

“WHEN I STUDY THE PSALMS . . .”

Enlarging My Faith – Eliminating
My Fears



21st Annual

West Virginia School of Preaching
Victory Lectures

October 25-29, 2015

“WHEN I STUDY THE
PSALMS . . .”

Enlarging My Faith – Eliminating
My Fears

21st Annual
West Virginia School of Preaching
Victory Lectures

Hosted by:
Hillview Terrace church of Christ
Moundsville, West Virginia

LECTURESHIP COMMITTEE:

Emanuel Daugherty
Terry Jones
Charles Pugh
Andy Robison
D. Gene West
Terry Varner

Copyright © 2015
West Virginia School of Preaching
P.O. Box 785
Moundsville, WV 26041

To order additional copies, please contact West Virginia
School of Preaching:

Email: dirwvsop@aol.com

Telephone: *Office* 304.845.8001
Toll-Free 888.418.4573

Foreword

A lectureship is a monumental product of the labor of a lot of people. When the lectureship physically takes place, so many members of the Hillview Terrace congregation pitch in to help in so many ways that thanking them individually becomes an impossible task. Back up in time from the moment of the lectureship and one sees that numerous others put in their time and effort in a variety of ways in getting the whole thing to happen. The elders oversee the work and are careful that only truth is taught. The speakers submit their lectures months in advance in a tedious manuscript format so that the book can be available when the lectureship takes place. And it all starts with the lectureship committee, who decides the theme and chooses the speakers.

This year's theme on the book of Psalms is the first of five, planned to be done over a ten-year period. With thirty lectures each time, at the end of those ten years, we will have five volumes that cover all of the 150 psalms. Terry Jones, the instructor of the book of Psalms at WVSOP, and Charles Pugh are the masterminds behind this master plan. To them, we offer our thanks for their many hours of labor in getting this whole plan, as well as this year's lectureship, together. The lectureship committee as a whole is to be thanked, as well. They meet and deliberate these topics and the speakers, giving careful thought to each step of the process.

Editing a lectureship book is enjoyable: in proofreading manuscripts, one gets to study the thoughts of good, sound men on select portions of the Word of God. Yet, for me, it is a nerve-racking undertaking. If I were to stand alone, it would not be done. Many thanks, therefore, are in order for Katie Gilchrist, who served masterfully as a grammatical proofreader and formatter of this book. Her countless hours of work and her patience with my many questions and suggestions are valued close to my heart. Thank you, Katie.

The Psalms are needed. This is obvious to any Bible-believer simply because they are a part of the sacred book. Man is a rational and an emotional being. Some people, in the name of religion, put the emotional ahead of the rational, and this is an error. However, when rationality dictates the belief of a person in God, Christ, and

the Bible, there are still emotions to be grappled with and handled. What faithful child of God who has been a faithful child of God for some time does not know of the struggles of faith, the struggles with enemies, and even the struggles over personal feelings toward those enemies that the book of Psalms addresses? God, who made the heart, mind, soul, and strength of man, gave us this book to help us deal appropriately and constructively with such emotional struggles.

Time brings more struggles. Those aging a bit in the faith turn more and more to the Psalms for God's guidance, strength, and solace. Thus this year's subtheme is "Enlarging My Faith -- Eliminating My Fears." We hope you enjoy the book.

Andy Robison
23 July 2015



Dedication

That this volume should be dedicated to Glenn and Hope Hawkins in recognition of their faithful service to the Lord, His church, and their support of the West Virginia School of Preaching is most appropriate. This year, Glenn and Hope marked three special milestones: they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, Glenn's 50th year of preaching, and Glenn's 40th year of service as preacher for the church in Massillon, Ohio.

Glenn and Hope are Ohio Valley College (now University) sweethearts. They were married June 27, 1965. They have two fine sons: Adam, who lives in Massillon, and Kenny (Susan) of Atlanta, Georgia. Their granddaughter, Addison, is the joy of their hearts and hopes to become a teacher just like her grandmother.

Glenn and Hope have dedicated their lives to education in and out of the church. Now retired, Hope taught elementary education in the various public school systems where they have lived. She has taught regularly in the educational programs of the church, and has been instrumental in organizing area events, such as ladies' days. She was a teacher and later administrator at the Stark County

Christian Academy, a cooperative effort of churches of Christ in Stark County, Ohio.

