PSALMS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study of Forty Psalms



The prayer book and songbook of God's people: praise, lament, confession and trust, and the psalms that point to Jesus Christ

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

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Andrew Dominguez

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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 forty of the Psalms. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

When I walked into my first 12-step meeting on May 29, 2020, I was drunk, and my wife waited in the truck. I sat there weeping, full of shame. I did not have words for what I felt. The Psalms did. "Out of the depths I have called to You, O LORD" (Psalm 130:1) is the prayer of a man at the bottom, and God hears it.

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. Forty psalms is a lot to cover, so here are three ways a group can pace it:

- One psalm a week: forty weeks, about the length of a school year. The group can read each psalm slowly and use all ten questions.
- Two psalms a week: twenty weeks. Pick five or six questions from each psalm.
- A shorter course: choose the psalms that fit your group, such as the psalms of trust (16, 23, 27, 46, 62, 91 and 121), the psalms of confession (32, 51 and 130) or the psalms the New Testament applies to Jesus (2, 16, 22, 110 and 118). 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 touch painful subjects: guilt, depression, the loss of a child, or being abandoned or hurt by family (for example Psalms 27, 42, 51, 127 and 139). 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.

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 Miktam, 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. "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (27:1). Once you see this pattern, the Psalms become much easier to read, because the second line often explains the first.

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: His kingship (Psalm 2), His suffering on the cross (Psalm 22), His resurrection (Psalm 16) and His place at the right hand of God as King and Priest (Psalm 110). 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. None of the forty psalms in this study is one of the long psalms of judgment, but several have hard lines inside them, where the writer asks God to punish his enemies or says he hates those who hate God (for example 63:9-11 and 139:19-22). 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. 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. When we reach these lines, I will point back here.

Why these forty psalms? This study covers forty psalms, chosen from all five books and from every main kind of psalm. They include the psalms the New Testament most often applies to Christ, the best-known psalms of trust and comfort, the main psalms of confession, a set of praise psalms that close the book, and the first eight stanzas (verses 1 to 64) of Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible. They are studied in the order they appear in the Bible: Psalms 1, 2, 8, 15, 16, 19, 22, 23, 24, 27, 32, 34, 37, 40, 42, 46, 51, 62, 63, 73, 84, 90, 91, 95, 96, 100, 103, 110, 118, 119, 121, 127, 130, 133, 136, 139, 145, 146, 148 and 150.

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).

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. 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 1: The Two Ways

Scripture

1:1-3 How blessed ***is*** the man who has not walked in the counsel of ***the*** wicked, and in the way of sinners has not stood, and in the seat of mockers has not sat! But rather his delight ***is*** in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates by day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, which gives its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and all that he does prospers.

1:4-6 Not so ***are*** the wicked, but rather ***they are*** like the chaff which ***the*** wind drives away. Therefore ***the*** wicked will not stand in the judgment, and sinners ***will not stand*** in the congregation of ***the*** righteous. For the LORD knows the way of ***the*** righteous, and the way of ***the*** wicked will perish.

Psalm 1 Preview

The Book of Psalms opens with a door, and over the door stands a choice. Psalm 1 sets two kinds of people side by side. One delights in God's Word and grows like a healthy tree beside a stream. The other is blown away like chaff, the light husk the wind carries off when grain is threshed. There is no middle road.

This psalm has no heading and does not name its writer. It reads like an introduction to the whole book. Before we learn to pray the psalms, to lament with them and to praise with them, we are told where a blessed life begins: listening to God and walking His way.

Psalm 1 Study

1:1 *How blessed **is** the man who has not walked in the counsel of **the** wicked, and in the way of sinners has not stood, and in the seat of mockers has not sat!*

"Blessed is the man." The Hebrew word for "blessed" means "happy," deeply well off. It describes the kind of life God approves and smiles on. The psalm begins by telling us what the blessed man does not do.

Look at the three verbs: "walk," "stand" and "sit." They show how sin draws a person in a step at a time. First a man walks along with the advice of the wicked. Then he stops and stands in the path where sinners go. At last he sits down and makes himself at home among the scoffers, people who mock God and the things of God. What started as listening becomes a way of life.

Here we meet the parallel lines described in the Overview: the three lines build on each other, from the wicked to sinners to scoffers.

1:2 *But rather his delight **is** in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates by day and night.*

The blessed man turns away from bad counsel because something better has filled his heart. "His delight is in the law of the LORD." The word "law" here is the Hebrew torah, which means "instruction" or "teaching." It includes the commands of Moses, but it is broader than rules. It is everything God has taught His people.

He does more than put up with God's Word. He delights in it. And "he meditates by day and night." The Hebrew word for "meditate" was used for a low murmur, like someone reading half aloud to himself. Meditation in the Bible means filling the mind with God's Word. You read it, repeat it, chew on it and come back to it all day.

We become what we take in. If the voice we hear most is the world's voice, we will think like the world. If we fill our minds with God's Word, He will shape us by it.

1:3 *And he shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, which gives its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and all that he does prospers.*

The man who delights in God's Word "shall be like a tree planted by streams of water." In a dry land like Israel, a tree that grew wild might wither every summer. A tree planted by a channel of water stayed green all year. The word "planted" suggests someone put it there on purpose. God is the One who plants His people where they can grow.

The tree "gives its fruit in its season." Fruit takes time, and it comes in its season. Its leaf "does not wither," even when the heat comes. Jeremiah 17:7-8 uses the same picture for the man who trusts in the LORD: his roots reach the stream, so he is not anxious in a year of drought.

"All that he does prospers." This does not promise that a believer will be rich or never suffer. Other psalms in this study are full of godly people in trouble. It means that a life rooted in God will bear the fruit God intends. Whatever happens, his life is not wasted.

1:4 *Not so **are** the wicked, but rather **they are** like the chaff which **the** wind drives away.*

"Not so are the wicked." The contrast is sudden and sharp. Instead of a tree, the wicked "are like the chaff which the wind drives away."

At harvest, farmers threw the crushed grain into the air with a fork. The heavy grain fell back to the threshing floor. The light husks, the chaff, blew away in the wind. A tree has roots, weight and fruit. Chaff has none of these. It looks like part of the harvest for a moment, and then it is gone. A life without God may look full, but in the end it has nothing to hold it down.

1:5-6 *Therefore **the** wicked will not stand in the judgment, and sinners **will not stand** in the congregation of **the** righteous. For the LORD knows the way of **the** righteous, and the way of **the** wicked will perish.*

"Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment." They chose to stand in the path of sinners (verse 1). In the end they will not be able to stand before God. The second line says the same thing

another way: sinners will not stand "in the congregation of the righteous." The righteous are those who are right with God and live in His ways. When God gathers His people, the wicked will not be among them.

Verse 6 explains why. "The LORD knows the way of the righteous." To know, in the Bible, often means more than to be aware of. It means to care for, to watch over and to have a close relationship with. God knows His people's road, every step of it. "And the way of the wicked will perish." The road the wicked walk leads to ruin, and in the end the road itself comes to nothing.

Jesus spoke of two ways too: a wide gate and a broad road that lead to destruction, and a small gate and a narrow way that lead to life (Matthew 7:13-14). Psalm 1 asks every reader the same question: which way are you walking?

None of us has walked the blessed way perfectly. Many see in Psalm 1 a portrait that only Jesus has fully lived out, the righteous Man who always delighted in His Father's will. The good news is that God counts as righteous those who trust in Him (Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 4:6-8), and then plants them by the water so they can grow.

Psalm 1 Summary

Psalm 1 opens the Book of Psalms by setting two ways of life side by side. The blessed man refuses to walk, stand and sit with the wicked, sinners and scoffers. Instead he delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in its season, with leaves that do not wither. The wicked are like chaff that the wind blows away. They will not stand in the judgment or among the righteous, because the LORD knows and watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 1 Study Questions

1. What three things does the blessed man not do, and with whom? (1:1)

2. What does the blessed man delight in, and how often does he meditate on it? (1:2)

3. What picture describes the righteous man in verse 3, and what three things are said about the tree?

4. What are the wicked compared to, and why is that a fitting picture? (1:4)

5. How does Psalm 1 show the way a person can slowly drift into sin? Where have you seen that happen?

6. What does it mean that the LORD "knows" the way of the righteous? (1:6)

7. What is the difference between reading the Bible and meditating on it? What could help you meditate on God's Word this week?

8. How does Jeremiah 17:7-8 add to the picture of the tree in Psalm 1:3?

9. Verse 3 says the righteous man prospers in whatever he does. How would you explain that promise to someone who loves God but is going through hard times?

10. Which voices have the most influence on your thinking right now? How could you give God's Word a louder voice?

Psalm 2: The LORD's Anointed King

Scripture

2:1-6 Why do nations rage, and peoples devise vanity? The kings of ***the*** earth take their stand, and rulers have seated themselves together, against the LORD and against His Anointed: "Let us tear apart their bonds, and let us throw away their cords from us." ***He who*** sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord mocks them. Then He speaks to them in His anger, and in His fury He terrifies them: "And I, I have installed My King on Zion, the mountain of My holiness."

2:7-12 I will recount concerning the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, "You ***are*** My Son; I, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will make nations Your inheritance, and the ends of ***the*** earth Your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron; like a vessel of a potter You will smash them." And now, O kings, act prudently; be instructed, O judges of ***the*** earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss ***the*** Son, lest He be angry and you perish ***in the*** way, for His anger will burn in a little ***while***. How blessed ***are*** all who take refuge in Him!

Psalm 2 Preview

Psalm 1 showed us the blessed man. Psalm 2 shows us the blessed King. The nations and their rulers rise up against the LORD and the King He has chosen. They want to throw off His rule. God in heaven laughs at them, because He has already set His King on Zion. Then the King Himself speaks and tells us what God has decreed: "You are My Son," and the nations will be His inheritance.

The psalm ends with a warning and an invitation. The kings of the earth are told to be wise, to serve the LORD and to honor the Son. Those who take refuge in Him are blessed. The New Testament quotes this psalm again and again and applies it to Jesus. He is the Anointed King, the Son, who will one day rule the nations.

Psalm 2 Study

2:1-3 *Why do nations rage, and peoples devise vanity? The kings of* ***the*** *earth take their stand, and rulers have seated themselves together, against the LORD and against His Anointed: "Let us tear apart their bonds, and let us throw away their cords from us."*

Psalm 2 has no heading, but the believers in Acts 4:25 say God spoke it through "the mouth of Your servant David." So we read it as David's psalm.

"Why do nations rage?" The question carries surprise. The peoples "devise vanity," planning something empty that cannot succeed. Look at the parallel lines: nations and peoples, kings and rulers. Each line repeats the one before it and makes the picture larger. The whole world seems to be lined up against God.

They stand "against the LORD and against His Anointed." "Anointed" means someone who had oil poured on his head to set him apart for a task from God. Kings of Israel were anointed, and Samuel

anointed David himself while he was still a young shepherd (1 Samuel 16:13). The Hebrew word is mashiach, which gives us the word "Messiah." The Greek word that translates it is christos, which gives us "Christ." So the "Anointed" of Psalm 2 is the Messiah, the Christ.

In verse 3 we hear the rebels speak: "Let us tear apart their bonds." To them, God's rule feels like chains. That is how the human heart has always seen God's authority since Eden.

In Acts 4:25-27 the early church prayed this psalm after Peter and John were threatened. They saw it fulfilled when Herod, the ruler of Galilee, and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, with the Gentiles (people who are not Jewish) and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against Jesus, God's holy servant "whom You anointed." The rebellion of Psalm 2 reached its peak at the cross.

Some Bible teachers see verses 1-3 fulfilled at the cross and nowhere else. I believe the cross was the first fulfillment, and that the nations will rage against the Lord again at His return, when John sees "the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war" against Him (Revelation 19:19).

New Testament links: Acts 4:25-26 (quoted); Acts 4:27 (fulfilled); Revelation 11:18 (alluded to)

2:4-6 ***He who*** *sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord mocks them. Then He speaks to them in His anger, and in His fury He terrifies them: "And I, I have installed My King on Zion, the mountain of My holiness."*

Now the scene moves from earth to heaven. "He who sits in the heavens laughs." God is not pacing the floor. He is seated on His throne. The plots of kings are so small next to Him that He laughs. "The Lord mocks them." Here "Lord" is the title "Master" (see the note on God's name in the Overview). The rebels want to throw off their Master, but He is still the Master.

"Then He speaks to them in His anger." God's anger is His settled, holy opposition to evil and rebellion, not a fit of temper. One word from Him will terrify those who thought they could defy Him.

And this is what He says: "I have installed My King on Zion, the mountain of My holiness." Zion was first the fortress David captured, called the City of David (2 Samuel 5:7). Later the name came to include the temple hill and the whole city of Jerusalem, the place God chose to dwell among His people. The nations say they will break free. God answers, in effect, that He has already crowned His King. The matter is settled in heaven before it is settled on earth.

I believe God still has a future for Zion and for Israel (Romans 11:1-2, 25-29). When Christ returns, He will reign on the earth as King, and Paul says the Deliverer will come from Zion (Romans 11:26).

2:7 *I will recount concerning the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, "You* ***are*** *My Son; I, today I have begotten You.*

Now the King Himself speaks. "I will recount concerning the decree of the LORD." A decree is an official royal word, like a king's signed order. "You are My Son; I, today I have begotten You."

In the ancient world a king was sometimes spoken of as the son of his god. Israel's view was different. God promised David that He would be a Father to David's royal son, and that son would be His son (2 Samuel 7:14). Hebrews 1:5 quotes that promise right alongside Psalm 2:7. So each king from David's line was crowned as God's son in this sense. But no king of Judah ever ruled the ends of the earth. The words point beyond David to a greater Son.

The New Testament says plainly who He is. In Acts 13:33 Paul says God fulfilled this promise, "having raised up Jesus," and he quotes this verse. Hebrews 1:5 asks, "For to which of the angels did He ever say, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You'?" The answer is none. Only Jesus.

What does "today I have begotten You" mean? It does not mean Jesus began to exist at a point in time. John 1:1 says the Word was with God in the beginning and was God. "Today" points to the day God publicly declared and installed His Son as King. Paul ties it to the resurrection (Acts 13:33; compare Romans 1:4). On Easter morning God announced to the world that Jesus is His Son.

Hebrews 5:5 quotes this verse once more, to show that "the Christ did not glorify Himself to become a high priest." The God who called Him Son also made Him priest, and Hebrews 5:6 goes straight on to Psalm 110:4.

New Testament links: Acts 13:33 (quoted); Hebrews 1:5 (quoted); Hebrews 5:5 (quoted); Matthew 3:17 (alluded to); Luke 3:22 (alluded to); Mark 1:11 (alluded to)

2:8-9 *Ask of Me, and I will make nations Your inheritance, and the ends of* ***the*** *earth Your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron; like a vessel of a potter You will smash them."*

"Ask of Me, and I will make nations Your inheritance." The nations that rebelled in verse 1 will belong to the Son. His kingdom will reach "the ends of the earth." This was always God's plan. He told Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). The nations are blessed through Israel's Messiah.

Verse 9 is hard: "You will break them with a rod of iron." A scepter is a ruler's rod, and a rod was also a shepherd's tool. Here it is made of iron, a picture of a rule that cannot be broken or resisted. Clay pots smashed with an iron rod cannot be put back together.

Revelation draws on this verse three times (Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15), and there the word is "rule," not "break." The Hebrew says "break." The Greek Old Testament, which the apostles often used, read the same Hebrew letters as "shepherd" or "rule," and Revelation follows that reading. A shepherd's rod both guides and strikes, and both ideas are true of Christ's reign. Jesus promises to share this rule with those who overcome (Revelation 2:27). And when Christ returns from heaven, "He Himself will shepherd them with a rod of iron" (Revelation 19:15).

By the Tribulation I mean the time of great trouble on the earth that Jesus said would come before His return in glory (Matthew 24:21, 29-30). I believe the church will be caught up to meet the Lord before the Tribulation begins (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), and that this verse points to His Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation, when He returns with His saints, puts down all rebellion

and reigns on the earth. Believers hold different views on the timing, but all agree that He is coming back to reign.

This line is honest about what rebellion against God deserves, and God is patient now, with His invitation still open (verse 12). But the iron scepter is in the King's hand, not ours. Judgment belongs to Him (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

New Testament links: Revelation 2:27 (quoted); Revelation 2:26 (alluded to); Revelation 12:5 (alluded to); Revelation 19:15 (alluded to)

2:10-11 *And now, O kings, act prudently; be instructed, O judges of **the** earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.*

"And now, O kings, act prudently; be instructed, O judges of the earth." After the warning comes an offer. The kings are not yet destroyed. They are given time to be wise and to "be instructed." God speaks before He strikes.

"Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." Joy and trembling go together here. To serve God is a joy, but He is not to be treated lightly. This is the fear of the LORD, which we will look at more closely in Psalm 19:9.

2:12 *Kiss **the** Son, lest He be angry and you perish **in the** way, for His anger will burn in a little **while**. How blessed **are** all who take refuge in Him!*

"Kiss the Son." The word for "Son" here is bar, the Aramaic form of the word, not the Hebrew ben used in verse 7, and translators have read the line in different ways, some as a call to kiss His feet and some as a call to worship in purity. The SLB and most English Bibles read "the Son," which ties back to verse 7, and I take it that way. In the ancient world people kissed a king's hand or the ground at his feet to show loyalty and submission. Rulers who have been plotting against the King are told to bow before Him instead.

"Lest He be angry and you perish in the way." The phrase "the way" ties back to Psalm 1:6, where "the way of the wicked will perish." The two psalms belong together. The way of rebellion ends in ruin.

And then the last line opens wide: "Blessed are all who take refuge in Him." Psalm 1 began with "Blessed," and Psalm 2 ends with it. The King who will judge the rebels is also the safe place for anyone who runs to Him. The same Son whose wrath is feared gives shelter to all who trust Him, and that invitation is still open today.

Psalm 2 Summary

Psalm 2 shows the nations and their kings plotting against the LORD and His Anointed, trying to throw off His rule. God in heaven laughs at their plans, because He has already installed His King on Zion, His holy mountain. The King tells of God's decree: "You are My Son; I, today I have begotten You," and God promises Him the nations as His inheritance and a rule that no one can break. The kings of the earth are warned to be wise, to serve the LORD with fear and to kiss the

Son. The New Testament applies this psalm to Jesus: to the plot against Him at the cross (Acts 4:25-27), to His resurrection (Acts 13:33), to His supremacy over the angels (Hebrews 1:5) and to His return to rule the nations (Revelation 19:15). All who take refuge in Him are blessed.

People and Places

- Anointed: one set apart by God with oil for a task, especially the king; the Hebrew is mashiach (Messiah), and the Greek word that translates it is christos (Christ).
- Zion: 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.

Psalm 2 Study Questions

1. Who is plotting, and against whom? (2:1-2)

2. What do the rebels say they want to do? (2:3) Why do you think people see God's rule as chains?

3. How does God respond to the plots of the nations, and where has He installed His King? (2:4-6)

4. What does the word "Anointed" mean, and what Hebrew and Greek words for it give us "Messiah" and "Christ"?

5. How did the early church apply this psalm in Acts 4:25-27?

6. What did God say to His Son in verse 7, and how do Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 use those words?

7. What does God promise to give His Son, and how does Revelation 19:15 describe His rule? (2:8-9)

8. What does it look like for us to "rejoice with trembling" today? (2:11)

9. How does verse 12 hold out both a warning and an invitation? How does it tie back to Psalm 1?

10. When world events feel out of control, how could Psalm 2:4-6 change the way you see them?

Psalm 8: How Majestic Is Your Name

Scripture

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

8:1-2 LORD, our Lord, how majestic ***is*** Your name in all the earth, You who have set Your splendor above the heavens! From the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have established strength because of Your adversaries, to make an enemy and an avenger cease.

8:3-9 When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, ***the*** moon and ***the*** stars which You have established, what ***is*** man that You remember him, and a son of man that You attend to him? And You have made him lack a little from God, and with glory and majesty You crown him. You make him rule over the works of Your hands; You have put everything under his feet: sheep and oxen, all of them, and also the animals of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas. LORD, our Lord, how majestic ***is*** Your name in all the earth!

Psalm 8 Preview

David looks up at the night sky and is overwhelmed by two things at once. God is so great that the heavens cannot contain His splendor. And yet this great God cares about human beings, who look so small under all those stars. God has crowned man with glory and given him rule over the works of His hands.

The psalm begins and ends with the same line of praise, like two bookends: "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!" In between, David marvels at the place God has given us. Hebrews 2 shows that this psalm finds its full meaning in Jesus, the true Man, who was made lower for a little while and is now crowned with glory and honor.

Psalm 8 Study

8:1 *LORD, our Lord, how majestic **is** Your name in all the earth, You who have set Your splendor above the heavens!*

The heading tells us this is "A psalm of David," given "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 will simply point back here.

"On the Gittith" is a musical term, and its meaning is uncertain. Because the word sounds like Gath, a Philistine city, some think it was a kind of lyre or a tune connected with Gath. Others link it to the Hebrew word for a winepress and think it was sung at harvest. The heading of Psalm 84 uses the same term.

"LORD, our Lord." The first word is God's personal name, and the second is the title "Master" (see the note on God's name in the Overview). David speaks to the God who made a covenant with Israel. A covenant is a binding agreement, a relationship God makes and commits Himself to keep. God bound Himself to Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:7-8), and through Jesus He made the new covenant He had promised in Jeremiah 31:31 (Luke 22:20). So David can call Him "our" Master. This great God belongs to His people, and they belong to Him.

"How majestic is Your name in all the earth." God's name stands for who He is, His character and His fame. Wherever you go on the earth, His greatness can be seen. And His splendor reaches higher still, "above the heavens." The sky is not big enough to hold His glory.

8:2 *From the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have established strength because of Your adversaries, to make an enemy and an avenger cease.*

This verse is a surprise. From "the mouth of infants and nursing babies" God has "established strength." Why little children? God does not need the mighty to defeat His enemies. He can "make an enemy and an avenger cease" with the weakest voices on earth. He delights to use small things to put down proud things (1 Corinthians 1:27, where Paul says God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong).

Jesus quoted this verse. When He cleansed the temple, children were crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David." ("Hosanna" is a Hebrew cry asking God to save; see Psalm 118:25.) The chief priests were angry. Jesus asked whether they had never read, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing ones You have prepared praise for Yourself" (Matthew 21:15-16).

Jesus followed the Greek Old Testament, which reads "praise" where the Hebrew has "strength." The Greek Old Testament is a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that Jewish scholars made in the centuries before Jesus was born, and the New Testament writers often quote it. The two ideas fit together here. The praise of children was a kind of strength that the proud could not answer.

New Testament links: Matthew 21:16 (quoted)

8:3-4 *When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, **the** moon and **the** stars which You have established, what **is** man that You remember him, and a son of man that You attend to him?*

"When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers." David may have been a shepherd boy lying out under the stars when he first felt this. The heavens are so vast, and God made them with His "fingers," as if they were delicate handwork.

Then the question rises up in his heart: "What is man that You remember him?" Next to the moon and the stars, a human being seems so small. The second line repeats the question in other words: "and a son of man that You attend to him?" Here "son of man" simply means a human being. Why would the Maker of the stars pay attention to us?

Today we know the universe is far bigger than David could have imagined. That should make his question even stronger for us. And the answer is the same. God does take thought of us. He knows each of us by name and cares for us.

Hebrews 2:6 quotes this question, "What is man, that You are mindful of him," and the writer answers it by pointing us to Jesus (Hebrews 2:9).

New Testament links: Hebrews 2:6-8 (quoted)

8:5 *And You have made him lack a little from God, and with glory and majesty You crown him.*

"You have made him lack a little from God." In plain English, God made man a little lower than God. The Hebrew word here is elohim. It usually means God, but it can also mean heavenly beings. The Greek Old Testament translated it "angels," and Hebrews 2:7 follows that reading: "You made him a little lower than the angels." Whichever reading we take, the point is clear. Man stands just below the heavenly realm. Of all God's creatures on earth, we are the highest.

"With glory and majesty You crown him." A crown belongs to a king. God made Adam and Eve in His image and told them to rule over the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). Psalm 8 is a song about that first chapter of the Bible. Every human being, born or unborn, rich or poor, carries this God-given dignity.

New Testament links: Hebrews 2:6-8 (quoted); Hebrews 2:9 (alluded to)

8:6-8 *You make him rule over the works of Your hands; You have put everything under his feet: sheep and oxen, all of them, and also the animals of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas.*

"You make him rule over the works of Your hands." God gave mankind authority over His creation. David lists the animals in groups: farm animals ("sheep and oxen"), wild animals, birds and fish. From the field to the sky to "the paths of the seas," God put it all under man's care.

To rule does not mean to abuse. Adam was placed in the garden "to work it and to keep it" (Genesis 2:15). We rule as stewards of what belongs to God.

But something has gone wrong. We do not look much like kings today. Sin entered the world, and death with it. Hebrews 2:6-9 quotes these verses and admits it: "we do not yet see all things subjected to him." Then it adds, "But we see Him who was made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor," so that He might taste death for everyone. Jesus is the true Man of Psalm 8. What Adam lost, Jesus won back. And He will bring "many sons to glory" with Him (Hebrews 2:10).

Paul uses these words too: "He put all things in subjection under His feet." In 1 Corinthians 15:27 he applies them to Christ, and adds that the last enemy to be destroyed is death (15:26). The rule God gave mankind will be fully restored when Christ reigns.

He uses them again in Ephesians 1:22, where God "put all things under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church."

New Testament links: Hebrews 2:6-8 (quoted); 1 Corinthians 15:27 (quoted); Ephesians 1:22 (quoted)

8:9 *LORD, our Lord, how majestic **is** Your name in all the earth!*

The psalm ends where it began: "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!" David started with God's glory, then marveled at man's place, and came back to God's glory again. That is the right order. Our dignity is real, but it is a gift. The praise belongs to God.

Psalm 8 Summary

In Psalm 8 David praises the LORD, whose name is majestic in all the earth and whose splendor is above the heavens. God silences His enemies even through the praise of children, a verse Jesus quoted in the temple. As David looks at the moon and stars, he wonders why God would care for man at all. Yet God has made man a little lower than God (or the angels), crowned him with glory and majesty and given him rule over all the creatures of land, sky and sea. Hebrews 2:6-9 shows that this psalm is fulfilled in Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, suffered death for everyone and is now crowned with glory and honor. The last line repeats the first, praising God's majestic name.

People and Places

- Choirmaster: the leader of the music in Israel's worship; many psalm headings name him.
- Gittith: a musical term in the headings of Psalms 8, 81 and 84; its meaning is uncertain (perhaps an instrument or tune from Gath, or a harvest song).
- Covenant: a binding agreement God makes and commits Himself to keep, such as His covenant with Israel at Sinai and the new covenant in Christ.

I feel small next to God's creation all the time. Out under the open sky, I am reminded how big He is. Psalm 8 asks what man is that God would care for him. Yet He does, and that never stops amazing me.

Psalm 8 Study Questions

1. What line begins and ends Psalm 8? (8:1, 9) Why do you think David repeats it?

2. Through whose mouths has God established strength, and why? (8:2)

3. When did Jesus quote verse 2, and why was it fitting? (Matthew 21:15-16)

4. What did David look at that made him ask, "What is man"? (8:3-4)

5. When have you felt small next to God's creation? What does it mean to you that He still cares for you?

6. How has God crowned human beings, and what did He give them to rule? (8:5-8)

7. How should Psalm 8 shape the way we treat other people, including those the world sees as weak or unimportant?

8. What does it mean for us to rule over creation as stewards and not as owners?

9. How does Hebrews 2:6-9 apply this psalm to Jesus?

10. Psalm 8 begins and ends with God's glory, with man's place in the middle. How can you keep that order in your own life?

Psalm 15: Who May Dwell on Your Holy Mountain

Scripture

A psalm of David.

15:1-5 LORD, who will sojourn in Your tent? Who will dwell on the mountain of Your holiness? ***He who*** walks blameless, and does righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart; he does not slander with his tongue; he does not do evil to his neighbor, and he does not lift up a reproach against his relative; in his eyes a rejected one is despised, and those who fear the LORD he honors; he swears to ***his own*** harm and does not change; his money he does not give at interest, and a bribe against the innocent he does not take. He who does these ***things*** will not be shaken forever.

Psalm 15 Preview

David asks a question every worshiper should ask: LORD, who may live in Your presence? Who is welcome in Your tent and on Your holy mountain? God answers with no rituals at all. He describes a person's character: how he walks, how he talks, how he treats his neighbor, how he keeps his word and how he handles money.

Psalm 15 is short, but it searches the heart. Its picture of a godly life sounds a lot like the Sermon on the Mount (Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 to 7). And it ends with a promise. The one who lives this way "will not be shaken forever."

Psalm 15 Study

15:1 *LORD, who will sojourn in Your tent? Who will dwell on the mountain of Your holiness?*

"LORD, who will sojourn in Your tent?" David is thinking of the tent where the ark of the covenant now stood. The ark was the gold-covered wooden chest that held the tablets of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, and it was the sign of God's presence with Israel (Exodus 25:10-22; Hebrews 9:4). In David's day the ark rested in a tent David had pitched for it in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17; 1 Chronicles 16:1), while the older tabernacle of Moses stood at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39; 21:29). That hill in Jerusalem was the "holy mountain," holy because God had set it apart as the place where He met His people.

The two lines say the same thing in different words. To abide in God's tent and to dwell on His holy mountain both mean to live near God, as a welcome guest in His house. God welcomes and shelters His guests, as we will see in Psalm 23. David wants to know: what kind of person may stay with God?

15:2 ***He who*** *walks blameless, and does righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart;*

The answer begins with three marks of a godly life. He "walks blameless." To be blameless means being whole, the same person in private as in public. He "does righteousness," doing what is right

in God's eyes. And he "speaks truth in his heart." His truthfulness starts on the inside. He does not lie even to himself.

Jesus said the pure in heart will see God (Matthew 5:8). God cares about the heart, but He also cares about the hands and the mouth. A true worshiper is truthful all the way through.

15:3 *he does not slander with his tongue; he does not do evil to his neighbor, and he does not lift up a reproach against his relative;*

Now David turns to what the godly person does not do. "He does not slander with his tongue." The word "slander" pictures someone going around spreading stories about others. "He does not do evil to his neighbor." And "he does not lift up a reproach against his relative," which means he will not pass along shameful talk about someone close to him.

Much of this psalm is about speech. James says the tongue is a small part of the body, but it can set a whole forest on fire (James 3:5-6). The person who lives near God guards his mouth, especially when someone isn't in the room to defend himself.

15:4 *in his eyes a rejected one is despised, and those who fear the LORD he honors; he swears to **his own** harm and does not change;*

In his eyes "a rejected one is despised." The rejected one is a person who has turned from God and lives wickedly. This line does not tell us to hate people. It means the godly person does not admire or honor wickedness, even when the wicked are rich or powerful. Our culture often celebrates people for the very things God condemns. The citizen of Zion refuses to be impressed by that.

Instead, "those who fear the LORD he honors," people who hold God in reverent awe (we will look at that phrase in Psalm 19:9). The godly person values faithful believers more than famous ones.

He "swears to his own harm and does not change." When he makes a promise, he keeps it, even when keeping it costs him. Jesus told His followers to be people whose yes means yes and whose no means no (Matthew 5:37). If you have ever kept a promise that turned out to be costly, you have lived this verse.

15:5 *his money he does not give at interest, and a bribe against the innocent he does not take. He who does these **things** will not be shaken forever.*

"His money he does not give at interest." The Law of Moses told Israel not to charge interest to a poor fellow Israelite who needed a loan (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-37). The point was to protect the poor from being taken advantage of in hard times. The Law did allow interest on loans to foreigners (Deuteronomy 23:20). So the heart of this line is that the godly person does not get rich off someone else's desperation.

"A bribe against the innocent he does not take." He cannot be bought. In a court or in business, he will not take money to harm someone who has done nothing wrong.

Then comes the promise: "He who does these things will not be shaken forever." The person who lives this way stands firm, like the tree of Psalm 1.

Who can live up to this? None of us does it perfectly. Psalm 15 is not a list of things we do to earn a place in God's house. It describes the kind of person God welcomes and the kind of life His grace produces in us. Only Jesus lived it fully. Through Him we are welcomed into God's presence, and by His Spirit we begin to live like this.

Psalm 15 Summary

Psalm 15 asks who may live in God's tent and on His holy mountain. The answer is a person whose life matches his worship. He walks with integrity, does what is right and speaks the truth from his heart. He does not slander, harm his neighbor or spread shameful talk about those close to him. He refuses to admire the wicked but honors those who fear the LORD. He keeps his promises even when it costs him. He will not take advantage of the poor by charging them interest, and he will not take a bribe against the innocent. The one who lives this way will never be shaken. None of us lives it perfectly, but God welcomes us through Christ and shapes us into this kind of person.

People and Places

- Ark of the covenant: the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the sign of God's presence with Israel; in David's day it rested in a tent in Jerusalem.

Psalm 15 Study Questions

1. What two questions does David ask in verse 1, and what places does he name?

2. What three things describe the godly person in verse 2?

3. What does the godly person not do with his tongue or to his neighbor? (15:3)

4. Why do you think so much of this psalm is about how we speak?

5. What does it mean that "a rejected one is despised" in his eyes, and how is that different from hating people? (15:4)

6. Who does the godly person honor? (15:4) Whom does our culture tend to honor instead?

7. What does it mean that he "swears to his own harm and does not change"? Have you ever kept a costly promise? (15:4)

8. What two things does the godly person refuse to do with money? (15:5)

9. What promise ends the psalm? (15:5)

10. Psalm 15 can feel impossible to live up to. How does the gospel help us read it as a picture of grace and not a ladder to climb?

Psalm 16: You Will Not Abandon My Soul

Scripture

A Miktam of David.

16:1-4 Keep me, O God, for I have taken refuge in You. ***O my soul,*** you have said to the LORD, "You ***are*** the Lord; my good ***is*** not beyond You." As for the holy ones who ***are*** in the land, they and the majestic ones, all my delight ***is*** in them. Their sorrows will multiply, ***those who*** have hurried ***after*** another ***god***; I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood, and I will not take up their names on my lips.

16:5-11 The LORD ***is*** the portion of my share and my cup; You hold my lot. Lines have fallen to me in pleasant ***places***; indeed, an inheritance is beautiful to me. I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; also ***in the*** nights my kidneys have instructed me. I have set the LORD before me continually; for ***He is*** at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory has rejoiced; also my flesh will dwell in safety. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; You will not give Your godly one to see the pit. You will make known to me the path of life; fullness of joys ***is*** with Your presence; pleasant things ***are*** at Your right hand forever.

Psalm 16 Preview

David's prayer for help is one line long: "Keep me, O God." The rest of Psalm 16 tells us why he is not afraid. The LORD is his only good. God's people are his delight. God Himself is his inheritance, and that inheritance is beautiful. With the LORD at his right hand, David will not be shaken, not even by death.

The last verses reach further than David could have reached on his own. "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; You will not give Your godly one to see the pit." On the Day of Pentecost, the Jewish harvest feast fifty days after Passover when the Holy Spirit came on Jesus' followers (Leviticus 23:15-16; Acts 2:1-4), Peter stands up in Jerusalem and says David was speaking about the resurrection of Jesus. Paul says the same thing in Antioch. This psalm points ahead to the empty tomb.

Psalm 16 Study

16:1 *Keep me, O God, for I have taken refuge in You.*

The heading calls this "A Miktam of David." The meaning of Miktam is uncertain. Some connect it with a Hebrew word for gold and think it means a golden or precious psalm. Others think it means an inscription, a poem meant to be engraved and remembered. Six psalms carry this title, all of them connected with David.

"Keep me, O God, for I have taken refuge in You." The prayer is short, and the reason is simple. David runs to God the way someone runs into a shelter when a storm hits. The psalm does not dwell on the danger. It dwells on God.

16:2-3 ***O my soul,*** *you have said to the LORD, "You* ***are*** *the Lord; my good* ***is*** *not beyond You." As for the holy ones who* ***are*** *in the land, they and the majestic ones, all my delight* ***is*** *in them.*

"You have said to the LORD, 'You are the Lord.'" David seems to be speaking to his own soul here, as the King James Version also reads it. He uses both names: LORD, God's personal name, and Lord, meaning Master. He has made his choice. God is his Master. "My good is not beyond You." Every good thing David has comes from God, and nothing is truly good to him apart from God.

From God, David turns to God's people. "As for the holy ones who are in the land." The holy ones, or saints, are people set apart for God. In the Bible every true believer is a saint, not only a few famous ones. David calls them "the majestic ones," and he says, "all my delight is in them." The world may not think much of them, but to David they are nobles.

Loving God and loving His people go together (1 John 4:20-21, where John says we cannot love God whom we have not seen if we do not love the brother we have seen). If God is your highest good, His people will become your joy too.

16:4 *Their sorrows will multiply,* ***those who*** *have hurried* ***after*** *another* ***god****; I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood, and I will not take up their names on my lips.*

Now David looks at the other way. "Their sorrows will multiply, those who have hurried after another god." These people left the true God to run after idols, and the chase only brought them more sorrow. Idols always take more than they give.

"I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood." Pagan worship sometimes involved drink offerings, and the phrase "of blood" may point to violent or bloody rites. David will have nothing to do with it. He says, "I will not take up their names on my lips." Israel was told not to call on the names of other gods (Exodus 23:13). David's loyalty to the LORD is total.

16:5-6 *The LORD* ***is*** *the portion of my share and my cup; You hold my lot. Lines have fallen to me in pleasant* ***places****; indeed, an inheritance is beautiful to me.*

"The LORD is the portion of my share and my cup." When Israel entered Canaan, each tribe received its portion of the land by lot. But the priests and Levites got no land. God told Aaron that He Himself was the priests' portion and inheritance (Numbers 18:20), and Moses said the same of the whole tribe of Levi: "the LORD, He is his inheritance" (Deuteronomy 18:1-2). David says the same thing about himself. Whatever land or wealth he has, his real inheritance is God. "My cup" is another picture of what God gives a person to receive in life.

"Lines have fallen to me in pleasant places." The lines were the measuring cords used to mark off property. David looks at his share and says it is good. "Indeed, an inheritance is beautiful to me." This is contentment. David does not envy what others have, because he has God.

Do you see your life that way? We often measure our lot by what we lack. David measured his by Whom he had.

16:7-8 *I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; also **in the** nights my kidneys have instructed me. I have set the LORD before me continually; for **He is** at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

"I will bless the LORD who has counseled me." God guides David. Even in the nights, he says, "my kidneys have instructed me." In Hebrew thought the kidneys stood for the inner self, the place of feelings and conscience, so his mind and heart keep teaching him. When David lies awake, God's counsel is still at work in him.

"I have set the LORD before me continually." David makes a choice to keep God in front of his eyes. Faith includes a daily decision to keep looking to God. "For He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." The right hand was the place of a defender or helper (Psalm 109:31; 121:5). God stands there, close beside him.

Peter quotes verses 8-11 in Acts 2:25-28 and says, "David says concerning Him." Peter heard these words as the voice of the Messiah. Jesus Himself lived every moment with the Father before Him.

New Testament links: Acts 2:25-28 (quoted)

16:9 *Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory has rejoiced; also my flesh will dwell in safety.*

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory has rejoiced." "My glory" probably means the deepest part of a person, his inner being. Peter, following the Greek Old Testament, reads it as "my tongue rejoiced" (Acts 2:26). David's whole self is full of joy.

"My flesh will dwell in safety." Now he speaks about his body. He is safe in God's care, body and soul. And the next verse tells us why that safety reaches even past death.

New Testament links: Acts 2:25-28 (quoted)

16:10 *For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; You will not give Your godly one to see the pit.*

"For You will not abandon my soul to 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. The Old Testament does not give a full picture of life after death, but psalms like this one already show the hope that God will not leave His own in Sheol. David is confident that God will not leave him in the grip of death.

"You will not give Your godly one to see the pit." The godly one is the one who belongs to God and is faithful to Him. His body will not rot in the grave.

Two notes on the Hebrew. In the written Hebrew text the word for "godly one" is spelled as a plural, "godly ones," while the Jewish scribes' reading and many copies have the singular. And the word translated "the pit," another word for the grave, can also mean "decay." Peter quoted the Greek Old Testament, which reads, "nor will You give Your Holy One to see decay" (Acts 2:27), and he applied the verse to Jesus' body (Acts 2:31). I follow Peter's reading.

Did that come true for David? No. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter pointed this out plainly. David "both died and was buried," and everyone in Jerusalem knew where his tomb was (Acts 2:29). David's body did decay. So who was David talking about? Peter says David was "being a prophet" and knew God had sworn to put one of his descendants on his throne. "Having foreseen this, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ" (Acts 2:30-31). The Messiah was not left in the grave, and His flesh did not decay. Jesus died, and His body was laid in the tomb. But on the third day God raised Him up before His body could see decay.

Paul made the same argument in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:35-37). David "saw corruption," "but He whom God raised up did not see corruption."

This is how the apostles read the verse. David spoke words of trust that were true for him, since God would not abandon him to death forever. But the full meaning of the words was fulfilled only in Jesus. And because Jesus rose, everyone who belongs to Him will rise too (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, where Paul calls Christ the first fruits of those who have died).

New Testament links: Acts 2:25-28 (quoted); Acts 13:35 (quoted); Acts 2:31 (quoted); Acts 13:36-37 (alluded to)

16:11 *You will make known to me the path of life; fullness of joys **is** with Your presence; pleasant things **are** at Your right hand forever.*

"You will make known to me the path of life." Psalm 1 spoke of two ways. Verse 11 shows the road that leads to life, and God Himself shows it. Peter quotes this verse too (Acts 2:28). For Jesus, the path of life led through death and out of the tomb to the Father's right hand.

"Fullness of joys is with Your presence." The deepest joy is not in what God gives us but in being with Him. And "pleasant things are at Your right hand forever." The joys the world offers fade. The joys at God's right hand never end. Peter tells us Jesus is now exalted at God's right hand (Acts 2:33). Everyone who belongs to Him will share that joy forever.

New Testament links: Acts 2:25-28 (quoted)

Psalm 16 Summary

In Psalm 16 David asks God to keep him safe, because he has taken refuge in Him. He confesses that the LORD is his Master and his only good, and that God's people are his delight. He refuses to worship other gods, whose followers only multiply their sorrows. The LORD is his portion and inheritance, and David is content with what God has given him. With the LORD always before him and at his right hand, he will not be shaken. His heart is glad, and even his body rests secure, because God will not abandon his soul to Sheol or give His godly one to see the pit. Peter and Paul both say this was fulfilled when God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:25-31; 13:35-37). God shows the path of life, and in His presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forever.

People and Places

- Miktam: a term in the heading of six psalms; its meaning is uncertain (perhaps "golden" or "inscription").
- Sheol: the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave and the realm beyond it; Hades in Greek.
- Saints: holy ones, people set apart for God; every true believer.

Psalm 16 Study Questions

1. What does David ask God to do, and why? (16:1)

2. What does David say to the LORD in verse 2?

3. How does David describe God's people, and how does he feel about them? (16:3)

4. What happens to those who trade the LORD for another god? (16:4) What are some idols people trade God for today?

5. What does it mean that the LORD is David's "portion"? (16:5; compare Numbers 18:20 and Deuteronomy 18:1-2)

6. Do you tend to measure your life by what you lack or by what you have in God? How could verses 5-6 change that?

7. What does it mean to set the LORD "before me continually"? What practical habits help you do that? (16:8)

8. How does Peter prove in Acts 2:29-31 that David was speaking about the Messiah in verse 10?

9. What hope does Jesus' resurrection give you as you face your own death or the death of someone you love?

10. Where does David say we find fullness of joy? (16:11) How have you tasted that?

Psalm 19: The Heavens and the Word

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

19:1-6 The heavens are recounting the glory of God, and the expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, and there are no words; their voice is not heard. Into all the earth their line has gone out, and their sayings to the end of the world. For the sun He has set a tent in them, and it ***is*** like a bridegroom going forth from his chamber; it rejoices like a mighty man to run ***its*** course. Its going forth ***is*** from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to their ends; and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

19:7-11 The law of the LORD ***is*** perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD ***is*** reliable, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD ***are*** upright, making the heart glad; the commandment of the LORD ***is*** clean, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD ***is*** pure, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD ***are*** truth; they are righteous altogether. ***They are*** more desirable than gold, and than much fine gold; and sweeter than honey and the drippings of ***the*** honeycombs. Also Your servant is warned by them; in keeping them ***there is*** great reward.

19:12-14 Errors, who will discern ***them***? Acquit me from hidden ***faults***. Also from presumptuous ***sins*** keep back Your servant; let them not rule over me; then I will be blameless, and I will be acquitted of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before You, LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 19 Preview

God speaks in two great books. The first is the sky. Day and night, without a single word, the heavens tell of His glory to every nation on earth. The sun races across the sky like a bridegroom or a runner, and nothing escapes its heat. The second book is God's written Word. It is perfect and sure, right and pure, sweeter than honey and more precious than gold.

When David puts the two side by side, he ends up looking at his own heart. God's Word shows him sins he did not even know were there. So the psalm closes with a prayer that every reader can make his own: that the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart would be acceptable to the LORD, our rock and our Redeemer.

Psalm 19 Study

19:1 *The heavens are recounting the glory of God, and the expanse is declaring the work of His hands.*

The heading says this psalm of David was given to "the choirmaster" (see Psalm 8).

"The heavens are recounting the glory of God." The sky is like a preacher who never stops. The second line repeats the thought: "the expanse is declaring the work of His hands." The expanse is the wide dome of the sky (Genesis 1:6-8 uses the same word). Every star and sunrise is a sign that Someone made all this.

The name David uses for God matters here. In verses 1-6 he calls Him "God," the general Hebrew word El, the Creator of all. In verses 7-14 he will switch to "the LORD," God's personal covenant name, seven times. Creation shows us that God exists and is powerful. His Word shows us His name and His heart.

19:2-4 *Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, and there are no words; their voice is not heard. Into all the earth their line has gone out, and their sayings to the end of the world. For the sun He has set a tent in them,*

"Day to day pours forth speech." The picture is of a spring that bubbles up and never runs dry. Each day hands the message to the next, and each night passes it on.

Verse 3 seems to say the opposite: "There is no speech, and there are no words; their voice is not heard." The sky makes no sound. Yet its message is clear. It speaks without words.

"Into all the earth their line has gone out." The line may be a measuring line, marking out the whole earth as the sky's territory, or it may mean their voice or sound. Whichever is right, the message reaches everywhere. No tribe on earth is left without a witness to God's glory. Paul says the same thing in Romans 1:20. God's eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen through what He has made, so that people are without excuse.

Paul also quotes this verse in Romans 10:18. He applies it to the spread of the gospel: "their sound has gone out into all the earth." As the sky's message has reached every land, so the good news about Christ was going out to the nations.

"For the sun He has set a tent in them." The sky is pictured as the sun's home, the tent it comes out of each morning.

New Testament links: Romans 10:18 (quoted)

19:5-6 *and it **is** like a bridegroom going forth from his chamber; it rejoices like a mighty man to run **its** course. Its going forth **is** from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to their ends; and there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

The sun comes out each morning "like a bridegroom going forth from his chamber," bright and full of joy on his wedding day. It runs its course like a strong athlete who loves to race.

"Its going forth is from the end of the heavens." The sun crosses the whole sky, and "there is nothing hidden from its heat." David describes what everyone sees, the way we still speak of the sun rising and setting. Many neighboring peoples worshiped the sun as a god. David treats it as a creature that God made and placed in the sky. Its power and beauty point beyond itself to the One who made it.

That last line also leads into the next section. Nothing hides from the sun's heat, and, as David is about to show, nothing in us hides from God's Word.

19:7 *The law of the LORD **is** perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD **is** reliable, making wise the simple.*

"The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul." Verses 7-9 give six names for God's Word, each with a description and an effect. The law means God's instruction (as in Psalm 1:2). It is "perfect," complete and lacking nothing. It restores the soul, bringing a weary or wandering person back to life.

"The testimony of the LORD is reliable, making wise the simple." A testimony is God's own witness about Himself and His will. It is sure, firm and trustworthy. The "simple" are people who are naive and easily led. God's Word gives them wisdom. No seminary degree is required. The way to become wise is to listen to God.

19:8 *The precepts of the LORD **are** upright, making the heart glad; the commandment of the LORD **is** clean, giving light to the eyes.*

"The precepts of the LORD are upright, making the heart glad." Precepts are God's specific instructions, the details of how to live. They are right, like a straight road. When we follow them, they bring joy. Many people think God's commands steal our happiness. David found the opposite.

"The commandment of the LORD is clean, giving light to the eyes." God's command is clean, with nothing false mixed in. It opens our eyes so we can see life clearly. Psalm 119:105 calls God's Word a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

19:9 *The fear of the LORD **is** pure, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD **are** truth; they are righteous altogether.*

"The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever." The phrase "the fear of the LORD" runs all through the Bible. It means the reverent awe that takes God seriously as holy and great, and that leads us to trust Him, worship Him and obey Him. It is more than being afraid of punishment. The fear of the LORD draws near to God with humble respect, the way a child honors a good and mighty father. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10), because wisdom starts when we see God as He is. In this list, the fear of the LORD stands for the word that teaches us to fear Him and the awe that God's Word produces in us. It is pure, and it lasts forever. Fashions change, and God's Word stays the same.

"The judgments of the LORD are truth; they are righteous altogether." His judgments are His decisions and rulings. Every one of them is true and right. There is nothing in God's Word that we will someday need to correct.

New Testament links: Revelation 16:7 (alluded to)

19:10-11 ***They are*** *more desirable than gold, and than much fine gold; and sweeter than honey and the drippings of* ***the*** *honeycombs. Also Your servant is warned by them; in keeping them* ***there is*** *great reward.*

"They are more desirable than gold, and than much fine gold." Gold was among the most valuable things people could own. God's Word is worth more. "And sweeter than honey and the drippings of the honeycombs." Honey was the sweetest thing they knew. God's Word is sweeter.

Do we feel that way about the Bible? Sometimes we read it more as a duty than a delight. David's words can become a prayer: Lord, make Your Word precious and sweet to me.

"Also Your servant is warned by them." God's Word warns us of danger before we walk into it. "In keeping them there is great reward." God's ways lead to blessing, and He is glad to reward those who walk in them.

19:12 *Errors, who will discern* ***them****? Acquit me from hidden* ***faults****.*

After praising God's Word, David turns to himself. "Errors, who will discern them?" No one can see all his own faults. Our hearts deceive us (Jeremiah 17:9). We are good at spotting the sins of others and blind to many of our own.

So David prays, "Acquit me from hidden faults." Hidden faults are sins we have committed without knowing it. David asks God to clear him even of those. That is a humble prayer. It admits that we need forgiveness for more than we can name.

19:13 *Also from presumptuous* ***sins*** *keep back Your servant; let them not rule over me; then I will be blameless, and I will be acquitted of great transgression.*

"Also from presumptuous sins keep back Your servant." Presumptuous sins are proud, willful sins, done on purpose with eyes wide open. Hidden faults are bad enough, and deliberate rebellion is worse. David asks God to hold him back from it.

"Let them not rule over me." Sin wants to be our master. Willful sin, repeated, can become a chain. If God keeps him from that, David says, "Then I will be blameless." Blameless does not mean sinless. It means whole and sincere before God, with no hidden rebellion in the heart. He will be "acquitted of great transgression," kept from the kind of sin that breaks fellowship with God.

19:14 *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before You, LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before You." David began with the sky declaring God's glory. He ends by asking that his own words, and even his thoughts, would please God. The heavens speak without words. David wants his words to speak for God too.

"LORD, my rock and my redeemer." A rock is a place of safety and strength. A redeemer, in Israel, was a close relative who paid to set a family member free from debt or slavery, or bought back

land that had been lost (Leviticus 25:25, 47-49; Ruth 3-4). God is David's Redeemer. He pays the price to set His people free. The New Testament shows us how far God went to be our Redeemer, buying us back with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Many Christians pray this verse before reading Scripture, preaching or teaching. It makes a good prayer for any day.

