PSALMS

BIBLE STUDY · VOLUME 3

A Verse-by-Verse Study of Psalms 74 to 149



Songs for the road up to Jerusalem, cries from the ruins,
and the King who will reign from Zion

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TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Psalms Bible Study Volume 3

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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 the Psalms. This is the third and last volume. 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-seven psalms and the second half of Psalm 119 is a lot to cover, so here are three ways a group can pace it:

- One psalm a week: fifty-eight weeks, a little more than a year. The group can read each psalm slowly and use all ten questions. Psalm 78 and Psalm 119 are long, and a group may want to give each of them two weeks.
- Two psalms a week: twenty-nine weeks. Pick five or six questions from each psalm.
- A shorter course: choose the psalms that fit your group, such as the Songs of Ascents in this volume (120, 122 to 126, 128, 129, 131, 132 and 134), the songs of praise (92, 98, 104,

113, 117 and 147), the cries for help (77, 86, 88, 102, 142 and 143) or the psalms the New Testament quotes in connection with Jesus (78, 82, 89, 102 and 109). 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: war and the loss of home, grief and depression that do not lift, serious illness, loneliness, betrayal and false accusation, and violence against the helpless, children among them (for example Psalms 74, 79, 88, 102, 109 and 137). Psalm 88 ends in darkness, and some in your group may be living in that darkness now. 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.

Volume 3 is the last of a study in three volumes. Volume 1 studies forty well-known psalms chosen from all five books of the Psalms. Volume 2 studies the rest of the psalms in Books One and Two, Psalms 3 to 72. This volume studies the psalms of Books Three, Four and Five that Volume 1 leaves out.

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 and Mahalath, 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.

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. "Steadfast love and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed" (85:10). Once you see this pattern, the Psalms become much easier to read, because the second line often explains the first.

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 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. Matthew says that Jesus' teaching in parables fulfilled

Psalm 78:2 (Matthew 13:35). Jesus Himself quoted Psalm 82:6 when He was accused of making Himself God (John 10:34). Psalm 89 holds God's covenant with David, the promise of a King from David's line whose throne would last forever, and Paul quotes it when he preaches that God brought Israel a Savior, Jesus, from David's seed (Acts 13:22-23). Hebrews 1:10-12 applies Psalm 102:25-27 to the Son, and Peter applies Psalm 109:8 to Judas, who betrayed Him (Acts 1:20). Psalm 110, the psalm the New Testament quotes most about Christ, is in Volume 1. 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 some of the hardest prayers in the Bible. Psalms 83 and 109 are among the long psalms of judgment, and others have hard lines inside them, where the writer asks God to punish his enemies or to pay them back (for example 79:6-12, 137:7-9 and 140:9-11). Bible teachers often call these imprecatory psalms, from an old English word meaning to call down a curse. 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. Most of these prayers come from people who had seen real evil: cities burned, the helpless killed, the innocent lied about. They wanted God's justice and His holiness upheld in the world. 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). 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. These prayers are not permission to hate anyone. When we reach these lines, I will point back here.

Why these psalms? Volume 1 of this study covers forty psalms chosen from all five books, including twenty-one from Books Three to Five, among them the first eight stanzas (verses 1 to 64) of Psalm 119. This volume covers the other fifty-seven psalms of Books Three, Four and Five, from Psalm 74 to Psalm 149, and the last fourteen stanzas of Psalm 119 (verses 65 to 176). They are studied in the order they appear in the Bible: Psalms 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 92, 93, 94, 97, 98, 99, 101, 102, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 119 (verses 65 to 176), 120, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 128, 129, 131, 132, 134, 135, 137, 138, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 147 and 149. When one of these psalms points back to a psalm studied in Volume 1, such as Psalm 73 or Psalm 90, I name it as Volume 1.

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, 46 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). In this volume, Book Three is mostly the psalms of Asaph and the sons of Korah, Book Four has few names in its headings, and Book Five has many psalms of David along with the Songs of Ascents and the closing songs of praise.

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. Some psalms, such as Psalm 137, were written during or after Israel's exile in Babylon in the 500s B.C. Several psalms in this volume seem to come from those dark years, when the Babylonians burned Jerusalem and its temple in 586 B.C., or from the years after the first exiles came home in 538 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 74: Remember Your Congregation

Scripture

A Maskil of Asaph.

74:1-11 Why, God, have You rejected ***us*** perpetually? ***Why*** does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture? Remember Your congregation, ***which*** You acquired of old, ***which*** You redeemed ***as*** the tribe of Your inheritance, the mountain of Zion, on which You have dwelt. Lift up Your footsteps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has done harm to everything in the holy place. Your adversaries have roared in the midst of Your meeting place; they have set up their signs ***as*** signs. It was known like one bringing up axes on high into a thicket of trees. And now its engravings, together, with axe and hatchets they strike down. They have sent Your sanctuary into the fire; to the ground they have profaned the tabernacle of Your name. They said in their heart, "Let us oppress them together." They burned all the meeting places of God in the land. Our signs we have not seen; there is no longer a prophet, and there is none with us who knows how long. How long, God, will the adversary taunt? Will the enemy spurn Your name forever? Why do You draw back Your hand, even Your right hand? From the midst of Your bosom, destroy ***them***!

74:12-17 And God ***is*** my King from of old, working salvations in the midst of the earth. You, You divided the sea by Your strength; You shattered the heads of the monsters on the waters. You, You crushed the heads of Leviathan; You gave him ***as*** food to a people, to desert dwellers. You, You broke open spring and torrent; You, You dried up ever-flowing rivers. To You ***belongs the*** day; also to You ***belongs the*** night; You, You established ***the*** luminary and ***the*** sun. You, You set all the boundaries of ***the*** earth; summer and winter, You, You formed them.

74:18-23 Remember this: ***the*** enemy has taunted, LORD, and a foolish people has spurned Your name. Do not give the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast; the life of Your afflicted do not forget forever. Look to the covenant, for the dark places of ***the*** land are full ***of*** habitations of violence. Let not the oppressed turn back humiliated; let the afflicted and needy praise Your name. Arise, God, contend ***for*** Your cause; remember Your reproach from a fool all the day. Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries, the uproar of those who rise against You, which goes up continually.

Psalm 74 Preview

Psalm 74 is a cry from the ashes. Enemies have broken into God's house, smashed its carved woodwork with axes and set it on fire. Every place of worship in the land has been burned. No prophet is speaking, and no one knows how long it will last. The writer asks God why He seems to have walked away from His own flock.

Then, in the middle of the psalm, he turns from the ruins to the God who has always been King. He remembers how God split the sea, crushed the monster of the waters, opened springs and dried up rivers and set the day, the night and the seasons in place. From there he pleads with God to remember His covenant and to rise up and defend His own name. The psalm ends without an

answer, but it ends in prayer. When everything we loved seems to be gone, this psalm gives us words to bring that grief straight to God.

Psalm 74 Study

74:1-3 *Why, God, have You rejected **us** perpetually? **Why** does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture? Remember Your congregation, **which** You acquired of old, **which** You redeemed **as** the tribe of Your inheritance, the mountain of Zion, on which You have dwelt. Lift up Your footsteps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has done harm to everything in the holy place.*

The heading reads, "A Maskil of Asaph." Asaph was a Levite whom David put in charge of the music before the ark of the covenant (1 Chronicles 15:17-19; 16:4-5). He is also called a seer, a prophet (2 Chronicles 29:30). Twelve psalms carry his name: Psalm 50 and Psalms 73 to 83. His family, the sons of Asaph, went on leading worship for centuries, and they were still singing when the exiles came home from Babylon (Ezra 2:41). Psalm 73 (Volume 1) opens Book Three, and this is the second of the eleven Asaph psalms that stand together there.

Maskil comes from a Hebrew word connected with wisdom and understanding. The meaning is uncertain. Many think it marks a teaching psalm, or a psalm written with special skill.

The psalm describes the burning of the temple. The likeliest time is 586 B.C., when the Babylonians burned the house of the LORD in Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:8-9). That was about four hundred years after Asaph led David's singers. Many think this psalm came from one of Asaph's descendants, who carried his name and his work. Others believe Asaph saw it ahead of time as a prophet. The heading ties the psalm to Asaph, and either way God gave it to His people for the darkest day they had known.

"Why, God, have You rejected us perpetually?" The writer is not afraid to ask God why. He calls Israel "the sheep of Your pasture." Sheep belong to a shepherd, and the shepherd is responsible for them. That is the ground of his prayer.

"Remember Your congregation." God bought this people "of old" and "redeemed" them. To redeem is to buy back or set free by paying a price, and God did that when He brought Israel out of Egypt. He also dwelt on "the mountain of 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 put His name. "Lift up Your footsteps to the perpetual ruins" asks God to come and walk through the wreckage and see it for Himself.

74:4-8 *Your adversaries have roared in the midst of Your meeting place; they have set up their signs **as** signs. It was known like one bringing up axes on high into a thicket of trees. And now its engravings, together, with axe and hatchets they strike down. They have sent Your sanctuary into the fire; to the ground they have profaned the tabernacle of Your name. They said in their heart, "Let us oppress them together." They burned all the meeting places of God in the land.*

The writer walks us through the damage. The enemy "roared in the midst of Your meeting place," like lions in the house of God. They set up "their signs," probably their war banners or the symbols of their gods, where God's people had met with Him.

Verses 5 and 6 picture men swinging axes as if they were clearing a forest. The temple Solomon built was lined with carved cedar, with flowers, palm trees and cherubim cut into the wood and covered with gold (1 Kings 6:29). The enemy hacked all of it down.

"They have sent Your sanctuary into the fire." A sanctuary is a holy place set apart for God. For Israel it was the tabernacle in the wilderness and later the temple in Jerusalem, the place where God said He would dwell among His people. They "profaned" it, treating what was holy as common trash.

They wanted more than the building. "Let us oppress them together," they said, and "They burned all the meeting places of God in the land." We are not told exactly what these meeting places were. They may have been other places where God's people gathered to pray and be taught. The goal was to wipe out the worship of the LORD altogether.

74:9-11 *Our signs we have not seen; there is no longer a prophet, and there is none with us who knows how long. How long, God, will the adversary taunt? Will the enemy spurn Your name forever? Why do You draw back Your hand, even Your right hand? From the midst of Your bosom, destroy **them**!*

"Our signs we have not seen; there is no longer a prophet." The enemy has signs. God's people have none. No miracle, no word from God and "none with us who knows how long." The hardest part of suffering is often not knowing when it will end.

"How long, God, will the adversary taunt?" The writer's deepest pain is for God's name. The enemy mocks the God of Israel, and it looks as though God is letting him. "Why do You draw back Your hand, even Your right hand?" The right hand stands for strength and action. It is as if God has folded His arms and tucked His hand inside His robe. "From the midst of Your bosom, destroy them!" Take Your hand out and act.

The Psalms show again and again that God welcomes this kind of honesty from His children. A "Why?" spoken to God is still a prayer. Jesus Himself cried "Why?" from the cross (Matthew 27:46).

74:12-17 *And God **is** my King from of old, working salvations in the midst of the earth. You, You divided the sea by Your strength; You shattered the heads of the monsters on the waters. You, You crushed the heads of Leviathan; You gave him **as** food to a people, to desert dwellers. You, You broke open spring and torrent; You, You dried up ever-flowing rivers. To You **belongs the** day; also to You **belongs the** night; You, You established **the** luminary and **the** sun. You, You set all the boundaries of **the** earth; summer and winter, You, You formed them.*

Now comes the turn. "And God is my King from of old." The city is in ruins, but the King is still on His throne. The writer stops looking at the ashes and starts remembering who God is and what He has done, "working salvations in the midst of the earth."

"You, You divided the sea by Your strength." The Hebrew repeats "You" again and again in these verses, as if to say that God and no one else did these things. He is thinking of the night God split the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22). "The monsters on the waters" and "Leviathan" picture the powers that stood against God's people. Leviathan was a great sea creature (Job 41; Psalm 104:26), and Isaiah uses it as a picture of evil powers God will one day destroy (Isaiah 27:1). Here it stands for Egypt and its Pharaoh, whom Ezekiel also calls a great monster in the waters (Ezekiel 29:3). God crushed its heads and left it as food for desert creatures. The power that had enslaved Israel was finished.

"You, You broke open spring and torrent." God brought water out of the rock in the wilderness (Exodus 17:6). "You dried up ever-flowing rivers," as He did at the Jordan when Israel crossed into the land (Joshua 3:16).

Then he goes back further, to creation. "To You belongs the day; also to You belongs the night." God made the sun and the moon, set the edges of the earth and formed "summer and winter." If He rules the seasons, He rules this season too. A God who could do all that is not helpless in the face of Babylon.

When our own lives are in ruins, this is the right move to make. We remember what God has already done, at the cross and the empty tomb, and in our own lives, and we let that steady us while we wait.

74:18-21 *Remember this: **the** enemy has taunted, LORD, and a foolish people has spurned Your name. Do not give the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast; the life of Your afflicted do not forget forever. Look to the covenant, for the dark places of **the** land are full **of** habitations of violence. Let not the oppressed turn back humiliated; let the afflicted and needy praise Your name.*

"Remember this." The writer asked God to remember His people in verse 2. Now he asks God to remember the insults against His own name, spoken by "a foolish people." In the Psalms a fool is not someone with a low IQ. A fool is someone who lives as if God does not matter (Psalm 14:1).

"Do not give the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast." A dove is small, gentle and defenseless. That is how Israel feels, surrounded by wild animals.

"Look to the covenant." A covenant is a binding agreement, a solemn promise sealed before God. God made covenants with Abraham (Genesis 15:18; 17:7), with Israel at Mount Sinai

(Exodus 24:7-8) and later with David (2 Samuel 7). The writer does not appeal to Israel's goodness. He appeals to God's promise. God bound Himself to this people, and He does not break His word.

"Let the afflicted and needy praise Your name." He asks God to act so that the very people who are suffering now will have reason to praise Him.

74:22-23 *Arise, God, contend **for** Your cause; remember Your reproach from a fool all the day. Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries, the uproar of those who rise against You, which goes up continually.*

"Arise, God, contend for Your cause." The writer asks God to defend Himself. It is really God's fight, because it is God's name being mocked. "Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries, the uproar of those who rise against You, which goes up continually."

The psalm stops there. There is no happy ending and no answer yet. But the writer has done what faith does. He has told God the truth, remembered who God is and put the whole matter back into God's hands. God did answer, in His time. The exiles came home in 538 B.C., and the temple was rebuilt (Ezra 1; 6:15). And God's people still look ahead to the day when every enemy of His name is silenced and Christ reigns from Zion (Romans 11:26).

Psalm 74 Summary

Psalm 74, a Maskil of Asaph, mourns the destruction of God's sanctuary, probably at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The writer asks why God has rejected the sheep of His pasture and begs Him to remember the people He redeemed and Mount Zion where He dwelt. He describes enemies roaring in the meeting place, cutting down the carved work with axes and burning the sanctuary and every meeting place of God in the land. No prophet speaks and no one knows how long it will last. Then he remembers that God is his King from of old, who divided the sea, crushed Leviathan, opened springs, dried up rivers and set the day, the night and the seasons in place. He asks God to remember the taunts of the foolish, to protect His defenseless turtledove, to look to His covenant and to rise up and plead His own cause.

People and Places

- Asaph: a Levite whom David put in charge of the music before the ark; twelve psalms carry his name (50 and 73 to 83).
- Maskil: a word in some psalm headings, probably meaning a teaching psalm or a skillful one; the meaning is uncertain.
- Zion: first the fortress David captured, called the City of David (2 Samuel 5:7); later the temple hill and the whole city of Jerusalem.
- Sanctuary: the holy place set apart for God, the tabernacle and later the temple.
- Covenant: a binding agreement or solemn promise; God made covenants with Abraham, with Israel at Sinai and with David.

- Leviathan: a great sea creature, used as a picture of powers that oppose God; here a picture of Egypt.

Psalm 74 Study Questions

1. What has happened to God's sanctuary, according to the writer? (74:3-8)

2. What two things does the writer ask God to remember? (74:2, 74:18)

3. Why does it hurt so much that "there is no longer a prophet"? (74:9)

4. What picture does the writer use for God's hand in verse 11?

5. What turning point comes in verse 12, and what does the writer begin to remember?

6. What events from Israel's history are pictured in verses 13 to 15?

7. What does it mean that the writer asks God to "Look to the covenant"? (74:20) Why is that a stronger plea than pointing to his own goodness?

8. Is it right to ask God "Why?" and "How long?" What does this psalm teach about honest prayer?

9. Have you lost something that mattered deeply to you, a home, a church or a way of life? How could verses 12 to 17 help you in that kind of loss?

10. What has God already done in your life that you could remember the next time He seems silent?

Psalm 75: God Is the Judge

Scripture

*To the choirmaster, **on** "Do Not Destroy." A psalm of Asaph, a song.*

75:1-5 We give thanks to You, God, we give thanks, and Your name ***is*** near; they recount Your wonders. When I take ***the*** appointed time, I, I will judge ***with*** uprightness. ***The*** earth and all its inhabitants are melting; I, I have made its pillars firm. Selah. I said to the boasters, "Do not boast," and to the wicked, "Do not lift up a horn. Do not lift up your horn on high; ***do not*** speak with an arrogant neck."

75:6-10 For not from ***the*** east and from ***the*** west, and not from ***the*** wilderness ***comes*** lifting up. For God ***is*** judge; this ***one*** He brings low, and this ***one*** He lifts up. For a cup ***is*** in the hand of the LORD, and the wine foams; ***it is*** full ***of*** mixture, and He pours out from it; surely its dregs they will drain ***and*** drink, all the wicked of ***the*** earth. And I, I will declare ***it*** forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. And all the horns of ***the*** wicked I will cut off; the horns of ***the*** righteous will be lifted up.

Psalm 75 Preview

Psalm 74 asked God how long the wicked would be allowed to mock Him. Psalm 75 answers. God Himself speaks: He has set a time, and when it comes He will judge with uprightness. The earth may seem to be falling apart, but He holds its pillars firm.

Then the writer warns the proud. Promotion does not come from east or west or anywhere on earth. It comes from God, who brings one person low and lifts up another. In the LORD's hand is a cup of foaming wine, and the wicked will drink it to the dregs. The psalm ends with a promise of praise and a picture of the proud cut down and the righteous lifted up.

Psalm 75 Study

75:1 *We give thanks to You, God, we give thanks, and Your name **is** near; they recount Your wonders.*

The heading calls this "A psalm of Asaph, a song," written "To the choirmaster." 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. Many psalms carry this line in their headings, and later chapters point back here. The heading also says it was set "on" Do Not Destroy, the same words found in the headings of Psalms 57, 58 and 59. The meaning is uncertain. Most think it was the name of a familiar tune the song was sung to. For Asaph, see Psalm 74.

"We give thanks to You, God, we give thanks." The people begin with thanks before God has said a word, and the repeated words show their eagerness. "Your name is near." God's name stands for God Himself, all that He is and has shown Himself to be. He is not far away. And "they recount Your wonders," telling again the great things He has done.

75:2-3 *When I take **the** appointed time, I, I will judge **with** uprightness. **The** earth and all its inhabitants are melting; I, I have made its pillars firm. Selah.*

Now God speaks. "When I take the appointed time, I, I will judge with uprightness." God has set a date on His calendar. Psalm 74 asked "how long" (74:10). Here God answers that the time is fixed, and He will not miss it. When He judges, He will judge rightly, with no favorites and no mistakes.

"The earth and all its inhabitants are melting." When evil seems to win, the whole world can feel as if it is coming apart. "I, I have made its pillars firm." The world stands because God holds it up. Hebrews 1:3 says the Son upholds all things by the word of His power.

Then comes the word "Selah." We meet it here for the first time in this volume. Selah appears seventy-one times in the Psalms and three more times in the prayer of Habakkuk 3. It always comes inside a psalm or at its end, never in a heading. Its meaning is uncertain. Many think it comes from a Hebrew root meaning "lift up," perhaps a signal for the singers or instruments to raise their voices, and the Greek Old Testament translated it with a word that probably means a musical interlude. So most scholars think it was a musical sign, perhaps a pause or a place where the instruments played. Many readers also take it as a call to stop and think about what was just said. That is a good habit. When you see Selah, slow down and let the words sink in.

75:4-5 *I said to the boasters, "Do not boast," and to the wicked, "Do not lift up a horn. Do not lift up your horn on high; **do not** speak with an arrogant neck."*

"I said to the boasters, Do not boast." God warns the proud. "Do not lift up a horn." In the Bible a horn is a picture of strength and pride, taken from a wild ox or a ram that tosses its head and charges with its horns. To lift up your horn is to strut, to show off your power and dare anyone to stop you.

"Speak with an arrogant neck" pictures a stiff neck held high, the posture of someone who bows to no one. God tells them, in effect, to put their heads down. That warning is for nations and rulers, and it is also for us. Pride is one of the oldest sins, and God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

75:6-7 *For not from **the** east and from **the** west, and not from **the** wilderness **comes** lifting up. For God **is** judge; this **one** He brings low, and this **one** He lifts up.*

"For not from the east and from the west, and not from the wilderness comes lifting up." Look in every direction on the map and you will not find the source of true honor. The Hebrew leaves out the north, and some think that is because the north, where Israel's worst invaders came from, is where they least expected help.

"For God is judge; this one He brings low, and this one He lifts up." Hannah sang the same truth when God gave her a son (1 Samuel 2:7). Kings rise and fall at His word. So do bosses, careers and reputations. That frees us from two traps. We don't have to claw our way to the top, and we don't need to fear the people who seem to be on top now.

75:8 *For a cup **is** in the hand of the LORD, and the wine foams; **it is** full **of** mixture, and He pours out from it; surely its dregs they will drain **and** drink, all the wicked of **the** earth.*

"For a cup is in the hand of the LORD, and the wine foams." The prophets often picture God's judgment as a cup of strong wine that makes those who drink it stagger and fall (Jeremiah 25:15-16; Isaiah 51:17). It is "full of mixture," mixed with spices to make it stronger. "Surely its dregs they will drain and drink, all the wicked of the earth." The dregs are the thick bitter sludge at the bottom. The wicked will not take a sip and pass it on. They will drink all of it.

Revelation uses the same picture. Those who worship the beast in the last days will drink the wine of God's fury, mixed undiluted in the cup of His wrath (Revelation 14:10). It is a sobering picture, and it should make us grateful. On the night before He died, Jesus prayed about the cup He was about to drink (Matthew 26:39). Many see in that prayer the cup of God's judgment against sin, which Jesus drank for us so that all who trust Him never will.

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

75:9-10 *And I, I will declare **it** forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. And all the horns of **the** wicked I will cut off; the horns of **the** righteous will be lifted up.*

"And I, I will declare it forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob." Calling Him "the God of Jacob" is a reminder that He is the God who kept His promises to a man who did not deserve them.

"And all the horns of the wicked I will cut off; the horns of the righteous will be lifted up." The proud wanted to lift up their own horns in verse 4. In the end God cuts them off and lifts up the horns of the righteous instead. The righteous are those who are right with God and live by His ways. They are not sinless, but they trust Him and walk with Him. Their strength is not their own. God gives it.

Some readers find this hard to hold on to when the wicked are winning. But the psalm has already told us that God picks the time. We do not have to set the date for justice, and we do not have to carry it out. We can leave it with Him and sing while we wait.

Psalm 75 Summary

Psalm 75 opens with thanks to God, whose name is near. Then God speaks: when the appointed time comes, He will judge with uprightness, and though the earth is melting He holds its pillars firm. He warns the boasters and the wicked not to lift up their horns or speak with an arrogant neck. Lifting up does not come from east or west or the wilderness, because God is the judge who brings one down and raises up another. In His hand is a cup of foaming, mixed wine, and all the wicked of the earth will drain it to the dregs. The writer promises to praise the God of Jacob forever, and the psalm ends with the horns of the wicked cut off and the horns of the righteous lifted up.

People and Places

- Choirmaster: the leader of the music in Israel's worship.

- Do Not Destroy: words in the headings of Psalms 57 to 59 and 75, probably the name of a tune; the meaning is uncertain.
- Selah: a word found inside many psalms, probably a musical pause or a call to stop and think; the meaning is uncertain.
- Horn: a picture of strength and pride, taken from the horns of a wild ox or a ram.
- Righteous: those who are right with God, who trust Him and live by His ways.

Psalm 75 Study Questions

1. What do the people say about God's name in verse 1?

2. What does God say He will do when He takes the appointed time? (75:2)

3. What does God say He has done for the earth when everything seems to be melting? (75:3)

4. What does it mean to "lift up a horn"? (75:4-5)

5. Where does true lifting up come from, according to verses 6 and 7?

6. What is in the LORD's hand, and who will drink it? (75:8)

7. How does Psalm 75 answer the question "How long?" from Psalm 74?

8. What changes when we believe that God, not people, lifts up and brings low? How could that affect the way you think about your work or your reputation?

9. How does the cup of God's judgment help us understand what Jesus did for us?

10. Is there a place in your life where pride has crept in? What would it look like to lower your horn before God?

Psalm 76: The Lion of Zion

Scripture

To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A psalm of Asaph, a song.

76:1-6 God ***is*** known in Judah; in Israel His name ***is*** great. And His lair was in Salem, and His den in Zion. There He shattered the flames of ***the*** bow, shield and sword and battle. Selah. You ***are*** resplendent, majestic, more than ***the*** mountains of prey. The stout of heart were plundered; they slumbered their sleep; and all the men of strength did not find their hands. From Your rebuke, God of Jacob, both chariot and horse ***were*** cast into deep sleep.

76:7-12 You, You ***are*** to be feared; and who will stand before You once Your anger ***is roused***? From heaven You made ***Your*** sentence heard; ***the*** earth feared and was quiet, when God arose for judgment, to save all the humble of ***the*** earth. Selah. For the wrath of mankind will praise You; the remnant of wraths You will gird on. Vow and pay to the LORD your God; let all who ***are*** around Him bring a gift to the Awesome ***One***. He cuts off the spirit of rulers; ***He is*** to be feared by the kings of ***the*** earth.

Psalm 76 Preview

Psalm 76 celebrates a victory God won for Jerusalem. The LORD is pictured as a lion whose den is in Zion. An enemy army came against the city, and God broke its weapons there. The strong men fell asleep and never woke, and chariot and horse lay still at His rebuke.

The second half widens the view. God's judgment from heaven makes the whole earth fall silent. He arose to save the humble, and even the anger of men ends up praising Him. So the psalm closes with a call to keep our vows to Him and to bring Him gifts, because the God who cuts off the spirit of proud rulers is to be feared by every king on earth.

Psalm 76 Study

76:1-3 *God **is** known in Judah; in Israel His name **is** great. And His lair was in Salem, and His den in Zion. There He shattered the flames of **the** bow, shield and sword and battle. Selah.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments. A psalm of Asaph, a song." For the choirmaster see Psalm 75, and for Asaph see Psalm 74. "With stringed instruments" means the song was to be played on harps and lyres.

The psalm does not name the battle. The old Greek translation of the Old Testament adds a line about the Assyrian to the heading, and many connect the psalm with 701 B.C. That year the Assyrian king Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem in the days of King Hezekiah, and in one night the angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 of his soldiers (2 Kings 19:35). Verses 5 and 6 fit that night well. But we can't be certain, and the psalm is written so that God's people could sing it after any rescue.

"God is known in Judah; in Israel His name is great." God made Himself known by what He did for His people. "And His lair was in Salem, and His den in Zion." Salem is an old name for Jerusalem. Melchizedek was "king of Salem" in Abraham's day (Genesis 14:18), and Hebrews 7:2 says the name means peace. A lair and a den are places where a lion lives. God is pictured as a lion guarding His city. Anyone who attacks it attacks Him.

"There He shattered the flames of the bow." The "flames" are probably arrows flashing through the air, perhaps even arrows set on fire. God broke them, along with shield and sword. Selah (see Psalm 75).

76:4-6 *You **are** resplendent, majestic, more than **the** mountains of prey. The stout of heart were plundered; they slumbered their sleep; and all the men of strength did not find their hands. From Your rebuke, God of Jacob, both chariot and horse **were** cast into deep sleep.*

"You are resplendent, majestic, more than the mountains of prey." Resplendent means shining, full of light. The mountains of prey may be the hills where the enemy camped, waiting to tear Jerusalem apart like hunters. God shines brighter and stands taller than all of them.

"The stout of heart were plundered; they slumbered their sleep." The brave soldiers who came to rob God's city were robbed themselves. They lay down to sleep and did not get up. "All the men of strength did not find their hands." Their arms were useless.

"From Your rebuke, God of Jacob, both chariot and horse were cast into deep sleep." A chariot army was the most feared weapon of the day. One word from God and it was finished. Isaiah 37:36 says that when the people got up early in the morning, the Assyrians were all dead bodies.

76:7-9 *You, You **are** to be feared; and who will stand before You once Your anger **is roused**? From heaven You made **Your** sentence heard; **the** earth feared and was quiet, when God arose for judgment, to save all the humble of **the** earth. Selah.*

"You, You are to be feared." The repetition presses the point: God, and no one else. "And who will stand before You once Your anger is roused?" No army can, and no person can. Revelation 6:17 asks the same question about the great day of His wrath.

"From heaven You made Your sentence heard." God passed judgment from His throne, and "the earth feared and was quiet." When God speaks, the noise of the nations stops.

Then we hear why He judged: "to save all the humble of the earth." God's judgment is not a bully's rage. He rises to defend the humble, the poor and the oppressed who cannot defend themselves. That is good news for anyone who has been pushed around. Selah.

76:10 *For the wrath of mankind will praise You; the remnant of wraths You will gird on.*

"For the wrath of mankind will praise You." It is one of the hardest lines in the psalm to translate, but the main idea is clear. Even the fury of people who hate God ends up bringing Him glory. Joseph's brothers meant evil against him, but God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20). The rulers

who crucified Jesus did what God's hand and plan had already determined would happen (Acts 4:27-28). Human anger cannot get outside of God's purpose.

"The remnant of wraths You will gird on." The meaning is uncertain. It may mean that God wears what is left of the enemy's rage like a belt, a trophy of His victory. Or it may mean that God restrains whatever rage remains. Either way, the last word belongs to Him.

76:11-12 *Vow and pay to the LORD your God; let all who **are** around Him bring a gift to the Awesome **One**. He cuts off the spirit of rulers; **He is** to be feared by the kings of **the** earth.*

"Vow and pay to the LORD your God." A vow was a solemn promise to God, often made in a time of trouble, to bring an offering or to do something for Him once He answered. The rescue has come, so it is time to keep the promises. Ecclesiastes 5:4 warns that when we make a vow to God, we should not put off paying it.

"Let all who are around Him bring a gift to the Awesome One." The nations around Israel are invited to honor the God who just defeated an army. After the Assyrians fell, many brought gifts to the LORD in Jerusalem and presents to Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:23).

"He cuts off the spirit of rulers." He can humble the proudest leader on earth. "He is to be feared by the kings of the earth." To fear God means to stand in awe of Him, to take Him seriously and to reverence Him, the way a wise person respects fire. Kings and presidents answer to Him. One day every one of them will bow before His Son (Philippians 2:10-11).

Psalm 76 Summary

Psalm 76, a song of Asaph, celebrates God's victory for Jerusalem. God is known in Judah, and His lair and His den are in Salem and Zion, where He shattered the enemy's arrows, shields and swords. He shines brighter than the mountains of prey. The brave enemy soldiers slept their last sleep, and chariot and horse lay still at His rebuke, perhaps when the Assyrian army fell outside Jerusalem in 701 B.C. No one can stand before God's anger, and when He spoke from heaven the earth was silent, because He rose to save the humble. Even human wrath ends up praising Him. So His people are told to keep their vows and bring gifts to the Awesome One, who cuts off the spirit of rulers and is to be feared by the kings of the earth.

People and Places

- Salem: an old name for Jerusalem; Melchizedek was king of Salem in Abraham's day (Genesis 14:18).
- Sennacherib: the king of Assyria who surrounded Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah, about 701 B.C. (2 Kings 18 and 19).
- Vow: a solemn promise made to God, often to bring an offering after He answered a prayer.

Psalm 76 Study Questions

1. Where does the psalm say God's lair and den are? (76:2)

2. What did God shatter there? (76:3)

3. What happened to the stout of heart and the men of strength? (76:5-6)

4. What question does verse 7 ask, and what is the answer?

5. Why did God arise for judgment, according to verse 9?

6. What does it mean that "the wrath of mankind will praise You"? (76:10) Where else in the Bible do we see God use the evil plans of people for good?

7. What is a vow, and why does the psalm tell the people to pay their vows now? (76:11)

8. How does it comfort you that God rises up to save the humble? Who are the humble around you that you could help?

9. Have you ever made a promise to God in a hard time? Did you keep it?

10. What does it mean for you to fear God in the way this psalm describes?

Psalm 77: I Will Remember the Deeds of the LORD

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on Jeduthun. Of Asaph, a psalm.

77:1-9 My voice ***is*** to God, and I will cry out; my voice ***is*** to God, and He will give ear to me. In the day of my distress I sought the Lord; my hand was stretched out by night and did not grow numb; my soul refused to be comforted. I will remember God and moan; I will muse, and my spirit faints. Selah. You held the eyelids of my eyes ***open***; I was troubled and did not speak. I thought about the days of old, the years of ancient times. I will remember my song in the night; with my heart I will muse, and my spirit searched. Will the Lord reject forever? And will He not again show favor anymore? Has His steadfast love ceased forever? Has ***His*** word come to an end for generation and generation? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Or has He shut up His compassion in anger? Selah.

77:10-20 And I said, "This ***is*** my wounding: the years of the right hand of the Most High." I will remember the deeds of ***the*** LORD; for I will remember Your wonders from of old. And I will meditate on all Your work, and on Your doings I will muse. God, Your way ***is*** in holiness; who ***is*** a great god like God? You ***are*** the God who does wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples. You redeemed Your people with ***Your*** arm, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. The waters saw You, God; the waters saw You; they writhed; also the deeps trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth a sound; also Your arrows went about. The sound of Your thunder ***was*** in the whirlwind; lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. In the sea ***was*** Your way, and Your path in many waters, and Your footprints were not known. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 77 Preview

Psalm 77 begins in a sleepless night. The writer is in deep distress. He prays with his hands stretched out all night long, and still his soul refuses to be comforted. When he thinks about God, it only makes him groan. Then the questions pour out: Has God rejected me forever? Has His steadfast love come to an end? Has He forgotten to be gracious?

Halfway through, something changes. The writer's trouble has not gone away, but he makes a choice: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD." He thinks back to the night God led Israel through the sea, when the waters writhed, the thunder rolled and God's path went straight through the deep where no one could see His footprints. The psalm ends with God leading His people like a flock. It is a psalm for anyone who has lain awake wondering whether God still cares.

Psalm 77 Study

77:1-3 *My voice **is** to God, and I will cry out; my voice **is** to God, and He will give ear to me. In the day of my distress I sought the Lord; my hand was stretched out by night and did not grow numb; my soul refused to be comforted. I will remember God and moan; I will muse, and my spirit faints. Selah.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on Jeduthun. Of Asaph, a psalm." For the choirmaster see Psalm 75, and for Asaph see Psalm 74. Jeduthun was one of David's chief musicians, along with Asaph and Heman, appointed to give thanks to the LORD with music (1 Chronicles 16:41-42; 25:1). His name is also in the headings of Psalms 39 and 62. "On Jeduthun" may mean the psalm was given to Jeduthun's choir, or that it was sung in a style or tune connected with him. The meaning is uncertain. The heading doesn't tell us what trouble the writer faced.

"My voice is to God, and I will cry out." He cries out loud, not just in his head. "In the day of my distress I sought the Lord; my hand was stretched out by night and did not grow numb." He prayed with his hands lifted up all night. And yet, "my soul refused to be comforted." He did everything right, and the pain did not lift.

Then the hardest line: "I will remember God and moan." Usually thinking about God brings comfort. For him, right now, it brings only groaning, because God seems to be the One who is not answering. If you have ever felt that way, you are not the first, and it does not mean your faith has failed. This writer's faith is the reason his pain is in a psalm. Selah (see Psalm 75).

77:4-6 *You held the eyelids of my eyes **open**; I was troubled and did not speak. I thought about the days of old, the years of ancient times. I will remember my song in the night; with my heart I will muse, and my spirit searched.*

"You held the eyelids of my eyes open." He blames no one but God for his sleeplessness. He is too troubled even to speak.

"I thought about the days of old." He remembers better times, when he used to sing in the night instead of lying awake (verse 6). But memory only makes it worse at first. His spirit "searched," digging for answers and finding none. Many people know this kind of night, when the mind runs in circles at three in the morning.

77:7-9 *Will the Lord reject forever? And will He not again show favor anymore? Has His steadfast love ceased forever? Has **His** word come to an end for generation and generation? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Or has He shut up His compassion in anger? Selah.*

Now he asks six questions, and they are bold.

"Will the Lord reject forever? And will He not again show favor anymore?" "Has His steadfast love ceased forever?" "Steadfast love" here is the Hebrew hesed, and hesed is one of the key words of the Old Testament. It means God's loyal love, the faithful, steady kindness He shows to His people because of His covenant with them (see Psalm 74 on "covenant"). Hesed is love that has bound itself by a promise and keeps that promise, even when the one who is loved has failed. The SLB

translates it "steadfast love," and other English Bibles say lovingkindness, loving devotion, loyal love, mercy or kindness, 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 the word again and again in this volume, and later chapters point back here.

That is why the question hurts so much. "Has God forgotten to be gracious? Or has He shut up His compassion in anger?" Each question sets what he feels against what he knows. He knows God promised steadfast love. He knows God is gracious and compassionate. But it feels as if all of it has stopped.

And the honest answer to every one of these questions is no. God's steadfast love does not cease. Lamentations 3:22-23 says His compassions never come to an end and are new every morning. But the writer has to ask before he can hear the answer. Selah.

77:10-12 *And I said, "This **is** my wounding: the years of the right hand of the Most High." I will remember the deeds of **the** LORD; for I will remember Your wonders from of old. And I will meditate on all Your work, and on Your doings I will muse.*

Verse 10 is the turning point, though the Hebrew is hard to translate. "And I said, This is my wounding: the years of the right hand of the Most High." The Most High is a title for God that means He is above everything, higher than every king, every power and every so-called god (Genesis 14:18-19). The line may mean that what wounds him most is that the right hand of the Most High seems to have changed. Or it may mean that this is his weakness, but he will remember the years when the Most High's right hand was at work. Either way, he stops staring at his wound and looks at God's hand.

"I will remember the deeds of the LORD; for I will remember Your wonders from of old." Earlier he remembered God and moaned (verse 3). Now he remembers what God has done, and it changes the direction of his thoughts. "I will meditate on all Your work, and on Your doings I will muse." He has not been rescued yet. He has decided where to look while he waits.

That is something we can do too. We can't always choose our feelings at three in the morning, but we can choose what we think about. We can open the Bible and read what God has done, and we can recall what He has done for us.

77:13-15 *God, Your way **is** in holiness; who **is** a great god like God? You **are** the God who does wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples. You redeemed Your people with **Your** arm, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.*

"God, Your way is in holiness." God's ways are always pure and right, even when we can't understand them. "Who is a great god like God?" None. "You are the God who does wonders."

"You redeemed Your people with Your arm, the sons of Jacob and Joseph." To redeem is to set free by paying a price (see Psalm 74), and God did it with His own arm, His own strength, when He brought Israel out of Egypt. Joseph is named alongside Jacob, likely because Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh became two of the largest tribes of Israel. Selah.

77:16-20 *The waters saw You, God; the waters saw You; they writhed; also the deeps trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth a sound; also Your arrows went about. The sound of Your thunder* ***was*** *in the whirlwind; lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. In the sea* ***was*** *Your way, and Your path in many waters, and Your footprints were not known. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

Now the writer paints the scene at the Red Sea. "The waters saw You, God; the waters saw You; they writhed." He pictures the sea like a living thing, twisting in fear at the sight of its Maker. Storm clouds poured rain, thunder rolled and lightning ("Your arrows") flashed across the sky. "The earth trembled and shook."

Then comes the line many believers have held on to in the dark: "In the sea was Your way, and Your path in many waters, and Your footprints were not known." God made a road through the sea where no road could be. And when the waters closed again, no one could see where He had walked. His path was real, but His footprints were hidden.

So it often is with us. We can't always see what God is doing or trace His steps through our trouble. That does not mean He is not walking through it. The writer of this psalm could not see God's footprints in his own night either, but he knew God had made a way before.

"You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." The psalm ends quietly. God led His people through the sea and on through the wilderness, gently, the way a shepherd leads sheep, using ordinary men to do it. The writer doesn't tell us that his distress ended. He ends by looking at the Shepherd. Jesus calls Himself the good Shepherd who knows His sheep and lays down His life for them (John 10:11, 14).

If you are in a night like this writer's, keep praying, even if the prayer is only questions. Open the Psalms and read what God has done. And don't stay alone in it. Talk to a pastor or a believer you trust, and if the darkness becomes more than you can carry, get help right away.

Psalm 77 Summary

In Psalm 77 Asaph cries out to God in the day of his distress, stretching out his hands all night, yet his soul refuses to be comforted. Remembering God only makes him moan. Kept awake and unable to speak, he thinks about the days of old and his song in the night, then asks whether the Lord has rejected him forever, whether His steadfast love has ceased and whether He has forgotten to be gracious. At the turning point he resolves to remember the deeds of the LORD and to meditate on His wonders. God's way is holy, no god is like Him, and He redeemed the sons of Jacob and Joseph with His arm. The writer recalls the Red Sea, when the waters writhed and the earth shook, and God's path ran through the sea though His footprints were not seen. The psalm ends with God leading His people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

People and Places

- Jeduthun: one of David's chief musicians, with Asaph and Heman; "on Jeduthun" in a heading may point to his choir or a style connected with him.

- Steadfast love (hesed): God's loyal, covenant love; love that keeps its promises. Some English Bibles call it lovingkindness, loving devotion or mercy.
- Most High: a title for God meaning He is above all kings, powers and so-called gods.

Psalm 77 Study Questions

1. What did the writer do in the day of his distress, and what did his soul refuse? (77:2)

2. Why did remembering God make him moan at first? (77:3)

3. What six questions does he ask in verses 7 to 9?

4. What does the word hesed mean, and why does the question in verse 8 hurt so much?

5. What does the writer decide to do in verses 11 and 12?

6. What event from Israel's history does he remember in verses 16 to 20?

7. What does it mean that God's "footprints were not known"? (77:19) How can that comfort someone who cannot see what God is doing?

8. Have you ever had a night like the one in verses 2 to 6? What helped you, or what would have helped?

9. What deeds of God, in the Bible or in your own life, could you remember when God seems silent?

10. How can a church or small group care well for someone whose soul "refused to be comforted"?

Psalm 78: Tell the Next Generation

Scripture

A Maskil of Asaph.

78:1-8 Give ear, my people, ***to*** my law; incline your ear to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will pour forth riddles from of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have recounted to us. We will not hide ***them*** from their sons, recounting to a later generation the praises of the LORD, and His might and His wonders which He has done. And He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers to make known to their sons, so that a later generation might know, sons ***who*** will be born; they will arise and recount ***them*** to their sons, that they may set their confidence in God, and not forget the deeds of God, and observe His commandments, and not be like their fathers, a generation stubborn and rebellious, a generation ***that*** did not make its heart steadfast, and its spirit was not faithful with God.

78:9-16 The sons of Ephraim, armed, shooters of ***the*** bow, turned ***back*** on ***the*** day of battle. They did not keep the covenant of God, and in His law they refused to walk, and they forgot His doings and His wonders which He had shown them. Before their fathers He did wonders in the land of Egypt, the field of Zoan. He split open ***the*** sea and brought them through, and He made ***the*** waters stand like a heap. And He guided them by the cloud by day, and all the night by the light of fire. He split open rocks in the wilderness, and He gave ***them*** drink as ***from*** deeps, abundantly. And He brought out streams from a crag, and He made waters flow down like rivers.

78:17-31 And they added again to sin against Him, rebelling against the Most High in the dry land. And they tested God in their heart by asking food for their appetite. And they spoke against God; they said, "Is God able to arrange a table in the wilderness? Look, He struck a rock, and waters flowed out, and torrents overflowed; is He able also to give bread? Or will He prepare meat for His people?" Therefore the LORD heard and was furious, and fire was kindled against Jacob, and also anger went up against Israel, for they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation. And He commanded ***the*** skies above, and the doors of heaven He opened. And He rained down on them manna to eat, and the grain of heaven He gave to them. ***Each*** man ate the bread of mighty ***ones***; He sent them provision to satiety. He made an east wind set out in the heavens, and by His strength He drove the south wind. And He rained down on them meat like the dust, and winged birds like the sand of ***the*** seas. And He made ***them*** fall in the midst of his camp, all around his dwellings. And they ate and were satisfied exceedingly, and their desire He brought to them. They were not estranged from their desire; their food ***was*** still in their mouth, and the anger of God went up against them, and He killed among their robust ones, and the young men of Israel He made bow down.

78:32-39 In all this they sinned still, and did not believe in His wonders. And He brought their days to an end in futility, and their years in sudden terror. When He killed them, then they sought Him, and they returned and sought God earnestly. And they remembered that God ***was*** their rock, and God Most High their redeemer. And they deceived Him with their mouth, and with their

tongue they lied to Him. And their heart was not steadfast with Him, and they were not faithful in His covenant. And He, compassionate, would make atonement for iniquity and not destroy; and many times He turned back His anger and did not stir up all His rage. And He remembered that they ***were*** flesh, a wind that goes and does not return.

78:40-55 How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness ***and*** grieved Him in the wasteland! And again they tested God, and they pained the Holy ***One*** of Israel. They did not remember His hand, the day when He ransomed them from ***the*** adversary, when He set His signs in Egypt, and His portents in the field of Zoan. And He turned their canals into blood, and their streams, they could not drink. He sent among them swarms, and they devoured them, and frogs, and they destroyed them. And He gave their produce to the grasshopper, and their toil to the locust. He killed their vines with hail, and their sycamore figs with frost. And He delivered up their cattle to the hail, and their livestock to the flames. He sent on them the burning of His anger, fury and indignation and distress, a band of angels of harm. He leveled a path for His anger; He did not withhold their soul from death, and their life He delivered up to the pestilence. And He struck every firstborn in Egypt, the beginning of ***their*** vigor in the tents of Ham. And He led out His people like sheep, and drove them like a flock in the wilderness. And He guided them in security, and they did not dread; and the sea covered their enemies. And He brought them to the territory of His holiness, the mountain which His right hand had acquired. And He drove out nations before them, and allotted them by a line of inheritance, and made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents.

78:56-64 And they tested and rebelled against God Most High, and His testimonies they did not keep. And they turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers; they were turned like a bow of deceit. And they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and with their carved images they made Him jealous. God heard and was furious, and He rejected Israel exceedingly. And He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent ***which*** He had pitched among mankind. And He gave His strength to captivity, and His splendor into the hand of an adversary. And He delivered up His people to the sword, and against His inheritance He was furious. Fire consumed its young men, and its virgins were not praised. Its priests fell by the sword, and its widows did not weep.

78:65-72 And the Lord awoke like one asleep, like a warrior overcome by wine. And He struck His adversaries backward; He gave them an everlasting reproach. And He rejected the tent of Joseph, and the tribe of Ephraim He did not choose. And He chose the tribe of Judah, the mountain of Zion, which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like ***the*** heights, like ***the*** earth ***which*** He has founded forever. And He chose David His servant, and took him from the folds of ***the*** sheep. From after the nursing ***ewes*** He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. And he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and with the skill of his hands he guided them.

Psalm 78 Preview

Psalm 78 is the second longest psalm in the Bible, and it is a history lesson set to music. Asaph tells the story of Israel from the plagues in Egypt to the reign of David so that the next generation will

not repeat their fathers' mistakes. Over and over the pattern is the same: God does wonders, His people forget, they rebel and test Him, He disciplines them and in His compassion He forgives and carries them on.

The psalm is honest about Israel's failures, and it is even more honest about God's patience. It ends with God choosing Judah, Mount Zion and David the shepherd boy to shepherd His people. Jesus taught in parables to fulfill the opening lines of this psalm (Matthew 13:35), and in John 6 He points to the manna of verse 24 and calls Himself the true bread from heaven. The lesson for us is simple and urgent: remember what God has done, and tell your children.

Psalm 78 Study

78:1-4 *Give ear, my people, **to** my law; incline your ear to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will pour forth riddles from of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have recounted to us. We will not hide **them** from their sons, recounting to a later generation the praises of the LORD, and His might and His wonders which He has done.*

The heading reads, "A Maskil of Asaph." For Maskil and Asaph, see Psalm 74. Since the psalm ends with David's reign, it fits Asaph's own day well.

"Give ear, my people, to my law." The word "law" here means teaching or instruction. Asaph speaks like a teacher calling his class to pay attention. "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will pour forth riddles from of old." A parable is a saying that sets one thing beside another to teach a lesson, and a riddle is a saying with a deeper meaning that takes thought to understand. The story of Israel is not just a list of events. It carries a lesson for anyone willing to learn it.

Matthew 13:35 says that Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet, and it quotes this verse. Asaph was called a seer (see Psalm 74), and Matthew counts his words as prophecy. Jesus is the greater Teacher who opened His mouth in parables and brought out things hidden from the foundation of the world.

"We will not hide them from their sons." What our fathers told us, we must tell our children: "the praises of the LORD, and His might and His wonders which He has done."

New Testament links: Matthew 13:35 (quoted)

78:5-8 *And He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers to make known to their sons, so that a later generation might know, sons **who** will be born; they will arise and recount **them** to their sons, that they may set their confidence in God, and not forget the deeds of God, and observe His commandments, and not be like their fathers, a generation stubborn and rebellious, a generation **that** did not make its heart steadfast, and its spirit was not faithful with God.*

God "established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel." The testimony and the law are God's written Word, given at Sinai. And He "commanded our fathers to make known to their sons." Moses told Israel to talk about God's words when they sat at home, walked on the road, lay down and got up (Deuteronomy 6:7). Faith was meant to be handed down at the kitchen table.

Verses 6 to 8 give three goals. The next generation should "set their confidence in God," should "not forget the deeds of God," and should keep His commandments. And they should "not be like their fathers, a generation stubborn and rebellious." Each generation has to learn the story for itself, or it will forget.

That is a word for parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers and anyone who has young people watching them. What we do not pass on, they will not have.

78:9-11 *The sons of Ephraim, armed, shooters of **the** bow, turned **back** on **the** day of battle. They did not keep the covenant of God, and in His law they refused to walk, and they forgot His doings and His wonders which He had shown them.*

"The sons of Ephraim, armed, shooters of the bow, turned back on the day of battle." Ephraim was the largest of the northern tribes, the tribe of Joshua, and the tabernacle stood in its land at Shiloh. We aren't told which battle Asaph means. He may be using Ephraim's retreat as a picture of the whole nation's failure. They had the weapons, but they lacked the heart. "They did not keep the covenant of God," and "they forgot His doings and His wonders." Forgetting came first, and the cowardice and the disobedience followed.

78:12-16 *Before their fathers He did wonders in the land of Egypt, the field of Zoan. He split open **the** sea and brought them through, and He made **the** waters stand like a heap. And He guided them by the cloud by day, and all the night by the light of fire. He split open rocks in the wilderness, and He gave **them** drink as **from** deeps, abundantly. And He brought out streams from a crag, and He made waters flow down like rivers.*

Now Asaph recalls what they forgot. God did wonders in Egypt, "the field of Zoan." Zoan was an ancient city in the Nile delta, in the region where Israel lived in Egypt (Numbers 13:22). "He split open the sea and brought them through," making the waters stand "like a heap" (Exodus 15:8). He guided them by the cloud by day and the fire by night (Exodus 13:21). He split the rocks and gave them water to drink, at Rephidim and again at Kadesh (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11). Every need they had, God met.

78:17-20 *And they added again to sin against Him, rebelling against the Most High in the dry land. And they tested God in their heart by asking food for their appetite. And they spoke against God; they said, "Is God able to arrange a table in the wilderness? Look, He struck a rock, and waters flowed out, and torrents overflowed; is He able also to give bread? Or will He prepare meat for His people?"*

"And they added again to sin against Him." After all that, they kept sinning. "They tested God in their heart by asking food for their appetite." To test God is to demand that He prove Himself on our terms. "Is God able to arrange a table in the wilderness?" They had seen water pour from a rock, and they still asked whether He could feed them.

Their question sounds a lot like ours. God answered yesterday's prayer, and today we wonder whether He can handle today's problem.

78:21-25 *Therefore the LORD heard and was furious, and fire was kindled against Jacob, and also anger went up against Israel, for they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation. And He commanded **the** skies above, and the doors of heaven He opened. And He rained down on them manna to eat, and the grain of heaven He gave to them. **Each** man ate the bread of mighty **ones**; He sent them provision to satiety.*

"Therefore the LORD heard and was furious." The reason is stated plainly: "for they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation." Unbelief was the root sin. Hebrews 3:12 warns believers against the same "evil heart of unbelief."

Yet God fed them anyway. "He commanded the skies above, and the doors of heaven He opened." "He rained down on them manna to eat, and the grain of heaven He gave to them." Manna was the bread God sent each morning in the wilderness for forty years (Exodus 16:14-15, 35). The name comes from the people's question, "What is it?" (Exodus 16:15). They called it "the bread of mighty ones," food fit for angels.

In John 6:31 the crowd quoted this psalm to Jesus, "He gave them bread out of heaven to eat," and asked Him for a sign like it. Jesus answered that Moses had not given them the bread out of heaven, but His Father gives the true bread out of heaven (John 6:32). "I am the bread of life," He said (John 6:35). The manna kept Israel alive for a day. Jesus gives life that lasts forever.

New Testament links: John 6:31 (quoted)

78:26-31 *He made an east wind set out in the heavens, and by His strength He drove the south wind. And He rained down on them meat like the dust, and winged birds like the sand of **the** seas. And He made **them** fall in the midst of his camp, all around his dwellings. And they ate and were satisfied exceedingly, and their desire He brought to them. They were not estranged from their desire; their food **was** still in their mouth, and the anger of God went up against them, and He killed among their robust ones, and the young men of Israel He made bow down.*

They wanted meat, so God sent it. He drove the east and south winds and "rained down on them meat like the dust," birds as many as "the sand of the seas." The account is in Numbers 11:31-34. Quail fell all around the camp, and the people gathered them for two days.

"They were not estranged from their desire; their food was still in their mouth, and the anger of God went up against them." Numbers 11:33 says the meat was still between their teeth when the LORD struck them with a plague. God gave them what they demanded, and it ruined them. There is a hard lesson there. Sometimes the worst thing God can do is give us what we keep insisting on.

78:32-39 *In all this they sinned still, and did not believe in His wonders. And He brought their days to an end in futility, and their years in sudden terror. When He killed them, then they sought Him, and they returned and sought God earnestly. And they remembered that God* ***was*** *their rock, and God Most High their redeemer. And they deceived Him with their mouth, and with their tongue they lied to Him. And their heart was not steadfast with Him, and they were not faithful in His covenant. And He, compassionate, would make atonement for iniquity and not destroy; and many times He turned back His anger and did not stir up all His rage. And He remembered that they* ***were*** *flesh, a wind that goes and does not return.*

"In all this they sinned still." Judgment did not change them for long. When God struck them, "then they sought Him," and they "remembered that God was their rock," their redeemer. But their repentance was only words: "they deceived Him with their mouth," and "their heart was not steadfast with Him."

Then comes one of the most beautiful passages in the psalm. "And He, compassionate, would make atonement for iniquity and not destroy." To make atonement is to cover sin so that the guilty can be forgiven and brought back to God. "Many times He turned back His anger and did not stir up all His rage." Why? "He remembered that they were flesh, a wind that goes and does not return." God knows how frail we are (Psalm 103:14). His patience with Israel is the same patience He shows us. When we are faithless, He remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:13). And the atonement He gave in pictures through Israel's sacrifices He gave in full at the cross.

78:40-43 *How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness* ***and*** *grieved Him in the wasteland! And again they tested God, and they pained the Holy* ***One*** *of Israel. They did not remember His hand, the day when He ransomed them from* ***the*** *adversary, when He set His signs in Egypt, and His portents in the field of Zoan.*

"How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness and grieved Him." God is not a machine. Our sin grieves Him. "They pained the Holy One of Israel." That title, used often by Isaiah, means that the God who is utterly holy, set apart from all sin, has bound Himself to Israel.

The root problem shows up again: "They did not remember His hand." They forgot the day He ransomed them, when He did His signs in Egypt.

78:44-51 *And He turned their canals into blood, and their streams, they could not drink. He sent among them swarms, and they devoured them, and frogs, and they destroyed them. And He gave their produce to the grasshopper, and their toil to the locust. He killed their vines with hail, and their sycamore figs with frost. And He delivered up their cattle to the hail, and their livestock to the flames. He sent on them the burning of His anger, fury and indignation and distress, a band of angels of harm. He leveled a path for His anger; He did not withhold their soul from death, and their life He delivered up to the pestilence. And He struck every firstborn in Egypt, the beginning of* ***their*** *vigor in the tents of Ham.*

Asaph now retells the plagues on Egypt (Exodus 7 to 12). God turned the Nile and its canals into blood, sent swarms of flies and frogs, gave their crops to grasshoppers and locusts, killed their vines and figs with hail and frost and struck their cattle. "A band of angels of harm" were God's

messengers of judgment. At the first Passover Moses called this one "the destroyer" (Exodus 12:23).

Last of all, "He struck every firstborn in Egypt," "in the tents of Ham." Ham was the son of Noah whose descendants included Egypt (Genesis 10:6), so "Ham" became a poetic name for Egypt.

78:52-55 *And He led out His people like sheep, and drove them like a flock in the wilderness. And He guided them in security, and they did not dread; and the sea covered their enemies. And He brought them to the territory of His holiness, the mountain which His right hand had acquired. And He drove out nations before them, and allotted them by a line of inheritance, and made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents.*

"He led out His people like sheep." The God who struck Egypt was a gentle shepherd to Israel. "He guided them in security, and they did not dread; and the sea covered their enemies." He brought them to "the territory of His holiness," the promised land, and drove out the nations before them. He gave each tribe its share, measured out "by a line of inheritance," and settled them in their homes. God kept every promise He made.

78:56-58 *And they tested and rebelled against God Most High, and His testimonies they did not keep. And they turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers; they were turned like a bow of deceit. And they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and with their carved images they made Him jealous.*

And still they turned away. In the land they "acted treacherously like their fathers; they were turned like a bow of deceit." A bow that is warped shoots crooked. You aim it at the target and the arrow goes somewhere else. That was Israel.

"They provoked Him to anger with their high places, and with their carved images they made Him jealous." High places were hilltop shrines where people worshiped idols or worshiped the LORD in ways He had forbidden. God's jealousy is not petty. It is the rightful anger of a husband whose wife has gone after other lovers. He will not share His people with idols.

78:59-64 *God heard and was furious, and He rejected Israel exceedingly. And He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent* ***which*** *He had pitched among mankind. And He gave His strength to captivity, and His splendor into the hand of an adversary. And He delivered up His people to the sword, and against His inheritance He was furious. Fire consumed its young men, and its virgins were not praised. Its priests fell by the sword, and its widows did not weep.*

"God heard and was furious, and He rejected Israel exceedingly. And He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh." The tabernacle was the tent God told Moses to build as His dwelling place among His people (Exodus 25:8-9). After the conquest it was set up at Shiloh, in Ephraim (Joshua 18:1). In the days of Eli the priest, Israel carried the ark of the covenant into battle against the Philistines like a good luck charm. The ark was the gold-covered chest that held the stone tablets of the law and stood in the Most Holy Place, where God said He would meet with His people (Exodus 25:10-22). The Philistines won the battle and captured the ark (1 Samuel 4:10-11).

That is what verse 61 means: "He gave His strength to captivity, and His splendor into the hand of an adversary." When Eli's daughter-in-law heard the news, she named her son Ichabod, saying that the glory had gone from Israel (1 Samuel 4:21). Eli's sons, the priests Hophni and Phinehas, died that day. That is why "Its priests fell by the sword." Phinehas's wife died giving birth, and there was no time for mourning. That is why "its widows did not weep." Centuries later Jeremiah warned Jerusalem to remember what God did to Shiloh (Jeremiah 7:12).

78:65-66 *And the Lord awoke like one asleep, like a warrior overcome by wine. And He struck His adversaries backward; He gave them an everlasting reproach.*

"And the Lord awoke like one asleep, like a warrior overcome by wine." It is a startling picture. God had seemed to sleep while His people suffered. Then He rose like a warrior shouting after wine. Of course God never really sleeps (Psalm 121:4). The picture tells us how it felt to Israel and how suddenly He acted. "He struck His adversaries backward." The Philistines who took the ark were struck with tumors until they sent it back (1 Samuel 5 and 6).

78:67-69 *And He rejected the tent of Joseph, and the tribe of Ephraim He did not choose. And He chose the tribe of Judah, the mountain of Zion, which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like **the** heights, like **the** earth **which** He has founded forever.*

"And He rejected the tent of Joseph, and the tribe of Ephraim He did not choose." Ephraim was a son of Joseph, and the center of worship would no longer be in Ephraim's land at Shiloh. "And He chose the tribe of Judah, the mountain of Zion, which He loved." God moved His dwelling to Jerusalem, where Solomon later built the temple, a sanctuary "like the heights," lasting like the earth itself.

78:70-72 *And He chose David His servant, and took him from the folds of **the** sheep. From after the nursing **ewes** He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. And he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and with the skill of his hands he guided them.*

"And He chose David His servant, and took him from the folds of the sheep." David was the youngest son of Jesse, out tending the sheep, when Samuel came to anoint a king (1 Samuel 16:11-13). God said later, "I took you from the pasture, from after the flock, to be ruler over My people" (2 Samuel 7:8). The boy who followed the nursing ewes became the shepherd of a nation. "He shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and with the skill of his hands he guided them."

The long story of failure ends with grace. Israel did not deserve a good shepherd, but God gave them one. And God did not stop with David. Long after David died, God promised through Ezekiel to raise up "one shepherd," "My servant David" (Ezekiel 34:23). Many see that promise fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of David, who calls Himself the good Shepherd (John 10:11). The whole history of Psalm 78 points to Him, the King who never fails His flock.

Psalm 78 Summary

Psalm 78, a Maskil of Asaph, opens with a call to hear a parable and riddles from of old, the wonders of God that each generation must tell the next so that their children will trust God and not be stubborn and rebellious like their fathers. Asaph tells how Ephraim turned back in battle and how Israel forgot what God did in Egypt and the wilderness: the split sea, the cloud and the fire and water from the rock. They tested God by demanding food, and He sent manna, the grain of heaven, and then quail, but His anger fell on them while the meat was still in their mouths. They sought Him only when He struck them, yet in His compassion He atoned for their iniquity and remembered they were flesh. Asaph retells the plagues on Egypt and how God led His people like sheep into His holy land. There they turned to high places and idols, so God abandoned the tabernacle at Shiloh and let the ark be captured. Then the Lord awoke like a warrior, struck His enemies, rejected the tent of Joseph and chose Judah, Mount Zion and David the shepherd, who shepherded Israel with integrity of heart. Matthew 13:35 says Jesus' parables fulfilled verse 2, and in John 6 Jesus calls Himself the true bread from heaven.

People and Places

- Parable: a saying that sets one thing beside another to teach a lesson.
- Ephraim: a son of Joseph and the largest of the northern tribes; Shiloh was in its land.
- Zoan: an ancient city in the Nile delta of Egypt.
- Manna: the bread God sent from heaven each morning in the wilderness for forty years.
- Atonement: the covering of sin so that the guilty can be forgiven and brought back to God.
- Ham: a son of Noah whose descendants included Egypt; "the tents of Ham" means Egypt.
- High places: hilltop shrines where Israel worshiped idols or worshiped the LORD in ways He had forbidden.
- Tabernacle: the tent God told Moses to build as His dwelling among His people.
- Shiloh: a town in Ephraim where the tabernacle stood from Joshua's day until the time of Eli.
- Ark of the covenant: the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the law and stood in the Most Holy Place.

Psalm 78 Study Questions

1. Why does Asaph say we must tell these things to our children? (78:4-7)

2. What three things should the next generation do, according to verse 7?

3. What wonders did God do for Israel in Egypt and the wilderness? (78:12-16)

4. What question did the people ask that showed their unbelief? (78:19-20)

5. How does Jesus use the manna of verse 24 in John 6:31-35?

6. Why did God hold back His anger many times? (78:38-39)

7. What happened at Shiloh, and why? (78:58-64; 1 Samuel 4)

8. Whom did God choose at the end of the psalm, and what kind of shepherd was he? (78:67-72)

9. Asaph says the root of Israel's sin was forgetting. What helps you remember what God has done?

10. Who in the next generation are you passing your faith to? What is one way you could tell them more of God's story this week?

Psalm 79: Help Us for the Sake of Your Name

Scripture

A psalm of Asaph.

79:1-7 God, ***the*** nations have come into Your inheritance; they have made the temple of Your holiness unclean; they have made Jerusalem into heaps of ruins. They have given the corpses of Your servants ***as*** food to the birds of the heavens, the flesh of Your faithful ones to the living things of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one burying ***them***. We have become a reproach to our neighbors, a mockery and derision to those around us. Until when, LORD? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire? Pour out Your rage on the nations that do not know You, and on ***the*** kingdoms that have not called on Your name. For ***one*** has devoured Jacob, and they have devastated his habitation.

