cf. Deut. 32:1-6, 23; Josh. 1:1-8). Israel praised and glorified God, not just in word but also in deed, by carrying out His will for her (cf. Neh. 4:9, 16-23). These verses may grate on the sensibilities of Christians who have a different way of obeying God today. Nevertheless, when the psalmist composed this hymn, Israel's destruction of wicked neighbors was her way of expressing obedience to God.

This psalm is a helpful reminder, to us who are believers, that praising God does not just involve praising Him with our lips. It must also include obeying Him with our lives.

PSALM 150

The inspired poet called on every person to praise Yahweh for His powerful deeds and supreme greatness (10 times out of the 13 uses of "praise" in this psalm). This psalm serves as a final doxology, bringing the whole collection of psalms, and the "hallelujah" group of psalms (Pss. 145—150) to a solemn and joyful conclusion.

> "We have now reached the last summit of the mountain chain of Psalms. It rises high into the clear azure, and its brow is bathed in the sunlight of the eternal world of worship. It is a rapture. The poet-prophet is full of inspiration and enthusiasm. He stays not to argue, to teach, to explain, but cries with burning worlds, 'Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise ye the Lord.'"[1340]

> "The conclusion of the Psalter is this extravagant summons to praise, which seeks to mobilize all creation with a spontaneous and unreserved act of adoration, praise, gratitude, and awe. There are no 'bases' given; no reason needs to be given."[1341]

> "It is . . . probable that in the mind of the poet the tenfold *halelu* ["Praise Him"] encompassed by Hallelujahs is significative; for ten is the number of rounding off, completeness, exclusiveness, and of the extreme of exhaustibleness."[1342]

1. The call 150:1

The psalmist called on his audience to praise God in His heavenly sanctuary. This psalm, like so many of the Hallel psalms (113—118, 120—136, 146—150), opens and closes with a call to worship. The term "sanctuary" (lit. "holy place") is evidently in apposition to "mighty expanse," and both terms are parallel synonyms for "heaven," i.e., God's home—the universe.

[1340]Spurgeon, 2:335.
[1341]Brueggemann, p. 167.
[1342]Delitzsch, 3:414.

2. The cause 150:2

All God's powerful acts and His surpassing greatness call for praise. These are general categories describing the works and character of God. The psalmist could have cited many specific examples in each category.

> "To praise the abundance of his power is the purpose which links together the most diverse voices in heaven and on earth in a tremendous symphonic hymn of praise."[1343]

3. The celebration 150:3-5

These verses cite a few examples of the accompaniments to Israel's verbal worship that were appropriate in her culture. They included wind, stringed, and percussion instruments, as well as joyful dancing.[1344] This would have been a noisy celebration.

4. The culmination 150:6

Having dealt with the "where" and "how" of worship, the psalmist now specified the "who." *"Everything that has breath"* should praise Yahweh. In the light of the context, he was undoubtedly thinking of all kinds of people. This verse is a fitting conclusion to the Book of Psalms.

All people should praise God. This is the message of the book.

> "Reader, wilt not thou at this moment pause a while and worship the Lord, thy God?"[1345]

[1343]Weiser, p. 841.

[1344]See VanGemeren, pp. 879-80, for an excursus on musical instruments used in Israel's worship in the Old Testament.

[1345]Spurgeon, 2:336.

Appendix 1

The letters in the boxes below identify selected commentators who identify the psalms as of various types.

B = Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Psalms*
C = Thomas Constable, *Notes on Psalms*
M = Eugene Merrill, *The Old Testament Explorer/Nelson's Old Testament Survey*
N = *The Nelson Study Bible*
R = Allen Ross, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*
S = *The New Scofield Reference Bible*
V = Willem VanGemeren, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