Psalm 19 Summary

Psalm 19 shows how God speaks through creation and through His Word. The heavens declare God's glory day and night, without words, to the whole earth. The sun moves across the sky like a joyful bridegroom and a strong runner, and nothing is hidden from its heat. Then David praises the law of the LORD with six names and descriptions: it is perfect, reliable, upright, clean, pure and true. It restores the soul, makes the simple wise, makes the heart glad and gives light to the eyes. It is more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey, and it warns and rewards those who keep it. Seeing himself in its light, David asks God to forgive his hidden faults and keep him from willful sins. He closes by praying that his words and thoughts would be acceptable to the LORD, his rock and his Redeemer.

People and Places

- Fear of the LORD: reverent awe toward God that leads us to trust, worship and obey Him; "the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10).

Psalm 19 Study Questions

1. What do the heavens tell about, and how often do they speak? (19:1-2)

2. How can the heavens speak if "there is no speech, and there are no words"? (19:3-4)

3. How does Paul use the message of creation in Romans 1:20? How does he use verse 4 in Romans 10:18?

4. What two pictures does David use to describe the sun? (19:5)

5. List the six names for God's Word in verses 7-9 and what each one does.

6. Which of those descriptions of God's Word means the most to you right now, and why?

7. David says God's Word is more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey (19:10). What helps you enjoy God's Word and not just read it as a duty?

8. What is the difference between hidden faults and presumptuous sins? (19:12-13)

9. What does the word "Redeemer" mean, and how is Jesus our Redeemer? (19:14)

10. How could praying verse 14 each morning change the way you speak and think during the day?

Psalm 22: My God, My God

Scripture

To the choirmaster, on "The Doe of the Dawn." A psalm of David.

22:1-11 My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? ***You are*** far from my salvation, ***from*** the words of my roaring. My God, I call out by day, and You do not answer; and by night, and ***there is*** no silence for me. And You ***are*** holy, sitting ***on*** the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; they trusted, and You delivered them. To You they cried out and escaped; in You they trusted and were not ashamed. And I ***am*** a worm and not a man, a reproach of mankind and despised by ***the*** people. All who see me mock at me; they open ***wide*** with ***the*** lip; they shake ***the*** head: "Roll ***it*** to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, for He delights in him." For You ***are the One*** who drew me out from ***the*** belly, who made me trust on the breasts of my mother. On You I was cast from ***the*** womb; from the belly of my mother You ***have been*** my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble ***is*** near, for there is no helper.

22:12-21 Many bulls have surrounded me; mighty ones of Bashan have encircled me. They have opened their mouth against me, a lion tearing and roaring. Like water I have been poured out, and all my bones have come apart; my heart has become like wax; it has melted in the midst of my inward parts. My strength has dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue is made to cling to my jaws; and to the dust of death You set me. For dogs have surrounded me; a company of evildoers has encircled me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I count all my bones; they look, they gaze at me. They divide my garments among themselves, and for my clothing they cast a lot. And You, LORD, do not be far off; my strength, hurry to my help! Rescue my soul from ***the*** sword, my only one from the hand of a dog. Save me from the mouth of a lion; and from the horns of wild oxen You have answered me.

22:22-31 I will recount Your name to my brothers; in the midst of ***the*** assembly I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All ***you*** seed of Jacob, glorify Him, and be afraid of Him, all ***you*** seed of Israel. For He has not despised and He has not detested the affliction of the afflicted, and He has not hidden His face from him; and when he cried for help to Him, He heard. From You ***comes*** my praise in ***the*** great assembly; my vows I will pay before those who fear Him. The humble will eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before You. For the kingship ***belongs*** to the LORD, and He ***is*** ruling over the nations. All the fat ones of ***the*** earth have eaten and have bowed down; before Him will bow all who go down ***to the*** dust, and ***he who*** has not kept his soul alive. A seed will serve Him; it will be recounted of the Lord to the generation. They will come and declare His righteousness to a people ***yet*** to be born, that He has done ***it***.

Psalm 22 Preview

Psalm 22 begins with a cry of deep loneliness: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" David feels abandoned by God and surrounded by enemies. People mock him, wag their heads

and laugh at his trust in God. His body is failing. His strength is gone. His enemies divide his clothes as if he were already dead. Then, at the very bottom, the psalm turns. God answers. Sorrow becomes praise, first in the gathering of God's people and then to the ends of the earth and to generations not yet born.

About a thousand years after David, Jesus hung on a cross outside Jerusalem and cried out the first line of this psalm. The Gospel writers describe a scene around the cross that echoes Psalm 22 again and again: the mocking, the shaking heads, the taunt about trusting God and the soldiers casting lots for His clothing, which John says happened "so that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Hebrews puts the praise of verse 22 on the lips of the risen Jesus. To read Psalm 22 is to stand at the foot of the cross, and then to see past it to the empty tomb and the worldwide kingdom of God.

Psalm 22 Study

22:1 *My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? **You are** far from my salvation, **from** the words of my roaring.*

The heading says this psalm of David is for "the choirmaster" (see Psalm 8), and that it was sung "on 'The Doe of the Dawn.'" The Hebrew words are Aijeleth Hashshahar. Their meaning is not certain, but most scholars take them as the name of a tune the psalm was sung to.

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" David still says "my God." He has not stopped believing. But he feels that God has left him alone. The second line adds to the first: "You are far from my salvation, from the words of my roaring." He roars and cries for help, and the help seems far away. The psalm does not name the crisis David was facing. His life had many dark seasons, when Saul hunted him and later when his own son Absalom drove him from Jerusalem. But as we read on, the psalm goes far beyond anything we know David suffered.

This verse gives believers permission to bring their hardest questions to God. Faith sometimes sounds like "Why?" David brought his question to God, not away from Him.

On the cross, about the ninth hour (about three in the afternoon), Jesus "cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' That is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34, which gives the Aramaic form, "Eloi"). Why would the Son of God say this? Paul says God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf (2 Corinthians 5:21). On the cross Jesus bore our sins, and He felt the full weight of the separation from God that sin deserves. The Son did not stop being the Son, and the Father did not stop loving Him. But in that moment Jesus entered the darkness that we deserved, so that we would never have to be forsaken.

Many believe Jesus was also pointing to the whole psalm. Jewish teachers sometimes referred to a passage by its opening words, and anyone who knew Psalm 22 knew how it ended, with God answering and the nations turning to Him.

New Testament links: Matthew 27:46 (quoted); Mark 15:34 (quoted)

22:2 *My God, I call out by day, and You do not answer; and by night, and* ***there is*** *no silence for me.*

"My God, I call out by day, and You do not answer." Day and night David prays, and heaven seems silent. "And by night, and there is no silence for me." He cannot sleep.

Many faithful believers have known that feeling. You pray and pray, and nothing seems to change. Psalm 22 does not pretend that silence is easy. It also shows us that God's silence does not mean God's absence. David keeps talking to Him.

22:3-5 *And You* ***are*** *holy, sitting* ***on*** *the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; they trusted, and You delivered them. To You they cried out and escaped; in You they trusted and were not ashamed.*

"And You are holy." In the middle of his pain, David says what he knows about God. God is holy, set apart, perfect and good. Whatever is happening, God has not become less than God.

"Sitting on the praises of Israel." God is pictured sitting as King, with the praises of His people as His throne. The ark of the covenant (see Psalm 15) was sometimes called the place where God was enthroned above the cherubim (1 Samuel 4:4). David says God's real throne is the worship of His people.

Then David remembers history. "In You our fathers trusted; they trusted, and You delivered them." He says it three times in these verses: they trusted, they cried out, they were delivered. God rescued Israel from Egypt and through the wilderness and in the time of the judges. "In You they trusted and were not ashamed." When we feel alone, remembering what God has done for others, and for us, helps us hold on.

22:6-8 *And I* ***am*** *a worm and not a man, a reproach of mankind and despised by* ***the*** *people. All who see me mock at me; they open* ***wide*** *with* ***the*** *lip; they shake* ***the*** *head: "Roll* ***it*** *to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, for He delights in him."*

"And I am a worm and not a man." David feels crushed and worthless, like something people step on. He is "a reproach of mankind and despised by the people." No one respects him.

"All who see me mock at me." His enemies make faces at him. "They open wide with the lip; they shake the head." To open wide with the lip is to curl the lips in scorn, and shaking the head is a gesture of contempt.

Then we hear their taunt: "Roll it to the LORD; let Him deliver him." They say, in effect, if God really loves him, let God get him out of this. They add that God "delights in him." They throw his faith back in his face.

Matthew tells us what happened at the cross. Those passing by "were blaspheming Him, wagging their heads" (Matthew 27:39). And the chief priests, scribes and elders mocked Him with almost the very words of this verse: "He has trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He wants Him" (Matthew 27:43). They did not seem to realize they were acting out Psalm 22 as they said it. Isaiah 53:3 also spoke of the Servant of the LORD as despised and rejected by men.

New Testament links: Matthew 27:43 (quoted); Mark 15:29 (alluded to); Matthew 27:39-40 (alluded to)

22:9-11 *For You **are the One** who drew me out from **the** belly, who made me trust on the breasts of my mother. On You I was cast from **the** womb; from the belly of my mother You **have been** my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble **is** near, for there is no helper.*

"For You are the One who drew me out from the belly." David answers the mockers by remembering his own story with God. God was there at his birth. "Who made me trust on the breasts of my mother." From his earliest days as a nursing baby, David was in God's care.

"On You I was cast from the womb." He was placed in God's arms, so to speak, from the day he was born. "From the belly of my mother You have been my God." God's care for a person starts before birth.

Then comes a plea: "Do not be far from me, for trouble is near, for there is no helper." The contrast is painful. Trouble is near. God feels far. No one else can help. It is the cry of a person who has nowhere else to turn but God.

22:12-13 *Many bulls have surrounded me; mighty ones of Bashan have encircled me. They have opened their mouth against me, a lion tearing and roaring.*

Now David describes his enemies with animal pictures. "Many bulls have surrounded me." "Mighty ones of Bashan." Bashan was the rich grazing land east of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee. Its cattle were famous for being well fed and strong (Amos 4:1; Ezekiel 39:18). David feels hemmed in by powerful, pushing enemies.

"They have opened their mouth against me, a lion tearing and roaring." The bulls crowd him. The lion wants to tear him apart. The danger is all around.

At the cross, Jesus was surrounded by the powerful: priests, rulers and soldiers. And they did tear at Him with their words and their whips.

22:14-15 *Like water I have been poured out, and all my bones have come apart; my heart has become like wax; it has melted in the midst of my inward parts. My strength has dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue is made to cling to my jaws; and to the dust of death You set me.*

Now David describes his own body. "Like water I have been poured out." All his strength has drained away. "All my bones have come apart." His frame is pulled apart. "My heart has become like wax; it has melted in the midst of my inward parts." His courage has melted.

"My strength has dried up like a potsherd." A potsherd is a broken piece of clay pot, dry and brittle. "My tongue is made to cling to my jaws." His mouth is so dry his tongue sticks. "To the dust of death You set me." David says even this is in God's hands. He is at the edge of the grave.

These words fit crucifixion closely. A man hanging on a cross would feel his joints pulled out of place and his strength poured out, and his thirst would become terrible. John tells us that near the end Jesus, "so that the Scripture might be accomplished," said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). John does not say which passage he means. Many see it as Psalm 69:21, and many also see this verse behind it.

As far as we know, crucifixion was not practiced in Israel in David's day. It came into wide use centuries later under the Persians, Greeks and Romans. Yet David wrote words that fit it.

22:16 *For dogs have surrounded me; a company of evildoers has encircled me; they pierced my hands and my feet.*

"For dogs have surrounded me." In Israel, dogs were not pets. They roamed in packs and fed on garbage and even dead bodies. In later times Jews sometimes used "dogs" as a name for Gentiles (compare Matthew 15:26). "A company of evildoers has encircled me." The pack has closed in.

"They pierced my hands and my feet." Scholars have discussed this line a great deal, so it is worth slowing down. The standard Hebrew text (the Masoretic Text, carefully preserved by Jewish scribes) has a word that means "like a lion." That reading fits the lions in verses 13 and 21, and many Jewish and some Christian scholars prefer it. The oldest translation, the Greek Old Testament, reads "they dug," which many take to mean "they have pierced." A copy of the Psalms found at Nahal Hever, near the Dead Sea, from about the first century A.D., also seems to read a verb here. In Hebrew the two readings differ by only one small letter, and the two letters look very much alike. The SLB follows the reading "pierced," as most English Bibles do.

With that reading, David described pierced hands and feet centuries before crucifixion was practiced in Israel's land, and Christians have long seen those words fulfilled in the nails of the cross. The New Testament does not quote this line directly. But Jesus showed His disciples His hands and His feet after He rose (Luke 24:39-40), and Thomas was invited to see the print of the nails (John 20:25-27).

22:17-18 *I count all my bones; they look, they gaze at me. They divide my garments among themselves, and for my clothing they cast a lot.*

"I count all my bones." David is so wasted and exposed that his bones show. "They look, they gaze at me." The suffering man has become a show for the crowd. Those who were crucified were usually stripped and left to hang in public.

"They divide my garments among themselves, and for my clothing they cast a lot." His enemies act as though he is already dead, so they split up his things. In Hebrew poetry, the two lines would usually mean the same thing. But at the cross both lines came true separately.

John tells us exactly how. The soldiers divided Jesus' outer garments into four parts, one for each soldier. But His tunic was woven in one piece, so they said, "Let us not tear it, but let us cast lots for it to see whose it will be." John says this happened "so that the Scripture might be fulfilled," and he quotes this verse (John 19:23-24). Matthew, Mark and Luke also tell how the soldiers cast lots for His garments (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34). The soldiers had no idea they were fulfilling a psalm. They were just gambling for a dying man's clothes. But God was showing that every detail of the cross was in His plan.

New Testament links: Matthew 27:35 (quoted); John 19:24 (quoted); Luke 23:34 (fulfilled); Mark 15:24 (fulfilled)

22:19-21 *And You, LORD, do not be far off; my strength, hurry to my help! Rescue my soul from **the** sword, my only one from the hand of a dog. Save me from the mouth of a lion; and from the horns of wild oxen You have answered me.*

"And You, LORD, do not be far off." The prayer of verse 11 comes back, now with God's personal name. "My strength, hurry to my help!" David asks God to hurry.

"Rescue my soul from the sword, my only one from the hand of a dog." His "only one" is the one life he has. The animals of verses 12-16 come back in reverse order: the dogs, then "the mouth of a lion," then "the horns of wild oxen."

And then the psalm turns on a few words: "You have answered me." In Hebrew these words come suddenly, at the very end of a verse that began as a cry for help. From here to the end, there is no more crying out for help. God has heard. Everything after this is praise.

For David, the psalm leaves the "how" with God. For Jesus, we know. The Father did not leave Him in death. On the third day He raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:24, 32).

New Testament links: 2 Timothy 4:17 (alluded to)

22:22 *I will recount Your name to my brothers; in the midst of **the** assembly I will praise You.*

"I will recount Your name to my brothers." The man who was mocked and alone now stands among his brothers and praises God. "In the midst of the assembly I will praise You." The assembly is the gathering of God's people for worship.

Hebrews 2:11-12 says Jesus "is not ashamed to call them brothers," and then quotes this verse as Jesus' own words: "I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." In the assembly He sings the Father's praise. The risen Christ stands among His people, calls them His brothers and leads them in praising the Father. When the church gathers to worship, Jesus is the One we praise, and He is also the One leading our praise.

After His resurrection, Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "go to My brothers" (John 20:17). The One who cried, "Why have You forsaken Me?" now called His disciples His brothers.

New Testament links: Hebrews 2:12 (quoted)

22:23-24 *You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All **you** seed of Jacob, glorify Him, and be afraid of Him, all **you** seed of Israel. For He has not despised and He has not detested the affliction of the afflicted, and He has not hidden His face from him; and when he cried for help to Him, He heard.*

"You who fear the LORD, praise Him." David calls everyone who reverences God to join him. "All you seed of Jacob, glorify Him!" Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes, and God renamed him Israel (Genesis 32:28). So "Jacob" and "Israel" here both mean the whole people of God.

Why should they praise? "For He has not despised and He has not detested the affliction of the afflicted." The world turned away from this suffering man. God did not. "He has not hidden His face from him." It seemed in verse 1 that God had turned away. Now David says God was listening all along. "When he cried for help to Him, He heard."

That truth is for every sufferer who belongs to God. Your feelings may tell you God has turned away. Psalm 22 tells us that He has not despised your affliction, and He hears.

22:25-26 *From You **comes** my praise in **the** great assembly; my vows I will pay before those who fear Him. The humble will eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever!*

"From You comes my praise in the great assembly." Even David's praise is a gift from God. "My vows I will pay." In trouble, people in Israel often made a vow to God, a promise to bring a thank offering when He delivered them. Part of that kind of offering was eaten in a meal of celebration (Leviticus 7:16).

That is why verse 26 says, "The humble will eat and be satisfied." The poor and suffering are invited to the feast. The one who was rescued shares his joy with others who are hurting. "Those who seek Him will praise the LORD." Then David speaks a blessing over them: "Let your heart live forever!"

Many Christians hear in this an echo of the Lord's Supper, where those who trust in Christ eat together and remember His death and resurrection. Whatever we make of that, the poor being fed and satisfied at God's table is a picture of the gospel.

22:27-28 *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before You. For the kingship **belongs** to the LORD, and He **is** ruling over the nations.*

Now the praise spreads far beyond Israel. "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD." The nations will come back to the God they forgot. "All the families of the nations will bow down before You." God promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). Here that promise flowers. The nations are blessed through the suffering and rescued King of Israel.

"For the kingship belongs to the LORD, and He is ruling over the nations." Psalm 2 showed the nations raging against God's King. Psalm 22 shows the nations turning to worship. One day the

loud voices of heaven will say that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever (Revelation 11:15).

22:29-31 *All the fat ones of **the** earth have eaten and have bowed down; before Him will bow all who go down **to the** dust, and **he who** has not kept his soul alive. A seed will serve Him; it will be recounted of the Lord to the generation. They will come and declare His righteousness to a people **yet** to be born, that He has done **it**.*

"All the fat ones of the earth have eaten and have bowed down." The fat ones are the rich and the powerful, and they will bow too. And so will the dying: "Before Him will bow all who go down to the dust, and he who has not kept his soul alive." From the strongest to the weakest, no one is left out of the worship of God. Paul says every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11).

The praise also spreads through time. "A seed will serve Him." The children of the future will worship God. "It will be recounted of the Lord to the generation." The story will be passed down. "They will come and declare His righteousness to a people yet to be born." Every generation will tell the next one what God has done.

What will they tell? "That He has done it." The psalm ends with what God has done. The rescue is complete. Many see a link with Jesus' last words on the cross, "It has been finished" (John 19:30). The Hebrew and Greek words are different, and the Gospel does not tie them together. But the thought is the same: the work God set out to do is done.

You and I are part of that people "yet to be born." We are reading this psalm thousands of years later, and someone told us. Now it is our turn to tell the next generation.

Psalm 22 Summary

Psalm 22 begins with David's cry, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" He prays day and night and feels unanswered, but he remembers that God is holy and that Israel's fathers trusted Him and were delivered. He is mocked and despised, and his enemies taunt him for trusting in the LORD. Surrounded by bulls, lions and dogs, he is poured out like water, his bones out of joint, his tongue dry, his hands and feet pierced, while his enemies divide his garments and cast lots for his clothing. Then God answers. David praises God among his brothers in the assembly, calls Israel to praise Him and invites the afflicted to eat and be satisfied. The psalm ends with the ends of the earth turning to the LORD, the kingdom belonging to Him and future generations declaring that He has done it. Jesus cried out its first line on the cross, the Gospels show the scene around Him echoing it, John says the casting of lots fulfilled verse 18 (Matthew 27:39-46; John 19:23-24), and Hebrews 2:12 puts verse 22 on the lips of the risen Christ.

People and Places

- The Doe of the Dawn: in Hebrew, Aijeleth Hashshahar; probably the name of a tune.
- Bashan: rich grazing land east of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee, known for its strong cattle.
- Jacob and Israel: Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes and was renamed Israel; both names stand for the whole people of God.

Psalm 22 Study Questions

1. What does David cry out in verse 1, and who later spoke these same words? (Matthew 27:46)

2. What does David remember about God and about Israel's fathers in verses 3-5?

3. What did the mockers say in verse 8, and how did the chief priests echo it at the cross? (Matthew 27:43)

4. What animals does David use to describe his enemies? (22:12-21)

5. How did the soldiers at the cross fulfill verse 18? (John 19:23-24)

6. Where does the psalm turn from crying out to praise, and what changes after that point? (22:21-22)

7. How does Hebrews 2:11-12 use verse 22? What does it mean to you that Jesus calls believers His brothers?

8. Have you ever felt like God was silent or far away? How does this psalm help you pray in those times?

9. How far does the praise spread by the end of the psalm, in place and in time? (22:27-31) What part can you play in telling the next generation?

10. Which details of Psalm 22 most strengthen your confidence that the Bible is God's Word and that Jesus is the Messiah?

Psalm 23: The LORD Is My Shepherd

Scripture

A psalm of David.

23:1-3 The LORD ***is*** my shepherd; I will not lack. In pastures of grass He makes me lie down; beside waters of rest He leads me. He restores my soul; He guides me in tracks of righteousness for the sake of His name.

23:4-6 Even when I walk in a valley of deep darkness, I will not fear evil, for You ***are*** with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You arrange a table before me in front of my adversaries; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup ***is*** overflowing. Surely goodness and steadfast love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will return ***to dwell*** in the house of the LORD for length of days.

Psalm 23 Preview

Psalm 23 is known and loved far beyond the church. Many people who rarely open a Bible have heard it read at a funeral. It is short and simple, but it holds a whole life inside it: green pastures and quiet waters, dark valleys and enemies, a table, an overflowing cup and a home with God forever.

David had been a shepherd boy before he was a king. He knew what sheep need and what a good shepherd does for them. In the first half of the psalm he speaks about the LORD as his Shepherd. In the second half he speaks to Him, and the picture shifts from a shepherd with his flock to a host welcoming a guest to his table. Jesus later called Himself the good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. Psalm 23 shows us what it means to belong to Him.

Psalm 23 Study

23:1 *The LORD **is** my shepherd; I will not lack.*

The heading is simple: "A psalm of David." David knew sheep. Before Samuel anointed him, he was out keeping his father's flock (1 Samuel 16:11). He told King Saul that when a lion or a bear took a lamb, he went after it and rescued the lamb from its mouth (1 Samuel 17:34-35). So when David says God is his Shepherd, he knows exactly what he means.

"The LORD is my shepherd." The first word is God's personal name, the name He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). The almighty Creator of Psalm 19 is the same God who leads one man like a shepherd. And David says "my shepherd." The Shepherd of all Israel cares for each single sheep.

In the ancient world kings were often called shepherds of their people. David the king says he himself is a sheep. Sheep cannot find their own pasture. They wander easily. They cannot defend themselves. That is a humbling picture, and a true one. We need a Shepherd.

"I will not lack." Because the LORD is my Shepherd, I will not lack anything I truly need. That is a different promise from having everything I want. The Shepherd knows what His sheep need, and He provides it. Paul learned this kind of contentment and said God would supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). He did not quote Psalm 23, but anyone who knew the psalm would have heard the claim. The LORD who is David's Shepherd came to us in Jesus. Hebrews 13:20 calls Him "the great Shepherd of the sheep," and Peter calls Him the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4).

23:2 *In pastures of grass He makes me lie down; beside waters of rest He leads me.*

"In pastures of grass He makes me lie down." Shepherds say a sheep will not lie down while it is hungry or afraid. A sheep lying in the grass is fed, calm and safe. In the dry hills of Judea, pastures of grass had to be found, and the shepherd knew where they were.

"He makes me" also suggests that sometimes the Shepherd has to make us rest. We push and hurry. He knows we need to stop.

"Beside waters of rest He leads me." Calm, restful water is easier and safer for sheep to drink from than a rushing stream, and a good shepherd leads them to still pools or calm streams. The shepherd leads. In Israel the shepherd usually walked ahead of his flock, and the sheep followed his voice (John 10:4).

New Testament links: Revelation 7:17 (alluded to)

23:3 *He restores my soul; He guides me in tracks of righteousness for the sake of His name.*

"He restores my soul." The word "restores" means to bring back. It can mean to refresh someone who is weary, or to bring back someone who has wandered. Both are true of our Shepherd. When we are worn out, He renews us. When we stray, He comes after us and brings us home.

"He guides me in tracks of righteousness." The tracks of righteousness are right paths, the ones that lead where we should go. They are also paths of right living. The same Shepherd who gives us rest also leads us in His ways.

"For the sake of His name." Why does He do all this? For the sake of His own name, His character and His reputation. God's care for us rests on who He is, more than on how good we are. A good shepherd's name is at stake in how his sheep do. God has put His name on His people.

23:4 *Even when I walk in a valley of deep darkness, I will not fear evil, for You **are** with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

"Even when I walk in a valley of deep darkness." Sometimes the path of righteousness goes straight through a dark valley. Good sheep with a good shepherd still go through valleys. Faith does not keep us out of the valley, but the Shepherd goes through it with us.

Many English Bibles translate the Hebrew phrase "the shadow of death," and the word does carry that sense. It covers every dark time in life, and death is the darkest of them. In Judea there were deep, narrow ravines where the sun barely reached. A sheep in such a place could not see what was waiting in the shadows.

"I will not fear evil, for You are with me." At the darkest point of the psalm, David stops talking about God and starts talking to Him. He stops speaking of God as "Him" and speaks to Him as "You." In the valley we need God Himself even more than we need information about Him. Jesus promised His followers, "I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

"Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." A shepherd carried two tools. The rod was a short, heavy club used to drive off wild animals. The staff was a long stick, sometimes with a crook at the end, used to guide sheep and pull them out of trouble. One protects. The other guides. Both comfort the sheep, because they show the shepherd is there and is ready to act.

23:5 *You arrange a table before me in front of my adversaries; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup **is** overflowing.*

The picture now changes from the pasture to a banquet. "You arrange a table before me in front of my adversaries." God is the host, and David is His honored guest. In the ancient Near East, a host who welcomed a guest to his table took responsibility to protect him. David's enemies can see him, but they cannot touch him. He eats in peace while they watch.

"You have anointed my head with oil." A good host would refresh his guests with fragrant oil on the head (Luke 7:46, where Jesus mentions this courtesy). It was a sign of welcome and honor.

"My cup is overflowing." The host keeps pouring until the cup runs over. God gives His people more than enough.

23:6 *Surely goodness and steadfast love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will return **to dwell** in the house of the LORD for length of days.*

"Surely goodness and steadfast love will pursue me all the days of my life." "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 8 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 the Psalms, and later chapters point back here.

The word "pursue" is a strong word. It means to chase. In other psalms, enemies pursue David. Here God's goodness and steadfast love chase him down every day of his life. If you belong to the Shepherd, His love is running after you.

"I will return to dwell in the house of the LORD for length of days." The house of the LORD was the place of God's presence. In David's day that was the tent where the ark rested in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17), and later it was the temple. David longed to be near God all his days. "For length of days" means a long life without end in God's presence. The New Testament shows us the full meaning. Jesus said His Father's house has many dwelling places, and He has gone to prepare a place for us (John 14:2-3). The sheep's journey ends at home with the Shepherd.

Psalm 23 Summary

In Psalm 23 David, who had been a shepherd, says the LORD is his Shepherd, so he will lack nothing he needs. The Shepherd makes him lie down in pastures of grass, leads him beside waters of rest, restores his soul and guides him in tracks of righteousness for the sake of His own name. Even in a valley of deep darkness, David will not fear, because the Shepherd is with him, and His rod and staff comfort him. Then God is pictured as a host who prepares a table for David in front of his enemies, anoints his head with oil and fills his cup to overflowing. God's goodness and steadfast love will pursue him all his life, and he will dwell in the house of the LORD for length of days. Jesus is the good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:11).

People and Places

- Hesed: God's loyal, covenant love; love that keeps its promises. The SLB says "steadfast love"; some English Bibles call it lovingkindness, loving devotion or mercy.

Psalm 23 Study Questions

1. What did David know about shepherding from his own life? (1 Samuel 16:11; 17:34-35)

2. What does it mean to say, "I will not lack"? (23:1)

3. What does the Shepherd do for His sheep in verses 2-3?

4. Why does God lead us in the paths of righteousness? (23:3) Why is that a comfort?

5. Where is David walking in verse 4, and why does he not fear?

6. Where in the psalm does David stop talking about God and start talking to Him? Why might that matter?

7. What were the rod and the staff used for? (23:4)

8. What does the picture change to in verse 5, and what do the table, the oil and the cup tell us about God?

9. What is hesed, the "steadfast love" of verse 6, and what does it mean that it will "pursue" you? (23:6)

10. Which line of Psalm 23 do you most need to hold on to this week, and why?

Psalm 24: The King of Glory

Scripture

Of David. A psalm.

24:1-6 To the LORD ***belongs*** the earth and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it on ***the*** seas, and on ***the*** rivers He established it. Who will go up on the mountain of the LORD? And who will stand in the place of His holiness? ***He who is*** innocent of hands and pure of heart, who has not lifted up My soul to falsehood and has not sworn to deceit. He will lift up a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This ***is*** the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face, Jacob. Selah.

24:7-10 Lift up, gates, your heads, and be lifted up, everlasting doors, and the King of glory will come in. Who ***is*** this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle. Lift up, gates, your heads, and lift ***them*** up, everlasting doors, and the King of glory will come in. Who ***is*** He, this King of glory? The LORD of armies, He ***is*** the King of glory. Selah.

Psalm 24 Preview

Psalm 24 moves in three steps. It begins with the whole earth: everything in it belongs to the LORD, because He made it. Then it narrows to one hill. Who may climb the hill of the LORD and stand in His holy place? Only someone innocent of hands and pure of heart. Last of all, the psalm turns to the city gates and calls them to open wide, because the King of glory is coming in.

Many scholars think this psalm was sung when David brought the ark of the covenant up to Jerusalem. The worshipers climb the hill, voices call back and forth at the gates and the ark, the sign of God's presence, enters the city. Many Christians also see the King of glory as Jesus, the Lord of glory, who ascended to heaven and will come again.

Psalm 24 Study

24:1-2 *To the LORD **belongs** the earth and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it on **the** seas, and on **the** rivers He established it.*

The heading says simply, "Of David. A psalm."

"To the LORD belongs the earth and its fullness." Everything belongs to God: the land, the seas, the animals, the cities and "those who dwell in it." That includes you and me. We are managers of what is His.

Why is it His? "For He has founded it on the seas." He made it. In the ancient world many peoples feared the sea as a power of chaos. The psalm says God set the dry land in place over the waters, as Genesis 1:9-10 describes. Nothing is outside His rule.

Paul quotes verse 1 in 1 Corinthians 10:26. He uses it to tell believers they can eat any food sold in the market, because the earth and everything in it belong to the Lord. This verse frees us to enjoy God's world with thanks. It also reminds us that we will give account for how we use it.

Paul quotes the same words again in 1 Corinthians 10:28. There he says that if someone tells you the food was offered to an idol, do not eat it, "because of conscience." Either way, the earth is the Lord's.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 10:26 (quoted); 1 Corinthians 10:28 (quoted)

24:3-4 *Who will go up on the mountain of the LORD? And who will stand in the place of His holiness?* ***He who is*** *innocent of hands and pure of heart, who has not lifted up My soul to falsehood and has not sworn to deceit.*

"Who will go up on the mountain of the LORD?" The hill is Zion (see Psalm 2), where David pitched a tent for the ark (2 Samuel 6:17). Solomon later built the temple on the hill just north of it, and the name Zion came to include that hill too. "Who will stand in the place of His holiness?" The questions sound like Psalm 15, and the answer is similar.

"He who is innocent of hands and pure of heart." Innocent hands mean right actions. A pure heart means right motives and desires. God cares about both the outside and the inside. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8).

He "has not lifted up My soul to falsehood." The written Hebrew reads "My soul," as though the LORD is speaking of Himself, and many Hebrew copies read "his soul." To lift up the soul to something is to long for it or worship it. Falsehood here takes in idols, which are empty and false. And he "has not sworn to deceit." His word can be trusted.

Who can claim that kind of record? None of us. We need someone with clean hands to go up the hill for us. That is part of why the end of the psalm matters so much.

New Testament links: Matthew 5:8 (alluded to); James 4:8 (alluded to)

24:5-6 *He will lift up a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This* ***is*** *the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face, Jacob. Selah.*

The one who comes to God this way "will lift up a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation." This righteousness means being declared right, and here it is received as a gift. Even the worshiper with clean hands does not earn it. He receives it from the God who saves him.

"This is the generation of those who seek Him." These are the kind of people who seek God's face. To seek His face means to want God Himself, to come near to Him in worship and prayer. The line ends with "Jacob," naming God's people descended from Jacob, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Then comes the word "Selah." This is the first time we meet it in this study, so it is worth a careful look. 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.

24:7-8 *Lift up, gates, your heads, and be lifted up, everlasting doors, and the King of glory will come in. Who **is** this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle.*

Now the scene changes. Voices call out to the gates of the city: "Lift up, gates, your heads." City gates were heavy and tall. The psalm pictures them as people who need to lift their heads high, as if they were too small to let such a great King through. They are "everlasting doors," old gates that have stood for generations. Now they must open wider than ever before.

Why? "And the King of glory will come in." The King of glory is the King who is full of glory, whose greatness and splendor outshine every earthly king.

A voice from inside the gates asks, "Who is this King of glory?" The answer rings out: "The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle." If this psalm was sung when the ark came up to Jerusalem, as described in 2 Samuel 6, then the ark represented the LORD's presence as He entered His city. He is the warrior King who had fought for Israel since the exodus (Exodus 15:3, where Moses sings that the LORD is a warrior).

24:9-10 *Lift up, gates, your heads, and lift **them** up, everlasting doors, and the King of glory will come in. Who **is** He, this King of glory? The LORD of armies, He **is** the King of glory. Selah.*

The call is repeated: "Lift up, gates, your heads." The question comes again, a little stronger: "Who is this King of glory?" And this time the answer is full: "The LORD of armies, He is the King of glory."

"The LORD of armies" is a name for God used often in the Old Testament, and this is the first time we meet it in this study. Many English Bibles call Him "the LORD of hosts," and 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. They are the armies of heaven, the angels who serve Him ("Bless the LORD, all His armies," Psalm 103:21). They are the armies of Israel, for David went out against Goliath "in the name of the LORD of armies, the God of the battle lines of Israel" (1 Samuel 17:45). The name can even take in the stars, which God leads out like an army and calls by name (Isaiah 40:26). Everything in heaven and on earth is under His command. The psalm ends with "Selah," calling us to stop and take in who this King is.

Who is the King of glory? Paul calls Jesus the Lord of glory, and says that if the rulers of this age had understood God's wisdom, they would not have crucified Him (1 Corinthians 2:8). Many see Psalm 24 as a picture of Jesus' ascension, when the risen Christ went up into heaven and was welcomed as King. Many also see it as a picture of His return, when He will come in His glory with

all the angels and sit on His glorious throne (Matthew 25:31). The gates will open, and the King will come in.

The question for each of us is whether we have opened the gates of our own hearts to Him. He asks for more than a small place. He is the LORD of armies.

Psalm 24 Summary

Psalm 24 begins by declaring that the earth and everything in it belong to the LORD, because He founded it upon the seas. Then it asks who may climb the hill of the LORD and stand in His holy place. The answer is the person innocent of hands and pure of heart, who does not worship falsehood or swear deceitfully. He receives blessing and righteousness from the God of his salvation, and such are the people who seek God's face. The psalm closes with a call to the ancient gates to lift up their heads so the King of glory can come in. When asked who He is, the answer comes: the LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle, the LORD of armies. Many scholars connect the psalm with the ark coming to Jerusalem, and many Christians see the King of glory as Jesus, the Lord of glory, in His ascension and His return.

People and Places

- Selah: a word found seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk 3; its meaning is uncertain, probably a musical pause or interlude and a call to stop and think.
- King of glory: the LORD, the King full of glory; many see Him as Christ.
- LORD of armies: God as commander of all the armies of heaven and earth: the angels, the armies of Israel and even the stars.

Psalm 24 Study Questions

1. What belongs to the LORD, and why? (24:1-2)

2. How does Paul use verse 1 in 1 Corinthians 10:26?

3. If the earth is the LORD's, how should that change the way you use your time, money and things?

4. What two questions are asked in verse 3, and what is the answer in verse 4?

5. What is the difference between innocent hands and a pure heart? Why does God care about both?

6. What does the person who comes to God receive? (24:5)

7. What does Selah probably mean, and how could pausing over Scripture help you?

8. What are the gates told to do, and why? (24:7, 9)

9. How is the King of glory described in verses 8 and 10?

10. How does seeing Jesus as the King of glory affect the way you worship Him and look for His return?

Psalm 27: The LORD Is My Light

Scripture

Of David.

27:1-6 The LORD ***is*** my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD ***is*** the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be in dread? When evildoers drew near against me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and my enemies against me, they stumbled and fell. Though a camp encamps against me, my heart will not fear; though war rises against me, in this I ***am*** trusting. One ***thing*** I have asked from the LORD; it I will seek: ***that*** I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to look on the pleasantness of the LORD and to inquire in His temple. For He will conceal me in His shelter in a day of trouble; He will hide me in the hiding place of His tent; on a rock He will lift me high. And now my head will be high above my enemies around me, and I will sacrifice in His tent sacrifices of shouting; I will sing and sing praises to the LORD.

27:7-14 Hear, LORD, my voice ***when*** I call, and be gracious to me and answer me. To You my heart has said, "Seek My face." Your face, LORD, I will seek. Do not hide Your face from me; do not turn Your servant aside in anger; You have been my help; do not abandon me and do not forsake me, God of my salvation. For my father and my mother have forsaken me, and the LORD will gather me ***in***. Instruct me, LORD, ***in*** Your way, and lead me in a path of level ground because of my enemies. Do not give me over to the desire of my adversaries, for witnesses of falsehood have risen against me, and ***one who*** breathes out violence. Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of ***the*** living— Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; and wait for the LORD.

Psalm 27 Preview

Psalm 27 has two moods. The first half is bold and confident. The LORD is David's light, his salvation and his defense, so whom should he fear? Even if an army surrounds him, his heart will be steady. Above everything else, he wants one thing: to live in God's house and look on His beauty.

The second half turns to prayer, and the tone changes. David pleads with God not to hide His face or turn him away. False witnesses are rising against him. He admits he would have given up if he had not believed he would see God's goodness. And he ends by speaking to his own heart, and to ours: wait for the LORD. Psalm 27 shows us that confidence and struggle can live in the same heart, and that both can turn into prayer.

Psalm 27 Study

27:1 *The LORD **is** my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD **is** the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be in dread?*

The heading says this psalm is "Of David." It does not say when he wrote it, though his life gave him plenty of enemies and plenty of armies to face.

"The LORD is my light." Light lets us see where we are going, and it drives away the fear that darkness brings. "And my salvation." Salvation here means rescue, being delivered from danger by God. The New Testament fills that word with its deepest meaning, rescue from sin and death through Jesus. "The LORD is the stronghold of my life." A stronghold is a fortress where someone can be safe.

Each statement is followed by a question: "Whom shall I fear?" "Of whom shall I be in dread?" The questions answer themselves. If God is my light, my rescue and my fortress, no one is big enough to make me afraid. Paul asks almost the same question in Romans 8:31: "If God is for us, who is against us?"

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," and He promised that those who follow Him will not walk in darkness (John 8:12). The LORD who was David's light has shown us His face in Christ.

27:2-3 *When evildoers drew near against me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and my enemies against me, they stumbled and fell. Though a camp encamps against me, my heart will not fear; though war rises against me, in this I **am** trusting.*

David remembers what happened before. "When evildoers drew near against me to devour my flesh," like wild animals ready to tear him apart, "my adversaries and my enemies against me, they stumbled and fell." God brought them down. Past rescues give present courage.

"Though a camp encamps against me, my heart will not fear." Even if an entire army camped around him, David says he would not panic. "Though war rises against me, in this I am trusting." David is not saying war is easy or that he never feels afraid. His confidence is anchored in something bigger than the size of the threat.

27:4 *One **thing** I have asked from the LORD; it I will seek: **that** I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to look on the pleasantness of the LORD and to inquire in His temple.*

Verse 4 is the heart of the psalm. "One thing I have asked from the LORD; it I will seek." Of all the things David could have asked for, safety, victory, a long life, he names one: "that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life."

Why? "To look on the pleasantness of the LORD." David wants to look at God, to enjoy Him, to gaze on how good and lovely He is. "And to inquire in His temple." The word can mean to inquire or to reflect. David wants to spend time thinking about God in God's presence.

David did not live to see Solomon's temple. The Hebrew word for "temple" here can also mean a palace or a holy house, and it was used for the tabernacle at Shiloh in Samuel's day (1 Samuel 1:9; 3:3). In David's own day the ark rested in the tent David set up for it in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17; 1 Chronicles 16:1), while the tabernacle of Moses stood at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39; 21:29). David is speaking of the place where God met His people.

Jesus told Martha that "there is need of one thing," and that Mary had chosen it by sitting at His feet and listening to Him (Luke 10:42). If you could ask God for one thing, what would it be? David's answer was God Himself.

27:5-6 *For He will conceal me in His shelter in a day of trouble; He will hide me in the hiding place of His tent; on a rock He will lift me high. And now my head will be high above my enemies around me, and I will sacrifice in His tent sacrifices of shouting; I will sing and sing praises to the LORD.*

"For He will conceal me in His shelter in a day of trouble." The place David longs to be is also the place where he is safe. "He will hide me in the hiding place of His tent." God shelters His people like a host who protects the guest in his tent (see Psalm 23:5). "On a rock He will lift me high," out of reach of the flood or the enemy.

"And now my head will be high above my enemies around me." The head that might have been bowed in defeat is raised in victory. And David's response is worship: "I will sacrifice in His tent sacrifices of shouting." He will sing, and he says it two ways to be sure we hear it: "I will sing and sing praises to the LORD."

27:7-8 *Hear, LORD, my voice **when** I call, and be gracious to me and answer me. To You my heart has said, "Seek My face." Your face, LORD, I will seek.*

Now the psalm shifts. The confident song becomes an urgent prayer. "Hear, LORD, my voice when I call." David is still trusting, but now he is pleading. "Be gracious to me and answer me."

Verse 8 shows us how prayer works. "To You my heart has said, 'Seek My face.' Your face, LORD, I will seek." God speaks first. He invites His people to seek Him, and David's heart repeats God's words back to Him and answers. Prayer is our response to God's invitation. We do not have to talk God into listening. He asked us to come.

27:9-10 *Do not hide Your face from me; do not turn Your servant aside in anger; You have been my help; do not abandon me and do not forsake me, God of my salvation. For my father and my mother have forsaken me, and the LORD will gather me **in**.*

"Do not hide Your face from me." To seek God's face is to seek His presence and favor. For God to hide His face would mean He had turned away. David fears that, and he asks God not to "turn Your servant aside in anger." He remembers what God has been: "You have been my help." So he pleads, "Do not abandon me and do not forsake me."

Verse 10 is tender: "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, and the LORD will gather me in." The Hebrew can be read as something that has happened or as something that might happen. Both readings lead to the same place: God's love is more faithful than the closest human love. When parents fail, God does not.

Some who read this have been abandoned, neglected or hurt by the people who should have loved them most. God sees that. David says "the LORD will gather me in," like someone gathering a child into his arms. God is "a father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5). No one is too forgotten for Him.

27:11-12 *Instruct me, LORD, **in** Your way, and lead me in a path of level ground because of my enemies. Do not give me over to the desire of my adversaries, for witnesses of falsehood have risen against me, and **one who** breathes out violence.*

"Instruct me, LORD, in Your way." David wants to walk the right road, the way of Psalm 1. "Lead me in a path of level ground because of my enemies." A level path is smooth and straight, without places to trip. His enemies are watching, waiting for him to stumble.

"Do not give me over to the desire of my adversaries." He asks God not to hand him over to them. "For witnesses of falsehood have risen against me." They are telling lies about him, and each of them "breathes out violence." Their words are weapons.

Jesus faced this too. At His trial many false witnesses came forward (Matthew 26:59-60). If people are telling lies about you, David's prayer can be yours. Ask God to teach you His way, to keep you on a straight path and to defend you, instead of fighting back with lies of your own.

27:13-14 *Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of **the** living— Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; and wait for the LORD.*

"Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." In Hebrew the sentence breaks off, and many English Bibles finish it with "I would have despaired." David may be admitting there was a time when he could have given up. What held him was faith. David hoped for heaven, but he also believed he would see God's goodness in this life, here and now.

Then David speaks to himself and to every reader. "Wait for the LORD." In the Bible, waiting for the LORD is active. It means to trust Him, to hope in Him and to look to Him expectantly while He works out His timing. "Be strong, and let your heart take courage." Waiting takes strength. "Wait for the LORD!" David says it twice. The psalm that began with bold confidence ends with patient hope. Both are faith.

Psalm 27 Summary

Psalm 27 opens with David's bold confidence that the LORD is his light, his salvation and the defense of his life, so he has no one to fear. His enemies stumbled and fell, and even if an army camps against him, he will be confident. The one thing he asks is to dwell in the house of the LORD all his days, to look on the pleasantness of the LORD and to inquire in His temple, where God hides him in the day of trouble and lifts him up on a rock. In the second half David prays urgently. He answers God's invitation to seek His face and pleads with Him not to hide His face or forsake him. Though his father and mother forsake him, the LORD will gather him in. He asks God to teach him His way and protect him from false witnesses. He would have despaired if he had not believed he would see the LORD's goodness in the land of the living, and he ends by telling himself and us to wait for the LORD, be strong and take courage.

Where do I need to wait for the LORD right now? In every part of my life. Waiting is not my strength. Psalm 27 tells me to be strong and let my heart take courage while I wait.

Psalm 27 Study Questions

1. What three things does David say the LORD is to him in verse 1?

2. How did David's past experience with enemies give him confidence? (27:2-3)

3. What is the one thing David asks for, and why does he want it? (27:4)

4. If you could ask God for only one thing, what would it be? How does David's request challenge you?

5. What does God do for David in the day of trouble? (27:5)

6. What does verse 8 teach us about who starts the conversation in prayer?

7. What does David say about his father and mother, and what will the LORD do? (27:10)

8. How could verse 10 comfort someone who has been hurt or abandoned by family?

9. What were David's enemies doing to him, and what did he ask God to do? (27:11-12)

10. What does it mean to "wait for the LORD"? Where in your life do you need to wait for Him right now? (27:14)

Psalm 32: The Joy of Forgiveness

Scripture

Of David. A Maskil.

32:1-5 How blessed ***is*** he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed ***is*** the man to whom the LORD does not count iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit! When I kept silent, my bones wore out through my roaring all the day. For day and night Your hand was heavy on me; my moisture was changed by the dry heat of summer. Selah. My sin I made known to You, and my iniquity I did not cover; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You, You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

32:6-11 For this let every godly one pray to You at a time of finding; surely, at a flood of many waters, they will not reach him. You ***are*** a hiding place for me; from distress You will preserve me; with shouts of deliverance You will surround me. Selah. I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel ***you***; My eye ***will be*** on you. Do not be like a horse, like a mule, ***which has*** no understanding, with bit and bridle, its trappings, to restrain ***it***; ***else it will*** not come near to you. Many pains ***belong*** to the wicked, and the one who trusts in the LORD, steadfast love will surround him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, righteous ones, and shout for joy, all upright of heart.

Psalm 32 Preview

David knew what it was to carry a hidden sin. For a while he kept quiet about it, and the silence wore him down in body and soul. Then he confessed it to the LORD, and God forgave him. Psalm 32 opens with the happiness of a forgiven person, and then David tells the story of how he got there.

In the second half David turns to the rest of us. He urges the godly to pray while God may be found, and then God Himself speaks, promising to teach and guide. The psalm ends with a call to shout for joy. Paul quotes the opening verses in Romans 4 to show that God has always made sinners right with Himself the same way: by grace through faith.

Psalm 32 Study

32:1-2 *How blessed **is** he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed **is** the man to whom the LORD does not count iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!*

The heading reads, "Of David. A Maskil." David wrote it. Maskil appears here for the first time in the book of Psalms. The meaning is uncertain. It comes from a Hebrew word connected with wisdom and understanding, so many think it marks a teaching psalm, or a psalm written with special skill. Psalm 32 certainly teaches. In verse 8 God says, "I will instruct you." The heading does not tell us what sin David had in mind. Many connect this psalm with his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah and with Psalm 51, but we can't be sure.

"Blessed" means happy, truly well off. David's first word is about joy, and the joy belongs to a person who has been forgiven.

Here are the parallel lines described in the Overview, each saying the thing again in other words. David uses three words for wrongdoing. Transgression is rebellion, stepping over a line God drew. Sin is missing the mark. Iniquity is something twisted or crooked, and it carries the idea of guilt. He also uses three pictures for what God does with them. Transgression is "forgiven," which means lifted off and carried away. Sin is "covered," put out of sight. And "the LORD does not count iniquity," which means He does not count it against us or charge it to our account.

Paul quotes these verses in Romans 4:6-8. He says David speaks of the blessing on the man "to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works." David lived under the Law of Moses, yet no sacrifice he could bring would undo what he had done. He was forgiven by God's mercy, received by faith. Salvation has always been by grace through faith. Today we know how God can cover sin justly: Jesus bore it on the cross (Isaiah 53:5).

The forgiven man is also one "in whose spirit there is no deceit." David does not mean he is sinless. He means he has stopped pretending before God. The next verses show what it was like before he got there.

New Testament links: Romans 4:6-8 (quoted)

32:3-4 *When I kept silent, my bones wore out through my roaring all the day. For day and night Your hand was heavy on me; my moisture was changed by the dry heat of summer. Selah.*

"When I kept silent, my bones wore out." David tried saying nothing about his sin. He went on with life as if all was well. But hidden sin did not stay hidden inside him. It came out as "roaring all the day." Guilt wore on his body, his sleep and his strength.

"For day and night Your hand was heavy on me." David knew who was pressing on him. It was the LORD. God loved him too much to leave him comfortable in his sin. Hebrews 12:6 says the Lord disciplines those He loves.

"My moisture was changed by the dry heat of summer." Israel's summers are long and dry, and plants wilt under the sun. That is how David felt: dried up and spent.

Then comes "Selah," which, as we saw in Psalm 24, probably marks a pause. It fits here. Ask yourself whether you are carrying something you have never brought to God. Not every illness or weariness comes from sin (John 9:2-3), and we should not tell a suffering person that it does. But if your conscience is heavy, that weight may be God's kindness calling you home.

32:5 *My sin I made known to You, and my iniquity I did not cover; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You, You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

Here the psalm turns. "My sin I made known to You, and my iniquity I did not cover." The same three words from verses 1-2 return: sin, iniquity and transgressions. David names them all. To confess is to agree with God about our sin, to call it what He calls it, without excuses.

"And You, You forgave the iniquity of my sin." The verse moves fast. David said, "I will confess," and the next thing we read is that God forgave. He did not make David earn it back first. Proverbs 28:13 says the one who covers his transgressions will not prosper, but "he who confesses and forsakes them will be shown mercy." The apostle John says the same in 1 John 1:9: if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us.

Another "Selah" follows. The long silence ended the moment he spoke. If you have been putting off confession, the road back to God is shorter than you think.

32:6-7 *For this let every godly one pray to You at a time of finding; surely, at a flood of many waters, they will not reach him. You **are** a hiding place for me; from distress You will preserve me; with shouts of deliverance You will surround me. Selah.*

"Therefore" turns David's story into an invitation. Let every godly one pray "at a time of finding," while God may be found. Isaiah 55:6 also tells us, "Seek the LORD while He lets Himself be found." Don't wait. Don't let your heart grow hard. Today is the day to come to Him.