79:8-13 Do not remember against us former iniquities; let Your compassion come quickly to meet us, for we have been brought very low. Help us, God of our salvation, on account of the glory of Your name; and deliver us, and make atonement for our sins for the sake of Your name. Why should the nations say, "Where ***is*** their God?" Let the vengeance of the blood of Your servants which has been poured out be known among the nations before our eyes. Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; according to the greatness of Your arm, leave remaining the sons of death. And repay to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom their reproach with which they have reproached You, Lord. And we, Your people and the sheep of Your pasture, will give thanks to You forever; to generation and generation we will recount Your praise.

Psalm 79 Preview

Psalm 79 comes from the same dark day as Psalm 74. The nations have broken into God's inheritance, defiled His temple and left Jerusalem in heaps of rubble. The bodies of God's people lie in the open for the birds to eat, and there is no one left to bury them. Israel's neighbors laugh.

The writer asks how long God's anger will last, and he asks God to pour out His rage on the nations that destroyed His people. He also confesses Israel's sin and asks God to forgive them, not because they deserve it, but for the sake of His own name. The psalm ends with God's people, the sheep of His pasture, promising to praise Him from generation to generation.

Psalm 79 Study

79:1-4 *God, **the** nations have come into Your inheritance; they have made the temple of Your holiness unclean; they have made Jerusalem into heaps of ruins. They have given the corpses of Your servants **as** food to the birds of the heavens, the flesh of Your faithful ones to the living things of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one burying **them**. We have become a reproach to our neighbors, a mockery and derision to those around us.*

The heading reads, "A psalm of Asaph." For Asaph, and for how a psalm connected with him can describe events long after his day, see Psalm 74. Like Psalm 74, this psalm most likely comes from 586 B.C., when the Babylonians took Jerusalem and burned the temple (2 Kings 25:8-10). The book of Lamentations mourns the same days.

"God, the nations have come into Your inheritance." God's inheritance is His own land and people, the portion He chose for Himself. Pagan armies have walked into it. They "have made the temple of Your holiness unclean" and turned Jerusalem "into heaps of ruins."

The next lines are hard to read. "They have given the corpses of Your servants as food to the birds of the heavens." In the ancient world, being left unburied was the final disgrace. Blood was poured out "like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one burying them." Lamentations 2:21 describes young and old lying in the streets.

"We have become a reproach to our neighbors." The people around them, who should have helped, laughed instead.

The psalm does not look away from the horror, and neither should we. People in many parts of the world still live through days like these. The Bible gives them words to bring it all before God.

79:5-7 *Until when, LORD? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire? Pour out Your rage on the nations that do not know You, and on **the** kingdoms that have not called on Your name. For **one** has devoured Jacob, and they have devastated his habitation.*

"Until when, LORD? Will You be angry forever?" The writer knows this disaster came under God's discipline. "Will Your jealousy burn like fire?" God's jealousy is His holy refusal to share His people with idols (see Psalm 78).

"Pour out Your rage on the nations that do not know You, and on the kingdoms that have not called on Your name." Verse 6 is a prayer for judgment, one of the hard lines in the Psalms (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). It is a prayer, not a plan. The writer has no army left. He gives the matter to God. He asks God to judge those who do not know Him and who "devoured Jacob." Jeremiah prayed almost the same words in Jeremiah 10:25.

Is it wrong to pray this way? The writer is not asking God to do anything unjust. He is asking God to deal with nations that slaughtered the helpless and mocked the LORD. But Jesus has shown us more. He prayed for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), and Stephen did the same as he died (Acts 7:60). We can pray for God's justice and also pray for our enemies to come to know Him.

79:8-9 *Do not remember against us former iniquities; let Your compassion come quickly to meet us, for we have been brought very low. Help us, God of our salvation, on account of the glory of Your name; and deliver us, and make atonement for our sins for the sake of Your name.*

Now the writer turns to his own people's guilt. "Do not remember against us former iniquities." He knows Israel has sinned. He does not claim to be innocent. "Let Your compassion come quickly to meet us, for we have been brought very low."

"Help us, God of our salvation, on account of the glory of Your name." His plea rests on God's honor, not on Israel's goodness. God's name is tied to this people. If they are wiped out, the nations will say He could not save them. "And deliver us, and make atonement for our sins for the sake of Your name." Atonement is the covering of sin so that the guilty can be forgiven (see Psalm 78). Daniel prayed the same way during the exile: "for Your own sake," he said, because God's name was called on His city and His people (Daniel 9:19).

That is the best ground for any prayer. We don't come to God saying we deserve help. We come asking Him to act according to who He is. The gospel rests on that same ground. God forgives us for the sake of His Son, who made atonement once for all.

79:10-12 *Why should the nations say, "Where **is** their God?" Let the vengeance of the blood of Your servants which has been poured out be known among the nations before our eyes. Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; according to the greatness of Your arm, leave remaining the sons of death. And repay to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom their reproach with which they have reproached You, Lord.*

"Why should the nations say, Where is their God?" The mockers think the God of Israel has failed. The writer asks God to show them otherwise: "Let the vengeance of the blood of Your servants which has been poured out be known among the nations before our eyes."

In Revelation 6:10 the souls of those killed for the word of God cry out from under the altar, asking the Master how long until He judges and avenges their blood. The same longing runs from this psalm to the end of the Bible. And Revelation 19:2 tells us that God will one day avenge the blood of His servants. The cry of Psalm 79 will be answered.

"Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You." The writer thinks of the captives being led away to Babylon. "According to the greatness of Your arm, leave remaining the sons of death." The sons of death are those condemned to die. He asks God to keep them alive.

"And repay to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom their reproach." Sevenfold means in full measure. The bosom was the fold in a robe where a person carried things, so to repay into their bosom is to drop the payment right in their lap. The insult they threw at God, let it come back on them. It is another hard line. He leaves the repaying to God, and the reason he gives is God's honor: "with which they have reproached You, Lord."

New Testament links: Revelation 6:10 (alluded to)

79:13 *And we, Your people and the sheep of Your pasture, will give thanks to You forever; to generation and generation we will recount Your praise.*

The psalm ends in hope. "And we, Your people and the sheep of Your pasture, will give thanks to You forever." In all the ruins, they are still His flock, and He is still their Shepherd. "To generation and generation we will recount Your praise." Psalm 78 called on each generation to tell the next. Psalm 79 promises to keep doing it, even after the temple has burned.

Psalm 79 Summary

Psalm 79, a psalm of Asaph, mourns the day the nations invaded God's inheritance, defiled His temple and left Jerusalem in ruins, probably in 586 B.C. The bodies of God's servants were left for the birds and beasts, with no one to bury them, and Israel's neighbors mocked. The writer asks how long God's anger will burn and prays for Him to pour out His rage on the nations that do not know Him. He asks God not to hold former iniquities against His people, but to help them, deliver them and atone for their sins for the sake of His name. He asks God to avenge the blood of His servants before the nations, to hear the groaning of the prisoners and to repay their neighbors sevenfold for their reproach against the Lord. The psalm ends with God's people, the sheep of His pasture, promising to give thanks to Him forever and to tell His praise to every generation.

People and Places

- Inheritance (God's): the land and people God chose as His own portion.
- Sons of death: people condemned to die.

Psalm 79 Study Questions

1. What have the nations done to God's inheritance, His temple and Jerusalem? (79:1)

2. What has happened to the bodies of God's servants? (79:2-3)

3. What two questions does the writer ask in verse 5?

4. On what ground does the writer ask God for help and forgiveness? (79:9)

5. What question do the nations ask, and what does the writer want them to see? (79:10)

6. How does Revelation 6:10 echo the cry of this psalm?

7. Why does the writer ask God to act "for the sake of Your name" rather than because Israel deserved it? How does that shape the way we pray?

8. How can we hold together the prayer of verse 6 and Jesus' prayer for His enemies in Luke 23:34?

9. Where in the world today are believers suffering like the people in this psalm? How could you pray for them this week?

10. Verse 13 ends in thanks, even in the ruins. What would it look like for you to give thanks to God in a season of loss?

Psalm 80: Restore Us, God of Armies

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on "Lilies," a testimony. Of Asaph, a psalm.

80:1-7 Shepherd of Israel, give ear, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who sit ***above*** the cherubim, shine forth! Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your might, and come for salvation for us. God, restore us, and make Your face shine, and let us be saved. LORD God of armies, until when have You smoked ***with anger*** against the prayer of Your people? You have fed them the bread of tears, and You have made them drink tears ***by*** the third ***measure***. You make us a contention to our neighbors, and our enemies mock among themselves. God of armies, restore us, and make Your face shine, and let us be saved.

80:8-13 You uprooted a vine from Egypt; You drove out nations and planted it. You cleared ***the ground*** before it, and it made its roots take root, and it filled the land. ***The*** mountains were covered ***with*** its shade, and its branches ***were like*** the cedars of God. It stretched out its branches to ***the*** sea, and its young shoots to ***the*** River. Why have You broken down its walls, so that all who pass by on the road pluck it? The boar from the forest eats it away, and the moving creatures of the field graze on it.

80:14-19 God of armies, return, please; look from heaven and see, and attend to this vine, and the root which Your right hand planted, and ***look*** on the son ***whom*** You made strong for Yourself. ***It is*** burned with fire; ***it is*** cut down; they perish from the rebuke of Your face. Let Your hand be on the man of Your right hand, on the son of mankind ***whom*** You made strong for Yourself. And we will not turn back from You; give us life, and we will call on Your name. LORD God of armies, restore us; make Your face shine, and let us be saved.

Psalm 80 Preview

Psalm 80 is a prayer for a nation that has been torn apart. The writer calls on God as the Shepherd of Israel, the King who sits above the cherubim, and asks Him to shine forth and save. Three times a refrain rings out, a little stronger each time: "restore us, and make Your face shine, and let us be saved."

In the middle of the psalm Israel is pictured as a vine. God brought it out of Egypt, cleared the ground, planted it, and it grew until it covered the mountains and reached from the sea to the River. Now its walls are broken down, wild boars trample it and it has been cut down and burned. The writer asks God to come back and look after His vine, to put His hand on the man at His right hand, and to give His people life again.

Psalm 80 Study

80:1-3 *Shepherd of Israel, give ear, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who sit **above** the cherubim, shine forth! Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your might, and come for salvation for us. God, restore us, and make Your face shine, and let us be saved.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster," set "on" Lilies, and it calls the psalm "a testimony" and "Of Asaph, a psalm." For the choirmaster see Psalm 75, and for Asaph see Psalm 74. Lilies appears in the headings of Psalms 45 and 69 too, and Psalm 60 has "The Lily of Testimony." Most think it was the name of a tune. A testimony is a solemn witness, and here it may mean the psalm bears witness to God's covenant. In both cases the meaning is uncertain.

The tribes named in verses 1 and 2, Joseph, Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh, point to the northern part of the nation. Many connect the psalm with the years when Assyria crushed the northern kingdom of Israel and carried its people away, about 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6). The heading doesn't say, and the prayer fits any time God's people were broken.

"Shepherd of Israel, give ear, You who lead Joseph like a flock." Jacob called God his Shepherd (Genesis 48:15), and the people of Joseph's line were part of God's flock. "You who sit above the cherubim, shine forth!" Cherubim are angelic beings who guard the holiness of God. On the lid of the ark of the covenant (see Psalm 78) were two gold cherubim with their wings spread out, and God said He would meet His people from between them (Exodus 25:20-22). So "You who sit above the cherubim" means the King enthroned in His holy place.

"Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your might." In the wilderness, these three tribes camped on the west side of the tabernacle and marched right behind the ark (Numbers 2:18-24). The writer asks God to go before them again.

Then comes the refrain: "God, restore us, and make Your face shine, and let us be saved." To restore is to bring back, to turn a person or a people around. "Make Your face shine" comes from the blessing the priests spoke over Israel: "may the LORD make His face shine toward you" (Numbers 6:25). When God's face shines on us, we have His favor. When He hides it, everything goes dark.

80:4-7 *LORD God of armies, until when have You smoked **with anger** against the prayer of Your people? You have fed them the bread of tears, and You have made them drink tears **by** the third **measure**. You make us a contention to our neighbors, and our enemies mock among themselves. God of armies, restore us, and make Your face shine, and let us be saved.*

"LORD God of armies." The refrain grows here with a fuller name. Many English Bibles say the LORD of hosts. A host is an army, a great company under one command, so the LORD of armies is God as the commander of all the armies there are: the angels of heaven, the armies of Israel and even the stars, which He leads out like an army and calls by name (Isaiah 40:26). We meet the name here for the first time in this volume, and later chapters point back here.

"Until when have You smoked with anger against the prayer of Your people?" They pray, and it feels like their prayers bounce off a cloud of smoke. "You have fed them the bread of tears." Tears

are their food and drink, and they get them "by the third measure," in large amounts. Their neighbors fight over them, and their enemies laugh.

And again the refrain, now stronger: "God of armies, restore us, and make Your face shine, and let us be saved." If God commands the armies of heaven, He can certainly save a broken people.

80:8-11 *You uprooted a vine from Egypt; You drove out nations and planted it. You cleared **the ground** before it, and it made its roots take root, and it filled the land. **The** mountains were covered **with** its shade, and its branches **were like** the cedars of God. It stretched out its branches to **the** sea, and its young shoots to **the** River.*

Now the picture of the vine. "You uprooted a vine from Egypt." God took Israel out of slavery the way a gardener digs up a young plant. "You drove out nations and planted it." He cleared the ground in Canaan, and the vine "filled the land."

It grew huge. Its shade covered the mountains. Its branches were "like the cedars of God," the tallest trees anyone knew. "It stretched out its branches to the sea, and its young shoots to the River." The sea is the Mediterranean on the west, and the River is the Euphrates far to the northeast. In Solomon's day Israel's rule reached that far (1 Kings 4:21).

The prophets used the same picture. Isaiah sang of God's vineyard and said, "the vineyard of the LORD of armies is the house of Israel" (Isaiah 5:7). God planted it with care and looked for good fruit.

80:12-13 *Why have You broken down its walls, so that all who pass by on the road pluck it? The boar from the forest eats it away, and the moving creatures of the field graze on it.*

"Why have You broken down its walls, so that all who pass by on the road pluck it?" A vineyard had stone walls or hedges to keep out thieves and animals. Now the walls are down. Anyone can walk in and take what they want. "The boar from the forest eats it away," tearing up the roots. The wild boar is a picture of the invading armies.

The writer does not blame the boar alone. He asks God why He broke down the wall. He knows that nothing happens to God's vine without God allowing it.

80:14-16 *God of armies, return, please; look from heaven and see, and attend to this vine, and the root which Your right hand planted, and **look** on the son **whom** You made strong for Yourself. **It is** burned with fire; **it is** cut down; they perish from the rebuke of Your face.*

"God of armies, return, please; look from heaven and see, and attend to this vine." He begs the Gardener to come back. "The root which Your right hand planted" is still there, even if the branches have been burned. "Look on the son whom You made strong for Yourself." Here the vine is also called a son. God called Israel His son when He brought them out of Egypt (Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1).

"It is burned with fire; it is cut down." The destruction has come "from the rebuke of Your face." The face that could shine on them in blessing has turned on them in rebuke.

80:17-19 *Let Your hand be on the man of Your right hand, on the son of mankind **whom** You made strong for Yourself. And we will not turn back from You; give us life, and we will call on Your name. LORD God of armies, restore us; make Your face shine, and let us be saved.*

"Let Your hand be on the man of Your right hand, on the son of mankind whom You made strong for Yourself." Who is this man? The right hand was the place of honor and power beside a king. The man may be Israel's king, God's chosen ruler, or the nation itself pictured as one man. The phrase "son of mankind" echoes the "son" of verse 15.

Many see a further meaning here. Jesus called Himself the Son of Man, and He said He would be seen "sitting at the right hand of the Power" (Mark 14:62). He also called Himself "the true vine" (John 15:1), the One in whom God's people bear fruit. Where Israel the vine failed, Jesus the true Vine did not. The New Testament does not quote this psalm about Him, so this is a picture many see, not a direct prophecy. But God's answer to the prayer of verse 17 came in the Man at His right hand.

"And we will not turn back from You; give us life, and we will call on Your name." They promise faithfulness, but they know they need life from God first.

The final refrain uses the fullest name of all: "LORD God of armies, restore us; make Your face shine, and let us be saved." The prayer has grown from "God," to "God of armies," to "LORD God of armies." The more they pray, the bigger their view of God becomes. I believe God has not finished with Israel. Paul says that a day is coming when all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26). The vine will be restored.

Psalm 80 Summary

Psalm 80, a psalm of Asaph, cries out to the Shepherd of Israel who sits above the cherubim, asking Him to shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh and save His people. Three times the refrain asks God to restore them, make His face shine and save them, each time with a fuller name: God, God of armies and LORD God of armies. God has fed His people the bread of tears and made them a laughingstock. Israel is pictured as a vine God brought out of Egypt and planted in the land, until it filled the land from the sea to the River. Now its walls are broken down, the wild boar ravages it and it has been burned and cut down. The writer begs God to return, to tend His vine, to put His hand on the man of His right hand and to give His people life, promising that they will not turn back from Him.

People and Places

- Lilies: a word in some psalm headings, probably the name of a tune; the meaning is uncertain.
- Cherubim: angelic beings who guard God's holiness; two gold cherubim spread their wings over the lid of the ark.
- Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh: Joseph was a son of Jacob, and his sons Ephraim and Manasseh became two of the tribes of Israel; with Benjamin they stand here for the northern tribes.

- LORD of armies: a name for God as commander of all the armies of heaven and earth; many English Bibles say LORD of hosts.
- The River: the Euphrates.

Psalm 80 Study Questions

1. What two titles for God does the writer use in verse 1?

2. What is the refrain of this psalm, and how does God's name grow each time it is repeated? (80:3, 7, 19)

3. Where does the phrase "make Your face shine" come from, and what does it mean?

4. What has God fed His people, according to verse 5?

5. How does the writer describe the vine's beginning and its growth? (80:8-11)

6. What has happened to the vine now? (80:12-16)

7. Who might "the man of Your right hand" be, and why do many believers think of Jesus here? (80:17; Mark 14:62; John 15:1)

8. Why do you think the writer asks God "Why have You broken down its walls" instead of only blaming the enemy?

9. Jesus calls Himself the true vine. What does it mean for you to remain in Him and bear fruit?

10. Is there a part of your life, your family or your church that feels like a broken-down vineyard? Pray the refrain of this psalm over it this week.

Psalm 81: If Only My People Would Listen

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on the Gittith. Of Asaph.

81:1-7 Sing for joy to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob. Lift up music, and sound a tambourine, a pleasant lyre with a harp. Blow a ram's horn at the new moon, at the full moon, for the day of our festival. For it ***is*** a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob. He set it ***as*** a testimony in Joseph when He went out over the land of Egypt. I heard a language I did not know: "I removed his shoulder from the burden; his hands passed away from the basket. In the distress you called, and I rescued you; I answered you in the hiding place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

81:8-16 Hear, My people, and let Me testify against you; Israel, if you would listen to Me! There shall not be a strange god among you, and you shall not bow down to a foreign god. I ***am*** the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. And My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel was not willing toward Me. And I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart; they walked in their own counsels. If only My people were listening to Me, ***if*** Israel would walk in My ways! In a little ***while*** I would subdue their enemies, and against their adversaries I would turn My hand. Those who hate the LORD would cringe before Him, and their time would be forever. And He would feed him from the fat of the wheat, and from ***the*** rock I would satisfy you ***with*** honey."

Psalm 81 Preview

Psalm 81 begins like a party. The people are called to sing for joy, strike the tambourine, play the harp and blow the ram's horn, because it is festival time. God commanded this feast to remind Israel of the day He brought them out of Egypt.

Then the music stops and God speaks. He reminds them that He lifted the burden off their shoulders, answered them from the thunder at Sinai and tested them at Meribah. He gives them the heart of His law: no other gods. And then He grieves. His people would not listen, so He let them go their own way. "If only My people were listening to Me." He longed to defeat their enemies and feed them with the finest wheat and honey from the rock. Worship that sings without listening misses the point, and this psalm calls us to do both.

Psalm 81 Study

81:1-3 *Sing for joy to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob. Lift up music, and sound a tambourine, a pleasant lyre with a harp. Blow a ram's horn at the new moon, at the full moon, for the day of our festival.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on the Gittith. Of Asaph." For the choirmaster see Psalm 75, and for Asaph see Psalm 74. The Gittith appears in the headings of Psalms 8 and 84 too. The

meaning is uncertain. It may be an instrument or a tune connected with the city of Gath, or it may come from the Hebrew word for a winepress, which would suit a song for a harvest festival.

"Sing for joy to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob." Worship in Israel was loud and glad. "Lift up music, and sound a tambourine, a pleasant lyre with a harp." All the instruments join in.

"Blow a ram's horn at the new moon, at the full moon, for the day of our festival." The ram's horn, called the shofar, was blown to call the people together for worship or for war. Israel's months began with the new moon, and the trumpets were blown at the beginning of every month (Numbers 10:10). The seventh month was special. It began with a day of trumpet blasts (Leviticus 23:24), and on the fifteenth day, at the full moon, came the Festival of Booths, also called Tabernacles, when Israel lived in shelters for a week to remember the wilderness (Leviticus 23:34, 42-43). Many think this psalm was sung at that festival.

81:4-5 *For it **is** a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob. He set it **as** a testimony in Joseph when He went out over the land of Egypt. I heard a language I did not know:*

"For it is a statute for Israel." The feast was not a human idea. God commanded it as "a testimony in Joseph when He went out over the land of Egypt." Joseph here stands for the whole people (see Psalm 80).

"I heard a language I did not know." This line is hard to place. It may mean that in Egypt Israel heard a foreign language they did not understand. Or the singer may be saying that he now hears a voice he does not know, the voice of God, whose words follow in verse 6. Either way, the psalm turns right away to God speaking.

81:6-7 *"I removed his shoulder from the burden; his hands passed away from the basket. In the distress you called, and I rescued you; I answered you in the hiding place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah.*

Now God speaks for the rest of the psalm. "I removed his shoulder from the burden; his hands passed away from the basket." In Egypt the Israelites hauled clay and bricks in baskets under hard masters (Exodus 1:14). God took the load off their backs.

"In the distress you called, and I rescued you." Israel groaned and cried out, and God heard (Exodus 2:23-24). "I answered you in the hiding place of thunder." That is Sinai, where God spoke out of thunder, lightning and a thick cloud (Exodus 19:16). "I tested you at the waters of Meribah." Meribah means "quarreling." There the people argued with Moses and tested God, asking whether the LORD was among them or not (Exodus 17:7). God saved them, spoke to them and tested them, and they failed the test. Selah (see Psalm 75).

81:8-10 *Hear, My people, and let Me testify against you; Israel, if you would listen to Me! There shall not be a strange god among you, and you shall not bow down to a foreign god. I **am** the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.*

"Hear, My people, and let Me testify against you; Israel, if you would listen to Me!" The word "hear" is the same word that begins the great command in Deuteronomy 6:4. Everything depended on listening.

"There shall not be a strange god among you." It is the first of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3). "I am the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." God always gives the reason before the command. He saved them first. Then He called them to be loyal. The gospel works the same way. God does not tell us to obey first so that He will save us. He saves us by grace, and then He calls us to follow Him.

"Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." What a promise. Like a baby bird with its beak open, they only had to look to God and receive. He was ready to give them everything they needed.

81:11-12 *And My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel was not willing toward Me. And I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart; they walked in their own counsels.*

"And My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel was not willing toward Me." These may be the saddest words in the psalm. God offered, and they refused.

"And I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart; they walked in their own counsels." When people keep refusing God, one of the most serious things He can do is let them have their way. Paul describes the same thing in Romans 1:24, where God "gave them up" to the desires of their hearts. It is not that God stopped caring. It is that He stopped holding them back.

81:13-16 *If only My people were listening to Me, **if** Israel would walk in My ways! In a little **while** I would subdue their enemies, and against their adversaries I would turn My hand. Those who hate the LORD would cringe before Him, and their time would be forever. And He would feed him from the fat of the wheat, and from **the** rock I would satisfy you **with** honey."*

And yet God's heart still reaches out. "If only My people were listening to Me, if Israel would walk in My ways!" We can hear the longing. Jesus wept over Jerusalem with the same longing: how often He wanted to gather her children like a hen gathers her chicks, "and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37).

"In a little while I would subdue their enemies." The victories they wanted were close, if only they had listened. "Those who hate the LORD would cringe before Him."

"And He would feed him from the fat of the wheat, and from the rock I would satisfy you with honey." The fat of the wheat means the very best grain. Honey from the rock recalls Moses' song, where God fed His people honey from the crag (Deuteronomy 32:13). The God who brought water from the rock would have brought sweetness from it too.

What is God offering us that we miss because we are not listening? Psalm 81 calls us to sing, and it calls us to listen. Both belong in worship. If we only sing and never listen, our worship becomes noise. If we listen and obey, God promises to fill our open mouths with good things.

Psalm 81 Summary

Psalm 81, a psalm of Asaph, calls God's people to sing for joy, play their instruments and blow the ram's horn at the new moon and full moon, because God commanded this festival as a testimony when He went out over Egypt. Then God speaks. He lifted the burden from Israel's shoulders, rescued them when they called, answered them from the thunder at Sinai and tested them at Meribah. He calls them to listen, to have no strange god among them, and to open their mouths wide so that He can fill them. But His people did not listen, so He gave them over to their stubborn hearts. God longs for His people to listen and walk in His ways, for then He would quickly subdue their enemies and feed them with the finest wheat and with honey from the rock.

People and Places

- Gittith: a word in some psalm headings, perhaps an instrument or tune from Gath, or a winepress song; the meaning is uncertain.
- Ram's horn (shofar): a horn blown to call Israel to worship, to feasts or to war.
- New moon: the start of each month in Israel's calendar, marked by trumpets and offerings.
- Festival of Booths (Tabernacles): the autumn feast when Israel lived in shelters for a week to remember the wilderness years.
- Meribah: a place in the wilderness whose name means "quarreling," where Israel tested God (Exodus 17:7).

Psalm 81 Study Questions

1. What instruments are named in verses 2 and 3, and when was the ram's horn to be blown?

2. Why did God command this festival? (81:4-5)

3. What three things did God do for Israel, according to verses 6 and 7?

4. What happened at Meribah? (81:7; Exodus 17:7)

5. Which of the Ten Commandments does verse 9 repeat, and what reason does God give in verse 10?

6. What did God do when His people would not listen? (81:11-12) How does Romans 1:24 describe the same thing?

7. What would God have done for Israel if they had listened? (81:14-16)

8. Why does God give the reason (He saved them) before the command? What does that teach us about grace?

9. What does it mean for you to "Open your mouth wide" before God? (81:10)

10. When you worship, do you spend more time singing or listening? What could help you listen to God more?

Psalm 82: God Judges the Judges

Scripture

A psalm of Asaph.

82:1-8 God takes His stand in the congregation of God; in the midst of the gods He judges. Until when will you judge ***with*** injustice and lift up the face of ***the*** wicked? Selah. Judge ***for the*** poor and ***the*** fatherless; do justice to ***the*** afflicted and ***the*** destitute. Rescue ***the*** poor and ***the*** needy; deliver ***them*** from the hand of ***the*** wicked. They do not know, and they do not understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of ***the*** earth are shaken. I, I said, "You ***are*** gods, and sons of the Most High, all of you. Nevertheless, like mankind you will die, and like one of the princes you will fall." Arise, God, judge the earth, for You will inherit among all the nations.

Psalm 82 Preview

Psalm 82 is a courtroom scene. God takes His stand in the assembly and puts the judges themselves on trial. They have judged unjustly and taken the side of the wicked. God tells them what their job was: to defend the poor, the fatherless, the afflicted and the needy. Instead they walk in darkness, and the very foundations of the earth are shaken.

God had given them a high calling. He called them "gods," sons of the Most High. But they will die like any other man. The psalm ends with a prayer for God Himself to rise up and judge the earth, because all the nations belong to Him. Jesus quoted verse 6 of this psalm when He was accused of making Himself God (John 10:34).

Psalm 82 Study

82:1 *God takes His stand in the congregation of God; in the midst of the gods He judges.*

The heading reads, "A psalm of Asaph." For Asaph see Psalm 74.

"God takes His stand in the congregation of God; in the midst of the gods He judges." Who are these "gods"? Bible teachers give two main answers.

Many understand them as human judges and rulers. In Israel, judges stood in God's place when they decided cases, and their judgment was really God's judgment (Deuteronomy 1:17; 2 Chronicles 19:6). In a few places the Hebrew word elohim, usually "God," seems to refer to judges acting for God (Exodus 22:8, where many English Bibles say "the judges"). When Jesus quoted verse 6, He explained that God called them gods because "the word of God came" to them (John 10:35). That fits human leaders who received God's law and were to judge by it. And verse 7 says they will die like men.

Others understand the "gods" as spiritual powers, angels or fallen angels whom God allowed some rule over the nations (compare Deuteronomy 32:8 and Daniel 10:13, 20), who now stand before God's heavenly court to be judged.

Those who hold the first view point to the way Jesus used the verse and to the charges in verses 2 to 4, which describe the work of human judges. Those who hold the second point to passages like Deuteronomy 32:8 and Daniel 10. Either way, the point is the same. There is a Judge above every judge, and He sees how power is used.

82:2-4 *Until when will you judge **with** injustice and lift up the face of **the** wicked? Selah. Judge **for the** poor and **the** fatherless; do justice to **the** afflicted and **the** destitute. Rescue **the** poor and **the** needy; deliver **them** from the hand of **the** wicked.*

"Until when will you judge with injustice and lift up the face of the wicked?" To lift up the face of someone was to show him favor, to take his side because of who he is or what he can pay. These judges were bought. Selah (see Psalm 75).

Then God gives them their job description. "Judge for the poor and the fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the poor and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." God's concern for the powerless runs through the whole Bible. Widows, orphans, the poor and the foreigner had no one to speak for them, so God made Himself their defender and told Israel's leaders to do the same (Deuteronomy 10:18).

This still matters. Anyone with power over others, a judge, a police officer, a boss, a pastor or a parent, answers to God for how they treat the weak. Proverbs 31:8 says to open your mouth for the mute.

82:5 *They do not know, and they do not understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of **the** earth are shaken.*

"They do not know, and they do not understand; they walk about in darkness." Unjust rulers are blind to what is right, and they don't want to see. "All the foundations of the earth are shaken." When justice fails, society starts to crack, because God's own throne rests on righteousness and justice (Psalm 89:14).

82:6-7 *I, I said, "You **are** gods, and sons of the Most High, all of you. Nevertheless, like mankind you will die, and like one of the princes you will fall."*

"I, I said, You are gods, and sons of the Most High, all of you." God gave these judges a title of honor. They stood in His place. They carried His authority. "Sons of the Most High" means they were to reflect their Father's character. The Most High is God above all (see Psalm 77).

"Nevertheless, like mankind you will die, and like one of the princes you will fall." Their high position will not save them. They will die like any other human being, and like any ruler who has ever fallen.

Jesus quoted verse 6 in John 10. The Jewish leaders wanted to stone Him because, being a man, He made Himself God (John 10:33). Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law," and quoted this verse (John 10:34). Then He reasoned from the smaller to the greater. If God called human judges "gods," people to whom His word came, and the Scripture cannot be broken, how could they accuse Him of blasphemy for calling Himself the Son of God, when the Father had set Him apart

and sent Him into the world (John 10:35-36)? Jesus was not saying that He was a god only in the way those judges were. He went on to say that the Father is in Him and He is in the Father (John 10:38). He was showing that their charge did not stand even by their own Scriptures.

Two other things follow from Jesus' words. He called the Psalms "your law," which shows that He treated the whole Old Testament as God's authority. And He said "the Scripture is not able to be broken." Every word holds.

This verse also does not teach that people can become gods. The point of verse 7 is the opposite. These "gods" die.

New Testament links: John 10:34 (quoted); John 10:35 (alluded to)

82:8 *Arise, God, judge the earth, for You will inherit among all the nations.*

"Arise, God, judge the earth, for You will inherit among all the nations." The writer has seen what corrupt rulers do. So he asks the true Judge to rise up and do what they would not. All the nations belong to God, and one day He will take possession of them.

That prayer will be answered when Christ returns to reign. Isaiah says the Messiah will judge the poor with righteousness and decide with uprightness for the humble of the earth (Isaiah 11:4). Revelation 11:15 looks ahead to the day when the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. Until then, we pray for those in authority, we stand up for the weak where we can, and we trust that every unjust judge will one day stand before the just One.

Psalm 82 Summary

In Psalm 82, a psalm of Asaph, God takes His stand in His assembly and judges the "gods," the rulers and judges He had placed over His people. He asks how long they will judge unjustly and favor the wicked, and He commands them to defend the poor, the fatherless, the afflicted and the needy and to rescue them from the wicked. Instead they walk in darkness, and the foundations of the earth are shaken. God had called them gods and sons of the Most High, but they will die like men and fall like any prince. The psalm ends with a prayer for God to arise and judge the earth, for all the nations are His inheritance. Jesus quoted verse 6 in John 10:34 to answer those who accused Him of blasphemy for calling Himself the Son of God.

People and Places

- Gods (in 82:1 and 82:6): read by many as the judges and rulers who stood in God's place to judge; others read them as spiritual powers in God's heavenly court.
- Lift up the face: to show favor to someone, to take his side unfairly.

Psalm 82 Study Questions

1. Where does God take His stand, and what does He do there? (82:1)

2. What are the judges doing wrong? (82:2)

3. Whom does God tell the judges to defend? (82:3-4)

4. What happens to the earth when justice fails? (82:5)

5. What did God call the judges, and what will happen to them anyway? (82:6-7)

6. How did Jesus use verse 6 in John 10:33-36? What was His point?

7. What does Jesus' statement that "the Scripture is not able to be broken" teach us about the Bible? (John 10:35)

8. Who are the poor, the fatherless and the needy in your town? What could you do to stand up for one of them?

9. Do you have authority over anyone, at work, at church or at home? How does this psalm speak to the way you use it?

10. How does it help you to pray "Arise, God, judge the earth" when you see injustice? (82:8)

Psalm 83: Do Not Be Silent, God

Scripture

A song, a psalm of Asaph.

83:1-8 God, let ***there*** be no silence for You; do not be silent, and do not be still, God. For look, Your enemies are in an uproar, and those who hate You have lifted up ***the*** head. Against Your people they make crafty counsel, and they consult together against Your treasured ones. They have said, "Come, and let us wipe them out from ***being*** a nation, and the name of Israel will not be remembered anymore." For they have consulted together ***with one*** heart; against You they make a covenant: the tents of Edom and ***the*** Ishmaelites, Moab and ***the*** Hagrites, Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre. Assyria also has joined with them; they have become an arm for the sons of Lot. Selah.

83:9-18 Do to them as ***to*** Midian, as ***to*** Sisera, as ***to*** Jabin at the wadi of Kishon, ***who*** were destroyed at En-dor; they became dung for the ground. Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb, and like Zebah and like Zalmunna all their princes, who said, "Let us take possession for ourselves ***of*** the pastures of God." My God, make them like the whirling dust, like chaff before a wind. Like fire ***that*** burns a forest, and like a flame ***that*** sets ***the*** mountains ablaze, so pursue them with Your tempest, and terrify them with Your storm wind. Fill their faces ***with*** dishonor, and let them seek Your name, LORD. Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever and ever, and let them be abashed and perish, and let them know that You, whose name ***is*** the LORD, You alone, ***are*** the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 83 Preview

Psalm 83 is the last of the psalms of Asaph, and it is a cry for help against a whole ring of enemy nations. They have made a covenant with one another to wipe Israel off the map so that its name will never be remembered. The writer lists them one by one, from Edom and Moab to Philistia, Tyre and even far-off Assyria.

He asks God not to stay silent. He reminds God of the great victories in the days of the judges, when Midian and Sisera fell, and he asks God to do it again: to blow the enemy away like chaff, to chase them with His storm and to cover their faces with shame. It is one of the psalms of judgment. But it ends with an aim higher than revenge, that the nations would seek God's name and know that the LORD alone is the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 83 Study

83:1-4 *God, let **there** be no silence for You; do not be silent, and do not be still, God. For look, Your enemies are in an uproar, and those who hate You have lifted up **the** head. Against Your people they make crafty counsel, and they consult together against Your treasured ones. They have said, "Come, and let us wipe them out from **being** a nation, and the name of Israel will not be remembered anymore."*

The heading reads, "A song, a psalm of Asaph." For Asaph see Psalm 74. The psalm does not tell us when the nations joined against Israel. Many connect it with the days of King Jehoshaphat, when Moab, Ammon and the people of Mount Seir (Edom) came against Judah, and a Levite "of the sons of Asaph" spoke God's word to the people (2 Chronicles 20:1, 14). But the list here is longer, and no single event in the Old Testament names all these nations together.

"God, let there be no silence for You; do not be silent, and do not be still, God." The writer asks God three times not to sit still while His people are in danger.

"For look, Your enemies are in an uproar, and those who hate You have lifted up the head." He calls them God's enemies first, not Israel's. To attack God's people is to attack Him. "Against Your people they make crafty counsel, and they consult together against Your treasured ones." God's people are His treasure.

Then we hear their plan: "Come, and let us wipe them out from being a nation, and the name of Israel will not be remembered anymore." The goal is not just to win a war. It is to erase a people. Sadly, people have said the same about the Jewish people in many generations since. But God promised through Jeremiah that Israel would not cease from being a nation before Him, as surely as the sun, moon and stars keep their courses (Jeremiah 31:35-36). I believe God still has a future for Israel, and no alliance of nations will undo His promise.

83:5-8 *For they have consulted together **with one** heart; against You they make a covenant: the tents of Edom and **the** Ishmaelites, Moab and **the** Hagrites, Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre. Assyria also has joined with them; they have become an arm for the sons of Lot. Selah.*

"For they have consulted together with one heart; against You they make a covenant." The nations are united in only one thing: hatred of God and His people.

Then the list. Edom came from Esau, Jacob's brother, and lived to the southeast. The Ishmaelites came from Abraham's son Ishmael and roamed the desert. Moab and Ammon, east of the Jordan, came from Lot (Genesis 19:37-38), so they are called "the sons of Lot." The Hagrites were a desert people east of the Jordan (1 Chronicles 5:10). Gebal may be the old port city on the coast north of Tyre, or a region near Edom. Amalek was the desert raider that had attacked Israel first, right after the exodus (Exodus 17:8). Philistia lay on the coast to the southwest and Tyre on the coast to the north. "Assyria also has joined with them," lending its strength from far to the northeast.

Put them on a map and they surround Israel on every side. To the people of God, it looked hopeless. Selah (see Psalm 75).

83:9-12 *Do to them as **to** Midian, as **to** Sisera, as **to** Jabin at the wadi of Kishon, **who** were destroyed at En-dor; they became dung for the ground. Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb, and like Zebah and like Zalmunna all their princes, who said, "Let us take possession for ourselves **of** the pastures of God."*

Now the writer remembers. "Do to them as to Midian." In Gideon's day the Midianites swarmed over Israel like locusts, and God used Gideon's three hundred men to rout them (Judges 7). "As to Sisera, as to Jabin at the wadi of Kishon." Sisera was the commander of Jabin, a Canaanite king, with nine hundred iron chariots. God sent a storm, and the Kishon river swept them away (Judges 4:13; 5:21). They were "destroyed at En-dor," a town near that battlefield (Joshua 17:11), and "became dung for the ground," left unburied on the field.

"Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb, and like Zebah and like Zalmunna." Oreb and Zeeb were Midianite commanders, and Zebah and Zalmunna were Midianite kings. All four were killed in Gideon's war (Judges 7:25; 8:21). They had said, "Let us take possession for ourselves of the pastures of God." The land is God's, and they wanted to steal it.

The writer's prayer rests on history. God had done it before against impossible odds. He could do it again.

83:13-15 *My God, make them like the whirling dust, like chaff before a wind. Like fire **that** burns a forest, and like a flame **that** sets **the** mountains ablaze, so pursue them with Your tempest, and terrify them with Your storm wind.*

"My God, make them like the whirling dust, like chaff before a wind." Tumbleweeds and chaff go wherever the wind takes them. "Like fire that burns a forest, and like a flame that sets the mountains ablaze." A forest fire cannot be stopped by people. "So pursue them with Your tempest, and terrify them with Your storm wind." He asks God to drive the enemy away with the forces of nature, as He did at the Kishon.

These are hard words, a prayer for God's judgment on people who planned to wipe out a nation. The writer does not pick up a sword himself. He gives the battle to God, as Paul tells us to leave room for God's wrath (Romans 12:19). Bible teachers call this an imprecatory psalm, a prayer that calls down God's judgment on the wicked (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

83:16-18 *Fill their faces **with** dishonor, and let them seek Your name, LORD. Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever and ever, and let them be abashed and perish, and let them know that You, whose name **is** the LORD, You alone, **are** the Most High over all the earth.*

Then comes a surprising line. "Fill their faces with dishonor, and let them seek Your name, LORD." The shame he asks for has a purpose. He wants the enemy humbled so that they will turn and look for God. That is not hatred. It is a hope that even these enemies might come to know the LORD.

"Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever and ever, and let them be abashed and perish." If they will not turn, then let them fall. The writer wants evil stopped.

"And let them know that You, whose name is the LORD, You alone, are the Most High over all the earth." That is the goal of the whole psalm. The writer cares most about God's name being known everywhere, not about Israel getting even. The nations thought they could erase Israel's name. He prays that they will learn God's name instead.

We pray this way too when we ask God to stop violence and evil so that people will turn to Him. And Jesus calls us to go further and "love your enemies" and "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you" (Matthew 5:44). God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). We can pray for justice and pray for our enemies to be saved, both in the same prayer. Psalm 83:16 already does.

Psalm 83 Summary

Psalm 83, the last psalm of Asaph, asks God not to be silent while His enemies rage and plot against His treasured people. The nations have made a covenant together to wipe Israel out so that its name is remembered no more: Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, Tyre and Assyria. The writer asks God to do to them as He did to Midian, to Sisera and Jabin at the Kishon and to the Midianite leaders Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna, who wanted to take God's pastures. He prays that God will scatter them like dust and chaff and pursue them with His storm. He asks God to fill their faces with shame so that they may seek His name, and to let them know that the LORD alone is the Most High over all the earth.

People and Places

- Edom: the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, living southeast of Israel.
- Ishmaelites: desert tribes descended from Abraham's son Ishmael.
- Moab and Ammon: peoples east of the Jordan descended from Lot, called "the sons of Lot."
- Hagrites: a desert people east of the Jordan (1 Chronicles 5:10).
- Gebal: probably the old port city on the coast north of Tyre, or a region near Edom.
- Amalek: desert raiders who attacked Israel right after the exodus (Exodus 17:8).
- Philistia and Tyre: lands on the Mediterranean coast, southwest and north of Israel.
- Midian: a desert people defeated by Gideon (Judges 7 and 8); Oreb and Zeeb were their commanders, Zebah and Zalmunna their kings.
- Sisera and Jabin: a Canaanite commander and king defeated at the Kishon river in the days of Deborah (Judges 4 and 5).
- Imprecatory psalm: a psalm that calls down God's judgment on the wicked.

When trouble surrounds me, I remember my deliverance from alcohol. May 29, 2020, is the day I stopped drinking, after losing that battle on my own strength for years. God did what I could not. Remembering what He has already done is the best fuel for trusting Him now.

Psalm 83 Study Questions

1. What do the enemies plan to do to Israel? (83:4)

2. Whose enemies does the writer call them first? (83:2) Why does that matter?

3. Name some of the nations in the alliance. Where were they in relation to Israel? (83:6-8)

4. What earlier victories does the writer ask God to repeat? (83:9-12; Judges 4 to 8)

5. What pictures from nature does he use in verses 13 to 15?

6. What purpose does verse 16 give for the enemies' shame?

7. What does the writer most want the nations to know? (83:18)

8. Why do you think people in many generations have tried to wipe out the name of Israel? What does God promise about Israel in Jeremiah 31:35-36?

9. How can we pray for God to stop evil and at the same time obey Jesus' command to love our enemies? (Matthew 5:44)

10. When you feel surrounded by trouble, what past victories of God, in the Bible or in your life, could you remember in prayer?

Psalm 85: Revive Us Again

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah, a psalm.

85:1-7 LORD, You have shown favor to Your land; You have turned back the captivity of Jacob. You have lifted away the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin. Selah. You have withdrawn all Your fury; You have turned back from the burning of Your anger. Restore us, God of our salvation, and break off Your vexation with us. Will You be angry with us forever? Will You draw out Your anger to generation and generation? Will You not return ***and*** give us life, so that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us, LORD, Your steadfast love, and give us Your salvation.

85:8-13 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His faithful ones; and let them not return to folly. Surely His salvation ***is*** near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth springs up from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. Also the LORD will give what is good, and our land will give its produce. Righteousness will go before Him, and will make His footsteps into a way.

Psalm 85 Preview

Psalm 85 looks back, looks around and looks ahead. Looking back, the writer thanks God for showing favor to His land, bringing His people home from captivity, forgiving their sin and turning away His anger. Looking around, he sees that things are still hard, and he asks God to restore them again and give them life so that they can rejoice in Him.

Then he stops to listen, and God speaks peace. The last verses are some of the most beautiful in the Psalms. Steadfast love and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss, truth springs up from the earth and righteousness looks down from heaven. God's salvation is near to those who fear Him, and His glory will dwell in the land.

Psalm 85 Study

85:1-3 *LORD, You have shown favor to Your land; You have turned back the captivity of Jacob. You have lifted away the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin. Selah. You have withdrawn all Your fury; You have turned back from the burning of Your anger.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah, a psalm." For the choirmaster see Psalm 75. The sons of Korah were a family of Levites. Their ancestor Korah rebelled against Moses and died under God's judgment (Numbers 16:32), 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 of the family 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. In this volume we meet them in Psalms 85, 87 and 88.

"LORD, You have shown favor to Your land; You have turned back the captivity of Jacob." Most think this looks back to the return from Babylon. In 538 B.C. the Persian king Cyrus let the exiles go home (Ezra 1:1-3). The phrase can also mean that God restored the fortunes of His people more generally, and the heading doesn't name the time.

"You have lifted away the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin." God did not only bring them home. He forgave them. He lifted their guilt off them like a heavy load and covered their sin so that He no longer held it against them. Selah (see Psalm 75). "You have withdrawn all Your fury." The anger that sent them into exile was over (Isaiah 40:2).

85:4-7 *Restore us, God of our salvation, and break off Your vexation with us. Will You be angry with us forever? Will You draw out Your anger to generation and generation? Will You not return* ***and*** *give us life, so that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us, LORD, Your steadfast love, and give us Your salvation.*

And yet the writer prays, "Restore us, God of our salvation." It may seem strange. God has already brought them back, so why ask again? Because coming home was not the end of their trouble. The returned exiles found Jerusalem in ruins. Crops failed, enemies opposed them and the walls lay broken for years (Haggai 1:6; Nehemiah 1:3). They were home, but they did not yet have the full blessing.

Many believers know that feeling. God has saved us and forgiven us, and still there are seasons when our faith feels dry and our church feels tired. "Will You be angry with us forever?" "Will You not return and give us life, so that Your people may rejoice in You?" To give life is to revive, to bring back from the edge of death. Christians have prayed this verse for revival in many generations.

"Show us, LORD, Your steadfast love, and give us Your salvation." Steadfast love is God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 77). The writer asks God to show it again.

85:8-9 *Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His faithful ones; and let them not return to folly. Surely His salvation* ***is*** *near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land.*

"Let me hear what God the LORD will speak." Now the writer stops talking and listens. That is a good pattern for our own prayers. "For He will speak peace to His people and to His faithful ones." Peace, in Hebrew shalom, means more than the end of war. It means wholeness, well-being and everything being right between God and His people. And there is a warning: "let them not return to folly." Folly here is the sin that sent them into exile in the first place.

"Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him." To fear God is to stand in awe of Him (see Psalm 76). "That glory may dwell in our land." God's glory had left the temple before Jerusalem fell (Ezekiel 10:18), and Ezekiel saw it return in a vision of the future (Ezekiel 43:2). The writer longs for God's glorious presence to live among them again.

John 1:14 tells us how God's glory came to dwell among His people in a way no one expected: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." Many see the hope of this verse fulfilled in Jesus.

85:10-11 *Steadfast love and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth springs up from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.*

"Steadfast love and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed." Four of God's great qualities are pictured like people who run to meet each other and embrace. Steadfast love is His loyal covenant love. Truth is His faithfulness, His being true to His word. Righteousness is His perfect rightness, His justice. Peace is the wholeness that comes when things are right between God and people.

On their own, some of these can seem to pull apart. How can a righteous God, who must punish sin, also be a God of steadfast love who forgives? How can His truth, which condemns us, ever meet with peace? Many believers have seen the answer at the cross. There God showed His righteousness and also became the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). Justice and mercy met. And because of the cross, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

"Truth springs up from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven." Faithfulness grows up from the ground like a plant, and righteousness leans down from heaven. Heaven and earth meet. This psalm doesn't name Christ, but Christians have long found in this line a picture of the One who came down from heaven and lived a perfectly faithful life on earth.

85:12-13 *Also the LORD will give what is good, and our land will give its produce. Righteousness will go before Him, and will make His footsteps into a way.*

"Also the LORD will give what is good, and our land will give its produce." The failed harvests would turn around. When God's blessing returns, the land itself responds.

"Righteousness will go before Him, and will make His footsteps into a way." Righteousness goes ahead of the LORD like a herald clearing the road for a king. Where God walks, righteousness prepares the path, and His people can walk in His steps.

I believe this psalm looks ahead to more than the return from Babylon. When Christ returns to reign, God will fully restore Israel, and His glory will fill the land (Romans 11:26). Until then, we pray, "Will You not return and give us life?" and we listen for His word of peace.

Psalm 85 Summary

Psalm 85, a psalm of the sons of Korah, thanks the LORD for showing favor to His land, bringing back the captives of Jacob, forgiving and covering all their sin and turning away from His fury. Yet the people still need God's help, so the writer asks God to restore them again, to stop being angry and to give them life so that they may rejoice in Him and see His steadfast love and salvation. He then listens for what God will say and hears that God will speak peace to His faithful people, warning them not to return to folly. God's salvation is near to those who fear Him, so that His

glory may dwell in the land. Steadfast love and truth meet, righteousness and peace kiss, truth springs from the earth and righteousness looks down from heaven. The LORD will give what is good, the land will yield its harvest and righteousness will prepare His way.

People and Places

- Sons of Korah: a family of Levite singers and doorkeepers descended from Korah, who rebelled against Moses (Numbers 16); eleven psalms carry their name.
- Peace (shalom): wholeness and well-being; everything being right between God and His people.
- Cyrus: the king of Persia who let the exiles of Judah return home in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-3).

Psalm 85 Study Questions

1. What has God already done for His land and people, according to verses 1 to 3?

2. What does it mean that God "covered all their sin"? (85:2)

3. Why do the people still pray "Restore us" after God has brought them home? (85:4-7)

4. What does the writer ask God to give in verse 6, and why?

5. What does the writer do in verse 8, and what will God speak?

6. What four qualities meet in verse 10, and how do they meet at the cross?

7. How does John 1:14 relate to the hope that God's "glory may dwell in our land"? (85:9)

8. Have you ever been through a season when you were saved and forgiven, but your faith felt dry? What helped you?

9. What would it look like for you to stop and listen to God in your prayers, as the writer does in verse 8?

10. Pray verse 6 for yourself, your family or your church. What would revival look like there?

Psalm 86: Unite My Heart to Fear Your Name

Scripture

A prayer of David.

86:1-10 Incline Your ear, LORD, answer me, for I ***am*** afflicted and needy. Keep my soul, for I ***am*** faithful; You ***are*** my God; save Your servant who trusts in You. Be gracious to me, Lord, for to You I call all the day. Make glad the soul of Your servant, for to You, Lord, I lift up my soul. For You, Lord, ***are*** good and ready to forgive, and great in steadfast love to all who call on You. Give ear, LORD, to my prayer, and pay attention to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my distress I call on You, for You will answer me. ***There is*** none like You among the gods, Lord, and ***there are*** none like Your works. All the nations whom You have made will come and bow down before You, Lord, and they will glorify Your name. For You ***are*** great and do wonders; You ***are*** God, You alone.

86:11-17 Teach me Your way, LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name. I will give thanks to You, Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forever. For Your steadfast love ***is*** great toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the lowest Sheol. God, arrogant ***men*** have risen up against me, and a company of ruthless ***men*** have sought my life, and they have not set You before them. And You, Lord, ***are*** a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant. Make with me a sign for good, and let those who hate me see ***it*** and be ashamed, because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Psalm 86 Preview

Psalm 86 is the only psalm of David in Book Three. It is a personal prayer from a man in trouble. Proud and ruthless men are after his life, and he calls himself afflicted and needy. He asks God to hear him, keep him, be gracious to him and make his soul glad.

What stands out is how much of the prayer is about who God is. David reminds himself that the Lord is good, ready to forgive and great in steadfast love. No god is like Him, and one day all the nations will come and bow before Him. In the middle of his trouble David asks for something we all need: "Teach me Your way, LORD," and "unite my heart to fear Your name." He ends asking God for a sign of His goodness, so that his enemies will see that the LORD has helped and comforted him.

Psalm 86 Study

86:1-4 *Incline Your ear, LORD, answer me, for I* ***am*** *afflicted and needy. Keep my soul, for I* ***am*** *faithful; You* ***are*** *my God; save Your servant who trusts in You. Be gracious to me, Lord, for to You I call all the day. Make glad the soul of Your servant, for to You, Lord, I lift up my soul.*

The heading reads, "A prayer of David." David was the shepherd boy God chose as king of Israel, who reigned about 1010 to 970 B.C. The heading doesn't tell us what trouble he faced. Many lines

in this psalm echo other prayers of David and the words of Exodus 34, as if he gathered the prayers he knew best and made them his own. That is a good way to pray when we can't find our own words.

"Incline Your ear, LORD, answer me, for I am afflicted and needy." David does not come as a king. He comes as a poor man who needs help. "Keep my soul, for I am faithful." Faithful here means one who belongs to God and is loyal to Him. David is not claiming to be sinless (he asks for forgiveness in verse 5). He is saying he is God's own servant, so he asks God to take care of what belongs to Him.

"Be gracious to me, Lord, for to You I call all the day." Throughout this psalm David often uses "Lord," Adonai, the title meaning "Master" (see Overview on God's name). A servant calls to his Master and trusts Him to care for him. "Make glad the soul of Your servant, for to You, Lord, I lift up my soul." To lift up the soul is to hand it to God, to trust Him with your whole life.

86:5-7 *For You, Lord, **are** good and ready to forgive, and great in steadfast love to all who call on You. Give ear, LORD, to my prayer, and pay attention to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my distress I call on You, for You will answer me.*

"For You, Lord, are good and ready to forgive, and great in steadfast love to all who call on You." Ready to forgive means God is not reluctant. He does not have to be talked into mercy. Steadfast love is His loyal covenant love (see Psalm 77), and He is "great" in it, rich in it, to everyone who calls.

"In the day of my distress I call on You, for You will answer me." David prays with confidence, not because his situation is easy, but because he knows God's character.

86:8-10 ***There is** none like You among the gods, Lord, and **there are** none like Your works. All the nations whom You have made will come and bow down before You, Lord, and they will glorify Your name. For You **are** great and do wonders; You **are** God, You alone.*

"There is none like You among the gods, Lord." David is not saying other gods are real. He is saying that no one the nations worship compares to the LORD. "And there are none like Your works."

"All the nations whom You have made will come and bow down before You, Lord, and they will glorify Your name." God made every nation, so every nation belongs to Him. In the middle of a personal crisis, David looks up and sees God's plan for the whole world. The prophets saw it too: all the nations will stream to the mountain of the LORD's house (Isaiah 2:2).

In Revelation 15:4 those who have overcome sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, and they echo this verse: "all the nations will come and worship before You." That song looks ahead to the day when Christ reigns and every knee bows to Him (Philippians 2:10-11).

"For You are great and do wonders; You are God, You alone." Israel confessed every day that the LORD is one (Deuteronomy 6:4). There is no other.

New Testament links: Revelation 15:4 (alluded to)

86:11 *Teach me Your way, LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.*

"Teach me Your way, LORD; I will walk in Your truth." David asks for more than rescue. He wants to know how to live. Being taught God's way and walking in His truth go together. We learn so that we can walk.

"Unite my heart to fear Your name." A divided heart is pulled in different directions, partly toward God and partly toward other things. James calls that kind of person "double-minded" and unstable (James 1:8). David asks God to pull his scattered heart together and point the whole of it toward Him. To fear His name is to stand in awe of who He is (see Psalm 76).

Most of us know what a divided heart feels like. We want God, and we want other things too. Verse 11 is a prayer we can pray every morning.

86:12-13 *I will give thanks to You, Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forever. For Your steadfast love **is** great toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the lowest Sheol.*

"I will give thanks to You, Lord my God, with all my heart." The prayer for a united heart becomes a promise of whole-hearted praise. "And I will glorify Your name forever."

"For Your steadfast love is great toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the lowest Sheol." 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 righteous as well as the wicked. When Jacob thought Joseph was dead, he said, "I will go down to my son mourning, to Sheol" (Genesis 37:35). The Greek word for it is Hades (Acts 2:27). The Old Testament does not give a full picture of life after death, but the Psalms already hold out the hope that God will not leave His own in Sheol.

"The lowest Sheol" means the very depths of death. David may mean that God has already saved him from dying in some earlier danger, or he may be speaking with such confidence that he talks as if this rescue has already happened. Either way, he knows God has the power to pull him back from the grave. Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18).

86:14 *God, arrogant **men** have risen up against me, and a company of ruthless **men** have sought my life, and they have not set You before them.*

"God, arrogant men have risen up against me, and a company of ruthless men have sought my life." Now we hear what David is facing. "And they have not set You before them." That is the root of their cruelty. They live as if God does not see. Anyone who forgets God will eventually forget how to treat people.

86:15 *And You, Lord, **are** a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

"And You, Lord, are a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in steadfast love and faithfulness." These are almost the exact words God spoke about Himself when He passed by

Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:6). The Old Testament comes back to them again and again. The arrogant men did not set God before them, but David does. He sets God's own description of Himself right in front of his eyes.

Compassionate means tender and full of pity. Gracious means giving kindness that is not earned. Slow to anger means God's patience is long, not that He never gets angry. And He is great in steadfast love and faithfulness, overflowing in loyal love and always true to His word. When we don't know what God is doing, we can always hold on to what He has told us He is like.

86:16-17 *Turn to me and be gracious to me; give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant. Make with me a sign for good, and let those who hate me see **it** and be ashamed, because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.*

"Turn to me and be gracious to me; give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant." A son born to a servant in a household belonged to that household from birth. David says, in effect, that he has belonged to God all his life. He was born into God's house.

"Make with me a sign for good, and let those who hate me see it and be ashamed." David asks for some visible proof of God's favor, something his enemies cannot deny. "Because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me." He ends as if the answer has already come. God helps, and God comforts. Those two words hold the whole psalm together.

Psalm 86 Summary

In Psalm 86, a prayer of David, the afflicted and needy king asks the LORD to hear him, keep his soul, be gracious to him and make him glad, because he trusts in God and lifts up his soul to Him. The Lord is good and ready to forgive, great in steadfast love to all who call on Him, and He will answer in the day of distress. No god is like Him, and all the nations He made will come and bow before Him and glorify His name, as Revelation 15:4 also sings. David asks God to teach him His way and to unite his heart to fear His name, and he promises to praise God with all his heart, because God's steadfast love delivered his soul from the lowest Sheol. Arrogant and ruthless men seek his life, but the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and great in steadfast love and faithfulness. David asks for strength, salvation and a sign for good so that his enemies will see that the LORD has helped and comforted him.

People and Places

- Sheol: the Hebrew word for the grave or the place of the dead; the Greek word is Hades.
- Adonai: the Hebrew title "Lord," meaning Master; David uses it often in this psalm.

Psalm 86 Study Questions

1. How does David describe himself in verse 1?

2. What does David say about God in verse 5?

3. What will all the nations do one day, according to verse 9? Where does Revelation echo this?

4. What two things does David ask for in verse 11?

5. What does it mean to have a divided heart, and what does it mean for God to "unite" it? (86:11; James 1:8)

6. What is Sheol, and what has God done for David's soul? (86:13)

7. What is missing in the lives of the arrogant men, according to verse 14?

8. Verse 15 repeats God's words to Moses in Exodus 34:6. Which of those qualities of God do you most need to remember right now?

9. Where is your heart divided? Pray verse 11 over that part of your life.

10. David asks God for "a sign for good." (86:17) How has God helped and comforted you in a way others could see?

Psalm 87: Born in Zion

Scripture

Of the sons of Korah, a psalm, a song.

87:1-7 His foundation ***is*** on the mountains of holiness. The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, city of God. Selah. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me; look, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush: "This one was born there." And of Zion it will be said, "Man and man was born in her"; and the Most High Himself will establish her. The LORD will count when He records the peoples: "This one was born there." Selah. And singers as well as pipers ***say***, "All my springs ***are*** in you."

Psalm 87 Preview

Psalm 87 is short, but it carries one of the widest hopes in the Old Testament. It praises Zion, the city God founded and loves more than any other place in Israel. Glorious things are spoken of her.

Then comes the surprise. God names Israel's old enemies and far-off neighbors, Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Cush, and writes them down as people "born" in Zion. People from every nation will be counted as citizens of the city of God. The psalm ends with singers and pipers saying to Zion, "All my springs are in you." God's plan was always bigger than one nation, and His blessing would flow out from Zion to the whole world.

Psalm 87 Study

87:1-3 *His foundation **is** on the mountains of holiness. The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, city of God. Selah.*

The heading reads, "Of the sons of Korah, a psalm, a song." For the sons of Korah see Psalm 85.

"His foundation is on the mountains of holiness." The psalm starts suddenly, as if we have walked in on the middle of a song. "His foundation" means the city God Himself founded. Jerusalem sits among hills, and God chose those hills as His holy place.

"The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob." Zion is the city of Jerusalem as God's chosen dwelling (see Psalm 74). God loved all the towns of Israel, but Zion was where He put His name and His temple. The gates stand for the whole city, the place where people came in and out and where business and justice were done.

"Glorious things are spoken of you, city of God." These words have been sung by believers for centuries, and they are the opening line of a well-known hymn. Selah (see Psalm 75).

87:4 *I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me; look, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush: "This one was born there."*

Now God Himself speaks. "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me." This Rahab is not the woman of Jericho. Here Rahab is a poetic name for Egypt (Isaiah 30:7). It comes from a Hebrew word for pride or storming, and it pictures Egypt as a proud monster (Isaiah 51:9). Egypt enslaved Israel. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem. And God says they will be counted "among those who know Me."

"Look, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush." Philistia was Israel's old enemy on the coast. Tyre was the rich trading city to the north. Cush lay far to the south of Egypt, along the upper Nile, in the region of today's Sudan. "This one was born there." God enrolls each of them as a native of Zion.

That is astonishing. Isaiah says the same: a day will come when the LORD will bless "My people Egypt, and the work of My hands Assyria, and My inheritance Israel" (Isaiah 19:25). Enemies become family.

87:5-6 *And of Zion it will be said, "Man and man was born in her"; and the Most High Himself will establish her. The LORD will count when He records the peoples: "This one was born there." Selah.*

"And of Zion it will be said, Man and man was born in her." One person after another, from nation after nation, will be counted as a child of Zion. "And the Most High Himself will establish her." God will make the city secure.

"The LORD will count when He records the peoples: This one was born there." Picture God with a great register, the book of citizens of His city, writing down each name. The person's birthplace on earth does not matter. What matters is that God writes "born there" beside the name. Selah.

The New Testament shows us how this happens. Jesus told His disciples to rejoice that their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20). Hebrews 12:22-23 says that believers have come "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God," to the church of the firstborn "who are enrolled in the heavens." Paul says believers from the nations are "fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). In Revelation John sees a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne (Revelation 7:9).

This does not mean the church has replaced Israel or that God has forgotten the earthly Zion. Paul says that believing Gentiles are like wild olive branches grafted into Israel's own tree (Romans 11:17). They are added. They do not take Israel's place. I believe God will still keep His promises to Jerusalem, and that when Christ reigns, the nations will come up to Zion to worship the King (Isaiah 2:2-3; Zechariah 14:16).

87:7 *And singers as well as pipers **say**, "All my springs **are** in you."*

"And singers as well as pipers say, All my springs are in you." The psalm ends in a celebration, with singers and musicians playing pipes or flutes. And their song is short: everything that refreshes them, every spring of life and joy, comes from Zion. In a dry land, a spring was life itself.

For us the source of every spring is the God who lives in Zion. Jesus said that whoever drinks the water He gives will never thirst, and it will become "a spring of water welling up into eternal life" (John 4:14). Wherever you were born, whatever your background, if you belong to Him, your name is written in His city, and all your springs are in Him.

Psalm 87 Summary

Psalm 87, a song of the sons of Korah, praises Zion, the city God founded on the holy mountains and loves more than all the other dwellings of Jacob; glorious things are spoken of the city of God. Then God speaks and names Rahab (Egypt) and Babylon among those who know Him, along with Philistia, Tyre and Cush, saying of each one, "This one was born there." Of Zion it will be said that one person after another was born in her, and the Most High will establish her. When the LORD records the peoples, He will write that each was born there. The psalm closes with singers and pipers saying to Zion, "All my springs are in you." The New Testament shows how people from every nation are enrolled in God's city through faith in Christ, while God's promises to Israel and Zion still stand.

People and Places

- Rahab: here a poetic name for Egypt, picturing it as a proud monster; not the Rahab of Jericho.
- Babylon: the empire that destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
- Cush: a land far south of Egypt along the upper Nile, in the region of today's Sudan.

