PSALMS

BIBLE STUDY

VOLUME 2

A Verse-by-Verse Study of Psalms 3 to 72



Prayers from the cave, the battlefield and the sickbed,
and the psalms that point to Jesus Christ

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TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Psalms Bible Study Volume 2

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Psalms Bible Study Volume 2: A Verse-by-Verse Study of Psalms 3 to 72

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of fifty-three more of the Psalms. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

The Psalms are the prayer book and the songbook of God's people. They give us words for joy and grief, for guilt and forgiveness, for fear and trust, and for praise. Believers have prayed and sung them for about three thousand years, and Jesus prayed them too, even on the cross (Matthew 27:46). I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on the Psalms. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and learn to pray and praise the way these writers did. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in the Psalms. They are poetry, so we read them as poetry: a shepherd, a rock, wings and a fortress are pictures that tell us something true about God. But the Psalms are also tied to real people and real events. Many of their headings tell us who wrote them and when, and this study reads those headings as part of the text. Jesus said that the things written about Him in the Psalms must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44), and the New Testament quotes them again and again to explain who He is. So for each psalm we will also ask: What does the heading tell us? What kind of psalm is it? Does the New Testament quote it?

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. When a psalm uses a picture, I take the picture as a picture and ask what it means. When a psalm tells us something about God, His promises, His Messiah or His people Israel, I take it at its word.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each psalm in this study is one chapter, and each follows the same pattern as my other studies:

- Scripture: the full text of the psalm, with its heading, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the psalm is about.
- Study: the psalm again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the flow and main points of the psalm in one paragraph.
- People and Places: in psalms that bring in new names, places or unusual terms, a short list explaining them. A term explained once is not explained again; later psalms point back to it.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.
- Where Key Words Are Explained: a list at the back of the book that shows which psalm explains each special word, such as Selah, hesed or Sheol.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Fifty-three psalms is a lot to cover, so here are three ways a group can pace it:

- One psalm a week: fifty-three weeks, about a year. The group can read each psalm slowly and use all ten questions.
- Two psalms a week: about twenty-seven weeks, or six months. Pick five or six questions from each psalm.
- A shorter course: choose the psalms that fit your group, such as the psalms of trust (3, 4, 11, 20, 28, 61 and 71), the cries for help in hard times (6, 13, 38, 43 and 55) or the psalms

the New Testament applies to Jesus (18, 31, 41, 45, 68 and 69). Each chapter stands on its own.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the psalm out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some psalms in this volume touch painful subjects: serious illness and the fear of dying, depression, guilt, betrayal by a close friend, false accusation, war and defeat, growing old and prayers for judgment on enemies (for example Psalms 6, 13, 35, 38, 41, 44, 55, 69 and 71). If you lead a group, read those chapters ahead of time and be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through these psalms. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of the Psalms

The book of Psalms has more chapters and verses than any other book in the Bible: 150 psalms and 2,461 verses in our English Bibles. The Hebrew title means "praises." Our English name comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where a psalm is a song sung to the music of stringed instruments.

This book is Volume 2 of three. Volume 1 studies forty well-known psalms chosen from all five books. This volume studies the other fifty-three psalms of Books One and Two (Psalms 3 to 72). Volume 3 studies the rest of Books Three to Five, along with verses 65 to 176 of Psalm 119. Each volume stands on its own, so you do not need Volume 1 to use this one, though I point to it now and then.

The Psalms are divided into five books, and each of the first four ends with a short blessing of praise to God (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48). Psalm 150 closes the fifth book, and the whole collection, with nothing but praise.

Book One: Psalms 1 to 41

Book Two: Psalms 42 to 72

Book Three: Psalms 73 to 89

Book Four: Psalms 90 to 106

Book Five: Psalms 107 to 150

Many psalms open with a heading, such as "A psalm of David." In the Hebrew Bible the heading is counted as part of the psalm, and in our English Bibles it is printed above verse 1 without a number. These headings name a writer, an occasion or a direction for the music. Some of the musical words in the headings, such as Maskil, Miktam and Shiggaion, and the word Selah found inside many psalms, are old terms whose exact meaning is not certain, and I will say so when we come to them. Selah first comes up in Psalm 3, and the choirmaster, named in many headings, first comes up in Psalm 4.

Hebrew poetry does not depend on rhyme. Its main feature is parallel lines: a writer says something, then says it again in other words, or builds on it, or sets its opposite beside it. "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (27:1). Once you see this pattern, the Psalms become much easier to read, because the second line often explains the first. In Psalm 3:1, "how my adversaries have multiplied" is followed by "Many are rising up against me," the same thought said a second way.

The Psalms come in several kinds, and many mix more than one: songs of praise, cries for help (often called laments), songs of thanksgiving, wisdom psalms that teach how to live, royal psalms about the king God chose, psalms of confession and songs sung by pilgrims on the way up to Jerusalem (the Songs of Ascents, Psalms 120 to 134). A lament usually moves from complaint to

request to trust, and many of David's psalms in this volume follow that path. A few psalms also have hard lines that ask God to bring judgment on the wicked; more on those below.

The New Testament quotes the Psalms often, and many of those quotations point to Jesus Christ. Several of them are in this volume. Paul hears Christ's praise among the nations in Psalm 18:49 (Romans 15:9). Jesus' last words on the cross come from Psalm 31:5 (Luke 23:46). Jesus said the line "They hated Me without cause," from Psalms 35:19 and 69:4, was fulfilled in Him (John 15:25), and that Psalm 41:9 was fulfilled when Judas, who ate His bread, betrayed Him (John 13:18). Hebrews 1:8-9 applies Psalm 45:6-7 to the Son. Paul applies Psalm 68:18 to Christ's ascension (Ephesians 4:8). Psalm 69 is quoted again and again for Jesus' zeal for God's house (John 2:17), for His suffering (Romans 15:3) and for the sour wine He was given on the cross (John 19:28-29), and Peter applies 69:25 to Judas (Acts 1:20). Psalm 72 closes Book Two with a picture of the righteous King whose rule reaches the ends of the earth, and I believe it looks ahead to the reign of Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus Himself said that "all the things which are written concerning Me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, YHWH (often written Yahweh), which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it usually translates Adonai, a title meaning "Master." When the two come together, the SLB prints "Lord GOD," with GOD in capitals standing for the personal name. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God.

Hard Lines in the Psalms. This volume holds several of the long psalms of judgment, such as Psalms 35, 58, 59 and 69, and many shorter hard lines inside other psalms, where the writer asks God to punish his enemies (for example 5:10, 10:15 and 28:4). Bible teachers often call these imprecatory psalms, from an old word that means to call down a curse. They can be hard to read, and I will not pretend otherwise. But these lines are prayers, not actions. The writer hands his enemies over to God instead of taking revenge himself, and he asks God to do what is right. He wants God's justice and holiness upheld in a world where the wicked seem to win and the helpless are crushed. The New Testament teaches the same thing. Paul tells us not to avenge ourselves but to "give place to the wrath," because "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19). And Jesus told us to "love your enemies" and to "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you" (Matthew 5:44). These prayers are not permission to hate anyone. So we can tell God plainly about the wrong done to us, long for Him to set things right, and still pray for those who hurt us. When we reach these lines, I will point back here.

Why these fifty-three psalms? Volume 1 chose forty psalms from across the whole book. This volume picks up every psalm in Books One and Two that Volume 1 left out, so that together the two volumes cover all of Psalms 1 to 72. Most of these psalms are David's, and many are his cries for help when he was hunted, betrayed, sick or guilty. Others are the songs of the sons of Korah, one is a psalm of Asaph and the last is a psalm of Solomon. They are studied in the order they appear in the Bible: Psalms 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 35, 36,

38, 39, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71 and 72.

Background of the Book

Authors: The Psalms have many writers. The headings name David on seventy-three psalms. Others are connected to Asaph, one of David's chief musicians (Psalm 50 and Psalms 73 to 83), and to the sons of Korah, a family of Levites who served in worship (including Psalms 42, 44 to 49 and 84). Two are connected to Solomon (72 and 127), one to Moses (90), one to Heman (88) and one to Ethan (89). About fifty have no name at all. The phrase "of David" can also mean "for David" or "belonging to David," but I read the headings as naming the writer, as Jesus and the apostles did when they quoted David's psalms by name (Mark 12:36; Acts 2:25; Romans 4:6). Books One and Two, the psalms in this volume, are mostly David's, and Book Two closes with the line, "The prayers of David, son of Jesse, are finished" (72:20).

Who it was written to: The people of Israel, first for worship before the ark in David's day and later at the temple, and for personal prayer. God kept these songs for His people in every age, including us.

When it was written: Over about a thousand years. The oldest is probably the prayer of Moses (Psalm 90). Its heading names Moses, which would place it in the wilderness years after the exodus; some scholars date it later. Most of David's psalms come from around 1000 B.C., and David reigned as king from about 1010 to 970 B.C. Some psalms, such as Psalm 137, were written during or after Israel's exile in Babylon in the 500s B.C. The collection was gathered and arranged over time, probably in its final form after the exile.

Purpose: To teach God's people to worship Him, to bring every part of life to Him in prayer, to trust His promises when life is hard and to look forward to the King He promised to send, Jesus Christ, who will reign over all the earth.

Psalm 3: A Shield About Me

Scripture

A psalm of David, when he fled from before Absalom his son.

3:1-4 LORD, how my adversaries have multiplied! Many ***are*** rising up against me. Many ***are*** saying of my soul, "There is no salvation for him in God." Selah. And You, LORD, ***are*** a shield about me, my glory, and ***the One who*** lifts up my head. ***With*** my voice I called out to the LORD, and He answered me from the mountain of His holiness. Selah.

3:5-8 I, I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set ***themselves*** all around against me. Arise, LORD! Save me, my God! For You have struck all my enemies ***on the*** jaw; the teeth of ***the*** wicked You have broken. Salvation ***belongs*** to the LORD; Your blessing ***is*** on Your people. Selah.

Psalm 3 Preview

Psalm 3 is the first psalm in the book with a heading, and it puts us in one of the worst weeks of David's life. His own son Absalom has stolen the hearts of the people and taken the throne, and David has fled Jerusalem on foot. Enemies are everywhere, and people are saying God has given up on him.

In eight short verses David moves from fear to rest. He tells God how bad things are, remembers who God is, lies down and sleeps, and wakes up still trusting. Many have called it a morning psalm, and it has helped believers face a hard day ever since.

Psalm 3 Study

3:1-2 *LORD, how my adversaries have multiplied! Many **are** rising up against me. Many **are** saying of my soul, "There is no salvation for him in God." Selah.*

The heading reads, "A psalm of David, when he fled from before Absalom his son." The account is in 2 Samuel 15 to 18. Absalom spent years winning the people over, then had himself crowned king in Hebron. David left Jerusalem rather than let the city be destroyed in battle. He went up the Mount of Olives weeping, his head covered and his feet bare (2 Samuel 15:30). Along the way a man named Shimei threw stones at him and cursed him (2 Samuel 16:5-8).

David's trouble was partly his own doing. Nathan had told him that because of his sin with Bathsheba, the sword would not leave his house (2 Samuel 12:10). Yet David still runs to God. Our failures do not close the door to prayer.

"LORD, how my adversaries have multiplied!" Here we meet the parallel lines explained in the Overview: the next line says the same thing again, "Many are rising up against me." Then the worst part: "There is no salvation for him in God." His enemies were not only after his throne. They wanted him to believe God was done with him.

Then comes "Selah," the first time we meet it in this study. Selah appears seventy-one times in the Psalms and three more times in Habakkuk 3. Its meaning is uncertain. Many think it comes from a Hebrew root meaning "lift up," perhaps a signal for the singers or instruments, and the Greek Old Testament translated it with a word that probably means a musical interlude. So most scholars think it marks a pause in the music. Many readers also take it as a call to stop and think about what was just said, and that is a good habit. When you see Selah, slow down. Later chapters simply point back here.

3:3-4 *And You, LORD, **are** a shield about me, my glory, and **the One who** lifts up my head. **With** my voice I called out to the LORD, and He answered me from the mountain of His holiness. Selah.*

"And You, LORD, are a shield about me." The enemies said there was no help for David in God. David answers by talking to God, not to them. A soldier's shield covered him in front. David says God is a shield "about" him, all the way around.

God is also "my glory." David had lost his crown, his palace and his good name. His real honor was God Himself, and Absalom could not take that. And God is the One who "lifts up my head." David had walked out of Jerusalem with his head covered in shame. God would lift it again, the way a friend lifts the chin of someone who is crying.

"I called out to the LORD, and He answered me from the mountain of His holiness." David had sent the ark back to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 15:25), and the ark stood for God's throne among His people. David was miles away, but God still heard him from His holy hill. Distance does not keep our prayers from God. Another Selah tells us to stop and take that in.

3:5-6 *I, I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set **themselves** all around against me.*

"I, I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me." For a man running for his life, sleep was a miracle. Fear keeps us awake. Trust lets us rest. David did not sleep because the danger was gone. He slept because God was holding him up.

"I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people." The numbers had not changed since verse 1. What changed was David. He had looked at God long enough that the crowd looked smaller.

If you lie awake at night with worry, this verse is worth praying before bed. You are not asking God to remove every problem by morning. You are handing Him the night.

3:7-8 *Arise, LORD! Save me, my God! For You have struck all my enemies **on the** jaw; the teeth of **the** wicked You have broken. Salvation **belongs** to the LORD; Your blessing **is** on Your people. Selah.*

"Arise, LORD! Save me, my God!" David calls on God to stand up and act, like a warrior rising for battle. Moses used the same cry when the ark set out in the wilderness (Numbers 10:35).

"For You have struck all my enemies on the jaw; the teeth of the wicked You have broken." The enemies are pictured as wild animals with teeth bared. God breaks their teeth so they cannot bite.

David is not planning to strike anyone. He is asking God to deal with them. (See the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms.) In the end, God gave David the victory, though it cost him his son, and David wept over Absalom (2 Samuel 18:33). He wanted the rebellion stopped. He never wanted his son dead.

"Salvation belongs to the LORD." With these words David answers verse 2. The enemies said there was no salvation for him in God. David says salvation is God's alone to give. The psalm ends with a blessing for others: "Your blessing is on Your people." Even while running for his life, the king prays for the nation that had turned against him.

Psalm 3 Summary

David wrote Psalm 3 while fleeing from his son Absalom, who had taken his throne. His enemies were many, and they said God would not save him. David turned to the LORD as his shield all around him, his glory and the One who lifts up his head. He cried out, and God answered from His holy mountain. Because the LORD sustained him, David lay down and slept and woke up safe, no longer afraid of the thousands set against him. He called on God to rise and save him and to break the power of the wicked. He ended by declaring that salvation belongs to the LORD and asking God's blessing on His people.

People and Places

- Absalom: David's son, who led a rebellion and made himself king for a time (2 Samuel 15 to 18).
- Selah: a word found seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk 3; its meaning is uncertain, probably a musical pause and a call to stop and think.

Psalm 3 Study Questions

1. What was happening in David's life when he wrote this psalm? (heading; 2 Samuel 15)

2. What were many people saying about David? (3:2)

3. What three things does David say the LORD is to him in verse 3?

4. From where did God answer David? (3:4)

5. What did David do in verse 5, and why could he do it?

6. What does Selah probably mean, and how might pausing over Scripture help you?

7. David's trouble came partly from his own sin. Why is it good news that he could still pray?

8. Has anyone ever told you, in words or actions, that God would not help you? How does David answer that kind of voice?

9. What keeps you awake at night? What would it look like to hand that to God before you sleep?

10. Even in danger, David prayed a blessing on his people (3:8). Who could you pray for this week, even while you are struggling yourself?

Psalm 4: In Peace I Will Lie Down

Scripture

To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A psalm of David.

4:1-5 When I call, answer me, O God of my righteousness! In the distress You have made ***it*** wide for me; be gracious to me, and hear my prayer. Sons of man, how long ***will*** my glory ***be turned*** into shame? ***How long*** will you love vanity ***and*** seek a lie? Selah. And know that the LORD has set apart the godly ***one*** for Himself; the LORD will hear when I call to Him. Tremble, and do not sin; speak in your heart on your bed, and be silent. Selah. Sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD.

4:6-8 Many ***are*** saying, "Who will show us good?" Lift up the light of Your face on us, LORD. You have put joy in my heart, more than ***at the*** time ***when*** their grain and their new wine have multiplied. In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You, LORD, alone make me dwell in safety.

Psalm 4 Preview

If Psalm 3 is a prayer for the morning, Psalm 4 is a prayer for the end of the day. David is under pressure again. People are twisting his good name into shame and chasing after lies. He prays, then turns and speaks to the people who are troubling him, and finally lies down to sleep in peace.

The psalm teaches us what to do with anger and worry at night: be still, trust the LORD and let Him give a joy that does not depend on how well things are going.

Psalm 4 Study

4:1 *When I call, answer me, O God of my righteousness! In the distress You have made* ***it*** *wide for me; be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A psalm of David." The choirmaster was the leader of the music in Israel's worship, so the psalm was written to be sung by God's people together and not only prayed alone. Fifty-five psalms carry this line in their headings, and later chapters will simply point back here. "With stringed instruments" tells the musicians to play it on the lyre or harp.

"When I call, answer me, O God of my righteousness!" Righteousness means being right with God and doing what is right in His eyes. David does not mean he is perfect. He means God knows the truth about him and will stand up for him when others accuse him. God is the One who sets him right.

"In the distress You have made it wide for me." Distress in Hebrew is a narrow, tight place. God had given him room before. David remembers past help and asks for it again. "Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer." Grace is favor we do not earn, and David asks for nothing more than that.

4:2-3 *Sons of man, how long **will** my glory **be turned** into shame? **How long** will you love vanity **and** seek a lie? Selah. And know that the LORD has set apart the godly **one** for Himself; the LORD will hear when I call to Him.*

Now David turns to his opponents. "Sons of man, how long will my glory be turned into shame?" We are not told exactly who they were. Some think this psalm also comes from Absalom's rebellion, others from another time when David's name was dragged through the mud. They "love vanity" and "seek a lie." They believed what was empty and false.

"And know that the LORD has set apart the godly one for Himself." The godly one is a person who belongs to God and is loyal to Him. God has marked him out as His own. So "the LORD will hear when I call to Him." David is not boasting about himself. He is boasting about whose he is.

4:4-5 *Tremble, and do not sin; speak in your heart on your bed, and be silent. Selah. Sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD.*

"Tremble, and do not sin." The Hebrew word means to shake, whether with fear or with anger. The Greek Old Testament read it as "be angry," and Paul quotes it that way in Ephesians 4:26, adding that we should not let the sun set on our anger. Strong feelings are not sin by themselves. What we do with them can be.

"Speak in your heart on your bed, and be silent." Instead of lashing out, think it over in private and then go quiet before God. Many of us replay arguments in bed and get angrier. David says to take it to God there and let it rest.

"Sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD." Right worship and trust go together. Bring God what is right, and leave the outcome in His hands.

New Testament links: Ephesians 4:26 (quoted)

4:6-8 *Many **are** saying, "Who will show us good?" Lift up the light of Your face on us, LORD. You have put joy in my heart, more than **at the** time **when** their grain and their new wine have multiplied. In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You, LORD, alone make me dwell in safety.*

Many were asking, "Who will show us good?" People were discouraged and wondering where the good times went. David answers with a prayer drawn from the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:25-26: "Lift up the light of Your face on us, LORD." When God's face shines on us, we have what we need, even in hard times.

"You have put joy in my heart, more than at the time when their grain and their new wine have multiplied." A full harvest made people happy. David says God's joy is greater than that. It comes from God and does not wait for good crops or good news.

"In peace I will both lie down and sleep." David does not lie awake half on guard. He lies down and sleeps. "For You, LORD, alone make me dwell in safety." Not locks, guards or a good bank balance. God alone. Many believers have prayed this verse as their last words before sleep, and it is still a good one to learn by heart.

Psalm 4 Summary

In Psalm 4 David asks the God of his righteousness to answer him, remembering how God gave him room in past distress. He warns those who turn his honor into shame and chase lies that the LORD has set apart His godly one and hears him. He tells them to tremble and not sin, to think quietly on their beds and to offer right sacrifices and trust the LORD. When many ask who will show them good, David prays for the light of God's face. God has given him a joy greater than a rich harvest, and so he lies down and sleeps in peace, because the LORD alone makes him dwell in safety.

People and Places

- Choirmaster: the leader of the music in Israel's worship; many psalm headings name him.
- Righteous: right with God and living in His ways; righteousness is what is right in God's eyes.

When I lie down at night with anger or worry, I try to release it to Him through prayer. Psalm 4:4 says to search your heart on your bed and be still. Giving it to God before I sleep is better than carrying it into the next day.

Psalm 4 Study Questions

1. What two directions for the music does the heading give?
2. What does David remember God doing for him in distress? (4:1)
3. What did David's opponents love and seek? (4:2)
4. Whom has the LORD set apart for Himself? (4:3)
5. How does Paul use verse 4 in Ephesians 4:26?
6. What blessing from Numbers 6 does David echo in verse 6?
7. What does David say is better than a big harvest? (4:7)
8. What do you usually do with anger or worry when you lie down at night? How could verse 4 change that?
9. Where do you tend to look for safety instead of God? (4:8)
10. Is there a verse you could pray every night this week as you go to sleep?

Psalm 5: In the Morning You Hear My Voice

Scripture

To the choirmaster, for the flutes. A psalm of David.

5:1-7 Give ear to my words, LORD; consider my sighing. Pay attention to the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, for to You I pray. LORD, ***in the*** morning You hear my voice; ***in the*** morning I set ***it*** in order for You, and I keep watch. For You ***are*** not a God delighting in wickedness; evil does not sojourn with You. ***The*** boastful will not take their stand before Your eyes; You hate all who work iniquity. You destroy those who speak a lie; the LORD abhors a man of blood and deceit. And I, in the abundance of Your steadfast love I will enter Your house; I will bow down toward the temple of Your holiness in fear of You.

5:8-12 LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes; make Your way straight before me. For there is nothing reliable in his mouth; their inner part ***is*** destruction; their throat ***is*** an open grave; their tongue they make smooth. Hold them guilty, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; in the abundance of their transgressions thrust them away, for they have rebelled against You. And let all who take refuge in You rejoice; let them shout for joy forever; and may You cover over them; and let those who love Your name exult in You. For You, You bless the righteous, LORD; like a shield You surround him ***with*** favor.

Psalm 5 Preview

Psalm 5 is another morning prayer. David starts his day by laying his words out before God and then watching for the answer. He is surrounded by liars and violent men, and he knows God hates what they do. But David does not stand on his own goodness. He comes into God's house only because of God's steadfast love.

The psalm sets two groups side by side, as Psalm 1 did: those who speak lies and rebel against God, and those who take refuge in Him and love His name. It ends with joy and with God's favor around the righteous like a shield.

Psalm 5 Study

5:1-3 *Give ear to my words, LORD; consider my sighing. Pay attention to the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, for to You I pray. LORD,* ***in the*** *morning You hear my voice;* ***in the*** *morning I set* ***it*** *in order for You, and I keep watch.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, for the flutes. A psalm of David." On the choirmaster, see Psalm 4. The Hebrew word behind "flutes" is uncertain. Many think it means wind instruments, so the psalm was played on flutes or pipes. Others think it was the name of a tune.

"Give ear to my words, LORD; consider my sighing." David prays with words, and when words run out, with sighs. God hears both. Then he calls God "my King and my God." David was the king of Israel, but he knew he had a King above him.

"LORD, in the morning You hear my voice; in the morning I set it in order for You, and I keep watch." The word for "set in order" was used for laying out wood on an altar or arranging a case in court. David lays his requests out before God, then waits like a watchman on the wall. Prayer is not throwing words at the ceiling and walking away. It is laying our needs before God and watching for His answer.

5:4-6 *For You **are** not a God delighting in wickedness; evil does not sojourn with You. **The** boastful will not take their stand before Your eyes; You hate all who work iniquity. You destroy those who speak a lie; the LORD abhors a man of blood and deceit.*

"For You are not a God delighting in wickedness; evil does not sojourn with You." To sojourn is to stay as a guest. Evil is never a welcome guest in God's house.

"The boastful will not take their stand before Your eyes; You hate all who work iniquity." That is a strong word. God's hatred is not like our moody dislike. It is His settled opposition to evil and to those who give themselves to it. "The LORD abhors a man of blood and deceit." Violence and lying are named here, and they will come up again and again in David's psalms. Yet the same God who hates evil sent His Son to die for evildoers (Romans 5:8). We must hold both truths.

5:7 *And I, in the abundance of Your steadfast love I will enter Your house; I will bow down toward the temple of Your holiness in fear of You.*

"And I, in the abundance of Your steadfast love I will enter Your house." David knows he does not come in because he is better than the wicked. He comes in on the strength of God's steadfast love.

"Steadfast love" here is the Hebrew hesed, and this is the first time we meet it in this study. Hesed is one of the key words of the Old Testament. It means God's loyal love, the faithful, steady kindness He shows His people because of the covenant He made with them. A covenant is a binding agreement, a relationship God makes and commits Himself to keep, like His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:7-8) and the new covenant He made through Jesus (Luke 22:20). Hesed is love that has bound itself by a promise and keeps that promise, even when the one who is loved has failed. Other English Bibles say lovingkindness, loving devotion, loyal love or mercy, and no single English word holds all of it. When God showed His glory to Moses, He named Himself "great in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). In short, hesed is love that keeps its promises. We will meet it again and again, and later chapters point back here.

"I will bow down toward the temple of Your holiness in fear of You." Solomon built the temple after David died, so what does David mean? The words "house" and "temple" were used for God's tent as well. The tabernacle at Shiloh was called "the temple of the LORD" (1 Samuel 1:9). In David's day the ark of the covenant, the gold-covered chest that stood for God's throne among His people, rested in a tent David set up in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17). That was God's house.

"In fear of You." The fear of the LORD is deep reverence and awe for God, a respect that takes Him seriously and wants to please Him. It is not the terror of a slave. It is the awe of a child who loves his father and would never want to dishonor him. Proverbs 9:10 says it is the beginning of wisdom.

5:8-10 *LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes; make Your way straight before me. For there is nothing reliable in his mouth; their inner part **is** destruction; their throat **is** an open grave; their tongue they make smooth. Hold them guilty, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; in the abundance of their transgressions thrust them away, for they have rebelled against You.*

"LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes; make Your way straight before me." With enemies watching for him to stumble, David asks God to make the path clear and level.

"Their throat is an open grave." Their words smell of death, like an opened tomb. "Their tongue they make smooth." They flatter while they plan harm. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 3:13 as part of a chain of psalm verses that prove all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are under sin. David wrote about his enemies. Paul shows that the same corruption runs through every human heart, which is why we all need the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus (Romans 3:21-24).

"Hold them guilty, O God; let them fall by their own counsels." We have come to the first of the hard lines in this study (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). David does not take up a sword. He asks God to judge, and he asks that their own plans bring them down. His reason is not personal spite: "for they have rebelled against You." God's honor is the issue.

New Testament links: Romans 3:13 (quoted)

5:11-12 *And let all who take refuge in You rejoice; let them shout for joy forever; and may You cover over them; and let those who love Your name exult in You. For You, You bless the righteous, LORD; like a shield You surround him **with** favor.*

"And let all who take refuge in You rejoice; let them shout for joy forever." The psalm turns from the wicked to God's people. Refuge is a place to run when danger comes. Those who run to God are told to sing. "May You cover over them" pictures God spreading His protection over them like a roof.

"For You, You bless the righteous, LORD; like a shield You surround him with favor." The shield here is the large kind that covered a soldier's whole body. God's favor surrounds His people on every side. David began the day with sighs. He ends with a shield of favor around him.

Psalm 5 Summary

David begins Psalm 5 by asking God, his King, to hear his words and his sighs, and he lays out his prayer in the morning and watches for the answer. God does not delight in wickedness. The boastful cannot stand before Him, and He hates those who work iniquity, lie and shed blood. David comes into God's house only through the abundance of His steadfast love, and he bows toward His holy temple in reverent fear. He asks God to lead him and make His way straight, because his enemies speak death and flattery. Paul quotes their open-grave throat in Romans 3:13 to show that all people are under sin. David asks God to hold the rebels guilty, and he calls all who take refuge in God to rejoice, because the LORD blesses the righteous and surrounds them with favor like a shield.

People and Places

- Hesed: God's loyal, covenant love; love that keeps its promises. The SLB says "steadfast love."
- Covenant: a binding agreement God makes and commits Himself to keep.
- Ark of the covenant: the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the Law and stood for God's throne among His people.
- Fear of the LORD: deep reverence and awe for God that takes Him seriously and wants to please Him.

Psalm 5 Study Questions

1. When does David pray in this psalm, and what does he do after he prays? (5:3)
2. What does David call God in verse 2?
3. What kinds of people does the LORD hate or abhor? (5:5-6)
4. On what basis does David enter God's house? (5:7)
5. What is hesed, and why is "steadfast love" a good way to say it?
6. What does the fear of the LORD mean, and how is it different from terror?
7. How does Paul use verse 9 in Romans 3:13, and why does it matter for us?
8. Why does David ask God to judge his enemies, and what reason does he give? (5:10)
9. What would it look like for you to "keep watch" after you pray this week?
10. How have you seen God's favor surround you like a shield?

Psalm 6: How Long, LORD?

Scripture

To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments, on the Sheminith. A psalm of David.

6:1-5 LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, and do not discipline me in Your wrath. Be gracious to me, LORD, for I ***am*** frail; heal me, LORD, for my bones are dismayed. And my soul is greatly dismayed; and You, LORD, how long? Return, LORD; rescue my soul; save me for the sake of Your steadfast love. For there is no remembrance of You in death; in Sheol who will give thanks to You?

6:6-10 I have become weary with my groaning; every night I make my bed swim; with my tears I melt my couch. My eye has wasted away from grief; it has grown old because of all my adversaries. Depart from me, all who work iniquity, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. The LORD has heard my supplication; the LORD will accept my prayer. Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly dismayed; they will turn back, they will be ashamed ***in*** a moment.

Psalm 6 Preview

Psalm 6 is the prayer of a man worn out by suffering. David is sick in body and sick at heart. He feels God's hand of discipline on him, he cries every night until his bed is wet, and his enemies are watching. He does not hide any of it from God.

Then, suddenly, the psalm turns. David knows the LORD has heard his weeping. The prayer that began with "how long?" ends with confidence. Christians have long counted Psalm 6 as the first of the seven penitential psalms, the psalms of sorrow over sin.

Psalm 6 Study

6:1-3 *LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, and do not discipline me in Your wrath. Be gracious to me, LORD, for I* ***am*** *frail; heal me, LORD, for my bones are dismayed. And my soul is greatly dismayed; and You, LORD, how long?*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments, on the Sheminith. A psalm of David." On the choirmaster and stringed instruments, see Psalm 4. Sheminith means "the eighth." The meaning is uncertain. Some think it was an eight-stringed instrument, and others think it told the singers to sing an octave lower, in a deep voice. The heading of Psalm 12 uses it too.

Christians have long called Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143 the penitential psalms, from a word that means sorrow for sin. Psalm 6 never names a sin, but David asks God not to rebuke him "in Your anger," so he seems to know his trouble is God's discipline. Psalms 32, 51 and 130 are studied in Volume 1, Psalm 38 in this volume and Psalms 102 and 143 in Volume 3.

"LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger." David does not ask God never to correct him. He asks God to correct him gently, as a father and not as a judge. Hebrews 12:6 says the Lord disciplines the one He loves.

"Be gracious to me, LORD, for I am frail; heal me, LORD, for my bones are dismayed." His body is failing. Then it reaches deeper: "my soul is greatly dismayed." And then he can only get out half a sentence: "And You, LORD, how long?" If you have ever been too tired to finish a prayer, God understands that kind of praying.

6:4-5 *Return, LORD; rescue my soul; save me for the sake of Your steadfast love. For there is no remembrance of You in death; in Sheol who will give thanks to You?*

"Return, LORD; rescue my soul; save me for the sake of Your steadfast love." David feels as if God has walked away. He does not ask God to save him because he deserves it. He asks on the ground of God's steadfast love, His hesed (see Psalm 5).

"For there is no remembrance of You in death; in Sheol who will give thanks to You?" Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead. In the Old Testament it can mean simply the grave, and it can also mean the realm of the dead beyond it, where all who die were said to go. The Greek word for it is Hades. The Old Testament does not yet give a full picture of life after death. David's point is that if he dies, his voice will be gone from the worship of God's people on earth. Through Jesus we know more, that to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). But David's plea is still a good one: Lord, let me live so I can keep praising You here.

6:6-7 *I have become weary with my groaning; every night I make my bed swim; with my tears I melt my couch. My eye has wasted away from grief; it has grown old because of all my adversaries.*

"I have become weary with my groaning; every night I make my bed swim; with my tears I melt my couch." David is not ashamed to tell God how much he cries. Nights are often the worst, when everything quiet makes the pain louder. "My eye has wasted away from grief." Sorrow and his enemies have aged him.

Scripture does not tell us that strong believers never cry. Jesus wept at Lazarus's tomb (John 11:35) and said in Gethsemane that His soul was very sorrowful, even to death (Matthew 26:38). If you are in a season like this, you are not failing God by grieving. And if the darkness will not lift, tell a pastor or a trusted believer, see a doctor, and if you are in danger, get emergency help right away. God often sends His help through people.

6:8-10 *Depart from me, all who work iniquity, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. The LORD has heard my supplication; the LORD will accept my prayer. Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly dismayed; they will turn back, they will be ashamed* ***in*** *a moment.*

"Depart from me, all who work iniquity, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping." The turn is sudden. Nothing in his body may have changed yet, but David knows God has heard. His tears were a prayer, and God received it. "The LORD has heard my supplication; the LORD will accept my prayer." He says it three ways to be sure he believes it.

Jesus used the words of verse 8 for the day of judgment. Those who called Him Lord but never truly knew Him will hear Him say, "depart from Me, you who work lawlessness" (Matthew 7:23; Luke 13:27). David sends his enemies away. Jesus, the Judge, will one day send away all who refused Him.

"Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly dismayed." The same word David used for his own bones and soul in verses 2 and 3 now falls on his enemies. The shame has changed sides. "They will turn back, they will be ashamed in a moment." God can change a long night in a moment.

New Testament links: Matthew 7:23 (quoted); Luke 13:27 (quoted)

Psalm 6 Summary

In Psalm 6 David, weak and sick, asks the LORD not to discipline him in anger but to be gracious and heal him, because his bones and his soul are dismayed. He cries, "How long?" and asks God to return and save him for the sake of His steadfast love, since in death and Sheol he could no longer praise God among the living. Every night he floods his bed with tears, and grief has worn out his eyes. Then he turns and tells the workers of iniquity to depart, because the LORD has heard his weeping and will accept his prayer. Jesus used the words of verse 8 for the day of judgment (Matthew 7:23). David's enemies will be ashamed and turn back in a moment.

People and Places

- Sheminith: a musical term meaning "the eighth"; perhaps an eight-stringed instrument or a lower octave.
- Sheol: the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave and the realm beyond it; Hades in Greek.
- Penitential psalms: Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143, long grouped by Christians as prayers of sorrow for sin.

Psalm 6 Study Questions

1. What does David ask God not to do in verse 1?

2. What parts of David are dismayed? (6:2-3)

3. On what basis does David ask God to save him? (6:4)

4. What is Sheol, and why does David bring it up? (6:5)

5. How does David describe his nights? (6:6)

6. What changes in verse 8, and what does David now know?

7. How did Jesus use the words of verse 8 in Matthew 7:23?

8. Why do you think David is so honest about his tears? Is it hard for you to be that honest with God?

9. How can we tell the difference between God's loving discipline and suffering that has nothing to do with our sin?

10. If someone in your group is going through a long night like this, what could you do to help them this week?

Psalm 7: God Is a Righteous Judge

Scripture

A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.

7:1-9 LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me, lest he tear my soul like a lion, tearing ***it*** in pieces, and there is no deliverer. LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is injustice in my hands, if I have repaid evil to ***him who*** was at peace with me, and have plundered my adversary without cause, let an enemy pursue my soul and overtake ***it***, and let him trample my life to the earth, and let him lay my glory in the dust. Selah. Arise, LORD, in Your anger; lift Yourself up against the furies of my adversaries; and awake for me; You have commanded judgment. And let the congregation of ***the*** peoples surround You, and over it return to the height. Let the LORD judge ***the*** peoples; judge me, LORD, according to my righteousness and according to my integrity ***that is*** on me. Please let the evil of ***the*** wicked come to an end, and establish the righteous; and ***You are*** the One who tests hearts and kidneys, O righteous God.

7:10-17 My shield ***is*** on God, the One who saves the upright of heart. God ***is*** a righteous judge, and God ***is*** indignant every day. If ***one*** does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and prepared it. And for him He has prepared weapons of death; He makes His arrows into burning ***shafts***. Look, he is in labor with iniquity, and he has conceived mischief and brought forth falsehood. He has dug a hole, and he has hollowed it out; and he has fallen into the pit ***that*** he made. His mischief returns on his own head, and on his crown his violence comes down. I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

Psalm 7 Preview

Someone has accused David falsely, and the accusation is dangerous. David runs to God and asks Him to be the Judge. He is willing to be examined first: if he has done what they say, let the enemy have him. But he knows he has not, so he asks the Judge of all the earth to rise and set things right.

The second half describes how God deals with the wicked. He is ready with sword and bow for those who will not repent, and often the evil a man plans falls back on his own head. David ends by thanking God for His righteousness. When we are falsely accused, this psalm shows us where to take our case.

Psalm 7 Study

7:1-2 *LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me, lest he tear my soul like a lion, tearing* ***it*** *in pieces, and there is no deliverer.*

The heading reads, "A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite." Shiggaion is used only here in the Psalms, and Habakkuk 3:1 has a plural form of it. The meaning is uncertain. Many connect it with a Hebrew root meaning "to wander" or "to reel," and think it was a song full of strong feeling, with changing rhythm.

We are not told who Cush was. He is not named anywhere else. He came from the tribe of Benjamin, which was King Saul's tribe, and many think he was one of Saul's men who spread lies about David while Saul hunted him (1 Samuel 24:9; 26:19).

"LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge." David runs to God first, not to his own defense. He feels hunted, as if a lion is about to "tear my soul." A lion does not argue. It drags its prey off, "and there is no deliverer." Only God can step in.

7:3-5 *LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is injustice in my hands, if I have repaid evil to **him who** was at peace with me, and have plundered my adversary without cause, let an enemy pursue my soul and overtake **it**, and let him trample my life to the earth, and let him lay my glory in the dust. Selah.*

"LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is injustice in my hands." David puts himself under oath. If he has repaid evil to a friend or robbed an enemy without cause, he says, "let an enemy pursue my soul and overtake it." He is not claiming to be sinless. He is saying that in this matter the charge is false.

David could say this honestly. Twice he could have killed Saul and would not (1 Samuel 24 and 26). When we are accused, it is good to let God search us first. If the charge is true, we confess. If it is false, we can rest our case with Him. Selah calls us to stop and ask ourselves that question.

7:6-9 *Arise, LORD, in Your anger; lift Yourself up against the furies of my adversaries; and awake for me; You have commanded judgment. And let the congregation of **the** peoples surround You, and over it return to the height. Let the LORD judge **the** peoples; judge me, LORD, according to my righteousness and according to my integrity **that is** on me. Please let the evil of **the** wicked come to an end, and establish the righteous; and **You are** the One who tests hearts and kidneys, O righteous God.*

"Arise, LORD, in Your anger." David asks God to take the bench. "You have commanded judgment." God has already said that justice must be done. Now David asks Him to carry it out.

"Let the congregation of the peoples surround You, and over it return to the height." He pictures all the nations gathered before God's throne, with God seated above them as Judge. "Let the LORD judge the peoples; judge me, LORD, according to my righteousness and according to my integrity." Integrity means being whole, the same on the inside as on the outside. David is asking to be judged on this case, and he knows he is in the right.

"You are the One who tests hearts and kidneys, O righteous God." In Hebrew the kidneys stood for the deepest feelings and thoughts, the way we use "heart." God sees what no court can see. Jesus says the same of Himself to the church at Thyatira: He searches minds and hearts and gives to each according to their works (Revelation 2:23).

New Testament links: Revelation 2:23 (alluded to)

7:10-13 *My shield **is** on God, the One who saves the upright of heart. God **is** a righteous judge, and God **is** indignant every day. If **one** does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and prepared it. And for him He has prepared weapons of death; He makes His arrows into burning **shafts**.*

"My shield is on God, the One who saves the upright of heart." David's protection is in God's hand. "God is a righteous judge, and God is indignant every day." God is never neutral about evil. His anger against it is steady, not a sudden fit.

"If one does not repent, He will sharpen His sword." Look at the word "if." God warns before He strikes. He would rather the wicked turn than perish (Ezekiel 33:11). But for those who refuse, the sword is sharpened, the bow is bent and the arrows are ready. God's patience is real, and so is His judgment. (See the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms.)

7:14-16 *Look, he is in labor with iniquity, and he has conceived mischief and brought forth falsehood. He has dug a hole, and he has hollowed it out; and he has fallen into the pit **that** he made. His mischief returns on his own head, and on his crown his violence comes down.*

"Look, he is in labor with iniquity, and he has conceived mischief and brought forth falsehood." The picture is a pregnancy. Evil starts as an idea, grows inside and is born as lies. James uses the same picture: desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and sin brings forth death (James 1:15).

"He has fallen into the pit that he made." Hunters dug pits to trap animals. The wicked man digs one for others and falls in himself. "His mischief returns on his own head." Haman built a gallows for Mordecai and was hanged on it (Esther 7:10). Often God lets evil destroy itself.

7:17 *I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.*

"I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness." David has not seen the verdict yet, but he gives thanks in advance. "I will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High." Most High is a title for God that means He is above every king, every judge and every so-called god. Abraham met Melchizedek, priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18-20). No court on earth can overturn the ruling of the Most High.

Psalm 7 Summary

In Psalm 7 David takes refuge in the LORD from a false accuser, Cush the Benjaminite, who is hunting him like a lion. David swears that if he has done wrong, the enemy may have him, but he knows the charge is false. He asks God to rise in anger, to sit as Judge over the peoples and to judge him by his integrity, because God tests the hearts and kidneys. God is his shield and a righteous Judge who is angry with evil every day. If the wicked will not repent, God's sword and arrows are ready. The wicked man conceives mischief and gives birth to lies, and he falls into the very pit he dug. David ends by thanking the LORD for His righteousness and praising the name of the LORD Most High.

People and Places

- Shiggaion: a term found only in the heading of Psalm 7 (and in plural in Habakkuk 3:1); meaning uncertain, perhaps a song of strong feeling.
- Cush: a man from the tribe of Benjamin who spoke against David; nothing more is known of him.
- Benjaminite: someone from the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of King Saul.
- Most High: a title for God as the One above every power in heaven and on earth.

Psalm 7 Study Questions

1. What did David do first when he was accused? (7:1)

2. What picture does David use for his enemy in verse 2?

3. What oath does David take in verses 3-5?

4. What does God test, according to verse 9, and how does Revelation 2:23 echo it?

5. What word in verse 12 shows that God warns before He judges?

6. What happens to the man who digs a pit for others? (7:15-16)

7. What does the title "Most High" tell us about God? (7:17)

8. When you are accused, is your first move to defend yourself or to let God search you? Why?

9. Why is it good news that God is "indignant every day" with evil?

10. Is there a situation where you need to leave your case with God instead of fighting it yourself?

Psalm 9: The LORD Sits Enthroned Forever

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on Muth-labben. A psalm of David.

9:1-10 I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will recount all Your wonders. I will rejoice and exult in You; I will sing praises to Your name, O Most High. When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish from before You. For You have executed my justice and my cause; You have sat on a throne, judging ***in*** righteousness. You have rebuked nations; You have destroyed ***the*** wicked; their name You have wiped out forever and ever. The enemy, they have come to an end, ruins forever; and cities You have uprooted; their memory has perished, they ***themselves***. And the LORD sits ***enthroned*** forever; He has established His throne for judgment. And He, He will judge the world in righteousness; He will judge the peoples with uprightness. And let the LORD be a high refuge for the oppressed, a high refuge for times of trouble. And those who know Your name will trust in You, for You have not forsaken those who seek You, LORD.

9:11-20 Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells ***in*** Zion; declare His deeds among the peoples. For He who seeks blood has remembered them; He has not forgotten the cry of ***the*** humble. Be gracious to me, LORD; see my affliction from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death, so that I may recount all Your praises in the gates of the daughter of Zion; I will rejoice in Your salvation. Nations have sunk into the pit ***that*** they made; in the net which they hid their own foot has been caught. The LORD has made Himself known; He has executed judgment; in the work of his hands ***He*** is snaring ***the*** wicked. Higgaion. Selah. ***The*** wicked will return to Sheol, all the nations forgetful of God. For the needy will not be forgotten forever; the hope of ***the*** afflicted ***will not*** perish forever. Arise, LORD; let not man prevail; let ***the*** nations be judged before Your face. Set terror for them, LORD; let ***the*** nations know ***that*** they ***are*** men. Selah.

Psalm 9 Preview

Psalm 9 begins with whole-hearted thanks. God has turned back David's enemies and judged the nations, and David wants to tell all His wonders. The LORD sits on His throne forever, and He is a high refuge for the oppressed. He does not forget the cry of the humble.

Yet the psalm also prays for more help, because the trouble is not over. Psalms 9 and 10 belong together. In Hebrew they form one acrostic poem, and the Greek Old Testament counts them as a single psalm. Psalm 9 is mostly praise for what God has done. Psalm 10 is mostly a cry about what the wicked are still doing.

Psalm 9 Study

9:1-2 *I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will recount all Your wonders. I will rejoice and exult in You; I will sing praises to Your name, O Most High.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on Muth-labben. A psalm of David." On the choirmaster, see Psalm 4. The words of Muth-labben mean something like death of the son, or death for the

son. The meaning is uncertain. Most think it was the name of a tune the psalm was sung to. Some older writers tied it to the death of Goliath or to a son of David, but the heading does not say.

Psalms 9 and 10 together are an acrostic. In an acrostic poem, each verse or pair of verses begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which has twenty-two letters. It helped people memorize the psalm, and it shows the writer covering his subject from A to Z. The pattern in Psalms 9 and 10 is not complete, and some letters are missing, but it runs through both psalms. Psalm 10 has no heading of its own, which also suggests they were once one psalm. Because the Greek and Latin Bibles join them, their psalm numbers run about one behind ours for most of the rest of the book.

"I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart." Not half-hearted, not out of habit. "I will recount all Your wonders." Wonders are the things only God could do. David will tell them over, one by one. Then he says three times what he will do: rejoice, exult and sing praises "to Your name, O Most High" (see Psalm 7).

9:3-6 *When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish from before You. For You have executed my justice and my cause; You have sat on a throne, judging **in** righteousness. You have rebuked nations; You have destroyed **the** wicked; their name You have wiped out forever and ever. The enemy, they have come to an end, ruins forever; and cities You have uprooted; their memory has perished, they **themselves**.*

"When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish from before You." The enemies fall because of God's presence. "For You have executed my justice and my cause; You have sat on a throne, judging in righteousness." David's case went to the highest court, and God ruled for him.

"You have rebuked nations; You have destroyed the wicked; their name You have wiped out forever and ever." Their cities lie in ruins and "their memory has perished." Many empires that once terrified Israel are known today only from old stones and the pages of Scripture. Nations that set themselves against God do not last.

9:7-10 *And the LORD sits **enthroned** forever; He has established His throne for judgment. And He, He will judge the world in righteousness; He will judge the peoples with uprightness. And let the LORD be a high refuge for the oppressed, a high refuge for times of trouble. And those who know Your name will trust in You, for You have not forsaken those who seek You, LORD.*

"And the LORD sits enthroned forever; He has established His throne for judgment." Earthly thrones come and go. God's throne stays. "He will judge the world in righteousness." Paul told the people of Athens that God has set a day when He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man He appointed, and He proved it by raising Jesus from the dead (Acts 17:31).

"And let the LORD be a high refuge for the oppressed." A high refuge is a fortress on a cliff that enemies cannot reach. The God who judges the world is also the safe place for the crushed.

"And those who know Your name will trust in You." To know God's name is to know who He is. The better we know Him, the more we trust Him. "For You have not forsaken those who seek You, LORD." That promise is still true. Hebrews 13:5 says the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us.

9:11-12 *Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells **in** Zion; declare His deeds among the peoples. For He who seeks blood has remembered them; He has not forgotten the cry of **the** humble.*

"Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion." Zion was first the fortress David captured, called the City of David (2 Samuel 5:7). Later the name came to include the temple hill and the whole city of Jerusalem, the place God chose to dwell among His people. "Declare His deeds among the peoples." Praise is not only for Israel's ears. The nations need to hear.

"For He who seeks blood has remembered them." God is pictured as the avenger of blood, the one who would track down a murderer in ancient Israel (Numbers 35:19). He keeps account of every innocent life taken. "He has not forgotten the cry of the humble."

9:13-14 *Be gracious to me, LORD; see my affliction from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death, so that I may recount all Your praises in the gates of the daughter of Zion; I will rejoice in Your salvation.*

"Be gracious to me, LORD; see my affliction from those who hate me." The praise turns to prayer. David still has enemies. God is the One "who lift me up from the gates of death." The gates of a city were where its business was done. David pictures death as a city with gates, and God pulls him back from the entrance.

"So that I may recount all Your praises in the gates of the daughter of Zion." Instead of the gates of death, David wants to stand in the gates of Jerusalem and praise God. "Daughter of Zion" is a tender name for the city and its people.

9:15-16 *Nations have sunk into the pit **that** they made; in the net which they hid their own foot has been caught. The LORD has made Himself known; He has executed judgment; in the work of his hands **He** is snaring **the** wicked. Higgaion. Selah.*

"Nations have sunk into the pit that they made; in the net which they hid their own foot has been caught." The same idea we saw in Psalm 7:15. "The LORD has made Himself known; He has executed judgment." When evil traps itself, God is showing who He is.

Then two words: "Higgaion. Selah." On Selah, see Psalm 3. Higgaion comes from the same root as the word for "meditates" in Psalm 1:2, a low murmur. The meaning here is uncertain. It may be a musical sign, perhaps a soft interlude, or a call to think deeply. Either way, we are being told to stop and ponder.

9:17-20 ***The** wicked will return to Sheol, all the nations forgetful of God. For the needy will not be forgotten forever; the hope of **the** afflicted **will not** perish forever. Arise, LORD; let not man prevail; let **the** nations be judged before Your face. Set terror for them, LORD; let **the** nations know **that** they **are** men. Selah.*

"The wicked will return to Sheol, all the nations forgetful of God." On Sheol, see Psalm 6. The nations here are described by one thing: they forget God. Leaving God out of life is not a small matter.

"For the needy will not be forgotten forever; the hope of the afflicted will not perish forever." The wicked forget God. God does not forget the needy. Their hope may seem buried for a long time, but it will not die.

"Arise, LORD; let not man prevail." The word "man" here stresses weak, mortal man. "Let the nations know that they are men." The proudest ruler is only a man who will die. David asks God to remind them. Selah. Stop and remember that you are only human too, and that the God who judges the nations is the same God who hears the humble.

Psalm 9 Summary

In Psalm 9 David gives thanks to the LORD with his whole heart and tells of His wonders. His enemies stumble before God, who sits on His throne and has judged in David's favor, rebuking nations and wiping out their memory. The LORD reigns forever and will judge the world in righteousness, and He is a high refuge for the oppressed who never forsakes those who seek Him. David calls for praise to the God who dwells in Zion, who remembers the blood of the innocent and the cry of the humble. He asks God to lift him from the gates of death so he can praise Him in the gates of Zion. The nations fall into their own pits, the wicked return to Sheol and the hope of the afflicted will not perish. David ends by asking God to rise and remind the nations that they are only men.

People and Places

- Muth-labben: a musical term that seems to mean death of the son; perhaps the name of a tune; its meaning is uncertain.
- Acrostic: a poem in which the lines or verses begin with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order.
- Zion: first the fortress David captured, called the City of David; later the temple hill and the whole city of Jerusalem.
- Daughter of Zion: a tender name for Jerusalem and its people.
- Higgaion: a term in 9:16, perhaps a musical sign or a call to meditate; its meaning is uncertain.

Psalm 9 Study Questions

1. How does David say he will give thanks? (9:1)

2. What has God done to the enemy nations? (9:5-6)

3. What does God do from His throne, according to verses 7-8, and how does Acts 17:31 build on it?

4. What is the LORD for the oppressed? (9:9)

5. What promise is given to those who seek the LORD? (9:10)

6. What is an acrostic, and how are Psalms 9 and 10 connected?

7. What does "Zion" mean, and why does David want to praise God in its gates? (9:11-14)

8. What happens to those who dig pits for others, and what does that show about God? (9:15-16)

9. Verse 18 says the hope of the afflicted will not perish forever. When has your hope felt buried? What helped?

10. What would it look like for you to "recount all Your wonders" to someone this week?

Psalm 10: Why Do You Stand at a Distance?

Scripture

10:1-11 Why, LORD, do You stand at a distance? ***Why*** do You hide ***Yourself*** in times of trouble? In the pride of ***the*** wicked he hotly pursues the afflicted; they are caught in the schemes which they have devised. For ***the*** wicked boasts of the desire of his soul, and ***the one*** greedy for gain blesses; he spurns the LORD. The wicked, according to the haughtiness of his nose, does not seek ***Him***; "There is no God" ***are*** all his schemes. His ways endure at all times; Your judgments ***are*** on high, away from before him; all his adversaries, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, "I will not be shaken; to generation and generation ***I am one*** who ***will*** not ***be*** in adversity." His mouth is full of cursing and deceits and oppression; under his tongue ***are*** mischief and iniquity. He sits in the ambush of ***the*** villages; in the hiding places he kills the innocent; his eyes lie hidden ***watching*** for the helpless. He lies in wait in the hiding place like a lion in its lair; he lies in wait to seize the afflicted; he seizes the afflicted when he draws ***him*** into his net. He is crushed, he bows down, and a host of disheartened ***ones*** falls by his mighty ones. He says in his heart, "God has forgotten; He has hidden His face; He will never see."

10:12-18 Arise, LORD! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble. Why has the wicked spurned God? He has said in his heart, "You will not seek ***it*** out." You have seen ***it***, for You, You look on mischief and vexation, to put ***it*** in Your hand; on You the helpless one leaves ***himself***; ***of the*** fatherless You, You have been the helper. Break the arm of the wicked; and the evil ***one***, You will seek out his wickedness, You will not find ***it***. The LORD ***is*** King forever and ever; nations have perished from His land. The desire of the humble You have heard, LORD; You will establish their heart; You will make Your ear pay attention, to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, ***so that*** man who ***is*** from the earth will no longer strike terror.

Psalm 10 Preview

Psalm 10 opens with a question many believers have asked: Why, LORD, are You so far away when I need You? The wicked are proud and greedy. They prey on the weak, and they say in their hearts that God will never see. The writer paints a long, honest picture of how such people think and act.

Then he calls on God to rise. God has seen everything. He is the helper of the fatherless and the King forever, and He hears the desire of the humble. Psalm 10 finishes the acrostic that began in Psalm 9 (see there), turning the praise of Psalm 9 into a cry for justice that has not come yet.

Psalm 10 Study

10:1-2 *Why, LORD, do You stand at a distance? **Why** do You hide **Yourself** in times of trouble? In the pride of **the** wicked he hotly pursues the afflicted; they are caught in the schemes which they have devised.*

Psalm 10 has no heading. Because it continues the acrostic of Psalm 9 and the Greek Old Testament joins the two, most read it as David's, like Psalm 9.

"Why, LORD, do You stand at a distance? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?" Scripture lets us ask God "why." The writer does not accuse God of being evil. He is confused that the good God he knows seems to be holding back. That confusion is part of faith, not the opposite of it.

"In the pride of the wicked he hotly pursues the afflicted." The wicked man hunts the weak. Then comes a prayer tucked into the line: "they are caught in the schemes which they have devised." Let the hunter fall into his own trap.

10:3-6 *For **the** wicked boasts of the desire of his soul, and **the one** greedy for gain blesses; he spurns the LORD. The wicked, according to the haughtiness of his nose, does not seek **Him**; "There is no God" **are** all his schemes. His ways endure at all times; Your judgments **are** on high, away from before him; all his adversaries, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, "I will not be shaken; to generation and generation **I am one** who **will** not **be** in adversity."*

Now we see inside the wicked man's mind. He "boasts of the desire of his soul." He is proud of what he wants. The greedy man "blesses," that is, he praises his own greed, and he "spurns the LORD."

"The wicked, according to the haughtiness of his nose, does not seek Him." In Hebrew the nose that is held high pictures pride. His whole way of thinking is "There is no God." He may not say it out loud, and he may even go to worship. But he lives as if God does not exist. That is the most common kind of unbelief.

"His ways endure at all times." For now, things go well for him. God's judgments seem "on high, away from before him," out of sight and out of mind. He "puffs at" his enemies. He says in his heart, "I will not be shaken." He thinks nothing will ever touch him.

10:7-11 *His mouth is full of cursing and deceits and oppression; under his tongue **are** mischief and iniquity. He sits in the ambush of **the** villages; in the hiding places he kills the innocent; his eyes lie hidden **watching** for the helpless. He lies in wait in the hiding place like a lion in its lair; he lies in wait to seize the afflicted; he seizes the afflicted when he draws **him** into his net. He is crushed, he bows down, and a host of disheartened **ones** falls by his mighty ones. He says in his heart, "God has forgotten; He has hidden His face; He will never see."*

"His mouth is full of cursing and deceits and oppression." His words are full of curses, lies and threats. Paul quotes this line in Romans 3:14, alongside Psalms 5, 14 and others, to show that every one of us is guilty before God apart from Christ. The wicked man of Psalm 10 is not a different species. He shows what any human heart can become without God.