"Surely, at a flood of many waters, they will not reach him." Floods stand for overwhelming trouble in the Psalms. The person who has made peace with God is not promised a life without floods, but the waters will not sweep him away.

"You are a hiding place for me." There is a lovely reversal here. Before, David was hiding his sin from God. Now he hides in God. The LORD protects him and surrounds him "with shouts of deliverance," as though he were ringed by people singing about how God rescued him. A third "Selah" lets that picture settle.

32:8-9 *I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel **you**; My eye **will be** on you. Do not be like a horse, like a mule, **which has** no understanding, with bit and bridle, its trappings, to restrain **it**; **else it will** not come near to you.*

Now a new voice speaks: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go." Most teachers believe God Himself is answering David here, since He says, "I will counsel you; My eye will be on you." Others think David is now the teacher, keeping the promise he makes in Psalm 51:13 to teach sinners God's ways. Whichever voice it is, the forgiven person is not left to figure out life alone. God guides him and keeps His eye on him, like a good guide watching a traveler on a hard path.

Then a warning: "Do not be like a horse, like a mule, which has no understanding." A horse or mule has to be controlled with "bit and bridle." Without them it will not come near you or go where you want. God would rather have children who listen and come willingly than animals He must drag. David had been stubborn, and it cost him dearly. We can learn from his story without repeating it.

32:10-11 *Many pains **belong** to the wicked, and the one who trusts in the LORD, steadfast love will surround him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, righteous ones, and shout for joy, all upright of heart.*

"Many pains belong to the wicked." Sin promises happiness but pays out pain. By contrast, "the one who trusts in the LORD, steadfast love will surround him." Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 23:6). In verse 7 shouts of deliverance surround the forgiven man. In verse 10 God's steadfast love surrounds him. He is hemmed in by grace.

The psalm ends in joy: "Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, righteous ones." The righteous are those who are right with God. In this psalm they are clearly forgiven sinners, not people who never failed. The "upright of heart" are people like David in verse 2, with no deceit in their spirit. A psalm that began with a man groaning under his guilt ends with God's people shouting for joy.

Psalm 32 Summary

David begins Psalm 32 by calling the forgiven person truly happy, because his transgression is forgiven, his sin is covered and the LORD does not count his iniquity against him. Paul quotes these verses in Romans 4 to show that God credits righteousness apart from works. David then tells his story. While he kept silent about his sin, he groaned all day and felt God's heavy hand drying him up like summer heat. When he confessed, God forgave the guilt of his sin. David urges the godly to pray while God may be found, and he calls the LORD his hiding place. God promises to instruct and guide His people and warns them not to be stubborn like a horse or mule. The wicked have many sorrows, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD, so the righteous are called to rejoice and shout for joy.

Psalm 32 Study Questions

1. What three things does David say God has done with the forgiven person's wrongdoing? (32:1-2)

2. How does Paul use these verses in Romans 4:6-8, and what do they show about how people are saved?

3. What happened to David while he kept silent about his sin? (32:3-4)

4. Why do you think people try to hide their sin instead of confessing it?

5. How quickly did God forgive David once he confessed? (32:5)

6. What does it mean to pray "at a time of finding"? (32:6)

7. David once hid his sin from God. Now he calls God his hiding place (32:7). What does that change look like in a believer's life?

8. What does God promise in verse 8, and what warning follows in verse 9?

9. Is there an area of your life where you are more like the horse or mule than a willing follower? What would it look like to come near?

10. What surrounds the person who trusts in the LORD, and how does the psalm end? (32:10-11)

Psalm 34: Taste and See

Scripture

Of David, when he changed his sense before Abimelech, and he drove him away, and he went.

34:1-10 I will bless the LORD at every time; His praise ***will be*** continually in my mouth. In the LORD my soul will boast; let the humble hear and rejoice. Magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and from all my fears He rescued me. They looked to Him and were radiant, and let their faces not be abashed. This afflicted ***one*** called, and the LORD heard, and from all his troubles He saved him. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and He frees them. Taste and see that the LORD ***is*** good; how blessed ***is*** the man ***who*** takes refuge in Him! Fear the LORD, His holy ones, for there is no lack for those who fear Him. Young lions are in want and are hungry, and those who seek the LORD do not lack any good ***thing***.

34:11-22 Come, sons, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who ***is*** the man who desires life, ***who*** loves days to see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD ***are*** toward ***the*** righteous, and His ears ***are*** toward their cry for help. The face of the LORD ***is*** against those who do evil, to cut off their memory from the earth. They cry out, and the LORD hears, and from all their troubles He rescues them. The LORD ***is*** near to the broken of heart, and the crushed of spirit He saves. Many ***are*** the evils of a righteous ***man***, and from them all the LORD rescues him. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Evil will kill the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be held guilty. The LORD ransoms the soul of His servants, and none who take refuge in Him will be held guilty.

Psalm 34 Preview

David wrote this psalm after a narrow escape. He had fled from King Saul into Philistine territory, and when he was recognized there he pretended to be insane so the king would send him away. It was not his finest hour, but God brought him through. Psalm 34 is his song of thanks. He praises the LORD, tells what God did for him and invites everyone to "taste and see that the LORD is good."

In the second half David becomes a teacher. He gathers his listeners like children and teaches them the fear of the LORD: guard your tongue, turn from evil and pursue peace. The righteous have many troubles, but the LORD is near to the brokenhearted and delivers them. The apostle John saw verse 20 fulfilled at the cross, when not one of Jesus' bones was broken.

Psalm 34 Study

34:1-3 *I will bless the LORD at every time; His praise **will be** continually in my mouth. In the LORD my soul will boast; let the humble hear and rejoice. Magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.*

The heading says David wrote this psalm "when he changed his sense before Abimelech, and he drove him away, and he went." To change his sense means he acted as if he had lost his mind. The account is in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. Running from Saul, David went to the Philistine city of Gath. The servants of the king recognized him as the famous warrior who had killed so many Philistines, and David was afraid. So he acted like a madman, scribbling on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard. The king sent him away in disgust. In 1 Samuel the king is called Achish. Many scholars think Abimelech was a royal title for Philistine kings, the way Pharaoh was for Egypt's kings (compare Genesis 20 and 26). Others think the king had two names. Some think the writer of the heading mixed up the names. I take the heading as part of the text, and the heading and 1 Samuel describe the same event.

This psalm is also an acrostic. In Hebrew, nearly every verse begins with the next letter of the alphabet. Many think this was a way of saying everything from A to Z, and it would have helped people memorize it.

David begins, "I will bless the LORD at every time." To bless the LORD is to praise Him and speak well of Him. David does not boast in his own cleverness at Gath. "In the LORD my soul will boast." And he does not want to praise alone: "Magnify the LORD with me." To magnify God is not to make Him bigger. He is already infinitely great. It is to make Him look as big to others as He really is.

34:4-7 *I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and from all my fears He rescued me. They looked to Him and were radiant, and let their faces not be abashed. This afflicted **one** called, and the LORD heard, and from all his troubles He saved him. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and He frees them.*

"I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and from all my fears He rescued me." David's first problem was fear. He was afraid in Gath (1 Samuel 21:12). God did more than get him out of the city. He delivered him from the fear itself.

"They looked to Him and were radiant." Those who look to God in their trouble come away with faces that shine, like Moses' face after he had been with God (Exodus 34:29). "Let their faces not be abashed." People who trust the LORD will not end up disappointed.

"This afflicted one called." David calls himself an afflicted one. He was the anointed future king, but at that moment he was a hunted refugee with nothing. He called, "and the LORD heard."

"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him." An encampment is an army's camp. God's angel sets up camp around His people to guard them. In 2 Kings 6:15-17, Elisha's servant saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire around them. Many believe the angel of the LORD was the Son of God appearing in the Old Testament, long before He was born as a man in

Bethlehem. Others see a created angel sent by God. Whichever view is right, God's people are not as alone as they feel.

34:8 *Taste and see that the LORD **is** good; how blessed **is** the man **who** takes refuge in Him!*

"Taste and see that the LORD is good." David does not ask us to take his word for it. He invites us to try God for ourselves. You can read a menu, but you don't know how good the food is until you taste it. In the same way, we can hear about God all our lives, but we know His goodness when we trust Him ourselves.

Peter borrows this verse in 1 Peter 2:2-3. He tells believers to long for the pure milk of the word, since they have tasted the kindness of the Lord. Peter applies the words to Jesus. In Him we taste how good God is.

"Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!" A refuge is a safe place to run in danger. David had run to Gath for safety and found danger there. The safest place was the LORD.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 2:3 (alluded to)

34:9-10 *Fear the LORD, His holy ones, for there is no lack for those who fear Him. Young lions are in want and are hungry, and those who seek the LORD do not lack any good **thing**.*

"Fear the LORD, His holy ones." The holy ones are God's people, the saints we saw in Psalm 16. The fear of the LORD, as we saw in Psalm 19, is reverent awe that trusts God and obeys Him. In this psalm, fearing the LORD goes hand in hand with being safe (verse 7) and lacking nothing (verse 9).

"Young lions are in want and are hungry." Lions are strong and fierce hunters, yet even they go hungry at times. Strength does not guarantee supply. "And those who seek the LORD do not lack any good thing." The promise covers every "good thing," and God decides what is good for us. Jesus taught that our heavenly Father knows what we need (Matthew 6:32-33). Believers may still go without things they want. They will not go without God's care.

34:11-14 *Come, sons, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who **is** the man who desires life, **who** loves days to see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*

"Come, sons, listen to me." David now speaks like a father or teacher. "I will teach you the fear of the LORD." Verse 9 told us to fear the LORD. Now David shows what it looks like in daily life.

"Who is the man who desires life, who loves days to see good?" Everyone wants a good life. David answers with four plain commands. Watch what you say: "Keep your tongue from evil." Don't lie: keep "your lips from speaking deceit." Turn around: "Turn away from evil and do good." And go after peace: "Seek peace and pursue it." Peace does not just happen. We have to chase it.

Peter quotes verses 12-16 in 1 Peter 3:10-12. He writes to Christians who were being mistreated and tells them not to pay back evil for evil, but to bless. David learned this lesson himself. In the years after Gath, he twice had the chance to kill Saul and would not do it (1 Samuel 24 and 26).

New Testament links: 1 Peter 3:10-12 (quoted)

34:15-18 *The eyes of the LORD **are** toward **the** righteous, and His ears **are** toward their cry for help. The face of the LORD **is** against those who do evil, to cut off their memory from the earth. They cry out, and the LORD hears, and from all their troubles He rescues them. The LORD **is** near to the broken of heart, and the crushed of spirit He saves.*

"The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and His ears are toward their cry." Here the righteous are those who fear the LORD and walk in His ways, people right with God. God watches over them and listens. By contrast, "The face of the LORD is against those who do evil." God is not neutral about evil. In the end, the memory of evildoers will be cut off from the earth.

"They cry out, and the LORD hears." David has said this three times now (verses 4, 6 and 17). He wants it to sink in.

Verse 18 is a word to hold on to in grief: "The LORD is near to the broken of heart, and the crushed of spirit He saves." When your heart is broken, God comes close. You may feel crushed, but you are not abandoned. Isaiah 61:1 promised One who would bind up the brokenhearted, and Jesus read that passage in the synagogue at Nazareth and said it was fulfilled in Him (Luke 4:16-21).

Peter's quotation goes on into these verses: "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears toward their supplication" (1 Peter 3:12).

New Testament links: 1 Peter 3:10-12 (quoted)

34:19-20 *Many **are** the evils of a righteous **man**, and from them all the LORD rescues him. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.*

"Many are the evils of a righteous man." David doesn't pretend. Fearing God does not mean an easy life. The righteous have many troubles. "And from them all the LORD rescues him." Sometimes God delivers us out of trouble in this life. Sometimes He delivers us through it. And for those who die in faith, He delivers them finally in the resurrection.

"He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken." In David's life this means God protects the whole person. But the New Testament sees more here. When Jesus died on the cross, the soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified with Him to hurry their deaths, but they found Jesus already dead and did not break His legs. John says this happened to fulfill the Scripture, "A bone of His will not be broken" (John 19:36). John may also have had the Passover lamb in mind, since its bones were not to be broken (Exodus 12:46). Jesus is the Righteous One above all others, and the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Even in His death, the Father kept every one of His bones.

New Testament links: John 19:36 (quoted); 2 Timothy 3:11 (alluded to)

34:21-22 *Evil will kill the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be held guilty. The LORD ransoms the soul of His servants, and none who take refuge in Him will be held guilty.*

"Evil will kill the wicked." The wicked man's own evil turns on him in the end. Those who hate the righteous "will be held guilty," which means they will be found guilty and punished.

The psalm ends with a promise: "The LORD ransoms the soul of His servants." To ransom is to buy back, to pay the price to set someone free. "None who take refuge in Him will be held guilty." For those who trust in Christ, Paul gives the same promise: there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). David began this psalm a frightened refugee. He ends it sure that the LORD ransoms those who hide in Him.

Psalm 34 Summary

David wrote Psalm 34 after he escaped from the Philistine king by pretending to be insane. In this alphabetic psalm he blesses the LORD at all times and invites the humble to magnify the LORD with him. He sought the LORD, and God answered and delivered him from all his fears. The angel of the LORD camps around those who fear Him, and David invites everyone to taste and see that the LORD is good. Those who fear Him lack no good thing. David then teaches the fear of the LORD: keep your tongue from evil, depart from evil, do good and pursue peace. God's eyes and ears are on the righteous, and He is near to the brokenhearted. The righteous have many afflictions, but the LORD delivers them, and He keeps all their bones, a verse John saw fulfilled at the cross. The LORD ransoms His servants, and none who take refuge in Him will be held guilty.

People and Places

- Abimelech: the name the heading gives the king of Gath, called Achish in 1 Samuel 21; many think Abimelech was a royal title.
- Gath: a Philistine city, the hometown of Goliath, where David fled from Saul.

Psalm 34 Study Questions

1. What was happening in David's life when he wrote this psalm? (heading; 1 Samuel 21:10-15)

2. What does it mean to "magnify the LORD," and why does David want others to do it with him? (34:3)

3. From what did the LORD deliver David in verse 4, and why do you think David mentions that first?

4. What does the angel of the LORD do for those who fear Him? (34:7)

5. What does it mean to "taste and see that the LORD is good"? How have you tasted His goodness? (34:8)

6. What four things does David say a person who loves life should do? (34:13-14)

7. Pursuing peace takes effort (34:14). Is there a relationship in your life where you need to chase after peace, where it is safe and wise to do so?

8. What does verse 18 promise to the brokenhearted, and how could you use it to comfort someone?

9. How does John connect verse 20 to Jesus' death? (John 19:36)

10. David admits that the righteous have many afflictions (34:19). How does knowing that help us when we suffer?

Psalm 37: Do Not Fret

Scripture

Of David.

37:1-11 Do not fret yourself because of evildoers; do not be jealous of those who do unrighteousness. For like grass they will quickly wither, and like the greenery of vegetation they will fade. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell ***in the*** land and graze ***on*** faithfulness. And take delight in the LORD, and He will give you the requests of your heart. Roll your way on the LORD, and trust in Him, and He Himself will act. And He will bring forth your righteousness like the light, and your justice like the noonday. Be still before the LORD and wait longingly for Him; do not fret yourself because of ***one*** who makes his way prosper, because of a man who carries out plots. Refrain from anger and forsake rage; do not fret yourself, only to do evil. For evildoers will be cut off, and those who wait for the LORD, they will possess ***the*** land. And yet a little ***while***, and ***there will be*** no wicked ***one***; and you will look carefully at his place, and he ***will*** not ***be there***. And the humble will possess ***the*** land, and they will take delight in ***the*** abundance of peace.

37:12-22 The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him. The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day will come. The wicked have drawn a sword and have bent their bow, to make ***the*** afflicted and ***the*** needy fall, to slaughter ***those*** upright of way. Their sword will enter into their ***own*** heart, and their bows will be broken. Better ***is*** the little of the righteous than the abundance of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked will be broken, and the LORD sustains the righteous. The LORD knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance will be forever. They will not be ashamed in a time of evil, and in days of famine they will be satisfied. For the wicked will perish, and the enemies of the LORD ***will be*** like the splendor of ***the*** pastures; they will come to an end; in smoke they will come to an end. The wicked borrows and does not repay, and the righteous shows favor and gives. For those blessed by Him will possess ***the*** land, and those cursed by Him will be cut off.

37:23-29 From the LORD the steps of a man are established, and He delights in his way. When he falls, he will not be thrown down, for the LORD supports his hand. I have been young, and also I am old, and I have not seen ***the*** righteous forsaken, and his offspring seeking bread. All the day he shows favor and lends, and his offspring ***are*** for a blessing. Turn away from evil and do good, and dwell forever. For the LORD loves justice, and He will not forsake His godly ones; they are preserved forever, and the offspring of the wicked is cut off. The righteous will possess ***the*** land and will dwell on it for all time.

37:30-40 The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of his God ***is*** in his heart; his steps do not slip. The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to kill him. The LORD will not forsake him in his hand, and He will not condemn him when he is judged. Wait for the LORD and keep His way, and He will exalt you to possess ***the*** land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see ***it***. I have seen a wicked ***man***, ruthless, and spreading himself like a luxuriant native tree. And he passed away, and look, he ***was*** not ***there***; and I sought him, and he was not found. Watch the blameless and see the upright, for ***there is*** a future for a man of peace.

And transgressors will be destroyed altogether; the future of the wicked will be cut off. And the salvation of the righteous ***is*** from the LORD, their place of refuge in a time of trouble. And the LORD has helped them and has delivered them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, for they have taken refuge in Him.

Psalm 37 Preview

Why do people who do wrong so often seem to get ahead? They cheat and lie, and they grow rich. They push others down, and they seem to get away with it. Meanwhile people who try to do right struggle. That can make a believer angry, envious or discouraged. Psalm 37 is David's answer, written as an older man looking back on a long life. His first words set the tone for the whole psalm: "Do not fret."

Psalm 37 is a wisdom psalm, more like the book of Proverbs than a prayer or a song of praise, with short sayings that set the righteous and the wicked side by side. David does not pretend the wicked never prosper. He says their success is short, and God's people should trust Him, do good, wait for Him and leave the wicked in His hands. Five times he says the humble and the righteous "will possess the land," and Jesus takes up that promise in the Sermon on the Mount.

Psalm 37 Study

37:1-2 *Do not fret yourself because of evildoers; do not be jealous of those who do unrighteousness. For like grass they will quickly wither, and like the greenery of vegetation they will fade.*

The heading says simply, "Of David." From verse 25 we learn he wrote it when he was old. Like Psalm 34, it is an acrostic. In Hebrew, every other verse, more or less, begins with the next letter of the alphabet.

"Do not fret yourself because of evildoers." The Hebrew word behind "fret" means to burn or to get heated. David is talking about the slow burn we feel when we watch dishonest people prosper. The second line, as so often in Hebrew poetry, says it another way: "Do not be jealous of those who do unrighteousness." Fretting and jealousy feed each other. We get angry at the wicked, and part of us wishes we had what they have.

Why not fret? "For like grass they will quickly wither." In Israel, the grass turns green after the winter rains and then dries up and dies in the summer heat. The wicked may look green and fresh now, but they will not last. Isaiah 40:6-8 uses the same picture for all human life: the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.

37:3-4 *Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell **in the** land and graze **on** faithfulness. And take delight in the LORD, and He will give you the requests of your heart.*

David gives us something better to do than fret. "Trust in the LORD and do good." Trust comes first. When we trust God to deal with the wicked, we are free to spend our energy doing good instead of stewing.

"Dwell in the land and graze on faithfulness." Stay where God has put you. Don't run off or give up. "Graze" is a shepherd's word. A flock stays in its pasture and feeds there day after day. Faithfulness grows slowly in the same way, as we tend it day after day.

"And take delight in the LORD, and He will give you the requests of your heart." People sometimes read this as a promise that God will give us whatever we want if we are religious enough. But the order matters. First we delight in the LORD Himself. When He becomes our joy, our desires begin to change. We start wanting what He wants. Then He gives us those desires, and above all He gives us Himself. The person who delights in God will never be disappointed in the end, because the thing he wants most is the thing God most loves to give.

37:5-6 *Roll your way on the LORD, and trust in Him, and He Himself will act. And He will bring forth your righteousness like the light, and your justice like the noonday.*

"Roll your way on the LORD." The Hebrew word means just that, to roll. Picture rolling a heavy load off your own back and onto God. Our "way" is the whole course of our life: our plans, our problems, our future. "Trust in Him, and He Himself will act." We roll the load onto Him, and He carries it to the end.

"He will bring forth your righteousness like the light, and your justice like the noonday." The righteous may be slandered or misunderstood now. Their good name may be hidden, like the sun behind clouds. But God will bring the truth out into the open, as bright as noon. We do not have to fight to defend our reputation. God will vindicate His people in His time.

37:7-8 *Be still before the LORD and wait longingly for Him; do not fret yourself because of **one** who makes his way prosper, because of a man who carries out plots. Refrain from anger and forsake rage; do not fret yourself, only to do evil.*

"Be still before the LORD and wait longingly for Him." To be still is to rest, silent before Him. Waiting is hard. We want God to act now. But waiting for Him means we trust His timing, even when the wicked are carrying out "plots" and seem to succeed.

"Refrain from anger and forsake rage; do not fret yourself, only to do evil." That third "do not fret" comes with a warning. Our anger at evil can turn into evil. Bitterness makes us harsh. Envy can make us copy the very people we resent. James 1:20 says that "the anger of a man does not produce the righteousness of God." Paul allows that we may be angry, but he warns us not to sin in it (Ephesians 4:26).

37:9-11 *For evildoers will be cut off, and those who wait for the LORD, they will possess **the** land. And yet a little **while**, and **there will be** no wicked **one**; and you will look carefully at his place, and he **will** not **be there**. And the humble will possess **the** land, and they will take delight in **the** abundance of peace.*

"For evildoers will be cut off, and those who wait for the LORD, they will possess the land." Here is the first of the promises about possessing the land (verses 9, 11, 22, 29 and 34). In David's day the land meant Canaan, the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants. To inherit it was to live there in peace and pass it on to your children.

"And yet a little while, and there will be no wicked one." From where we stand, the wicked seem to last a long time. From God's point of view, their time is short. Though you "look carefully at his place, and he will not be there."

"And the humble will possess the land." The humble are people who do not grab or push, who trust God instead of their own power. Jesus took up this verse in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). The Hebrew word for "land" can also mean "earth," and Jesus widens the promise. I believe this will be fulfilled when Christ returns and reigns on the earth. His people will reign with Him (Revelation 5:10). God promised the land to Abraham's descendants "an everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:8), and Paul says, "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). I believe those promises to Israel still stand, and the whole earth will be the possession of the humble in His kingdom.

New Testament links: Matthew 5:5 (alluded to)

37:12-15 *The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him. The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day will come. The wicked have drawn a sword and have bent their bow, to make **the** afflicted and **the** needy fall, to slaughter **those** upright of way. Their sword will enter into their **own** heart, and their bows will be broken.*

"The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him." Gnashing the teeth is a picture of rage and hatred. David knew this from experience. Saul hunted him for years.

"The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day will come." God's laughter shows how small the threats of the wicked are to Him. They plot, but God already sees their day of judgment. Psalm 2:4 uses the same picture of God laughing at the nations who rage against His Anointed.

The wicked have "drawn a sword and have bent their bow" to make "the afflicted and the needy" fall. But "Their sword will enter into their own heart." Evil turns back on itself. Haman built a gallows for Mordecai and was hanged on it himself (Esther 7:10). God often lets the wicked fall into the pit they dug for others.

37:16-20 *Better **is** the little of the righteous than the abundance of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked will be broken, and the LORD sustains the righteous. The LORD knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance will be forever. They will not be ashamed in a time of evil, and in days of famine they will be satisfied. For the wicked will perish, and the enemies of the LORD **will be** like the splendor of **the** pastures; they will come to an end; in smoke they will come to an end.*

"Better is the little of the righteous than the abundance of many wicked." A small income with a clean conscience and God's blessing is better than a fortune gained by wrong. Jesus warned that a person's life does not consist of his possessions (Luke 12:15).

"For the arms of the wicked will be broken, and the LORD sustains the righteous." The arm stands for strength. The wicked rely on their own strength, and God will break it. The righteous rely on the LORD, and He holds them up.

"The LORD knows the days of the blameless." God knows every day of our lives, the good ones and the hard ones. "Their inheritance will be forever." The wicked have their wealth for a few years. The righteous have an inheritance that lasts. Even "in days of famine they will be satisfied." God provides for His own in hard times, as He fed Elijah in the drought (1 Kings 17:2-16).

The wicked "will perish." David uses two pictures. They are like "the splendor of the pastures," the wildflowers that cover the hills in spring and are gone in a few weeks. And they are like smoke that rises and then vanishes.

37:21-22 *The wicked borrows and does not repay, and the righteous shows favor and gives. For those blessed by Him will possess **the** land, and those cursed by Him will be cut off.*

"The wicked borrows and does not repay, and the righteous shows favor and gives." The wicked take. The righteous give. How we handle money shows what is in our hearts. The person who trusts God can afford to be generous, because he knows God will supply his needs.

"For those blessed by Him will possess the land, and those cursed by Him will be cut off." In the end, what matters is whether a person stands under God's blessing or under His curse.

37:23-24 *From the LORD the steps of a man are established, and He delights in his way. When he falls, he will not be thrown down, for the LORD supports his hand.*

"From the LORD the steps of a man are established." God guides the steps of the person who walks with Him, and "He delights in his way." God takes pleasure in His people.

"When he falls, he will not be thrown down." The righteous do fall. They stumble into trouble, and sometimes into sin. But they are not thrown down for good, "for the LORD supports his hand." Picture a father walking with a small child over rough ground. The child may trip, but the father's grip keeps him from falling flat. The LORD's hand holds His people, and that hand is stronger than their stumbling.

37:25-26 *I have been young, and also I am old, and I have not seen **the** righteous forsaken, and his offspring seeking bread. All the day he shows favor and lends, and his offspring **are** for a blessing.*

"I have been young, and also I am old, and I have not seen the righteous forsaken, and his offspring seeking bread." David speaks from a lifetime of watching. In all his years, he had not seen God abandon His people.

How should we take this verse? There are faithful believers today who go hungry, and Hebrews 11:37 speaks of believers who were destitute. David is not making a promise that no believer will ever be poor. He is telling what he saw over a long life: God takes care of His own, and the generous righteous person and his family are not left without help. The general pattern holds, and where it seems to fail in this life, God will make it right in the next. If you are in need right now, don't read this verse as a sign that God has rejected you. Let it remind you that He has not forsaken you.

"All the day he shows favor and lends, and his offspring are for a blessing." The righteous person David has in mind is generous, and his children benefit from his faith.

37:27-29 *Turn away from evil and do good, and dwell forever. For the LORD loves justice, and He will not forsake His godly ones; they are preserved forever, and the offspring of the wicked is cut off. The righteous will possess **the** land and will dwell on it for all time.*

"Turn away from evil and do good." David repeats the words of Psalm 34:14 and adds, "and dwell forever." The one who turns from evil will stay, while the wicked are removed.

"For the LORD loves justice, and He will not forsake His godly ones." God cares about what is right. He is not indifferent when the wicked hurt people. And He does not abandon those who belong to Him. "They are preserved forever." Jesus said of His sheep that they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of His hand (John 10:28).

"The righteous will possess the land and will dwell on it for all time." The promise grows. Not just for a lifetime, but forever. Only God's eternal kingdom can fulfill that.

37:30-31 *The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of his God **is** in his heart; his steps do not slip.*

What does a righteous person look like? Start with his mouth. It "utters wisdom," and "his tongue speaks justice." What we say shows what we are (Matthew 12:34).

"The law of his God is in his heart." God's Word lives in his heart, not only in his head or on a shelf, so it shapes what he wants and how he lives. That is why "His steps do not slip." God's Word steadies our feet when the ground is slippery. Psalm 119:11 says, "In my heart I have treasured Your word, so that I will not sin against You."

37:32-33 *The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to kill him. The LORD will not forsake him in his hand, and He will not condemn him when he is judged.*

"The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to kill him." David knows the danger is real. People who hate God sometimes hunt His people.

"The LORD will not forsake him in his hand, and He will not condemn him when he is judged." God may allow the righteous to suffer at the hands of the wicked for a time, but He will not abandon them to their enemies. Nor will He "condemn him when he is judged." Even if a human court rules against him, God's court will not. Stephen was stoned (Acts 7), and many believers since have been put to death for Christ. They were condemned on earth, but heaven welcomed them.

37:34 *Wait for the LORD and keep His way, and He will exalt you to possess **the** land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see **it**.*

"Wait for the LORD and keep His way." Waiting is not doing nothing. While we wait, we keep walking in His way. "And He will exalt you to possess the land." God will lift up those who wait for Him.

"When the wicked are cut off, you will see it." David does not tell us to bring about their end. God does that. We will see it. That is how to read the hard lines in this psalm. The end of the wicked is God's work, not ours. Our part is to wait, keep His way and pray that they turn to Him before that day comes (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

37:35-36 *I have seen a wicked **man**, ruthless, and spreading himself like a luxuriant native tree. And he passed away, and look, he **was** not **there**; and I sought him, and he was not found.*

David tells a story from his own life. "I have seen a wicked man, ruthless, and spreading himself like a luxuriant native tree." The man looked strong, rooted and growing, like a great tree in rich ground. "And he passed away, and look, he was not there." David went looking for him, "sought him, and he was not found."

David doesn't name him, and he doesn't need to. His success was real, and it was short. Jesus told of a rich man who built bigger barns, and God said, "Fool! This night they are demanding your soul from you" (Luke 12:20).

37:37-38 *Watch the blameless and see the upright, for **there is** a future for a man of peace. And transgressors will be destroyed altogether; the future of the wicked will be cut off.*

"Watch the blameless and see the upright." David now tells us to look at a different kind of person. Blameless, as we saw in Psalm 19, means whole and sincere before God, a person of integrity. Study his life. "For there is a future for a man of peace." The word "future" can mean descendants, and it can also mean a good end. Both meanings point the same way: his life ends well.

"And transgressors will be destroyed altogether." The wicked have no future like that. "The future of the wicked will be cut off."

37:39-40 *And the salvation of the righteous **is** from the LORD, their place of refuge in a time of trouble. And the LORD has helped them and has delivered them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, for they have taken refuge in Him.*

"The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD." The last word goes to God. The salvation of the righteous comes from Him, not from their own goodness. "Their place of refuge in a time of trouble." The psalm never says trouble will not come. It says God will be their strength in it.

"The LORD has helped them and has delivered them." Four times in one verse David says what God does: helps, delivers, delivers and saves. And why? "For they have taken refuge in Him." Not because they were stronger or smarter than the wicked, but because they ran to God.

So when you see evil people prosper, don't fret. Trust the LORD, do good and wait for Him. Their day is short. God's people have a future that lasts forever.

Psalm 37 Summary

In Psalm 37, written in his old age, David tells God's people not to fret or envy when the wicked prosper, because the wicked will wither like grass. Instead, believers should trust in the LORD and do good, delight in Him, roll their way onto Him, rest in Him and wait patiently, giving up anger that leads to evil. Again and again David promises that the humble and those who wait for the LORD will possess the land, a promise Jesus takes up in Matthew 5:5. The wicked plot and draw the sword, but God laughs at them, and their weapons turn on themselves. A little with righteousness is better than great wealth with wickedness. The LORD establishes the steps of the righteous and holds their hand when they fall. David has never seen the righteous forsaken. The righteous speak wisdom and keep God's law in their hearts. The wicked man flourished like a great tree and was gone, but the man of peace has a future. The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD, who helps and delivers those who take refuge in Him.

Psalm 37 Study Questions

1. What two things does David tell us not to do in verse 1, and why? (37:1-2)

2. What does it mean to "take delight in the LORD," and how does that change our desires? (37:4)

3. Verse 5 says, "Roll your way on the LORD." What burden do you need to roll onto Him?

4. David says, "do not fret yourself, only to do evil." How can fretting lead us into evil? (37:8)

5. Who does David say will possess the land, and how does Jesus use this promise in Matthew 5:5? (37:9, 11)

6. When have you been tempted to envy someone who seemed to get ahead by doing wrong? How does this psalm speak to that?

7. What happens when a righteous person falls, and why? (37:23-24)

8. How should we understand David's words in verse 25 when we know faithful believers who are poor or hungry?

9. Where is the law of God kept in the righteous person, and what difference does it make? (37:31)

10. How can we long for God to judge the wicked and still love our enemies and pray for them? (37:34; Matthew 5:44)

Psalm 40: I Waited Intently

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of David. A psalm.

40:1-5 I waited intently for the LORD, and He inclined to me and heard my cry for help. And He brought me up from a pit of roaring, from the mud of the mire, and He set my feet on a rock; He established my steps. And He put a new song in my mouth, praise to our God; many will see and fear, and will trust in the LORD. How blessed ***is*** the man who has made the LORD his trust, and has not turned to the proud and to those who turn aside to falsehood. Many, LORD my God, You Yourself have done: Your wonders and Your plans toward us; there is none to compare to You; I would declare and I would speak, ***but*** they are too numerous to recount.

40:6-10 Sacrifice and grain offering You did not desire; ears You have dug for me; burnt offering and sin offering You did not ask for. Then I said, "Look, I have come; in the scroll of the book ***it is*** written about me. I delight to do Your will, my God, and Your law ***is*** in the midst of my inward parts." I have proclaimed good news of righteousness in the great assembly; look, I do not restrain my lips; LORD, You Yourself know. Your righteousness I have not concealed in the midst of my heart; Your faithfulness and Your salvation I have told; I have not hidden Your steadfast love and Your truth from the great assembly.

40:11-17 You, LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your steadfast love and Your truth will continually preserve me. For evils have surrounded me until there is no number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I am not able to see; they are more numerous than the hairs of my head, and my heart has forsaken me. Be pleased, LORD, to deliver me; LORD, hurry to my help. Let them be ashamed and let them be abashed altogether, those who seek my life to snatch it away; let them be turned backward and let them be humiliated, those who desire my harm. Let them be appalled as the consequence of their shame, those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" Let all who seek You exult and rejoice in You; let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let the LORD be great." And I ***am*** afflicted and needy; let the Lord think of me. You ***are*** my help and my deliverer; my God, do not delay.

Psalm 40 Preview

Psalm 40 begins with a testimony. David waited a long time for God to help him, and God lifted him out of a pit of mud and set his feet on a rock. Now he has a new song to sing, and he wants everyone to hear it. He has learned that God does not want religious ritual without a willing heart. What God wants is a person who delights to do His will.

Then the mood changes. David is in trouble again, surrounded by evils and weighed down by his own sins, and he cries out for God to hurry and help him. The psalm moves from praise to prayer, which is how life often goes for believers. The book of Hebrews quotes verses 6-8 as the words of Jesus Himself, coming into the world to do the Father's will and to offer His own body once for all.

Psalm 40 Study

40:1-3 *I waited intently for the LORD, and He inclined to me and heard my cry for help. And He brought me up from a pit of roaring, from the mud of the mire, and He set my feet on a rock; He established my steps. And He put a new song in my mouth, praise to our God; many will see and fear, and will trust in the LORD.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of David. A psalm." Like the other psalms given to the choirmaster (see Psalm 8), it was meant for worship together.

"I waited intently for the LORD." The Hebrew says, in effect, waiting, I waited. David waited and kept on waiting. The waiting was not wasted, because "He inclined to me and heard my cry." To incline is to lean down, like a parent bending low to hear a small child.

"He brought me up from a pit of roaring, from the mud of the mire." A pit in Israel was often a cistern dug into the rock to hold rainwater. When it was dry, the bottom was thick mud. Jeremiah was let down into one and sank into the mud (Jeremiah 38:6). You cannot climb out of a pit like that. Someone has to pull you out. David uses the picture for a trouble he could not escape on his own.

God did more than lift him out. "He set my feet on a rock; He established my steps." From sinking mud to solid rock. And "He put a new song in my mouth." God gave David the song as well as the rescue. "Many will see and fear, and will trust in the LORD." When God rescues one person, others hear about it and turn to Him too. Your story of what God has done for you may be the thing that helps someone else trust Him.

40:4-5 *How blessed **is** the man who has made the LORD his trust, and has not turned to the proud and to those who turn aside to falsehood. Many, LORD my God, You Yourself have done: Your wonders and Your plans toward us; there is none to compare to You; I would declare and I would speak, **but** they are too numerous to recount.*

"Blessed is the man who has made the LORD his trust." David says it is a happy thing to rely on God and not turn "to the proud and to those who turn aside to falsehood." The proud trust themselves. Others chase lies, false gods or false promises. The blessed man puts his whole weight on the LORD.

"Many, LORD my God, You Yourself have done: Your wonders and Your plans toward us." David cannot keep track of them all. God has worked wonders, and He also has plans for His people. He plans for our good. "I would declare and I would speak, but they are too numerous to recount." David would run out of time before he ran out of things to praise God for. Try counting your own blessings sometime. You will find the same thing.

40:6 *Sacrifice and grain offering You did not desire; ears You have dug for me; burnt offering and sin offering You did not ask for.*

Now David says something surprising. "Sacrifice and grain offering You did not desire." God Himself had commanded these offerings in the Law of Moses. So what does David mean? He

means God never wanted the offerings by themselves, as empty ritual. He wanted obedient hearts. Samuel told Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22), and in Hosea 6:6 God says, "For steadfast love I desire, and not sacrifice."

"Ears You have dug for me." The Hebrew pictures God digging out David's ears. God gave him ears to hear and obey. Some connect it with Exodus 21:6, where a servant who chose to serve his master for life had his ear pierced at the doorpost, but that is a different word in Hebrew. The plain point is that God wants a listening, obedient servant.

When Hebrews 10:5 quotes this verse, it reads, "A body You prepared for Me." The writer of Hebrews was quoting the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which put it that way. The meaning fits: God prepared a body for His Son so He could obey the Father fully, with His whole self, all the way to the cross.

Hebrews 10:8 comes back to this verse a second time and notes that these sacrifices "are offered according to the law."

New Testament links: Hebrews 10:5-7 (quoted); Hebrews 10:8 (quoted)

40:7-8 *Then I said, "Look, I have come; in the scroll of the book **it is** written about me. I delight to do Your will, my God, and Your law **is** in the midst of my inward parts."*

"Then I said, 'Look, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written about me.'" David offers himself. In his own life, the scroll was probably the Law of Moses, which described the kind of king God wanted (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). David was saying, in effect, here I am, ready to be what Your Word calls me to be.

"I delight to do Your will, my God, and Your law is in the midst of my inward parts." Obedience was David's joy. God's Law was written on his heart as well as on stone, as God promised He would one day do for His people in the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:33).

Hebrews 10:5-10 tells us that these words find their full meaning in Jesus. "Coming into the world, He says," and then the writer quotes verses 6-8. Jesus said, "Look, I have come to do Your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:9). The Scriptures testify about Him (John 5:39), including the Psalms (Luke 24:44). David could only partly live these words. Jesus lived them completely. He said His food was to do the will of the One who sent Him (John 4:34). In the garden He prayed, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

And Hebrews draws the conclusion. By God's will we have been made holy "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). The animal sacrifices could never take away sins. Jesus came to do the Father's will by offering Himself. His one sacrifice did what all the others could only point to. That is why we no longer bring animals to an altar. Christ has been offered once, for all.

New Testament links: Hebrews 10:5-7 (quoted); Hebrews 10:9 (quoted)

40:9-10 *I have proclaimed good news of righteousness in the great assembly; look, I do not restrain my lips; LORD, You Yourself know. Your righteousness I have not concealed in the midst of my heart; Your faithfulness and Your salvation I have told; I have not hidden Your steadfast love and Your truth from the great assembly.*

"I have proclaimed good news of righteousness in the great assembly." The great assembly was the gathered people of God at worship. David did not keep God's goodness to himself. "I do not restrain my lips; LORD, You Yourself know." God knew David had spoken out.

"Your righteousness I have not concealed in the midst of my heart." That might sound strange next to verse 8, where God's Law is within David's heart. The Law was in his heart to shape his life, but he did not hide God's goodness there to keep it private. He told it. He spoke of God's "faithfulness and Your salvation," and he did not hide "Your steadfast love and Your truth." Steadfast love is God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 23:6).

What has God done for you that you have never told anyone? Believers today are called to the same thing. When God is good to us, we should say so where others can hear.

40:11-12 *You, LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your steadfast love and Your truth will continually preserve me. For evils have surrounded me until there is no number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I am not able to see; they are more numerous than the hairs of my head, and my heart has forsaken me.*

"You, LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me." David has not held back his lips (verse 9), and now he trusts God not to hold back His compassion. "Your steadfast love and Your truth will continually preserve me." The same two things David proclaimed in verse 10 are the things he now leans on.

Then the trouble comes out. "For evils have surrounded me until there is no number." In verse 5, God's wonders were too many to count. Now David's troubles seem too many to count. And some of them are his own fault: "My iniquities have overtaken me, and I am not able to see." They are "more numerous than the hairs of my head, and my heart has forsaken me."

David does not pretend. A believer can sing a new song one day and feel overwhelmed the next. The same man who praised God in the great congregation now confesses that his sins have caught up with him. The New Testament applies verses 6-8 to Jesus, but it does not apply this verse to Him, and we should not either. Jesus had no sins of His own (Hebrews 4:15). This verse is David's confession, and often ours.

40:13-15 *Be pleased, LORD, to deliver me; LORD, hurry to my help. Let them be ashamed and let them be abashed altogether, those who seek my life to snatch it away; let them be turned backward and let them be humiliated, those who desire my harm. Let them be appalled as the consequence of their shame, those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!"*

"Be pleased, LORD, to deliver me; LORD, hurry to my help." Verses 13-17 appear again, with small changes, as Psalm 70. It seems this prayer was used on its own as well.

David prays that his enemies, "those who seek my life," will be "ashamed" and "abashed altogether." He asks God to turn them back. They mock him, saying, "Aha! Aha!" which is the sound of someone gloating over another's fall.

David asks God to deal with the men who want him dead, and he leaves the outcome there. Their gloating will be answered by God, not by David's sword. We can pray the same way when people hurt us: that God would stop them from doing harm, and that He would turn their hearts (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

40:16-17 *Let all who seek You exult and rejoice in You; let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let the LORD be great." And I **am** afflicted and needy; let the Lord think of me. You **are** my help and my deliverer; my God, do not delay.*

"Let all who seek You exult and rejoice in You." David's prayer widens to include everyone who seeks God. He wants them to keep saying, "Let the LORD be great."

"And I am afflicted and needy; let the Lord think of me." David, the king, calls himself poor and needy. He has nothing to bring God but his need. And that is enough, because God is mindful of the needy. He thinks of them. In verse 5 David said God has thoughts toward us. Now he prays that God would think of him.

"You are my help and my deliverer; my God, do not delay." David started this psalm content to wait. He ends it asking God to hurry. God makes room for both prayers, in this psalm and in ours. The God who lifted David out of the pit once can do it again.

Psalm 40 Summary

David waited intently for the LORD, and God bent down, heard his cry, lifted him out of the mud of the mire and set his feet on a rock. God put a new song in his mouth so that many would trust in Him. David blesses the person who trusts the LORD and says God's wonders are too many to count. God did not desire sacrifices without obedience. He gave David open ears, and David answered, "Look, I have come," delighting to do God's will with God's Law in his heart. Hebrews 10:5-10 quotes these words as spoken by Jesus, who came to do the Father's will and offered His body once for all. David proclaimed God's righteousness and steadfast love in the great assembly. Then, surrounded by troubles and overtaken by his own sins, he cried out for God to hurry and help him, prayed that his enemies would be turned back and asked that all who seek God would rejoice. Poor and needy, he trusted God as his help and deliverer.

Psalm 40 Study Questions

1. What did God do for David after he waited intently? (40:1-3)

2. Have you ever been in a "pit" you could not climb out of on your own? How did God help you?

3. Why does David say God did not desire sacrifices and offerings? (40:6)

4. What does David say he delights to do, and where is God's Law? (40:8)

5. How does Hebrews 10:5-10 apply verses 6-8 to Jesus?

6. Why could Jesus' one offering do what animal sacrifices never could? (Hebrews 10:10)

7. What did David refuse to keep hidden, and where did he speak about it? (40:9-10)

8. Is there something God has done for you that you could share with someone this week?

9. David praised God in verse 5 and felt overwhelmed in verse 12. What does that teach us about the ups and downs of the Christian life?

10. How does David describe himself in verse 17, and why is that a good way to come to God?

Psalm 42: As a Deer Pants

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the sons of Korah.

42:1-5 As a deer pants for channels of water, so my soul pants for You, God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when will I come and appear ***before*** the face of God? My tears have been food to me day and night, while ***they*** say to me all the day, "Where ***is*** your God?" These ***things*** I will remember, and I will pour out my soul within me: how I would pass along with the throng; I would lead them slowly to the house of God, with the sound of a shout of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude celebrating a festival. Why are you bowed down, my soul, and ***why*** are you in turmoil within me? Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him, the salvation of His face.

42:6-11 My God, my soul is bowed down within me; therefore I will remember You from the land of ***the*** Jordan and ***the*** Hermons, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; all Your breakers and Your waves have passed over me. By day the LORD will command His steadfast love, and in the night His song ***is*** with me, a prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I walk mourning because of the oppression of an enemy?" With a shattering in my bones my adversaries have taunted me, while they say to me all the day, "Where ***is*** your God?" Why are you bowed down, my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him, the salvation of my face and my God.

Psalm 42 Preview

The writer of Psalm 42 is far from home. He used to lead crowds of worshipers up to the house of God in Jerusalem, singing at the feasts. Now he seems to be far away in the north, near the sources of the Jordan River, and he cannot go. People around him mock him: "Where is your God?" He is homesick for God, and his soul is thirsty, like a deer panting for water in a dry land.

Psalm 42 speaks plainly about deep discouragement and depression. The writer weeps day and night. He feels forgotten by God. But he does not give up. Twice he talks back to his own soul: "Why are you bowed down, my soul?" And twice he answers, "Wait for God." His feelings are low, but he keeps telling his soul the truth about God, even before his feelings follow.

Psalm 42 Study

42:1-2 *As a deer pants for channels of water, so my soul pants for You, God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when will I come and appear* ***before*** *the face of God?*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the sons of Korah." The sons of Korah were a family of Levites. Their ancestor Korah rebelled against Moses and died under God's judgment (Numbers 16), but his sons did not die (Numbers 26:11). Their descendants became singers in Israel's worship, serving with song 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. A Maskil, as we saw in Psalm 32, may mean a teaching psalm or a skillful one; the meaning is uncertain. Psalm 42 also opens Book Two of the Psalms.

Many scholars believe Psalms 42 and 43 were first one psalm. They share the same refrain (42:5, 42:11 and 43:5), and Psalm 43 has no heading of its own. We will study Psalm 42 here, but it is worth reading 43 right after it.

"As a deer pants for channels of water, so my soul pants for You, God." Picture a deer in dry country, worn out, its tongue hanging, searching for a stream. The writer's soul longs for God that way. He is not just wishing for a better mood. He wants God Himself.

"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." The gods of the nations were idols of wood and stone. Israel's God is alive. Only a living God can satisfy a thirsty soul. Jesus stood up at the feast in Jerusalem and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37).

"When will I come and appear before the face of God?" To appear before God meant to go up to His house to worship, as Israel did at the great feasts. The writer cannot go, and it breaks his heart.

42:3-4 *My tears have been food to me day and night, while **they** say to me all the day, "Where **is** your God?" These **things** I will remember, and I will pour out my soul within me: how I would pass along with the throng; I would lead them slowly to the house of God, with the sound of a shout of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude celebrating a festival.*

"My tears have been food to me day and night." He is crying so much he has lost his appetite. Tears are all he has. And it is worse because people keep asking, "Where is your God?" They mean, if your God is real, why doesn't He help you? That question hurts most when we are already asking it ourselves.

"These things I will remember, and I will pour out my soul." He remembers the old days: "how I would pass along with the throng; I would lead them slowly to the house of God." He was a leader in worship. He walked with the crowd up to Jerusalem at festival time, "with the sound of a shout of joy and thanksgiving," a whole multitude celebrating.

Memories can hurt. Remembering how close God once felt can make the present feel even emptier. But memory can also be a gift. It reminds us that God has been good before, and He has not changed.

42:5 *Why are you bowed down, my soul, and **why** are you in turmoil within me? Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him, the salvation of His face.*

Now comes the refrain. "Why are you bowed down, my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" The writer turns and speaks to himself. He questions his own sadness without denying it.

"Wait for God." The answer is simple. The Hebrew word means to wait with hope, with confident expectation that God will do what He has promised. "For I will yet give thanks to Him, the salvation of His face." He cannot praise right now the way he used to. But he is sure he will again.

There is wisdom here for anyone who struggles with discouragement or depression. Our feelings can talk to us all day. This writer also talks back to them with the truth about God. He does not pretend everything is fine, and he does not expect the heaviness to lift at once. He simply refuses to let it have the last word. Depression is real, and some who suffer with it also need help from doctors or counselors. That is no shame. But every believer can learn to say to his own soul, "Wait for God."

If your despair has reached the point where you are thinking about ending your life, please do not carry that alone. Tell someone today: a pastor, a friend, a doctor. In the United States you can call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, at any hour. If you live elsewhere, call your local emergency number. Reaching out is not a lack of faith. It is what the writer of this psalm did when he cried out.

Jesus knew sorrow of soul too. In Gethsemane He said, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38). Our Savior understands a troubled soul (Hebrews 4:15).

42:6-7 *My God, my soul is bowed down within me; therefore I will remember You from the land of* ***the*** *Jordan and* ***the*** *Hermons, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; all Your breakers and Your waves have passed over me.*

"My God, my soul is bowed down within me." He admits it again, this time to God. "Therefore I will remember You." He chooses to remember God, not just the good old days.

He remembers God "from the land of the Jordan and the Hermons, from Mount Mizar." This is Mount Hermon, the high mountain on Israel's northern edge, roughly 120 miles north of Jerusalem. The Jordan River begins at its foot. Mizar means "small" or "little," and no one knows for sure which hill it was. The writer is far from Jerusalem, maybe taken north against his will. We aren't told why he is there.

Up in that country, streams pour down from Hermon in waterfalls. He hears them roaring. "Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls." The water that should remind him of satisfying his thirst now feels like it is drowning him. "All Your breakers and Your waves have passed over me." He feels wave after wave of trouble. But he calls them "Your" waves. Even his suffering is under God's control.

42:8 *By day the LORD will command His steadfast love, and in the night His song* ***is*** *with me, a prayer to the God of my life.*

In the middle of the waves comes a verse of light. "By day the LORD will command His steadfast love." God gives orders to His loyal love (see Psalm 23:6), the way a king issues a decree, and it goes out to His people by day. "And in the night His song is with me." When the night is long and dark, God gives a song.

Only here in the psalm does the writer use LORD, God's personal covenant name. In his darkest place he remembers that God has bound Himself to His people. He calls Him "the God of my life." The God who seems far away is the One who gives him life every day.

42:9-10 *I will say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I walk mourning because of the oppression of an enemy?" With a shattering in my bones my adversaries have taunted me, while they say to me all the day, "Where **is** your God?"*

"I will say to God my rock, 'Why have You forgotten me?'" He calls God his rock, steady and strong. In the same breath he asks why God has forgotten him. Faith and doubt are side by side in one sentence. God does not reject that kind of prayer. The writer is still talking to God, and that matters.

"Why do I walk mourning because of the oppression of an enemy?" His enemies are pressing him. Their taunts come "with a shattering in my bones." Words can wound deeply. Again they say, "Where is your God?"

If people mock your faith when you are hurting, you are not the first. Jesus heard the same kind of taunt on the cross: let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him (Matthew 27:43).

42:11 *Why are you bowed down, my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him, the salvation of my face and my God.*

The refrain comes back. "Why are you bowed down, my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" Nothing has changed outside. He is still far from home. The enemies are still mocking. But he speaks the same truth to his soul again: "Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him."