Psalm 87 Study Questions

1. Where is the foundation of God's city? (87:1)

2. What does the LORD love more than all the dwelling places of Jacob? (87:2)

3. Which nations does God name in verse 4, and what were most of them to Israel?

4. What does God say about each of them? (87:4-6)

5. Who is Rahab in verse 4, and how is she different from the Rahab of Jericho?

6. What does the LORD do "when He records the peoples"? (87:6)

7. How do Luke 10:20 and Hebrews 12:22-23 help us understand what it means to be "born" in Zion?

8. Why is it important that Gentile believers are grafted in with Israel and do not replace Israel? (Romans 11:17)

9. What do the singers say in verse 7? Where do you look for your "springs," the things that refresh you?

10. Is there a person or a group you find hard to imagine as part of God's family? How does this psalm challenge that?

Psalm 88: My Acquaintances Are Darkness

Scripture

A song, a psalm of the sons of Korah. To the choirmaster, on Mahalath, to sing. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

88:1-9 LORD, God of my salvation, by day I have cried out, in the night, before You. Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry. For my soul is filled with troubles, and my life has reached Sheol. I am counted with those who go down ***to the*** pit; I have become like a man without strength, free among the dead, like ***the*** slain who lie ***in the*** grave, whom You remember no more, and they are cut off from Your hand. You have put me in ***the*** pit of the lowest parts, in dark places, in the depths. Your rage has lain heavy on me, and with all Your breakers You have afflicted ***me***. Selah. You have removed my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; ***I am*** shut in, and I cannot go out. My eye languishes because of affliction; I have called on You, LORD, every day; I have spread out my hands to You.

88:10-18 Will You do wonders for the dead? Will ***the*** shades arise ***and*** give thanks to You? Selah. Will Your steadfast love be recounted in the grave, Your faithfulness in Abaddon? Will Your wonders be known in the darkness, and Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? And I, to You, LORD, cry for help, and in the morning my prayer comes to meet You. Why, LORD, do You reject my soul? ***Why*** do You hide Your face from me? I ***am*** afflicted and about to die from ***my*** youth; I have borne Your terrors; I am helpless. Your burning angers have passed over me; Your terrors have destroyed me. They have surrounded me like water all the day; they have encircled me altogether. You have removed far from me lover and friend; my acquaintances ***are*** darkness.

Psalm 88 Preview

Psalm 88 is the darkest prayer in the Bible. The writer has been sick and near death since he was young. He feels counted among the dead, shut in, abandoned by his friends and crushed by what he believes is God's anger. He prays day and night, morning after morning, and nothing changes. Most laments in the Psalms turn toward praise before the end. This one does not. Its last word is "darkness."

I won't pretend this psalm is anything other than what it is. But it is in the Bible, and that matters. God put a prayer like this in His book because some of His people live where this writer lived. If that is you, this psalm tells you that you are not the first, that you are not faithless for feeling this way, and that even here you can still say, "LORD, God of my salvation." Please read the whole chapter, and please don't stay in the dark alone.

Psalm 88 Study

88:1-2 *LORD, God of my salvation, by day I have cried out, in the night, before You. Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry.*

The heading reads, "A song, a psalm of the sons of Korah. To the choirmaster, on Mahalath, to sing. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite." For the sons of Korah see Psalm 85, for the choirmaster see Psalm 75 and for Maskil see Psalm 74. Mahalath appears only here and in the heading of Psalm 53. The meaning is uncertain. It may be the name of a tune, or it may come from a Hebrew word for sickness or suffering, which would fit this psalm well.

Heman was one of the three chief musicians David appointed, along with Asaph and Ethan (or Jeduthun) (1 Chronicles 15:17). He was a Levite descended from Korah and a grandson of the prophet Samuel (1 Chronicles 6:33), and he is called "the seer of the king" (1 Chronicles 25:5). God gave him fourteen sons and three daughters, who all served in worship. A Heman was also famous for his wisdom in Solomon's day (1 Kings 4:31). "Ezrahite" may point to a family line from Zerah (1 Chronicles 2:6). We aren't told for certain whether these are the same Heman, but the heading ties this psalm to the gifted Levite singer of the sons of Korah.

Heman was a respected leader of worship, a man of God, with a large family and an honored place at court. And he wrote the bleakest psalm in the book. Faith, gifts and position do not keep a person from this kind of darkness.

"LORD, God of my salvation, by day I have cried out, in the night, before You." Hold on to that first line. Everything else in the psalm is dark, but Heman still calls God "God of my salvation." He still prays to Him. He prays by day and by night. "Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry."

88:3-5 *For my soul is filled with troubles, and my life has reached Sheol. I am counted with those who go down* ***to the*** *pit; I have become like a man without strength, free among the dead, like* ***the*** *slain who lie* ***in the*** *grave, whom You remember no more, and they are cut off from Your hand.*

"For my soul is filled with troubles, and my life has reached Sheol." Sheol is the place of the dead (see Psalm 86). Heman feels he is already at death's door. "I am counted with those who go down to the pit." The pit is another name for the grave. People look at him and see a dying man. "I have become like a man without strength."

"Free among the dead" is a strange phrase. It may mean he has been set loose from life, cast adrift among the dead. He feels like "the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and they are cut off from Your hand." That is how it feels to him: forgotten, beyond God's reach.

We know more than Heman could see. Psalm 139:8 says that even if we make our bed in Sheol, God is there. And Romans 8:38-39 tells us that not even death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Heman's feelings were real. They were not the whole truth.

88:6-9 *You have put me in **the** pit of the lowest parts, in dark places, in the depths. Your rage has lain heavy on me, and with all Your breakers You have afflicted **me**. Selah. You have removed my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; **I am** shut in, and I cannot go out. My eye languishes because of affliction; I have called on You, LORD, every day; I have spread out my hands to You.*

"You have put me in the pit of the lowest parts, in dark places, in the depths." Heman says God did this. He does not blame chance or his enemies. He believes God is behind it, and that makes it worse. "Your rage has lain heavy on me, and with all Your breakers You have afflicted me." He feels like a man in the surf, knocked down by wave after wave, every time he tries to stand. Selah (see Psalm 75).

The Bible does not tell us that every illness or loss is God's anger. Job's friends made that mistake, and God said they were wrong (Job 42:7). Heman felt God's anger. We are not told he was being punished for any sin.

"You have removed my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them." His friends keep away. Maybe his sickness made him unclean or frightening to be near. Long illness often does that. People stop visiting. "I am shut in, and I cannot go out." He is a prisoner in his own room, maybe in his own body.

"My eye languishes because of affliction." His eyes are worn out from weeping. "I have called on You, LORD, every day; I have spread out my hands to You." He has not stopped praying. That is faith, even when it feels like nothing.

88:10-12 *Will You do wonders for the dead? Will **the** shades arise **and** give thanks to You? Selah. Will Your steadfast love be recounted in the grave, Your faithfulness in Abaddon? Will Your wonders be known in the darkness, and Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?*

Now Heman asks God a series of questions. "Will You do wonders for the dead? Will the shades arise and give thanks to You?" The shades are the dead, pictured as weak shadows of the people they once were. Selah.

"Will Your steadfast love be recounted in the grave, Your faithfulness in Abaddon?" Abaddon means destruction. It is another name for the realm of the dead (Job 26:6). Revelation 9:11 uses the same name for the angel of the abyss. "Will Your wonders be known in the darkness, and Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"

Heman means these questions as an argument. If I die, I can't praise You. Keep me alive so I can tell of Your steadfast love. He expects the answer to be no.

But the gospel gives a different answer. God has done wonders for the dead. He raised Jesus, who now holds the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). One day the dead in Christ will rise and give thanks to Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Paul could ask, "Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). Heman could not see the empty tomb. We can.

88:13-14 *And I, to You, LORD, cry for help, and in the morning my prayer comes to meet You. Why, LORD, do You reject my soul? **Why** do You hide Your face from me?*

"And I, to You, LORD, cry for help, and in the morning my prayer comes to meet You." Every morning he is up before God, praying again. He has not given up on God, even though he feels God has given up on him.

"Why, LORD, do You reject my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?" Those are honest questions, and God does not strike him down for asking them. The Bible never tells us not to ask God why.

88:15-18 *I **am** afflicted and about to die from **my** youth; I have borne Your terrors; I am helpless. Your burning angers have passed over me; Your terrors have destroyed me. They have surrounded me like water all the day; they have encircled me altogether. You have removed far from me lover and friend; my acquaintances **are** darkness.*

"I am afflicted and about to die from my youth." Heman has suffered since he was young. He is describing a lifetime of illness and fear, not a bad week. "I have borne Your terrors; I am helpless." "Your burning angers have passed over me; Your terrors have destroyed me. They have surrounded me like water all the day."

"You have removed far from me lover and friend; my acquaintances are darkness." The people he loved are gone. The only company he has left is the dark. And there the psalm ends.

What do we do with a psalm that ends this way? First, we let it be honest. Not every story in this life is tied up neatly, and not every prayer is answered the way we want, or as quickly as we want. Faith does not always take away illness or grief. Some believers carry depression, chronic pain or loneliness for years. God does not promise that this will never happen to His children.

Second, we notice that Heman kept praying. He prayed to "God of my salvation" in verse 1 and was still crying to the LORD every morning in verse 13. Isaiah says that the one who walks in darkness and has no light should "trust in the name of the LORD and lean on his God" (Isaiah 50:10). That is what Heman did, even when he could see nothing at all.

Third, we remember that Jesus went into this darkness too. In Gethsemane He said His soul was very sorrowful, "even to death" (Matthew 26:38). His disciples left Him and fled (Matthew 26:56), and at the cross "all His acquaintances stood at a distance" (Luke 23:49). Many see Psalm 88 in His sufferings. We have a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). He has been to the bottom of the pit, and He came out of the grave.

If you are in this place now, please hear me. You are not alone, and you are not a bad Christian for feeling this way. Pray like Heman prayed, even if all you can say is "God of my salvation." But don't carry this by yourself. Talk to your pastor or a believer you trust. See a doctor, because depression and long illness are real, and getting medical help is not a lack of faith. And if you are thinking about ending your life or are in danger, call your local emergency number or a crisis line right away, or go to the nearest emergency room. Getting help is not giving up on God. Often it is one of the ways God answers.

Psalm 88 Summary

Psalm 88, a Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite from the sons of Korah, is a cry from a man who has suffered and been near death since his youth. He prays day and night to the LORD, the God of his salvation, but his soul is full of troubles and his life has reached Sheol. He feels counted with those who go down to the pit, forgotten like the slain in the grave and cut off from God's hand. He believes God has put him in the depths and overwhelmed him with His waves, and that God has driven his friends away and shut him in. He asks whether God does wonders for the dead, whether His steadfast love is told in the grave or His faithfulness in Abaddon. Every morning he prays again and asks why God rejects him and hides His face. The psalm ends with his loved ones and friends removed and darkness as his only companion. Yet from first to last he keeps praying to the God of his salvation.

People and Places

- Heman the Ezrahite: a Levite singer of the family of Korah and one of David's three chief musicians (1 Chronicles 15:17); a Heman was also known for wisdom (1 Kings 4:31).
- Mahalath: a word in the headings of Psalms 53 and 88, perhaps a tune or a word for sickness; the meaning is uncertain.
- The pit: another name for the grave.
- Shades: the dead, pictured as weak shadows of who they once were.
- Abaddon: a name meaning destruction, used for the realm of the dead (Job 26:6).

Psalm 88 Study Questions

1. What does Heman call God in the first line of the psalm? (88:1) Why is that important?

2. How often does Heman pray, according to verses 1, 9 and 13?

3. How does Heman describe himself in verses 3 to 5?

4. What has happened to his friends and acquaintances? (88:8, 18)

5. What questions does Heman ask in verses 10 to 12, and what answer does he expect?

6. How does the resurrection of Jesus answer those questions? (1 Corinthians 15:55; Revelation 1:18)

7. How long has Heman suffered? (88:15) What does that tell us about the kind of trouble some believers carry?

8. Why do you think God put a psalm that ends in darkness in the Bible?

9. How did Jesus enter the kind of darkness this psalm describes? How does that help someone who is suffering?

10. Do you know someone who is shut in, sick or alone like Heman? What is one thing you could do this week to keep them from being alone in the dark?

Psalm 89: God's Covenant with David

Scripture

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

89:1-18 I will sing of the steadfast loves of the LORD forever; to generation and generation I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth. For I have said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever; the heavens, You establish Your faithfulness in them." "I have made a covenant with My chosen one; I have sworn to David My servant: 'I will establish your offspring forever, and I will build your throne to generation and generation.'" Selah. And the heavens will praise Your wonders, LORD, also Your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the clouds can be compared to the LORD? ***Who*** is like the LORD among the sons of gods, a God greatly dreaded in the council of the holy ones, and feared above all who ***are*** around Him? LORD God of armies, who ***is*** mighty like You, LORD? And Your faithfulness ***is*** all around You. You rule over the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, You calm them. You crushed Rahab like one slain; with the arm of Your strength You scattered Your enemies. The heavens ***are*** Yours; the earth also ***is*** Yours; the world and its fullness, You founded them. North and south, You created them; Tabor and ***Mount*** Hermon shout for joy in Your name. Yours ***is*** an arm with might; Your hand is strong; Your right hand is exalted. Righteousness and justice ***are*** the foundation of Your throne; steadfast love and truth go before Your face. How blessed ***is*** the people who know the shout of joy! LORD, they walk in the light of Your face. In Your name they rejoice all the day, and in Your righteousness they are exalted. For You ***are*** the splendor of their strength, and in Your favor our horn is exalted. For our shield ***belongs*** to the LORD, and our King to the Holy One of Israel.

89:19-37 Then You spoke in a vision to Your faithful ones, and You said, "I have placed help on a mighty one; I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found David My servant; with the oil of My holiness I have anointed him, with whom My hand will be established; My arm also will strengthen him. An enemy will not deceive him, and a son of injustice will not afflict him. And I will crush his adversaries before him, and those who hate him I will strike down. And My faithfulness and My steadfast love ***will be*** with him, and in My name his horn will be exalted. And I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. He will call to Me, 'You ***are*** my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.' I also will make him ***the*** firstborn, ***the*** highest of the kings of the earth. Forever I will keep My steadfast love for him, and My covenant ***will be*** faithful to him. And I will establish his offspring forever, and his throne like the days of the heavens. If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments, if they profane My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with a rod and their iniquity with plagues. But My steadfast love I will not break off from him, and I will not deal falsely with My faithfulness. I will not profane My covenant, and what has gone out from My lips I will not change. Once I have sworn by My holiness: I will not lie to David. His offspring will be forever, and his throne like the sun before Me. Like the moon it will be established forever, and a witness in the clouds ***is*** faithful." Selah.

89:38-52 And You, You have spurned and rejected; You have been furious with Your anointed. You have repudiated the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown to the ground.

You have broken through all his walls; You have made his strongholds a ruin. All who pass by on the road have plundered him; he has become a reproach to his neighbors. You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries; You have made all his enemies rejoice. Also You turn back the flint of his sword, and You have not made him stand in the battle. You have made ***him*** cease from his luster, and You have hurled his throne to the ground. You have shortened the days of his youth; You have wrapped him ***with*** shame. Selah. Until when, LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your rage burn like fire? Remember, as for me, what ***my*** lifespan ***is***; for what emptiness have You created all the sons of mankind! What man will live and not see death? ***Who*** will deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol? Selah. Where ***are*** Your former steadfast loves, Lord, ***which*** You swore to David in Your faithfulness? Remember, Lord, the reproach of Your servants, ***how*** I bear in my bosom ***the reproach of*** all the many peoples, with which Your enemies have reproached, LORD, with which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed. Blessed ***be*** the LORD forever. Amen and amen.

Psalm 89 Preview

Psalm 89 is the last psalm of Book Three, and it holds one of the hardest questions in the whole Psalter. God swore to David that his offspring would sit on his throne forever. Then the writer looked around and saw David's crown in the dust, the walls of the city broken and the king put to shame. What happens when God's promise and what we see with our eyes do not seem to match?

The psalm moves in three large steps. It begins with praise for God's steadfast love and faithfulness, His power over the sea and His throne built on righteousness. Then it sets out the covenant God made with David, in God's own words. Then it turns to lament: "You have repudiated the covenant of Your servant." The writer never lets go of the promise, and neither should we. The New Testament shows us how God kept it, and is still keeping it, in Jesus Christ, the Son of David.

Psalm 89 Study

89:1-4 *I will sing of the steadfast loves of the LORD forever; to generation and generation I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth. For I have said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever; the heavens, You establish Your faithfulness in them." "I have made a covenant with My chosen one; I have sworn to David My servant: 'I will establish your offspring forever, and I will build your throne to generation and generation.'" Selah.*

The heading reads, "A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite." Maskil is a musical or teaching term (see Psalm 74). Ethan the Ezrahite is named in 1 Kings 4:31 as one of the wise men of his day, though Solomon was wiser still, and Heman, the writer of Psalm 88, is named beside him. "Ezrahite" probably means he came from the family of Zerah, and 1 Chronicles 2:6 lists an Ethan and a Heman among the sons of Zerah. Many think he is the same Ethan who led the singers in David's day (1 Chronicles 15:19). We aren't told exactly when he wrote, and the last part of the psalm makes that a real question, which we will come to at verse 38.

"I will sing of the steadfast loves of the LORD forever." The word is hesed, God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 77). The psalm will use it seven times, and "faithfulness" seven times too. Those two words carry the whole psalm. Ethan is about to describe a disaster, but he starts by saying that God's love is "built up forever," like a building that keeps rising.

Then God Himself speaks in verses 3-4: "I have made a covenant with My chosen one; I have sworn to David My servant." A covenant is a binding agreement, and God has bound Himself to it with an oath. The promise is "I will establish your offspring forever, and I will build your throne to generation and generation." These verses sum up 2 Samuel 7:12-16, where the prophet Nathan brought this word to David. Bible teachers call it the Davidic covenant. God promised David a house (a royal line), a throne and a kingdom that would last forever. The word Selah closes the thought (see Psalm 75).

89:5-8 *And the heavens will praise Your wonders, LORD, also Your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the clouds can be compared to the LORD?* ***Who*** *is like the LORD among the sons of gods, a God greatly dreaded in the council of the holy ones, and feared above all who are around Him? LORD God of armies, who* ***is*** *mighty like You, LORD? And Your faithfulness* ***is*** *all around You.*

Before Ethan looks at the promise, he looks at the One who made it. Heaven itself praises God's faithfulness "in the assembly of the holy ones," the angels who surround His throne. "Who is like the LORD among the sons of gods?" The "sons of gods" here are heavenly beings, not rival gods. Even the mightiest creatures in heaven cannot be compared with Him, and He is "greatly dreaded in the council of the holy ones."

"LORD God of armies" is the title many older Bibles render as LORD of hosts. The armies are the angels and the stars, all under His command. And "Your faithfulness is all around You," like a robe He wears. A promise is only as good as the one who makes it. Ethan wants us to see that the God who swore to David is the strongest and most faithful Being there is.

89:9-13 *You rule over the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, You calm them. You crushed Rahab like one slain; with the arm of Your strength You scattered Your enemies. The heavens* ***are*** *Yours; the earth also* ***is*** *Yours; the world and its fullness, You founded them. North and south, You created them; Tabor and Mount Hermon shout for joy in Your name. Yours* ***is*** *an arm with might; Your hand is strong; Your right hand is exalted.*

"You rule over the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, You calm them." To Israel the sea was the picture of chaos and danger. God rules it. The disciples saw the same power in Jesus when He calmed the storm and they asked what kind of man the winds and the sea obeyed (Matthew 8:27).

"You crushed Rahab like one slain." Rahab here has nothing to do with Rahab of Jericho. It is a poetic name for a great sea monster, standing for the proud powers that set themselves against God (Job 26:12; Isaiah 51:9). The prophets also used it as a nickname for Egypt (Isaiah 30:7), and Psalm 87:4 uses it that way. Here Ethan probably has the exodus in mind, when God crushed

Egypt at the sea. In Luke 1:51 Mary sings that God has worked strength with His arm and scattered the proud, using the same picture as this verse.

The heavens and the earth belong to Him because He made them. "Tabor and Mount Hermon shout for joy in Your name." Tabor is a rounded hill in Galilee and Hermon the high snowy mountain in the far north. Even the mountains praise their Maker. God's arm is mighty and His right hand is exalted, so nothing can stop Him from keeping His word.

New Testament links: Luke 1:51 (alluded to)

89:14-18 *Righteousness and justice **are** the foundation of Your throne; steadfast love and truth go before Your face. How blessed **is** the people who know the shout of joy! LORD, they walk in the light of Your face. In Your name they rejoice all the day, and in Your righteousness they are exalted. For You **are** the splendor of their strength, and in Your favor our horn is exalted. For our shield **belongs** to the LORD, and our King to the Holy One of Israel.*

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; steadfast love and truth go before Your face." God's rule stands on what is right, and love and truth walk ahead of Him like servants going before a king. His power is never cruel.

"How blessed is the people who know the shout of joy!" The shout is the glad cry of worship, perhaps the trumpet blast at the feasts. Those who know it "walk in the light of Your face," living in God's favor. Their strength is not their own. "In Your favor our horn is exalted." A horn is the picture of strength, like the horns of a wild ox.

Verse 18 brings in the king: "our shield belongs to the LORD, and our King to the Holy One of Israel." The king of Israel was called the people's shield. He did not belong to himself. He belonged to God. That sets up everything that follows.

89:19-23 *Then You spoke in a vision to Your faithful ones, and You said, "I have placed help on a mighty one; I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found David My servant; with the oil of My holiness I have anointed him, with whom My hand will be established; My arm also will strengthen him. An enemy will not deceive him, and a son of injustice will not afflict him. And I will crush his adversaries before him, and those who hate him I will strike down.*

"Then You spoke in a vision to Your faithful ones." Ethan now quotes God's promise in full. The vision points back to Nathan's word to David (2 Samuel 7:4, 17). "I have found David My servant; with the oil of My holiness I have anointed him." Samuel poured oil on the young shepherd in his father's house (1 Samuel 16:13).

Paul quotes this line in Acts 13:22 when he preaches in the synagogue at Antioch. He joins it with the words of 1 Samuel 13:14 and says God found David, a man after His heart. Then Paul goes straight on to say that from David's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus (Acts 13:23). The promise to David led to Christ.

God promises that His hand will hold David up, his enemies will not get the better of him and God Himself will strike down those who hate him. David's victories over the Philistines and others were God's doing (2 Samuel 8:14).

New Testament links: Acts 13:22 (quoted)

89:24-29 *And My faithfulness and My steadfast love **will be** with him, and in My name his horn will be exalted. And I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. He will call to Me, 'You **are** my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.' I also will make him **the** firstborn, **the** highest of the kings of the earth. Forever I will keep My steadfast love for him, and My covenant **will be** faithful to him. And I will establish his offspring forever, and his throne like the days of the heavens.*

"And I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers." The God who rules the sea (verse 9) shares His rule with His king. David will call God "my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation." God had said He would be a Father to David's son (2 Samuel 7:14).

"I also will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." David was the youngest of eight sons, so "firstborn" here means rank, not birth order. The firstborn held first place and the double share. Israel itself was called God's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22). The New Testament gives this title to Jesus. Paul calls Him "the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15), meaning He holds first place over everything He made, and Revelation 1:5 calls Him "the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." That last phrase echoes this verse. What God said of David, He fulfills in David's greater Son.

"Forever I will keep My steadfast love for him." His offspring will last forever "and his throne like the days of the heavens." As long as the sky is there, the promise stands.

New Testament links: Colossians 1:15 (alluded to); Revelation 1:5 (alluded to)

89:30-37 *If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments, if they profane My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with a rod and their iniquity with plagues. But My steadfast love I will not break off from him, and I will not deal falsely with My faithfulness. I will not profane My covenant, and what has gone out from My lips I will not change. Once I have sworn by My holiness: I will not lie to David. His offspring will be forever, and his throne like the sun before Me. Like the moon it will be established forever, and a witness in the clouds **is** faithful." Selah.*

What if David's sons sin? God answers before anyone asks. "If his sons forsake My law," then "I will punish their transgression with a rod." Sin would bring discipline. And it did: many kings of Judah turned away, and God disciplined them, in the end by sending Babylon.

"But My steadfast love I will not break off from him." The discipline was conditional. The covenant was not. God says it four ways. He will not deal falsely. He will not profane His covenant. He will not change what has gone out of His lips. And He has sworn by His own holiness: "I will not lie to David." God has nothing greater to swear by than Himself (Hebrews 6:13).

"His offspring will be forever, and his throne like the sun before Me. Like the moon it will be established forever." Jeremiah used the same picture. If anyone could break God's covenant with the day and the night, then His covenant with David could be broken (Jeremiah 33:20-21). The sun still comes up. "A witness in the clouds is faithful" may mean the moon itself, standing in the sky as a witness to the promise. Revelation 1:5 calls Jesus "the faithful witness," and many hear this line behind those words.

In John 12:34 the crowd said they had heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. They were most likely thinking of promises like this one. They were right about the Messiah. What they could not fit in was the cross.

I believe God means exactly what He says here. Jesus is the Son of David (Matthew 1:1). The angel told Mary that the Lord God would give Him "the throne of David His father" and that "of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). Today Jesus sits with His Father on His Father's throne, and He speaks of His own throne as still to come (Revelation 3:21). When He returns visibly to the earth after the Tribulation (Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 19:11-16), He will sit on David's throne and reign over Israel and the nations for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6). God has not cancelled His promises to Israel, because "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). Many teachers hold the amillennial view, that Christ is reigning on David's throne now from heaven and there will be no future earthly kingdom. They love the Lord and take His promises seriously, but I believe the plain sense of Psalm 89, Luke 1:32-33 and Revelation 20 points to a real reign on the earth still to come.

New Testament links: John 12:34 (alluded to); Revelation 1:5 (alluded to)

89:38-45 *And You, You have spurned and rejected; You have been furious with Your anointed. You have repudiated the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown to the ground. You have broken through all his walls; You have made his strongholds a ruin. All who pass by on the road have plundered him; he has become a reproach to his neighbors. You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries; You have made all his enemies rejoice. Also You turn back the flint of his sword, and You have not made him stand in the battle. You have made **him** cease from his luster, and You have hurled his throne to the ground. You have shortened the days of his youth; You have wrapped him **with** shame. Selah.*

"And You, You have spurned and rejected." The music changes all at once. After all those promises, Ethan says God has been "furious with Your anointed." "You have repudiated the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown to the ground." The king's walls are broken, his strongholds are ruins, passers-by have looted him and his neighbors mock. His sword has failed in battle. His throne has been "hurled" to the ground and "the days of his youth" cut short.

When did this happen? The heading doesn't say. Many think it was the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 B.C., when the young king Jehoiachin had already been taken away and Zedekiah's sons were killed before his eyes (2 Kings 24:8-15; 25:7). If the writer is the Ethan of David's and Solomon's day, the crisis could be an earlier invasion, such as Shishak of Egypt

plundering Jerusalem in the days of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25-26). Either way, the line of David looked finished.

Ethan says it to God's face. He does not pretend. He holds God's words in one hand and the ruins in the other and brings both to Him. That is what faith looks like when it is hurting. Faith doesn't hide the gap between the promise and what we see. It takes the gap to God.

89:46-48 *Until when, LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your rage burn like fire? Remember, as for me, what **my** lifespan **is**; for what emptiness have You created all the sons of mankind! What man will live and not see death? **Who** will deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol? Selah.*

"Until when, LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever?" The "how long" cry is the cry of many psalms. Ethan feels how short his own life is: "Remember, as for me, what my lifespan is." He wants to see God keep His word before he dies.

"What man will live and not see death? Who will deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol?" Sheol is the grave, the place of the dead (see Psalm 86). Every king of David's line died. Death seemed to have the last word over them all. God's answer came in the One Son of David whom death could not hold. Peter preached that God raised Jesus up, "because it was not possible for Him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24), and that David, seeing this ahead, spoke of the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2:30-31). The King who will sit on David's throne forever is alive forever.

89:49-51 *Where **are** Your former steadfast loves, Lord, **which** You swore to David in Your faithfulness? Remember, Lord, the reproach of Your servants, **how** I bear in my bosom **the reproach of** all the many peoples, with which Your enemies have reproached, LORD, with which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed.*

"Where are Your former steadfast loves, Lord, which You swore to David in Your faithfulness?" The two key words of the psalm come back, now in a question. Ethan does not ask whether God swore. He knows God swore. He asks God to act on it.

He carries in his heart "the reproach of all the many peoples." The enemies have mocked "the footsteps of Your anointed," following the defeated king and jeering at every step. To mock God's anointed is to mock God.

If you are waiting on a promise of God that seems far from being kept, Ethan gives you words. Tell God what you see. Remind Him of what He said. He is not offended by that kind of prayer.

89:52 *Blessed **be** the LORD forever. Amen and amen.*

"Blessed be the LORD forever. Amen and amen." This short line closes Book Three of the Psalms, the way 41:13 closed Book One and 72:18-19 closed Book Two. Each book of the Psalter ends with a blessing like this, called a doxology, a short word of praise to God. Book Three has been full of hard psalms: the temple burned (Psalm 74), the history of rebellion (Psalm 78), the darkness of Psalm 88 and now the throne in the dust. Still it ends with "Amen and amen." Ethan has no answer yet, but he blesses God anyway.

We know more of the answer than Ethan did. The Son of David has come, died, risen and gone up to His Father, and He is coming back to reign. The promise has not failed.

Psalm 89 Summary

Psalm 89, a Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite, sings of the LORD's steadfast love and faithfulness, which last forever. It recalls God's sworn covenant with David to establish his offspring and his throne forever (2 Samuel 7). It praises the God whom the holy ones in heaven fear, who rules the raging sea, crushed Rahab and made the heavens and the earth, whose throne rests on righteousness and justice. Then God's own words lay out the covenant: He found David and anointed him, made him the firstborn and highest of the kings, and promised that if David's sons sinned He would punish them but never take away His steadfast love or break His oath. The psalm then turns to lament, because the king has been rejected, his crown thrown down and his walls broken, and Ethan asks how long God will hide and where His former steadfast loves have gone. The New Testament shows the promise kept in Jesus, the Son of David, the firstborn and ruler of the kings of the earth, who rose from the dead and will reign on David's throne. The psalm, and Book Three, end with "Blessed be the LORD forever. Amen and amen."

People and Places

- Ethan the Ezrahite: a wise man of Solomon's time named in 1 Kings 4:31, probably of the family of Zerah; many think he was also a leader of the singers in David's day.
- Davidic covenant: God's sworn promise to David that his royal line, throne and kingdom would last forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16; 1 Chronicles 17).
- Rahab: a poetic name for a sea monster standing for the powers against God, and a nickname for Egypt; not Rahab of Jericho.
- Tabor and Hermon: Mount Tabor is a rounded hill in Galilee; Mount Hermon is the highest mountain on Israel's northern border.
- Doxology: a short word of praise to God; one closes each of the first four books of the Psalms (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48).

Psalm 89 Study Questions

1. Which two qualities of God does Ethan promise to sing about forever? (89:1-2)

2. What did God swear to David? (89:3-4; 2 Samuel 7:12-16)

3. How does Ethan describe God's power over the sea and over Rahab, and how did Jesus show the same power? (89:9-10; Matthew 8:27)

4. What does "firstborn" mean in verse 27, and how do Colossians 1:15 and Revelation 1:5 apply it to Jesus?

5. What would happen if David's sons forsook God's law, and what would never happen? (89:30-34)

6. What signs in the sky does God use to show how long the promise will last? (89:36-37)

7. What had happened to the king and the city in verses 38-45?

8. How does the psalm help you pray when God's promises and your circumstances do not seem to match?

9. How does the resurrection of Jesus answer the question of verse 48?

10. Why do you think Ethan, and Book Three, end with "Amen and amen" even though the lament is not resolved? What would it look like for you to bless God while you are still waiting?

Psalm 92: A Song for the Sabbath

Scripture

A psalm, a song for the day of the Sabbath.

92:1-8 ***It is*** good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, Most High; to declare Your steadfast love in the morning, and Your faithfulness in the nights, on a ten-stringed ***instrument*** and on a harp, on a melody with a lyre. For You have made me rejoice, LORD, by Your deeds; in the works of Your hands I sing for joy. How great are Your works, LORD! Your thoughts are very deep. A senseless man does not know, and a fool does not understand this: when ***the*** wicked sprout like vegetation, and all who work iniquity blossom, ***it is*** so that they may be destroyed forever and ever. But You, LORD, ***are*** on high forever.

92:9-15 For look, Your enemies, LORD, for look, Your enemies will perish; all who work iniquity will be scattered. And You have raised up my horn like ***that of*** a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil. And my eye has looked on my enemies; my ears have heard of the evildoers who rise up against me. The righteous will flourish like the palm tree; he will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age; they will be full of sap and fresh, to declare that the LORD ***is*** upright; ***He is*** my rock, and ***there is*** no injustice in Him.

Psalm 92 Preview

Psalm 92 is the only psalm whose heading ties it to the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest God gave Israel. It is a song of thanks for a day set aside to stop working and look at what God has done. The writer starts with music, morning and night, and ends with a picture of old saints still green and bearing fruit.

In between, he deals with a question that troubles every believer sooner or later: why do the wicked seem to do so well? His answer is short. They sprout like grass, and grass does not last. "But You, LORD, are on high forever." That one line sits in the exact middle of the psalm, and everything else turns on it.

Psalm 92 Study

92:1-3 ***It is*** *good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, Most High; to declare Your steadfast love in the morning, and Your faithfulness in the nights, on a ten-stringed* ***instrument*** *and on a harp, on a melody with a lyre.*

The heading reads, "A psalm, a song for the day of the Sabbath." The Sabbath was the seventh day, the day God rested from His work of creation and the day He told Israel to keep holy (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11). The heading doesn't name a writer, and we aren't told who first sang it. Jewish tradition says the Levites sang it in the temple on the Sabbath.

"It is good to give thanks to the LORD." Thanks is good for God, because He deserves it, and good for us, because it sets our hearts right. The writer wants to declare God's steadfast love "in the morning, and Your faithfulness in the nights." We start the day with His love in front of us and end it by looking back on how faithful He was.

He sings with "a ten-stringed instrument and on a harp, on a melody with a lyre." Israel's worship was full of music. God made us to sing, and He is pleased when we use our gifts to praise Him.

For us, the Lord's day is the first day of the week, the day Jesus rose (Acts 20:7). Whatever day we gather, a weekly rhythm of rest and worship is still a gift from God. Hebrews 4:9-10 says a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God, a rest we enter by trusting Christ.

92:4-5 *For You have made me rejoice, LORD, by Your deeds; in the works of Your hands I sing for joy. How great are Your works, LORD! Your thoughts are very deep.*

"For You have made me rejoice, LORD, by Your deeds." The Sabbath looked back to creation, and later also to the exodus (Deuteronomy 5:15). On that day God's people stopped and remembered what His hands had made and done. "In the works of Your hands I sing for joy."

"How great are Your works, LORD! Your thoughts are very deep." God's plans go deeper than we can see. In Revelation 15:3 the saints who have overcome sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, beginning, "Great and marvelous are Your works." The same praise will be sung at the end of the story.

New Testament links: Revelation 15:3 (alluded to)

92:6-9 *A senseless man does not know, and a fool does not understand this: when **the** wicked sprout like vegetation, and all who work iniquity blossom, **it is** so that they may be destroyed forever and ever. But You, LORD, **are** on high forever. For look, Your enemies, LORD, for look, Your enemies will perish; all who work iniquity will be scattered.*

"A senseless man does not know, and a fool does not understand this." What doesn't the fool understand? He sees the wicked "sprout like vegetation" and "blossom," and he thinks they have won. He misses the end of the story: "it is so that they may be destroyed forever and ever." Grass springs up quickly after rain and is gone in the heat. Psalm 37 says the same thing (see Volume 1).

"But You, LORD, are on high forever." Seven verses come before this line and seven after it. The writer has put God's throne at the center of his song, and that is where it belongs in our thinking too. The wicked sprout and wither. God stays.

"For look, Your enemies, LORD, for look, Your enemies will perish." The repeated "look" sounds like a man pointing. He calls them God's enemies, not just his own. This line is a statement of what will happen, not a prayer for revenge (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

92:10-11 *And You have raised up my horn like **that of** a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil. And my eye has looked on my enemies; my ears have heard of the evildoers who rise up against me.*

"And You have raised up my horn like that of a wild ox." The horn is the picture of strength (see Psalm 75). A wild ox was strong and could not be tamed. "I have been anointed with fresh oil." Fresh oil poured on the head was a sign of joy and of God's blessing, like a guest welcomed to a feast.

"My eye has looked on my enemies." God has turned things around. The writer does not take revenge. He simply sees God settle it.

92:12-15 *The righteous will flourish like the palm tree; he will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age; they will be full of sap and fresh, to declare that the LORD **is** upright; **He is** my rock, and **there is** no injustice in Him.*

Now comes a picture of the righteous to set beside the grass. "The righteous will flourish like the palm tree; he will grow like a cedar in Lebanon." A palm tree stands tall in the desert and gives fruit for many years. The cedars of Lebanon were huge, long-lived trees, used for the temple itself. Grass is here today and gone tomorrow. These trees last for generations.

They are "planted in the house of the LORD." Their roots go down into God's presence. Psalm 1 gave us a tree planted by streams of water. Here the tree is planted in God's courts.

"They will still bear fruit in old age; they will be full of sap and fresh." I love this verse. Our world often treats old age as the end of usefulness. God does not. An older believer who has walked with the Lord for decades can pray, teach, encourage and show the young what faithfulness looks like. If you are in your later years, your fruit-bearing season is not over.

And what is the fruit for? "To declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no injustice in Him." A long faithful life is a testimony. It says to everyone watching that God kept His word, all the way through.

Psalm 92 Summary

Psalm 92, a song for the Sabbath, says it is good to thank the LORD and sing to His name, declaring His steadfast love in the morning and His faithfulness at night with music. The writer rejoices in God's works and His deep thoughts, which a fool cannot understand: the wicked spring up like grass only to be destroyed forever. At the center stands the line "But You, LORD, are on high forever." God's enemies will perish, while He raises up the writer's strength and anoints him with fresh oil. The righteous will flourish like the palm and the cedar, planted in the house of the LORD, still bearing fruit in old age, to declare that the LORD is upright, his rock, with no injustice in Him.

People and Places

- Sabbath: the seventh day of the week, which God made holy as a day of rest, remembering creation and the exodus (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:15).
- Lebanon: the mountain country north of Israel, famous for its great cedar trees.

Psalm 92 Study Questions

1. For what day was this psalm written, according to its heading?

2. When does the writer want to declare God's steadfast love and His faithfulness? (92:2)

3. What instruments does he name? (92:3)

4. What does the senseless man fail to understand about the wicked? (92:6-7)

5. Which line sits at the center of the psalm, and why do you think it is placed there? (92:8)

6. What two trees picture the righteous, and how are they different from grass? (92:7, 12)

7. Where are the righteous planted, and what does that mean for us? (92:13)

8. How could you build a weekly rhythm of rest and worship that helps you look at what God has done?

9. Who is an older believer who still "bears fruit" in your life? What have you learned from that person?

10. What fruit would you like your life to bear in old age, and what are you doing now to get there? (92:14-15)

Psalm 93: The LORD Reigns

Scripture

93:1-5 The LORD reigns; He is clothed ***with*** majesty; the LORD is clothed; He has girded Himself ***with*** strength. Also the world is established; it will not be shaken. Your throne ***has been*** established from of old; You ***are*** from everlasting. The rivers have lifted up, LORD, the rivers have lifted up their voice; the rivers lift up their pounding. More than the sounds of many waters, mighty breakers of the sea, the LORD on high ***is*** mighty. Your testimonies are very faithful; holiness befits Your house, LORD, for length of days.

Psalm 93 Preview

Psalm 93 is only five verses long, but it says the biggest thing a person can say: "The LORD reigns." God is King. He is dressed in majesty and strength, His throne was set up before time began, and the roaring floods cannot shake it.

This psalm opens a group of psalms that celebrate God as King (Psalms 93 and 95 to 99). Psalms 95 and 96 are in Volume 1, and Psalms 97, 98 and 99 come next in this volume. They speak of God's rule now, and they look ahead to the day He comes to rule the whole earth in the open.

Psalm 93 Study

93:1-2 *The LORD reigns; He is clothed **with** majesty; the LORD is clothed; He has girded Himself **with** strength. Also the world is established; it will not be shaken. Your throne **has been** established from of old; You **are** from everlasting.*

Psalm 93 has no heading, and we aren't told who wrote it.

"The LORD reigns." The Hebrew can also be read as The LORD has become King, as when a new king is crowned and the crowd shouts the news. Psalms 93, 96, 97 and 99 open with this cry or carry it at their center, and Psalms 95 and 98 call the LORD the great King. Bible teachers often call them the kingship psalms or the "LORD reigns" psalms.

"He is clothed with majesty." A king dressed for his crowning wears his royal robes. God's robes are majesty and strength. "He has girded Himself with strength," like a man tying his belt tight for action.

Because He reigns, "the world is established; it will not be shaken." The world is steady because its King is steady. "Your throne has been established from of old; You are from everlasting." God did not become King at some point in history. He always was.

What about the reading "has become King" then? God has always reigned, but there are moments when He shows His rule openly. The exodus was one (Exodus 15:18). The greatest is still to come. Revelation 11:15 hears loud voices in heaven say that the kingdoms of the world have become those of our Lord and of His Christ, and that He will reign forever. I believe that points to Christ's

return to the earth after the Tribulation and His thousand-year reign (Revelation 19:11-16; 20:4-6). The kingship psalms are a preview of that day. Some teachers read these psalms only of God's present rule over all things, or of His reign in the hearts of believers, and that is true as far as it goes. I think they say more.

93:3-4 *The rivers have lifted up, LORD, the rivers have lifted up their voice; the rivers lift up their pounding. More than the sounds of many waters, mighty breakers of the sea, the LORD on high **is** mighty.*

"The rivers have lifted up, LORD, the rivers have lifted up their voice; the rivers lift up their pounding." Hebrew poetry often builds a line in steps like this, each line repeating and adding to the last (see the Overview on parallel lines). You can almost hear the floodwaters rising: lifted up, lifted up, lifted up. In the Old Testament the raging sea stands for chaos and for the nations that rage against God (Psalm 46:3; Isaiah 17:12-13).

Then comes the answer. "More than the sounds of many waters, mighty breakers of the sea, the LORD on high is mighty." However loud the waves get, God is louder. However high they rise, He is "on high," above them all. If you feel the waters rising around you right now, in your health, your family or the news, this verse is for you. The floods are real, but they are not in charge.

93:5 *Your testimonies are very faithful; holiness befits Your house, LORD, for length of days.*

"Your testimonies are very faithful." After the thunder of the sea, the psalm ends quietly with God's Word. His testimonies are His laws and promises, what He has said and stands behind. The King who rules the sea also speaks, and His word can be trusted completely.

"Holiness befits Your house, LORD, for length of days." The King's house, the temple, must be holy, because He is holy. His rule is not only strong. It is pure. For us, that means His people are to be holy too, since we are now His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

Psalm 93 Summary

Psalm 93 declares, "The LORD reigns." He is robed in majesty and strength, the world is established and cannot be shaken, and His throne has stood from of old, because He is from everlasting. The floods lift up their voice and their pounding, but the LORD on high is mightier than the roar of many waters and the breakers of the sea. His testimonies are very faithful, and holiness belongs to His house forever. The psalm opens the kingship psalms, which celebrate God's reign now and look ahead to the day Christ reigns openly over all the earth.

People and Places

- Kingship psalms: Psalms 93 and 95 to 99 (with 47), which celebrate the LORD as King, often with the cry "The LORD reigns."
- Testimonies: God's laws and promises, the words He has spoken and stands behind.

The flood rising in my life right now is a painful separation in my family. Some days the waters feel loud. Psalm 93:4 says the LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters. I hold on to that while I keep praying.

Psalm 93 Study Questions

1. What are the first three words of the psalm, and what could they also mean? (93:1)

2. What is the LORD clothed with? (93:1)

3. Why will the world not be shaken? (93:1-2)

4. How long has God's throne been established? (93:2)

5. What lifts up its voice in verse 3, and what does it stand for in the Old Testament?

6. Who is mightier than the sounds of many waters? (93:4)

7. What two things does the psalm say about God's testimonies and His house? (93:5)

8. What "floods" are rising in your life or in the world right now? How does verse 4 change the way you see them?

9. How does Revelation 11:15 help us see where the kingship psalms are heading?

10. If holiness befits God's house, and believers are now His temple, what does that mean for how you live this week?

Psalm 94: God of Vengeance, Shine Forth

Scripture

94:1-11 God of vengeance, LORD, God of vengeance, shine forth! Lift Yourself up, Judge of the earth; return recompense on the proud. Until when ***will the*** wicked, LORD, until when will ***the*** wicked exult? They pour forth, they speak arrogance; all who work iniquity boast themselves. Your people, LORD, they crush, and Your inheritance they afflict. ***The*** widow and ***the*** sojourner they kill, and orphans they murder. And they said, "***The*** LORD will not see, and the God of Jacob will not perceive." Understand, senseless ones among the people! And fools, when will you have insight? He who plants the ear, does He not hear? Or He who forms the eye, does He not look? He who disciplines nations, does He not rebuke, He who teaches mankind knowledge? The LORD knows the thoughts of mankind, that they ***are*** vanity.

94:12-23 How blessed ***is*** the man whom You discipline, LORD, and from Your law You teach him, to give him quiet from days of evil, until a pit is dug for the wicked. For the LORD will not abandon His people, and His inheritance He will not forsake. For judgment will return to righteousness, and after it ***will be*** all the upright of heart. Who will rise up for me against evildoers? Who will take his stand for me against those who work iniquity? If the LORD ***had*** not ***been*** a help to me, my soul would almost have dwelt ***in*** silence. If I said, "My foot has slipped," Your steadfast love, LORD, supported me. In the multitude of my anxious thoughts within me, Your consolations delight my soul. Will a throne of destructions be joined with You, which forms trouble by statute? They band together against the life of the righteous, and innocent blood they condemn. And the LORD has become a high refuge for me, and my God the rock of my refuge. And He has brought back on them their iniquity, and in their evil He will destroy them; the LORD our God will destroy them.

Psalm 94 Preview

Psalm 94 sits right between two kingship psalms, and it asks what every oppressed believer asks: if the LORD reigns, why do the wicked get away with it? The writer sees widows, strangers and orphans murdered, and the people who do it say God isn't watching. So he cries out to the Judge of the earth to act.

The psalm moves from that cry to a lesson for the foolish, then to quiet trust. God disciplines and teaches His own. He will not abandon His people. When the writer's foot slipped, God's steadfast love held him up. When his worried thoughts piled up, God's comfort brought him joy. The psalm ends where it began, with God bringing justice, but the writer is in a different place: the LORD has become his high refuge.

Psalm 94 Study

94:1-3 *God of vengeance, LORD, God of vengeance, shine forth! Lift Yourself up, Judge of the earth; return recompense on the proud. Until when **will the** wicked, LORD, until when will **the** wicked exult?*

Psalm 94 has no heading, and we aren't told who wrote it or when.

"God of vengeance, LORD, God of vengeance, shine forth!" The word "vengeance" can sound ugly to us, because we think of people getting even. When the Bible speaks of God's vengeance, it means His just punishment of evil, the right of a judge to set things right. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35). The writer is doing what Paul tells us to do. He doesn't take revenge. He hands it to God.

"Lift Yourself up, Judge of the earth; return recompense on the proud." Abraham once asked, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?" (Genesis 18:25). The answer is yes. "Until when will the wicked, LORD, until when will the wicked exult?" How long will they celebrate? The writer is not asking whether God will act, only when.

94:4-7 *They pour forth, they speak arrogance; all who work iniquity boast themselves. Your people, LORD, they crush, and Your inheritance they afflict. **The** widow and **the** sojourner they kill, and orphans they murder. And they said, "**The** LORD will not see, and the God of Jacob will not perceive."*

The wicked "speak arrogance" and "boast themselves." Then the writer names what they do. "Your people, LORD, they crush." They go after "the widow and the sojourner" and the "orphans." A sojourner was a foreigner living in Israel without land or family to protect him. These were the three groups God's Law singled out for protection (Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 10:18). To harm them was to defy God directly.

And they think they can get away with it: "The LORD will not see, and the God of Jacob will not perceive." Their violence rests on a lie, that God is blind or doesn't care. People still tell themselves that.

94:8-11 *Understand, senseless ones among the people! And fools, when will you have insight? He who plants the ear, does He not hear? Or He who forms the eye, does He not look? He who disciplines nations, does He not rebuke, He who teaches mankind knowledge? The LORD knows the thoughts of mankind, that they **are** vanity.*

"Understand, senseless ones among the people!" The writer now turns and speaks to the wicked as a teacher speaks to foolish students. "He who plants the ear, does He not hear? Or He who forms the eye, does He not look?" The argument is simple. The God who made ears and eyes cannot be deaf or blind. The One who designed seeing sees everything.

"He who disciplines nations, does He not rebuke?" God has corrected whole nations through history. He will correct these men too. "The LORD knows the thoughts of mankind, that they are vanity." Their clever plans are breath, empty and passing.

Paul quotes this verse in 1 Corinthians 3:20, following the Greek Old Testament, to warn the church against boasting in human wisdom: "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are futile." The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1 Corinthians 3:19). Whether the clever man is a tyrant or a church leader, God sees through him.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 3:20 (quoted)

94:12-15 *How blessed **is** the man whom You discipline, LORD, and from Your law You teach him, to give him quiet from days of evil, until a pit is dug for the wicked. For the LORD will not abandon His people, and His inheritance He will not forsake. For judgment will return to righteousness, and after it **will be** all the upright of heart.*

"How blessed is the man whom You discipline, LORD, and from Your law You teach him." The wicked are rebuked. God's own children are disciplined. The difference is love. Discipline is training, the way a good father shapes a son. Hebrews 12:6 says the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and Hebrews 12:11 admits that discipline hurts at the time but afterward "it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

God's teaching gives "quiet from days of evil, until a pit is dug for the wicked." The believer can be calm inside while the trouble lasts, because he knows how it ends.

"For the LORD will not abandon His people, and His inheritance He will not forsake." Israel is called God's inheritance, the people who belong to Him. He will not walk away from them. Paul makes the same point about Israel in Romans 11:1-2: God has not rejected His people. "For judgment will return to righteousness." Right now justice is often bent. One day it will be straightened out, and all the upright will follow it.

94:16-19 *Who will rise up for me against evildoers? Who will take his stand for me against those who work iniquity? If the LORD **had** not **been** a help to me, my soul would almost have dwelt **in** silence. If I said, "My foot has slipped," Your steadfast love, LORD, supported me. In the multitude of my anxious thoughts within me, Your consolations delight my soul.*

"Who will rise up for me against evildoers?" The writer looks around for someone to stand with him, and finds no one. Then he answers his own question. "If the LORD had not been a help to me, my soul would almost have dwelt in silence." Silence here is the silence of death. Without God he would not have survived.

When he said his foot had slipped, "Your steadfast love, LORD, supported me." At the moment he felt himself going down, God's steadfast love caught him. Many of us know that moment.

"In the multitude of my anxious thoughts within me, Your consolations delight my soul." I can't think of a better verse for a sleepless night. The worries come in a crowd. God's comfort comes too, and it is stronger. His consolations are the promises of His Word, the presence of His Spirit and often the kindness of His people. If anxious thoughts are crowding you today, tell them to God one by one, and ask Him for His comfort. And if the anxiety does not lift, talk with your pastor or a trusted believer, or a doctor. God often comforts us through other people.

94:20-23 *Will a throne of destructions be joined with You, which forms trouble by statute? They band together against the life of the righteous, and innocent blood they condemn. And the LORD has become a high refuge for me, and my God the rock of my refuge. And He has brought back on them their iniquity, and in their evil He will destroy them; the LORD our God will destroy them.*

"Will a throne of destructions be joined with You, which forms trouble by statute?" Here is a government that makes evil legal. It "forms trouble by statute," writing injustice into law. The writer asks whether such a throne can ever be on God's side, and the answer is no. A law that crushes the innocent has no part with God, however official it looks. "They band together against the life of the righteous, and innocent blood they condemn."

"And the LORD has become a high refuge for me, and my God the rock of my refuge." A high refuge is a fortress on a cliff, out of reach. He brings back on them their own iniquity, and "the LORD our God will destroy them." The wicked fall into the pit they dug. God's justice comes, and it comes from His hand, not ours. Meanwhile Jesus tells us to love our enemies and "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you" (Matthew 5:44). We can pray both ways at once: for God to stop the wicked, and for the wicked to turn to Him before He does.

Psalm 94 Summary

Psalm 94 calls on the God of vengeance, the Judge of the earth, to shine forth and repay the proud, and asks how long the wicked will exult. They boast, crush God's people and murder the widow, the stranger and the orphan, saying the LORD does not see. The writer answers that the God who planted the ear and formed the eye surely hears and sees, and the LORD knows that human thoughts are vanity (quoted in 1 Corinthians 3:20). Blessed is the man God disciplines and teaches, because the LORD will not abandon His people or forsake His inheritance, and justice will return to righteousness. When no one stood with him, the LORD was his help; when his foot slipped, God's steadfast love held him up, and in his many anxious thoughts God's comfort delighted his soul. No throne that frames evil by law can be joined with God. The LORD is his high refuge and rock, and He will bring the wicked's iniquity back on them.

People and Places

- Sojourner: a foreigner living among Israel without land or family to protect him; with widows and orphans, one of the groups God's Law protected.
- God's inheritance: God's people Israel, who belong to Him as His own possession.

Psalm 94 Study Questions

1. What does the writer call God in verses 1-2, and what does he ask Him to do?

2. Which three groups of people do the wicked attack? (94:6) Why does God's Law protect them?

3. What do the wicked say about God? (94:7)

4. How does the writer prove that God sees and hears? (94:9-10)

5. How does Paul use verse 11 in 1 Corinthians 3:19-20?

6. How is God's discipline of His people different from His rebuke of the wicked? (94:10, 12; Hebrews 12:6, 11)

7. What does God promise in verse 14, and how does Romans 11:1-2 echo it?

8. Have you had a moment when your "foot slipped"? How did God hold you up? (94:18)

9. What helps you when anxious thoughts crowd in? How could verse 19 become your prayer?

10. What does a "throne of destructions" that "forms trouble by statute" look like today, and how should believers respond to injustice written into law? (94:20)

Psalm 97: The LORD Reigns, Let the Earth Be Glad

Scripture

97:1-6 The LORD reigns; let the earth be glad; let the many coastlands rejoice. Cloud and thick darkness ***are*** all around Him; righteousness and justice ***are*** the foundation of His throne. Fire goes before Him, and it burns up His adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees, and it trembles. ***The*** mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory.

97:7-12 Let all who serve a carved image be ashamed, who boast themselves in worthless idols; bow down to Him, all gods. Zion heard, and it rejoiced, and the daughters of Judah were glad, because of Your judgments, LORD. For You, LORD, ***are*** Most High over all the earth; You are exalted exceedingly above all gods. You who love the LORD, hate evil! He guards the lives of His faithful ones; from the hand of the wicked He delivers them. Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright of heart. Rejoice, righteous ones, in the LORD, and give thanks to the remembrance of His holiness.

Psalm 97 Preview

Psalm 97 begins with the same cry as Psalm 93: "The LORD reigns." This time the King comes in a storm. Clouds and thick darkness surround Him, fire goes before Him, lightning lights up the world and the mountains melt like wax. It sounds like Mount Sinai, and it sounds like the day of His coming.

The second half turns to people. Those who worship idols are put to shame. Zion rejoices at God's judgments. And those who love the LORD are told to hate evil, because He guards His faithful ones and has sown light and joy for them.

Psalm 97 Study

97:1-2 *The LORD reigns; let the earth be glad; let the many coastlands rejoice. Cloud and thick darkness **are** all around Him; righteousness and justice **are** the foundation of His throne.*

Psalm 97 has no heading, and the writer isn't named.

"The LORD reigns; let the earth be glad" (see Psalm 93 on the kingship psalms). God's rule is good news. "Let the many coastlands rejoice." The coastlands are the islands and shores of the Mediterranean, the far places of the Gentile world. God's reign is not only for Israel. The whole earth is invited to be glad.

"Cloud and thick darkness are all around Him." When God came down on Sinai, the mountain was covered with cloud and thick darkness, fire and smoke (Exodus 19:16-18; Deuteronomy 4:11). God is near, but He is also hidden. We cannot look at Him directly. Still, we know what His throne rests on: "righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne," the same words as Psalm 89:14. A dark cloud may surround Him, but there is nothing dark in His rule.

97:3-6 *Fire goes before Him, and it burns up His adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees, and it trembles.* ***The*** *mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory.*

"Fire goes before Him, and it burns up His adversaries all around." God's holiness is like fire to everything that opposes Him. "His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees, and it trembles." "The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth." Mountains are the most solid things we know. Before Him they melt like a candle.

"The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory." In Psalm 19 the heavens declare His glory day by day. Here they announce His righteousness, as if the sky itself were a herald going before the King.

Many of these pictures are used again of the Lord's coming. Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus revealed from heaven with His mighty angels "in flaming fire" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). I believe this psalm looks ahead to that day, when Christ returns in glory after the Tribulation and every eye sees Him (Revelation 1:7).

97:7 *Let all who serve a carved image be ashamed, who boast themselves in worthless idols; bow down to Him, all gods.*

"Let all who serve a carved image be ashamed, who boast themselves in worthless idols." When the true King appears, every false god is exposed. The word for "worthless idols" means things of nothing. People boast in them, and they turn out to be empty.

"Bow down to Him, all gods." Whatever the nations worship, or whatever spiritual powers stand behind those idols, must bow to Him. The Greek Old Testament read this line as a call for all His angels to bow down to Him, and Hebrews 1:6 uses the same words when it says that God brings His Firstborn into the world and says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him." So the One the angels worship is Jesus, the Son. That is one of the plainest ways the New Testament shows that Jesus is God, because angels may worship no one else.

New Testament links: Hebrews 1:6 (alluded to)

97:8-9 *Zion heard, and it rejoiced, and the daughters of Judah were glad, because of Your judgments, LORD. For You, LORD,* ***are*** *Most High over all the earth; You are exalted exceedingly above all gods.*

"Zion heard, and it rejoiced, and the daughters of Judah were glad, because of Your judgments, LORD." The "daughters of Judah" are the towns of Judah, pictured as daughters around their mother city. God's judgments bring joy to His people because they mean the wrong is being put right. "For You, LORD, are Most High over all the earth; You are exalted exceedingly above all gods."

97:10-12 *You who love the LORD, hate evil! He guards the lives of His faithful ones; from the hand of the wicked He delivers them. Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright of heart. Rejoice, righteous ones, in the LORD, and give thanks to the remembrance of His holiness.*

"You who love the LORD, hate evil!" Loving God and hating evil go together. We cannot love the One who is holy and stay comfortable with what He hates. Paul says the same when he tells us to let love be without hypocrisy, "Abhorring the evil, clinging to the good" (Romans 12:9). Hating evil means hating the sin, beginning with our own, not hating people.

"He guards the lives of His faithful ones; from the hand of the wicked He delivers them." That doesn't mean they will never suffer. It means no one can snatch them from Him.

"Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright of heart." Light is planted like seed. It may lie hidden in the ground for a while, but it will come up. If you are in a dark season, the seed is already in the ground.

"Rejoice, righteous ones, in the LORD, and give thanks to the remembrance of His holiness." The psalm that began with the earth rejoicing ends with the righteous rejoicing, thanking God every time they remember how holy He is.

Psalm 97 Summary

Psalm 97 proclaims that the LORD reigns and calls the earth and the coastlands to rejoice. Cloud and thick darkness surround Him, but righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. Fire goes before Him, His lightning lights the world, the mountains melt like wax and the heavens declare His righteousness to all peoples. Idol worshipers are put to shame and all gods must bow to Him, a line Hebrews 1:6 applies to the angels worshiping the Son. Zion and the towns of Judah rejoice at His judgments, for He is Most High over all the earth. Those who love the LORD are to hate evil, since He guards His faithful ones; light and joy are sown for the righteous, who rejoice in the LORD and give thanks for His holiness.

People and Places

- Coastlands: the islands and coasts of the Mediterranean Sea, standing for the far nations of the Gentile world.
- Daughters of Judah: the towns and villages of Judah, pictured as daughters around Jerusalem.

Psalm 97 Study Questions

1. What does the earth do because the LORD reigns? (97:1)

2. What surrounds God, and what is the foundation of His throne? (97:2)

3. What happens to the mountains before the LORD? (97:5)

4. What do the heavens declare, and what do the peoples see? (97:6)

5. How does Hebrews 1:6 use verse 7, and what does that tell us about who Jesus is?

6. Why does Zion rejoice? (97:8)

7. What does God tell those who love Him to do, and what does He promise them? (97:10)

8. Why can't we love God and still be comfortable with evil? Where is that a struggle for you?

9. What does it mean that "light is sown" for the righteous? How might that encourage someone in a dark time? (97:11)

10. How do the pictures of fire and lightning in this psalm shape the way you think about the return of Christ?

Psalm 98: Joy to the Earth

Scripture

A psalm.

98:1-3 Sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done wonders; His right hand and the arm of His holiness have saved for Him. The LORD has made known His salvation; to the eyes of the nations He has revealed His righteousness. He has remembered His steadfast love and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

98:4-9 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth; break forth, and sing for joy, and sing praises. Sing praises to the LORD with a lyre, with a lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of a ram's horn shout for joy before the King, the LORD. Let the sea thunder, and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it. Let ***the*** rivers clap ***their*** hands; together let ***the*** mountains sing for joy before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world in righteousness, and peoples with uprightness.

Psalm 98 Preview

Psalm 98 is a call to sing, and it keeps getting louder. First Israel sings because God has saved them and kept His promises. Then the whole earth is told to shout, with harps, trumpets and the ram's horn. Last of all the sea roars, the rivers clap their hands and the mountains sing together.

Why all the noise? Because the King is coming. "He is coming to judge the earth." The psalm is very close to Psalm 96 (see Volume 1), and the hymn writer Isaac Watts built his Christmas hymn Joy to the World on it. The song fits Christmas, when the King first came, and it fits even better the day He comes again.

Psalm 98 Study

98:1 *Sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done wonders; His right hand and the arm of His holiness have saved for Him.*

The heading reads simply, "A psalm." The writer isn't named.

"Sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done wonders." A new song is a fresh song of praise for something new God has done (see Psalm 96 in Volume 1). "His right hand and the arm of His holiness have saved for Him." God needed no help. He won the victory Himself, with His own arm. Isaiah uses the same picture: the LORD bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations (Isaiah 52:10).

98:2-3 *The LORD has made known His salvation; to the eyes of the nations He has revealed His righteousness. He has remembered His steadfast love and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.*

"The LORD has made known His salvation; to the eyes of the nations He has revealed His righteousness." God's saving work is done in public, where the nations can see it.

"He has remembered His steadfast love and His faithfulness to the house of Israel." God saves the world through His faithfulness to Israel, not by setting Israel aside. Mary sang this verse back to God when she carried Jesus: He has helped Israel His servant, "to remember mercy" (Luke 1:54-55), just as He spoke to Abraham. And old Simeon, holding the baby Jesus, said, "My eyes have seen Your salvation," a light for the Gentiles and glory for Israel (Luke 2:30-32).

"All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God." That happened in part when the gospel went out to the nations (Acts 1:8). It will happen completely when Christ returns and every eye sees Him.

New Testament links: Luke 1:54 (alluded to)

98:4-6 *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth; break forth, and sing for joy, and sing praises. Sing praises to the LORD with a lyre, with a lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of a ram's horn shout for joy before the King, the LORD.*

"Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth; break forth, and sing for joy, and sing praises." The verbs tumble out one after another. Joy that big can't be kept quiet.

"Sing praises to the LORD with a lyre, with a lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of a ram's horn shout for joy before the King, the LORD." The trumpets were silver trumpets the priests blew (Numbers 10:1-10). The ram's horn, the shofar, was blown to announce feasts, battles and the crowning of a king (1 Kings 1:34). Here it announces the King, the LORD Himself.

98:7-9 *Let the sea thunder, and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it. Let **the** rivers clap **their** hands; together let **the** mountains sing for joy before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world in righteousness, and peoples with uprightness.*

Now creation joins the choir. "Let the sea thunder, and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands; together let the mountains sing for joy." Rivers don't have hands, and mountains don't sing. It is poetry. But it is poetry about something real. Creation has been groaning since the fall (Romans 8:22), and it is waiting for the King to set it free.

"Before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world in righteousness, and peoples with uprightness." Psalm 96 ends almost the same way. To the poor and the wronged, a righteous Judge is good news. Nothing will be overlooked, and no one will be treated unfairly.

I believe this looks ahead to the return of Jesus Christ. After He takes His church to be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) and after the Tribulation, He will come back in glory to judge and reign

on the earth (Matthew 25:31; Revelation 19:11; 20:4-6). The angels at His ascension said He would come back the same way they saw Him go (Acts 1:11). Psalm 98 tells us how creation will greet Him.

Psalm 98 Summary

Psalm 98 calls God's people to sing a new song because the LORD has done wonders, winning salvation with His own right hand and holy arm. He has made His salvation known to the nations and remembered His steadfast love and faithfulness to Israel, so that the ends of the earth have seen it, as Mary and Simeon rejoiced when Jesus came (Luke 1:54; 2:30-32). All the earth is to shout for joy with lyre, trumpets and ram's horn before the King, the LORD. The sea, the rivers and the mountains join in, because He is coming to judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with uprightness.