Glenn earned degrees at OVC (AA), Harding University (BA, Bible), and Harding Graduate School (MA, Philosophy of Religion). He has served churches in West Virginia, Missouri, Tennessee, and Ohio. In addition to preaching and teaching in local churches for the last fifty years, he taught Bible part-time at Ohio Valley College and served as educational director in Waverly, Tennessee; Memphis, Tennessee; and Massillon. He continues to work with the Massillon congregation part-time.

Glenn has been a popular speaker for meetings, lectureships, and workshops. He wrote a weekly newspaper column for years, has written for numerous Gospel publications, has mentored many young preachers, and has been a trusted resource of biblical knowledge and wisdom in Stark County and beyond. He has worked with the Northeastern Ohio Christian Youth Camp for many years, serving as co-director of Family Camp Week. He is a stellar song leader with a gifted voice, and has helped many congregations in this regard.

Most importantly, Glenn and Hope are dedicated to the Lord and to His church. They believe in and support the work of training preachers. Their good works will live on for generations and in eternity.

Rick Kelley

Eldership Honored

Salem (Glen Easton) church of Christ

The Salem church of Christ that meets in Glen Easton, West Virginia, (outside Moundsville) has been a faithful congregation of the Lord's people for many, many years. During that time, their service to the Lord has been manifest in many ways. Several generations of children have been raised attending worship services and Bible classes in the small, white church building on top of the hill -- seemingly overlooking all of Marshall County. There they have learned the basics of the Bible, the principles of New Testament Christianity, and the truth of doctrines that have helped them through life. Many moved away, some stayed put, but their early teaching came at the feet of teachers and preachers way out there on the hill.

That congregation has helped many a young preacher. They endured many long ramblings by this writer, who, as a college student, needed to wet his feet somewhere. There could not have been found a more encouraging group.

During these years, the Salem congregation has been led by a strong eldership consisting, over the years, of a variety of men who have gone on to their reward. The current elders are Donnie Harris and Fred Morris. These men, like their forebears, are very loving and compassionate shepherds of all who meet out there. They are men who know the truth, love the truth, and have a strong desire to propagate the truth.

For years, the Salem congregation and the Hillview Terrace congregation, where WVSOP is, have had a strong, informal (of course -- respecting autonomy) working relationship. Salem has been exceedingly supportive of the West Virginia School of Preaching in every way. We thank them. And in the vein of giving honor where honor is due, we honor them at this year's lectureship. Donnie and Fred, thank you. We also extend our thanks to the good wives who stand behind them: Terri (Harris) and Donna (Morris). We know you are humbled by this. Think of yourselves as accepting it on behalf of all of those who have gone before you in this role. Thank you for your work for the Lord as shepherds and overseers of His people.

Table of Contents

Foreword	v
Dedication	vi
Eldership Honored	ix
“God Gives Me Reward” (Psalm 58)	1
<i>Charles J. Aebi</i>	
“God Gives Me Confidence” (Psalm 27)	16
<i>David L. Lipe</i>	
“God Gives Me Salvation” (Psalm 50)	25
<i>Terry G. Jones</i>	
“God Gives Me Help” (Psalm 3)	38
<i>Ed Melott</i>	
“Introduction to the Book of Psalms	50
<i>David L. Lipe</i>	
“God Gives Me Steadfastness” (Psalm 112)	60
<i>Don Cooper</i>	
“God Gives Me Peace” (Psalm 57)	70
<i>W. Terry Varner</i>	
“God Gives Me Goodness” (Psalm 33)	80
<i>Jack Gilchrist</i>	
“God Gives Me Satisfaction” (Psalm 63)	88
<i>Rick Kelley</i>	
“God Gives Me Evidence” (Psalm 19)	99
<i>Cecil May Jr.</i>	

“God Gives Me Courage” (Psalm 60)110
John A. Keith

“God Gives Me Mercy” (Psalm 52).....123
Paolo Di Luca

“God Gives Me Assurance” (Psalm 56)134
Charles C. Pugh III

“God Gives Me Deliverance” (Psalm 55).....146
Phil Grear

“God Gives Me Comfort” (Psalm 94)156
Eddie Cooper

“God Gives Me Loyalty” (Psalm 9).....165
Skip Andrews

“God Gives Me Refuge” (Psalm 46)178
Cecil May Jr.