"He sits in the ambush of the villages; in the hiding places he kills the innocent." He is pictured as a robber waiting by the road and then as a lion crouched in its den. "He seizes the afflicted when he draws him into his net." The weak are worn down and fall under his power.

Then the worst line: "God has forgotten; He has hidden His face; He will never see." The writer asked in verse 1 why God was hiding. The wicked man takes that same silence as proof that he can get away with anything. Same silence, two very different answers.

New Testament links: Romans 3:14 (quoted)

10:12-15 *Arise, LORD! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble. Why has the wicked spurned God? He has said in his heart, "You will not seek **it** out." You have seen **it**, for You, You look on mischief and vexation, to put **it** in Your hand; on You the helpless one leaves **himself**; **of the** fatherless You, You have been the helper. Break the arm of the wicked; and the evil **one**, You will seek out his wickedness, You will not find **it**.*

"Arise, LORD! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble." The wicked said God has forgotten. The writer asks God to show that He has not.

"You have seen it, for You, You look on mischief and vexation, to put it in Your hand." God has seen everything the wicked man thought no one saw. He takes it into His own hand to deal with. "On You the helpless one leaves himself." The weak, who have no one else, drop themselves into God's care. "Of the fatherless You, You have been the helper." Throughout Scripture God cares for orphans and widows (Deuteronomy 10:18; James 1:27).

"Break the arm of the wicked." The arm stands for strength. The writer asks God to break the power of the oppressor. Like the prayer in Psalm 5:10, it hands justice to God, and it is asked for the sake of the helpless (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). "You will seek out his wickedness, You will not find it." God will search until nothing of his evil is left.

10:16-18 *The LORD **is** King forever and ever; nations have perished from His land. The desire of the humble You have heard, LORD; You will establish their heart; You will make Your ear pay attention, to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, **so that** man who **is** from the earth will no longer strike terror.*

"The LORD is King forever and ever." The writer looks past the present trouble to the throne. "Nations have perished from His land." The God who drove out the nations from Canaan will not let wickedness keep His land forever.

"The desire of the humble You have heard, LORD; You will establish their heart." God steadies the hearts of His people even before He changes their circumstances. "You will make Your ear pay attention."

He does all this "to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is from the earth will no longer strike terror." Man from the earth is mortal and made of dust. He frightens people now, but his time is short. The psalm that began with "why?" ends with the King on His throne.

Psalm 10 Summary

Psalm 10 continues Psalm 9 and asks why the LORD stands far off in times of trouble. It describes the wicked man in detail: proud of his desires, greedy, spurning the LORD and living as if there is

no God. He thinks nothing will shake him. His mouth is full of cursing and lies, words Paul quotes in Romans 3:14, and he lies in wait like a lion to seize the helpless, telling himself that God has forgotten and will never see. The writer calls on God to rise and not forget the humble. God has seen it all and is the helper of the fatherless. The writer asks God to break the arm of the wicked, and he ends by declaring that the LORD is King forever, that He hears the desire of the humble and that He will judge for the fatherless and oppressed so that mortal man will terrify no more.

Psalm 10 Study Questions

1. What two questions does the writer ask God in verse 1?

2. What does the wicked man boast of and spurn? (10:3)

3. What is the wicked man's whole way of thinking, according to verse 4?

4. How does Paul use verse 7 in Romans 3:14?

5. What animal is the wicked man compared to, and what does he do? (10:9)

6. What does the wicked man tell himself about God in verse 11?

7. Whom does God help, according to verse 14?

8. How can a person believe in God and still live as if "There is no God"? Where might that show up in our own lives?

9. Have you ever felt that God was standing far away? What does this psalm teach you to do with that feeling?

10. Who are the "fatherless" and "oppressed" in your community, and how might God use you to help them? (10:18)

Psalm 11: When the Foundations Are Torn Down

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of David.

11:1-7 In the LORD I have taken refuge; how will you say to my soul, "Flee ***to*** your mountain ***as*** a bird, for look, the wicked bend a bow; they have prepared their arrow on the string, to shoot in darkness at the upright of heart. When the foundations are torn down, what has the righteous done?" The LORD ***is*** in the temple of His holiness; the LORD, in the heavens ***is*** His throne; His eyes see, His eyelids test the sons of man. The LORD tests the righteous, and the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Let Him rain snares on ***the*** wicked; fire and sulfur and a wind of scorching heat ***will be*** the portion of their cup. For the LORD ***is*** righteous; He loves righteous deeds; the upright will see His face.

Psalm 11 Preview

Friends are telling David to run. The wicked have their arrows on the string, the foundations of society are cracking, and what can one righteous man do? Fly away to the mountains like a bird, they say.

David will not run. He has already taken refuge in the LORD, and the LORD is still on His throne in heaven. He sees everything, tests everyone and will judge the wicked. Psalm 11 is a short, strong answer to fear: look up before you run.

Psalm 11 Study

11:1-3 *In the LORD I have taken refuge; how will you say to my soul, "Flee **to** your mountain **as** a bird, for look, the wicked bend a bow; they have prepared their arrow on the string, to shoot in darkness at the upright of heart. When the foundations are torn down, what has the righteous done?"*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of David." On the choirmaster, see Psalm 4. The heading gives no occasion. Many think of the years when Saul hunted David, or the start of Absalom's revolt, when advice to flee would make sense.

"In the LORD I have taken refuge." Then David repeats what others are telling him: "Flee to your mountain as a bird." The advice sounds wise. Birds escape danger by flying to the hills. But David has already found his refuge. Running to the mountains would mean trusting the mountains instead of God.

"For look, the wicked bend a bow." The danger is real. The wicked shoot "in darkness at the upright of heart," from hiding, where no one sees.

"When the foundations are torn down, what has the righteous done?" The foundations are the things a society rests on: justice, truth and law. When those crack, it can feel as if nothing a

righteous person does will matter. Many believers feel that way about their own times. David's answer is in the next verse.

11:4-5 *The LORD **is** in the temple of His holiness; the LORD, in the heavens **is** His throne; His eyes see, His eyelids test the sons of man. The LORD tests the righteous, and the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.*

"The LORD is in the temple of His holiness; the LORD, in the heavens is His throne." When the foundations on earth shake, the throne in heaven does not. On God's house and temple in David's day, see Psalm 5. David looks past the earthly tent to God's throne in heaven.

"His eyes see, His eyelids test the sons of man." The picture is of someone narrowing his eyes to look closely. God is not taken by surprise. He examines every person. "The LORD tests the righteous." The trouble David is in is a test, not a sign that God has lost control. "And the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates" (see Psalm 5:5).

11:6-7 *Let Him rain snares on **the** wicked; fire and sulfur and a wind of scorching heat **will be** the portion of their cup. For the LORD **is** righteous; He loves righteous deeds; the upright will see His face.*

"Let Him rain snares on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a wind of scorching heat will be the portion of their cup." The picture comes from the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, when the LORD rained fire and sulfur from heaven (Genesis 19:24). A cup was a person's share at a meal. The wicked will be served the judgment they chose. Revelation 14:10 uses the same picture of fire and sulfur and the cup of God's wrath for those who worship the beast. (See the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms.)

"For the LORD is righteous; He loves righteous deeds; the upright will see His face." The last line is the best of all. The wicked get the cup of judgment. The upright get to see God's face. To see His face means to be welcome in His presence, as a friend before a king. In the end, God's people will see Him face to face (1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:4). That is worth staying for when everything in us wants to run.

New Testament links: Revelation 14:10 (alluded to)

Psalm 11 Summary

In Psalm 11 David refuses the advice to flee to the mountains like a bird, though the wicked have their bows bent and the foundations seem to be crumbling. He has taken refuge in the LORD, who is in His holy temple with His throne in heaven. God's eyes examine all people. He tests the righteous and hates the wicked who love violence, and He will rain judgment on them like the fire and sulfur that fell on Sodom. The LORD is righteous and loves righteous deeds, and the upright will see His face.

Psalm 11 Study Questions

1. What advice did people give David, and what was his answer? (11:1)

2. How do the wicked attack the upright? (11:2)

3. What question do David's friends ask in verse 3?

4. Where is the LORD's throne, and what does He do from there? (11:4)

5. Whom does the LORD test, and whom does His soul hate? (11:5)

6. What Old Testament event stands behind verse 6, and how does Revelation 14:10 use the same picture?

7. What is promised to the upright in verse 7?

8. What "foundations" do you see being torn down today, and how does verse 4 help you face that?

9. When you are afraid, what are the "mountains" you are tempted to run to instead of God?

10. What does it mean to you that the upright will one day see God's face?

Psalm 12: Pure Words in a World of Lies

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on the Sheminith. A psalm of David.

12:1-8 Save, LORD, for the godly ***one*** has come to an end; for the faithful have vanished from the sons of man. They speak emptiness, each with his neighbor; ***with*** a lip of flatteries, with a heart and a heart they speak. May the LORD cut off all lips of flatteries, the tongue that speaks great things, who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; our lips ***are*** with us; who ***is*** lord over us?" "Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, now I will arise," says the LORD; "I will set in safety ***him who*** pants for it." The words of the LORD ***are*** pure words, silver refined in a furnace on the earth, purified sevenfold. You, LORD, will keep them; You will guard him from this generation forever. The wicked walk about on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of man.

Psalm 12 Preview

David looks around and it seems that the faithful have disappeared. People lie to their neighbors, flatter with their lips and boast that their tongues can get them anything they want. Words have become cheap and dangerous.

Into that noise God speaks. He promises to rise for the oppressed, and His words are not like man's words. They are pure, like silver refined seven times. Psalm 12 sets the lying tongue of man beside the true word of God and tells us which one to trust.

Psalm 12 Study

12:1-2 *Save, LORD, for the godly **one** has come to an end; for the faithful have vanished from the sons of man. They speak emptiness, each with his neighbor; **with** a lip of flatteries, with a heart and a heart they speak.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on the Sheminith. A psalm of David." On the choirmaster, see Psalm 4, and on Sheminith, see Psalm 6.

"Save, LORD, for the godly one has come to an end." David feels like the last faithful man standing. Elijah felt the same way (1 Kings 19:10), and God told him there were still seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal. When it feels as if we are alone, we usually are not.

"They speak emptiness, each with his neighbor." Their words have nothing true in them. They speak "with a lip of flatteries, with a heart and a heart." That is a Hebrew way of saying double-hearted. They say one thing and mean another.

12:3-4 *May the LORD cut off all lips of flatteries, the tongue that speaks great things, who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; our lips **are** with us; who **is** lord over us?"*

"May the LORD cut off all lips of flatteries, the tongue that speaks great things." David asks God to silence the flatterers and boasters. Then he lets us hear them: "With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are with us; who is lord over us?" They think their words are a weapon no one can stop and that they answer to no one. That last question is the root of the problem. The answer is that God is Lord over them.

James says the tongue is a small part of the body but can set a whole forest on fire (James 3:5-6). Words matter to God.

12:5-6 *"Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, now I will arise," says the LORD; "I will set in safety **him who** pants for it." The words of the LORD **are** pure words, silver refined in a furnace on the earth, purified sevenfold.*

"Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, now I will arise," says the LORD. Here God Himself speaks. He has heard the groaning of the weak, and He will act. "I will set in safety him who pants for it." Those who long for rescue will have it.

"The words of the LORD are pure words, silver refined in a furnace on the earth, purified sevenfold." Silver was heated in a clay furnace until the impurities rose and could be skimmed off. Seven times stands for complete. There is no flattery and no lie in God's words. Man's lips are double. God's word is pure. Proverbs 30:5 says every word of God is tested and proven true. That is why we can build our lives on Scripture.

12:7-8 *You, LORD, will keep them; You will guard him from this generation forever. The wicked walk about on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of man.*

"You, LORD, will keep them; You will guard him from this generation forever." God will keep His people, and His promise, safe from this lying generation.

"The wicked walk about on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of man." The psalm ends on a sober note. The wicked strut around freely when evil is praised. David does not pretend the problem is gone. But he has put God's pure word in the middle of the psalm, and that is where our trust belongs while the world around us still honors what is vile.

Psalm 12 Summary

In Psalm 12 David cries to the LORD because the godly seem to have vanished and everyone speaks lies and flattery with a double heart. He asks God to cut off the boasting tongues of those who say their lips are their own and no one is lord over them. The LORD answers that because of the groaning of the needy He will arise and set them in safety. His words are pure, like silver refined seven times. God will keep His people from this generation, even while the wicked walk about freely and vileness is honored among men.

Psalm 12 Study Questions

1. What does David say has happened to the godly and faithful? (12:1)

2. How do people speak to their neighbors, according to verse 2?

3. What do the boasters say about their tongues and lips? (12:4)

4. Why does the LORD say He will arise? (12:5)

5. What are God's words compared to in verse 6, and what does that picture mean?

6. How does the psalm end, and why do you think David ends it that way? (12:8)

7. Have you ever felt like the only faithful person around? How does Elijah's story help?

8. Where do you hear flattery or "double-hearted" speech today? Where are you tempted to use it?

9. How should the purity of God's words shape the way we read and trust the Bible?

10. What is one way you could use your words to build someone up this week instead of tearing them down?

Psalm 13: How Long, O LORD?

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

13:1-6 How long, LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long will I set counsels in my soul, ***with*** sorrow in my heart by day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Look; answer me, LORD my God; give light to my eyes, lest I sleep ***in*** death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," ***and*** my adversaries rejoice when I am shaken. And I, in Your steadfast love I have trusted; let my heart rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for He has dealt bountifully with me.

Psalm 13 Preview

Psalm 13 is one of the shortest laments in the Bible, and one of the most honest. Four times David asks, "How long?" He feels forgotten by God, his heart is heavy all day and his enemy is winning. He is afraid he will die.

Then, without any sign that his situation has changed, David turns to God's steadfast love. In six verses he moves from "Will You forget me forever?" to "I will sing to the LORD." The psalm shows the path of a lament (see the Overview): complaint, then request, then trust. It does not pretend the waiting is easy, and it does not leave us there.

Psalm 13 Study

13:1-2 *How long, LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long will I set counsels in my soul,* ***with*** *sorrow in my heart by day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David." On the choirmaster, see Psalm 4. We are not told when David wrote it. It fits many seasons of his life, and many seasons of ours.

"How long, LORD? Will You forget me forever?" David does not really believe God has forgotten him, or he would not be praying. But it feels that way. "How long will You hide Your face from me?" To have God's face shining on you meant His favor (Numbers 6:25). To have it hidden felt like being shut out.

"How long will I set counsels in my soul?" David keeps turning his problem over in his mind, making plans that go nowhere. "With sorrow in my heart by day." The sorrow does not lift. And outside, "my enemy" is "exalted over me."

Four times he asks, "How long?" God does not scold him for it. These words are in the Bible because God wants us to know we may bring Him our long waits.

13:3-4 *Look; answer me, LORD my God; give light to my eyes, lest I sleep **in** death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," **and** my adversaries rejoice when I am shaken.*

"Look; answer me, LORD my God." Now the complaint turns into a request. He still calls the LORD "my God." "Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep in death." Dim eyes in Scripture are a sign of weakness, sickness or despair. David asks God to put the light back in them, to give him life and strength again.

David does not want his enemy to say, "I have prevailed over him." He does not want his enemy to have the last word, and he does not want God's name dishonored by his fall.

If you are in a long, dark season, it is right to ask God for light. It is also right to ask people for help. Talk to a pastor or a trusted believer, see a doctor, and if you are in danger, get emergency help right away.

13:5-6 *And I, in Your steadfast love I have trusted; let my heart rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for He has dealt bountifully with me.*

"And I, in Your steadfast love I have trusted." The turn comes with the word "And I." Nothing outside has changed. What has changed is where David is looking. He looks at God's steadfast love, His hesed (see Psalm 5), and he chooses to trust it. Faith does not wait until the feelings are better. It holds on to who God is.

"Let my heart rejoice in Your salvation." David speaks of joy before the rescue arrives. "I will sing to the LORD, for He has dealt bountifully with me." He looks back on all God has done and knows God will be good again. The psalm that began with "Will You forget me?" ends with a song.

Psalm 13 Summary

In Psalm 13 David asks the LORD four times, "How long?" He feels forgotten and shut out from God's face, he struggles with sorrow in his heart all day and his enemy is exalted over him. He asks God to answer him and give light to his eyes so that he will not die and his enemy will not boast of victory. Then he turns to trust in God's steadfast love, rejoices in His salvation in advance and promises to sing to the LORD, who has dealt bountifully with him.

Psalm 13 Study Questions

1. How many times does David ask "How long?" and what does he ask each time? (13:1-2)

2. What does it mean for God to "hide" His face? (13:1)

3. What does David ask God to do in verse 3, and why?

4. What does David not want his enemy to say? (13:4)

5. In what has David trusted? (13:5)

6. What has God done for David, according to verse 6?

7. What changes between verses 4 and 5? What does not change?

8. Is it hard for you to ask God "How long?" Why or why not?

9. When you are waiting on God, what helps you remember His steadfast love?

10. Who do you know who is in a "how long" season right now, and how could you walk with them?

Psalm 14: There Is None Who Does Good

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of David.

14:1-7 A fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They have acted corruptly; they have done abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The LORD has looked down from ***the*** heavens on the sons of man to see whether there is ***anyone*** who acts prudently, who seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Do all who work iniquity not know, who eat up My people ***as*** they eat bread? They have not called on the LORD. There they have dreaded a dread, for God ***is*** with a righteous generation. You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, for the LORD ***is*** his refuge. Oh, that from Zion the salvation of Israel ***would come***! When the LORD turns back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

Psalm 14 Preview

Psalm 14 starts with the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God," and then widens the picture. The LORD looks down from heaven at the whole human race, searching for anyone who seeks Him, and finds that all have turned aside. Not one does good.

Paul quotes this psalm in Romans 3 to show that every person needs God's salvation. The psalm itself ends with that hope: a longing for salvation to come out of Zion. Psalm 53 is almost the same psalm, with a few changes, and it is studied later in this volume.

Psalm 14 Study

14:1-3 *A fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They have acted corruptly; they have done abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The LORD has looked down from* ***the*** *heavens on the sons of man to see whether there is* ***anyone*** *who acts prudently, who seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, there is not even one.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of David." On the choirmaster, see Psalm 4.

"A fool has said in his heart." What he says is short: "There is no God." In the Bible a fool is not someone with a low IQ. The Hebrew word, nabal, means someone who is morally and spiritually senseless, who shuts God out of his life. Abigail's foolish husband was named Nabal, and she said that "fool" was just what he was (1 Samuel 25:25). The fool says it "in his heart." He may never write a book against God. He simply lives as though God will never call him to account (see Psalm 10:4).

"They have acted corruptly; they have done abominable deeds." What a person believes about God shows up in how he lives. "There is none who does good."

"The LORD has looked down from the heavens on the sons of man." God looks over all humanity, like an inspector, "to see whether there is anyone who acts prudently, who seeks God." To act prudently is to live wisely, and true wisdom starts by seeking God.

"All have turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, there is not even one." The verdict is complete. The word "corrupt" pictures something that has spoiled. Something has gone wrong at the root of every human heart.

Paul quotes these lines in Romans 3:10-12, along with Psalms 5:9, 10:7 and others. He uses them to show that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin (Romans 3:9), that "all sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and that we are made right with God only as a gift, through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24). The bad news of Psalm 14 is what makes the good news so good.

New Testament links: Romans 3:10-12 (quoted)

14:4-6 *Do all who work iniquity not know, who eat up My people **as** they eat bread? They have not called on the LORD. There they have dreaded a dread, for God **is** with a righteous generation. You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, for the LORD **is** his refuge.*

"Do all who work iniquity not know, who eat up My people as they eat bread?" Now God speaks. The wicked devour God's people as easily as eating a meal, without a second thought. "They have not called on the LORD." Leaving God out is at the bottom of it all.

"There they have dreaded a dread, for God is with a righteous generation." Suddenly the bullies are afraid. They find out that God stands with the people they were eating up.

"You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, for the LORD is his refuge." The wicked laugh at the plans of the poor, who trust in God. But the poor man has the LORD as his refuge, and the joke is on the mockers.

14:7 *Oh, that from Zion the salvation of Israel **would come**! When the LORD turns back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.*

"Oh, that from Zion the salvation of Israel would come!" David longs for God to act from Zion (see Psalm 9), the place where He dwells among His people. "When the LORD turns back the captivity of His people." To turn back captivity means to restore, to bring back what was lost. Some think this line was added after the exile, but it can also be David's longing for God to set His oppressed people free.

Paul says the Deliverer will come from Zion and turn ungodliness away from Jacob, and that all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26). I believe God still has a future for the nation of Israel, and that this prayer will be answered in full when Christ returns and reigns. Then "let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad."

Psalm 14 Summary

Psalm 14 describes the fool who says in his heart that there is no God, and who acts corruptly as a result. The LORD looks down from heaven to see if anyone seeks Him, and finds that all have turned aside and become corrupt, not even one doing good. Paul quotes these verses in Romans 3:10-12 to show that all people are under sin and need the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus. The evildoers eat up God's people and do not call on the LORD, but they are seized with dread, because God is with the righteous and the LORD is the refuge of the afflicted. David ends by longing for the salvation of Israel to come from Zion, when the LORD will restore His people and Jacob will rejoice.

People and Places

- Fool: in the Psalms, a person who is morally and spiritually senseless and shuts God out of his life (Hebrew nabal).

Psalm 14 Study Questions

1. What does the fool say, and where does he say it? (14:1)

2. What is the LORD looking for when He looks down from heaven? (14:2)

3. What does He find? (14:3)

4. How does Paul use verses 1-3 in Romans 3:10-12?

5. What do the workers of iniquity do to God's people, and what have they not done? (14:4)

6. Why are the wicked suddenly afraid? (14:5)

7. What does David long for in verse 7, and how does Romans 11:26 speak of it?

8. What is the difference between saying "There is no God" with your mouth and saying it "in your heart"?

9. Why is it important to understand the bad news of verses 1-3 before we can understand the gospel?

10. Where are you tempted to live as though God will not hold you to account? What would change if you remembered He sees?

Psalm 17: The Shadow of Your Wings

Scripture

A prayer of David.

17:1-7 Hear righteousness, LORD; pay attention to my cry; give ear to my prayer, without lips of deceit. Let my judgment come forth from before You; let Your eyes see uprightness. You have tested my heart; You have visited ***me by*** night; You have refined me, You will not find ***anything***; I have resolved ***that*** my mouth will not transgress. As for the deeds of man, by the word of Your lips I, I have guarded ***myself from*** the paths of ***the*** violent. My steps have held fast in Your tracks; my footsteps have not been shaken. I, I have called on You, for You will answer me, O God; incline Your ear to me; hear my word. Make Your steadfast loves wonderful, O Savior of those who take refuge from those who rise up ***against them***, by Your right hand.

17:8-15 Keep me like the pupil of the daughter of ***the*** eye; hide me in the shadow of Your wings, from before ***the*** wicked who have assailed me, my enemies ***who*** surround me for ***my*** life. Their fat they have closed up; ***with*** their mouth they have spoken with pride. Our steps, now they have surrounded us; their eyes they set to bend ***us*** down to the earth. His likeness ***is*** like a lion ***that*** longs to tear, and like a young lion sitting in hiding places. Arise, LORD; confront his face; make him bow down; deliver my soul from the wicked, Your sword, from men, Your hand, LORD, from men of ***the*** world, whose portion ***is*** in life, and ***whose*** belly You fill ***with*** Your treasured ***things***; they are satisfied ***with*** sons, and they leave their abundance to their infants. I, in righteousness I will see Your face; I will be satisfied, when ***I*** awake, ***with*** Your form.

Psalm 17 Preview

Psalm 17 is a prayer for protection from men who are closing in like a lion. David asks God to hear his case, and he can say honestly that God has tested his heart and found him faithful in this matter. He asks God to keep him like the pupil of His eye and hide him in the shadow of His wings.

The psalm ends by setting two kinds of people side by side. The men of this world have their reward now, in full bellies and big families. David wants something better: to see God's face and be satisfied when he wakes.

Psalm 17 Study

17:1-2 *Hear righteousness, LORD; pay attention to my cry; give ear to my prayer, without lips of deceit. Let my judgment come forth from before You; let Your eyes see uprightness.*

The heading reads, "A prayer of David." Only a few psalms are called prayers in their headings (17, 86, 90, 102 and 142). We are not told the occasion, though the hunted feeling of the psalm fits the years when Saul chased David.

"Hear righteousness, LORD." David asks God to listen to a just cause. "Give ear to my prayer, without lips of deceit." He is not putting on a show. "Let my judgment come forth from before You." He wants the verdict to come from God, not from his enemies.

17:3-5 *You have tested my heart; You have visited **me by** night; You have refined me, You will not find **anything**; I have resolved **that** my mouth will not transgress. As for the deeds of man, by the word of Your lips I, I have guarded **myself from** the paths of **the** violent. My steps have held fast in Your tracks; my footsteps have not been shaken.*

"You have tested my heart; You have visited me by night." God has come by night, when a man is alone with his thoughts, and examined him. "You have refined me, You will not find anything." As in Psalm 7, David is not claiming to be sinless. He is saying the charges against him are false and his heart toward God is sincere.

"I have resolved that my mouth will not transgress." He has made up his mind to guard his tongue. "By the word of Your lips I, I have guarded myself from the paths of the violent." God's word kept him off the wrong roads (compare Psalm 119:9-11). "My steps have held fast in Your tracks." He has walked where God walks.

17:6-7 *I, I have called on You, for You will answer me, O God; incline Your ear to me; hear my word. Make Your steadfast loves wonderful, O Savior of those who take refuge from those who rise up **against them**, by Your right hand.*

"I, I have called on You, for You will answer me, O God." David prays because he expects an answer. "Incline Your ear to me." He asks God to lean down and listen, the way we lean toward someone who speaks softly.

"Make Your steadfast loves wonderful." The plural means every act of God's hesed (see Psalm 5). David asks God to show it in a way that will make people marvel. God is the "Savior of those who take refuge" in Him, and He saves "by Your right hand." The right hand was the hand of strength.

17:8-9 *Keep me like the pupil of the daughter of **the** eye; hide me in the shadow of Your wings, from before **the** wicked who have assailed me, my enemies **who** surround me for **my** life.*

"Keep me like the pupil of the daughter of the eye." The pupil is the most protected part of the body. We blink and flinch without thinking to guard it. Moses used the same picture for how God kept Israel in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 32:10). David asks God to guard him that closely.

"Hide me in the shadow of Your wings." A mother bird spreads her wings over her chicks when danger comes. Ruth came to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel (Ruth 2:12), and Jesus said He longed to gather Jerusalem's children as a hen gathers her chicks (Matthew 23:37). The enemies "surround me for my life," but the wings are closer than the enemies.

17:10-12 *Their fat they have closed up; **with** their mouth they have spoken with pride. Our steps, now they have surrounded us; their eyes they set to bend **us** down to the earth. His likeness **is** like a lion **that** longs to tear, and like a young lion sitting in hiding places.*

"Their fat they have closed up." Their hearts are hard and dull, wrapped in fat, unable to feel. "With their mouth they have spoken with pride." Then David describes their hunt: "Our steps, now they have surrounded us." They watch for a chance to throw him to the ground. Their leader is "like a lion that longs to tear," crouching in hiding. Peter uses the same kind of picture for the devil, who prowls like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8).

17:13-14 *Arise, LORD; confront his face; make him bow down; deliver my soul from the wicked, Your sword, from men, Your hand, LORD, from men of **the** world, whose portion **is** in life, and **whose** belly You fill **with** Your treasured **things**; they are satisfied **with** sons, and they leave their abundance to their infants.*

"Arise, LORD; confront his face; make him bow down." David asks God to step into the lion's path. He calls the wicked "Your sword" and the hand of God: God can even use the wicked to carry out His purposes, as He did with Assyria (Isaiah 10:5). David asks to be delivered from them.

They are "men of the world, whose portion is in life." Everything they want is here and now. God fills their bellies, they have many children and they leave plenty to their little ones. God is kind even to those who ignore Him (Matthew 5:45). But that is all they have. (See the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms.)

17:15 *I, in righteousness I will see Your face; I will be satisfied, when **I** awake, **with** Your form.*

"I, in righteousness I will see Your face." The contrast could not be sharper. The worldly man's portion is in this life. David's portion is God Himself. "I will be satisfied, when I awake, with Your form." He may mean waking from a night of danger to find God still with him. Many also see a hope that reaches past death: to wake on the other side and see God. Daniel 12:2 speaks of those who sleep in the dust and awake. John says that when Christ appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). The full answer to this prayer is face to face.

Psalm 17 Summary

In Psalm 17 David asks the LORD to hear his just cause and let his verdict come from God. God has tested his heart by night and found no falsehood in him, and God's word has kept him from the paths of the violent. David calls on God to show His steadfast love and save him with His right hand. He asks to be kept like the pupil of God's eye and hidden in the shadow of His wings, because proud enemies surround him like a lion ready to tear. He asks God to rise and deliver him from men of the world, whose portion is in this life only. David's own portion is far better: he will see God's face in righteousness and be satisfied when he awakes with God's likeness.

People and Places

- Pupil of the eye: the most carefully protected part of the body, used as a picture of how closely God guards His people.

Psalm 17 Study Questions

1. What does David ask God to hear and to let come forth from Him? (17:1-2)

2. When did God test David's heart, and what did He find? (17:3)

3. What kept David from the paths of the violent? (17:4)

4. What two pictures does David use in verse 8 for God's protection?

5. What animal does David compare his enemy to? (17:12)

6. How does David describe the "men of the world"? (17:14)

7. What does David look forward to in verse 15?

8. Who has acted as a shadow of God's wings for you in a hard time? How did that show you God's care?

9. What is the difference between having your "portion in life" and having God as your portion?

10. How does the hope of seeing God's face change the way you handle what you do not have now?

Psalm 18: The LORD Is My Rock

Scripture

*To the choirmaster. Of the servant of the LORD, of David, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day **when** the LORD rescued him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.*

18:1-19 And he said, "I love You, LORD, my strength. The LORD ***is*** my crag and my stronghold and my deliverer; my God ***is*** my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high refuge. I call on the LORD, ***who is*** to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. The cords of death encompassed me, and the torrents of worthlessness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called on the LORD, and to my God I cried for help; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears. And the earth shook and quaked, and the foundations of ***the*** mountains trembled, and they shook back and forth, for it burned ***with anger*** in Him. Smoke went up in His nose, and fire from His mouth consumed; coals burned from Him. And He bent ***the*** heavens and came down, and thick darkness ***was*** under His feet. And He rode on a cherub and flew, and He soared on the wings of ***the*** wind. He made darkness His covering, His canopy around Him, darkness of waters, dark clouds of ***the*** skies. From the brightness before Him His dark clouds passed on, hail and coals of fire. And the LORD thundered in the heavens, and the Most High gave forth His voice, hail and coals of fire. And He sent out His arrows and scattered them, and He shot lightnings and routed them. And the channels of water appeared, and the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, LORD, at the blast of the wind of Your nose. He sent from on high; He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hate me, for they were stronger than I. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, and the LORD became a support to me. And He brought me out into a broad place; He set me free, for He delighted in me.

18:20-30 The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has repaid me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and I have not acted wickedly ***away*** from my God. For all His judgments ***were*** before me, and His statutes I did not remove from me. And I was blameless with Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. And the LORD has repaid me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands before His eyes. With the godly ***one*** You show Yourself loyal; with the blameless man You show Yourself blameless; with the pure You show Yourself pure, and with the crooked You show Yourself shrewd. For You, You save an afflicted people, and eyes ***that are*** lifted up You bring low. For You, You light my lamp; the LORD my God illumines my darkness. For by You I run ***against*** a raiding band, and by my God I leap over a wall. ***As for*** God, His way ***is*** blameless; the word of the LORD ***is*** refined; He ***is*** a shield to all who take refuge in Him.

18:31-50 For who ***is*** God except the LORD? And who ***is*** a rock besides our God? The God who girds me ***with*** strength, and He has made my way blameless; ***He*** makes my feet like the does, and on my high places He makes me stand; ***He*** trains my hands for the battle, and my arms bend a bow of bronze. And You have given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your right hand has supported

me, and Your humility has made me great. You have enlarged my steps under me, and my ankles have not slipped. I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and I did not turn back until they were destroyed. I shattered them, and they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet. And You girded me ***with*** strength for the battle; You made those who rose against me bow down under me. And my enemies, You have given me ***their*** neck, and those who hate me, I destroyed them. They cried for help, and there was no one to save; to the LORD, and He did not answer them. And I crushed them like dust on the face of ***the*** wind; like the mud of the streets I emptied them out. You delivered me from the strivings of the people; You made me the head of nations; a people ***whom*** I have not known serve me. At the hearing of the ear they obey me; sons of a foreign ***land*** cringe before me. Sons of a foreign ***land*** wither, and they come trembling out of their strongholds. The LORD lives, and blessed ***be*** my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted, the God who gives vengeance to me, and has subdued peoples under me, who delivers me from my enemies; yes, above those who rise against me You exalt me; from a man of violence You rescue me. Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, LORD, and I will sing praises to Your name. ***He*** makes great the salvations of His king, and shows steadfast love to His anointed, to David and to his offspring forever."

Psalm 18 Preview

Psalm 18 is David's great song of thanks near the end of his life, looking back on all the times God rescued him from his enemies, Saul above all. It is one of the longest psalms in Book One, and it appears a second time in the Bible, almost word for word, in 2 Samuel 22.

David begins by piling up names for God: rock, fortress, deliverer, shield, horn of salvation. Then he tells how he cried out from the edge of death, and how God came down from heaven in storm and fire to pull him out of deep waters. He thanks God for keeping him faithful, for training him for battle and for making him king over nations. The psalm ends with a promise that reaches all the way to Jesus: God shows steadfast love to His anointed king, to David and his offspring forever.

Psalm 18 Study

18:1-3 *And he said, "I love You, LORD, my strength. The LORD **is** my crag and my stronghold and my deliverer; my God **is** my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high refuge. I call on the LORD, **who is** to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of the servant of the LORD, of David, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day when the LORD rescued him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul." On the choirmaster, see Psalm 4. "The servant of the LORD" was an honored title. Moses was called the servant of the LORD (Joshua 1:1), and so was Joshua (Joshua 24:29). David did not call himself king here. He called himself God's servant. The heading of Psalm 36 uses the same title.

The same song is recorded in 2 Samuel 22, near the end of David's story, with only small differences. David probably wrote it after God had given him rest from his enemies (2 Samuel 7:1) and later shaped it for use in worship.

"I love You, LORD, my strength." The word for love here is tender, the kind of deep, warm love a mother has for her child. David does not begin with doctrine. He begins with love.

"The LORD is my crag and my stronghold and my deliverer." David had hidden among the crags and strongholds of the wilderness of Judah while Saul hunted him (1 Samuel 23:14, 25). He learned there that the real safety was not the rock. It was God. "My God is my rock in whom I take refuge." A rock in the Bible pictures strength that does not move and a shelter that does not fail. Moses called God "the Rock" in his song (Deuteronomy 32:4).

"My shield and the horn of my salvation, my high refuge." The horn was the weapon of a strong animal like a wild ox, and it became a picture of power and victory. God is the strength that saves David. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, praised God for raising up "a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant" (Luke 1:69). That horn is Jesus, the Son of David.

"I call on the LORD, who is to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies." The whole psalm is in that one line: David called, and God saved.

New Testament links: Luke 1:69 (alluded to)

18:4-6 *The cords of death encompassed me, and the torrents of worthlessness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called on the LORD, and to my God I cried for help; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears.*

"The cords of death encompassed me, and the torrents of worthlessness terrified me." Death is pictured as a hunter with ropes and as a flood. "The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me." On Sheol, see Psalm 6. David was more than once a step away from death (1 Samuel 20:3).

"In my distress I called on the LORD." Look at what he did with the danger. He prayed. "He heard my voice from His temple." God's temple here is His dwelling in heaven, and from there "my cry for help before Him came into His ears." One man's cry reached the throne of the universe.

18:7-15 *And the earth shook and quaked, and the foundations of **the** mountains trembled, and they shook back and forth, for it burned **with anger** in Him. Smoke went up in His nose, and fire from His mouth consumed; coals burned from Him. And He bent **the** heavens and came down, and thick darkness **was** under His feet. And He rode on a cherub and flew, and He soared on the wings of **the** wind. He made darkness His covering, His canopy around Him, darkness of waters, dark clouds of **the** skies. From the brightness before Him His dark clouds passed on, hail and coals of fire. And the LORD thundered in the heavens, and the Most High gave forth His voice, hail and coals of fire. And He sent out His arrows and scattered them, and He shot lightnings and routed them. And the channels of water appeared, and the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, LORD, at the blast of the wind of Your nose.*

Now David describes God coming to save him, and he uses the biggest pictures he knows. "The earth shook and quaked." The mountains tremble because God is angry at what has been done to His servant. "Smoke went up in His nose, and fire from His mouth consumed." The language is

poetry, and David does not mean that God has a physical nose. He means God's anger is real and burning.

"He bent the heavens and came down." The sky itself bends as God steps down. "He rode on a cherub and flew." Cherubim (the plural of cherub) are mighty heavenly beings who guard God's holiness and surround His throne. Cherubim guarded the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24), and two gold cherubim spread their wings over the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:18-22). God is pictured riding on a cherub like a king in his chariot, flying "on the wings of the wind."

Darkness, clouds, hail, coals of fire, thunder and lightning follow. Much of this recalls Mount Sinai, when the mountain smoked and quaked and there was thunder, lightning and a thick cloud as God came down (Exodus 19:16-18). "And the channels of water appeared, and the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, LORD." That recalls the Red Sea, when God parted the waters with the blast of His nostrils (Exodus 15:8). David is saying that the same God who came down at the Red Sea and at Sinai came down for him.

We are not told of a literal storm in the account of David's rescues. David is using the language of God's great acts in Israel's history to say how great his own rescue was. When God saved him, it was as if heaven itself came down.

18:16-19 *He sent from on high; He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hate me, for they were stronger than I. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, and the LORD became a support to me. And He brought me out into a broad place; He set me free, for He delighted in me.*

"He sent from on high; He took me; He drew me out of many waters." The great God of the storm reaches down one hand for one man. The word for "drew out" is the same word used when Moses was drawn out of the water (Exodus 2:10). Many waters stand for overwhelming danger.

"He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hate me, for they were stronger than I." David admits he could not save himself. "They confronted me in the day of my calamity, and the LORD became a support to me."

"And He brought me out into a broad place." After the narrow places of danger, God gave him room to breathe (see Psalm 4:1). Then the reason: "He set me free, for He delighted in me." God did not rescue David because He had to. He rescued him because He loved him. Every believer can say the same about the salvation God gives in Christ.

18:20-24 *The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has repaid me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and I have not acted wickedly* ***away*** *from my God. For all His judgments* ***were*** *before me, and His statutes I did not remove from me. And I was blameless with Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. And the LORD has repaid me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands before His eyes.*

"The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has repaid me." This can sound proud, especially from the man who later sinned with Bathsheba. But in the context of the heading, David is talking about his conduct toward Saul and

his enemies. He had not lifted his hand against the LORD's anointed (1 Samuel 24:10). In that long trial he had walked straight.

"For all His judgments were before me." David kept God's word in front of him. "And I was blameless with Him." To be blameless means to be whole and sincere, a man of integrity who does not have a hidden life. It does not mean sinless. Noah and Job were called blameless (Genesis 6:9; Job 1:1), and both had faults. David's heart was turned toward God, and when he sinned, he came back in repentance (Psalm 51).

18:25-27 *With the godly **one** You show Yourself loyal; with the blameless man You show Yourself blameless; with the pure You show Yourself pure, and with the crooked You show Yourself shrewd. For You, You save an afflicted people, and eyes **that are** lifted up You bring low.*

"With the godly one You show Yourself loyal; with the blameless man You show Yourself blameless; with the pure You show Yourself pure, and with the crooked You show Yourself shrewd." God meets people the way they come to Him. To the faithful, He is faithful. To the twisted, He is not fooled. He outwits them and turns their plans back on them.

"For You, You save an afflicted people, and eyes that are lifted up You bring low." Proud eyes are lifted up in arrogance. God brings them down, and He lifts up the humble. Mary sang the same truth: God has brought down rulers and lifted up the humble (Luke 1:52).

18:28-30 *For You, You light my lamp; the LORD my God illumines my darkness. For by You I run **against** a raiding band, and by my God I leap over a wall. **As for** God, His way **is** blameless; the word of the LORD **is** refined; He **is** a shield to all who take refuge in Him.*

"For You, You light my lamp; the LORD my God illumines my darkness." A lamp that went out in a house was a sign of death or ruin. God keeps David's light burning. When everything else is dark, God is light.

"For by You I run against a raiding band, and by my God I leap over a wall." With God, what looked impossible becomes possible. David is not boasting in his own strength. He says "by You" and "by my God."

"As for God, His way is blameless; the word of the LORD is refined." God's word is like refined metal, with nothing false in it (see Psalm 12:6). "He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him." Not only to kings. To all.

18:31-36 *For who **is** God except the LORD? And who **is** a rock besides our God? The God who girds me **with** strength, and He has made my way blameless; **He** makes my feet like the does, and on my high places He makes me stand; **He** trains my hands for the battle, and my arms bend a bow of bronze. And You have given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your right hand has supported me, and Your humility has made me great. You have enlarged my steps under me, and my ankles have not slipped.*

"For who is God except the LORD? And who is a rock besides our God?" There is no other. Every other god is empty.

"The God who girds me with strength." To gird was to tie up one's long robe with a belt so a man could run or fight. God dresses David for the work ahead. "He makes my feet like the does," like female deer that can leap across rocky mountainsides without slipping, "and on my high places He makes me stand." Habakkuk 3:19 uses the same picture.

"He trains my hands for the battle, and my arms bend a bow of bronze." God gave David skill as well as courage. A bow of bronze was too stiff for most men to draw.

"And You have given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your right hand has supported me, and Your humility has made me great." The last phrase is a surprise. God's humility, His willingness to bend down to care for a shepherd boy, is what made David great. We see that humility in full in Jesus, who humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). "You have enlarged my steps under me, and my ankles have not slipped." God made room for him to walk.

18:37-42 *I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and I did not turn back until they were destroyed. I shattered them, and they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet. And You girded me **with** strength for the battle; You made those who rose against me bow down under me. And my enemies, You have given me **their** neck, and those who hate me, I destroyed them. They cried for help, and there was no one to save; to the LORD, and He did not answer them. And I crushed them like dust on the face of **the** wind; like the mud of the streets I emptied them out.*

"I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and I did not turn back until they were destroyed." These verses describe David's wars. They are hard to read, and they come from a soldier king who fought Israel's enemies at God's command. God gave him victory, and those who fought against God's king fell.

"They cried for help, and there was no one to save; to the LORD, and He did not answer them." His enemies prayed too late, and they prayed only for rescue, not in repentance. Proverbs 1:28 warns that those who refuse God's call will one day call and He will not answer.

These verses are not a pattern for believers today to take up arms against those who oppose them. Our battle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12), and Jesus told us to love our enemies (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). They tell of the real wars God gave His king to fight in His time and place, and they look ahead to the day when Christ returns and puts down all rebellion (Revelation 19:11-16).

18:43-45 *You delivered me from the strivings of the people; You made me the head of nations; a people **whom** I have not known serve me. At the hearing of the ear they obey me; sons of a foreign **land** cringe before me. Sons of a foreign **land** wither, and they come trembling out of their strongholds.*

"You delivered me from the strivings of the people; You made me the head of nations." David was saved from civil war at home, the fighting with Saul's house and later Absalom, and God gave him rule over neighboring nations, such as the Philistines, Moab, Edom and Ammon (2 Samuel 8). "A people whom I have not known serve me." Foreigners "cringe" and come "trembling out of their strongholds." David's kingdom reached farther than any Israelite king before him. These lines

also look ahead to the greater Son of David, whose kingdom will one day reach the ends of the earth (Psalm 2:8).

18:46-48 *The LORD lives, and blessed **be** my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted, the God who gives vengeance to me, and has subdued peoples under me, who delivers me from my enemies; yes, above those who rise against me You exalt me; from a man of violence You rescue me.*

"The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock." The idols of the nations were dead. David's God is alive. "Let the God of my salvation be exalted."

"The God who gives vengeance to me." David did not take vengeance into his own hands. With Saul, he refused to. He left it to God, and God gave it to him in His own time (1 Samuel 24:12; Romans 12:19). "From a man of violence You rescue me." Many think David means Saul.

18:49-50 *Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, LORD, and I will sing praises to Your name. **He** makes great the salvations of His king, and shows steadfast love to His anointed, to David and to his offspring forever."*

"Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, LORD, and I will sing praises to Your name." David's praise will not stay inside Israel. He will praise God where the nations can hear.

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:9. He says Christ became a servant to the Jews to confirm God's promises to the fathers, and so that the Gentiles, the nations who are not Jewish, would glorify God for His mercy. Then he quotes this verse, and Paul seems to hear it in the voice of Christ, the Son of David, praising God among the Gentiles who have come to Him. God always meant for the nations to praise Him through David's greater Son.

"He makes great the salvations of His king, and shows steadfast love to His anointed, to David and to his offspring forever." "Anointed" means someone who had oil poured on his head to set him apart for a task from God. Samuel anointed David while he was still a young shepherd (1 Samuel 16:13). The Hebrew word is mashiach, which gives us the word "Messiah." The Greek word that translates it is christos, which gives us "Christ."

God promised David through Nathan that his house, his kingdom and his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). That is the covenant God made with David. It is the steadfast love, the hesed (see Psalm 5), that David sings about here. The promise was not kept by a long line of kings. The kings of Judah failed, and the throne was empty after 586 B.C. It is kept in Jesus. The angel told Mary that God would give her Son the throne of His father David, and that He would reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:32-33). I believe Jesus will return to the earth and sit on that throne. The song David sang at the end of his life ends with the name of the King who never ends.

New Testament links: Romans 15:9 (quoted)

Psalm 18 Summary

Psalm 18, also found in 2 Samuel 22, is David's song of thanks for God's rescue from all his enemies and from Saul. He declares his love for the LORD and calls Him his rock, fortress, deliverer, shield, horn of salvation and high refuge. When the cords of death and Sheol surrounded him, he cried out, and God heard from His temple and came down in earthquake, fire, storm and thunder, riding on a cherub, to draw him out of many waters, because He delighted in him. David says God rewarded his integrity in his dealings with his enemies, that God is faithful to the faithful and shrewd with the crooked, and that God lights his lamp and makes his way blameless. God gave him strength, sure feet and skill for battle, and through God's humility made him great. God gave him victory over his enemies and made him head of nations. David blesses the living God, his rock, and promises to praise Him among the nations, words Paul applies to Christ in Romans 15:9. The psalm ends with God's steadfast love to His anointed king, to David and his offspring forever, a promise fulfilled in Jesus.

People and Places

- Servant of the LORD: an honored title for those God used in a special way, such as Moses, Joshua and David.
- Rock: a name for God, picturing strength that does not move and a sure place of refuge.
- Horn: a picture of strength and victory, from the horns of a strong animal.
- Cherub, cherubim: mighty heavenly beings who guard God's holiness and surround His throne; gold cherubim stood over the ark.
- Blameless: whole-hearted and sincere, a person of integrity; not the same as sinless.
- Gentiles: the nations or peoples who are not Jewish.
- Anointed: one set apart by God with oil for a task, especially the king; the Hebrew is mashiach (Messiah), and the Greek is christos (Christ).

Psalm 18 Study Questions

1. Where else in the Bible is this song found, and what does the heading say about when David sang it?

2. What names does David give the LORD in verse 2?

3. What did David do when the cords of death surrounded him, and what did God do? (18:4-6)

4. What earlier events in Israel's history do the pictures of verses 7-15 call to mind?

5. Why did God rescue David, according to verse 19?

6. What does "blameless" mean in verse 23, and how is it different from being sinless?

7. How does Paul use verse 49 in Romans 15:9, and what does it show about God's plan for the nations?

8. How is the promise of verse 50 fulfilled in Jesus? (2 Samuel 7:16; Luke 1:32-33)

9. Which name for God in verse 2 means the most to you right now, and why?

10. David says God's humility made him great (18:35). Where have you seen God stoop down to help you?

Psalm 20: Some Trust in Chariots

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

20:1-5 May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob set you on high. May He send your help from the holy place, and from Zion may He support you. May He remember all your grain offerings, and may He regard your burnt offering as fat. Selah. May He give to you according to your heart, and may He fulfill all your counsel. Let us shout for joy at your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up a banner. May the LORD fulfill all your requests.

20:6-9 Now I know that the LORD has saved His anointed; He will answer him from the heavens of His holiness with the mighty deeds of the salvation of His right hand. These ***trust*** in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God. They, they have bowed down and fallen, and we, we have risen and stood upright. LORD, save the king! May He answer us in the day we call.

Psalm 20 Preview

Psalm 20 is a prayer for the king before a battle. The people gather at the sanctuary, the king offers sacrifices, and the congregation prays that God will answer him, send help from Zion and give him victory. Then a single voice rises with confidence: now I know that the LORD has saved His anointed.

The heart of the psalm is verse 7. Other nations trust in chariots and horses. God's people trust in the name of the LORD their God. Psalm 21 is its partner, the thanksgiving after the battle is won.

Psalm 20 Study

20:1-3 *May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob set you on high. May He send your help from the holy place, and from Zion may He support you. May He remember all your grain offerings, and may He regard your burnt offering as fat. Selah.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David." On the choirmaster, see Psalm 4. David wrote it, and Israel would have prayed it for him and for the kings after him whenever they went out to war.

"May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble." The people pray for their king. "May the name of the God of Jacob set you on high." God's name stands for God Himself, all that He is and has revealed. To be set on high is to be lifted out of reach of danger. "The God of Jacob" reminds them of the God who protected Jacob when he was a lonely, frightened man (Genesis 35:3).

"May He send your help from the holy place, and from Zion may He support you." On Zion, see Psalm 9. Help comes from where God dwells among His people.

"May He remember all your grain offerings, and may He regard your burnt offering as fat." Before battle a king offered sacrifices (1 Samuel 13:9-12). The people pray that God will accept them. Selah (see Psalm 3).

20:4-5 *May He give to you according to your heart, and may He fulfill all your counsel. Let us shout for joy at your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up a banner. May the LORD fulfill all your requests.*

"May He give to you according to your heart, and may He fulfill all your counsel." They pray that the king's plans will succeed. That is a good prayer for those who lead us (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

"Let us shout for joy at your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up a banner." A banner was a flag carried in battle. Israel's banner was not their own strength but God's name. Moses built an altar after the victory over Amalek and called it "The LORD Is My Banner" (Exodus 17:15). "May the LORD fulfill all your requests."

20:6 *Now I know that the LORD has saved His anointed; He will answer him from the heavens of His holiness with the mighty deeds of the salvation of His right hand.*

"Now I know that the LORD has saved His anointed." On "anointed," see Psalm 18:50. Here it means the king. A single voice speaks, perhaps the king or a priest or prophet, and the prayer turns to confidence. The battle has not yet started, but he is sure of the outcome. God "will answer him from the heavens of His holiness with the mighty deeds of the salvation of His right hand."

20:7-9 *These **trust** in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God. They, they have bowed down and fallen, and we, we have risen and stood upright. LORD, save the king! May He answer us in the day we call.*

"These trust in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God." Chariots and horses were the strongest weapons of the ancient world. Egypt had them, and the Canaanite cities had them. Israel often did not. God even told Israel's kings not to multiply horses (Deuteronomy 17:16), so they would not trust in them. When we face trouble, we too are tempted to trust in what we can count: money, skill, connections, numbers. None of those things is wrong in itself. But our trust belongs to God.

"They, they have bowed down and fallen, and we, we have risen and stood upright." The proud who trusted in their weapons fall. Those who trusted God stand.

"LORD, save the king! May He answer us in the day we call." The psalm ends where it began, with a prayer for answers in the day of trouble. The people know their king needs saving too. Every earthly king does. Only one King never needed rescue, and He came to save His people.

Psalm 20 Summary

In Psalm 20 the people pray for their king before battle, asking the LORD to answer him in the day of trouble, to protect him by the name of the God of Jacob, to send help from Zion, to accept his offerings and to fulfill his plans. They promise to shout for joy at his victory and to raise their

banner in God's name. A voice declares that the LORD has saved His anointed and will answer him from heaven with the strength of His right hand. Others trust in chariots and horses, but God's people trust in the name of the LORD. The proud fall, the faithful stand, and the people end by praying, "LORD, save the king!"

Psalm 20 Study Questions

1. For whom are the people praying, and when? (20:1)

2. From where do they ask God to send help? (20:2)

3. What do they ask God to remember? (20:3)

4. In whose name will they set up a banner? (20:5)

5. What does the single voice now know in verse 6?

6. What do others trust in, and what does God's people trust in? (20:7)

7. How does the psalm end? (20:9)

8. What are the chariots and horses you are tempted to trust in?

9. How could this psalm shape the way you pray for leaders in your church, your work or your country?

10. Is there a "day of trouble" you are facing now? What would it mean to trust in the name of the LORD there?

Psalm 21: The King Rejoices in Your Strength

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

21:1-7 LORD, in Your strength the king rejoices, and in Your salvation how greatly he exults! The desire of his heart You have given to him, and the request of his lips You have not withheld. Selah. For You meet him ***with*** blessings of good; You set on his head a crown of pure gold. Life he asked from You; You gave ***it*** to him, length of days forever and ever. Great ***is*** his glory in Your salvation; splendor and majesty You place on him. For You set him ***as*** blessings forever; You make him glad with joy in Your presence. For the king ***is*** trusting in the LORD, and in the steadfast love of the Most High he will not be shaken.

21:8-13 Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate You. You will make them like a furnace of fire at the time of Your presence. The LORD in His anger will swallow them up, and fire will consume them. Their fruit You will destroy from the earth, and their seed from the sons of man. For they have stretched out evil against You; they have devised a scheme; they will not prevail. For You will make them ***turn their*** shoulder; on Your bowstrings You will make ready ***Your arrows*** against their faces. Be exalted, LORD, in Your strength! Let us sing and sing praises ***to*** Your might.

Psalm 21 Preview

Psalm 21 is the thanksgiving that follows Psalm 20. The prayers for the king have been answered. God has given him the desire of his heart, crowned him with gold and given him life and glory. The king trusts in the LORD, and the steadfast love of the Most High keeps him from being shaken.

The second half looks ahead to the defeat of every enemy of God. The psalm ends with the whole congregation praising God's strength. The king of this psalm is David, but its words reach further than any king of Judah, and many see in it the greater King to come.

Psalm 21 Study

21:1-2 *LORD, in Your strength the king rejoices, and in Your salvation how greatly he exults! The desire of his heart You have given to him, and the request of his lips You have not withheld. Selah.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David." On the choirmaster, see Psalm 4.

"LORD, in Your strength the king rejoices, and in Your salvation how greatly he exults!" The king's joy is not in his own strength. It is in God's. Psalm 20 prayed for "salvation" (20:5). Here it has come.

"The desire of his heart You have given to him, and the request of his lips You have not withheld." Psalm 20:4 prayed for exactly this. God answered. Selah (see Psalm 3). Stop and remember the prayers God has answered for you.

21:3-6 *For You meet him **with** blessings of good; You set on his head a crown of pure gold. Life he asked from You; You gave **it** to him, length of days forever and ever. Great **is** his glory in Your salvation; splendor and majesty You place on him. For You set him **as** blessings forever; You make him glad with joy in Your presence.*

"For You meet him with blessings of good; You set on his head a crown of pure gold." After David defeated the Ammonites, the crown of their king, heavy with gold, was set on David's head (2 Samuel 12:30). But the crown is pictured here as God's gift.

"Life he asked from You; You gave it to him, length of days forever and ever." A king facing battle asks for his life. God gives him far more: a line that will last forever, as He promised David (2 Samuel 7:16). No earthly king lives forever. The words point to the King who rose from the dead and lives forever (Romans 6:9; Revelation 1:18).

"Great is his glory in Your salvation; splendor and majesty You place on him." Every honor the king has came from God's hand. "You make him glad with joy in Your presence." The best gift of all is not the crown. It is God Himself.

21:7 *For the king **is** trusting in the LORD, and in the steadfast love of the Most High he will not be shaken.*

"For the king is trusting in the LORD, and in the steadfast love of the Most High he will not be shaken." The whole psalm turns on this verse. The king's security rests on his trust in God and on God's steadfast love, His hesed (see Psalm 5). On "Most High," see Psalm 7. A king who trusts the Most High has someone higher than himself holding him steady.

21:8-12 *Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate You. You will make them like a furnace of fire at the time of Your presence. The LORD in His anger will swallow them up, and fire will consume them. Their fruit You will destroy from the earth, and their seed from the sons of man. For they have stretched out evil against You; they have devised a scheme; they will not prevail. For You will make them **turn their** shoulder; on Your bowstrings You will make ready **Your arrows** against their faces.*

Now the psalm speaks to the king, or perhaps to God, about the enemies. "Your hand will find all Your enemies." No one can hide. "You will make them like a furnace of fire at the time of Your presence. The LORD in His anger will swallow them up."

These are hard lines (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). The enemies here are not people who simply disagree with the king. They are those who "have stretched out evil against You," who have "devised a scheme" against God Himself. The psalm says plainly what will happen to those who make war on God, and that "they will not prevail."

"Their fruit You will destroy from the earth, and their seed from the sons of man." Their descendants will not carry on their rebellion. God will make them turn and flee, with His arrows aimed at their faces. Those who refuse God's King will one day face Him as Judge. Until that day, His invitation to turn and take refuge in Him is still open (Psalm 2:12).

21:13 *Be exalted, LORD, in Your strength! Let us sing and sing praises **to** Your might.*

"Be exalted, LORD, in Your strength! Let us sing and sing praises to Your might." The psalm began with the king rejoicing in God's strength (21:1). It ends with the people praising God's strength. The glory goes to God, not to the king.