People and Places

- Ram's horn (shofar): a trumpet made from a ram's horn, blown to call Israel to feasts or battle and to announce a new king.

Psalm 98 Study Questions

1. Why are God's people told to sing a new song? (98:1)

2. With what did God win the victory? (98:1)

3. What has God remembered toward the house of Israel, and who has seen His salvation? (98:3)

4. How did Mary and Simeon echo this psalm when Jesus came? (Luke 1:54-55; 2:30-32)

5. Which instruments are named in verses 5-6?

6. What parts of creation are called to praise in verses 7-8?

7. Why is the LORD coming, and how will He judge? (98:9)

8. Why would a righteous Judge be good news for some people and frightening for others?

9. What "new song" could you sing to God for something He has done recently?

10. How does this psalm help you look forward to Christ's return with joy instead of fear?

Psalm 99: Holy Is He

Scripture

99:1-5 The LORD reigns; let peoples tremble! ***He*** sits ***on*** the cherubim; let the earth quake! The LORD in Zion ***is*** great, and He ***is*** exalted over all the peoples. Let them give thanks to Your name, great and to be feared; holy ***is*** He. And the strength of a King loves justice; You have established uprightness; justice and righteousness in Jacob You have done. Exalt the LORD our God, and bow down at the footstool of His feet; holy ***is*** He.

99:6-9 Moses and Aaron ***were*** among His priests, and Samuel among those who call on His name; they called to the LORD, and He answered them. In a pillar of cloud He spoke to them; they kept His testimonies and the statute ***that*** He gave to them. LORD our God, You answered them; a forgiving God You were to them, and One taking vengeance on their deeds. Exalt the LORD our God, and bow down at the mountain of His holiness, for the LORD our God ***is*** holy.

Psalm 99 Preview

Psalm 99 is the last of the "LORD reigns" psalms, and it has one word ringing through it: holy. Three times the psalm stops to say it. "Holy is He." "Holy is He." "The LORD our God is holy." It is a little like the seraphim in Isaiah 6, calling "Holy, holy, holy" to one another.

The King sits enthroned above the cherubim in Zion. He loves justice. And He is not far off. He answered Moses, Aaron and Samuel when they called on Him, forgave His people and still disciplined their sins. The holy God is also the God who answers prayer.

Psalm 99 Study

99:1-3 *The LORD reigns; let peoples tremble! **He** sits **on** the cherubim; let the earth quake! The LORD in Zion **is** great, and He **is** exalted over all the peoples. Let them give thanks to Your name, great and to be feared; holy **is** He.*

Psalm 99 has no heading.

"The LORD reigns; let peoples tremble!" Psalm 97 said the earth should be glad; Psalm 99 says it should tremble. Both are right. "He sits on the cherubim; let the earth quake!" The cherubim were the two golden figures of angels on the lid of the ark of the covenant (see Psalm 80). God spoke of meeting His people from between them (Exodus 25:22). The ark was His earthly throne room, and the whole earth is to shake before the One seated there.

"The LORD in Zion is great, and He is exalted over all the peoples." His throne is in Zion, but His rule is over everyone. "Let them give thanks to Your name, great and to be feared; holy is He."

Holy means set apart, wholly other than us and wholly pure. God is not just a bigger and better version of us. He is in a class by Himself. And He is morally perfect, with no trace of evil. Isaiah

heard the seraphim call, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of armies" (Isaiah 6:3), and John heard the living creatures around the throne say the same day and night (Revelation 4:8).

99:4-5 *And the strength of a King loves justice; You have established uprightness; justice and righteousness in Jacob You have done. Exalt the LORD our God, and bow down at the footstool of His feet; holy **is** He.*

"And the strength of a King loves justice." Earthly kings often use their strength to get what they want. This King uses His to do what is right. "You have established uprightness; justice and righteousness in Jacob You have done." God did justice among His people Israel, giving them His Law and judging their sin.

"Exalt the LORD our God, and bow down at the footstool of His feet; holy is He." The footstool is the ark of the covenant. David called the ark "the footstool of the feet of our God" (1 Chronicles 28:2). God is so great that the ark, the holiest object in Israel, was only the place for His feet. Isaiah 66:1 goes further and calls the whole earth His footstool. The right response is to bow.

99:6-7 *Moses and Aaron **were** among His priests, and Samuel among those who call on His name; they called to the LORD, and He answered them. In a pillar of cloud He spoke to them; they kept His testimonies and the statute **that** He gave to them.*

Now the psalm names three men. "Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel among those who call on His name; they called to the LORD, and He answered them." Moses led Israel out of Egypt and served as a priest when the priesthood began (Exodus 24:6-8; Leviticus 8). Aaron was the first high priest. Samuel was the prophet and judge who anointed Saul and David. What these three have in common is prayer. All three are known for standing between God and His people. Jeremiah 15:1 names Moses and Samuel together as the great intercessors. Samuel said it would be a sin for him to stop praying for Israel (1 Samuel 12:23).

"In a pillar of cloud He spoke to them." God led Israel through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud and spoke to Moses from it (Exodus 33:9; Numbers 12:5). "They kept His testimonies and the statute that He gave to them."

The holy God who sits above the cherubim is not too high to listen. He answered when they called, and He still does. We have an even greater go-between than Moses or Samuel. Jesus always lives to intercede for those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25).

99:8-9 *LORD our God, You answered them; a forgiving God You were to them, and One taking vengeance on their deeds. Exalt the LORD our God, and bow down at the mountain of His holiness, for the LORD our God **is** holy.*

"LORD our God, You answered them; a forgiving God You were to them, and One taking vengeance on their deeds." Both halves are true. God forgave. Israel was not destroyed when they made the golden calf, because Moses prayed and God relented (Exodus 32:11-14). But He still dealt with their sin. Moses and Aaron themselves were not allowed to enter the promised land after they disobeyed at Meribah (Numbers 20:12).

Forgiveness and discipline are not opposites. A forgiven child is still corrected. God forgives us fully in Christ, and He still lovingly disciplines His children so we grow (Hebrews 12:6).

"Exalt the LORD our God, and bow down at the mountain of His holiness, for the LORD our God is holy." The third time, the refrain is the longest and fullest. The psalm ends on its key word.

I believe the kingship psalms look forward to the day the Lord reigns from Zion over all the nations. Zechariah 14:9 says the LORD will be King over all the earth on that day. Then every people will tremble and bow, and the holiness of the King will fill the whole earth.

Psalm 99 Summary

Psalm 99 proclaims that the LORD reigns, enthroned on the cherubim, and calls the peoples to tremble and the earth to quake. He is great in Zion and exalted over all peoples, and they are to praise His great and awesome name, for He is holy. The mighty King loves justice and has done justice and righteousness in Jacob, so His people are to exalt Him and bow at His footstool, for He is holy. Moses, Aaron and Samuel called on Him, and He answered them and spoke to them from the pillar of cloud. He forgave Israel and yet disciplined their sins. The psalm ends by calling God's people to exalt Him and bow at His holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.

People and Places

- Footstool of His feet: the ark of the covenant, the place of God's presence among His people (1 Chronicles 28:2).
- Moses, Aaron and Samuel: Moses the leader and lawgiver, his brother Aaron the first high priest, and Samuel the prophet and judge who anointed Saul and David; all three were known for praying for Israel.
- Pillar of cloud: the cloud by which God led Israel through the wilderness and from which He spoke to Moses.

Psalm 99 Study Questions

1. What are the peoples and the earth told to do, and why? (99:1)

2. Where does the LORD sit enthroned? (99:1)

3. How many times does the psalm say that God is holy, and where? (99:3, 5, 9)

4. What does the strength of this King love? (99:4)

5. What is the "footstool of His feet"? (99:5; 1 Chronicles 28:2)

6. Which three men are named in verse 6, and what do they have in common?

7. How was God both forgiving and "taking vengeance" on Israel's deeds? (99:8)

8. What does the word "holy" mean to you, and how should it change the way you come to God in worship?

9. Who has prayed for you over the years the way Moses and Samuel prayed for Israel? Whom could you pray for that way?

10. How have you seen God both forgive you and discipline you? How do those two things fit together?

Psalm 101: A King's Promise

Scripture

Of David. A psalm.

101:1-8 ***Of*** steadfast love and justice I will sing; to You, LORD, I will sing praises. I will give attention to a blameless way. When will You come to me? I will walk about in the integrity of my heart in the midst of my house. I will not set before my eyes a thing of worthlessness; the doing of deviations I hate; it will not cling to me. A perverse heart will depart from me; evil I will not know. Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him I will destroy; the haughty of eyes and arrogant of heart, him I will not be able ***to endure***. My eyes ***will be*** on the faithful of the land, to dwell with me; he who walks in a blameless way, he will serve me. He who does deceit will not dwell in the midst of my house; he who speaks lies will not be established before my eyes. Morning by morning I will destroy all the wicked of the land, to cut off from the city of the LORD all who work iniquity.

Psalm 101 Preview

Psalm 101 sounds like a king's oath on the day he takes the throne. David promises God how he will live and how he will rule. First he speaks about himself: a blameless way, a pure heart and eyes that refuse what is worthless. Then he speaks about his court: no slanderers, no proud people, no liars. Only the faithful will serve him.

Every leader could learn from this psalm, and so could every parent and every believer. It begins at home, "in the midst of my house," before it ever reaches the city. And no king of Israel kept it perfectly. Many see in it a picture of the one King who will.

Psalm 101 Study

101:1-2 ***Of*** *steadfast love and justice I will sing; to You, LORD, I will sing praises. I will give attention to a blameless way. When will You come to me? I will walk about in the integrity of my heart in the midst of my house.*

The heading reads, "Of David. A psalm." The heading names David, and I read it as naming him as the writer, though "of David" can also mean "for" or "belonging to" him.

"Of steadfast love and justice I will sing." These are the two things a good ruler needs. Steadfast love is loyal kindness (see Psalm 77), and justice is doing what is right. God shows both, and David wants to rule with both.

"I will give attention to a blameless way." Blameless doesn't mean sinless. It means whole, with nothing hidden, a life of integrity. "When will You come to me?" That short question in the middle of David's vow is the cry of a man who knows he can't do this without God. Some think it points to the time David was waiting to bring the ark to Jerusalem, when he asked how the ark of the LORD could come to him (2 Samuel 6:9). We aren't told, but either way David wants God near.

"I will walk about in the integrity of my heart in the midst of my house." Integrity starts at home. It's easy to act godly in public. The real test is how we live with the people who see us every day.

101:3-4 *I will not set before my eyes a thing of worthlessness; the doing of deviations I hate; it will not cling to me. A perverse heart will depart from me; evil I will not know.*

"I will not set before my eyes a thing of worthlessness." The Hebrew is close to a thing of belial, a word for what is wicked and good for nothing. What we look at shapes us. Jesus said the eye is the lamp of the body (Matthew 6:22-23). In our day this verse speaks directly to what we watch and scroll through.

"The doing of deviations I hate; it will not cling to me." Deviations are swerving from God's path. David doesn't want that kind of thing to stick to him. "A perverse heart will depart from me; evil I will not know." He wants nothing to do with a twisted heart, his own or anyone else's.

101:5 *Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him I will destroy; the haughty of eyes and arrogant of heart, him I will not be able* ***to endure****.*

Now David turns from himself to his court. "Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him I will destroy." Slander in a king's palace could ruin innocent people and tear a kingdom apart. David will not allow it. "The haughty of eyes and arrogant of heart, him I will not be able to endure." Pride and gossip were the two poisons of royal courts.

"Destroy" sounds harsh. David is speaking as king and judge, not as a private man with a grudge. A ruler is responsible to stop evil in his realm (Romans 13:3-4). That is a different calling from the one Jesus gives each of us personally, to love our enemies and pray for them (Matthew 5:44). For us, the verse is a warning about how seriously God takes secret slander. Proverbs 6:16-19 puts haughty eyes and a lying tongue on the list of things the LORD hates.

101:6-7 *My eyes* ***will be*** *on the faithful of the land, to dwell with me; he who walks in a blameless way, he will serve me. He who does deceit will not dwell in the midst of my house; he who speaks lies will not be established before my eyes.*

"My eyes will be on the faithful of the land, to dwell with me; he who walks in a blameless way, he will serve me." David will choose his staff by character. He looks for faithful people. A leader is known by the people he keeps close.

"He who does deceit will not dwell in the midst of my house; he who speaks lies will not be established before my eyes." Liars won't last in his palace.

Sadly, David's own house did not live up to this. Absalom, his son, won the people's hearts by deceit (2 Samuel 15:1-6), and David's own sin with Bathsheba stained his house (Volume 1, Psalm 51). Psalm 101 is the right goal, and David fell short of it, as we all do.

101:8 *Morning by morning I will destroy all the wicked of the land, to cut off from the city of the LORD all who work iniquity.*

"Morning by morning I will destroy all the wicked of the land, to cut off from the city of the LORD all who work iniquity." In Israel the king often heard cases in the morning, at the city gate or in his court (2 Samuel 15:2; Jeremiah 21:12). David promises to deal with wrongdoers every day, without delay, to keep Jerusalem, "the city of the LORD," a holy place.

Only one King will ever rule like this perfectly. Many see in this psalm a picture of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who will reign in righteousness. Isaiah 11:3-5 says the coming King from Jesse's line will judge the poor with righteousness and strike the earth with the rod of His mouth. When He reigns from Jerusalem, nothing evil will be allowed in the city of the LORD (compare Revelation 21:27). Until then, we work at the first half of this psalm, the blameless heart and the clean house, and we leave the judging to Him.

Psalm 101 Summary

Psalm 101 is David's vow to God about how he will live and rule. He will sing of steadfast love and justice and give attention to a blameless way, asking when God will come to him, and he will walk with integrity in his own house. He will not set anything worthless before his eyes, and he hates the deeds of those who turn aside, refusing to let a perverse heart or evil cling to him. As king he will silence secret slanderers and will not put up with the proud. He will look for the faithful of the land to serve him, and no deceiver or liar will stay in his house. Every morning he will deal with the wicked to keep the city of the LORD pure. No king of Israel kept this vow perfectly, and many see in it a picture of Christ's righteous reign.

People and Places

- Worthlessness: the Hebrew is close to "Belial," a word for what is wicked and good for nothing; the New Testament uses Belial as a name for Satan (2 Corinthians 6:15).

Psalm 101 Study Questions

1. What two things does David say he will sing about? (101:1)

2. Where does David say he will walk with integrity? (101:2) Why do you think he starts there?

3. What question does David ask God in the middle of his vow? (101:2)

4. What will David not set before his eyes? (101:3) What would that mean for you in what you watch, read or scroll through?

5. What two kinds of people will David not allow in his court? (101:5)

6. Whom will David choose to serve him? (101:6)

7. How did David's own house fall short of this psalm? (2 Samuel 11; 15:1-6)

8. Why is it important that David speaks as a king in verses 5 and 8, and how is that different from what Jesus asks of us personally? (Matthew 5:44; Romans 13:3-4)

9. If you lead others, at work, at church or at home, which line of this psalm challenges you most?

10. How does Psalm 101 point us forward to the reign of Jesus, the perfect King?

Psalm 102: A Prayer of the Afflicted

Scripture

*A prayer of an afflicted **one**, when he grows faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.*

102:1-11 LORD, hear my prayer, and let my cry for help come to You. Do not hide Your face from me in the day ***when*** distress ***comes*** to me; incline Your ear to me; in the day ***when*** I call, hurry, answer me. For my days have come to an end in smoke, and my bones have been burned like a hearth. My heart has been struck like vegetation, and it has withered, for I have forgotten to eat my bread. From the sound of my groaning my bones cling to my flesh. I am like a desert owl of the wilderness; I have become like an owl of the waste places. I lie awake, and I have become like a bird alone on a roof. All the day my enemies have taunted me; those who mock me have sworn by me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and my drinks I have mixed with weeping, because of Your indignation and Your wrath, for You have lifted me up, and You have thrown me away. My days ***are*** like a stretched-out shadow, and I wither like vegetation.

102:12-22 And You, LORD, sit forever, and Your remembrance ***is*** to generation and generation. You will arise; You will have compassion on Zion, for ***it is*** time to show favor to her, for the appointed time has come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and they show favor to her dust. And nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth Your glory. For the LORD has built Zion; He has appeared in His glory. He has turned to the prayer of the destitute, and He has not despised their prayer. Let this be written for a later generation, and a people to be created will praise ***the*** LORD. For He has looked down from the height of His holiness; the LORD has looked from heaven to earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to set free the sons of death, to recount in Zion the name of the LORD, and His praise in Jerusalem, when peoples are gathered together, and kingdoms, to serve the LORD.

102:23-28 He has afflicted my strength in the way; He has cut short my days. I said, "My God, do not take me up in the middle of my days; Your years ***are*** in a generation of generations. Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens ***are*** the work of Your hands. They will perish, and You will endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them, and they will pass away. And You ***are*** He, and Your years will not come to an end. The sons of Your servants will dwell, and their offspring will be established before You."

Psalm 102 Preview

Psalm 102 is the prayer of someone at the end of his strength. He can't eat. He can't sleep. He feels like a lone bird on a roof, and his life is fading like an evening shadow. He feels God has picked him up and thrown him away. If you have been in that place, this psalm will sound familiar.

Then, halfway through, he lifts his eyes. "And You, LORD, sit forever." His days are short, but God's are not. God will rebuild Zion, hear the prisoner's groan and gather the nations to worship. The psalm ends with words about God that the book of Hebrews applies to Jesus: the heavens will wear out like old clothes, "And You are He, and Your years will not come to an end."

Psalm 102 Study

102:1-2 *LORD, hear my prayer, and let my cry for help come to You. Do not hide Your face from me in the day **when** distress **comes** to me; incline Your ear to me; in the day **when** I call, hurry, answer me.*

The heading reads, "A prayer of an afflicted one, when he grows faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD." This heading is unusual. It does not name a writer or an event. It names a condition. The psalm is written for anyone who is worn out and needs to pour out his heart to God. The verses about Zion's stones and dust (verses 13-14) lead many to think it was written during the exile in Babylon, when Jerusalem lay in ruins, but we aren't told.

Psalm 102 is one of the seven psalms the church has long called the penitential psalms, psalms of sorrow and repentance (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143). It says less about personal sin than the others. Its sorrow is mainly suffering under God's hand (verse 10), and Christians have prayed it in times of grief and confession alike.

"LORD, hear my prayer, and let my cry for help come to You." He asks God not to hide His face and to "hurry, answer me." There is nothing polished about this prayer. It is the cry of someone who needs help today.

102:3-7 *For my days have come to an end in smoke, and my bones have been burned like a hearth. My heart has been struck like vegetation, and it has withered, for I have forgotten to eat my bread. From the sound of my groaning my bones cling to my flesh. I am like a desert owl of the wilderness; I have become like an owl of the waste places. I lie awake, and I have become like a bird alone on a roof.*

He describes what his affliction feels like. "My days have come to an end in smoke," vanishing like smoke. "My bones have been burned like a hearth." He has a fever, or a burning ache deep in his body. "My heart has been struck like vegetation, and it has withered, for I have forgotten to eat my bread." He is so low that he forgets to eat. "My bones cling to my flesh." He is skin and bones.

"I am like a desert owl of the wilderness; I have become like an owl of the waste places." Owls live in ruins and empty places and cry out at night. "I lie awake, and I have become like a bird alone on a roof." Sleepless, alone, exposed.

Loss of appetite, loss of sleep and deep loneliness are what many people go through in depression, grief or long illness. Scripture doesn't scold this man for feeling this way. It gives him words and puts them in the Bible for us. If this is where you are, you are not a lesser believer. Tell God plainly, as he did. And please tell someone else too: a pastor, a trusted believer, a doctor. If you are in danger of harming yourself, get emergency help right away.

102:8-11 *All the day my enemies have taunted me; those who mock me have sworn by me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and my drinks I have mixed with weeping, because of Your indignation and Your wrath, for You have lifted me up, and You have thrown me away. My days **are** like a stretched-out shadow, and I wither like vegetation.*

"All the day my enemies have taunted me." On top of his pain come the mockers. They even use his name as a curse, the meaning of "those who mock me have sworn by me." People point at him as the example of someone ruined.

"For I have eaten ashes like bread, and my drinks I have mixed with weeping." Ashes were the sign of mourning. Grief has become his food and tears his drink.

"Because of Your indignation and Your wrath, for You have lifted me up, and You have thrown me away." Here is the deepest pain. He believes his suffering comes from God's hand. He doesn't explain it away. "My days are like a stretched-out shadow." A shadow in the late afternoon stretches long and thin just before the sun goes down. His life feels like that.

We should be careful. Not all suffering is God's punishment for a particular sin (John 9:1-3). This man may be suffering along with his nation under God's judgment in the exile. But he still brings it to the same God he feels is against him. That is faith.

102:12-17 *And You, LORD, sit forever, and Your remembrance **is** to generation and generation. You will arise; You will have compassion on Zion, for **it is** time to show favor to her, for the appointed time has come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and they show favor to her dust. And nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth Your glory. For the LORD has built Zion; He has appeared in His glory. He has turned to the prayer of the destitute, and He has not despised their prayer.*

"And You, LORD, sit forever, and Your remembrance is to generation and generation." Everything changes with this line. He has looked at himself long enough. Now he looks at God. He is a shadow; God sits enthroned forever.

"You will arise; You will have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her, for the appointed time has come." He believes God has set a time for Zion. Jeremiah had said the exile would last seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10), and Daniel prayed when he read that the time was near (Daniel 9:2). "For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and they show favor to her dust." Even the rubble of Jerusalem is dear to God's people.

"And nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth Your glory." When God rebuilds Zion, the whole world will notice. "He has turned to the prayer of the destitute, and He has not despised their prayer." The man who began by begging to be heard now says that God hears the destitute.

I believe this hope reaches past the return from Babylon in 538 B.C. The nations and kings coming to fear the LORD, and kingdoms gathering to serve Him (verse 22), look ahead to the day Christ reigns from Zion and the nations come up to worship (Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 14:16). God has a future for Zion still.

102:18-22 *Let this be written for a later generation, and a people to be created will praise **the** LORD. For He has looked down from the height of His holiness; the LORD has looked from heaven to earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to set free the sons of death, to recount in Zion the name of the LORD, and His praise in Jerusalem, when peoples are gathered together, and kingdoms, to serve the LORD.*

"Let this be written for a later generation, and a people to be created will praise the LORD." He wants this written down for people not yet born. We are part of that later generation, reading his prayer today. "A people to be created" may point to a whole new people of God, made new by Him (2 Corinthians 5:17).

"For He has looked down from the height of His holiness." God looks "from heaven to earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to set free the sons of death." The "sons of death" are those condemned to die, whether prisoners in exile or anyone under a death sentence. God frees them so they can tell of His name in Zion, "when peoples are gathered together, and kingdoms, to serve the LORD."

102:23-24 *He has afflicted my strength in the way; He has cut short my days. I said, "My God, do not take me up in the middle of my days; Your years **are** in a generation of generations.*

Then the writer comes back to his own trouble. "He has afflicted my strength in the way; He has cut short my days." The big picture has not taken away his pain. He prays, "My God, do not take me up in the middle of my days." He is afraid he will die before his time.

"Your years are in a generation of generations." Again he sets his short life beside God's endless years. That is the turning point of the whole psalm: our days are few, His are without end.

102:25-27 *Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens **are** the work of Your hands. They will perish, and You will endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them, and they will pass away. And You **are** He, and Your years will not come to an end.*

"Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, and You will endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them, and they will pass away."

The heavens and the earth seem permanent. They are not. They will wear out like old clothes, and God will change them the way we change a worn shirt. Peter says the heavens will pass away and the elements will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10), and John saw a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). "And You are He, and Your years will not come to an end." God does not change.

Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes these verses and says God speaks them to the Son. In Psalm 102 the words are addressed to the LORD, the Creator. Hebrews applies them to Jesus. That means Jesus is the LORD who founded the earth, the One through whom all things were made (John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2). He does not change. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

That is good news for the afflicted man and for us. The world can wear out, our bodies can wear out, but the Lord we trust will not.

New Testament links: Hebrews 1:10-12 (quoted)

102:28 *The sons of Your servants will dwell, and their offspring will be established before You."*

"The sons of Your servants will dwell, and their offspring will be established before You." The writer may not live to see Zion rebuilt, but his children will. Because God endures, His people endure. The psalm that began with a man fading like smoke ends with a future for generations.

That doesn't promise every illness will be healed in this life. It promises something deeper. Those who belong to the unchanging God have a future no illness can take away.

Psalm 102 Summary

Psalm 102 is the prayer of an afflicted one who has grown faint and pours out his complaint to the LORD. His days vanish like smoke, his bones burn, he forgets to eat, he lies awake like a lonely bird on a roof, enemies mock him and he eats ashes and drinks tears, feeling that God has lifted him up and thrown him down. Then he turns to the LORD who sits enthroned forever and trusts that God will have compassion on Zion at the appointed time, so that the nations will fear His name and kingdoms will gather to serve Him. He wants this written for a later generation, for God looks down to hear prisoners and set free those condemned to die. Though his own strength is cut short, he rests in the God whose years never end, who founded the earth and will outlast the heavens, words Hebrews 1:10-12 applies to Jesus the Son. The children of God's servants will dwell secure before Him.

People and Places

- Penitential psalms: seven psalms the church has long used for sorrow and repentance: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143.

Psalm 102 Study Questions

1. What kind of person is this prayer written for, according to the heading?

2. List some of the ways the writer describes his suffering in verses 3-11.

3. What birds does he compare himself to, and why? (102:6-7)

4. Where does he believe his suffering comes from? (102:10) How does John 9:1-3 help us not to jump to conclusions about others' suffering?

5. What turns the psalm around in verse 12?

6. What does the writer believe God will do for Zion, and what will the nations do? (102:13-15)

7. Who does the writer want to read his prayer? (102:18) How does it feel to know you are part of that later generation?

8. How does Hebrews 1:10-12 use verses 25-27, and what does it teach about Jesus?

9. When you are worn out, what helps you look away from yourself to God, as the writer does in verse 12?

10. Who could you encourage this week who feels like "a bird alone on a roof"?

Psalm 104: How Many Are Your Works

Scripture

104:1-18 Bless the LORD, my soul. LORD my God, You are very great; You are clothed ***with*** splendor and majesty, wrapping Yourself ***in*** light like a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent curtain, who lays the beams of His upper rooms in the waters, who makes clouds His chariot, who walks on the wings of the wind, who makes His messengers winds, His ministers a flaming fire. He founded the earth on its foundations; it will not be shaken forever and ever. ***With*** the deep like clothing You covered it; the waters stood above the mountains. From Your rebuke they fled; from the sound of Your thunder they hurried away. They went up mountains; they went down valleys, to the place that You founded for them. You set a boundary ***that*** they will not pass over; they will not return to cover the earth. He sends forth springs into the ravines; between the mountains they go. They give drink to every living thing of the field; wild donkeys break their thirst. By them the flying things of the heavens dwell; from among the branches they give voice. He waters the mountains from His upper rooms; from the fruit of Your works the earth is satisfied. He causes grass to sprout for the livestock, and vegetation for the labor of mankind, to bring forth bread from the earth, and wine ***that*** makes glad the heart of man, to make ***his*** face shine with oil, and bread ***that*** sustains the heart of man. The trees of the LORD are satisfied, the cedars of Lebanon which He planted, where the birds make nests; the stork, the cypresses ***are*** her home. The high mountains ***are*** for the mountain goats; the crags ***are*** a refuge for the rock badgers.

104:19-35 He made the moon for appointed times; the sun knows its setting. You make darkness, and it becomes night; in it every living thing of the forest moves about. The young lions roar for the prey, and to seek their food from God. The sun rises; they withdraw, and in their dens they lie down. Man goes out to his work and to his labor until evening. How many are Your works, LORD! In wisdom You have made all of them; the earth is full of Your possessions. This sea, great and broad in extent, there ***are*** moving things, and ***there is*** no number ***to them***, living things small along with great. There the ships go about, ***and*** Leviathan, which You formed to play in it. All of them wait for You, to give their food in its time. You give to them; they gather ***it*** up; You open Your hand; they are satisfied ***with*** good. You hide Your face; they are terrified; You withdraw their breath; they die, and to their dust they return. You send forth Your Spirit; they are created, and You renew the face of the ground. Let the glory of the LORD be forever; let the LORD rejoice in His works, who looks at the earth, and it trembles; He touches the mountains, and they smoke. I will sing to the LORD in my life; I will sing praises to my God while I still ***exist***. Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; I, I will rejoice in the LORD. Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and ***let the*** wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, my soul. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 104 Preview

Psalm 104 is a walk through creation with the Creator. It begins and ends with the same words as Psalm 103 (see Volume 1): "Bless the LORD, my soul." Psalm 103 praised God for what He does for His people. Psalm 104 praises Him for the world He made and keeps running.

The psalm follows the order of the creation days in Genesis 1 in a loose way: light and the heavens, the waters pushed back, dry land and plants, sun and moon, the sea and its creatures, then animals and man. But it does more than look back to the beginning. It shows God at work today, watering the hills, feeding the lions, giving breath and taking it away. Every living thing waits on Him.

Psalm 104 Study

104:1-4 *Bless the LORD, my soul. LORD my God, You are very great; You are clothed **with** splendor and majesty, wrapping Yourself **in** light like a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent curtain, who lays the beams of His upper rooms in the waters, who makes clouds His chariot, who walks on the wings of the wind, who makes His messengers winds, His ministers a flaming fire.*

Psalm 104 has no heading in the Hebrew. Its close tie to Psalm 103, which is "of David," leads many to think David wrote it too, but we aren't told.

"Bless the LORD, my soul. LORD my God, You are very great." To bless God is to praise Him with thanks and honor. "You are clothed with splendor and majesty, wrapping Yourself in light like a garment." On the first day God said, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). Here the psalmist pictures God wearing light like a robe. Paul says God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16).

"Stretching out the heavens like a tent curtain." The sky is pictured as a tent God has pitched. He "lays the beams of His upper rooms in the waters," the waters above the sky (Genesis 1:7). He "makes clouds His chariot" and "walks on the wings of the wind." The storm is His vehicle.

"Who makes His messengers winds, His ministers a flaming fire." The Hebrew word for "messengers" also means "angels," and the word for "winds" also means "spirits." Hebrews 1:7 quotes this verse from the Greek Old Testament: He makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire. The point in Hebrews is that angels are servants, swift and powerful, but servants. Then Hebrews 1:8 turns to the Son and says God calls Him "O God" and gives Him an everlasting throne. Angels serve. The Son reigns.

New Testament links: Hebrews 1:7 (quoted)

104:5-9 *He founded the earth on its foundations; it will not be shaken forever and ever. **With** the deep like clothing You covered it; the waters stood above the mountains. From Your rebuke they fled; from the sound of Your thunder they hurried away. They went up mountains; they went down valleys, to the place that You founded for them. You set a boundary **that** they will not pass over; they will not return to cover the earth.*

"He founded the earth on its foundations; it will not be shaken forever and ever." God set the earth in place on purpose. It is not an accident.

"With the deep like clothing You covered it; the waters stood above the mountains." This goes back to Genesis 1:2, when the earth was covered with water. "From Your rebuke they fled; from the sound of Your thunder they hurried away." On the third day God spoke, the waters gathered

and the dry land appeared (Genesis 1:9). "They went up mountains; they went down valleys, to the place that You founded for them."

"You set a boundary that they will not pass over; they will not return to cover the earth." Many also hear in this verse God's promise after the flood, that waters would never again destroy the earth (Genesis 9:11). God tells the sea where it may go and where it must stop (Job 38:8-11).

104:10-13 *He sends forth springs into the ravines; between the mountains they go. They give drink to every living thing of the field; wild donkeys break their thirst. By them the flying things of the heavens dwell; from among the branches they give voice. He waters the mountains from His upper rooms; from the fruit of Your works the earth is satisfied.*

Now the water that once covered everything becomes a blessing. "He sends forth springs into the ravines; between the mountains they go. They give drink to every living thing of the field; wild donkeys break their thirst." The birds nest by the streams and sing "from among the branches."

"He waters the mountains from His upper rooms." Rain is God pouring water from His rooms above. "From the fruit of Your works the earth is satisfied." Every spring, every bird song and every rain is His doing. Jesus said the Father feeds the birds of the sky (Matthew 6:26), and if He cares for them, He will care for us.

104:14-18 *He causes grass to sprout for the livestock, and vegetation for the labor of mankind, to bring forth bread from the earth, and wine **that** makes glad the heart of man, to make **his** face shine with oil, and bread **that** sustains the heart of man. The trees of the LORD are satisfied, the cedars of Lebanon which He planted, where the birds make nests; the stork, the cypresses **are** her home. The high mountains **are** for the mountain goats; the crags **are** a refuge for the rock badgers.*

"He causes grass to sprout for the livestock, and vegetation for the labor of mankind, to bring forth bread from the earth." God provides, and man works the ground. Both are part of God's design.

Then three gifts: "wine that makes glad the heart of man," oil "to make his face shine" and "bread that sustains the heart of man." Bread for strength, oil for health and beauty, wine for gladness. God doesn't only keep us alive. He gives good things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17). Scripture also warns plainly against drunkenness (Proverbs 20:1; Ephesians 5:18), but here wine is a gift of joy, and we can thank God for it.

"The trees of the LORD are satisfied, the cedars of Lebanon which He planted." The great cedars are His trees; no man planted them. The stork nests in the cypresses. "The high mountains are for the mountain goats; the crags are a refuge for the rock badgers." Every creature has its home, and God made the high, hard places for creatures that need them.

104:19-23 *He made the moon for appointed times; the sun knows its setting. You make darkness, and it becomes night; in it every living thing of the forest moves about. The young lions roar for the prey, and to seek their food from God. The sun rises; they withdraw, and in their dens they lie down. Man goes out to his work and to his labor until evening.*

"He made the moon for appointed times; the sun knows its setting." On the fourth day God made the lights in the sky for signs and seasons (Genesis 1:14). Israel's months and feasts followed the moon.

"You make darkness, and it becomes night; in it every living thing of the forest moves about." Night is God's too. "The young lions roar for the prey, and to seek their food from God." A lion's roar sounds fierce, but the psalm calls it a prayer. Even the lion depends on God. "The sun rises; they withdraw." Then "man goes out to his work and to his labor until evening." The lions have the night, and man has the day. God has given each its time. Work itself is part of God's good design, given to Adam before the fall (Genesis 2:15).

104:24-26 *How many are Your works, LORD! In wisdom You have made all of them; the earth is full of Your possessions. This sea, great and broad in extent, there **are** moving things, and **there is** no number **to them**, living things small along with great. There the ships go about, **and** Leviathan, which You formed to play in it.*

"How many are Your works, LORD! In wisdom You have made all of them; the earth is full of Your possessions." The psalmist stops in wonder. Everything is made with wisdom, and everything belongs to God.

"This sea, great and broad in extent, there are moving things, and there is no number to them." The sea is full of creatures past counting, small and great. "There the ships go about, and Leviathan, which You formed to play in it." Leviathan was a great sea creature (see Psalm 74). In some passages it pictures God's enemies. Here it is just one of God's creatures, a huge animal splashing in the ocean like a pet in a pool. What frightens us is God's plaything.

104:27-30 *All of them wait for You, to give their food in its time. You give to them; they gather **it** up; You open Your hand; they are satisfied **with** good. You hide Your face; they are terrified; You withdraw their breath; they die, and to their dust they return. You send forth Your Spirit; they are created, and You renew the face of the ground.*

"All of them wait for You, to give their food in its time. You give to them; they gather it up; You open Your hand; they are satisfied with good." Psalm 145:15 says the same. Every creature lives from God's open hand, whether it knows it or not.

"You hide Your face; they are terrified; You withdraw their breath; they die, and to their dust they return." Life and death are in His hands. Genesis 3:19 said that man would return to the dust.

"You send forth Your Spirit; they are created, and You renew the face of the ground." The Hebrew word ruach means wind, breath or spirit. In Genesis 1:2 the Spirit of God was moving over the waters, and in Genesis 2:7 God breathed the breath of life into Adam. Here His Spirit gives life to

each new generation of creatures. Every spring is a small picture of renewal. One day God will renew all creation (Romans 8:21; Revelation 21:5).

104:31-35 *Let the glory of the LORD be forever; let the LORD rejoice in His works, who looks at the earth, and it trembles; He touches the mountains, and they smoke. I will sing to the LORD in my life; I will sing praises to my God while I still* ***exist****. Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; I, I will rejoice in the LORD. Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and* ***let the*** *wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, my soul. Praise* ***the*** *LORD!*

"Let the glory of the LORD be forever; let the LORD rejoice in His works." When God finished creation, He saw that it was very good (Genesis 1:31). The psalmist wants God to keep delighting in what He made. Yet this Creator is awesome too: He looks at the earth "and it trembles; He touches the mountains, and they smoke."

"I will sing to the LORD in my life; I will sing praises to my God while I still exist." The right response to creation is a lifetime of praise. "Let my meditation be pleasing to Him." He wants even his thoughts about God to please God.

"Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more." This line can surprise us at the end of such a lovely psalm. But it fits. Sin is what spoils God's good world. The psalmist longs for a creation cleansed of everything that ruins it. That is a prayer for God to set the world right, not a call for us to harm anyone (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). God's way of removing sinners includes making them saints. Paul himself was once a persecutor (1 Timothy 1:13-15).

"Bless the LORD, my soul. Praise the LORD!" The last words are "Praise the LORD," in Hebrew hallelu yah, which gives us "Hallelujah." This is the first time the word appears in the Book of Psalms. From here on it will ring through the closing psalms of the book, all the way to Psalm 150.

Psalm 104 Summary

Psalm 104 calls the soul to bless the LORD, who is very great, clothed in light and majesty, stretching out the heavens like a tent and riding the clouds and the wind, making His messengers winds and His ministers flames of fire (a verse Hebrews 1:7 applies to the angels). He founded the earth, drove back the waters that covered it and set them a boundary. He sends springs to water the animals and rain on the mountains, grows grass for cattle and crops for people, giving bread, oil and wine. He gives the trees, the birds, the goats and the badgers their homes, set the moon and sun for seasons, and gives the night to the lions and the day to man's work. His works are many and made in wisdom, filling the sea with countless creatures and Leviathan at play. All creatures wait on Him for food; when He takes their breath they die, and when He sends His Spirit they are created. The writer prays that God's glory will last forever, promises to praise Him all his life, longs for sinners to be gone from the earth and ends with "Praise the LORD!"

People and Places

- Leviathan: a great sea creature; here simply one of God's creatures playing in the sea.

- Rock badgers: small furry animals (often called hyraxes) that live among the rocks.
- Hallelujah: Hebrew for "Praise the LORD" (hallelu, praise, and Yah, short for the LORD's name); it first appears in the Psalms at 104:35.

Psalm 104 Study Questions

1. How does the psalm begin and end? (104:1, 35) Which psalm in Volume 1 begins and ends the same way?

2. What does God wear like a garment, and how does He travel? (104:2-3)

3. How does Hebrews 1:7 use verse 4, and what point does it make about angels and the Son?

4. What boundary has God set for the waters? (104:9)

5. What three gifts for man are named in verse 15?

6. How does the psalm describe the lion's roar, and who gives the lions their food? (104:21, 27-28)

7. What happens when God withdraws breath, and when He sends His Spirit? (104:29-30)

8. Which part of creation makes you want to praise God most? Why?

9. How could remembering that every creature waits on God change the way you handle worry about provision?

10. Why do you think the psalm ends with a prayer about sinners being gone from the earth? How does the gospel change the way we pray that line?

Psalm 105: He Remembered His Covenant

Scripture

105:1-15 Give thanks to the LORD; call on His name; make known His deeds among the peoples. Sing to Him; sing praises to Him; tell of all His wonders. Boast in the name of His holiness; let the heart of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually. Remember His wonders which He has done, His portents and the judgments of His mouth, offspring of Abraham His servant, sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! He ***is*** the LORD our God; His judgments ***are*** in all the earth. He has remembered His covenant forever, the word ***that*** He commanded for a thousand generations, which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac. And He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel ***as*** an everlasting covenant, saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan, the measured portion of your inheritance," when they were men few in number, a mere few, and sojourners in it. And they went about from nation to nation, from a kingdom to another people. He did not allow a man to oppress them, and He rebuked kings on their account: "Do not touch My anointed ones, and do not do harm to My prophets."

105:16-25 And He called a famine on the land; He broke every staff of bread. He sent a man before them; Joseph was sold as a slave. They afflicted his foot with shackles; his neck came ***into*** iron, until the time ***that*** his word came; the word of the LORD refined him. The king sent, and he released him, the ruler of peoples, and he set him free. He made him lord of his house and ruler over all his possessions, to bind his officials at his will, and to make his elders wise. And Israel came ***into*** Egypt, and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And He made His people very fruitful, and He made them stronger than their adversaries. He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants.

105:26-45 He sent Moses His servant, ***and*** Aaron whom He had chosen. They set among them the matters of His signs, and portents in the land of Ham. He sent darkness, and He made ***it*** dark, and they did not rebel against His word. He turned their waters into blood, and He caused their fish to die. Their land swarmed ***with*** frogs, in the chambers of their kings. He spoke, and ***there*** came a swarm, gnats in all their territory. He made their rains hail, a fire of flames in their land. And He struck down their vines and their fig trees, and He broke the trees of their territory. He spoke, and ***there*** came locusts, and young locusts, and ***there was*** no number. And it ate all the vegetation in their land, and it ate the fruit of their ground. And He struck down every firstborn in their land, the first of all their vigor. And He brought them out with silver and gold, and ***there was*** no one among His tribes who stumbled. Egypt was glad when they went out, for the dread of them had fallen on them. He spread out a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light ***at*** night. ***The people*** asked, and He brought quail, and ***with*** the bread of heaven He satisfied them. He opened a rock, and waters flowed out; they went in the dry places ***as*** a river. For He remembered the word of His holiness, Abraham His servant. And He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with a shout of joy. And He gave them the lands of nations, and they took possession of the labor of peoples, so that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 105 Preview

Psalm 105 tells Israel's story from Abraham to the promised land, and it tells it with one hero. Abraham, Joseph and Moses are all in it, but the real subject of almost every sentence is God. He made the covenant. He protected the wanderers. He sent Joseph ahead. He struck Egypt. He fed them in the desert. He brought them out with joy. Why? "For He remembered the word of His holiness, Abraham His servant."

Psalm 105 and Psalm 106 are a pair. Both tell the same history. Psalm 105 tells it as the story of God's faithfulness. Psalm 106 tells it again as the story of Israel's unfaithfulness. We need both. This psalm is the bright side: God keeps His promises.

Psalm 105 Study

105:1-6 *Give thanks to the LORD; call on His name; make known His deeds among the peoples. Sing to Him; sing praises to Him; tell of all His wonders. Boast in the name of His holiness; let the heart of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually. Remember His wonders which He has done, His portents and the judgments of His mouth, offspring of Abraham His servant, sons of Jacob, His chosen ones!*

Psalm 105 has no heading. Its first fifteen verses appear, almost word for word, in 1 Chronicles 16:8-22, as part of the song David gave Asaph and his relatives on the day the ark came to Jerusalem. The rest of that song is close to Psalm 96 (see Volume 1) and to Psalm 106:1 and 47-48. So these words were sung in David's day. Some scholars think the Chronicler drew on psalms already in use; either way, the song belongs to David's great celebration.

The psalm opens with a burst of commands: "Give thanks to the LORD; call on His name; make known His deeds among the peoples. Sing to Him; sing praises to Him; tell of all His wonders." Praise is meant to be told, not kept private. The nations need to hear what God has done.

"Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually." To seek His face means to want God Himself, not just His gifts. "Remember His wonders which He has done." Remembering is the heart of this psalm. God's people are called "offspring of Abraham His servant, sons of Jacob, His chosen ones."

105:7-11 *He **is** the LORD our God; His judgments **are** in all the earth. He has remembered His covenant forever, the word **that** He commanded for a thousand generations, which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac. And He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel **as** an everlasting covenant, saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan, the measured portion of your inheritance,"*

"He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth." Israel's God is the God of the whole world.

"He has remembered His covenant forever, the word that He commanded for a thousand generations." God made the covenant "with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac," and confirmed it "to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant." The covenant God made with Abraham

promised him a land, countless offspring and a blessing for all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18; 17:7-8). God repeated it to Isaac (Genesis 26:3) and to Jacob (Genesis 28:13).

And the heart of it was a land: "To you I will give the land of Canaan, the measured portion of your inheritance." The psalm calls this covenant "everlasting." I believe that is what it means. God has not taken back His promise to Abraham's offspring. Paul says that the gifts and calling of God cannot be revoked (Romans 11:28-29), and that one day all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26). The church shares in the blessing promised to Abraham through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:14), but the church does not replace Israel.

105:12-15 *when they were men few in number, a mere few, and sojourners in it. And they went about from nation to nation, from a kingdom to another people. He did not allow a man to oppress them, and He rebuked kings on their account: "Do not touch My anointed ones, and do not do harm to My prophets."*

"When they were men few in number, a mere few, and sojourners in it." Abraham, Isaac and Jacob owned almost nothing of the land. Abraham had to buy a grave to bury Sarah (Genesis 23). They moved "from nation to nation." They were weak, and yet "He did not allow a man to oppress them, and He rebuked kings on their account." God struck Pharaoh's house when Pharaoh took Sarah (Genesis 12:17), and warned Abimelech, king of Gerar, in a dream (Genesis 20:3-7).

"Do not touch My anointed ones, and do not do harm to My prophets." The anointed ones here are the patriarchs themselves, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, set apart by God. God told Abimelech that Abraham "is a prophet" (Genesis 20:7). This verse is sometimes used today to say no one may question a pastor or church leader. That is not what it means. It is about God protecting the patriarchs, and Scripture tells believers to test what leaders teach (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1).

105:16-22 *And He called a famine on the land; He broke every staff of bread. He sent a man before them; Joseph was sold as a slave. They afflicted his foot with shackles; his neck came **into** iron, until the time **that** his word came; the word of the LORD refined him. The king sent, and he released him, the ruler of peoples, and he set him free. He made him lord of his house and ruler over all his possessions, to bind his officials at his will, and to make his elders wise.*

"And He called a famine on the land; He broke every staff of bread." Bread was the staff people leaned on to live. God sent the famine, and He had already prepared the answer. "He sent a man before them; Joseph was sold as a slave." His brothers sold him (Genesis 37:28), but the psalm says God sent him. Joseph said it himself: his brothers planned evil, but God planned it for good, to keep many people alive (Genesis 50:20).

"They afflicted his foot with shackles; his neck came into iron." Joseph spent years in prison for a crime he did not commit (Genesis 39:20). "Until the time that his word came; the word of the LORD refined him." The "word" may be Joseph's dreams coming true or God's word that brought him out. Either way, those prison years were not wasted. God was refining him like metal in a fire.

"The king sent, and he released him." Pharaoh made Joseph "lord of his house and ruler over all his possessions," with power over his officials, and even teaching his elders wisdom

(Genesis 41:39-44). Stephen tells the same story in Acts 7:9-10: God was with Joseph and rescued him out of all his troubles. If you are waiting in a hard place, remember Joseph. The waiting is part of the work.

105:23-25 *And Israel came **into** Egypt, and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And He made His people very fruitful, and He made them stronger than their adversaries. He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants.*

"And Israel came into Egypt, and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham." Ham was the son of Noah from whom the Egyptians came (Genesis 10:6), so "the land of Ham" is a poetic name for Egypt. "He made His people very fruitful," as God had promised Abraham (Exodus 1:7).

"He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants." This is a hard line. The Egyptians chose to oppress Israel, and the Bible holds them responsible. Yet God was over it all, using even their hatred to bring about the exodus. Scripture holds both truths without explaining every detail.

105:26-36 *He sent Moses His servant, **and** Aaron whom He had chosen. They set among them the matters of His signs, and portents in the land of Ham. He sent darkness, and He made **it** dark, and they did not rebel against His word. He turned their waters into blood, and He caused their fish to die. Their land swarmed **with** frogs, in the chambers of their kings. He spoke, and **there** came a swarm, gnats in all their territory. He made their rains hail, a fire of flames in their land. And He struck down their vines and their fig trees, and He broke the trees of their territory. He spoke, and **there** came locusts, and young locusts, and **there was** no number. And it ate all the vegetation in their land, and it ate the fruit of their ground. And He struck down every firstborn in their land, the first of all their vigor.*

"He sent Moses His servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen." Then come the plagues: darkness, water turned to blood and the fish dying, frogs even in the king's rooms, swarms and gnats, hail and lightning that broke the vines and fig trees, locusts beyond counting and last of all the death of "every firstborn in their land."

The psalm does not list all ten plagues, and it does not follow the order in Exodus 7-12. It starts with darkness, the ninth plague, and leaves out the death of the livestock and the boils. A poet may arrange events for effect, and this one wants to end with the firstborn. "They did not rebel against His word" probably means Moses and Aaron obeyed God's word, or that the darkness itself obeyed.

Each plague showed that the gods of Egypt were nothing, just as God said (Exodus 12:12). The God of a few wandering shepherds humbled the strongest empire on earth.

105:37-41 *And He brought them out with silver and gold, and **there was** no one among His tribes who stumbled. Egypt was glad when they went out, for the dread of them had fallen on them. He spread out a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light **at** night. **The people** asked, and He brought quail, and **with** the bread of heaven He satisfied them. He opened a rock, and waters flowed out; they went in the dry places **as** a river.*

"And He brought them out with silver and gold." The Egyptians gave them silver and gold as they left (Exodus 12:35-36). "There was no one among His tribes who stumbled." A huge crowd left, and God held them all up. "Egypt was glad when they went out." After the plagues, the Egyptians were glad to see them go.

Then the wilderness. "He spread out a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light at night." He sent quail and "the bread of heaven," the manna (Exodus 16). "He opened a rock, and waters flowed out" (Exodus 17:6). Psalm 106 will tell what Israel did in those same years. Psalm 105 tells only what God did. Jesus called Himself the true bread from heaven (John 6:32-35), and Paul says the rock that followed them was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).

105:42-45 *For He remembered the word of His holiness, Abraham His servant. And He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with a shout of joy. And He gave them the lands of nations, and they took possession of the labor of peoples, so that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws. Praise **the** LORD!*

"For He remembered the word of His holiness, Abraham His servant." Everything in the psalm goes back to this. God made a promise to Abraham, and God remembers. "He remembered" doesn't mean He had forgotten. It means He acted on what He had promised.

"He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with a shout of joy. And He gave them the lands of nations." The promise of verse 11 came true under Joshua.

Why? "So that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws." God's grace came first, and obedience was the grateful answer. God did not save Israel because they kept His laws. He saved them so they would. The same is true for us: we are saved by grace through faith, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). "Praise the LORD!" (see Psalm 104 on Hallelujah).

Psalm 105 Summary

Psalm 105 calls God's people to give thanks, make His deeds known among the nations, seek Him and remember His wonders. The LORD has remembered forever His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the everlasting promise of the land of Canaan. When the patriarchs were few and wandering, He protected them and warned kings not to touch His anointed ones. He sent Joseph ahead as a slave, refined him in prison and raised him to rule Pharaoh's house. Israel grew strong in Egypt until the Egyptians hated them; then He sent Moses and Aaron with signs: darkness, blood, frogs, insects, hail, locusts and the death of the firstborn. He brought Israel out with silver and gold, led them by cloud and fire, fed them quail and bread from heaven and gave them water from the rock. All this He did because He remembered His holy promise to Abraham. He brought His people out with joy and gave them the land, so that they would keep His laws.

People and Places

- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: the patriarchs, the fathers of Israel, to whom God gave His covenant and the promise of the land (Genesis 12-35).
- Joseph: Jacob's son, sold as a slave into Egypt, who became ruler under Pharaoh and saved his family from famine (Genesis 37-50).
- Land of Ham: Egypt, named after Ham, the son of Noah from whom the Egyptians descended (Genesis 10:6).
- Canaan: the land God promised to Abraham's offspring, later called Israel.

Psalm 105 Study Questions

1. What commands does the psalm give in verses 1-5?

2. With whom did God make His covenant, and what land did He promise? (105:8-11)

3. Who are the "anointed ones" of verse 15, and how should we not misuse this verse today?

4. What does the psalm say God did through Joseph's slavery and prison? (105:17-22; Genesis 50:20)

5. Which plagues are named in verses 28-36, and which ones are left out?

6. How did God provide for Israel in the wilderness? (105:39-41)

7. What one reason does verse 42 give for everything God did?

8. Joseph waited years in prison before God lifted him up. How does his story help you in a time of waiting?

9. Why does the psalm say God gave Israel the land (105:45)? How does that order, grace first and then obedience, apply to us?

10. Psalm 105 tells only what God did. If you wrote your own life story that way, what would you put in it?

Psalm 106: We Have Sinned with Our Fathers

Scripture

106:1-12 Praise ***the*** LORD! Give thanks to the LORD, for ***He is*** good; for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Who will speak the mighty deeds of the LORD, ***who*** will proclaim all His praise? How blessed ***are*** those who keep justice, ***the one*** who does righteousness at every time! Remember me, LORD, with the favor of Your people; visit me with Your salvation, to look on the good of Your chosen ones, to rejoice in the joy of Your nation, to boast with Your inheritance. We have sinned with our fathers; we have acted perversely; we have acted wickedly. Our fathers in Egypt did not consider Your wonders; they did not remember the abundance of Your steadfast loves, and they rebelled at ***the*** sea, at the Red Sea. And He saved them for the sake of His name, to make known His might. And He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; and He led them through the deeps as ***through*** the wilderness. And He saved them from the hand of the one who hated ***them***, and He redeemed them from the hand of ***the*** enemy. And the waters covered their adversaries; not one of them was left. And they believed in His words; they sang His praise.

106:13-33 They hastened, they forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel. And they craved a craving in the wilderness, and they tested God in ***the*** desert. And He gave them their request, and He sent leanness into their soul. And they were jealous of Moses in the camp, of Aaron, the holy one of the LORD. ***The*** earth opened, and it swallowed Dathan, and it covered over the company of Abiram. And fire burned in their company; a flame set the wicked ablaze. They made a calf at Horeb, and they bowed down to a molten image. And they exchanged their glory for the likeness of an ox that eats plants. They forgot God their Savior, who did great ***things*** in Egypt, wonders in the land of Ham, awesome ***things*** at the Red Sea. And He said ***He would*** destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, to turn back His wrath from destroying. And they rejected the land of desire; they did not believe His word. And they grumbled in their tents; they did not listen to the voice of the LORD. And He lifted His hand to them, to make them fall in the wilderness, and to make their offspring fall among the nations, and to scatter them among the lands. And they joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and they ate sacrifices of ***the*** dead. And they provoked ***Him*** to anger with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them. And Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was restrained. And it was reckoned to him for righteousness, to generation and generation, until forever. And they provoked ***Him*** to wrath at the waters of Meribah, and it went badly for Moses because of them, for they rebelled against His Spirit, and he spoke rashly with his lips.

106:34-48 They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD had said to them, and they mingled with the nations, and they learned their works. And they served their idols, and they became a snare to them. And they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons. And they shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with the blood. And they became unclean by their works, and they played the prostitute by their deeds. And the anger of the LORD burned against His people, and He abhorred His inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of ***the*** nations, and those who hated them ruled over them. And their enemies oppressed them, and they were humbled under their hand. Many times He delivered them, and they, they rebelled in their counsel, and they sank

in their iniquity. And He saw, when distress ***came*** to them, when He heard their cry. And He remembered for them His covenant, and He relented according to the abundance of His steadfast loves. And He gave them to compassion before all their captors. Save us, LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, to give thanks to the name of Your holiness, to glory in Your praise. Blessed ***be*** the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting and to everlasting. And all the people shall say, "Amen." Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 106 Preview

Psalm 106 tells the same history as Psalm 105, from Egypt to the promised land and beyond, but from the other side. Psalm 105 told what God did. Psalm 106 tells what Israel did: they forgot, they craved, they grumbled, they worshiped a calf, they joined themselves to Baal and they sacrificed their own children. It is one of the most honest confessions in the Bible.

And yet the psalm begins and ends with praise. Over and over, the same pattern comes back. Israel rebelled, God judged, they cried out and "He remembered for them His covenant." The writer, speaking for a scattered people, confesses, "We have sinned with our fathers," and asks God to gather them home. The psalm closes Book Four of the Psalms with a blessing and a loud "Amen."

Psalm 106 Study

106:1-5 *Praise **the** LORD! Give thanks to the LORD, for **He is** good; for His steadfast love **is** forever. Who will speak the mighty deeds of the LORD, **who** will proclaim all His praise? How blessed **are** those who keep justice, **the one** who does righteousness at every time! Remember me, LORD, with the favor of Your people; visit me with Your salvation, to look on the good of Your chosen ones, to rejoice in the joy of Your nation, to boast with Your inheritance.*

Psalm 106 has no heading, and we aren't told who wrote it.

"Praise the LORD! Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love is forever." This was one of Israel's best-known songs of thanks. The same words appear in 1 Chronicles 16:34, in David's song for the ark, and again in Psalm 107 (later in this volume) and Psalms 118 and 136 (see Volume 1). Hallelujah opens the psalm (see Psalm 104). Before the writer tells one sad story, he states the truth that holds everything together: God is good, and His steadfast love lasts forever.

"Who will speak the mighty deeds of the LORD?" No one can tell them all. "How blessed are those who keep justice." Then the prayer turns personal: "Remember me, LORD, with the favor of Your people; visit me with Your salvation." The writer wants to be there when God blesses His people again.

106:6-12 *We have sinned with our fathers; we have acted perversely; we have acted wickedly. Our fathers in Egypt did not consider Your wonders; they did not remember the abundance of Your steadfast loves, and they rebelled at **the** sea, at the Red Sea. And He saved them for the sake of His name, to make known His might. And He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; and He led them through the deeps as **through** the wilderness. And He saved them from the hand of the one who hated **them**, and He redeemed them from the hand of **the** enemy. And the waters covered their adversaries; not one of them was left. And they believed in His words; they sang His praise.*

"We have sinned with our fathers; we have acted perversely; we have acted wickedly." The confession starts here, and the writer includes himself. He doesn't blame the past generation while excusing his own. Daniel prayed the same way (Daniel 9:5), and so did Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:6).

The story begins in Egypt. "Our fathers in Egypt did not consider Your wonders." Even after ten plagues, "they rebelled at the sea, at the Red Sea." With Pharaoh's army behind them, they told Moses it would have been better to stay slaves (Exodus 14:11-12).

"And He saved them for the sake of His name." God did not save them because they deserved it. He saved them for His own name's sake, to show His power. "He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up." "He redeemed them from the hand of the enemy," buying them back out of slavery. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, sang of the same kind of salvation, from our enemies and "from the hand of all those who hate us" (Luke 1:71), which God was bringing through Jesus.

"And they believed in His words; they sang His praise." That is the Song of Moses in Exodus 15. For a little while, they got it right.

New Testament links: Luke 1:71 (alluded to)

106:13-15 *They hastened, they forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel. And they craved a craving in the wilderness, and they tested God in **the** desert. And He gave them their request, and He sent leanness into their soul.*

"They hastened, they forgot His works." It didn't take long. Within days they were complaining about water (Exodus 15:22-24). "They did not wait for His counsel."

"They craved a craving in the wilderness." They were sick of manna and wanted meat (Numbers 11:4-6). "And He gave them their request, and He sent leanness into their soul." God gave them quail, so much that it became loathsome to them, and a plague followed (Numbers 11:20, 33). Sometimes the worst thing God can do is give us what we demand. We can get what we want and lose our souls in the process. Paul says these things were written as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did (1 Corinthians 10:6).

106:16-18 *And they were jealous of Moses in the camp, of Aaron, the holy one of the LORD. **The** earth opened, and it swallowed Dathan, and it covered over the company of Abiram. And fire burned in their company; a flame set the wicked ablaze.*

"And they were jealous of Moses in the camp, of Aaron, the holy one of the LORD." Korah, Dathan and Abiram led a revolt against Moses and Aaron, claiming they had made themselves too important (Numbers 16). "The earth opened, and it swallowed Dathan, and it covered over the company of Abiram. And fire burned in their company." Fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who offered incense (Numbers 16:35). Envy of God's chosen leaders was really rebellion against God.

106:19-23 *They made a calf at Horeb, and they bowed down to a molten image. And they exchanged their glory for the likeness of an ox that eats plants. They forgot God their Savior, who did great **things** in Egypt, wonders in the land of Ham, awesome **things** at the Red Sea. And He said **He would** destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, to turn back His wrath from destroying.*

"They made a calf at Horeb, and they bowed down to a molten image." Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the Law, the people made a golden calf and called it the god who brought them out of Egypt (Exodus 32:4). Stephen reminded the council of this in Acts 7:41: they made a calf and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

"And they exchanged their glory for the likeness of an ox that eats plants." Their glory was God Himself. They traded the living God for a statue of a cow. Paul uses the same picture in Romans 1:23 for all mankind, which exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images of people and animals. Every idol is a bad trade.

"They forgot God their Savior, who did great things in Egypt." And God said He would destroy them, "had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him." A breach is a hole in a city wall. Moses stood in the gap and pleaded for the people, and God relented (Exodus 32:11-14). Moses points us to Jesus, the one Mediator, who stands between God and us and always lives to intercede for us (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25).

New Testament links: Acts 7:41 (alluded to); Romans 1:23 (alluded to)

106:24-27 *And they rejected the land of desire; they did not believe His word. And they grumbled in their tents; they did not listen to the voice of the LORD. And He lifted His hand to them, to make them fall in the wilderness, and to make their offspring fall among the nations, and to scatter them among the lands.*

"And they rejected the land of desire; they did not believe His word." At Kadesh the spies came back with a report of giants, and the people refused to go in (Numbers 13-14). "They grumbled in their tents." So God "lifted His hand," swearing an oath that that generation would "fall in the wilderness," and it did. Forty years of wandering followed (Numbers 14:28-35).

Verse 27 adds that their offspring would be scattered "among the lands." That warning had been given long before (Leviticus 26:33), and by the time this psalm was written it may already have come true. Unbelief always costs more than we think.

106:28-31 *And they joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and they ate sacrifices of **the** dead. And they provoked **Him** to anger with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them. And Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was restrained. And it was reckoned to him for righteousness, to generation and generation, until forever.*

"And they joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and they ate sacrifices of the dead." Baal was the chief god of the Canaanites, and Peor a mountain in Moab where he was worshiped. Moabite women invited Israelite men to their sacrifices, and the men fell into both idolatry and sexual sin (Numbers 25:1-3). "Sacrifices of the dead" probably means sacrifices to lifeless idols, or meals offered for the dead. "A plague broke out among them."

"And Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was restrained." Phinehas, Aaron's grandson, acted with zeal for God's honor and stopped a flagrant act of sin, and the plague ended (Numbers 25:7-11). "And it was reckoned to him for righteousness." These are the same words used of Abraham in Genesis 15:6, which Paul quotes in Romans 4:3. Phinehas's zeal showed that he was right with God, and God gave him a lasting priesthood (Numbers 25:13). He was not saved by his deed. In every age, people are made right with God by grace through faith, and true faith shows itself in action (James 2:21-24).

106:32-33 *And they provoked **Him** to wrath at the waters of Meribah, and it went badly for Moses because of them, for they rebelled against His Spirit, and he spoke rashly with his lips.*

"And they provoked Him to wrath at the waters of Meribah, and it went badly for Moses because of them." At Meribah the people quarreled with Moses over water (Numbers 20:2-13). Moses was so angry that "he spoke rashly with his lips" and struck the rock instead of speaking to it. Because of that, even Moses was not allowed to enter the land (Numbers 20:12). The people's rebellion wore down the best leader they had. Leaders still need our prayers more than our complaints.

106:34-39 *They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD had said to them, and they mingled with the nations, and they learned their works. And they served their idols, and they became a snare to them. And they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons. And they shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with the blood. And they became unclean by their works, and they played the prostitute by their deeds.*

Now the psalm moves into the promised land. "They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD had said to them." God had commanded Israel to drive out the Canaanites, whose religion included child sacrifice and other horrors (Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 12:31). The command was a judgment on those nations, given for that time and place, and it is never a pattern for God's people today. Israel didn't obey it. Instead "they mingled with the nations, and they learned their works."

"And they served their idols, and they became a snare to them." And then the worst line of the psalm: "They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons." Behind the idols were demons (Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Corinthians 10:20). Israel's own kings later burned their sons in the fire (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6), something God had plainly forbidden (Leviticus 18:21). "The land was polluted with the blood."

These lines are hard to read, and they should be. When a people turns from God, the weakest suffer first, and children most of all. The writer doesn't look away. I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23), and the God who saw every one of these children will judge those who harmed them. "They played the prostitute by their deeds." Idolatry is pictured as unfaithfulness in marriage, because Israel belonged to God as a wife belongs to her husband (Hosea 2).

106:40-46 *And the anger of the LORD burned against His people, and He abhorred His inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of **the** nations, and those who hated them ruled over them. And their enemies oppressed them, and they were humbled under their hand. Many times He delivered them, and they, they rebelled in their counsel, and they sank in their iniquity. And He saw, when distress **came** to them, when He heard their cry. And He remembered for them His covenant, and He relented according to the abundance of His steadfast loves. And He gave them to compassion before all their captors.*

"The anger of the LORD burned against His people, and He abhorred His inheritance." So He handed them over to the nations, and "those who hated them ruled over them." That is the story of the book of Judges, and later of the exile.

"Many times He delivered them." Over and over He raised up judges and saved them (Judges 2:16-18). And over and over "they rebelled in their counsel, and they sank in their iniquity."