This time he ends a little differently. In verse 5 he looked forward to thanking God for "the salvation of His face." Now he calls God "the salvation of my face and my God." His face is bowed down now, but God will save him and lift it up. And He is "my God." The writer has lost his home, his place in worship and his joy. He has not lost his God.

The battle with discouragement is often not won in one round. We may have to tell our soul to hope in God again and again. That is all right. The writer of Psalm 42 had to do it twice in eleven verses, and once more in Psalm 43.

Psalm 42 Summary

The writer of Psalm 42, one of the sons of Korah, longs for God the way a deer pants for water. He is far from the house of God, in the north near the Jordan and Mount Hermon, and he weeps day and night while people mock him with "Where is your God?" He remembers leading joyful crowds to worship at the feasts. Twice he questions his own despair and tells his soul to wait for God, because he will again praise Him. Trouble rolls over him like waves and waterfalls, yet he knows the LORD will command His steadfast love by day and give him a song at night. He asks God his rock why He has forgotten him, but he ends by waiting for God, the salvation of his face and his God.

People and Places

- Sons of Korah: a family of Levite singers descended from Korah, who led worship in David's day and later in the temple; eleven psalms carry their name.
- Hermon: Mount Hermon, the high mountain on Israel's northern edge, roughly 120 miles north of Jerusalem.
- Mizar: a small hill or peak in the same area; its exact location is unknown.

Psalm 42 Study Questions

1. What picture does the writer use for his longing for God? (42:1-2)

2. What did the writer's enemies keep saying to him, and why would that hurt? (42:3, 10)

3. What does the writer remember from his past, and how do memories help or hurt us? (42:4)

4. What question does the writer ask his own soul, and how does he answer it? (42:5, 11)

5. What does it mean to tell your own soul the truth about God, even before your feelings follow? When could you do that this week?

6. Where was the writer when he remembered God, and what did the waterfalls make him feel? (42:6-7)

7. What does the LORD give by day and by night? (42:8)

8. The writer calls God "my rock" and asks why God has forgotten him in the same verse (42:9). Is it all right to pray that honestly? Why?

9. How could you use this psalm to encourage a friend who is going through a time of depression or discouragement?

10. Jesus said His soul was "very sorrowful" in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:38). How does that comfort you when your soul is troubled?

Psalm 46: God Is Our Refuge

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. On Alamoth. A song.

46:1-3 God ***is*** a refuge and strength for us, a help in troubles, found abundantly. Therefore we will not fear when the earth changes and when mountains shake in the heart of the seas. Its waters will roar ***and*** foam; mountains will quake at its swelling. Selah.

46:4-7 ***There is*** a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy ***place*** of the dwellings of the Most High. God ***is*** in her midst; she will not be shaken; God will help her at the turning of the morning. Nations roared; kingdoms shook; He gave forth with His voice; the earth melts. The LORD of armies ***is*** with us; a high refuge for us ***is*** the God of Jacob. Selah.

46:8-11 Come, see the works of the LORD, who has set desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; the bow He breaks and cuts the spear in two; carts He burns with fire. Let go, and know that I ***am*** God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted on the earth. The LORD of armies ***is*** with us; a high refuge for us ***is*** the God of Jacob. Selah.

Psalm 46 Preview

Psalm 46 is a song of confidence when everything is shaking. The writer imagines the worst: the earth giving way, the mountains sliding into the sea, the oceans roaring. Even then, God's people will not fear, because God is their refuge and strength. In the middle of the chaos there is a quiet river that makes glad the city of God, because God Himself lives there.

The nations rage, but when God speaks, the earth melts. The psalm ends with an invitation to come and see what God has done and with God's own voice: "Let go, and know that I am God." Twice the people sing the refrain, "The LORD of armies is with us." Martin Luther based his hymn known in English as "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" on this psalm, and believers in every age have sung it in times of trouble.

Psalm 46 Study

46:1 *God **is** a refuge and strength for us, a help in troubles, found abundantly.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. On Alamoth. A song." The sons of Korah were the family of Levite singers we met in Psalm 42. The meaning of Alamoth is uncertain. The word means "young women," and 1 Chronicles 15:20 mentions harps tuned to Alamoth, so many think it called for high voices or high-pitched instruments, like a soprano part.

Many scholars connect this psalm with the time Jerusalem was saved from the Assyrian army in the days of King Hezekiah, about 701 B.C. (2 Kings 18-19; Isaiah 36-37). Sennacherib's army overran the towns of Judah and sent a large force to threaten Jerusalem, but God promised that the king would not come into the city or shoot an arrow there (Isaiah 37:33). Then the angel of the

LORD struck down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp, and when they rose early in the morning, "look, all of them were dead corpses" (Isaiah 37:36). Verse 5 says God will help His city "at the turning of the morning." That fits well, but the psalm does not name the occasion.

"God is a refuge and strength for us." A refuge is a safe place to hide. Strength is power to keep going. God is both. He shelters us, and He strengthens us to stand. "A help in troubles, found abundantly." The Hebrew means a help that is easily found, always there when trouble comes. We do not have to go looking far for Him. He is already present.

46:2-3 *Therefore we will not fear when the earth changes and when mountains shake in the heart of the seas. Its waters will roar **and** foam; mountains will quake at its swelling. Selah.*

"Therefore we will not fear." Because God is our refuge, fear does not have to rule us. Then come the worst things the writer can imagine: "when the earth changes and when mountains shake in the heart of the seas." To people in the ancient world, the mountains were the most solid things there were, and the sea was a picture of chaos and danger. If the mountains fell into the sea, it would be like the whole world coming apart.

"Its waters will roar and foam; mountains will quake at its swelling." The sea surges up as if to attack God's creation. Still, God's people will not fear.

Most of us will never see mountains fall into the sea. But we know what it is like when our world shakes: a diagnosis, a death, a betrayal, a job gone overnight. The ground we thought was solid gives way. The psalm never promises that the shaking won't come, only that God is still our refuge when it does. Hebrews 12:28 says believers are "receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken."

"Selah" (see Psalm 24) gives us a moment to let the picture of a shaking world settle before the scene changes.

46:4-5 ***There is*** *a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy **place** of the dwellings of the Most High. God **is** in her midst; she will not be shaken; God will help her at the turning of the morning.*

The scene turns from roaring seas to a quiet river. "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God." The city of God is Jerusalem, also called Zion (see Psalm 2), the city where God chose to put His name and where His temple stood. Jerusalem had no great river. It depended on the Gihon spring and on water brought in by tunnels and channels. So the river here is a picture. God's presence is like a steady stream that refreshes His people while the sea rages outside.

Scripture follows this river all the way to the end. Ezekiel 47:1-12 sees water flowing out from the temple and bringing life wherever it goes. Zechariah 14:8 says "living waters will go out from Jerusalem" in the day of the LORD. And in Revelation 22:1-2, John sees "a pure river of water of life" flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

"The holy place of the dwellings of the Most High." The Most High is a name for God as the One above all. "God is in her midst; she will not be shaken." The city is safe, not because its walls are strong, but because God lives inside them. The earth may change and the mountains may shake

(verse 2), but the city of God "will not be shaken." "God will help her at the turning of the morning." The night may be long, but help comes with the morning.

I believe God still has a future for Zion. The prophets look ahead to the day when the Messiah reigns from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-4), and Paul says God has not rejected His people Israel (Romans 11:1-2). At the same time, every believer can take this verse personally. God now lives in His people by His Spirit, and He is our refuge and our river.

46:6-7 *Nations roared; kingdoms shook; He gave forth with His voice; the earth melts. The LORD of armies **is** with us; a high refuge for us **is** the God of Jacob. Selah.*

"Nations roared; kingdoms shook." The same words used for the raging sea are now used for the nations. They roar and they shake. Armies and empires rise against God's people. Then "He gave forth with His voice; the earth melts." God only has to speak. The nations that seemed so strong melt like wax.

"The LORD of armies is with us." The LORD of armies, as we saw in Psalm 24, is the commander of the armies of heaven. The God of all power is "with us." That phrase reminds us of Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). In Jesus, God came to be with us in person, and He promised, "I am with you all the days" (Matthew 28:20).

"A high refuge for us is the God of Jacob." Why Jacob? Jacob was not a hero of faith at first. He was a schemer who often failed. But God made promises to him and kept them (Genesis 28:15). If God was faithful to Jacob, He will be faithful to us. A high refuge is a safe place up high, like a fortress on a cliff. Another "Selah" follows.

46:8-9 *Come, see the works of the LORD, who has set desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; the bow He breaks and cuts the spear in two; carts He burns with fire.*

"Come, see the works of the LORD." The writer invites us to come and look at what God has done. He "has set desolations on the earth." God has brought ruin on His enemies. If the psalm was written after the Assyrian army was destroyed, the people could hear how God had emptied the Assyrian camp.

"He makes wars cease to the end of the earth." God breaks the bow, cuts the spear in two and burns the "carts," the war wagons, with fire. These were the weapons of the day. God does not just stop one war. He ends war itself.

We do not see that yet. Wars still rage across the earth. But the prophets look ahead to the day when the Messiah will judge the nations, and "they will beat their swords into plowshares" and never again learn war (Isaiah 2:4). I believe this will happen when Christ returns and reigns on the earth. Until then, every time God stops a war or protects His people, it is a small preview of what He will do in full.

46:10 *Let go, and know that I **am** God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted on the earth.*

Now God Himself speaks. "Let go, and know that I am God." Many English Bibles say, "Be still." The words mean to let go, to stop fighting, to drop your hands. In the setting of this psalm, God is speaking first of all to the raging nations: stop your warring, and know that I am God. But His people need the same word. We strive and worry and try to hold everything together. God says, let go. Know who I am.

This verse is often quoted as a call to quiet prayer, and it can be that. It is also a call to surrender: stop fighting God, and let Him rule. "I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted on the earth." God's purpose is that every nation will one day honor Him. Paul says that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). The nations that raged in verse 6 will one day bow.

46:11 *The LORD of armies **is** with us; a high refuge for us **is** the God of Jacob. Selah.*

The refrain comes again: "The LORD of armies is with us; a high refuge for us is the God of Jacob." The refuge of verse 1 is still standing in verse 11. Between the two, the earth shook, the seas roared and the nations raged. None of it changed who God is or where He is. He is with us.

The last "Selah" invites one more pause. If your world is shaking right now, read this psalm out loud. Let the refrain become your own. The mountains may move, but the LORD of armies is still with His people.

Psalm 46 Summary

Psalm 46, a song of the sons of Korah, declares that God is our refuge and strength, a help in troubles, found abundantly. Because of that, God's people will not fear even if the earth changes, the mountains shake in the heart of the seas and the waters roar. In contrast to the raging sea, a river makes glad the city of God. God is in the midst of her, so she will not be shaken, and He helps her when morning dawns. The nations roar and kingdoms shake, but God speaks and the earth melts. The LORD of armies is with us, and the God of Jacob is our high refuge. The psalm invites us to see God's works: He makes wars cease to the end of the earth and breaks the weapons of war, which the prophets say will happen fully when the Messiah reigns. God speaks to the nations and to His people: let go and know that He is God, who will be exalted among the nations and in the earth.

People and Places

- Alamoth: a musical term of uncertain meaning, probably high voices or instruments.

Psalm 46 Study Questions

1. What three things does verse 1 say God is to His people?

2. What frightening pictures does the writer use in verses 2-3, and what does he say God's people will not do?

3. What "earthquakes" have shaken your life? How did you find God to be your refuge in them?

4. What makes glad the city of God, and why will the city not be shaken? (46:4-5)

5. How does the river in this psalm point ahead to Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 22?

6. What happens when God raises His voice? (46:6)

7. What does the title "the LORD of armies" mean, and why is it comforting that He is "with us"? (46:7, 11)

8. What does God promise to do with wars and weapons, and when do you think that will be fully true? (46:9; Isaiah 2:4)

9. To whom is God speaking in verse 10, and what does it mean for you to "let go"?

10. Which line of this psalm do you most need to remember this week, and why?

Psalm 51: Create for Me a Pure Heart

Scripture

To the choirmaster. A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

51:1-6 Be gracious to me, God, according to Your steadfast love; according to the abundance of Your compassion wipe out my transgressions. Wash me abundantly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I myself know my transgressions, and my sin ***is*** before me continually. Against You, You alone, I have sinned, and I have done the evil in Your eyes, so that You may be justified when You speak ***and*** be pure when You judge. Look, in iniquity I was brought forth, and in sin my mother conceived me. Look, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden ***part*** You make me know wisdom.

51:7-12 You will purify me from sin with hyssop, and I will be clean; You will wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. You will make me hear joy and gladness; let the bones ***that*** You have crushed rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and wipe out all my iniquities. Create for me a pure heart, God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from before You, and do not take the Spirit of Your holiness from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and a willing spirit will sustain me.

51:13-19 I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will return to You. Deliver me from bloodguilt, God, the God of my salvation; my tongue will shout for joy ***of*** Your righteousness. Lord, You will open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or I would give ***it***; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God ***are*** a broken spirit; a broken and crushed heart, God, You will not despise. Do good in Your favor to Zion; You will build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You will delight in sacrifices of righteousness, burnt offering and whole offering; then they will offer young bulls on Your altar.

Psalm 51 Preview

Psalm 51 is David's prayer after the darkest chapter of his life. As king, he took another man's wife, Bathsheba, and then arranged the death of her husband, Uriah, to hide what he had done. For months he said nothing. Then God sent the prophet Nathan to confront him, and David broke. This psalm is what came out of his heart when he finally faced the truth.

David makes no excuses. He asks for mercy, not on the basis of anything good in himself, but on the basis of God's steadfast love. He asks God to wash him, to blot out his sin and to create for him a pure heart. He knows that no sacrifice can pay for what he has done. What God wants is a broken and crushed heart. Believers in every generation have prayed this psalm when they had nothing to offer God but their sin and their need for mercy.

Psalm 51 Study

51:1-2 *Be gracious to me, God, according to Your steadfast love; according to the abundance of Your compassion wipe out my transgressions. Wash me abundantly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." The account is in 2 Samuel 11-12. In the spring, when kings went out to war, David stayed home in Jerusalem. From his roof he saw a woman bathing and sent to find out who she was. She was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his own loyal soldiers who was away fighting David's war. David sent messengers, had her brought to the palace and slept with her. He was the king, and nothing in the text suggests she was free to refuse him.

When Bathsheba sent word that she was pregnant, David tried to cover it up. He called Uriah home from the battle, hoping he would go home to his wife. Uriah would not, out of loyalty to the men still in the field. So David sent him back carrying his own death sentence: a letter telling the commander Joab to put Uriah where the fighting was fiercest and then pull back. Uriah was killed. David married Bathsheba, and the child was born. Then 2 Samuel 11:27 says that what David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.

God sent Nathan, who told David a story about a rich man who took a poor man's only lamb. David was furious at the rich man. Then Nathan told David that he was the man. David confessed that he had sinned against the LORD. Nathan told him the LORD had taken away his sin and he would not die, but the child would die, and trouble would never leave David's house (2 Samuel 12:1-14). David's own family later suffered terribly, just as God said.

God's forgiveness was real and full. Nathan said plainly that the LORD had taken away David's sin. But forgiveness did not undo every consequence, and the hardest of them was the death of the child (2 Samuel 12:13-14). The child died because of David's sin, not his own, and Scripture never treats the child as guilty. When the child died, David said he would go to him, though the child would not return to him (2 Samuel 12:23), and many believers have found comfort there for little ones who die. If you have lost a child, your loss is not God's verdict on your sin.

We should not soften any of this. David was a man after God's heart, but here he used his power to take what was not his and to destroy a faithful man. Nathan's story puts the guilt on the rich man, not on the lamb. Psalm 51 is the prayer of a man who finally stopped hiding.

"Be gracious to me, God, according to Your steadfast love;" David does not ask God to remember all the good he has done. He has no claim on God. He appeals only to God's character: His steadfast love, His loyal covenant love (see Psalm 23:6), and "the abundance of Your compassion."

Then he uses three words for what he wants God to do. "Wipe out" is the language of wiping a record clean. "Wash me abundantly" pictures scrubbing dirty clothes. "Cleanse me" is the word used for being made ceremonially clean so a person could come back to worship. And again he uses the three words for wrongdoing that we saw in Psalm 32: transgressions, iniquity and sin.

51:3-4 *For I myself know my transgressions, and my sin **is** before me continually. Against You, You alone, I have sinned, and I have done the evil in Your eyes, so that You may be justified when You speak **and** be pure when You judge.*

"For I myself know my transgressions, and my sin is before me continually." David cannot stop seeing what he did. That is what an awakened conscience feels like.

"Against You, You alone, I have sinned." Someone may ask, didn't David also sin against Bathsheba and Uriah? Yes, terribly. He wronged them, and Uriah lost his life. They mattered. But all sin, at its root, is against God, because God made those people and gave the commands David broke. Joseph said the same when he refused Potiphar's wife: how could he sin against God (Genesis 39:9)? The harm to people is real. The offense against God is deeper still.

"So that You may be justified when You speak and be pure when You judge." David does not argue with God's verdict. Whatever God says about his sin is right. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 3:4 to show that God is always true and right, even if every human being is found to be a liar.

New Testament links: Romans 3:4 (quoted)

51:5 *Look, in iniquity I was brought forth, and in sin my mother conceived me.*

"Look, in iniquity I was brought forth, and in sin my mother conceived me." He means that sin goes back as far as he goes, not that his mother sinned in conceiving him or that his birth was shameful. He was a sinner from the start.

Paul teaches that sin entered the world through one man, Adam, and that death spread to all because all sinned (Romans 5:12). Most Christians have understood this to mean that every person is born with a sinful nature. We don't become sinners when we first sin. We sin because we are sinners. That is why David needs more than a fresh start. He needs a new heart, as he will ask in verse 10. Remember this verse too when we are tempted to think we could never do what David did. The same heart is in all of us.

51:6-7 *Look, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden **part** You make me know wisdom. You will purify me from sin with hyssop, and I will be clean; You will wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

"Look, You desire truth in the inward parts." David spent months living a lie. God wanted the opposite: truth all the way down, in the hidden places of the heart. "In the hidden part You make me know wisdom." God works deep inside, where no one else can see.

"You will purify me from sin with hyssop, and I will be clean." Hyssop was a small bushy plant. The Israelites used a bunch of it to put the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts (Exodus 12:22), and priests used it to sprinkle blood or water when cleansing someone from leprosy or from touching a dead body (Leviticus 14; Numbers 19). David asks God Himself to do the sprinkling, to make him clean so he can come back into God's presence.

"Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." Isaiah 1:18 makes the same promise: though your sins are scarlet, "They will become white like snow." We now know how that cleansing happens. The writer of Hebrews says the blood of animals could never take away sins (Hebrews 10:4), but the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience (Hebrews 9:14). No stain is too dark for Him.

51:8-9 *You will make me hear joy and gladness; let the bones **that** You have crushed rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and wipe out all my iniquities.*

"You will make me hear joy and gladness." David had lost his joy. Sin always takes it. "Let the bones that You have crushed rejoice." David feels as though God has broken his bones. Guilt hurt that much (compare Psalm 32:3-4). But he believes the same God who wounded his conscience can heal it, and that broken bones can dance again.

"Hide Your face from my sins." David asks God to stop looking at his sins. "And wipe out all my iniquities." He asks a second time for God to wipe the record clean, this time "all" of it. When God forgives, He does not keep a file to open later. Micah 7:19 says God will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

51:10 *Create for me a pure heart, God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

Now comes the heart of the psalm. "Create for me a pure heart, God." The word "create" in Hebrew is the same word used in Genesis 1:1, when God created the heavens and the earth. In the Old Testament, when this word means create, God is always the one who does it. People can make things, but only God creates. David knows he cannot fix his own heart. He cannot try harder and become clean. He needs God to do something new, a work only God can do.

"And renew a steadfast spirit within me." A steadfast spirit is firm and steady, one that does not give way when temptation comes. David had been anything but steady with Bathsheba. He asks God to make him new on the inside.

God promised this very thing through the prophets. "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you," He says in Ezekiel 36:26. Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born again (John 3:3). Paul says that anyone in Christ is a new creation, the old gone and the new come (2 Corinthians 5:17). What David asked for, God gives in Christ to everyone who turns to Him.

If you have tried and failed to change yourself, take this verse as your own prayer. God still makes new hearts.

51:11 *Do not cast me away from before You, and do not take the Spirit of Your holiness from me.*

"Do not cast me away from before You." More than his throne, David fears losing God. "Do not take the Spirit of Your holiness from me." The Spirit of His holiness is the Holy Spirit. David had seen what that looked like. When he was anointed king, the Spirit of the LORD came on him, and the Spirit departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16:13-14). Saul's life fell apart after that. David begs God not to let that happen to him.

In the Old Testament the Spirit came upon kings, prophets and others for the work God gave them. Since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit lives in every believer (Acts 2:38; Ephesians 4:30). Believers today can still pray this verse as a cry never to grieve the Spirit and never to drift from God's presence.

51:12-13 *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and a willing spirit will sustain me. I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will return to You.*

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." Sin had robbed David of the gladness of walking with God, and he wants it back.

"And a willing spirit will sustain me." David does not trust himself to stay faithful. He asks God to hold him up and to give him a heart that wants to obey.

"I will teach transgressors Your ways." Here is something hopeful. David's sin will not be the end of his usefulness to God. A forgiven sinner makes a good teacher of grace. He knows what it is to fall and what it is to be lifted up. "Sinners will return to You," which means they will turn back to God. Peter denied Jesus three times, wept bitterly and was restored, and then he preached at Pentecost (Luke 22:61-62; John 21:15-17; Acts 2). Your worst failure, forgiven, may become the story God uses to bring someone else home.

51:14-15 *Deliver me from bloodguilt, God, the God of my salvation; my tongue will shout for joy **of** Your righteousness. Lord, You will open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise.*

"Deliver me from bloodguilt, God." David names it plainly now. He has blood on his hands. Uriah's death was his doing. The Law of Moses allowed no ransom for a murderer (Numbers 35:31). David's only hope is "the God of my salvation."

"My tongue will shout for joy of Your righteousness." It may seem odd that a guilty man would sing about God's righteousness. Wouldn't God's righteousness condemn him? But the gospel shows us that God is righteous when He forgives those who trust in His provision. At the cross God's justice and mercy meet (Romans 3:26).

"Lord, You will open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise." Sin had shut David's mouth. He could not praise while he was hiding. Only God can open his lips again.

51:16-17 *For You do not desire sacrifice, or I would give **it**; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God **are** a broken spirit; a broken and crushed heart, God, You will not despise.*

"For You do not desire sacrifice, or I would give it." Under the Law, sacrifices covered many sins. But the Law offered no sacrifice for deliberate adultery and murder. Both carried the death penalty (Leviticus 20:10; Numbers 35:31). David cannot buy his way out. Even if he could, God never wanted sacrifices without a heart behind them (Psalm 40:6).

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and crushed heart, God, You will not despise." A crushed heart is one broken down by sorrow over sin. That is the offering God wants. Proud people despise a broken heart. God does not. Isaiah 57:15 says the high and holy God lives "with

the contrite and lowly of spirit." Jesus told of a tax collector who would not even look up, but beat his breast and prayed, "God, be propitious to me, the sinner!" To be propitious is to turn from wrath and show mercy. Jesus said that man went home justified (Luke 18:13-14).

A word to those who have been hurt by someone else's sin. God's forgiveness of a repentant sinner does not mean your pain does not matter. David was forgiven, but the consequences still came, and God called his deeds evil. God sees what was done to Uriah, to Bathsheba and to you. He is a God of justice as well as mercy. His forgiveness does not erase what a person did to others. True repentance does not demand trust it has not earned. It makes things right where it can, accepts the consequences (including legal ones) and does not insist on returning to a place of power over others. If someone who hurt you says he is forgiven, you are not required to act as if nothing happened.

And a word to those carrying their own guilt: if you come to God with a broken heart, He will not turn you away.

51:18-19 *Do good in Your favor to Zion; You will build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You will delight in sacrifices of righteousness, burnt offering and whole offering; then they will offer young bulls on Your altar.*

"Do good in Your favor to Zion; You will build the walls of Jerusalem." Zion, as we saw in Psalm 2, is a name for Jerusalem as the city of God. David's sin had harmed more than himself. A king's sin affects his people. Now he prays for the whole city.

Some scholars think these last two verses were added later, after the Babylonians tore down Jerusalem's walls in 586 B.C., when God's people prayed for the city to be rebuilt. The heading gives the psalm to David, and David was building up Jerusalem in his own day, so the prayer fits him too.

"Then You will delight in sacrifices of righteousness." Once the heart is right, the offerings are right. Sacrifices given by a forgiven, broken, grateful people please God. For us, the one true sacrifice for sin has already been made in Christ (Hebrews 10:10). Our offerings now are our lives (Romans 12:1) and "a sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15). The psalm that began with a guilty man begging for mercy ends with God's people at His altar, worshiping again.

Psalm 51 Summary

David wrote Psalm 51 after Nathan the prophet confronted him for taking Bathsheba and having her husband Uriah killed (2 Samuel 11-12). He asks God for mercy according to His steadfast love and compassion, to blot out his transgressions and wash him from his sin. He admits his sin is always before him, that it was against God above all and that God is right to judge him. He confesses that he has been sinful from birth and that God wants truth in the inner person. He asks to be purified with hyssop and washed whiter than snow, and for joy to return. At the heart of the psalm he prays, "Create for me a pure heart, God," and begs God not to cast him away or take His Holy Spirit from him. He asks for the joy of salvation and promises to teach sinners God's ways. He knows no sacrifice can cover his bloodguilt, but God will not despise a broken and crushed

heart. He ends by praying for Zion and Jerusalem, where God's people will again offer sacrifices that please Him.

People and Places

- Nathan: the prophet who confronted David with a story about a stolen lamb (2 Samuel 12).
- Bathsheba: the wife of Uriah, whom David took; she later became the mother of Solomon.
- Uriah: a Hittite and one of David's loyal soldiers; David had him sent where the fighting was fiercest so that he would die.
- Hyssop: a small bushy plant used to sprinkle blood or water in Israel's cleansing rites.

Psalm 51 Study Questions

1. What had David done before Nathan came to him? (heading; 2 Samuel 11-12)

2. On what does David base his plea for mercy? (51:1)

3. David sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah. Why does he say, "Against You, You alone, I have sinned"? (51:4)

4. What does verse 5 teach about where sin begins in us, and how should that change the way we look at other people's sins?

5. What do hyssop and snow picture in verse 7, and how does Christ fulfill that cleansing?

6. Why does David ask God to "create" a pure heart instead of just fixing the old one? (51:10)

7. What did David fear most, according to verse 11, and why?

8. How might God use a forgiven person to help others turn to Him? (51:13) Have you seen that happen?

9. What sacrifice does God not despise? (51:17)

10. How can this psalm help someone carrying guilt, and how should we care for people who have been hurt by someone else's sin?

Psalm 62: My Soul Is Silent Before God

Scripture

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

62:1-4 Only toward God ***is*** my soul ***in*** silence; from Him ***is*** my salvation. Only He ***is*** my rock and my salvation, my high refuge; I will not be greatly shaken. How long will you assail a man? You will be murdered, all of you, like a leaning wall, a fence pushed down. Surely from his loftiness they have planned to thrust ***him*** down; they delight in falsehood; with his mouth they bless, and in their inward part they curse. Selah.

62:5-8 Only for God be silent, my soul, for from Him ***is*** my hope. Only He ***is*** my rock and my salvation, my high refuge; I will not be shaken. On God ***rests*** my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, my refuge ***is*** in God. Trust in Him at every time, people; pour out your heart before Him; God ***is*** a refuge for us. Selah.

62:9-12 Only vanity ***are*** the sons of mankind; a lie ***are*** the sons of man; in the balances they go up; they ***are*** less than vanity altogether. Do not trust in extortion, and do not become vain in robbery; wealth, if it bears fruit, do not set ***your*** heart ***on it***. Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this: that strength ***belongs*** to God; and to You, Lord, ***belongs*** steadfast love; for You, You repay a man according to his work.

Psalm 62 Preview

David is under attack. Men are trying to bring him down from his high position. They smile and bless him to his face while they curse him in their hearts. He feels like a leaning wall about to fall. Yet Psalm 62 is remarkably calm. David does not panic. He waits in silence for God, because God only is his rock and his salvation.

A small Hebrew word runs all through this psalm, six times in all. The SLB translates it "only" in verses 1, 2, 5, 6 and 9, and "surely" in verse 4. God only is David's rock. His enemies want nothing but to push him down. People are but a breath. David wants us to see that everything else is light and passing, and God only is solid. He ends by urging God's people to trust in Him at all times and pour out their hearts before Him.

Psalm 62 Study

62:1-2 *Only toward God **is** my soul **in** silence; from Him **is** my salvation. Only He **is** my rock and my salvation, my high refuge; I will not be greatly shaken.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on Jeduthun. A psalm of David." Jeduthun was one of the chief musicians David appointed to lead worship (1 Chronicles 16:41-42; 25:1). The meaning of "on Jeduthun" is uncertain. It may mean the psalm was given to Jeduthun's choir, or that it followed a style or tune connected with him.

Verse 4 speaks of enemies who want to thrust him down "from his loftiness," which fits a king. Many connect it with the rebellion of his son Absalom, who won the people's hearts with flattery while plotting to take the throne (2 Samuel 15). But the psalm does not say.

"Only toward God is my soul in silence." The Hebrew word means silence or stillness. David is quiet before God. He is not silent because he has nothing to say, since he will pour out his heart in verse 8. He is silent because he has stopped arguing, stopped scheming and stopped trying to save himself. He is waiting for God to act. Isaiah 30:15 says, "In keeping quiet and in trust will be your strength."

"From Him is my salvation." Salvation here means rescue from danger, but it points to the deeper rescue only God can give. "Only He is my rock and my salvation, my high refuge." A rock is solid. A high refuge is a stronghold up high. "I will not be greatly shaken." David may be rattled, but he will not be knocked down.

62:3-4 *How long will you assail a man? You will be murdered, all of you, like a leaning wall, a fence pushed down. Surely from his loftiness they have planned to thrust **him** down; they delight in falsehood; with his mouth they bless, and in their inward part they curse. Selah.*

Now David turns to his enemies. "How long will you assail a man?" They are ganging up on one man. They see him as "a leaning wall, a fence pushed down," something already about to fall, and they want to give it the last push.

"From his loftiness they have planned to thrust him down." Their only goal is to bring him down. "They delight in falsehood." And they are two-faced: "With his mouth they bless, and in their inward part they curse." They say kind things in public and wish him harm in private.

Most of us know what it is to be smiled at by someone who is working against us. It hurts deeply. David does not answer them with schemes of his own. Next to their lies he sets the steady truth of who God is.

"Selah" (see Psalm 24). Lying enemies on one side, a faithful God on the other.

62:5-7 *Only for God be silent, my soul, for from Him **is** my hope. Only He **is** my rock and my salvation, my high refuge; I will not be shaken. On God **rests** my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, my refuge **is** in God.*

"Only for God be silent, my soul." In verse 1 David described his soul in silence. Now he commands it to be silent. Even a man of faith has to tell his soul to be still more than once. Psalm 42 did the same: "Wait for God."

"For from Him is my hope." Everything David is hoping for will come from God, not from his own cleverness or from people who might help him.

Verse 6 repeats verse 2 almost word for word. In verse 2 David said, "I will not be greatly shaken." Now he says, "I will not be shaken." Verse 6 drops the word "greatly." His confidence has grown as he has prayed. Waiting on God does that. The longer we look at Him, the steadier we become.

"On God rests my salvation and my glory." David's glory, his honor and good name, is in God's hands. His enemies are trying to tear down his good name, but they cannot take what God holds. God is "the rock of my strength," and "my refuge is in God." Rock, salvation, high refuge, glory, strength, refuge. David piles up the names because he cannot say enough about how safe God is.

62:8 *Trust in Him at every time, people; pour out your heart before Him; God **is** a refuge for us. Selah.*

Now David turns to the people around him. "Trust in Him at every time, people." David has learned something in his trouble, and he wants everyone to learn it. Trust God not just in emergencies but "at every time."

"Pour out your heart before Him." The silence of verses 1 and 5 does not mean keeping everything inside. David was quiet in the sense of resting in God, but he also poured out his heart to God. Waiting in silence and pouring out our hearts belong together. We tell God everything, our fears, our anger and our hurt, and then we rest and let Him act.

"God is a refuge for us." David changes from "my refuge" in verse 7 to a refuge "for us." What God is for him, God is for all who trust Him. Another "Selah" follows. What do you need to pour out before God today?

62:9-10 *Only vanity **are** the sons of mankind; a lie **are** the sons of man; in the balances they go up; they **are** less than vanity altogether. Do not trust in extortion, and do not become vain in robbery; wealth, if it bears fruit, do not set **your** heart **on it**.*

"Only vanity are the sons of mankind; a lie are the sons of man." The two phrases are often read as people of low rank and people of high rank. Whether a person is poor or powerful, rich or common, if we trust in people instead of God, they will let us down. The word "vanity" means a breath, here one moment and gone the next. The same word appears at the end of the verse: "they are less than vanity altogether." Ancient merchants weighed goods on balance scales. Put all of humanity on one side of the scale, and it goes up, because it weighs less than a breath. Isaiah 40:15 says the nations are regarded "like the dust of the scales."

"Do not trust in extortion, and do not become vain in robbery." Some people try to get security by force or fraud. David says it will not last.

"Wealth, if it bears fruit, do not set your heart on it." David does not say riches are evil. But he warns us not to lean our hearts on them. Money can be gone as quickly as a breath. Jesus said we cannot serve God and wealth (Matthew 6:24), and He warned against the one "who treasures up for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

62:11-12 *Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this: that strength **belongs** to God; and to You, Lord, **belongs** steadfast love; for You, You repay a man according to his work.*

"Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this." This is a Hebrew way of saying that something is sure and worth repeating. God said it, and David has heard it more than once. What has God said? Two things.

First, "that strength belongs to God." No enemy, no king and no fortune has real power next to Him. Second, "to You, Lord, belongs steadfast love." God's power and His loyal love (see Psalm 23:6) belong together. If God had power without love, we would be terrified of Him. If He had love without power, He could not help us. He has both. That is why David can wait in silence for Him.

"For You, You repay a man according to his work." God will judge every person justly. Paul takes up these words: God "will render to each according to his works" (Romans 2:6), and Jesus said He "will repay each according to his conduct" when He comes in glory (Matthew 16:27). The two-faced men of verse 4 will answer to God. David does not need to repay them himself.

How does this fit with salvation by grace? We are saved by grace through faith, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). But true faith shows itself in what we do, and God sees it all. For the believer, the judgment of our works is not about whether we are saved, but about how we lived as those who have been saved. God will not forget anything done for Him. And He will not overlook evil that goes unrepented. Because strength and steadfast love belong to God, our souls can rest.

New Testament links: Romans 2:6 (quoted); Matthew 16:27 (alluded to); 2 Timothy 4:14 (alluded to); Revelation 2:23 (alluded to)

Psalm 62 Summary

In Psalm 62, David waits in silence for God alone, because his salvation comes from Him and God only is his rock and high refuge. His enemies attack him like men pushing over a leaning wall. They want to bring him down from his high position, and they bless with their mouths but curse in their hearts. David tells his soul again to wait for God, and his confidence grows from "I will not be greatly shaken" to "I will not be shaken." His salvation, his glory and his refuge are in God. He urges all God's people to trust in God at all times and pour out their hearts before Him. People, whether low or high, weigh less than a breath, and riches, however they are gained, should not hold our hearts. God has spoken that strength belongs to Him and steadfast love is His, and that He repays each person according to his work.

People and Places

- Jeduthun: one of the chief musicians David appointed to lead worship in Israel.

Psalm 62 Study Questions

1. What does David say his soul does, and why? (62:1-2)

2. What does it mean for your soul to be "in silence" toward God only? Is that hard for you?

3. How does David describe his enemies and what they are doing? (62:3-4)

4. Have you ever been hurt by someone who was kind to your face but worked against you? How does this psalm help?

5. What small but important change does David make between verse 2 and verse 6, and what does it show?

6. What does David tell the people to do in verse 8?

7. Waiting in silence and pouring out our hearts both appear in this psalm. How do they fit together?

8. What picture does David use in verse 9 to show how light people are compared with God?

9. What warning does David give about riches, and how does Jesus echo it? (62:10; Luke 12:21)

10. What two things has God spoken, according to verses 11-12, and why do we need both?

Psalm 63: Thirsting for God in the Wilderness

Scripture

A psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

63:1-4 God, You ***are*** my God; I seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and weary land without water. So I have gazed on You in the holy place, to see Your strength and Your glory. For Your steadfast love ***is*** better than life; my lips will extol You. So I will bless You in my life; in Your name I will lift up my hands.

63:5-8 As ***with*** fat and fatness my soul will be satisfied, and ***with*** lips of joyful cries my mouth will praise ***You***. When I have remembered You on my bed, in the night watches I meditate on You. For You have been a help to me, and in the shadow of Your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings after You; Your right hand holds me fast.

63:9-11 And they, for destruction they seek my life; they will go into the lower parts of the earth. They will pour him out on the hands of the sword; they will be the portion of foxes. And the king will rejoice in God; everyone who swears by Him will boast, for the mouth of those who speak falsehood will be shut.

Psalm 63 Preview

David is in the wilderness of Judah, a dry and rocky land east of Jerusalem that drops down toward the Dead Sea. He is running for his life. Water is scarce, and so is safety. But the thirst David writes about in Psalm 63 is not mainly for water. It is for God.

In this psalm David remembers seeing God's power and glory in the sanctuary. He says God's steadfast love is better than life itself. He lies awake at night thinking about God and sings for joy under the shadow of His wings. His enemies are still after him, but David is sure they will fall and he will rejoice in God. Psalm 63 shows us that we can find God in the dry places, and that He satisfies the soul even when everything else is gone.

Psalm 63 Study

63:1 *God, You **are** my God; I seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and weary land without water.*

The heading reads, "A psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah." David spent time in that wilderness twice. As a young man he hid there from King Saul (1 Samuel 23-24). Years later, as king, he fled through it when his son Absalom rebelled (2 Samuel 15:23-28; 16:14). Verse 11 calls David "the king," so many think this psalm comes from the time of Absalom's revolt. But either setting fits the heading.

"God, You are my God." David begins by claiming God as his own. "I seek You earnestly." Some translations say "early," and the Hebrew word is connected to the dawn. David seeks God first, before anything else.

"My soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You." His whole person longs for God, soul and body. The setting gives him the picture: "In a dry and weary land without water." David looked out at the cracked ground and the empty riverbeds and thought, my soul is like that without God. Psalm 42 used a similar picture: "My soul thirsts for God."

We all thirst for something. People try to satisfy that thirst with success, pleasure, money or relationships. Those things cannot fill a soul made for God. Jesus said that whoever drinks the water He gives will never thirst (John 4:14).

63:2-4 *So I have gazed on You in the holy place, to see Your strength and Your glory. For Your steadfast love **is** better than life; my lips will extol You. So I will bless You in my life; in Your name I will lift up my hands.*

"So I have gazed on You in the holy place, to see Your strength and Your glory." The holy place is the sanctuary where God met His people. If this psalm comes from the Absalom years, David is remembering worship at the tent he set up in Jerusalem for the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6:17), while the older tabernacle of Moses stood at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39; 21:29). David remembers worshiping there and seeing God's "strength" and "glory." Now, out in the wilderness, he holds on to that memory. What he saw of God in worship carries him through the dry place.

That is one reason gathering with God's people matters. The times we meet God in worship store up strength for the times we feel far from Him.

"For Your steadfast love is better than life; my lips will extol You." David is running for his life, and he says God's loyal love (see Psalm 23:6) is worth more than his life. He could lose his life. He could not lose God's love. Paul would later say that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:35-39).

"So I will bless You in my life; in Your name I will lift up my hands." Lifting up hands was a way of praying and praising in Israel. It was a picture of reaching out to God and of giving ourselves to Him. David cannot go to the sanctuary right now, but he can worship right where he is.

63:5-6 *As **with** fat and fatness my soul will be satisfied, and **with** lips of joyful cries my mouth will praise **You**. When I have remembered You on my bed, in the night watches I meditate on You.*

"As with fat and fatness my soul will be satisfied." The Hebrew speaks of the richest food. In a land where food was often scarce, a meal that rich was a feast. David is hungry and thirsty in the wilderness, yet he says his soul feels like it has been to a banquet. God Himself satisfies him. "With lips of joyful cries my mouth will praise You."

"When I have remembered You on my bed, in the night watches I meditate on You." The night was divided into watches, shifts when guards stayed awake. David is lying awake, maybe because

danger keeps him from sleeping. Instead of filling those hours with worry, he fills them with God. To meditate is to think deeply and slowly about something, turning it over in the mind. When you can't sleep, try what David did. Think about who God is and what He has done.

63:7-8 *For You have been a help to me, and in the shadow of Your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings after You; Your right hand holds me fast.*

"For You have been a help to me, and in the shadow of Your wings I will sing for joy." David looks back at how God has helped him before. That memory gives him a song. The shadow of God's wings pictures a mother bird covering her young to keep them safe from heat and danger. Boaz told Ruth she had come to seek refuge under the LORD's wings (Ruth 2:12). Jesus used a similar picture when He said He longed to gather Jerusalem's children the way a hen gathers her chicks (Matthew 23:37).

"My soul clings after You." The word "clings" is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:24 for a man being joined to his wife. David holds on to God with that kind of closeness and commitment. "Your right hand holds me fast." The right hand stands for strength. David clings to God, and God holds David. Both are true, and David needs both.

63:9-11 *And they, for destruction they seek my life; they will go into the lower parts of the earth. They will pour him out on the hands of the sword; they will be the portion of foxes. And the king will rejoice in God; everyone who swears by Him will boast, for the mouth of those who speak falsehood will be shut.*

Now David speaks about his enemies. "And they, for destruction they seek my life; they will go into the lower parts of the earth." The depths of the earth means the grave, the place of the dead. "They will pour him out on the hands of the sword." Those who live by violence will die by it. "They will be the portion of foxes." The word may mean jackals, wild dogs that scavenged on battlefields. In that world, to be left unburied was a shameful end.

These are hard lines, so look at how David actually treated these men. When Saul was in his power, David spared him (1 Samuel 24). When Absalom fought against him, David begged his commanders to deal gently with the young man, and he wept bitterly when Absalom died (2 Samuel 18:5, 33). So these verses come from a king who has put the outcome in God's hands and trusts God to stop the wicked, not from a man sharpening his sword (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

"And the king will rejoice in God." David does not rejoice in his enemies' fall but "in God." "Everyone who swears by Him will boast." To swear by God means to make your promises in His name, to belong to Him and trust Him. Those people will have reason to boast in God. "For the mouth of those who speak falsehood will be shut." The lies that hunted David will one day be silenced.

David started out thirsty. He finishes with a full heart, and the ground around him is just as dry. He has found that God is enough.

Psalm 63 Summary

David wrote Psalm 63 in the wilderness of Judah, likely while fleeing from Absalom. In that dry land he tells God that his soul thirsts and his body longs for Him. He remembers seeing God's power and glory in the sanctuary and says God's steadfast love is better than life, so he will praise God and lift up his hands as long as he lives. His soul is satisfied as with a rich feast. He meditates on God through the night watches and sings for joy in the shadow of God's wings. His soul clings to God, and God's right hand holds him fast. Those who seek his life will go down to the grave and fall by the sword, but the king will rejoice in God, and the mouths of liars will be stopped.

People and Places

- Wilderness of Judah: the dry, rugged land between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea.
- Sanctuary: the holy place where God met His people; in David's later years, the tent for the ark in Jerusalem.

Psalm 63 Study Questions

1. Where was David when he wrote this psalm, and what two times in his life might it fit? (heading; 63:11)

2. What does David compare his longing for God to? (63:1)

3. What things do people today use to try to satisfy their thirst, and why do they fall short?

4. What had David seen in the sanctuary, and how did that memory help him in the wilderness? (63:2)

5. What does David say is better than life, and why would he say that while running for his life? (63:3)

6. What does David do when he lies awake at night? (63:6) What could you do the next time you can't sleep?

7. What picture does David use for God's protection in verse 7?

8. David clings to God, and God's right hand holds him (63:8). How do those two truths encourage you?

9. How should we understand David's words about his enemies in verses 9-10, in light of how he treated Saul and Absalom?

10. Is there a "dry and weary land" in your life right now? How could this psalm help you seek God in it?

Psalm 73: When the Wicked Prosper

Scripture

A psalm of Asaph.

73:1-14 Surely God ***is*** good to Israel, to ***the*** pure of heart. And I, my feet had almost turned aside; my steps had nearly been poured out. For I was jealous of the boasters, ***as*** I saw the peace of ***the*** wicked. For there are no pangs at their death, and their body ***is*** fat. In the trouble of mortals they are not, and with mankind they are not stricken. Therefore pride is a necklace ***for*** them; a garment of violence covers them. Their eye comes out from fat; the imaginations of ***the*** heart pass beyond ***bounds***. They mock and speak in evil; ***of*** oppression from on high they speak. They have set their mouth in the heavens, and their tongue walks on the earth. Therefore his people turn back here, and full waters are drained out by them. And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" Look, these ***are the*** wicked, and, always at ease, they have increased wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence. And I have been stricken all the day, and my rebuke ***comes*** morning by morning.

73:15-28 If I had said, "I will speak thus," look, I would have dealt treacherously with the generation of Your sons. And I thought ***how*** to know this; it ***was*** trouble in my eyes, until I went into the sanctuaries of God; ***then*** I discerned their end. Surely You set them on slippery ***places***; You make them fall to ruins. How they have become a desolation, as ***in*** a moment! They have come to an end; they are finished by terrors. Like a dream after awaking, Lord, when ***You*** rouse ***Yourself***, You will despise their image. When my heart was embittered, and ***in*** my kidneys I was pierced, and I ***was*** stupid and did not know; I was ***like*** beasts with You. And I ***am*** continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You guide me, and afterward You will take me ***to*** glory. Whom have I in the heavens? And with You I desire nothing on the earth. My flesh and my heart have failed; God ***is*** the rock of my heart and my portion forever. For look, those far from You will perish; You have destroyed everyone who prostitutes ***himself*** from You. And I, the nearness of God ***is*** good for me; I have set my refuge in the Lord GOD, to recount all Your works.

Psalm 73 Preview

Psalm 37 tells us not to fret over the wicked. In Psalm 73 Asaph, one of King David's chief musicians, tells us about the time he nearly lost his faith. He looks around and sees proud, cruel people doing well. They are healthy, rich and carefree, and they mock God and get away with it. Meanwhile Asaph has kept his heart clean, and all he seems to get for it is trouble. He begins to wonder whether serving God is worth it.

Then he goes into the house of God, and everything looks different. He sees where the wicked are headed, and he sees what he has in God that no one can take away. The psalm ends with tender words of trust: God holds his right hand, God will guide him and then take him to glory, and God is the rock of his heart forever. If you have ever been tempted to envy people who ignore God and seem to prosper, this psalm speaks to you.

Psalm 73 Study

73:1 *Surely God **is** good to Israel, to **the** pure of heart.*

The heading says this is "A psalm of Asaph." Asaph was a Levite whom David put in charge of music before the ark of the covenant (1 Chronicles 15:17-19; 16:4-5). Twelve psalms carry his name (Psalm 50 and Psalms 73 to 83). His family went on leading worship for generations, so some of these psalms may come from Asaph's sons who carried on his work, but the heading connects this psalm to him, and I read it that way. Psalm 73 also opens Book Three of the Psalms.

Asaph begins with the conclusion. "Surely God is good to Israel," that is, "to the pure of heart." He did not always feel that way. The rest of the psalm tells how he got there. He starts with the answer so we will not lose our way while he tells us about the time he nearly lost his.

"Pure of heart" describes people whose hearts are turned toward God, who want what He wants. Jesus said the pure in heart are blessed, for they will see God (Matthew 5:8).

73:2-3 *And I, my feet had almost turned aside; my steps had nearly been poured out. For I was jealous of the boasters, **as** I saw the peace of **the** wicked.*

"And I," he says. Asaph knew God was good. Yet "my feet had almost turned aside." He pictures himself on a steep, slippery path, about to fall. He did not fall, but it was close.

What nearly tripped him? "I was jealous of the boasters." He saw "the peace of the wicked" and wanted what they had. The word for peace here is shalom, the usual Hebrew word for peace. The wicked seemed to have peace, and Asaph did not.

Asaph says out loud what many believers only think. He does not pretend that believers never struggle with doubt or envy. We all know the feeling: the coworker who cheats gets the promotion. Scripture lets us say that out loud.

73:4-9 *For there are no pangs at their death, and their body **is** fat. In the trouble of mortals they are not, and with mankind they are not stricken. Therefore pride is a necklace **for** them; a garment of violence covers them. Their eye comes out from fat; the imaginations of **the** heart pass beyond **bounds**. They mock and speak in evil; **of** oppression from on high they speak. They have set their mouth in the heavens, and their tongue walks on the earth.*

Asaph describes what he saw. The wicked seemed to have "no pangs at their death," or as some translate it, no pains at all until their death. Their bodies were healthy and well fed. "With mankind they are not stricken." The troubles that come to ordinary people seemed to pass them by.

Their success made them proud. "Pride is a necklace" worn openly for everyone to see, and violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge from fatness, a picture of people stuffed with more than they need, and "the imaginations of the heart pass beyond bounds." They dream up schemes and carry them out.

Their speech is the worst of it. "They mock and speak in evil." They talk about oppressing others as if it were nothing. "Of oppression from on high they speak," looking down on everyone. "They have set their mouth in the heavens," speaking against God Himself, and "their tongue walks on the earth" as if they owned it.

Asaph is painting from life. People like this were real in his day, and they are real in ours.

73:10-12 *Therefore his people turn back here, and full waters are drained out by them. And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" Look, these **are the** wicked, and, always at ease, they have increased wealth.*

Verse 10 is hard to translate, and the meaning is uncertain. The SLB says, "Therefore his people turn back here, and full waters are drained out by them." Many take it to mean that ordinary people are drawn to the wicked. They turn toward them and drink in their words like water, because success makes even cruel people popular.

Then comes their boast: "How does God know?" They believe God exists, but they live as though He does not see or care. They call Him "the Most High," but they act as if He is too high up to notice what happens down here.

"Look, these are the wicked." Asaph sums it up: "always at ease, they have increased wealth." That is what he saw, and he could not make sense of it.

73:13-14 *Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence. And I have been stricken all the day, and my rebuke **comes** morning by morning.*

Now Asaph says the thing he was afraid to say. "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure." Washing his hands "in innocence" is a picture of a clean life. He had lived right, and for what? He says, "I have been stricken all the day, and my rebuke comes morning by morning." Every day brought a new trouble.

Have you ever felt that way? You pray, you obey, you give, and life gets harder, while people who ignore God seem to have it easy. Asaph felt that too, and God put his words in the Bible. When we bring our doubt to God, it does not have to be the end of our faith.

73:15-16 *If I had said, "I will speak thus," look, I would have dealt treacherously with the generation of Your sons. And I thought **how** to know this; it **was** trouble in my eyes,*

Asaph caught himself. "If I had said, 'I will speak thus,'" that is, if he had gone around telling people that serving God was useless, he "would have dealt treacherously with the generation of Your sons." He would have hurt God's people by spreading his doubt.

Asaph was wise here. He did not hide his struggle from God, but he was careful about what he spread to others. There is a difference between bringing our questions to God and to a trusted brother or sister, and broadcasting our doubts in a way that pulls others down. Asaph did not go around saying God was useless. But it is not betrayal to tell a mature believer that you are struggling. That is often how God brings us, like Asaph, into the sanctuary.

Still, keeping quiet did not solve it. "And I thought how to know this; it was trouble in my eyes." The more he thought about it, the more it hurt. He could not reason his way out alone.