Psalm	Lament		Imprecatory	Praise		Hallel	Trust		Wisdom			Royal	Messianic	Enthronement	Zion	Acrostic	Ascent
	Individual	Communal		Declarative	Descriptive		Individual	Communal	History	Creation	Torah						
1											NBVMC						
2												NBRC	RSMC				
3	NBMC																
4	NBMC						B										
5	NBMC																
6	NBVMC																
7	NBMC																
8				NVC						VC			S				
9	NC			MC												SMC	
10	NC								V							SC	
11	BC						NM										
12		NMC															
13	NBMC																
14									NV								
15								M	N		V						
16	N						B						S				
17	NBMC																
18				BMC			N					BMC	C				
19											NBVC						
20								N				NBRM	C				
21				R								NBMC	C				
22	NBVMC												NRSC				
23	BC						NBMC						S				
24												N	S				
25	NMC															SMC	
26	NMC																
27	BMC						NBM					C					
28	NMC																
29					C					C		N					
30	B			NBRMC													

Psalm	Lament		Imprecatory	Praise		Hallel	Trust		Wisdom			Royal	Messianic	Enthronement	Zion	Acrostic	Ascent
	Individual	Communal		Declarative	Descriptive		Individual	Communal	History	Creation	Torah						
31	NBMC			BC			N										
32	BC			BRM					NBVC								
33					NRC					C							
34				NRMC					NBVC				R			NSMC	
35	NBMC		BSM														
36	M				R				NVC								
37									NBVMC							NSMC	
38	NBMC																
39	NBMC								N								
40	NC			NBRMC									S				
41	NBMC			NMC									SC				
42	N						N										
43	NMC						N										
44		NBMC							N								
45											NBR	MC	RSC				
46					N			N							NVMC		
47					N						NB			R	NMC		
48					N						N				NVMC		
49									NBVC		N						
50									C	NV							
51	NBC																
52	N		S				C		V								
53									NV								
54	NMC																
55	MC		BSC				N						N				
56	NMC																
57	NBMC																
58		MC	NSC														
59	NMC		BS														
60		NBMC															
61	NMC						N				N		MC				
62							BMC		N								
63	BMC						N				N						
64	NMC		N						N								
65				BMC						N			N				
66				NBRMC	N												
67				M	N												
68				M	N				C				S				
69	NBMC		BMC										NSMC				
70	NMC		C														
71	NBMC						N										
72												NBRMC	NRSC				
73							NB		NBVM								
74		NBMC															

Psalm	Lament		Imprecatory	Praise		Hallel	Trust		Wisdom			Royal	Messianic	Enthronement	Zion	Acrostic	Ascent
	Individual	Communal		Declarative	Descriptive		Individual	Communal	History	Creation	Torah						
75				NC													
76				C	N										VM		
77	N	BMC															
78									NBVMC								
79		NBMC	BS														
80		NBMC															
81				N					C								
82		M							NV								
83		NBMC	N														
84															NVM		MC
85		BMC						N									
86	NMC																
87															NVMC		
88	NBMC																
89	N				N							BRMC	SC				
90		NBMC						B									
91	B							N	VMC				N				
92				BM	N				V								
93												NBMC	C	R			
94		BMC							V			NC					
95												NBC	C	R			
96												NBMC	RC	R			
97												NBMC	RC	R			
98					N							NBMC	RC	R			
99					N							NBMC	R	R			
100					NC												
101												NBMC					
102	NBMC												SC				
103	BC			NC					N								
104				VC		S				NVC							
105					NR	S			NMC								
106		M		N		S			NC								
107				BMC					NC								
108		M					N										
109	NMC		NBSC														
110												NBRMC	RMC				
111					NR	SM			NV				NRS			NSCM	
112						S			NBVC							NSCM	
113					NRC	NVSMC											
114					C	NVS			NMC								
115					N	NVSC		BM									
116				BMC		NVSC							N				
117					NRC	NVSC											
118				NBC		NVSC							SC				