Psalm 21 Summary

In Psalm 21 the king rejoices in the LORD's strength and salvation, because God has given him his heart's desire and answered his prayers. God has crowned him with gold, given him life and length of days forever, and placed glory and majesty on him, and He makes him glad in His presence. The king trusts in the LORD, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he will not be shaken. God's hand will find all His enemies who plot evil against Him, and they will be consumed and will not prevail. The psalm ends with the people praising the LORD for His strength and might.

Psalm 21 Study Questions

1. In what does the king rejoice? (21:1)
2. What has God given the king, according to verse 2? How does that answer Psalm 20:4?
3. What did the king ask for, and what did God give him? (21:4)
4. What is the best gift God gives the king in verse 6?
5. Why will the king not be shaken? (21:7)
6. What have God's enemies done, according to verse 11?
7. How does the psalm begin and end with the same idea? (21:1, 13)
8. How do the words "length of days forever and ever" point beyond David to Jesus?
9. When God answers your prayers, how do you make sure He, and not you, gets the praise?
10. What answered prayer could you thank God for this week, out loud, with someone else?

Psalm 25: To You I Lift Up My Soul

Scripture

Of David.

25:1-11 To You, LORD, I lift up my soul. My God, in You I trust; let me not be ashamed; let not my enemies exult over me. Also all who wait for You will not be ashamed; those who act treacherously without cause will be ashamed. Make me know Your ways, LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You ***are*** the God of my salvation; for You I have waited all the day. Remember Your compassions, LORD, and Your steadfast loves, for they ***are*** from of old. The sins of my youth and my transgressions do not remember; according to Your steadfast love remember me, You, for the sake of Your goodness, LORD. Good and upright ***is*** the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way. All the paths of the LORD ***are*** steadfast love and faithfulness to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies. For the sake of Your name, LORD, You will forgive my iniquity, for it ***is*** great.

25:12-22 Who ***is*** this, the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way ***that*** he will choose. His soul will lodge in good, and his seed will possess the land. The counsel of the LORD ***is*** for those who fear Him, and His covenant, to make them know ***it***. My eyes ***are*** continually toward the LORD, for He, He will bring my feet out from ***the*** net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I ***am*** alone and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have grown wide; bring me out from my distresses. See my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. See my enemies, for they have become many, and ***with*** a hatred of violence they have hated me. Guard my soul and rescue me; let me not be ashamed, for I have taken refuge in You. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I have waited for You. Ransom Israel, God, from all his troubles.

Psalm 25 Preview

Psalm 25 is a prayer from a man who is lonely, troubled and aware of his own sin. Enemies hate him, his heart is in distress and the sins of his youth still weigh on him. So he lifts his soul to God and asks for three things again and again: protection, guidance and forgiveness.

It is an acrostic (see Psalm 9), each verse starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The pattern helps the psalm move steadily through its themes. Running through it all is trust in the God who is good and upright, who teaches sinners His way and whose paths are steadfast love and faithfulness.

Psalm 25 Study

25:1-3 *To You, LORD, I lift up my soul. My God, in You I trust; let me not be ashamed; let not my enemies exult over me. Also all who wait for You will not be ashamed; those who act treacherously without cause will be ashamed.*

The heading reads, "Of David." The occasion is not given. David speaks of "the sins of my youth" (verse 7), so many think he wrote it later in life.

"To You, LORD, I lift up my soul." To lift up your soul is to lift your whole self to God in prayer and trust, the way a child lifts his arms to be picked up.

"My God, in You I trust; let me not be ashamed." To be ashamed here means to be let down, to trust and then be left standing foolish. "Also all who wait for You will not be ashamed." To wait for the LORD is to keep expecting Him to act, even when nothing is happening yet. That kind of waiting is never wasted. The ones who will be put to shame are "those who act treacherously without cause."

25:4-5 *Make me know Your ways, LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You **are** the God of my salvation; for You I have waited all the day.*

"Make me know Your ways, LORD; teach me Your paths." David is a king, but here he is a student. He asks to know God's ways, not only His commands. "Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I have waited all the day." The God who saves us is also the God who teaches us how to live. We need both.

25:6-7 *Remember Your compassions, LORD, and Your steadfast loves, for they **are** from of old. The sins of my youth and my transgressions do not remember; according to Your steadfast love remember me, You, for the sake of Your goodness, LORD.*

"Remember Your compassions, LORD, and Your steadfast loves, for they are from of old." On steadfast love, hesed, see Psalm 5. David asks God to remember the long history of His mercy. God has been showing it since the beginning.

"The sins of my youth and my transgressions do not remember." What David wants God to remember is His own love. What he wants God to forget is David's sin. When God forgives, He chooses not to hold our sins against us (Jeremiah 31:34). "According to Your steadfast love remember me, You, for the sake of Your goodness, LORD." David does not appeal to his own goodness. He appeals to God's.

Some of us still carry things we did when we were young. David did too. If you have confessed them to God, you can pray this verse and trust that He no longer holds them against you.

25:8-10 *Good and upright **is** the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way. All the paths of the LORD **are** steadfast love and faithfulness to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.*

"Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way." Because God is good, He does not leave sinners to wander. Because He is upright, the way He teaches is straight. Jesus came to call sinners, not the righteous (Mark 2:17).

"He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way." God teaches those who are willing to learn. Pride shuts the classroom door.

"All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies." On covenant, see Psalm 5. His testimonies are His written words, His witness to Himself. For those who belong to God, every road He leads them on, even the hard ones, is made of His steadfast love and faithfulness.

25:11 *For the sake of Your name, LORD, You will forgive my iniquity, for it **is** great.*

"For the sake of Your name, LORD, You will forgive my iniquity, for it is great." David does not ask to be forgiven because his sin is small. He asks to be forgiven because it is great. Only a great God can forgive great sin, and He does it "for the sake of Your name," to show who He is. Forgiveness in Christ works the same way. We are forgiven for His name's sake (1 John 2:12).

25:12-14 *Who **is** this, the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way **that** he will choose. His soul will lodge in good, and his seed will possess the land. The counsel of the LORD **is** for those who fear Him, and His covenant, to make them know **it**.*

"Who is this, the man who fears the LORD?" On the fear of the LORD, see Psalm 5. "He will instruct him in the way that he will choose." God guides the one who honors Him.

"His soul will lodge in good, and his seed will possess the land." Under the covenant, Israel's blessing was tied to the land God promised Abraham (Genesis 15:18). The one who fears God will rest in God's goodness, and his children will inherit.

"The counsel of the LORD is for those who fear Him." The word for "counsel" means a close, private conversation between friends. God shares His heart with those who fear Him. Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23), and Jesus called His disciples friends because He told them what He heard from His Father (John 15:15).

25:15-18 *My eyes **are** continually toward the LORD, for He, He will bring my feet out from **the** net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I **am** alone and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have grown wide; bring me out from my distresses. See my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.*

"My eyes are continually toward the LORD, for He, He will bring my feet out from the net." A man caught in a trap cannot free himself. He keeps his eyes on the One who can.

"Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am alone and afflicted." David the king feels alone. Leaders often do. "The troubles of my heart have grown wide." His troubles keep spreading. "See my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins." Once more he joins his trouble and his sin together. He does not say all his suffering is caused by his sin, but he knows he needs forgiveness as much as rescue.

25:19-21 *See my enemies, for they have become many, and **with** a hatred of violence they have hated me. Guard my soul and rescue me; let me not be ashamed, for I have taken refuge in You. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I have waited for You.*

"See my enemies, for they have become many." Their hatred is violent. "Guard my soul and rescue me; let me not be ashamed, for I have taken refuge in You." The prayer of verse 2 comes back.

"Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I have waited for You." David asks that his integrity (see Psalm 7) would guard him like sentries. A clean life does not save us, but it protects us from many traps.

25:22 *Ransom Israel, God, from all his troubles.*

"Ransom Israel, God, from all his troubles." The acrostic is finished, and this last verse stands outside the pattern. David widens the prayer from himself to the whole nation. To ransom is to set free by paying a price. God ransomed Israel from Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:8). Jesus said He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Our private prayers should end, sooner or later, in prayers for all God's people.

Psalm 25 Summary

In Psalm 25, an acrostic, David lifts up his soul to the LORD and trusts that those who wait for Him will not be put to shame. He asks God to make him know His ways and lead him in His truth. He asks God to remember His compassion and steadfast love but not the sins of his youth. Because the LORD is good and upright, He teaches sinners and the humble His way, and all His paths are steadfast love and faithfulness to those who keep His covenant. David asks forgiveness for his great iniquity for the sake of God's name. The one who fears the LORD will be taught, will rest in good and will know God's friendship. Lonely, afflicted and surrounded by enemies, David keeps his eyes on the LORD, asks to be guarded by integrity and ends by asking God to ransom all Israel from its troubles.

People and Places

- Ransom: to set someone free by paying a price.

Psalm 25 Study Questions

1. What does David say he lifts up to the LORD? (25:1)

2. What does David ask God to teach him in verses 4-5?

3. What does David ask God to remember, and what does he ask God not to remember? (25:6-7)

4. Whom does the LORD instruct, according to verses 8-9?

5. Why does David ask for forgiveness in verse 11, and what reason does he give?

6. What is "the counsel of the LORD," and who has it? (25:14)

7. How does the prayer of verse 22 widen beyond David?

8. Are there sins from your youth that still weigh on you? What does this psalm say to you about them?

9. What does it look like in daily life to "wait" for the LORD? (25:3, 5, 21)

10. David felt "alone and afflicted" (25:16). Who in your life might feel that way, and how could you reach out?

Psalm 26: I Have Walked in My Integrity

Scripture

Of David.

26:1-12 Judge me, LORD, for I, I have walked in my integrity, and in the LORD I have trusted; I will not slip. Test me, LORD, and try me; refine my kidneys and my heart. For Your steadfast love ***is*** before my eyes, and I walk about in Your truth. I have not sat with men of falsehood, and with those who conceal themselves I will not go in. I have hated the assembly of evildoers, and with ***the*** wicked I will not sit. I wash my hands in innocence, and I go around Your altar, LORD, to make ***it*** heard with a voice of thanksgiving and to recount all Your wonders. LORD, I love the habitation of Your house and the place of the tabernacle of Your glory. Do not gather my soul with sinners, and my life with men of bloodshed, in whose hands ***is*** wickedness, and their right hand is full ***of*** a bribe. And I, I will walk in my integrity; ransom me and be gracious to me. My foot has stood on level ground; in ***the*** assemblies I will bless the LORD.

Psalm 26 Preview

Psalm 26 is the prayer of a man who wants God to judge between him and the wicked. David asks God to test him through and through. He has kept away from liars and evildoers, he loves the place where God's glory dwells, and he does not want to be swept away with sinners when judgment comes.

It can sound proud at first. But David's confidence rests on God's steadfast love, and he still asks God to ransom him and be gracious to him. The psalm shows us a life that is the same in private as in worship.

Psalm 26 Study

26:1-3 *Judge me, LORD, for I, I have walked in my integrity, and in the LORD I have trusted; I will not slip. Test me, LORD, and try me; refine my kidneys and my heart. For Your steadfast love* ***is*** *before my eyes, and I walk about in Your truth.*

The heading reads, "Of David." The occasion is not given. Many think David was falsely accused, as in Psalms 7 and 17.

"Judge me, LORD, for I, I have walked in my integrity." To judge here means to vindicate, to rule in his favor. On integrity, see Psalm 7. David is not claiming to be sinless. He is saying his life has been whole and honest before God. "And in the LORD I have trusted; I will not slip." His steadiness comes from his trust.

"Test me, LORD, and try me; refine my kidneys and my heart." On the kidneys and heart, see Psalm 7:9. David invites God's examination. Only a person who wants to be clean prays like that. Compare Psalm 139:23-24, studied in Volume 1.

"For Your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk about in Your truth." That line is the key to the psalm. David keeps God's steadfast love (see Psalm 5) in front of him, and that shapes the way he walks. His integrity grows out of God's love, not the other way around.

26:4-5 *I have not sat with men of falsehood, and with those who conceal themselves I will not go in. I have hated the assembly of evildoers, and with **the** wicked I will not sit.*

"I have not sat with men of falsehood, and with those who conceal themselves I will not go in." David has chosen his company. He does not make his home with liars and two-faced people. "I have hated the assembly of evildoers." This echoes Psalm 1: the blessed man does not sit in the seat of mockers. David is not refusing to love sinners or speak to them. He is refusing to join them in their ways.

26:6-8 *I wash my hands in innocence, and I go around Your altar, LORD, to make **it** heard with a voice of thanksgiving and to recount all Your wonders. LORD, I love the habitation of Your house and the place of the tabernacle of Your glory.*

"I wash my hands in innocence, and I go around Your altar, LORD." Priests washed their hands and feet before serving at the altar (Exodus 30:19-21). Washing the hands was also a sign of being innocent of a crime (Deuteronomy 21:6-7). David comes to worship with clean hands. Psalm 24:3-4, studied in Volume 1, asks who may go up the hill of the LORD and answers that it is the one with clean hands and a pure heart.

"To make it heard with a voice of thanksgiving and to recount all Your wonders." The reason for clean hands is worship. He comes to tell what God has done.

"LORD, I love the habitation of Your house and the place of the tabernacle of Your glory." The tabernacle was the tent God told Moses to build, where He dwelt among His people. In David's day the ark rested in the tent David set up in Jerusalem (see Psalm 5). God's glory was there. David loves the place because he loves the God who meets him there. Many of us know that feeling about a church where God has met us.

26:9-10 *Do not gather my soul with sinners, and my life with men of bloodshed, in whose hands **is** wickedness, and their right hand is full **of** a bribe.*

"Do not gather my soul with sinners, and my life with men of bloodshed." To gather a soul is to take a life. David asks that when God judges the wicked, He will not sweep him away with them. They are men "in whose hands is wickedness, and their right hand is full of a bribe." David washed his hands. Their hands are full of bribes.

26:11-12 *And I, I will walk in my integrity; ransom me and be gracious to me. My foot has stood on level ground; in **the** assemblies I will bless the LORD.*

"And I, I will walk in my integrity; ransom me and be gracious to me." Right after speaking of his integrity, David asks God to ransom him (see Psalm 25:22) and be gracious to him. He knows he still needs grace. A life of integrity and a cry for mercy belong together.

"My foot has stood on level ground; in the assemblies I will bless the LORD." David started with "I will not slip." He ends standing on level ground, among God's people, praising Him. He refused the assembly of evildoers (verse 5). Now he stands in the assembly of worshipers.

Psalm 26 Summary

In Psalm 26 David asks the LORD to vindicate him, because he has walked in integrity and trusted God without slipping. He invites God to test and refine his heart, and he keeps God's steadfast love before his eyes. He has not sat with liars or joined the assembly of evildoers. He washes his hands in innocence and goes around God's altar with thanksgiving, telling of His wonders, and he loves the house where God's glory dwells. He asks not to be swept away with bloodthirsty, bribe-taking sinners. He promises to keep walking in integrity, asks God to ransom him and be gracious to him and ends standing on level ground, blessing the LORD among His people.

People and Places

- Tabernacle: the tent God told Moses to build, where He dwelt among His people before the temple was built.

Psalm 26 Study Questions

1. What does David ask God to do in verse 1, and why?
2. What does David invite God to test? (26:2)
3. What is before David's eyes, and how does it shape the way he walks? (26:3)
4. With whom does David refuse to sit? (26:4-5)
5. What does David do before he goes around God's altar, and what does it mean? (26:6)
6. What does David love, according to verse 8?
7. What does David still ask God to do, even after speaking of his integrity? (26:11)
8. How is refusing to join in sin different from refusing to love sinners?
9. Would you be willing to pray "Test me, LORD, and try me"? What might God find?
10. Where is a place you love because God has met you there?

Psalm 28: The LORD Is My Strength and My Shield

Scripture

Of David.

28:1-5 To You, LORD, I call; my rock, do not be deaf to me, lest You be silent to me and I become like those who go down ***to the*** pit. Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry for help to You, when I lift up my hands toward the inner sanctuary of Your holiness. Do not drag me away with ***the*** wicked and with those who work iniquity, who speak peace with their neighbors, and evil ***is*** in their heart. Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds; according to the work of their hands give to them; return their recompense to them. For they do not discern the deeds of the LORD and the work of His hands; He will tear them down and will not build them up.

28:6-9 Blessed ***be*** the LORD, for He has heard the voice of my supplications. The LORD ***is*** my strength and my shield; in Him my heart has trusted, and I was helped; and my heart exults, and with my song I will give thanks to Him. The LORD ***is*** strength for them, and He ***is*** the stronghold of salvations for His anointed. Save Your people and bless Your inheritance, and shepherd them and carry them forever.

Psalm 28 Preview

Psalm 28 begins with a man afraid that God will stay silent. If God does not answer, David says, he will be like the dead. He asks not to be dragged away with the wicked, who speak peace but plan evil, and he asks God to repay them.

Then, in the middle of the psalm, the prayer turns to praise. God has heard. The LORD is David's strength and shield, his heart trusts Him and his heart sings. The psalm ends with a prayer for all God's people: save them, bless them, shepherd them and carry them forever.

Psalm 28 Study

28:1-2 *To You, LORD, I call; my rock, do not be deaf to me, lest You be silent to me and I become like those who go down* ***to the*** *pit. Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry for help to You, when I lift up my hands toward the inner sanctuary of Your holiness.*

The heading reads, "Of David." The occasion is not given.

"To You, LORD, I call; my rock, do not be deaf to me." On God as David's rock, see Psalm 18:2. David's fear is that God will be silent. "Lest You be silent to me and I become like those who go down to the pit." The pit is another word for the grave, the place of the dead (see Psalm 6 on Sheol). Without God's voice, David feels as good as dead.

"When I lift up my hands toward the inner sanctuary of Your holiness." Lifting the hands was a common way to pray in Israel (1 Timothy 2:8 speaks of it too). The inner sanctuary was the

innermost room of God's house, the Most Holy Place, where the ark stood (1 Kings 6:19). David turns toward the place where God had promised to meet His people.

28:3-5 *Do not drag me away with **the** wicked and with those who work iniquity, who speak peace with their neighbors, and evil **is** in their heart. Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds; according to the work of their hands give to them; return their recompense to them. For they do not discern the deeds of the LORD and the work of His hands; He will tear them down and will not build them up.*

"Do not drag me away with the wicked and with those who work iniquity." Like Psalm 26:9, David asks not to share their judgment. They are people "who speak peace with their neighbors, and evil is in their heart." Smiles on the outside, knives on the inside.

"Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds." David asks God to repay them with what they deserve. It is one of the hard lines (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms), but it asks for justice, not for more than justice. It is God's own rule: He will give to each according to his works (Romans 2:6; Revelation 22:12). David leaves the repaying to God.

"For they do not discern the deeds of the LORD and the work of His hands." Their real problem is blindness to God. They do not notice what He does, so they do not fear Him. "He will tear them down and will not build them up."

28:6-7 *Blessed **be** the LORD, for He has heard the voice of my supplications. The LORD **is** my strength and my shield; in Him my heart has trusted, and I was helped; and my heart exults, and with my song I will give thanks to Him.*

"Blessed be the LORD, for He has heard the voice of my supplications." The turn is sudden. David asked in verse 2 for God to hear "the voice of my supplications." Now he says God has heard it. Whether the answer came as an inner assurance or a word from a prophet or priest, we are not told. But David knows.

"The LORD is my strength and my shield." Strength for the fight, a shield for protection. "In Him my heart has trusted, and I was helped." He trusted before he was helped. "And my heart exults, and with my song I will give thanks to Him." The same heart that was afraid of God's silence now sings.

28:8-9 *The LORD **is** strength for them, and He **is** the stronghold of salvations for His anointed. Save Your people and bless Your inheritance, and shepherd them and carry them forever.*

"The LORD is strength for them, and He is the stronghold of salvations for His anointed." On "anointed," see Psalm 18:50. What God is for David, He is for all His people.

"Save Your people and bless Your inheritance, and shepherd them and carry them forever." Israel is called God's inheritance, His own treasured possession (Deuteronomy 32:9). The last request is tender. A shepherd leads his flock, and sometimes he carries a weak lamb in his arms (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). He still carries His people.

Psalm 28 Summary

In Psalm 28 David calls on the LORD, his rock, not to be silent, because without His answer he would be like those who go down to the pit. He lifts his hands toward God's inner sanctuary and asks not to be dragged away with the wicked, who speak peace but carry evil in their hearts. He asks God to repay them according to their deeds, because they do not regard the works of the LORD. Then he blesses the LORD for hearing him. The LORD is his strength and shield, and his trusting heart is helped and sings. The LORD is the strength of His people and the stronghold of His anointed, and David ends by asking God to save, bless, shepherd and carry His people forever.

People and Places

- The pit: another word for the grave, the place of the dead.
- Sanctuary, inner sanctuary: God's holy place; the inner sanctuary was the innermost room where the ark stood, the Most Holy Place.

Psalm 28 Study Questions

1. What does David fear in verse 1?
2. Toward what does David lift his hands when he prays? (28:2)
3. How do the wicked speak to their neighbors, and what is in their hearts? (28:3)
4. Why will God tear the wicked down, according to verse 5?
5. What changes in verse 6?
6. What is the LORD to David in verse 7, and what happened when David trusted Him?
7. What four things does David ask God to do for His people in verse 9?
8. Have you ever felt that God was silent? What did you do in that time?
9. Why is it better to ask God to repay evil than to repay it ourselves?
10. Who could you pray verse 9 for this week, by name?

Psalm 29: The Voice of the LORD

Scripture

A psalm of David.

29:1-2 Ascribe to the LORD, sons of gods, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; bow down to the LORD in the adornment of holiness.

29:3-11 The voice of the LORD ***is*** over the waters; the God of glory thunders; the LORD ***is*** over many waters. The voice of the LORD ***is*** in power; the voice of the LORD ***is*** in majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks cedars, and the LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon. And He makes them skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire. The voice of the LORD makes ***the*** wilderness tremble; the LORD makes the wilderness of Kadesh tremble. The voice of the LORD makes the does writhe ***in birth***, and it strips forests bare; and in His temple all of it says, "Glory!" The LORD sat at the flood, and the LORD sits ***as*** King forever. The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace.

Psalm 29 Preview

Psalm 29 is a thunderstorm set to music. It opens in heaven, with the mighty ones called to give glory to the LORD. Then the storm rolls in from the sea, crashes over the mountains of Lebanon in the north and sweeps down to the wilderness in the south. Seven times we hear "the voice of the LORD" in the thunder, breaking cedars, flashing fire and shaking the desert.

At the end the storm is over, and the LORD sits as King above it all. The God whose voice shakes the earth gives strength to His people and blesses them with peace.

Psalm 29 Study

29:1-2 *Ascribe to the LORD, sons of gods, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; bow down to the LORD in the adornment of holiness.*

The heading reads, "A psalm of David."

"Ascribe to the LORD, sons of gods, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength." To ascribe is to give credit where it is due. The "sons of gods" are the heavenly beings, the angels who stand around God's throne (compare Job 1:6; Psalm 89:6). Others take the phrase as the mighty ones of the earth. Either way, the most powerful beings there are told to bow to the LORD.

"Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; bow down to the LORD in the adornment of holiness." The adornment of holiness may picture the holy clothing priests wore to serve (Exodus 28:2), or the beauty of God's own holiness. Worship begins by giving God the honor that belongs to Him.

29:3-4 *The voice of the LORD **is** over the waters; the God of glory thunders; the LORD **is** over many waters. The voice of the LORD **is** in power; the voice of the LORD **is** in majesty.*

"The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders." The storm begins over the waters, perhaps the Mediterranean Sea to the west. In Hebrew the word for "voice" was also used for thunder. David hears the thunder and knows whose voice it is. "The LORD is over many waters." The sea frightened the ancient world. God is over it.

"The voice of the LORD is in power; the voice of the LORD is in majesty." The same voice spoke the world into being (Genesis 1:3) and still speaks with power.

Many scholars point out that the Canaanites praised their god Baal as the lord of the storm. Psalm 29 may be answering that claim: the thunder belongs to the LORD, not to Baal.

29:5-7 *The voice of the LORD breaks cedars, and the LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon. And He makes them skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire.*

"The voice of the LORD breaks cedars, and the LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon." The cedars of Lebanon were the greatest trees in that part of the world, used for Solomon's temple (1 Kings 5:6). The lightning splits them like sticks.

"And He makes them skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox." Sirion is another name for Mount Hermon, the high mountain in the far north (Deuteronomy 3:9). The mountains seem to leap like young animals as the storm shakes them.

"The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire." Lightning cuts through the sky like a blade.

29:8-9 *The voice of the LORD makes **the** wilderness tremble; the LORD makes the wilderness of Kadesh tremble. The voice of the LORD makes the does writhe **in birth**, and it strips forests bare; and in His temple all of it says, "Glory!"*

"The voice of the LORD makes the wilderness tremble; the LORD makes the wilderness of Kadesh tremble." The storm has swept south. Kadesh was in the wilderness south of Judah, where Israel camped in the days of Moses (Numbers 20:1). From the far north to the far south, the whole land feels God's voice.

"The voice of the LORD makes the does writhe in birth, and it strips forests bare." The fear of the storm brings deer into early labor, and the wind tears the leaves off the trees.

"And in His temple all of it says." What they say is one word: "Glory!" Out in the land, the storm crashes. In God's temple, everyone is shouting one word. On the temple in David's day, see Psalm 5. The scene may also be God's heavenly temple, where the sons of gods of verse 1 have done what they were told.

29:10-11 *The LORD sat at the flood, and the LORD sits **as** King forever. The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace.*

"The LORD sat at the flood, and the LORD sits as King forever." The Hebrew word for "flood" is used elsewhere only for the flood in Noah's day (Genesis 6 to 11). The God who ruled over that great flood still sits on His throne. No storm unseats Him.

"The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace." The psalm ends very quietly. All that power is not only for show. It is for His people's good. The same God whose voice breaks cedars gives His people strength and peace. Jesus showed that same power when He stood in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, rebuked the wind and the sea, "and there was a great calm" (Matthew 8:26). The voice of the LORD still speaks peace.

Psalm 29 Summary

Psalm 29 calls the heavenly beings to ascribe glory and strength to the LORD and to worship Him in the splendor of holiness. Then it describes a great storm as the voice of the LORD: thundering over the waters, breaking the cedars of Lebanon, making Lebanon and Sirion skip, flashing fire, shaking the wilderness of Kadesh, bringing deer into labor and stripping the forests bare, while in His temple all cry, "Glory!" The LORD sat enthroned over the flood and sits as King forever. The psalm ends with His promise to give strength to His people and bless them with peace.

People and Places

- Sons of gods: here, the heavenly beings or angels around God's throne; some take it as earthly rulers.
- Lebanon: the mountain range north of Israel, famous for its great cedar trees.
- Sirion: another name for Mount Hermon, the high mountain in the far north (Deuteronomy 3:9).
- Kadesh: here, most likely the wilderness of Kadesh south of Judah, where Israel camped under Moses.

Psalm 29 Study Questions

1. Who is called to ascribe glory to the LORD in verse 1, and what are they to give Him?

2. How many times does the phrase "the voice of the LORD" appear in this psalm? Count them.

3. What does the voice of the LORD do to the cedars of Lebanon? (29:5)

4. Where are Lebanon, Sirion and Kadesh, and what does that tell us about the storm's path? (29:6-8)

5. What does everyone in God's temple say? (29:9)

6. Over what does the LORD sit as King? (29:10)

7. What does the LORD give His people at the end of the psalm? (29:11)

8. What do you learn about God from storms and the power of nature?

9. How does the calm ending of this psalm speak to someone who feels caught in a storm?

10. How might Jesus calming the sea (Matthew 8:26) help you trust Him with what frightens you?

Psalm 30: Joy Comes in the Morning

Scripture

A psalm, a song of the dedication of the house, of David.

30:1-5 I will exalt You, LORD, for You have drawn me up and have not made my enemies rejoice over me. LORD my God, I cried for help to You, and You healed me. LORD, You brought up my soul from Sheol; You kept me alive from going down ***to the*** pit. Sing praises to the LORD, His godly ones, and give thanks to the remembrance of His holiness. For a moment ***is*** in His anger, life ***is*** in His favor; in the evening weeping lodges, and at the morning, a shout of joy.

30:6-12 And I, I said in my ease, "I will not be shaken forever." LORD, in Your favor You made strength stand for my mountain; You hid Your face; I was dismayed. To You, LORD, I called, and to the Lord I made supplication: "What profit ***is*** in my blood, in my going down to ***the*** pit? Will dust give thanks to You? Will it declare Your faithfulness? Hear, LORD, and be gracious to me; LORD, be a helper to me." You have turned my mourning into dancing for me; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me ***with*** joy, so that glory may sing praises to You and not be silent. LORD my God, forever I will give thanks to You.

Psalm 30 Preview

Psalm 30 is a song of thanks from a man God brought back from the edge of death. David had grown comfortable and sure of himself. Then God hid His face, and everything fell apart. David cried out, and God healed him.

The psalm is full of reversals: from the pit to life, from weeping at night to joy in the morning, from mourning to dancing, from sackcloth to gladness. David cannot keep quiet about it, and he calls God's people to sing with him.

Psalm 30 Study

30:1-3 *I will exalt You, LORD, for You have drawn me up and have not made my enemies rejoice over me. LORD my God, I cried for help to You, and You healed me. LORD, You brought up my soul from Sheol; You kept me alive from going down* ***to the*** *pit.*

The heading reads, "A psalm, a song of the dedication of the house, of David." We are not told which house. Some think of David's own palace in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:11). Others think of the site of the future temple, which David bought and set apart after the plague in 2 Samuel 24 (1 Chronicles 21:26 to 22:1). Still others think the psalm was sung later at the dedication of the temple. In later Jewish worship it came to be used at Hanukkah, the feast that remembers the cleansing and rededication of the temple in the 160s B.C.

"I will exalt You, LORD, for You have drawn me up." The word for "drawn up" was used for lifting a bucket out of a well. God pulled David up out of the depths. "And have not made my enemies rejoice over me."

"LORD my God, I cried for help to You, and You healed me." We are not told what the sickness was. "LORD, You brought up my soul from Sheol; You kept me alive from going down to the pit." On Sheol, see Psalm 6, and on the pit, see Psalm 28. David was so near death it was as if he had already gone down.

30:4-5 *Sing praises to the LORD, His godly ones, and give thanks to the remembrance of His holiness. For a moment **is** in His anger, life **is** in His favor; in the evening weeping lodges, and at the morning, a shout of joy.*

"Sing praises to the LORD, His godly ones." David calls in the congregation. One man's rescue becomes everyone's song. "Give thanks to the remembrance of His holiness." To remember His holiness is to remember who He is.

"For a moment is in His anger, life is in His favor." God's discipline is real, but it is short compared to His favor. "In the evening weeping lodges, and at the morning, a shout of joy." Weeping is pictured as a guest who stays the night but leaves in the morning. Joy arrives with the sunrise.

Few lines in the Psalms are better loved. It does not promise that every sorrow ends by the next day. Some nights are long. But for the believer, weeping is always the guest and joy is the one who stays. The final morning will come when God wipes every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4).

30:6-7 *And I, I said in my ease, "I will not be shaken forever." LORD, in Your favor You made strength stand for my mountain; You hid Your face; I was dismayed.*

"And I, I said in my ease." What he said was, "I will not be shaken forever." Now David tells how he got into trouble. Things were going well, and he grew proud and self-sure. It is the same thing the wicked man said in Psalm 10:6. Some connect this with David's proud census of the people in 2 Samuel 24.

"LORD, in Your favor You made strength stand for my mountain." David's security, his "mountain," was really God's gift. "You hid Your face; I was dismayed." The moment God withdrew His favor, David saw how weak he was. Sometimes God lets us feel our weakness so that we stop trusting ourselves.

30:8-10 *To You, LORD, I called, and to the Lord I made supplication: "What profit **is** in my blood, in my going down to **the** pit? Will dust give thanks to You? Will it declare Your faithfulness? Hear, LORD, and be gracious to me; LORD, be a helper to me."*

"To You, LORD, I called, and to the Lord I made supplication." Then David lets us hear his prayer: "What profit is in my blood, in my going down to the pit? Will dust give thanks to You? Will it declare Your faithfulness?" Like Psalm 6:5, he reasons with God. If I die, Lord, my voice will be gone from Your praise on earth. That is not bargaining. It is a man who wants to live in order to praise.

"Hear, LORD, and be gracious to me; LORD, be a helper to me." At the bottom, all he can ask for is grace and help.

30:11-12 *You have turned my mourning into dancing for me; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me **with** joy, so that glory may sing praises to You and not be silent. LORD my God, forever I will give thanks to You.*

"You have turned my mourning into dancing for me." The answer came. "You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with joy." Sackcloth was rough, dark cloth made of goat's hair, worn when mourning or repenting. God took off David's mourning clothes and dressed him in joy.

"So that glory may sing praises to You and not be silent." "Glory" here may mean David's soul or his whole self, the best part of him. God rescued him so he would praise. "LORD my God, forever I will give thanks to You." The man who once said in his ease that he would never be shaken now says he will never stop thanking God.

Psalm 30 Summary

In Psalm 30, sung at the dedication of the house, David exalts the LORD for lifting him up, healing him when he cried out and bringing him back from Sheol and the pit. He calls God's godly ones to praise Him, because His anger lasts only a moment but His favor a lifetime, and weeping may stay the night but joy comes in the morning. David admits that in his ease he thought he could never be shaken, but when God hid His face he was dismayed. He cried to the LORD, asking what profit there would be in his death, since dust cannot praise Him, and he begged for grace and help. God turned his mourning into dancing and clothed him with joy, so that he could sing God's praise and give thanks forever.

People and Places

- Sackcloth: rough, dark cloth made of goat's hair, worn in mourning or repentance.
- Hanukkah: a Jewish feast that remembers the cleansing and rededication of the temple in the 160s B.C.

I have grown comfortable and self-sure more times than I can count. It usually happens when my pride is at its greatest and I am relying on myself. Then something happens and I see again how much I need God. Psalm 30 is my story too.

Psalm 30 Study Questions

1. What "house" might the heading be speaking of? Why are we not sure?

2. What has God done for David, according to verses 1-3?

3. Whom does David call to sing praises with him? (30:4)

4. How does verse 5 compare God's anger and His favor, and weeping and joy?

5. What did David say when he was at ease, and what happened next? (30:6-7)

6. What questions does David ask God in verse 9?

7. What did God turn David's mourning and sackcloth into? (30:11)

8. Have you ever grown comfortable and self-sure, and then seen how much you needed God? What happened?

9. Verse 5 does not promise that every sorrow ends by the next morning. How would you comfort someone whose night has been long?

10. What is one way God has turned mourning into dancing in your life, and who could you tell about it this week?

Psalm 31: Into Your Hand I Commit My Spirit

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

31:1-8 In You, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me not be ashamed forever; in Your righteousness deliver me. Incline Your ear to me; rescue me quickly; be for me a rock of stronghold, a house of fortresses to save me. For You ***are*** my crag and my fortress; and for the sake of Your name You will guide me and lead me. You will bring me out from the net which they have hidden for me, for You ***are*** my stronghold. Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, LORD, God of truth. I hate those who regard vanities of falsehood, and I, I trust in the LORD. I will rejoice and be glad in Your steadfast love, because You have seen my affliction; You have known the troubles of my soul. And You have not shut me up into the hand of ***the*** enemy; You have made my feet stand in a broad place.

31:9-18 Be gracious to me, LORD, for it is distressing to me; my eye has wasted away with vexation, my soul and my body. For my life has been spent in sorrow and my years in groaning; my strength has stumbled because of my iniquity, and my bones have wasted away. Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, and to my neighbors exceedingly, and a dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have been forgotten like a dead ***man*** out of ***the*** heart; I have become like a vessel ***that is*** perishing. For I have heard the slander of many, terror on every side, when they consult together against me; they plot to take my life. And I, I trust in You, LORD; I say, "You ***are*** my God." My times ***are*** in Your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from those who pursue me. Make Your face shine on Your servant; save me in Your steadfast love. LORD, let me not be ashamed, for I have called on You; let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent to Sheol. Let the lips of falsehood be mute, which speak arrogance against the righteous with pride and contempt.

31:19-24 How great ***is*** Your goodness, which You have stored up for those who fear You, ***which*** You have worked for those who take refuge in You before the sons of man! You hide them in the hiding place of Your presence from the conspiracies of man; You conceal them in a shelter from the strife of tongues. Blessed ***be*** the LORD, for He has made His steadfast love wonderful to me in a city of siege. And I, I said in my alarm, "I have been cut off from before Your eyes." Nevertheless, You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried for help to You. Love the LORD, all His godly ones! The LORD preserves the faithful and repays abundantly the one who acts ***with*** pride. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all who wait for the LORD.

Psalm 31 Preview

Psalm 31 is the prayer of a man surrounded by enemies, wasted by grief and forgotten by his friends. David swings back and forth between trouble and trust. He cries for help, then says what he knows about God, then sinks again into his pain, then rises again. That back and forth is honest. Faith in hard times rarely moves in a straight line.

In the middle of the first section is a line that Jesus prayed as He died on the cross: "Into Your hand I commit my spirit." David meant that his life, and every part of it, was safe in God's keeping. Jesus took those words as His last prayer. The psalm ends with David calling on all God's people to love the LORD and to take courage while they wait for Him.

Psalm 31 Study

31:1-2 *In You, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me not be ashamed forever; in Your righteousness deliver me. Incline Your ear to me; rescue me quickly; be for me a rock of stronghold, a house of fortresses to save me.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David." The choirmaster was the leader of the music in Israel's worship (see Psalm 4). The heading doesn't tell us when David wrote it. He mentions a net set for him, slander, plots against his life and a "city of siege" (verse 21). That could fit the years when Saul hunted him, or the time of Absalom's revolt. We simply aren't told.

"In You, LORD, I have taken refuge." A refuge is a safe place to run to, like a shelter in a storm. David has already run to God before he asks for anything. "Let me not be ashamed forever" means, don't let my trust in You turn out to be a mistake that leaves me disgraced in front of my enemies.

"In Your righteousness deliver me." David doesn't appeal to his own goodness. He appeals to God's righteousness, His faithfulness to do what is right and to keep His promises to His people. Then he asks, "Incline Your ear to me; rescue me quickly." He wants God to lean down and listen, and he wants help soon. You can ask God to hurry. David often did.

"Be for me a rock of stronghold, a house of fortresses to save me." In the hill country of Judah, a high rock or a fortress on a cliff was the safest place a hunted man could find. David had hidden in such places. He knew that the real fortress was God Himself.

31:3-5 *For You **are** my crag and my fortress; and for the sake of Your name You will guide me and lead me. You will bring me out from the net which they have hidden for me, for You **are** my stronghold. Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, LORD, God of truth.*

"For You are my crag and my fortress." In verse 2 David asked God to be his rock. In verse 3 he says God already is. Prayer often works this way. We ask, and as we ask we remember what is already true.

"For the sake of Your name You will guide me and lead me." God's name stands for who He is and His reputation. God guides His people because His own honor is bound up with them. David's hope rests on God's character, not his own.

"You will bring me out from the net which they have hidden for me." His enemies have set a hidden trap, like a hunter's net laid across a path. David can't see where it is. God can.

Verse 5 is the heart of the first section. "Into Your hand I commit my spirit." To commit something is to hand it over for safekeeping, like leaving something valuable with a trusted

friend. David puts his whole life, his breath and his future in God's hand. "You have ransomed me, LORD, God of truth." To ransom is to buy someone back from danger or slavery. David has seen God do it before, and so he trusts Him again. The "God of truth" is the God who is faithful and does not lie.

On the cross, at the very end, Jesus cried out with a loud voice and prayed this verse, adding the word "Father" (Luke 23:46). Then He died. His life was not taken from Him against His will; He handed His spirit to His Father. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed in the same way as he was being stoned, but he prayed to Jesus: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Generations of believers have prayed this verse at the end of their lives, and at the start of each day too. It is a good prayer for both.

New Testament links: Luke 23:46 (quoted)

31:6-8 *I hate those who regard vanities of falsehood, and I, I trust in the LORD. I will rejoice and be glad in Your steadfast love, because You have seen my affliction; You have known the troubles of my soul. And You have not shut me up into the hand of **the** enemy; You have made my feet stand in a broad place.*

"I hate those who regard vanities of falsehood, and I, I trust in the LORD." "Vanities of falsehood" are worthless idols, gods that cannot help because they are not real. David sets himself against those who hold on to them. His hatred here is a refusal to stand with idolatry. He will not join those who trust in empty things. Instead, "I, I trust in the LORD." The doubled "I" is emphatic: whatever others do, David will trust the LORD.

"I will rejoice and be glad in Your steadfast love." Steadfast love translates the Hebrew word hesed, God's loyal covenant love that does not let go. David can rejoice in the middle of trouble, "because You have seen my affliction; You have known the troubles of my soul." Some of the worst pain is the pain no one sees. David is comforted that God has seen all of it.

"You have made my feet stand in a broad place." A man hunted in narrow ravines feels trapped. A broad place is open ground where he can breathe and move. God gives room.

31:9-10 *Be gracious to me, LORD, for it is distressing to me; my eye has wasted away with vexation, my soul and my body. For my life has been spent in sorrow and my years in groaning; my strength has stumbled because of my iniquity, and my bones have wasted away.*

Now the psalm drops again. "Be gracious to me, LORD, for it is distressing to me." David's grief has worn him down: "my eye has wasted away with vexation, my soul and my body." Sorrow is felt in the body. Anyone who has walked through a long trial knows how it drains strength and steals sleep.

"For my life has been spent in sorrow and my years in groaning." It is no passing bad day. It has gone on for years. And David is honest about one cause: "my strength has stumbled because of my iniquity." He doesn't claim to be blameless. Some of his trouble came from his enemies, and some from his own sin. Many of us know that mix. God hears prayers from people who are partly to blame for their own pain.

31:11-13 *Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, and to my neighbors exceedingly, and a dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have been forgotten like a dead **man** out of **the** heart; I have become like a vessel **that is** perishing. For I have heard the slander of many, terror on every side, when they consult together against me; they plot to take my life.*

"Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach." Worse than his enemies' attacks is what has happened with everyone else. His neighbors scorn him, and to his acquaintances he has become "a dread." People cross the street to avoid him: "those who see me in the street flee from me."

"I have been forgotten like a dead man out of the heart." People have moved on as if he were already buried. "I have become like a vessel that is perishing," a broken clay pot that gets thrown out. Loneliness can make a person feel exactly like that.

"For I have heard the slander of many, terror on every side." The prophet Jeremiah, hated by his own people, used the same cry, terror all around (Jeremiah 20:10). The enemies "consult together against me; they plot to take my life." David's situation is as bad as it can be.

31:14-15 *And I, I trust in You, LORD; I say, "You **are** my God." My times **are** in Your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from those who pursue me.*

Then comes the turn. "And I, I trust in You, LORD." The doubled "I" again sets David against everything around him. Everyone else may slander and flee. "I say, You are my God." Faith is personal. He doesn't just say there is a God. He says the LORD is his God.

"My times are in Your hand." Few lines in the Psalms are better loved. "My times" means the whole course of a life: its seasons, its days, its turning points and its end. None of it is in the hands of David's enemies, or in the hands of chance. It is all in God's hand. That is the same hand David trusted with his spirit in verse 5. If your future frightens you, you can pray this line and mean it.

"Rescue me from the hand of my enemies." Two hands are in this verse. The enemies' hand is real and dangerous. But the hand of God holds the times.

31:16-18 *Make Your face shine on Your servant; save me in Your steadfast love. LORD, let me not be ashamed, for I have called on You; let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent to Sheol. Let the lips of falsehood be mute, which speak arrogance against the righteous with pride and contempt.*

"Make Your face shine on Your servant." These words echo the blessing the priests spoke over Israel, that the LORD would make His face shine on them and be gracious to them (Numbers 6:25). A shining face is a face turned toward someone in favor and delight. "Save me in Your steadfast love." Again David rests his case on God's hesed.

Verses 17-18 turn toward the enemies. "Let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent to Sheol." Sheol is the place of the dead, the grave. David asks that the liars who attack him be silenced, and in the end that their slander go down to the grave with them. "Let the lips of falsehood be mute, which speak arrogance against the righteous."

These are prayers for God's justice, not plans for revenge. David doesn't take the matter into his own hands. He asks God to deal with lying and arrogance. The New Testament teaches us to do the same: leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:19) and pray for those who mistreat us (Matthew 5:44), while still longing for the day when God shuts every lying mouth (see the Overview on hard lines).

31:19-20 *How great **is** Your goodness, which You have stored up for those who fear You, **which** You have worked for those who take refuge in You before the sons of man! You hide them in the hiding place of Your presence from the conspiracies of man; You conceal them in a shelter from the strife of tongues.*

Now the psalm moves into praise. "How great is Your goodness, which You have stored up for those who fear You." The fear of the LORD is the reverent awe and trust that bows before God and takes Him seriously. God has goodness "stored up," like a harvest laid away in a barn, for those who honor Him. Some of it He gives openly, "before the sons of man," where others can see it.

"You hide them in the hiding place of Your presence from the conspiracies of man." The safest place on earth is not a cave or a fortress. It is the presence of God. "You conceal them in a shelter from the strife of tongues." Lies, gossip and slander can wound deeply, and David had felt all of them. God shelters His people from the strife of tongues, even when the tongues keep wagging.

31:21-22 *Blessed **be** the LORD, for He has made His steadfast love wonderful to me in a city of siege. And I, I said in my alarm, "I have been cut off from before Your eyes." Nevertheless, You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried for help to You.*

"Blessed be the LORD, for He has made His steadfast love wonderful to me in a city of siege." Whatever the siege was, God showed His love there in a way that left David amazed.

Verse 22 is one of the most honest lines in the psalm. "And I, I said in my alarm, I have been cut off from before Your eyes." In his panic David thought God had lost sight of him. "Nevertheless, You heard the voice of my supplications." God heard him anyway. Our feelings in a crisis are not the final word. David felt cut off. He was not. If you have prayed and felt nothing, you are in good company, and God still hears.

31:23-24 *Love the LORD, all His godly ones! The LORD preserves the faithful and repays abundantly the one who acts **with** pride. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all who wait for the LORD.*

The psalm ends with David turning to the whole congregation. "Love the LORD, all His godly ones!" The godly ones are those who belong to God and are loyal to Him. David's own experience becomes a word for everyone. "The LORD preserves the faithful and repays abundantly the one who acts with pride." God keeps His own, and He will deal with the proud.

"Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all who wait for the LORD." To wait for the LORD is to keep trusting and hoping in Him while the answer has not yet come. Waiting is hard. Courage here is not a feeling we produce. It grows as we remember who holds our times. David has been through the whole cycle of fear and trust in this psalm, and he hands the lesson on to us.

Psalm 31 Summary

In Psalm 31 David takes refuge in the LORD and asks to be rescued from the net his enemies have hidden for him. He calls God his rock and fortress, and he commits his spirit into God's hand, the words Jesus prayed on the cross (Luke 23:46). He rejoices that God has seen his affliction. Then he describes his grief: years of sorrow, failing strength partly because of his own sin, friends who flee from him and enemies who plot to take his life. He answers with trust: "My times are in Your hand." He asks God to make His face shine on him and to silence the lying lips. He praises God for the goodness stored up for those who fear Him, and he admits that in his alarm he thought he was cut off, but God heard him. He ends by calling God's people to love the LORD and to take courage while they wait for Him.

Psalm 31 Study Questions

1. What does David ask God to be for him in verse 2? (31:2)

2. What words from verse 5 did Jesus pray on the cross? (31:5; Luke 23:46)

3. How do David's neighbors and acquaintances treat him? (31:11-12)

4. What does David say about his "times"? (31:15)

5. What has God stored up for those who fear Him? (31:19)

6. What did David say "in my alarm," and what did God do anyway? (31:22)

7. David admits that some of his trouble came from his own sin (31:10). Why does it matter that God still hears a person who is partly to blame?

8. What would it look like for you to commit your spirit into God's hand today, and not only at the end of life?

9. How does God shelter His people "from the strife of tongues" when others are slandering them? (31:20)

10. Who do you know who is waiting for the LORD right now, and how could you help that person take courage? (31:24)

Psalm 33: By the Word of the LORD

Scripture

33:1-9 Shout for joy in the LORD, righteous ones; for the upright, praise is fitting. Give thanks to the LORD with ***the*** lyre; with a harp of ten ***strings*** sing praises to Him. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy. For the word of the LORD ***is*** upright, and all His work ***is*** in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full ***of*** the steadfast love of the LORD. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea like a heap; He puts ***the*** deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world be afraid of Him. For He, He spoke, and it was; He, He commanded, and it stood.

33:10-22 The LORD has made void the counsel of ***the*** nations; He has frustrated the plans of ***the*** peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to generation and generation. How blessed ***is*** the nation whose God ***is*** the LORD, the people ***whom*** He has chosen as an inheritance for Himself! From the heavens the LORD looks; He sees all the sons of man. From the place of His dwelling He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth, He who forms their heart together, who discerns all their deeds. The king is not saved by ***the*** greatness of an army; a mighty man is not rescued by ***the*** greatness of strength. The horse ***is*** a deception for salvation, and by the greatness of its strength it does not deliver. Look, the eye of the LORD ***is*** toward those who fear Him, toward those who hope for His steadfast love, to rescue their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD; He ***is*** our help and our shield. For in Him our heart rejoices, for in the name of His holiness we trust. Let Your steadfast love, LORD, be on us, just as we hope for You.

Psalm 33 Preview

Psalm 33 is a song of praise from start to finish. It calls the righteous to sing a new song and then gives the reasons. God's word is upright. He made the heavens by speaking. He overturns the plans of nations, but His own plans stand forever. He looks down from heaven and sees every person on earth.

The second half turns to trust. Kings are not saved by big armies, and warhorses can't deliver anyone. The LORD watches over those who fear Him and hope in His steadfast love. The psalm ends with God's people waiting for Him and asking that His steadfast love rest on them.

Psalm 33 Study

33:1-3 *Shout for joy in the LORD, righteous ones; for the upright, praise is fitting. Give thanks to the LORD with* ***the*** *lyre; with a harp of ten* ***strings*** *sing praises to Him. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy.*

Psalm 33 has no heading. It is one of only a few psalms in Book One (Psalms 1 to 41) without one, and many scholars think it was meant to be read with Psalm 32, which ends with a call to "shout

for joy, all upright of heart" (32:11). Psalm 33 picks up the same words. We don't know who wrote it.

"Shout for joy in the LORD, righteous ones; for the upright, praise is fitting." The righteous are those who are right with God and live by His ways. Praise fits them the way a good coat fits. It looks right on them, and it is what they were made for.

"Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; with a harp of ten strings sing praises to Him." The harp and lyre were stringed instruments played by hand. Israel's worship was not silent. It was loud, skillful and full of music.

"Sing to Him a new song." A new song is fresh praise for fresh mercies. God keeps doing new things, so His people keep finding new reasons to sing. "Play skillfully with a shout of joy." God deserves our best, not careless noise. Skill and joy belong together.

33:4-5 *For the word of the LORD **is** upright, and all His work **is** in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full **of** the steadfast love of the LORD.*

Now the reasons for praise. "For the word of the LORD is upright, and all His work is in faithfulness." What God says is straight and true, and what He does always keeps faith with what He said. His word and His work never pull in different directions.

"He loves righteousness and justice." God isn't neutral about right and wrong. He loves what is right. "The earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD." Steadfast love is God's loyal covenant love, the Hebrew hesed. The psalm says the whole earth is full of it. Every sunrise, every harvest and every breath is a gift of His kindness.

33:6-9 *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea like a heap; He puts **the** deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world be afraid of Him. For He, He spoke, and it was; He, He commanded, and it stood.*

"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host." The host of the heavens means the sun, moon and stars. God didn't need tools or materials. He spoke, and they were there. That takes us straight back to Genesis 1, where God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

The New Testament teaches the same truth. Hebrews 11:3 says that by faith we understand that the ages were formed by the word of God, so that what we see was not made from things that are visible. Peter reminds scoffers that the heavens and earth came into being by the word of God (2 Peter 3:5). John tells us that the Word, the Son of God, was the One through whom all things were made (John 1:3).

"He gathers the waters of the sea like a heap; He puts the deeps in storehouses." The sea, which frightened the ancient world, is like grain to God, gathered up and stored away. This may also bring to mind the Red Sea, when the waters stood up in a heap (Exodus 15:8).

"Let all the earth fear the LORD." If God is that powerful, everyone should stand in awe of Him. The reason is in verse 9: "For He, He spoke, and it was; He, He commanded, and it stood." The doubled "He" stresses that it was God and no one else. One word from Him, and creation stood up and stayed.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:3 (alluded to); 2 Peter 3:5 (alluded to)

33:10-12 *The LORD has made void the counsel of **the** nations; He has frustrated the plans of **the** peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to generation and generation. How blessed **is** the nation whose God **is** the LORD, the people **whom** He has chosen as an inheritance for Himself!*

From creation the psalm turns to history. "The LORD has made void the counsel of the nations." Nations make plans and form alliances. God can empty them out like a bag with a hole in it. "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to generation and generation." Human plans come and go. God's plans stand.

That should steady us when the news is frightening. Governments rise and fall, and their plans may look unstoppable, but none of them can overturn what God has purposed.

"How blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom He has chosen as an inheritance for Himself!" The first meaning is Israel, the nation God chose for Himself out of all the peoples (Deuteronomy 7:6). God has not given up on that choice (Romans 11:29). The verse also holds a truth for every nation: a people that honors the LORD is blessed. And every believer today belongs to the people God has made His own through Christ (1 Peter 2:9).

33:13-15 *From the heavens the LORD looks; He sees all the sons of man. From the place of His dwelling He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth, He who forms their heart together, who discerns all their deeds.*

"From the heavens the LORD looks; He sees all the sons of man." God isn't distant in the sense of not caring or not knowing. He sees everyone. "From the place of His dwelling He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth."

"He who forms their heart together, who discerns all their deeds." The God who made each human heart understands what goes on inside it. He knows why we do what we do. Nothing is hidden from the Maker.

33:16-19 *The king is not saved by **the** greatness of an army; a mighty man is not rescued by **the** greatness of strength. The horse **is** a deception for salvation, and by the greatness of its strength it does not deliver. Look, the eye of the LORD **is** toward those who fear Him, toward those who hope for His steadfast love, to rescue their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine.*

"The king is not saved by the greatness of an army; a mighty man is not rescued by the greatness of strength." Kings in the ancient world trusted their troops. Warriors trusted their muscles. Both will fail sooner or later.

"The horse is a deception for salvation." The horse and chariot were the tanks of the ancient world. A king with many horses felt safe. The psalm calls that a lie. "By the greatness of its strength it does not deliver." We have our own horses: money, health, careers and connections. Good gifts, all of them, but none can save.

"Look, the eye of the LORD is toward those who fear Him, toward those who hope for His steadfast love." The same eye that looks on all the earth in verse 13 rests with special care on those who fear Him. To hope in His steadfast love is to expect God to be faithful because of who He is.

"To rescue their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine." God doesn't promise that His people will never face death or famine. He promises to watch over them in those very places.

33:20-22 *Our soul waits for the LORD; He **is** our help and our shield. For in Him our heart rejoices, for in the name of His holiness we trust. Let Your steadfast love, LORD, be on us, just as we hope for You.*

The psalm ends with the congregation speaking together. "Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield." Waiting is trust that keeps looking to God while the answer is still on the way. A shield takes the blows meant for us.

"For in Him our heart rejoices, for in the name of His holiness we trust." God's holy name stands for everything He is, perfect, pure and set apart from all that is evil. That is the God we trust.

"Let Your steadfast love, LORD, be on us, just as we hope for You." The last line is a prayer. We have sung about God's steadfast love filling the earth (verse 5). Now we ask that it rest on us. It is a fitting prayer to end any day with.

Psalm 33 Summary

Psalm 33 has no heading. It calls the righteous to praise the LORD with harp, lyre and a new song, because His word is upright, His work is faithful and the earth is full of His steadfast love. By His word the heavens were made, and the New Testament teaches the same (Hebrews 11:3; 2 Peter 3:5). He spoke, and creation stood. The LORD overturns the plans of nations, but His own counsel stands forever, and the nation whose God is the LORD is blessed. From heaven He sees all people and understands their hearts. No king is saved by an army and no horse can deliver, but the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him and hope in His steadfast love. God's people wait for Him as their help and shield and ask that His steadfast love rest on them.

People and Places

- Lyre: a small stringed instrument held in the hands and plucked, often used in Israel's worship.

Psalm 33 Study Questions

1. Who is called to shout for joy in verse 1? (33:1)

2. What instruments are named in verse 2? (33:2)

3. How were the heavens made, according to verse 6? (33:6)

4. What happens to the counsel of the nations, and what happens to the counsel of the LORD? (33:10-11)

5. What does the psalm say about the horse in battle? (33:17)

6. Toward whom is the eye of the LORD? (33:18)

7. What does it mean to you that God made everything simply by speaking? How might that change the way you read His word in Scripture?

8. What are the "horses" people trust in today instead of God? Which one tempts you most?

9. How can verse 11 steady us when world events are frightening?

10. Verse 22 is a prayer. Who could you pray it for this week, and why?

Psalm 35: Contend, LORD, with Those Who Contend with Me

Scripture

Of David.

35:1-10 Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take hold of shield and large shield, and rise up for my help. And draw out spear and battle-axe to meet those who pursue me; say to my soul, "I ***am*** your salvation." Let them be ashamed and humiliated who seek my life; let them be turned back and abashed who devise my harm. Let them be like chaff before ***the*** wind, and the angel of the LORD pushing ***them***. Let their way be darkness and slippery places, and the angel of the LORD pursuing them. For without cause they have hidden for me the pit of their net; without cause they have dug for my soul. Let destruction come on him ***that*** he does not know, and let his net which he hid catch him; into destruction let him fall, into it. And my soul will rejoice in the LORD; it will exult in His salvation. All my bones will say, "LORD, who ***is*** like You, who rescues the afflicted from ***one*** too strong for him, and the afflicted and the needy from the one who robs him?"