73:17 *until I went into the sanctuaries of God;* ***then*** *I discerned their end.*

Here the psalm turns. "Until I went into the sanctuaries of God." The sanctuary is the holy place where God made His presence known among His people. In Asaph's day that was the tent David set up for the ark in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17; 1 Chronicles 16:1), where Asaph led the worship (1 Chronicles 16:37). The older tabernacle of Moses stood at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39; 21:29). Later the temple took the tent's place.

What happened there? The psalm doesn't say exactly. Maybe it was the worship, the sacrifices, the reading of God's Word or simply being in God's presence. Whatever it was, it changed what Asaph saw. "Then I discerned their end." He had been looking only at how the wicked were living. In God's house he saw how their story ends.

For us, the place to get that clear view is still the presence of God: in prayer, in His Word and in worship with His people. Things that look upside down from the outside start to look right side up when we see them from where God is.

73:18-20 *Surely You set them on slippery* ***places****; You make them fall to ruins. How they have become a desolation, as* ***in*** *a moment! They have come to an end; they are finished by terrors. Like a dream after awaking, Lord, when* ***You*** *rouse* ***Yourself****, You will despise their image.*

Asaph had worried about his own feet slipping (73:2). Now he sees that the wicked are the ones on slippery ground. "Surely You set them on slippery places." Their success has no firm footing. "You make them fall to ruins."

It can happen fast. "How they have become a desolation, as in a moment! They have come to an end; they are finished by terrors." The things they trusted, their money, health and power, can be gone overnight, like the rich fool in Jesus' story (Luke 12:20; see Psalm 37).

"Like a dream after awaking." A dream feels real while it lasts, but when you wake up it is gone. That is what the success of the wicked will look like when God rises to judge. Asaph says, "Lord, when You rouse Yourself, You will despise their image," and what looked so impressive will be treated as nothing.

The psalm does not deny what we see now. The wicked often do prosper for a time. But God has the last word, and their end is coming. We can wait for God's justice instead of envying them.

73:21-22 *When my heart was embittered, and* ***in*** *my kidneys I was pierced, and I* ***was*** *stupid and did not know; I was* ***like*** *beasts with You.*

Now Asaph looks back at himself, and he does not like what he sees. "When my heart was embittered, and in my kidneys I was pierced." Envy had made him sour, and it had cut him inside.

"I was stupid and did not know; I was like beasts with You." An animal sees only what is in front of it. It does not think about the future or about God. That is how Asaph had been thinking. He had judged everything by what he could see today.

It takes humility to say that. When God shows us we have been wrong, the best thing we can do is agree with Him.

73:23-24 *And I **am** continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You guide me, and afterward You will take me **to** glory.*

"And I am continually with You." Even while Asaph was bitter and foolish, God had not let him go. "You have taken hold of my right hand." Picture a father holding a child's hand on a slippery path. Asaph's feet almost slipped, but God was holding him the whole time.

"With Your counsel You guide me." God would lead him through the rest of his life by His wisdom. "And afterward You will take me to glory." Many read this as looking beyond this life: when Asaph's days on earth are done, God will take him to Himself. Others take it as God bringing him to honor later in this life. The word "take" is the same Hebrew word used of Enoch: "God took him" (Genesis 5:24).

So Asaph's answer to the prosperity of the wicked goes beyond their fall. He has something far better than anything they have. He has God now, and he will have God forever.

73:25-26 *Whom have I in the heavens? And with You I desire nothing on the earth. My flesh and my heart have failed; God **is** the rock of my heart and my portion forever.*

"Whom have I in the heavens? And with You I desire nothing on the earth." Asaph had been envying the rich. Now he sees that God Himself is what he wants most. Nothing in heaven and nothing on earth compares with Him.

"My flesh and my heart have failed." His body may break down. His courage may give out. Asaph is realistic. Faith does not make us immune to weakness, sickness or death. "God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever."

A portion was a share of the inheritance, especially land. When Israel divided the land, the Levites received no territory, because the LORD Himself was their portion (Numbers 18:20, 24; Deuteronomy 10:9). Asaph was a Levite, and he understood. The wicked may have their wealth for a few years. Asaph has God, and God does not run out.

Paul said something similar when he counted everything as loss compared to knowing Christ Jesus his Lord (Philippians 3:8). Whatever we lack in this life, if we have God, we have our portion forever.

73:27-28 *For look, those far from You will perish; You have destroyed everyone who prostitutes **himself** from You. And I, the nearness of God **is** good for me; I have set my refuge in the Lord GOD, to recount all Your works.*

"For look, those far from You will perish." That is the end Asaph saw in the sanctuary. The people who live far from God, everyone "who prostitutes himself from You," will not last.

"And I," he says. Asaph used those same words in verse 2, when his feet nearly slipped. Now he says them again with a very different ending: "the nearness of God is good for me." Being close to God is the best thing there is. The wicked have their goods. Asaph has his good, and it is God.

"I have set my refuge in the Lord GOD." Lord GOD is how the SLB prints the title Lord joined to God's personal name. A refuge is a safe place to run to. And now Asaph has a purpose: "To recount all Your works." He was afraid in verse 15 of saying something that would hurt God's people. Now he has something to say that will help them. The psalm itself is his testimony.

Asaph started this psalm with "Surely God is good to Israel" (73:1). He has walked us through the doubt, the envy, the turn in the sanctuary and the hope of glory. By the end we can see that he meant it.

Psalm 73 Summary

Psalm 73 is Asaph's account of a crisis of faith. He begins with the truth that God is good to the pure in heart, then admits he nearly stumbled because he envied the arrogant. They seemed healthy, rich and free from trouble, even while they mocked God and oppressed others, and Asaph wondered whether keeping his heart pure had been for nothing. He kept his doubts from spreading to God's people, but he could not solve them alone until he went into the sanctuary of God. There he saw the end of the wicked: they stand on slippery ground and can be swept away in a moment, like a dream when one wakes. Asaph confessed that his bitterness had made him foolish, yet God had held his right hand the whole time. God would guide him in this life and afterward take him to glory. With nothing in heaven or on earth to compare with God, Asaph found that even if his flesh and heart failed, God was the rock of his heart and his portion forever, and the nearness of God was his good.

People and Places

- Asaph: a Levite musician whom David appointed to lead worship; twelve psalms carry his name.
- Portion: a share of an inheritance; the Levites had no land, because the LORD Himself was their portion (Numbers 18:20, 24; Deuteronomy 10:9).

Psalm 73 Study Questions

1. What truth does Asaph state at the very beginning of the psalm? (73:1)

2. What nearly made Asaph stumble? (73:2-3)

3. How does Asaph describe the lives and words of the wicked? (73:4-12)

4. Why did Asaph decide not to speak his doubts to others? (73:15)

5. Have you ever felt that obeying God was "in vain"? What brought you to that point, and what helped you through it?

6. What changed when Asaph went into the sanctuary of God, and what did he see there? (73:17-20)

7. How does Asaph describe himself when he was bitter? (73:21-22) Why does envy make us think like that?

8. What does God do for Asaph, both now and afterward? (73:23-24)

9. Asaph says, "Whom have I in the heavens?" (73:25) What things compete with God for first place in your heart?

10. What would it look like for you this week to say, "the nearness of God is good for me" (73:28), and to tell someone about God's works?

Psalm 84: How Lovely Are Your Dwelling Places

Scripture

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

84:1-4 How lovely ***are*** Your dwelling places, LORD of armies! My soul has longed, and also has wasted away, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh shout for joy to the living God. Even a bird has found a home, and a swallow a nest for herself, where she has put her young: Your altars, LORD of armies, my King and my God. How blessed ***are*** those who dwell in Your house! They are still praising You. Selah.

84:5-8 How blessed ***is the*** man whose strength ***is*** in You, in whose heart ***are*** highways! Passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the early rain also covers ***it with*** blessings. They go from strength to strength; ***each*** appears before God in Zion. LORD God of armies, hear my prayer; give ear, God of Jacob. Selah.

84:9-12 Our shield, see, God, and look on the face of Your anointed. For a day in Your courts ***is*** better than a thousand; I have chosen to stand at the threshold in the house of my God rather than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God ***is*** a sun and a shield; the LORD gives favor and glory; He does not withhold good from those who walk in blamelessness. LORD of armies, how blessed ***is the*** man who trusts in You!

Psalm 84 Preview

Psalm 84 is a song of longing for the house of God. The writer aches to be in the temple courts in Jerusalem. He envies the little birds that build their nests near the altar, and he envies the priests and Levites who live and serve there every day. Then he describes the pilgrims who travel up to Jerusalem for the feasts, passing through dry valleys and growing stronger the closer they get.

The psalm ends with a famous comparison: one day in God's courts is better than a thousand anywhere else, and it is better to stand at the door of God's house than to live comfortably among the wicked. For us, the point is the same as it was for the pilgrims. The best thing in life is to be near God, and He withholds no good thing from those who walk with Him.

Psalm 84 Study

84:1-2 *How lovely **are** Your dwelling places, LORD of armies! My soul has longed, and also has wasted away, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh shout for joy to the living God.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster, on the Gittith. Of the sons of Korah, a psalm." The choirmaster and Gittith are heading words we met in Psalm 8. The sons of Korah were the Levite singers we met in Psalm 42; their family also served as doorkeepers in God's house.

"How lovely are Your dwelling places, LORD of armies!" In Hebrew the word for "dwelling places" is plural, probably meaning the whole temple area with its courts and buildings. The word "lovely" means dear or beloved. What the psalmist loves about the place is that God is there.

The LORD of armies, the commander of heaven's armies (see Psalm 24), chose to dwell among His people.

"My soul has longed, and also has wasted away, for the courts of the LORD." To waste away here means to faint with longing. Ordinary worshipers could enter the courts but not the inner rooms of the temple. The psalmist wants to be there so badly that it wears him out. "My heart and my flesh shout for joy to the living God." His whole being, inside and out, cries out to God. What he wants most is "the living God."

84:3 *Even a bird has found a home, and a swallow a nest for herself, where she has put her young: Your altars, LORD of armies, my King and my God.*

The psalmist pictures the small birds that nested in and around the temple. "Even a bird has found a home, and a swallow a nest for herself." The Hebrew word for bird here often means a sparrow or some other small bird. Sparrows and swallows are about as common and unimportant as birds get. Yet they had found a home near God's altars, and they raised their young there.

The altars were in constant use, so the psalmist probably means birds nesting in the temple area around them. The point is clear. Even a sparrow was closer to God's house than the psalmist was at that moment, and he envied it.

Jesus said God feeds the birds and that not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father (Matthew 6:26; 10:29). If God makes room for sparrows, He has room for you. "My King and my God." The great LORD of armies is the psalmist's own God, and He can be yours.

84:4 *How blessed **are** those who dwell in Your house! They are still praising You. Selah.*

"How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!" The ones who dwelt there were the priests and Levites who served at the temple. "Blessed" means truly happy, well off in God's sight. These people were "still praising You." Their whole work was worship.

Selah, as we saw in Psalm 24, probably marks a pause.

For believers today, God's dwelling is no longer one building in Jerusalem. Jesus "dwelt among us" (John 1:14), and now God lives by His Spirit in His people (Ephesians 2:22). Through Jesus we have confidence to come near to God (Hebrews 10:19). Every Christian can feel the longing of this psalm, and in Christ every Christian can have that longing met.

84:5 *How blessed **is the** man whose strength **is** in You, in whose heart **are** highways!*

Now the psalm turns to the pilgrims. Three times a year faithful Israelites traveled to Jerusalem for the great feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16). "How blessed is the man whose strength is in You." The pilgrims did not travel in their own strength. They leaned on God.

They are those "in whose heart are highways." The Hebrew speaks of the highways, the roads that led up to Zion. Zion, as we saw in Psalm 2, came to stand for the temple hill and the whole city of God. The road to Zion ran through their hearts as well as across the map. They thought about it, longed for it and set their minds on it before they ever packed a bag.

What road is in your heart? The things we dream about and plan for show what we love. The blessed person has a heart set on drawing near to God.

84:6-7 *Passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the early rain also covers* ***it with*** *blessings. They go from strength to strength;* ***each*** *appears before God in Zion.*

"Passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring." No one knows for sure where the Valley of Baca was. The word sounds like the Hebrew word for weeping, and it may also be the name of a tree that grows in dry places. Whichever is right, it was a dry, hard stretch of road. Yet the pilgrims "make it a spring." Their faith turned a hard place into a place of blessing, and God sent "the early rain" that softened the ground after the long dry summer.

"They go from strength to strength." You would expect travelers to grow weaker as the journey went on. These pilgrims grew stronger. The closer they came to God, the more strength He gave them. Isaiah 40:31 says those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength.

"They go from strength to strength; each appears before God in Zion." They all made it. The road was hard, but the destination was sure.

That is a picture of the Christian life. We all pass through valleys of weeping. God does not always take us around them, but He can bring springs in them, and He brings His people home.

84:8-9 *LORD God of armies, hear my prayer; give ear, God of Jacob. Selah. Our shield, see, God, and look on the face of Your anointed.*

The psalmist prays: "LORD God of armies, hear my prayer; give ear, God of Jacob." The mighty LORD of armies is also the God of Jacob, who kept His promises to a flawed man (see Psalm 46). Then comes another Selah, a pause to take it in.

"Our shield, see, God, and look on the face of Your anointed." To be anointed was to have oil poured on your head, setting you apart for a task from God. Kings were anointed. Here "Your anointed" is Israel's king, and "our shield" probably also means the king, who was supposed to protect the people. The psalmist prays for God's favor on him, because a godly king meant safety for the pilgrims and for the whole nation.

Anointed is the word behind Messiah and Christ (see Psalm 2). Israel's kings looked ahead to the King God would send. Many see in this prayer a longing that reaches past David's line to Jesus, the Anointed One, who is our shield before God. The psalm does not say that directly, but it fits the hope of the whole book.

84:10 *For a day in Your courts **is** better than a thousand; I have chosen to stand at the threshold in the house of my God rather than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

"For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand." One day near God is worth more than a thousand days anywhere else. That is nearly three years. The psalmist would trade almost three years of ordinary life for a single day in God's presence.

"I have chosen to stand at the threshold in the house of my God." The threshold is the doorway, the very edge of God's house. That fits the sons of Korah, since some of their family were the keepers of the thresholds of the tent of meeting (1 Chronicles 9:19). Scripture calls the doorkeepers' work an office of trust (1 Chronicles 9:22, 26), so this is not the lowest job. The point is that the writer would choose a humble place at the door of God's house "rather than to dwell in the tents of wickedness," with all the comfort that might bring.

That is a question for us. Would we rather have a small place near God or a big place far from Him? Asaph learned the same lesson in Psalm 73. The nearness of God is our good.

84:11 *For the LORD God **is** a sun and a shield; the LORD gives favor and glory; He does not withhold good from those who walk in blamelessness.*

"For the LORD God is a sun and a shield." The sun gives light, warmth and life. A shield gives protection. God provides what we need, and He protects us from what would harm us. Malachi 4:2 uses a similar picture when it speaks of "the sun of righteousness" rising with healing.

"The LORD gives favor and glory." His favor is His undeserved kindness, His grace. Glory is the honor and beauty He shares with His people. He gives grace now and glory in the end.

"He does not withhold good from those who walk in blamelessness." A good father does not hand his child everything the child asks for, and God does not give us everything we want. He will never hold back anything that is truly good for us. Paul makes the same argument: God did not spare His own Son, so how will He not also with Him freely give us all things (Romans 8:32)?

84:12 *LORD of armies, how blessed **is the** man who trusts in You!*

"LORD of armies, how blessed is the man who trusts in You!" This is the third "blessed" in the psalm. Those who dwell in God's house are blessed (84:4). Those whose strength is in God are blessed (84:5). And now, the one "who trusts in You" is blessed.

That last one matters. Not everyone could live at the temple, and not everyone could make the journey. Some were too old, too poor or too far away. But anyone can trust God. The blessing of this psalm is open to everyone who puts their trust in Him, wherever they are.

Psalm 84 Summary

Psalm 84, from the sons of Korah, is a song of longing for God's house. The psalmist finds God's dwelling places lovely and yearns with all his heart and flesh for the courts of the living God. He

envies even the sparrow and swallow that nest near God's altars, and he calls those who serve in God's house blessed. He then describes the blessed pilgrims whose strength is in God and whose hearts are set on the road to Zion. As they pass through the dry valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs, and they go from strength to strength until each one appears before God. He prays for God's anointed king and says that one day in God's courts is better than a thousand elsewhere, and that he would rather stand at the doorway of God's house than live among the wicked. The LORD is a sun and shield who gives grace and glory and withholds no good from those who walk in blamelessness. The psalm ends by calling blessed everyone who trusts in Him.

People and Places

- Valley of Baca: a dry valley on the way to Jerusalem; its location is unknown, and the name may mean weeping.

Psalm 84 Study Questions

1. How does the psalmist describe his longing for God's house? (84:1-2)

2. What creatures had found a home near God's altars? (84:3)

3. Who does the psalm call blessed in verses 4, 5 and 12?

4. What did the pilgrims do as they passed through the valley of Baca? (84:6)

5. What does "from strength to strength" mean, and when have you seen God give you strength along a hard road? (84:7)

6. Whom does the psalmist pray for in verse 9, and why would that matter to the people?

7. What comparison does the psalmist make in verse 10?

8. Would you rather have a small place near God or a big place far from Him? What pulls you toward the "tents of wickedness"?

9. What two pictures of God are given in verse 11, and what does each one mean for you?

10. How can you tell the difference between something you want and something that is truly good for you, in light of verse 11?

Psalm 90: Teach Us to Count Our Days

Scripture

A prayer of Moses, the man of God.

90:1-6 Lord, You have been a dwelling place for us in generation and generation. Before ***the*** mountains were born, and You brought forth the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You ***are*** God. You return man to crushed dust, and You say, "Return, sons of mankind." For a thousand years in Your eyes ***are*** like yesterday when it passes, and ***like*** a watch in the night. You sweep them away ***like*** a flood; they are ***like*** sleep; in the morning ***they are*** like grass ***that*** sprouts again. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts again; toward evening it withers and dries up.

90:7-12 For we are consumed by Your anger, and by Your rage we are terrified. You have set our iniquities before You, our hidden ***sins*** in the light of Your face. For all our days have turned away in Your fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. The days of our years in them ***are*** seventy years, and if by strength, eighty years; yet their pride ***is*** toil and trouble, for it passes quickly, and we fly away. Who knows the strength of Your anger, and Your fury according to the fear of You? So teach ***us*** to count our days, that we may bring in a heart of wisdom.

90:13-17 Return, LORD! Until when? And have compassion on Your servants. Satisfy us in the morning ***with*** Your steadfast love, that we may shout for joy and rejoice all our days. Make us rejoice according to the days ***in which*** You have afflicted us, the years ***in which*** we have seen evil. Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your majesty to their sons. And let the pleasantness of the Lord our God be on us; and establish the work of our hands on us; yes, the work of our hands, establish it.

Psalm 90 Preview

Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses. It sets the eternal God beside short-lived human beings. God has been His people's home in every generation, and He was God before the mountains were born. We, by contrast, are like grass that springs up in the morning and withers by evening. Our lives last seventy or eighty years, and even the best of them are full of toil and trouble. Moses does not hide that sin and God's anger stand behind our frailty.

So Moses asks God to teach us to count our days, so that we will live wisely. Then he prays for mercy: that God would return to His people, satisfy them each morning with His steadfast love, make them glad for as many days as they have suffered and make the work of their hands last. This psalm helps us face how short life is without despair, because the God who outlasts every generation is our dwelling place.

Psalm 90 Study

90:1 *Lord, You have been a dwelling place for us in generation and generation.*

The heading calls this "A prayer of Moses, the man of God." Deuteronomy 33:1 gives Moses the same title. "Man of God" was a name for a prophet, someone who spoke for God. Many conservative scholars take the heading at face value, while others date the psalm later. Those who take the heading at its word, as I do, usually place it in the forty years in the wilderness, when a whole generation of Israel died outside the promised land. If so, it is probably the oldest psalm in the book. Psalm 90 also begins Book Four of the Psalms.

"Lord, You have been a dwelling place for us in generation and generation." Moses grew up in Pharaoh's palace and fled to Midian, and he spent the last forty years of his life without a settled home, wandering in the wilderness with Israel and living in tents. Yet he says Israel always had a home. God Himself was their dwelling place. Moses said the same in his final blessing: the eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Houses change. We move, and the places we grew up in are sold or torn down. But God does not change. For every generation of His people, He has been home.

90:2 *Before **the** mountains were born, and You brought forth the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You **are** God.*

"Before the mountains were born." Mountains seem as old and permanent as anything on earth. But there was a time when they did not exist, and God was already there. He "brought forth the earth and the world." He made it all.

"From everlasting to everlasting, You are God." Everlasting means without beginning or end. Look back as far as you can, and God is there. Look ahead as far as you can, and God is still there. He did not start, and He will not stop.

Moses begins with God's eternity before he says a word about our frailty. That order matters. Our short lives make sense only when we set them against the God who lasts forever, and our weakness is easier to face when we know He is our home.

90:3-4 *You return man to crushed dust, and You say, "Return, sons of mankind." For a thousand years in Your eyes **are** like yesterday when it passes, and **like** a watch in the night.*

"You return man to crushed dust." This points back to Genesis 3:19, where God told Adam that he came from the ground and would return to it. "Return, sons of mankind." God speaks, and one generation goes back to the dust while another takes its place. Even death is under God's command.

"For a thousand years in Your eyes are like yesterday when it passes." A thousand years is a long time to us. To God it is like a day that just ended. It is even like "a watch in the night," one of the three or four shifts that guards stood through the night, a few hours that pass in your sleep without your noticing.

Peter uses this verse to answer people who mocked the promise that Jesus would come back. With the Lord, he says, one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. God is not slow about His promise. He is patient, giving people time to repent (2 Peter 3:8-9). We get impatient. God does not, because time does not press on Him the way it presses on us.

New Testament links: 2 Peter 3:8 (alluded to)

90:5-6 *You sweep them away **like** a flood; they are **like** sleep; in the morning **they are** like grass **that** sprouts again. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts again; toward evening it withers and dries up.*

Moses gives two pictures of how quickly people pass away. The first is a flood. "You sweep them away like a flood." A flash flood in a dry riverbed comes without warning and carries everything off. And "they are like sleep," a gentle way of describing death.

The second picture is grass. In the Middle East, grass springs up green after the rain, and the hot wind can wither it in a day. "In the morning it flourishes and sprouts again; toward evening it withers and dries up." Isaiah uses the same picture: all flesh is grass, but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:6-8).

These are sobering pictures. Moses wants us to feel how brief and fragile life is. We are not built to last on our own.

90:7-8 *For we are consumed by Your anger, and by Your rage we are terrified. You have set our iniquities before You, our hidden **sins** in the light of Your face.*

Now Moses tells us why life is so short and hard. "For we are consumed by Your anger." Death came into the world because of sin (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12). The wilderness generation saw this clearly. Because they refused to trust God and enter the land, God said their bodies would fall in the wilderness over forty years (Numbers 14:29-34). Moses watched it happen, funeral after funeral.

Moses is speaking about the human race and about that rebellious generation. He is not saying that each illness or early death is God's anger at that person. Jesus refused that conclusion (John 9:2-3; Luke 13:1-5). For those in Christ, the anger that sin deserves has already fallen on Him.

"You have set our iniquities before You, our hidden sins in the light of Your face." Iniquities are sins, especially the crooked, twisted ones. God sees all of them, even the "hidden sins" we hide from everyone else and sometimes from ourselves. In God's light nothing is hidden.

That is hard to read. But we cannot understand God's mercy until we face the truth about our sin. Moses tells the truth about it because he is getting ready to ask for grace.

90:9-10 *For all our days have turned away in Your fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. The days of our years in them **are** seventy years, and if by strength, eighty years; yet their pride **is** toil and trouble, for it passes quickly, and we fly away.*

"All our days have turned away in Your fury; we have finished our years like a sigh." A sigh is a breath, here for a moment and then gone. That is how life feels at the end.

"The days of our years in them are seventy years, and if by strength, eighty years." Moses is speaking of the normal span of a human life. Some live longer. Moses himself lived to 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7). But seventy or eighty is the usual measure, and it still is in much of the world.

"Yet their pride is toil and trouble." Even the best years, the ones we are proudest of, are full of hard work and trouble. "For it passes quickly, and we fly away." The years go by faster than we expect. Ask anyone who is seventy whether it felt long.

James says the same: our life is a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away (James 4:14).

90:11-12 *Who knows the strength of Your anger, and Your fury according to the fear of You? So teach **us** to count our days, that we may bring in a heart of wisdom.*

"Who knows the strength of Your anger?" Few people take God's anger against sin seriously. Moses says we should, and that God deserves to be feared, the fear of the LORD we met in Psalm 19.

Then comes the prayer that gives the psalm its title. "So teach us to count our days, that we may bring in a heart of wisdom." To count our days is to remember that they are limited and that each one matters. We count our days so that we will live wisely.

What would change if you really believed your days were numbered? You might stop putting off the things that matter most. You might forgive someone sooner, pray more and spend less time on things that will not last. Moses does not ask for more days. He asks for wisdom to use the ones he has.

90:13-14 *Return, LORD! Until when? And have compassion on Your servants. Satisfy us in the morning **with** Your steadfast love, that we may shout for joy and rejoice all our days.*

The tone of the psalm shifts here. Moses turns from describing life under God's anger to pleading for God's mercy. "Return, LORD! Until when?" He asks God to turn back toward His people with kindness.

"Have compassion on Your servants." The Hebrew word means to relent, or to have compassion. It is the same word Moses used when he prayed for Israel after the golden calf, asking God to change His mind about destroying them (Exodus 32:12). God heard him then (Exodus 32:14), and Moses prays the same way again.

"Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love." Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 23:6). Moses asks God to satisfy them with it every morning, fresh each day, like the manna in the wilderness. The result: "That we may shout for joy and rejoice all our days." Life is short and hard, but a life filled with God's love can be glad all the way through.

90:15-16 *Make us rejoice according to the days **in which** You have afflicted us, the years **in which** we have seen evil. Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your majesty to their sons.*

"Make us rejoice according to the days in which You have afflicted us." Moses asks God to balance the scales. Israel had years of slavery in Egypt and years of wandering in the wilderness. Moses asks for as many years of gladness as they had of sorrow.

It is a bold prayer, and a good one. Paul says our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17). God does more than balance the scales.

"Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your majesty to their sons." The generation in the wilderness would die before entering the land. Moses prays that their children would see God's great work and His glory. Many of us pray this way for our own children and grandchildren. We may not see everything we hope for, but we ask God to show Himself to those who come after us.

90:17 *And let the pleasantness of the Lord our God be on us; and establish the work of our hands on us; yes, the work of our hands, establish it.*

"And let the pleasantness of the Lord our God be on us." The word can also mean favor or beauty. Moses asks that God's kindness would rest on His people.

"Establish the work of our hands on us." To establish it means to make it last. Moses has spent the whole psalm saying that people pass away like grass. Now he asks God to make their work last anyway. He says it twice, because he means it: "Yes, the work of our hands, establish it."

The psalm ends in hope. On our own, our lives and our work fade. But when God's favor rests on what we do, it lasts. Paul says something similar: our labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). The days are numbered, but work done for God and with His blessing outlasts the worker.

Psalm 90 Summary

Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses, the man of God. He begins by declaring that the Lord has been His people's dwelling place in every generation, God from everlasting to everlasting, before the mountains were born. Against that eternity, people are frail. God returns them to dust, and a thousand years are like yesterday to Him, while human lives are swept away like a flood or wither like grass by evening. Moses says plainly that sin and God's anger stand behind our short, troubled lives, since God sees even our hidden sins. Our years are seventy or eighty, full of toil and trouble, and soon gone. So Moses prays that God would teach us to count our days and gain a heart of wisdom. He asks God to return in compassion, satisfy His people every morning with His steadfast love, make them glad for as many days as they have suffered, show His work to their

children and let His favor rest on them. He closes by asking twice that God would establish the work of their hands.

Psalm 90 Study Questions

1. What does Moses call God in verse 1, and why would that be meaningful for someone who lived in tents for forty years?

2. How long has God been God, according to verse 2?

3. How does God see a thousand years? (90:4) How does Peter use that idea in 2 Peter 3:8-9?

4. What two pictures does Moses use for how quickly people pass away? (90:5-6)

5. What reason does Moses give for the shortness and trouble of human life (90:7-9)? Why is that different from saying a person's illness or loss is God's anger at that person?

6. What is the normal span of life, according to verse 10?

7. What does it mean to "count our days," and why does Moses ask God to teach us to do it? (90:12)

8. If you really believed your days were numbered, what is one thing you would start doing, or stop doing, this week?

9. What does Moses ask God to satisfy His people with every morning, and what will that lead to? (90:14)

10. Moses prays that God would "establish the work of our hands" (90:17). What work are you doing that you want God to make last?

Psalm 91: Under His Wings

Scripture

91:1-8 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will lodge in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "My refuge and my stronghold, my God, in whom I trust." For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler, from the plague of destruction. With His pinion He will cover you, and under His wings you will take refuge; His faithfulness ***is*** a shield and a wall. You will not be afraid of the dread of night, of ***the*** arrow ***that*** flies by day, of ***the*** plague ***that*** walks in the darkness, of ***the*** destruction ***that*** devastates at noon. A thousand will fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; to you it will not draw near. Only with your eyes will you look, and you will see the retribution of ***the*** wicked.

91:9-16 For You, LORD, ***are*** my refuge! You have made the Most High your dwelling place. No evil will befall you, and no plague will draw near your tent. For He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. On ***their*** hands they will lift you up, lest you strike your foot against the stone. On ***the*** lion and cobra you will tread; you will trample ***the*** young lion and ***the*** serpent. "Because he has set his love on Me, I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he knows My name. He will call on Me, and I will answer him; I ***will be*** with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With length of days I will satisfy him, and I will show him My salvation."

Psalm 91 Preview

Psalm 91 is a psalm of safety in God. It pictures the believer living in the shelter of the Most High, covered by God's wings like a chick under its mother. Terror at night, arrows by day, plague and disaster may surround us, but God is our refuge and fortress. He sends His angels to guard His people. At the end, God Himself speaks and promises to deliver, answer, honor and satisfy the one who loves Him.

These promises are true, and believers have leaned on them in war, sickness and danger for centuries. But this psalm is also easy to misuse. Satan quoted it to Jesus to tempt Him to jump from the temple. And faithful believers still get sick, suffer and die. We will look at what these promises mean, what they do not mean and why they are still a strong place to stand.

Psalm 91 Study

91:1-2 *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will lodge in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "My refuge and my stronghold, my God, in whom I trust."*

This psalm has no heading, so we are not told who wrote it. The Greek translation of the Old Testament adds David's name, and some old Jewish teachers thought Moses wrote it, since it follows his prayer in Psalm 90. Whoever wrote it, it is God's Word, and its message is clear.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will lodge in the shadow of the Almighty." Four names for God appear in these two verses. "Most High" says God is above all. "Almighty"

(Shaddai) says He is all-powerful. "LORD" is His personal covenant name, and "My God" makes it personal. The mighty God over all is someone I can call my own.

"Dwells" and "lodge" mean to live somewhere, to stay. This promise is for the person who makes God their home, not for someone who runs to Him only in an emergency. A "shelter" is a hiding place, and a "shadow" is shade from the burning sun, or the shadow of a protector standing over you.

"I will say of the LORD, 'My refuge and my stronghold, my God, in whom I trust.'" A refuge is a place to run to. A stronghold is a fortress no enemy can break into. The psalmist does not just believe these things about God. He says them out loud: "My God, in whom I trust." Trust has to be spoken and lived.

91:3-4 *For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler, from the plague of destruction. With His pinion He will cover you, and under His wings you will take refuge; His faithfulness **is** a shield and a wall.*

"For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler." A fowler was a bird catcher who hid snares to catch birds. The picture is of dangers we do not see coming, traps laid by people who want to harm us. God sees them, and He delivers. He also delivers "from the plague of destruction," the plagues that spread through ancient towns with no cure.

"With His pinion He will cover you, and under His wings you will take refuge." A pinion is a wing feather. The picture is of a mother bird spreading her wings over her chicks. We met this picture in Psalm 63. Jesus used it too, lamenting over Jerusalem: He longed to gather her children "the way a hen gathers her own chicks under the wings" (Matthew 23:37).

"His faithfulness is a shield and a wall." A wall was the main defense of a city. God's faithfulness, His keeping His word, is what protects us. Our safety rests on His character.

91:5-6 *You will not be afraid of the dread of night, of **the** arrow **that** flies by day, of **the** plague **that** walks in the darkness, of **the** destruction **that** devastates at noon.*

The psalm names dangers at every hour. There is "the dread of night," the fear that comes in the dark when we cannot see. There is "the arrow that flies by day," the attack out in the open. There is "the plague that walks in the darkness," disease that spreads unseen, and "the destruction that devastates at noon," disaster in broad daylight.

Night and day, seen and unseen, the psalm covers all of it. The promise is "You will not be afraid." The dangers may be real, but the person who lives in God's shelter does not have to live in fear of them.

Fear is one of the hardest burdens to carry. Many of us lie awake at night with worries. The dangers are real enough. This psalm tells us who is watching over us while we sleep.

91:7-8 *A thousand will fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; to you it will not draw near. Only with your eyes will you look, and you will see the retribution of **the** wicked.*

"A thousand will fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; to you it will not draw near." The picture is of a battlefield or a plague, with people falling all around. The one who trusts in God is kept safe.

Verse 8 is a hard line: "Only with your eyes will you look, and you will see the retribution of the wicked." Retribution means payback. The psalm speaks of God's judgment on the wicked, and the one who trusts in God watches it happen without being swept up in it. Israel saw something like this in Egypt, when the plagues struck the Egyptians while Israel was spared (Exodus 9:26; 12:13).

On the night of the Passover, Israel stayed inside behind doors marked with blood while judgment passed over (Exodus 12:22-23). The verse is about being kept safe and about God's justice. It gives no one permission to enjoy another person's suffering. In the end God will set things right, and those who trust Him will be safe when He does (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

91:9-10 *For You, LORD, **are** my refuge! You have made the Most High your dwelling place. No evil will befall you, and no plague will draw near your tent.*

"For You, LORD, are my refuge! You have made the Most High your dwelling place." The voices change in this psalm. In verse 2 someone speaks of "my refuge." Here a voice tells "you" that the LORD is your dwelling place too. It may be a priest or teacher encouraging a worshiper, or the psalmist encouraging himself. The promise is the same: it is for the one who has made the LORD their home.

"No evil will befall you, and no plague will draw near your tent." These are strong words. Do they mean a believer will never be sick, never be hurt and never die young? We know they cannot mean that. Paul was beaten, stoned and shipwrecked (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). James was put to death with the sword (Acts 12:2). Hebrews 11 praises people of faith who were tortured, imprisoned and killed. Faithful believers today get cancer, lose children and die in accidents. Their suffering is not a sign that they lacked faith. This psalm is not a guarantee that no believer will ever be harmed.

So what does the promise mean? God does protect His people, far more often than we know. Many believers can tell of times God kept them from harm. But the promise also reaches past this life. Even death does not have the last word: Jesus said, "The one believing in Me, even if he dies, will live" (John 11:25).

91:11-12 *For He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. On **their** hands they will lift you up, lest you strike your foot against the stone.*

"For He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways." God's angels are real, and they serve God's people. Hebrews 1:14 calls them ministering spirits sent out to serve those who will inherit salvation. "On their hands they will lift you up, lest you strike your foot against the stone."

These are the verses Satan quoted when he tempted Jesus. He took Jesus to the highest point of the temple and told Him to throw Himself down, since God had promised His angels would catch Him (Matthew 4:5-6). Satan quoted Scripture, but he twisted it. He left out the words "in all your ways." The promise is for people walking in God's ways, not for people who throw themselves into danger to force God to act.

Jesus answered with Scripture: "You shall not test the Lord your God" (Matthew 4:7, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16). Trusting God means walking where He leads and resting in His care. Testing God means making demands and daring Him to prove Himself. This psalm is a comfort. Satan tried to turn it into a dare.

We should also learn from how Satan used this verse. He can quote the Bible. A verse pulled out of context and used to push us toward something foolish is not God speaking. We need to know God's Word well enough to see when it is being twisted.

Luke records the same temptation (Luke 4:9-12). In Luke, Satan quotes one more phrase, "to guard You," but he still stops before "in all your ways."

New Testament links: Luke 4:10-11 (quoted); Matthew 4:6 (quoted)

91:13 *On **the** lion and cobra you will tread; you will trample **the** young lion and **the** serpent.*

"On the lion and cobra you will tread; you will trample the young lion and the serpent." Lions and snakes were real dangers in ancient Israel. The picture is of victory over the fiercest enemies, both the strong ones that attack openly and the hidden ones that strike without warning.

Many see in the serpent a picture of Satan, the old serpent of Genesis 3. God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). Jesus gave His disciples authority "to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:19). Paul told the Romans that God would soon crush Satan under their feet (Romans 16:20). Satan stopped quoting the psalm one verse too soon. The very next line promises that God's people will trample the serpent.

New Testament links: Luke 10:19 (alluded to)

91:14 *"Because he has set his love on Me, I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he knows My name.*

Now God Himself speaks. "Because he has set his love on Me, I will deliver him." The word for setting his love here means to cling to, to hold fast in love. God's promises are for the one who clings to Him.

"I will set him on high, because he knows My name." To set someone on high means to lift him out of reach of danger, like a fortress on a cliff. To know God's name is to know who He is, to know Him personally and trust His character. The one God protects is the one who knows Him and clings to Him.

That is the heart of the psalm. The safety it promises flows from a relationship. God protects those who love Him and know Him.

91:15-16 *He will call on Me, and I will answer him; I **will be** with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With length of days I will satisfy him, and I will show him My salvation."*

In verses 14-16 God makes eight promises: I will deliver him, set him on high, answer him, be with him, rescue him, honor him, satisfy him and let him see My salvation. "He will call on Me, and I will answer him."

"I will be with him in trouble." The promise is realistic. God expects that trouble will come, and He promises to be with us in it. When Daniel's friends were thrown into the furnace, God did not keep them out of the fire. A fourth figure was seen walking with them in it (Daniel 3:25).

"With length of days I will satisfy him, and I will show him My salvation." A long life was a sign of blessing in the Old Testament. Many believers do live long, satisfying lives. Some die early, as Stephen and James did, killed for their faith. But for every believer, "My salvation" reaches beyond this life. The life God gives through Jesus does not end, and every one of His people will be satisfied in the end and see His salvation in full.

Psalm 91 Summary

Psalm 91 teaches that the one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will lodge in the shadow of the Almighty. The psalmist calls the LORD his refuge, fortress and God, and he promises that God will deliver those who trust Him from hidden traps and deadly plagues. God covers His people as a bird spreads its wings over its young, and His faithfulness is their shield. They need not fear terror at night or arrows by day, plague in the dark or destruction at noon, even if thousands fall around them. God gives His angels charge to guard His people in all their ways, a promise Satan twisted when he tempted Jesus, and they will tread down the lion and the serpent. At the end God speaks, promising to deliver, answer, honor and be with the one who loves Him and knows His name, to satisfy him with long life and show him His salvation. The promises are true, though believers still suffer, and God's care for His people reaches past this life.

Psalm 91 Study Questions

1. What four names for God appear in verses 1-2, and what does each one tell us about Him?

2. What picture of God's care is used in verse 4? Where else in the Bible is this picture used?

3. What dangers are named in verses 5-6, and what is the promise about them?

4. How did Satan use verses 11-12 when he tempted Jesus, and how did Jesus answer? (Matthew 4:5-7)

5. What words did Satan leave out of the promise, and why do they matter? (91:11)

6. How can you tell the difference between trusting God and testing Him?

7. Why does God say He will deliver the one in verse 14?

8. What does God promise in verse 15 about trouble? Why might that promise mean more than a promise of no trouble at all?

9. Faithful believers still get sick and die. How would you use this psalm to comfort someone who is suffering, without promising them something God has not promised?

10. What fear keeps you awake at night? What would it look like to bring it under the shadow of the Almighty?

Psalm 95: Come, Let Us Worship

Scripture

95:1-7 Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His face with thanksgiving; with songs let us shout for joy to Him. For the LORD ***is*** a great God, and a great King above all gods, in whose hand ***are*** the depths of the earth, and the peaks of the mountains ***are*** His, whose ***is*** the sea, and He made it, and the dry land His hands formed. Come, let us bow down and bend low; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He ***is*** our God, and we ***are*** the people of His pasture and the flock of His hand. Today, if you will listen to His voice,

95:8-11 do not harden your heart as ***at*** Meribah, as ***on*** the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, also they saw My work. Forty years I loathed ***that*** generation, and I said, "They ***are*** a people who go astray in heart, and they have not known My ways." So I swore in My anger, "They shall not enter into My rest."

Psalm 95 Preview

Psalm 95 is a call to worship with a warning attached. It opens with joy: come, let us sing and shout to the LORD, the rock of our salvation, the great King who holds the depths of the earth and the peaks of the mountains, who made the sea and the dry land. Then it calls us lower, to bow and kneel before the LORD our Maker, because we are the sheep of His pasture.

Then the tone changes. "Today, if you will listen to His voice," do not harden your hearts the way Israel did in the wilderness. That generation saw God's works and still tested Him, and they never entered His rest. The book of Hebrews quotes this psalm at length and applies it to Christians: today is the day to listen to God and enter His rest by faith. Worship and obedience belong together.

Psalm 95 Study

95:1-2 *Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His face with thanksgiving; with songs let us shout for joy to Him.*

This psalm has no heading, but Hebrews 4:7 says God spoke these words "through David," so the New Testament connects it with him. The Greek translation of the Old Testament also gives it to David.

"Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD." The psalm begins with an invitation. Worship is something we do together. "Let us" appears again and again in these opening verses. "Let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation." A rock is a place of safety and strength that does not move. God is our salvation, and He is as solid as rock. The title may also remind Israel of the rock in the wilderness that gave them water (Exodus 17:6), which comes up again in verse 8.

"Let us come before His face with thanksgiving." We come into God's presence grateful for what He has done. "With songs let us shout for joy to Him." Worship in Israel was loud and glad.

Some of us are more reserved by nature, and that is fine. But there is a place for wholehearted, joyful praise. God has given us something to shout about.

95:3-5 *For the LORD **is** a great God, and a great King above all gods, in whose hand **are** the depths of the earth, and the peaks of the mountains **are** His, whose **is** the sea, and He made it, and the dry land His hands formed.*

Why should we worship? "For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods." The nations around Israel worshiped many gods. This psalm says the LORD is King over all of them. The next psalm explains what those gods really are: "all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols" (96:5). Whatever powers people bow down to, the LORD rules them all.

"In whose hand are the depths of the earth." The deepest places of the earth are in God's hand. "The peaks of the mountains are His." So are the highest places. From the bottom to the top, it all belongs to Him.

"Whose is the sea, and He made it, and the dry land His hands formed." The sea frightened ancient peoples. It was wild and dangerous, and some neighbors of Israel told stories of gods fighting the sea. Israel knew better. The sea belongs to the LORD because He made it. He shaped the land with His hands like a potter shaping clay.

We worship God first because of who He is. He is great, He is King and He made everything. Our praise is His due.

95:6-7 *Come, let us bow down and bend low; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He **is** our God, and we **are** the people of His pasture and the flock of His hand. Today, if you will listen to His voice,*

"Come, let us bow down and bend low; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker." The invitation in verse 1 was to sing and shout. Now it is to bow and kneel. Worship has both joy and reverence. We celebrate God, and we humble ourselves before Him. The Hebrew word for worship here means to bow low, to lay yourself down before someone greater.

"For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the flock of His hand." In verses 3-5 God is King of creation. Now He is our Shepherd. He made the mountains, and He also takes care of His flock. The Hebrew says "the flock of His hand," a tender picture: sheep the shepherd leads and cares for personally. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

That leads straight into the warning. Sheep listen to the shepherd's voice. "Today, if you will listen to His voice." The psalm turns from praise to a call to listen. Singing to God and then ignoring what He says does not make sense. True worship includes hearing and obeying.

Hebrews quotes these words three times (Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7). The writer says the Holy Spirit is the One speaking them (Hebrews 3:7), and he means them for us today.

New Testament links: Hebrews 3:7-11 (quoted); Hebrews 4:7 (quoted); Hebrews 3:15 (quoted); Hebrews 3:13 (alluded to)

95:8-9 *do not harden your heart as **at** Meribah, as **on** the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, also they saw My work.*

"Do not harden your heart as at Meribah, as on the day of Massah in the wilderness." Meribah means "quarreling," and Massah means "testing." Soon after Israel left Egypt, they camped where there was no water. Instead of trusting God, they quarreled with Moses and asked whether the LORD was among them or not (Exodus 17:1-7). Moses named the place Massah and Meribah. A similar thing happened near the end of the wilderness years (Numbers 20:1-13).

Now God Himself speaks in the psalm. "Your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, also they saw My work." They had seen the ten plagues, the Red Sea opened and manna falling from heaven. They still did not trust Him.

That is what a hard heart looks like. People with hard hearts know what God has done, and they refuse to trust Him anyway. A hard heart grows one refusal at a time. Hebrews warns that sin is deceitful and hardens us, and tells us to encourage one another day after day so that none of us will be hardened (Hebrews 3:13).

Hebrews 3:8-9 quotes these lines too: "in the day of the testing in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me."

New Testament links: Hebrews 3:7-11 (quoted); Hebrews 4:7 (quoted); Hebrews 3:15 (quoted)

95:10-11 *Forty years I loathed **that** generation, and I said, "They **are** a people who go astray in heart, and they have not known My ways." So I swore in My anger, "They shall not enter into My rest."*

"Forty years I loathed that generation." These are strong words. God was grieved and disgusted with the way that generation kept rebelling. "They are a people who go astray in heart, and they have not known My ways." Their problem was in their hearts. They had God's law and God's miracles, but they did not know His ways, because they did not want them.

"So I swore in My anger, 'They shall not enter into My rest.'" After Israel refused to go into the promised land, God declared that the adults of that generation would die in the wilderness (Numbers 14:20-35). Only Joshua and Caleb went in. The "rest" was the land of Canaan, where Israel would finally settle after years of slavery and wandering.

The book of Hebrews quotes these verses (Hebrews 3:7-11) and builds a long warning on them (Hebrews 3:7-4:11). The writer points out that the psalm was written long after Joshua led Israel into the land, yet it still says "Today." So the rest God offers is more than Canaan. "So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). It is the rest of trusting Christ,

ceasing from our own efforts to earn God's favor, and in the end it is the eternal rest of being with God.

Hebrews also presses the warning. The same writer says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7). Today is the only day we are promised. If God is speaking to you, the time to respond is now, not some later day when it is more convenient.

New Testament links: Hebrews 3:7-11 (quoted); Hebrews 4:3 (quoted); Hebrews 4:5 (quoted); Hebrews 3:17 (alluded to); Hebrews 3:18 (alluded to)

Psalm 95 Summary

Psalm 95 calls God's people to joyful worship. They are to sing and shout to the LORD, the rock of their salvation, and come before Him with thanksgiving, because He is a great God and King above all gods. The depths of the earth and the peaks of the mountains are in His hand, and He made the sea and formed the dry land. So the psalm calls them to bow down and kneel before the LORD their Maker, since He is their God and they are the sheep of His pasture. Then it warns them: today, if they hear His voice, they must not harden their hearts as their fathers did at Meribah and Massah, where they tested God even after seeing His works. For forty years God was grieved with that generation, and He swore they would not enter His rest. The book of Hebrews applies this warning to believers, calling us to listen today and enter the rest God offers through faith.

People and Places

- Meribah: "quarreling," a place in the wilderness where Israel quarreled with Moses over water (Exodus 17:7; Numbers 20:13).
- Massah: "testing," another name for the same place in Exodus 17, where Israel tested the LORD.
- My rest: first the promised land of Canaan; Hebrews 4 shows it also points to the rest God gives His people in Christ.

Psalm 95 Study Questions

1. What two names for God are used in verses 1 and 6, and what does each one tell us?

2. What does the psalm say belongs to God in verses 4-5?

3. How does the invitation in verse 6 differ from the one in verse 1? Why do we need both in worship?

4. What picture of God's people is used in verse 7?

5. What happened at Meribah and Massah? (95:8; Exodus 17:1-7)

6. Israel had seen God's works and still tested Him (95:9). Why do you think seeing miracles did not produce trust?

7. What does the writer of Hebrews say about "Today" and God's rest? (Hebrews 3:7-4:11)

8. How does a heart become hard? What warning signs might show that your own heart is starting to harden?

9. Hebrews 3:13 tells believers to encourage one another daily. Who could you encourage this week?

10. Is there something God has been saying to you that you have been putting off? What would it look like to respond "today"?

Psalm 96: Sing a New Song

Scripture

96:1-6 Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, bless His name; bring good news of His salvation from day to day. Recount His glory among the nations, His wonders among all the peoples. For the LORD ***is*** great and greatly to be praised; He ***is*** to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples ***are*** worthless idols, and the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty ***are*** before Him; strength and beauty ***are*** in His sanctuary.

96:7-13 Ascribe to the LORD, families of peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; lift up an offering and come into His courts. Bow down to the LORD in the adornment of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth. Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns; also the world is established; it will not be shaken; He will judge peoples with uprightness." Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea thunder, and its fullness. Let the field exult, and all that ***is*** in it; then all the trees of the forest will shout for joy before the LORD, for He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and peoples in His faithfulness.

Psalm 96 Preview

Psalm 96 is a missionary psalm. It calls the whole earth to sing to the LORD and tells God's people to announce His salvation and glory among the nations. The LORD is greater than all the gods of the peoples, because they are only idols, while He made the heavens. So every family of the earth is invited to give Him glory, bring an offering and worship Him in holiness.

The psalm ends with creation itself joining in. The heavens are glad, the sea roars, the fields exult and the trees of the forest sing, because the LORD is coming to judge the earth in righteousness. For Christians, this looks forward to the day Jesus returns to reign. Until then, we have good news to tell every nation.

Psalm 96 Study

96:1-2 *Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, bless His name; bring good news of His salvation from day to day.*

This psalm has no heading. Nearly the same words appear in 1 Chronicles 16:23-33, as part of the song of thanks David gave to Asaph and his relatives on the day the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem. The Chronicler presents this psalm as part of that great day in David's reign. Some scholars think the Chronicler gathered these words from psalms already in use, since 1 Chronicles 16 also includes parts of Psalms 105 and 106.

"Sing to the LORD a new song." The command to sing appears three times in two verses. A new song is a fresh song of praise for something new God has done. God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23), so our praise should be fresh too. In Revelation the redeemed in

heaven sing "a new song" to the Lamb who was slain and purchased people for God with His blood (Revelation 5:9).

"Sing to the LORD, all the earth." The audience here is the whole world, not Israel alone. "Bless His name." His name stands for who He is, and we bless it when we speak well of Him.

"Bring good news of His salvation from day to day." The Hebrew word means to bring good news. The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the word that later gives us the word "gospel." God's people are to announce His salvation every day.

96:3 *Recount His glory among the nations, His wonders among all the peoples.*

"Recount His glory among the nations, His wonders among all the peoples." God's glory is His greatness and beauty made visible. His wonderful deeds are the things He has done, like the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the land.

Israel was never meant to keep God to itself. God told Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). That promise comes to its fullness in Abraham's descendant, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus sent His disciples to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19), and in Revelation John sees a great multitude from every nation standing before the throne (Revelation 7:9).

Every Christian has a part in it, whether by going, sending, giving or praying. Who in your life has not yet heard of God's wonderful deeds?

96:4-5 *For the LORD **is** great and greatly to be praised; He **is** to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples **are** worthless idols, and the LORD made the heavens.*

"For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised." He is great, so He deserves great praise. "He is to be feared above all gods," with the fear of the LORD we met in Psalm 19.

"For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols." The Hebrew word for idols here sounds like the word for God, but it means "worthless things," "nothings." There is a play on words: the nations' gods are no-gods. Jeremiah mocked idols as being like scarecrows in a cucumber field that cannot speak and must be carried (Jeremiah 10:5).