Psalm	Lament		Imprecatory	Praise		Hallel	Trust		Wisdom			Royal	Messianic	Enthronement	Zion	Acrostic	Ascent
	Individual	Communal		Declarative	Descriptive		Individual	Communal	History	Creation	Torah						
119											NBVMC					NSMC	
120	MC	N		B		V											SMC
121						V	M	N									SMC
122						V									NM		SMC
123	NC	BMC				V		B									SMC
124				NB		V		B									SMC
125		C				V		NBMC									SMC
126		BMC				V		B							N		SMC
127						V			NBVMC								SMC
128						V			NBVMC						N		SMC
129			N	BC		V		NMC									SMC
130	BMC					V											SMC
131						V	MC	N									SMC
132						V						NBMC	NC				SMC
133						V			BMC								SMC
134						V											SMC
135					NRC	VSM			C								
136					N	VMC			C								
137		BMC	NBSC												NC		
138				NMC													
139				V	N				VC	VC							
140	NMC		N														
141	NMC		N														
142	NMC																
143	NMC																
144					N							BRMC	C				
145				NC		M			N	C						NSMC	
146					N	VSMC											
147					N	VSMC				N							
148					N	VSMC				N							
149				N		VSMC											
150				N		VSMC											

Appendix 2

Some Figures of Speech in Scripture

Figure	Definition	Example
Hendiadys	the expression of a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than by using an adjective and a substantive	"the sacrifice and service of your faith" = the sacrificial service of your faith
Hyperbole	overstatement for the sake of emphasis	cut off your hand if it causes you to stumble = deal radically with instruments of temptation
Litotes	the statement of a negative to stress its positive opposite	"no small thing" = a very large thing
Merism	the identification of two extremes to represent the whole	"heaven and earth" = the universe
Metaphor	a comparison in which one thing is likened to a different thing by being spoken of as if it were that other	"All the world is a stage."
Metonymy	the use of the name of one thing for that of another asssociated with or suggested by it	"Jerusalem" = Israel; "the White House has decided" = "the President has decided"
Oxymoron	the joining of contradictory or incongruous terms to make a point	"an hour is coming and now is" = what will characterize the future is present even now
Personification	attributing the qualities of a person to an inanimate object	"the stones would cry out"
Polarization	expressing the extremes to highlight the difference between them	"as far as the east is from the west" = a very great distance
Simile	a comparison in which one thing is likened to a different thing by the use of "like," "as," etc.	a heart as big as a whale

Appendix 3

Structural Markers

Repetition -- the reiteration of the same or analogous terms, phrases, themes, motifs, type-scenes, or elements. Narrative echoes.

Contrast -- the juxtaposition of opposites or that which is dissimilar.

Characterization -- the techniques of presenting directly or indirectly a character.

Narration -- the "angle of vision" from which a story is told by the narrator (1st, 2nd, 3rd person narration).

Narrative Asides -- parenthetical remarks addressed to the reader by the writer or narrated by the narrator.

Comparison -- the juxtaposition of counterparts or that which is similar.

Causation and Substantiation -- the movement from cause to effect or effect to cause respectively.

Climax -- the progression from lesser to great intensity.

Pivot -- a change in direction, whether positive or negative, in the movement of text.

Particularization and Generalization -- the movement from the general to the particular or the particular to the general respectively.

Statement of Purpose (instrumentation) -- the report or movement from means to end.

Preparation (introduction) -- the inclusion of material beforehand to set up the reader for what is to come.

Prolepsis -- anticipated action. A form of preparation.

Analepsis -- recalled action. A form of repetition.

Summarization -- the abridgement of that which is elaborated elsewhere.

Interrogation -- the use of a question or problem followed by the answer or solution.

Syncrisis -- the presentation of similar events, happenings, or characters that sets up a comparison or establishes a correlation. A form of repetition or modeling.

Inclusio -- the bracketing of a unit via features such as words or phrases at the beginning and end.

Interchange -- exchanging or alternating between elements to strengthen contrasts or comparisons.

Irony -- incongruity or contradiction between what is expressed and what is implied.

Suspense and surprise -- the arousal of expectations and uncertainty as well as the result or effect when these do not turn out as expected.

Carnivalesque -- the reversal of accepted norms, values and beliefs of the dominant culture, which underscores the relativity of structure and order.

Chiasm -- the repetition of elements in inverted order.

Intercalation -- the insertion of a literary unit in the midst of another. A framing or sandwich narrative

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