35:11-18 Witnesses of violence rise up; what I do not know they ask me. They repay me evil instead of good, bereavement for my soul. And I, when they were sick, my clothing ***was*** sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer returned to my bosom. As ***for*** a friend, as ***for*** a brother to me, I went about; like one mourning ***for*** a mother, I bowed down in mourning. And at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered; stricken ones gathered against me, and I did not know ***them***; they tore ***at me*** and were not silent. Like godless mockers ***for*** a cake, they gnashed their teeth at me. Lord, how long will You look ***on***? Bring back my soul from their ravages, my only one from ***the*** young lions. I will give thanks to You in ***the*** great assembly; among a numerous people I will praise You.

35:19-28 Let not those who are falsely my enemies rejoice over me; ***nor let*** those who hate me without cause wink ***the*** eye. For they do not speak peace, and against the quiet ones of the land they devise words of deceit. And they have opened their mouth wide against me; they have said, "Aha! Aha! Our eye has seen ***it***!" You have seen, LORD; do not be silent; Lord, do not be far from me. Rouse Yourself and awake for my judgment, my God and my Lord, for my cause! Judge me according to Your righteousness, LORD my God, and let them not rejoice over me. Let them not say in their heart, "Aha, our desire!" Let them not say, "We have swallowed him up." Let them be ashamed and abashed altogether who rejoice at my evil; let them be clothed ***with*** shame and humiliation who magnify themselves against me. Let them shout for joy and rejoice who delight in my righteousness, and let them say continually, "Let the LORD be great, who delights in the peace of His servant." And my tongue will utter Your righteousness, Your praise all the day.

Psalm 35 Preview

Psalm 35 is the prayer of a man under attack by people he once helped. When they were sick, he fasted and prayed for them and mourned as if for his own family. Now they lie about him in court,

mock him when he stumbles and want him dead. David asks the LORD to step in like a warrior and a judge, to fight for him and to put his enemies to shame.

Psalm 35 is one of the psalms called imprecatory, which means it asks God to bring judgment on the wicked. Those lines can make us uneasy, and we will look at them honestly. Three times David ends a section with a promise to praise God. And Jesus quoted this psalm when He spoke of those who hated Him "without cause" (John 15:25).

Psalm 35 Study

35:1-3 *Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take hold of shield and large shield, and rise up for my help. And draw out spear and battle-axe to meet those who pursue me; say to my soul, "I **am** your salvation."*

The heading reads simply, "Of David." It doesn't say when he wrote it. The enemies seem to be people from his own circle: neighbors and companions who turned on him, who bring false witnesses and gloat over his troubles. That could fit David's years in Saul's court, when jealous men spread lies about him, or other times in his life. We aren't told.

"Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me." To contend is to argue a case in court, and the word is courtroom language. "Fight against those who fight against me" is battlefield language. David needs God to be both his defense lawyer and his warrior.

"Take hold of shield and large shield, and rise up for my help." The small shield was carried on the arm; the large one covered the whole body. "And draw out spear and battle-axe." David pictures the LORD arming Himself and stepping between him and his pursuers. Exodus 15:3 calls the LORD "a man of war." He fights for His people.

Most of all David wants to hear one thing: "say to my soul, I am your salvation." Under all the fighting language is a simple need. He wants God to speak peace to his heart.

35:4-8 *Let them be ashamed and humiliated who seek my life; let them be turned back and abashed who devise my harm. Let them be like chaff before **the** wind, and the angel of the LORD pushing **them**. Let their way be darkness and slippery places, and the angel of the LORD pursuing them. For without cause they have hidden for me the pit of their net; without cause they have dug for my soul. Let destruction come on him **that** he does not know, and let his net which he hid catch him; into destruction let him fall, into it.*

Now come the hard lines. "Let them be ashamed and humiliated who seek my life." David asks that his enemies' plans fail and that they be turned back in shame. "Let them be like chaff before the wind." Chaff was the light husk blown away when grain was tossed in the air (compare Psalm 1:4).

"And the angel of the LORD pushing them." The angel of the LORD appears many times in the Old Testament as God's messenger who speaks and acts with God's own authority. Sometimes he is so closely tied to God that he speaks as God Himself (Genesis 16:10-13; Exodus 3:2-6). Many Christians believe that some of these appearances were the Son of God before He was born in

Bethlehem. Here the angel drives David's enemies away and chases them down a dark and slippery path.

"For without cause they have hidden for me the pit of their net." David's enemies had no reason to attack him. Twice he says "without cause." So he asks, "let his net which he hid catch him." He asks that the trap they set for him become their own downfall.

How should we read lines like these? David is praying, not plotting. David doesn't pick up a sword. He hands the case to God. He asks for what God's own justice requires, that evil fall back on the people who do it. Proverbs says the same in its own way: whoever digs a pit will fall into it (Proverbs 26:27). Paul teaches us not to take revenge, but to "give place to the wrath" (Romans 12:19). And Jesus told us to "love your enemies" and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). Both belong together. We can tell God plainly what has been done to us, ask Him to set it right and still pray for the people who hurt us (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

35:9-10 *And my soul will rejoice in the LORD; it will exult in His salvation. All my bones will say, "LORD, who **is** like You, who rescues the afflicted from **one** too strong for him, and the afflicted and the needy from the one who robs him?"*

"And my soul will rejoice in the LORD; it will exult in His salvation." David's real joy is not that his enemies fall but that God saves. "All my bones will say, LORD, who is like You." His whole body, down to the bones, will join in the praise. "Who rescues the afflicted from one too strong for him." God takes the side of the weak against the bully. That is good news for anyone who has been overpowered by someone stronger.

35:11-14 *Witnesses of violence rise up; what I do not know they ask me. They repay me evil instead of good, bereavement for my soul. And I, when they were sick, my clothing **was** sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer returned to my bosom. As **for** a friend, as **for** a brother to me, I went about; like one mourning **for** a mother, I bowed down in mourning.*

"Witnesses of violence rise up; what I do not know they ask me." These are false witnesses, people who accuse him of things he never did. Many see here a picture of Jesus' trial, when false witnesses came forward against Him (Matthew 26:59-60).

"They repay me evil instead of good." What hurts most is what David had done for them. "When they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth." Sackcloth was rough cloth made of goat hair, worn in grief and in humble prayer. "I humbled my soul with fasting." He fasted and prayed when they were ill. "My prayer returned to my bosom" probably means he prayed with his head bowed on his chest, or that his prayer, unanswered for them, came back as a blessing to himself. Either way he prayed hard.

"As for a friend, as for a brother to me, I went about; like one mourning for a mother, I bowed down in mourning." He grieved over their sickness as if a close family member were dying. He gave them real love. They gave him slander.

35:15-16 *And at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered; stricken ones gathered against me, and I did not know **them**; they tore **at me** and were not silent. Like godless mockers **for** a cake, they gnashed their teeth at me.*

"And at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered." When David had a hard time, his old friends threw a party. People he didn't even know joined in: "stricken ones gathered against me, and I did not know them." They "tore at me and were not silent," like animals pulling at prey.

"Like godless mockers for a cake, they gnashed their teeth at me." The picture may be of men who would mock anyone for a bite of food, and who grind their teeth in hatred. If you have ever been betrayed by people you helped, you know how this feels.

35:17-18 *Lord, how long will You look **on**? Bring back my soul from their ravages, my only one from **the** young lions. I will give thanks to You in **the** great assembly; among a numerous people I will praise You.*

"Lord, how long will You look on?" David is honest with God. He feels God is watching and not acting. "Bring back my soul from their ravages, my only one from the young lions." "My only one" is his life, the one life he has. His enemies are like young lions closing in.

Then he makes a promise: "I will give thanks to You in the great assembly." He expects to stand with God's people at worship and tell them what God has done. That is the end of the second section, and it ends in praise.

35:19-21 *Let not those who are falsely my enemies rejoice over me; **nor let** those who hate me without cause wink **the** eye. For they do not speak peace, and against the quiet ones of the land they devise words of deceit. And they have opened their mouth wide against me; they have said, "Aha! Aha! Our eye has seen **it**!"*

"Let not those who are falsely my enemies rejoice over me." To "wink the eye" was a sly signal between people sharing a cruel joke. David asks God not to let them get away with it.

"Those who hate me without cause." Jesus took these words, or the same words in Psalm 69:4, for Himself. On the night before He died, He told His disciples that the world hated Him and His Father, so that the word written in their law would be fulfilled: "They hated Me without cause" (John 15:25). Jesus did nothing but good, and He was hated for it. What David felt in part, Jesus felt in full.

"For they do not speak peace, and against the quiet ones of the land they devise words of deceit." The quiet ones are ordinary people who want to live in peace and trust God. The wicked target them. And they gloat: "Aha! Aha! Our eye has seen it!" They think they have caught David at last.

New Testament links: John 15:25 (quoted)

35:22-25 *You have seen, LORD; do not be silent; Lord, do not be far from me. Rouse Yourself and awake for my judgment, my God and my Lord, for my cause! Judge me according to Your righteousness, LORD my God, and let them not rejoice over me. Let them not say in their heart, "Aha, our desire!" Let them not say, "We have swallowed him up."*

"You have seen, LORD." The enemies said, "Our eye has seen it." David answers that God has seen too, and God sees the truth. "Do not be silent; Lord, do not be far from me."

"Rouse Yourself and awake for my judgment." God does not sleep (Psalm 121:4). That is the language of a man who feels God is slow to act, and God lets him say so. "My God and my Lord, for my cause!" David asks God to take up his case.

"Judge me according to Your righteousness, LORD my God." He doesn't ask God to ignore the facts. He asks God to judge rightly, because he knows the truth is on his side in this matter. "Let them not say, We have swallowed him up." He asks that his enemies not get the last word.

35:26-28 *Let them be ashamed and abashed altogether who rejoice at my evil; let them be clothed **with** shame and humiliation who magnify themselves against me. Let them shout for joy and rejoice who delight in my righteousness, and let them say continually, "Let the LORD be great, who delights in the peace of His servant." And my tongue will utter Your righteousness, Your praise all the day.*

"Let them be ashamed and abashed altogether who rejoice at my evil." Once more David asks God to put his enemies to shame, to clothe them with the shame they wanted to put on him.

Then he turns to his friends. "Let them shout for joy and rejoice who delight in my righteousness." Some people stood with David. He wants them to see God's answer and say, "Let the LORD be great, who delights in the peace of His servant." God delights in the peace, the wholeness and well-being, of those who serve Him.

"And my tongue will utter Your righteousness, Your praise all the day." The psalm that began with a call to battle ends with a tongue full of praise. David's enemies used their tongues to lie. He will use his to praise God all day long.

Psalm 35 Summary

In Psalm 35 David asks the LORD to contend with those who contend with him and to fight for him like a warrior with shield and spear. Most of all he wants God to say to his soul, "I am your salvation." He asks that his enemies, who set traps for him without cause, be shamed, scattered like chaff and driven by the angel of the LORD into their own net. These are prayers that hand vengeance to God, not permission to hate. David describes how he had fasted and mourned for these same people when they were sick, and how they repaid him with false witness and mockery. Jesus applied the words "those who hate me without cause" to Himself (John 15:25). David asks God to wake up and judge rightly, and he promises to praise God in the great assembly and with his tongue all the day.

People and Places

- Angel of the LORD: God's messenger who speaks and acts with God's own authority; at times he speaks as God Himself.

Psalm 35 Study Questions

1. What two pictures does David use for what he wants God to do in verse 1? (35:1)

2. What does David most want God to say to his soul? (35:3)

3. What does David ask to happen to the net his enemies hid? (35:8)

4. What did David do when his enemies were sick? (35:13-14)

5. What words from this psalm did Jesus apply to Himself, and where? (35:19; John 15:25)

6. What does David promise to do in verses 18 and 28? (35:18, 28)

7. How is a prayer like verses 4-8 different from taking revenge? How do Romans 12:19 and Matthew 5:44 help us pray about people who hurt us?

8. Have you been repaid with evil for good? How does this psalm help you bring that to God honestly?

9. Why might God let David say, "Rouse Yourself and awake," when God does not sleep? What does that teach us about honest prayer? (35:23)

10. Who are the "quiet ones of the land" today, and how can we stand with them? (35:20)

Psalm 36: The Fountain of Life

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of the servant of the LORD, of David.

36:1-4 An utterance of transgression to the wicked ***is*** in the midst of my heart: there is no dread of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes, to find his iniquity, to hate ***it***. The words of his mouth ***are*** iniquity and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely, to do good. Iniquity he devises on his bed; he sets himself on a way ***that is*** not good; evil he does not reject.

36:5-12 LORD, Your steadfast love ***is*** in the heavens, Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness ***is*** like the mountains of God; Your judgments ***are*** a great deep; man and beast You save, LORD. How precious ***is*** Your steadfast love, God! And the sons of man take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. They drink their fill from the fatness of Your house, and You give them drink ***from*** the river of Your delights. For with You ***is*** a fountain of life; in Your light we see light. Draw out Your steadfast love to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright of heart. Let not the foot of pride come to me, and let not the hand of ***the*** wicked make me wander. There those who work iniquity have fallen; they have been thrust down and have not been able to rise.

Psalm 36 Preview

Psalm 36 sets two pictures side by side. The first is a portrait of the wicked man. He has no dread of God, he flatters himself, he lies and he lies awake at night planning evil. The second is a portrait of God. His steadfast love reaches to the heavens, His righteousness stands like the mountains, and His people find shelter under His wings and drink from the river of His delights.

The contrast is sharp on purpose. Sin shrinks a person down to his own small schemes. The love of God opens up a world as wide as the sky. David ends by praying to stay in that love and not be pushed off course by the proud.

Psalm 36 Study

36:1-2 *An utterance of transgression to the wicked **is** in the midst of my heart: there is no dread of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes, to find his iniquity, to hate **it**.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of the servant of the LORD, of David." Only here and in Psalm 18 does a heading call David "the servant of the LORD." It is a title of honor. Moses and Joshua were called the servant of the LORD, and so was David. To be God's servant was the highest calling in Israel.

"An utterance of transgression to the wicked is in the midst of my heart." The wording is hard in Hebrew, and translations differ. The SLB keeps the Hebrew "my heart": David has thought this through in his own heart, and what he sees is that sin speaks to the wicked man like an oracle.

Transgression has become his prophet, and he listens to it. Its message is simple: you don't need to fear God.

"There is no dread of God before his eyes." That is the root of all the rest. When a person no longer fears God, nothing holds him back. Paul quotes this line at the end of his long list of Old Testament verses in Romans 3:10-18, which shows that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, are under sin. In Romans 3:18 it reads, "there is no fear of God before their eyes." Paul uses David's portrait of the wicked man to show what every human heart is like apart from God's grace. That leads Paul straight to the good news that God makes sinners right with Himself as a gift, through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-24).

"For he flatters himself in his own eyes." He tells himself he is fine. He is so pleased with himself that he can't see his own sin "to find his iniquity, to hate it." Self-flattery is blindness. The person who never finds anything wrong with himself is in the most danger.

New Testament links: Romans 3:18 (quoted)

36:3-4 *The words of his mouth **are** iniquity and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely, to do good. Iniquity he devises on his bed; he sets himself on a way **that is** not good; evil he does not reject.*

"The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely, to do good." He once may have known better. Now he has stopped trying.

"Iniquity he devises on his bed." Night is when many of us pray or think over the day. He uses it to plan evil. "He sets himself on a way that is not good; evil he does not reject." He doesn't stumble into sin. He chooses it, walks in it and won't say no to it. David paints the picture so we will see the danger and turn away from it ourselves.

36:5-6 *LORD, Your steadfast love **is** in the heavens, Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness **is** like the mountains of God; Your judgments **are** a great deep; man and beast You save, LORD.*

Then David lifts his eyes. "LORD, Your steadfast love is in the heavens, Your faithfulness to the clouds." Steadfast love is the Hebrew hesed, God's loyal covenant love. Look up at the sky and try to measure it. That is how big God's love is. His faithfulness, His keeping of every promise, reaches as high as the clouds.

"Your righteousness is like the mountains of God." The mountains stand firm and don't move. God's righteousness is just as solid. "Your judgments are a great deep." His decisions go deeper than the ocean. We can't always see to the bottom of what God is doing, but we can trust that it is right.

"Man and beast You save, LORD." God cares for His whole creation. He feeds the animals and keeps people alive every day (Psalm 104:27; Matthew 6:26).

36:7-9 *How precious **is** Your steadfast love, God! And the sons of man take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. They drink their fill from the fatness of Your house, and You give them drink **from** the river of Your delights. For with You **is** a fountain of life; in Your light we see light.*

"How precious is Your steadfast love, God!" David can't stop talking about it. "And the sons of man take refuge in the shadow of Your wings." A mother bird spreads her wings over her chicks when danger comes. Jesus used the same picture when He wept over Jerusalem and said He had longed to gather her children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Matthew 23:37).

"They drink their fill from the fatness of Your house." The fatness means the richest food, like the best portions at a feast in God's house. "You give them drink from the river of Your delights." God's people don't get scraps. They are guests at His table, and He gives them a river.

"For with You is a fountain of life." Life itself flows from God like water from a spring. "In Your light we see light." We can only see clearly when God gives us light, like a room that comes into focus when someone turns on a lamp. Jesus said He is the light of the world, and whoever follows Him will have the light of life (John 8:12). He also offered living water that becomes in a person "a spring of water welling up into eternal life" (John 4:14). The wicked man in verses 1-4 is blind. Those who come to God see.

36:10-12 *Draw out Your steadfast love to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright of heart. Let not the foot of pride come to me, and let not the hand of **the** wicked make me wander. There those who work iniquity have fallen; they have been thrust down and have not been able to rise.*

"Draw out Your steadfast love to those who know You." To draw out is to keep pulling, like stretching a cord further and further. David asks God to keep His love going for those who know Him, without a break. "And Your righteousness to the upright of heart."

"Let not the foot of pride come to me, and let not the hand of the wicked make me wander." David knows that even a man who loves God can be knocked off course by the proud. He asks God to guard him.

"There those who work iniquity have fallen." David sees the end of the wicked as if it had already happened. "They have been thrust down and have not been able to rise." The proud man of verses 1-4 looked strong. In the end he falls and does not get up. God's people, sheltered under His wings, stand.

Psalm 36 Summary

Psalm 36, written by David, "the servant of the LORD," first describes the wicked man. Sin speaks deep in his heart, and he has no dread of God, a line Paul quotes in Romans 3:18 to show that all people are under sin. He flatters himself, speaks deceit, stops doing good and plots evil on his bed. Then David turns to the LORD. His steadfast love reaches the heavens, His faithfulness the clouds, His righteousness stands like the mountains and His judgments are a great deep. People take refuge in the shadow of His wings, feast in His house and drink from the river of His delights,

because with Him is the fountain of life, and in His light we see light. David prays that God's love would continue toward those who know Him, that pride would not push him off course, and he sees the workers of iniquity fallen.

Psalm 36 Study Questions

1. What title does the heading give David? (heading)

2. What is missing "before his eyes" in the wicked man? (36:1)

3. How does the wicked man spend his nights? (36:4)

4. How high does God's steadfast love reach? (36:5)

5. Where do the sons of man take refuge? (36:7)

6. What is "with You," according to verse 9? (36:9)

7. Why do you think losing the fear of God leads to every other sin in verses 1-4? Where do you see that today?

8. How does Paul use verse 1 in Romans 3, and why is that bad news followed by good news?

9. How can a believer guard against flattering himself and missing his own sin? (36:2)

10. What does "In Your light we see light" mean to you? How has God helped you see something clearly? (36:9)

Psalm 38: Do Not Forsake Me, LORD

Scripture

A psalm of David, to bring to remembrance.

38:1-8 LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, and ***do not*** discipline me in Your rage. For Your arrows have sunk into me, and Your hand has come down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; there is no peace in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have passed over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink; they fester because of my folly. I am bent down; I am bowed down exceedingly; all the day I have gone about mourning. For my loins are full of burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am numb and I am crushed exceedingly; I roar because of the groaning of my heart.

38:9-14 Lord, all my desire ***is*** before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs; my strength has left me; and the light of my eyes, even they are not with me. My loved ones and my companions stand off from before my plague, and my near ones have stood far away. And those who seek my life set traps, and those who seek out my harm have spoken destruction, and they devise deceits all the day. And I, like a deaf ***man***, do not hear, and ***I am*** like a mute ***man who*** does not open his mouth. And I have become like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth there are no reproofs.

38:15-22 For I have waited for You, LORD; You Yourself will answer, Lord my God. For I said, "Lest they rejoice over me; when my foot slips, they magnify themselves against me." For I am prepared for stumbling, and my pain ***is*** before me continually. For I declare my iniquity; I am anxious because of my sin. And my enemies ***are*** living ***and*** are numerous, and those who hate me falsely are many. And those who repay evil in place of good accuse me, because of my pursuing good. Do not forsake me, LORD; my God, do not be far from me. Hurry to my help, Lord, my salvation.

Psalm 38 Preview

Psalm 38 is the prayer of a man who is sick in body and sick at heart, and who knows his own sin is behind much of it. He feels God's hand pressing down on him. His wounds fester, his strength is gone and his friends keep their distance. His enemies use the moment to attack. He doesn't argue back. He waits for the LORD.

Psalm 38 is one of the seven psalms the church has long called the penitential psalms, prayers of sorrow for sin. It is raw and honest. It doesn't end with a burst of joy, only with a cry, "Hurry to my help." But that cry is aimed at "Lord, my salvation." Even at the bottom, David knows where to turn.

Psalm 38 Study

38:1-2 *LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, and **do not** discipline me in Your rage. For Your arrows have sunk into me, and Your hand has come down on me.*

The heading reads, "A psalm of David, to bring to remembrance." Psalm 70 has the same phrase. Its meaning is uncertain. Some think it means the psalm was sung when a memorial offering was made, a portion of an offering burned on the altar to bring the worshiper before God (Leviticus 2:2). Others think it simply means a prayer to remind God of the writer's need, or to help God's people remember. The heading doesn't tell us when David wrote it.

Psalm 38 is one of the seven penitential psalms (see Psalm 6).

"LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, and do not discipline me in Your rage." Psalm 6 opens almost the same way. David doesn't ask God to skip discipline. He asks God not to discipline him in anger. He would rather be corrected as a son than crushed as an enemy. Hebrews 12:6 says the Lord disciplines the one He loves.

"For Your arrows have sunk into me, and Your hand has come down on me." David feels as though God has shot him and pinned him down. He believes his suffering has come from God's hand because of his sin.

38:3-5 *There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; there is no peace in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have passed over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink; they fester because of my folly.*

"There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; there is no peace in my bones because of my sin." David connects his illness with his sin. The heading doesn't say what the sickness was, and we shouldn't guess.

A word of caution here. Scripture shows that sin can bring suffering, as it did for David. But it also shows that not all sickness comes from a person's sin. When the disciples asked whether a blind man or his parents had sinned, Jesus said neither had (John 9:3). Job's friends were wrong to blame his suffering on his sin. If you are ill, don't assume God is punishing you. If you do know of sin in your life, bring it to Him, as David did.

"For my iniquities have passed over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me." He pictures his sins as floodwaters over his head, or as a load too heavy to carry. "My wounds stink; they fester because of my folly." Folly in the Bible is not a lack of brains. It is moral foolishness, choosing to go against God. David calls his sin what it is.

38:6-8 *I am bent down; I am bowed down exceedingly; all the day I have gone about mourning. For my loins are full of burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am numb and I am crushed exceedingly; I roar because of the groaning of my heart.*

"I am bent down; I am bowed down exceedingly; all the day I have gone about mourning." His body is bent, and so is his spirit. "For my loins are full of burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh." The loins are the lower back and hips, the seat of strength. They burn with pain or fever.

"I am numb and I am crushed exceedingly; I roar because of the groaning of my heart." Numb from the pain, crushed under the weight, he groans so deeply that it comes out as a roar. Guilt and sickness together have broken him down. Anyone who has carried a heavy conscience knows how it can affect the whole body (compare Psalm 32:3-4).

38:9-10 *Lord, all my desire **is** before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs; my strength has left me; and the light of my eyes, even they are not with me.*

Then David turns. "Lord, all my desire is before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You." Even his sighs are heard. He doesn't need perfect words. God knows what he wants before he can say it. Paul says that when we don't know how to pray as we should, the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26).

"My heart throbs; my strength has left me; and the light of my eyes, even they are not with me." His heart races, his strength is gone and his eyes have grown dim. He is worn out.

38:11-12 *My loved ones and my companions stand off from before my plague, and my near ones have stood far away. And those who seek my life set traps, and those who seek out my harm have spoken destruction, and they devise deceits all the day.*

"My loved ones and my companions stand off from before my plague, and my near ones have stood far away." Plague here means his affliction, the stroke of illness. The people closest to him won't come near. Maybe they are afraid of his disease, or maybe they think God is against him and don't want to be caught on the wrong side. Either way, he is alone.

Many see a likeness to the cross, where Jesus' acquaintances "stood at a distance" watching (Luke 23:49). The difference matters, though: Jesus suffered for our sins, not His own.

"And those who seek my life set traps." Worse than the friends who stay away are the enemies who move in. They speak destruction and "devise deceits all the day." Weak people are easy targets.

38:13-14 *And I, like a deaf **man**, do not hear, and **I am** like a mute **man who** does not open his mouth. And I have become like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth there are no reproofs.*

"And I, like a deaf man, do not hear, and I am like a mute man who does not open his mouth." David doesn't answer his accusers. He acts as though he can't hear them. "In whose mouth there are no reproofs." He has no arguments to throw back.

Why stay silent? Partly because he knows he has sinned, so he can't claim to be innocent. And partly because he is leaving his defense to God, as the next verse shows. Isaiah 53:7 says of the Servant of the LORD that "He did not open His mouth," and Jesus kept silent before His accusers (Matthew 26:63). Many see David's silence as a faint picture of His. Silence is sometimes the strongest answer we have, when we trust God to speak for us.

38:15-17 *For I have waited for You, LORD; You Yourself will answer, Lord my God. For I said, "Lest they rejoice over me; when my foot slips, they magnify themselves against me." For I am prepared for stumbling, and my pain **is** before me continually.*

"For I have waited for You, LORD; You Yourself will answer, Lord my God." That is why David can stay quiet. He isn't the one who has to answer. God will. To wait for the LORD is to trust Him to act in His time.

"For I said, Lest they rejoice over me; when my foot slips, they magnify themselves against me." David's fear is that his enemies will gloat. "For I am prepared for stumbling, and my pain is before me continually." He feels he is about to fall. He is that close to the edge.

38:18-20 *For I declare my iniquity; I am anxious because of my sin. And my enemies **are** living **and** are numerous, and those who hate me falsely are many. And those who repay evil in place of good accuse me, because of my pursuing good.*

"For I declare my iniquity; I am anxious because of my sin." That is the heart of the confession. David doesn't hide his sin. He says it out loud to God. That is what confession is, agreeing with God about what we have done. John writes that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

"And my enemies are living and are numerous." David is guilty before God, but not before them. "Those who repay evil in place of good accuse me, because of my pursuing good." His enemies attack him for the good he does. A person can be truly guilty before God and still be falsely accused by people. David brings both to the LORD.

38:21-22 *Do not forsake me, LORD; my God, do not be far from me. Hurry to my help, Lord, my salvation.*

"Do not forsake me, LORD; my God, do not be far from me." David's worst fear isn't sickness or enemies. It is being left alone by God. His friends have stood far off. He begs God not to.

"Hurry to my help, Lord, my salvation." That is how the psalm ends. There is no report that the sickness lifted or the enemies fled. It ends with a cry for help. Some of our prayers end that way too. But David calls God "my salvation" while he is still in the pit. He knows his only hope is in the God he sinned against. If that is where you are today, this psalm gives you words. God hears a broken sinner who turns to Him.

Psalm 38 Summary

Psalm 38 is a psalm of David "to bring to remembrance" and one of the seven penitential psalms. David asks the LORD not to discipline him in anger. He feels God's arrows and hand on him and links his sickness to his sin: his iniquities are over his head like a flood, his wounds fester and his strength is gone. All his longing and sighing are before the Lord. His friends stand far off, and his enemies set traps and plot against him. He keeps silent like a deaf and mute man, because he waits for the LORD to answer. He confesses his iniquity openly and admits he is anxious over his sin, while his enemies repay his good with evil. He ends with a cry: "Do not forsake me, LORD," and "Hurry to my help, Lord, my salvation."

Psalm 38 Study Questions

1. What does David ask God not to do in verse 1? (38:1)

2. What does David say is the cause of the lack of peace in his bones? (38:3)

3. What is "not hidden" from the Lord? (38:9)

4. How do David's loved ones and companions respond to his suffering? (38:11)

5. How does David respond to his accusers, and why? (38:13-15)

6. What does David do with his iniquity in verse 18? (38:18)

7. Why is it wrong to assume that every illness comes from a person's sin? How should that shape the way we care for sick friends? (John 9:3)

8. David is guilty before God but falsely accused by people (38:18-20). How can both be true at once, and how should we pray when they are?

9. When has silence been the right answer for you, and when has it been the wrong one?

10. The psalm ends without a clear answer. What does it teach you about praying when relief hasn't come yet? (38:21-22)

Psalm 39: Make Me Know My End

Scripture

To the choirmaster, for Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

39:1-6 I said, "I will keep my ways from sinning with my tongue; I will keep a muzzle for my mouth while the wicked ***is*** still before me." I was mute ***in*** silence; I kept silent from good, and my pain was stirred up. My heart became hot within me; in my musing a fire burned; I spoke with my tongue: "LORD, make me know my end, and the measure of my days, what it ***is***; let me know how fleeting I ***am***. Look, You have made my days handbreadths, and my lifespan ***is*** like nothing before You; surely all mankind ***that*** stands ***is*** all vanity." Selah. Surely a man walks about as an image; surely ***in*** vanity they are in turmoil; he heaps up and does not know who will gather them.

39:7-13 And now, what do I wait for, Lord? My hope, it ***is*** in You. Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make me a reproach of the foolish. I am mute; I do not open my mouth, for You Yourself have acted. Remove Your plague from on me; I have come to an end from the hostility of Your hand. With reproofs for iniquity You have disciplined a man, and You have melted like the moth what he desires; surely all mankind ***is*** vanity. Selah. Hear my prayer, LORD, and give ear to my cry for help; do not be silent toward my tears, for I ***am*** a sojourner with You, a resident alien like all my fathers. Look away from me, that I may be cheerful before I go and am not.

Psalm 39 Preview

David tried to keep quiet. He was suffering, the wicked were watching and he didn't want to say anything he would regret. But the silence only made the pain worse, until it burst out of him in prayer. What he asks is surprising: "LORD, make me know my end." He wants to see how short his life is.

Psalm 39 is a hard and honest psalm about how brief life is. Our days are a few handbreadths, and all our busy getting and gathering is a breath. Yet in the middle of it David says, "My hope, it is in You." He ends as a traveler passing through, asking God for a little relief before he goes.

Psalm 39 Study

39:1-3 *I said, "I will keep my ways from sinning with my tongue; I will keep a muzzle for my mouth while the wicked **is** still before me." I was mute **in** silence; I kept silent from good, and my pain was stirred up. My heart became hot within me; in my musing a fire burned; I spoke with my tongue:*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, for Jeduthun. A psalm of David." Jeduthun was one of the three chief musicians David appointed to lead worship, with Asaph and Heman (1 Chronicles 16:41-42; 25:1). His name is also in the headings of Psalms 62 and 77. "For Jeduthun" most likely means the psalm was given to him or to the singers of his family to perform. Some think it names a tune or style linked with him. We can't be sure.

"I said, I will keep my ways from sinning with my tongue." David is suffering, and the wicked are around him. He knows that if he starts talking, he may say something bitter about God in front of people who would love to hear it. So he resolves to "keep a muzzle for my mouth." That was wise. James tells us to be "slow to speak" (James 1:19).

"I was mute in silence; I kept silent from good, and my pain was stirred up." But holding everything in didn't help. He kept silent even from saying good things, and the pain grew worse. "My heart became hot within me; in my musing a fire burned." Bottled-up grief can build like a fire. At last, "I spoke with my tongue."

David's answer was not to complain to the wicked. He turned and spoke to God. That is the right place to take what is burning inside us.

39:4-6 *"LORD, make me know my end, and the measure of my days, what it **is**; let me know how fleeting I **am**. Look, You have made my days handbreadths, and my lifespan **is** like nothing before You; surely all mankind **that** stands **is** all vanity." Selah. Surely a man walks about as an image; surely **in** vanity they are in turmoil; he heaps up and does not know who will gather them.*

"LORD, make me know my end, and the measure of my days, what it is; let me know how fleeting I am." David isn't asking for a date on the calendar. David wants to feel the truth of how short life is, so he can live wisely. Moses prayed something similar: "So teach us to count our days, that we may bring in a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

"Look, You have made my days handbreadths." A handbreadth was the width of a hand, about four inches, one of the smallest measures in Israel. Our whole life is a few hands wide. "And my lifespan is like nothing before You." Next to the eternal God, eighty years is a blink.

"Surely all mankind that stands is all vanity." "Vanity" here is the Hebrew word for a breath or a vapor, the same word that runs all through Ecclesiastes. Even a man standing at his strongest is a puff of breath. James says our life "is a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). Selah follows, a pause in the music (see Psalm 3). It is a good place to stop and think.

"Surely a man walks about as an image." He is like a shadow moving across the ground. "Surely in vanity they are in turmoil." People rush around, busy and anxious, over things that won't last. "He heaps up and does not know who will gather them." We pile up money and things, and someone else will get them. Jesus told of a rich man who built bigger barns and died that night, and God asked him whose those things would be now (Luke 12:20).

39:7-9 *And now, what do I wait for, Lord? My hope, it **is** in You. Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make me a reproach of the foolish. I am mute; I do not open my mouth, for You Yourself have acted.*

"And now, what do I wait for, Lord? My hope, it is in You." Verse 7 is the turning point of the psalm. If life is that short and everything we gather is a breath, what is left to hope for? Only God. When we see how little our own lives can hold, we are ready to put our hope where it belongs.

"Deliver me from all my transgressions." David knows that his deepest problem isn't how short life is. It is his sin. "Do not make me a reproach of the foolish." The foolish are those who live as if there is no God. He doesn't want his suffering to give them a reason to mock.

"I am mute; I do not open my mouth, for You Yourself have acted." Now his silence has changed. At first he was silent to keep from sinning. Now he is silent because he sees that God is behind what has happened. He accepts it from God's hand, as Job did when he said, "The LORD has given, and the LORD has taken" (Job 1:21).

39:10-11 *Remove Your plague from on me; I have come to an end from the hostility of Your hand. With reproofs for iniquity You have disciplined a man, and You have melted like the moth what he desires; surely all mankind **is** vanity. Selah.*

"Remove Your plague from on me." The plague is the blow of suffering God has allowed. "I have come to an end from the hostility of Your hand." David is worn out. He has nothing left.

"With reproofs for iniquity You have disciplined a man." David sees his suffering as God's discipline for sin. That was true for him. It isn't always true for every sufferer (see Psalm 38). "And You have melted like the moth what he desires." A moth eats through fine cloth until the garment falls apart. That is how quickly the things a person treasures can be lost. Jesus warned us not to store up treasure on earth, "where moth and rust destroy" (Matthew 6:19).

"Surely all mankind is vanity." The refrain from verse 5 comes back, and another Selah. The point is driven home twice.

39:12-13 *Hear my prayer, LORD, and give ear to my cry for help; do not be silent toward my tears, for I **am** a sojourner with You, a resident alien like all my fathers. Look away from me, that I may be cheerful before I go and am not.*

"Hear my prayer, LORD, and give ear to my cry for help; do not be silent toward my tears." David had been silent. Now he asks God not to be. God sees tears. Jesus Himself wept at the grave of His friend (John 11:35).

"For I am a sojourner with You, a resident alien like all my fathers." A sojourner was a foreigner living in a land not his own, with few rights, depending on the kindness of others. David, the king, says he is just passing through, as Abraham and his family were. Hebrews 11:13 says the people of faith confessed that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth, and Peter calls believers "sojourners and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11). But look at the words "with You." David is a guest in God's world, and he is God's guest. That is why he dares to ask for help.

"Look away from me, that I may be cheerful before I go and am not." This last line is hard. David asks God to stop looking at him in discipline, to ease His hand, so he can have a little joy before he dies. It sounds close to despair, and the psalm ends there.

We should not hurry past this. Some believers have prayed this way when the pain was long and heavy. God put this prayer in His book, which tells us He can bear our hardest words. David still prayed it to God, and he called God "my hope" (verse 7). If you are in a place where you only want

relief and can't see anything else, tell God that, and tell a pastor or a trusted believer too. If you are thinking of ending your life, get emergency help right away. We now know more than David could see. Jesus has defeated death, and those who belong to Him "will live" (John 11:25). For us, "before I go and am not" is not the end of the story.

Psalm 39 Summary

In Psalm 39, given to Jeduthun the musician, David tries to keep silent before the wicked so he won't sin with his tongue, but the pain burns inside him until he speaks to God. He asks the LORD to make him know how fleeting he is. His days are only handbreadths, every person is a breath and people rush around heaping up things others will gather. Then he says, "My hope, it is in You," asks to be delivered from his transgressions and accepts his suffering as from God's hand. He asks God to remove the blow, since God's discipline melts what a person treasures like a moth. He ends by asking God to hear his tears, because he is a sojourner with God like his fathers, and by asking for a little relief before he dies.

People and Places

- Jeduthun: one of David's three chief musicians, with Asaph and Heman (1 Chronicles 25:1).
- Handbreadth: the width of a hand, about four inches, one of the smallest measures in Israel.
- Sojourner: a foreigner living in a land not his own, depending on the kindness of others.

Psalm 39 Study Questions

1. Why did David decide to keep a muzzle on his mouth? (39:1)

2. What happened when David kept silent? (39:2-3)

3. What did David ask the LORD to make him know? (39:4)

4. How long does David say his days are? (39:5)

5. What does David say about the person who heaps up wealth? (39:6)

6. Where does David put his hope? (39:7)

7. What does David call himself in verse 12, and what does that mean? (39:12)

8. Why is it wise to remember how short life is? How might that change what you do this week?

9. When is silence wise, and when does holding things in become harmful? What did David do with what was burning inside him?

10. Verse 13 ends the psalm near despair. Why do you think God included a prayer like that in Scripture, and what would you say to a friend praying it?

Psalm 41: The Friend Who Lifted His Heel

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

41:1-3 How blessed ***is he who*** considers ***the*** poor; in a day of harm the LORD will deliver him. The LORD will keep him and preserve him alive, and he will be called blessed in the land; and do not give him into the desire of his enemies. The LORD will sustain him on a couch of illness; all his bed You have changed in his sickness.

41:4-9 I myself said, "LORD, be gracious to me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against You." My enemies speak evil of me: "When will he die, and his name perish?" And if ***one*** comes to see ***me***, he speaks falsehood; his heart gathers wickedness for itself; he goes out to the outside ***and*** speaks. All who hate me whisper together against me; against me they plot harm for me: "A thing of worthlessness has been poured out on him, and since he has lain down, he will not rise again." Even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has made ***his*** heel great against me.

41:10-13 And You, LORD, be gracious to me and raise me up, that I may repay them. By this I know that You delight in me: that my enemy does not shout in triumph over me. And I, in my integrity You have upheld me, and You have set me before Your face forever. Blessed ***be*** the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting and to everlasting. Amen and Amen.

Psalm 41 Preview

Psalm 41 begins with a blessing on the person who cares for the poor and weak. God will care for that person in his own day of trouble, even on his sickbed. Then David tells his own story. He is sick, and his enemies are waiting for him to die. Visitors come to his bedside with smiles and leave to spread rumors. Worst of all, a close friend who shared his table has turned against him.

Jesus quoted verse 9 on the night He was betrayed and said Judas fulfilled it. The psalm ends with David trusting God to uphold him and with a doxology, a short burst of praise, that closes Book One of the Psalms.

Psalm 41 Study

41:1-3 *How blessed **is he who** considers **the** poor; in a day of harm the LORD will deliver him. The LORD will keep him and preserve him alive, and he will be called blessed in the land; and do not give him into the desire of his enemies. The LORD will sustain him on a couch of illness; all his bed You have changed in his sickness.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David." It doesn't say when he wrote it. Many think of the time of Absalom's revolt, when David's trusted counselor Ahithophel joined the conspiracy (2 Samuel 15:12), though the books of Samuel don't mention an illness then. We aren't told.

"How blessed is he who considers the poor." To consider the poor is more than feeling sorry for them. It means paying attention, thinking about their situation and acting with wisdom and care. "Blessed" means the person lives under God's favor (as Volume 1 shows in Psalm 1).

"In a day of harm the LORD will deliver him." The one who helps the weak will find God helping him when he is weak. "The LORD will keep him and preserve him alive." Jesus said the merciful are blessed, because they will receive mercy (Matthew 5:7).

"The LORD will sustain him on a couch of illness; all his bed You have changed in his sickness." The picture is of God tending a sick person, like a nurse turning the bedding and making the sufferer comfortable. God doesn't promise that the merciful will never get sick. He promises to be with them in the sickbed.

41:4-6 *I myself said, "LORD, be gracious to me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against You." My enemies speak evil of me: "When will he die, and his name perish?" And if **one** comes to see **me**, he speaks falsehood; his heart gathers wickedness for itself; he goes out to the outside **and** speaks.*

"I myself said, 'LORD, be gracious to me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against You.'" David is sick, and he is honest about his sin. He asks God for mercy and healing, and "my soul" means his whole person, inside and out.

"My enemies speak evil of me: When will he die, and his name perish?" They aren't just waiting. They are hoping. To have your name perish was to be forgotten with no heir to carry on your line. For a king, his enemies would also be eager to see who took the throne.

"And if one comes to see me, he speaks falsehood." Visitors come and say kind words at the bedside. "His heart gathers wickedness for itself." While he sits there, he is collecting gossip. Then "he goes out to the outside and speaks." He walks out the door and tells everyone how bad David looks. A sickroom can be a lonely place when you can't trust the people who visit.

41:7-8 *All who hate me whisper together against me; against me they plot harm for me: "A thing of worthlessness has been poured out on him, and since he has lain down, he will not rise again."*

"All who hate me whisper together against me." The whispering campaign spreads. "A thing of worthlessness has been poured out on him." The word for worthlessness is the Hebrew belial, a word for something wicked and destructive. His enemies say some evil disease has been poured on him, maybe as a curse or a judgment for some secret sin. "Since he has lain down, he will not rise again." They have already written him off.

41:9 *Even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has made **his** heel great against me.*

Now comes the deepest wound. "Even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has made his heel great against me." "The man of my peace" is a close friend, someone David was at peace with and trusted completely. In the ancient world, to eat at someone's table was a bond of loyalty. To turn on the host after sharing his bread was the worst kind of betrayal. "Made his heel

great" pictures a horse or mule kicking, or a man lifting his foot to stamp on someone who is down.

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus quoted this verse at the Last Supper. He said He knew whom He had chosen, but the Scripture had to be fulfilled: "The one feeding on the bread with Me lifted up his heel against Me" (John 13:18). The wording is a little different from the SLB of Psalm 41 because John is translating from the Hebrew in his own words, but it is the same verse. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record Jesus saying that the one who would betray Him was eating with Him at the table (Matthew 26:23; Mark 14:18; Luke 22:21). Then He handed the morsel to Judas (John 13:26).

Look at what Jesus left out. He did not quote "in whom I trusted." Jesus knew from the beginning who would betray Him (John 6:64). Judas was His friend in the sense that he ate at His table and was treated with love, but Jesus was never fooled by him.

What David felt from a trusted friend, the Son of David felt from Judas. If you have been betrayed by someone close, Jesus knows that pain from the inside. He was betrayed with a kiss.

New Testament links: John 13:18 (quoted); Matthew 26:23 (fulfilled); Mark 14:18 (fulfilled); Luke 22:21 (fulfilled)

41:10-12 *And You, LORD, be gracious to me and raise me up, that I may repay them. By this I know that You delight in me: that my enemy does not shout in triumph over me. And I, in my integrity You have upheld me, and You have set me before Your face forever.*

"And You, LORD, be gracious to me and raise me up, that I may repay them." His enemies said he would not rise again (verse 8). David asks God to raise him up. "That I may repay them" is a hard line. David was the king, and part of a king's God-given duty was to bring justice on traitors and conspirators. He is not asking for the power to take personal revenge so much as for God to restore him to the throne so that justice can be done. Still, believers today live under Jesus' command to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44) and to leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:19).

"By this I know that You delight in me: that my enemy does not shout in triumph over me." David will take his recovery as a sign of God's favor.

"And I, in my integrity You have upheld me." David has already confessed his sin (verse 4), so integrity here doesn't mean he is sinless. It means he has been true to God and loyal to his friends, unlike the traitor. "You have set me before Your face forever." To stand before God's face is to live in His presence and favor. That is where David ends up, forever.

41:13 *Blessed **be** the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting and to everlasting. Amen and Amen.*

"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting and to everlasting. Amen and Amen." This verse closes the psalm and also closes Book One of the Psalms (Psalms 1 to 41). Each of the five books ends with a doxology like this (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48; and Psalm 150 closes the whole collection). "From everlasting and to everlasting" means God had no beginning and will have no end. "Amen" means it is true, or let it be so. The double Amen is the people's strong agreement.

After a psalm of sickness, slander and betrayal, Book One ends in praise. God is still blessed, still the God of Israel, still everlasting. Our troubles are real, but they are not the last word.

Psalm 41 Summary

Psalm 41 begins by blessing the person who considers the poor: the LORD will deliver, keep and sustain him, even on his sickbed. Then David, sick and aware of his sin, asks God to heal him. His enemies wait for him to die, visitors speak falsely at his bedside and spread rumors outside, and they say an evil disease has been poured on him. Worst of all, a close friend who ate his bread has lifted his heel against him. Jesus quoted this verse at the Last Supper and said Judas fulfilled it (John 13:18). David asks God to raise him up, sees God's favor in his enemy's failure and trusts that God has set him before His face forever. The psalm, and Book One of the Psalms, ends with "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel," and "Amen and Amen."

People and Places

- Doxology: a short burst of praise to God; one closes each of the five books of the Psalms.

Psalm 41 Study Questions

1. Who is blessed, according to verse 1? (41:1)

2. What will the LORD do for that person on a couch of illness? (41:3)

3. What did David's enemies say about him? (41:5, 8)

4. What did the visitor do after leaving David's bedside? (41:6)

5. Who lifted up his heel against David? (41:9)

6. Where did Jesus quote verse 9, and whom did He mean? (John 13:18)

7. How does verse 13 close Book One of the Psalms? (41:13)

8. What does it look like to "consider" the poor and weak, not just feel sorry for them? Who could you consider this week?

9. If you have been betrayed by a friend, how does it help to know Jesus was betrayed by someone who ate at His table?

10. How can we visit sick people in a way that is the opposite of the visitor in verse 6?

Psalm 43: Send Your Light and Your Truth

Scripture

43:1-5 Vindicate me, God, and argue my case against a nation ***that is*** not godly; from a man of deceit and injustice You will deliver me. For You ***are*** the God of my refuge; why have You rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of an enemy? Send Your light and Your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to the mountain of Your holiness and to Your dwelling places. And I will go to the altar of God, to the God of the joy of my rejoicing, and I will give thanks to You with a lyre, God, my God. Why are you bowed down, my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him, the salvation of my face and my God.

Psalm 43 Preview

Psalm 43 picks up where Psalm 42 left off. The writer is still far from God's house, still mocked by ungodly people and still fighting discouragement. In Psalm 42 he mostly talked to his own soul. In Psalm 43 he talks to God. He asks God to defend him, and then he asks for light and truth to lead him home to the altar, where he will praise God with a lyre.

The psalm ends with the same refrain heard twice in Psalm 42: "Why are you bowed down, my soul?" And once more the answer is, "Wait for God." This time the answer comes after a prayer, and it sounds a little stronger.

Psalm 43 Study

43:1-2 *Vindicate me, God, and argue my case against a nation **that is** not godly; from a man of deceit and injustice You will deliver me. For You **are** the God of my refuge; why have You rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of an enemy?*

Psalm 43 has no heading. Volume 1 studies Psalm 42, and many scholars believe Psalms 42 and 43 were first one psalm. They share the same refrain (42:5, 42:11 and 43:5), they use the same phrases, and Psalm 43 has no title of its own, which is unusual in Book Two. If they belong together, the writer was one of the sons of Korah, the Levite singers named in the heading of Psalm 42 (see Psalm 44 for more on them). Others think Psalm 43 was written as a companion to 42. Either way, it is best read right after it.

"Vindicate me, God, and argue my case against a nation that is not godly." To vindicate is to clear someone's name. The writer pictures a court. He asks God to be both his judge and his defense lawyer against people who have no love for God. "From a man of deceit and injustice You will deliver me." He may have one enemy in mind, a leader among those who mock him. He doesn't try to answer the liars himself. He leaves his case with God.

"For You are the God of my refuge; why have You rejected me?" The struggle of faith fits in a single breath. He calls God his refuge, his safe place, and in the same line asks why God seems to have rejected him. Both are real. Faith doesn't always feel strong. Sometimes it holds on to God while

asking hard questions. "Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of an enemy?" Psalm 42:9 asked almost the same question.

43:3-4 *Send Your light and Your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to the mountain of Your holiness and to Your dwelling places. And I will go to the altar of God, to the God of the joy of my rejoicing, and I will give thanks to You with a lyre, God, my God.*

Now comes the turn. "Send Your light and Your truth; let them lead me." The writer pictures God's light and truth as two guides, like messengers sent to bring a traveler home. Light shows the way in the dark. Truth keeps us from being deceived by the "man of deceit" in verse 1. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), and He called Himself the truth (John 14:6). God has sent both in His Son.

"Let them bring me to the mountain of Your holiness and to Your dwelling places." The mountain of God's holiness is Zion in Jerusalem, where God's house stood. The writer wants more than to feel better. He wants to be back where God has promised to meet His people.

"And I will go to the altar of God." The altar was where sacrifices were offered and where sinners met a holy God. "To the God of the joy of my rejoicing." God isn't just the source of his joy. God is his joy. "And I will give thanks to You with a lyre, God, my God." The writer used to lead the crowds in worship (42:4). He is looking forward to playing again. He says "my God," and that small word "my" holds a lot of faith.

For believers today, we don't travel to an altar in Jerusalem to meet God. Through Jesus we can come near to God with confidence (Hebrews 10:19-22). But the longing is the same. We were made to worship God with His people, and when we are cut off from that, we feel it.

43:5 *Why are you bowed down, my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him, the salvation of my face and my God.*

"Why are you bowed down, my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" For the third time the writer speaks to himself. He doesn't just listen to his feelings. He questions them. That is a good habit for any discouraged believer.

"Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him." To wait for God is to keep hoping in Him even before the answer comes. "I will yet give thanks" is faith looking forward. He isn't praising yet in the temple, but he is sure he will.

"The salvation of my face and my God." The writer was downcast, his face fallen. God is the One who will lift his face again. The refrain hasn't changed, but the writer has. He has prayed now. He has asked for light and truth. The same words sound different at the end of a prayer than in the middle of a lament.

If you are discouraged and keep having to tell yourself the same truth, take heart. This writer had to do it three times. He kept going until his soul caught up with what he knew about God. You may have to do the same, and that is all right. God is patient with us while we wait.

Psalm 43 Summary

Psalm 43 continues Psalm 42, and many think the two were first one psalm. The writer asks God to vindicate him and plead his case against an ungodly nation and a deceitful man. He calls God his refuge but asks why God seems to have rejected him. Then he prays, "Send Your light and Your truth; let them lead me," asking to be brought back to God's holy mountain, to the altar and to God his joy, where he will give thanks with the lyre. The psalm ends with the same refrain as Psalm 42: his soul is bowed down, but he tells it to wait for God, for he will yet praise Him, the salvation of his face and his God.

Psalm 43 Study Questions

1. What does the writer ask God to do in verse 1? (43:1)

2. What does he call God in verse 2, and what question does he ask? (43:2)

3. What two things does he ask God to send? (43:3)

4. Where does he want light and truth to lead him? (43:3)

5. What will he do when he reaches the altar of God? (43:4)

6. What does he tell his soul to do in verse 5? (43:5)

7. How can someone call God "my refuge" and ask, "Why have You rejected me?" in the same breath? Have you felt that way?

8. How has God sent His light and truth to us in Jesus? (John 8:12; 14:6)

9. Why is it helpful to question our own feelings, as the writer does in verse 5?

10. When you are cut off from worship with God's people, what helps you keep longing for God?

Psalm 44: Why Do You Sleep, Lord?

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. A Maskil.

44:1-8 God, with our ears we have heard; our fathers have recounted to us the work ***that*** You worked in their days, in the days of old. You, ***by*** Your hand, dispossessed nations, and You planted them; You did harm to peoples, and You sent them out. For not by their sword did they take possession of the land, and their arm did not save them; but Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your face, for You took pleasure in them. You ***are*** He, my King, God; command the salvation of Jacob. Through You we gore our adversaries; in Your name we tread down those who rise up against us. For not in my bow do I trust, and my sword does not save me. For You have saved us from our adversaries, and those who hate us You have put to shame. In God we have boasted all the day, and we will give thanks to Your name forever. Selah.

44:9-16 Yet You have rejected ***us*** and humiliated us, and You do not go out with our armies. You make us turn back from the adversary, and those who hate us have plundered for themselves. You make us like sheep ***for*** food, and among the nations You have scattered us. You sell Your people for no wealth, and You have not made ***it*** great by their price. You make us a reproach to our neighbors, a mockery and derision to those around us. You make us a byword among the nations, a shaking of ***the*** head among the peoples. All the day my disgrace ***is*** before me, and the shame of my face has covered me, because of the voice of one who taunts and reviles, because of an enemy and avenger.

44:17-26 All this has come on us, and we have not forgotten You, and we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, and our steps ***have not*** turned aside from Your path, for You have crushed us in a place of jackals and covered us over with deep darkness. If we had forgotten the name of our God and spread out our hands to a strange god, would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. For on account of You we have been killed all the day; we have been regarded like sheep ***for*** slaughter. Rouse Yourself! Why do You sleep, Lord? Awake! Do not reject ***us*** perpetually. Why do You hide Your face, ***and*** forget our affliction and our oppression? For our soul has sunk down to the dust; our belly has clung to the earth. Arise, a help for us, and ransom us for the sake of Your steadfast love.

Psalm 44 Preview

Psalm 44 is a prayer of the whole nation after a terrible defeat. It starts with memory: our fathers told us how You drove out the nations and gave us the land. It moves to confidence: we trust You, not our swords. Then it falls off a cliff. God has let His people be beaten, scattered and mocked. And the people insist they have not turned away from Him.

That is what makes this psalm so hard and so important. Not all suffering comes from sin. Sometimes God's people suffer because they belong to Him. Paul quotes verse 22 in Romans 8, right before he says that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. The psalm ends

with a loud cry: "Rouse Yourself! Why do You sleep, Lord?" and a plea for help "for the sake of Your steadfast love."

Psalm 44 Study

44:1-3 *God, with our ears we have heard; our fathers have recounted to us the work **that** You worked in their days, in the days of old. You, **by** Your hand, dispossessed nations, and You planted them; You did harm to peoples, and You sent them out. For not by their sword did they take possession of the land, and their arm did not save them; but Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your face, for You took pleasure in them.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. A Maskil." The sons of Korah were a family of Levites. Their ancestor Korah rebelled against Moses and died under God's judgment (Numbers 16), but his sons did not die (Numbers 26:11). Their descendants became singers in Israel's worship in David's day and later in the temple (1 Chronicles 6:31-37), and some kept the doors of God's house (1 Chronicles 9:19). Eleven psalms carry their name: 42, 44 to 49, 84, 85, 87 and 88. God took a family with a dark past and gave it a song.

"Maskil" probably comes from a Hebrew word meaning to be wise or to understand. It may mark a teaching psalm, or a psalm written with special skill. The meaning is uncertain. Thirteen psalm headings use it.

We don't know when Psalm 44 was written. The nation has lost a battle, and some of its people have been carried off. Some link it with an invasion by Edom in David's time, others with a later crisis in Judah. The psalm itself doesn't say.

"God, with our ears we have heard; our fathers have recounted to us the work that You worked in their days." Israel's faith was handed down. Parents told their children what God had done, as Moses commanded (Deuteronomy 6:20-23). "You, by Your hand, dispossessed nations, and You planted them." God drove out the Canaanites and planted Israel in the land like a vine.

"For not by their sword did they take possession of the land." Israel didn't win Canaan by its own strength. It was "Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your face, for You took pleasure in them." God gave the land as a gift, because He loved them.

44:4-8 *You **are** He, my King, God; command the salvation of Jacob. Through You we gore our adversaries; in Your name we tread down those who rise up against us. For not in my bow do I trust, and my sword does not save me. For You have saved us from our adversaries, and those who hate us You have put to shame. In God we have boasted all the day, and we will give thanks to Your name forever. Selah.*

"You are He, my King, God; command the salvation of Jacob." The voice changes from "we" to "my." One person, perhaps the king or a leader of worship, speaks for the nation. Jacob is another name for Israel. He asks God, the true King, simply to give the order, and salvation will come.

"Through You we gore our adversaries." The picture is of a wild ox with its horns. "In Your name we tread down those who rise up against us." To act in God's name is to act by His power and authority.