"And the LORD made the heavens." That is the difference. Idols are made by people. The LORD made everything, including the heavens the nations worshiped. People today may not bow to statues, but we still make idols of money, success, pleasure and ourselves. They are just as worthless. Only the Maker of heaven deserves our worship.

96:6 *Splendor and majesty **are** before Him; strength and beauty **are** in His sanctuary.*

"Splendor and majesty are before Him." These words describe the honor and glory of a king. They go before God like attendants announcing His arrival.

"Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary." The sanctuary is God's holy dwelling: on earth, the tent for the ark in David's day and later the temple, and above all His heavenly throne room.

Strength and beauty belong together in God. He is powerful, and He is lovely. Some people think of God's power as harsh and His beauty as weak. In Him they are perfectly joined.

In the same line, 1 Chronicles 16:27 speaks of strength and joy in His place. Where God is, strength, beauty and joy are found together.

96:7-8 *Ascribe to the LORD, families of peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; lift up an offering and come into His courts.*

"Ascribe to the LORD, families of peoples." To ascribe is to give or credit something to someone, to say it belongs to them. The nations are called to give God the credit He deserves: "glory and strength." "Families of peoples" echoes the promise to Abraham about "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3).

"Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name." Nothing we say can add to God's glory, but we can recognize it and say it out loud. Psalm 29:1-2 uses almost the same words to call the angels to praise. Here it is the nations who are called.

"Lift up an offering and come into His courts." In Israel, worshipers brought gifts when they came to the temple. Here the Gentile nations are invited to come into God's courts with offerings. This was a remarkable invitation in the Old Testament. It looks forward to the day when people of every nation would be brought near to God through Christ (Ephesians 2:13).

96:9 *Bow down to the LORD in the adornment of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth.*

"Bow down to the LORD in the adornment of holiness." This could mean the special clothing priests wore in the temple, or it could mean the beauty of holiness, a life set apart for God. Both readings call us to come to God prepared and set apart for Him. Holiness means being set apart, belonging to God and sharing His purity.

"Tremble before Him, all the earth." Trembling is the right response to a holy God. The joy of verses 1-3 and the trembling of verse 9 belong together. True worship holds both. We rejoice in God's salvation, and we are in awe of His holiness.

In our day many churches lean toward one or the other, either joy without reverence or reverence without joy. Psalm 96 calls us to both.

96:10 *Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns; also the world is established; it will not be shaken; He will judge peoples with uprightness."*

"Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns.'" This is the message God's people are to carry to the world. The LORD is King, and He rules over every god the nations serve.

"The world is established; it will not be shaken." Because God reigns, the world is held steady. It does not spin out of control. Nations rise and fall, but God's rule does not.

"He will judge peoples with uprightness." Uprightness here means fairness. God's judgment will be perfectly just. He will not show favoritism, and He cannot be bribed. For the oppressed, that is good news. For the wicked, it is a warning.

Paul preached this same message to the philosophers of Athens. God has fixed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man He has appointed, and He proved it by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

New Testament links: Acts 17:31 (alluded to)

96:11-12 *Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea thunder, and its fullness. Let the field exult, and all that **is** in it; then all the trees of the forest will shout for joy*

Now all creation joins in. "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad." The sky and the land celebrate. "Let the sea thunder, and its fullness." The ocean and everything in it add their voice. "Let the field exult, and all that is in it." Then "all the trees of the forest will shout for joy."

The psalmist is writing poetry, of course, but it says something true. Creation has been under a curse since Adam's sin (Genesis 3:17-18). Paul says the whole creation groans and waits eagerly for the day it will be set free from its slavery to corruption (Romans 8:19-22). When God comes to judge and rule, creation will finally be set right. Isaiah pictures the trees of the field clapping their hands (Isaiah 55:12).

The world around us is waiting for that day too.

96:13 *before the LORD, for He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and peoples in His faithfulness.*

Why does creation rejoice? "Before the LORD, for He is coming." He says it twice: "He is coming to judge the earth." The psalmist looks forward to the day God comes to rule the earth directly and set everything right.

"He will judge the world in righteousness, and peoples in His faithfulness." His judgment will be right, and it will be faithful to everything He has promised.

I believe this points to the return of Jesus Christ. Jesus said that when the Son of Man comes in His glory, He will sit on His glorious throne (Matthew 25:31). Revelation shows Christ coming from heaven on a white horse, called Faithful and True, who judges in righteousness (Revelation 19:11), and then reigning on the earth (Revelation 20:4-6). He will come after the Great Tribulation, and He will reign as King over all the earth, with Israel and the nations under His rule.

That is why the psalm is full of joy. For those who know Him, the coming of the Judge is the day everything is made right. The Bible ends with the same longing: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

New Testament links: Revelation 19:11 (alluded to); Acts 17:31 (alluded to)

Psalm 96 Summary

Psalm 96, also found in nearly the same words in 1 Chronicles 16, calls the whole earth to sing a new song to the LORD. God's people are to bless His name, proclaim His salvation every day and tell of His glory and wonderful deeds among the nations. The LORD is great and greatly to be praised, to be feared above all gods, because the gods of the peoples are worthless idols while He made the heavens. Splendor, majesty, strength and beauty surround Him. The families of the peoples are invited to give Him the glory due His name, bring offerings into His courts and worship Him in holiness with trembling. God's people are to tell the nations that the LORD reigns, that the world is firmly established and that He will judge with fairness. The heavens, earth, sea, fields and trees are called to rejoice, because the LORD is coming to judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness, a hope fulfilled when Christ returns to reign.

Psalm 96 Study Questions

1. How many times does the psalm say "Sing to the LORD" in verses 1-2? Who is called to sing?

2. What is a "new song," and what new things has God done in your life that you could praise Him for?

3. What are God's people to tell the nations? (96:2-3, 10)

4. What does the psalm say about the gods of the peoples, and what makes the LORD different? (96:5)

5. What modern idols compete for people's worship today, including your own?

6. What are the "families of peoples" invited to do in verses 7-9?

7. Why do joy (96:1-3) and trembling (96:9) both belong in worship? Which one do you tend to forget?

8. How does creation respond to the LORD's coming? (96:11-13) How does Romans 8:19-22 help explain this?

9. How will the LORD judge the world when He comes? (96:13)

10. What is one way you could take part this week in telling God's glory "among the nations," whether nearby or far away?

Psalm 100: Enter His Gates with Thanksgiving

Scripture

A psalm for thanksgiving.

100:1-5 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Serve the LORD with joy; come before Him with joyful singing. Know that the LORD, He ***is*** God; He made us, and we ***are*** His, His people and the flock of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving, His courts with praise; give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the LORD ***is*** good; His steadfast love ***is*** forever, and His faithfulness ***is*** to generation and generation.

Psalm 100 Preview

Psalm 100 is only five verses long, but God's people have sung it for many centuries. It calls all the earth to shout for joy to the LORD, to serve Him with joy and to come before Him with singing. It tells us why: the LORD is God, He made us and we belong to Him as His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Then it invites us through the gates and into the courts of God's house with thanksgiving and praise. The reason is the last verse, a plain statement of God's character: the LORD is good, His steadfast love endures forever and His faithfulness lasts to all generations. Psalm 100 is a model for how to come to God.

Psalm 100 Study

100:1-2 *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Serve the LORD with joy; come before Him with joyful singing.*

The heading reads, "A psalm for thanksgiving." The Hebrew word for thanksgiving, todah, is also the name of the thank offering, a sacrifice an Israelite brought to thank God for a particular blessing (Leviticus 7:12). This psalm may have been sung when worshipers came to the temple with those offerings. No other psalm has this heading.

"Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth." The Hebrew pictures the shout of a crowd welcoming a king. And once again, as in Psalms 95 and 96, the call goes out to the whole earth, not just Israel.

"Serve the LORD with joy." The word for serve can mean to work for someone, and it also means to worship. For Israel, serving God and worshiping Him were the same word. Our work, our worship and our daily obedience are all service to God, and He wants it done with joy. A grumbling servant obeys, but a glad servant shows that his master is good.

"Come before Him with joyful singing." We come into the presence of the King, and we come singing. Coming to God is a joy.

100:3 *Know that the LORD, He **is** God; He made us, and we **are** His, His people and the flock of His pasture.*

"Know that the LORD, He is God." Before we can worship God rightly, we need to know who He is. The LORD, the God of Israel, is God, the only true God. Everything else in the psalm rests on that.

"He made us, and we are His." We did not make ourselves. We are not self-made people. God gave us life, and we owe Him everything. The Hebrew can also be read "and not we ourselves," and some translations put it that way. Both readings are true. He made us, and we belong to Him.

We are "His people and the flock of His pasture." Psalm 95:7 uses almost the same words. Sheep are weak, prone to wander and in need of a shepherd. God's people are His flock, and He feeds them, leads them and protects them. Jesus called Himself "the good shepherd" who "lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

There is a lot of freedom in this verse. If God made me and I belong to Him, then I do not have to prove my worth or carry my life alone. I am His, and He takes care of what is His.

100:4 *Enter His gates with thanksgiving, His courts with praise; give thanks to Him, bless His name.*

"Enter His gates with thanksgiving, His courts with praise." The picture is of worshipers coming up to the temple in Jerusalem, passing through the outer gates and into the open courts where the people gathered. Each step closer to God is taken with thanks and praise.

Thanksgiving is the way in. We come to God remembering what He has done. Before we bring Him our requests, we thank Him. Paul says the same: in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6).

"Give thanks to Him, bless His name." Thanksgiving thanks God for what He has done. Blessing His name honors Him for who He is. Both belong in worship.

For believers, the way into God's presence is now open through Jesus. We do not need a temple in Jerusalem, because through His blood we have confidence to enter the holy place (Hebrews 10:19). The gates are open. The question is whether we will come in thankful.

100:5 *For the LORD **is** good; His steadfast love **is** forever, and His faithfulness **is** to generation and generation.*

Why should we come so gladly? "For the LORD is good." God is good in His nature, in all He does and toward His people. He has never done anything wrong and never will.

"His steadfast love is forever." His loyal covenant love, hesed (see Psalm 23:6), never ends. It is the refrain of Psalm 136, repeated in every verse.

"His faithfulness is to generation and generation." God keeps His word, and He keeps it from parents to children to grandchildren. The same God who was faithful to Abraham, Moses and David is faithful to us, and He will be faithful to our children.

Those three truths are the reasons for every shout, every song and every thanksgiving in the psalm. God is good, His love does not end and He keeps His promises. When life is hard and our feelings tell us otherwise, this verse is a good place to stand.

Psalm 100 has been set to music many times. One of the best-known hymns based on it is "All People That on Earth Do Dwell," sung to the tune Old Hundredth. Many churches still sing the Doxology to that same tune. God's people have been entering His gates with these words for centuries.

Psalm 100 Summary

Psalm 100, a psalm for thanksgiving, calls all the earth to shout joyfully to the LORD, serve Him with joy and come before Him with singing. It tells God's people to know that the LORD is God, that He made us and we did not make ourselves, and that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. It invites worshipers to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise, giving thanks and blessing His name. The reason is the character of God Himself: the LORD is good, His steadfast love endures forever and His faithfulness continues to all generations.

Psalm 100 Study Questions

1. Who is called to shout joyfully to the LORD in verse 1?

2. How are we to serve the LORD, and what does that look like in ordinary work and life? (100:2)

3. What three things does verse 3 tell us to know about God and ourselves?

4. What difference does it make in your life that God made you and you belong to Him?

5. How are worshipers to enter God's gates and courts? (100:4)

6. What is the difference between thanksgiving and praise? Try writing one sentence of each to God.

7. What three reasons does verse 5 give for worship?

8. Why do you think the psalm puts thanksgiving at the gate, before anything else?

9. When is it hardest for you to come to God with gladness? What in this psalm could help you then?

10. How has God shown His faithfulness to your family or to earlier generations you know about?

Psalm 103: Bless the LORD, My Soul

Scripture

Of David.

103:1-5 Bless the LORD, my soul, and all my inward parts, the name of His holiness. Bless the LORD, my soul, and do not forget all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you ***with*** steadfast love and compassion, who satisfies your ornament with good; your youth renews itself like the eagle.

103:6-14 The LORD does righteous acts and judgments for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the sons of Israel. The LORD ***is*** compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and great in steadfast love. He will not contend perpetually, and He will not keep ***His anger*** forever. He has not done to us according to our sins, and He has not repaid us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, His steadfast love is strong toward those who fear Him. As the east is far from the west, He has removed our transgressions far from us. As a father has compassion on ***his*** sons, the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we ***are*** dust.

103:15-22 Man, his days ***are*** like grass; like the flower of the field, so he flourishes. For a wind passes over it, and it is no more, and its place will not recognize it again. And the steadfast love of the LORD ***is*** from everlasting and to everlasting upon those who fear Him, and His righteousness to the sons of sons, to those who keep His covenant, and to those who remember His precepts to do them. The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all. Bless the LORD, His angels, mighty ones of strength, who do His word, obeying the voice of His word. Bless the LORD, all His armies, His ministers who do His will. Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, my soul.

Psalm 103 Preview

In Psalm 103 David talks to his own soul. He tells himself to bless the LORD and not forget any of His benefits: God forgives, heals, redeems, crowns and satisfies. Then David widens the view to all of God's people. The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and great in steadfast love. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west, and He pities us the way a father pities his children, because He remembers that we are dust.

Our lives are as brief as grass, but God's steadfast love lasts from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him. The psalm ends by calling the angels, the armies of heaven and all of God's works to bless Him, and then David comes back to where he started: "Bless the LORD, my soul." This psalm is a song of grateful worship for God's mercy.

Psalm 103 Study

103:1-2 *Bless the LORD, my soul, and all my inward parts, the name of His holiness. Bless the LORD, my soul, and do not forget all His benefits,*

The heading says this psalm is "Of David." The psalm does not tell us when in his life he wrote it, but by the end of his life David knew a great deal about God's forgiveness.

"Bless the LORD, my soul." David is speaking to himself. Sometimes we need to preach to our own hearts. Our feelings can drift and our thanks can grow cold, so David tells his soul what to do.

He calls on "all my inward parts" to bless "the name of His holiness." David wants every part of him to praise God, his mind, his heart and his will. Half-hearted praise is not enough for a God this good.

"And do not forget all His benefits." We forget so easily. We remember our problems and forget God's kindness. A benefit is a good thing done for us. David is about to list some of them, and he wants to remember every one.

One simple practice is to count God's benefits on purpose, maybe by writing them down. Forgetfulness is one of the quiet enemies of faith.

103:3 *who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,*

"Who forgives all your iniquity." The first benefit David names is forgiveness. That is where everything begins. To forgive is to cancel the debt. And it is "all your iniquity," not some of it. No sin is too great for God's forgiveness when we come to Him in repentance and faith.

David knew this personally. After his sin with Bathsheba and the death of Uriah, he cried out for mercy, and God forgave him (Psalm 51; 2 Samuel 12:13). He never forgot it.

He "heals all your diseases." God is the healer. He heals in many ways, through medicine, through the body's own recovery and sometimes through answers to prayer that doctors cannot explain. James tells the church to pray for the sick, and the Lord will raise them up (James 5:14-15).

Yet even David got old and died, and so has nearly every believer since. God does not heal every sickness in this life. When healing does not come, it is not because the sick person lacked faith or the church prayed wrong. The full answer to this promise comes at the resurrection, when Christ will transform our weak bodies to be like His glorious body (Philippians 3:21), and there will no longer be any death or pain (Revelation 21:4). Forgiveness and healing come together here. Both are complete in the end.

103:4-5 *who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you **with** steadfast love and compassion, who satisfies your ornament with good; your youth renews itself like the eagle.*

"Who redeems your life from the pit." Redemption is rescue at a cost. The pit is the grave, or the place of death. God rescues us from death. For Christians, the price of our redemption was the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19).

He "crowns you with steadfast love and compassion." God lifts us out of the pit and puts a crown on our heads. He treats forgiven sinners like royalty. The crown is made of His steadfast love (see Psalm 23:6) and His compassion, His tender mercy.

"Who satisfies your ornament with good." The word translated "ornament" is hard to pin down; many take it to mean the whole person or the years of life. God fills our lives with good. "Your youth renews itself like the eagle." Eagles were a picture of strength and soaring flight, and Isaiah uses the same bird for those who wait for the LORD (Isaiah 40:31). The body grows old, but God renews the spirit of those who trust Him. Many elderly believers are young in spirit because God keeps renewing them.

So David has listed five benefits: forgiveness, healing, redemption, a crown of love and a life satisfied with good. Each is a reason to bless the LORD.

103:6-7 *The LORD does righteous acts and judgments for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the sons of Israel.*

Now David turns from his own soul to God's dealings with His people. "The LORD does righteous acts and judgments for all who are oppressed." God sees the oppressed and acts for them. Israel had been oppressed in Egypt, and God brought them out with great acts of judgment on their oppressors.

"He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the sons of Israel." The people of Israel saw what God did, His acts: the plagues, the sea, the manna. Moses was given more. He was shown God's ways, the reasons and character behind the acts. Moses had prayed, "let me know, please, Your ways, that I may know You" (Exodus 33:13), and God answered him.

Some people see only what God does. Others come to know who God is. Moses knew God's ways because he spent time with Him. We can know God's ways too, through His Word and through walking with Him.

103:8 *The LORD **is** compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and great in steadfast love.*

"The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and great in steadfast love." These words come from Exodus 34:6, where God passed by Moses on Mount Sinai and proclaimed His own name. After Israel's sin with the golden calf, God told Moses who He is. He is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in steadfast love and faithfulness."

This description of God is repeated again and again in the Old Testament (for example Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). It is how God introduced Himself. Compassionate means tender, like a mother toward her child. Gracious means giving favor to those who do not deserve it. Slow to anger means God is patient; His anger is real, but it is not quick or hot-tempered. Great in steadfast love means His faithful love overflows.

Many people picture God as harsh and quick to punish. That is not how He describes Himself. If we want to know what God is like, we should start where He started.

103:9-10 *He will not contend perpetually, and He will not keep **His anger** forever. He has not done to us according to our sins, and He has not repaid us according to our iniquities.*

"He will not contend perpetually, and He will not keep His anger forever." To contend is to accuse or bring a case against someone. God does deal with our sin, but He does not hold a grudge forever. His anger has an end for those who turn to Him.

"He has not done to us according to our sins, and He has not repaid us according to our iniquities." That is grace. If God gave us what our sins deserved, none of us could stand. Instead He has dealt with us far better than we deserve.

How can God do this and still be just? The Old Testament gives the sacrifices. The New Testament shows the full answer. Christ died for our sins, taking the punishment we deserved, so that God could forgive us and still be righteous (Romans 3:25-26). Salvation has always been by grace through faith. David received it looking forward, and we receive it looking back to the cross.

103:11-12 *For as the heavens are high above the earth, His steadfast love is strong toward those who fear Him. As the east is far from the west, He has removed our transgressions far from us.*

David gives two pictures of how great God's mercy is. The first is height. "For as the heavens are high above the earth, His steadfast love is strong toward those who fear Him." Look up at the sky, and try to measure how high it goes. You cannot. God's love is like that. Those who fear Him, as we saw in Psalm 19, are those who revere and trust Him.

The second picture is distance. "As the east is far from the west, He has removed our transgressions far from us." Transgressions are acts of rebellion, stepping over a line God has drawn. North and south meet at the poles, but east and west never meet. You can travel east forever and never start going west. That is how far God removes our sins.

God does more than cover our sins and keep them nearby to bring up later. He removes them. Micah says He will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Hebrews quotes God's promise, "their sins and their lawless deeds I will certainly not remember any more" (Hebrews 8:12).

If you carry guilt for something God has forgiven, these verses are for you. When you repent and trust Christ, God does not keep your sin in front of Him. You don't need to keep it in front of you either.

103:13-14 *As a father has compassion on **his** sons, the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we **are** dust.*

"As a father has compassion on his sons, the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him." A good father feels for his children when they are hurting, afraid or weak. God feels for His children in the same way. Jesus told of a father who saw his wayward son coming home while he was still a long way off, "was moved with compassion" and ran to embrace him (Luke 15:20).

Some readers had fathers who were harsh, absent or cruel. If that is your story, the picture of a father may be painful. God is the Father you never had, the perfect one every earthly father should have imitated.

"For He knows our frame." God knows how we are made, because He made us. "He remembers that we are dust." God remembers that we are weak, made from the ground (Genesis 2:7). He does not expect more from us than dust can do. He is patient with our weakness, and He gives us the strength we lack.

103:15-16 *Man, his days **are** like grass; like the flower of the field, so he flourishes. For a wind passes over it, and it is no more, and its place will not recognize it again.*

"Man, his days are like grass." David now turns to how short life is, the same picture Moses used in Psalm 90:5-6. "Like the flower of the field, so he flourishes." Wildflowers bloom bright and beautiful for a short season.

"For a wind passes over it, and it is no more." In Israel, a hot east wind from the desert could wither flowers in a day. "And its place will not recognize it again." When the flower is gone, the place it grew does not even know it was there. A generation or two after we die, few people on earth will remember us.

That could be a sad thought. But David is setting up a contrast. Our lives are short, so we need something that lasts longer than we do. The next verse tells us what it is.

103:17-18 *And the steadfast love of the LORD **is** from everlasting and to everlasting upon those who fear Him, and His righteousness to the sons of sons, to those who keep His covenant, and to those who remember His precepts to do them.*

"And the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting and to everlasting upon those who fear Him." Man is like grass, but God's love is everlasting. It had no beginning and will have no end. We fade. God's love does not.

"And His righteousness to the sons of sons." God's faithfulness carries on from one generation to the next. A believing parent can pray with hope for children and grandchildren.

"To those who keep His covenant, and to those who remember His precepts to do them." This love is for those who fear Him, keep His covenant and remember His commands. These words describe the people who have received God's love, rather than a way to earn it. Those who know God's mercy want to obey Him. Grace comes first, and obedience follows as the response of a grateful heart.

New Testament links: Luke 1:50 (alluded to)

103:19 *The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all.*

"The LORD has established His throne in the heavens." God's throne is set in place, firm and secure in heaven. "And His kingdom rules over all." His kingdom is His kingly rule. God rules over everything, every nation, every event and every life.

This verse holds the whole psalm together. The God who forgives us, heals us, pities us and loves us forever is also the King who rules over all. His love has all the strength of a King behind it, and His power is always used with love. The One who knows we are dust sits on the throne of heaven.

103:20-22 *Bless the LORD, His angels, mighty ones of strength, who do His word, obeying the voice of His word. Bless the LORD, all His armies, His ministers who do His will. Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, my soul.*

David ends by calling everyone to bless the LORD. First the angels: "Bless the LORD, His angels, mighty ones of strength, who do His word." The angels are powerful, yet they live to obey God. They are the ones "obeying the voice of His word." Jesus taught us to pray that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). In heaven, the angels do it perfectly.

Then the armies: "Bless the LORD, all His armies, His ministers who do His will." These are the armies of heaven, all the servants of God.

Then all creation: "Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion." Everything God has made, everywhere He rules, should praise Him.

And finally, after calling the whole universe, David comes back to himself: "Bless the LORD, my soul." The psalm ends where it began. All heaven is praising God, and David does not want to be left out. Neither should we.

Psalm 103 Summary

In Psalm 103 David calls his own soul to bless the LORD and forget none of His benefits: God forgives all our iniquity, heals our diseases, redeems our lives from the pit, crowns us with steadfast love and compassion and satisfies us with good things. David then praises God's dealings with His people. The LORD acts for the oppressed and made His ways known to Moses. He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and great in steadfast love, as He declared in Exodus 34:6. He does not deal with us according to our sins. His love is as high as the heavens, and He removes our transgressions as far as the east is from the west. Like a father, He has compassion on those who fear Him, because He knows we are dust. Our days are like grass, but His steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him and keep His covenant. The LORD's throne is established in heaven, and His rule is over all. David closes by calling the angels, the armies of heaven and all God's works to bless the LORD, and then calls on his own soul again.

Psalm 103 Study Questions

1. Whom is David speaking to in verses 1-2, and what does he tell his soul to do?

2. List the five benefits of God named in verses 3-5. Which one means the most to you right now, and why?

3. Why do you think forgiveness comes first in the list? (103:3)

4. What is the difference between knowing God's acts and knowing His ways? (103:7)

5. Where do the words of verse 8 first appear, and what had just happened there? (Exodus 34:6)

6. What two pictures does David use to describe God's mercy in verses 11-12?

7. Is there a sin God has forgiven that you still carry? How do verses 10-12 speak to that?

8. Why is it comforting that God "remembers that we are dust"? (103:14)

9. How does David contrast human life with God's steadfast love in verses 15-17?

10. Try praying verses 1-5 aloud to God this week, adding your own list of His benefits. What did you remember that you had forgotten?

Psalm 110: The Priest-King at God's Right Hand

Scripture

Of David. A psalm.

110:1-3 The LORD declares to my Lord, "Sit at My right ***hand*** until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." The LORD will send out the staff of Your strength from Zion; rule in the midst of Your enemies. Your people ***will be*** freewill offerings in the day of Your power, in ***the*** splendors of holiness; from the womb of dawn, the dew of Your youth ***is*** Yours.

110:4-7 The LORD has sworn, and He will not relent: "You ***are*** a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." The Lord ***is*** at Your right ***hand***; He has shattered kings in the day of His anger. He will judge among the nations; He has filled ***them with*** corpses; He has shattered ***the*** head over a great land. From the brook on the way He will drink; therefore He will lift up ***the*** head.

Psalm 110 Preview

Psalm 110 is short, but New Testament writers quote and echo it many times. In it David hears the LORD speak to someone David calls "my Lord," telling Him to sit at God's right hand until His enemies are made His footstool. This King will rule from Zion, His people will gladly volunteer in the day of His power and God swears an oath that He will be a priest forever, in the line of Melchizedek. In the end He will judge the nations and crush the rulers who oppose Him.

Jesus Himself used this psalm to show that the Messiah is more than David's son. He is David's Lord. Peter preached it at Pentecost, and the book of Hebrews builds its teaching about Christ's priesthood on it. Psalm 110 shows us Jesus as He is now, seated at the Father's right hand and praying for His people, and as He will be when He returns to reign as King on the earth.

Psalm 110 Study

110:1 *The LORD declares to my Lord, "Sit at My right **hand** until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."*

The heading says, "Of David. A psalm." That matters for this psalm more than most, because Jesus' argument depends on David being the one who wrote it. Some scholars read the heading as "for David" and think a court singer wrote this about King David as his lord. I take the heading as naming David as the writer, as Jesus, Peter and the Pharisees all did. Jesus' question only works if David spoke these words, and no one in the crowd disputed it (Matthew 22:46).

"The LORD declares to my Lord." The first "LORD" is Yahweh, God's personal name. The second "Lord" is the Hebrew adoni, "my lord," a title for a master or superior. It is not Adonai, the form kept for God. David, the king of Israel, hears God speaking to someone whom David calls his own lord. Who could be David's master? No king in Israel stood above David. The answer has to be someone greater than David.

Jesus asked the Pharisees, a strict group of Jewish religious teachers, this very question. "What do you think concerning the Christ? Whose son is He?" They said, the son of David. Then Jesus asked, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him Lord?" If the Messiah is only David's descendant, why would David call Him Lord? No one could answer Him (Matthew 22:41-46). The point is that the Messiah is David's son and also David's Lord. He is human, born in David's line, and He is also divine.

"Sit at My right hand." The right hand of a king was the place of highest honor and authority. To sit there is to share the king's rule. After Jesus rose from the dead, He ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. Peter preached this verse at Pentecost: David did not go up into heaven, but he spoke of the Lord who did, so God has made this Jesus "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:34-36). Hebrews says that when He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3).

"Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." Conquered enemies were sometimes made to lie under the victor's feet. Jesus is seated now, and He is waiting. Hebrews says He sat down after offering one sacrifice for sins, waiting from that time until His enemies are made a footstool (Hebrews 10:12-13). The work of the cross is finished. The full defeat of His enemies is still to come.

Many count this verse as the Old Testament verse most often quoted or referred to in the New Testament. It is easy to see why. It tells us where Jesus is right now.

Mark 12:36 and Luke 20:42-43 record the same question Jesus asked the Pharisees. And Hebrews 1:13 uses this verse to show that the Son is far above the angels, because God never said to any angel, "Sit at My right hand."

New Testament links: Luke 20:42-43 (quoted); Hebrews 1:13 (quoted); Acts 2:34-35 (quoted); Matthew 22:44 (quoted); Mark 12:36 (quoted); Hebrews 10:12-13 (alluded to)

110:2 *The LORD will send out the staff of Your strength from Zion; rule in the midst of Your enemies.*

"The LORD will send out the staff of Your strength from Zion." The staff is the rod a king holds as a sign of his authority. God Himself will send out the King's rule from Zion, David's city (see Psalm 2).

"Rule in the midst of Your enemies." The King reigns right in the middle of His enemies, before they are all gone. That is true now. Jesus already reigns at the Father's right hand, and His kingdom grows through the gospel in a world that still opposes Him.

It will also be true in a fuller way. I believe Jesus will return at the end of the Tribulation and reign on the earth, ruling the nations from Zion. Zechariah says the LORD's feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and "the LORD will be King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:4, 9). God has not finished with Israel or with Jerusalem. Paul says, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29), and all Israel will be saved when the Deliverer comes from Zion (Romans 11:26).

110:3 *Your people **will be** freewill offerings in the day of Your power, in **the** splendors of holiness; from the womb of dawn, the dew of Your youth **is** Yours.*

"Your people will be freewill offerings in the day of Your power." The King's people are not forced into His army. They offer themselves gladly. The word is the one used for the freewill offering, a gift given out of love rather than duty. When the King goes out in power, His people come willingly.

The rest of the verse is hard to translate, and the meaning of some of it is uncertain. "In the splendors of holiness" may mean holy garments, like priests wear, or the beauty of holiness. "From the womb of dawn, the dew of Your youth is Yours." Dew appears fresh and plentiful at dawn, covering the ground. The picture seems to be of the King's young warriors coming out like the morning dew, fresh, many and full of life. Some take "Your youth" to mean the King's own youthful strength instead.

For us, the clearest part is the first line. Paul urges us by the mercies of God to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Jesus wants people who give themselves to Him freely because they love Him.

110:4 *The LORD has sworn, and He will not relent: "You **are** a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*

"The LORD has sworn, and He will not relent." God makes an oath, and it will never be taken back. Hebrews makes a point of this: other priests became priests without an oath, but Jesus was made a priest with an oath from God (Hebrews 7:20-21). That makes His priesthood unshakable.

"You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." That would have surprised an Israelite. In Israel, David's royal line came from the tribe of Judah, and priests came from the tribe of Levi, through Aaron's family. Kings were not allowed to take over the priests' work. When King Uzziah tried to burn incense in the temple, God struck him with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). Yet here, David's Lord is both King and Priest.

How can that be? He is a priest of a different order. Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14:18-20. He was "king of Salem," an early name for Jerusalem, and "priest of God Most High." He brought bread and wine to Abraham, blessed him and received a tenth of the spoils. He was a king and a priest at the same time, in Jerusalem, long before Levi was even born.

Hebrews builds its teaching on this verse (Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1-28). Melchizedek's name means "king of righteousness," and Salem means "peace" (Hebrews 7:2). Genesis gives no record of his parents, his birth or his death, so he pictures a priesthood without beginning or end (Hebrews 7:3). Abraham, the father of Levi, gave him a tithe, so Melchizedek's priesthood is greater than Levi's. And Jesus, who was from Judah and not Levi, is a priest in this greater line.

Why does that matter for us? A priest stands between God and people. He offers sacrifice for sins and prays for the people. The priests of Levi died and had to be replaced, and they offered the same sacrifices over and over. Jesus offered Himself once for all. Because He lives forever, He holds His priesthood permanently, "always living to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:24-25). Right now, Jesus is praying for His people. He is our King, who rules us, and our Priest, who brings us to God.

New Testament links: Hebrews 7:17 (quoted); Hebrews 5:6 (quoted); Hebrews 7:21 (quoted); Hebrews 6:20 (quoted); Hebrews 7:28 (alluded to); Hebrews 7:11 (alluded to)

110:5-6 *The Lord **is** at Your right **hand**; He has shattered kings in the day of His anger. He will judge among the nations; He has filled **them with** corpses; He has shattered **the** head over a great land.*

"The Lord is at Your right hand." Now the picture shifts slightly. In verse 1 the King sat at God's right hand. Here "the Lord" stands at the King's right hand, fighting beside Him, or the King Himself goes out to battle. In both readings, God and His King act together. "He has shattered kings in the day of His anger."

"He will judge among the nations; He has filled them with corpses; He has shattered the head over a great land." These are hard words. The picture is of a battlefield after a great victory. The rulers who set themselves against God and His Anointed are shattered.

This is sobering. The same King who gave His life for sinners will one day judge those who refuse Him. Revelation shows Christ coming from heaven to strike down the nations and rule them with a rod of iron, as He "treads the press of the wine of the fury and of the wrath of God the Almighty" (Revelation 19:15). The day of His wrath is the day He returns. It comes after a long time of patience, in which God has called all people to repent.

This judgment belongs to the King, not to His people. Our part while He is still seated and waiting is to tell everyone the good news, and to long for the day when He sets the world right and evil rulers no longer crush the weak (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

110:7 *From the brook on the way He will drink; therefore He will lift up **the** head.*

"From the brook on the way He will drink." This last verse is unusual, and its meaning is debated. The most common view pictures the King in the middle of His campaign, pursuing His enemies. He stops at a stream along the way, drinks and is refreshed, then presses on.

"Therefore He will lift up the head." To lift up the head is a picture of victory and honor. The King does not grow weary or give up. He is refreshed and triumphant to the end.

On the cross Jesus said, "It has been finished," and He bowed His head and delivered up the spirit (John 19:30). Now His head is lifted up in glory. Many see in this verse a picture of the King who was humbled and then exalted, the One who suffered and now reigns. The psalm ends with Him victorious, His head lifted high, and His people with Him.

Psalm 110 Summary

Psalm 110 is David's psalm about the Messiah. David hears the LORD tell David's own Lord to sit at His right hand until His enemies become His footstool. Jesus used this verse to show that the Messiah is both David's son and David's Lord, and Peter and Hebrews show that Jesus fulfilled it when He ascended and sat down at God's right hand. The LORD will send out the staff of the King's strength from Zion, and He will rule in the midst of His enemies, now through the gospel and fully when He returns to reign on the earth. His people will offer themselves freely in the day of His power. God has sworn an oath that will never change: this King is a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek, the king and priest of Salem in Genesis 14. Hebrews shows that Jesus is this eternal Priest who lives forever to intercede for His people. In the day of His wrath He will judge the nations and shatter rulers who oppose Him, and refreshed on the way, He will lift up His head in victory.

People and Places

- Melchizedek: king of Salem and priest of God Most High who blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7).
- Salem: an early name for Jerusalem (compare Psalm 76:2).
- Right hand: the place of highest honor and authority beside a king.

Psalm 110 Study Questions

1. Who speaks in verse 1, and to whom? What does David call the one being spoken to?

2. How did Jesus use verse 1 to question the Pharisees, and what was His point? (Matthew 22:41-46)

3. How did Peter use this psalm at Pentecost? (Acts 2:34-36)

4. What does it mean that Jesus is seated at God's right hand "until" His enemies are made His footstool? (110:1; Hebrews 10:12-13)

5. How do the King's people respond in the day of His power? (110:3) What would it look like for you to offer yourself freely to Him?

6. Who was Melchizedek, and what made him unusual? (Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7:1-3)

7. Why is it significant that God made Jesus a priest with an oath? (110:4; Hebrews 7:20-25)

8. Jesus is "always living to intercede" for His people (Hebrews 7:25). How does it help you to know that Jesus is praying for you right now?

9. How should Christians think about the judgment described in verses 5-6, and how does it fit with Jesus' command to love our enemies?

10. Which picture of Jesus in this psalm do you most need right now: the seated King, the eternal Priest or the coming Judge? Why?

Psalm 118: The Stone the Builders Rejected

Scripture

118:1-4 Give thanks to the LORD, for ***He is*** good; for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Let Israel now say that His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Let the house of Aaron now say that His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Let those who fear the LORD now say that His steadfast love ***is*** forever.

118:5-18 From the distress I called on ***the*** LORD; ***the*** LORD answered me in the broad place. The LORD ***is*** for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me? The LORD ***is*** for me among my helpers, and I, I will look on those who hate me. ***It is*** better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. ***It is*** better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in nobles. All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD indeed I will cut them off. They surrounded me, also they surrounded me; in the name of the LORD indeed I will cut them off. They surrounded me like bees; they were extinguished like a fire of thorns; in the name of the LORD indeed I will cut them off. You surely pushed me to fall, and the LORD helped me. My strength and song ***is the*** LORD, and He has become salvation for me. The sound of a shout of joy and salvation ***is*** in the tents of ***the*** righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly." I will not die, but I will live, and I will recount the deeds of ***the*** LORD. ***The*** LORD has surely disciplined me, and to death He has not given me.

118:19-29 Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go in through them; I will give thanks to ***the*** LORD. This ***is*** the gate of the LORD; ***the*** righteous will go in through it. I will give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and You have become salvation for me. A stone ***which*** the builders rejected has become the head of ***the*** corner. From the LORD this has come; it ***is*** wonderful in our eyes. This ***is*** the day ***which*** the LORD has made; let us be glad, and let us rejoice in it. Please, LORD, save now! Please, LORD, give success now! Blessed ***is*** the one who comes in the name of the LORD; we bless you from the house of the LORD. The LORD ***is*** God, and He has given light to us; bind the festival ***sacrifice*** with cords up to the horns of the altar. You ***are*** my God, and I will give thanks to You; my God, I will exalt You. Give thanks to the LORD, for ***He is*** good; for His steadfast love ***is*** forever.

Psalm 118 Preview

Psalm 118 is a song of thanksgiving sung on the way into God's house. Someone, most likely a king or leader of Israel, has been surrounded by enemies and pushed to the edge of death, and the LORD has rescued him. Now he leads the people up to the temple gates to give thanks, and the whole crowd joins in with a refrain: "His steadfast love is forever." Psalms 113 to 118 are known in Jewish tradition as the Hallel and were sung at the great feasts, including Passover; Psalm 118 is the last of them. It may well be part of the hymn Jesus sang with His disciples on the night before He died.

The New Testament quotes this psalm often. The crowds shouted its words when Jesus rode into Jerusalem: "Hosanna" and "Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord!" (Matthew 21:9). Jesus Himself pointed to verse 22, the stone the builders rejected that became the head of the

corner, and Peter preached it after the resurrection. The man who was nearly killed and then lifted up by God becomes a picture the New Testament fills in with Jesus.

Psalm 118 Study

118:1-4 *Give thanks to the LORD, for **He is** good; for His steadfast love **is** forever. Let Israel now say that His steadfast love **is** forever. Let the house of Aaron now say that His steadfast love **is** forever. Let those who fear the LORD now say that His steadfast love **is** forever.*

The psalm opens with a call: "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good." Two reasons are given. God is good, and "His steadfast love is forever." Steadfast love is the SLB's phrase for hesed, God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 23:6). It never runs out.

Then three groups are called to say it. "Israel" is the whole nation. "The house of Aaron" is the priests, Aaron's descendants who served at the altar. "Those who fear the LORD" are all who worship Him with reverence and trust (on the fear of the LORD, see Psalm 19). Some think this third group also includes Gentiles who had come to worship Israel's God (Psalm 115:9-13 has the same three groups).

Picture a leader calling out a line and the crowd answering. Every group says the same thing. Whatever your place among God's people, you have the same reason to give thanks.

118:5-7 *From the distress I called on **the** LORD; **the** LORD answered me in the broad place. The LORD **is** for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me? The LORD **is** for me among my helpers, and I, I will look on those who hate me.*

Now the speaker tells his story. "From the distress I called on the LORD." The word "distress" has the idea of being hemmed in, squeezed into a tight place. God's answer was the opposite: "the LORD answered me in the broad place." The Hebrew pictures a wide, open place. God gave him room to breathe.

"The LORD is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:6 quotes this line to teach believers to be content and to trust God's care. Paul says much the same in Romans 8:31: if God is for us, who is against us?

Verse 7 says, "I, I will look on those who hate me." He expects to see God vindicate him and his enemies' plans fail, and he leaves any payback in God's hands (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

New Testament links: Hebrews 13:6 (quoted)

118:8-9 ***It is** better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. **It is** better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in nobles.*

"It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man." Verse 9 says it again with "princes" in place of "man," and the second line narrows it down: not even the most powerful people are a safe place to put your whole weight.

To take refuge is to run to God for shelter the way you would run into a fortress. People can help us, and God often uses them. But people fail, change their minds and die. Psalm 146 says the same thing. Only the LORD can carry the full weight of our trust.

118:10-12 *All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD indeed I will cut them off. They surrounded me, also they surrounded me; in the name of the LORD indeed I will cut them off. They surrounded me like bees; they were extinguished like a fire of thorns; in the name of the LORD indeed I will cut them off.*

"All nations surrounded me." The speaker says it four times in three verses: they surrounded me, they surrounded me, they surrounded me, they surrounded me "like bees." That repetition lets you feel how trapped he was. He was a single man with enemies on every side.

They "were extinguished like a fire of thorns." Dry thorn bushes flare up fast and loud, then burn out in moments. The danger looked huge and then was gone.

Three times he says, "In the name of the LORD indeed I will cut them off." The name of the LORD stands for God Himself, His character and His power. The victory came by calling on God. The language fits a king leading Israel in battle, though the psalm does not name the battle.

118:13-14 *You surely pushed me to fall, and the LORD helped me. My strength and song **is the** LORD, and He has become salvation for me.*

Verse 13 tells how close it was: "You surely pushed me to fall." He was going down. "And the LORD helped me."

Verse 14 is a quotation from the song Moses and Israel sang after crossing the Red Sea: "My strength and song is the LORD, and He has become salvation for me" (Exodus 15:2). Isaiah 12:2 uses the same words. The speaker sees his own rescue as one more chapter in the same story. The God who brought Israel out of Egypt had done it again.

God is his strength when he is weak and his song when he is safe. And He "has become salvation for me." God did more than send help. He Himself is the help.

118:15-16 *The sound of a shout of joy and salvation **is** in the tents of **the** righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly."*

The sound of rescue fills the camp: "The sound of a shout of joy and salvation is in the tents of the righteous." The righteous are those who are right with God and live faithfully before Him. Their tents ring with celebration.

"The right hand of the LORD" is said three times. In the Bible the right hand stands for strength and skill in action. Exodus 15:6 again praises God's right hand, which shattered the enemy at the sea. The speaker gives God all the credit. "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly." He acts like a mighty warrior.

118:17-18 *I will not die, but I will live, and I will recount the deeds of **the** LORD. **The** LORD has surely disciplined me, and to death He has not given me.*

"I will not die, but I will live, and I will recount the deeds of the LORD." He had expected to die. Now he has a reason to live: to tell what God has done. During a hard season in 1530, while staying at Coburg Castle, Martin Luther is reported to have written this verse on the wall of his room. The verse fits every believer God has carried through danger. We are kept alive to speak of Him.

Verse 18 adds a humbling line: "The LORD has surely disciplined me." He doesn't blame everything on his enemies. God had allowed the trouble and used it to train him. "And to death He has not given me." Hebrews 12:5-11 says God disciplines His children because He loves them, and that discipline, though painful, yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Hard seasons are not proof that God has abandoned you.

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 6:9 (alluded to)

118:19-21 *Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go in through them; I will give thanks to **the** LORD. This **is** the gate of the LORD; **the** righteous will go in through it. I will give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and You have become salvation for me.*

Now the procession arrives at the temple. "Open to me the gates of righteousness." These are the gates of God's house, called gates of righteousness because only the righteous may enter. The gatekeepers, or the priests, answer in verse 20: "This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous will go in through it."

Psalms 15 and 24 ask the same question: who may come into God's presence? The answer is the one who is right with God. The speaker enters "to give thanks," saying, "You have answered me, and You have become salvation for me."

Jesus said, "I am the door" (John 10:9). The way into God's presence for us is through Him. He makes us righteous so that we can enter and give thanks.

118:22 *A stone **which** the builders rejected has become the head of **the** corner.*

"A stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner." Builders check every stone before they use it. Some they set aside as not good enough. In the psalm, the rejected stone is the speaker. People had counted him worthless, even tried to destroy him. God picked him up and set him in the most important place in the building.

"The head of the corner" may mean the cornerstone at the base, which set the line for the whole building, or the top stone that locked an arch or a corner together. On both readings, it is the stone everything else depends on.

Jesus quoted this verse about Himself. After telling the parable of the tenants who killed the owner's son, He asked the religious leaders whether they had never read in the Scriptures about "the stone which those building rejected" (Matthew 21:42; also Mark 12:10-11 and Luke 20:17).

The leaders of Israel were the builders. They rejected Jesus and handed Him over to be crucified. God raised Him from the dead and made Him the cornerstone.

Peter preached the same verse to the council in Jerusalem: Jesus is "the stone which was treated with contempt by you, the builders, which has become the head of the corner" (Acts 4:11). In his first letter, Peter says that to those who believe, this stone is precious, but to those who do not believe, it is the rejected stone that became the head of the corner (1 Peter 2:7). Paul says the church is built on the apostles and prophets, "Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

The world still sets Jesus aside as not good enough. God has made Him the stone the whole building rests on. What will you do with that stone?

New Testament links: Luke 20:17 (quoted); Matthew 21:42 (quoted); Acts 4:11 (quoted); Mark 12:10-11 (quoted); 1 Peter 2:7 (quoted); 1 Peter 2:4 (alluded to)

118:23-24 *From the LORD this has come; it **is** wonderful in our eyes. This **is** the day **which** the LORD has made; let us be glad, and let us rejoice in it.*

"From the LORD this has come; it is wonderful in our eyes." No human planner would have chosen the rejected stone. Only God turns rejection into honor, and when He does it, His people can only stand and wonder. Jesus included this line when He quoted verse 22 (Matthew 21:42).

"This is the day which the LORD has made." Many of us know this verse as a reminder that every day is a gift from God, and that is true. In the psalm, though, "the day" is the day God did this marvelous thing, the day the rejected one was lifted up. For Christians, that points us to the day God raised Jesus from the dead. "Let us be glad, and let us rejoice in it."

Mark 12:11 includes these words as well: "this was from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

New Testament links: Matthew 21:42 (quoted); Mark 12:10-11 (quoted)

118:25 *Please, LORD, save now! Please, LORD, give success now!*

"Please, LORD, save now!" In Hebrew, "save now" is hoshi'ah na, which means "save, please." That is where our word "Hosanna" comes from. "Give success now" asks God to give success and blessing.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the crowds took palm branches and shouted "Hosanna!" (Matthew 21:9; John 12:13). They were using the words of this psalm, sung at the great feasts, and pointing them at Jesus. A cry for help had become a shout of welcome to the One who had come to save.

New Testament links: Mark 11:9 (alluded to); John 12:13 (alluded to); Matthew 21:9 (alluded to)

118:26 *Blessed **is** the one who comes in the name of the LORD; we bless you from the house of the LORD.*

"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD." In the psalm, the priests welcome the king and his procession as they arrive: "We bless you from the house of the LORD."

The crowds shouted this line too as Jesus entered the city (Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9; John 12:13). They welcomed Him as the Son of David, the coming King. Days later, Jesus lamented over Jerusalem and said, "you will by no means see Me from now on until you say, 'Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord'" (Matthew 23:39).

I believe that is a promise as well as a warning. God is not finished with Israel. Paul says "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). When Jesus returns to reign, Israel will greet Him with the words of this psalm.

Luke records both sayings too: Jesus' warning over Jerusalem in Luke 13:35, and the crowd's cry as He came to the city, "Blessed is the King coming in the name of the Lord!" (Luke 19:38).

New Testament links: Matthew 21:9 (quoted); Matthew 23:39 (quoted); Luke 19:38 (quoted); Luke 13:35 (quoted); John 12:13 (quoted); Mark 11:9-10 (quoted)

118:27 *The LORD **is** God, and He has given light to us; bind the festival **sacrifice** with cords up to the horns of the altar.*

"The LORD is God, and He has given light to us." Light is a picture of God's favor, His face shining on His people (Numbers 6:25). He had turned their darkness into day.

"Bind the festival sacrifice with cords up to the horns of the altar." The horns were the corner points on the altar. The Hebrew line is hard to translate. The SLB reads it as tying the sacrifice to the altar. Other versions read it as a festival procession with branches reaching up to the altar. Both readings show the people worshiping God at His altar with thanksgiving.

Many see a picture of Christ here, the true sacrifice bound and offered for us. The New Testament doesn't make that link directly, so I hold it lightly.

118:28-29 *You **are** my God, and I will give thanks to You; my God, I will exalt You. Give thanks to the LORD, for **He is** good; for His steadfast love **is** forever.*

The speaker makes it personal: "You are my God, and I will give thanks to You; my God, I will exalt You." To exalt is to lift up in praise. He says "my God" twice. The God of Israel is his God.

The last verse repeats the first: "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love is forever." Everything between the first verse and the last, the distress, the enemies, the near death, the discipline and the rescue, has proved that line true.

If Jesus and His disciples sang this psalm after the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30 says they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives), He sang these words on His way to the cross. He knew He was the rejected stone. He sang anyway that the LORD is good and His steadfast love is forever.

Psalm 118 Summary

Psalm 118 is a song of thanksgiving sung by a leader of Israel and the worshipers who walk with him to the temple. It opens and closes with the call to give thanks because the LORD is good and His steadfast love is forever. The speaker tells how he was hemmed in and surrounded by enemies like bees, pushed until he was falling, and how the LORD helped him. Using the words of Moses' song at the Red Sea, he calls God his strength, his song and his salvation, and he learns that trusting the LORD is better than trusting people or princes. Though God disciplined him severely, He did not give him over to death. At the temple gates he gives thanks and declares that the stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. Jesus applied that verse to Himself, and Peter preached it of the risen Christ. The crowds used the psalm's cry, "Hosanna," and its blessing on the one who comes in the name of the LORD to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem, and Jesus said Jerusalem would say those words again when it sees Him.

People and Places

- House of Aaron: the priests of Israel, descended from Moses' brother Aaron.
- Gates of righteousness: the gates of the temple, through which the righteous enter to worship.
- Head of the corner: the most important stone in a building, which sets the line for the rest or locks the structure together; many English Bibles say "chief corner stone."
- Hosanna: from the Hebrew of 118:25, meaning "save, please," and later used as a shout of praise.
- Horns of the altar: the raised corner points of the altar in the temple.

Psalm 118 Study Questions

1. What two reasons does the psalm give for thanking the LORD, and which three groups are called to say so? (118:1-4)

2. What did the LORD do when the speaker called to Him in distress? (118:5)

3. Why is it better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in people or princes? (118:8-9) Where are you tempted to put your trust in people more than in God?

4. What pictures does the psalm use for the enemies who surrounded him, and how did he overcome them? (118:10-12)

5. Which earlier song in the Bible does verse 14 quote, and why do you think the speaker used it?

6. The speaker says the LORD disciplined him severely but did not give him over to death (118:18). How has God used a hard season to shape you?

7. Who were "the builders" when Jesus quoted verse 22, and how did God make the rejected stone the head of the corner? (Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11)

8. What does "Hosanna" mean, and when did crowds shout it to Jesus? (118:25; Matthew 21:9)

9. Jesus said Jerusalem would not see Him again until they said, "Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39). What does that tell you about God's plans for Israel?

10. If Jesus sang this psalm on the night before the cross, what would it have meant to Him? How can its words help you give thanks in a hard time?

Psalm 119: Delighting in God's Word (Verses 1 to 64)

Scripture

Aleph

119:1-8 How blessed ***are*** the blameless of way, those who walk in the law of the LORD! How blessed ***are*** those who observe His testimonies; with all ***their*** heart they seek Him. Also they do not work injustice; in His ways they walk. You, You have commanded Your precepts, to keep ***them*** exceedingly. O that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes! Then I will not be ashamed, when I look to all Your commandments. I will give thanks to You in uprightness of heart, when I learn the judgments of Your righteousness. Your statutes I will keep; do not forsake me utterly.