Then the turn. "And He saw, when distress came to them, when He heard their cry. And He remembered for them His covenant, and He relented according to the abundance of His steadfast loves." Psalm 105:42 said He remembered His word to Abraham. Psalm 106:45 says the same. Israel's history is a long record of their unfaithfulness, and an even longer record of His faithfulness. "He gave them to compassion before all their captors." Even their captors were moved to treat them kindly, as Persia's king Cyrus later let the exiles go home (Ezra 1:1-4).

If you look back over your own life and see the same pattern, a lot of falling and a lot of grace, the God of Psalm 106 is your God too.

106:47 *Save us, LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, to give thanks to the name of Your holiness, to glory in Your praise.*

"Save us, LORD our God, and gather us from the nations." The writer speaks for a scattered people. They want to be gathered "to give thanks to the name of Your holiness, to glory in Your praise." The same prayer stands at the end of David's song in 1 Chronicles 16:35, where the people asked God to gather and deliver them from the nations.

God answered in part when the exiles returned from Babylon in 538 B.C. I believe He will answer fully in the future. The prophets said God would gather Israel from the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 23:3), and Paul says that one day all Israel will be saved, when the Deliverer comes from Zion (Romans 11:26).

106:48 *Blessed **be** the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting and to everlasting. And all the people shall say, "Amen." Praise **the** LORD!*

"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting and to everlasting." All the people are to answer "Amen," and the psalm ends with "Praise the LORD!" This blessing closes Book Four of the Psalms, as Psalm 89:52 closed Book Three (see Psalm 89 on the doxologies). In 1 Chronicles 16:36 all the people said "Amen" and praised the LORD. Book Four began with Moses (Psalm 90), and it ends with the long story of the people Moses led. After a psalm of so much sin, the last word is still praise, and every one of God's people is invited to say "Amen."

Psalm 106 Summary

Psalm 106 opens with praise for the LORD's goodness and everlasting steadfast love and a prayer to share in the blessing of His people. Then the writer confesses, "We have sinned with our fathers," and tells Israel's history as a story of rebellion. In Egypt and at the Red Sea they forgot God's wonders, yet He saved them for His name's sake, and they sang His praise. In the wilderness they quickly forgot, craved meat and were struck with leanness, envied Moses and Aaron and were swallowed by the earth and burned by fire. They made a calf at Horeb and traded their glory for an ox, and only Moses standing in the breach kept God from destroying them. They refused the land, joined Baal of Peor until Phinehas stopped the plague, and provoked God at Meribah so that even Moses suffered. In the land they mingled with the nations, served idols and sacrificed their children to demons. God gave them over to their enemies, yet many times He delivered them, and when they cried out He remembered His covenant and relented in His abundant steadfast love. The writer prays, "Save us, LORD our God, and gather us from the nations," and Book Four ends with "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting and to everlasting."

People and Places

- Red Sea: the sea God divided so Israel could cross out of Egypt (Exodus 14).
- Dathan and Abiram: leaders who rebelled with Korah against Moses and Aaron and were swallowed by the earth (Numbers 16).
- Horeb: another name for Mount Sinai, where Israel made the golden calf (Exodus 32).
- Baal of Peor: the Canaanite god Baal as worshiped at Peor in Moab, where Israel fell into idolatry and sexual sin (Numbers 25).
- Phinehas: grandson of Aaron, whose zeal stopped the plague at Peor; God gave him a lasting priesthood (Numbers 25:7-13).
- Meribah: the place where Israel quarreled over water and Moses struck the rock in anger (Numbers 20).

Psalm 106 Study Questions

1. How does the psalm begin, and why is that a good place to start a confession? (106:1)

2. Why did God save Israel at the Red Sea, according to verse 8?

3. What did God give Israel when they craved meat, and what came with it? (106:14-15)

4. What did Israel exchange their glory for, and how does Romans 1:23 use that picture? (106:20)

5. What did Moses do that kept God from destroying Israel, and how does that point to Jesus? (106:23)

6. What was reckoned to Phinehas as righteousness, and how is that different from being saved by works? (106:30-31)

7. What happened when Israel mingled with the nations? (106:34-39)

8. The writer says "We have sinned with our fathers" (106:6). Why is it important to confess our own sin and not only the sins of others?

9. Verse 15 says God gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul. Have you ever wanted something that would have been bad for you? How did God handle it?

10. Looking at the pattern of verses 43-46, what does it teach you about God's patience with you?

Psalm 107: Let the Redeemed of the LORD Say So

Scripture

107:1-9 Give thanks to the LORD, for ***He is*** good; for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say ***so***, whom He has redeemed from the hand of ***the*** adversary, and from the lands He has gathered them, from east and from west, from north and from ***the*** sea. They wandered in the wilderness, in a desert way; a city of dwelling they did not find. Hungry, also thirsty, their soul fainted within them. And they cried out to the LORD when distress ***came*** to them; from their troubles He delivered them. And He led them by a straight way, to go to a city of dwelling. Let them give thanks to the LORD ***for*** His steadfast love, and His wonders to the sons of man. For He has satisfied a longing soul, and a hungry soul He has filled ***with*** good.

107:10-22 Those who sat in darkness and deep darkness, prisoners of affliction and iron, for they had rebelled against the words of God, and the counsel of the Most High they had spurned. And He humbled their heart with toil; they stumbled, and ***there was*** no helper. And they cried out to the LORD when distress ***came*** to them; from their troubles He saved them. He brought them out from darkness and deep darkness, and their bonds He tore apart. Let them give thanks to the LORD ***for*** His steadfast love, and His wonders to the sons of man. For He has broken doors of bronze, and bars of iron He has cut down. Fools, because of the way of their transgression and because of their iniquities, were afflicted. All food their soul loathed, and they reached to the gates of death. And they cried out to the LORD when distress ***came*** to them; from their troubles He saved them. He sent His word and healed them, and He rescued ***them*** from their pits. Let them give thanks to the LORD ***for*** His steadfast love, and His wonders to the sons of man. And let them sacrifice sacrifices of thanksgiving, and let them recount His works with a shout of joy.

107:23-32 Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do work on many waters, they have seen the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep. And He spoke and raised up a wind of storm, and it lifted up its waves. They went up ***to the*** heavens, they went down ***to the*** deeps; their soul melted in trouble. They reeled and staggered like the drunkard, and all their skill was swallowed up. And they cried out to the LORD when distress ***came*** to them, and from their troubles He brought them out. He settled the storm into a calm, and their waves were hushed. And they rejoiced because they were quiet, and He guided them to the harbor of their desire. Let them give thanks to the LORD ***for*** His steadfast love, and His wonders to the sons of man. And let them exalt Him in the assembly of ***the*** people, and in the seat of the elders let them praise Him.

107:33-43 He makes rivers into a wilderness, and springs of water into thirsty ground, a land of fruit into saltiness, because of the evil of those who dwell in it. He makes a wilderness into a pool of water, and a land of dryness into springs of water. And He made the hungry dwell there, and they established a city of dwelling. And they sowed fields, and they planted vineyards, and they made fruit of produce. And He blessed them, and they multiplied greatly, and their livestock He did not make few. And they became few, and they were bowed down by the oppression of trouble and sorrow. He pours contempt on nobles, and He made them wander in formlessness, ***where there is*** no way. And He set the needy on high from affliction, and He made ***their*** families like the

flock. The upright see, and they rejoice, and all injustice shuts its mouth. Who ***is*** wise? Then let him keep these ***things***, and let them consider the steadfast loves of the LORD.

Psalm 107 Preview

Psalm 107 opens Book Five, the last of the five books of the Psalms (see the Overview). Book Four ended with a prayer, "Save us, LORD our God, and gather us from the nations" (106:47). Psalm 107 begins with the answer. God has gathered His people from every direction, and now the redeemed are told to say so.

The heart of the psalm is four pictures of people in trouble: travelers lost in the desert, prisoners in chains, fools sick because of their own sin and sailors caught in a storm. Each picture follows the same pattern. They are in distress, they cry out to the LORD, He rescues them and they are told to give thanks for His steadfast love. Then the psalm steps back and shows God turning deserts into springs and lifting up the needy. It ends by asking who is wise enough to take all this in.

Psalm 107 Study

107:1-3 *Give thanks to the LORD, for **He is** good; for His steadfast love **is** forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say **so**, whom He has redeemed from the hand of **the** adversary, and from the lands He has gathered them, from east and from west, from north and from **the** sea.*

Psalm 107 has no heading, and we aren't told who wrote it. Its first line is one Israel sang often: "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love is forever." Psalm 106 opened the same way, and so do 118 and 136. Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 77), and this whole psalm is built around it.

"Let the redeemed of the LORD say so." To redeem is to buy back or set free, as a relative would buy back a family member sold into slavery. God's people were redeemed "from the hand of the adversary." Thanks that stays in the heart is not enough. The redeemed are told to say it out loud.

Verse 3 says He "has gathered them, from east and from west, from north and from the sea." The sea here is the south, perhaps the Red Sea. Many think the psalm was written after the return from Babylon in 538 B.C., when Jews came home from many lands. The four directions also fit the four pictures that follow, which show people rescued from every kind of trouble.

107:4-9 *They wandered in the wilderness, in a desert way; a city of dwelling they did not find. Hungry, also thirsty, their soul fainted within them. And they cried out to the LORD when distress **came** to them; from their troubles He delivered them. And He led them by a straight way, to go to a city of dwelling. Let them give thanks to the LORD **for** His steadfast love, and His wonders to the sons of man. For He has satisfied a longing soul, and a hungry soul He has filled **with** good.*

The first group "wandered in the wilderness, in a desert way; a city of dwelling they did not find." They were lost, hungry and thirsty, and "their soul fainted within them." Anyone who has been lost in a hot, dry land knows how quickly hope runs out.

Then comes the line that will repeat four times: "And they cried out to the LORD when distress came to them; from their troubles He delivered them." God did more than end their thirst. "He led them by a straight way, to go to a city of dwelling." The wanderers found a home.

Verse 8 is the second refrain: "Let them give thanks to the LORD for His steadfast love, and His wonders to the sons of man." And verse 9 gives the reason: "For He has satisfied a longing soul, and a hungry soul He has filled with good." Mary echoed this line when she sang that God had filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty (Luke 1:53). Jesus called Himself the bread of life and promised that the one who comes to Him will never hunger (John 6:35). The deepest hunger in us is for God, and only He fills it.

New Testament links: Luke 1:53 (alluded to)

107:10-16 *Those who sat in darkness and deep darkness, prisoners of affliction and iron, for they had rebelled against the words of God, and the counsel of the Most High they had spurned. And He humbled their heart with toil; they stumbled, and **there was** no helper. And they cried out to the LORD when distress **came** to them; from their troubles He saved them. He brought them out from darkness and deep darkness, and their bonds He tore apart. Let them give thanks to the LORD **for** His steadfast love, and His wonders to the sons of man. For He has broken doors of bronze, and bars of iron He has cut down.*

The second group "sat in darkness and deep darkness, prisoners of affliction and iron." This time the psalm tells us why: "they had rebelled against the words of God, and the counsel of the Most High they had spurned." Israel went into exile in Babylon for exactly that reason (2 Chronicles 36:15-17). God "humbled their heart with toil." Some trouble is the fruit of our own rebellion, and God uses it to bring us low enough to look up.

"They stumbled, and there was no helper." No one else could help them, so they cried to the LORD, and "He saved them." He "brought them out from darkness and deep darkness, and their bonds He tore apart." Verse 16 adds, "He has broken doors of bronze, and bars of iron He has cut down." No prison is stronger than God.

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, used the language of verse 10 when he praised God for sending the Messiah "to shine upon those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79). Jesus came to set prisoners free, prisoners of sin first of all (John 8:34-36).

New Testament links: Luke 1:79 (alluded to)

107:17-22 *Fools, because of the way of their transgression and because of their iniquities, were afflicted. All food their soul loathed, and they reached to the gates of death. And they cried out to the LORD when distress **came** to them; from their troubles He saved them. He sent His word and healed them, and He rescued **them** from their pits. Let them give thanks to the LORD **for** His steadfast love, and His wonders to the sons of man. And let them sacrifice sacrifices of thanksgiving, and let them recount His works with a shout of joy.*

The third group are called "Fools." In the Psalms a fool is not someone with a low mind but someone who lives as if God does not matter. "Because of the way of their transgression and

because of their iniquities," they "were afflicted." They were so sick that "All food their soul loathed, and they reached to the gates of death."

The psalm does not say all sickness comes from sin. Job and the man born blind in John 9:1-3 tell us otherwise. It says that some of it did here, and that God still heard them when they cried. "He sent His word and healed them, and He rescued them from their pits." God's word is powerful enough to heal. Jesus healed the centurion's servant with a word, without even going to the house (Matthew 8:8, 13). Many also see a picture here of the Word Himself, Jesus, sent by the Father to heal us of sin (John 1:14).

Those who were healed are told to bring "sacrifices of thanksgiving" and to "recount His works with a shout of joy." Thanksgiving was an offering in Israel (Leviticus 7:12). Ours today is "a sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15).

107:23-27 *Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do work on many waters, they have seen the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep. And He spoke and raised up a wind of storm, and it lifted up its waves. They went up* ***to the*** *heavens, they went down* ***to the*** *deeps; their soul melted in trouble. They reeled and staggered like the drunkard, and all their skill was swallowed up.*

The fourth picture is the longest. "Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do work on many waters" were traders and sailors. Israel was mostly a land people, and the sea was a place of fear. Out there, the sailors "have seen the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep."

God "spoke and raised up a wind of storm." The waves lifted the ships so high that "They went up to the heavens, they went down to the deeps; their soul melted in trouble." They "reeled and staggered like the drunkard, and all their skill was swallowed up." Good sailors know what to do in a storm, but this one was beyond their skill. Many of us have had a storm like that, when everything we knew how to do was not enough.

107:28-32 *And they cried out to the LORD when distress* ***came*** *to them, and from their troubles He brought them out. He settled the storm into a calm, and their waves were hushed. And they rejoiced because they were quiet, and He guided them to the harbor of their desire. Let them give thanks to the LORD* ***for*** *His steadfast love, and His wonders to the sons of man. And let them exalt Him in the assembly of* ***the*** *people, and in the seat of the elders let them praise Him.*

Again "they cried out to the LORD," and "He settled the storm into a calm, and their waves were hushed." The same God who raised the storm stilled it. "They rejoiced because they were quiet, and He guided them to the harbor of their desire."

The disciples once woke Jesus in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. He rebuked the winds and the sea, there was a great calm, and they asked, "What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Matthew 8:26-27). Many see the answer in this psalm. Only the LORD stills the sea, and Jesus did what the LORD does.

The sailors are to give thanks and "exalt Him in the assembly of the people." Rescue is meant to be told in front of others, where it can strengthen their faith.

107:33-38 *He makes rivers into a wilderness, and springs of water into thirsty ground, a land of fruit into saltiness, because of the evil of those who dwell in it. He makes a wilderness into a pool of water, and a land of dryness into springs of water. And He made the hungry dwell there, and they established a city of dwelling. And they sowed fields, and they planted vineyards, and they made fruit of produce. And He blessed them, and they multiplied greatly, and their livestock He did not make few.*

Now the pattern changes. There are no more refrains. The psalm speaks of God's rule over the land itself. "He makes rivers into a wilderness, and springs of water into thirsty ground." A fruitful land can become "saltiness, because of the evil of those who dwell in it." Sodom and Gomorrah, once well watered, became a salty waste (Genesis 13:10; 19:24-25).

And God does the reverse: "He makes a wilderness into a pool of water." He settles the hungry there, and "they established a city of dwelling," the very thing the wanderers could not find in verse 4. They sow fields and plant vineyards, and "He blessed them, and they multiplied greatly." Isaiah promised the same for the land of Israel, the desert blooming when God restores His people (Isaiah 35:1-2, 6-7). I believe that promise still has a future fulfillment for Israel in Messiah's kingdom.

107:39-42 *And they became few, and they were bowed down by the oppression of trouble and sorrow. He pours contempt on nobles, and He made them wander in formlessness, **where there is** no way. And He set the needy on high from affliction, and He made **their** families like the flock. The upright see, and they rejoice, and all injustice shuts its mouth.*

Blessing is not the end of the story. "They became few, and they were bowed down by the oppression of trouble and sorrow." Life rises and falls. But God is not on the side of the proud. "He pours contempt on nobles, and He made them wander in formlessness, where there is no way." The word "formlessness" is the same word used of the empty earth in Genesis 1:2. Proud rulers end up as lost as the wanderers were at the start.

"He set the needy on high from affliction." God lifts up the low and brings down the high, as Hannah and Mary both sang (1 Samuel 2:7-8; Luke 1:52). When the upright see it, "they rejoice, and all injustice shuts its mouth." Evil always has plenty to say, until God acts.

107:43 *Who **is** wise? Then let him keep these **things**, and let them consider the steadfast loves of the LORD.*

The last verse sounds like Proverbs. "Who is wise? Then let him keep these things, and let them consider the steadfast loves of the LORD." The plural, "steadfast loves," means the many acts of His love, one after another. A wise person does more than enjoy God's rescues. He keeps them in mind and thinks them over.

It is a good habit for us. Which of the four pictures is yours? Some of us were lost. Some were in chains of our own making. Some were sick and some were caught in storms. The psalm's answer is the same for all of us: cry out to the LORD, and then, when He answers, say so.

Psalm 107 Summary

Psalm 107 opens Book Five by calling the redeemed of the LORD to give thanks, because He is good and His steadfast love is forever, and He has gathered them from every land. Four pictures follow: wanderers lost in the desert, prisoners in darkness because they rebelled, fools sick because of their sins and sailors caught in a storm. Each time they cry out to the LORD in their distress, He saves them, and they are called to thank Him for His steadfast love and His wonders. Then the psalm shows God turning rivers into desert and desert into springs, blessing the hungry, humbling proud nobles and lifting up the needy. It ends by calling the wise to consider the steadfast loves of the LORD.

People and Places

- Redeemed: people bought back or set free by someone else; here, the people God rescued.

Psalm 107 Study Questions

1. What are the redeemed of the LORD told to do, and from where has He gathered them? (107:2-3)

2. Name the four groups of people in trouble in verses 4-32.

3. What two lines repeat in each of the four pictures? (107:6, 8)

4. Why were the prisoners in darkness, and why were the fools afflicted? (107:11, 17)

5. Some of the trouble in this psalm came from people's own sin, and some did not. Why does it matter that God heard both kinds of cry?

6. How did God heal those who reached the gates of death? (107:20)

7. How does Jesus calming the storm in Matthew 8:23-27 add to verses 23-32?

8. What does God do to proud nobles, and what does He do for the needy? (107:40-41)

9. Which of the four pictures is most like your own story? How did God answer you?

10. What would it look like for you to "say so" this week, telling someone else what God has done?

Psalm 108: With God We Will Do Valiantly

Scripture

A song. A psalm of David.

108:1-6 My heart is steadfast, God; I will sing, and I will sing praises, also my glory. Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will give thanks to You among the peoples, LORD, and I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your steadfast love ***is*** great above the heavens, and Your faithfulness to the clouds. Be exalted above the heavens, God, and ***let*** Your glory ***be*** over all the earth. So that Your beloved ones may be rescued, save ***with*** Your right hand, and answer me.

108:7-13 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, 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 Philistia I will shout aloud." Who will bring me ***to*** a city of fortification? Who has led me to Edom? ***Have*** not You, God, 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 108 Preview

Psalm 108 is made of two parts of earlier psalms of David joined together. Verses 1-5 are almost the same as Psalm 57:7-11, a song of praise David sang after hiding from Saul. Verses 6-13 are almost the same as Psalm 60:5-12, a prayer for victory over Edom. Volume 2 studies both of those psalms, so here we look briefly at what the new combination does.

Psalm 57 began in a cave, and Psalm 60 began with a defeat. Both of those dark openings are left out. Psalm 108 starts with the praise and goes straight to the promise. It is as if someone took the high points of two old songs and set them side by side for a new day of need: God is worthy of praise among the nations, and God has spoken about His land.

Psalm 108 Study

108:1-2 *My heart is steadfast, God; I will sing, and I will sing praises, also my glory. Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.*

The heading reads, "A song. A psalm of David." Like many psalms, it names David as the writer, and the two psalms it draws from both name him too (see Background of the Book on "of David"). We aren't told who joined the two parts or when. Many think it was done later for worship at the temple, perhaps in a time when Edom was again a threat.

"My heart is steadfast, God; I will sing, and I will sing praises, also my glory." Psalm 57:7 said "my heart is steadfast" twice. Here it is said once, with "my glory" added at the end. In the Psalms, "my glory" often means the inner self, the soul that gives God honor. David puts all of himself into praise.

"Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn." He wants to be up before the sun, singing so early that the morning seems to wake to his song.

108:3-5 *I will give thanks to You among the peoples, LORD, and I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your steadfast love **is** great above the heavens, and Your faithfulness to the clouds. Be exalted above the heavens, God, and **let** Your glory **be** over all the earth.*

"I will give thanks to You among the peoples, LORD." Psalm 57:9 has "Lord" (Master) here, and Psalm 108 has "LORD," God's name. David will praise Him "among the nations," not just in Israel. Paul quotes a similar line in Romans 15:9 to show that God always meant the Gentiles to glorify Him.

The reason: "For Your steadfast love is great above the heavens, and Your faithfulness to the clouds." Psalm 57:10 said "to the heavens." Here it is "above the heavens." His love is too large for the sky to hold. Then comes the prayer, "Be exalted above the heavens, God, and let Your glory be over all the earth." One day that prayer will be answered in full, when the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of His glory (Habakkuk 2:14).

108:6-9 *So that Your beloved ones may be rescued, save **with** Your right hand, and answer me. 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, 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 Philistia I will shout aloud."*

Now the psalm turns to need. "So that Your beloved ones may be rescued, save with Your right hand, and answer me." God's "beloved ones" are His people. The right hand stands for His strength.

God answers with a speech from His holy place, and it is a promise about the land. "I will divide up Shechem, and I will measure off the valley of Succoth." These are places west and east of the Jordan where Jacob stopped on his way home (Genesis 33:17-18). "Gilead is Mine, Manasseh is Mine," He says, naming land east of the Jordan and the tribes that lived there. "Ephraim is the protection of My head," like a soldier's helmet, and "Judah is My ruler's staff," the tribe of the king (Genesis 49:10).

Then come the enemies. "Moab is the pot of My washing," a basin for dirty feet. "Over Edom I will throw My sandal," a sign of taking possession. In Psalm 60:8 Philistia is told to shout over God, perhaps in mockery or in surrender. Here God says, "over Philistia I will shout aloud," a shout of victory. The point is the same: the land and the nations around it belong to Him. I believe God's promises about this land to Israel still stand (Genesis 17:8; Romans 11:29).

108:10-13 *Who will bring me **to** a city of fortification? Who has led me to Edom? **Have** not You, God, 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.*

"Who will bring me to a city of fortification? Who has led me to Edom?" Edom's capital sat high in the rocks and was hard to take. Then a hard question: "Have not You, God, rejected us? And You do not go out, God, with our armies." There had been a defeat, and Psalm 60 opens with it.

So the people pray, "Give us help from the foe, and the deliverance of man is worthlessness." Human help is not enough. Armies, allies and plans fail. The psalm ends with confidence: "In God we will do valiantly, and He, He will tread down our foes." The same God who seemed to stay home will go out ahead of them.

These lines fit any believer who faces something too strong for him. We can be honest that it feels as if God has stayed away. We can also say that our strength is in Him and not in ourselves. Paul put it this way: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Psalm 108 Summary

Psalm 108 joins Psalm 57:7-11 and Psalm 60:5-12, both psalms of David. It opens with a steadfast heart that wakes the dawn with song and praises the LORD among the nations, because His steadfast love is great above the heavens. Then it prays for God's right hand to save His beloved ones and recalls God's promise from His holy place: Shechem, Succoth, Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim and Judah are His, and Moab, Edom and Philistia will come under Him. The psalm admits that God seemed to have rejected His people and their armies, asks for help because human help is worthless, and ends in confidence: in God we will do valiantly, and He will tread down our foes.

People and Places

- Shechem: a town in the hill country west of the Jordan, where Jacob camped after Succoth.
- Succoth: a valley east of the Jordan, where Jacob built shelters.
- Gilead: hill country east of the Jordan.
- Ephraim and Manasseh: the two tribes from Joseph's sons; Ephraim was the strongest northern tribe.
- Moab, Edom and Philistia: neighbor nations of Israel, to the east, southeast and west.

Psalm 108 Study Questions

1. Which two earlier psalms make up Psalm 108? (Preview)

2. What does David say about his heart, and what will he wake? (108:1-2)

3. How great does David say God's steadfast love is? (108:4)

4. What does God promise about Shechem, Gilead, Ephraim and Judah? (108:7-8)

5. What do the pictures of the washing pot and the thrown sandal say about Moab and Edom? (108:9)

6. Psalm 108 leaves out the dark openings of Psalms 57 and 60. Why might a writer reuse only the high points of older psalms?

7. What does verse 12 say about the help of man? Where have you seen that to be true?

8. How can a believer say both "You have rejected us" and "In God we will do valiantly"? (108:11, 13)

9. What does it mean for you to praise God "among the nations"? (108:3)

10. What battle in your life right now needs the confidence of verse 13?

Psalm 109: In Return for My Love

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of David. A psalm.

109:1-5 God of my praise, do not be silent. For the mouth of ***the*** wicked and the mouth of deceit they have opened against me; they have spoken with me ***with*** a tongue of falsehood. And ***with*** words of hatred they have surrounded me, and they have fought against me without cause. In return for my love they accuse me, and I ***am*** prayer. And they have set on me evil in return for good, and hatred in return for my love.

109:6-20 Appoint a wicked ***man*** over him, and let an accuser stand at his right ***hand***. When he is judged, let him come out guilty, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; let another take his office. Let his sons be fatherless, and his wife a widow. And let his sons surely wander and beg, and let them seek ***food*** away from their ruins. Let ***the*** creditor ensnare all that ***is*** his, and let strangers plunder his toil. Let there be no ***one*** to him who extends steadfast love, and let there be no ***one*** who shows favor to his fatherless children. Let his posterity be for cutting off; in another generation let their name be wiped out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD, and let the sin of his mother not be wiped out. Let them be before the LORD continually, and let Him cut off their memory from the earth, because he did not remember to do steadfast love, and he pursued an afflicted and needy man, and the disheartened in heart, to put ***him*** to death. And he loved cursing, and it came to him; and he did not delight in blessing, and it was far from him. And he put on cursing like his garment, and it came like water into his inner parts, and like oil into his bones. Let it be to him like a garment ***that*** he wraps himself ***in***, and for a belt ***that*** he girds on continually. This ***is*** the wages of my accusers from the LORD, and of those who speak evil against my soul.

109:21-31 And You, GOD the Lord, deal with me for the sake of Your name; for Your steadfast love ***is*** good, deliver me. For I ***am*** afflicted and needy, and my heart is pierced within me. Like a shadow when it stretches out, I have gone; I have been shaken off like the locust. My knees have stumbled from fasting, and my flesh has grown lean, without fatness. And I, I have become a reproach to them; they see me, they shake their head. Help me, LORD my God; save me according to Your steadfast love, and they will know that this ***is*** Your hand; You, LORD, You have done it. They, they will curse, and You, You will bless; they have arisen, and they have been put to shame, and Your servant will rejoice. Let my accusers be clothed ***with*** dishonor, and let them be wrapped ***with*** their shame like the robe. I will give thanks to the LORD greatly with my mouth, and in the midst of many I will praise Him. For He stands at the right ***hand*** of the needy, to save ***him*** from those who judge his soul.

Psalm 109 Preview

Psalm 109 is the hardest of the imprecatory psalms, the prayers for judgment (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). David has been attacked with lies by people he loved and prayed for. In the middle of the psalm he asks God to bring down on one enemy a long list of curses: a short life,

a ruined family, a name wiped out. Few Christians read these lines without wincing, and we should not hurry past them or pretend they say something softer.

But the psalm does not stop there, and neither does the Bible. The man who prays these words has not lifted a hand against his enemies. He has answered their hatred with prayer, and he leaves the judging to God. Peter quoted verse 8 about Judas, the friend who betrayed Jesus (Acts 1:20). And the psalm ends with a quiet picture of hope: the LORD standing at the right hand of the needy to save him.

Psalm 109 Study

109:1-5 *God of my praise, do not be silent. For the mouth of **the** wicked and the mouth of deceit they have opened against me; they have spoken with me **with** a tongue of falsehood. And **with** words of hatred they have surrounded me, and they have fought against me without cause. In return for my love they accuse me, and I **am** prayer. And they have set on me evil in return for good, and hatred in return for my love.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of David. A psalm." The choirmaster led the temple music (see Psalm 75). We aren't told what event lies behind the psalm. David was betrayed more than once, by Saul, by his son Absalom and by his counselor Ahithophel (2 Samuel 15:12, 31), and any of these might fit.

"God of my praise, do not be silent." David has often praised God. Now he needs God to speak. His enemies are not silent at all. "The mouth of the wicked and the mouth of deceit they have opened against me." They have used "a tongue of falsehood" and "words of hatred," and they have "fought against me without cause." Jesus said the same about the hatred aimed at Him, applying words from other psalms: they hated Him without cause (John 15:25).

Verse 4 holds the key to the whole psalm. "In return for my love they accuse me, and I am prayer." The Hebrew is short and strong, just "and I" followed by the word for prayer, as if he had become nothing but prayer. David's answer to false accusation was not revenge or a smear campaign of his own. He prayed. Verse 5 says they "set on me evil in return for good, and hatred in return for my love." Betrayal hurts most when it comes from someone we have loved.

109:6-8 *Appoint a wicked **man** over him, and let an accuser stand at his right **hand**. When he is judged, let him come out guilty, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; let another take his office.*

Now come the hard lines. David asks God, "Appoint a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand." The enemy has been a false accuser, so David asks that he face an accuser himself. The word is satan, which means "accuser" or "adversary." It is the same word used for Satan standing at the right hand of Joshua the high priest "to accuse him" (Zechariah 3:1). The right hand was where an accuser stood in court.

"When he is judged, let him come out guilty, and let his prayer become sin." In other words, let him lose his case, and let even his prayer count against him, because it is not honest.

"Let his days be few; let another take his office." After Judas betrayed Jesus and died, Peter stood before the believers and said the Holy Spirit had spoken through David about Judas. He quoted Psalm 69:25 and this verse: "May another take his office" (Acts 1:16, 20). Then the apostles chose Matthias to take Judas's place. Peter read Psalm 109 as more than David's private complaint. The betrayer of David's day pointed ahead to the betrayer of the Son of David.

New Testament links: Acts 1:20 (quoted)

109:9-15 *Let his sons be fatherless, and his wife a widow. And let his sons surely wander and beg, and let them seek **food** away from their ruins. Let **the** creditor ensnare all that **is** his, and let strangers plunder his toil. Let there be no **one** to him who extends steadfast love, and let there be no **one** who shows favor to his fatherless children. Let his posterity be for cutting off; in another generation let their name be wiped out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD, and let the sin of his mother not be wiped out. Let them be before the LORD continually, and let Him cut off their memory from the earth,*

The curses grow. "Let his sons be fatherless, and his wife a widow." His children are to "wander and beg." A creditor is to take all he has, and no one is to show "favor to his fatherless children." His family line is to be cut off, and "in another generation let their name be wiped out." Even "the iniquity of his fathers" and "the sin of his mother" are to be remembered before the LORD.

How can a man of God pray this? I won't pretend these lines are easy. A few honest things can be said.

First, some teachers think verses 6-19 are the curses the enemies spoke against David, which he quotes before answering in verse 20. The change from "they" in verses 2-5 to "he" in verse 6 is one reason for that view. Others take the words as they stand, as David's own prayer, and Peter's use of verse 8 in Acts 1:20 fits that reading. The points below hold either way.

Second, in David's world a man's family shared his fate. A wicked man's ruin brought down his house, and his name lived on through his sons. David asks that this man's whole power to do harm come to an end. The Law itself said children were not to be put to death for their father's sin (Deuteronomy 24:16), and God warned that the sins of fathers would follow "those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:5). David is asking God to judge as God has said He judges.

Third, and most important, David does all of this in prayer. He does not lift a sword or hire a thief to rob the man. He hands the whole thing to God, as Paul tells us to do: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19). See the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms.

So may a Christian pray these words against a person who has hurt him, or against that person's children? I believe not. Jesus told us to "love your enemies" and to "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you" (Matthew 5:44), and on the cross He prayed for the men who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). What we can learn from David is to be honest with God about how deep the wound goes and to leave justice with Him, not to wish harm on someone's children.

109:16-20 *because he did not remember to do steadfast love, and he pursued an afflicted and needy man, and the disheartened in heart, to put **him** to death. And he loved cursing, and it came to him; and he did not delight in blessing, and it was far from him. And he put on cursing like his garment, and it came like water into his inner parts, and like oil into his bones. Let it be to him like a garment **that** he wraps himself **in**, and for a belt **that** he girds on continually. This **is** the wages of my accusers from the LORD, and of those who speak evil against my soul.*

Now David says why. The man "did not remember to do steadfast love," and "he pursued an afflicted and needy man, and the disheartened in heart, to put him to death." He did not make one mistake. He hunted the weak to kill them.

"He loved cursing, and it came to him; and he did not delight in blessing, and it was far from him." David asks that the man receive what he chose. He wore cursing "like his garment," and it soaked into him "like water into his inner parts, and like oil into his bones." So let it cling to him like a garment and a belt. Evil chosen over and over becomes part of a person, and God gives people what they insist on.

"This is the wages of my accusers from the LORD." Some read this verse as David turning the enemies' curses back on them. Either way, he asks that the wages come "from the LORD," not from his own hand.

109:21-25 *And You, GOD the Lord, deal with me for the sake of Your name; for Your steadfast love **is** good, deliver me. For I **am** afflicted and needy, and my heart is pierced within me. Like a shadow when it stretches out, I have gone; I have been shaken off like the locust. My knees have stumbled from fasting, and my flesh has grown lean, without fatness. And I, I have become a reproach to them; they see me, they shake their head.*

The psalm turns. "And You, GOD the Lord, deal with me for the sake of Your name." David has spoken of what his enemy deserves. Now he speaks of what he himself needs, and he asks for it on the ground of God's name and "Your steadfast love is good," not his own goodness.

His words are worn out with suffering. "I am afflicted and needy, and my heart is pierced within me." He fades "Like a shadow when it stretches out," the long shadow of evening just before dark. He is "shaken off like the locust," brushed off like an insect. He has fasted until "My knees have stumbled," and he has grown thin.

"I have become a reproach to them; they see me, they shake their head." The people who passed Jesus on the cross shook their heads at Him (Matthew 27:39). Many see Christ in this suffering man, the One betrayed by a friend and mocked by enemies.

If you have been lied about by someone you trusted, these verses give you words. You can tell God you are worn down, pierced and mocked. He listens to the needy.

109:26-31 *Help me, LORD my God; save me according to Your steadfast love, and they will know that this **is** Your hand; You, LORD, You have done it. They, they will curse, and You, You will bless; they have arisen, and they have been put to shame, and Your servant will rejoice. Let my accusers be clothed **with** dishonor, and let them be wrapped **with** their shame like the robe. I will give thanks to the LORD greatly with my mouth, and in the midst of many I will praise Him. For He stands at the right **hand** of the needy, to save **him** from those who judge his soul.*

"Help me, LORD my God; save me according to Your steadfast love." David wants his rescue to be so clear that "they will know that this is Your hand; You, LORD, You have done it."

Verse 28 is a fine line for anyone under attack: "They, they will curse, and You, You will bless." People may curse us, but they do not have the last word. God's blessing outweighs every curse. The enemies will be "put to shame," and "Your servant will rejoice." David asks that his accusers "be clothed with dishonor," wrapped in their shame like a robe. He wants the truth to come out and the liars to be seen for what they are.

"I will give thanks to the LORD greatly with my mouth." The mouth his enemies used for lies (verse 2), David will use for praise. And the last verse answers verse 6. David asked that an accuser stand at his enemy's right hand. Now he says the LORD "stands at the right hand of the needy, to save him from those who judge his soul." The accuser stands at the right hand of the guilty. God stands at the right hand of the needy. For the believer, that place belongs to Jesus Christ, who stands for us as our defender before the Father (Romans 8:33-34; 1 John 2:1).

Psalm 109 Summary

In Psalm 109 David cries to the God of his praise not to be silent, because lying enemies have attacked him without cause and repaid his love with hatred, while he gives himself to prayer. He asks God to bring judgment on the chief enemy: a guilty verdict, a short life, another to take his office, a ruined family and a name wiped out, because the man loved cursing, showed no steadfast love and hunted the needy to kill them. Peter applied verse 8 to Judas (Acts 1:20). Then David turns to his own need. Afflicted, pierced in heart, worn thin and mocked, he asks the LORD to save him according to His steadfast love so that all will know it was His hand. Though they curse, God will bless. David will praise the LORD, who stands at the right hand of the needy to save him.

People and Places

- Accuser: the Hebrew word satan, meaning "accuser" or "adversary"; it is used of a human accuser in 109:6 and of Satan himself in Zechariah 3:1.
- Judas: Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus; Peter applied 109:8 to him (Acts 1:16-20).
- Matthias: the disciple chosen to take Judas's place among the twelve apostles (Acts 1:23-26).

Psalm 109 Study Questions

1. What have David's enemies done to him, and what did he do in return? (109:2-5)

2. What does it mean that David says "I am prayer"? (109:4)

3. Who did Peter say verse 8 was about, and what did the apostles do next? (Acts 1:16-26)

4. According to verses 16-18, what kind of man was David's enemy?

5. Why do you think the curses in verses 6-15 are so hard for us to read?

6. How do Romans 12:19 and Matthew 5:44 help us read this psalm as Christians?

7. How does David describe his own suffering in verses 22-25?

8. What contrast does verse 28 draw between people and God? How might that line help someone who is being slandered?

9. Who stands at the right hand of the enemy in verse 6, and who stands at the right hand of the needy in verse 31?

10. Is there someone who has repaid your love with hatred? What would it look like to hand that person over to God and still pray for him or her?

Psalm 111: Great Are the Works of the LORD

Scripture

111:1-10 Praise ***the*** LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with all ***my*** heart, in the council of ***the*** upright and ***the*** congregation. Great ***are*** the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. Splendor and majesty ***is*** His work, and His righteousness stands forever. A remembrance He has made for His wonders; gracious and compassionate ***is*** the LORD. Food He has given to those who fear Him; He will remember His covenant forever. The power of His works He has declared to His people, to give them the inheritance of ***the*** nations. The works of His hands ***are*** faithfulness and justice; all His precepts ***are*** trustworthy. ***They are*** upheld forever ***and*** ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness. Redemption He has sent to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever; holy and awesome ***is*** His name. The fear of the LORD ***is*** the beginning of wisdom; good understanding ***belongs*** to all who do them; His praise stands forever.

Psalm 111 Preview

Psalm 111 is a short song of praise for what God has done. The writer stands among God's people and thanks the LORD with his whole heart for His great works: His wonders, His provision, His covenant and His redemption. It ends with one of the best-known lines in the Bible: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

Psalm 111 is an acrostic, a poem built on the Hebrew alphabet. After the opening "Praise the LORD!" there are twenty-two short lines, and each one begins with the next of the twenty-two letters. Psalm 112 is built the same way, and the two psalms are twins. Psalm 111 praises God, and Psalm 112 shows the person who fears Him beginning to look like Him.

Psalm 111 Study

111:1 *Praise **the** LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with all **my** heart, in the council of **the** upright and **the** congregation.*

The psalm has no heading, and the writer is not named. It opens with "Praise the LORD!" In Hebrew this is two words, Hallelu Yah, which give us our word "Hallelujah" (see Psalm 104). "Hallelu" is a command to praise, spoken to a group, and "Yah" is a short form of God's name, the LORD. Several psalms near the end of Book Five begin or end with it.

"I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart, in the council of the upright and the congregation." His praise is wholehearted, and it is public. He praises God in the small circle of close friends who love God and in the large gathering of God's people. Both matter. We need a few believers we can be honest with and the whole church gathered in worship.

In the Hebrew, the first word after "Praise the LORD" begins with Aleph, the first letter of the alphabet, and the next line with Beth, the second. An acrostic was easy to memorize, and it also says that this praise runs from A to Z. The English cannot show it, so I will not point it out line by line.

111:2-4 *Great **are** the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. Splendor and majesty **is** His work, and His righteousness stands forever. A remembrance He has made for His wonders; gracious and compassionate **is** the LORD.*

"Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them." The word "studied" means searched out, sought with care. God's works are worth a lifetime of looking into, both what He made in creation and what He did in history. Those who love Him love to study what He has done.

"Splendor and majesty is His work, and His righteousness stands forever." His deeds are beautiful, and they are always right. He never has to take one back.

"A remembrance He has made for His wonders." God made sure His people would not forget. The Passover, the feasts and the stones set up by the Jordan were all reminders (Exodus 12:14; Joshua 4:6-7). Jesus gave His church a remembrance too, the Lord's Supper: "do this, as often as you drink it, in My remembrance" (1 Corinthians 11:25).

"Gracious and compassionate is the LORD." This is how God described Himself to Moses (Exodus 34:6). Psalm 112:4 will say the same of the upright person.

111:5-6 *Food He has given to those who fear Him; He will remember His covenant forever. The power of His works He has declared to His people, to give them the inheritance of **the** nations.*

"Food He has given to those who fear Him." Israel ate manna in the wilderness for forty years (Exodus 16:35). God still provides daily bread for His people (Matthew 6:11). The second line gives the reason: "He will remember His covenant forever." God feeds His people because He made promises to them, and He keeps His promises.

"The power of His works He has declared to His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations." God gave Israel the land of Canaan, the inheritance of the nations who lived there before (Deuteronomy 7:1). His power was put on display for His people in that gift.

111:7-8 *The works of His hands **are** faithfulness and justice; all His precepts **are** trustworthy. **They are** upheld forever **and** ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness.*

"The works of His hands are faithfulness and justice." What God does matches what He says. "All His precepts are trustworthy." His precepts are His detailed instructions (see Psalm 119), and we can lean our full weight on them.

"They are upheld forever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness." God's Word does not wear out or go out of date. Jesus said heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will by no means pass away (Matthew 24:35).

111:9 *Redemption He has sent to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever; holy and awesome **is** His name.*

"Redemption He has sent to His people." God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt, buying them back for Himself (Exodus 6:6). "He has commanded His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name."

When the angel told Mary she would bear the Messiah, she sang that the Mighty One had done great things for her, "and holy is His name" (Luke 1:49). Zechariah praised God because He "has worked redemption for His people" (Luke 1:68). Both used the language of this verse. The redemption God sent in the exodus pointed to the greater redemption He sent in His Son, who gave His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

"Holy and awesome is His name." God's name stands for all that He is. He is set apart from everything else and worthy of awe.

New Testament links: Luke 1:49 (alluded to); Luke 1:68 (alluded to)

111:10 *The fear of the LORD **is** the beginning of wisdom; good understanding **belongs** to all who do them; His praise stands forever.*

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Proverbs says nearly the same (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). The fear of the LORD is the reverent awe that takes God seriously, trusts Him and obeys Him. It is not terror that runs from God. It is the respect that runs to Him and listens.

It is "the beginning" of wisdom, the starting point and the foundation. A person can be very clever and still not be wise, because wisdom starts with a right view of God. "Good understanding belongs to all who do them," that is, to those who do His precepts. Wisdom is not just knowing what God says. It is doing it.

The psalm ends where it began, with praise: "His praise stands forever." The God whose righteousness stands forever (verse 3) will be praised forever.

Psalm 111 Summary

Psalm 111 is a "Hallelujah" psalm and an acrostic, each line beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The writer thanks the LORD with all his heart among the upright and the congregation. He praises God's great works, which are worth studying, full of splendor and majesty, and made to be remembered. The LORD is gracious and compassionate, gives food to those who fear Him and remembers His covenant forever. He gave His people the inheritance of the nations, His works are faithful and just, and His precepts are trustworthy forever. He sent redemption to His people, and His name is holy and awesome. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and His praise stands forever.

People and Places

- Acrostic: a poem in which each line or section begins with the next letter of the alphabet.

Psalm 111 Study Questions

1. Where does the writer give thanks to the LORD, and how much of his heart is in it? (111:1)

2. What does "Hallelujah" mean, and where does the word come from?

3. Who studies the works of the LORD? (111:2)

4. What has God made for His wonders, and what has Jesus given His church for the same purpose? (111:4; 1 Corinthians 11:25)

5. What does God give to those who fear Him, and why? (111:5)

6. How did Mary and Zechariah use the words of verse 9 in Luke 1:49 and 1:68?

7. What is an acrostic, and why might a writer choose that form for a song of praise?

8. What is the fear of the LORD, and why is it the beginning of wisdom? (111:10)

9. Which of God's works in your own life would you like to "study" and remember this week?

10. Who are the "upright" people in your life you can praise God with? How could you encourage one of them this week?

Psalm 112: The Man Who Fears the LORD

Scripture

112:1-10 Praise ***the*** LORD! How blessed ***is*** the man ***who*** fears the LORD, ***who*** delights greatly in His commandments! His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches ***are*** in his house, and his righteousness stands forever. Light has risen in the darkness for the upright, gracious and compassionate and righteous. Good ***is*** the man who shows favor and lends; he will maintain his affairs with justice. For forever he will not be shaken; the righteous will be for an everlasting remembrance. He will not be afraid of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. His heart ***is*** upheld; he will not be afraid, until he looks on his foes. He has scattered, he has given to the needy; his righteousness stands forever; his horn will be exalted in glory. The wicked will see, and he will be vexed; his teeth he will gnash, and he will melt away; the desire of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 112 Preview

Psalm 111 ended, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Psalm 112 picks up right there and shows us the person who fears the LORD. It is built the same way, an acrostic of twenty-two lines after the opening "Praise the LORD!" (see Psalm 111), and it borrows phrases from its twin. What Psalm 111 says about God, Psalm 112 says in a smaller way about the godly man. His righteousness stands forever. He is gracious and compassionate. He gives freely.

The psalm reads like a picture from Proverbs: a generous, steady man whose family is blessed, who lends to others and who is not afraid of bad news. It ends with the wicked man, who sees all this, grinds his teeth and melts away. Paul quotes verse 9 to encourage believers to give generously (2 Corinthians 9:9).

Psalm 112 Study

112:1 *Praise **the** LORD! How blessed **is** the man **who** fears the LORD, **who** delights greatly in His commandments!*

"Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments!" The psalm opens like Psalm 1, with "How blessed." The man who fears the LORD does not obey grudgingly. He "delights greatly" in what God commands. Fear and delight go together here. The more we revere God, the more we love what He says.

The word "man" here stands for anyone, man or woman, who fears the LORD.

112:2-3 *His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches **are** in his house, and his righteousness stands forever.*

"His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed." A godly life sends blessing down to children and grandchildren. Timothy's faith first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5).

"Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness stands forever." Psalm 111:3 said God's righteousness stands forever. Now the same is said of the godly man, because his righteousness comes from God and reflects Him.

We should be careful with the line about wealth. It describes what God often gives to those who live wisely and honestly, as Proverbs does. It is not a promise that every believer will be rich. Many godly people in the Bible were poor, and Jesus Himself had nowhere to lay His head (Luke 9:58). And verse 9 shows what the godly man does with what he has: he gives it away.

112:4-5 *Light has risen in the darkness for the upright, gracious and compassionate and righteous. Good **is** the man who shows favor and lends; he will maintain his affairs with justice.*

"Light has risen in the darkness for the upright." The godly man still has dark days. This psalm does not pretend otherwise. But in the dark, light rises for him. Jesus said the one who follows Him "will certainly not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The upright person is "gracious and compassionate and righteous." Psalm 111:4 used the first two words of the LORD Himself. Those who fear God begin to look like Him.

"Good is the man who shows favor and lends." The Law told Israel to open their hand to a needy brother and lend him what he lacked (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). "He will maintain his affairs with justice." He is generous, but he is also honest and fair in his business.

112:6-8 *For forever he will not be shaken; the righteous will be for an everlasting remembrance. He will not be afraid of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. His heart **is** upheld; he will not be afraid, until he looks on his foes.*

"For forever he will not be shaken; the righteous will be for an everlasting remembrance." People may forget him, but God does not.

Verse 7 is one to memorize: "He will not be afraid of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD." Every one of us will get bad news, a phone call, a doctor's report or a letter. The psalm does not promise the news will never come. It promises a steady heart when it does, because the heart is "trusting in the LORD." Paul says the same: pray about everything, and the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

"His heart is upheld; he will not be afraid, until he looks on his foes." He waits calmly until he sees God deal with his enemies.

112:9 *He has scattered, he has given to the needy; his righteousness stands forever; his horn will be exalted in glory.*

"He has scattered, he has given to the needy." He scatters his gifts like a farmer scattering seed. "His righteousness stands forever; his horn will be exalted in glory." A horn was a picture of strength and honor, like the horns of a strong animal. God will lift him up.

Paul quotes this verse in 2 Corinthians 9:9, in a letter asking the church to give to poor believers in Jerusalem. He says that God is able to make all grace abound to us so that we can abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8), and then he cites this psalm. The generous person never runs out, because God keeps supplying the seed. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 9:9 (quoted)

112:10 *The wicked will see, and he will be vexed; his teeth he will gnash, and he will melt away; the desire of the wicked will perish.*

The last verse shows the other side. "The wicked will see, and he will be vexed." The wicked man watches the godly man being blessed and it makes him angry. "His teeth he will gnash, and he will melt away; the desire of the wicked will perish." Psalm 1 ended with the way of the wicked perishing, and so does this psalm. Everything the wicked man lived for comes to nothing.

So Psalm 112 sets the same choice before us as Psalm 1. One person fears the LORD, gives freely and stands firm. The other envies, grinds his teeth and fades away. Which one are we becoming?

Psalm 112 Summary

Psalm 112 is the twin of Psalm 111, a "Hallelujah" psalm and an acrostic. It describes the blessed man who fears the LORD and delights greatly in His commandments. His children are blessed, his house has plenty and his righteousness stands forever. Light rises for him in the darkness, and he is gracious, compassionate and righteous, lending freely and running his affairs with justice. He will not be shaken and will not be afraid of bad news, because his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. He gives to the needy, and Paul quotes this line to encourage generous giving (2 Corinthians 9:9). The wicked see it and are angry, but they melt away, and their desire perishes.

Psalm 112 Study Questions

1. What two things are true of the man who is blessed? (112:1)
2. What does Psalm 112 say of the godly man that Psalm 111 said of God? (112:3-4; 111:3-4)
3. What happens for the upright in the darkness? (112:4)
4. How does the godly man handle money and business? (112:5, 9)
5. How would you answer someone who says verse 3 promises wealth to every believer?
6. What does verse 7 say the godly man will not be afraid of, and why not?
7. How does Paul use verse 9 in 2 Corinthians 9:6-9?
8. How does the end of Psalm 112 compare with the end of Psalm 1?
9. When you last got bad news, what happened in your heart? What helps you keep a steady heart?
10. Who in your life could use your generosity this month, and what could you give?

Psalm 113: Who Is Like the LORD Our God

Scripture

113:1-4 Praise ***the*** LORD! Praise, servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD! Let the name of the LORD be blessed from now and to forever. From the rising of ***the*** sun to its setting, the name of the LORD ***is*** to be praised. The LORD ***is*** exalted over all nations; His glory ***is*** above the heavens.

113:5-9 Who ***is*** like the LORD our God, who makes ***Himself*** high to sit, who makes ***Himself*** low to look on the heavens and on the earth? ***He*** raises up ***the*** poor from the dust; from the ash heap He lifts up ***the*** needy, to make ***him*** sit with nobles, with the nobles of His people. ***He*** makes the barren ***woman*** of the house dwell ***as*** a joyful mother of children. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 113 Preview

Psalm 113 begins a group of six psalms, 113 to 118, that the Jewish people call the Egyptian Hallel. "Hallel" means "praise." They are called "Egyptian" because Psalm 114 tells of the exodus from Egypt, and the whole group was sung at the Passover, the feast that remembers that night. Jewish tradition says Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the Passover meal and 115 to 118 after it. When Matthew tells us that Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn after the Last Supper and then went out to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30), these are very likely the psalms they sang.

Psalm 113 is short and full of wonder. It calls God's servants to praise His name at all times and in all places. Then it asks, "Who is like the LORD our God," who sits so high that He has to stoop to look at the heavens, yet bends down to lift the poor out of the dust and give a childless woman a home full of children.

Psalm 113 Study

113:1-3 *Praise **the** LORD! Praise, servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD! Let the name of the LORD be blessed from now and to forever. From the rising of **the** sun to its setting, the name of the LORD **is** to be praised.*

The psalm has no heading. It opens and closes with "Praise the LORD!" (Hallelujah; see Psalm 104). In between, the word "praise" comes twice more in verse 1 alone: "Praise, servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD!" The "servants of the LORD" may be the priests and Levites who led worship, but every believer is His servant.

"Let the name of the LORD be blessed from now and to forever." His praise has no end in time. Verse 3 says it has no end in space either: "From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised." From east to west, and from morning to night, God deserves praise. Malachi 1:11 uses the same words to say God's name will be great among the nations.

113:4-6 *The LORD **is** exalted over all nations; His glory **is** above the heavens. Who **is** like the LORD our God, who makes **Himself** high to sit, who makes **Himself** low to look on the heavens and on the earth?*

"The LORD is exalted over all nations; His glory is above the heavens." God is higher than every ruler on earth and greater than the sky itself.

Then comes the question at the center of the psalm: "Who is like the LORD our God, who makes Himself high to sit, who makes Himself low to look on the heavens and on the earth?" God's throne is so high that even the heavens are beneath Him. He must look down to see the stars. Isaiah says the same: the High and Lifted-Up One dwells in a high and holy place, and also "with the contrite and lowly of spirit" (Isaiah 57:15).

The words "makes Himself low" point us to something even greater. Paul tells us that Christ Jesus, "existing in the form of God," emptied Himself and took the form of a servant, and "He humbled Himself, having become obedient as far as death, even death of a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). Many see in this psalm a first glimpse of that. The God who stoops to look at the heavens stooped all the way down to a manger and a cross.

113:7-9 ***He** raises up **the** poor from the dust; from the ash heap He lifts up **the** needy, to make **him** sit with nobles, with the nobles of His people. **He** makes the barren **woman** of the house dwell **as** a joyful mother of children. Praise **the** LORD!*

Now we see what God does when He looks down. "He raises up the poor from the dust; from the ash heap He lifts up the needy, to make him sit with nobles." The ash heap was the town dump outside the city, where the poorest people begged and slept. Job sat in the ashes in his misery (Job 2:8). God lifts people from that place and seats them with princes.

Hannah sang almost the same words after God gave her a son, Samuel (1 Samuel 2:8). Mary echoed her when she sang that God "has brought down rulers from thrones and has exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:52). Both women knew what it was to be low, and both saw God lift them up.

"He makes the barren woman of the house dwell as a joyful mother of children." In Israel, a woman with no children often felt shame and was looked down on. Sarah, Rachel and Hannah all knew that pain, and God gave each of them a child (Genesis 21:1-2; 30:22; 1 Samuel 1:20). Their stories are part of how God kept His promise to Abraham and, in the end, brought the Messiah into the world.

I want to be careful here. This verse shows what kind of God He is. It is not a promise that every woman who longs for a child will have one. Many faithful women never do. If that is your story, your sorrow is not a sign that God has passed you by. The God who "makes Himself low" sees you, and He gives His people a family in Him (Mark 3:34-35; Isaiah 56:3-5).

The psalm ends as it began: "Praise the LORD!"

Psalm 113 Summary

Psalm 113 opens the Egyptian Hallel, Psalms 113 to 118, sung at Passover and very likely the hymn Jesus and His disciples sang after the Last Supper. It calls the servants of the LORD to praise His name from now and forever, from the rising of the sun to its setting. The LORD is exalted over all nations, and His glory is above the heavens. No one is like Him: He sits so high that He must stoop to look at the heavens and the earth. Yet He raises the poor from the dust and the needy from the ash heap and seats them with nobles, and He gives the barren woman a home as a joyful mother of children.

People and Places

- Egyptian Hallel: Psalms 113 to 118, sung at Passover and other great feasts; "Hallel" means "praise."
- Passover: the yearly feast remembering the night God struck Egypt and passed over the houses of Israel marked with the blood of a lamb (Exodus 12).
- Ash heap: the dump outside a town, where the poorest people sat and begged.

Psalm 113 Study Questions

1. What are the "servants of the LORD" told to praise, and for how long? (113:1-2)

2. What does verse 3 say about where and when God is to be praised?

3. What is the Egyptian Hallel, and when was it sung?

4. Where does God sit, and what must He do to look at the heavens and the earth? (113:5-6)

5. How do Philippians 2:6-8 and Psalm 113:6 help each other?

6. Whom does God lift up from the dust and the ash heap, and where does He seat them? (113:7-8)

7. Which women in the Bible sang or lived out verses 7-9? (1 Samuel 2:8; Luke 1:52)

8. How would you comfort a friend who has longed for children for years and has read verse 9?

9. Jesus very likely sang this psalm on the night before He died. How does that change the way you read it?

10. When have you felt "in the dust," and how did God lift you up?

Psalm 114: Tremble, Earth, Before the Lord

Scripture

114:1-8 When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign speech, Judah became His holy place, Israel His dominion. The sea saw and fled; the Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, ***the*** hills like young ones of ***the*** flock. What ***is it*** to you, sea, that you flee, Jordan, ***that*** you turn back, mountains, ***that*** you skip like rams, hills, like young ones of ***the*** flock? Before ***the*** Lord tremble, earth, before the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.

Psalm 114 Preview

Psalm 114 is the second psalm of the Egyptian Hallel (see Psalm 113), the one that gives the group its name. In eight short verses it retells the exodus as a poem. When Israel came out of Egypt, the sea ran away, the Jordan River turned back and the mountains jumped like young sheep. Then the psalm asks them why, and answers by calling the whole earth to tremble before the Lord, who turns rock into water.

The psalm has a surprise in it. God is not named until verse 7. Verse 2 speaks of "His holy place," but we are not told whose until the end. The writer holds back the name so that, when it comes, it lands with full force.

Psalm 114 Study

114:1-2 *When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign speech, Judah became His holy place, Israel His dominion.*

"When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign speech." Israel had lived in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years (Exodus 12:40), much of it as slaves, among people whose language was not their own. The exodus was the great rescue of the Old Testament, the event every later rescue was measured by.

"Judah became His holy place, Israel His dominion." God did not just bring a people out. He made them His own. They became the place where He lived among men and the kingdom over which He ruled. Judah is named because God would later choose Jerusalem in Judah for His temple and David of Judah as king. At Sinai God called Israel "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6).

We still don't know whose holy place it is. The psalm only says "His."

114:3-4 *The sea saw and fled; the Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, **the** hills like young ones of **the** flock.*

"The sea saw and fled; the Jordan turned back." The Red Sea split when Israel left Egypt (Exodus 14:21-22). Forty years later, the Jordan River stopped flowing when the priests carrying

the ark stepped into it, and the people crossed on dry ground (Joshua 3:15-17). The psalm puts the beginning and the end of the journey side by side, and pictures the waters as if they saw something and ran.

"The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like young ones of the flock." When God came down on Mount Sinai, the whole mountain trembled (Exodus 19:18). The psalm draws it as lambs jumping in a field. It is a picture, and a joyful one. Creation shakes when its Maker passes by.

114:5-6 *What **is it** to you, sea, that you flee, Jordan, **that** you turn back, mountains, **that** you skip like rams, hills, like young ones of **the** flock?*

Now the writer speaks to the sea, the river and the mountains. "What is it to you, sea, that you flee, Jordan, that you turn back, mountains, that you skip like rams, hills, like young ones of the flock?" He almost teases them. What were you afraid of? What made you run?

He knows the answer, and so do we. These questions are there to make us say it.

114:7-8 *Before **the** Lord tremble, earth, before the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.*

"Before the Lord tremble, earth, before the God of Jacob." At last the name comes. It was the Lord all along. The sea fled from His face, and the mountains shook at His coming. The whole earth should tremble before Him.

"Who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water." Twice in the wilderness God brought water from a rock (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11). Flint is the hardest, driest stone there is. Water from flint is the last thing anyone would expect, and that is the point. The God who makes the sea run away also makes a dry rock gush with water for His thirsty people.

Paul says Israel drank "from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). The same Lord who gave water in the desert gives living water today. Jesus said that whoever drinks the water He gives will never thirst again (John 4:14).

The psalm ends there, with no "Praise the LORD." It does not need one. Anyone who has seen what God did will tremble and praise without being told.

Psalm 114 Summary

Psalm 114, part of the Egyptian Hallel, celebrates the exodus. When Israel came out of Egypt, Judah became God's holy place and Israel His kingdom. The Red Sea fled and the Jordan turned back, and the mountains skipped like rams. The psalm asks the sea, the river and the hills why they fled and jumped, and then gives the answer: the earth trembles before the Lord, the God of Jacob, who turns rock into a pool and flint into a spring of water.

People and Places

- Jacob: Abraham's grandson, also named Israel; "the house of Jacob" means his descendants, the people of Israel.
- Jordan: the river on Israel's eastern border, which stopped flowing so the people could cross into the land (Joshua 3).
- Flint: a very hard stone; water from flint pictures God doing the impossible.

Psalm 114 Study Questions

1. What did Israel come out of, and what did Judah and Israel become? (114:1-2)

2. What did the sea and the Jordan do, and what events does that recall? (114:3; Exodus 14; Joshua 3)

3. What did the mountains and hills do? (114:4)

4. Why do you think the writer asks the sea and the mountains questions in verses 5-6?

5. Why might the psalm wait until verse 7 to name God?

6. What does God turn rock and flint into? (114:8)

7. How does 1 Corinthians 10:4 help us see Christ in verse 8?

8. What does it mean for the earth to tremble before the Lord? What would that look like in us?

9. What "rock" or hard place in your life would you like to see God turn into a spring?

10. What rescue in your own life do you look back on the way Israel looked back on the exodus?

Psalm 115: Not to Us, LORD

Scripture

115:1-8 Not to us, LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your steadfast love, because of Your faithfulness. Why should the nations say, "Where, now, ***is*** their God?" And our God ***is*** in the heavens; all that He desires, He does. Their idols ***are*** silver and gold, the work of the hands of man. They have a mouth, and they do not speak; they have eyes, and they do not see; they have ears, and they do not hear; they have a nose, and they do not smell; their hands, and they do not feel; their feet, and they do not walk; they do not make a sound with their throat. Like them will be those who make them, everyone who trusts in them.

115:9-18 Israel, trust in the LORD; He ***is*** their help and their shield. House of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He ***is*** their help and their shield. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He ***is*** their help and their shield. The LORD has remembered us; He will bless; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the LORD, the small with the great. May the LORD add to you, to you and to your sons. Blessed ***are*** you by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. The heavens ***are*** the heavens of the LORD, and the earth He has given to the sons of man. The dead do not praise ***the*** LORD, and not any who go down ***into*** silence. And we, we will bless ***the*** LORD from now and to forever. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 115 Preview

Psalm 115 is the third psalm of the Egyptian Hallel (see Psalm 113), and the first of those sung after the Passover meal. It opens with a prayer that God, not His people, would get the glory. The nations mock Israel, asking where their God is. The answer is that He is in the heavens and does whatever He pleases, while the nations' gods are statues of silver and gold with eyes that cannot see.

Then the psalm turns to God's people in three groups, Israel, the priests and all who fear the LORD, and calls each to trust Him, because He is their help and their shield. It ends with blessing and a promise to praise the LORD forever.

Psalm 115 Study

115:1-2 *Not to us, LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your steadfast love, because of Your faithfulness. Why should the nations say, "Where, now,* ***is*** *their God?"*

"Not to us, LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory." The words "not to us" come twice, as if the singer wants to be very sure. God's people do not want credit for what God has done. Glory belongs to Him "because of Your steadfast love, because of Your faithfulness." Everything good in their story came from His loyal love and His faithfulness, not from their goodness.

"Why should the nations say," and then comes their taunt: "Where, now, is their God?" Israel may have been weak or defeated when this was written, and the nations around them laughed. A

people who had been through exile knew that taunt well. The prayer of verse 1 is not for Israel's pride to be restored. It is for God's name to be honored again.

115:3-8 *And our God **is** in the heavens; all that He desires, He does. Their idols **are** silver and gold, the work of the hands of man. They have a mouth, and they do not speak; they have eyes, and they do not see; they have ears, and they do not hear; they have a nose, and they do not smell; their hands, and they do not feel; their feet, and they do not walk; they do not make a sound with their throat. Like them will be those who make them, everyone who trusts in them.*

"And our God is in the heavens; all that He desires, He does." Our God cannot be seen because He is too great to be seen, not because He is absent. He rules from heaven, and nothing can stop His will.

Their gods are another matter. "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of the hands of man." The idols are made of costly metal, but they are still things men made. Then comes a long, almost funny list. "They have a mouth, and they do not speak; they have eyes, and they do not see." They have ears that don't hear, noses that don't smell, hands that don't feel and feet that don't walk. "They do not make a sound with their throat." A god with a mouth that cannot speak is no god at all. Isaiah mocks idols in the same way: a man burns half a log to cook his dinner and bows down to the other half (Isaiah 44:15-17).

Revelation 9:20 uses this language for the people who refuse to repent even under God's judgments in the Tribulation, the time of great trouble on the earth before Christ returns to reign. They keep worshiping idols of gold and silver "which can neither see nor hear nor walk."