"For not in my bow do I trust, and my sword does not save me." These people have learned the lesson of verse 3. They don't trust their weapons. They trust God. "In God we have boasted all the day." Selah follows, a pause (see Psalm 3). Up to this point the psalm is full of faith. Nothing prepares us for what comes next.

44:9-12 *Yet You have rejected **us** and humiliated us, and You do not go out with our armies. You make us turn back from the adversary, and those who hate us have plundered for themselves. You make us like sheep **for** food, and among the nations You have scattered us. You sell Your people for no wealth, and You have not made **it** great by their price.*

"Yet You have rejected us and humiliated us, and You do not go out with our armies." Israel went into battle trusting God, and God did not go with them. "You make us turn back from the adversary." They ran, and the enemy plundered them.

"You make us like sheep for food, and among the nations You have scattered us." Some were killed like sheep for the butcher. Others were taken captive and scattered.

"You sell Your people for no wealth." They feel God has sold them off cheap, like a merchant dumping goods for nothing. "And You have not made it great by their price." He didn't even gain anything from it. It is a shocking thing to say to God. But the psalm says it, and God kept it in His word.

44:13-16 *You make us a reproach to our neighbors, a mockery and derision to those around us. You make us a byword among the nations, a shaking of **the** head among the peoples. All the day my disgrace **is** before me, and the shame of my face has covered me, because of the voice of one who taunts and reviles, because of an enemy and avenger.*

"You make us a reproach to our neighbors, a mockery and derision to those around us." The nations around them laugh. "You make us a byword among the nations." A byword is a name people use as a joke or an insult. "A shaking of the head among the peoples" is a gesture of scorn.

The voice turns personal again. "All the day my disgrace is before me, and the shame of my face has covered me." He can't escape it. Every day he hears the taunts "of one who taunts and reviles." Public shame is its own kind of pain.

44:17-19 *All this has come on us, and we have not forgotten You, and we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, and our steps **have not** turned aside from Your path, for You have crushed us in a place of jackals and covered us over with deep darkness.*

Now comes the claim that sets this psalm apart. "All this has come on us, and we have not forgotten You, and we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant." A covenant is a binding agreement. God's covenant with Israel at Sinai promised blessing for obedience and discipline for

disobedience (Deuteronomy 28). Many psalms and prophets explain Israel's defeats by Israel's sin. Psalm 44 says that this time, that isn't the reason.

"Our heart has not turned back, and our steps have not turned aside from Your path." The people aren't claiming to be sinless. They are saying they have not abandoned God or gone after idols. "For You have crushed us in a place of jackals." Jackals live among ruins. The land is in ruins, and they are covered "with deep darkness," the shadow of death.

44:20-22 *If we had forgotten the name of our God and spread out our hands to a strange god, would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. For on account of You we have been killed all the day; we have been regarded like sheep **for** slaughter.*

"If we had forgotten the name of our God and spread out our hands to a strange god, would not God search this out?" To spread out the hands was a posture of prayer. If they had prayed to an idol, God would know. "For He knows the secrets of the heart." They are not hiding anything.

"For on account of You we have been killed all the day; we have been regarded like sheep for slaughter." That answers the riddle. They suffer not in spite of their faith but because of it. They belong to God, and that makes them a target.

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 8:36. He has just asked who can separate us from the love of Christ: trouble, distress, persecution, famine, danger or sword? Then he quotes Psalm 44:22 to show that God's people have always suffered for His sake. And he answers: "But in all these things we more than conquer through the One who loved us" (Romans 8:37). Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

Psalm 44 asks why. Romans 8 doesn't explain every why, but it shows that suffering for God's sake is not a sign that God's love has failed. The cross proves it. Jesus Himself was led like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7), and He was the One the Father loved most.

New Testament links: Romans 8:36 (quoted)

44:23-26 *Rouse Yourself! Why do You sleep, Lord? Awake! Do not reject **us** perpetually. Why do You hide Your face, **and** forget our affliction and our oppression? For our soul has sunk down to the dust; our belly has clung to the earth. Arise, a help for us, and ransom us for the sake of Your steadfast love.*

"Rouse Yourself! Why do You sleep, Lord? Awake!" God never sleeps (Psalm 121:4). But that is how it feels to the people. The disciples felt the same way in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, when Jesus was asleep in the storm and they woke Him, asking if He didn't care that they were perishing (Mark 4:38). He did care. He calmed the storm.

"Do not reject us perpetually. Why do You hide Your face, and forget our affliction and our oppression?" These are bold words. God allows His people to pray this way. Honest prayer is not a lack of faith. These people still go to God with their pain.

"For our soul has sunk down to the dust; our belly has clung to the earth." They are lying face down, flat on the ground, as low as they can go.

"Arise, a help for us, and ransom us for the sake of Your steadfast love." The psalm ends with a prayer, not an answer. But look at what they appeal to. Not their faithfulness, which they spoke of in verses 17-18, but God's steadfast love, His hesed, His loyal covenant love. In the end, that is the only ground any of us can stand on.

If you are suffering and can't find a reason, and you know you have not walked away from God, this psalm is for you. You are not the first. God doesn't mind your questions. He put these very questions in His book. And in Christ we know how the story ends: nothing can separate us from His love.

Psalm 44 Summary

Psalm 44, a Maskil of the sons of Korah, begins with what Israel's fathers told them: God drove out the nations and planted His people in the land, not by their sword but by His right hand, because He delighted in them. The people say they trust God, not their bow or sword, and they boast in Him all day. Then they describe a terrible defeat. God has not gone out with their armies, they have been scattered like sheep, sold for nothing and made a byword among the nations. Yet they have not forgotten God or broken His covenant, and God, who knows the secrets of the heart, knows it. They are being killed all day for His sake, like sheep for slaughter, a verse Paul quotes in Romans 8:36 before saying that in all these things we more than conquer through Christ. They cry for God to wake up, stop hiding His face and ransom them for the sake of His steadfast love.

People and Places

- Sons of Korah: a family of Levite singers and gatekeepers descended from Korah (Numbers 16; 26:11; 1 Chronicles 6:31-37).
- Maskil: a word in some psalm headings, probably meaning a teaching psalm or a skillful psalm; the meaning is uncertain.
- Jacob: Abraham's grandson, renamed Israel; his name often stands for the whole nation.
- Byword: a name used as a joke or an insult.

Psalm 44 Study Questions

1. How did Israel's people learn what God had done in the past? (44:1)

2. How did Israel take possession of the land, according to verse 3? (44:3)

3. In what does the speaker not trust? (44:6)

4. What does God seem to have done to His people in verses 9-12? (44:9-12)

5. What do the people claim in verses 17-18? (44:17-18)

6. What does verse 21 say God knows? (44:21)

7. Where does Paul quote verse 22, and what does he say right after it? (Romans 8:36-37)

8. Why is it important to know that not all suffering is caused by our own sin? How might that help someone who is suffering now?

9. Have you ever felt God was asleep? What did you do with that feeling? Compare Mark 4:38.

10. Why do you think the psalm ends by appealing to God's steadfast love instead of the people's faithfulness? (44:26)

Psalm 45: Your Throne, God, Is Forever

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on "Lilies." Of the sons of Korah. A Maskil. A song of loves.

45:1-9 My heart overflows ***with*** a good word; I am speaking my works to the King; my tongue ***is*** the stylus of a skilled scribe. You are more handsome than the sons of mankind; grace has been poured on Your lips; therefore God has blessed You forever. Gird Your sword on ***the*** thigh, mighty ***one***, Your splendor and Your majesty. And ***in*** Your majesty prosper; ride on for the cause of truth and humility ***and*** righteousness, and let Your right hand teach You awesome ***things***. Your arrows ***are*** sharpened; peoples will fall under You; ***they are*** in the heart of the enemies of the King. Your throne, God, ***is*** forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness ***is*** the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You ***with*** the oil of joy above Your companions. Myrrh and aloes ***and*** cassia ***are*** all Your garments; from palaces of ivory stringed instruments have made You glad. Daughters of kings ***are*** among Your noble women; a queen consort stands at Your right hand in the gold of Ophir.

45:10-17 Listen, daughter, and see, and incline your ear, and forget your people and the house of your father. And let the King desire your beauty; for He ***is*** your Lord, and bow down to Him. And the daughter of Tyre ***will come*** with a gift; the rich of ***the*** people will entreat your face. All glorious ***is the*** daughter of ***the*** King within; her clothing ***is*** of settings of gold. In embroidered robes she is led to the King; virgins after her, her companions, are being brought to You. They are led with joy and rejoicing; they enter into the palace of ***the*** King. In place of Your fathers will be Your sons; You will make them princes in all the earth. I will cause Your name to be remembered in every generation and generation; therefore peoples will give thanks to You forever and ever.

Psalm 45 Preview

Psalm 45 is a wedding song for a king. The poet can hardly contain himself. He praises the King's beauty, His gracious words, His victories in the cause of truth and His righteous rule. Then he turns to the bride, a princess from another land, and tells her to leave her old home and honor her new husband. The psalm ends with a procession into the palace and a promise that the King's name will be remembered forever.

The song began at a real royal wedding in Israel, but its words reach far beyond any earthly king. In verse 6 the poet speaks to the King and calls Him "God." Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes verses 6-7 and says they are spoken "to the Son." Psalm 45 points to Jesus Christ, the King whose throne lasts forever.

Psalm 45 Study

45:1 *My heart overflows **with** a good word; I am speaking my works to the King; my tongue **is** the stylus of a skilled scribe.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on Lilies. Of the sons of Korah. A Maskil. A song of loves." "On Lilies" probably names a tune the psalm was sung to; Psalms 69 and 80 use the same word, and 60 uses a similar one. Some think it refers to a lily-shaped instrument. The meaning is uncertain. The sons of Korah were Levite singers, and a Maskil may be a teaching or skillful psalm (see Psalm 44). "A song of loves" means a love song, a wedding song.

We don't know which king's wedding first inspired it. Some suggest Solomon, others a later king of Judah. The psalm doesn't name him, and that may be on purpose, because its words are too large for any of them.

"My heart overflows with a good word." The poet's heart is bubbling over, like a pot about to boil. "I am speaking my works to the King." He offers his song as a gift. "My tongue is the stylus of a skilled scribe." A stylus was a pen. The words flow out of him like a practiced writer's hand moving across a page.

45:2 *You are more handsome than the sons of mankind; grace has been poured on Your lips; therefore God has blessed You forever.*

"You are more handsome than the sons of mankind." The King stands out among all men. "Grace has been poured on Your lips." His words are full of grace, kind and attractive. When Jesus spoke in Nazareth, the people wondered at the words of grace coming out of His mouth (Luke 4:22). "Therefore God has blessed You forever." God's blessing rests on this King, and it does not end.

Isaiah says the Servant of the LORD had no special beauty that people would desire Him (Isaiah 53:2). That was how He came the first time, to suffer. Psalm 45 shows how His people will see Him as the King in His glory.

45:3-5 *Gird Your sword on **the** thigh, mighty **one**, Your splendor and Your majesty. And **in** Your majesty prosper; ride on for the cause of truth and humility **and** righteousness, and let Your right hand teach You awesome **things**. Your arrows **are** sharpened; peoples will fall under You; **they are** in the heart of the enemies of the King.*

"Gird Your sword on the thigh, mighty one." To gird a sword was to strap it on and get ready for battle. "Your splendor and Your majesty" are like armor. "And in Your majesty prosper; ride on for the cause of truth and humility and righteousness." This King doesn't fight for land or loot. He rides out for truth, humility and righteousness. That is a rare kind of king.

"Let Your right hand teach You awesome things." His strong right hand will do mighty deeds. "Your arrows are sharpened; peoples will fall under You." His enemies will fall.

Revelation 19:11-16 shows the risen Christ coming from heaven on a white horse, judging and making war in righteousness, with a sharp sword coming out of His mouth and a name written on

His thigh: "King of kings and Lord of lords." Many see Psalm 45:3-5 fulfilled there. I believe that day is still ahead, when Christ returns visibly to the earth at the end of the Tribulation to defeat His enemies and set up His kingdom.

45:6-7 *Your throne, God, **is** forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness **is** the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You **with** the oil of joy above Your companions.*

Here the psalm takes our breath away. "Your throne, God, is forever and ever." The poet is speaking to the King, and he calls Him "God." "A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom." A scepter was the rod a king held to show his authority. This King rules with a straight rod. His rule is fair and right.

"You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness." His heart matches His scepter. "Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your companions." To anoint was to pour oil on a person's head to set him apart for a task, as prophets did for Israel's kings. The Hebrew word for anointed gives us "Messiah," and its Greek form gives us "Christ." This King is anointed with joy, set above all others.

Look closely at verse 7. The King is called "God" in verse 6, and then "God, Your God" anoints Him in verse 7. There is God, and there is the One God anoints, and both are called God. No earthly king of Judah could fit those words.

Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes verses 6-7 and says plainly that God speaks them "to the Son." The writer of Hebrews uses them to show that Jesus is greater than the angels. They are servants. He is God on the throne, and His kingdom lasts forever. Here, centuries before Bethlehem, the Psalms show us something of the Father and the Son.

Some translations read verse 6 differently, saying that the king's throne is God's throne, or that God is his throne, and take the words as describing an earthly king. The Hebrew can be read more than one way. But the plainest reading is the one Hebrews follows, speaking to the King as God, and I take Hebrews as settling it.

New Testament links: Hebrews 1:8-9 (quoted)

45:8-9 *Myrrh and aloes **and** cassia **are** all Your garments; from palaces of ivory stringed instruments have made You glad. Daughters of kings **are** among Your noble women; a queen consort stands at Your right hand in the gold of Ophir.*

"Myrrh and aloes and cassia are all Your garments." These were costly spices and perfumes. The King's robes smell of them. Myrrh was also among the gifts brought to the child Jesus (Matthew 2:11) and was used at His burial (John 19:39). "From palaces of ivory stringed instruments have made You glad." Music fills the palace on His wedding day.

"Daughters of kings are among Your noble women; a queen consort stands at Your right hand in the gold of Ophir." The right hand is the place of honor. The queen consort, the King's bride, stands there dressed in gold from Ophir, a distant land famous for its fine gold (1 Kings 9:28).

45:10-12 *Listen, daughter, and see, and incline your ear, and forget your people and the house of your father. And let the King desire your beauty; for He **is** your Lord, and bow down to Him. And the daughter of Tyre **will come** with a gift; the rich of **the** people will entreat your face.*

Now the poet speaks to the bride. "Listen, daughter, and see, and incline your ear, and forget your people and the house of your father." She is a princess from another nation. To marry the King, she must leave her old loyalties behind. Like Ruth, who told Naomi that her people would be Naomi's people and her God Naomi's God (Ruth 1:16), she gives herself fully to her new home.

"And let the King desire your beauty; for He is your Lord, and bow down to Him." The King delights in her. She honors Him as her Lord.

"And the daughter of Tyre will come with a gift." Tyre was a rich trading city on the coast north of Israel. Even its people will bring wedding gifts and seek her favor.

Who is the bride when we read the psalm as pointing to Christ? Bible teachers answer in different ways. Many see the church, since Paul says he betrothed believers "to one husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2), and Revelation 19:7 speaks of "the marriage of the Lamb." Others see Israel, whom God calls His wife in the prophets (Hosea 2:19-20), and some see both, with the bride and her companions in verse 14. The psalm doesn't settle it, and both Israel and the church have a place in His kingdom. The call to the bride is clear for any believer: leave your old loyalties and give yourself wholly to the King.

45:13-15 *All glorious **is the** daughter of **the** King within; her clothing **is** of settings of gold. In embroidered robes she is led to the King; virgins after her, her companions, are being brought to You. They are led with joy and rejoicing; they enter into the palace of **the** King.*

"All glorious is the daughter of the King within." Inside the palace the bride is radiant. "Her clothing is of settings of gold." "In embroidered robes she is led to the King." The wedding procession begins. "Virgins after her, her companions, are being brought to You." Her bridesmaids follow.

"They are led with joy and rejoicing; they enter into the palace of the King." The whole scene is full of gladness. Weddings in the Bible often picture the joy of the day when God's people are brought home to Him (Revelation 19:9).

45:16-17 *In place of Your fathers will be Your sons; You will make them princes in all the earth. I will cause Your name to be remembered in every generation and generation; therefore peoples will give thanks to You forever and ever.*

"In place of Your fathers will be Your sons; You will make them princes in all the earth." The King's line will continue, and His sons will rule over all the earth. For a king in Jerusalem, that was a large hope. Revelation 5:10 says Christ has made His people kings and priests, and they "will reign on the earth."

"I will cause Your name to be remembered in every generation and generation." The poet says his song will keep the King's name alive. And it has. "Therefore peoples will give thanks to You forever and ever." Not one nation but many peoples will praise Him.

I believe this looks ahead to Messiah's reign on the earth, when Christ returns and rules from Jerusalem over all the nations for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6), and then forever. Some Christians, holding what is called the amillennial view, read the kingdom promises as fulfilled now in Christ's spiritual reign from heaven over His church. All agree that Jesus is the King whose throne lasts forever. What a day it will be when every people gives Him thanks.

Psalm 45 Summary

Psalm 45 is a wedding song of the sons of Korah, set to "Lilies." The poet's heart overflows as he praises the King: more handsome than all men, with grace poured on His lips and God's blessing forever. He calls the King to ride out in majesty for truth, humility and righteousness. In verses 6-7 he speaks to the King as God, whose throne is forever and whose scepter is upright, and says God, His God, has anointed Him with the oil of joy. Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes these verses as spoken to the Son, Jesus Christ. The King's robes smell of myrrh and His bride stands at His right hand in gold. The bride is told to forget her father's house and honor the King as her Lord, and she is led into the palace with joy. The psalm ends with a promise that the King's sons will be princes in all the earth and that peoples will praise His name forever.

People and Places

- Lilies: a word in some psalm headings (45, 69, 80), probably the name of a tune; the meaning is uncertain.
- Ophir: a distant land famous for its fine gold (1 Kings 9:28).
- Tyre: a rich trading city on the coast north of Israel.
- Myrrh, aloes and cassia: costly spices and perfumes.
- Scepter: the rod a king held as a sign of his authority.

Psalm 45 Study Questions

1. What kind of song does the heading call Psalm 45? (heading)

2. What has been poured on the King's lips? (45:2)

3. For what causes does the King ride out? (45:4)

4. What does the poet call the King in verse 6, and where does the New Testament quote it? (45:6; Hebrews 1:8)

5. With what has God anointed the King? (45:7)

6. What is the bride told to forget? (45:10)

7. What will happen to the King's name? (45:17)

8. How do verses 6-7 show both the Father and the Son? Why does Hebrews use them to show that Jesus is greater than the angels?

9. The bride must leave her old loyalties behind. What old loyalties might a believer need to leave to follow Christ fully?

10. The King rides out "for the cause of truth and humility and righteousness" (45:4). How is that different from the way the world often uses power, and how should it shape us?

Psalm 47: God Is the King of All the Earth

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. A psalm.

47:1-9 Strike ***the*** palm, all the peoples; shout for joy to God with the sound of a ringing cry. For the LORD Most High ***is*** to be feared, a great King over all the earth. He subdues peoples under us and nations under our feet. He chooses our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loved. Selah. God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a ram's horn. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God ***is*** the King of all the earth; sing praises ***with*** a Maskil. God reigns over nations; God sits on the throne of His holiness. The nobles of peoples have gathered, the people of the God of Abraham; for the shields of ***the*** earth ***belong*** to God; He is greatly exalted.

Psalm 47 Preview

Psalm 47 is a loud psalm. It calls all the peoples of the earth to clap their hands and shout to God. The LORD Most High is the great King over the whole world. He has chosen Israel's inheritance for them, and He has gone up to His throne with shouts and the blast of the ram's horn.

The psalm ends with a striking scene. The nobles of the nations gather together with "the people of the God of Abraham." The promise God made to Abraham, that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him, is coming true. Psalm 47 looks ahead to the day when God's King reigns over every nation.

Psalm 47 Study

47:1-2 *Strike **the** palm, all the peoples; shout for joy to God with the sound of a ringing cry. For the LORD Most High **is** to be feared, a great King over all the earth.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. A psalm." The sons of Korah were a family of Levite singers (see Psalm 44). We don't know the occasion. Some think it was sung after a victory, or when the ark of God was carried up to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:15), or at a yearly festival celebrating God as King. The psalm doesn't say.

"Strike the palm, all the peoples." Clapping hands was what people did when a king was crowned (2 Kings 11:12). This psalm calls on all the peoples, not just Israel, to applaud God. "Shout for joy to God with the sound of a ringing cry." Worship here isn't quiet. It is a stadium full of people cheering their King.

"For the LORD Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth." "Most High" means God is above every power and every so-called god. He is "to be feared," which means He deserves awe and reverence. He isn't a local god of one small nation. He is King over all the earth.

47:3-4 *He subdues peoples under us and nations under our feet. He chooses our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loved. Selah.*

"He subdues peoples under us and nations under our feet." God gave Israel victory over the nations when He brought them into the land. That is a hard thought for the nations, but the psalm already called them to clap and shout in verse 1. God's rule over them leads in the end to their blessing, not only their defeat.

"He chooses our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loved." The inheritance is the promised land, which God chose and gave to Israel. "The pride of Jacob" means the land Israel was proud of, the gift that showed God's love. Jacob is another name for the nation of Israel. "Whom He loved" reminds us that God chose Israel not because they were great but because He loved them (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). God still has a future for Israel and its land, as He promised (Romans 11:28-29). Selah follows (see Psalm 3).

47:5-7 *God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a ram's horn. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God **is** the King of all the earth; sing praises **with** a Maskil.*

"God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a ram's horn." The ram's horn, the shofar, was blown to announce a king, to call Israel to worship and to signal battle. The picture is of God going up to His throne, like a king climbing the steps to sit down after a victory, while the crowd shouts and the horns sound. The first scene may have been the ark of God being carried up to Jerusalem.

Many Christians see in this verse a picture of Jesus' ascension, when He was taken up into heaven after His resurrection (Acts 1:9). He went up as the victorious King to sit at the right hand of the Father. The New Testament doesn't quote Psalm 47 for the ascension, so we hold this picture lightly, but it fits. The angels told the disciples that this same Jesus will come back in the same way they saw Him go (Acts 1:11).

"Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises." Four times in one verse we are told to sing praises. The repetition is the point. God is worth it.

"For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a Maskil." A Maskil may mean a skillful song or a song of teaching (see Psalm 44). We are to praise God with our minds as well as our voices, singing what is true about Him with skill and understanding.

47:8-9 *God reigns over nations; God sits on the throne of His holiness. The nobles of peoples have gathered, the people of the God of Abraham; for the shields of **the** earth **belong** to God; He is greatly exalted.*

"God reigns over nations; God sits on the throne of His holiness." Verse 8 is the heart of the psalm. God reigns now. No election, no army and no empire can take His throne away. His throne is holy, and His rule is pure and right.

"The nobles of peoples have gathered, the people of the God of Abraham." The rulers of the nations come together as one people with Israel, the people of the God of Abraham. God promised Abraham that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Paul says the Scripture "preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham" with that promise (Galatians 3:8). Through Abraham's Seed, Jesus Christ, people from every nation are coming to know the God of Abraham. Gentiles who believe do not take Israel's place. They are brought in alongside to share in Abraham's blessing (Romans 11:17-18).

"For the shields of the earth belong to God." The shields are the rulers and defenders of the nations. They all belong to God. "He is greatly exalted."

I believe this psalm looks ahead to the day when Christ returns and reigns on the earth, and the nations come up to worship the King in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:9, 16). Some Christians read these kingdom psalms as fulfilled now in Christ's reign from heaven and the spread of the gospel. Both views agree that God is King of all the earth today, and that one day every knee will bow to Jesus (Philippians 2:10-11).

Psalm 47 Summary

Psalm 47, a psalm of the sons of Korah, calls all the peoples to clap their hands and shout for joy to God, because the LORD Most High is a great King over all the earth. He subdued nations under Israel and chose the land as Israel's inheritance, the pride of Jacob whom He loved. God has gone up with a shout and the sound of the ram's horn, and many Christians see in this a picture of Jesus' ascension. The psalm calls us four times to sing praises to our King, and to sing with understanding. God reigns over the nations from His holy throne, and the nobles of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham, as God promised Abraham long ago. The shields of the earth belong to Him, and He is greatly exalted.

People and Places

- Ram's horn: the shofar, a trumpet made from a ram's horn, blown to announce a king, call to worship or signal battle.

Psalm 47 Study Questions

1. Whom does verse 1 call to clap and shout? (47:1)

2. What two things does verse 2 say about the LORD Most High? (47:2)

3. What has God chosen for His people? (47:4)

4. With what sounds has God gone up? (47:5)

5. How many times does verse 6 say "sing praises"? (47:6)

6. Who gathers together in verse 9? (47:9)

7. Why do you think Psalm 47 calls all the nations, not just Israel, to praise God?

8. How does God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 come true in verse 9 and in the gospel?

9. What does it mean to sing praises "with a Maskil," with understanding? How can we worship with our minds as well as our voices? (47:7)

10. When the news makes the world seem out of control, how does "God reigns over nations" change the way you see it? (47:8)

Psalm 48: The City of Our God

Scripture

A song. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

48:1-8 Great ***is*** the LORD, and to be praised exceedingly in the city of our God, the mountain of His holiness. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of all the earth, ***is*** Mount Zion, the far sides of ***the*** north, the town of ***the*** great King. God ***is*** in her citadels; He has made Himself known as a high refuge. For look, the kings assembled; they passed on together. They themselves saw; so they were astonished; they were terrified; they hurried away. Trembling seized them there, anguish like ***a woman*** giving birth. With an east wind You shatter the ships of Tarshish. As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of armies, in the city of our God; God will establish her forever. Selah.

48:9-14 We have reflected, God, ***on*** Your steadfast love in the midst of Your temple. Like Your name, God, so ***is*** Your praise over the ends of the earth; Your right hand is full of righteousness. Mount Zion will rejoice; the daughters of Judah will be glad because of Your judgments. Go around Zion and circle her; count her towers. Set your heart on her rampart; walk through her citadels, so that you may recount ***it*** to a later generation. For this ***is*** God, our God forever and ever; He Himself will guide us over death.

Psalm 48 Preview

Psalm 48 is a song about Jerusalem, the city of God. It praises Mount Zion as beautiful and high, the joy of all the earth, because God Himself lives there and protects it. Kings came together to attack the city, took one look and fled in terror. God's people had heard stories of what He had done in the past. Now they have seen it with their own eyes.

The second half calls worshipers to think about God's steadfast love in His temple, and then to walk around the city, count its towers and tell the next generation. The towers are not the point. They are evidence. "For this is God, our God forever and ever; He Himself will guide us."

Psalm 48 Study

48:1-3 *Great **is** the LORD, and to be praised exceedingly in the city of our God, the mountain of His holiness. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of all the earth, **is** Mount Zion, the far sides of **the** north, the town of **the** great King. God **is** in her citadels; He has made Himself known as a high refuge.*

The heading reads, "A song. A psalm of the sons of Korah." The sons of Korah were Levite singers (see Psalm 44). Psalms 46, 47 and 48 sit together and share a theme: God is King, and He protects His city. Volume 1 studies Psalm 46.

"Great is the LORD, and to be praised exceedingly in the city of our God, the mountain of His holiness." The psalm starts with God, not the city. Jerusalem is great only because the great God lives there.

"Beautiful in elevation, the joy of all the earth, is Mount Zion." Zion is Jerusalem, the place God chose to dwell among His people (see Psalm 9). It isn't the highest mountain in the world, but to the psalmist it stands higher than all of them, because God is there.

"The far sides of the north" is a puzzling phrase. The Hebrew word for north, Zaphon, was also the name of a mountain where Israel's neighbors said their gods lived. The psalm may be saying that Zion, not Zaphon, is the true mountain of God. Or it may simply describe where the temple stood on the north side of the city. We can't be sure.

"The town of the great King." Jesus used these very words when He told people not to swear by Jerusalem, "because it is the city of the great King" (Matthew 5:35). The great King is God.

"God is in her citadels; He has made Himself known as a high refuge." The city's strong towers are not what keep it safe. God is.

New Testament links: Matthew 5:35 (alluded to)

48:4-7 *For look, the kings assembled; they passed on together. They themselves saw; so they were astonished; they were terrified; they hurried away. Trembling seized them there, anguish like* ***a woman*** *giving birth. With an east wind You shatter the ships of Tarshish.*

"For look, the kings assembled; they passed on together." A group of kings joined forces to march on Jerusalem. "They themselves saw; so they were astonished; they were terrified; they hurried away." The short, rapid phrases read like a report from the front lines: they saw, they panicked, they ran.

"Trembling seized them there, anguish like a woman giving birth." Their fear came on suddenly and could not be stopped, like labor pains.

"With an east wind You shatter the ships of Tarshish." Tarshish was a distant port, probably in Spain, and "ships of Tarshish" were the large ocean-going trading ships of the day. A hot east wind off the desert could wreck them. The kings were as helpless before God as those ships in a storm.

We don't know which attack the psalm remembers. Many think of 701 B.C., when the Assyrian king Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem and the angel of the LORD struck down his army in one night (2 Kings 19:35). Others think of the time when several nations came against King Jehoshaphat and turned on each other (2 Chronicles 20). The psalm doesn't name it.

48:8 *As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of armies, in the city of our God; God will establish her forever. Selah.*

"As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of armies." The people grew up hearing what God had done for their fathers. Now they have seen Him do it again. Stories of faith passed down by parents become our own when we see God work in our day.

"The LORD of armies" is a title for God as the commander of the armies of heaven, the angels and all the powers of creation. "God will establish her forever." Selah (see Psalm 3).

Jerusalem was later destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C. and by Rome in A.D. 70. Did this promise fail? No. God disciplined His people, but He has not abandoned the city He chose. The prophets say that in the last days the mountain of the LORD's house will be established above the hills and all nations will stream to it (Isaiah 2:2-3). I believe that when Christ returns, He will reign from Jerusalem, and Zion will be the joy of the whole earth at last (Zechariah 14:9, 16). Hebrews also speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem, "Mount Zion" and "the city of the living God" (Hebrews 12:22), and Revelation shows the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven (Revelation 21:2). The earthly city and the heavenly city both belong to God's plan.

48:9-11 *We have reflected, God, **on** Your steadfast love in the midst of Your temple. Like Your name, God, so **is** Your praise over the ends of the earth; Your right hand is full of righteousness. Mount Zion will rejoice; the daughters of Judah will be glad because of Your judgments.*

"We have reflected, God, on Your steadfast love in the midst of Your temple." After the danger passed, the people went to worship and thought deeply about God's hesed, His loyal covenant love. They didn't just celebrate the victory. They thought about the God who gave it.

"Like Your name, God, so is Your praise over the ends of the earth." God's name stands for who He is. His praise should reach as far as His fame, to the ends of the earth. "Your right hand is full of righteousness." What God does with His power is always right.

"Mount Zion will rejoice; the daughters of Judah will be glad because of Your judgments." The daughters of Judah may be the towns and villages around Jerusalem, or the women of Judah who came out singing after a victory. God's judgments, His acts of justice in defeating the enemy, give His people joy.

48:12-14 *Go around Zion and circle her; count her towers. Set your heart on her rampart; walk through her citadels, so that you may recount **it** to a later generation. For this **is** God, our God forever and ever; He Himself will guide us over death.*

"Go around Zion and circle her; count her towers." The psalm invites us on a walk. "Set your heart on her rampart; walk through her citadels." Look at the walls and the strongholds the enemy could not break. Take it all in.

Why? "So that you may recount it to a later generation." The walk has a purpose. The people are to tell their children and grandchildren what God did there. Every generation needs to hear what God has done, and every generation of parents needs to tell it.

"For this is God, our God forever and ever." That line is the point of the whole walk. The towers and walls are wonderful, but the real point is God. Strong walls fall. God remains "our God forever."

"He Himself will guide us over death." The Hebrew of this last phrase is difficult, and translations differ. Some read it as "until death," meaning God guides us all our lives, to the end. Others read it as "forever." The SLB reads "over death," which suggests that God guides His people even through and beyond death. Whichever is right, the promise is that God's guidance doesn't stop. For believers in Christ, who rose from the dead, death is not the end of the road (John 11:25).

Psalm 48 Summary

Psalm 48, a song of the sons of Korah, praises the great LORD in the city of our God. Mount Zion is beautiful and high, the joy of all the earth and the city of the great King, words Jesus used in Matthew 5:35. God in her citadels is her real defense. When kings joined to attack, they saw, were terrified and fled, like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind. The people had heard of God's deeds and now had seen them, and God will establish His city forever. They reflect on His steadfast love in the temple and rejoice that His praise reaches the ends of the earth. They are invited to walk around Zion, count her towers and tell the next generation, because this is God, our God forever, who will guide us over death.

People and Places

- Tarshish: a distant port, probably in Spain; "ships of Tarshish" were large ocean-going ships.
- LORD of armies: a title for God as commander of the armies of heaven.

Psalm 48 Study Questions

1. Where is the LORD to be praised, according to verse 1? (48:1)

2. What does verse 2 call Mount Zion, and how did Jesus use part of this verse? (48:2; Matthew 5:35)

3. What happened when the kings saw the city? (48:4-6)

4. What does the east wind do? (48:7)

5. What did the people reflect on in the temple? (48:9)

6. Why are the people told to walk around Zion and count her towers? (48:12-13)

7. What does verse 14 promise about God's guidance? (48:14)

8. "As we have heard, so we have seen" (48:8). Has God ever turned a story you heard into something you saw for yourself?

9. How do you pass on what God has done to the next generation? What could you tell a younger person this week?

10. How does God's future for Jerusalem encourage us that He keeps His promises?

Psalm 49: Wealth Cannot Ransom a Soul

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. A psalm.

49:1-12 Hear this, all the peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both sons of mankind and sons of man, together rich and needy. My mouth will speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart ***will be*** understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will open my riddle with a lyre. Why should I fear in days of evil, ***when*** the iniquity of my heels surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast in the abundance of their riches? No man will by any means ransom a brother; he will not give to God his ransom price, for the redemption of their soul is costly, and he will cease forever, that he should live on perpetually ***and*** not see the pit. For he will see ***that*** wise ***men*** die; the fool and the stupid alike perish, and they leave their wealth to others. Their inner ***thought is that*** their houses ***are*** forever, their dwelling places to generation and generation; they have called their lands by their names. And mankind in honor will not remain; he is like the animals ***that*** are destroyed.

49:13-20 This ***is*** their way; folly ***is*** theirs; and after them ***men*** take pleasure in their mouth. Selah. Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death will shepherd them; and the upright rule over them in the morning, and their form ***is*** for Sheol to wear away, away from his lofty abode. Surely God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for He will take me. Selah. Do not fear when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For in his death he will not take anything; his glory will not go down after him. For in his life he blesses his soul, and they praise you when you do well for yourself; it will go to the generation of his fathers; they will not see light perpetually. Mankind in honor, and ***who*** does not understand, is like the animals ***that*** are destroyed.

Psalm 49 Preview

Psalm 49 is a wisdom psalm, more like a teacher's lesson than a prayer. The writer calls the whole world to listen, rich and poor alike. His subject is a riddle: Why should God's people be afraid of rich and powerful people who trust in their money? His answer is simple and sobering. Everyone dies, and no amount of money can buy a person out of death. The rich leave everything behind.

But the psalm doesn't stop at the grave. In verse 15 the writer says something the rich man can't say: "Surely God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for He will take me." What money cannot buy, God gives. The psalm ends with a warning not to envy the rich, because a person with honor but no understanding is like the animals that perish.

Psalm 49 Study

49:1-4 *Hear this, all the peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both sons of mankind and sons of man, together rich and needy. My mouth will speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart **will be** understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will open my riddle with a lyre.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. A psalm." The sons of Korah were Levite singers (see Psalm 44).

"Hear this, all the peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world." Most psalms speak to Israel or to God. This one speaks to everyone on earth, because death and money are everyone's concern. "Both sons of mankind and sons of man, together rich and needy." The Hebrew uses two words for people here, probably meaning the common folk and the important ones. High and low, rich and poor, all need this lesson.

"My mouth will speak wisdom." The writer speaks as a teacher. "I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will open my riddle with a lyre." He first listens to wisdom himself, then sets it to music. A riddle is a puzzle, a hard question. The riddle comes next.

49:5-6 *Why should I fear in days of evil, **when** the iniquity of my heels surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast in the abundance of their riches?*

"Why should I fear in days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels surrounds me." The meaning is that wicked people are dogging his steps, close behind him, like someone stepping on his heels. In "days of evil," when the wicked are strong, God's people are tempted to be afraid.

Who are these people? "Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the abundance of their riches." They are rich, proud and powerful, and they use their money to push others around. The question is why a believer should be afraid of them.

49:7-9 *No man will by any means ransom a brother; he will not give to God his ransom price, for the redemption of their soul is costly, and he will cease forever, that he should live on perpetually **and** not see the pit.*

The first part of the answer comes next. "No man will by any means ransom a brother; he will not give to God his ransom price." A ransom is a price paid to set someone free. In Israel the Law allowed a ransom in some cases (Exodus 21:30). But no one can pay God enough to keep himself or his brother from dying. Money can buy the best doctors and the finest tomb. It can't buy one more day from God.

"For the redemption of their soul is costly, and he will cease forever." The price of a soul is so high that no one could ever pay it. A person would have to give up trying. "That he should live on perpetually and not see the pit." The pit is the grave. No rich man can buy his way out of it.

That sets up a question the New Testament answers. If no human being can pay the ransom for a soul, who can? Jesus said He came "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Peter says

we were redeemed "not with perishable things, silver or gold," but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). The price was too costly for us, so God paid it Himself.

49:10-12 *For he will see **that** wise **men** die; the fool and the stupid alike perish, and they leave their wealth to others. Their inner **thought is that** their houses **are** forever, their dwelling places to generation and generation; they have called their lands by their names. And mankind in honor will not remain; he is like the animals **that** are destroyed.*

"For he will see that wise men die; the fool and the stupid alike perish, and they leave their wealth to others." Death doesn't care how smart you are, how foolish or how rich. Everyone dies, and everyone leaves everything behind. Paul says we brought nothing into the world, and we can't carry anything out (1 Timothy 6:7).

"Their inner thought is that their houses are forever." The rich act as if they will live forever. "They have called their lands by their names." They name estates and buildings after themselves, hoping to be remembered. But a name on a building is not life.

"And mankind in honor will not remain; he is like the animals that are destroyed." For all his honor, a man dies like a beast. This line is the refrain of the psalm, and it comes back at the end with one important change.

49:13-14 *This **is** their way; folly **is** theirs; and after them **men** take pleasure in their mouth. Selah. Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death will shepherd them; and the upright rule over them in the morning, and their form **is** for Sheol to wear away, away from his lofty abode.*

"This is their way; folly is theirs." Trusting in money is foolish. Yet "after them men take pleasure in their mouth." People keep admiring them and repeating what they said, as if they were wise. Selah follows, a pause (see Psalm 3).

"Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death will shepherd them." Sheol is the place of the dead, the grave. The rich man thought he was a shepherd, leading and owning others. In the end he is a sheep, and death is his shepherd, herding him into the grave. That is a chilling picture, the opposite of Psalm 23, where the LORD is the shepherd of His people.

"And the upright rule over them in the morning." The morning is when the night is over, when God sets things right. On that day, the upright will be over the wicked, not under them. "Their form is for Sheol to wear away, away from his lofty abode." Their fine houses won't follow them. Their bodies will waste away in the grave.

49:15 *Surely God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for He will take me. Selah.*

Then comes the brightest verse in the psalm. "Surely God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for He will take me." No man can pay the ransom (verse 7), but God can, and God will. The same Hebrew word for "take" is used when "God took" Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and when Elijah was taken up to heaven (2 Kings 2:3-5). The writer believes that God will not leave him in the grave. God will take him to Himself.

In the Old Testament the hope beyond death is often only glimpsed, and this is one of the clearest glimpses. In Christ it shines in full daylight. Jesus rose from the dead, and He says, "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19). Paul says that to die is gain (Philippians 1:21). Selah. Stop and let that sink in.

49:16-20 *Do not fear when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For in his death he will not take anything; his glory will not go down after him. For in his life he blesses his soul, and they praise you when you do well for yourself; it will go to the generation of his fathers; they will not see light perpetually. Mankind in honor, and **who** does not understand, is like the animals **that** are destroyed.*

"Do not fear when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases." The riddle of verse 5 is answered. Don't be afraid of the rich and powerful, and don't envy them. "For in his death he will not take anything; his glory will not go down after him." His wealth stops at the grave. As Job said, naked we came and naked we return (Job 1:21).

"For in his life he blesses his soul, and they praise you when you do well for yourself." The rich man congratulates himself, and others flatter him for his success. "It will go to the generation of his fathers; they will not see light perpetually." He will join his ancestors in the dark.

"Mankind in honor, and who does not understand, is like the animals that are destroyed." The refrain returns, but with two added words, "does not understand." Verse 12 said that every person in honor dies like the animals. Verse 20 adds the deeper point: the person who has honor but no understanding of God is the one who perishes like a beast. The difference between the rich fool and the believer is not money. It is knowing God.

Jesus told the story of a rich man who said to his soul to take it easy, eat, drink and be merry. God called him a fool, because that night his soul was required of him (Luke 12:20). He asked, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life (Mark 8:36)? Psalm 49 asks the same question. The answer is the same: nothing. Jesus said the way out is to be "rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

Psalm 49 Summary

Psalm 49, a wisdom psalm of the sons of Korah, calls all the peoples of the world, rich and poor, to hear a riddle: Why should God's people fear the wicked rich who trust in their wealth? No one can pay God a ransom for his brother's soul or buy his way out of the grave; the price is too costly. Wise and foolish die alike and leave their wealth to others, though they name their lands after themselves. Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol, with death as their shepherd. But the writer says, "Surely God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for He will take me." So do not fear when a man grows rich, because he takes nothing with him when he dies. A person in honor who does not understand is like the animals that perish.

Psalm 49 Study Questions

1. Whom does the writer call to listen in verses 1-2? (49:1-2)

2. In what do the wicked trust? (49:6)

3. What can no man do for his brother? (49:7)

4. What happens to the wealth of wise and foolish alike? (49:10)

5. Who shepherds the proud rich in verse 14? (49:14)

6. What will God do for the writer's soul? (49:15)

7. What two words are added to the refrain in verse 20, and why do they matter? (49:12, 20)

8. If no one can pay the ransom for a soul, how does Jesus answer that problem? (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 1:18-19)

9. Why do people sometimes fear or envy the rich and powerful? How does this psalm free us from both?

10. What would it look like for you to be "rich toward God" this week instead of trusting in what you own?

Psalm 50: God Calls His People to Court

Scripture

A psalm of Asaph.

50:1-6 God, God, the LORD, has spoken, and He has summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. From Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth. Our God comes, and He will not be silent; fire consumes before Him, and around Him it storms exceedingly. He summons the heavens above and the earth, to judge His people: "Gather to Me My godly ones, those who made My covenant with sacrifice." And the heavens declare His righteousness, for God, He ***is*** judge. Selah.

50:7-15 "Hear, My people, and let Me speak; Israel, and I will testify against you: God, your God, I ***am***. Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you, and your burnt offerings ***are*** before Me continually. I will not take a young bull from your house, ***or*** goats from your folds. For every living thing of the forest ***is*** Mine, the animals on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and the moving creatures of the field ***are*** with Me. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness ***are*** Mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, and do I drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice a thank offering to God, and pay your vows to the Most High. And call to Me in a day of trouble; I will rescue you, and you will glorify Me."

50:16-23 And to the wicked God says, "What ***is it*** to you to recount My decrees, and ***that*** you have taken My covenant on your mouth? And you, you hate discipline, and you have thrown My words behind you. If you saw a thief, you were pleased with him, and your portion ***was*** with adulterers. You let loose your mouth in evil, and your tongue harnesses deceit. You sit ***and*** speak against your brother; against the son of your mother you set a fault. These ***things*** you have done, and I kept silent; you imagined that I was exactly like you; I will rebuke you and set ***it*** in order before your eyes. Consider this, please, you who forget God, lest I tear ***you*** to pieces and there is no deliverer. He who sacrifices a thank offering glorifies Me, and ***one who*** sets ***his*** way, I will make him see the salvation of God."

Psalm 50 Preview

Psalm 50 is a courtroom scene. God Himself comes from Zion with fire and storm and calls heaven and earth as witnesses. Then He puts His own people on trial. The charge is not that they have stopped bringing sacrifices. They bring plenty. The charge is that they think God needs them, and that their hearts are not in it. God owns every animal on a thousand hills. What He wants is thanksgiving, kept promises and prayer in times of trouble.

Then God turns to the wicked among His people, those who recite His laws but live like thieves and slanderers. He has been silent, and they took His silence to mean He didn't care. Now He warns them. The psalm ends with an invitation: the one who offers thanks honors God, and the one who orders his way rightly will see His salvation.

Psalm 50 Study

50:1-3 *God, God, the LORD, has spoken, and He has summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. From Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth. Our God comes, and He will not be silent; fire consumes before Him, and around Him it storms exceedingly.*

The heading reads, "A psalm of Asaph." Asaph was a Levite whom David appointed as one of the chief leaders of music before the ark, along with Heman and Jeduthun (1 Chronicles 15:16-19; 16:4-5). He played cymbals and led singers, and 2 Chronicles 29:30 calls him a seer, a prophet. His family continued as temple singers for centuries, and some returned from exile (Ezra 2:41). Twelve psalms carry his name: Psalm 50 and Psalms 73 to 83. Some of those seem to come from much later than David's time, so "of Asaph" may sometimes mean the family or choir of Asaph. Psalm 50 could well be from Asaph himself.

"God, God, the LORD, has spoken." The psalm opens with three names for God piled up: El, Elohim and YHWH (the LORD). It is like a herald announcing the full title of a king before he enters the court. "He has summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting." The whole world is called to attention.

"From Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth." God's glory shines out from Jerusalem like the sun coming up. "Our God comes, and He will not be silent." His coming is not quiet. "Fire consumes before Him, and around Him it storms exceedingly." That is how God came down on Mount Sinai, with fire, thunder and thick cloud (Exodus 19:16-18). The God who gave the covenant at Sinai now comes to hold His people to it.

50:4-6 *He summons the heavens above and the earth, to judge His people: "Gather to Me My godly ones, those who made My covenant with sacrifice." And the heavens declare His righteousness, for God, He **is** judge. Selah.*

"He summons the heavens above and the earth, to judge His people." Heaven and earth are the witnesses. Moses called them as witnesses when he gave Israel the covenant (Deuteronomy 30:19). God isn't judging the nations here. He is judging His own people.

"Gather to Me My godly ones, those who made My covenant with sacrifice." The godly ones are those who belong to God by covenant. A covenant is a binding agreement. God's covenant with Israel was sealed with sacrifice at Sinai, when Moses sprinkled the blood on the people (Exodus 24:8).

"And the heavens declare His righteousness, for God, He is judge." The judge in this court is perfectly fair. Selah (see Psalm 3).

50:7-11 *"Hear, My people, and let Me speak; Israel, and I will testify against you: God, your God, I **am**. Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you, and your burnt offerings **are** before Me continually. I will not take a young bull from your house, **or** goats from your folds. For every living thing of the forest **is** Mine, the animals on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and the moving creatures of the field **are** with Me.*

"Hear, My people, and let Me speak; Israel, and I will testify against you: God, your God, I am." God speaks as both witness and judge. He reminds them who He is. He is their God, the One who made the covenant with them.

"Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you, and your burnt offerings are before Me continually." God isn't complaining that they've stopped bringing sacrifices. They bring them all the time. The problem is elsewhere.

"I will not take a young bull from your house, or goats from your folds. For every living thing of the forest is Mine, the animals on a thousand hills." God doesn't need their animals. He already owns every animal there is. Many have sung about the cattle on a thousand hills. The point is not only that God is rich, but that we can't give Him anything He doesn't already own.

"I know every bird of the mountains, and the moving creatures of the field are with Me." God knows each bird by name. Jesus said not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father (Matthew 10:29).

50:12-15 *If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness **are** Mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, and do I drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice a thank offering to God, and pay your vows to the Most High. And call to Me in a day of trouble; I will rescue you, and you will glorify Me."*

"If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are Mine." The nations around Israel believed their gods ate the sacrifices, as though gods needed feeding. God mocks that idea. "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, and do I drink the blood of goats?" Of course not.

So what does God want? "Sacrifice a thank offering to God, and pay your vows to the Most High." The thank offering was a sacrifice of thanks for God's goodness (Leviticus 7:12). God wants a grateful heart behind the offering. He wants His people to keep the promises, the vows, they made to Him.

"And call to Me in a day of trouble; I will rescue you, and you will glorify Me." God doesn't need us, but He invites us to need Him. Prayer honors God because it admits that we depend on Him. He rescues, and we give Him the glory.

The New Testament picks up this language. Through Jesus, Hebrews says, "let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name" (Hebrews 13:15). The animal sacrifices have been fulfilled in Christ's one sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10-14). Our offering now is thanksgiving from the heart.

New Testament links: Hebrews 13:15 (alluded to)

50:16-17 *And to the wicked God says, "What **is it** to you to recount My decrees, and **that** you have taken My covenant on your mouth? And you, you hate discipline, and you have thrown My words behind you.*

Now God turns to a second group. "And to the wicked God says, What is it to you to recount My decrees, and that you have taken My covenant on your mouth?" These are people inside Israel who know God's laws and talk about them, but don't keep them. God asks what right they have to quote His word.

"And you, you hate discipline, and you have thrown My words behind you." They can recite the commandments, but they toss them over their shoulder like trash. Paul asks the same kind of question: You who teach others, do you not teach yourself (Romans 2:21)?

50:18-21 *If you saw a thief, you were pleased with him, and your portion **was** with adulterers. You let loose your mouth in evil, and your tongue harnesses deceit. You sit **and** speak against your brother; against the son of your mother you set a fault. These **things** you have done, and I kept silent; you imagined that I was exactly like you; I will rebuke you and set **it** in order before your eyes.*

God names the charges. "If you saw a thief, you were pleased with him, and your portion was with adulterers." They approve of thieves and join in with adulterers. "You let loose your mouth in evil, and your tongue harnesses deceit." They use their words to lie. "You sit and speak against your brother; against the son of your mother you set a fault." They slander even their own family. Each charge breaks one of the Ten Commandments: stealing, adultery and false witness.

"These things you have done, and I kept silent." God was patient. He didn't strike them down right away. "You imagined that I was exactly like you." They thought God's silence meant He didn't care, or that He was as easy on sin as they were. That is a deadly mistake. God's patience is meant to lead us to repentance, not to make us bolder in sin (Romans 2:4). "I will rebuke you and set it in order before your eyes." God will lay out the evidence, one sin after another.

50:22-23 *Consider this, please, you who forget God, lest I tear **you** to pieces and there is no deliverer. He who sacrifices a thank offering glorifies Me, and **one who** sets **his** way, I will make him see the salvation of God."*

"Consider this, please, you who forget God, lest I tear you to pieces and there is no deliverer." The warning is fierce. God pictures Himself like a lion tearing its prey. These words are hard, and they are meant to be. God is speaking to people who have heard His word and thrown it away. Even here He says "please." He wants them to consider and turn before it is too late.

"He who sacrifices a thank offering glorifies Me." The psalm ends where verse 14 began. The way back to God is thanksgiving from a humble heart. "And one who sets his way, I will make him see the salvation of God." To set your way is to put your life in order according to God's word. To that person God promises salvation.

Both groups in this psalm went to worship. One thought God needed their gifts. The other quoted God's word and ignored it. God calls both to the same place: a grateful heart, a life that matches the words, and prayer to Him in trouble.

Psalm 50 Summary

Psalm 50, a psalm of Asaph, shows God coming from Zion with fire and storm and calling heaven and earth to witness as He judges His own people. He doesn't rebuke them for a lack of sacrifices, but He reminds them that He owns every animal on a thousand hills and the whole world, and He does not eat flesh or drink blood. What He wants is a thank offering, kept vows and prayer in the day of trouble, so that He may rescue them and they may glorify Him (compare Hebrews 13:15). Then God speaks to the wicked who recite His laws but throw His words behind them, approving of thieves, joining adulterers and slandering their brothers. They thought His silence meant He was like them. He warns them to consider before He tears them to pieces. The psalm ends with a promise: the one who offers thanks glorifies God, and the one who orders his way will see the salvation of God.

People and Places

- Asaph: a Levite whom David appointed to lead music before the ark (1 Chronicles 16:4-5); twelve psalms carry his name (50 and 73 to 83).
- Thank offering: a sacrifice offered to thank God for His goodness (Leviticus 7:12).

Psalm 50 Study Questions

1. From where has God shone forth? (50:2)

2. Whom does God summon as witnesses, and whom does He judge? (50:4)

3. Why doesn't God need Israel's bulls and goats? (50:10-12)

4. What three things does God ask for in verses 14-15? (50:14-15)

5. What are the wicked doing with God's words? (50:17)

6. What did the wicked imagine when God kept silent? (50:21)

7. How does Hebrews 13:15 use the idea of a sacrifice of thanksgiving for believers today?

8. In what ways might we act as if God needs us, instead of us needing Him?

9. Why is it dangerous to take God's patience as a sign that He doesn't care about sin? (50:21; Romans 2:4)

10. Is there a place in your life where your words about God and your actions don't match? What would it look like to set your way in order in that area? (50:23)

Psalm 52: Like a Luxuriant Olive Tree

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech."

52:1-9 Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God ***is*** all the day. Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharpened razor, O doer of deceit. You love evil more than good, falsehood more than speaking righteousness. Selah. You love all words of swallowing, O tongue of deceit. God also will tear you down forever; He will snatch you up and tear you away from ***your*** tent, and He will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah. And ***the*** righteous will see and fear, and they will laugh at him: "Look, the man ***who*** did not make God his refuge, and he trusted in the abundance of his riches; he was strong in his destruction." And I ***am*** like a luxuriant olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. I will give thanks to You forever, for You have acted; and I will wait for Your name, for ***it is*** good, before Your godly ones.

Psalm 52 Preview

Psalm 52 comes out of one of the darkest stories in David's life. Running from King Saul, David stopped at the town of Nob and received help from the priest Ahimelech. One of Saul's servants, Doeg the Edomite, saw it and reported it to Saul. Then, at Saul's order, Doeg killed eighty-five priests and wiped out their town.

David speaks straight to this proud, lying man. Doeg boasts in evil, his tongue is like a razor, and he loves lies more than truth. God will tear him down and uproot him. Then David sets a very different picture beside him: "And I am like a luxuriant olive tree in the house of God." The man who trusted in riches will be uprooted. The man who trusts in God's steadfast love will flourish.

Psalm 52 Study

52:1-4 *Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God **is** all the day. Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharpened razor, O doer of deceit. You love evil more than good, falsehood more than speaking righteousness. Selah. You love all words of swallowing, O tongue of deceit.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said to him," and then it gives Doeg's words: "David has come to the house of Ahimelech." A Maskil may be a teaching or skillful psalm (see Psalm 44).

The story is in 1 Samuel 21-22. David fled from Saul and came to Nob, a town of priests. He told Ahimelech the priest that he was on the king's business, and Ahimelech gave him holy bread and the sword of Goliath. Doeg, an Edomite who was the chief of Saul's shepherds, was there that day and saw it (1 Samuel 21:7). Later, when Saul accused his servants of plotting against him, Doeg spoke up and told him what he had seen (1 Samuel 22:9-10). Saul ordered his guards to kill the priests. They refused to lift a hand against the LORD's priests. Doeg didn't refuse. He killed eighty-

five priests that day, and then he struck down the town of Nob, men, women, children and babies (1 Samuel 22:18-19). Only one son of Ahimelech, Abiathar, escaped to David. David told him that he knew Doeg would tell Saul, and he took the blame on himself for the deaths of Abiathar's family (1 Samuel 22:22).

"Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?" David calls Doeg a "mighty man" with bitter irony. He was mighty at killing unarmed priests. "The steadfast love of God is all the day." Doeg's evil was loud for a day. God's steadfast love, His hesed, lasts all day, every day. David puts the two side by side from the start.

"Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharpened razor, O doer of deceit." Doeg's report was probably true in its facts, but it was told in a way that made the innocent priests look like traitors. He left out that Ahimelech didn't know David was running from Saul. A half truth told to destroy is still a lie. "You love evil more than good, falsehood more than speaking righteousness." Selah (see Psalm 3).

"You love all words of swallowing, O tongue of deceit." He loves words that devour people. Some people today still use their tongues this way, through gossip, slander or reports twisted to ruin someone. James says the tongue is a fire (James 3:6).

52:5-7 *God also will tear you down forever; He will snatch you up and tear you away from **your** tent, and He will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah. And **the** righteous will see and fear, and they will laugh at him: "Look, the man **who** did not make God his refuge, and he trusted in the abundance of his riches; he was strong in his destruction."*

"God also will tear you down forever." Doeg tore down the priests. God will tear him down. "He will snatch you up and tear you away from your tent, and He will uproot you from the land of the living." The pictures are of a building pulled down, a man dragged out of his home and a tree pulled up by the roots. Selah.

These are hard words. David is speaking God's judgment on a man who murdered priests and children. He doesn't take revenge himself; he leaves it to God. Scripture does not tell us how Doeg died. But God sees every innocent life taken, and He will judge. For anyone who has seen terrible evil go unpunished, this verse is a promise that God has not forgotten (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

"And the righteous will see and fear, and they will laugh at him." The righteous will be struck with awe at God's judgment. Their laughter is not cruel glee at someone's pain. It is the laughter of seeing proud evil exposed and brought down, like the end of a bully's reign.

"Look, the man who did not make God his refuge, and he trusted in the abundance of his riches." Doeg's trust was in his position and wealth as Saul's chief herdsman. "He was strong in his destruction." He thought evil made him strong.