Beth

119:9-16 By what will a youth keep his path pure? By keeping ***it*** according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me stray from Your commandments. In my heart I have treasured Your word, so that I will not sin against You. Blessed ***are*** You, LORD; teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have recounted all the judgments of Your mouth. In the way of Your testimonies I have exulted, as over all wealth. On Your precepts I will meditate, and I will look to Your paths. In Your statutes I will delight myself; I will not forget Your word.

Gimel

119:17-24 Deal bountifully with Your servant; I will live, and I will keep Your word. Uncover my eyes, and let me look at wonderful ***things*** from Your law. I ***am*** a sojourner on the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me. My soul is crushed with longing for Your judgments at every time. You have rebuked ***the*** arrogant, ***the*** cursed, who stray from Your commandments. Roll away from upon me reproach and contempt, for I have observed Your testimonies. Also officials have sat; against me they have spoken together; Your servant meditates on Your statutes. Also Your testimonies ***are*** my delight, the men of my counsel.

Daleth

119:25-32 My soul clings to the dust; keep me alive according to Your word. My ways I recounted, and You answered me; teach me Your statutes. The way of Your precepts make me understand, and let me meditate on Your wonders. My soul weeps from grief; raise me up according to Your word. The way of falsehood remove from me, and graciously grant me Your law. The way of faithfulness I have chosen; Your judgments I have set ***before me***. I have clung to Your testimonies; LORD, do not put me to shame. The way of Your commandments I will run, for You will enlarge my heart.

He

119:33-40 Instruct me, LORD, ***in*** the way of Your statutes, and I will observe it ***to the*** end. Give me understanding, and let me observe Your law, and I will keep it with all ***my*** heart. Make me tread in the pathway of Your commandments, for in it I take pleasure. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to unjust gain. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthlessness; in Your

ways keep me alive. Confirm to Your servant Your word, which ***is*** for the fear of You. Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your judgments ***are*** good. Look, I have longed for Your precepts; in Your righteousness keep me alive.

Vav

119:41-48 And let Your steadfast loves come to me, LORD, Your salvation according to Your word. And I will answer the one who taunts me ***with*** a word, for I have trusted in Your word. And do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth utterly, for I have hoped for Your judgment. And I will keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk about in a broad place, for Your precepts I have sought. And I will speak of Your testimonies before kings, and I will not be ashamed. And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I have loved. And I will lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I have loved, and I will meditate on Your statutes.

Zayin

119:49-56 Remember the word to Your servant, on which You have made me hope. This ***is*** my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has kept me alive. ***The*** arrogant have mocked me utterly; from Your law I have not turned away. I have remembered Your judgments from of old, LORD, and I have comforted myself. Burning indignation has seized me because of ***the*** wicked, who forsake Your law. Your statutes have been songs to me in the house of my sojournings. I have remembered Your name in the night, LORD, and I have kept Your law. This has been mine, that I have observed Your precepts.

Heth

119:57-64 My portion ***is*** the LORD; I have said ***I would*** keep Your words. I have entreated Your face with all ***my*** heart; be gracious to me according to Your word. I have thought about my ways, and I have turned my feet to Your testimonies. I have hurried, and I have not delayed, to keep Your commandments. The cords of ***the*** wicked have surrounded me; Your law I have not forgotten. ***At*** the middle of the night I rise to give thanks to You for the judgments of Your righteousness. I ***am*** a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts. ***Of*** Your steadfast love, LORD, the earth is full; teach me Your statutes.

Psalm 119 Preview

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, 176 verses, and nearly every verse is about God's Word. Like Psalms 34 and 37, it is an acrostic, a poem built on the alphabet, but here each letter gets a whole stanza. There are twenty-two stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each stanza has eight verses. In the Hebrew, all eight verses of the first stanza begin with Aleph, the first letter, all eight of the second begin with Beth, and so on to the end. The letter names printed over each stanza come from that pattern. This study covers the first eight stanzas, verses 1 to 64. The writer is not named. Some think David wrote it, others a later teacher of the Law, but the psalm itself does not tell us. What it does show us is a believer, perhaps a young one, opposed by powerful people, often in tears, who keeps running back to what God has said.

The psalm uses eight main words for God's Word, and the SLB keeps them distinct. "Law" (Hebrew torah) means instruction or teaching, God's whole revealed direction for life (119:1).

"Testimonies" are what God has solemnly declared and witnessed to (119:2). "Precepts" are detailed orders from the One in charge (119:4). "Statutes" come from a word for carving or inscribing, God's fixed and lasting decrees (119:5). "Commandments" are His direct orders (119:6). "Judgments" (119:7, 13) are His rulings as Judge about what is right; some translations call them "ordinances." "Word" translates two Hebrew words: one is the ordinary term for what God has spoken (119:9), and the other is a word for a saying or promise (119:11). These words overlap. The writer uses them the way a man in love uses many names for the one he loves, to say over and over how much it all means to him. In the Hebrew of these sixty-four verses, only verses 3 and 37 lack one of the eight, and even those speak of God's ways.

Psalm 119 Study

119:1-3 *How blessed **are** the blameless of way, those who walk in the law of the LORD! How blessed **are** those who observe His testimonies; with all **their** heart they seek Him. Also they do not work injustice; in His ways they walk.*

The psalm begins like Psalm 1: "How blessed." As we saw there, to be blessed is to live under God's favor. Who is blessed? "The blameless of way, those who walk in the law of the LORD." "Blameless" here means whole, with no double life, walking in a straight line with God.

Verse 2 adds, "with all their heart they seek Him." God's Word is never only a rulebook. The person who keeps His testimonies is looking for God Himself. Verse 3 sums up their life: "In His ways they walk."

119:4-6 *You, You have commanded Your precepts, to keep **them** exceedingly. O that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes! Then I will not be ashamed, when I look to all Your commandments.*

Now the writer turns and speaks to God directly, as he will through nearly the whole psalm. "You, You have commanded Your precepts, to keep them exceedingly." God is the One who gave the commands, and He meant them to be kept with great care.

Verse 5 is a sigh: "O that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes!" He knows the standard, and he knows he falls short. He wants God to make his steps steady.

"Then I will not be ashamed." Shame comes when we are caught living against what we know. The person who walks in God's commandments can look at them without flinching.

119:7-8 *I will give thanks to You in uprightness of heart, when I learn the judgments of Your righteousness. Your statutes I will keep; do not forsake me utterly.*

"I will give thanks to You in uprightness of heart, when I learn the judgments of Your righteousness." Learning God's Word leads to worship. The more he understands God's ways, the more he has to thank Him for.

"Your statutes I will keep; do not forsake me utterly." The first stanza ends with resolve and a plea side by side. He means to obey, but he knows he cannot do it without God. Jesus said the same to His disciples: apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

119:9-11 *By what will a youth keep his path pure? By keeping **it** according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me stray from Your commandments. In my heart I have treasured Your word, so that I will not sin against You.*

The second stanza asks a question: "By what will a youth keep his path pure?" The answer: "By keeping it according to Your word." Young people face strong temptations and hear many voices. A pure life has to be guarded, and God's Word is the guard.

"With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me stray from Your commandments." He has given God his whole heart, yet he still asks God to keep him from drifting. Even sincere believers need God's hand to hold them.

Verse 11 is well known: "In my heart I have treasured Your word, so that I will not sin against You." To treasure something is to store it away like hidden wealth. Memorizing Scripture and thinking about it puts God's Word where temptation strikes, in the heart. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus answered him each time with Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11).

119:12-13 *Blessed **are** You, LORD; teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have recounted all the judgments of Your mouth.*

"Blessed are You, LORD; teach me Your statutes." He praises God first and then asks to be taught. The God who gave the Word is the best Teacher of it. Jesus opened His disciples' minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45), and the Holy Spirit still does that for us.

"With my lips I have recounted all the judgments of Your mouth." What he has stored in his heart (verse 11) comes out of his mouth. God's Word is meant to be spoken and shared.

119:14-16 *In the way of Your testimonies I have exulted, as over all wealth. On Your precepts I will meditate, and I will look to Your paths. In Your statutes I will delight myself; I will not forget Your word.*

"In the way of Your testimonies I have exulted, as over all wealth." Imagine the joy of someone who just came into a fortune. The writer says God's Word gives him that kind of joy.

Verse 15 gives two habits: "On Your precepts I will meditate, and I will look to Your paths." To meditate is to turn God's Word over in your mind, as the blessed man of Psalm 1:2 does day and night. To "look to" it is to keep your eyes on it.

"In Your statutes I will delight myself; I will not forget Your word." Delight and memory go together. We remember what we love.

119:17-18 *Deal bountifully with Your servant; I will live, and I will keep Your word. Uncover my eyes, and let me look at wonderful* ***things*** *from Your law.*

The third stanza opens with a request: "Deal bountifully with Your servant; I will live, and I will keep Your word." He asks God to be generous to him, and the purpose is that he can go on living for God.

"Uncover my eyes, and let me look at wonderful things from Your law." This is a good prayer to pray before you open your Bible. The wonders are already there. What we need is eyes to see them. Without God's help we can read the words and miss the glory. With His help, familiar passages come alive.

119:19-21 *I* ***am*** *a sojourner on the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me. My soul is crushed with longing for Your judgments at every time. You have rebuked* ***the*** *arrogant,* ***the*** *cursed, who stray from Your commandments.*

"I am a sojourner on the earth." A sojourner is a foreigner, someone living in a land that is not home. Hebrews 11:13 says the people of faith confessed that they were "strangers and sojourners on the earth." Because this world is not our home, we need God's directions, so he prays, "Do not hide Your commandments from me."

"My soul is crushed with longing for Your judgments at every time." He aches for God's Word the way a hungry man aches for food.

"You have rebuked the arrogant, the cursed, who stray from Your commandments." Pride is the root of wandering. The arrogant think they do not need God's direction, and they live under His rebuke.

119:22-24 *Roll away from upon me reproach and contempt, for I have observed Your testimonies. Also officials have sat; against me they have spoken together; Your servant meditates on Your statutes. Also Your testimonies* ***are*** *my delight, the men of my counsel.*

"Roll away from upon me reproach and contempt." People were mocking him for his faithfulness. "Also officials have sat; against me they have spoken together; Your servant meditates on Your statutes." Officials were meeting to plot against him, and he answered by going deeper into God's Word. The psalm does not name these rulers, but the picture is clear: powerful people against one faithful servant.

"Also Your testimonies are my delight, the men of my counsel." When important people gather to counsel against you, God's Word becomes your own counsel. He has a better set of advisers than the officials do.

119:25-27 *My soul clings to the dust; keep me alive according to Your word. My ways I recounted, and You answered me; teach me Your statutes. The way of Your precepts make me understand, and let me meditate on Your wonders.*

The fourth stanza goes low. "My soul clings to the dust." He feels pressed down, as low as a man lying on the ground, perhaps near death. "Keep me alive according to Your word." He asks God to give him life again. He asks God to do what He has promised.

"My ways I recounted, and You answered me." He has told God the truth about his life, and God has listened. Now he asks again, "Teach me Your statutes," and, "The way of Your precepts make me understand." Understanding leads to praise: "And let me meditate on Your wonders."

119:28-30 *My soul weeps from grief; raise me up according to Your word. The way of falsehood remove from me, and graciously grant me Your law. The way of faithfulness I have chosen; Your judgments I have set* ***before me****.*

"My soul weeps from grief; raise me up according to Your word." The Bible lets believers cry. The writer of this psalm loves God's Word with his whole heart, and he still weeps. Faith and grief live side by side in many of God's people.

"The way of falsehood remove from me, and graciously grant me Your law." He sees two ways in front of him, a false way and the way of God's law, and he asks God to take the false one out of his path. Even the law is a gift of grace. Verse 30 is his choice: "The way of faithfulness I have chosen; Your judgments I have set before me." He keeps God's Word in front of him like a map.

119:31-32 *I have clung to Your testimonies; LORD, do not put me to shame. The way of Your commandments I will run, for You will enlarge my heart.*

"I have clung to Your testimonies." Verse 25 used the same Hebrew word: his soul clung to the dust. Now he clings to God's Word instead. "LORD, do not put me to shame."

"The way of Your commandments I will run, for You will enlarge my heart." Earlier he was lying in the dust. Now he is running. God enlarging his heart means giving him freedom, joy and a bigger capacity to love Him. Obedience becomes a race run gladly instead of a load dragged along.

119:33-35 *Instruct me, LORD,* ***in*** *the way of Your statutes, and I will observe it* ***to the*** *end. Give me understanding, and let me observe Your law, and I will keep it with all* ***my*** *heart. Make me tread in the pathway of Your commandments, for in it I take pleasure.*

The fifth stanza is almost all prayer. Nearly every verse begins with a request: teach me, give me understanding, make me walk, incline my heart, turn away my eyes. "Instruct me, LORD, in the way of Your statutes, and I will observe it to the end." He wants a devotion that lasts all the way to the end.

"Give me understanding, and let me observe Your law, and I will keep it with all my heart." Understanding is meant to lead to obedience.

"Make me tread in the pathway of Your commandments, for in it I take pleasure." He already delights in God's way, and still he asks God to make him walk in it. Desire is not enough. We need God's power to follow through (Philippians 2:13).

119:36-38 *Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to unjust gain. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthlessness; in Your ways keep me alive. Confirm to Your servant Your word, which **is** for the fear of You.*

"Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to unjust gain." Our hearts lean toward something. The writer names the pull he feels most: money gained the wrong way. He asks God to tilt his heart toward His Word instead. Jesus warned that we cannot serve God and wealth (Matthew 6:24).

"Turn away my eyes from looking at worthlessness." Worthlessness means things that are empty and of no value. What we look at shapes what we want. "In Your ways keep me alive." Here God's Word is called His "ways," the path He walks and asks us to walk with Him.

"Confirm to Your servant Your word." He asks God to confirm His promise, to make it stand. The purpose is reverence: it is "for the fear of You." When God keeps His word, people fear and honor Him.

119:39-40 *Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your judgments **are** good. Look, I have longed for Your precepts; in Your righteousness keep me alive.*

"Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your judgments are good." He is afraid of disgrace, either the mocking of others or the shame of failing God. But he knows God's rulings are good, and he trusts them.

"Look, I have longed for Your precepts; in Your righteousness keep me alive." He longs for God's Word, and he asks again to be kept alive. God's righteousness here is His faithfulness to do what is right, including keeping His promises to His people.

119:41-43 *And let Your steadfast loves come to me, LORD, Your salvation according to Your word. And I will answer the one who taunts me **with** a word, for I have trusted in Your word. And do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth utterly, for I have hoped for Your judgment.*

The sixth stanza starts with love. "And let Your steadfast loves come to me, LORD, Your salvation according to Your word." Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 23:6). In Hebrew the writer asks for it in the plural, many acts of that love, and he connects it to salvation and to God's word.

"And I will answer the one who taunts me with a word." When people mock his faith, he will be able to point to what God has done. Peter tells us to be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).

"And do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth utterly." He wants to keep speaking God's truth, "for I have hoped for Your judgment." He is waiting on God to act.

119:44-46 *And I will keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk about in a broad place, for Your precepts I have sought. And I will speak of Your testimonies before kings, and I will not be ashamed.*

"And I will keep Your law continually, forever and ever." His commitment has no end date.

Verse 45 says something surprising: "And I will walk about in a broad place, for Your precepts I have sought." We might expect God's precepts to feel like walls. The writer says they are freedom. The Hebrew pictures walking in a wide, open space. Jesus told those who continue in His word that "the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

"I will speak of Your testimonies before kings, and I will not be ashamed." He is ready to speak God's Word to the most powerful people around. Paul did that before King Agrippa (Acts 26), and Jesus told His disciples they would stand before kings for His sake (Matthew 10:18).

119:47-48 *And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I have loved. And I will lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I have loved, and I will meditate on Your statutes.*

"And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I have loved." The word "love" appears twice in these two verses. He loves God's commands because he loves the God who gave them. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

"And I will lift up my hands to Your commandments." Lifting the hands was a posture of prayer and worship. He reaches out toward God's Word the way a worshiper reaches toward God. Then the stanza ends with his habit: "I will meditate on Your statutes."

119:49-50 *Remember the word to Your servant, on which You have made me hope. This **is** my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has kept me alive.*

The seventh stanza is about comfort in suffering. "Remember the word to Your servant, on which You have made me hope." When God remembers, He acts on His promise. The writer reminds God of what He has said, not because God forgets, but because that is how faith prays.

"This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has kept me alive." "Affliction" means suffering or hardship. He doesn't say God took the affliction away. He says God's Word kept him alive in the middle of it.

119:51-53 ***The** arrogant have mocked me utterly; from Your law I have not turned away. I have remembered Your judgments from of old, LORD, and I have comforted myself. Burning indignation has seized me because of **the** wicked, who forsake Your law.*

"The arrogant have mocked me utterly; from Your law I have not turned away." Mockers laughed at him. He kept walking.

"I have remembered Your judgments from of old, LORD, and I have comforted myself." He looked back at what God had said and done in the past, and it steadied him. Remembering God's faithfulness in the Bible's history and in our own lives is one way God comforts us.

"Burning indignation has seized me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law." His anger comes from grief that people would throw away God's good Word and the life it brings. Verse 136, beyond this study, shows the same writer weeping streams of tears because people do not keep God's law. Zeal for God's honor and tears for the people belong together here (see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms).

119:54-56 *Your statutes have been songs to me in the house of my sojournings. I have remembered Your name in the night, LORD, and I have kept Your law. This has been mine, that I have observed Your precepts.*

"Your statutes have been songs to me in the house of my sojournings." To sojourn is to live somewhere as a traveler, and the house of his sojournings is wherever he lives during his life on earth, a temporary stop. God's Word has become the music for the road. Travelers sing to pass the miles, and he sings God's statutes.

"I have remembered Your name in the night, LORD, and I have kept Your law." Night can be the time of fear and sleeplessness. He uses it to remember who God is.

"This has been mine, that I have observed Your precepts." Obedience has become his portion and blessing, part of who he is. Keeping God's Word has become his habit.

119:57-58 *My portion **is** the LORD; I have said **I would** keep Your words. I have entreated Your face with all **my** heart; be gracious to me according to Your word.*

The eighth stanza opens simply: "My portion is the LORD." When Israel divided the promised land, each tribe received a portion. The priestly tribe of Levi received no land, because the LORD Himself was their inheritance (Numbers 18:20, 24; Deuteronomy 10:9; see Psalm 73). The writer says the same of himself. God is what he gets, and that is enough.

Because God is his portion, "I have said I would keep Your words." Then: "I have entreated Your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to Your word." He seeks God's face, His favor, and asks for grace on the basis of God's word.

119:59-60 *I have thought about my ways, and I have turned my feet to Your testimonies. I have hurried, and I have not delayed, to keep Your commandments.*

"I have thought about my ways, and I have turned my feet to Your testimonies." He stopped and took a hard look at his life. Where he saw himself heading in the wrong direction, he turned. That is what repentance looks like: thinking about your ways and changing your direction.

"I have hurried, and I have not delayed, to keep Your commandments." When he saw what to do, he did it right away. Delayed obedience is easy to excuse, and it often turns into no obedience at all.

119:61-62 *The cords of **the** wicked have surrounded me; Your law I have not forgotten. **At** the middle of the night I rise to give thanks to You for the judgments of Your righteousness.*

"The cords of the wicked have surrounded me." Wicked people had wrapped him up like a hunter's snare. "Your law I have not forgotten." Trouble can push God's Word out of our minds, but he held on to it.

"At the middle of the night I rise to give thanks to You." He gets up in the middle of the night to thank God "for the judgments of Your righteousness." Paul and Silas did the same in the Philippian jail, praying and singing hymns to God at about midnight (Acts 16:25).

119:63-64 *I **am** a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts. **Of** Your steadfast love, LORD, the earth is full; teach me Your statutes.*

"I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts." Love for God's Word draws him to God's people. We need friends who fear God and keep His Word.

The eighth stanza ends with a wide view: "Of Your steadfast love, LORD, the earth is full." Everywhere he looks, he sees God's loyal love. And his last request is the one he has made again and again: "Teach me Your statutes." After sixty-four verses, he still wants to learn.

Psalm 119 Summary

Psalm 119 is an acrostic of twenty-two eight-verse stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and this study covers the first eight, verses 1 to 64. The writer uses eight main words for God's Word: law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments or ordinances, and two Hebrew words translated "word." The psalm opens by calling blessed those who walk in God's law and seek Him with all their heart. The writer asks how a youth can keep his path pure, and answers that he must keep it by God's Word treasured in the heart. He prays for uncovered eyes to see wonderful things in God's law, confesses that he is a sojourner on the earth, and finds God's testimonies to be his counselors while officials speak against him. Lying in the dust and weeping with grief, he asks God to keep him alive and raise him up according to His word, and he chooses the way of faithfulness. He prays for a heart turned from unjust gain and eyes turned from worthlessness. He finds liberty in God's precepts and is ready to speak of them before kings. In affliction, God's Word is his comfort and his song on the road. He ends by declaring that the LORD is his portion, that he turns his feet quickly to God's commandments, and that the earth is full of God's steadfast love, and he prays once more, "Teach me Your statutes."

People and Places

- Acrostic: a poem in which each line or section begins with the next letter of the alphabet.
- Aleph, Beth and the other stanza names: the letters of the Hebrew alphabet that begin each verse of their stanza.
- Steadfast love: hesed, God's loyal covenant love (see Psalm 23:6).

Psalm 119 Study Questions

1. How is Psalm 119 built, and how many stanzas and verses does it have?

2. Name the eight words the psalm uses for God's Word. Which one shows up most often in your own Bible reading and prayer?

3. According to verses 1-2, who is blessed?

4. How can a youth keep his path pure, and what does it mean to treasure God's Word in the heart? (119:9-11)

5. What does the writer ask God to open, and why? (119:18) Try praying that verse the next time you open your Bible.

6. Who were talking against the writer, and what did he do in response? (119:23-24)

7. The writer clung to the dust and wept with grief, yet loved God's Word (119:25-28). What does that teach about faith and sorrow?

8. What two things does the writer ask God to turn him away from? (119:36-37) What pulls on your heart and eyes most strongly?

9. How can God's precepts give liberty instead of feeling like walls? (119:45)

10. What does it mean to say "My portion is the LORD"? (119:57) How would it change your week to live as if that were true?

Psalm 121: My Help Is from the LORD

Scripture

A song for the ascents.

121:1-2 I lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come? My help ***is*** from the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth.

121:3-4 May He not let your foot slip; may your Keeper not slumber. Look, He will not slumber and He will not sleep, the Keeper of Israel.

121:5-6 The LORD ***is*** your Keeper; the LORD ***is*** your shade at your right hand. By day the sun will not strike you, and the moon in the night.

121:7-8 The LORD will keep you from all evil; He will keep your soul. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in, from now and until forever.

Psalm 121 Preview

Psalm 121 is a traveler's song of trust. Someone is about to set out on a long walk through hill country, and he asks the question every traveler asks: who will help me on the way? He answers it at once. His help comes from the LORD, the One who made heaven and earth. The rest of the psalm is a promise spoken to him, maybe by a priest, a friend or his own heart, that God will keep him day and night, on the road and at home.

One Hebrew word runs all through these eight verses. The SLB translates it "Keeper" and "keep" every time, so you can hear that it is the same word. The psalm says it six times, so the reader cannot miss the point. God is the keeper of His people. He does not get tired, He does not look away and He does not fall asleep.

Psalm 121 Study

121:1 *I lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come?*

The heading calls this "A song for the ascents." Fifteen psalms in a row carry that title (Psalms 120 to 134), and Psalm 121 is the first of them in our study. Like Psalms 110, 118 and 119 before it, this psalm is in Book Five of the Psalms (Psalms 107 to 150), the book that closes with the praise psalms 146 to 150. To ascend is to go up. Jerusalem sits high in the hills of Judah, so people always spoke of going "up" to it. God commanded 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 climbed toward the city. Others connect the title with the fifteen steps in the temple courts where, the Mishnah says, the Levites stood and sang (the Mishnah is a written collection of Jewish tradition from about A.D. 200). Still others connect it with the return from exile in Babylon. The exact meaning is uncertain, but the pilgrim picture fits these psalms well. They are short, easy to remember and full of the road, the city and the house of God.

"I lift up my eyes to the mountains." The traveler looks at the hills he must cross. Bible teachers read this two ways. Some think the hills look threatening: rough country with steep paths, wild animals and robbers, and also the high places where people worshiped false gods. Others think he is looking toward the hills of Jerusalem, where God's house stood. Both readings lead to the same question: "From where will my help come?" He admits that he needs help. Faith often starts with a question like that.

121:2 *My help **is** from the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth.*

He answers his own question. "My help is from the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth." The hills cannot help him. Whatever might be worshiped on them cannot help him. His help comes from the One who made the hills in the first place.

That title, "Maker of heaven and earth," matters. A traveler might feel small among the mountains. But the God he trusts is bigger than anything he can see, because He made all of it. If God made heaven and earth, then no road is outside His reach and no danger is too big for Him.

We can ask the same question the traveler asked. Where does my help come from? It is easy to answer with money, doctors, friends or our own planning. God uses all of those. But the psalm wants us to look past them to the One who made them.

121:3-4 *May He not let your foot slip; may your Keeper not slumber. Look, He will not slumber and He will not sleep, the Keeper of Israel.*

Now the voice changes. Until now the traveler has spoken for himself. Now someone speaks to him, and through him to us. "May He not let your foot slip." On rocky hill paths, one slip could mean a broken leg or worse. God watches every step.

"May your Keeper not slumber." A night watchman might doze off. A shepherd might fall asleep by the fire. God never does. Verse 4 widens it: "Look, He will not slumber and He will not sleep, the Keeper of Israel." The God who watches over one traveler is the same God who has watched over His whole people for centuries.

The false gods of the nations were imagined much like people: they ate, they traveled and they slept. On Mount Carmel, Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal by suggesting their god might be asleep and need waking (1 Kings 18:27). The LORD is not like that. When we lie awake at night with worry, we can remember that someone else is awake too, and He is able to do something about it.

121:5-6 *The LORD **is** your Keeper; the LORD **is** your shade at your right hand. By day the sun will not strike you, and the moon in the night.*

"The LORD is your Keeper." The psalm does not say God is like a keeper. It says He is yours. And He is "your shade at your right hand." In that dry land, the midday sun could be dangerous, and a traveler longed for shade. The right hand was the side of help and strength. A bodyguard would stand at your right side. God stands that close.

"By day the sun will not strike you, and the moon in the night." The sun could strike a traveler with heatstroke. The moon is a way of covering the night hours, when the road brings other fears: cold, darkness and things we cannot see. Some think the line also answers an old fear that the moon could harm people, but the main point is simple. Day and night together mean all the time. There is no hour when God stops keeping you.

121:7-8 *The LORD will keep you from all evil; He will keep your soul. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in, from now and until forever.*

"The LORD will keep you from all evil; He will keep your soul." All evil? Believers still get sick, lose loved ones and suffer harm. The psalmists knew that well, and many of them wrote about it. So what does the promise mean? The second line helps: "He will keep your soul." God may let us walk through trouble, but the deepest part of us, our very life before Him, is in His keeping. Jesus said of His sheep that no one will snatch them out of His hand (John 10:28). Whatever comes against our bodies, the LORD keeps His people.

"The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in." That is a Hebrew way of saying your whole life: leaving home and coming back, starting the day and ending it, starting a journey and finishing it. And it lasts "from now and until forever." The pilgrim would one day reach Jerusalem. But God's keeping does not stop when the trip ends. It goes on into eternity.

If you are setting out on something new or hard this week, take this psalm with you. The God who made the mountains will walk beside you through them.

Psalm 121 Summary

Psalm 121 is a pilgrim's psalm, a Song of Ascents. The traveler looks at the hills ahead and asks where his help will come from, and he answers that it comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. The rest of the psalm promises six times that God keeps His people: He never slumbers, He shades them day and night, and He guards their going out and coming in, now and forever.

Psalm 121 Study Questions

1. What does the traveler see when he lifts up his eyes, and what question does he ask? (121:1)

2. How does the traveler describe the LORD in verse 2, and why does that description matter?

3. What does "A song for the ascents" most likely mean, and why would a pilgrim sing this psalm on the road?

4. What two things does God never do, according to verses 3-4?

5. When you lie awake worrying, how could knowing that God "will not slumber and He will not sleep" change the way you pray?

6. What does it mean that the LORD is "your shade at your right hand"? (121:5)

7. Why does the psalm mention both the sun and the moon? (121:6)

8. The psalm says, "The LORD will keep you from all evil," yet believers still suffer. How does the rest of verse 7 help us understand that promise?

9. What does "your going out and your coming in" describe, and how long does God's keeping last? (121:8)

10. What road are you facing right now, and what would it look like to trust God as your keeper on it?

Psalm 127: Unless the LORD Builds the House

Scripture

A song of the ascents. Of Solomon.

127:1-2 If the LORD does not build a house, in vain its builders have toiled on it; if the LORD does not keep a city, in vain the watchman has stayed awake. ***It is*** in vain for you who rise early to get up, who delay sitting down, who eat the bread of toils; so He gives to His beloved sleep.

127:3-5 Look, the inheritance of the LORD ***is*** sons; a reward ***is*** the fruit of the womb. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so ***are*** the sons of ***one's*** youth. How blessed ***is*** the man who has filled his quiver with them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with enemies in the gate.

Psalm 127 Preview

Psalm 127 is a short wisdom psalm about work and family, the two things that fill most of our days. The first half says that all our building, guarding and hard work come to nothing unless the LORD is in it. Getting up early and staying up late will not secure our lives. God gives to His beloved, even while they sleep.

The second half turns to children. They are a gift from the LORD, not a product of our own effort. Like arrows in a warrior's hand, they are a strength and a blessing to their parents. The psalm speaks to anyone who has ever worried about a job, a home or a family.

Psalm 127 Study

127:1 *If the LORD does not build a house, in vain its builders have toiled on it; if the LORD does not keep a city, in vain the watchman has stayed awake.*

Psalm 127 is another Song of Ascents, one of the pilgrim songs (see Psalm 121), and its heading adds "Of Solomon." Solomon was David's son, the king who built the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6). That gives the opening line extra weight. "If the LORD does not build a house, in vain its builders have toiled on it." The man who built God's house in Jerusalem says that the real builder is God.

"House" can mean a building, a household or a family line. In 2 Samuel 7, God promised David that He would build David a house, meaning a family and a kingdom that would last. The word likely carries more than one meaning here, since the second half of the psalm is about children.

Then the picture moves from the house to the whole city. "If the LORD does not keep a city, in vain the watchman has stayed awake." Walls and watchmen matter, and Solomon has no quarrel with the guards. But they cannot do what only God can do.

For us, the point is plain. We should work hard, plan well and do our jobs faithfully. But a career, a marriage, a business or a church built without God will not stand. It may look strong for a while. In the end, only what God builds lasts.

127:2 ***It is*** *in vain for you who rise early to get up, who delay sitting down, who eat the bread of toils; so He gives to His beloved sleep.*

"It is in vain for you who rise early to get up, who delay sitting down, who eat the bread of toils." Picture someone who is up before dawn and still working at midnight, eating meals made bitter by worry. Solomon calls that kind of anxious work "vain," empty, like chasing smoke.

The psalm does not condemn hard work. Proverbs, much of it from Solomon, praises the diligent and warns the lazy (Proverbs 6:6-11). What the psalm warns against is the anxious striving that thinks everything depends on us.

"So He gives to His beloved sleep." Some translations read that He gives to His beloved even while they sleep. Either way, God provides for His people while they rest. Sleep is an act of trust. When you lie down and close your eyes, you admit that you are not in control, and God keeps working anyway. Jesus said something close to this: our heavenly Father feeds the birds, which do not sow or reap, and we are worth much more than they (Matthew 6:26).

"Beloved" may be a small play on Solomon's own name. When Solomon was born, God sent word through the prophet Nathan to call him Jedidiah, which means "beloved of the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:24-25). Many teachers have pointed this out. Whether or not Solomon meant it that way, every child of God is His beloved.

127:3 *Look, the inheritance of the LORD* ***is*** *sons; a reward* ***is*** *the fruit of the womb.*

"Look, the inheritance of the LORD is sons." An inheritance is a gift passed down. The Hebrew word for sons often means children in general. Children are not something we make or earn. They come from God. "A reward is the fruit of the womb," a blessing from God's hand.

This verse speaks against two ideas common in our day. One treats children mainly as a cost or a burden. The other treats them as a product we design to our own wishes. Scripture says they are a gift.

Some who read this verse have longed for children and never had them, or have lost a child, or have walked through years of infertility. Please do not read this verse as a verdict on you. A gift is given freely, and when a gift does not come, that is not a punishment. Childlessness is not a sign of God's displeasure. Scripture tells of godly women who waited long years, such as Sarah, Rachel and Hannah. And some of God's faithful servants never had children at all. Jeremiah was told not to take a wife or have sons or daughters (Jeremiah 16:2). Paul lived single (1 Corinthians 7:7-8), and he called Timothy his true child in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2). To eunuchs, who could never have children, God promised "a name better than sons and than daughters," "an everlasting name," one "which will not be cut off" (Isaiah 56:5). God's love for you does not rise or fall with the size of your family. And many who have no children of their own have been spiritual fathers and mothers to many others.

127:4-5 *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so **are** the sons of **one's** youth. How blessed **is** the man who has filled his quiver with them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with enemies in the gate.*

"Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the sons of one's youth." Arrows extend a warrior's reach. They go where he cannot go. Children raised while their parents are young grow up to stand beside them and carry their lives and values into places and years the parents will never reach.

Arrows also need aiming. A warrior shapes them, cares for them and points them in the right direction. Parents do the same. We cannot control where our children will land, but we can aim them toward God.

"How blessed is the man who has filled his quiver with them." A quiver is the case that holds arrows. The psalm does not give a number. A full quiver is whatever God gives.

"They will not be ashamed when they speak with enemies in the gate." The city gate was where elders sat, business was done and legal cases were settled (Ruth 4:1-11). A man with grown sons standing with him had support when someone accused him or tried to cheat him. His family was his strength in the public square.

The psalm began with work and ends with family, and both rest on the same truth. We build, but God builds the house. We raise children, but they are His gift. So we can do our part faithfully and then sleep in peace.

Psalm 127 Summary

Psalm 127, a Song of Ascents of Solomon, teaches that all our effort is empty without the LORD. Unless He builds the house and guards the city, the builders and watchmen work in vain, and anxious toil cannot win what God gives His beloved even in their sleep. Children are His gift, like arrows in a warrior's hand. Work and family both rest on God, so those who trust Him can rest.

Psalm 127 Study Questions

1. Who is this psalm connected to in its heading, and why is that fitting for the first line? (127:1)

2. What two pictures of human effort does verse 1 use, and what makes them "vain"?

3. What kind of work does verse 2 warn against, and what does God give His beloved?

4. How is sleep an act of trust in God? What keeps you awake at night?

5. What does the psalm call children, and why does that word matter? (127:3)

6. How would you encourage someone who has longed for children and not had them, using what Scripture says about God's love?

7. In what ways are children like arrows in the hand of a warrior? (127:4)

8. What happened at the city gate, and why would sons matter there? (127:5)

9. Is there any area of your life where you are building without the LORD? What would it look like to invite Him into it?

10. How can a church family help aim the "arrows" of the next generation, including children who are not their own?

Psalm 130: Out of the Depths

Scripture

A song of the ascents.

130:1-4 From ***the*** depths I have called to You, LORD. Lord, hear my voice; let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You keep iniquities, LORD, Lord, who will stand? For with You ***is*** forgiveness, so that You may be feared.

130:5-8 I wait for the LORD; my soul waits, and for His word I hope. My soul ***waits*** for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning. Hope, Israel, in the LORD, for with the LORD ***is*** steadfast love, and with Him ***is*** abundant redemption. And He, He will ransom Israel from all his iniquities.

Psalm 130 Preview

Psalm 130 begins at the bottom. The writer is in "the depths," overwhelmed by his own sin, and he cries out to God. He knows that if God kept a record of every sin, no one could stand before Him. But he also knows that God forgives. So he waits for the LORD, longing for Him more than a night watchman longs for the sunrise.

Then he turns from himself to the whole nation. He calls Israel to hope in the LORD, because with Him there is steadfast love and plenty of redemption. The psalm moves from a lonely cry to a shared hope, from guilt to grace. Christians have long counted it among the seven penitential psalms, the psalms of repentance (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143), and we have already studied two of them, Psalms 32 and 51.

Psalm 130 Study

130:1-2 *From **the** depths I have called to You, LORD. Lord, hear my voice; let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.*

Psalm 130 is another Song of Ascents, a pilgrim song (see Psalm 121). The writer is not named.

"From the depths I have called to You, LORD." The depths are deep waters, the picture of being in over your head, sinking and unable to save yourself. Jonah used the same kind of language from inside the fish (Jonah 2:2-3). The psalm does not say what pulled the writer down, but verse 3 shows that his sin is a big part of it.

He does not give up, and he does not turn to anyone else. He cries to the LORD. "Lord, hear my voice; let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." A supplication is a humble, earnest request for mercy. He asks God simply to listen. When you are in the depths, the first prayer is often just that: Lord, please hear me.

130:3 *If You keep iniquities, LORD, Lord, who will stand?*

"If You keep iniquities, LORD, Lord, who will stand?" To keep iniquities is to keep a record of them, the way a merchant marks down every debt in his book.

The question answers itself. No one could stand. If God kept a full account of our sins and judged us by it, every one of us would fall. Paul says the same thing: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The writer does not compare himself with worse sinners. He knows he has no ground of his own to stand on.

Admitting that is where real hope starts. A person who thinks he can stand on his own record sees no need for forgiveness.

130:4 *For with You **is** forgiveness, so that You may be feared.*

"For with You is forgiveness." Everything turns on that line. The record is real, and the guilt is real, but God forgives. Forgiveness is "with" Him. We do not have to pry it out of God, because it belongs to who He is.

Then comes a surprising reason: "That You may be feared." We might expect forgiveness to make people careless about God. The psalm says the opposite. This is the reverent fear of the LORD we met in Psalm 19. People who have been forgiven much do not take God lightly. They love Him and stand in awe of Him, because they know what it cost.

For us, that cost is the cross. God does not shrug at sin. Jesus took the record of our sins and paid it (Colossians 2:13-14). That is why God can forgive and still be just (Romans 3:26).

130:5-6 *I wait for the LORD; my soul waits, and for His word I hope. My soul **waits** for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning.*

"I wait for the LORD; my soul waits, and for His word I hope." Waiting in Scripture means leaning your weight on God and expecting Him to act. The writer's hope rests on "His word," what God has said and promised.

"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning." Picture a guard on the city wall in the last cold hours of the night. He cannot make the sun come up. He can only watch the eastern sky. But he knows morning will come. The writer repeats the line, "watchmen for the morning," because the waiting is long, and the longing is deep.

If you are waiting on God right now, in guilt or grief or trouble, this verse gives you words. The night may be long, but the morning is certain.

130:7 *Hope, Israel, in the LORD, for with the LORD **is** steadfast love, and with Him **is** abundant redemption.*

Now the writer turns outward. "Hope, Israel, in the LORD." What he found for himself, he offers to everyone.

"For with the LORD is steadfast love," His loyal covenant love (see Psalm 23:6), "and with Him is abundant redemption." God has more than enough to buy back and set free all who come to Him, and nobody's sin is too great for it.

130:8 *And He, He will ransom Israel from all his iniquities.*

"And He, He will ransom Israel from all his iniquities." The word "iniquities" comes back from verse 3. This time God is not counting them. He is ransoming Israel from them, all of them.

The New Testament shows how God does it. The angel told Joseph that Mary's son would be called Jesus, "for He Himself will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Paul says Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all lawlessness" (Titus 2:14). Psalm 130 does not name the Redeemer, but it waits for what Jesus came to do.

This promise also points ahead for the nation of Israel. Paul looks forward to a day when "all Israel will be saved," when the Deliverer will remove ungodliness from Jacob (Romans 11:26). God has not finished with His people.

Psalm 130 Summary

Psalm 130 is a Song of Ascents and a cry from the depths. The writer admits that if God kept a record of iniquities, no one could stand, but there is forgiveness with God, and it leads people to fear Him. He waits for the LORD more than watchmen wait for the morning, then calls all Israel to hope in Him, because with the LORD are steadfast love and redemption in abundance. The New Testament shows that this redemption comes through Jesus, who saves His people from their sins.

Psalm 130 Study Questions

1. Where is the writer when he cries out to the LORD, and what does that picture describe? (130:1)

2. What does it mean for God to "keep iniquities," and what is the answer to the question in verse 3?

3. What is "with" God, according to verse 4, and what is its purpose?

4. Why would being forgiven make someone fear God more, not less?

5. What does the writer hope in while he waits? (130:5)

6. Why do you think he compares his waiting to watchmen waiting for the morning? (130:6)

7. What two things does verse 7 say are with the LORD, and why would that give Israel hope?

8. How does the New Testament show us how God redeems His people from their iniquities? (Matthew 1:21; Titus 2:14)

9. Have you ever been in "the depths"? What did you learn about God there?

10. The writer moves from his own need to calling others to hope. Who in your life needs to hear that there is forgiveness with God?

Psalm 133: How Good and Pleasant

Scripture

A song of the ascents. Of David.

133:1-3 Look, how good and how pleasant ***is*** the dwelling of brothers, also together! ***It is*** like the good oil on the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, that runs down on the mouth of his robes; like the dew of Mount Hermon that runs down on the mountains of Zion. For there the LORD has commanded the blessing: life until forever.

Psalm 133 Preview

Psalm 133 is only three verses long, but it paints a picture every church and family needs. This short song of the pilgrims celebrates how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity. Then it gives two pictures to show what that unity is like: the holy oil poured on the head of Aaron the high priest, running down his beard onto his robes, and the heavy dew of Mount Hermon falling on the hills of Zion.

Both pictures are about something that comes down from above. Real unity among believers is a gift from God that flows down on His people, and where it is found, the LORD commands His blessing.

Psalm 133 Study

133:1 *Look, how good and how pleasant **is** the dwelling of brothers, also together!*

The heading reads, "A song of the ascents. Of David." It is one of the pilgrim songs (see Psalm 121), and this one is connected to David, the shepherd who became Israel's king.

"Look, how good and how pleasant is the dwelling of brothers, also together!" "Look" means pay attention. Something good is happening, and the writer wants us to see it. "Good" means right and beneficial. "Pleasant" means sweet and delightful. Unity is both. It is right before God, and it is a joy to live in.

The brothers here are fellow Israelites. Picture the three great feasts, when families from every tribe and town came up to Jerusalem and camped together in and around the city. People from the north and the south, farmers and shepherds, old rivals and strangers, all gathered to worship the same God. David knew how rare that kind of unity was. In his own lifetime the tribes had been split between his house and the house of Saul (2 Samuel 2-3), and later his own son Absalom rebelled against him.

For Christians, the brothers and sisters are all who belong to Christ. Jesus prayed for His followers "that they all may be one" (John 17:21), and Paul urged believers to be "diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Paul's word is "keep." The Spirit gives the unity, and our job is to guard it.

133:2 ***It is*** *like the good oil on the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, that runs down on the mouth of his robes;*

"It is like the good oil on the head." This was no ordinary oil. When Aaron, Moses' brother, was made Israel's first high priest, Moses poured the holy anointing oil on his head (Exodus 29:7; Leviticus 8:12). The oil was made by God's own recipe, with myrrh, cinnamon and other spices, and it was set apart for holy use only (Exodus 30:22-33). To anoint someone was to pour oil on him to set him apart for God's service.

The oil was poured so generously that it was "running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron," and it "runs down on the mouth of his robes," the opening at the neck. The high priest's garments carried, on his shoulders and over his heart, the names of all twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:9-12, 21, 29). So the oil that flowed down from his head reached the names of all God's people. In the same way, God's blessing on His people flows down and covers them all together.

Unity smells sweet, like that fragrant oil. It is also holy. It belongs to God, and it marks His people as set apart for Him.

133:3 *like the dew of Mount Hermon that runs down on the mountains of Zion. For there the LORD has commanded the blessing: life until forever.*

It is "like the dew of Mount Hermon that runs down on the mountains of Zion." Mount Hermon, the high mountain on Israel's northern edge, roughly 120 miles north of Jerusalem, is often capped with snow and known for heavy dew. In a dry land, dew kept plants alive through the summer. Zion, as we saw in Psalm 2, came to stand for Jerusalem itself, the city where God chose to put His name.

So the dew of Hermon did not actually fall on Zion. The picture is poetry. It is as if the rich dew of the north were falling on the hills of the south, bringing life and freshness to the place of worship. Unity is like that. It refreshes everyone it touches.

"For there the LORD has commanded the blessing." Where? In the place where God's people dwell together in unity, in Zion, where they gathered to worship Him. The blessing is "life until forever." The psalm opens with brothers living together and ends with life that never ends.

God commands blessing where His people are united. That does not mean every believer must agree on everything. It means a shared love for God and for each other, a willingness to forgive and to put up with one another (Colossians 3:13-14). Divisions in a church or a family dry things up. Unity brings the dew.

Is there someone in your church or family you need to make peace with? Peace is not the same as pretending, and it does not mean going back into a relationship that is unsafe. Paul says, "if possible, so far as it is from you, being at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18). Sometimes the step toward peace is forgiveness from a safe distance.

Psalm 133 Summary

Psalm 133, a Song of Ascents of David, celebrates how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity. It compares that unity to the holy oil poured on Aaron's head and to the dew of Hermon falling on the mountains of Zion, two blessings that come down from above. Where God's people live in unity, the LORD commands His blessing, life forever, and believers today are called to preserve the unity the Spirit gives.

People and Places

- Aaron: Moses' brother and Israel's first high priest, anointed with holy oil.
- Hermon: Mount Hermon, the high mountain on Israel's northern edge, roughly 120 miles north of Jerusalem.

Psalm 133 Study Questions

1. What two words does David use to describe brothers dwelling together in unity? (133:1)

2. What gatherings might the pilgrims have had in mind when they sang this psalm?

3. What was the anointing oil used for, and who was it poured on? (133:2; Exodus 29:7)

4. Why might it matter that the oil flowed down onto garments that carried the names of the twelve tribes?

5. Where is Mount Hermon, and what was it known for? (133:3)

6. What does the LORD command where His people live in unity? (133:3)

7. Jesus prayed that His followers would be one (John 17:21). Why do you think unity matters so much to Him?

8. What is the difference between unity and everyone agreeing about everything?

9. What tends to divide believers today, and how can we "keep the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3)?

10. Is there a relationship in your family or church that needs peace, where it is safe and wise to pursue it? What step could you take?

Psalm 136: His Steadfast Love Is Forever

Scripture

136:1-3 Give thanks to the LORD, for ***He is*** good, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Give thanks to the God of the gods, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Give thanks to the Lord of the lords, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever.

136:4-9 To Him who alone does great wonders, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. To Him who made the heavens by understanding, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. To Him who spread out the earth over the waters, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. To Him who made great luminaries, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. The sun for rule in the day, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. The moon and stars for rule in the night, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever.

136:10-22 To Him who struck down Egypt in their firstborn, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. And brought out Israel from their midst, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. With a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. To Him who cut the Red Sea into pieces, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. And made Israel pass through the middle of it, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. And shook off Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. To Him who led His people in the wilderness, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. To Him who struck down great kings, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. And killed mighty kings, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Sihon, king of the Amorites, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. And Og, king of Bashan, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. And gave their land ***as*** an inheritance, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. An inheritance to Israel His servant, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever.

136:23-26 Who remembered us in our low condition, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. And tore us away from our foes, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Who gives food to all flesh, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever. Give thanks to the God of the heavens, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever.

Psalm 136 Preview

Psalm 136 is a hymn of thanksgiving with one line that repeats in every verse, twenty-six times: "His steadfast love is forever." It was probably sung by a leader and a congregation, with the leader singing the first half of each verse and the people answering with the refrain. By the end, no one who sang it could forget the point.

Between the refrains, the psalm tells the story of God's love. It starts with creation, the heavens, the earth and the lights in the sky. Then it moves to the exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the journey through the wilderness and the gift of the promised land. It closes with God's care for His people in their low times and His care for every living thing. Every act of God, whether it is making the stars or overthrowing a king, comes from the same steady love.

Psalm 136 Study

136:1-3 *Give thanks to the LORD, for **He is** good, for His steadfast love **is** forever. Give thanks to the God of the gods, for His steadfast love **is** forever. Give thanks to the Lord of the lords, for His steadfast love **is** forever.*

The psalm has no heading and does not name its writer. In Jewish tradition it is called the Great Hallel ("Hallel" means "praise"), and it too came to be used at Passover.

"Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good." The psalm begins with who God is before it says anything about what He has done. God is good, and every good thing He does flows from that.

"His steadfast love is forever." Steadfast love (hesed) is God's loyal, covenant love (see Psalm 23:6). Forever means it never runs out and never ends. The same words were sung when the ark came into Solomon's temple and the glory of the LORD filled the house (2 Chronicles 5:13), and again when the returning exiles laid the foundation of the second temple (Ezra 3:11). God's people sang this line at their highest moments.

Picture how it sounded. A leader calls out, "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good," and the whole crowd answers with the refrain. Then the leader calls out the next line, and the crowd answers again. Nobody needs a songbook. Even a child can join in the second half of every verse.

The first three verses give God three titles: "the LORD," "the God of the gods" and "the Lord of the lords." He is above every so-called god the nations worshiped, and above every ruler on earth.

136:4-9 *To Him who alone does great wonders, for His steadfast love **is** forever. To Him who made the heavens by understanding, for His steadfast love **is** forever. To Him who spread out the earth over the waters, for His steadfast love **is** forever. To Him who made great luminaries, for His steadfast love **is** forever. The sun for rule in the day, for His steadfast love **is** forever. The moon and stars for rule in the night, for His steadfast love **is** forever.*

Now the psalm praises God as Creator. He is the One "who alone does great wonders." He is the One "who made the heavens by understanding," as Proverbs 3:19 also says. He "spread out the earth over the waters." He "made great luminaries," the sun to rule the day and the moon and stars to rule the night.

These lines follow Genesis 1. Other nations bowed to the sun and moon as gods. Israel sang that the sun and moon were made by the LORD and given jobs to do. They rule only because He put them there. The people who sang this psalm could look up at the same sun the Egyptians worshiped and say, our God made that.

And after every line comes the refrain. Creation itself is an act of God's steadfast love. Every sunrise is a reminder that His love has not run out.

136:10-15 *To Him who struck down Egypt in their firstborn, for His steadfast love **is** forever. And brought out Israel from their midst, for His steadfast love **is** forever. With a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, for His steadfast love **is** forever. To Him who cut the Red Sea into pieces, for His steadfast love **is** forever. And made Israel pass through the middle of it, for His steadfast love **is** forever. And shook off Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, for His steadfast love **is** forever.*

Next comes the exodus. He "struck down Egypt in their firstborn," the last and worst plague, when the firstborn of Egypt died and Israel's homes were spared by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12). He "brought out Israel from their midst" "with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm." He "cut the Red Sea into pieces," led Israel through on dry ground and "shook off Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea" (Exodus 14).

Remember what came before. Israel had been slaves in Egypt for generations, forced into hard labor under cruel masters (Exodus 1:11-14). Pharaoh had ordered every Hebrew baby boy thrown into the Nile (Exodus 1:22). Then Egypt was warned plague after plague, and Pharaoh kept refusing to let the people go.

It may seem strange to sing "His steadfast love is forever" after the death of Egypt's firstborn and the drowning of Pharaoh's army. This is a heavy line to sing, and Scripture does not ask us to sing it lightly. God's judgment fell where Pharaoh's cruelty began. His love for His people included rescuing them from their oppressors, and saving the oppressed meant stopping the oppressor.