Verse 8 is a warning: "Like them will be those who make them, everyone who trusts in them." We become like what we worship. People who worship dead things grow dead to God. The reverse is true too. Paul says that as we look at the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18). Our idols today are usually not made of silver, but they are just as real: money, success, comfort, a person or ourselves. John ends his first letter with a plain word: "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

New Testament links: Revelation 9:20 (alluded to)

115:9-11 *Israel, trust in the LORD; He **is** their help and their shield. House of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He **is** their help and their shield. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He **is** their help and their shield.*

Now come three calls, perhaps sung by a leader with the people answering. "Israel, trust in the LORD." "House of Aaron, trust in the LORD." "You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD." Each time the answer is the same: "He is their help and their shield." Psalm 118:2-4 names the same three groups.

The house of Aaron are the priests, Aaron's descendants. "You who fear the LORD" may mean all the faithful in Israel, or it may reach wider to include Gentiles who had come to worship Israel's God, people like Ruth or the God-fearers of Acts (Acts 10:2; 13:16). Either way, God is help and shield to all who trust Him. A help comes alongside. A shield stands in front of us.

115:12-15 *The LORD has remembered us; He will bless; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the LORD, the small with the great. May the LORD add to you, to you and to your sons. Blessed **are** you by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

"The LORD has remembered us; He will bless." The word "bless" comes four times in two verses. He will bless the house of Israel, the house of Aaron and "those who fear the LORD, the small with the great." God's blessing is not just for important people. Children and old people, the poor and the powerful, all receive it.

Revelation picks up this phrase twice. In Revelation 11:18 the time comes to reward "those who fear Your name, to the small and to the great," and in Revelation 19:5 a voice from the throne says, "Praise our God, all you His slaves and you who fear Him, and the small and the great." The worship of Psalm 115 will be heard around God's throne.

Verse 14 is a priest's blessing: "May the LORD add to you, to you and to your sons." And verse 15: "Blessed are you by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth." The idols were made by man. The LORD made everything.

New Testament links: Revelation 11:18 (alluded to); Revelation 19:5 (alluded to)

115:16-18 *The heavens **are** the heavens of the LORD, and the earth He has given to the sons of man. The dead do not praise **the** LORD, and not any who go down **into** silence. And we, we will bless **the** LORD from now and to forever. Praise **the** LORD!*

"The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, and the earth He has given to the sons of man." God rules from heaven and has given the earth into human care (Genesis 1:28). We are stewards of it, not owners.

"The dead do not praise the LORD, and not any who go down into silence." This sounds sad. In the Old Testament, God had not yet shown clearly what happens after death, and Sheol, the place of the dead (see Psalm 86), was pictured as a place of silence (Psalm 6:5; Isaiah 38:18-19). The point is that now, while we live, is the time to praise. We do not know how long we have.

We know more than the psalm writer did. Paul says Christ Jesus "abolished death and brought life and incorruptibility to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). Believers who die go to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23), and we will be raised. But the call of the psalm still stands: don't wait to praise Him.

"And we, we will bless the LORD from now and to forever. Praise the LORD!" The dead may be silent, but God's people will not be. They will praise Him now, and forever.

Psalm 115 Summary

Psalm 115, part of the Egyptian Hallel, asks God to glorify His own name, not His people's, because of His steadfast love and faithfulness, and answers the nations who ask, "Where is their God?" Our God is in the heavens and does whatever He pleases. The idols of the nations are silver and gold made by men, with mouths, eyes, ears, noses, hands and feet that do nothing, and those who

make and trust them become like them. Israel, the house of Aaron and all who fear the LORD are called to trust Him, their help and shield. The LORD has remembered His people and will bless them, small and great. The heavens belong to Him, and He has given the earth to mankind. The dead do not praise Him, but His people will bless the LORD from now and forever.

People and Places

- House of Aaron: the priests of Israel, descended from Moses' brother Aaron.
- Idols: statues or objects worshiped as gods; in the Bible, anything that takes God's place.

Psalm 115 Study Questions

1. To whom does the writer want glory to go, and why? (115:1)

2. What do the nations say, and how does the psalm answer them? (115:2-3)

3. List what the idols have and what they cannot do. (115:4-7)

4. What happens to those who make and trust idols? (115:8) What does that teach us about worship?

5. What idols are common today, even if they are not made of silver and gold?

6. What three groups are called to trust the LORD, and what is He to each of them? (115:9-11)

7. Who will God bless, according to verse 13, and how does Revelation 19:5 use those words?

8. What has God done with the heavens and with the earth? (115:16) How should that shape the way we care for the earth?

9. Why does the psalm say the dead do not praise the LORD, and what does the New Testament add? (115:17; 2 Timothy 1:10)

10. Where are you tempted to take some of the glory that belongs to God? How could you pray verse 1 this week?

Psalm 116: I Love, for the LORD Hears

Scripture

116:1-9 I love, for the LORD hears my voice, my supplications. For He has inclined His ear to me, and in my days I will call. The cords of death surrounded me, and the distresses of Sheol found me; I found trouble and sorrow. And on the name of the LORD I called: "Please, LORD, deliver my soul!" Gracious ***is*** the LORD, and righteous, and our God ***is*** compassionate. The LORD keeps the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Return, my soul, to your rest, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. For You have rescued my soul from death, my eye from tears, my foot from stumbling. I will walk before the LORD in the lands of the living.

116:10-19 I believed, for I spoke: "I, I have been greatly afflicted." I, I said in my alarm, "Every man ***is*** a liar." What shall I return to the LORD ***for*** all His benefits toward me? A cup of salvations I will lift up, and on the name of the LORD I will call. My vows to the LORD I will pay, now, before all His people. Precious in the eyes of the LORD ***is*** the death of His godly ones. Please, LORD, for I ***am*** Your servant; I ***am*** Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. To You I will sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and on the name of the LORD I will call. My vows to the LORD I will pay, now, before all His people, in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, Jerusalem. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 116 Preview

Psalm 116 is a personal song of thanks from someone God rescued from death. The cords of death had wrapped around him, and he called on the name of the LORD. God heard him and saved him. Now he comes to the temple in Jerusalem to keep his promises, lift up the cup of salvation and thank God in front of everyone.

It is part of the Egyptian Hallel (see Psalm 113), sung after the Passover meal. Paul quotes it twice: verse 10 to explain why he kept preaching through suffering (2 Corinthians 4:13), and verse 11 to say that God is true even if every man is a liar (Romans 3:4). And verse 15 has comforted many Christians at the death of someone they love: "Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death of His godly ones."

Psalm 116 Study

116:1-2 *I love, for the LORD hears my voice, my supplications. For He has inclined His ear to me, and in my days I will call.*

The psalm has no heading, and we aren't told who wrote it or what illness or danger he faced. It begins with a simple, warm line: "I love, for the LORD hears my voice, my supplications." He doesn't even name the LORD as the One he loves at first. He just says, "I love." His love grew out of being heard. Supplications are humble requests, the prayers of someone who needs help.

"For He has inclined His ear to me." God bent down to listen, as a parent leans in to hear a small child. "And in my days I will call." Because God listened once, he will keep praying for the rest of his life.

116:3-4 *The cords of death surrounded me, and the distresses of Sheol found me; I found trouble and sorrow. And on the name of the LORD I called: "Please, LORD, deliver my soul!"*

"The cords of death surrounded me, and the distresses of Sheol found me." Death is pictured as a hunter with ropes. Sheol, the place of the dead (see Psalm 86), seemed to reach out and grab him. "I found trouble and sorrow."

So he did the one thing left: "on the name of the LORD I called." His prayer was "Please, LORD, deliver my soul!" The prayer is short. People in deep trouble rarely pray long prayers. God hears short ones.

116:5-7 *Gracious **is** the LORD, and righteous, and our God **is** compassionate. The LORD keeps the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Return, my soul, to your rest, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.*

"Gracious is the LORD, and righteous, and our God is compassionate." His rescue showed him God's character. God is kind, He is right and He feels for His people.

"The LORD keeps the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me." The simple here are ordinary, unprotected people, those without clever ways out. God watches over them.

Then he speaks to himself: "Return, my soul, to your rest, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you." His soul had been running in fear. Now he tells it to come home and settle down. We can preach to our own hearts this way. When fear rises again, we can remind ourselves of what God has already done.

116:8-9 *For You have rescued my soul from death, my eye from tears, my foot from stumbling. I will walk before the LORD in the lands of the living.*

"For You have rescued my soul from death, my eye from tears, my foot from stumbling." God saved his life, dried his tears and kept him from falling. "I will walk before the LORD in the lands of the living." He has been given more days, and he means to spend them living in God's sight.

116:10-11 *I believed, for I spoke: "I, I have been greatly afflicted." I, I said in my alarm, "Every man **is** a liar."*

"I believed, for I spoke." What he spoke was this: "I, I have been greatly afflicted." He kept trusting God even while he was saying how bad things were. Faith does not mean pretending we are fine. It is honest about the trouble and still looks to God.

Paul quotes this verse in 2 Corinthians 4:13: "I believed, therefore I spoke." He had just described being afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, but never destroyed. He kept preaching

because he believed that the God who raised Jesus would raise him too (2 Corinthians 4:14). Faith opens our mouths.

"I, I said in my alarm," and what he said was "Every man is a liar." In his panic, he felt that no one could be trusted. Human help had failed him. Paul uses these words in Romans 3:4: "let God be true, and every man a liar." People fail us. God never does.

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 4:13 (quoted); Romans 3:4 (quoted)

116:12-14 *What shall I return to the LORD **for** all His benefits toward me? A cup of salvations I will lift up, and on the name of the LORD I will call. My vows to the LORD I will pay, now, before all His people.*

"What shall I return to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?" The honest answer is that we can never pay God back. His answer is to receive more and to say thank you. "A cup of salvations I will lift up, and on the name of the LORD I will call." The cup may have been a drink offering poured out in thanks, or a cup raised at a thanksgiving meal. Either way, he lifts it up to say that salvation came from God.

At the Passover meal, several cups of wine were shared. On the night before He died, Jesus took a cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is being poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). Many see a picture here. The cup of salvation we lift up was filled by His blood.

"My vows to the LORD I will pay, now, before all His people." When he was in danger, he made promises to God. Now he keeps them, in public. Ecclesiastes 5:4 warns that when you make a vow to God, you should not delay to pay it.

116:15 *Precious in the eyes of the LORD **is** the death of His godly ones.*

"Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death of His godly ones." The word "precious" means costly, weighty, of great value. God does not take the death of His people lightly. He does not shrug when a believer dies. It matters deeply to Him, and He does not let it happen carelessly or outside His care.

In context, the writer is thanking God for not letting him die yet. God values the lives of His godly ones too much to let them go cheaply. When the time does come, their death is still precious to Him. For the Christian, death is not the end. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), and Paul could say "to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). If you have lost someone who loved the Lord, this verse is for you. God saw, and He cared.

116:16-19 *Please, LORD, for I **am** Your servant; I **am** Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. To You I will sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and on the name of the LORD I will call. My vows to the LORD I will pay, now, before all His people, in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, Jerusalem. Praise **the** LORD!*

"Please, LORD, for I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant." He was born into a family that served God, and he belongs to God twice over. "You have loosed my bonds." The cords of death in verse 3 are gone.

"To You I will sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving." He comes "in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, Jerusalem," before all God's people, to give thanks and to keep his promises. And the psalm closes, "Praise the LORD!"

Gratitude in the Bible is not a private feeling. It goes to God's house, it keeps its promises and it tells others. When God answers your prayer, tell His people.

Psalm 116 Summary

Psalm 116, part of the Egyptian Hallel, is the thanksgiving of someone rescued from death. He loves the LORD because God bent down and heard his supplications. The cords of death and the distresses of Sheol had surrounded him, and he called on the name of the LORD, who is gracious, righteous and compassionate. God rescued his soul from death, his eyes from tears and his feet from stumbling, and he tells his soul to return to its rest. He believed even while he spoke of his affliction, and he learned that every man is a liar; Paul quotes both lines (2 Corinthians 4:13; Romans 3:4). He asks what he can give back, and answers that he will lift the cup of salvation, call on the LORD and pay his vows before all God's people. The death of God's godly ones is precious to Him. As God's servant, set free, he offers thanks in the courts of the LORD's house in Jerusalem.

People and Places

- Supplications: humble, earnest requests made in prayer.
- Vows: promises made to God, often in a time of trouble, to be kept with an offering or thanks.
- Cup of salvation: a cup lifted up in thanks to God for rescue, perhaps as a drink offering.

Psalm 116 Study Questions

1. Why does the writer love the LORD? (116:1-2)

2. What surrounded him, and what did he pray? (116:3-4)

3. What three words describe the LORD in verse 5?

4. What does the writer tell his soul to do in verse 7? How could you speak to your own soul this way?

5. How does Paul use verse 10 in 2 Corinthians 4:13, and verse 11 in Romans 3:4?

6. What does the writer decide to "return" to the LORD? (116:12-14)

7. Have you ever made a promise to God in a hard time? Did you keep it?

8. What does it mean that the death of God's godly ones is "precious" to Him? (116:15)

9. How could verse 15 comfort someone who has lost a believing friend or family member?

10. Why does the writer give thanks in public, before all God's people? (116:14, 18-19) How could you do that this week?

Psalm 117: Praise the LORD, All Nations

Scripture

117:1-2 Praise the LORD, all nations; extol Him, all the peoples! For His steadfast love has prevailed over us, and the faithfulness of the LORD ***is*** forever. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 117 Preview

Psalm 117 is the shortest psalm and the shortest chapter in the Bible, just two verses. It belongs to the Egyptian Hallel (see Psalm 113), sung after the Passover meal. In those two verses it calls the whole world to praise Israel's God and gives two reasons: His steadfast love and His faithfulness.

Short as it is, Paul quotes it in Romans 15:11 to show that God always planned for the Gentiles to praise Him alongside Israel.

Psalm 117 Study

117:1 *Praise the LORD, all nations; extol Him, all the peoples!*

"Praise the LORD, all nations; extol Him, all the peoples!" To extol is to praise highly, to speak well of someone with great honor. The call goes out to every nation and every people, not just to Israel.

This was God's plan from the start. He promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him (Genesis 12:3). Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:11: "Praise the Lord, all the Gentiles, and extol Him, all the peoples." The word for "nations" also means "Gentiles," people who are not Jewish. Paul puts it in a chain of Old Testament verses to show that Christ came to confirm God's promises to Israel and so that the Gentiles would glorify God for His mercy (Romans 15:8-12). Israel and the nations together praise the same God, and the nations do not take Israel's place (Romans 11:17-18).

One day this psalm will be fully answered. John saw a great crowd that no one could count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing before the throne and the Lamb (Revelation 7:9).

New Testament links: Romans 15:11 (quoted)

117:2 *For His steadfast love has prevailed over us, and the faithfulness of the LORD* ***is*** *forever. Praise* ***the*** *LORD!*

"For His steadfast love has prevailed over us." Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love. The word "prevailed" means it has been mighty, stronger than everything against it, stronger than our sin and our failures. And "us" here means Israel. The nations are called to praise God for what He has done for Israel. His faithfulness to Israel shows the whole world what kind of God He is.

"And the faithfulness of the LORD is forever." He keeps every promise, and He will go on keeping them. Then the psalm ends with the same call it began with, "Praise the LORD!"

Two verses are enough to say what matters most. God's love is strong, His faithfulness never ends, and everyone on earth is invited to praise Him. If you have time for only one psalm today, this one will do.

Psalm 117 Summary

Psalm 117, the shortest chapter in the Bible and part of the Egyptian Hallel, calls all nations and all peoples to praise and extol the LORD. Paul quotes it in Romans 15:11 to show that God meant the Gentiles to praise Him along with Israel. The reason is that His steadfast love has prevailed over His people, and His faithfulness is forever. Praise the LORD!

Psalm 117 Study Questions

1. Who is called to praise the LORD in verse 1?
2. What does "extol" mean?
3. What two reasons does verse 2 give for praising God?
4. What does it mean that God's steadfast love has "prevailed" over us?
5. How does Paul use this psalm in Romans 15:8-12?
6. How does God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 connect with this psalm?
7. Why might the nations praise God for what He has done for Israel?
8. How does Revelation 7:9 show this psalm being fulfilled?
9. Which people group or nation would you like to see praising God? How could you pray for them?
10. If you had to praise God in only two sentences, what would you say?

Psalm 119: Delighting in God's Word (Verses 65 to 176)

Scripture

119:65-72 You have done good with Your servant, LORD, according to Your word. Teach me goodness of discernment and knowledge, for I have believed in Your commandments. Before I was afflicted, I was erring; and now I keep Your word. You ***are*** good and doing good; teach me Your statutes. ***The*** arrogant have smeared falsehood on me; I, with all ***my*** heart I observe Your precepts. Their heart is insensitive like fat; I, I delight in Your law. It was good for me that I was afflicted, so that I may learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth ***is*** better for me than thousands of gold and silver.

119:73-80 Your hands made me and established me; give me understanding, and let me learn Your commandments. Those who fear You will see me and rejoice, for I have hoped in Your word. I know, LORD, that Your judgments ***are*** righteousness, and ***in*** faithfulness You have afflicted me. Let Your steadfast love, please, be to comfort me, according to Your word to Your servant. Let Your compassion come to me, and I will live, for Your law ***is*** my delight. Let ***the*** arrogant be ashamed, for ***with*** falsehood they have subverted me; I, I will meditate on Your precepts. Let those who fear You turn to me, and those who know Your testimonies. Let my heart be blameless in Your statutes, so that I will not be ashamed.

119:81-88 My soul is spent for Your salvation; for Your word I have hoped. My eyes are spent for Your word, saying, "When will You comfort me?" For I have become like a wineskin in smoke; Your statutes I have not forgotten. How many ***are*** the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who pursue me? ***The*** arrogant have dug pits for me, which ***are*** not according to Your law. All Your commandments ***are*** faithfulness; ***with*** falsehood they have pursued me; help me! Almost they have made an end of me on the earth; and I, I have not forsaken Your precepts. According to Your steadfast love keep me alive, and let me keep the testimony of Your mouth.

119:89-96 Forever, LORD, Your word stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness ***is*** to generation and generation; You have established the earth, and it stands. By Your judgments they stand this day, for all things ***are*** Your servants. Unless Your law ***had been*** my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction. Forever I will not forget Your precepts, for by them You have kept me alive. I ***am*** Yours; save me, for I have sought Your precepts. ***The*** wicked have waited for me, to destroy me; Your testimonies I will consider. Of all perfection I have seen an end; Your commandment ***is*** exceedingly broad.

119:97-104 How I love Your law! All the day it ***is*** my meditation. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for forever they ***are*** mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies ***are*** my meditation. I gain understanding more than ***the*** aged, for I have observed Your precepts. From every evil path I have restrained my feet, so that I may keep Your word. From Your judgments I have not turned aside, for You, You have instructed me. How smooth Your word is to my palate, more than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I gain understanding; therefore I hate every path of falsehood.

119:105-112 A lamp to my foot ***is*** Your word, and a light to my pathway. I have sworn, and I have confirmed ***it***, to keep the judgments of Your righteousness. I have been afflicted utterly; LORD, keep me alive according to Your word. Accept, please, the freewill offerings of my mouth, LORD, and teach me Your judgments. My life ***is*** in my hand continually, and Your law I have not forgotten. ***The*** wicked have set a snare for me, and from Your precepts I have not gone astray. I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they ***are*** the joy of my heart. I have inclined my heart to do Your statutes forever, ***to the*** end.

119:113-120 ***The*** half-hearted I hate, and Your law I love. My hiding place and my shield ***are*** You; for Your word I have hoped. Depart from me, evildoers, and let me observe the commandments of my God. Sustain me according to Your word, and I will live; and do not put me to shame for my hope. Uphold me, and let me be saved, and I will have regard for Your statutes continually. You have rejected all who stray from Your statutes, for their deceitfulness ***is*** falsehood. ***As*** dross You have made all the wicked of the earth cease; therefore I have loved Your testimonies. My flesh bristles from dread of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments.

119:121-128 I have done justice and righteousness; do not leave me to my oppressors. Be surety for Your servant for good; do not let ***the*** arrogant oppress me. My eyes are spent for Your salvation, and for the word of Your righteousness. Do with Your servant according to Your steadfast love, and teach me Your statutes. I ***am*** Your servant; give me understanding, and let me know Your testimonies. ***It is*** a time to act for the LORD; they have broken Your law. Therefore I have loved Your commandments more than gold and more than fine gold. Therefore all the precepts of everything I count right; every path of falsehood I hate.

119:129-136 Your testimonies ***are*** wonders; therefore my soul observes them. The opening of Your words gives light, giving understanding to ***the*** simple. My mouth I opened wide, and I panted, for I yearned for Your commandments. Turn to me and be gracious to me, according to ***the*** custom toward those who love Your name. Establish my steps by Your word, and do not let any iniquity have power over me. Ransom me from the oppression of man, and let me keep Your precepts. Make Your face shine on Your servant, and teach me Your statutes. Streams of water have gone down my eyes, because they have not kept Your law.

119:137-144 Righteous ***are*** You, LORD, and upright ***are*** Your judgments. You have commanded the righteousness of Your testimonies, and faithfulness exceedingly. My zeal has destroyed me, for my foes have forgotten Your words. Your word ***is*** refined exceedingly, and Your servant has loved it. I ***am*** small and despised; Your precepts I have not forgotten. Your righteousness ***is*** righteousness forever, and Your law ***is*** truth. Distress and anguish have found me; Your commandments ***are*** my delight. The righteousness of Your testimonies ***is*** forever; give me understanding, and I will live.

119:145-152 I have called with all ***my*** heart; answer me, LORD; Your statutes I will observe. I have called to You; save me, and let me keep Your testimonies. I have gone before the twilight and cried for help; for Your word I have hoped. My eyes have gone before the night watches, to meditate on Your word. Hear my voice according to Your steadfast love; LORD, according to Your judgment keep me alive. Those who pursue wicked scheming draw near; from Your law they are far. Near

are You, LORD, and all Your commandments ***are*** truth. Long ago I have known from Your testimonies that You have founded them forever.

119:153-160 See my affliction and rescue me, for Your law I have not forgotten. Plead my case and redeem me; according to Your word keep me alive. Salvation ***is*** far from ***the*** wicked, for Your statutes they have not sought. Your compassion ***is*** great, LORD; according to Your judgments keep me alive. Many ***are*** those who pursue me and my foes; from Your testimonies I have not turned away. I have seen ***the*** treacherous, and I have loathed ***them***, because they have not kept Your word. See that I have loved Your precepts; LORD, according to Your steadfast love keep me alive. The sum of Your word ***is*** truth, and every judgment of Your righteousness ***is*** forever.

119:161-168 Officials have pursued me without cause, and my heart stands in dread of Your word. I ***am*** exulting over Your word like one who finds much plunder. Falsehood I hate, and I abhor ***it***; Your law I love. Seven ***times*** in the day I praise You for the judgments of Your righteousness. Great peace ***belongs*** to those who love Your law, and ***there is*** no stumbling block for them. I have waited for Your salvation, LORD, and Your commandments I have done. My soul has kept Your testimonies, and I have loved them exceedingly. I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways ***are*** before You.

119:169-176 Let my cry draw near before You, LORD; according to Your word give me understanding. Let my supplication come before You; according to Your word deliver me. Let my lips pour forth praise, for You will teach me Your statutes. Let my tongue sing ***of*** Your word, for all Your commandments ***are*** righteousness. Let Your hand be ***ready*** to help me, for I have chosen Your precepts. I have longed for Your salvation, LORD, and Your law ***is*** my delight. Let my soul live, and it will praise You; and let Your judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for Your commandments I have not forgotten.

Psalm 119 Preview

Volume 1 of this study covered the first sixty-four verses of Psalm 119. This chapter covers the rest, verses 65 to 176. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. It is an acrostic (see Psalm 111) of twenty-two stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, with eight verses in each. In the Hebrew, all eight verses of a stanza begin with the same letter. Our part begins with the ninth letter, Teth, and runs through Yodh, Kaph, Lamedh, Mem, Nun, Samekh, Ayin, Pe, Tsadhe, Qoph, Resh and Shin to Tav, the last letter. The writer is not named. He is a believer under pressure, mocked and hunted by proud men, often in tears, who keeps running to what God has said.

Almost every verse names God's Word with one of eight words. "Law" (torah) is God's instruction. "Testimonies" are what He has solemnly declared. "Precepts" are His detailed orders. "Statutes" are His fixed decrees, a word linked to carving in stone. "Commandments" are His direct orders. "Judgments" are His rulings as Judge. And "word" translates two Hebrew words, one for what God has spoken and one for His saying or promise. The words overlap, and the writer uses them the way someone in love keeps finding new names for the one he loves.

Psalm 119 Study

119:65-68 *You have done good with Your servant, LORD, according to Your word. Teach me goodness of discernment and knowledge, for I have believed in Your commandments. Before I was afflicted, I was erring; and now I keep Your word. You **are** good and doing good; teach me Your statutes.*

The ninth stanza, Teth, is about goodness, and several verses begin with the Hebrew word for "good." "You have done good with Your servant, LORD, according to Your word." Looking back, he sees that God kept His promises.

"Teach me goodness of discernment and knowledge." He wants good judgment, the ability to tell right from wrong in real life. Then an honest confession: "Before I was afflicted, I was erring; and now I keep Your word." Trouble brought him back. "You are good and doing good; teach me Your statutes." God's goodness is not only who He is. It is what He does.

119:69-72 ***The** arrogant have smeared falsehood on me; I, with all **my** heart I observe Your precepts. Their heart is insensitive like fat; I, I delight in Your law. It was good for me that I was afflicted, so that I may learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth **is** better for me than thousands of gold and silver.*

"The arrogant have smeared falsehood on me." Proud people smeared him with lies, like dirt rubbed on a wall. He answers by obeying "with all my heart." Their hearts are "insensitive like fat," dull and unfeeling, while he delights in God's law.

Verse 71 is one of the most surprising lines in the Bible: "It was good for me that I was afflicted, so that I may learn Your statutes." He does not say suffering is pleasant. He says God used it. Hebrews 12:11 says discipline seems painful at the time but later yields "the peaceful fruit of righteousness." That does not mean every hardship is punishment, or that we should call evil good. It means God wastes nothing. No wonder he can say, "The law of Your mouth is better for me than thousands of gold and silver."

119:73-76 *Your hands made me and established me; give me understanding, and let me learn Your commandments. Those who fear You will see me and rejoice, for I have hoped in Your word. I know, LORD, that Your judgments **are** righteousness, and **in** faithfulness You have afflicted me. Let Your steadfast love, please, be to comfort me, according to Your word to Your servant.*

The tenth stanza, Yodh, begins with God's hands. "Your hands made me and established me; give me understanding." The God who made him knows how he works and can teach him. "Those who fear You will see me and rejoice, for I have hoped in Your word." His faithfulness will encourage other believers.

"I know, LORD, that Your judgments are righteousness, and in faithfulness You have afflicted me." He does not accuse God. Even his trouble was given by a faithful God. Then, tenderly: "Let Your steadfast love, please, be to comfort me." Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love. He knows God's rulings are right, and he still needs God's comfort.

119:77-80 *Let Your compassion come to me, and I will live, for Your law **is** my delight. Let **the** arrogant be ashamed, for **with** falsehood they have subverted me; I, I will meditate on Your precepts. Let those who fear You turn to me, and those who know Your testimonies. Let my heart be blameless in Your statutes, so that I will not be ashamed.*

"Let Your compassion come to me, and I will live, for Your law is my delight." He asks that the arrogant be put to shame, because "with falsehood they have subverted me," that is, they have twisted the truth to bring him down. His own answer is to meditate on God's precepts.

"Let those who fear You turn to me." He wants the company of others who know God's testimonies. Then he prays, "Let my heart be blameless in Your statutes, so that I will not be ashamed." A blameless heart is whole, not divided.

119:81-84 *My soul is spent for Your salvation; for Your word I have hoped. My eyes are spent for Your word, saying, "When will You comfort me?" For I have become like a wineskin in smoke; Your statutes I have not forgotten. How many **are** the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who pursue me?*

The eleventh stanza, Kaph, is the darkest. "My soul is spent for Your salvation." He has waited until he is worn out. "My eyes are spent for Your word," and they ask, "When will You comfort me?" His eyes are strained from looking for help that has not yet come.

"I have become like a wineskin in smoke." Wineskins hung near the fire turned black, dry and cracked. That is how he feels, shriveled and useless. Yet "Your statutes I have not forgotten." Then he asks, "How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who pursue me?" It is the cry of many sufferers: How long? He asks God to judge, rather than taking revenge himself (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

119:85-88 ***The** arrogant have dug pits for me, which **are** not according to Your law. All Your commandments **are** faithfulness; **with** falsehood they have pursued me; help me! Almost they have made an end of me on the earth; and I, I have not forsaken Your precepts. According to Your steadfast love keep me alive, and let me keep the testimony of Your mouth.*

"The arrogant have dug pits for me, which are not according to Your law." His enemies set traps, the way hunters dug pits for animals. "Almost they have made an end of me on the earth; and I, I have not forsaken Your precepts." He came close to death and still held on.

"According to Your steadfast love keep me alive." The stanza ends with a prayer, not a rescue. If you are in a Kaph season, worn out and waiting, you are in good company. Faith sometimes means simply not letting go.

119:89-92 *Forever, LORD, Your word stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness **is** to generation and generation; You have established the earth, and it stands. By Your judgments they stand this day, for all things **are** Your servants. Unless Your law **had been** my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction.*

The twelfth stanza, Lamedh, lifts our eyes. "Forever, LORD, Your word stands firm in the heavens." After the smoke and the pits, he looks up. God's Word is settled in heaven, where no enemy can reach it. Isaiah says the grass withers, "and the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8), and Jesus said His words will never pass away (Matthew 24:35).

"Your faithfulness is to generation and generation; You have established the earth, and it stands." The earth stays put because God's Word holds it. "For all things are Your servants." All creation does His bidding.

"Unless Your law had been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction." God's Word kept him alive. Many believers can say the same about a verse that held them up in a dark time.

119:93-96 *Forever I will not forget Your precepts, for by them You have kept me alive. I **am** Yours; save me, for I have sought Your precepts. **The** wicked have waited for me, to destroy me; Your testimonies I will consider. Of all perfection I have seen an end; Your commandment **is** exceedingly broad.*

"Forever I will not forget Your precepts, for by them You have kept me alive." Then a short, strong prayer: "I am Yours; save me." He belongs to God, so he asks God to take care of what is His.

"The wicked have waited for me, to destroy me; Your testimonies I will consider." While they plot, he thinks about God's Word.

"Of all perfection I have seen an end; Your commandment is exceedingly broad." Everything in this world, even the best of it, has limits. God's commandment has none. It reaches every part of life and goes deeper than we can measure.

119:97-100 *How I love Your law! All the day it **is** my meditation. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for forever they **are** mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies **are** my meditation. I gain understanding more than **the** aged, for I have observed Your precepts.*

The thirteenth stanza, Mem, begins with love. "How I love Your law! All the day it is my meditation." This is the blessed man of Psalm 1:2, who meditates on God's law day and night.

"Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies." He then says he has "more insight than all my teachers" and gains "understanding more than the aged." This is not pride. His teachers may have been men who ignored God's Word, and he knows something they missed. Any believer who listens to God can be wiser than a scholar who doesn't. And the reason is plain: "I have observed Your precepts." Wisdom comes from doing what God says (Matthew 7:24).

119:101-104 *From every evil path I have restrained my feet, so that I may keep Your word. From Your judgments I have not turned aside, for You, You have instructed me. How smooth Your word is to my palate, more than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I gain understanding; therefore I hate every path of falsehood.*

"From every evil path I have restrained my feet, so that I may keep Your word." Loving God's Word includes saying no to some roads. "From Your judgments I have not turned aside, for You, You have instructed me." God Himself is his Teacher.

"How smooth Your word is to my palate, more than honey to my mouth!" Psalm 19:10 says God's Word is "sweeter than honey." Jeremiah said he found God's words and ate them, and they became his joy (Jeremiah 15:16). "Therefore I hate every path of falsehood." Loving truth means hating lies, the lies themselves, not the people caught in them.

119:105-108 *A lamp to my foot **is** Your word, and a light to my pathway. I have sworn, and I have confirmed **it**, to keep the judgments of Your righteousness. I have been afflicted utterly; LORD, keep me alive according to Your word. Accept, please, the freewill offerings of my mouth, LORD, and teach me Your judgments.*

The fourteenth stanza, Nun, holds the best-known verse of the psalm: "A lamp to my foot is Your word, and a light to my pathway." A lamp in that day was a small clay bowl of oil with a wick. It did not light up the whole road. It lit the next step. God's Word often works that way. It may not show us the whole future, but it shows us where to put our foot next. Peter calls the prophetic word "a lamp shining in a dark place," to be heeded until the day dawns (2 Peter 1:19).

"I have sworn, and I have confirmed it, to keep the judgments of Your righteousness." He made a firm promise to obey. Yet "I have been afflicted utterly." Obedience does not exempt him from pain. "Accept, please, the freewill offerings of my mouth." His praise is his offering (Hebrews 13:15).

New Testament links: 2 Peter 1:19 (alluded to)

119:109-112 *My life **is** in my hand continually, and Your law I have not forgotten. **The** wicked have set a snare for me, and from Your precepts I have not gone astray. I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they **are** the joy of my heart. I have inclined my heart to do Your statutes forever, **to the** end.*

"My life is in my hand continually." That was a saying for living in constant danger. "And Your law I have not forgotten." The wicked have "set a snare," and still he has not strayed.

"I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart." Some people inherit land or money. He has inherited God's Word, and he counts it his family fortune. So "I have inclined my heart to do Your statutes forever, to the end." He bends his will toward obedience for the rest of his life.

119:113-116 ***The*** *half-hearted I hate, and Your law I love. My hiding place and my shield* ***are*** *You; for Your word I have hoped. Depart from me, evildoers, and let me observe the commandments of my God. Sustain me according to Your word, and I will live; and do not put me to shame for my hope.*

The fifteenth stanza, Samekh, is about being held up. "The half-hearted I hate, and Your law I love." The half-hearted are the double-minded, people who try to keep one foot in God's way and one in the world. James says a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). He hates that divided heart, in others and surely in himself.

"My hiding place and my shield are You." God is the place he hides and the shield that covers him. "Depart from me, evildoers." He will not let wicked company pull him away from "the commandments of my God." Then, "Sustain me according to Your word, and I will live." The Hebrew word for "sustain" is the one that gives this stanza its letter. He cannot hold himself up, and he asks God to do it.

119:117-120 *Uphold me, and let me be saved, and I will have regard for Your statutes continually. You have rejected all who stray from Your statutes, for their deceitfulness* ***is*** *falsehood.* ***As*** *dross You have made all the wicked of the earth cease; therefore I have loved Your testimonies. My flesh bristles from dread of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments.*

"Uphold me, and let me be saved." He keeps asking for the same thing in new words. God rejects those who stray, "for their deceitfulness is falsehood." "As dross You have made all the wicked of the earth cease." Dross is the scum skimmed off when metal is melted. God removes the wicked like waste from silver.

"My flesh bristles from dread of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments." Seeing God's judgment makes him tremble. That is the fear of the LORD. Love for God and awe of Him belong together.

119:121-124 *I have done justice and righteousness; do not leave me to my oppressors. Be surety for Your servant for good; do not let* ***the*** *arrogant oppress me. My eyes are spent for Your salvation, and for the word of Your righteousness. Do with Your servant according to Your steadfast love, and teach me Your statutes.*

The sixteenth stanza, Ayin, opens with a plea. "I have done justice and righteousness; do not leave me to my oppressors." He is not claiming to be sinless. He is saying that he has been fair to others and does not deserve their oppression.

"Be surety for Your servant for good." A surety is a guarantor, someone who takes responsibility for another person's debt or safety. Judah offered to be surety for Benjamin, putting himself in his place (Genesis 43:9). Hebrews 7:22 says Jesus has become "the guarantee of a better covenant." Many see in this verse a longing that Christ fulfills. He stands in for us.

"My eyes are spent for Your salvation." He is still waiting. "Do with Your servant according to Your steadfast love, and teach me Your statutes."

119:125-128 *I **am** Your servant; give me understanding, and let me know Your testimonies. **It is** a time to act for the LORD; they have broken Your law. Therefore I have loved Your commandments more than gold and more than fine gold. Therefore all the precepts of everything I count right; every path of falsehood I hate.*

"I am Your servant; give me understanding." Then a bold line: "It is a time to act for the LORD; they have broken Your law." Some read it as a prayer that the LORD Himself act, and others as a call for God's people to act for Him. Either way, things have gone so far that he feels it is time.

"Therefore I have loved Your commandments more than gold and more than fine gold." The worse the world gets, the more he values God's Word. "Every path of falsehood I hate."

119:129-132 *Your testimonies **are** wonders; therefore my soul observes them. The opening of Your words gives light, giving understanding to **the** simple. My mouth I opened wide, and I panted, for I yearned for Your commandments. Turn to me and be gracious to me, according to **the** custom toward those who love Your name.*

The seventeenth stanza, Pe, begins with wonder. "Your testimonies are wonders; therefore my soul observes them." Then, "The opening of Your words gives light, giving understanding to the simple." When God's Word is opened, light comes in, like a door opened in a dark room. The simple, ordinary people without much schooling, can understand it.

"My mouth I opened wide, and I panted, for I yearned for Your commandments." He is like a thirsty animal with its mouth open, or a baby bird waiting to be fed. "Turn to me and be gracious to me, according to the custom toward those who love Your name." God has a habit of being gracious to those who love Him.

119:133-136 *Establish my steps by Your word, and do not let any iniquity have power over me. Ransom me from the oppression of man, and let me keep Your precepts. Make Your face shine on Your servant, and teach me Your statutes. Streams of water have gone down my eyes, because they have not kept Your law.*

"Establish my steps by Your word, and do not let any iniquity have power over me." He wants no sin to rule him (Romans 6:14). "Ransom me from the oppression of man." "Make Your face shine on Your servant," an echo of the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:25.

Then: "Streams of water have gone down my eyes, because they have not kept Your law." In verse 53 (Volume 1) he spoke of burning indignation at the wicked. Here we see the other side. He weeps for them. Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). A heart that loves God's Word will grieve, not gloat, over those who reject it.

119:137-140 *Righteous **are** You, LORD, and upright **are** Your judgments. You have commanded the righteousness of Your testimonies, and faithfulness exceedingly. My zeal has destroyed me, for my foes have forgotten Your words. Your word **is** refined exceedingly, and Your servant has loved it.*

The eighteenth stanza, Tsadhe, is about righteousness. "Righteous are You, LORD, and upright are Your judgments." God's Word is as right as God Himself. "You have commanded the righteousness of Your testimonies, and faithfulness exceedingly."

"My zeal has destroyed me, for my foes have forgotten Your words." His passion for God burns him up, because he cannot bear to see God's Word ignored. When Jesus cleared the temple, His disciples remembered the similar words of Psalm 69:9, "The zeal of Your house has consumed Me" (John 2:17).

"Your word is refined exceedingly, and Your servant has loved it." Refined like silver, God's Word has no impurity in it.

119:141-144 *I **am** small and despised; Your precepts I have not forgotten. Your righteousness **is** righteousness forever, and Your law **is** truth. Distress and anguish have found me; Your commandments **are** my delight. The righteousness of Your testimonies **is** forever; give me understanding, and I will live.*

"I am small and despised; Your precepts I have not forgotten." People looked down on him. He kept God's Word anyway.

"Your righteousness is righteousness forever, and Your law is truth." Not just true in places, but truth itself. "Distress and anguish have found me; Your commandments are my delight." Delight and distress live in the same heart. "The righteousness of Your testimonies is forever; give me understanding, and I will live."

119:145-148 *I have called with all **my** heart; answer me, LORD; Your statutes I will observe. I have called to You; save me, and let me keep Your testimonies. I have gone before the twilight and cried for help; for Your word I have hoped. My eyes have gone before the night watches, to meditate on Your word.*

The nineteenth stanza, Qoph, is a stanza of crying out. "I have called with all my heart; answer me, LORD." His prayers are early and late. "I have gone before the twilight and cried for help," rising before dawn, as Jesus did (Mark 1:35). "My eyes have gone before the night watches, to meditate on Your word." He stays awake through the hours of the night to think on God's Word.

119:149-152 *Hear my voice according to Your steadfast love; LORD, according to Your judgment keep me alive. Those who pursue wicked scheming draw near; from Your law they are far. Near **are** You, LORD, and all Your commandments **are** truth. Long ago I have known from Your testimonies that You have founded them forever.*

"Hear my voice according to Your steadfast love." Then a pair of verses with a beautiful contrast. "Those who pursue wicked scheming draw near; from Your law they are far." The enemies are close. "Near are You, LORD, and all Your commandments are truth." But God is closer.

"Long ago I have known from Your testimonies that You have founded them forever." What he learned long ago still holds. God's Word was built on a foundation that does not move.

119:153-156 *See my affliction and rescue me, for Your law I have not forgotten. Plead my case and redeem me; according to Your word keep me alive. Salvation **is** far from **the** wicked, for Your statutes they have not sought. Your compassion **is** great, LORD; according to Your judgments keep me alive.*

The twentieth stanza, Resh, asks God to see. "See my affliction and rescue me." "Plead my case and redeem me." He pictures God as his lawyer in court, the One who takes up his case and buys him back. Three times in this stanza he prays "keep me alive" (verses 154, 156, 159).

"Salvation is far from the wicked, for Your statutes they have not sought." Those who will not seek God's Word stay far from rescue. "Your compassion is great, LORD."

119:157-160 *Many **are** those who pursue me and my foes; from Your testimonies I have not turned away. I have seen **the** treacherous, and I have loathed **them**, because they have not kept Your word. See that I have loved Your precepts; LORD, according to Your steadfast love keep me alive. The sum of Your word **is** truth, and every judgment of Your righteousness **is** forever.*

"Many are those who pursue me and my foes; from Your testimonies I have not turned away." He has many enemies and one Word to hold.

"I have seen the treacherous, and I have loathed them, because they have not kept Your word." His disgust is at their treachery against God. As in verse 136, his grief and his anger are both about God's honor, and he leaves judgment with God.

Verse 160 sums up what he has learned: "The sum of Your word is truth." Not just each verse, but the whole of it added together. Jesus prayed to the Father, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). "And every judgment of Your righteousness is forever."

New Testament links: John 17:17 (alluded to)

119:161-164 *Officials have pursued me without cause, and my heart stands in dread of Your word. I **am** exulting over Your word like one who finds much plunder. Falsehood I hate, and I abhor **it**; Your law I love. Seven **times** in the day I praise You for the judgments of Your righteousness.*

The twenty-first stanza, Shin, begins with persecution. "Officials have pursued me without cause, and my heart stands in dread of Your word." Powerful people chase him, but he fears God's Word more than he fears them.

"I am exulting over Your word like one who finds much plunder." After a battle, soldiers gathered the spoils. Finding a new truth in God's Word gives him that kind of joy. "Falsehood I hate, and I abhor it; Your law I love." "Seven times in the day I praise You." Seven is the number of fullness. His whole day is full of praise.

119:165-168 *Great peace **belongs** to those who love Your law, and **there is** no stumbling block for them. I have waited for Your salvation, LORD, and Your commandments I have done. My soul has kept Your testimonies, and I have loved them exceedingly. I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways **are** before You.*

"Great peace belongs to those who love Your law, and there is no stumbling block for them." People who love God's Word have a deep peace, the peace of God that guards the heart (Philippians 4:7), and they do not trip over what trips up others.

"I have waited for Your salvation, LORD, and Your commandments I have done." Waiting and obeying go together. "All my ways are before You." He lives his whole life in God's sight.

119:169-172 *Let my cry draw near before You, LORD; according to Your word give me understanding. Let my supplication come before You; according to Your word deliver me. Let my lips pour forth praise, for You will teach me Your statutes. Let my tongue sing **of** Your word, for all Your commandments **are** righteousness.*

The last stanza, Tav, is a prayer. Each verse in verses 169-175 is a request or a promise. "Let my cry draw near before You, LORD; according to Your word give me understanding." "Let my supplication come before You; according to Your word deliver me." Supplication is humble, earnest asking.

"Let my lips pour forth praise," like water from a spring. "Let my tongue sing of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness." After 171 verses, he wants to keep singing about God's Word.

119:173-176 *Let Your hand be **ready** to help me, for I have chosen Your precepts. I have longed for Your salvation, LORD, and Your law **is** my delight. Let my soul live, and it will praise You; and let Your judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for Your commandments I have not forgotten.*

"Let Your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen Your precepts." "I have longed for Your salvation, LORD, and Your law is my delight." "Let my soul live, and it will praise You."

And then the last verse: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for Your commandments I have not forgotten." After 176 verses of loving God's Word, the psalm does not end with a boast. It ends with a confession. He has wandered, like a sheep. Isaiah says "All of us like the sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6). He asks God to come looking for him.

That is exactly what God has done. Jesus told of a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one lost sheep until he finds it (Luke 15:4), and He said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). The longest psalm ends with a prayer that only Jesus fully answers. We do not keep ourselves. The Shepherd seeks us and carries us home.

Psalm 119 Summary

This chapter covers the last fourteen stanzas of Psalm 119, Teth to Tav. The writer thanks God for doing him good and says affliction taught him God's statutes, which are worth more than gold. Worn out like a wineskin in smoke and almost destroyed, he still holds to God's precepts, and he looks up to see God's Word standing firm forever in heaven. He loves God's law, meditates on it all day and finds it sweeter than honey and a lamp to his feet. He hates a divided heart, asks God to sustain him and to be his surety, and weeps because people do not keep God's law. He cries to God before dawn and finds that God is near when enemies are near. The sum of God's Word is truth, and great peace belongs to those who love it. He ends by confessing that he has gone astray like a lost sheep and asking God to seek His servant.

People and Places

- Stanza letters: Teth, Yodh, Kaph, Lamedh, Mem, Nun, Samekh, Ayin, Pe, Tsadhe, Qoph, Resh, Shin and Tav, the ninth to twenty-second letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each beginning all eight verses of its stanza.
- Wineskin: a goat skin sewn up to hold wine; one hung in smoke turned black, dry and cracked.
- Surety: a person who guarantees another's debt or safety and stands in his place.
- Dross: the scum removed when metal is melted and purified.

Psalm 119 Study Questions

1. How is Psalm 119 built, and which stanzas does this chapter cover?

2. What does the writer say affliction did for him? (119:67, 71) How should we understand those verses when we suffer?

3. What picture does the writer use for himself in verse 83, and what does he still hold on to?

4. Where does God's Word stand firm, and for how long? (119:89)

5. Why does the writer have more insight than his teachers? (119:99-100)

6. What does verse 105 compare God's Word to? How has God's Word shown you your "next step"?

7. What is a surety, and how does Hebrews 7:22 help us see Christ in verse 122?

8. Why does the writer weep in verse 136? How does that balance his strong words about the wicked?

9. What does verse 160 say about God's Word, and how does Jesus echo it in John 17:17?

10. Psalm 119 ends with "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Why is that a fitting end, and how does Jesus answer it in Luke 15:4 and John 10:11?

Psalm 120: In My Distress I Called

Scripture

A song of the ascents.

120:1-4 To the LORD in my distress I called, and He answered me. LORD, deliver my soul from a lip of falsehood, from a tongue of deceit. What will he give to you, and what will he add to you, tongue of deceit? Sharpened arrows of a warrior, with burning coals of broom trees.

120:5-7 Woe to me, that I have sojourned ***in*** Meshech, ***that*** I have dwelt with the tents of Kedar! Long has my soul dwelt with one who hates peace. I ***am*** peace, and when I speak, they ***are*** for war.

Psalm 120 Preview

Psalm 120 opens a set of fifteen short psalms (Psalms 120 to 134), each one called a Song of Ascents. Many believe Israel's pilgrims sang them on the road up to Jerusalem for the feasts. It seems an odd way to start a pilgrim songbook. There is no city here, no temple and no joy yet. There is only a man far from home, surrounded by liars and people who want a fight.

That is often where the journey to God begins: with a sense that we don't belong where we are. The writer cries to the LORD, asks to be rescued from lying lips, warns the liar of God's judgment and admits how tired he is of living among people who hate peace. He wants peace. They want war. The next psalms will take him up the road toward Zion.

Psalm 120 Study

120:1-2 *To the LORD in my distress I called, and He answered me. LORD, deliver my soul from a lip of falsehood, from a tongue of deceit.*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents." Psalm 120 is the first of the fifteen Songs of Ascents in a row (Psalms 120 to 134), and the first one in this volume. To ascend is to go up. Jerusalem sits high in the hills of Judah, so the Bible always speaks of going "up" to it. God told the men of Israel to come before Him three times a year for the great feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16), and many scholars think these were the songs pilgrims sang as they walked and climbed toward the city. Others connect the title with the fifteen steps in the temple courts where, Jewish tradition says, the Levites stood and sang. Still others connect it with the return from exile in Babylon. The exact meaning is uncertain, but the pilgrim picture fits. These psalms are short, easy to remember and full of the road, the city, the home and the house of God. Volume 1 studies four of them (Psalms 121, 127, 130 and 133), and this volume studies the other eleven. Psalm 120 does not name its writer.

"To the LORD in my distress I called, and He answered me." The psalm starts with a testimony. Some take this as a past answer that gives him courage to pray again now. Others read it as the answer he is sure is coming. Either way, he knows where to take his trouble.

His trouble is people's words. "LORD, deliver my soul from a lip of falsehood, from a tongue of deceit." We aren't told what the lies were. Maybe slander, maybe broken promises, maybe smooth talk hiding a knife. Anyone who has been lied about knows how much a tongue can wound. The writer doesn't answer lie for lie. He asks God to deliver him.

120:3-4 *What will he give to you, and what will he add to you, tongue of deceit? Sharpened arrows of a warrior, with burning coals of broom trees.*

Now he turns and speaks to the liar. "What will he give to you, and what will he add to you, tongue of deceit?" In plain words: what do you think God is going to do to you? The answer is in verse 4: "Sharpened arrows of a warrior, with burning coals of broom trees."

The picture fits the crime. A lying tongue wounds like an arrow, so God's judgment will come like a warrior's sharp arrows. Lies spread like fire, so judgment will come like coals of the broom tree. The broom tree is a desert bush (Elijah sat under one in 1 Kings 19:4), and its wood was known for burning hot and long. The writer leaves the punishment to God. He doesn't shoot the arrows himself.

James says the tongue is "a fire" (James 3:6). Before we nod at this psalm and think of the people who have lied about us, we should ask whether our own tongue has ever been the arrow.

120:5 *Woe to me, that I have sojourned **in** Meshech, **that** I have dwelt with the tents of Kedar!*

"Woe to me, that I have sojourned in Meshech, that I have dwelt with the tents of Kedar!" To sojourn is to live somewhere as a foreigner, not at home. Meshech was a people far to the north, near the Black Sea, in what is now Turkey (Genesis 10:2; Ezekiel 38:2). Kedar was a tribe of desert people in Arabia, to the south and east, descended from Ishmael (Genesis 25:13). They were known as fierce people of the bow (Isaiah 21:16-17).

The two places are hundreds of miles apart, so the writer can't have lived in both at once. Most Bible teachers think he uses them as a figure of speech. They stand for wild, warlike people, far from God's house. Others think the writer was a Jew living abroad, among the nations, and the names stand for his foreign neighbors. Both readings land in the same place: he feels like a stranger where he lives.

Believers today can feel the same. Peter calls Christians "sojourners and exiles" in this world (1 Peter 2:11). If you feel out of place at work, at school or even at home because you belong to Christ, this psalm is for you.

120:6-7 *Long has my soul dwelt with one who hates peace. I **am** peace, and when I speak, they **are** for war.*

"Long has my soul dwelt with one who hates peace." The word "long" carries the weight. This has not been a bad week. It has gone on for years, and he is worn out by it.

"I am peace, and when I speak, they are for war." He says "I am peace," as if peace is who he is. Every time he opens his mouth to make peace, they take it as a reason to fight. The Hebrew word

is shalom (see Psalm 85), which means more than no fighting. It means wholeness, everything being as it should be.

The psalm ends there, with no answer yet. It is honest about how hard it is to live among people who want conflict. Paul tells us to be at peace with all men, "so far as it is from you" (Romans 12:18). Sometimes it does not depend on us. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9), and He did not promise they would always be thanked for it. The pilgrim's answer is to start walking toward the place where God dwells, and that is where the next psalms go.

Psalm 120 Summary

Psalm 120, the first Song of Ascents in this volume, begins with a man in distress who has called to the LORD and been answered. He asks God to deliver him from lying lips and a deceitful tongue, and he warns the liar that God's judgment will come like a warrior's sharp arrows and hot coals of the broom tree. He grieves that he has lived so long among people like those of Meshech and Kedar, far from God's house. He is for peace, but when he speaks, they are for war. The psalm leaves him ready to set out for Zion.

People and Places

- Song of Ascents: the heading on Psalms 120 to 134; most likely songs sung by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the feasts.
- Meshech: a people in the far north, near the Black Sea (Genesis 10:2).
- Kedar: a desert tribe of Arabia, descended from Ishmael, known as fighters and tent dwellers (Genesis 25:13).
- Broom tree: a desert bush whose wood burns hot and long (1 Kings 19:4).

Psalm 120 Study Questions

1. What does the writer say happened when he called to the LORD in his distress? (120:1)

2. What does he ask God to deliver him from? (120:2)

3. What two pictures describe what will come on the deceitful tongue? (120:3-4)

4. What does "A song of the ascents" most likely mean? Why might a pilgrim songbook start with a psalm like this one?

5. Where were Meshech and Kedar, and why do you think the writer names both of them? (120:5)

6. How long has the writer lived among people who hate peace? (120:6)

7. What happens when he speaks of peace? (120:7)

8. Have you ever been hurt by lies? What does this psalm teach about what to do with that hurt?

9. Peter calls believers "sojourners and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11). In what ways do you feel like a stranger in the world because you belong to Christ?

10. Romans 12:18 says to be at peace with all men "so far as it is from you." Is there a relationship where you need to do your part to make peace this week?

Psalm 122: Let Us Go to the House of the LORD

Scripture

A song of the ascents. Of David.

122:1-5 I rejoiced in those who said to me, "Let us go ***to*** the house of the LORD." Our feet were standing in your gates, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which is built like a city that is joined together to itself, where the tribes went up, the tribes of ***the*** LORD, ***as*** a testimony to Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. For there thrones have sat for judgment, thrones of the house of David.

122:6-9 Ask for the peace of Jerusalem; may those who love you be at ease. Let ***there*** be peace in your rampart, ease in your fortresses. For the sake of my brothers and my friends let me speak, please: "Peace ***be*** in you." For the sake of the house of the LORD our God let me seek good for you.

Psalm 122 Preview

Psalm 120 left the pilgrim far from home among people who hate peace. Psalm 122 puts him inside the gates of Jerusalem. He remembers the day his friends invited him to go up to the house of the LORD, and he remembers the thrill of standing in the city at last. He looks at its walls, thinks of the tribes who come there to give thanks and remembers that the throne of David's house stands there.

Then he prays. The word "peace" comes three times in the last four verses. He asks for the peace of Jerusalem, for the sake of his brothers and friends and for the sake of God's house. Believers are still called to pray this way, and God still has a future for this city.

Psalm 122 Study

122:1-2 *I rejoiced in those who said to me, "Let us go **to** the house of the LORD." Our feet were standing in your gates, Jerusalem,*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents. Of David." It is a pilgrim song (see Psalm 120), and the heading names David as its writer. The words "of David" can also mean for David or belonging to David, but I read them as naming the writer. David brought the ark to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6), so he was the first to make the city the place where Israel came to worship. Some scholars think the psalm was written later and dedicated to David, because it mentions "the house of the LORD" and the temple was built by his son Solomon. But David himself called the tent where the ark stood the house of the LORD (2 Samuel 12:20), so the heading fits.

"I rejoiced in those who said to me, Let us go to the house of the LORD." Someone came to the door and said, "Let's go." He was glad. Going up to worship was not a chore. It was the highlight of his year.

"Our feet were standing in your gates, Jerusalem." After days of walking, the dust on their feet is now the dust of the city gate. He speaks to the city as if it were a friend.

Do we feel that way about gathering with God's people? Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us not to give up meeting together. Sometimes the best gift a friend can give us is the invitation, "Let's go."

122:3-5 *Jerusalem, which is built like a city that is joined together to itself, where the tribes went up, the tribes of **the** LORD, **as** a testimony to Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. For there thrones have sat for judgment, thrones of the house of David.*

"Jerusalem, which is built like a city that is joined together to itself." The city was packed close inside its walls, houses tight against one another, solid and secure. Many also see a picture of the people. The tribes came from all over the land and became one crowd in one city.

"Where the tribes went up, the tribes of the LORD, as a testimony to Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD." Going up to Jerusalem was something God commanded (Deuteronomy 16:16), a "testimony," a standing law for Israel. The purpose was thanks. They came to praise the name of the LORD for what He had done.

"For there thrones have sat for judgment, thrones of the house of David." Jerusalem was the place of worship and also the place of government. The king sat there to judge, and so did the royal princes who helped him. God had promised David a house, a family line that would rule forever (2 Samuel 7:16). We will see that promise again in Psalm 132.

The thrones of David's house stand empty today. But the angel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32). I believe Jesus will sit on that throne and rule from Jerusalem when He returns to reign on the earth (Revelation 20:4-6).

122:6-7 *Ask for the peace of Jerusalem; may those who love you be at ease. Let **there** be peace in your rampart, ease in your fortresses.*

"Ask for the peace of Jerusalem." The name Jerusalem sounds like the Hebrew word for peace, shalom (see Psalm 85). The city of peace has seldom had peace. It has been besieged, burned and fought over again and again, and it still is.

"May those who love you be at ease." To be at ease is to be secure and settled. "Let there be peace in your rampart, ease in your fortresses." The rampart was the outer wall. He prays for peace at the walls and safety in the strong towers.

What does it mean for us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem? First, it means praying for the real city and its people. God has not cast away His people Israel (Romans 11:1-2), and Paul longed and prayed for their salvation (Romans 10:1). Second, it means praying for the peace only the Messiah can bring. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because it did not know "the things for your peace" (Luke 19:42). The prophets say that when He reigns, the nations will go up to Zion to learn God's ways (Isaiah 2:3), and Jerusalem will finally be the city of peace.

122:8-9 *For the sake of my brothers and my friends let me speak, please: "Peace **be** in you." For the sake of the house of the LORD our God let me seek good for you.*

"For the sake of my brothers and my friends let me speak, please: Peace be in you." He prays for the city because the people he loves live there and worship there. Love for people moves him to pray.

"For the sake of the house of the LORD our God let me seek good for you." Most of all he prays because God's house is there. He loves the city because God chose it.

For believers today, this is also a good picture of how to pray for our local church. We pray for its peace for the sake of the brothers and sisters in it, and because it belongs to God. A pilgrim who loves God's house will work for its good and not tear it down.

Psalm 122 Summary

Psalm 122, a Song of Ascents of David, remembers the joy of the invitation to go to the house of the LORD and the thrill of standing in Jerusalem's gates. The pilgrim admires the close-built city where the tribes go up to give thanks to the LORD's name and where the thrones of David's house stand for judgment. Then he calls for prayer for the peace of Jerusalem, asks for peace within its walls and blesses it for the sake of his brothers and friends and of the house of the LORD. God's promise to David's house points ahead to Jesus, who will reign on David's throne.

Psalm 122 Study Questions

1. How did the writer feel when people said, "Let us go to the house of the LORD"? (122:1)

2. Where were the pilgrims' feet standing? (122:2)

3. Why did the tribes go up to Jerusalem? (122:4)

4. What thrones were in Jerusalem, and what were they for? (122:5)

5. What does the writer ask for in verse 6, and what does he pray for the walls and fortresses? (122:6-7)

6. What two reasons does he give for praying for the city? (122:8-9)

7. How do you feel about gathering to worship with God's people? Who could you invite to come with you?

8. What does it mean for a Christian today to pray for the peace of Jerusalem?

9. Why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-42), and what peace will He bring when He reigns?

10. How can you seek the good of your own church this week, for the sake of your brothers and sisters there?

Psalm 123: Our Eyes Look to the LORD

Scripture

A song of the ascents.

123:1-4 To You I have lifted up my eyes, You who sit in the heavens. Look, as the eyes of slaves ***are*** to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a female slave ***are*** to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes ***are*** to the LORD our God, until He is gracious to us. Be gracious to us, LORD, be gracious to us, for greatly we have been sated ***with*** contempt. Greatly our soul has been sated ***with*** the mockery of the self-confident, the contempt of ***the*** proud oppressors.

Psalm 123 Preview

Psalm 123 is one of the shortest of the Songs of Ascents, only four verses, but it says a lot about prayer. The writer lifts his eyes to God in heaven and waits, the way a servant watches his master's hand for a signal. Then he says why: God's people are sick of being mocked and looked down on by proud people who are comfortable and secure.

The psalm doesn't tell us who the mockers were. It does tell us what to do when contempt piles up: look up, keep looking and ask for grace.

Psalm 123 Study

123:1-2 *To You I have lifted up my eyes, You who sit in the heavens. Look, as the eyes of slaves **are** to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a female slave **are** to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes **are** to the LORD our God, until He is gracious to us.*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents." It is a pilgrim song (see Psalm 120), and it does not name its writer. Some think it fits the years after the exile, when Nehemiah and the returned Jews were rebuilding Jerusalem's walls and their neighbors laughed at them (Nehemiah 2:19; 4:1-4). That fits well, but the psalm doesn't say.

"To You I have lifted up my eyes, You who sit in the heavens." Psalm 121 began, "I lift up my eyes to the mountains." This writer looks higher, to God on His throne. The One who sits in the heavens is not shaken by what people on earth say.

"Look, as the eyes of slaves are to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a female slave are to the hand of her mistress." In a large household, servants stood quietly and watched for the small motion of a hand that told them what to do, or that gave them what they needed. They didn't take their eyes away. "So our eyes are to the LORD our God, until He is gracious to us."

That is a picture of patient, humble prayer. We fix our eyes on God and keep them there "until." We don't give up after one glance. We also don't come demanding. We come as servants who know that every good thing we receive is grace. Hebrews 12:2 asks the same of us, "looking to the founder and perfecter of the faith, Jesus."

123:3-4 *Be gracious to us, LORD, be gracious to us, for greatly we have been sated **with** contempt. Greatly our soul has been sated **with** the mockery of the self-confident, the contempt of **the** proud oppressors.*

"Be gracious to us, LORD, be gracious to us." He says it twice. When you are worn down, you don't need fancy words. The tax collector in Jesus' parable had only one short prayer too, asking God to be merciful to him, a sinner (Luke 18:13).

"For greatly we have been sated with contempt." To be sated is to be filled up, stuffed full, like a person who has eaten so much he can't take another bite. They have had all the scorn they can take. "Greatly our soul has been sated with the mockery of the self-confident, the contempt of the proud oppressors."

The self-confident are people at ease, comfortable and sure of themselves, who feel no need of God. They look down on those who trust Him. Contempt can hurt more than open attack, because it tells you that you don't even matter.

The psalm doesn't ask God to crush the mockers. It asks for grace. Jesus was mocked too, at His trial and on the cross (Matthew 27:29, 41). He knows how it feels, and He understands when we bring it to Him. If you are being belittled for your faith, you are in good company. Keep your eyes on the Master's hand. His grace will come.

Psalm 123 Summary

Psalm 123 is a short Song of Ascents of prayer and waiting. The writer lifts his eyes to God enthroned in heaven and compares himself and his people to servants watching their master's hand, waiting until the LORD is gracious to them. He asks twice for grace, because God's people have had more than enough of the scorn of the comfortable and the contempt of the proud. Instead of striking back, they look up and wait.

Psalm 123 Study Questions

1. Where does the writer lift his eyes, and how does he describe God? (123:1)

2. What two pictures does he use for the way God's people look to Him? (123:2)

3. How long do they keep looking to God? (123:2)

4. What does the writer ask God for, and how many times? (123:3)

5. What have God's people been filled with, and from whom? (123:3-4)

6. Why do you think a servant watching his master's hand is a good picture of prayer?

7. What is the difference between waiting on God like a servant and making demands of Him?

8. Have you ever been looked down on or mocked for your faith? How did you respond?

9. Jesus was mocked at His trial and on the cross (Matthew 27:29, 41). How does that help you when you face contempt?

10. Where do you need to keep your eyes on the Lord "until He is gracious to us" right now?

Psalm 124: If the LORD Had Not Been for Us

Scripture

A song of the ascents. Of David.

124:1-5 If ***it had*** not ***been*** the LORD who was for us, let Israel say, please, if ***it had*** not ***been*** the LORD who was for us, when man rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger burned against us; then the waters would have overflowed us; a torrent would have passed over our soul; then the raging waters would have passed over our soul.

124:6-8 Blessed ***be*** the LORD, who has not given us ***as*** prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped like a bird from a snare of fowlers; the snare is broken, and we, we have escaped. Our help ***is*** in the name of the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth.

Psalm 124 Preview

Psalm 124 asks God's people to imagine what would have happened if the LORD had not been on their side. The answer is frightening. Their enemies would have swallowed them alive, and the flood would have carried them off. But God was for them. So the psalm turns to praise. They have escaped like a bird from a broken trap.

The psalm ends with a line every believer can say: "Our help is in the name of the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth." Psalm 121 said nearly the same thing. A pilgrim could sing it on the road, remembering every danger God had already brought him through.