52:8-9 *And I **am** like a luxuriant olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. I will give thanks to You forever, for You have acted; and I will wait for Your name, for **it is** good, before Your godly ones.*

"And I am like a luxuriant olive tree in the house of God." Doeg will be uprooted. David will be planted. Olive trees in Israel can live for hundreds of years, stay green through dry summers and keep bearing fruit. To be like an olive tree "in the house of God" is to be rooted in God's presence. David was a fugitive when this happened, with no home at all, but he knew where his roots were.

"I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever." Verse 1 said God's steadfast love is all the day. Verse 8 says David trusts in it forever. Doeg trusted riches. David trusts God's love. That is the whole difference between the two men.

"I will give thanks to You forever, for You have acted." David thanks God for what He has done, and he speaks as if God's justice has already come. "And I will wait for Your name, for it is good, before Your godly ones." To wait for God's name is to trust that God will act according to His character. He will wait, and he will do it among God's people.

If you have been hurt by someone's lying tongue, this psalm gives you a way to pray. Tell God what happened. Leave the judgment to Him. Put your roots down in His steadfast love. You will outlast the liar.

Psalm 52 Summary

Psalm 52 is a Maskil of David from the time when Doeg the Edomite told Saul that David had gone to Ahimelech the priest, and then killed eighty-five priests and the people of Nob (1 Samuel 21-22). David asks why this mighty man boasts in evil, while God's steadfast love lasts all day. Doeg's tongue is like a sharpened razor, and he loves evil and lies more than good and truth. God will tear him down, snatch him from his tent and uproot him from the land of the living, and the righteous will see and say, "Look, the man who did not make God his refuge." In contrast, David is like a green olive tree in the house of God, trusting God's steadfast love forever. He will thank God and wait for His good name among His godly ones.

People and Places

- Doeg the Edomite: Saul's chief herdsman, who reported David's visit to Nob and then killed the priests there (1 Samuel 21:7; 22:9-19).
- Ahimelech: the priest at Nob who gave David bread and Goliath's sword.
- Nob: a town of priests near Jerusalem.
- Abiathar: Ahimelech's son, the only priest who escaped from Nob; he later served David as priest.

Psalm 52 Study Questions

1. What event does the heading of Psalm 52 describe? (heading; 1 Samuel 22:9-10)

2. What did Doeg do at Saul's command? (1 Samuel 22:18-19)

3. What does David set beside the boasting of the mighty man in verse 1? (52:1)

4. What is Doeg's tongue compared to? (52:2)

5. What will God do to him? (52:5)

6. In what did the man who did not make God his refuge trust? (52:7)

7. What does David compare himself to, and where is it planted? (52:8)

8. How can a report that is true in its facts still be deceitful? How should that shape the way we talk about other people?

9. How does this psalm help someone who has seen great evil go unpunished?

10. What would it look like for you to be "like a luxuriant olive tree in the house of God" in your present season of life?

Psalm 53: The Fool Says There Is No God

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on Mahalath. A Maskil of David.

53:1-6 A fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They have acted corruptly, and they have done abominable injustice; there is none who does good. God has looked down from ***the*** heavens on the sons of man to see whether there is ***anyone*** who acts prudently, who seeks God. Every one of them has turned back; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Do those who work iniquity not know, who eat up My people ***as*** they eat bread? They have not called on God. There they have dreaded a dread ***where*** there was no dread, for God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you; you have put ***them*** to shame, for God has rejected them. Oh, that from Zion the salvation of Israel ***would come***! When God turns back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

Psalm 53 Preview

Psalm 14 is almost the same psalm; see there. Psalm 53 repeats it with a few changes. A fool says in his heart that there is no God, and the whole human race is corrupt. God looks down from heaven and finds no one who does good. Paul quotes these lines in Romans 3 to show that every person needs God's grace.

The main differences are two. Psalm 53 uses "God" (Elohim) throughout where Psalm 14 uses "the LORD," and verse 5 tells of a sudden defeat of an enemy army. Both psalms end with the same longing: that salvation would come from Zion.

Psalm 53 Study

53:1-3 *A fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They have acted corruptly, and they have done abominable injustice; there is none who does good. God has looked down from* ***the*** *heavens on the sons of man to see whether there is* ***anyone*** *who acts prudently, who seeks God. Every one of them has turned back; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, there is not even one.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on Mahalath. A Maskil of David." Mahalath appears only here and in the heading of Psalm 88. It may name a tune, or it may come from a Hebrew word for sickness or sorrow, suggesting a sad melody. The meaning is uncertain. A Maskil may be a teaching or skillful psalm (see Psalm 44).

Why would the Psalms include the same psalm twice? Psalm 14 is in Book One, and Psalm 53 is in Book Two. The books were probably gathered at different times, and each collection kept its own copy of David's psalm. Book Two (Psalms 42 to 72) mostly uses "God" rather than "the LORD," which may explain the change in names. And it seems the psalm was later adapted for a new occasion, as verse 5 shows.

"A fool has said in his heart, There is no God." In the Bible a fool is not someone short on brains. He is someone who lives as if God doesn't matter. He may never say it out loud, but he says it "in his heart." His life shows what he believes. "They have acted corruptly, and they have done abominable injustice; there is none who does good." Where God is pushed out, justice soon goes too.

"God has looked down from the heavens on the sons of man to see whether there is anyone who acts prudently, who seeks God." God searches the whole human race. "Every one of them has turned back; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, there is not even one."

Paul quotes these verses (from Psalm 14 or 53, which say the same thing) in Romans 3:10-12. He puts them first in a chain of Old Testament verses to show that "There is not a righteous one, not even one" and that "there is none who seeks out God" (Romans 3:10-11). Jews and Gentiles alike are under sin. That is bad news, but Paul gives it so that we will see our need for the good news: God makes sinners righteous as a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-24).

New Testament links: Romans 3:10-12 (quoted)

53:4-6 *Do those who work iniquity not know, who eat up My people **as** they eat bread? They have not called on God. There they have dreaded a dread **where** there was no dread, for God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you; you have put **them** to shame, for God has rejected them. Oh, that from Zion the salvation of Israel **would come**! When God turns back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.*

"Do those who work iniquity not know, who eat up My people as they eat bread?" God Himself speaks. The wicked devour God's people as easily as they eat a meal, without a second thought. "They have not called on God." They never pray.

Verse 5 is where Psalm 53 differs most from Psalm 14. "There they have dreaded a dread where there was no dread." The enemy was suddenly terrified when there was nothing they could see to fear. "For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you." An army camped against God's people, and God struck it down so completely that its bones lay scattered on the ground, unburied, a mark of deep disgrace. "You have put them to shame, for God has rejected them." Many think this change reflects a later deliverance, perhaps the defeat of Sennacherib's Assyrian army outside Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (2 Kings 19:35), when the psalm was sung again with new meaning. We can't be sure.

"Oh, that from Zion the salvation of Israel would come!" Zion is Jerusalem, the city where God chose to dwell. The longing is for God to come and save His people. "When God turns back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad." To turn back the captivity means to restore their fortunes, to bring them home and set things right.

I believe that longing will be answered in full. Paul says that one day "all Israel will be saved," as it is written, the One who delivers will come out of Zion (Romans 11:26). The salvation Psalm 53

longs for has a name, Jesus. He came first to die for sinners, and He will come again to Zion as King.

Psalm 53 Summary

Psalm 53 is a Maskil of David, set to Mahalath, and almost the same as Psalm 14. A fool says in his heart that there is no God, and people have become corrupt and done abominable injustice. God looks down from heaven to see if anyone seeks Him, and finds that all have turned back and none does good, not even one. Paul quotes these lines in Romans 3:10-12 to show that all need God's grace. The workers of iniquity eat up God's people and never call on Him. In a change from Psalm 14, verse 5 tells how God scattered the bones of the army that camped against His people. The psalm ends with the longing that salvation would come from Zion and that Jacob and Israel would rejoice when God restores His people.

People and Places

- Mahalath: a word in the headings of Psalms 53 and 88, perhaps a tune or a word meaning sickness or sorrow; the meaning is uncertain.

Psalm 53 Study Questions

1. What does the fool say in his heart? (53:1)

2. What is God looking for when He looks down from heaven? (53:2)

3. How many people does God find who do good? (53:3)

4. What name for God does Psalm 53 use where Psalm 14 uses "the LORD"?

5. What did God do to the one who encamped against His people? (53:5)

6. Where does Paul quote this psalm, and why? (Romans 3:10-12)

7. What does it mean to say "There is no God" in your heart without saying it out loud? Where might believers slip into that?

8. Why do you think God included this psalm twice in the Bible?

9. Why must we hear the bad news of verses 1-3 before we can understand the good news of the gospel?

10. How does the longing of verse 6 point to Jesus and to God's future for Israel? (Romans 11:26)

Psalm 54: God Is My Helper

Scripture

To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, "Is not David hiding himself with us?"

54:1-7 God, save me by Your name, and vindicate me by Your might. God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen up against me, and ruthless men have sought my life; they have not set God before them. Selah. Look, God ***is*** my helper; the Lord ***is*** among those who sustain my life. He will bring back the evil on my enemies; in Your faithfulness destroy them. With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to Your name, LORD, for ***it is*** good. For from every trouble He has delivered me, and my eye has looked on my enemies.

Psalm 54 Preview

Psalm 54 is a short prayer from a man betrayed by people he thought were on his side. David was hiding from Saul in the wilderness of Judah when the people of Ziph went to Saul and told him where David was. Saul came after him with an army.

In seven verses David moves from a cry for help to a vow of thanks. He asks God to save him by His name. He names the danger: strangers and ruthless men who have no regard for God. Then he says the line at the center of the psalm: "Look, God is my helper." He ends by promising a freewill offering and thanking God as if the rescue had already come.

Psalm 54 Study

54:1-3 *God, save me by Your name, and vindicate me by Your might. God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen up against me, and ruthless men have sought my life; they have not set God before them. Selah.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul," and then it gives their words: "Is not David hiding himself with us?" "With stringed instruments" means the psalm was to be accompanied by stringed instruments (see Psalm 4). A Maskil may be a teaching or skillful psalm (see Psalm 44).

The Ziphites were people of Ziph, a town in the hill country of Judah, southeast of Hebron. They were from David's own tribe of Judah. Twice they went to Saul to betray David's hiding place (1 Samuel 23:19; 26:1). The first time, Saul's army nearly surrounded David's men on a mountain, but just then a messenger brought news that the Philistines had raided the land, and Saul had to turn back (1 Samuel 23:26-28). The second time, David crept into Saul's camp at night and could have killed him, but he refused to lift his hand against the LORD's anointed (1 Samuel 26).

"God, save me by Your name, and vindicate me by Your might." God's name stands for all that He is. David asks God to act in keeping with His character. To vindicate is to prove someone right, to clear his name. David knows he has done Saul no wrong.

"God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth." It is a simple, urgent request. Some of the best prayers are short.

"For strangers have risen up against me." The Ziphites were not foreigners. They were fellow members of Judah. But they acted like strangers, people who owed David nothing. "Ruthless men have sought my life; they have not set God before them." That is the root of their cruelty. They didn't think about God at all when they made their plans. Selah (see Psalm 3).

54:4-5 *Look, God **is** my helper; the Lord **is** among those who sustain my life. He will bring back the evil on my enemies; in Your faithfulness destroy them.*

"Look, God is my helper." The word "Look" calls us to pay attention. In the middle of the danger, David sees what is most real: God is on his side. "The Lord is among those who sustain my life." David had loyal men with him, and he also had the Lord, who held him up. Hebrews 13:6 gives every believer the same confidence: "The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid."

"He will bring back the evil on my enemies." David trusts that the harm his enemies planned will come back on their own heads. "In Your faithfulness destroy them." That is a hard line. David asks God to deal with the men hunting him to the death. But look at what he actually did. When he had Saul in his power, he spared him and said that the LORD Himself would strike Saul in His own time (1 Samuel 26:9-11). David asked God for justice and refused to take it himself. That is exactly what Paul teaches: don't avenge yourselves, but leave room for God's wrath (Romans 12:19). And Jesus adds that we should pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44).

54:6-7 *With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to Your name, LORD, for **it is** good. For from every trouble He has delivered me, and my eye has looked on my enemies.*

"With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to You." A freewill offering was a sacrifice given out of a glad heart, not because the Law required it (Leviticus 7:16). David promises to bring one. "I will give thanks to Your name, LORD, for it is good." In verse 1 he asked to be saved by God's name. Now he praises that name. The God he called on is the God he will thank.

"For from every trouble He has delivered me." David speaks as if the rescue has already happened. He is so sure of God's help that he gives thanks in advance. "And my eye has looked on my enemies." He means he has seen, or will see, his enemies defeated, and himself safe.

When people we trusted betray us, Psalm 54 shows us what to do. Tell God plainly what has happened. Remember that God is our helper. Leave the judgment to Him, and start thanking Him before the answer comes.

Psalm 54 Summary

Psalm 54 is a Maskil of David from the time when the Ziphites told Saul that David was hiding among them (1 Samuel 23:19; 26:1). David asks God to save him by His name and vindicate him by His might, and to hear his prayer, because strangers and ruthless men who do not set God before them are seeking his life. In the center of the psalm he says, "Look, God is my helper," and the Lord sustains his life. He trusts God to bring their evil back on his enemies, and in God's faithfulness to

deal with them, while in his own life he left vengeance to God. He promises a freewill offering and thanks to God's good name, because God has delivered him from every trouble.

People and Places

- Ziphites: people of Ziph, a town in the hill country of Judah, who twice told Saul where David was hiding (1 Samuel 23:19; 26:1).
- Freewill offering: a sacrifice given gladly, beyond what the Law required (Leviticus 7:16).

Psalm 54 Study Questions

1. Who were the Ziphites, and what did they do? (heading; 1 Samuel 23:19)

2. By what does David ask God to save and vindicate him? (54:1)

3. What does David say his enemies have not done? (54:3)

4. What does David say about God in verse 4? (54:4)

5. What kind of offering does David promise? (54:6)

6. What has God delivered David from? (54:7)

7. The Ziphites were from David's own tribe. Why does betrayal by "our own" hurt so much? How can this psalm help?

8. How does David's sparing of Saul (1 Samuel 26:9-11) help us understand the hard line in verse 5?

9. What difference does it make to say "God is my helper" in the middle of trouble, not just after it?

10. David thanks God before the rescue is complete. What is one thing you can thank God for in advance this week?

Psalm 55: Cast Your Burden on the LORD

Scripture

To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David.

55:1-8 Give ear, God, to my prayer, and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Pay attention to me and answer me; I am restless in my complaint, and I groan, because of the voice of an enemy, because of the pressure of the wicked; for they drop wickedness on me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me. My heart trembles within me, and the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling come on me, and shuddering has covered me. And I said, "Oh, that I ***had*** a wing like the dove! I would fly away and settle down. Look, I would go far away, fleeing; I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah. I would hurry ***to*** my place of escape from a rushing wind, from a storm."

55:9-15 Swallow ***them*** up, Lord, divide their tongue, for I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go around it on its walls, and wickedness and trouble ***are*** in its midst. Destruction ***is*** in its midst, and oppression and deceit do not depart from its square. For ***it is*** not an enemy ***who*** taunts me, then I could bear ***it***; ***it is*** not one who hates me ***who*** has magnified himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But you, a man as my equal, my close friend and my acquaintance, ***with*** whom together we made counsel sweet; in the house of God we walked in the throng. Let death come deceitfully on them; let them go down ***to*** Sheol alive, for evils ***are*** in their dwelling, in their midst.

55:16-23 ***As for*** me, I will call to God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and noon I will complain and moan, and He has heard my voice. He has ransomed my soul in peace from the battle against me, for in great numbers they were with me. God will hear and humble them, and He who sits ***enthroned from*** ancient times, Selah, those who have no changes, and they do not fear God. He has stretched out his hands against his allies; he has profaned his covenant. The creamy ***words*** of his mouth were smooth, and his heart ***was*** war; his words were softer than oil, and they ***were*** drawn swords. Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be shaken. And You, God, will bring them down to the well of the pit; men of bloodshed and deceit will not reach half their days; and I will trust in You.

Psalm 55 Preview

Some wounds come from enemies. The deepest come from friends. In Psalm 55 David is surrounded by trouble in his own city, and the worst of it is that the man leading the attack is someone he trusted, someone he once walked with to the house of God. David is so worn out that he wishes he had wings like a dove so he could fly away from all of it.

He can't fly away, so he does the next best thing. He calls on God evening, morning and noon. By the end of the psalm he has found a word for every hurting believer: "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you." Peter picks up the same thought when he tells us to cast all our anxiety on God, because He cares for us.

Psalm 55 Study

55:1-3 *Give ear, God, to my prayer, and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Pay attention to me and answer me; I am restless in my complaint, and I groan, because of the voice of an enemy, because of the pressure of the wicked; for they drop wickedness on me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David." The choirmaster led the music at the sanctuary (see Psalm 4), and "with stringed instruments" tells him how to accompany it. A Maskil is probably a psalm meant to teach or to make wise (see Psalm 44).

The heading doesn't tell us the occasion. Many teachers think of the time Absalom, David's son, rebelled against him and Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor, joined the plot (2 Samuel 15:12, 31). That would fit the city full of strife and the friend who turned. But we aren't told, and the psalm fits any believer betrayed by someone close.

David begins by asking God to listen. "Do not hide Yourself from my supplication." A supplication is a humble, earnest request. He admits how he feels: "I am restless in my complaint, and I groan." In the Psalms a complaint is not grumbling against God. It is pouring out trouble to Him. The cause is "the voice of an enemy" and "the pressure of the wicked." They drop trouble on him like stones and hold a grudge against him.

55:4-8 *My heart trembles within me, and the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling come on me, and shuddering has covered me. And I said, "Oh, that I **had** a wing like the dove! I would fly away and settle down. Look, I would go far away, fleeing; I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah. I would hurry **to** my place of escape from a rushing wind, from a storm."*

"My heart trembles within me, and the terrors of death have fallen on me." David is not ashamed to say he is afraid. Fear, trembling and shuddering cover him like a blanket he can't throw off. Believers today sometimes feel guilty for being afraid. The Bible lets us say it out loud to God.

Then comes one of the most honest wishes in Scripture: "Oh, that I had a wing like the dove! I would fly away and settle down." A dove is gentle and quick, and it flies to the cliffs to hide. David wants to get away to the wilderness, far from the noise, to "my place of escape from a rushing wind, from a storm." Anyone who has wanted to get in the car and just keep driving knows this feeling. God doesn't scold David for it. But the psalm doesn't end with escape. It ends with trust. Selah marks a pause here (see Psalm 3).

55:9-11 *Swallow **them** up, Lord, divide their tongue, for I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go around it on its walls, and wickedness and trouble **are** in its midst. Destruction **is** in its midst, and oppression and deceit do not depart from its square.*

"Swallow them up, Lord, divide their tongue." Dividing the tongue may look back to the tower of Babel, where God confused the builders' language so they could not work together (Genesis 11:7-9). David asks God to break up the plotters' plans so they argue among themselves. If

the occasion was Absalom's revolt, God answered just this way: Hushai's advice overturned Ahithophel's, and the plot fell apart (2 Samuel 17:14).

David describes the city. "Violence and strife" walk around on its walls day and night like watchmen, but they guard nothing. Inside are wickedness, trouble, destruction, oppression and deceit, and they "do not depart from its square," the open place by the gate where business and court cases were done. When justice leaves the public square, the whole city suffers.

55:12-14 *For **it is** not an enemy **who** taunts me, then I could bear **it**; **it is** not one who hates me **who** has magnified himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But you, a man as my equal, my close friend and my acquaintance, **with** whom together we made counsel sweet; in the house of God we walked in the throng.*

Now we come to the heart of the pain. "For it is not an enemy who taunts me, then I could bear it." David could have handled an open enemy. He could have hidden from him. "But you, a man as my equal, my close friend and my acquaintance." David speaks straight to the traitor. This was a friend, and they had shared sweet counsel, the kind of talk friends have when they trust each other. "In the house of God we walked in the throng." They had worshiped side by side.

Betrayal by a fellow believer is one of the hardest things a Christian can go through. If that has happened to you, David knows how you feel, and so does Jesus. Judas ate with Him and walked with Him for three years. Psalm 41:9 is the verse the Gospel of John says was fulfilled in Judas (see Psalm 41). Many see Psalm 55:12-14 as a picture of the same kind of betrayal. Ahithophel and Judas even ended their lives the same way (2 Samuel 17:23; Matthew 27:5).

55:15 *Let death come deceitfully on them; let them go down **to** Sheol alive, for evils **are** in their dwelling, in their midst.*

"Let death come deceitfully on them; let them go down to Sheol alive." Sheol is the grave, the place of the dead (see Psalm 6). Going down alive recalls Korah and his rebels, whom the ground swallowed in Numbers 16:31-33. David is asking God to judge men who have turned the city into a place of evil.

Verse 15 is one of the hard lines (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). David does not grab a sword. He hands his enemies to God. Paul tells us to leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:19), and Jesus tells us to pray for those who mistreat us (Matthew 5:44). We can tell God how deep the wound goes, ask Him to stop the wicked and still pray for the person who hurt us.

55:16-19 ***As for** me, I will call to God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and noon I will complain and moan, and He has heard my voice. He has ransomed my soul in peace from the battle against me, for in great numbers they were with me. God will hear and humble them, and He who sits **enthroned from** ancient times, Selah, those who have no changes, and they do not fear God.*

"As for me, I will call to God, and the LORD will save me." The betrayer has made his choice. David makes his. "Evening and morning and noon I will complain and moan." The Hebrew day began at evening, so David is praying all day long, through the whole day. Daniel later prayed three times a

day, even when it was against the law (Daniel 6:10). Then comes the confidence: "He has heard my voice."

"He has ransomed my soul in peace from the battle against me." He talks as if the rescue has already happened, because he is sure God has heard. God "sits enthroned from ancient times." He was King before David's enemies were born and will be King after they are gone. The enemies are "those who have no changes," men whose lives have rolled on without trouble, so they feel no need to turn to God and "they do not fear God." Easy times can make a person hard.

55:20-21 *He has stretched out his hands against his allies; he has profaned his covenant. The creamy **words** of his mouth were smooth, and his heart **was** war; his words were softer than oil, and they **were** drawn swords.*

David comes back to the traitor. "He has stretched out his hands against his allies; he has profaned his covenant." A covenant is a binding agreement, a promise sealed before God. The friend broke it.

"His words were softer than oil, and they were drawn swords." He said all the right things while he planned harm. Smooth speech is not the same as a true heart. Jesus warned of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but are wolves inside (Matthew 7:15). We don't need to be suspicious of everyone, but we should watch what people do, not only what they say.

55:22-23 *Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be shaken. And You, God, will bring them down to the well of the pit; men of bloodshed and deceit will not reach half their days; and I will trust in You.*

Then David turns to us. "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you." The word "burden" may mean what has been given to you, your lot in life. Whatever you are carrying, throw it on Him. He won't always take away the load, but "He will sustain you." He holds up the one who carries it. "He will never permit the righteous to be shaken." The righteous may be shaken by events, but they will not be knocked loose from God.

Peter echoes this verse when he tells us to cast all our anxiety on God, "because He cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7). Jesus invites the weary and burdened to come to Him for rest (Matthew 11:28).

The last verse puts the two roads side by side. God will bring the "men of bloodshed and deceit" down to "the well of the pit," and they "will not reach half their days." David's last words are simple: "and I will trust in You." He still can't fly away. He doesn't need to.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 5:7 (alluded to)

Psalm 55 Summary

David cries to God because enemies are pressing him and his city is full of violence, deceit and oppression. He is so afraid that he wishes he had the wings of a dove to fly away to the wilderness. He asks God to confuse the plotters, as at Babel. The worst wound is that the leader against him is a close friend who once worshiped with him, whose words were smoother than oil but hid drawn

swords. David hands his enemies over to God's judgment. He prays evening, morning and noon, sure that God has heard him and will rescue him. He ends by telling every believer to cast their burden on the LORD, who will sustain them and never let the righteous be shaken, and he closes with a simple vow of trust.

People and Places

- Ahithophel: David's trusted counselor, who joined Absalom's revolt and later took his own life (2 Samuel 15-17).

Psalm 55 Study Questions

1. How does David describe his feelings in verses 4-5?

2. What does David wish he could do, and where would he go? (55:6-8)

3. What did David see in the city? (55:9-11)

4. Why does David say the betrayal is harder than an attack from an enemy? (55:12-14)

5. How often does David say he will pray, and what is he sure of? (55:16-17)

6. How are the traitor's words described in verse 21?

7. Have you ever wanted to "fly away" from your problems? What did you do, and how does this psalm help?

8. What does it look like to cast your burden on the LORD? How is that different from simply trying not to think about it? (55:22; 1 Peter 5:7)

9. How can a believer who has been betrayed by another Christian keep from becoming bitter?

10. How does knowing that Jesus was betrayed by a friend help you pray when you are hurt?

Psalm 56: When I Am Afraid

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on "A Dove of Distant Terebinths." Of David, a Miktam, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

56:1-7 Be gracious to me, God, for man has crushed me; all the day ***one*** fighting oppresses me. My enemies have crushed ***me*** all the day, for many ***are*** fighting against me loftily. ***In the*** day I fear, I will trust in You. In God I will praise His word; in God I have trusted; I will not fear. What will flesh do to me? All the day they twist my words; all their plans against me ***are*** for evil. They stir up strife, they lie hidden; they watch my heels, as they have waited for my life. Because of wickedness ***will You*** deliver them? In anger bring down peoples, God.

56:8-13 You have counted my wandering; put my tears in Your skin bottle; ***are they*** not in Your book? Then my enemies will turn back on the day I call out; this I know, that God ***is*** for me. In God I will praise ***His*** word; in the LORD I will praise ***His*** word. In God I have trusted; I will not fear. What will man do to me? On me, God, ***are*** Your vows; I will pay thank offerings to You. For You have delivered my soul from death, ***have You*** not ***delivered*** my feet from stumbling, to walk before God in the light of life?

Psalm 56 Preview

David wrote this psalm at one of the lowest points of his life. Running from King Saul, he fled to the Philistine city of Gath, the hometown of Goliath, and the Philistines recognized him. He was alone in enemy hands. Psalm 34, studied in Volume 1, comes from the same event and shows David afterward, praising God for getting him out.

Psalm 56 shows David in the middle of it. He is afraid, and he says so. But he answers his fear with a short line he repeats like a chorus: "In God I have trusted; I will not fear. What will man do to me?" He also tells us something tender about God. Not one of our tears is lost. God keeps count of them.

Psalm 56 Study

56:1-2 *Be gracious to me, God, for man has crushed me; all the day **one** fighting oppresses me. My enemies have crushed **me** all the day, for many **are** fighting against me loftily.*

The heading is addressed "To the choirmaster, on" what is probably a tune, "A Dove of Distant Terebinths," and then it reads, "Of David, a Miktam, when the Philistines seized him in Gath." The heading has three parts.

The choirmaster would have known the tune. A terebinth is a large spreading tree, like an oak. Some read the Hebrew as a silent dove far away, and that fits David, a gentle man far from home among strangers. The meaning is uncertain.

Psalm 56 is the first psalm in this volume called a Miktam. The word appears in the headings of six psalms, all of them David's (16, 56, 57, 58, 59 and 60). Its meaning is uncertain. Some connect it with a Hebrew word for gold and think it means a golden or precious psalm. Others think it means an inscription, a poem to be engraved and remembered. Several of these psalms come from times when David's life was in danger, so they may be prayers he wanted never to forget.

The occasion is in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. David fled from Saul to Achish, the king of Gath. The king's servants recognized him as the man the women sang about, the one who had struck down his ten thousands. David "was exceedingly afraid" (1 Samuel 21:12). He pretended to be a madman, scratching on the gate and drooling in his beard, and Achish sent him away. The heading says the Philistines "seized" him, so for a time he was their prisoner.

"Be gracious to me, God, for man has crushed me." The enemies press him "all the day," and there are many. "Loftily" means they fight from a high and proud position. David is outnumbered and alone.

56:3-4 ***In the*** *day I fear, I will trust in You. In God I will praise His word; in God I have trusted; I will not fear. What will flesh do to me?*

"In the day I fear, I will trust in You." David does not say he will never be afraid. He says that when fear comes, he will trust. Courage is not the lack of fear. It is choosing to trust God while you are afraid. That is one of the most useful verses in the Psalms for children and adults alike, and many believers have learned it by heart.

"In God I will praise His word." God's word is His promise. David had God's promise that he would be king (1 Samuel 16:13). Sitting in Gath, nothing looked like that promise. He praised the promise anyway.

"What will flesh do to me?" Flesh here means human beings, weak and mortal. Men can hurt David's body, but they cannot undo God's word. Jesus said much the same: do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul (Matthew 10:28).

56:5-7 *All the day they twist my words; all their plans against me* ***are*** *for evil. They stir up strife, they lie hidden; they watch my heels, as they have waited for my life. Because of wickedness* ***will You*** *deliver them? In anger bring down peoples, God.*

The enemies twist David's words. They stir up strife, hide, and "watch my heels," following his every step, waiting for a chance to kill him. Gossip and lies are old weapons, and they still hurt.

"Because of wickedness will You deliver them?" The question expects a no: surely God will not let them escape because of their wickedness. "In anger bring down peoples, God." David asks God to judge, not only his enemies in Gath, but any nation that sets itself against God's purposes. He leaves the judging to God (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

56:8-9 *You have counted my wandering; put my tears in Your skin bottle; **are they** not in Your book? Then my enemies will turn back on the day I call out; this I know, that God **is** for me.*

"You have counted my wandering; put my tears in Your skin bottle; are they not in Your book?" Few verses in the Bible are more tender. David's life had become a long wandering: from Saul's court to the priests at Nob, to Gath, to caves in the wilderness. God has counted every step.

A skin bottle was a container made from animal skin, used to carry water, milk or wine. David asks God to store his tears in it, as something worth keeping. And then he says God has already written them down "in Your book." God keeps a record of His people's sorrows. Jesus said the hairs of our head are all numbered (Matthew 10:30). One day God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelation 21:4). If you have cried in secret where no one saw, God saw, and He kept count.

"This I know, that God is for me." David may not know how he will escape, but he knows whose side God is on. Paul asks the same question in Romans 8:31: if God is for us, who is against us?

56:10-11 *In God I will praise **His** word; in the LORD I will praise **His** word. In God I have trusted; I will not fear. What will man do to me?*

The chorus comes back, stronger than before. "In God I will praise His word; in the LORD I will praise His word." In verse 4 David said "God." Now he adds "the LORD," God's personal covenant name. "In God I have trusted; I will not fear. What will man do to me?"

Hebrews 13:6 echoes these words: "The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid; what will man do to me?" Hebrews is quoting Psalm 118:6 (Volume 1), but both psalms say the same thing. The writer of Hebrews tells believers to be content, because God has promised never to leave or forsake them (Hebrews 13:5).

New Testament links: Hebrews 13:6 (alluded to)

56:12-13 *On me, God, **are** Your vows; I will pay thank offerings to You. For You have delivered my soul from death, **have You** not **delivered** my feet from stumbling, to walk before God in the light of life?*

"On me, God, are Your vows; I will pay thank offerings to You." A vow was a promise made to God, often in a time of trouble, to bring an offering or do something for Him when He answered. David knows God will answer, so he is already planning to keep his word. A thank offering was a sacrifice given to thank God publicly for His help (Leviticus 7:12).

"You have delivered my soul from death." David got out of Gath alive. "To walk before God in the light of life." To walk before God is to live in His presence, under His eye. The light of life is the life God gives, full and bright. Jesus said that whoever follows Him "will have the light of life" (John 8:12). The man who began the psalm crushed and afraid ends it walking in the light.

Psalm 56 Summary

David wrote this Miktam when the Philistines seized him in Gath while he was running from Saul. Enemies crush him and twist his words all day long. Yet when he is afraid, he chooses to trust God, and he praises God's word, His promise. Twice he says, "In God I have trusted; I will not fear," and asks what mere man can do to him. He asks God to judge the wicked. He takes comfort that God has counted his wanderings, kept his tears in His bottle and written them in His book, and he knows that God is for him. He ends ready to keep his vows and give thank offerings, because God has delivered him from death so that he can walk before God in the light of life.

People and Places

- Gath: one of the five chief cities of the Philistines, the hometown of Goliath.
- Philistines: a people on the coast west of Israel, often at war with Israel in the days of Saul and David.
- Terebinth: a large spreading tree common in Israel, much like an oak.
- Vow: a promise made to God, often to bring an offering when He answered a prayer.

Psalm 56 Study Questions

1. Where was David when he wrote this psalm, and who had seized him? (heading; 1 Samuel 21:10-15)

2. What does David say he will do on the day he is afraid? (56:3)

3. What were David's enemies doing to his words? (56:5)

4. What does David ask God to do with his tears? (56:8)

5. What does David know for certain in verse 9?

6. What line does David repeat in verses 4 and 11?

7. How is trusting God while you are afraid different from never being afraid? When have you had to do that?

8. What comfort do you find in knowing that God keeps count of your tears?

9. David praised God's promise when nothing around him looked like it would come true. Which of God's promises do you need to hold on to right now?

10. How could Hebrews 13:5-6 and this psalm help someone who is afraid of what people might do to them?

Psalm 57: In the Shadow of Your Wings

Scripture

*To the choirmaster, **on** "Do Not Destroy." Of David, a Miktam, when he fled from before Saul in the cave.*

57:1-5 Be gracious to me, God, be gracious to me, for in You my soul takes refuge; and in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge until destruction passes by. I will call to God Most High, to God who completes ***it*** for me. He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who crushes me. Selah. God will send His steadfast love and His faithfulness. My soul ***is*** in the midst of lions; I lie down ***among*** those who blaze, the sons of man, their teeth ***are*** a spear and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be exalted above the heavens, God; ***let*** Your glory ***be*** over all the earth.

57:6-11 They prepared a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down; they dug a pit before me; they have fallen into its midst. Selah. My heart is steadfast, God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, and I will sing praises. Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will give thanks to You among the peoples, Lord; I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your steadfast love ***is*** great to the heavens, and Your faithfulness to the clouds. Be exalted above the heavens, God; ***let*** Your glory ***be*** over all the earth.

Psalm 57 Preview

David is hiding in a cave with King Saul's army hunting him. He is surrounded by men he compares to lions. Yet this psalm is not mainly about lions. It is about God's wings. David pictures himself as a young bird tucked under its mother's wings until the storm passes.

The psalm turns halfway through. The first half is prayer in danger, the second half is praise, and both halves end with the same chorus: "Be exalted above the heavens, God; let Your glory be over all the earth." David wakes the dawn with his singing while he is still in the cave. Verses 7-11 appear again in Psalm 108 (Volume 3).

Psalm 57 Study

57:1-3 *Be gracious to me, God, be gracious to me, for in You my soul takes refuge; and in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge until destruction passes by. I will call to God Most High, to God who completes **it** for me. He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who crushes me. Selah. God will send His steadfast love and His faithfulness.*

The heading is addressed "To the choirmaster," set to "Do Not Destroy," and then it reads, "Of David, a Miktam, when he fled from before Saul in the cave." Miktam is explained at Psalm 56.

"Do Not Destroy" appears in the headings of four psalms (57, 58, 59 and 75). It is probably the name of a tune. Some connect it with Moses' prayer that God would not ruin His people, which uses the same Hebrew word (Deuteronomy 9:26), and others with David's words when he refused

to let Abishai kill Saul: "Do not destroy him" (1 Samuel 26:9). Whatever its source, it fits a psalm prayed by a man whose life hung by a thread. The meaning is uncertain.

The cave may be the cave of Adullam, where David first hid (1 Samuel 22:1), or the cave near En-gedi where Saul came in while David and his men were hiding deep inside (1 Samuel 24:3). In the second account David could have killed Saul but would not lift his hand against the LORD's anointed. Psalm 142 also comes from the cave.

"Be gracious to me, God, be gracious to me." The doubled cry shows how urgent he is. "In the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge until destruction passes by." A mother bird spreads her wings over her chicks when a storm or a hawk comes. Jesus used the same picture when He wept over Jerusalem and said He had longed to gather her children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Matthew 23:37). The danger is real, but it is passing. God's wings are not.

David calls to "God Most High" (see Psalm 7), the One above every king, Saul included, "to God who completes it for me." God finishes what He starts. He had promised David the throne, and He would complete it. Paul says the same of every believer: He who began a good work in you will complete it (Philippians 1:6). God "will send His steadfast love and His faithfulness," His hesed or covenant love (see Psalm 5) and His truthfulness, like two messengers sent from heaven to bring David out.

57:4 *My soul **is** in the midst of lions; I lie down **among** those who blaze, the sons of man, their teeth **are** a spear and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.*

"My soul is in the midst of lions." David has to lie down to sleep among men who "blaze," burning with hatred. Their teeth are spears and arrows, "and their tongue a sharp sword." The lions are Saul's men and the people who slandered David to Saul. Words can wound as badly as weapons. Even so, David can lie down. Faith does not always remove the lions, but it can let us rest among them, as Daniel did (Daniel 6:22).

57:5 *Be exalted above the heavens, God; **let** Your glory **be** over all the earth.*

Right in the middle of the danger David breaks into praise. "Be exalted above the heavens, God; let Your glory be over all the earth." He stops asking about himself and asks for God to be honored. David's safety mattered, but God's glory mattered more. That changes the way we pray in trouble: we can ask God to rescue us in a way that shows the world how great He is.

57:6 *They prepared a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down; they dug a pit before me; they have fallen into its midst. Selah.*

"They prepared a net for my steps." Hunters set nets and dug pits to trap animals. Saul's men did the same to David, and for a time his soul "was bowed down." But "they have fallen into its midst." The trap caught the hunters. In the cave near En-gedi, Saul walked right into the place where David was hiding, and David spared him (1 Samuel 24:4-7). Evil often ends up catching the one who plans it (Proverbs 26:27).

57:7-8 *My heart is steadfast, God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, and I will sing praises. Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.*

"My heart is steadfast, God, my heart is steadfast." The word means fixed, settled, firmly set in place. Nothing outside has changed. David is still in the cave. But his heart has been settled on God. Then he sings: "Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre!" His "glory" may mean his soul, the best part of him. He tells himself, his instruments and the whole morning to wake up. "I will awaken the dawn." Usually the dawn wakes us. David is going to wake the dawn with praise.

You may be in a cave of your own, a hospital room, a hard marriage or a lost job. You can still fix your heart on God before anything outside changes.

57:9-11 *I will give thanks to You among the peoples, Lord; I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your steadfast love **is** great to the heavens, and Your faithfulness to the clouds. Be exalted above the heavens, God; **let** Your glory **be** over all the earth.*

"I will give thanks to You among the peoples, Lord; I will sing praises to You among the nations." David is hiding in a cave, and he plans to praise God in front of the nations. His faith looks far ahead. Paul quotes a similar line from Psalm 18:49 to show that God always meant the Gentiles, the nations outside Israel, to praise Him (Romans 15:9).

"For Your steadfast love is great to the heavens, and Your faithfulness to the clouds." The two messengers of verse 3 are back, and now they fill the sky. God's love is bigger than David's trouble.

The psalm ends with the chorus once more: "Be exalted above the heavens, God; let Your glory be over all the earth." I believe this prayer will be answered in full when Christ returns to reign, and the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

Psalm 57 Summary

David wrote Psalm 57 when he was hiding from Saul in a cave. He asks God for mercy and takes refuge in the shadow of His wings until the danger passes, trusting God Most High to complete His purpose and send His steadfast love and faithfulness. He lies among enemies like lions, whose words are spears and swords. Twice he cries, "Be exalted above the heavens, God; let Your glory be over all the earth." His enemies set a net and dug a pit, but fell into it themselves. With his heart steadfast, David wakes his soul, his harp and the dawn with praise, and promises to thank God among the nations, because God's love and faithfulness reach to the heavens.

People and Places

- Adullam: a cave in the hill country of Judah where David hid from Saul (1 Samuel 22:1).
- En-gedi: an oasis by the Dead Sea with many caves, where David spared Saul's life (1 Samuel 24).

Psalm 57 Study Questions

1. Where was David when he wrote this psalm, and who was he running from? (heading)

2. Where does David take refuge, and for how long? (57:1)

3. What two things will God send from heaven? (57:3)

4. How does David describe his enemies in verse 4?

5. What happened to the net and the pit his enemies prepared? (57:6)

6. What does David say about his heart in verse 7, and what does he decide to do?

7. Why do you think David prayed for God's glory in the middle of his own danger? How could that change your prayers?

8. What does it mean to you that God shelters His people "in the shadow of Your wings"? Compare Matthew 23:37.

9. What would it look like for you to "awaken the dawn" with praise this week?

10. What "cave" are you in right now, and how could this psalm help you fix your heart on God there?

Psalm 58: Surely There Is a God Who Judges

Scripture

*To the choirmaster, **on** "Do Not Destroy." Of David, a Miktam.*

58:1-5 Do you indeed speak righteousness ***in*** silence? Do you judge with uprightness, sons of man? Even in ***your*** heart you work injustices; in the land you weigh out the violence of your hands. The wicked are estranged from the womb; those who speak lies go astray from the belly. Their venom ***is*** like the likeness of the venom of a serpent, like a deaf cobra ***that*** shuts its ear, which does not listen to the voice of charmers, of one skillfully casting spells.

58:6-11 God, break down their teeth in their mouth; tear out the fangs of the young lions, LORD. Let them flow away like waters ***that*** go about by themselves; ***when*** he bends his arrows, let them be as ***if*** cut off. Like a snail ***that*** goes ***along*** melting away, ***like*** the miscarriage of a woman, they have not seen the sun. Before your pots perceive the thorn bush, whether alive or whether burning, He will sweep it away in a storm. The righteous will rejoice when he has seen vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked. And man will say, "Surely ***there is*** fruit for the righteous; surely there is a God judging on the earth."

Psalm 58 Preview

Psalm 58 is about corrupt rulers. David speaks to the men who are supposed to judge with justice and asks whether they really do. They don't. They plan injustice in their hearts and hand out violence with their hands. Their lies are like the venom of a snake that won't listen to anyone.

Then David turns to God and asks Him to break their power. This psalm has some of the hardest lines in the book, and we will take them slowly. But its last line is something every person who has suffered injustice longs to hear: "Surely there is a God judging on the earth."

Psalm 58 Study

58:1-2 *Do you indeed speak righteousness **in** silence? Do you judge with uprightness, sons of man? Even in **your** heart you work injustices; in the land you weigh out the violence of your hands.*

The heading is addressed "To the choirmaster," set to "Do Not Destroy," and reads, "Of David, a Miktam." The tune "Do Not Destroy" is explained at Psalm 57 and Miktam at Psalm 56.

"Do you indeed speak righteousness in silence? Do you judge with uprightness, sons of man?" The Hebrew of the first line is hard. The SLB reads it as "in silence": these rulers keep quiet when they should speak up for what is right. Many other translations read the same letters as a word for mighty ones or gods, meaning rulers and judges who held God's authority on earth (compare Psalm 82:1-2). Either way, David is speaking to the people in charge of justice. Calling them "sons of man" reminds them that they are only human and will answer to God.

"Even in your heart you work injustices." Their corruption starts on the inside. Then "you weigh out the violence of your hands." Judges were supposed to weigh cases fairly on honest scales. These men weigh out violence instead. God's Law told judges not to twist justice, show favoritism or take bribes (Deuteronomy 16:18-19). These judges did all three.

58:3-5 *The wicked are estranged from the womb; those who speak lies go astray from the belly. Their venom **is** like the likeness of the venom of a serpent, like a deaf cobra **that** shuts its ear, which does not listen to the voice of charmers, of one skillfully casting spells.*

"The wicked are estranged from the womb; those who speak lies go astray from the belly." David describes how deep their wickedness runs. These men have been going the wrong way from the start. This fits what David said of himself in Psalm 51:5 (Volume 1): sin is in us from the beginning. The difference is that these men never turned back. They let their lying grow into a way of life.

Their venom is like a serpent's, "like a deaf cobra that shuts its ear." In the ancient world snake charmers played music or chanted to control snakes. This cobra won't listen to the charmer at all. The wicked rulers are like that. No warning, no appeal and no word from God gets through to them. Paul uses the picture of snake venom under the lips to describe the whole human race in Romans 3:13, quoting Psalm 140:3.

58:6-9 *God, break down their teeth in their mouth; tear out the fangs of the young lions, LORD. Let them flow away like waters **that** go about by themselves; **when** he bends his arrows, let them be as **if** cut off. Like a snail **that** goes **along** melting away, **like** the miscarriage of a woman, they have not seen the sun. Before your pots perceive the thorn bush, whether alive or whether burning, He will sweep it away in a storm.*

Now David prays, and the prayer is fierce. "God, break down their teeth in their mouth; tear out the fangs of the young lions, LORD." He mixes his pictures: the snake of verse 4 becomes a lion. A lion without teeth cannot tear its prey. David asks God to take away the power these rulers use to hurt people.

Then come four pictures of the wicked passing away. They are like water that soaks into the sand and is gone. They are like arrows that break off when the bow is drawn. They are like a snail that seems to melt as it moves, leaving a trail behind. And they are like "the miscarriage of a woman," a child who never saw the sun.

That last picture is painful, especially for anyone who has lost a baby. David is not saying anything about the worth of an unborn child or about where such a child goes. He uses the picture only to say that the wicked rulers' plans will come to nothing, as if they had never been. If you have lost a child before birth, please hear this clearly: I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

Verse 9 is one of the hardest verses in the Psalms to translate. It seems to picture a traveler's cooking fire. Before the pot even feels the heat from the burning thorns, "He will sweep it away in a storm." God's judgment will come suddenly, before the wicked finish what they started.

58:10 *The righteous will rejoice when he has seen vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.*

"The righteous will rejoice when he has seen vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked." No line in the psalm is harder. How can a believer rejoice in that?

First, the picture comes from the battlefield. After a great victory the winners walked over the field where the enemy had fallen. It is a picture of complete and final victory over evil, the same kind of picture the prophets use for God's judgment (Isaiah 63:3; Revelation 14:20). Second, the vengeance belongs to God. The righteous do not shed this blood. They see what God has done. Third, what they rejoice in is justice. The rulers who crushed the weak have been stopped.

Scripture also guards our hearts here. Proverbs 24:17 says not to rejoice when your enemy falls. God Himself says He takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked man" and wants him to turn and live (Ezekiel 33:11). So we do not cheer for anyone's suffering. But we can rejoice when God puts an end to evil, the way heaven shouts "Hallelujah" when God judges the great prostitute and avenges the blood of His servants (Revelation 19:1-2).

Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). Paul tells us never to take revenge but to leave it to God (Romans 12:19). Psalm 58 is how a man who obeyed that kind of command prayed. He did not take up the sword against the corrupt judges. He asked God to deal with them (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

58:11 *And man will say, "Surely **there is** fruit for the righteous; surely there is a God judging on the earth."*

The psalm ends with what people will finally say when God acts: "Surely there is fruit for the righteous; surely there is a God judging on the earth." It does pay to live right, even when it doesn't look like it. And there is a Judge above the judges.

That is good news for anyone who has been treated unjustly by people in power. Courts fail. Rulers lie. But God has set a day when He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed, Jesus, whom He raised from the dead (Acts 17:31). Jesus also promised that God will bring justice for His people who cry out to Him day and night (Luke 18:7-8). We can wait for that day without becoming cruel ourselves.

Psalm 58 Summary

David challenges the rulers and judges of his day: do they really speak what is right and judge fairly? They plan injustice in their hearts and hand out violence. They have gone astray from birth and are like a deaf cobra that will not listen to any charmer. David asks God to break their teeth like a lion's, to make them vanish like water, broken arrows, a melting snail and a child who never saw the sun, and to sweep them away suddenly like a storm. The righteous will rejoice when God brings justice and wins the final victory over evil. Then people will say that there really is a reward for the righteous, and that there really is a God who judges on the earth.

Psalm 58 Study Questions

1. Who is David speaking to in verses 1-2, and what does he ask them?

2. Where does the rulers' injustice start, according to verse 2?

3. What animal does David compare the wicked to in verses 4-5, and why won't it listen?

4. What does David ask God to do in verse 6?

5. What will people finally say in verse 11?

6. Why do you think God included prayers like this one in the Bible?

7. How can we long for God's justice without wishing suffering on anyone? How do Proverbs 24:17 and Ezekiel 33:11 help?

8. Where do you see injustice by people in power today? How could you pray about it using this psalm?

9. How does Romans 12:19 keep us from taking revenge, and how does it still take the wrong seriously?

10. Why is it good news that "there is a God judging on the earth"? Who needs to hear that this week?

Psalm 59: My High Refuge

Scripture

*To the choirmaster, **on** "Do Not Destroy." Of David, a Miktam, when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.*

59:1-9 Deliver me from my enemies, my God; set me on high from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from those who work wickedness, and save me from men of bloodshed. For look, they lie in wait for my life; fierce ***men*** stir up strife against me, not ***for*** my transgression and not ***for*** my sin, LORD. Without iniquity they run and set themselves in place; awake to meet me, and see. And You, LORD God of armies, the God of Israel, awake to punish all the nations; do not be gracious to any who deal treacherously in wickedness. Selah. They return at evening; they growl like the dog and go around ***the*** city. Look, they pour out with their mouth; swords ***are*** in their lips, for "Who hears?" And You, LORD, will laugh at them; You will mock all ***the*** nations. ***Because of*** his strength I will watch for You, for God ***is*** my high refuge.

59:10-17 The God of my steadfast love will meet me; God will let me look on my enemies. Do not kill them, lest my people forget; make them wander by Your strength, and bring them down, Lord, our shield. The sin of their mouth ***is*** the word of their lips; and let them be caught in their pride, and because of the curse and because of the lying ***that*** they tell. Make an end in wrath, make an end, and ***let*** them ***be*** no more; and let them know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth. Selah. And they return at evening; they growl like the dog and go around ***the*** city. They wander about to eat; if they are not satisfied, then they grumble. And I will sing of Your strength, and I will sing joyfully of Your steadfast love in the morning; for You have been a high refuge for me, and a place of escape in the day ***when*** distress ***is*** mine. My strength, to You I will sing praises; for God ***is*** my high refuge, the God of my steadfast love.

Psalm 59 Preview

One night King Saul sent men to surround David's house and kill him in the morning. David's wife Michal warned him and let him down through a window, and he escaped (1 Samuel 19:11-12). Psalm 59 is the prayer of a man whose house is being watched by killers.

The enemies come back every evening like a pack of wild dogs, growling as they roam the city. David says it twice. But he answers them twice too. At night the dogs prowl. In the morning David sings of God's strength and steadfast love. God is his high refuge, a place too high for the dogs to reach. The psalm has hard lines, and we will look at them honestly.

Psalm 59 Study

59:1-2 *Deliver me from my enemies, my God; set me on high from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from those who work wickedness, and save me from men of bloodshed.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on" the tune "Do Not Destroy" (see Psalm 57), and then, "Of David, a Miktam, when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him." Miktam is explained at Psalm 56.

The account is in 1 Samuel 19. Saul had already told his son Jonathan and his servants to kill David (1 Samuel 19:1). He threw a spear at David, and David fled home. That night Saul sent messengers to watch the house and kill him in the morning. Michal, Saul's own daughter, let David down through the window and put an idol in his bed with goat hair at its head to fool the messengers (1 Samuel 19:11-17).

"Deliver me from my enemies, my God; set me on high from those who rise up against me." To be set on high is to be lifted out of reach, like a fortress on a cliff. David calls his enemies "those who work wickedness" and "men of bloodshed." They aren't just angry. They mean to kill.

59:3-5 *For look, they lie in wait for my life; fierce **men** stir up strife against me, not **for** my transgression and not **for** my sin, LORD. Without iniquity they run and set themselves in place; awake to meet me, and see. And You, LORD God of armies, the God of Israel, awake to punish all the nations; do not be gracious to any who deal treacherously in wickedness. Selah.*

"For look, they lie in wait for my life." Then David says something important: he has done nothing to deserve this, "not for my transgression and not for my sin, LORD." He is not claiming to be sinless. He is saying that in this conflict he is innocent. He had served Saul faithfully, won his battles and played music to calm him. Saul hated him out of jealousy (1 Samuel 18:28-29).

"Awake to meet me, and see." It feels to David as if God is asleep. He knows God never sleeps (Psalm 121:4, Volume 1), but he prays the way he feels. We may do the same.

Then David calls on God by a full, strong name: "LORD God of armies, the God of Israel." The LORD of armies is the God who commands the armies of heaven (see Psalm 48). "Awake to punish all the nations; do not be gracious to any who deal treacherously in wickedness." Why does David speak of "nations" when his enemies are Saul's men? Some think David is saying that these men, though Israelites, act like the pagan nations who hate God. Others think the psalm was later sung by all Israel against foreign enemies, so the prayer widened. Either way David sees his danger as part of a larger battle: God against all who rebel against Him.

"Do not be gracious" sounds like the opposite of what Jesus taught. But David is not asking God to refuse mercy to the repentant. He asks God not to let the treacherous go on in their evil without judgment. God is patient and does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). But a day comes when patience ends and evil is judged. David hands that day to God (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

59:6-8 *They return at evening; they growl like the dog and go around **the** city. Look, they pour out with their mouth; swords **are** in their lips, for "Who hears?" And You, LORD, will laugh at them; You will mock all **the** nations.*

"They return at evening; they growl like the dog and go around the city." In Bible times dogs were seldom kept as pets. They ran in wild packs, scavenging at night. Saul's men prowled around David's house like that. "Swords are in their lips," because their words are full of threats, and they say, "Who hears?" They think no one, not even God, is listening.

"And You, LORD, will laugh at them; You will mock all the nations." God laughs the same way in Psalm 2:4 (Volume 1). God is not worried. The plots of men look small from heaven.

59:9-10 ***Because of** his strength I will watch for You, for God **is** my high refuge. The God of my steadfast love will meet me; God will let me look on my enemies.*

"Because of his strength I will watch for You." The enemy is strong, so David keeps watch, not for the enemy, but for God. "For God is my high refuge." A high refuge is a fortress set up high, out of reach. "The God of my steadfast love will meet me." Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 5). David calls Him "the God of my steadfast love," as if God's love belonged to him personally. God will go out to meet him and let him see his enemies defeated.

59:11-13 *Do not kill them, lest my people forget; make them wander by Your strength, and bring them down, Lord, our shield. The sin of their mouth **is** the word of their lips; and let them be caught in their pride, and because of the curse and because of the lying **that** they tell. Make an end in wrath, make an end, and **let** them **be** no more; and let them know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth. Selah.*

"Do not kill them, lest my people forget." That may surprise us. David asks God not to wipe his enemies out all at once, so that Israel will see God's judgment happen over time and remember it. "Make them wander by Your strength, and bring them down." He calls God "our shield." A sudden end might be quickly forgotten. A long fall would teach God's people a lesson they would not forget.

"Let them be caught in their pride." Their own words become the trap. They cursed and lied, and now that sin catches them.

Then: "Make an end in wrath, make an end, and let them be no more." This seems to clash with verse 11. Probably David means: don't kill them at once, but in the end, bring their power to a full stop. The goal is in the last line: "Let them know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth." Jacob is another name for Israel. The point of God's judgment is that everyone will know who is really King.

These are hard lines. David asks God to bring his enemies down and put an end to them. But he is not taking matters into his own hands. When he later had the chance to kill Saul in the cave, he refused (1 Samuel 24:6). He prayed hard prayers and showed mercy with his hands. That is the pattern for us: tell God plainly about the wrong, let Him deal with it and still obey Jesus' command to love our enemies and pray for them (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:19).

59:14-15 *And they return at evening; they growl like the dog and go around **the** city. They wander about to eat; if they are not satisfied, then they grumble.*

The chorus comes back: "And they return at evening; they growl like the dog and go around the city." The dogs are still there. Prayer has not made them disappear. Now they "wander about to eat," and if they don't find enough, "they grumble." The hunters are hungry and frustrated. The prey has slipped away.

59:16-17 *And I will sing of Your strength, and I will sing joyfully of Your steadfast love in the morning; for You have been a high refuge for me, and a place of escape in the day **when** distress **is** mine. My strength, to You I will sing praises; for God **is** my high refuge, the God of my steadfast love.*

"And I will sing of Your strength, and I will sing joyfully of Your steadfast love in the morning." Evening belongs to the dogs. Morning belongs to David's song. That fits the story: Saul's men planned to kill David in the morning, but by morning he was gone, singing (1 Samuel 19:11). God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23).

"For You have been a high refuge for me, and a place of escape in the day when distress is mine." David ends with the words from verse 9, but now he sings them: "My strength, to You I will sing praises; for God is my high refuge, the God of my steadfast love." In verse 9 he watched for God's strength. In verse 17 he calls God "My strength." What he waited for, he now has.

Many of us have nights when fears circle like dogs. This psalm teaches us to keep watch for God and to wait for the morning song.

Psalm 59 Summary

David wrote this psalm when Saul sent men to watch his house and kill him. He asks God to deliver him and set him on high, since he has done nothing to deserve their hatred. He calls on the LORD God of armies to wake up and judge the treacherous. His enemies come back every evening like growling dogs, boasting that no one hears, but God laughs at them. David watches for God, his high refuge and the God of his steadfast love. He asks God not to destroy them at once, so that Israel will not forget, but to bring them down and finally end their power, so that all will know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth. The dogs still prowl at night, but in the morning David sings of God's strength and steadfast love.

People and Places

- Michal: Saul's daughter and David's first wife, who helped him escape through a window (1 Samuel 19:11-17).

Psalm 59 Study Questions

1. What was happening when David wrote this psalm? (heading; 1 Samuel 19:11-12)

2. What does David say about his own guilt in this conflict? (59:3-4)

3. What does David compare his enemies to, and how often do they come back? (59:6, 14)

4. How does God respond to the plots of David's enemies? (59:8)

5. Why does David ask God not to kill his enemies right away? (59:11)

6. What does David want everyone to know in the end? (59:13)

7. David prayed hard words about his enemies but spared Saul when he had the chance (1 Samuel 24:6). What does that teach us about praying for justice?