136:16-22 *To Him who led His people in the wilderness, for His steadfast love **is** forever. To Him who struck down great kings, for His steadfast love **is** forever. And killed mighty kings, for His steadfast love **is** forever. Sihon, king of the Amorites, for His steadfast love **is** forever. And Og, king of Bashan, for His steadfast love **is** forever. And gave their land **as** an inheritance, for His steadfast love **is** forever. An inheritance to Israel His servant, for His steadfast love **is** forever.*

He "led His people in the wilderness." For forty years God fed them with manna, gave them water from the rock and led them with the cloud and the fire. Moses later told Israel that God led them those forty years to humble them and to teach them that man does not live by bread alone (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). Even the hard years in the wilderness were years of His steadfast love.

He "struck down great kings" "and killed mighty kings." The psalm names two: "Sihon, king of the Amorites," "and Og, king of Bashan." These kings came out to fight Israel on the east side of the Jordan before Israel entered Canaan, and God gave Israel the victory (Numbers 21:21-35). Israel remembered these two victories for generations, in song and prayer, as proof that God keeps His promises (Psalm 135:10-12; Nehemiah 9:22; see Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11).

God "gave their land as an inheritance," "an inheritance to Israel His servant." An inheritance is something passed down from a father to his children. The land was God's gift to His people, as He had promised Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21).

136:23-26 *Who remembered us in our low condition, for His steadfast love **is** forever. And tore us away from our foes, for His steadfast love **is** forever. Who gives food to all flesh, for His steadfast love **is** forever. Give thanks to the God of the heavens, for His steadfast love **is** forever.*

The psalm now brings the story close to home. He "remembered us in our low condition," when we were weak, humbled or helpless. The psalm does not say which low time it means. It may be the troubles in the time of the judges, or the exile in Babylon. It fits every low time God's people have known. He "tore us away from our foes."

Then the circle widens to the whole world. He "gives food to all flesh," everything that lives. The God who parted the sea is the same God who puts food on your table.

"Give thanks to the God of the heavens." The call to thanks that opened the psalm closes it. Twenty-six times the people have answered, "His steadfast love is forever."

We can do the same with our own story. Try writing down what God has done in your life, line by line, and after each line say, "His steadfast love is forever." His love was there at creation, at the Red Sea, in the wilderness and in your own low condition. The refrain is still true.

Psalm 136 Summary

Psalm 136 is a song of thanksgiving in which every verse ends with the refrain, "His steadfast love is forever." It praises the LORD as the good God of gods, the Creator of heaven, earth and the lights of the sky. It retells the exodus, the wilderness years and the defeat of Sihon and Og, and it closes with God remembering His people in their low condition and feeding every living thing. From creation to the daily meal, every act of God flows from His steadfast love that is forever.

People and Places

- Red Sea: the sea God divided so Israel could cross on dry ground when they left Egypt (Exodus 14).
- Sihon: king of the Amorites east of the Jordan, defeated by Israel (Numbers 21:21-32).
- Og: king of Bashan, a fertile region east of the Sea of Galilee, defeated by Israel (Numbers 21:33-35).

Psalm 136 Study Questions

1. What line is repeated in every verse of Psalm 136, and how was the psalm probably sung?

2. What three titles does the psalm give God in its first three verses? (136:1-3)

3. What acts of creation does the psalm praise God for? (136:4-9)

4. What events from the exodus does the psalm recall? (136:10-15)

5. How can God's love and God's judgment on Egypt both be true at the same time?

6. Who were Sihon and Og, and what did God give Israel after defeating them? (136:19-22)

7. What does it mean that God "remembered us in our low condition"? (136:23)

8. Why do you think the psalm moves from great events like the Red Sea to something as ordinary as food? (136:25)

9. If you wrote your own version of Psalm 136, what events from your life would you include?

10. How does repeating a truth, as this psalm does, help it sink into our hearts? What truth do you need to keep repeating to yourself?

Psalm 139: You Have Searched Me and Known Me

Scripture

To the choirmaster. Of David. A psalm.

139:1-6 LORD, You have searched me and known ***me***. You, You know my sitting and my rising; You understand my thought from a distance. My traveling and my lying down You sift, and ***with*** all my ways You are acquainted. For there is not a word on my tongue; look, LORD, You know all of it. Behind and in front You have hemmed me in, and You have placed Your palm on me. ***Such*** knowledge ***is too*** wonderful for me; it is set on high; I am not able ***to reach*** to it.

139:7-12 Where shall I go from Your Spirit? And where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend ***to the*** heavens, You ***are*** there; and ***if*** I make my bed ***in*** Sheol, look, You ***are there***. ***If*** I take up the wings of dawn, ***if*** I dwell at the end of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right ***hand*** will grasp me. And I said, "Surely darkness will crush me, and the light around me ***will be*** night," even darkness is not dark to You, and night shines like the day; the darkness ***is*** as the light.

139:13-18 For You, You created my kidneys; You wove me together in the womb of my mother. I will give thanks to You, because ***in*** awesome ***ways*** I am distinguished; wonderful ***are*** Your works, and my soul knows ***it*** exceedingly. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, woven in the lower parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance, and on Your scroll all of them were written, ***the*** days ***that*** were formed, and to it ***was*** one among them. And to me, how precious are Your thoughts, God! How vast are their sums! I will count them; they are more numerous than sand. I awake, and I ***am*** still with You.

139:19-24 If only You would slay the wicked, God! And men of bloodshed, depart from me! They speak of You for wicked scheming; lifted up for falsehood ***are*** Your enemies. Do I not hate those who hate You, LORD? And those who rise up against You, do I ***not*** loathe? ***With*** the completeness of hatred I hate them; they have become enemies to me. Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. And see if ***there is*** a way of pain in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

Psalm 139 Preview

In Psalm 139, David stands amazed at how completely God knows him. God knows when he sits and when he stands, what he is thinking and what he will say before he says it. There is nowhere David could go to get away from God, not the heights of heaven, not the place of the dead and not the far side of the sea. Even darkness cannot hide him. And God has known him from the very beginning, since before he was born, when God was forming him in his mother's womb.

Then the psalm takes a sharp turn. David asks God to deal with the wicked, the men of bloodshed who speak against God. And then he turns the searchlight back on himself: "Search me, God, and know my heart." The psalm begins with God searching David and ends with David asking God to keep searching. Being fully known by God can be frightening, but for those who belong to Him, it is a safe place to be.

Psalm 139 Study

139:1 *LORD, You have searched me and known **me**.*

The heading reads, "To the choirmaster. Of David. A psalm." The choirmaster, the leader of the music in Israel's worship (see Psalm 8), received this psalm, so it was meant to be sung in worship and not only prayed alone.

"LORD, You have searched me and known me." To search is to dig through something carefully, the way you would search a house or a field. God has gone through David's whole life and knows all of it. David says this without fear, in prayer, speaking directly to God. The rest of the psalm unpacks this one verse.

139:2-4 *You, You know my sitting and my rising; You understand my thought from a distance. My traveling and my lying down You sift, and **with** all my ways You are acquainted. For there is not a word on my tongue; look, LORD, You know all of it.*

David gives examples. "You, You know my sitting and my rising." God knows our ordinary moments, the start and end of each day. "You understand my thought from a distance." God does not need to be close to us to read our minds. He knows our thoughts from heaven.

"My traveling and my lying down You sift." God examines where we go and when we rest, the way grain is sifted. "With all my ways You are acquainted." He knows them closely, the way you know someone you have lived with for years.

"For there is not a word on my tongue; look, LORD, You know all of it." God knows what we are going to say before we say it. Jesus told His disciples, "your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). That can humble us, since God hears the unkind words we hold back as well as the ones we speak. It can also comfort us. When we do not know how to put our prayer into words, God already knows.

139:5-6 *Behind and in front You have hemmed me in, and You have placed Your palm on me. **Such** knowledge **is too** wonderful for me; it is set on high; I am not able **to reach** to it.*

"Behind and in front You have hemmed me in, and You have placed Your palm on me." God surrounds David on every side. That could sound like being trapped, but David means it as being protected. God's hand on him is a hand of care.

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is set on high; I am not able to reach to it." David cannot get his mind around it. A God who knows everything about every person who has ever lived is beyond our understanding. Rather than trying to figure it out, David worships.

139:7-8 *Where shall I go from Your Spirit? And where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend **to the** heavens, You **are** there; and **if** I make my bed **in** Sheol, look, You **are there**.*

"Where shall I go from Your Spirit? And where shall I flee from Your presence?" Here "Spirit" and "presence" are two words for one idea. David has no plan to run away. His point is that there is no place where God is not.

"If I ascend to the heavens, You are there; and if I make my bed in Sheol, look, You are there." Sheol is the place of the dead (see Psalm 16). The highest place and the lowest place both belong to God. Even death cannot take us out of His reach.

Jonah tried to flee "from before the LORD" by boarding a ship for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). It did not work. God met him in the storm and in the depths of the sea.

139:9-10 ***If*** *I take up the wings of dawn, **if** I dwell at the end of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right **hand** will grasp me.*

"If I take up the wings of dawn." The dawn rises in the east. "If I dwell at the end of the sea." For Israel, the sea lay to the west. Even if David could fly as fast as the morning light from one end of the world to the other, he would find God already there.

"Even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will grasp me." For God's children, His presence everywhere means His hand is guiding us and holding on to us, wherever we end up. A believer who moves to a new city, goes to the mission field or lies in a hospital bed far from home is never beyond God's hand.

139:11-12 *And I said, "Surely darkness will crush me, and the light around me **will be** night," even darkness is not dark to You, and night shines like the day; the darkness **is** as the light.*

"And I said, 'Surely darkness will crush me.'" Darkness can feel like it covers us and presses down on us. It also hides things from people. Some sins are committed in the dark for that reason. And sometimes darkness overwhelms us in another way, in seasons of depression, grief or fear when we feel lost.

"Even darkness is not dark to You, and night shines like the day." God sees in the dark as well as in the light. "The darkness is as the light." No one can hide sin from Him, and no one is lost in darkness so deep that God cannot see them. Hebrews 4:13 says, "there is no creature hidden before Him."

139:13 *For You, You created my kidneys; You wove me together in the womb of my mother.*

"For You, You created my kidneys." The word "For" explains why God knows David so well. God made him. In Hebrew thought the kidneys stood for the deepest part of a person, the inner life. "You wove me together in the womb of my mother." God wove David together like a weaver making cloth, thread by thread.

This verse tells us plainly that God is at work in the womb. The child growing there is a person God is forming. That is why Christians have long treated unborn life as precious. God spoke the same way to Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5).

Some readers carry deep grief here. If you have lost a child through miscarriage or stillbirth, hear this clearly: that loss was not your fault, and God does not hold it against you. He formed your little one, He knew him or her, and He holds every little one in His care. Some readers also carry guilt over a past abortion. For you there is forgiveness with God (Psalm 130:4). He already knows, and He does not turn away anyone who comes to Him.

139:14 *I will give thanks to You, because **in** awesome **ways** I am distinguished; wonderful **are** Your works, and my soul knows **it** exceedingly.*

"I will give thanks to You, because in awesome ways I am distinguished;" "Awesome" means in a way that inspires awe. "Distinguished" means set apart, made with care. When David thinks about how God made him, he cannot help giving thanks.

"Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it exceedingly." This is a good word for anyone who struggles with how they look, how they were made or what others have said about them. God made you with care. You are His work. That does not mean we never suffer in our bodies, since we live in a fallen world with sickness and pain. But your worth comes from your Maker, not from your appearance or your abilities.

139:15-16 *My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, woven in the lower parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance, and on Your scroll all of them were written, **the** days **that** were formed, and to it **was** one among them.*

"My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, woven in the lower parts of the earth." "Frame" means bones, the skeleton. No one could see inside the womb in David's day, but God could. "The lower parts of the earth" is a poetic way of describing that hidden place. It is as hidden as the deepest part of the ground. "Woven" translates a word used for fine embroidery.

"Your eyes saw my unformed substance." Before David had a shape, God saw him. "On Your scroll all of them were written, the days that were formed," before even one of them came. God knew the length and the course of David's life before David lived a single day. Our days are known to God and held in His hand.

That is a comfort when life seems out of control. God is not surprised by your hard season. Every day of your life was known to Him before it came. That is true of the little one who lived only a few days, or none outside the womb. Not one of those days was hidden from God.

139:17-18 *And to me, how precious are Your thoughts, God! How vast are their sums! I will count them; they are more numerous than sand. I awake, and I **am** still with You.*

"How precious are Your thoughts, God! How vast are their sums!" David has been thinking about God's thoughts toward him, and he cannot count them. "I will count them; they are more numerous than sand." Think of trying to count the grains of sand on a beach.

"I awake, and I am still with You." David may mean he fell asleep counting and woke up still with God. Or he may mean that every morning, God is still there. Both readings carry the same comfort: God's presence does not end when we sleep, and it will not end when we wake up on the other side of death.

139:19-20 *If only You would slay the wicked, God! And men of bloodshed, depart from me! They speak of You for wicked scheming; lifted up for falsehood **are** Your enemies.*

Now the psalm turns suddenly. "If only You would slay the wicked, God! And men of bloodshed, depart from me!" After so much wonder, these lines can shock us. But they follow from what came before. If God sees everything, He sees the violent and the cruel too. David longs for God to act.

"They speak of You for wicked scheming; lifted up for falsehood are Your enemies." David's main concern is God's honor. These men oppose God and use His name for lies. David wants God's holiness and justice upheld.

139:21-22 *Do I not hate those who hate You, LORD? And those who rise up against You, do I **not** loathe? **With** the completeness of hatred I hate them; they have become enemies to me.*

"Do I not hate those who hate You, LORD?" "With the completeness of hatred I hate them; they have become enemies to me." These are hard words. David does not pick up a sword here. He brings his anger to the God who has just searched his own heart, and he leaves the judging to Him, as Paul tells us to leave room for God's wrath (Romans 12:19). He also refuses to be neutral about evil that mocks God's name.

Jesus took us further. He taught us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44), and on the cross He prayed for the men who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked and wants them to turn and live (Ezekiel 33:11), and Saul of Tarsus, once His enemy, became His servant. So these verses are not permission for us to hate people. We can hate evil and still pray for evildoers to repent. (For more on lines like these, see Overview, Hard Lines in the Psalms.)

139:23-24 *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. And see if **there is** a way of pain in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.*

Then David turns the light on himself. "Search me, God, and know my heart." He began the psalm by saying God had searched him (139:1). Now he asks for it. "Test me and know my anxious thoughts." To test is to try, like testing metal in a fire. His anxious thoughts are the worries and troubled thoughts that crowd the mind.

"And see if there is a way of pain in me." A way of pain is a hurtful way, one that grieves God and others. David has just spoken about the wicked. He knows he could be wrong, and that evil can hide in his own heart too. So he asks God to show him. That is the right place to end a prayer about enemies. Before we ask God to deal with others, we ask Him to deal with us.

"And lead me in the everlasting way." The everlasting way is the path that lasts, the way of life with God that goes on forever. He wants to be searched, and then he wants to be led.

We can pray these last two verses every day. They are a humble prayer for anyone who wants to walk with God, and the God who knows everything about us is the God who leads us home.

Psalm 139 Summary

In Psalm 139, David praises God for knowing him completely, his sitting and rising, his thoughts and his words before he speaks them. There is nowhere he can go from God's presence, not heaven, not Sheol, not the far side of the sea and not even the darkness. God formed him in his mother's womb and wrote all his days on His scroll before one of them came. David asks God to judge the wicked who hate Him, then ends by asking God to search his own heart and lead him in the everlasting way.

Psalm 139 Study Questions

1. What does David say God knows about him in verses 1-4?

2. How does David respond to God's knowledge in verse 6?

3. What places does David name where he could not escape God's presence? (139:7-12)

4. Does it comfort you or unsettle you that God knows everything about you? Why?

5. What does David say God did in his mother's womb? (139:13-16)

6. How should verses 13-16 shape the way we think about unborn life and about our own worth?

7. What is written on God's scroll, according to verse 16?

8. Why do you think David turns to the wicked in verses 19-22, and how should Christians read these verses in light of Matthew 5:44?

9. What does David ask God to do in verses 23-24?

10. Take a few minutes to pray verses 23-24 for yourself. What "anxious thoughts" or "way of pain" might God want to show you?

Psalm 145: Great Is the LORD

Scripture

A praise of David.

145:1-7 I will exalt You, my God, the King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great ***is*** the LORD and greatly to be praised, and of His greatness there is no searching. Generation to generation will extol Your works, and Your mighty deeds they will declare. The splendor of the glory of Your majesty and the matters of Your wonders I will meditate on. And the might of Your awesome deeds they will tell, and Your greatness, I will recount it. The remembrance of the abundance of Your goodness they will pour forth, and ***of*** Your righteousness they will shout for joy.

145:8-13 The LORD ***is*** gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in steadfast love. The LORD ***is*** good to all, and His compassions ***are*** over all His works. All Your works will give thanks to You, LORD, and Your faithful ones will bless You. The glory of Your kingdom they will tell, and Your might they will speak of, to make known to the sons of mankind His mighty deeds and the glory of the splendor of His kingdom. Your kingdom ***is*** a kingdom of all ages, and Your dominion ***is*** in every generation and generation.

145:14-21 The LORD sustains all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all wait for You, and You give them their food in its time. You open Your hand and satisfy every living thing ***with*** desire. The LORD ***is*** righteous in all His ways and faithful in all His works. The LORD ***is*** near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. The desire of those who fear Him He will do, and their cry for help He will hear, and He will save them. The LORD keeps all who love Him, and all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless the name of His holiness forever and ever.

Psalm 145 Preview

Psalm 145 is David's hymn of praise to God as King. He promises to bless God's name every day and forever, and he calls each generation to tell the next about God's mighty works. Then he describes God's character: gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, great in steadfast love and good to all. God's kingdom is everlasting, and His care reaches every creature.

The last part of the psalm shows the King bending down to help. He lifts up those who fall, feeds every living thing and comes near to all who call on Him in truth. The psalm ends with David's own mouth praising the LORD and a call for all flesh to join him. It is the last psalm in the book with David's name in the heading, and it leads straight into the five psalms of praise that close the Psalms.

Psalm 145 Study

145:1-2 *I will exalt You, my God, the King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever.*

The heading reads, "A praise of David." Psalm 145 is the only psalm whose heading uses that word for praise (Hebrew tehillah). It is the same word that, in its plural form, became the Hebrew name for the whole book: Tehillim, "Praises."

The psalm is also an acrostic. Each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from the first letter to the last, like an A to Z of praise. The standard Hebrew text is missing the line for one letter (nun), between verses 13 and 14. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the ancient Greek translation include a line there that reads much like verse 17. English versions differ on whether to print it. The SLB follows the standard Hebrew text and does not print it. Whichever text is original, nothing the psalm teaches about God is lost, since that line says much what verse 17 says in every Bible.

"I will exalt You, my God, the King." To exalt is to lift high in praise. David was Israel's king, but he calls God "the King." David knew that his own throne belonged to a greater King. "I will bless Your name forever and ever."

"Every day I will bless You." Praise is not saved for special days. It belongs to ordinary Tuesdays as much as to feast days. And it goes on "forever and ever." David expects to keep praising God long after this life is over.

145:3 *Great **is** the LORD and greatly to be praised, and of His greatness there is no searching.*

"Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised." God's greatness calls for praise, and much of it. "Of His greatness there is no searching." We will never reach the bottom of who God is. We can study Him all our lives and still find more. That means worship will never get old, now or in eternity.

145:4-7 *Generation to generation will extol Your works, and Your mighty deeds they will declare. The splendor of the glory of Your majesty and the matters of Your wonders I will meditate on. And the might of Your awesome deeds they will tell, and Your greatness, I will recount it. The remembrance of the abundance of Your goodness they will pour forth, and **of** Your righteousness they will shout for joy.*

"Generation to generation will extol Your works." Faith is meant to be handed down. Grandparents tell parents, parents tell children and children tell their children. Each generation can say, this is what God has done for us.

David will "meditate" on "the splendor of the glory of Your majesty" and on "the matters of Your wonders." Others will tell "the might of Your awesome deeds," and of God's greatness David says, "I will recount it." Some praise is quiet thought. Some is spoken out loud.

"The remembrance of the abundance of Your goodness they will pour forth." The Hebrew word behind "pour forth" pictures words bubbling up like a spring. When people remember God's

goodness, they cannot keep quiet about it. "Of Your righteousness they will shout for joy," His perfect rightness in all He does.

We should ask ourselves: are we passing our faith on? Our children and grandchildren, and the younger believers in our churches, need to hear what God has done in our lives.

145:8-9 *The LORD **is** gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in steadfast love. The LORD **is** good to all, and His compassions **are** over all His works.*

"The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in steadfast love." These are the words God proclaimed about Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:6; see Psalm 103:8). The Old Testament comes back to them often (Numbers 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).

Gracious means God gives what we do not deserve. Compassionate means He feels for us in our weakness and holds back the judgment we do deserve. Slow to anger means He is patient. God does get angry at sin, but His anger is slow, and His steadfast love abounds.

"The LORD is good to all, and His compassions are over all His works." God's goodness reaches every creature, believers and unbelievers alike. Jesus said the Father causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45).

145:10-13 *All Your works will give thanks to You, LORD, and Your faithful ones will bless You. The glory of Your kingdom they will tell, and Your might they will speak of, to make known to the sons of mankind His mighty deeds and the glory of the splendor of His kingdom. Your kingdom **is** a kingdom of all ages, and Your dominion **is** in every generation and generation.*

"All Your works will give thanks to You, LORD, and Your faithful ones will bless You." All creation thanks God by being what He made it to be. His faithful ones, His saints, bless Him with their words.

"The glory of Your kingdom they will tell." They talk about it so that "the sons of mankind," all people, will know about God's mighty acts and the majesty of His reign. Praise is meant to be overheard. When believers speak of God's kingdom, the world is listening.

"Your kingdom is a kingdom of all ages, and Your dominion is in every generation and generation." Earthly kingdoms rise and fall. David's own dynasty would one day lose its throne for a time. But God's kingdom never ends. Jesus preached that kingdom, and the New Testament looks ahead to the day when He returns and "The kingdoms of the world have become those of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign to the ages of the ages" (Revelation 11:15).

145:14-16 *The LORD sustains all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all wait for You, and You give them their food in its time. You open Your hand and satisfy every living thing **with** desire.*

Now David shows what kind of King God is. "The LORD sustains all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down." Earthly kings often ignore the weak. This King stoops to lift them up. If you have fallen, or if life has bent you low, the King of heaven is the One who helps you stand again.

"The eyes of all wait for You, and You give them their food in its time." Picture a field of animals all looking up to the One who feeds them. "You open Your hand and satisfy every living thing with desire." Every meal is a gift from God's open hand. Christians have long prayed these verses before meals. Martin Luther put them in the mealtime prayer of his Small Catechism. We look to Him, and He provides.

145:17-20 *The LORD **is** righteous in all His ways and faithful in all His works. The LORD **is** near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. The desire of those who fear Him He will do, and their cry for help He will hear, and He will save them. The LORD keeps all who love Him, and all the wicked He will destroy.*

"The LORD is righteous in all His ways and faithful in all His works." God never does wrong, and He never breaks faith. Even when we do not understand His ways, we can trust His character.

"The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth." The great King of verse 1 is not far away. He is near. But David adds a condition: "in truth." God is near to those who call on Him sincerely, not to those who only use His name.

"The desire of those who fear Him He will do." Those who fear the LORD come to want what He wants, and He gives it. "Their cry for help He will hear, and He will save them." God listens and acts.

"The LORD keeps all who love Him, and all the wicked He will destroy." God's love and His justice stand side by side. He keeps His people safe, and He will bring an end to evil. The wicked are those who will not turn to Him. And the same verses hold the door open: He is near to all who call on Him in truth.

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

145:21 *My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless the name of His holiness forever and ever.*

"My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD." David's own praise opened the psalm, and it closes it. Then he calls for more: "Let all flesh bless the name of His holiness forever and ever." His personal praise becomes a call to the whole world.

Psalm 145 hands us on to the last five psalms of the book. David's voice opens the door, and the rest of creation is about to join in.

Psalm 145 Summary

Psalm 145, a praise of David, is an acrostic that praises God as King. David promises to bless Him every day, calls each generation to tell the next of His works, and describes Him in the words of Exodus 34:6 as gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and great in steadfast love. The King lifts up those who fall, feeds every living thing and is near to all who call on Him in truth. The psalm ends with David's praise and a call for all flesh to bless God's holy name forever.

Psalm 145 Study Questions

1. What does David call God in verse 1, and why is that striking coming from a king?

2. What is an acrostic, and why might David have written this psalm that way?

3. What does "of His greatness there is no searching" mean, and how does that make worship something that never gets old? (145:3)

4. What is one generation supposed to do for the next, according to verse 4?

5. Who has passed the faith on to you, and to whom are you passing it on?

6. What do the words of verse 8 tell us about God, and where did God first speak them?

7. What does the LORD do for those who fall and those who are bowed down? (145:14)

8. Verses 15-16 describe God feeding every living thing. How might these verses change the way you pray before a meal?

9. What does it mean to call on the LORD "in truth"? (145:18)

10. What part of God's character in this psalm do you most need to remember right now, and why?

Psalm 146: Do Not Trust in Nobles

Scripture

146:1-2 Praise ***the*** LORD! Praise the LORD, my soul! I will praise the LORD in my life; I will sing praises to my God while I still ***exist***.

146:3-4 Do not trust in nobles, in a son of man, who has no deliverance. His breath goes out; he returns to his ground; in that day his plans perish.

146:5-9 How blessed ***is he*** whose help ***is*** the God of Jacob, whose hope ***is*** on the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that ***is*** in them, who keeps faithfulness forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets free the prisoners; the LORD opens ***the eyes of*** the blind; the LORD raises up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous; the LORD watches over the sojourners; the fatherless and widow He helps up, and the way of the wicked He makes crooked.

146:10 The LORD will reign forever, your God, Zion, to generation and generation. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 146 Preview

Psalm 146 opens the last five psalms in the book, a closing set of hymns of praise. The writer promises to praise God as long as he lives. Then he gives a warning: do not put your trust in princes. Even the most powerful leader is a mortal man. He will die, and his plans will die with him.

In contrast, the person whose help is the God of Jacob is blessed. The psalm piles up reasons. God made heaven and earth. He keeps faith forever. He brings justice to the oppressed, feeds the hungry, frees prisoners, opens blind eyes, lifts up the bowed down and protects strangers, orphans and widows. Princes come and go, but the LORD will reign forever.

Psalm 146 Study

146:1-2 *Praise **the** LORD! Praise the LORD, my soul! I will praise the LORD in my life; I will sing praises to my God while I still **exist**.*

The psalm has no heading in the Hebrew, so we do not know who wrote it. The Greek translation of the Old Testament links it with Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets of the return from exile, but that title is not part of the Hebrew text.

"Praise the LORD!" In Hebrew this is two words, Hallelu Yah, which give us our word "hallelujah." "Hallelu" means "praise," spoken to a group, and "Yah" is a short form of God's name, the LORD. So hallelujah is a call to everyone listening to praise the LORD. Psalms 146 to 150 all begin and end with it, and many call them the Hallelujah Psalms.

Then the writer speaks to himself: "Praise the LORD, my soul!" Before he calls anyone else to praise, he stirs up his own heart.

"I will praise the LORD in my life; I will sing praises to my God while I still exist." He commits his whole life to praise, as long as he has breath. That sets up the warning that follows. He knows his life will end, and so will everyone else's.

146:3-4 *Do not trust in nobles, in a son of man, who has no deliverance. His breath goes out; he returns to his ground; in that day his plans perish.*

"Do not trust in nobles, in a son of man, who has no deliverance." Nobles are princes and rulers, kings, leaders, the powerful people of the world. The psalm does not call them all evil; it says they cannot save. "Deliverance" here means rescue or help, the kind of deliverance only God can give.

Why not trust them? "His breath goes out; he returns to his ground." The most powerful ruler on earth will one day breathe his last and be buried. God told Adam, "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). "In that day his plans perish." His plans, his promises and his big ideas all end at his grave.

The warning fits every age, ours included. People put enormous hope in politicians, celebrities and experts. We should pray for our leaders and respect them (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and voting and good government matter. But no leader can give what only God can give. When we look to a human being as our savior, we will be let down.

146:5-6 *How blessed **is he** whose help **is** the God of Jacob, whose hope **is** on the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that **is** in them, who keeps faithfulness forever,*

"How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is on the LORD his God." The God of Jacob kept His promises to a flawed man (see Psalm 46), and He will be faithful to us.

Unlike nobles, this God is the One "who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them," Princes rule a small piece of land for a short time. God made everything and rules it all.

He is the One "who keeps faithfulness forever." A prince's promise lasts as long as he does, and sometimes not that long. God's faithfulness never ends. What He promised to Abraham, to David and to us in Christ, He will do.

New Testament links: Acts 14:15 (alluded to)

146:7 *who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets free the prisoners;*

Now come the reasons, one after another. God "executes justice for the oppressed." He sees those who are crushed by others, and He will set things right. He "gives food to the hungry." And "the LORD sets free the prisoners."

These were the people princes often ignored or even caused to suffer. The LORD is a King of a different kind, and He cares for the people at the bottom.

146:8-9 *the LORD opens **the eyes of** the blind; the LORD raises up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous; the LORD watches over the sojourners; the fatherless and widow He helps up, and the way of the wicked He makes crooked.*

"The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LORD raises up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous." The name of the LORD begins line after line, as though the writer wants us to hear it over and over.

It is hard to read these verses without thinking of Jesus. He fed the hungry crowds. He opened the eyes of the blind. He straightened a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-13). When John the Baptist sent to ask whether He was the One, Jesus pointed to His works: the blind see, the lame walk and the poor hear the good news (Matthew 11:4-5). Jesus did what Psalm 146 says the LORD does.

"The LORD watches over the sojourners; the fatherless and widow He helps up." Sojourners were foreigners living in Israel with no land and no family to protect them. The fatherless and the widow had lost their protector. God's law commanded Israel to care for all three (Deuteronomy 10:18-19; 24:19-21), because God Himself cares for them. James says pure religion includes visiting orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27). If God cares for them, so should His people.

"And the way of the wicked He makes crooked." To make it crooked is to block it or turn it upside down. The road of the wicked looks smooth, but God will turn it so it leads to ruin.

146:10 *The LORD will reign forever, your God, Zion, to generation and generation. Praise **the** LORD!*

"The LORD will reign forever, your God, Zion, to generation and generation." Princes die and their kingdoms pass away. The LORD's reign never ends. Zion, the city of God (see Psalm 2), will see generation after generation, and the same God will be King over all of them.

The New Testament looks forward to the day when that reign is seen by all, when Christ returns and rules over the earth (Revelation 11:15). God has not forgotten Zion or His promises to Israel. Until then, we can trust Him with everything princes cannot handle.

And the last word is the first word: "Praise the LORD!"

Psalm 146 Summary

Psalm 146 is the first of the five Hallelujah Psalms that close the book. The writer vows to praise God all his life and warns against trusting princes, who die and whose plans die with them. Blessed is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, the Maker of all things, who keeps faith forever and cares for the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoner, the blind, the stranger, the orphan and the widow. Jesus did these very works, and the LORD, Zion's God, will reign forever.

Psalm 146 Study Questions

1. What does "Praise the LORD!" mean in Hebrew, and where in Psalms 146-150 does it appear?

2. Why does the writer say not to trust in nobles? (146:3-4)

3. In what ways do people today put their trust in "princes," and what happens when those leaders fail?

4. How can we respect and pray for our leaders without trusting them as our savior? (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

5. What is the person called whose help is the God of Jacob, and why do you think the psalm names Jacob? (146:5)

6. List the things the LORD does for people in need in verses 7-9. Which one stands out to you?

7. How did Jesus show in His ministry the same care that verses 7-9 describe?

8. Who were the "sojourners," "the fatherless and widow," and why does God care about them? (146:9)

9. How long will the LORD reign, according to verse 10?

10. Who in your community is like the strangers, orphans and widows of verse 9, and how could you show them God's care?

Psalm 148: All Creation, Praise Him

Scripture

148:1-6 Praise ***the*** LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise Him in the heights. Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His armies. Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all stars of light. Praise Him, heavens of the heavens, and the waters which ***are*** above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for He, He commanded, and they were created. And He established them forever and ever; a decree He gave, and it will not pass away.

148:7-12 Praise the LORD from the earth, sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and smoke, wind of storm doing His word, the mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, the living things and all livestock, moving things and winged birds, kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all judges of the earth, young men and also virgins, elders with youths.

148:13-14 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted; His splendor ***is*** above earth and heavens. And He has raised up a horn for His people, praise for all His faithful ones, for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 148 Preview

Psalm 148 is a hymn that calls the whole universe to praise the LORD. It starts at the top, in the heavens, with angels, the sun, moon and stars and the highest skies. Then it comes down to earth and calls on sea creatures and the deep, fire and hail, snow and wind, mountains and trees, animals and birds, and finally every kind of person, from kings to little children.

The reason for all this praise is simple. God made everything, and His name alone is exalted. At the very end, the psalm narrows to God's own people, Israel, whom He has made strong and brought near to Himself. All creation praises God as its Maker. His people praise Him as their Redeemer too.

Psalm 148 Study

148:1-2 *Praise **the** LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise Him in the heights. Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His armies.*

Like the other closing psalms, Psalm 148 has no heading and begins with "Praise the LORD!" (see Psalm 146).

"Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise Him in the heights." The psalm starts as high as it can go. The first voices called to praise are "all His angels" and "all His armies," the armies of heaven (see Psalm 24). Angels already praise God day and night (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). The psalm invites them to keep going.

148:3-4 *Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all stars of light. Praise Him, heavens of the heavens, and the waters which **are** above the heavens.*

"Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all stars of light." The sun, moon and stars cannot speak, so how can they praise God? They praise Him by shining, by doing what He made them to do. Psalm 19 says the heavens are recounting the glory of God without saying a word.

"Praise Him, heavens of the heavens, and the waters which are above the heavens." The waters above the heavens take us back to Genesis 1:6-8, when God separated the waters above the expanse from the waters below it. Whatever exactly those upper waters are, the point is that every part of the sky, as high as anyone can imagine, belongs to God and owes Him praise.

148:5-6 *Let them praise the name of the LORD, for He, He commanded, and they were created. And He established them forever and ever; a decree He gave, and it will not pass away.*

Now comes the reason: "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for He, He commanded, and they were created." God did not need tools or help. He spoke, and the universe came into being (Genesis 1:3; Hebrews 11:3). John tells us that all things came into being through the Word, the Son of God (John 1:1-3).

"And He established them forever and ever; a decree He gave, and it will not pass away." God made the heavens, and He keeps them in place. The sun rises every morning because God set it on its course. Hebrews 1:3 says the Son is "upholding all things by the word of His power." The order of the universe is a daily sign of God's faithfulness.

148:7-8 *Praise the LORD from the earth, sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and smoke, wind of storm doing His word,*

The psalm comes down to earth. "Praise the LORD from the earth, sea monsters and all deeps." Sea monsters are the great creatures of the ocean. In Israel's world, the deep sea was a fearful place, full of danger. But the psalm calls even the deepest waters and their wildest creatures to praise God. Nothing is outside His rule.

"Fire and hail, snow and smoke, wind of storm doing His word." Even the weather obeys God. A storm that frightens us is still doing what God tells it. When Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, His disciples asked who this was, that even the wind and the sea obeyed Him (Matthew 8:27).

148:9-10 *the mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, the living things and all livestock, moving things and winged birds,*

"The mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, the living things and all livestock, moving things and winged birds." The list moves from the land itself to the trees, then to wild animals, farm animals, crawling creatures and birds. It sounds like a walk through the days of creation in Genesis 1.

Every living thing gives glory to God by being what He made it to be. A cedar praises God by growing tall. A bird praises Him by flying and singing. When we enjoy a mountain view or a bird at the feeder, we are watching creation praise its Maker.

148:11-12 *kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all judges of the earth, young men and also virgins, elders with youths.*

Finally the psalm comes to people. "Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all judges of the earth." The powerful are not exempt. Kings and judges answer to a higher King and Judge. "Young men and also virgins, elders with youths." Young and old, men and women, rulers and ordinary people, all are called to the same praise.

Nobody is too important to praise God, and nobody is too small. Paul looks forward to the day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess "that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

148:13 *Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted; His splendor **is** above earth and heavens.*

"Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted." The psalm repeats the call from verse 5 and gives a second reason. God made all things, and God alone is supreme. "His splendor is above earth and heavens." The psalm has just walked through earth and heaven. God's splendor is higher than all of it.

148:14 *And He has raised up a horn for His people, praise for all His faithful ones, for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise **the** LORD!*

"He has raised up a horn for His people." In the Bible, a horn is a picture of strength, like the horns of a strong animal. To lift up a horn for His people is to make them strong and victorious. Many see a hint of the Messiah here. When John the Baptist was born, his father Zacharias praised God, who "has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant" (Luke 1:69), speaking of Jesus.

He is "praise for all His faithful ones, for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him." All creation praises God as Creator, but Israel had a special reason. God chose them and brought them near to Himself. Through Israel's Messiah, the nations who were once far off have been brought near too (Ephesians 2:13). God has not forgotten Israel. Paul says they are still "beloved on account of the fathers," for "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:28-29).

"Praise the LORD!" From the highest angel to the smallest child, the call is the same.

Psalm 148 Summary

Psalm 148 calls all creation to praise the LORD. From the heavens it calls the angels, the sun, moon and stars and the highest heavens, because God commanded and they were created. From the earth it calls the sea creatures and the weather, mountains, trees and animals, and then kings,

judges and all people, young and old, because His name alone is exalted. It ends with God's own people Israel, for whom He has lifted up a horn of strength, a people near to Him.

Psalm 148 Study Questions

1. Who and what are called to praise the LORD from the heavens? (148:1-4)

2. How can things that cannot speak, such as the sun and stars, praise God?

3. What reason does verse 5 give for creation's praise?

4. What does it mean that "a decree He gave, and it will not pass away"? (148:6)

5. Why do you think the psalm includes storms, sea monsters and the deep in its call to praise? (148:7-8)

6. Who are the people called to praise God in verses 11-12, and what does that list teach us?

7. What does "horn" mean in verse 14, and how does Luke 1:69 use the same picture?

8. What makes God's people's praise different from the praise of the rest of creation? (148:14)

9. When was the last time something in creation moved you to praise God? Describe it.

10. How could you praise God this week in an ordinary moment outdoors, at work or at home?

Psalm 150: Let Everything Praise the LORD

Scripture

150:1-2 Praise ***the*** LORD! Praise God in His holy place; praise Him in the expanse of His strength. Praise Him for His mighty deeds; praise Him according to the abundance of His greatness.

150:3-5 Praise Him with a blast of ***the*** ram's horn; praise Him with harp and lyre. Praise Him with tambourine and dancing; praise Him with strings and flute. Praise Him with cymbals of sound; praise Him with cymbals of shouting.

150:6 Let everything that has breath praise ***the*** LORD. Praise ***the*** LORD!

Psalm 150 Preview

Psalm 150 is the last psalm in the book, and it is pure praise. There are no requests, no complaints and no enemies. Thirteen times in six verses it says "Praise." It tells us where to praise God, why to praise Him, how to praise Him and who should do it.

The answer to the last question is the finale of the whole book: "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD." The Psalms began with one blessed man meditating on God's law (Psalm 1). They end with every living, breathing creature joined in praise.

Psalm 150 Study

150:1 *Praise **the** LORD! Praise God in His holy place; praise Him in the expanse of His strength.*

Like the four psalms before it, Psalm 150 has no heading and opens with "Praise the LORD!" (see Psalm 146).

"Praise God in His holy place." The holy place is the sanctuary, set apart for God. For Israel, that meant the temple in Jerusalem, where God's people gathered to worship Him. "Praise Him in the expanse of His strength." The Hebrew word is the one used for the expanse of the sky, the great dome of the heavens that God made on the second day (Genesis 1:6-8). Some think the sanctuary here means God's heavenly dwelling, since the two lines may be saying the same thing in two ways.

Whichever is meant, the psalm calls for praise in both places, on earth where God's people gather and in heaven where He reigns. Praise rises from the temple floor, and it fills the sky.

150:2 *Praise Him for His mighty deeds; praise Him according to the abundance of His greatness.*

Now the reasons. "Praise Him for His mighty deeds." We praise God for what He has done: creating the world, bringing Israel out of Egypt, keeping His promises to David and, for us, sending His Son to die and rise again. All through the Psalms we have watched God act. Now we praise Him for all of it.

"Praise Him according to the abundance of His greatness." We praise God for who He is. His greatness is abundant, which means it goes beyond everything. And we praise Him "according to" that greatness, which means our praise should fit how great He is. That is a high standard, and eternity will not exhaust it.

150:3-5 *Praise Him with a blast of **the** ram's horn; praise Him with harp and lyre. Praise Him with tambourine and dancing; praise Him with strings and flute. Praise Him with cymbals of sound; praise Him with cymbals of shouting.*

Then come the instruments, a whole temple orchestra. The "ram's horn" here is the shofar, which was blown for feasts, for the new moon and for calling God's people together (Psalm 81:3; Leviticus 25:9). The "harp and lyre" were stringed instruments, played by plucking. David himself played the kinnor, the "lyre" of this verse, for King Saul (1 Samuel 16:23).

"Praise Him with tambourine and dancing." The tambourine was a small hand drum. Miriam took one and led the women of Israel in dancing and song after God brought them through the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20-21). David danced before the LORD with all his might when the ark came into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:14). "Strings and flute" adds more stringed instruments and a wind instrument.

"Praise Him with cymbals of sound; praise Him with cymbals of shouting." We do not know exactly what the difference between these two kinds of cymbals was. Some think one was clear and the other was a louder, crashing sound. What is plain is that the psalm wants every sound to be used for God.

The psalm does not hand us a rule about which instruments a church must use. It shows us that every gift of music, every skill and every kind of sound can be offered to God. Whether your church sings with an organ, a guitar or no instruments at all, the call is the same: praise Him with what you have, and do it with all your heart.

150:6 *Let everything that has breath praise **the** LORD. Praise **the** LORD!*

"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD." The psalm has called on priests, musicians and dancers. Now it opens the door to every living thing.

Breath is God's gift. He breathed into Adam the breath of life (Genesis 2:7), and Paul told the people of Athens that God is "giving to all life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25). If God gave you breath, you have a reason to praise Him and the means to do it. As long as you are breathing, you are invited.

The book of Psalms has taken us through every part of life: joy and sorrow, sin and forgiveness, fear and trust, the prosperity of the wicked and the faithfulness of God. Many of the psalms began in the depths. But the book does not end there. It ends here, with everything that has breath praising the LORD. One day that will be true of the whole creation. John saw every created thing in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea giving blessing and honor and glory to the One on the throne and to the Lamb (Revelation 5:13).

"Praise the LORD!" The last words of the Psalms are a call, and an invitation to join in.

Psalm 150 Summary

Psalm 150, the last psalm in the book, is praise from beginning to end. It calls for praise in God's holy place and in the expanse of His strength, for His mighty deeds and the abundance of His greatness, with every kind of music and dancing. It ends with the widest call of all, "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD," a picture of the day when every creature will praise God and the Lamb (Revelation 5:13).

Psalm 150 Study Questions

1. Where does Psalm 150 tell us to praise God? (150:1)

2. What two reasons does verse 2 give for praising God?

3. What does it mean to praise God "according to the abundance of His greatness"? (150:2)

4. What instruments does the psalm name, and what was a tambourine? (150:3-5)

5. Where else in Scripture do we see God's people praising Him with dancing? (Exodus 15:20-21; 2 Samuel 6:14)

6. Psalm 150 has no requests or complaints. Why do you think the book ends this way?

7. Who is called to praise the LORD in verse 6, and what does breath have to do with it? (Acts 17:25)

8. How does Revelation 5:13 show the final fulfillment of Psalm 150?

9. Looking back over the psalms in this study, which one has meant the most to you, and why?

10. What would it look like for you to praise God with "everything" you have this week?

Conclusion

We have walked through forty psalms, from the blessed man of Psalm 1 to the last great call of Psalm 150, "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD." Along the way we have seen almost every part of life brought before God: fear and joy, sin and forgiveness, sickness, enemies, old age, waiting and worship.

The Psalms teach us to pray honestly. David did not hide his guilt in Psalm 51 or his feelings of being forsaken in Psalm 22. The writer of Psalm 73 admitted that he nearly gave up when the wicked seemed to win. Yet these prayers almost always end in trust, because the writers kept bringing their questions to the God who hears. We can do the same.

The Psalms also point beyond themselves to Jesus Christ. He is the King of Psalm 2, the One whose cry from the cross, whose mockers and whose clothing divided by lot are all found in Psalm 22, the Holy One whose body would not see decay in Psalm 16, the stone the builders rejected in Psalm 118 and the Lord at God's right hand in Psalm 110. He prayed the Psalms and fulfilled them, and one day He will return to reign over all the earth, as these psalms promise.

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him and give you words to pray and to praise. Keep reading the Psalms. There are more than a hundred more waiting for you. Volumes 2 and 3 of this study cover the other psalms, verse by verse.

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.

- LORD, Lord, GOD and God: Overview of the Psalms
- Parallel lines in Hebrew poetry: Overview of the Psalms
- Hard lines (prayers for judgment): Overview of the Psalms
- Books One to Five of the Psalms: Overview of the Psalms
- Anointed, Messiah and Christ: Psalm 2
- Zion: Psalm 2
- Gentiles: Psalm 2
- Choirmaster: Psalm 8
- Gittith: Psalm 8
- Covenant: Psalm 8
- Greek Old Testament: Psalm 8
- Ark of the covenant: Psalm 15
- Miktam: Psalm 16
- Sheol: Psalm 16
- Saints (holy ones): Psalm 16
- Fear of the LORD: Psalm 19
- Blameless: Psalm 19
- Redeemer: Psalm 19
- Masoretic Text: Psalm 22
- Steadfast love (hesed): Psalm 23
- Selah: Psalm 24
- LORD of armies: Psalm 24
- King of glory: Psalm 24
- Maskil: Psalm 32
- Acrostic: Psalm 34
- Angel of the LORD: Psalm 34
- Sons of Korah: Psalm 42
- Alamoth: Psalm 46
- Hyssop: Psalm 51
- Jeduthun: Psalm 62
- Asaph: Psalm 73

- Portion: Psalm 73
- Valley of Baca: Psalm 84
- Melchizedek: Psalm 110
- Right hand of God: Psalm 110
- Hallel: Psalm 118
- Hosanna: Psalm 118
- Head of the corner: Psalm 118
- The eight words for God's Word: Psalm 119
- Song of Ascents: Psalm 121
- Mishnah: Psalm 121
- Penitential psalms: Psalm 130
- Hallelujah: Psalm 146
- Shofar (ram's horn): Psalm 150

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
2:1-3	Acts 4:25-26	quoted
2:1-3	Acts 4:27	fulfilled
2:1-3	Revelation 11:18	alluded to
2:7	Acts 13:33	quoted
2:7	Hebrews 1:5	quoted
2:7	Hebrews 5:5	quoted
2:7	Matthew 3:17	alluded to
2:7	Luke 3:22	alluded to
2:7	Mark 1:11	alluded to
2:8-9	Revelation 2:27	quoted
2:8-9	Revelation 2:26	alluded to
2:8-9	Revelation 12:5	alluded to
2:8-9	Revelation 19:15	alluded to
8:2	Matthew 21:16	quoted
8:3-4	Hebrews 2:6-8	quoted
8:5	Hebrews 2:6-8	quoted
8:5	Hebrews 2:9	alluded to
8:6-8	Hebrews 2:6-8	quoted
8:6-8	1 Corinthians 15:27	quoted
8:6-8	Ephesians 1:22	quoted
16:7-8	Acts 2:25-28	quoted
16:9	Acts 2:25-28	quoted
16:10	Acts 2:25-28	quoted
16:10	Acts 13:35	quoted
16:10	Acts 2:31	quoted
16:10	Acts 13:36-37	alluded to
16:11	Acts 2:25-28	quoted
19:2-4	Romans 10:18	quoted
19:9	Revelation 16:7	alluded to
22:1	Matthew 27:46	quoted
22:1	Mark 15:34	quoted
22:6-8	Matthew 27:43	quoted
22:6-8	Mark 15:29	alluded to
22:6-8	Matthew 27:39-40	alluded to
22:17-18	Matthew 27:35	quoted
22:17-18	John 19:24	quoted
22:17-18	Luke 23:34	fulfilled
22:17-18	Mark 15:24	fulfilled
22:19-21	2 Timothy 4:17	alluded to
22:22	Hebrews 2:12	quoted

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
23:2	Revelation 7:17	alluded to
24:1-2	1 Corinthians 10:26	quoted
24:1-2	1 Corinthians 10:28	quoted
24:3-4	Matthew 5:8	alluded to
24:3-4	James 4:8	alluded to
32:1-2	Romans 4:6-8	quoted
34:8	1 Peter 2:3	alluded to
34:11-14	1 Peter 3:10-12	quoted
34:15-18	1 Peter 3:10-12	quoted
34:19-20	John 19:36	quoted
34:19-20	2 Timothy 3:11	alluded to
37:9-11	Matthew 5:5	alluded to
40:6	Hebrews 10:5-7	quoted
40:6	Hebrews 10:8	quoted
40:7-8	Hebrews 10:5-7	quoted
40:7-8	Hebrews 10:9	quoted
51:3-4	Romans 3:4	quoted
62:11-12	Romans 2:6	quoted
62:11-12	Matthew 16:27	alluded to
62:11-12	2 Timothy 4:14	alluded to
62:11-12	Revelation 2:23	alluded to
90:3-4	2 Peter 3:8	alluded to
91:11-12	Luke 4:10-11	quoted
91:11-12	Matthew 4:6	quoted
91:13	Luke 10:19	alluded to
95:6-7	Hebrews 3:7-11	quoted
95:6-7	Hebrews 4:7	quoted
95:6-7	Hebrews 3:15	quoted
95:6-7	Hebrews 3:13	alluded to
95:8-9	Hebrews 3:7-11	quoted
95:8-9	Hebrews 4:7	quoted
95:8-9	Hebrews 3:15	quoted
95:10-11	Hebrews 3:7-11	quoted
95:10-11	Hebrews 4:3	quoted
95:10-11	Hebrews 4:5	quoted
95:10-11	Hebrews 3:17	alluded to
95:10-11	Hebrews 3:18	alluded to
96:10	Acts 17:31	alluded to
96:13	Revelation 19:11	alluded to
96:13	Acts 17:31	alluded to
103:17-18	Luke 1:50	alluded to
110:1	Luke 20:42-43	quoted
110:1	Hebrews 1:13	quoted
110:1	Acts 2:34-35	quoted
110:1	Matthew 22:44	quoted
110:1	Mark 12:36	quoted
110:1	Hebrews 10:12-13	alluded to
110:4	Hebrews 7:17	quoted

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
110:4	Hebrews 5:6	quoted
110:4	Hebrews 7:21	quoted
110:4	Hebrews 6:20	quoted
110:4	Hebrews 7:28	alluded to
110:4	Hebrews 7:11	alluded to
118:5-7	Hebrews 13:6	quoted
118:17-18	2 Corinthians 6:9	alluded to
118:22	Luke 20:17	quoted
118:22	Matthew 21:42	quoted
118:22	Acts 4:11	quoted
118:22	Mark 12:10-11	quoted
118:22	1 Peter 2:7	quoted
118:22	1 Peter 2:4	alluded to
118:23-24	Matthew 21:42	quoted
118:23-24	Mark 12:10-11	quoted
118:25	Mark 11:9	alluded to
118:25	John 12:13	alluded to
118:25	Matthew 21:9	alluded to
118:26	Matthew 21:9	quoted
118:26	Matthew 23:39	quoted
118:26	Luke 19:38	quoted
118:26	Luke 13:35	quoted
118:26	John 12:13	quoted
118:26	Mark 11:9-10	quoted
145:17-20	Revelation 15:3	alluded to
146:5-6	Acts 14:15	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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