Psalm 124 Study

124:1-2 *If **it had** not **been** the LORD who was for us, let Israel say, please, if **it had** not **been** the LORD who was for us, when man rose up against us,*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents. Of David." It is a pilgrim song (see Psalm 120), and the heading names David as writer. We aren't told which danger he had in mind. David faced many, from Saul's hunt for him to the Philistines and the rebellion of his son Absalom.

"If it had not been the LORD who was for us, let Israel say, please." David calls the whole people to join him. He leads, and they repeat the line after him: "if it had not been the LORD who was for us, when man rose up against us."

The key words are "for us." God took their side. Paul asks the same thing in Romans 8:31: if God is for us, who can be against us? Looking back is a good habit for believers. When we remember how close we came to disaster, we see how often God stood between us and it.

124:3-5 *then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger burned against us; then the waters would have overflowed us; a torrent would have passed over our soul; then the raging waters would have passed over our soul.*

Three pictures show what would have happened without Him. "Then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger burned against us." The enemy is like a wild beast or the grave itself, opening its mouth to swallow its prey whole.

"Then the waters would have overflowed us; a torrent would have passed over our soul." In the dry land of Israel, a sudden storm could turn a dry streambed into a raging flood in minutes. People were swept away before they could climb out. "Then the raging waters would have passed over our soul." The repeated "then" makes us feel the danger rising like water.

Some of us know this feeling: a diagnosis, a financial collapse, an attack we didn't see coming. The psalm doesn't pretend the danger was small. It says the danger was real and God was greater.

124:6-7 *Blessed **be** the LORD, who has not given us **as** prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped like a bird from a snare of fowlers; the snare is broken, and we, we have escaped.*

"Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth." The enemy had teeth, but God would not hand His people over to them.

"Our soul has escaped like a bird from a snare of fowlers." A fowler caught birds for food with nets and traps. A bird in a snare is helpless. It can flap and struggle, but it can't open the trap. "The snare is broken, and we, we have escaped." The bird didn't break the snare. Someone else did. All the bird had to do was fly.

That is a good picture of salvation. We were caught in sin's trap and could not free ourselves. Jesus broke the snare. Paul writes that God rescued us out of the authority of darkness (Colossians 1:13).

124:8 *Our help **is** in the name of the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth.*

"Our help is in the name of the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth." This closing line echoes Psalm 121:2 (Volume 1). His name stands for who He is and all He has revealed of Himself. The God who made heaven and earth is strong enough to break any snare and stop any flood. Many churches have opened their worship with this verse for centuries, and it is a fine way to start any day.

Psalm 124 Summary

Psalm 124, a Song of Ascents of David, calls Israel to imagine what would have happened if the LORD had not been on their side. Their enemies would have swallowed them alive, and the raging waters would have swept over them. Instead the LORD did not give them as prey to their teeth. They escaped like a bird from a fowler's snare when the snare was broken. The psalm ends with the confession that their help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

People and Places

- Fowler: a man who caught birds with nets and snares.

Psalm 124 Study Questions

1. Whom does David call to repeat the opening line? (124:1)

2. What three things would have happened if the LORD had not been for His people? (124:3-5)

3. What did the LORD not do, according to verse 6?

4. What picture describes the people's escape, and what happened to the snare? (124:7)

5. Where does the psalm say our help is? (124:8)

6. Why does it matter that God is "for us"? How does Romans 8:31 add to this psalm?

7. Look back over your life. When were you close to being "swallowed" or swept away, and how did God bring you through?

8. How is the bird escaping a broken snare a picture of what Jesus has done for us?

9. Psalm 124:8 echoes Psalm 121:2. Why would God's people want to say this truth again and again?

10. Write a short "If it had not been the LORD" list of your own and thank Him for each item.

Psalm 125: Like Mount Zion

Scripture

A song of the ascents.

125:1-5 Those who trust in the LORD ***are*** like the mountain of Zion, ***which*** will not be shaken; forever it will remain. Jerusalem: mountains ***are*** around it, and the LORD ***is*** around His people, from now and until forever. For the scepter of wickedness will not rest on the lot of the righteous, so that the righteous will not stretch out their hands to injustice. Do good, LORD, to the good, and to ***the*** upright in their hearts. And those who turn aside ***to*** their crooked ***ways***, the LORD will lead them away with those who work iniquity. Peace ***be*** on Israel.

Psalm 125 Preview

Psalm 125 is a pilgrim's song of security. As the travelers came near Jerusalem, they saw the city on its hill with higher mountains all around it. The psalm turns that view into a promise. Those who trust in the LORD are as steady as Mount Zion, and the LORD surrounds His people like those mountains surround the city.

The psalm also faces a hard fact: wicked people sometimes rule over the righteous. God promises that it will not last forever, so that His people are not tempted to give up and join in. It ends with a prayer for the upright, a warning for those who turn crooked and a blessing of peace on Israel.

Psalm 125 Study

125:1-2 *Those who trust in the LORD **are** like the mountain of Zion, **which** will not be shaken; forever it will remain. Jerusalem: mountains **are** around it, and the LORD **is** around His people, from now and until forever.*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents." It is a pilgrim song (see Psalm 120) and does not name its writer.

"Those who trust in the LORD are like the mountain of Zion, which will not be shaken; forever it will remain." Zion is the hill of Jerusalem where God chose to dwell. Mountains don't move. Kings came and went, and storms came and went, and the hill stayed where it was. Trust in the LORD gives a believer that kind of steadiness. The steadiness doesn't come from the person. It comes from the One he trusts.

"Jerusalem: mountains are around it, and the LORD is around His people, from now and until forever." Jerusalem sits lower than the Mount of Olives to the east and other heights around it. A pilgrim coming up the road could see the city ringed by hills. In the same way, God surrounds His people. Elisha's servant saw this with his own eyes when God opened them, and the hills around them were full of horses and chariots of fire (2 Kings 6:17). We may not see it, but it is just as true.

125:3 *For the scepter of wickedness will not rest on the lot of the righteous, so that the righteous will not stretch out their hands to injustice.*

"For the scepter of wickedness will not rest on the lot of the righteous." A scepter is a ruler's staff, the sign of power. The "lot" is the land God gave His people by lot in Joshua's day. The psalm admits that wicked rulers may hold power over God's people for a time. But that rule "will not rest," that is, it will not stay.

Why? "So that the righteous will not stretch out their hands to injustice." God knows how weak we are. If evil seemed to win forever, even good people might decide that doing right gets them nowhere and start doing wrong. So God sets a limit on how long the wicked will rule. Paul says something similar: God will not let us be tempted beyond what we are able (1 Corinthians 10:13). God knows how much pressure His people can bear, and He sets a limit on it.

125:4-5 *Do good, LORD, to the good, and to **the** upright in their hearts. And those who turn aside **to** their crooked **ways**, the LORD will lead them away with those who work iniquity. Peace **be** on Israel.*

"Do good, LORD, to the good, and to the upright in their hearts." The writer prays for those who trust God and walk straight. Upright means straight, honest, with nothing crooked inside.

"And those who turn aside to their crooked ways, the LORD will lead them away with those who work iniquity." The warning is not mainly about outsiders. It is about people among God's people who leave the straight road for crooked paths. In the end they will be led away with the evildoers they chose to walk with, like prisoners led off in a line.

"Peace be on Israel." The psalm closes with a blessing, as Psalm 128 does. Paul seems to echo it at the end of Galatians, where he blesses those who walk by the gospel and also "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). Bible teachers read Paul's phrase in different ways. Many take it as Jewish believers in Jesus, the part of Israel who trust their Messiah. Others take it as the whole church of Jews and Gentiles together. Either way, Psalm 125's blessing is on the people of Israel, and God has not forgotten them.

New Testament links: Galatians 6:16 (alluded to)

Psalm 125 Summary

Psalm 125, a Song of Ascents, compares those who trust in the LORD to Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken and remains forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people forever. The rule of the wicked will not stay on the land of the righteous, so that the righteous will not be pushed into doing wrong. The writer asks God to do good to the upright and warns that those who turn to crooked ways will be led away with evildoers. He ends with a blessing: "Peace be on Israel."

People and Places

- Scepter: a ruler's staff, the sign of a king's power.

- Lot: a share of land; Israel's land was divided among the tribes by casting lots (Joshua 14:2).

Psalm 125 Study Questions

1. What are those who trust in the LORD compared to? (125:1)

2. How does verse 2 describe the way the LORD surrounds His people, and for how long?

3. What will not rest on the land of the righteous? (125:3)

4. Why does God limit the rule of the wicked, according to verse 3?

5. Whom does the writer ask God to do good to? (125:4)

6. What will happen to those who turn aside to crooked ways? (125:5)

7. When have you felt shaken? What would it look like for you to be "like the mountain of Zion" in that situation?

8. Have you ever been tempted to do wrong because doing right didn't seem to pay? How does verse 3 speak to that?

9. How does 2 Kings 6:17 help you picture the truth of verse 2?

10. The psalm ends, "Peace be on Israel." How can you pray for the Jewish people this week?

Psalm 126: Those Who Sow with Tears

Scripture

A song of the ascents.

126:1-3 When the LORD brought back the restoration of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled ***with*** laughter, and our tongue ***with*** a shout of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great ***things*** with these." The LORD has done great ***things*** with us; we were glad.

126:4-6 Bring back our captivity, LORD, like streams in the Negeb. Those who sow with tears will reap with a shout of joy. He will surely go, and weep, carrying the bag of seed; he will surely come with a shout of joy, carrying his sheaves.

Psalm 126 Preview

Psalm 126 has two halves. The first looks back with laughter. When the LORD brought His people back to Zion, it felt like a dream. They laughed and shouted for joy, and even the nations said that the LORD had done great things for them.

The second half looks forward with tears. The restoration is not finished, so they pray for God to bring it all the way, like sudden streams flooding the dry south country. Then comes a promise many believers have held onto in hard seasons: those who sow with tears will reap with a shout of joy.

Psalm 126 Study

126:1 *When the LORD brought back the restoration of Zion, we were like those who dream.*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents." It is a pilgrim song (see Psalm 120), and it does not name its writer. Most Bible teachers connect it with the return from exile in Babylon. In 538 B.C. Cyrus king of Persia let the Jews go home and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4), after the seventy years Jeremiah had foretold (Jeremiah 29:10). Some think it could fit an earlier rescue, such as Jerusalem's deliverance from the Assyrians in Hezekiah's day (2 Kings 19). The return from Babylon fits best.

"When the LORD brought back the restoration of Zion, we were like those who dream." The news seemed too good to be true. After decades in a foreign land, they could go home. They had to pinch themselves. Have you ever had God answer a prayer so fully that it felt unreal? That is the feeling here.

126:2-3 *Then our mouth was filled **with** laughter, and our tongue **with** a shout of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great **things** with these." The LORD has done great **things** with us; we were glad.*

"Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with a shout of joy." Their joy spilled out. They couldn't keep quiet about it.

Even outsiders noticed. "Then they said among the nations, The LORD has done great things with these." The nations who had watched Israel fall now watched God bring them back. God's work in His people is a witness to the world.

"The LORD has done great things with us; we were glad." The people take the nations' words and make them their own. It is one thing for others to say God has blessed you. It is another to say it yourself, to God, with thanks. When God has done great things for us, we should be the first to say so.

126:4 *Bring back our captivity, LORD, like streams in the Negeb.*

"Bring back our captivity, LORD, like streams in the Negeb." Now the mood changes. The first return happened, but it was small. Only part of the people came home, and life in the ruined land was hard (Ezra 3:12; Haggai 1:6). So they ask God to finish what He started.

The Negeb (also spelled Negev) is the dry south country of Judah. Most of the year its streambeds are empty and dusty. When the winter rains come, those dry channels can fill almost overnight with rushing water, and the desert turns green. That is the kind of restoration they ask for: sudden, full and life-giving.

God has promised a greater gathering of Israel still to come, when He brings His people back to their land and they turn to their Messiah (Ezekiel 36:24-28; Romans 11:26). I believe the full answer to this prayer is still ahead.

126:5-6 *Those who sow with tears will reap with a shout of joy. He will surely go, and weep, carrying the bag of seed; he will surely come with a shout of joy, carrying his sheaves.*

"Those who sow with tears will reap with a shout of joy." In a hard year, seed grain was precious. A farmer might sow it with tears, knowing his family was hungry and the seed could have been bread. Sowing meant giving up something now and trusting God for a harvest later.

"He will surely go, and weep, carrying the bag of seed; he will surely come with a shout of joy, carrying his sheaves." He goes out weeping with a small bag of seed. He comes home shouting with arms full of sheaves, the bundles of cut grain. The Hebrew doubles the verbs, and the SLB catches that with "surely." It is certain.

Few promises in Scripture have comforted more people. Tears are not the end of the story for God's people. Grief, prayer, faithful work that no one sees, a sickbed, a long wait for a wayward child: God sees the seed that is sown in tears. Paul says, "let us not lose heart in doing the good, for in its own time we will reap" (Galatians 6:9). Jesus Himself went the way of tears to the cross, and

He spoke of a grain of wheat that dies and bears much fruit (John 12:24). The final harvest comes when God wipes away every tear (Revelation 21:4).

The verse does not promise the harvest will come quickly, or always in this life. It promises that it will come.

Psalm 126 Summary

Psalm 126, a Song of Ascents, looks back on the day the LORD brought His people back to Zion. It felt like a dream, their mouths filled with laughter and the nations said the LORD had done great things for them. Then it prays for the restoration to be completed, like dry streambeds in the Negeb filling with water. It closes with the promise that those who sow with tears will reap with shouts of joy, coming home carrying their sheaves.

People and Places

- Negeb (Negev): the dry southern region of Judah, where dry streambeds fill suddenly in the rainy season.
- Sheaves: bundles of cut grain stalks tied together at harvest.

Psalm 126 Study Questions

1. What were God's people like when the LORD restored Zion? (126:1)

2. What filled their mouths and tongues? (126:2)

3. What did the nations say about them? (126:2)

4. What do the people ask God to do in verse 4, and what picture do they use?

5. What does the one who sows with tears carry going out, and what does he carry coming home? (126:6)

6. When has God answered a prayer so fully that you felt "like those who dream"?

7. Why do you think the people still pray for restoration after they have already come home?

8. What "seed" are you sowing with tears right now? How does verse 5 encourage you?

9. How do Galatians 6:9 and John 12:24 help explain verses 5-6?

10. How can God's great things in your life be a witness to people around you, as Israel's return was to the nations?

Psalm 128: The Blessed Home

Scripture

A song of the ascents.

128:1-4 How blessed ***is*** everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. For you will eat the labor of your hands; how blessed ***are*** you, and it will be good for you. Your wife ***will be*** like a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of your house; your sons like shoots of olive trees around your table. Look, for thus will a man be blessed who fears the LORD.

128:5-6 May the LORD bless you from Zion; and see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. And see sons of your sons. Peace ***be*** on Israel.

Psalm 128 Preview

Psalm 127 (Volume 1) said that unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Psalm 128 walks into that house. A man who fears the LORD sits at his table with his wife and children around him, eating food he worked for. It is a simple, warm picture of ordinary blessing.

Then the blessing widens to Zion and Jerusalem, to grandchildren and to the whole people: "Peace be on Israel." A godly home is part of something bigger. The pilgrims singing this song on the way to Jerusalem were reminded that their homes and the nation and the house of God belong together.

Psalm 128 Study

128:1-2 *How blessed **is** everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. For you will eat the labor of your hands; how blessed **are** you, and it will be good for you.*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents." It is a pilgrim song (see Psalm 120) and does not name its writer.

"How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways." Blessed means deeply happy, well off before God, as in Psalm 1 (Volume 1). The fear of the LORD is reverent awe that leads to obedience (see Psalm 76). The second line shows what it looks like: walking in His ways. Fear of God shows up in how we walk, not only in how we feel. The word "everyone" matters. The blessing is not only for priests or kings. Any farmer, worker or mother can fear the LORD.

"For you will eat the labor of your hands." That may sound small, but in the ancient world it was a real blessing. Enemies, drought or unjust rulers often took a man's crops before he could eat them (Deuteronomy 28:33). Here a man works and enjoys the fruit of his work. "How blessed are you, and it will be good for you."

128:3-4 *Your wife **will be** like a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of your house; your sons like shoots of olive trees around your table. Look, for thus will a man be blessed who fears the LORD.*

"Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of your house." The vine was a picture of fruitfulness and joy. The "innermost parts" of the house were the private rooms of the family. She is the heart of the home.

"Your sons like shoots of olive trees around your table." Olive trees live for centuries, and new shoots spring up around the old trunk. Children gathered around the family table are like those young shoots, the next generation growing up strong.

"Look, for thus will a man be blessed who fears the LORD." The psalm repeats its main point.

We should read this as a picture of how God's blessing often looks, not a promise that every godly person will marry or have children. Some faithful believers are single. Some couples long for children and never have them. Some lose a child, or a spouse. That is not a sign that God has withheld His blessing because they lacked faith. Jesus was never married, and Paul says singleness can be a gift (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). The heart of verse 1 is open to all: everyone who fears the LORD is blessed. If this psalm touches a painful place for you, bring that to the Lord honestly. He knows.

128:5-6 *May the LORD bless you from Zion; and see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. And see sons of your sons. Peace **be** on Israel.*

"May the LORD bless you from Zion; and see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life." Now the writer speaks a blessing over the man, the way a priest might over a pilgrim. Blessing comes "from Zion," where God dwelt among His people. A happy home and a healthy nation go together. The man is not only to enjoy his own good. He is to see the good of Jerusalem.

"And see sons of your sons." To live to see your grandchildren was a sign of a long, full life. Proverbs 17:6 calls grandchildren the crown of the aged.

"Peace be on Israel." Psalm 125 ends with the same words. The blessing on one home becomes a blessing on the whole people. Our homes matter far beyond our own front door. A family that fears God strengthens the church, the town and the generations to come.

Psalm 128 Summary

Psalm 128, a Song of Ascents, describes the blessing of everyone who fears the LORD and walks in His ways. Such a man will eat the fruit of his labor. His wife will be like a fruitful vine in his home and his children like olive shoots around his table. The writer asks the LORD to bless him from Zion, to let him see Jerusalem prosper all his life and live to see his grandchildren. The psalm closes with a blessing of peace on Israel.

Psalm 128 Study Questions

1. Who is blessed, according to verse 1, and how do they live?

2. What will the man who fears the LORD eat? (128:2)

3. What picture is used for the wife, and where is she in the house? (128:3)

4. What are the children compared to, and where are they? (128:3)

5. From where does the writer ask the LORD to bless? (128:5)

6. What two things does the writer hope the man will see? (128:5-6)

7. What does it mean to fear the LORD? How does that fear show up in daily life?

8. Why was eating the labor of your own hands such a blessing in the ancient world? What ordinary blessings do you take for granted?

9. How would you encourage a single believer or a childless couple who reads this psalm?

10. How can your home, whatever it looks like, be a place where people see the blessing of fearing the LORD?

Psalm 129: They Have Not Prevailed

Scripture

A song of the ascents.

129:1-4 Greatly they have harassed me from my youth, let Israel say, please; greatly they have harassed me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me. On my back plowers have plowed; they have made their furrows long. The LORD ***is*** righteous; He has cut the cord of ***the*** wicked.

129:5-8 Let them be ashamed and turned backward, all who hate Zion. Let them be like grass of ***the*** roofs, which withers before it shoots up, with which the reaper has not filled his hand, and the binder of sheaves his bosom. And those who pass by have not said, "The blessing of the LORD ***be*** on you; we bless you in the name of the LORD."

Psalm 129 Preview

Psalm 129 looks back over Israel's long history of suffering. From her youth, from the days of slavery in Egypt, enemies have attacked her again and again. They plowed her back like a field and cut long furrows. And yet they have not won. The LORD is righteous, and He has cut the cords that bound His people.

The second half prays that all who hate Zion will be put to shame and wither like grass growing on a rooftop, which dries up before anyone can harvest it. It is a hard prayer, but it asks God to do what He has already promised.

Psalm 129 Study

129:1-2 *Greatly they have harassed me from my youth, let Israel say, please; greatly they have harassed me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me.*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents." It is a pilgrim song (see Psalm 120) and does not name its writer.

"Greatly they have harassed me from my youth, let Israel say, please." As in Psalm 124, a leader calls the people to repeat the line together. The "me" is Israel, speaking as one person. Her "youth" goes back to her beginnings as a nation, when Pharaoh made her people slaves in Egypt (Hosea 11:1 calls Israel God's child in Egypt). After that came the Canaanites, the Philistines, Assyria, Babylon and many more.

"Greatly they have harassed me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me." The word "yet" is the turning point. The attacks were real and many, but Israel is still here. That is still true. Empires that tried to wipe out the Jewish people are gone, and the people remain. God keeps His promises (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

Jesus said something similar about His church: the gates of Hades will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). God's people may be hurt, but they will not be destroyed.

129:3-4 *On my back plowers have plowed; they have made their furrows long. The LORD **is** righteous; He has cut the cord of **the** wicked.*

"On my back plowers have plowed; they have made their furrows long." It is a painful picture. The enemy treated Israel's back like a field, cutting it open with a plow. Many think of the whip on a slave's back. Isaiah describes the Servant of the LORD giving His back to those who struck Him (Isaiah 50:6), and Jesus was flogged before His crucifixion (Matthew 27:26). Many see in this verse a picture of Israel's suffering that the Messiah, Israel's King, would share.

"The LORD is righteous; He has cut the cord of the wicked." The plow was pulled by animals harnessed with ropes. God cut the ropes, and the plowing stopped. Israel didn't free herself. The righteous God did what was right and set her free.

129:5-7 *Let them be ashamed and turned backward, all who hate Zion. Let them be like grass of **the** roofs, which withers before it shoots up, with which the reaper has not filled his hand, and the binder of sheaves his bosom.*

Now the psalm turns to prayer against Zion's enemies. "Let them be ashamed and turned backward, all who hate Zion." To be "turned backward" is to be routed, to have your attack fail and run away.

"Let them be like grass of the roofs, which withers before it shoots up." Houses had flat roofs made of packed earth. Seeds blew onto them and sprouted after a rain, but the soil was so thin that the grass dried up in a day or two. "With which the reaper has not filled his hand, and the binder of sheaves his bosom." No one ever harvests rooftop grass. It comes to nothing.

These are hard lines, but they are gentle compared with others in the Psalms. The writer asks God to make the plans of Zion's haters wither and fail. He takes no sword in hand. He leaves it to God (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). God had promised Abraham that He would curse those who curse his people (Genesis 12:3), so the prayer asks God to keep His word.

129:8 *And those who pass by have not said, "The blessing of the LORD **be** on you; we bless you in the name of the LORD."*

"And those who pass by have not said, The blessing of the LORD be on you; we bless you in the name of the LORD." At harvest, people walking past a field would call out a blessing to the reapers, and the reapers would call one back (Ruth 2:4 shows Boaz and his workers doing just this). But no one blesses a man gathering rooftop grass, because there is nothing to gather.

The point is that the enemies of God's people will have no harvest and no blessing. Their work will come to nothing. It is a sober thought. A life spent fighting God gets no "well done" at the end.

For us there is another side. Jesus told us to bless those who curse us (Luke 6:28). We can pray against evil plans and still pray for the people who make them, that they will turn to God before the end comes.

Psalm 129 Summary

Psalm 129, a Song of Ascents, lets Israel look back on how much she has suffered from her youth. Enemies have harassed her greatly and plowed her back like a field, yet they have not prevailed, because the righteous LORD has cut the cords of the wicked. The psalm then prays that all who hate Zion will be put to shame and wither like grass on a rooftop, which no reaper gathers and over which no one speaks the harvest blessing of the LORD.

People and Places

- Grass of the roofs: grass that sprouted in the thin soil of flat earthen roofs and withered quickly.

Psalm 129 Study Questions

1. How long have Israel's enemies harassed her? (129:1-2)

2. What have the enemies not been able to do? (129:2)

3. What picture describes Israel's suffering in verse 3?

4. What has the LORD done, and why? (129:4)

5. What does the writer ask for all who hate Zion? (129:5)

6. Why is grass on a rooftop a good picture of failure? (129:6-7)

7. What blessing do passersby not say? What custom lies behind it? (129:8; Ruth 2:4)

8. How has God kept His people through history, even when enemies seemed to win? What does that tell you about His faithfulness to you?

9. How can we pray against evil plans while still obeying Jesus' command to bless those who curse us (Luke 6:28)?

10. Is there a "plowed back" in your own life, a long hurt, where you need to trust that the righteous LORD will cut the cords?

Psalm 131: A Quieted Soul

Scripture

A song of the ascents. Of David.

131:1-3 LORD, my heart has not been lofty, and my eyes have not been raised up; and I have not walked in great ***things***, and in ***things too*** wonderful for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul; like a weaned ***child*** on his mother, like the weaned ***child*** on me ***is*** my soul. Hope, Israel, in the LORD, from now and until forever.

Psalm 131 Preview

Psalm 131 is only three verses long, and it may be the easiest psalm to read and the hardest to live. David tells the LORD that he has stopped reaching for things too big for him. He has quieted his soul, and now he rests on God like a weaned child resting on his mother.

Then he turns to the whole people and invites them to the same hope. In a world that tells us to push, grab and climb, this little psalm teaches a different way: humility, contentment and trust.

Psalm 131 Study

131:1 *LORD, my heart has not been lofty, and my eyes have not been raised up; and I have not walked in great **things**, and in **things too** wonderful for me.*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents. Of David." It is a pilgrim song (see Psalm 120), and the heading names David as writer. We don't know when in his life he wrote it. It fits the young shepherd who waited years for the throne God promised him and refused to grab it by killing Saul (1 Samuel 24:6).

"LORD, my heart has not been lofty, and my eyes have not been raised up." A lofty heart is a proud heart, one that thinks itself above others. Raised eyes look down on people and look greedily at what is out of reach. Pride starts inside and shows on the face.

"And I have not walked in great things, and in things too wonderful for me." David doesn't mean he never thought about anything hard. He means he stopped trying to run what only God can run. He accepted his limits. There are things God has not told us and plans He has not explained (Deuteronomy 29:29). A humble heart can leave them with Him.

This is not laziness or a lack of ambition for God. It is the opposite of the restless grasping that wants to control everything and understand everything. The prophet told Baruch, "you are seeking great things for yourself; do not seek them" (Jeremiah 45:5).

131:2 *Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul; like a weaned **child** on his mother, like the weaned **child** on me **is** my soul.*

"Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul." David did this on purpose. A soul does not quiet itself by accident. He talked to it, the way a parent soothes a crying child, and brought it to rest.

"Like a weaned child on his mother, like the weaned child on me is my soul." In Israel a child was often weaned at two or three years old. A nursing baby fusses and roots for milk the moment he is in his mother's arms. A weaned child sits on her lap content. He is not there for what he can get. He is there because he loves to be near her.

That is a picture of mature faith. We can come to God like the nursing baby, only wanting something from Him. Or we can learn to rest on Him because He is our God, whether or not He gives us what we want right now. Paul says he had learned to be content in whatever circumstances he was in (Philippians 4:11). He learned it. So do we.

Jesus said that whoever humbles himself like a little child is the greatest in the kingdom (Matthew 18:4). And He described Himself as "gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). He is the perfect picture of this psalm.

131:3 *Hope, Israel, in the LORD, from now and until forever.*

"Hope, Israel, in the LORD, from now and until forever." David turns from his own heart to the nation. What he has found, he wants them to have. Hope is quiet confidence that God will keep His promises. The same call ends Psalm 130 (Volume 1).

If you are anxious, restless or straining to control things you can't control, try praying this short psalm slowly. Tell the Lord where your heart has been lofty. Then let Him quiet you, and rest.

Psalm 131 Summary

Psalm 131, a Song of Ascents of David, is a short prayer of humility. David tells the LORD that his heart is not proud, his eyes are not haughty and he does not chase things too great and wonderful for him. He has calmed and quieted his soul until it rests like a weaned child with its mother, content just to be near. Then he calls Israel to hope in the LORD now and forever.

Psalm 131 Study Questions

1. What does David say about his heart and his eyes? (131:1)

2. What has David not walked in? (131:1)

3. What has David done with his soul? (131:2)

4. What picture does David use for his quieted soul? (131:2)

5. What does David call Israel to do, and for how long? (131:3)

6. What is the difference between a nursing baby and a weaned child on a mother's lap? What does that teach about how we come to God?

7. What are some "things too wonderful" that you are tempted to try to control or figure out?

8. How does a person calm and quiet his own soul? What helps you do that?

9. How did Jesus show the humility of this psalm (Matthew 11:29; Philippians 2:6-7)?

10. Is there something you need to stop grasping for this week so you can rest in God?

Psalm 132: The LORD Has Chosen Zion

Scripture

A song of the ascents.

132:1-10 Remember, LORD, for David all his being afflicted, who swore to the LORD; he vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob: "Surely I will not go into the tent of my house; surely I will not go up on the couch of my bed; surely I will not give sleep to my eyes, ***or*** slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, dwelling places for the Mighty One of Jacob." Look, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar. Let us go into His dwelling places; let us bow down at the footstool of His feet. Arise, LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength. Let Your priests be clothed ***with*** righteousness, and let Your faithful ones shout for joy. For the sake of David Your servant, do not turn away the face of Your anointed.

132:11-18 The LORD swore to David ***in*** faithfulness; He will not turn back from it: "Of the fruit of your belly I will set ***one*** on the throne for you. If your sons keep My covenant and My testimonies which I will teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on the throne for you." For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for a dwelling place for Himself: "This ***is*** My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. Its provision I will surely bless; its needy I will satisfy ***with*** bread. And its priests I will clothe ***with*** salvation, and its faithful ones will surely shout for joy. There I will make a horn sprout for David; I have arranged a lamp for My anointed. His enemies I will clothe ***with*** shame, and on him his crown will shine."

Psalm 132 Preview

Psalm 132 is the longest of the Songs of Ascents, and it is a royal psalm. It is built on two oaths. In the first half, David swears he will not rest until he finds a place for the LORD to dwell, and the people go up with the ark to Zion, praying for God to come to His resting place. In the second half, the LORD swears an oath to David: one of his sons will sit on his throne, and God will make Zion His home forever.

David's oath was about a place for God. God's oath was about a King for His people. The psalm ends with a horn sprouting for David, a lamp for God's anointed and a crown that shines. The New Testament tells us that oath points to Jesus Christ, the Son of David, and I believe it will be fully kept when He reigns from Zion over all the earth.

Psalm 132 Study

132:1-2 *Remember, LORD, for David all his being afflicted, who swore to the LORD; he vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents." It is a pilgrim song (see Psalm 120). It does not name its writer. Verses 8-10 are nearly the same words Solomon prayed when he dedicated the temple (2 Chronicles 6:41-42), so many think Solomon wrote it, or that it was written for that day. Others place it later, as a prayer for David's line after the exile. We aren't told.

"Remember, LORD, for David all his being afflicted." To ask God to remember is to ask Him to act on what He knows. David's affliction was all the trouble and effort he went through for God's sake, and especially his burning desire to give the LORD a house.

"Who swore to the LORD; he vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob." The title "Mighty One of Jacob" goes back to Jacob's blessing on his sons (Genesis 49:24). It reminds us that the God of Israel's fathers is strong, and He keeps His people.

132:3-5 *"Surely I will not go into the tent of my house; surely I will not go up on the couch of my bed; surely I will not give sleep to my eyes,* ***or*** *slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, dwelling places for the Mighty One of Jacob."*

David's vow: "Surely I will not go into the tent of my house; surely I will not go up on the couch of my bed; surely I will not give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, dwelling places for the Mighty One of Jacob."

We don't have this vow word for word anywhere else, but we see its spirit in 2 Samuel 7:2. David looked at his own house of cedar and was troubled that the ark of God sat in a tent. He wanted to build God a house. God told him no. His son would build it (2 Samuel 7:12-13). But David spent the rest of his life gathering materials and making plans (1 Chronicles 22:5; 28:2).

Stephen mentioned this in his speech in Acts 7:46. He said David found favor with God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. Then Stephen reminded his hearers that the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands (Acts 7:48). God let His people build Him a house, but He was never limited to it.

What do we care about so much that we lose sleep over it? David's passion was God's honor among His people.

New Testament links: Acts 7:46 (alluded to)

132:6-7 *Look, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar. Let us go into His dwelling places; let us bow down at the footstool of His feet.*

"Look, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar." The "it" is the ark. Ephrathah is the old name for the area of Bethlehem, David's hometown (Ruth 4:11; Micah 5:2), though some think it refers to the region of Ephraim, where the ark had stood at Shiloh. The "fields of Jaar" means the fields of the forest, a short name for Kiriath-jearim, which means town of forests. The ark stayed there for twenty years after the Philistines sent it back (1 Samuel 7:1-2), until David brought it up to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6).

"Let us go into His dwelling places; let us bow down at the footstool of His feet." The ark was called God's footstool (1 Chronicles 28:2). The LORD was pictured as enthroned above the cherubim on the ark, with the ark as the place where His feet rested. To bow at His footstool was to come humbly before the King of heaven.

132:8-10 *Arise, LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength. Let Your priests be clothed **with** righteousness, and let Your faithful ones shout for joy. For the sake of David Your servant, do not turn away the face of Your anointed.*

"Arise, LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength." These words echo Moses' cry whenever the ark set out in the wilderness, "Rise up, LORD" (Numbers 10:35). Now the wandering is over. God is asked to come to His resting place in Zion.

"Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let Your faithful ones shout for joy." The faithful ones are God's godly people, those who love Him and are loyal to Him. Righteous priests and joyful people are what a place of God's presence should have.

"For the sake of David Your servant, do not turn away the face of Your anointed." The anointed here is the king then reigning, David's son. To turn away his face would mean to reject his prayer. The people ask God to hear the king for the sake of His promise to David.

As I said above, Solomon prayed these lines at the temple dedication (2 Chronicles 6:41-42). God answered with fire from heaven and His glory filling the house (2 Chronicles 7:1).

132:11-12 *The LORD swore to David **in** faithfulness; He will not turn back from it: "Of the fruit of your belly I will set **one** on the throne for you. If your sons keep My covenant and My testimonies which I will teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on the throne for you."*

Now God's oath answers David's. "The LORD swore to David in faithfulness; He will not turn back from it." God does not need to swear, but He does so to make His promise doubly sure (Hebrews 6:17-18). "Of the fruit of your belly I will set one on the throne for you."

This is the covenant God made with David through Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 7:12-16), the promise of a house, a throne and a kingdom forever. Psalm 89 in this volume studies that covenant at length, its crisis and God's faithfulness to it.

"If your sons keep My covenant and My testimonies which I will teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on the throne for you." There is a condition here for each king. Kings who disobeyed would be disciplined, and history shows it. The kings of Judah turned away, the line lost the throne and Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C. God even said of King Jeconiah that none of his offspring would prosper on David's throne (Jeremiah 22:30). But the promise itself never failed, because God said He would not take His steadfast love from David's line (2 Samuel 7:14-15; Psalm 89:30-37). The promise needed a Son of David who would keep the covenant perfectly. Only One ever has.

Peter quotes verse 11 on the day of Pentecost. He says David was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him that "out of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit upon his throne" (Acts 2:30). David saw ahead to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:31). Jesus is that Son. The crowds in John 7:42 knew the Scriptures said the Christ would come from the seed of David and from Bethlehem.

Where does Jesus sit now? Peter says He is exalted at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33-34; Psalm 110:1). The angel told Mary that God would give Him "the throne of David His father," and He would reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:32-33). Jesus Himself spoke of the day when He comes in glory and sits on the throne of His glory (Matthew 25:31). I believe He will take David's throne in Jerusalem when He returns, after the Tribulation, and will reign on the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6), and then forever. Amillennial teachers, and some others, believe Acts 2 shows that Christ is already reigning on David's throne now from heaven, and that there will be no future earthly kingdom. I respect them, but I believe the promises to David and Zion will be kept on the earth, just as plainly as they were given.

New Testament links: Acts 2:30 (quoted); John 7:42 (alluded to)

132:13-16 *For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for a dwelling place for Himself: "This **is** My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. Its provision I will surely bless; its needy I will satisfy **with** bread. And its priests I will clothe **with** salvation, and its faithful ones will surely shout for joy.*

"For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for a dwelling place for Himself." God chose David, and He chose a place. Zion is the hill of Jerusalem where God put His name.

Now God Himself speaks: "This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it." David had prayed, "Arise, LORD, to Your resting place" (verse 8). God answers: yes, this is My resting place, forever.

"Its provision I will surely bless; its needy I will satisfy with bread." God promises food for the poor of the city.

"And its priests I will clothe with salvation, and its faithful ones will surely shout for joy." Look back at verse 9. The people asked for priests clothed with righteousness. God promises more than they asked: priests clothed with salvation. They asked that the faithful would shout for joy. God says they "will surely shout for joy." God's answer is bigger than the prayer.

Does "forever" still apply to Zion? The temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. and again in A.D. 70. But God has not taken back His choice. The prophets look ahead to a day when the LORD will dwell in Zion again and the nations will come there to worship the King (Zechariah 8:3; 14:16). Paul says the Deliverer will come from Zion (Romans 11:26). The church does not replace Zion. God will keep His word to the city He chose.

132:17-18 *There I will make a horn sprout for David; I have arranged a lamp for My anointed. His enemies I will clothe **with** shame, and on him his crown will shine."*

"There I will make a horn sprout for David." A horn stands for strength, like the horns of a bull (see Psalm 75). A horn that "sprouts" is a strong King springing up from David's family. The prophets use the same word "sprout" for the coming Branch of David (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). When Zechariah the priest praised God for the coming of the Messiah, he said God had raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant (Luke 1:69). He was talking about Jesus, whose birth was only months away.

"I have arranged a lamp for My anointed." A lamp kept burning meant the family line would not die out. God kept a lamp for David in Jerusalem even when his sons were faithless (1 Kings 11:36). That lamp shines finally in Christ.

"His enemies I will clothe with shame, and on him his crown will shine." His enemies will be clothed with shame, while His priests are clothed with salvation (verse 16). The King's crown will shine, flourishing like a blossom. One day every enemy of King Jesus will be put under His feet, and His crown will shine over all the earth (Revelation 19:11-16).

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

Psalm 132 Summary

Psalm 132, a Song of Ascents, asks the LORD to remember David's vow that he would not rest until he found a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob. It recalls finding the ark and bringing it to Zion, and prays for God to arise to His resting place and to hear His anointed king for David's sake. Then God's own oath answers: one of David's sons will sit on his throne, and the LORD has chosen Zion as His resting place forever. He will bless its provision, clothe its priests with salvation, make a horn sprout for David and make his crown shine. The New Testament applies this oath to Jesus (Acts 2:30), the Son of David who will reign on David's throne.

People and Places

- Mighty One of Jacob: a title of God from Jacob's blessing (Genesis 49:24), stressing His strength on behalf of His people.
- Ephrath: an old name for the area of Bethlehem, David's hometown (Micah 5:2).
- Fields of Jaar: the fields of the forest, most likely Kiriath-jearim, where the ark stayed twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-2).
- Footstool: a name for the ark, where God was pictured as resting His feet (1 Chronicles 28:2).

God's place is in my heart and at the forefront of all I do and think. David could not rest until God had a place among His people. I want God to have first place in me, not whatever room is left over.

Psalm 132 Study Questions

1. What did David vow he would not do, and until when? (132:3-5)

2. Where did the people hear of the ark and find it? (132:6)

3. What do the people ask the LORD to do in verse 8?

4. What did the LORD swear to David? (132:11)

5. What condition does God give for David's sons? (132:12)

6. What has the LORD chosen, and what does He call it? (132:13-14)

7. Compare verse 9 with verse 16. How does God's answer go beyond what the people asked?

8. How does Peter use verse 11 in Acts 2:30, and what does it tell us about Jesus?

9. What will it mean for Jesus to sit on "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32)? Why does it matter that God keeps His promises to Israel and Zion?

10. David could not rest until God had a place among His people. What place does God have in your life, and is there anything you would lose sleep over for His sake?

Psalm 134: Bless the LORD in the Night

Scripture

A song of the ascents.

134:1-3 Look, bless the LORD, all servants of the LORD, who stand in the house of the LORD in the nights. Lift up your hands ***to the*** sanctuary, and bless the LORD. May the LORD bless you from Zion, Maker of heaven and earth.

Psalm 134 Preview

Psalm 134 is the last of the fifteen Songs of Ascents, and it is a fitting close. The pilgrims have come up the road, worshiped in the city and are about to go home. In the first two verses someone calls on the servants of the LORD who keep watch in His house through the night to lift their hands and bless Him. In the last verse a blessing comes back: may the LORD bless you from Zion.

The psalm is a short exchange of blessing. God's people bless the LORD, and the LORD blesses His people. That is how the pilgrim songbook ends.

Psalm 134 Study

134:1-2 *Look, bless the LORD, all servants of the LORD, who stand in the house of the LORD in the nights. Lift up your hands* ***to the*** *sanctuary, and bless the LORD.*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents." It is the last of the pilgrim songs (see Psalm 120) and does not name its writer.

"Look, bless the LORD, all servants of the LORD, who stand in the house of the LORD in the nights." The "servants of the LORD" here are most likely the priests and Levites who served at the temple. Some of them kept watch through the night, guarding the house and tending the lamps (1 Chronicles 9:27, 33). Many think the pilgrims called these words to them as they left, perhaps on the last night of a feast: keep praising God when we are gone.

To "bless the LORD" means to praise Him, to speak well of Him, to honor Him with grateful words. We can't add anything to God, but we can give Him thanks and honor.

Night work at the temple was quiet and unseen. No crowds came at midnight. It may have felt unimportant. The psalm says it mattered. The night watch could fill the quiet hours with praise. There are believers who serve God in unseen places, a night shift, a hospital room, caring for a sick parent at two in the morning. God sees that service. And night is a good time to bless Him.

"Lift up your hands to the sanctuary, and bless the LORD." The sanctuary is the holy place, God's house. Lifting the hands was a common way to pray and praise in Israel, a sign of reaching toward God with empty hands. Paul wanted men everywhere to pray "lifting up holy hands" (1 Timothy 2:8).

134:3 *May the LORD bless you from Zion, Maker of heaven and earth.*

Now the answer comes, perhaps spoken by the priests back to the departing pilgrims. "May the LORD bless you from Zion, Maker of heaven and earth." It sounds like the blessing God gave the priests to speak over Israel, "May the LORD bless you, and may He keep you" (Numbers 6:24).

The blessing comes "from Zion," where God dwelt among His people, but it comes from the "Maker of heaven and earth." the God who is not limited to one hill. The pilgrims were going home to their villages and farms. The God of Zion would go with them.

So the Songs of Ascents end where Psalm 121 began, with the Maker of heaven and earth. Jesus' last act on earth before He went up to heaven was to lift up His hands and bless His disciples (Luke 24:50). We bless Him, and He blesses us.

Psalm 134 Summary

Psalm 134, the last Song of Ascents, calls the servants of the LORD who stand in His house through the night to bless the LORD and lift up their hands toward the sanctuary. The psalm closes with a blessing in return: may the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion. The pilgrim songs end with God's people blessing Him and His blessing going home with them.

Psalm 134 Study Questions

1. Whom does the psalm call to bless the LORD? (134:1)
2. When do these servants stand in the house of the LORD? (134:1)
3. What are they told to do with their hands? (134:2)
4. From where does the LORD bless, and how is He described? (134:3)
5. Who do you think the "servants of the LORD" were, and what was their job at night?
6. What does it mean for us to "bless the LORD"?
7. How could you use quiet or sleepless hours to praise God?
8. Where do you serve God in ways no one sees? How does this psalm encourage you?
9. How is verse 3 like the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24?
10. Who could you speak a blessing over this week, as the priests blessed the pilgrims going home?

Psalm 135: Praise the Name of the LORD

Scripture

135:1-7 Praise ***the*** LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; praise, servants of the LORD, who stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God. Praise ***the*** LORD, for the LORD ***is*** good; sing praises to His name, for ***it is*** pleasant. For Jacob the LORD has chosen for Himself, Israel for His treasured possession. For I know that the LORD ***is*** great, and our Lord ***is*** above all gods. All that the LORD desires He does, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all deeps. ***He is*** bringing up clouds from the end of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, bringing out wind from His storehouses;

135:8-14 who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, from man to animal. He sent signs and wonders into your midst, Egypt, on Pharaoh and on all his servants; who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings: Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan; and He gave their land ***as*** an inheritance, an inheritance to Israel His people. LORD, Your name ***is*** forever; LORD, Your remembrance ***is*** to generation and generation. For the LORD will vindicate His people, and on His servants He will have compassion.

135:15-21 The idols of the nations ***are*** silver and gold, the work of the hands of man. They have a mouth, and they do not speak; they have eyes, and they do not see; they have ears, and they do not give ear; also there is no breath in their mouth. Like them will be those who make them, everyone who trusts in them. House of Israel, bless the LORD; house of Aaron, bless the LORD; house of the Levites, bless the LORD; you who fear the LORD, bless the LORD. Blessed ***be*** the LORD from Zion, who dwells ***in*** Jerusalem. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 135 Preview

Psalm 135 picks up where Psalm 134 left off. Psalm 134 called the servants of the LORD in His house to bless Him. Psalm 135 calls the same servants to praise Him, and then gives them reasons: He is good, He chose Israel, He is greater than all gods, He rules the weather, He brought His people out of Egypt and gave them their land.

Then the psalm laughs at idols, gods of silver and gold that have mouths and cannot speak. Those who trust in them become like them. It ends by calling every group in Israel to bless the LORD who dwells in Jerusalem. Much of this psalm is made from lines found elsewhere in Scripture, like a hymn built from favorite verses.

Psalm 135 Study

135:1-2 *Praise **the** LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; praise, servants of the LORD, who stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God.*

The psalm has no heading and does not name its writer. It begins and ends with "Praise the LORD!" which in Hebrew is Hallelujah (see Psalm 104). Jewish tradition calls Psalm 136 (Volume

1) the Great Hallel, the great psalm of praise, and some old traditions include Psalm 135 with it, because the two tell the same story in nearly the same order. Both were sung at the feasts.

"Praise the name of the LORD; praise, servants of the LORD, who stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God." The priests and Levites stood in the house itself, and the people stood in its courts. Everyone in God's house has a job to do, and it starts with praise.

Revelation 19:5 echoes this call. A voice from the throne says, "Praise our God, all you His slaves and you who fear Him." The same praise that rang in the temple courts will ring around God's throne.

New Testament links: Revelation 19:5 (alluded to)

135:3-4 *Praise **the** LORD, for the LORD **is** good; sing praises to His name, for **it is** pleasant. For Jacob the LORD has chosen for Himself, Israel for His treasured possession.*

"Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant." The first reason for praise is who God is. He is good. And praising Him is pleasant. It is not a duty to get through but a delight.

"For Jacob the LORD has chosen for Himself, Israel for His treasured possession." The second reason is what God has done for His people. A treasured possession is a king's private treasure, the things he keeps for himself (Exodus 19:5). God chose Israel, not because they were great but because He loved them (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). Peter uses similar words of the church, "a people for His possession" (1 Peter 2:9). God has a treasured people in Israel and a treasured people in the church, and He keeps His promises to both.

135:5-7 *For I know that the LORD **is** great, and our Lord **is** above all gods. All that the LORD desires He does, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all deeps. **He is** bringing up clouds from the end of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, bringing out wind from His storehouses;*

"For I know that the LORD is great, and our Lord is above all gods." The writer says it from his own conviction: "I know." The nations had many gods. The LORD is above them all, because they are not gods at all (verse 15).

"All that the LORD desires He does, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all deeps." Nothing anywhere is outside His rule. The false gods of the nations were each given a territory: a sky god, a sea god, a god of the underworld. The LORD rules every place at once.

"He is bringing up clouds from the end of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, bringing out wind from His storehouses." The Canaanites thought Baal was the god of storm and rain. The psalm says no, the LORD sends the clouds, the lightning and the wind. The same lines are in Jeremiah 10:13. When it rains on your garden, give thanks to Him.

135:8-12 *who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, from man to animal. He sent signs and wonders into your midst, Egypt, on Pharaoh and on all his servants; who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings: Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan; and He gave their land **as** an inheritance, an inheritance to Israel His people.*

Now the psalm tells Israel's story. "Who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, from man to animal." That was the last and worst plague, which broke Pharaoh's will (Exodus 12:29). "He sent signs and wonders into your midst, Egypt, on Pharaoh and on all his servants." The writer even speaks to Egypt directly, as if it were standing there.

"Who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings: Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan." Sihon and Og ruled east of the Jordan and came out to fight Israel before Israel entered the land (Numbers 21:21-35). Psalm 136 (Volume 1) names them too.

"And He gave their land as an inheritance, an inheritance to Israel His people." The land was God's gift. Israel didn't earn it. He kept His promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:18).

God's acts in history are not fairy tales. He really did these things, and He is the same God today.

135:13-14 *LORD, Your name **is** forever; LORD, Your remembrance **is** to generation and generation. For the LORD will vindicate His people, and on His servants He will have compassion.*

"LORD, Your name is forever; LORD, Your remembrance is to generation and generation." These words come from Exodus 3:15, where God told Moses His name. Empires rise and fall. His name lasts.

"For the LORD will vindicate His people, and on His servants He will have compassion." This line comes from the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:36). To vindicate is to defend someone's cause and prove them in the right. God will stand up for His people. And He has compassion on them, even when they have sinned and are low.

135:15-18 *The idols of the nations **are** silver and gold, the work of the hands of man. They have a mouth, and they do not speak; they have eyes, and they do not see; they have ears, and they do not give ear; also there is no breath in their mouth. Like them will be those who make them, everyone who trusts in them.*

Now the psalm turns to idols, using almost the same words as Psalm 115:4-8. "The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of the hands of man." An idol might be beautiful and expensive, but a craftsman made it. How can something you made save you?

"They have a mouth, and they do not speak; they have eyes, and they do not see; they have ears, and they do not give ear; also there is no breath in their mouth." The LORD speaks, sees, hears and breathes life into His creatures. The idols do none of it.

"Like them will be those who make them, everyone who trusts in them." We become like what we worship. People who worship lifeless things become spiritually lifeless, blind and deaf to God.

Few of us bow down to statues today, but money, success, pleasure and our own image can be idols just as surely. John's last words in his first letter were "guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

135:19-21 *House of Israel, bless the LORD; house of Aaron, bless the LORD; house of the Levites, bless the LORD; you who fear the LORD, bless the LORD. Blessed **be** the LORD from Zion, who dwells **in** Jerusalem. Praise **the** LORD!*

"House of Israel, bless the LORD; house of Aaron, bless the LORD; house of the Levites, bless the LORD; you who fear the LORD, bless the LORD." The call goes out to the whole nation, then the priests (the house of Aaron), then the Levites who helped them, and finally to all "who fear the LORD." Many think that last group included Gentiles who came to worship Israel's God. The circle of praise is wide.

"Blessed be the LORD from Zion, who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!" Psalm 134 ended with the LORD blessing His people from Zion. Psalm 135 ends with His people blessing Him from Zion. The God of the whole earth chose to make His home among His people. Jesus, God the Son, did the same when He came to live among us (John 1:14).

Psalm 135 Summary

Psalm 135 calls the servants of the LORD in His house to praise Him because He is good and has chosen Israel as His treasured possession. He is above all gods and does whatever He pleases in heaven, earth and sea, sending clouds, lightning and wind. He struck down the firstborn of Egypt, defeated Sihon, Og and the kings of Canaan and gave Israel their land. His name endures forever, and He will vindicate His people. The idols of the nations cannot speak, see or hear, and those who trust in them become like them. The psalm calls all Israel, the priests, the Levites and all who fear the LORD to bless the LORD who dwells in Zion.

People and Places

- Treasured possession: a king's personal treasure; God's name for Israel as His own people (Exodus 19:5).
- Sihon and Og: kings east of the Jordan defeated by Israel before it entered Canaan (Numbers 21:21-35).

Psalm 135 Study Questions

1. Whom does verse 1 call to praise the LORD, and where do they stand? (135:1-2)

2. What reasons for praise does the writer give in verses 3-4?

3. Where does the LORD do all that He desires? (135:6)

4. What does the LORD bring up, make and bring out? (135:7)

5. What acts of God in Israel's history does the psalm name? (135:8-12)

6. What can idols not do, and what happens to those who trust in them? (135:15-18)

7. Who is called to bless the LORD in verses 19-20?

8. Why do you think the writer used so many lines from other parts of Scripture? How could you use Scripture in your own prayers and praise?

9. What modern idols do people trust in? Have any of them crept into your own life?

10. The psalm teaches that we become like what we worship. How have you seen that to be true, for good or for bad?

Psalm 137: By the Rivers of Babylon

Scripture

137:1-6 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat; also we wept when we remembered Zion. On the poplars in its midst we hung up our lyres. For there our captors asked us ***for*** words of a song, and our tormentors ***asked for*** gladness: "Sing for us ***one*** of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the song of the LORD on foreign ground? If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right ***hand*** forget. Let my tongue cling to my palate if I do not remember you, if I do not lift up Jerusalem above the head of my joy.

137:7-9 Remember, LORD, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, "Lay ***it*** bare, lay ***it*** bare, to the foundation in it!" Daughter of Babylon, who is to be devastated, how blessed ***is he*** who repays you your dealing that you dealt to us! How blessed ***is he*** who seizes and smashes your infants against the rock!

Psalm 137 Preview

Psalm 137 is a song from the exile. Babylon's army destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. and carried thousands of its people away. Now they sit by Babylon's rivers and weep. Their captors mock them by asking for a happy song about Zion. They hang up their harps instead. How can they sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? Then one of them makes a vow: he will never forget Jerusalem.

The last three verses are among the hardest words in the Bible. The writer asks God to remember what Edom did on the day Jerusalem fell, and he pronounces a blessing on whoever pays Babylon back, even to the killing of its little ones. We will not skip those lines or soften them. We will try to understand where they came from, what God did with them and what Jesus teaches us about our own enemies.

Psalm 137 Study

137:1-2 *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat; also we wept when we remembered Zion. On the poplars in its midst we hung up our lyres.*

The psalm has no heading and does not name its writer. It was written during the exile or soon after, by someone who had been there. Psalm 79, earlier in this volume, mourns the same disaster from inside the ruined city.

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat; also we wept when we remembered Zion." Babylon stood on the Euphrates River, and canals ran through the land around it for watering crops. The exiles sat down by the water, maybe because that is where captives were put to work, maybe because it was a quiet place to pray. And they wept. They were remembering Zion: the temple, the feasts, the walk up to the house of the LORD that the Songs of Ascents sing about. All of it was gone.

"On the poplars in its midst we hung up our lyres." Some translations say willows. The lyres were for joy and worship. The exiles hung them up in the branches. There was no song left in them.

Grief like this belongs in the Bible. If you have lost something you loved, a home, a marriage, a church, a person, you are allowed to sit down and weep. God put this psalm in His book so we would know that.

137:3-4 *For there our captors asked us **for** words of a song, and our tormentors **asked for** gladness: "Sing for us **one** of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the song of the LORD on foreign ground?*

"For there our captors asked us for words of a song, and our tormentors asked for gladness: Sing for us one of the songs of Zion!" The Babylonians wanted entertainment. It may have been curiosity, but most likely it was mockery: Sing us one of those songs about how your God protects His city. Psalm 46 and Psalm 48 sang that God was in Zion and it would not be shaken. Now Zion was rubble.

"How shall we sing the song of the LORD on foreign ground?" The songs of Zion were not party songs. They were the LORD's songs, praise to Him. To sing them as a show for the men who had burned His house would make a mockery of God. So they refused.

That does not mean God's people can never sing in hard places. Paul and Silas sang hymns in a Philippian jail at midnight (Acts 16:25). Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem three times a day in Babylon itself (Daniel 6:10). Jeremiah even told the exiles to pray for Babylon's welfare while they lived there (Jeremiah 29:7). But the exiles here would not turn holy songs into entertainment for those who mocked the LORD.

137:5-6 *If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right **hand** forget. Let my tongue cling to my palate if I do not remember you, if I do not lift up Jerusalem above the head of my joy.*

"If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget." The voice changes from "we" to "I." A harp player plucks the strings with his right hand. He says: if I ever forget Jerusalem, let my hand forget how to play.

"Let my tongue cling to my palate if I do not remember you." Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, so I can never sing again. "If I do not lift up Jerusalem above the head of my joy." Jerusalem, the city of God, will be his highest joy, above every other joy he has.

For a believer, the lesson is clear. Love for God and His purposes should rank above every other joy. In 538 B.C. God began to bring His people home (Ezra 1:1), keeping the promise He had given through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10; Daniel 9:2). Jews around the world have spoken these verses for centuries. I believe God still has a future for Jerusalem, and this vow is not foolish. The city matters to Him (Zechariah 8:3).

137:7 *Remember, LORD, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, "Lay **it** bare, lay **it** bare, to the foundation in it!"*

Now the psalm turns to the people who caused this grief. "Remember, LORD, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem." Edom was the nation descended from Esau, Jacob's brother (Genesis 25:30). They were Israel's relatives, and they should have helped. Instead, when Babylon attacked Jerusalem, Edom cheered it on, blocked the roads so refugees could not escape and handed survivors over to the enemy (Obadiah 10-14).

"Who said, Lay it bare, lay it bare, to the foundation in it!" Tear it down to the ground. Edom wanted Jerusalem wiped out.

The writer does not go after Edom himself. He asks the LORD to remember. That is the key to all of the hard lines in the Psalms (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms). God had already promised to judge Edom for this (Obadiah 15; Lamentations 4:21-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14). The writer asks God to do what He said He would do.

137:8 *Daughter of Babylon, who is to be devastated, how blessed **is he** who repays you your dealing that you dealt to us!*

"Daughter of Babylon, who is to be devastated." "Daughter" is a Hebrew way of speaking of a city or nation as a person. Babylon is "to be devastated." God had already announced her fall through Isaiah and Jeremiah, long before it came (Isaiah 13; Jeremiah 50-51). Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C.

"How blessed is he who repays you your dealing that you dealt to us!" The word "blessed" here does not mean that God smiles on cruelty. It means the one who carries out God's justice on Babylon is doing what God Himself decreed. God's own words through Jeremiah were almost the same: "just as she has done, do to her" (Jeremiah 50:15), and "repay her according to her deed" (Jeremiah 50:29). The writer is saying amen to God's sentence.

The New Testament picks up these words for the final Babylon, the great city of Revelation 17-18 that stands for the world's proud system set against God. A voice from heaven says, "Pay back to her as she also paid back to you" (Revelation 18:6). Heaven rejoices because "God has judged your judgment against her" (Revelation 18:20). The longing of Psalm 137 for God to set things right will be answered.

New Testament links: Revelation 18:6 (alluded to)

137:9 *How blessed **is he** who seizes and smashes your infants against the rock!*

"How blessed is he who seizes and smashes your infants against the rock!" There is no gentle way to read this line. It speaks of killing children. Some readers have tried to make it a picture of something else, but I believe we should face what it says.

First, think about who is speaking. These are people who had seen Jerusalem fall. In the wars of that age, conquering armies often killed little children so that no one would grow up to take

revenge. Scripture records it in plain words (2 Kings 8:12; Hosea 13:16; Nahum 3:10). We aren't told everything these exiles saw, but Lamentations shows the horror of Jerusalem's last days, children fainting from hunger in the streets (Lamentations 2:11, 20). The writer may have watched his own children die. Verse 9 asks for Babylon to suffer what Babylon had done. It is the cry of a wounded man for justice to be equal to the crime.

Second, it echoes what God had already said. Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon says, "their children will be dashed in pieces before their eyes" (Isaiah 13:16). The psalm is not inventing a new cruelty. It repeats God's announced judgment, written in the hard language of ancient war.

Third, it is a prayer, not an act. The writer did not do this. He poured out his rage to God and left it there. Paul tells us, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19). God would rather we bring our fury to Him in honest words than act on it.

Fourth, it is not a pattern for us. God included this cry in His Word so that we would know He hears even our rawest prayers. He did not include it to teach us to wish harm on children. Jesus loved little children and warned anyone who would harm one of them (Matthew 18:6). He told us, "love your enemies," and to "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you" (Matthew 5:44), and on the cross He prayed for the men who killed Him (Luke 23:34). God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). We can long for God to judge evil, and we should, while we pray for our enemies to repent before that day comes.

If you have been deeply wronged, especially if someone harmed a child you love, this psalm says you can tell God exactly how you feel. He will not turn you away. Bring the anger to Him, and leave the judgment with Him. And please do not carry it alone. Talk with a pastor or a trusted believer. If you or anyone else is in danger, get help right away.

Psalm 137 Summary

Psalm 137 is a lament from the exile. By the rivers of Babylon, the captives weep as they remember Zion and hang up their harps. When their captors mock them by asking for a song of Zion, they ask how they can sing the LORD's song in a foreign land. One of them vows never to forget Jerusalem and to set it above his highest joy. The psalm ends with hard prayers: that the LORD will remember Edom's cruelty on the day Jerusalem fell, and that Babylon will be repaid for what it did, even to its little ones. These are cries for the justice God Himself had promised, handed over to Him, and the New Testament shows that God will finally judge Babylon (Revelation 18), while Jesus teaches us to love and pray for our enemies.

People and Places

- Babylon: the great city and empire on the Euphrates River (in modern Iraq) that destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and took its people into exile; it fell to the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C.
- Edom: the nation descended from Esau, Jacob's brother, living south and east of the Dead Sea; it cheered Jerusalem's fall and helped the enemy (Obadiah 10-14).

- Poplars: trees growing beside the water; some translations say willows.

Psalm 137 Study Questions

1. Where were the exiles sitting, and what made them weep? (137:1)

2. What did they do with their harps? (137:2)

3. What did their captors ask them to do? (137:3)

4. What does the writer ask to happen to his right hand and his tongue if he forgets Jerusalem? (137:5-6)

5. What did the sons of Edom say on the day Jerusalem fell? (137:7)

6. Why do you think the exiles refused to sing the songs of Zion for their captors?

7. What does it mean to set God and His purposes "above the head of my joy"? What competes for first place in your heart?

8. How does knowing what the exiles had seen, and what God had already said about Babylon (Isaiah 13:16; Jeremiah 50:15), help us understand verses 8-9?

9. How do Romans 12:19 and Matthew 5:44 guide a Christian who reads these verses?

10. Is there a wrong done to you that you need to bring honestly to God and leave with Him? Who could you talk to about it?

Psalm 138: With All My Heart

Scripture

Of David.

138:1-3 I will give thanks to You with all my heart; before ***the*** gods I will sing praises to You. I will bow down toward the temple of Your holiness, and give thanks to Your name for Your steadfast love and for Your faithfulness; for You have made Your word great above all Your name. In the day I called, and You answered me; You made me bold in my soul ***with*** strength.

138:4-6 All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, LORD, for they have heard the words of Your mouth. And they will sing of the ways of the LORD, for great ***is*** the glory of the LORD. For the LORD ***is*** exalted, and the lowly He sees; and the lofty He knows from a distance.

138:7-8 If I walk in the midst of distress, You preserve me alive; against the anger of my enemies You stretch out Your hand, and Your right ***hand*** saves me. The LORD will complete ***it*** for me; LORD, Your steadfast love ***is*** forever; do not abandon the works of Your hands.

Psalm 138 Preview

Psalm 138 opens the last group of David's psalms in the Psalter (Psalms 138 to 145). It begins with whole-hearted thanks. David called, and God answered and gave him strength. He thanks the LORD for His steadfast love and His faithfulness, and he sings it out boldly, even in front of the "gods."

Then David looks ahead to the day when all the kings of the earth will thank the LORD too. He knows that the great God sees the lowly, and he trusts that whatever trouble comes, God will keep him alive and finish what He started. The psalm ends with a short prayer every believer can pray: do not abandon the works of Your hands.

Psalm 138 Study

138:1 *I will give thanks to You with all my heart; before **the** gods I will sing praises to You.*

The heading reads, "Of David." It names David as the writer. It does not tell us what answered prayer he had in mind.

"I will give thanks to You with all my heart." Half-hearted thanks is easy. David gives God all of it. "Before the gods I will sing praises to You." Bible teachers read "the gods" in three ways. Some think David means the false gods of the nations: he praises the LORD openly in their face, as if to say that their gods did not do this, but his God did. Others think he means the angels, the heavenly beings around God's throne. Still others think he means kings and judges, who are sometimes called "gods" because they rule in God's place (see Psalm 82). We aren't told which one David meant. Whichever it is, David's praise is bold. He is not embarrassed to praise God in front of anyone.

138:2-3 *I will bow down toward the temple of Your holiness, and give thanks to Your name for Your steadfast love and for Your faithfulness; for You have made Your word great above all Your name. In the day I called, and You answered me; You made me bold in my soul **with** strength.*

"I will bow down toward the temple of Your holiness." The temple was not yet built in David's day, so "temple" here means God's holy house: the tent where the ark was kept, or His heavenly temple. Daniel in Babylon would later pray facing Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10).

"And give thanks to Your name for Your steadfast love and for Your faithfulness." Steadfast love is God's loyal covenant love, the Hebrew hesed (see Psalm 77). Faithfulness is His reliability: He does what He says. These two words come together often in the Psalms.

"For You have made Your word great above all Your name." This is a hard line, and translators handle it differently. Most take it to mean that God has kept His promise in a way that went beyond anything David had known of Him before. His word, His promise, has been shown greater than even His reputation. God did more than David expected.

"In the day I called, and You answered me; You made me bold in my soul with strength." God didn't necessarily take away the trouble at once, but He made David strong inside. Sometimes God's answer to prayer is courage. Paul prayed three times for his thorn to be removed and was told God's grace was enough for him (2 Corinthians 12:9).

138:4-5 *All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, LORD, for they have heard the words of Your mouth. And they will sing of the ways of the LORD, for great **is** the glory of the LORD.*

"All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, LORD, for they have heard the words of Your mouth." David looks ahead. One day the rulers of the earth will hear what God has said and thank Him. "And they will sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD."