8. What "dogs" circle in your nights, the fears or problems that keep coming back? How could verses 16-17 help you face the morning?

9. What does it mean to you to call God "the God of my steadfast love"?

10. How can we pray for God to stop evil people and still pray for those people, as Jesus commanded in Matthew 5:44?

Psalm 60: In God We Will Do Valiantly

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on "The Lily of Testimony." A Miktam of David, to teach; when he struggled with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and Joab returned and struck Edom in the Valley of Salt, twelve thousand.

60:1-5 God, You have rejected us, You have broken out against us; You have been angry; restore us. You have made ***the*** earth quake; You have split it open; heal its fractures, for it is shaking. You have made Your people see a hard ***thing***; You have made us drink wine of staggering. You have given to those who fear You a banner, to be displayed because of the bow. Selah. So that Your beloved ones may be rescued, save ***with*** Your right hand, and answer me.

60:6-12 God has spoken in His holiness: "I will exult; I will divide up Shechem, and I will measure off the valley of Succoth. Gilead ***is*** Mine, and Manasseh ***is*** Mine, and Ephraim ***is*** the protection of My head; Judah ***is*** My ruler's staff. Moab ***is*** the pot of My washing; over Edom I will throw My sandal; over Me shout aloud, Philistia." Who will bring me ***to*** a city of fortification? Who has led me to Edom? ***Is it*** not You, God, ***who*** have rejected us? And You do not go out, God, with our armies. Give us help from ***the*** foe, and the deliverance of man ***is*** worthlessness. In God we will do valiantly, and He, He will tread down our foes.

Psalm 60 Preview

Most of David's psalms in this part of the book are personal: one man surrounded by enemies. Psalm 60 is national. The whole army has suffered a blow. David was fighting far to the north when trouble broke out in the south, and for a time it felt as if God had turned against His people.

The psalm moves from shock to a word from God, and then to fresh courage. God reminds His people that the land and the nations around it belong to Him. The last line has given courage to God's people for three thousand years: "In God we will do valiantly, and He, He will tread down our foes." Verses 5-12 appear again, almost word for word, in Psalm 108 (Volume 3).

Psalm 60 Study

60:1-3 *God, You have rejected us, You have broken out against us; You have been angry; restore us. You have made **the** earth quake; You have split it open; heal its fractures, for it is shaking. You have made Your people see a hard **thing**; You have made us drink wine of staggering.*

The heading is addressed "To the choirmaster, on" the tune "The Lily of Testimony," and then it reads, "A Miktam of David, to teach; when he struggled with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and Joab returned and struck Edom in the Valley of Salt, twelve thousand." It is the longest heading in the Psalms; only the heading of Psalm 18 comes close.

"The Lily of Testimony" is probably a tune. "Lilies" also appears in other headings (see Psalm 45). The word "testimony" often means God's covenant law, His witness to His people, so some think

the tune was used for songs about God's covenant. The meaning is uncertain. Miktam is explained at Psalm 56. "To teach" may mean the psalm was to be learned by heart, as David once had a lament taught to the sons of Judah (2 Samuel 1:18).

The history is in 2 Samuel 8 and 10 and 1 Chronicles 18. Aram is the land we call Syria. Aram-naharaim means Aram of the two rivers, the land toward the Euphrates. Aram-zobah was a kingdom north of Damascus. While David's army fought in the north, the Edomites seem to have struck from the south. Joab, David's commander, came back and defeated them in the Valley of Salt, near the Dead Sea. The heading gives twelve thousand. 2 Samuel 8:13 gives eighteen thousand and credits David, and 1 Chronicles 18:12 gives eighteen thousand and credits Abishai, Joab's brother. Likely the king got the credit for the whole war, Joab led the campaign and Abishai led part of the army, and the heading may count one part of the fighting. We aren't told how the counts fit together.

The psalm itself was written before that victory, in the dark days when things went badly. "God, You have rejected us, You have broken out against us; You have been angry; restore us." David does not blame bad luck or the generals. He sees God's hand behind the defeat. That is hard, but it also gives hope, because the God who allowed the blow can heal it.

"You have made the earth quake." The defeat felt like an earthquake that split the land. "Heal its fractures, for it is shaking." Then: "You have made us drink wine of staggering." The prophets use the same picture of God's cup of judgment that leaves people reeling (Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15).

60:4-5 *You have given to those who fear You a banner, to be displayed because of the bow. Selah. So that Your beloved ones may be rescued, save **with** Your right hand, and answer me.*

"You have given to those who fear You a banner, to be displayed because of the bow." A banner was a flag on a pole. In battle, soldiers rallied to it when the fighting got confused. Even in defeat God has given His people a rallying point. "Because of the bow" may mean a place to gather when the enemy archers attack. Some translations read the Hebrew as a banner raised because of the truth, a sign that God's truth stands. Moses once named an altar "The LORD Is My Banner" after a victory (Exodus 17:15). God Himself is the flag His people gather around. Selah marks a pause (see Psalm 3).

"So that Your beloved ones may be rescued, save with Your right hand, and answer me." God's people are still His "beloved ones," even after a defeat. The right hand is the hand of strength and skill.

60:6-8 *God has spoken in His holiness: "I will exult; I will divide up Shechem, and I will measure off the valley of Succoth. Gilead **is** Mine, and Manasseh **is** Mine, and Ephraim **is** the protection of My head; Judah **is** My ruler's staff. Moab **is** the pot of My washing; over Edom I will throw My sandal; over Me shout aloud, Philistia."*

Now God speaks. "God has spoken in His holiness: I will exult; I will divide up Shechem, and I will measure off the valley of Succoth." God speaks like a landowner walking His property and

marking the lines. Shechem was west of the Jordan River, and Succoth was east of it. Both sides of the river are His.

"Gilead is Mine, and Manasseh is Mine." Gilead was the land east of the Jordan, and the tribe of Manasseh lived on both sides. "Ephraim is the protection of My head," God's helmet, the strongest tribe of the north. "Judah is My ruler's staff," the tribe of kings, as Jacob had promised (Genesis 49:10).

Then God turns to the enemies around Israel. "Moab is the pot of My washing," a basin for washing feet, a lowly servant's job. "Over Edom I will throw My sandal." Throwing a sandal over land was a way of claiming it as your own (compare Ruth 4:7), and it also showed contempt. "Over Me shout aloud, Philistia," a taunt to the Philistines to shout if they dare.

The point is plain. The land belongs to God, and He gave it to Israel by covenant (Genesis 15:18). The nations that attack His people are under His feet. I believe God has not cancelled that promise. He still has a future for Israel and for the land (Romans 11:25-29).

60:9-10 *Who will bring me **to** a city of fortification? Who has led me to Edom? **Is it** not You, God, **who** have rejected us? And You do not go out, God, with our armies.*

David asks, "Who will bring me to a city of fortification? Who has led me to Edom?" Edom's cities were built high in the rocky hills and were very hard to take. Only God could get the army in.

"Is it not You, God, who have rejected us? And You do not go out, God, with our armies." David is honest. The same God who has to lead them seems to have stayed home. But David keeps talking to Him. He doesn't turn to anyone else.

60:11-12 *Give us help from **the** foe, and the deliverance of man **is** worthlessness. In God we will do valiantly, and He, He will tread down our foes.*

"Give us help from the foe, and the deliverance of man is worthlessness." David had a strong army and the best general in the land. He knows none of that is enough without God. That doesn't mean we don't work, plan or fight. Joab still had to lead the troops. It means we don't put our trust in them. God told Zerubbabel that His work would be done not by might or power but by His Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

"In God we will do valiantly, and He, He will tread down our foes." The doubled "He" puts all the weight on God. God's people fight bravely, and God wins the victory. And He did: Joab struck Edom, and all Edom became David's servants (2 Samuel 8:14). Paul says that in all our troubles we more than conquer through the One who loved us (Romans 8:37).

Psalm 60 Summary

David wrote this Miktam during wars with the Arameans in the north and Edom in the south, before Joab's victory in the Valley of Salt. He begins in shock: God seems to have rejected His people, shaken the land and made them drink the wine of staggering. Yet God has given a banner to those who fear Him, and David asks God to save His beloved ones. God answers, speaking as the

owner of the land: Shechem and Succoth, Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim and Judah are His, and Moab, Edom and Philistia are under His feet. David asks who can lead him into Edom's strong cities, admits that God seems to have stayed away from their armies and asks for help, because human help is worthless. He ends with confidence that through God they will do valiantly, because God will tread down their foes.

People and Places

- Aram-naharaim: Aram (Syria) of the two rivers, the region toward the Euphrates.
- Aram-zobah: a kingdom of Aram north of Damascus, ruled in David's day by Hadadezer (2 Samuel 8:3).
- Joab: David's nephew and the commander of his army.
- Valley of Salt: a valley near the Dead Sea, south of Judah, where Edom was defeated.
- Shechem: a town in the hill country west of the Jordan, where Abraham first built an altar in the land.
- Succoth: a town east of the Jordan, in the Jordan valley.
- Gilead: the hilly land east of the Jordan River.
- Manasseh and Ephraim: the two tribes descended from Joseph's sons; Manasseh lived on both sides of the Jordan.
- Moab: a nation east of the Dead Sea, often at war with Israel.

Psalm 60 Study Questions

1. What wars was David fighting when he wrote this psalm? (heading)

2. What does David say God has done to His people in verses 1-3?

3. What has God given to those who fear Him? (60:4)

4. Name three places God claims as His own in verses 6-7.

5. What does God say about Moab, Edom and Philistia? (60:8)

6. What does David say about "the deliverance of man"? (60:11)

7. Why do you think David saw God's hand even behind Israel's defeat? Is that hard or comforting for you?

8. How can we work hard and plan well and still not put our trust in our own strength?

9. What does it mean to you that God is the "banner" His people rally around?

10. Where do you need to "do valiantly" in God this week, trusting Him to win the victory?

Psalm 61: Lead Me to the Rock

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on a stringed instrument. Of David.

61:1-4 Hear, God, my cry; pay attention to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart grows faint; lead me on a rock ***that*** is higher than I. For You have been a refuge for me, a tower of strength from before the enemy. Let me sojourn in Your tent forever; let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. Selah.

61:5-8 For You, God, have listened to my vows; You have given the possession of those who fear Your name. You will add days to the days of the king; his years ***will be*** like generation and generation. Let him sit ***enthroned*** forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness ***that*** they may preserve him. So I will sing praises to Your name forever, that I may pay my vows day ***by*** day.

Psalm 61 Preview

Psalm 61 is short and quiet, the prayer of a tired man far from home. David calls to God "from the end of the earth" with a heart that is growing faint. He asks God to lead him to a rock that is higher than he is, a safe place he could never climb to on his own.

The second half of the psalm turns to the king. David prays for long life for the king and for God's steadfast love and faithfulness to guard him. Then he promises to keep singing God's praise every day. Many believers have prayed verse 2 when they felt overwhelmed: "Lead me on a rock that is higher than I."

Psalm 61 Study

61:1-2 *Hear, God, my cry; pay attention to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart grows faint; lead me on a rock* ***that*** *is higher than I.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on a stringed instrument. Of David." The choirmaster and the stringed instruments are explained at Psalm 4.

"Hear, God, my cry; pay attention to my prayer." The two lines say the same thing in two ways (see the Overview on parallel lines), which makes the plea stronger.

"From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart grows faint." David is far away, or at least feels far away, from Jerusalem and the place where God's presence dwelt. The heading doesn't say when this was. Some think of the time David fled from Absalom across the Jordan to Mahanaim (2 Samuel 17:24). The end of the earth may also describe how he felt: at the edge of everything, worn out. A faint heart is one that is ready to give up.

"Lead me on a rock that is higher than I." David doesn't ask for the strength to climb. He asks God to lead him there. The rock is a place of safety above the flood, out of the enemy's reach, and it is higher than David, more than he could reach on his own. David often calls God his rock (Psalm 18:2). Paul says the rock that followed Israel in the wilderness was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). When we are overwhelmed, we need a Savior who is higher than we are, and we have one.

61:3-4 *For You have been a refuge for me, a tower of strength from before the enemy. Let me sojourn in Your tent forever; let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. Selah.*

"For You have been a refuge for me, a tower of strength from before the enemy." David remembers what God has done. He has been a refuge before, and He will be again. A tower was a strong lookout point in a city wall or a field where people could run when raiders came.

"Let me sojourn in Your tent forever." To sojourn is to stay as a guest. God's tent was the tabernacle, where the ark was kept in David's day. David wants to live as God's guest, under His care, all his life (compare Psalm 15:1, Volume 1). "Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings." The wings may be those of a mother bird sheltering her young (see Psalm 57), or the wings of the cherubim (see Psalm 18), whose golden wings covered the mercy seat on the ark (Exodus 25:20). Either way, David wants to be as close to God as he can get. Selah marks a pause (see Psalm 3).

61:5 *For You, God, have listened to my vows; You have given the possession of those who fear Your name.*

"For You, God, have listened to my vows." A vow is a promise made to God (see Psalm 56). God heard David's prayers and promises. "You have given the possession of those who fear Your name." The possession, or heritage, is what God gives His people: the land, His blessing and Himself. To fear God's name is to honor Him with reverent trust. David knows he shares in what God gives all who fear Him.

61:6-7 *You will add days to the days of the king; his years **will be** like generation and generation. Let him sit **enthroned** forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness **that** they may preserve him.*

Now David prays for the king. Since David is the king, he is praying for himself, but he speaks the way a king's people would pray for him. "You will add days to the days of the king; his years will be like generation and generation."

"Let him sit enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness that they may preserve him." These words reach further than David's own life. David died, as every king does. But God had promised David that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). Many see that promise in these verses, and it is kept in Jesus, the Son of David. The angel told Mary that God would give Him the throne of David His father, and He would reign forever (Luke 1:32-33). Jesus lives forever before God, and He always lives to intercede for His people (Hebrews 7:25). I believe He will return to reign on David's throne on the earth.

The two guards David asks for are God's steadfast love, His hesed (see Psalm 5), and His faithfulness. Those two keep God's King, and they keep God's people too.

61:8 *So I will sing praises to Your name forever, that I may pay my vows day **by** day.*

"So I will sing praises to Your name forever, that I may pay my vows day by day." The psalm that began with a faint heart at the end of the earth ends with a song that never stops. Paying vows is not a one-time event for David. It is a daily way of life. Every day he will thank God and keep his promises to Him. That is a good rhythm for us: when God answers, keep thanking Him, day by day.

Psalm 61 Summary

David cries to God from the end of the earth with a fainting heart and asks God to lead him to a rock higher than himself. He remembers that God has been his refuge and strong tower, and he longs to live in God's tent and shelter under His wings. God has heard his vows and given him the heritage of those who fear His name. David prays that the king's life will be long, that he will be enthroned before God forever and that steadfast love and faithfulness will guard him, a promise kept in Jesus, the Son of David. He ends by vowing to sing God's praise forever and keep his vows every day.

At my lowest and darkest times, I have felt like I was calling to God from the end of the earth. He still heard me. Psalm 61 asks God to lead us to the rock that is higher than we are. That is exactly what I needed.

Psalm 61 Study Questions

1. From where does David call to God, and how is his heart? (61:2)
2. What does David ask God to lead him to? (61:2)
3. What two pictures does David use for God in verse 3?
4. Where does David want to live, and where does he want to take refuge? (61:4)
5. What does David pray for the king in verses 6-7?
6. How does God's promise in 2 Samuel 7:16 help us understand verses 6-7?
7. When have you felt like you were calling to God "from the end of the earth"?
8. Why does it matter that the rock is "higher than I"? How is Jesus that kind of rock for you?
9. What would it look like for you to "pay my vows day by day"?
10. What promises have you made to God in hard times? Have you kept them?

Psalm 64: The Arrows of the Tongue

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

64:1-6 Hear my voice, God, in my complaint; You will preserve my life from dread of an enemy. You will hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, from the scheming of those who work wickedness, who sharpen their tongue like the sword; they bend their arrow, a bitter word, to shoot from the secret places ***at the*** blameless; suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear. They strengthen for themselves an evil matter; they talk of hiding snares; they say, "Who will see them?" They search out injustices: "We have finished a searched-out plot." And the inward part of a man and ***his*** heart ***is*** deep.

64:7-10 And God shot at them ***with*** an arrow; suddenly their wounds came. And they made him stumble; their tongue ***is*** against them; all who look on them will shake ***their heads***. And all mankind feared, and they declared the work of God, and they considered His deed. Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in Him; and let all the upright of heart boast.

Psalm 64 Preview

Psalm 64 is about words used as weapons. David's enemies are not attacking with spears this time. They are plotting in secret, sharpening their tongues like swords and shooting bitter words like arrows at a man who has done nothing wrong. They are sure no one will ever find out.

Then God shoots back. The same picture is turned around: God's arrow strikes them suddenly, and their own tongues bring them down. People who see it are struck with awe and think about what God has done, and the righteous take refuge in Him. Anyone who has been the target of gossip, slander or a whispering campaign will find a friend in this psalm.

Psalm 64 Study

64:1-2 *Hear my voice, God, in my complaint; You will preserve my life from dread of an enemy. You will hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, from the scheming of those who work wickedness,*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David." It doesn't tell us the occasion. David had plenty of enemies who spread lies about him, at Saul's court and later in Absalom's day.

"Hear my voice, God, in my complaint." A complaint here is a cry of trouble poured out to God (see Psalm 55). "You will preserve my life from dread of an enemy." David asks God to keep him not only from the enemy but from the dread of the enemy. Fear can do as much damage as the attack itself.

"You will hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, from the scheming of those who work wickedness." The enemies meet in secret and plot together. David asks God to hide him from their plans.

64:3-4 *who sharpen their tongue like the sword; they bend their arrow, a bitter word, to shoot from the secret places* ***at the*** *blameless; suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear.*

"Who sharpen their tongue like the sword; they bend their arrow, a bitter word." A soldier sharpened his sword and bent his bow before battle. These men prepare their words the same way, carefully, to do the most harm. James says the tongue is a small member that can set a whole forest on fire (James 3:5-6).

They shoot "from the secret places at the blameless." Slander usually works from hiding. The person being attacked often doesn't know who started it. "Suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear." They are not afraid of being caught, and they are not afraid of God.

64:5-6 *They strengthen for themselves an evil matter; they talk of hiding snares; they say, "Who will see them?" They search out injustices: "We have finished a searched-out plot." And the inward part of a man and* ***his*** *heart* ***is*** *deep.*

"They strengthen for themselves an evil matter." They encourage each other in their evil plan. "They talk of hiding snares; they say, Who will see them?" They think no one will ever know. They forget that God sees everything (Hebrews 4:13).

"They search out injustices." They work hard at finding ways to do wrong, and they are proud of the result: "We have finished a searched-out plot." Then David adds, "And the inward part of a man and his heart is deep." The human heart can hide a great deal. Jeremiah says the heart is deceitful more than everything, but the LORD searches it (Jeremiah 17:9-10). People may fool each other. They can't fool God.

64:7-8 *And God shot at them* ***with*** *an arrow; suddenly their wounds came. And they made him stumble; their tongue* ***is*** *against them; all who look on them will shake* ***their heads****.*

"And God shot at them with an arrow; suddenly their wounds came." The turn is sudden. In verse 4 they shot "suddenly" at the blameless. Now God's arrow strikes them "suddenly." What they did to others comes back on them.

"And they made him stumble; their tongue is against them." Their own words bring them down. The lies they told become the evidence against them. Haman built a gallows for Mordecai and was hanged on it himself (Esther 7:10). Paul says God is not mocked: what a man sows, he will reap (Galatians 6:7). "All who look on them will shake their heads," amazed at how fast they fell.

64:9-10 *And all mankind feared, and they declared the work of God, and they considered His deed. Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in Him; and let all the upright of heart boast.*

"And all mankind feared, and they declared the work of God, and they considered His deed." God's judgment on the slanderers teaches everyone who sees it. People stop and think. They see that God was at work, and they tell others.

"Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in Him; and let all the upright of heart boast." The righteous don't rejoice that someone fell. They rejoice "in the LORD," who defends the innocent. They hide in Him. And they boast, not in themselves, but in Him.

If you have been the target of lies, you don't have to fight back with lies of your own. Bring it to God. Tell Him the truth, ask Him to protect you and leave the plotters in His hands. God sees what is done in secret, and in His time He brings it into the light. Meanwhile, we guard our own tongues, because the same sharp words can come from our mouths too (Proverbs 18:21).

Psalm 64 Summary

David asks God to hear his complaint and protect him from the dread of his enemies, who plot in secret. They sharpen their tongues like swords and shoot bitter words like arrows at the blameless, unafraid, sure that no one will see. They work hard at planning wrong, and the human heart can hide a great deal. But God shoots His own arrow, and suddenly they are wounded. Their own tongues bring them down, and people shake their heads at their fall. Everyone who sees it fears God and thinks about what He has done, and the righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in Him.

Psalm 64 Study Questions

1. What does David ask God to protect him from in verse 1?

2. What do the enemies use as weapons, according to verses 3-4?

3. Where do they shoot from, and at whom? (64:4)

4. What question do the plotters ask in verse 5?

5. What does God do to them in verses 7-8?

6. How do people respond when they see God's judgment? (64:9)

7. Why do you think words can hurt as badly as weapons? When have you seen that happen?

8. How should a believer respond when someone spreads lies about them?

9. Verse 6 says the human heart is deep. How do you guard your own heart and tongue from becoming like the plotters'?

10. What does it look like to "rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in Him" when you have been wronged?

Psalm 65: You Crown the Year with Your Goodness

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David, a song.

65:1-4 To You silence ***is*** praise, God, in Zion; and to You a vow will be paid. You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come. Matters of iniquities have prevailed over me; our transgressions, You, You make atonement for them. How blessed ***is he whom*** You choose and bring near; he dwells ***in*** Your courts. Let us be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, the holy ***place*** of Your temple.

65:5-8 ***With*** awesome ***deeds*** in righteousness You answer us, God of our salvation, the trust of all the ends of ***the*** earth and of ***the*** distant sea, who establishes ***the*** mountains by His strength, being girded with might, who calms the roar of ***the*** seas, the roar of their waves, and the tumult of ***the*** peoples. And those who dwell ***at the*** ends feared because of Your signs; You make the goings out of morning and evening shout for joy.

65:9-13 You have visited the earth and made it overflow; You greatly enrich it; the stream of God is full of water; You prepare their grain, for so You prepare it, watering its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges; You soften it with showers; You bless its growth. You have crowned the year of Your goodness, and Your tracks drip ***with*** fatness. The pastures of the wilderness drip, and the hills gird themselves ***with*** rejoicing. The meadows are clothed ***with*** the flock, and the valleys cover themselves ***with*** grain; they shout for joy; yes, they sing.

Psalm 65 Preview

After several psalms full of enemies, Psalm 65 is like stepping out into a green field after a rain. It is a song of thanksgiving, probably sung at harvest time. It moves outward in three circles: God's people gathered in Zion, then the whole world from the mountains to the seas, then the fields and pastures soaked with rain and covered with grain and sheep.

It starts with sin and forgiveness. Before David thanks God for the harvest, he thanks Him for atonement, for dealing with the sins that had overwhelmed His people. Then he praises God as the Creator who calms the seas and the Farmer who waters the earth. By the end even the hills and valleys are singing.

Psalm 65 Study

65:1-2 *To You silence **is** praise, God, in Zion; and to You a vow will be paid. You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David, a song." A song is a psalm meant to be sung, perhaps by the whole gathering.

"To You silence is praise, God, in Zion." The Hebrew can mean that praise waits quietly for God, or that silence itself is a kind of praise. There is a quiet awe before God that says more than words

(compare Habakkuk 2:20). Zion is Jerusalem, the city where God chose to dwell (see Psalm 9). "And to You a vow will be paid." The people had made promises to God, perhaps while they waited for rain, and now they keep them.

"You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come." Few titles for God in the Psalms are more beautiful: the One who hears prayer. And David looks beyond Israel: "all flesh," all people, will one day come to Him.

65:3 *Matters of iniquities have prevailed over me; our transgressions, You, You make atonement for them.*

"Matters of iniquities have prevailed over me; our transgressions, You, You make atonement for them." David begins with "me" and moves to "our." His own sins and the sins of the whole people had piled up and overpowered them. They could not deal with them.

"You, You make atonement for them." The doubled "You" puts the emphasis on God. To make atonement means to cover sin so that the guilty person is forgiven and made right with God. Under the Law of Moses, God gave the blood of sacrifices to make atonement (Leviticus 17:11), and the writer of Hebrews says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). Those sacrifices pointed ahead to Jesus, whom God set forth as the sacrifice for sin through faith in His blood (Romans 3:25). The harvest is a gift, but forgiveness is the greater gift, and David puts it first.

65:4 *How blessed **is he whom** You choose and bring near; he dwells **in** Your courts. Let us be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, the holy **place** of Your temple.*

"How blessed is he whom You choose and bring near; he dwells in Your courts." The courts were the open areas around God's sanctuary where worshipers gathered. David says it is God who chooses and draws a person near. We do not earn our way into His presence. He invites us. Jesus told His disciples that He had chosen them (John 15:16).

"Let us be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, the holy place of Your temple." The word "temple" may surprise us, since Solomon built the temple after David died. But the tabernacle at Shiloh was already called "the temple of the LORD" in Samuel's day (1 Samuel 1:9), so the word fits God's house in David's time. The goodness of God's house is His presence and the joy of worship. Nothing else fills the soul the same way.

65:5-8 ***With*** *awesome **deeds** in righteousness You answer us, God of our salvation, the trust of all the ends of **the** earth and of **the** distant sea, who establishes **the** mountains by His strength, being girded with might, who calms the roar of **the** seas, the roar of their waves, and the tumult of **the** peoples. And those who dwell **at the** ends feared because of Your signs; You make the goings out of morning and evening shout for joy.*

Now the circle widens to the whole earth. God answers His people "with awesome deeds in righteousness," and He is "the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the distant sea." People everywhere depend on Him, whether they know Him or not.

He "establishes the mountains by His strength," wearing power like a belt. He "calms the roar of the seas, the roar of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples." The roaring sea and the roaring nations are put side by side. God can quiet both. When Jesus stood up in the boat and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm (Mark 4:39), His disciples saw the God of Psalm 65 at work.

People who live at the far ends of the earth stand in awe of His signs in the sky. "You make the goings out of morning and evening shout for joy." From where the sun rises to where it sets, every sunrise and sunset is a shout of joy to God.

65:9-10 *You have visited the earth and made it overflow; You greatly enrich it; the stream of God is full of water; You prepare their grain, for so You prepare it, watering its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges; You soften it with showers; You bless its growth.*

Now the circle comes down to the fields. "You have visited the earth and made it overflow." To visit, in the Bible, often means God coming to act, here in blessing. "The stream of God is full of water." Israel depended on rain from heaven, not on a great river like the Nile (Deuteronomy 11:14). Every good rain was God's stream overflowing.

David describes a farmer's field after the rains. God waters the furrows, the long rows the plow has cut, and settles the ridges between them. "You soften it with showers; You bless its growth." Hard ground becomes soft, and seed can grow. Paul told the people of Lystra that God had not left Himself without witness, because He gave rain from heaven and fruitful seasons (Acts 14:17). Every harvest preaches.

65:11-13 *You have crowned the year of Your goodness, and Your tracks drip **with** fatness. The pastures of the wilderness drip, and the hills gird themselves **with** rejoicing. The meadows are clothed **with** the flock, and the valleys cover themselves **with** grain; they shout for joy; yes, they sing.*

"You have crowned the year of Your goodness." A whole year of blessing is pictured as a crown on God's head. "And Your tracks drip with fatness." Picture God driving His cart across the land, and everywhere the wheels go, the ground overflows with plenty.

The wilderness pastures drip with moisture. The hills "gird themselves with rejoicing," as if they had put on party clothes. The meadows are "clothed with the flock," covered with sheep, and the valleys are covered with grain. "They shout for joy; yes, they sing." All creation sings for the God who feeds it.

When we sit down to a meal, it is easy to forget where it came from. This psalm reminds us that every loaf of bread starts with God's rain and God's sun. It also reminds us of the order of things: first forgiveness, then food. God cares for our bodies, and He cares even more for our souls. Saying grace before a meal is a small way of joining this song.

Psalm 65 Summary

David praises God in Zion, where praise waits for Him and vows are paid, and calls Him the One who hears prayer, to whom all people will come. Though sins had overpowered them, God makes atonement for their transgressions, and those He chooses and brings near are blessed to dwell in His courts and be satisfied with the goodness of His house. God answers with awesome deeds; He is the hope of the ends of the earth, sets the mountains in place, calms the roaring seas and the raging nations and makes morning and evening shout for joy. He visits the earth with rain, fills His stream, softens the ground and blesses its growth. He crowns the year with His goodness, and the pastures, hills, meadows and valleys are clothed with flocks and grain and shout and sing for joy.

Psalm 65 Study Questions

1. What title does David give God in verse 2, and who will come to Him?

2. What has God done about the sins that overwhelmed His people? (65:3)

3. Who is blessed, according to verse 4?

4. Name two things God does in creation in verses 6-7.

5. How does God care for the fields in verses 9-10?

6. How do the hills, meadows and valleys respond in verses 12-13?

7. Why do you think David thanks God for forgiveness before he thanks Him for the harvest?

8. How does Jesus calming the storm (Mark 4:39) connect with verse 7?

9. Acts 14:17 says rain and harvests are God's witness to the world. How could you use that thought to talk with someone about God?

10. What everyday gifts from God have you stopped noticing? How could you thank Him for them this week?

Psalm 66: Come and See What God Has Done

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A song, a psalm.

66:1-7 Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing praises ***to*** the glory of His name; make His praise glory. Say to God, "How awesome ***are*** Your deeds! In the greatness of Your strength Your enemies cringe before You. All the earth bows down to You and sings praises to You; they sing praises to Your name." Selah. Come and see the works of God, awesome ***in His*** deed toward the sons of man. He turned ***the*** sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot; there let us rejoice in Him, who rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.

66:8-12 Bless our God, peoples, and make the sound of His praise heard, who has set our soul in life, and has not let our foot slip. For You have tested us, God; You have refined us as silver is refined. You have brought us into the net; You have laid affliction on our loins. You have made man ride over our head; we have gone through fire and through water, and You have brought us out to abundance.

66:13-20 I will come ***into*** Your house with burnt offerings; I will pay to You my vows, which my lips opened ***to utter***, and my mouth spoke when I was in distress. Burnt offerings of fatlings I will offer up to You, with the smoke of rams; I will offer cattle with goats. Selah. Come, hear, all who fear God, and let me recount what He has done for my soul. To Him I called ***with*** my mouth, and exaltation ***was*** under my tongue. If I had regarded wickedness in my heart, the Lord would not listen. Nevertheless, God has heard; He has paid attention to the voice of my prayer. Blessed ***be*** God, who has not turned aside my prayer, nor His steadfast love from me.

Psalm 66 Preview

Psalm 66 starts with the whole earth and ends with one person. First the writer calls every nation to shout for joy to God and to come and see His mighty works, especially the day He turned the sea into dry land. Then he speaks for Israel: God tested His people like silver in a fire and brought them out into abundance.

Then the "we" becomes "I." The writer walks into God's house with his offerings to keep the promises he made in trouble, and he invites everyone who fears God to come and hear what God did for his soul. He prayed, God heard, and God did not turn away His steadfast love. A whole nation's history and one person's testimony end up in the same song.

Psalm 66 Study

66:1-4 *Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing praises **to** the glory of His name; make His praise glory. Say to God, "How awesome **are** Your deeds! In the greatness of Your strength Your enemies cringe before You. All the earth bows down to You and sings praises to You; they sing praises to Your name." Selah.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A song, a psalm." It does not name the writer. Some think it was written after a great national rescue, such as the day God saved Jerusalem from the Assyrian army in King Hezekiah's time (2 Kings 19:35). We aren't told.

"Shout for joy to God, all the earth." The call goes out to every nation, not only Israel. "Sing praises to the glory of His name; make His praise glory." Make His praise as glorious as He is.

The writer gives the nations words to say: "How awesome are Your deeds!" Before God's great strength "Your enemies cringe before You," bowing down out of fear even when they don't love Him. "All the earth bows down to You and sings praises to You." I believe that day is coming. Paul says that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Selah marks a pause (see Psalm 3).

66:5-7 *Come and see the works of God, awesome **in His** deed toward the sons of man. He turned **the** sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot; there let us rejoice in Him, who rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.*

"Come and see the works of God." The psalm invites us to look. Faith is not a blind leap. It rests on what God has done in history.

"He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot." The first line remembers the Red Sea, where Israel walked through on dry land with the waters standing like walls on both sides (Exodus 14:22). The second may remember the Jordan River, which God stopped so Israel could cross into the Promised Land (Joshua 3:17). The two crossings began and ended the journey from slavery to the land. "There let us rejoice in Him." Israel rejoiced there long ago, and every generation joins the joy, because the same God still rules.

He "rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations." No nation acts unseen. "Let not the rebellious exalt themselves." Those who rise up against Him had better think again.

66:8-9 *Bless our God, peoples, and make the sound of His praise heard, who has set our soul in life, and has not let our foot slip.*

"Bless our God, peoples." Again the nations are called to praise Israel's God. He "has set our soul in life, and has not let our foot slip." Israel had come close to death, but God kept them alive and kept their feet on the path.

66:10-12 *For You have tested us, God; You have refined us as silver is refined. You have brought us into the net; You have laid affliction on our loins. You have made man ride over our head; we have gone through fire and through water, and You have brought us out to abundance.*

Now the psalm explains the hard times. "For You have tested us, God; You have refined us as silver is refined." A silversmith heated silver in a furnace until the impurities rose to the top and could be skimmed off. The heat didn't destroy the silver. It made it pure. God allowed His people to go through fire for the same reason. Peter says the testing of our faith is more precious than gold tested by fire (1 Peter 1:6-7).

The writer lists what they went through. God "brought us into the net," like a trapped animal. He "laid affliction on our loins," a heavy load on their backs. "You have made man ride over our head," as enemies rode over them like conquerors trampling the fallen. "We have gone through fire and through water." God promised Israel that when they passed through waters and walked through fire, He would be with them (Isaiah 43:2).

"And You have brought us out to abundance." The fire and the water had an end. God did not leave them in the furnace. He brought them out to a place that overflowed with good. If you are in the furnace right now, this verse is for you. God is not wasting your pain, and the fire is not the end of the story.

66:13-15 *I will come **into** Your house with burnt offerings; I will pay to You my vows, which my lips opened **to utter**, and my mouth spoke when I was in distress. Burnt offerings of fatlings I will offer up to You, with the smoke of rams; I will offer cattle with goats. Selah.*

Now one voice speaks. "I will come into Your house with burnt offerings; I will pay to You my vows." A burnt offering was a sacrifice burned whole on the altar, given entirely to God. This worshiper made promises when he was in trouble, "which my lips opened to utter, and my mouth spoke when I was in distress," and now he keeps them.

It is easy to promise God things when we are desperate and forget them when the trouble passes. This man didn't forget. He brings the best: fat animals, rams, cattle and goats. That was a costly offering. Thankfulness gives generously. For us, the sacrifice for sin is finished in Christ, and our offering is our whole life (Romans 12:1).

66:16-17 *Come, hear, all who fear God, and let me recount what He has done for my soul. To Him I called **with** my mouth, and exaltation **was** under my tongue.*

"Come, hear, all who fear God, and let me recount what He has done for my soul." In verse 5 the call was "come and see." Now it is "come, hear." The writer has a story to tell. Every believer has a testimony like that. Jesus told the man He had freed from demons to go home and tell his people how much the Lord had done for him (Mark 5:19).

"To Him I called with my mouth, and exaltation was under my tongue." He cried out to God, and praise was already ready on his tongue, waiting to come out.

66:18-20 *If I had regarded wickedness in my heart, the Lord would not listen. Nevertheless, God has heard; He has paid attention to the voice of my prayer. Blessed **be** God, who has not turned aside my prayer, nor His steadfast love from me.*

"If I had regarded wickedness in my heart, the Lord would not listen." To regard wickedness is to cherish it, to hold on to a sin and refuse to let it go. That does not mean God hears only perfect people. No one would be heard. It means we can't hold on to a sin we love and expect God to answer our prayers as if nothing were wrong. Isaiah says our sins can hide God's face from us so that He does not hear (Isaiah 59:2). The answer is to confess, and God is faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9).

"Nevertheless, God has heard; He has paid attention to the voice of my prayer." The man had come with a clean heart, and God listened.

"Blessed be God, who has not turned aside my prayer, nor His steadfast love from me." The psalm ends with two things God did not take away: He did not push the prayer aside, and He did not take back His steadfast love, His hesed (see Psalm 5). The God of the Red Sea is also the God who listens to one person's prayer.

Psalm 66 Summary

The psalm calls all the earth to shout for joy to God, praise His glorious name and confess how awesome His deeds are. It invites everyone to come and see what God has done, especially when He turned the sea into dry land and brought His people through the river. He rules forever and watches the nations. The peoples are called to bless Him for keeping Israel alive. He tested His people like silver in the fire, through nets, burdens, enemies, fire and water, and brought them out to abundance. Then one worshiper comes to God's house with costly burnt offerings to keep the vows he made in distress. He invites all who fear God to hear what God did for his soul: he cried out, and because he did not cherish sin in his heart, God heard him. He blesses God, who did not turn away his prayer or His steadfast love.

Psalm 66 Study Questions

1. Who is called to shout for joy to God in verse 1?

2. What great work of God does verse 6 remember?

3. What picture does verse 10 use for how God tested His people?

4. What hard things did God's people go through, and where did God bring them in the end? (66:11-12)

5. Why does the writer come to God's house with offerings? (66:13-14)

6. What does verse 18 say about cherished sin and prayer?

7. When has a hard time in your life worked like a refiner's fire? What did God burn away?

8. Have you ever made promises to God in trouble and forgotten them later? What could you do about that now?

9. If someone asked you what God has done for your soul, what would you say? (66:16)

10. How do verses 18-20 encourage you to deal honestly with sin before you pray?

Psalm 67: Let All the Peoples Praise You

Scripture

To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A psalm, a song.

67:1-7 May God be gracious to us and bless us; may He make His face shine with us, Selah, that Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples give thanks to You, God; let the peoples give thanks to You, all of them. Let the nations rejoice and sing for joy, for You will judge ***the*** peoples ***with*** uprightness, and the nations on the earth, You will guide them. Selah. Let the peoples give thanks to You, God; let the peoples give thanks to You, all of them. ***The*** earth has given its produce; God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of ***the*** earth will fear Him.

Psalm 67 Preview

Psalm 67 is only seven verses long, but it has one of the biggest hearts in the Bible. It begins with the blessing the priests spoke over Israel: may God be gracious to us, bless us and make His face shine on us. Then it tells us why Israel wants that blessing: so that God's way and His salvation will be known among all nations.

A chorus runs through the middle: "Let the peoples give thanks to You, God; let the peoples give thanks to You, all of them." The psalm ends with a harvest and a hope that all the ends of the earth will fear Him. Some have called it a missionary psalm, and that fits well.

Psalm 67 Study

67:1-2 *May God be gracious to us and bless us; may He make His face shine with us, Selah, that Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A psalm, a song." It does not name a writer. The stringed instruments are explained at Psalm 4.

"May God be gracious to us and bless us; may He make His face shine with us." These words echo the blessing God gave Aaron and his sons to speak over Israel: "May the LORD bless you, and may He keep you; may the LORD make His face shine toward you, and may He be gracious to you" (Numbers 6:24-25). For God's face to shine on someone is for Him to look on them with favor and delight, the way a father's face lights up when his child walks into the room. Selah marks a pause (see Psalm 3).

Then comes the reason: "that Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations." Israel was never blessed only for its own sake. God told Abraham that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Paul says that promise was the gospel preached ahead of time, God's plan to justify the Gentiles by faith (Galatians 3:8). When we ask God to bless us, this verse asks us a question: blessed for what? God blesses His people so that others will come to know Him.

67:3-5 *Let the peoples give thanks to You, God; let the peoples give thanks to You, all of them. Let the nations rejoice and sing for joy, for You will judge* ***the*** *peoples* ***with*** *uprightness, and the nations on the earth, You will guide them. Selah. Let the peoples give thanks to You, God; let the peoples give thanks to You, all of them.*

"Let the peoples give thanks to You, God; let the peoples give thanks to You, all of them." The chorus repeats the same words twice in the verse, and the whole verse comes again in verse 5. The repetition is the point. The writer wants every people on earth to praise God, with no one left out.

"Let the nations rejoice and sing for joy." Why would the nations be glad? "For You will judge the peoples with uprightness, and the nations on the earth, You will guide them." The nations have known plenty of unjust rulers. God's rule will be fair. He will judge rightly and guide the nations the way a shepherd leads a flock.

I believe this will be fulfilled fully when Christ returns and reigns on the earth, and the nations are ruled with justice (Isaiah 2:3-4). The gospel going to the nations today is the first part of that harvest. John saw a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and tongue standing before the throne (Revelation 7:9). This psalm is one of the reasons Christians send missionaries.

67:6-7 ***The*** *earth has given its produce; God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of* ***the*** *earth will fear Him.*

"The earth has given its produce." The psalm may have been sung at harvest time. The crop is in, and the people see it as God's blessing. God had promised that if Israel obeyed Him, the land would give its produce (Leviticus 26:4).

"God, our God, will bless us." He is God of all the earth, but He is also "our God," Israel's covenant God. The last verse says it once more: "God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear Him." The harvest in Israel's fields becomes a sign to the nations. To fear God here means to honor and worship Him.

The psalm began with blessing and ends with blessing, and both times the blessing flows outward to the world. For believers today, that is a good test. What is God doing in your life, and who else is it meant to reach?

Psalm 67 Summary

Psalm 67 begins with the priestly blessing: may God be gracious to us, bless us and make His face shine on us. The purpose of the blessing is that God's way and salvation will be known among all nations. Twice the psalm prays that all the peoples will give thanks to God, and it calls the nations to rejoice, because God will judge them fairly and guide them. The earth has given its harvest, and God will keep blessing His people, so that all the ends of the earth will fear Him.

Psalm 67 Study Questions

1. What three things does the writer ask God to do in verse 1?

2. What blessing in Numbers 6:24-26 does verse 1 echo?

3. Why does the writer want God to bless His people? (67:2)

4. What words are repeated in verses 3 and 5?

5. Why will the nations rejoice, according to verse 4?

6. What has the earth given, and what will happen to the ends of the earth? (67:6-7)

7. How does God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 help explain this psalm?

8. What does it mean for God's face to shine on you?

9. How has God blessed you so that others might come to know Him?

10. How could you, your family or your church help God's salvation become known among the nations?

Psalm 68: Let God Arise

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of David, a psalm, a song.

68:1-10 Let God arise; let His enemies be scattered, and let those who hate Him flee from before Him. As smoke is driven away, drive ***them*** away; as wax melts before ***the*** fire, let ***the*** wicked perish before God. And let ***the*** righteous be glad; let them exult before God, and let them rejoice with gladness. Sing to God, sing praises to His name; lift up ***a highway*** for Him who rides through the deserts, His name ***is the*** LORD, and exult before Him. A father of the fatherless and a judge of widows ***is*** God in the dwelling place of His holiness. God causes the solitary to dwell in a house; He brings out prisoners into prosperity; only the rebellious dwell ***in*** a parched land. God, when You went out before Your people, when You marched through the desolate place, Selah, the earth quaked; the heavens also dropped ***rain*** before God, this Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. A rain of freewill ***gifts*** You shed abroad, God; Your inheritance, when it was weary, You, You established it. Your community dwelt in it; You prepared in Your goodness for the poor, God.

68:11-23 The Lord gives the word; the women who bear the news ***are*** a great host: "Kings of armies flee, they flee, and she who dwells ***in the*** house divides ***the*** spoil. Though you lie down between the sheepfolds, the wings of a dove ***are*** covered with silver, and its pinions with greenish gold." When the Almighty scatters kings in it, it snows on Mount Zalmon. A mountain of God ***is*** the mountain of Bashan; a mountain of peaks ***is*** the mountain of Bashan. Why do you watch with envy, mountains of peaks, the mountain God desired for His dwelling? Yes, the LORD will dwell ***in it*** forever. The chariots of God ***are*** twice ten thousand, thousands repeated; the Lord ***is*** among them, Sinai in holiness. You have gone up to the height; You have taken captive captivity; You have received gifts among mankind, and even ***among the*** rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell ***there***. Blessed ***be*** the Lord; day ***by*** day He bears a load for us, the God, our salvation. Selah. The God for us ***is*** a God of saving acts, and to GOD the Lord ***belong*** the escapes from death. Surely God will shatter the head of His enemies, the hairy crown of him who goes about in his guilt. The Lord has said, "From Bashan I will bring back, I will bring back from the depths of the sea, so that your foot may shatter ***them*** in blood, the tongue of your dogs ***having*** its portion from ***the*** enemies."

68:24-35 They have seen Your processions, God, the processions of my God, my King, in the holy place. Singers went in front, musicians behind, in the midst of young women playing tambourines. In ***the*** assemblies bless God, the LORD, from the fountain of Israel. There ***is*** Benjamin, the youngest, ruling them, the princes of Judah, their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali. Your God has commanded your strength; be strong, God, You who have acted for us. From Your temple over Jerusalem, kings will bring a gift to You. Rebuke the beast of the reeds, the herd of mighty ones with the calves of ***the*** peoples, trampling on pieces of silver; He has scattered peoples ***who*** delight in wars. Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will make its hands run to God. Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, sing praises to the Lord, Selah, to Him who rides in the heavens of the heavens of old; look, He gives ***forth*** with His voice a voice of strength. Ascribe strength to God; His majesty ***is*** over Israel, and His strength ***is*** in the clouds. Awesome

are You, God, from Your sanctuaries; the God of Israel, He gives strength and power to the people. Blessed ***be*** God.

Psalm 68 Preview

Psalm 68 is a victory march. It begins with the words Moses spoke whenever the ark of the covenant set out in the wilderness: "Let God arise; let His enemies be scattered." Then the psalm follows God on the move, from Sinai through the desert, past the defeated kings, up to the mountain He chose for His home, Zion. It ends with the kingdoms of the earth singing to Him.

It is one of the hardest psalms in the book to translate. Some lines are so old and compressed that scholars still argue over them, and I will say so where it matters. But the big picture is clear. God is a Father to the fatherless and a defender of widows. He marches before His people and carries their load every day. And Paul quotes verse 18 to describe Jesus going up to heaven in victory and pouring out gifts on His church.

Psalm 68 Study

68:1-3 *Let God arise; let His enemies be scattered, and let those who hate Him flee from before Him. As smoke is driven away, drive **them** away; as wax melts before **the** fire, let **the** wicked perish before God. And let **the** righteous be glad; let them exult before God, and let them rejoice with gladness.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of David, a psalm, a song." It doesn't name the occasion. Many think David wrote it when he brought the ark of the covenant up to Jerusalem with music, dancing and shouting (2 Samuel 6:12-15). The opening words, the procession into the sanctuary in verses 24-27 and God choosing His mountain in verse 16 all fit that day.

"Let God arise; let His enemies be scattered, and let those who hate Him flee from before Him." When the ark set out in the wilderness, Moses said, "Rise up, LORD, and let Your enemies be scattered" (Numbers 10:35). The ark was the sign of God's presence leading His people. When God moves, His enemies run.

Two pictures follow. The wicked will be driven away "as smoke is driven away" by the wind, and they will melt "as wax melts before the fire." Neither smoke nor wax can stand. But the righteous will be glad. The same presence of God that scatters the wicked makes His people rejoice.

68:4-6 *Sing to God, sing praises to His name; lift up **a highway** for Him who rides through the deserts, His name **is the** LORD, and exult before Him. A father of the fatherless and a judge of widows **is** God in the dwelling place of His holiness. God causes the solitary to dwell in a house; He brings out prisoners into prosperity; only the rebellious dwell **in** a parched land.*

"Sing to God, sing praises to His name; lift up a highway for Him who rides through the deserts." In the ancient world people built a raised road for a king's arrival. God's people are told to prepare the way for Him. Some translations read it as riding on the clouds, as in verse 33. The SLB reads "through the deserts," which fits God leading Israel through the wilderness. "His name is the

LORD." Here the Hebrew uses the short form of God's name, Yah, the same Yah heard in Hallelujah, which means "praise Yah."

Then we learn what kind of King this is. "A father of the fatherless and a judge of widows is God in the dwelling place of His holiness." The God who rides through the deserts stops for the orphan and the widow. A judge of widows defends their cause when no one else will. James says pure religion is to visit orphans and widows in their trouble (James 1:27). God's people should care for the people God cares for.

"God causes the solitary to dwell in a house." The lonely find a family. God's church is meant to be that kind of house. "He brings out prisoners into prosperity," as He brought Israel out of Egypt. "Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land." Those who refuse Him stay in the desert.

68:7-10 *God, when You went out before Your people, when You marched through the desolate place, Selah, the earth quaked; the heavens also dropped **rain** before God, this Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. A rain of freewill **gifts** You shed abroad, God; Your inheritance, when it was weary, You, You established it. Your community dwelt in it; You prepared in Your goodness for the poor, God.*

Now the psalm looks back to the wilderness. "God, when You went out before Your people, when You marched through the desolate place," then "the earth quaked." When God came down on Mount Sinai, the whole mountain shook (Exodus 19:18). "This Sinai" trembled "before God, the God of Israel." Deborah sang almost the same words after her victory (Judges 5:4-5).

"A rain of freewill gifts You shed abroad, God." God sent rain on His weary people, and He sent manna, quail and water in the desert. He gave without being asked. "Your inheritance, when it was weary, You, You established it." Israel was His inheritance, His own people, and He made them strong again. When they reached the land, "Your community dwelt in it," and God provided for the poor out of His goodness.

68:11-14 *The Lord gives the word; the women who bear the news **are** a great host: "Kings of armies flee, they flee, and she who dwells **in the** house divides **the** spoil. Though you lie down between the sheepfolds, the wings of a dove **are** covered with silver, and its pinions with greenish gold." When the Almighty scatters kings in it, it snows on Mount Zalmon.*

"The Lord gives the word; the women who bear the news are a great host." After a victory in Israel the women went out singing and spreading the good news, as Miriam did at the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20). Here a great crowd of women carry the news.

The words of their song follow: "Kings of armies flee, they flee, and she who dwells in the house divides the spoil." Enemy kings run so fast that even the women who stayed home share in the plunder.

Verse 13 is one of the hardest verses in the Psalms. "Though you lie down between the sheepfolds" may be a rebuke to tribes who stayed home among their sheep instead of fighting, as Deborah once rebuked Reuben (Judges 5:16). The dove "covered with silver" may be a piece of the spoil, a

silver ornament, or a picture of Israel, God's dove, shining with wealth after the victory. The meaning is uncertain.

"When the Almighty scatters kings in it, it snows on Mount Zalmon." The Almighty translates Shaddai, a name God used when He appeared to Abraham, "I am God Almighty" (Genesis 17:1). It speaks of His all-sufficient power. Zalmon was probably a dark wooded hill near Shechem. The scattered kings, or their weapons and bodies, may have looked like snow falling on a dark mountain. Or God may have sent a real snowstorm. Again, we aren't told.

68:15-17 *A mountain of God **is** the mountain of Bashan; a mountain of peaks **is** the mountain of Bashan. Why do you watch with envy, mountains of peaks, the mountain God desired for His dwelling? Yes, the LORD will dwell **in it** forever. The chariots of God **are** twice ten thousand, thousands repeated; the Lord **is** among them, Sinai in holiness.*

"A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; a mountain of peaks is the mountain of Bashan." Bashan was the high land northeast of the Sea of Galilee, near the tall peaks of Mount Hermon. Its mountains were far higher and grander than little Mount Zion. "Mountain of God" can mean a mighty mountain, a mountain fit for God.

"Why do you watch with envy, mountains of peaks, the mountain God desired for His dwelling?" The psalm pictures the high mountains looking down jealously at Zion. God didn't choose the tallest mountain. He chose the one He wanted. "Yes, the LORD will dwell in it forever." God often chooses what looks small (1 Corinthians 1:27). I believe God still has a future for Zion, and the prophets say that one day the mountain of the LORD's house will be raised above the hills and all nations will stream to it (Isaiah 2:2).

"The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands repeated." God's armies are beyond counting. Elisha's servant saw them once when his eyes were opened: the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire (2 Kings 6:17). "The Lord is among them, Sinai in holiness." The holiness of Sinai has come with God to His new home. The God who met Israel on Sinai now dwells on Zion.

68:18 *You have gone up to the height; You have taken captive captivity; You have received gifts among mankind, and even **among the** rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell **there**.*

"You have gone up to the height; You have taken captive captivity; You have received gifts among mankind, and even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there." The picture is a conquering king going up to his capital after a war. Behind him march his captives, and he receives tribute from the conquered, even those who had rebelled. Then he takes his throne. When the ark went up to Zion, it was as if God Himself had gone up in triumph to take His seat.

Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians 4:8: "Having ascended on high, He took captivity captive, and He gave gifts to men." He applies it to Jesus. Christ came down to earth and then ascended far above all the heavens (Ephesians 4:9-10; Acts 1:9). At the cross He defeated the powers of evil and made a public show of them (Colossians 2:15). Now He sits on His throne, and from there He gives

gifts to His people: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers, to build up His body, the church (Ephesians 4:11-12).

You may ask why the psalm says "received" and Paul says "gave." A conquering king received tribute and then handed out the spoil to his people. What He received, He gave. Paul brings out that second half. An old Jewish Aramaic paraphrase of the Psalms also reads "gave" here, so Paul was not the only one to read it that way. Jesus won the victory, and every believer shares in what He won. Each of us has been given grace "according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7).

New Testament links: Ephesians 4:8 (quoted)

68:19-20 *Blessed **be** the Lord; day **by** day He bears a load for us, the God, our salvation. Selah. The God for us **is** a God of saving acts, and to GOD the Lord **belong** the escapes from death.*

"Blessed be the Lord; day by day He bears a load for us, the God, our salvation." No line in the psalm is sweeter. The great warrior God who rides through the deserts and commands countless chariots also carries His people's burdens, every single day. Compare Psalm 55:22: we cast our burden on Him, and He carries it. Selah marks a pause (see Psalm 3).

"The God for us is a God of saving acts, and to GOD the Lord belong the escapes from death." Only God has the way out of death. Jesus went into death and came out again, and He holds the keys (Revelation 1:18).

68:21-23 *Surely God will shatter the head of His enemies, the hairy crown of him who goes about in his guilt. The Lord has said, "From Bashan I will bring back, I will bring back from the depths of the sea, so that your foot may shatter **them** in blood, the tongue of your dogs **having** its portion from **the** enemies."*

Now come hard lines. "Surely God will shatter the head of His enemies, the hairy crown of him who goes about in his guilt." The hairy crown may picture a proud warrior with long hair, or a man who goes on in his guilt with no sign of turning.

Then God speaks: "From Bashan I will bring back, I will bring back from the depths of the sea." God will bring His enemies back from wherever they try to hide, the highest mountain or the deepest sea. Amos says the same: no one can hide from God, in Sheol or on the floor of the sea (Amos 9:2-3). The purpose is "so that your foot may shatter them in blood, the tongue of your dogs having its portion from the enemies."

These are battlefield pictures. In ancient wars dogs roamed the field after the battle, and the picture means the enemy is completely defeated. Revelation uses a picture just as grim for the end of the battle when Christ returns, when the birds are called to eat the flesh of kings and commanders (Revelation 19:17-18). The point is not cruelty but finality. God's enemies, those who go on in their guilt and refuse Him, will not escape His judgment.

We need to hear the whole Bible here. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked and calls them to turn and live (Ezekiel 33:11). Jesus tells us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). The battle

in this psalm belongs to God, and so does the judgment (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

68:24-27 *They have seen Your processions, God, the processions of my God, my King, in the holy place. Singers went in front, musicians behind, in the midst of young women playing tambourines. In **the** assemblies bless God, the LORD, from the fountain of Israel. There **is** Benjamin, the youngest, ruling them, the princes of Judah, their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.*

The scene changes to a procession. "They have seen Your processions, God, the processions of my God, my King, in the holy place." The singers go first, the musicians behind, and young women playing tambourines walk in the middle. This sounds very much like David bringing the ark to Jerusalem.

"In the assemblies bless God, the LORD, from the fountain of Israel." The fountain may mean Jacob, the father of the nation, from whom all Israel came.

Four tribes are named. "There is Benjamin, the youngest, ruling them." Benjamin was the smallest tribe (1 Samuel 9:21), and Saul came from it, yet it leads the march. Then come "the princes of Judah," David's tribe, and from the far north, "the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali." South and north, small and great, the whole nation marches together. Centuries later Jesus made His home in Capernaum, in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, and Matthew says that fulfilled Isaiah's promise that a great light would shine there (Matthew 4:13-16).

68:28-31 *Your God has commanded your strength; be strong, God, You who have acted for us. From Your temple over Jerusalem, kings will bring a gift to You. Rebuke the beast of the reeds, the herd of mighty ones with the calves of **the** peoples, trampling on pieces of silver; He has scattered peoples **who** delight in wars. Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will make its hands run to God.*

"Your God has commanded your strength; be strong, God, You who have acted for us." Israel's strength came at God's command. The prayer asks Him to show that strength again.

"From Your temple over Jerusalem, kings will bring a gift to You." The nations will come with tribute. "Rebuke the beast of the reeds." The beast of the reeds is probably Egypt, pictured as a crocodile or hippopotamus in the reeds of the Nile. The "herd of mighty ones" with "the calves of the peoples" are other nations and their leaders. They trample on silver, perhaps in greed for it, or bow with pieces of silver as tribute. "He has scattered peoples who delight in wars."

"Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will make its hands run to God." Cush was the land south of Egypt along the upper Nile, in what is now Sudan. The picture is of Cush stretching out its hands to God in worship. We see a first taste of it in Acts 8:27, when an Ethiopian court official who had come to Jerusalem to worship heard the gospel and was baptized. I believe the full answer comes when Christ reigns and the nations bring their gifts to Him.

68:32-35 *Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, sing praises to the Lord, Selah, to Him who rides in the heavens of the heavens of old; look, He gives **forth** with His voice a voice of strength. Ascribe strength to God; His majesty **is** over Israel, and His strength **is** in the clouds. Awesome **are You**, God, from Your sanctuaries; the God of Israel, He gives strength and power to the people. Blessed **be** God.*

"Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, sing praises to the Lord." The psalm opened with God's enemies running away. It closes with the kingdoms of the earth singing to Him. He is the One "who rides in the heavens of the heavens of old," the highest heavens. "He gives forth with His voice a voice of strength." When God speaks, it is like thunder.

"Ascribe strength to God." To ascribe means to give credit where it is due. His majesty is over Israel, and His strength is in the clouds. "Awesome are You, God, from Your sanctuaries; the God of Israel, He gives strength and power to the people." The God who has all strength gives strength to His people. The psalm ends with two words: "Blessed be God."

We serve a God mighty enough to command heaven's armies and kind enough to set the lonely in a family and carry our load every day. One day the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever (Revelation 11:15).

Psalm 68 Summary

The psalm opens with the cry Moses used when the ark set out: let God arise and scatter His enemies like smoke and melt the wicked like wax, while the righteous rejoice. God rides through the deserts, is a Father to the fatherless and a defender of widows, gives the lonely a home and frees prisoners. He marched before Israel through the wilderness, shook Sinai, sent rain and provided for the poor. Kings fled before Him, and the women spread the news. Of all the high mountains, God chose Zion for His home, and His countless chariots came with Him from Sinai. He went up on high, led captives and received gifts, words Paul applies to Christ's ascension and the gifts He gives His church. God carries our load daily and holds the escapes from death, and He will utterly defeat His enemies. The psalm describes a procession of the tribes into the sanctuary, prays for God to show His strength, pictures kings bringing gifts and Egypt and Cush reaching out to God, and ends by calling the kingdoms of the earth to sing to the God who gives strength to His people.

People and Places

- Sinai: the mountain where God gave Israel His law through Moses.
- Bashan: the high, fertile land northeast of the Sea of Galilee, near Mount Hermon.
- Zalmon: probably a wooded hill near Shechem (Judges 9:48).
- Benjamin, Judah, Zebulun and Naphtali: tribes of Israel; Benjamin and Judah in the south, Zebulun and Naphtali in Galilee in the north.
- Cush: the land south of Egypt along the upper Nile, in what is now Sudan.

Psalm 68 Study Questions

1. Whose words open this psalm, and when were they first spoken? (68:1; Numbers 10:35)

2. What does verse 5 say God is to the fatherless and to widows?

3. What does God do for the lonely and for prisoners? (68:6)

4. Which mountain did God choose for His dwelling, and which mountains are envious? (68:15-16)

5. How does Paul use verse 18 in Ephesians 4:8-12?

6. What does God do for His people day by day? (68:19)

7. Which four tribes are named in the procession, and why do you think they are listed together? (68:27)

8. God is a mighty warrior and also a Father to the fatherless. How do those two sides of God fit together for you?

9. How could your church be a place where God "causes the solitary to dwell in a house"?

10. What load do you need to let God carry for you today? (68:19)

Psalm 69: The Zeal of Your House

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on "Lilies." Of David.

69:1-12 Save me, God, for ***the*** waters have come to ***my*** neck. I have sunk in ***the*** mire of ***the*** depth, and there is no foothold; I have come into ***the*** depths of waters, and a flood has overflowed me. I have grown weary with my calling out; my throat has become parched; my eyes have failed, waiting for my God. Those who hate me without cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me are mighty, my enemies ***by*** falsehood; what I did not steal, then I ***must*** restore. God, You, You know my folly, and my guilty deeds are not hidden from You. Let not those who wait for You be ashamed through me, Lord GOD of armies; let not those who seek You be humiliated through me, God of Israel. For on account of You I have borne reproach; ignominy has covered my face. I have become estranged to my brothers, and a foreigner to the sons of my mother. For the zeal of Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. And I wept with fasting ***of*** my soul, and it became reproaches to me. And I made sackcloth my clothing, and I became a byword to them. Those who sit ***in the*** gate talk about me, and the songs of the drinkers of strong drink ***are about me***.

69:13-21 And I, my prayer ***is*** to You, LORD, ***at*** a time of favor; God, in the greatness of Your steadfast love, answer me in the faithfulness of Your salvation. Deliver me from the mud, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from those who hate me and from ***the*** depths of waters. Let not a flood of waters overflow me, and let not the depth swallow me up, and let not the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, LORD, for Your steadfast love ***is*** good; according to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me. And do not hide Your face from Your servant, for ***I am in*** distress; hurry, answer me. Draw near to my soul; redeem it; because of my enemies, ransom me. You, You know my reproach and my shame and my ignominy; all my adversaries ***are*** before You. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am sick; and I waited for ***one*** to show sympathy, and there was none, and for comforters, and I did not find ***any***. And they put poison in my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

69:22-29 Let their table before them become a trap, and for ***those at*** peace, a snare. Let their eyes grow dark from seeing, and make their loins shake continually. Pour out on them Your indignation, and let the burning of Your anger overtake them. Let their encampment be made desolate; in their tents let there be no one dwelling. For ***the one*** whom You, You struck, they have pursued, and about the pain of Your wounded ones they recount. Put iniquity on their iniquity, and let them not come into Your righteousness. Let them be wiped out from the book of life, and with ***the*** righteous let them not be written. And I ***am*** afflicted and in pain; let Your salvation, God, set me on high.

69:30-36 I will praise the name of God with a song, and I will magnify Him with thanksgiving. And it will be better to the LORD than an ox, a young bull horned ***and*** hoofed. The humble have seen; they will rejoice; you who seek God, let your heart live. For the LORD listens to ***the*** needy, and His prisoners He has not despised. Let heaven and earth praise Him, ***the*** seas and everything

that moves in them. For God will save Zion and will build the cities of Judah, and they will dwell there and possess it. And the offspring of His servants will inherit it, and those who love His name will dwell in it.

Psalm 69 Preview

Psalm 69 is the cry of a man who is drowning. The waters are up to his neck, his feet can't find the bottom and his throat is raw from calling out. Enemies hate him for no reason. His own family treats him like a stranger. He is mocked in the city gate and in the drinking songs. And all of it has come on him because of his love for God and God's house.

Psalm 69 is one of the psalms the New Testament quotes most often. Jesus quoted it about the people who hated Him without a cause. His disciples remembered it when He drove the money changers out of the temple. On the cross He said, "I am thirsty," so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, and He was given sour wine. Peter applied it to Judas, and Paul used it twice. The psalm also holds some of the hardest prayers for judgment in the Bible, and we will take them honestly. It ends in praise, with God saving Zion and rebuilding the cities of Judah.

Psalm 69 Study

69:1-3 *Save me, God, for **the** waters have come to **my** neck. I have sunk in **the** mire of **the** depth, and there is no foothold; I have come into **the** depths of waters, and a flood has overflowed me. I have grown weary with my calling out; my throat has become parched; my eyes have failed, waiting for my God.*

The heading is addressed "To the choirmaster, on" the tune "Lilies" (see Psalm 45), and it reads, "Of David." The heading names David, and Paul quotes this psalm as David's words (Romans 11:9). We aren't told what point in his life it comes from.

"Save me, God, for the waters have come to my neck." David uses the picture of a flood. "I have sunk in the mire of the depth, and there is no foothold." The mud at the bottom gives no place to stand. "A flood has overflowed me." Many of us know this feeling, when trouble rises so fast there is no time to breathe.

"I have grown weary with my calling out; my throat has become parched; my eyes have failed, waiting for my God." He has prayed until his voice is gone and looked up until his eyes ache. He is still waiting. Faith sometimes looks like this: tired, hoarse and still turned toward God.

69:4 *Those who hate me without cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me are mighty, my enemies **by** falsehood; what I did not steal, then I **must** restore.*

"Those who hate me without cause are more than the hairs of my head." They have no good reason to hate him, and there are too many of them to count. "What I did not steal, then I must restore." He is being made to pay back what he never took, as if he were a thief.

Jesus quoted this verse the night before He died. He told His disciples that the world had seen and hated both Him and His Father, so that the word written in their law would be fulfilled: "They hated Me without cause" (John 15:24-25). Jesus did nothing but good, and He was hated anyway. He told His followers to expect the same (John 15:18-20). If you are hated for following Christ, you are in good company.

New Testament links: John 15:25 (quoted)

69:5-6 *God, You, You know my folly, and my guilty deeds are not hidden from You. Let not those who wait for You be ashamed through me, Lord GOD of armies; let not those who seek You be humiliated through me, God of Israel.*

"God, You, You know my folly, and my guilty deeds are not hidden from You." David is honest. He is not claiming to be perfect. He has been foolish and has sinned, and God knows it. His enemies hate him without cause, but he still has sins of his own to confess.

This verse shows us how to read the psalm. It is David's prayer first, and David was a sinner. The New Testament applies certain lines of it to Jesus, the Son of David, who suffered as the righteous One. But this line does not fit Jesus, who committed no sin (1 Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15). We take the lines the New Testament applies to Christ as fulfilled in Him, and we let David's confession stay David's. It is our confession too.

"Let not those who wait for You be ashamed through me." David's greatest fear is that his trouble will make other believers lose heart. If God doesn't answer him, what will they think? Leaders feel this weight. Our lives affect the faith of others.

69:7-8 *For on account of You I have borne reproach; ignominy has covered my face. I have become estranged to my brothers, and a foreigner to the sons of my mother.*

"For on account of You I have borne reproach." Reproach is insult and disgrace. David is mocked because he belongs to God. "Ignominy has covered my face." He is shamed in public.

"I have become estranged to my brothers, and a foreigner to the sons of my mother." Even his family has turned away. David's oldest brother, Eliab, scorned him when he came to the battle with Goliath (1 Samuel 17:28).

Many apply this verse to Jesus as well. John tells us that "not even His brothers were believing in Him" (John 7:5), and at one point His family went out to take Him home, saying He was out of His mind (Mark 3:21). These brothers, James, Joses, Simon and Jude (Matthew 13:55), were the later children of Mary and Joseph, "the sons of my mother." After the resurrection His brothers were praying with the disciples (Acts 1:14), and James became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:19). If your family doesn't understand your faith, Jesus knows what that is like.

69:9 *For the zeal of Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.*

"For the zeal of Your house has consumed me." Zeal is burning devotion. David's love for God's house, the place where God was worshiped, burned in him like a fire. He cared about God's honor more than his own comfort. "And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me." When people insulted God, the insults landed on David, because he stood with God.

Both halves of this verse are quoted in the New Testament. When Jesus made a whip of cords and drove the sellers and money changers out of the temple, saying, "do not make the house of My Father a house of trade," His disciples remembered that it is written, "The zeal of Your house has consumed Me" (John 2:16-17). Jesus' zeal for His Father's house would cost Him His life.

Paul quotes the second half in Romans 15:3: "For even Christ did not please Himself; but just as it has been written, The reproaches of those reproaching You fell on Me." Jesus took on Himself the insults aimed at God. Paul uses that to teach us to bear with weaker believers and not to live just to please ourselves (Romans 15:1-2).

New Testament links: John 2:17 (quoted); Romans 15:3 (quoted)

69:10-12 *And I wept with fasting **of** my soul, and it became reproaches to me. And I made sackcloth my clothing, and I became a byword to them. Those who sit **in the** gate talk about me, and the songs of the drinkers of strong drink **are about me**.*

David fasted and wept, and they mocked that too. He wore sackcloth (see Psalm 30) and became "a byword," a joke people passed around. "Those who sit in the gate talk about me." The city gate was where the elders and judges sat. The leaders mocked him, and "the songs of the drinkers of strong drink" made fun of him at parties. He was mocked from the top of society to the bottom. Jesus too was mocked by rulers, priests and soldiers (Matthew 27:29).

69:13-15 *And I, my prayer **is** to You, LORD, **at** a time of favor; God, in the greatness of Your steadfast love, answer me in the faithfulness of Your salvation. Deliver me from the mud, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from those who hate me and from **the** depths of waters. Let not a flood of waters overflow me, and let not the depth swallow me up, and let not the pit close its mouth over me.*

"And I, my prayer is to You, LORD, at a time of favor." Everyone else is talking about David. David talks to God. "God, in the greatness of Your steadfast love, answer me in the faithfulness of Your salvation." His hope is God's hesed (see Psalm 5) and God's faithfulness.

He comes back to the flood. "Deliver me from the mud, and let me not sink." "Let not the pit close its mouth over me." The pit is the grave, pictured as a well whose mouth could close over him forever.

69:16-18 *Answer me, LORD, for Your steadfast love **is** good; according to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me. And do not hide Your face from Your servant, for **I am in** distress; hurry, answer me. Draw near to my soul; redeem it; because of my enemies, ransom me.*

"Answer me, LORD, for Your steadfast love is good; according to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me." David has no claim on God except God's own character. "Do not hide Your face from Your servant, for I am in distress; hurry, answer me."

"Draw near to my soul; redeem it." To redeem is to buy back or set free by paying a price. "Ransom me." David asks God to pay the price to set him free from his enemies. The Bible later shows us the price God paid to redeem us: the blood of His own Son (1 Peter 1:18-19).

69:19-20 *You, You know my reproach and my shame and my ignominy; all my adversaries **are** before You. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am sick; and I waited for **one** to show sympathy, and there was none, and for comforters, and I did not find **any**.*

"You, You know my reproach and my shame and my ignominy." No one else understands, but God does. "All my adversaries are before You." God sees every one of them.

"Reproach has broken my heart, and I am sick." Insults can break a heart. "I waited for one to show sympathy, and there was none, and for comforters, and I did not find any." David was alone. On the night Jesus was arrested, all His disciples forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:56).

69:21 *And they put poison in my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.*

"And they put poison in my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Instead of comfort, David's enemies gave him poison and sour wine. The word for poison is the same word often translated gall, a bitter, poisonous plant. Vinegar here is sour wine, the cheap drink of soldiers and laborers.

This verse was fulfilled at the cross. When they crucified Jesus, they offered Him sour wine mixed with gall, and when He tasted it, He would not drink it (Matthew 27:34). Later, the soldiers mocked Him and offered Him sour wine (Luke 23:36). Near the end, John tells us, "Jesus, knowing that all things have now been finished, so that the Scripture might be accomplished, says, I am thirsty" (John 19:28). They filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop and held it to His mouth (John 19:29; Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:36). When He had received it, He said, "It has been finished," and gave up His spirit (John 19:30).

Think of what that means. On the cross, in the worst pain a man can suffer, Jesus was still watching to make sure every word of Scripture about Him came true. Nothing about His death was an accident. He was the righteous Sufferer David's psalm pointed to, and He drank the bitter cup all the way to the end, for us.

New Testament links: John 19:28 (fulfilled); Matthew 27:48 (fulfilled); Mark 15:36 (fulfilled); Matthew 27:34 (alluded to); Luke 23:36 (alluded to)

69:22-23 *Let their table before them become a trap, and for **those at** peace, a snare. Let their eyes grow dark from seeing, and make their loins shake continually.*

Now come the hard lines. "Let their table before them become a trap, and for those at peace, a snare." Their table is their feasting and their comfort. David asks that the very things they trust in become the trap that catches them. "Let their eyes grow dark from seeing, and make their loins shake continually." He asks that they be blinded and weakened.

Paul quotes these verses in Romans 11:9-10. He applies them to the part of Israel that rejected Jesus as Messiah: "let their eyes be darkened so as not to see." But Paul goes straight on to say that this hardening is not the end of the story. Did they stumble so as to fall for good? "May it not be!" (Romans 11:11). The hardening is "in part" and only "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-26). I believe God still has a future for His people Israel. This psalm's own last verses say so: God will save Zion and build the cities of Judah (69:35). The church has not replaced Israel.

New Testament links: Romans 11:9-10 (quoted)

69:24-25 *Pour out on them Your indignation, and let the burning of Your anger overtake them. Let their encampment be made desolate; in their tents let there be no one dwelling.*

"Pour out on them Your indignation, and let the burning of Your anger overtake them." David asks God to bring His anger on those who have attacked Him and His servant. "Let their encampment be made desolate; in their tents let there be no one dwelling."

Peter quotes verse 25 in Acts 1:20 about Judas, who betrayed Jesus. Judas bought a field with the money, died there, and it became known as the Field of Blood (Acts 1:18-19). Peter says it has been written in the book of Psalms, "Let his homestead become desolate, and let there not be one dwelling in it." David wrote "their," and Peter applies it to the one man who led the plot against Jesus. He goes on to quote Psalm 109:8 (Volume 3), "May another take his office," and the apostles chose Matthias to take Judas' place.

New Testament links: Acts 1:20 (quoted)

69:26-28 *For **the one** whom You, You struck, they have pursued, and about the pain of Your wounded ones they recount. Put iniquity on their iniquity, and let them not come into Your righteousness. Let them be wiped out from the book of life, and with **the** righteous let them not be written.*

Why does David pray this way? Verse 26 tells us. "For the one whom You, You struck, they have pursued." When God disciplined David, his enemies piled on. They hunted a wounded man and made jokes about his pain. David is praying about people who have hardened themselves against God and kicked those who are already down.

"Put iniquity on their iniquity, and let them not come into Your righteousness." He asks God to hold them guilty for the wrong they have done and not count them righteous.

"Let them be wiped out from the book of life, and with the righteous let them not be written." The book of life is God's record of His people. In the Old Testament it can mean the list of the living. When Israel sinned with the golden calf, Moses asked God to wipe him out of His book instead of them, and God said He would wipe out whoever sinned against Him (Exodus 32:32-33). In the New Testament the book of life is the record of those who belong to God and have eternal life (Philippians 4:3). Jesus promises the one who overcomes that He will never blot out his name from the book of life (Revelation 3:5). Those who worship the beast in the last days are those whose names are not written "in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). Jesus told His disciples to rejoice that their names were written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

How should a Christian read these hard lines? First, David is not taking revenge. He is handing his enemies over to God, who judges justly (Romans 12:19). Second, he is praying about people who keep on in their hatred of God, not people who turn back. Third, we must put these verses next to the cross. The One who fulfilled verse 21 prayed for the men who crucified Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Stephen prayed the same as he was stoned (Acts 7:60). Jesus commands us to "love your enemies" and to "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you" (Matthew 5:44).

Both are true. God will judge those who refuse Him to the end, and the New Testament applies these very verses to that judgment. And God offers mercy to anyone who repents, and so must we. We pray for our enemies to be saved, and we leave the final judgment in God's hands (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

New Testament links: Revelation 3:5 (alluded to); Revelation 13:8 (alluded to)

69:29-31 *And I **am** afflicted and in pain; let Your salvation, God, set me on high. I will praise the name of God with a song, and I will magnify Him with thanksgiving. And it will be better to the LORD than an ox, a young bull horned **and** hoofed.*

"And I am afflicted and in pain; let Your salvation, God, set me on high." David is still in trouble, but now he turns toward praise. "I will praise the name of God with a song, and I will magnify Him with thanksgiving." To magnify God is to make Him great in our eyes and in the eyes of others.

"And it will be better to the LORD than an ox, a young bull horned and hoofed." A young bull with full horns and hoofs was a costly sacrifice. David says a thankful song pleases God more. Psalm 51:16-17 (Volume 1) teaches the same truth: God wants the heart more than the animal. Hebrews tells believers to offer "a sacrifice of praise to God continually" (Hebrews 13:15).

69:32-33 *The humble have seen; they will rejoice; you who seek God, let your heart live. For the LORD listens to **the** needy, and His prisoners He has not despised.*

"The humble have seen; they will rejoice; you who seek God, let your heart live." In verse 6 David feared that his trouble would discourage other believers. Now he says the opposite will happen. When God rescues him, the humble will see it and take heart.

"For the LORD listens to the needy, and His prisoners He has not despised." God's prisoners are His people who are bound by trouble or held by enemies. He does not look down on them. He hears.

69:34-36 *Let heaven and earth praise Him, **the** seas and everything that moves in them. For God will save Zion and will build the cities of Judah, and they will dwell there and possess it. And the offspring of His servants will inherit it, and those who love His name will dwell in it.*

"Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them." The psalm that began with David drowning in deep waters ends with the seas praising God.

"For God will save Zion and will build the cities of Judah, and they will dwell there and possess it." David looks beyond his own rescue to the rescue of God's people and their land. "And the offspring of His servants will inherit it, and those who love His name will dwell in it." God's promise to Israel reaches down the generations. Some think these verses were added after the exile, when the cities of Judah lay in ruins. But David also knew God's promises about the land, and the words fit him. I believe they look ahead to the day when Christ reigns from Zion and Israel dwells safely in the land God promised (Romans 11:26).

The psalm that holds Christ's thirst on the cross ends with God's people at home in His land. Suffering gives way to praise, as it did for Jesus. The cross was followed by the empty tomb.

Psalm 69 Summary

David cries to God like a drowning man, worn out from calling and waiting. Enemies hate him without cause, words Jesus applied to Himself in John 15:25. David admits his own folly and fears that his troubles will shame other believers. Because of his zeal for God's house, he bears insults aimed at God and is cut off from his brothers; the disciples remembered verse 9 when Jesus cleansed the temple, and Paul quotes it of Christ in Romans 15:3. He is mocked by leaders and drunkards, yet he prays to God for rescue according to His steadfast love and compassion. He finds no comforters; instead he is given poison and sour wine, a verse fulfilled when Jesus was given sour wine on the cross. David then prays for judgment on his persistent enemies: that their table become a trap, their eyes be darkened, their homes be desolate and their names be blotted from the book of life. The New Testament applies these lines to Israel's partial hardening and to Judas. The psalm ends with praise that pleases God more than sacrifice, encouragement for the humble and a promise that God will save Zion, rebuild Judah's cities and give the land to the children of His servants.

People and Places

- Book of life: God's record of His people; in the Old Testament it can mean the list of the living, and in the New Testament the record of those who have eternal life.

Psalm 69 Study Questions

1. What picture does David use for his trouble in verses 1-2?

2. How does Jesus use verse 4 in John 15:25?

3. What does David admit about himself in verse 5, and why does that line not fit Jesus?

4. What made David's family treat him like a stranger, and how does John 7:5 relate to verse 8?

5. When did the disciples remember verse 9, and what was Jesus doing? (John 2:13-17)

6. What did David's enemies give him instead of comfort, and how was that fulfilled at the cross? (69:21; John 19:28-30)

7. How does Paul use verses 22-23 in Romans 11, and why does he say Israel's hardening is not final? (Romans 11:9-11, 25-26)

8. How can we pray honestly about people who hurt us while obeying Jesus' command to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44; Luke 23:34)?

9. David feared that his trouble would discourage other believers (69:6). How do your struggles and your faith affect the people watching you?

10. Verse 30 says a song of thanks pleases God more than an expensive sacrifice. What could you thank God for this week, even while you wait?

Psalm 70: Hurry to Help Me

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of David, to bring to remembrance.

70:1-5 God, ***hurry*** to deliver me; LORD, hurry to my help! Let them be ashamed and abashed who seek my life; let them be turned back and humiliated who delight in my harm. Let them turn back on account of their shame, those who say, "Aha! Aha!" Let all who seek You exult and rejoice in You; and let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified!" And I ***am*** afflicted and needy; God, hurry to me! You ***are*** my help and my rescuer; LORD, do not delay.

Psalm 70 Preview

Psalm 70 is a short, urgent prayer: "God, hurry to deliver me." It is almost the same as the last five verses of Psalm 40 (40:13-17), which Volume 1 studies. Someone took the closing prayer of that psalm and set it apart to be used on its own, an emergency prayer for days when there is no time for anything long.

David asks God to turn back those who want to hurt him, to fill all who seek God with joy and to come quickly, because he is poor and needy. It is a prayer anyone can pray in one breath.

Psalm 70 Study

70:1-3 *God, **hurry** to deliver me; LORD, hurry to my help! Let them be ashamed and abashed who seek my life; let them be turned back and humiliated who delight in my harm. Let them turn back on account of their shame, those who say, "Aha! Aha!"*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of David, to bring to remembrance." The phrase "to bring to remembrance" is explained at Psalm 38. It may mean the psalm was sung when an offering was made, asking God to remember His servant.

Volume 1 studies Psalm 40, so I will only point out what is different here. The changes are small but worth seeing. Psalm 40:13 begins, "Be pleased, LORD, to deliver me." Psalm 70 cuts it short: "God, hurry to deliver me." In the Hebrew the first line has no verb at all. It simply cries out to God to deliver, and the SLB supplies the word "hurry." When you are drowning, you don't make speeches. You shout for help.

Psalm 70 also uses "God" in several places where Psalm 40 has "the LORD." Most of the psalms in Book Two (Psalms 42 to 72) use "God" (Elohim) far more often than the personal name "the LORD" (YHWH), and many think the editors of this collection preferred it. The same thing happens when Psalm 14 is repeated as Psalm 53 (see Psalm 53). It is the same God.

"Let them be ashamed and abashed who seek my life." David asks that the people trying to kill him be turned back in disgrace. Those who mock him by saying, "Aha! Aha!" gloating over his trouble, are to be turned back "on account of their shame." Their plans will fail, and they will be

embarrassed by it. David asks God to stop his enemies and leaves it in His hands (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

70:4 *Let all who seek You exult and rejoice in You; and let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified!"*

"Let all who seek You exult and rejoice in You; and let those who love Your salvation say continually, Let God be magnified!" David's prayer is not only about himself. He wants all who seek God to rejoice. When God rescues one of His people, the others are encouraged too. Those who love His salvation never run out of reasons to say it: let God be magnified, let Him be seen as great. Psalm 40:16 says, "Let the LORD be great." The meaning is the same.

70:5 *And I **am** afflicted and needy; God, hurry to me! You **are** my help and my rescuer; LORD, do not delay.*

"And I am afflicted and needy; God, hurry to me!" In Psalm 40:17 David says, "let the Lord think of me." Here he says it more urgently: "hurry to me!" The prayer begins and ends with the same plea. "You are my help and my rescuer; LORD, do not delay."

David was a king, but before God he says he is "afflicted and needy." That is the right way to come to God. We do not come with our strength. We come with our need. And God, who is our help and our rescuer, hears that kind of prayer. Psalm 71, which has no heading, picks up right where this one ends. Its first verses and its cry "my God, hurry to my help" (71:12) sound like the same voice, and many think the two psalms belong together.

Psalm 70 Summary

Psalm 70 is a short, urgent prayer, nearly the same as Psalm 40:13-17, set apart to be used on its own. David asks God to hurry to deliver him and to turn back in shame those who seek his life and mock him with "Aha! Aha!" He prays that all who seek God will rejoice in Him and that those who love His salvation will always say, "Let God be magnified!" He ends by confessing that he is afflicted and needy and calls God his help and rescuer, asking Him not to delay.

Psalm 70 Study Questions

1. What does David ask God to do in verse 1, and how quickly?

2. What do David's enemies say about him? (70:3)

3. What does David want for all who seek God? (70:4)

4. How does David describe himself in verse 5?

5. Compare Psalm 70 with Psalm 40:13-17. What words are different?

6. Why do you think this prayer was set apart to be used on its own?

7. When have you prayed a short, desperate prayer like "God, hurry to deliver me"? What happened?

8. Why is it right to come to God as "afflicted and needy," even if we are doing well in life?

9. How can God's rescue of one person encourage other believers? (70:4)

10. Write or say your own one-sentence prayer for help, using the words of this psalm.

Psalm 71: Do Not Forsake Me When I Am Old

Scripture

71:1-12 In You, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me not be ashamed forever. In Your righteousness You will deliver me and rescue me; incline Your ear to me and save me. Become for me a rock ***of*** dwelling, to come ***to*** continually; You have commanded to save me, for You ***are*** my crag and my fortress. My God, rescue me from the hand of ***the*** wicked, from the palm of ***the*** unjust and ruthless. For You ***are*** my hope, Lord GOD, my confidence from my youth. On You I have leaned from ***the*** womb; from the inward parts of my mother You ***are*** the One who cut me ***out***; in You ***is*** my praise continually. I have become like a portent to many, and You ***are*** my strong refuge. My mouth is filled ***with*** Your praise, all the day ***with*** Your splendor. Do not cast me away at ***the*** time of old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me. For my enemies have spoken about me, and those who watch my life have consulted together, saying, "God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is no deliverer." God, do not be far from me; my God, hurry to my help!

71:13-24 Let them be ashamed, let them come to an end, the accusers of my soul; let them cover themselves ***with*** reproach and ignominy, those who seek my harm. And I, I will wait continually, and I will add to all Your praise. My mouth will recount Your righteousness, all the day Your salvation, for I do not know ***their*** numbers. I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will bring to remembrance Your righteousness, Yours alone. God, You have taught me from my youth, and until now I declare Your wonders. And even to old age and gray hair, God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your arm to a generation, Your might to everyone who will come. And Your righteousness, God, ***is*** to ***the*** height, You who have done great things; God, who ***is*** like You? You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will again revive me, and from the depths of the earth You will again bring me up. May You increase my greatness and turn around ***and*** comfort me. I also, I will give thanks to You with an instrument of a harp, ***for*** Your faithfulness, my God; I will make music to You with a lyre, Holy One of Israel. My lips will sing for joy when I make music to You, and my soul, which You have ransomed. Also my tongue all the day will utter Your righteousness, for they are ashamed, for they are abashed, those who seek my harm.

Psalm 71 Preview

Psalm 71 is the prayer of an old believer. He has trusted God since he was born, and now his hair is gray and his strength is failing. His enemies think that God has finally left him. He asks God not to cast him away in old age, and he asks for one more thing: time to tell the next generation about God's power.

The psalm is full of words for time: from the womb, from my youth, until now, old age and gray hair, all the day, continually. It looks back over a whole life with God and looks forward with hope that God will bring him up again "from the depths of the earth." Older readers will hear their own prayer in it, and younger readers will hear what a lifetime of faith sounds like.

Psalm 71 Study

71:1-3 *In You, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me not be ashamed forever. In Your righteousness You will deliver me and rescue me; incline Your ear to me and save me. Become for me a rock **of** dwelling, to come **to** continually; You have commanded to save me, for You **are** my crag and my fortress.*

Psalm 71 has no heading. Many think David wrote it in his old age, perhaps during Absalom's rebellion, when David was no longer young and many believed his day was over. Its opening verses are very close to Psalm 31:1-3, which is David's (see Psalm 31), and it picks up the urgent cry of Psalm 70, which is also David's. The ancient Greek translation of the Psalms gives it a heading naming David. We can't be sure, but the psalm fits him well.

"In You, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me not be ashamed forever." To be ashamed here means to be let down, to have trusted and been disappointed. The writer asks God never to let that happen.

"Become for me a rock of dwelling, to come to continually." A rock of dwelling is a strong place where he can live, not just visit in an emergency. He wants God to be a home he can go to again and again. "You are my crag and my fortress."

71:4-6 *My God, rescue me from the hand of **the** wicked, from the palm of **the** unjust and ruthless. For You **are** my hope, Lord GOD, my confidence from my youth. On You I have leaned from **the** womb; from the inward parts of my mother You **are** the One who cut me **out**; in You **is** my praise continually.*

"My God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked, from the palm of the unjust and ruthless." Old age does not end every battle.

"For You are my hope, Lord GOD, my confidence from my youth." His faith is not new. He has trusted God since he was young. "On You I have leaned from the womb; from the inward parts of my mother You are the One who cut me out." God was there at his birth, like a midwife bringing him into the world. David says the same in Psalm 22:9-10 (Volume 1). Before he could know God, God knew him (compare Jeremiah 1:5). "In You is my praise continually." A whole life of God's care becomes a whole life of praise.

71:7-8 *I have become like a portent to many, and You **are** my strong refuge. My mouth is filled **with** Your praise, all the day **with** Your splendor.*

"I have become like a portent to many." A portent is a sign, something people stare at and wonder about. Some looked at his troubles and thought they were a sign of God's judgment. Others looked at how he had survived and saw a sign of God's care. Either way, his life had become a kind of public lesson. "And You are my strong refuge." Whatever people thought, he knew where his safety was.

"My mouth is filled with Your praise, all the day with Your splendor." He doesn't save his praise for special days.

71:9-11 *Do not cast me away at **the** time of old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me. For my enemies have spoken about me, and those who watch my life have consulted together, saying, "God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is no deliverer."*

"Do not cast me away at the time of old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me." Here we reach the heart of the psalm. Old age brings its own fears: failing health, loss of strength, being set aside, being forgotten. Many older believers fear becoming a burden. The writer brings that fear straight to God.

God answers this prayer in Isaiah 46:4: "and to old age I am He, and to gray hair I, I will bear you." The God who carried you at birth will carry you at the end.

His enemies see his weakness as their chance. They say, "God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is no deliverer." They think a weak old man has no protector. The enemies at the cross said much the same about Jesus: let God deliver Him now, if He wants Him (Matthew 27:43). They were wrong both times.

71:12-13 *God, do not be far from me; my God, hurry to my help! Let them be ashamed, let them come to an end, the accusers of my soul; let them cover themselves **with** reproach and ignominy, those who seek my harm.*

"God, do not be far from me; my God, hurry to my help!" The cry of Psalm 70:1 comes again.

"Let them be ashamed, let them come to an end, the accusers of my soul." The writer asks God to bring his accusers to shame and stop them. He uses the same words that he asked God to keep from him in verse 1. He wants God to turn their attack back on them. As in other psalms, he hands that justice to God (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

71:14-16 *And I, I will wait continually, and I will add to all Your praise. My mouth will recount Your righteousness, all the day Your salvation, for I do not know **their** numbers. I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will bring to remembrance Your righteousness, Yours alone.*

"And I, I will wait continually, and I will add to all Your praise." Hope is a decision. Whatever happens, he will keep hoping and keep adding new praise to the old.

"My mouth will recount Your righteousness, all the day Your salvation, for I do not know their numbers." God's saving acts are too many to count. He will keep telling them anyway. "I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will bring to remembrance Your righteousness, Yours alone." He has no righteousness of his own to talk about, only God's.

71:17-18 *God, You have taught me from my youth, and until now I declare Your wonders. And even to old age and gray hair, God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your arm to a generation, Your might to everyone who will come.*

"God, You have taught me from my youth, and until now I declare Your wonders." He has been in God's school all his life, and he is still telling what he learned.

"And even to old age and gray hair, God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your arm to a generation, Your might to everyone who will come." He gives the reason he wants to live longer: not for comfort, but to pass the faith on. God's arm is His power to act and save. He wants the next generation to know it.

Passing on the faith is one of the great tasks of older believers. Your stories of God's faithfulness are a treasure the young need (Titus 2:3-4; Psalm 78:4). Gray hair does not mean your work is finished. Psalm 92:14 says the righteous "will still bear fruit in old age."

71:19-21 *And Your righteousness, God, **is** to **the** height, You who have done great things; God, who **is** like You? You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will again revive me, and from the depths of the earth You will again bring me up. May You increase my greatness and turn around **and** comfort me.*

"And Your righteousness, God, is to the height, You who have done great things; God, who is like You?" No one compares with God.

"You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will again revive me." He doesn't pretend God had nothing to do with his hard years. God allowed them. But the same God will bring him back. "And from the depths of the earth You will again bring me up." The depths of the earth may picture the grave or a trouble so deep it felt like death. Either way, God can lift him out. Christians read this with the hope of the resurrection. Paul says that though our outer man is wearing out, our inner man is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

"May You increase my greatness and turn around and comfort me." He asks God to restore his honor and turn to him with comfort.

71:22-24 *I also, I will give thanks to You with an instrument of a harp, **for** Your faithfulness, my God; I will make music to You with a lyre, Holy One of Israel. My lips will sing for joy when I make music to You, and my soul, which You have ransomed. Also my tongue all the day will utter Your righteousness, for they are ashamed, for they are abashed, those who seek my harm.*

"I also, I will give thanks to You with an instrument of a harp, for Your faithfulness, my God; I will make music to You with a lyre, Holy One of Israel." An old man is picking up his instruments again.

The Holy One of Israel is a name for God that Isaiah uses again and again. It means God is completely set apart, pure and above all, and yet He has bound Himself to Israel as their God. The seraphim in Isaiah's vision called Him "Holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3). The Holy One is not distant. He is Israel's own.

"My lips will sing for joy when I make music to You, and my soul, which You have ransomed." He praises with his lips and his whole soul, because God has ransomed him, bought him back from trouble and death. "Also my tongue all the day will utter Your righteousness." His enemies have been put to shame. The psalm that began with a plea not to be ashamed ends with the enemies ashamed and the old man still singing.

Psalm 71 Summary

An older believer takes refuge in the LORD and asks never to be put to shame, calling God his rock, crag and fortress. He has trusted God from birth and from his youth, and his mouth is full of praise. His life has become a sign to many. He begs God not to cast him away in old age or forsake him when his strength fails, because enemies say God has left him. He asks God to hurry to help him and put his accusers to shame. He resolves to keep hoping, to tell of God's righteousness and salvation and to keep declaring God's wonders as he has since his youth, asking God to keep him through gray hair until he tells the next generation of God's power. He confesses that God, who allowed his troubles, will revive him and bring him up from the depths. He ends by praising God, the Holy One of Israel, with lyre and harp, lips and soul, because God has ransomed him and his enemies are ashamed.

People and Places

- Holy One of Israel: a name for God, used often by Isaiah, meaning that the holy God, set apart from all sin, has bound Himself to Israel as their God.

If God gives me the opportunity, I want to tell my grandchildren about His faithfulness. I want them to hear how He brought me out of my worst seasons. Psalm 71 is an older man asking to declare God's strength to the next generation. That is my prayer too.

Psalm 71 Study Questions

1. What does the writer ask God not to let happen in verse 1?

2. Since when has the writer trusted God? (71:5-6)

3. What does the writer ask God not to do in his old age? (71:9)

4. What do his enemies say about him? (71:10-11)

5. Why does the writer want God to keep him through old age and gray hair? (71:18)

6. What name for God does the writer use in verse 22?

7. How does Isaiah 46:4 answer the prayer of verse 9?

8. What fears about getting older do you have, or see in people you love? How could this psalm help?

9. Who in the next generation could you tell about God's faithfulness? What story would you tell them?

10. If you are younger, which older believer could you listen to and learn from this month?

Psalm 72: The Reign of the Righteous King

Scripture

Of Solomon.

72:1-7 God, give Your judgments to the king, and Your righteousness to the son of ***the*** king. He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your afflicted with justice. The mountains will bear peace to the people, and the hills, in righteousness. He will judge the afflicted of the people; he will save the sons of the needy, and he will crush the oppressor. They will fear You with the sun and before the moon, generation of generations. He will come down like rain on mown grass, like copious showers, a sprinkling of ***the*** earth. In his days the righteous will flourish, and abundance of peace, until ***there is*** no moon.

72:8-14 And let him have dominion from sea to sea, and from ***the*** River to the ends of ***the*** earth. Before him the desert dwellers will bow down, and his enemies will lick dust. The kings of Tarshish and of ***the*** coastlands will render tribute; the kings of Sheba and Seba will bring near a gift. And let all kings bow down to him; all nations will serve him. For he will deliver ***the*** needy who cries for help, and the afflicted, and ***him*** who has no helper. He will have pity on ***the*** poor and needy, and the lives of ***the*** needy he will save. From oppression and from violence he will redeem their life, and their blood will be precious in his eyes.

72:15-20 And let him live, and let one give to him of the gold of Sheba; and let one pray for him continually; all the day let one bless him. Let there be abundance of grain in the land, on the top of ***the*** mountains; let its fruit wave like Lebanon; and let them blossom from ***the*** city like the vegetation of the earth. Let his name be forever; before the sun let his name increase; and let them bless themselves by him; all nations, let them call him blessed. Blessed ***be*** the LORD God, the God of Israel, who does wonders, He alone. And blessed ***be*** the name of His glory forever, and let all the earth be filled ***with*** His glory. Amen and amen. The prayers of David, son of Jesse, are finished.

Psalm 72 Preview

Psalm 72 is a prayer for the king. It asks God to give the king His own justice and righteousness, so that he will defend the poor, crush the oppressor and bring peace to the land like rain on a cut field. It prays that his kingdom will reach from sea to sea and that all kings will bow down to him and all nations call him blessed.

No king of Israel ever fully lived up to this prayer, not even Solomon at his best. The psalm points beyond him to the King God promised from David's line, the Messiah. I believe it describes the reign of Jesus Christ on the earth when He returns. The psalm also closes Book Two of the Psalms with a great blessing of praise, and then a short note: "The prayers of David, son of Jesse, are finished."

Psalm 72 Study

72:1-2 *God, give Your judgments to the king, and Your righteousness to the son of **the** king. He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your afflicted with justice.*

The heading reads, "Of Solomon." I take it as naming Solomon as the writer, as the headings of other psalms name their writers. Solomon is also named in the heading of Psalm 127. Some read it as "for Solomon," a prayer David prayed for his son as the young man came to the throne. David did pray for Solomon near the end of his life (1 Chronicles 29:19), and that reading would explain why verse 20 closes "the prayers of David" right after this psalm. Either way, it is a prayer for the son of David on David's throne.

"God, give Your judgments to the king, and Your righteousness to the son of the king." The king is to rule by God's standards, not his own. Solomon asked God for exactly this when he became king: "a listening heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9). God gave him wisdom beyond any king of his time (1 Kings 10:23-24).

"He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your afflicted with justice." The people belong to God. The psalm calls them "Your people" and "Your afflicted." The king does not own them. He serves God by caring for them, especially the poor and powerless.

72:3-4 *The mountains will bear peace to the people, and the hills, in righteousness. He will judge the afflicted of the people; he will save the sons of the needy, and he will crush the oppressor.*

"The mountains will bear peace to the people, and the hills, in righteousness." When the king rules justly, the land itself seems to bring forth peace. The Hebrew word for peace, shalom, means more than the absence of war. It means wholeness, well-being and everything being as it should be. In Solomon's day "Judah and Israel dwelt in security, each man under his vine and under his fig tree" (1 Kings 4:25). It was a small taste of something greater.

"He will judge the afflicted of the people; he will save the sons of the needy, and he will crush the oppressor." A good king defends the weak and breaks the power of those who abuse them. Isaiah says the Messiah "will judge the poor with righteousness" (Isaiah 11:4).

72:5-7 *They will fear You with the sun and before the moon, generation of generations. He will come down like rain on mown grass, like copious showers, a sprinkling of **the** earth. In his days the righteous will flourish, and abundance of peace, until **there is** no moon.*

"They will fear You with the sun and before the moon, generation of generations." As long as the sun and moon last, people will honor God because of this king's reign. The prayer is already reaching past one man's lifetime.

"He will come down like rain on mown grass, like copious showers, a sprinkling of the earth." After a field was cut, the grass needed rain to grow again. A good king's rule is like that rain, bringing new life after hard times. David said the righteous ruler is "like the light of morning when the sun rises" and like rain that brings green growth from the earth (2 Samuel 23:3-4).

"In his days the righteous will flourish, and abundance of peace, until there is no moon." Peace without end. Isaiah 9:7 says of the coming Son of David that there will be no end to the increase of His government and of peace.

72:8-11 *And let him have dominion from sea to sea, and from **the** River to the ends of **the** earth. Before him the desert dwellers will bow down, and his enemies will lick dust. The kings of Tarshish and of **the** coastlands will render tribute; the kings of Sheba and Seba will bring near a gift. And let all kings bow down to him; all nations will serve him.*

"And let him have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." The River is the Euphrates. Solomon's kingdom reached a long way, from the River to the border of Egypt (1 Kings 4:21), and the borders God promised Abraham reached from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18). But this prayer reaches "to the ends of the earth." Zechariah repeats these very words about the coming King who rides on a donkey: "His rule will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:10). Matthew and John tell us that Jesus fulfilled Zechariah's picture of the humble King when He rode into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:4-5; John 12:14-15). The worldwide rule in the same verse is still to come.

"Before him the desert dwellers will bow down, and his enemies will lick dust." To lick the dust is to bow so low your face is in the dirt, a picture of total surrender.

"The kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands will render tribute; the kings of Sheba and Seba will bring near a gift." Tarshish was far to the west, probably in Spain, at the edge of the known world by sea. Sheba was in southern Arabia, and Seba was probably in Africa, south of Egypt. From west to south, the far corners of the world bring gifts. The queen of Sheba came to Solomon with gold and spices (1 Kings 10:1-2), and Jesus said "something greater than Solomon" had come (Matthew 12:42). Many also see a picture of these verses in the wise men from the east who brought gold, frankincense and myrrh to the child Jesus (Matthew 2:11; compare Isaiah 60:6).

"And let all kings bow down to him; all nations will serve him." Every king and every nation. No earthly king has ever had that. Paul says God has given Jesus the name above every name, so that every knee will bow (Philippians 2:9-10).

I believe these verses look ahead to the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth after He returns (Revelation 20:4-6), when He will reign from Jerusalem over all nations, and God will keep His promises to David and to Israel. Some Bible teachers read this psalm as fulfilled now in Christ's spiritual reign through the gospel as it spreads to the nations, and the spread of the gospel is certainly a first taste of it. But the psalm speaks of real kings, real nations and a real earth filled with justice and peace, and I take it at its word.

72:12-14 *For he will deliver **the** needy who cries for help, and the afflicted, and **him** who has no helper. He will have pity on **the** poor and needy, and the lives of **the** needy he will save. From oppression and from violence he will redeem their life, and their blood will be precious in his eyes.*

Now we hear why the King deserves such honor. "For he will deliver the needy who cries for help, and the afflicted, and him who has no helper." His greatness is seen in how he treats the weakest

people in his kingdom. "He will have pity on the poor and needy, and the lives of the needy he will save."

"From oppression and from violence he will redeem their life, and their blood will be precious in his eyes." To this King, the life of a poor person matters. No one is too small for Him to notice. Jesus showed this kind of heart in His earthly ministry: the poor had the gospel preached to them, and the sick, the outcasts and the forgotten found Him close (Matthew 11:5). If you feel that no one sees you, the King sees you, and your life is precious to Him.

72:15-17 *And let him live, and let one give to him of the gold of Sheba; and let one pray for him continually; all the day let one bless him. Let there be abundance of grain in the land, on the top of* ***the*** *mountains; let its fruit wave like Lebanon; and let them blossom from* ***the*** *city like the vegetation of the earth. Let his name be forever; before the sun let his name increase; and let them bless themselves by him; all nations, let them call him blessed.*

"And let him live, and let one give to him of the gold of Sheba; and let one pray for him continually; all the day let one bless him." The people pray for their king and honor him with gifts.

"Let there be abundance of grain in the land, on the top of the mountains; let its fruit wave like Lebanon." Grain grows even on the mountaintops, where it usually doesn't. The crops wave in the wind like the great cedar forests of Lebanon. The cities overflow with people like grass in a field. Under this King, the land and the people flourish together.

"Let his name be forever; before the sun let his name increase; and let them bless themselves by him; all nations, let them call him blessed." These words echo God's promise to Abraham: "all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed" (Genesis 22:18). Paul tells us that the Seed of Abraham is Christ (Galatians 3:16). Through Him the blessing promised to Abraham reaches every nation, and His name will last as long as the sun. Solomon's name is remembered, but Solomon's heart turned away from the LORD in his old age (1 Kings 11:4). Only one Son of David has a name that will endure forever.

72:18-19 *Blessed* ***be*** *the LORD God, the God of Israel, who does wonders, He alone. And blessed* ***be*** *the name of His glory forever, and let all the earth be filled* ***with*** *His glory. Amen and amen.*

"Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who does wonders, He alone. And blessed be the name of His glory forever, and let all the earth be filled with His glory. Amen and amen."

These two verses close Book Two of the Psalms. Each of the first four books ends with a short blessing of praise like this, called a doxology (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48). Book One closed with one in Psalm 41:13 (see Psalm 41). This doxology is the longest of them, and it fits the psalm before it. After praying for the King's reign to fill the earth, the people bless God and pray that His glory will fill the earth.

God promised this long ago: "all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Numbers 14:21). Habakkuk says the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the

LORD as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). The doubled "Amen and amen" means yes, let it be so.

72:20 *The prayers of David, son of Jesse, are finished.*

"The prayers of David, son of Jesse, are finished." This short note is not part of the psalm. It is an editor's note marking the end of a collection.

What does it mean? Most of the psalms in Books One and Two are David's, so the early collection was known as "the prayers of David," even though it also held some psalms by others, like the sons of Korah and Asaph and this one by Solomon. The note marked where that collection ended. Later, when the whole book of Psalms was put together, more psalms of David were found in other collections and placed in Books Three to Five. Eighteen later psalms have David's name in their headings, including Psalms 86, 101, 103, 110 and 138 to 145. The editors left the old note in place, the way an old sign is left on a building after an addition is built.

"Son of Jesse" reminds us where David came from. Jesse was a farmer in Bethlehem, and David was his youngest son, out with the sheep when Samuel came (1 Samuel 16:11). David's last words also begin, "the declaration of David the son of Jesse" (2 Samuel 23:1). Isaiah says that a shoot will come from the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), a new King from David's family line when it looks cut down like a tree. That King is Jesus, the Son of David, and the prayers of David point to Him. The prayers of the son of Jesse are finished, but the reign of the Son of David has no end (Luke 1:32-33).

Psalm 72 Summary

Psalm 72, from Solomon, prays that God will give the king His justice and righteousness so he will judge God's people fairly and defend the afflicted. Under his rule the land will bear peace, the needy will be saved and the oppressor crushed, and people will honor God as long as the sun and moon endure. His reign will be like rain on mown grass, and the righteous will flourish in endless peace. His rule will reach from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth; kings from Tarshish, Sheba and Seba will bring gifts, and all nations will serve him. He deserves this because he rescues the needy and counts their lives precious. The people pray for him and bless him, the land overflows with grain and all nations are blessed through him, as God promised Abraham. No earthly king fulfilled this prayer; it looks ahead to the reign of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, on the earth. The psalm and Book Two close with a doxology blessing the LORD, the God of Israel, and praying that all the earth will be filled with His glory, followed by a note that the prayers of David, son of Jesse, are finished.

People and Places

- Solomon: David's son by Bathsheba and the third king of Israel, about 970-930 B.C., known for his wisdom and for building the temple.
- Jesse: David's father, a man of Bethlehem in Judah.
- The River: the Euphrates River in the north and east.

- Sheba and Seba: distant lands to the south; Sheba in southern Arabia and Seba probably in Africa.

Psalm 72 Study Questions

1. What does the writer ask God to give the king? (72:1)

2. Whom will the king defend, and whom will he crush? (72:2-4)

3. What picture is used for the king's rule in verse 6?

4. How far will the king's rule reach, and who will bring him gifts? (72:8-11)

5. Why does the king deserve this honor, according to verses 12-14?

6. What promise to Abraham does verse 17 echo? (Genesis 22:18)

7. What do verses 18-19 do in the book of Psalms, and what does verse 20 tell us?

8. Why can't verses 8-11 and 17 be fully true of Solomon or any other earthly king? Who fulfills them?

9. This King counts the blood of the needy as "precious in his eyes" (72:14). How should that shape the way we treat poor and powerless people?

10. How does looking forward to Christ's reign over the earth give you hope when the news is full of injustice?

Conclusion

We have walked through fifty-three more psalms from Books One and Two, from David running from Absalom in Psalm 3 to the prayer for the righteous King in Psalm 72. These are the psalms of a man who knew trouble. David prayed them in caves, in an enemy city, in a house surrounded by killers and in a city where a close friend turned traitor. In Psalm 71 an old believer prays one when his strength is gone. Other writers, the sons of Korah, Asaph and Solomon, add their voices. Again and again the trouble is real, the honesty is real and the help of God is real.

These psalms teach us to bring everything to God, even the hardest things. Some of them hold prayers for judgment that are painful to read, in Psalms 35, 58, 59 and 69. We saw that those prayers hand vengeance to God instead of taking it ourselves, and that Jesus, who fulfilled Psalm 69 on the cross, prayed for the men who crucified Him. We also learned to say with David, "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be shaken" (55:22). God keeps count of our tears, carries our load day by day and shelters us under His wings until the storm passes.

Most of all, these psalms point to Jesus Christ. He is the One whose last words on the cross came from Psalm 31:5, the Son of David betrayed by a friend who ate His bread in Psalm 41, the King whose throne is forever in Psalm 45, the One who went up on high and gave gifts to His church in Psalm 68, and the One whose zeal for His Father's house consumed Him and who was given sour wine for His thirst in Psalm 69. Psalm 72 looks ahead to the day He will reign over all the earth, and it closes Book Two with the prayer we can still pray: "And blessed be the name of His glory forever, and let all the earth be filled with His glory. Amen and amen" (72:19).

Volume 1 of this study covers forty of the best-known psalms, and Volume 3 covers the psalms of Books Three to Five that Volume 1 leaves out, with the rest of Psalm 119. I hope you will keep going. And I hope this volume has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him and give you words to pray when life is hard.

The heart of the gospel is in the Psalms too. "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!" (32:1). Paul tells us this is the blessing of the person God credits with righteousness apart from works (Romans 4:6-8). Jesus died for our sins and rose again so that everyone who trusts in Him is forgiven. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of

my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized and find a church where you can grow in God's Word, walk with Him and keep praying the Psalms.

Where Key Words Are Explained

Each special word in this study is explained the first time it comes up, and later chapters point back. This list shows where to find each one.

- A Dove of Distant Terebinths: Psalm 56
- Acrostic: Psalm 9
- Almighty (Shaddai): Psalm 68
- Angel of the LORD: Psalm 35
- Anointed, Messiah and Christ: Psalm 18
- Ark of the covenant: Psalm 5
- Asaph: Psalm 50
- Atonement: Psalm 65
- Blameless: Psalm 18
- Book of life: Psalm 69
- Books One to Five of the Psalms: Overview of the Psalms
- Cherub and cherubim: Psalm 18
- Choirmaster: Psalm 4
- Covenant: Psalm 5
- Do Not Destroy: Psalm 57
- Doeg the Edomite: Psalm 52
- Doxology: Psalm 41
- Fear of the LORD: Psalm 5
- Flutes (in the headings): Psalm 5
- Fool (in the Psalms): Psalm 14
- Gentiles: Psalm 18
- Hanukkah: Psalm 30
- Hard lines (prayers for judgment): Overview of the Psalms
- Higgaion: Psalm 9
- Holy One of Israel: Psalm 71
- Horn: Psalm 18
- House of the LORD in David's day: Psalm 5
- Imprecatory psalms: Overview of the Psalms
- Jeduthun: Psalm 39
- Lament: Overview of the Psalms
- Lilies: Psalm 45

- LORD, Lord, GOD and God: Overview of the Psalms
- Mahalath: Psalm 53
- Maskil: Psalm 44
- Miktam: Psalm 56
- Most High: Psalm 7
- Muth-labben: Psalm 9
- Parallel lines in Hebrew poetry: Overview of the Psalms
- Penitential psalms: Psalm 6
- Ransom: Psalm 25
- Righteous and righteousness: Psalm 4
- Rock (a name for God): Psalm 18
- Sackcloth: Psalm 30
- Sanctuary and inner sanctuary: Psalm 28
- Selah: Psalm 3
- Servant of the LORD: Psalm 18
- Sheminith: Psalm 6
- Sheol: Psalm 6
- Shiggaion: Psalm 7
- Sons of gods: Psalm 29
- Sons of Korah: Psalm 44
- Steadfast love (hesed): Psalm 5
- Tabernacle: Psalm 26
- The Lily of Testimony: Psalm 60
- The pit: Psalm 28
- The prayers of David are finished (72:20): Psalm 72
- With stringed instruments: Psalm 4
- Zion: Psalm 9
- Ziphites: Psalm 54

Old and New Testament Links in Psalms

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
4:4-5	Ephesians 4:26	quoted
5:8-10	Romans 3:13	quoted
6:8-10	Matthew 7:23	quoted
6:8-10	Luke 13:27	quoted
7:6-9	Revelation 2:23	alluded to
10:7-11	Romans 3:14	quoted
11:6-7	Revelation 14:10	alluded to
14:1-3	Romans 3:10-12	quoted
18:1-3	Luke 1:69	alluded to
18:49-50	Romans 15:9	quoted
31:3-5	Luke 23:46	quoted
33:6-9	Hebrews 11:3	alluded to
33:6-9	2 Peter 3:5	alluded to
35:19-21	John 15:25	quoted
36:1-2	Romans 3:18	quoted
41:9	John 13:18	quoted
41:9	Matthew 26:23	fulfilled
41:9	Mark 14:18	fulfilled
41:9	Luke 22:21	fulfilled
44:20-22	Romans 8:36	quoted
45:6-7	Hebrews 1:8-9	quoted
48:1-3	Matthew 5:35	alluded to
50:12-15	Hebrews 13:15	alluded to
53:1-3	Romans 3:10-12	quoted
55:22-23	1 Peter 5:7	alluded to
56:10-11	Hebrews 13:6	alluded to
68:18	Ephesians 4:8	quoted
69:4	John 15:25	quoted
69:9	John 2:17	quoted
69:9	Romans 15:3	quoted
69:21	John 19:28	fulfilled
69:21	Matthew 27:48	fulfilled
69:21	Mark 15:36	fulfilled
69:21	Matthew 27:34	alluded to
69:21	Luke 23:36	alluded to
69:22-23	Romans 11:9-10	quoted
69:24-25	Acts 1:20	quoted
69:26-28	Revelation 3:5	alluded to
69:26-28	Revelation 13:8	alluded to

Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions. Background notes on history, archaeology, Jewish tradition and the ancient translations are drawn from widely known reference information and are stated in general terms; where scholars disagree, the study tries to say so.

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