This has begun as the gospel goes to all nations. It will be complete when Jesus returns and reigns, and the kings of the earth bring their glory into His city (Revelation 21:24; Psalm 72:11). The God who answers one man's prayer is the God the whole world will one day praise.

138:6 *For the LORD **is** exalted, and the lowly He sees; and the lofty He knows from a distance.*

"For the LORD is exalted, and the lowly He sees." Here is a wonderful truth. The higher God is, the more we might expect Him to ignore little people. The opposite is true. He is exalted, and He looks down to see the lowly. Isaiah says the same: the High and Lifted-Up One dwells with the contrite and humble in spirit (Isaiah 57:15).

"And the lofty He knows from a distance." He sees the proud too, but from far off. He keeps His distance from them. James 4:6 says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. If you feel small and unnoticed, God sees you. If you feel proud and self-sufficient, God sees you too, from a distance.

138:7 *If I walk in the midst of distress, You preserve me alive; against the anger of my enemies You stretch out Your hand, and Your right **hand** saves me.*

"If I walk in the midst of distress, You preserve me alive." David does not expect a life free from trouble. He expects to walk right through the middle of it. But God will keep him alive in it.

"Against the anger of my enemies You stretch out Your hand, and Your right hand saves me." God's right hand is His hand of strength. He reaches out between David and those who are angry with him.

Psalm 23:4 says something similar: even walking through the valley of deep darkness, we need not fear, because God is with us. God's promise is not that we will avoid the valley but that we will not walk it alone.

138:8 *The LORD will complete **it** for me; LORD, Your steadfast love **is** forever; do not abandon the works of Your hands.*

"The LORD will complete it for me." God finishes what He starts. Whatever purpose He has for David, He will see it through. Paul was sure of the same thing: He who began a good work in you will complete it (Philippians 1:6).

"LORD, Your steadfast love is forever." That is the refrain of Psalm 136 (Volume 1), and the reason God will complete His work. His love never runs out.

"Do not abandon the works of Your hands." David is confident, and he still prays. Confidence in God's promises doesn't stop prayer. It fuels it. We are the works of His hands. We can ask Him not to let go of what He has made, and we can be sure He hears.

Psalm 138 Summary

In Psalm 138 David gives thanks to the LORD with all his heart and sings His praises boldly before the gods. He bows toward God's holy temple and thanks Him for His steadfast love and faithfulness, because God answered when he called and made him strong in his soul. He looks ahead to the day when all the kings of the earth will praise the LORD's glory. The exalted LORD sees the lowly but knows the proud from far away. Even in the middle of trouble, God will keep David alive and save him with His right hand. David ends confident that the LORD will complete His purpose for him, and he prays that God will not abandon the work of His hands.

Psalm 138 Study Questions

1. How does David say he will give thanks to the LORD? (138:1)

2. What two things about God does David give thanks for? (138:2)

3. What happened on the day David called? (138:3)

4. Who will give thanks to the LORD, and why? (138:4)

5. Whom does the exalted LORD see, and how does He know the lofty? (138:6)

6. What does God do for David when he walks in the middle of trouble? (138:7)

7. What is David sure the LORD will do, and what does he still pray? (138:8)

8. Has God ever answered your prayer by making you "bold in my soul with strength" instead of taking the trouble away? What happened?

9. What do verse 6 and James 4:6 teach about the way God treats the humble and the proud? Which do you find harder to live out?

10. How does Philippians 1:6 add to verse 8? Where do you need to trust God to finish what He started in you?

Psalm 140: Rescue Me from the Man of Violence

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

140:1-5 Rescue me, LORD, from an evil man; from a man of violence preserve me, who plan evil things in ***the*** heart; every day they stir up wars. They sharpen their tongue like a serpent; the venom of a viper ***is*** under their lips. Selah. Keep me, LORD, from the hands of the wicked; from a man of violence preserve me, who have planned to trip up my steps. The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords; they have spread a net beside ***the*** track; snares they have set for me. Selah.

140:6-8 I say to the LORD, "You ***are*** my God; give ear, LORD, to the voice of my supplications. GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in ***the*** day of weaponry. Do not grant, LORD, the desires of the wicked; do not promote his plot; they would be exalted." Selah.

140:9-13 ***As for*** the head of those surrounding me, let the mischief of their lips cover them. Let burning coals be dropped on them; into the fire let Him make them fall, into pits; they will not rise. Let a man of tongue not be established in the land; ***as for*** a man of violence, let evil hunt him with thrusts. I know that the LORD will execute the cause of the afflicted, the justice of the needy. Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your name; the upright will dwell with Your presence.

Psalm 140 Preview

In Psalm 140 David is surrounded by violent men and liars. They plan evil, stir up fights, sharpen their tongues like snakes and set traps for his feet. He asks the LORD to rescue him and keep him safe. Then he says the words that hold everything together: "You are my God."

The last part of the psalm asks God to turn the enemies' own evil back on their heads. These are hard lines, and we will look at them honestly. But the psalm ends in calm confidence. The LORD will defend the afflicted, and the upright will live in His presence.

Psalm 140 Study

140:1-3 *Rescue me, LORD, from an evil man; from a man of violence preserve me, who plan evil things in* ***the*** *heart; every day they stir up wars. They sharpen their tongue like a serpent; the venom of a viper* ***is*** *under their lips. Selah.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David." The choirmaster led the music in worship (see Psalm 75), so this prayer was meant to be sung by God's people. We aren't told when David wrote it. It fits the years when Saul hunted him and men like Doeg spread lies about him (1 Samuel 22:9-10), or the time of Absalom's rebellion.

"Rescue me, LORD, from an evil man; from a man of violence preserve me." David names two things about his enemy: he is evil inside and violent outside. "Who plan evil things in the heart; every day they stir up wars." They plot all day long. Some people go looking for a fight.

"They sharpen their tongue like a serpent; the venom of a viper is under their lips." A snake's tongue flicks out before it strikes. These men use their words like a snake's bite, quick and poisonous. Slander, threats and lies can do as much damage as a sword.

"Selah." Selah is a musical term of uncertain meaning, probably a pause (see Psalm 75).

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 3:13, in his chain of verses showing that all people are under sin: "the venom of asps is under their lips." He applies David's words about his enemies to the whole human race, Jew and Gentile. That is sobering. Our own tongues have the same poison in them. James says no one can tame the tongue; it is "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). Only Christ can make us new and put new words in our mouths.

New Testament links: Romans 3:13 (quoted); James 3:8 (alluded to)

140:4-5 *Keep me, LORD, from the hands of the wicked; from a man of violence preserve me, who have planned to trip up my steps. The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords; they have spread a net beside **the** track; snares they have set for me. Selah.*

"Keep me, LORD, from the hands of the wicked; from a man of violence preserve me, who have planned to trip up my steps." The prayer repeats itself, the way people in danger repeat themselves. The enemy's aim is to make David stumble and fall.

"The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords; they have spread a net beside the track; snares they have set for me. Selah." These are a hunter's tools: a hidden trap, cords, a net and snares. The enemies are not out in the open. They plan secretly and wait.

Have you ever felt that someone was waiting for you to slip? It might be at work, in a family fight or in a church conflict. David brings it to God instead of laying traps of his own.

140:6-8 *I say to the LORD, "You **are** my God; give ear, LORD, to the voice of my supplications. GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in **the** day of weaponry. Do not grant, LORD, the desires of the wicked; do not promote his plot; they would be exalted." Selah.*

"I say to the LORD, You are my God; give ear, LORD, to the voice of my supplications." Everything turns on this. With enemies on every side, David doesn't boast in his own strength. He says, "You are my God." A supplication is a humble, earnest request.

"GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of weaponry." In the SLB, "GOD" in capitals stands for God's personal name, and "Lord" means Master (see the Overview). David calls Him the strength of his salvation. "You have covered my head" is the picture of a helmet in battle. On the day the weapons came out, God was David's helmet. Paul tells us to take "the helmet of salvation" (Ephesians 6:17).

"Do not grant, LORD, the desires of the wicked; do not promote his plot; they would be exalted. Selah." David asks God not to let the plan succeed. If it did, the wicked would grow proud and others would learn that evil pays.

140:9-11 ***As for*** *the head of those surrounding me, let the mischief of their lips cover them. Let burning coals be dropped on them; into the fire let Him make them fall, into pits; they will not rise. Let a man of tongue not be established in the land;* ***as for*** *a man of violence, let evil hunt him with thrusts.*

Now come the hard lines. "As for the head of those surrounding me, let the mischief of their lips cover them." God covered David's head (verse 7). David asks that the enemies' heads be covered with their own trouble, that the evil they spoke come back on them.

"Let burning coals be dropped on them; into the fire let Him make them fall, into pits; they will not rise." Fire from above, like Sodom (Genesis 19:24), and pits below. The enemies spread a net and dug traps (verse 5). David asks that they fall into their own kind of pit.

"Let a man of tongue not be established in the land; as for a man of violence, let evil hunt him with thrusts." A "man of tongue" is a slanderer. David asks that the liar have no lasting place in the land and that the evil the violent man chased after would turn and chase him.

How should we read these words? First, David does not take revenge. He has had chances to kill his enemies before (1 Samuel 24 and 26) and refused. Here he hands them over to God. Second, he asks for justice that fits the crime: let them reap what they sowed. That is what God promises to do (Galatians 6:7). Third, he is praying for God's justice to be seen in the land, so that the violent do not win and the afflicted are not crushed (verse 12).

And yet as believers in Jesus we pray with more light. Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22 and tells us to feed a hungry enemy, saying that in doing so we "heap coals of fire on his head" (Romans 12:20). The coals in Paul's verse are the burning shame that kindness can bring, which may lead an enemy to repent. Jesus told us to "love your enemies" and to "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you" (Matthew 5:44). We can still ask God to stop the violent and bring the liar to justice. But our first hope for our enemies should be that they turn to God. Saul of Tarsus was once a man of violence against the church, and God saved him (1 Timothy 1:13). (For more on lines like these, see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms.)

140:12-13 *I know that the LORD will execute the cause of the afflicted, the justice of the needy. Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your name; the upright will dwell with Your presence.*

"I know that the LORD will execute the cause of the afflicted, the justice of the needy." Now David speaks with certainty. "I know." God takes up the case of the poor and the oppressed like a lawyer defending a client. Whoever is helpless and wronged has the best Advocate there is.

"Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your name; the upright will dwell with Your presence." The psalm ends where David wants to be: with God. The wicked will not be established in the land (verse 11), but the upright will dwell in God's presence. That is the final answer to every violent man and every lying tongue. In the end, God's people will live with Him forever, and they will give thanks.

Psalm 140 Summary

In Psalm 140 David asks the LORD to rescue him from evil and violent men who plot trouble and use their tongues like poisonous snakes. They have set traps, nets and snares for his feet. David declares, "You are my God," and calls on the Lord GOD who covered his head in battle. He asks God not to let the plans of the wicked succeed, and to let their own evil come back on them. He ends with confidence that the LORD will uphold the cause of the afflicted and that the upright will live in His presence. Paul uses verse 3 to show that all people are under sin (Romans 3:13).

Psalm 140 Study Questions

1. How does David describe the men he wants to be rescued from? (140:1-2)

2. What are their tongues and lips compared to? (140:3)

3. What tools have the proud used to try to catch David? (140:5)

4. What does David say to the LORD in verse 6?

5. What did God do for David "in the day of weaponry"? (140:7)

6. What does David know the LORD will do? (140:12)

7. Where will the upright dwell? (140:13)

8. Paul uses verse 3 to describe all of us (Romans 3:13). How have you seen the "venom" of the tongue in your own words?

9. How should a Christian read verses 9-11 in light of Romans 12:20 and Matthew 5:44?

10. Is there someone who has hurt you whom you need to hand over to God? What would it look like to pray for that person this week?

Psalm 141: Let My Prayer Rise Like Incense

Scripture

A psalm of David.

141:1-4 LORD, I call out to You; hurry to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to You. Let my prayer be established ***as*** incense before You, the lifting up of my palms ***as*** an evening offering. Set, LORD, a guard for my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not turn my heart to an evil thing, to practice practices in wickedness with men who work iniquity; and I will not eat of their delicacies.

141:5-7 Let a righteous ***one*** strike me: steadfast love; and let him rebuke me: oil for the head; let my head not refuse ***it***. For still my prayer ***is*** against their evil deeds. Their judges have been thrown down by the sides of the rock, and they will hear my words, for they are pleasant. As one plowing and breaking up the earth, our bones have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol.

141:8-10 For to You, GOD the Lord, ***are*** my eyes; in You I take refuge; do not lay bare my soul. Keep me from the hands of the trap ***that*** they have laid for me, and the snares of those who work iniquity. Let the wicked fall into his nets together, while I, I pass by.

Psalm 141 Preview

Psalm 141 is an evening prayer. David asks that his prayer rise before God like the incense the priests burned each evening at the tabernacle. Then he prays something few of us think to pray: guard my mouth, and don't let my heart turn toward evil. He knows the danger is not only outside him. It is inside too.

He welcomes the correction of a righteous friend, even when it hurts. The middle of the psalm is hard to translate, but the end is clear. His eyes are on the LORD, he takes refuge in Him and he asks to be kept from the traps the wicked have set.

Psalm 141 Study

141:1-2 *LORD, I call out to You; hurry to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to You. Let my prayer be established **as** incense before You, the lifting up of my palms **as** an evening offering.*

The heading reads, "A psalm of David." We aren't told the occasion. Some connect it with the time David spent hiding from Saul, as in the next psalm, or with Absalom's rebellion.

"LORD, I call out to You; hurry to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to You." David is in a hurry. It is not polite, slow prayer. He needs God now.

"Let my prayer be established as incense before You, the lifting up of my palms as an evening offering." Each morning and evening the priests burned sweet incense on the golden altar in the holy place (Exodus 30:7-8), and each evening a lamb was offered with grain (Exodus 29:39-41).

David may have been far from the tabernacle, but he could still pray. He asks God to receive his words like incense and his lifted hands like the evening sacrifice.

Revelation shows that this is how heaven sees our prayers. The elders around the throne hold "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8). An angel offers incense "with the prayers of all the saints" on the golden altar, and the smoke goes up before God (Revelation 8:3-4). Your prayers, even short, tired ones at the end of the day, rise before God like sweet incense. He does not forget them.

New Testament links: Revelation 5:8 (alluded to); Revelation 8:3 (alluded to); Revelation 8:4 (alluded to)

141:3-4 *Set, LORD, a guard for my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not turn my heart to an evil thing, to practice practices in wickedness with men who work iniquity; and I will not eat of their delicacies.*

"Set, LORD, a guard for my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." In Psalm 140, David's enemies had poison on their tongues. Now he knows his own tongue needs guarding too. He asks God to post a guard at the door of his mouth, like a soldier at a city gate who decides what goes in and out.

When we are under attack, it is easy to answer with angry words. James says, "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19). A good prayer before a hard meeting or a tense conversation is this one: Lord, guard my mouth.

"Do not turn my heart to an evil thing, to practice practices in wickedness with men who work iniquity; and I will not eat of their delicacies." David knows the temptation to join the wicked. Their "delicacies" are the rich food at their tables, the comforts and pleasures that come with going along. It's often not the threats of evil people that pull us in but their invitations. Daniel refused the king's rich food in Babylon (Daniel 1:8), and David asks God to keep him from wanting it in the first place. Jesus taught us to pray, "And do not lead us into temptation" (Matthew 6:13).

141:5 *Let a righteous **one** strike me: steadfast love; and let him rebuke me: oil for the head; let my head not refuse **it**. For still my prayer **is** against their evil deeds.*

"Let a righteous one strike me: steadfast love; and let him rebuke me: oil for the head; let my head not refuse it." David would rather be corrected by a godly friend than flattered at the table of the wicked. A rebuke from a righteous person feels like a blow, but it is really kindness, steadfast love. It is like the oil a host poured on a guest's head to refresh him. Proverbs says, "Faithful are the wounds of one who loves" (Proverbs 27:6).

"Let my head not refuse it." That is the hard part. Most of us don't like being corrected. A wise believer asks for it, and receives it.

"For still my prayer is against their evil deeds." Even while he welcomes correction from the righteous, he keeps praying against the deeds of the wicked.

141:6-7 *Their judges have been thrown down by the sides of the rock, and they will hear my words, for they are pleasant. As one plowing and breaking up the earth, our bones have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol.*

These two verses are the hardest in the psalm to translate, and Bible teachers read them in different ways. "Their judges have been thrown down by the sides of the rock, and they will hear my words, for they are pleasant." One reading is that when the wicked leaders fall, their followers will finally listen to David's words and find them good. Another is that the leaders will be thrown down from a cliff as judgment, and only then will people see that David was speaking the truth.

"As one plowing and breaking up the earth, our bones have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol." Sheol is the grave, the place of the dead (see Psalm 86). The picture is of ground broken up by a plow, with clods scattered everywhere. Some read this as David's own people, close to death, their bones lying at the edge of the grave. Others read it as describing the fallen judges. Either way, it shows how close death felt.

141:8-10 *For to You, GOD the Lord, **are** my eyes; in You I take refuge; do not lay bare my soul. Keep me from the hands of the trap **that** they have laid for me, and the snares of those who work iniquity. Let the wicked fall into his nets together, while I, I pass by.*

"For to You, GOD the Lord, are my eyes; in You I take refuge." After the dark picture of verse 7, David looks up. Whatever is happening around him, his eyes are on God. "Do not lay bare my soul." He means: don't leave me exposed and defenseless. Don't pour out my life.

"Keep me from the hands of the trap that they have laid for me, and the snares of those who work iniquity." The traps of Psalm 140 are still there.

"Let the wicked fall into his nets together, while I, I pass by." David asks that the wicked be caught in their own nets while he walks safely past. As in Psalm 140, he asks God to let evil come back on those who planned it, and he leaves it to God. Haman prepared a gallows for Mordecai and was hanged on it himself (Esther 7:10). God often lets the wicked fall into the pits they dig.

Psalm 141 Summary

In Psalm 141 David calls on the LORD to hurry to him and asks that his prayer rise like incense and his lifted hands be received like the evening sacrifice. He asks God to guard his mouth and keep his heart from turning to evil or sharing the delicacies of evildoers. He welcomes the rebuke of a righteous person as kindness, and keeps praying against the deeds of the wicked. Though death seems near, his eyes are on GOD the Lord, his refuge. He asks to be kept from the traps of the wicked and that they fall into their own nets while he passes by safely. Revelation shows our prayers rising like incense before God's throne.

Psalm 141 Study Questions

1. What two things does David ask God to receive like incense and an evening offering? (141:2)

2. What does David ask God to set over his mouth? (141:3)

3. What does David ask God not to let his heart do? (141:4)

4. How does David describe a rebuke from a righteous person? (141:5)

5. Where are David's eyes, and where does he take refuge? (141:8)

6. What does David ask to happen to the wicked, and what will he do? (141:10)

7. How do Revelation 5:8 and 8:3-4 change the way you think about your prayers?

8. When are you most tempted to say things you shouldn't? How could you pray verse 3 in those moments?

9. Why are the "delicacies" of the wicked sometimes more dangerous than their threats?

10. How do you usually respond when someone corrects you? Who is a righteous friend you could ask to speak honestly into your life?

Psalm 142: A Prayer from the Cave

Scripture

A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A prayer.

142:1-4 ***With*** my voice I cry out to the LORD; ***with*** my voice I plead for favor to the LORD. I pour out my complaint before Him; my distress before Him I declare. When my spirit faints within me, and You, You know my path. In the way ***in*** which I walk they have hidden a snare for me. Look ***to the*** right and see, and there is no one who recognizes me; refuge has perished from me; there is no one who seeks after my soul.

142:5-7 I cry out to You, LORD; I say, "You ***are*** my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Give attention to my cry, for I have been brought very low; deliver me from my pursuers, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out from prison, to give thanks to Your name; the righteous will surround me, for You will deal bountifully with me.

Psalm 142 Preview

Psalm 142 is a prayer from a cave. David is hiding from Saul, hunted, alone and worn out. He pours out his complaint to God out loud. He looks around for someone who cares and finds no one. So he turns to the LORD and says, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

The cave feels like a prison, but David ends with hope. He asks God to bring him out so he can give thanks, and he pictures the righteous gathering around him. Anyone who has felt trapped and forgotten can pray this psalm.

Psalm 142 Study

142:1-2 ***With*** *my voice I cry out to the LORD;* ***with*** *my voice I plead for favor to the LORD. I pour out my complaint before Him; my distress before Him I declare.*

The heading reads, "A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A prayer." A Maskil is a psalm that teaches or gives insight, though the exact meaning is uncertain (see Psalm 74). The cave is most likely the cave of Adullam, where David hid when he first fled from Saul (1 Samuel 22:1), or the cave at En-gedi, where Saul came in while David and his men hid deep inside (1 Samuel 24:3). Psalm 57 also comes from "the cave."

"With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for favor to the LORD." David prays out loud. Sometimes silent prayer is not enough. In a cave, alone, he cries to God with his voice.

"I pour out my complaint before Him; my distress before Him I declare." To pour out is to empty everything, holding nothing back. A complaint here is not grumbling against God. It is telling God honestly what is wrong. God invites that kind of prayer. Peter tells us to cast all our anxiety on Him, because He cares about us (1 Peter 5:7).

142:3-4 *When my spirit faints within me, and You, You know my path. In the way **in** which I walk they have hidden a snare for me. Look **to the** right and see, and there is no one who recognizes me; refuge has perished from me; there is no one who seeks after my soul.*

"When my spirit faints within me, and You, You know my path." David is exhausted inside. But even when he can't see a way forward, God knows the path. "You, You" is emphatic: You, God, know it, even when I don't.

"In the way in which I walk they have hidden a snare for me." His enemies are everywhere. Every road might hold a trap.

"Look to the right and see, and there is no one who recognizes me." The right side was where a defender or an advocate stood in court, or a bodyguard in battle. David looks to his right side and the place is empty. No one will even admit to knowing him. "Refuge has perished from me; there is no one who seeks after my soul." No one cares whether he lives or dies.

Loneliness is one of the hardest kinds of suffering. If you feel that no one sees you or cares, David has been there. So has Jesus. On the night of His arrest, all the disciples left Him and fled (Matthew 26:56). Paul wrote near the end of his life that at his first defense no one stood with him, "But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me" (2 Timothy 4:16-17). If you are in that place right now, please reach out to a pastor or a believer you trust. God often sends His help through His people.

142:5 *I cry out to You, LORD; I say, "You **are** my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."*

"I cry out to You, LORD; I say, You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Here the psalm turns. There was no refuge on his right side (verse 4), so David says God is his refuge. He had nobody, so he says God is his portion. A portion was a share of land or food, what belonged to you. The priests of Israel had no land of their own because the LORD was their portion (Numbers 18:20). David has lost his home, his position and his friends. But he has God, and God is enough.

"In the land of the living" means here and now, in this life. David doesn't only hope for God after death. He trusts God to be his portion in the cave.

142:6-7 *Give attention to my cry, for I have been brought very low; deliver me from my pursuers, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out from prison, to give thanks to Your name; the righteous will surround me, for You will deal bountifully with me.*

"Give attention to my cry, for I have been brought very low; deliver me from my pursuers, for they are stronger than I." David admits his weakness. Saul had an army. David had a cave. He doesn't pretend to be strong.

"Bring my soul out from prison, to give thanks to Your name." The cave has become a prison to him. He asks to be brought out, and his reason is to give thanks. He wants freedom so he can praise God.

"The righteous will surround me, for You will deal bountifully with me." Now he looks ahead. He was alone, and he sees a day when God's people will gather around him. That happened. While David was at Adullam, his family came to him, and about four hundred men gathered to him (1 Samuel 22:1-2). Years later he was king, surrounded by the people of God.

The psalm ends before the rescue, but it ends in hope. God will "deal bountifully," that is, generously. The cave is not the end of the story.

Psalm 142 Summary

Psalm 142 is David's prayer from the cave while he hid from Saul. He cries aloud to the LORD and pours out his complaint before Him. His spirit faints, traps lie on his path, and when he looks for someone to stand at his right hand, no one cares for him. Then he cries that the LORD is his refuge and his portion in the land of the living. He asks God to hear him because he is very low, to rescue him from pursuers too strong for him and to bring him out of his prison so he can give thanks. He ends confident that the righteous will gather around him because God will deal generously with him.

People and Places

- The cave: most likely the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1) or the cave at En-gedi (1 Samuel 24:3), where David hid from Saul.
- Portion: a share or inheritance; to say God is my portion is to say He is what I have and all I need.

Psalm 142 Study Questions

1. Where was David when he prayed this psalm, according to the heading?

2. How does David pray to the LORD, and what does he pour out? (142:1-2)

3. What does God know, even when David's spirit faints? (142:3)

4. What does David see when he looks to his right? (142:4)

5. What two things does David call the LORD in verse 5?

6. Why does David want to be brought out of prison? (142:7)

7. What is the difference between pouring out a complaint to God and grumbling against Him?

8. Have you ever felt that no one cared for your soul? How do Matthew 26:56 and 2 Timothy 4:16-17 help in that place?

9. What does it mean for you that God is your "portion in the land of the living"?

10. Who in your life might be in a "cave" right now? How could you be one of the righteous who surround them?

Psalm 143: Teach Me to Do Your Will

Scripture

A psalm of David.

143:1-6 LORD, hear my prayer; give ear to my supplications; in Your faithfulness answer me, in Your righteousness. And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for no one living is righteous before You. For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in dark places like those dead long ago. And my spirit faints within me; my heart is appalled in my midst. I have remembered the days from of old; I have meditated on all Your deeds; on the work of Your hands I muse. I have spread out my hands to You; my soul ***is*** like an exhausted land to You. Selah.

143:7-12 Hurry, answer me, LORD; my spirit is exhausted; do not hide Your face from me, and I will be like those who go down ***to the*** pit. Make me hear Your steadfast love in the morning, for in You I have trusted; make known to me the way in which I should go, for to You I lift up my soul. Deliver me from my enemies, LORD; in You I have covered ***myself***. Teach me to do Your will, for You ***are*** my God; let Your good Spirit lead me in a land of level ground. For the sake of Your name, LORD, You will preserve me alive; in Your righteousness You will bring my soul out of distress. And in Your steadfast love You will cut off my enemies, and You will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I ***am*** Your servant.

Psalm 143 Preview

Psalm 143 is the last of the seven penitential psalms, the psalms of repentance (see Psalm 102). David is crushed. His enemy has driven him into darkness, his spirit is fainting and his heart is numb. Yet before he asks for rescue, he asks God not to judge him, because he knows no one living is righteous before God. He comes on the ground of God's faithfulness, not his own goodness.

Then he does three things worth copying. He remembers what God has done. He reaches out his hands to God like dry ground thirsting for rain. And he asks not only to be rescued but to be taught: "Teach me to do Your will." The psalm ends with quiet confidence that God will bring him out of trouble for His name's sake.

Psalm 143 Study

143:1-2 *LORD, hear my prayer; give ear to my supplications; in Your faithfulness answer me, in Your righteousness. And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for no one living is righteous before You.*

The heading reads, "A psalm of David." We aren't told the occasion. The Greek Old Testament adds that it was when Absalom his son was pursuing him, but that note is not in the Hebrew heading.

"LORD, hear my prayer; give ear to my supplications; in Your faithfulness answer me, in Your righteousness." David appeals to who God is. God's faithfulness is His loyalty to His promises. His

righteousness here means His commitment to do what is right and to keep His covenant, which includes saving His people.

"And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for no one living is righteous before You." This is why Psalm 143 is counted with the penitential psalms. David is in trouble because of his enemy, but he knows that if God put him on trial, he would lose too. He doesn't ask to be saved because he is innocent. He asks God not to judge him at all, because no one could stand. Psalm 130:3 asks the same question (Volume 1).

Paul builds on this verse twice. In Romans 3:20 he writes that "by works of law no flesh will be justified before Him." In Galatians 2:16 he says the same and adds that we are justified "by faith of Christ." David knew he could not be declared righteous by his own record. Paul tells us how God does it: through faith in Jesus, who bore our judgment so that we could be declared right with God (Romans 3:23-24). Here is real comfort for anyone who feels unworthy to pray. None of us comes to God on our own record. We come because of His faithfulness and His grace.

New Testament links: Romans 3:20 (alluded to); Galatians 2:16 (alluded to)

143:3-4 *For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in dark places like those dead long ago. And my spirit faints within me; my heart is appalled in my midst.*

"For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in dark places like those dead long ago." David feels as good as dead, shut up in darkness like someone buried long ago and forgotten.

"And my spirit faints within me; my heart is appalled in my midst." His spirit is worn out (the same words as Psalm 142:3), and his heart is stunned, numb, unable to feel anything but dismay.

Some readers know this place. It may come from an enemy, as with David. It may come from grief, illness or depression. The Bible does not tell us to pretend we feel fine. David says plainly how low he is. If that is where you are, you are not a bad believer. Keep praying, even if all you can say is "LORD, hear my prayer." And please don't carry it alone. Talk to a pastor or a trusted believer, and get medical help if you need it. If you are in danger, get emergency help right away.

143:5-6 *I have remembered the days from of old; I have meditated on all Your deeds; on the work of Your hands I muse. I have spread out my hands to You; my soul **is** like an exhausted land to You. Selah.*

"I have remembered the days from of old; I have meditated on all Your deeds; on the work of Your hands I muse." When he cannot feel anything, David remembers. He thinks back on what God has done: the exodus, the wilderness, the many times God came through. Psalm 77 does the same thing. Feelings change, but God's past faithfulness is a fact.

"I have spread out my hands to You; my soul is like an exhausted land to You. Selah." Picture ground in a long drought, cracked and dry. David's soul is like that, and he holds out his hands to

God the way dry land waits for rain. Psalm 63:1 speaks of a soul thirsting for God "in a dry and weary land without water." Selah is a pause (see Psalm 75).

143:7-8 *Hurry, answer me, LORD; my spirit is exhausted; do not hide Your face from me, and I will be like those who go down* ***to the*** *pit. Make me hear Your steadfast love in the morning, for in You I have trusted; make known to me the way in which I should go, for to You I lift up my soul.*

"Hurry, answer me, LORD; my spirit is exhausted; do not hide Your face from me, and I will be like those who go down to the pit." The pit is the grave. If God turns away, David feels he will die.

"Make me hear Your steadfast love in the morning, for in You I have trusted." Many hard nights end with a new morning. David asks that the first thing he hears when he wakes up be God's steadfast love. Lamentations says God's compassions are "new in the mornings" (Lamentations 3:23).

"Make known to me the way in which I should go, for to You I lift up my soul." He asks for direction. Troubled people often don't know which way to turn. David lifts his soul to God and asks Him to show the way.

143:9-10 *Deliver me from my enemies, LORD; in You I have covered* ***myself****. Teach me to do Your will, for You* ***are*** *my God; let Your good Spirit lead me in a land of level ground.*

"Deliver me from my enemies, LORD; in You I have covered myself." David has run to God and hidden himself in Him for shelter.

"Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God." This may be the most important prayer in the psalm. David doesn't only want to be rescued. He wants to be changed. He wants to learn to do what God wants. Jesus prayed in the garden, "not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

"Let Your good Spirit lead me in a land of level ground." David asks God's good Spirit to lead him. Nehemiah 9:20 says God gave Israel His good Spirit to instruct them in the wilderness. Level ground is the opposite of the dark, rough places of verse 3, a smooth road where he can walk without stumbling. Believers in Christ have the Holy Spirit living in them, who guides us into the truth (John 16:13). We can pray this verse every morning.

143:11-12 *For the sake of Your name, LORD, You will preserve me alive; in Your righteousness You will bring my soul out of distress. And in Your steadfast love You will cut off my enemies, and You will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I* ***am*** *Your servant.*

"For the sake of Your name, LORD, You will preserve me alive; in Your righteousness You will bring my soul out of distress." The tone has changed. Earlier David begged God to hurry. Now he says what God "will" do. His confidence rests on God's name, His reputation and character. God saves His people because of who He is.

"And in Your steadfast love You will cut off my enemies, and You will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am Your servant." It may surprise us to hear "steadfast love" and "cut off" in the same breath. But God's love for His servant includes protecting him from those who would

destroy him. David does not take revenge. He leaves his enemies to God. As believers we can ask God to stop those who do evil, while we pray for them as Jesus told us to (Matthew 5:44) and leave the outcome to Him (see the Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

"For I am Your servant." David began the psalm calling himself God's servant (verse 2) and ends the same way. He has no merit to plead. He belongs to God, and that is enough.

Psalm 143 Summary

Psalm 143, the last of the penitential psalms, is David's cry from deep darkness. He asks the LORD to answer him in His faithfulness and righteousness, and not to bring him into judgment, because no one living is righteous before God, a truth Paul builds on in Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16. His enemy has crushed him, and his spirit faints. So he remembers God's works of old and stretches out his hands to God like a thirsty land. He asks to hear God's steadfast love in the morning, to be shown the way to go and to be taught to do God's will, led by God's good Spirit on level ground. He ends confident that for His name's sake the LORD will bring him out of trouble and deal with his enemies, because he is God's servant.

Psalm 143 Study Questions

1. On what two qualities of God does David base his request in verse 1?

2. Why does David ask God not to enter into judgment with him? (143:2)

3. What has the enemy done to David? (143:3)

4. What three things does David do in his darkness in verse 5?

5. What is David's soul like, and what does he do with his hands? (143:6)

6. What does David want to hear in the morning? (143:8)

7. What does David ask God to teach him, and who does he ask to lead him? (143:10)

8. How do Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16 use verse 2? Why is that good news for anyone who feels unworthy to pray?

9. When your feelings are numb or dark, how can remembering what God has done help you? What has He done for you that you can remember?

10. David prays, "Teach me to do Your will." What would it look like for you to pray that honestly this week?

Psalm 144: Blessed Be the LORD, My Rock

Scripture

Of David.

144:1-4 Blessed ***be*** the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle; my steadfast love and my fortress, my high refuge and my deliverer for me, my shield, and in Him I take refuge, who subdues my people under me. LORD, what ***is*** man, that You know him, a son of man, that You consider him? Man is like a breath; his days ***are*** like a passing shadow.

144:5-8 LORD, bend down Your heavens and come down; touch the mountains, and they will smoke. Flash lightning and scatter them; send Your arrows and rout them. Stretch out Your hands from on high; set me free and deliver me from many waters, from the hand of foreign sons, whose mouth speaks falsehood, and their right ***hand is*** a right ***hand*** of deception.

144:9-11 God, a new song I will sing to You; with a harp of ten ***strings*** I will make music to You, who gives deliverance to kings, who sets free David His servant from ***the*** evil sword. Set me free and deliver me from the hand of foreign sons, whose mouth speaks falsehood, and their right ***hand is*** a right ***hand*** of deception;

144:12-15 that our sons ***may be*** like plants grown large in their youth, our daughters like corners carved ***in*** the pattern of a palace; our granaries full, providing from kind to kind; our flocks producing thousands, producing ten thousands in our open places; our cattle loaded; no breach and no going out, and no outcry in our open places. How blessed ***is*** the people for whom ***it is*** thus! How blessed ***is*** the people whose God ***is*** the LORD!

Psalm 144 Preview

Psalm 144 is a king's prayer before battle. David blesses the LORD, his rock, who trains his hands for war. He marvels that God would care about mere man, whose life is like a breath. Then he asks God to come down from heaven in power and rescue him from foreign enemies who lie.

Much of the first half is drawn from Psalm 18 (Volume 2), David's great song of victory, with a line from Psalm 8. The second half promises a new song and then paints a picture of a nation at peace, with strong children, full barns and quiet streets. It ends with one of the best-known lines in the Psalms: "How blessed is the people whose God is the LORD!"

Psalm 144 Study

144:1-2 *Blessed **be** the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle; my steadfast love and my fortress, my high refuge and my deliverer for me, my shield, and in Him I take refuge, who subdues my people under me.*

The heading reads, "Of David." It names David as writer. We don't know which war he had in mind. He fought many, against the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites and others (2 Samuel 8).

"Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle." Psalm 18 says the same thing in fuller form (18:2, 34). David was a great warrior, but he gave the credit to God. The skill in his hands and fingers came from the LORD.

Then comes a list of names for God: "my steadfast love and my fortress, my high refuge and my deliverer for me, my shield, and in Him I take refuge, who subdues my people under me." The word "steadfast love" here is the Hebrew hesed, God's loyal covenant love. It is unusual to call God Himself "my steadfast love," but that is what He was to David. A fortress, a high refuge and a shield are places and things of safety in war. The LORD was all of them.

"Who subdues my people under me." God gave David his kingdom and kept it united under him. A king's authority is a gift from God.

Few of us fight with swords. But all of us face battles, and the same God trains our hands for the work He gives us, whether that work is a job, a family or a ministry.

144:3-4 *LORD, what **is** man, that You know him, a son of man, that You consider him? Man is like a breath; his days **are** like a passing shadow.*

"LORD, what is man, that You know him, a son of man, that You consider him?" This echoes Psalm 8:4 (Volume 1). In Psalm 8, David asked it while looking at the stars. Here he asks it while thinking about how much God has done for him. Why would the God of heaven bother with us?

"Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow." A breath is there and gone, like your breath on a cold morning. A shadow moves and fades as the sun goes down. James asks, "For what is your life? For it is a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14).

Even a king is only a breath. David was not proud of his victories. He was amazed that God would care about him at all. And yet God does. The God who made the stars knows your name, and He sent His Son for people who are only a breath.

144:5-8 *LORD, bend down Your heavens and come down; touch the mountains, and they will smoke. Flash lightning and scatter them; send Your arrows and rout them. Stretch out Your hands from on high; set me free and deliver me from many waters, from the hand of foreign sons, whose mouth speaks falsehood, and their right **hand is** a right **hand** of deception.*

"LORD, bend down Your heavens and come down; touch the mountains, and they will smoke." David asks God to come down in power, as He did at Mount Sinai, when the mountain smoked (Exodus 19:18). Psalm 18:9 describes God doing just that in answer to David's cry.

"Flash lightning and scatter them; send Your arrows and rout them." God's lightning bolts are His arrows (Psalm 18:14). David asks God to fight for him with the weapons of the storm.

"Stretch out Your hands from on high; set me free and deliver me from many waters, from the hand of foreign sons." Many waters are a picture of overwhelming danger (Psalm 18:16). The "foreign sons" are the enemy nations.

"Whose mouth speaks falsehood, and their right hand is a right hand of deception." The right hand was raised to swear an oath, and shaken to make a treaty. These enemies swore oaths and broke them. They could not be trusted.

144:9-11 *God, a new song I will sing to You; with a harp of ten **strings** I will make music to You, who gives deliverance to kings, who sets free David His servant from **the** evil sword. Set me free and deliver me from the hand of foreign sons, whose mouth speaks falsehood, and their right **hand is** a right **hand** of deception;*

"God, a new song I will sing to You; with a harp of ten strings I will make music to You," A new song is a song for a new act of God (see Psalm 96 in Volume 1). The harp of ten strings was a stringed instrument used in worship (Psalm 33:2).

"Who gives deliverance to kings, who sets free David His servant from the evil sword." Kings did not save themselves. God saved them. David, the great king, calls himself God's servant.

"Set me free and deliver me from the hand of foreign sons, whose mouth speaks falsehood, and their right hand is a right hand of deception." Verse 11 repeats verses 7-8 almost word for word, like a refrain. The prayer is not finished until God answers.

144:12-15 *that our sons **may be** like plants grown large in their youth, our daughters like corners carved **in** the pattern of a palace; our granaries full, providing from kind to kind; our flocks producing thousands, producing ten thousands in our open places; our cattle loaded; no breach and no going out, and no outcry in our open places. How blessed **is** the people for whom **it is** thus! How blessed **is** the people whose God **is** the LORD!*

Now the psalm paints the picture of what God's rescue will bring. "That our sons may be like plants grown large in their youth." Young men growing strong, like healthy trees. "Our daughters like corners carved in the pattern of a palace." Young women as beautiful and graceful as the carved corner pillars of a palace.

"Our granaries full, providing from kind to kind." The storehouses are full of every kind of food. "Our flocks producing thousands, producing ten thousands in our open places." The sheep multiply in the fields.

"Our cattle loaded." The cattle are heavy with young, or loaded with the harvest. "No breach and no going out, and no outcry in our open places." No breach in the city wall, no going out into exile or captivity and no cry of distress in the streets. It is a picture of peace and plenty.

"How blessed is the people for whom it is thus! How blessed is the people whose God is the LORD!" The first line praises the blessings. The second line names the source. Full barns are good, but the real blessing is having the LORD as your God. Psalm 33:12 says the same. Without Him, all the rest would be empty.

The prophets describe this same kind of peace and plenty in the kingdom Messiah will bring, when each man sits under his vine and fig tree and no one makes him afraid (Micah 4:4;

Isaiah 65:21). Many see Psalm 144:12-15 as a taste of that day. Until then, the deepest blessing is already ours if the LORD is our God.

Psalm 144 Summary

In Psalm 144 David blesses the LORD, his rock, who trains his hands for war and is his steadfast love, fortress, refuge, deliverer and shield. He marvels that God cares for man, whose life is like a breath and a passing shadow. He asks God to come down in power, as in Psalm 18, and rescue him from lying foreign enemies. He promises a new song to the God who gives victory to kings, and describes the blessings God's rescue will bring: strong sons, graceful daughters, full barns, growing flocks and peaceful streets. The psalm ends, "How blessed is the people whose God is the LORD!"

Psalm 144 Study Questions

1. What does David say the LORD trains his hands and fingers for? (144:1)

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

3. What question does David ask in verse 3, and what does he compare man to in verse 4?

4. What does David ask God to do to the heavens and the mountains? (144:5)

5. What is wrong with the mouths and right hands of the foreign enemies? (144:8, 11)

6. What blessings does David describe for the sons, daughters, granaries and flocks? (144:12-14)

7. What two kinds of people does verse 15 call blessed?

8. How do verses 3-4 keep a successful person humble? How do they comfort a person who feels small?

9. Psalm 144 borrows from Psalm 18 and Psalm 8. How can old words of Scripture become your own new prayer?

10. Verse 15 says the true blessing is having the LORD as your God. How would your life look different if you believed that more fully than you believe in your possessions?

Psalm 147: He Heals the Brokenhearted

Scripture

147:1-6 Praise ***the*** LORD! For ***it is*** good to sing praises to our God; for ***it is*** pleasant; praise ***is*** fitting. The LORD ***is*** the builder of Jerusalem; the banished ones of Israel He gathers, who heals the broken of heart and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; to all of them He calls names. Great ***is*** our Lord and abundant in power; to His understanding there is no number. The LORD relieves the humble, bringing the wicked low to the ground.

147:7-11 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God with ***the*** lyre, who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass sprout ***on the*** mountains, who gives to the animal its food, to the young of the raven, which call out. Not in the strength of the horse does He delight; not in the legs of the man does He take pleasure. The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope for His steadfast love.

147:12-20 Extol the LORD, Jerusalem; praise your God, Zion! For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your sons in your midst, who makes your territory peace; ***with*** the fat of wheat He satisfies you, who sends His utterance ***to the*** earth; His word runs very quickly. Who gives snow like wool; frost like ashes He scatters. He throws His ice like crumbs; before His cold who can stand? He sends His word and melts them; He makes His wind blow; waters flow. He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not done so for any nation, and ***His*** judgments they have not known. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 147 Preview

Psalm 147 is one of the five Hallelujah psalms that close the book (Psalms 146 to 150). It is a song in three stanzas, and each one starts with a fresh call to praise. The first praises the God who rebuilds Jerusalem, gathers its exiles and heals the brokenhearted, and who also counts the stars and calls them by name. The second praises the God who sends rain, feeds the animals and delights not in strong horses but in people who fear Him and hope in His love.

The third calls Jerusalem to praise the God who protects its gates, sends snow and ice and melts them with a word, and who has given His word to Israel as to no other nation. The psalm sets the greatness of God beside His tenderness, and it never lets go of either one.

Psalm 147 Study

147:1 *Praise **the** LORD! For **it is** good to sing praises to our God; for **it is** pleasant; praise **is** fitting.*

The psalm has no heading and does not name its writer. It begins and ends with "Praise the LORD!" which is Hallelujah (see Psalm 104). Many think it was written after the return from exile, perhaps for the day the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem were dedicated in Nehemiah's time (Nehemiah 12:27, 43), because it speaks of God building Jerusalem, gathering the exiles and strengthening the bars of its gates.

"For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant; praise is fitting." Praise is good for us, it is pleasant and it is right. God deserves it, and we were made to give it.

147:2-3 *The LORD **is** the builder of Jerusalem; the banished ones of Israel He gathers, who heals the broken of heart and binds up their wounds.*

"The LORD is the builder of Jerusalem; the banished ones of Israel He gathers." The banished ones are the exiles, scattered among the nations. God brings them home and rebuilds their city. He did that after the exile, and the prophets promise He will do it again on a greater scale (Isaiah 11:12; Ezekiel 36:24). I believe God is still gathering His people Israel and will finish it when Messiah reigns.

"Who heals the broken of heart and binds up their wounds." The God who builds cities also bends down to bandage a hurting heart. The exiles came home with grief: lost homes, lost family, lost years. God tends those wounds like a doctor or a nurse.

Isaiah 61:1 uses the same words for the anointed One whom the LORD sent "to bind up the broken of heart." Jesus read that passage in the synagogue at Nazareth and said it was fulfilled in Him (Luke 4:18, 21). If your heart is broken, Jesus is the One who binds it up. He doesn't rush you, and He doesn't despise a crushed heart (Psalm 51:17).

147:4-6 *He counts the number of the stars; to all of them He calls names. Great **is** our Lord and abundant in power; to His understanding there is no number. The LORD relieves the humble, bringing the wicked low to the ground.*

"He counts the number of the stars; to all of them He calls names." Now the psalm lifts our eyes from wounds to the night sky. No one can count the stars. God can, and He has a name for every one (Isaiah 40:26). Putting verse 3 and verse 4 side by side is the point. The God who names billions of stars knows each broken heart. If He knows every star, He knows you.

"Great is our Lord and abundant in power; to His understanding there is no number." His understanding cannot be measured. When we cannot understand what He is doing, He still understands.

"The LORD relieves the humble, bringing the wicked low to the ground." God lifts up the lowly and brings down the proud. The same truth runs through the whole Bible, from Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:7-8) to Mary's (Luke 1:52).

147:7-9 *Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God with **the** lyre, who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass sprout **on the** mountains, who gives to the animal its food, to the young of the raven, which call out.*

"Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God with the lyre," The second stanza begins.

"Who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass sprout on the mountains." Rain is not an accident. God prepares it. In a dry land, every rain was a gift that meant food for the year.

"Who gives to the animal its food, to the young of the raven, which call out." Young ravens squawk loudly in the nest, begging for food. They don't know God, but God hears them. Jesus pointed to this very thing: "Consider the ravens," He said, they do not sow or reap, "and God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than the birds!" (Luke 12:24). If God feeds noisy baby ravens, He will take care of His children.

New Testament links: Luke 12:24 (alluded to)

147:10-11 *Not in the strength of the horse does He delight; not in the legs of the man does He take pleasure. The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope for His steadfast love.*

"Not in the strength of the horse does He delight; not in the legs of the man does He take pleasure." The war horse was the tank of the ancient world, and the strong legs of a soldier or runner were admired by everyone. God is not impressed. Psalm 20:7 says some trust in chariots and horses, but we will remember the name of the LORD.

"The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope for His steadfast love." What delights God is not strength but trust. He takes pleasure in people who stand in awe of Him and hope in His steadfast love (see Psalm 77). That is good news for anyone who feels weak. You don't have to impress God. You only have to trust Him.

147:12-14 *Extol the LORD, Jerusalem; praise your God, Zion! For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your sons in your midst, who makes your territory peace; **with** the fat of wheat He satisfies you,*

"Extol the LORD, Jerusalem; praise your God, Zion!" The third stanza calls the city itself to praise.

"For He has strengthened the bars of your gates." The bars locked the city gates at night. God made them strong, so the city was safe. "He has blessed your sons in your midst." The people inside are blessed.

"Who makes your territory peace; with the fat of wheat He satisfies you." The best wheat, the finest flour. Peace at the borders and bread on the table both come from God.

147:15-18 *who sends His utterance **to the** earth; His word runs very quickly. Who gives snow like wool; frost like ashes He scatters. He throws His ice like crumbs; before His cold who can stand? He sends His word and melts them; He makes His wind blow; waters flow.*

"Who sends His utterance to the earth; His word runs very quickly." God's word is like a swift messenger running to carry out His orders. Paul asks believers to pray that "the word of the Lord may run and be glorified" (2 Thessalonians 3:1). God's Word still runs today, as the gospel spreads to every nation.

New Testament links: 2 Thessalonians 3:1 (alluded to)

"Who gives snow like wool; frost like ashes He scatters." Snow falls soft and white like wool. Frost lies on the ground like a scattering of gray ash. "He throws His ice like crumbs; before His cold who can stand?" Hail comes down like crumbs of bread. Snow is rare in Jerusalem, but it does fall, and it shut the city down then just as it can today.

"He sends His word and melts them; He makes His wind blow; waters flow." God speaks, and the ice melts. He sends the wind, and the streams run again. The same word that commands the weather is the word that runs to the earth in verse 15. Jesus showed He had this same authority when He spoke to the wind and the sea, and they obeyed Him (Matthew 8:27).

147:19-20 *He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not done so for any nation, and **His** judgments they have not known. Praise **the** LORD!*

"He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel." Here is God's greatest gift to Israel. He controls the weather with a word, but to Israel He spoke His law, His promises and His will. "He has not done so for any nation, and His judgments they have not known. Praise the LORD!"

Moses said the same: no great nation has statutes and judgments so righteous (Deuteronomy 4:8). Paul says the Jews were "entrusted with the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2). Through Israel, God gave the Scriptures and the Messiah to the whole world (Romans 9:4-5). Now the gospel goes to every nation, and anyone who believes can know God's Word. If you have a Bible on your shelf, you hold a gift that most people in history never had. Read it, and praise the LORD.

Psalm 147 Summary

Psalm 147 calls God's people to praise Him three times over. The LORD builds Jerusalem, gathers the exiles of Israel and heals the brokenhearted, and He also counts the stars and calls each by name. He lifts the humble and brings down the wicked. He sends rain, makes grass grow and feeds even young ravens, and He delights not in the strength of horses or men but in those who fear Him and hope in His steadfast love. He protects Jerusalem, gives it peace and fine wheat, and rules snow, frost and ice by His word, which runs swiftly. Above all, He has given His word to Israel as to no other nation.

Psalm 147 Study Questions

1. Why is it good to sing praises to God, according to verse 1?

2. What does the LORD do for Jerusalem and for the banished ones of Israel? (147:2)

3. What does God do for the broken of heart? (147:3)

4. What does God do with the stars? (147:4)

5. What does God not delight in, and what does He take pleasure in? (147:10-11)

6. What does God send to the earth, and how fast does it run? (147:15)

7. What has God given Israel that He has not given any other nation? (147:19-20)

8. Why do you think the psalm puts healing broken hearts (verse 3) right next to counting the stars (verse 4)? What does that tell you about God?

9. How does Jesus use the picture of the ravens in Luke 12:24? What worry do you need to bring to God this week?

10. Verse 11 says God takes pleasure in those who hope in His steadfast love. In what are you tempted to put your confidence instead?

Psalm 149: The High Praises of God

Scripture

149:1-4 Praise ***the*** LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, His praise in the assembly of faithful ones. Let Israel rejoice in its Maker; let the sons of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise His name with dancing; with tambourine and lyre let them make music to Him. For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He adorns the humble with salvation.

149:5-9 Let the faithful ones exult in glory; let them shout for joy on their beds. ***Let*** the high praises of God ***be*** in their throat, and a sword of two edges in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, punishments among the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, and their honored ones with shackles of iron, to execute on them the judgment written. This ***is*** glory for all His faithful ones. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 149 Preview

Psalm 149 is the next to last psalm in the book, one of the five Hallelujah psalms at the end (Psalms 146 to 150). Its first half is pure joy. God's faithful people sing a new song, dance, play tambourines and harps and rejoice in their Maker and King, because the LORD takes pleasure in His people and crowns the humble with salvation.

The second half is startling. The same people who sing God's praises hold a two-edged sword, to carry out God's judgment on the nations and bind their kings in chains. That is one of the hard passages of the Psalms. We will look at what it meant for Israel, why it is not a call for believers today to take up the sword and how it points ahead to the day when Christ returns to judge the earth and His saints reign with Him.

Psalm 149 Study

149:1 *Praise **the** LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, His praise in the assembly of faithful ones.*

The psalm has no heading and does not name its writer. It begins and ends with "Praise the LORD!" (Hallelujah; see Psalm 104).

"Sing to the LORD a new song, His praise in the assembly of faithful ones." A new song celebrates a new work of God (see Psalm 96 in Volume 1). The "faithful ones" are God's loyal, godly people, the ones who love Him and keep His covenant. Their praise is not private. It rings out "in the assembly," when God's people gather.

Revelation shows the final new song, sung in heaven to the Lamb who was slain and who purchased people for God from every nation (Revelation 5:9).

149:2-4 *Let Israel rejoice in its Maker; let the sons of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise His name with dancing; with tambourine and lyre let them make music to Him. For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He adorns the humble with salvation.*

"Let Israel rejoice in its Maker; let the sons of Zion be glad in their King." God made Israel. He formed the nation from Abraham and brought it out of Egypt. And He is their King. When the LORD reigns, His people are glad. One day the Son of David will reign from Zion as King over all the earth (see Psalm 132), and this verse will ring out as never before.

"Let them praise His name with dancing; with tambourine and lyre let them make music to Him." Israel's worship was not stiff. Miriam led the women with tambourines and dancing after the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20), and David danced before the LORD when the ark came to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:14). The tambourine was a small hand drum, shaken or struck.

"For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He adorns the humble with salvation." This is the reason for all the joy. God delights in His people. And He "adorns" the humble, that is, He dresses them up and makes them beautiful, with salvation. People the world overlooks, God crowns.

149:5-6 *Let the faithful ones exult in glory; let them shout for joy on their beds. **Let** the high praises of God **be** in their throat, and a sword of two edges in their hand,*

"Let the faithful ones exult in glory; let them shout for joy on their beds." Joy that started in the assembly goes home with them. Even lying down at night, they sing.

"Let the high praises of God be in their throat, and a sword of two edges in their hand." Now the picture changes. Praise in their mouth, a sword in their hand. In Nehemiah's day, the builders of the wall held a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other (Nehemiah 4:17). In Israel's history, God's people went into battle with singers at the front (2 Chronicles 20:21). Praise and battle belonged together, because the battles were the LORD's.

149:7-9 *to execute vengeance on the nations, punishments among the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, and their honored ones with shackles of iron, to execute on them the judgment written. This **is** glory for all His faithful ones. Praise **the** LORD!*

"To execute vengeance on the nations, punishments among the peoples." "To bind their kings with fetters, and their honored ones with shackles of iron." "To execute on them the judgment written. This is glory for all His faithful ones. Praise the LORD!"

These are hard words, and they have been badly misused. People in church history have quoted them to stir up wars and persecutions in God's name. So we need to read them carefully.

First, look at the last line of the stanza: "the judgment written." The faithful do not decide whom to punish. They carry out only the judgment God has already written, the sentence He Himself has decreed. In Israel's history, God sometimes used His people as the instrument of His judgment on nations whose sin had come to its full measure (Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 9:4-5). That was God's judgment, not Israel's grudge.

Second, believers in Jesus are not given the sword this way today. Jesus told Peter to put his sword away (Matthew 26:52). Paul says "the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly" (2 Corinthians 10:4). Our sword is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17), and the Word of God is "sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). We fight with truth and prayer, not with steel. And we are told to "love your enemies" and to "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you" (Matthew 5:44). No Christian may use this psalm to justify violence against anyone.

Third, the psalm looks ahead. Scripture says plainly that God will judge the nations, and that His saints will share in Christ's rule. Paul asks, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Corinthians 6:2). Enoch prophesied that the Lord would come "with His holy myriads" to judge (Jude 14-15). When Christ returns after the Tribulation, the armies of heaven follow Him (Revelation 19:14), and out of His mouth goes a sharp sword with which He strikes the nations (Revelation 19:15). The beast and the false prophet are seized (Revelation 19:20), and Satan himself is bound (Revelation 20:1-3). Then His saints reign with Him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6). It is Christ who carries out the judgment. His people share in His victory and His reign. That is the "glory" for all His faithful ones.

The longing in this psalm, for evil to be judged and the proud kings of the earth to bow, is a right longing. But the sword belongs in Christ's hand, and the day belongs to Him.

Psalm 149 Summary

Psalm 149 calls God's faithful people to sing a new song in their assembly. Israel is to rejoice in its Maker and the sons of Zion in their King, praising Him with dancing, tambourine and harp, because the LORD takes pleasure in His people and adorns the humble with salvation. The faithful exult even on their beds. Then, with God's high praises in their throats and a two-edged sword in their hands, they carry out the judgment God has written against the nations and their kings. For believers today the sword is the Word of God, and the final judgment belongs to Christ, who will return to judge the nations and share His reign with His saints.

People and Places

- Tambourine: a small hand drum, often with jingles, played in joyful worship (Exodus 15:20).
- Faithful ones: God's godly, loyal people who keep His covenant.

Psalm 149 Study Questions

1. What kind of song does the psalm call for, and where is it sung? (149:1)

2. In whom should Israel and the sons of Zion rejoice? (149:2)

3. With what instruments and actions do they praise God? (149:3)

4. What does the LORD take pleasure in, and how does He adorn the humble? (149:4)

5. Where do the faithful shout for joy? (149:5)

6. What do the faithful have in their throat and in their hand? (149:6)

7. What kind of judgment do they carry out, according to verse 9?

8. Why is it wrong for Christians to use verses 6-9 to justify violence? How do 2 Corinthians 10:4 and Ephesians 6:17 help?

9. How do Revelation 19:11-16 and 1 Corinthians 6:2 help us understand where this psalm is pointing?

10. Verse 4 says the LORD takes pleasure in His people. How does knowing God delights in you change the way you worship?

Conclusion

We have walked through the rest of the Psalter: the fifty-seven psalms of Books Three to Five that Volume 1 left out, and the last fourteen stanzas of Psalm 119. Along the way we stood with Asaph in the ruins of the temple (Psalms 74 and 79), sat in the dark with Heman in Psalm 88, heard the covenant with David tested and upheld in Psalm 89, retold Israel's long history in Psalms 78, 105 and 106, climbed to Jerusalem with the pilgrims in the Songs of Ascents and wept by the rivers of Babylon in Psalm 137. We ended with David's last cries for help (Psalms 140 to 144) and the great Hallelujah songs that close the book.

These psalms are honest. Some of them ask God hard questions, and a few end without an answer. Some ask Him to bring His judgment on cruel and violent people. We have tried to read those lines carefully: as prayers that hand vengeance to God instead of taking it ourselves, set beside Jesus' command to love our enemies and pray for them. And over and over, the writers come back to the same rock. Psalm 89 opens, "I will sing of the steadfast loves of the LORD forever; to generation and generation I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth." God's steadfast love held when the city burned, when the exiles wept and when David hid in a cave.

These psalms also point to Jesus Christ. He is the Son of David whom God swore to set on David's throne (Psalm 132:11; Acts 2:30). He is the Lord who laid the foundations of the earth and whose years will not end (Psalm 102:25-27; Hebrews 1:10-12). He is the true bread from heaven that Psalm 78 remembers (John 6:31-35), and the Teacher who spoke in parables as Psalm 78:2 foretold (Matthew 13:35). Peter applied Psalm 109:8 to Judas, who betrayed Him (Acts 1:20). He heals the brokenhearted (Psalm 147:3; Luke 4:18), and one day He will return to judge the nations and reign from Zion over all the earth, as these psalms promise.

With Volume 1 (forty well-known psalms) and Volume 2 (Books One and Two), this volume completes the study of all 150 psalms. I hope these three books have 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 and to praise. Keep praying the Psalms. As the returned exiles sang, "The LORD has done great things with us; we were glad."

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.

- Abaddon: Psalm 88
- Accuser (satan): Psalm 109
- Acrostic: Psalm 111
- Adonai (Lord, Master): Psalm 86
- Ark of the covenant: Psalm 78
- Asaph: Psalm 74
- Atonement: Psalm 78
- Cherubim: Psalm 80
- Choirmaster: Psalm 75
- Compassionate and gracious (Exodus 34:6): Psalm 86
- Covenant: Psalm 74
- Cup of God's wrath: Psalm 75
- Cush: Psalm 87
- Davidic covenant: Psalm 89
- "Do Not Destroy" (in headings): Psalm 75
- Doxologies at the end of the five books: Psalm 89
- Edom: Psalm 83
- Egyptian Hallel: Psalm 113
- Ephrath and Jaar: Psalm 132
- Ethan the Ezrahite: Psalm 89
- Fear of God (fear of the LORD): Psalm 76
- Festival of Booths (Tabernacles): Psalm 81
- Five books of the Psalms: Overview of the Psalms
- Gittith: Psalm 81
- Gods (judges in Psalm 82): Psalm 82
- Great Hallel: Psalm 135
- Hallelujah (Praise the LORD): Psalm 104
- Hard lines (prayers for judgment): Overview of the Psalms
- Hebrew letters of the Psalm 119 stanzas: Psalm 119
- Heman the Ezrahite: Psalm 88
- High places: Psalm 78

- Horn: Psalm 75
- Imprecatory psalms: Overview of the Psalms
- Inheritance (God's): Psalm 79
- Jeduthun: Psalm 77
- Lament (cry for help): Overview of the Psalms
- Leviathan: Psalm 74
- Lilies (in headings): Psalm 80
- LORD of armies (LORD of hosts): Psalm 80
- LORD, Lord, GOD and God: Overview of the Psalms
- Mahalath: Psalm 88
- Manna: Psalm 78
- Maskil: Psalm 74
- Meribah: Psalm 81
- Meshech and Kedar: Psalm 120
- Mighty One of Jacob: Psalm 132
- Most High: Psalm 77
- Negeb: Psalm 126
- Parable: Psalm 78
- Parallel lines in Hebrew poetry: Overview of the Psalms
- Peace (shalom): Psalm 85
- Penitential psalms: Psalm 102
- Psalm headings: Overview of the Psalms
- Rahab (Egypt): Psalm 87
- Ram's horn (shofar): Psalm 81
- Redeem: Psalm 74
- Restore: Psalm 80
- Righteous: Psalm 75
- Sabbath: Psalm 92
- Salem: Psalm 76
- Sanctuary: Psalm 74
- Selah: Psalm 75
- Shades: Psalm 88
- Sheol: Psalm 86
- Shiloh: Psalm 78

- Song of Ascents: Psalm 120
- Sons of Korah: Psalm 85
- Steadfast love (hesed): Psalm 77
- Stringed instruments (in headings): Psalm 76
- Tabernacle: Psalm 78
- The cave (Adullam and En-gedi): Psalm 142
- The eight words for God's Word: Psalm 119
- "The LORD reigns" (the kingship psalms): Psalm 93
- The pit: Psalm 88
- Vow: Psalm 76
- Zion: Psalm 74

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
75:8	Revelation 14:10	alluded to
78:1-4	Matthew 13:35	quoted
78:21-25	John 6:31	quoted
79:10-12	Revelation 6:10	alluded to
82:6-7	John 10:34	quoted
82:6-7	John 10:35	alluded to
86:8-10	Revelation 15:4	alluded to
89:9-13	Luke 1:51	alluded to
89:19-23	Acts 13:22	quoted
89:24-29	Colossians 1:15	alluded to
89:24-29	Revelation 1:5	alluded to
89:30-37	John 12:34	alluded to
89:30-37	Revelation 1:5	alluded to
92:4-5	Revelation 15:3	alluded to
94:8-11	1 Corinthians 3:20	quoted
97:7	Hebrews 1:6	alluded to
98:2-3	Luke 1:54	alluded to
102:25-27	Hebrews 1:10-12	quoted
104:1-4	Hebrews 1:7	quoted
106:6-12	Luke 1:71	alluded to
106:19-23	Acts 7:41	alluded to
106:19-23	Romans 1:23	alluded to
107:4-9	Luke 1:53	alluded to
107:10-16	Luke 1:79	alluded to
109:6-8	Acts 1:20	quoted
111:9	Luke 1:49	alluded to
111:9	Luke 1:68	alluded to
112:9	2 Corinthians 9:9	quoted
115:3-8	Revelation 9:20	alluded to
115:12-15	Revelation 11:18	alluded to
115:12-15	Revelation 19:5	alluded to
116:10-11	2 Corinthians 4:13	quoted
116:10-11	Romans 3:4	quoted
117:1	Romans 15:11	quoted
119:105-108	2 Peter 1:19	alluded to
119:157-160	John 17:17	alluded to
125:4-5	Galatians 6:16	alluded to
132:3-5	Acts 7:46	alluded to
132:11-12	Acts 2:30	quoted
132:11-12	John 7:42	alluded to

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
132:17-18	Luke 1:69	alluded to
135:1-2	Revelation 19:5	alluded to
137:8	Revelation 18:6	alluded to
140:1-3	Romans 3:13	quoted
140:1-3	James 3:8	alluded to
141:1-2	Revelation 5:8	alluded to
141:1-2	Revelation 8:3	alluded to
141:1-2	Revelation 8:4	alluded to
143:1-2	Romans 3:20	alluded to
143:1-2	Galatians 2:16	alluded to
147:7-9	Luke 12:24	alluded to
147:15-18	2 Thessalonians 3:1	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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