“God Gives Me Blessings” (Psalm 67)189
Mark Jones

“God Gives Me Preservation” (Psalm 121)201
Cecil May Jr.

“God Gives Me Security” (Psalm 91).....211
Bruce Daugherty

“God Gives Me Patience” (Psalm 62).....222
Aaron N. Burch

“God Gives Me Restoration” (Psalm 80)232
Steven P. Smithbauer

“God Gives Me Protection” (Psalm 17)245
John Wright

“God Gives Me an Inheritance” (Psalm 37)256
Andy Robison

“God Gives Me Gladness” (Psalm 64)268
Peter Ray Cole

“God Gives Me Defense” (Psalm 59).....278
Keith Kull

“God Gives Me Strength” (Psalm 145)284
Steve Higginbotham

“God Gives Me Eternal Hope” (Psalm 49)293
Will Montgomery

“God Gives Me Justice” (Psalm 140)304
J. D. Conley

“God Gives Me Endurance” (Psalm 71)321
Emanuel Daugherty

“God Gives Me Companionship” (Psalm 139).....331
Steve Higginbotham

Scripture Index.....340

GOD GIVES ME REWARD

Psalm 58

Charles J. Aebi

Introduction

The opportunity given me to participate in this lectureship and in other activities at the West Virginia School of Preaching is deeply appreciated. The topic assigned for this hour is “God Gives Me Reward: Psalm 58.”

The title of this psalm says it is “A Michtam of David,” as do the titles of the two before it and the one after it, and the themes of Psalms 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, and 59 are very similar. [All scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Psalm 58’s title does not list a particular setting, but four of the others do: 54 is “when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, ‘Is David not hiding with us?’”; 56 is “when Philistines captured him [David] at Gath”; 57 is “when he fled from Saul into the cave”; 59 is “when Saul sent men, and they watched the house in order to kill him.” (Three of these psalms are to be covered in other lectures here this week.) Many modern writers reject the titles in favor of their own imagined authors and circumstances, and it is true that the titles in Psalms are not part of the inspired text. However, the titles are in the Septuagint, which means they were there when inspired New Testament writers lived, and, to my knowledge, no New Testament writer contradicted any Psalm title but even added support to some of them, as Peter did when he said in Acts 1:16-20 that David spoke of Judas in Psalms 69 and 109.

Psalms 54-59, like Psalms 69 and 109, are usually called “imprecatory psalms,” because they call for punishment of their wicked enemies who persecute the righteous -- in this case, David. One example cited in the titles of some of the Psalms and recorded in 1 Samuel is King Saul’s persecution of David, his son-in-law, who had done him no harm but only good. Saul tried to kill David several times and in different ways: he threw spears at David, sent men to kill him, sent him against enemies who he thought would kill David, and led his own army around Judea in search for David to kill him.

When an inspired author prays for or calls for punishment on his enemies who are wrongfully abusing him, we may think of his prayer as a sort of prophecy. An example of this is Peter's quoting Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 as prophesying Judas' fate and the need to appoint another apostle to take Judas' place:

“Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.”

(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

“For it is written in the Book of Psalms: ‘Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it’; and, ‘Let another take his office.’

“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” (Acts 1:16-22)

While David said this of his own enemies, Peter quotes it as applying to Judas who was, without any justification, an enemy of Jesus. This is an example of the generic application of prophecy; what David said of his wrongful enemies was true of all the enemies of the righteous, and no one was more righteous than Jesus, nor was anyone more wrongfully an enemy of Jesus than was Judas. So when David prayed for God's punishment to be on the enemies of the righteous, it can be seen as a prophecy of what any persecutor of the righteous deserves. Judas was by no means the only persecutor of the righteous, but he falls among the most notorious of them. In the block of psalms among which 58 falls, the persecutors were King Saul and those who -- like Doeg the Edomite -- endorsed and aided him in his evil pursuit of David, and the persecuted were David and those who supported him --

like the priests of Nob who were murdered by Doeg at Saul's command (1 Sam. 21-22).

Psalm 58 contains only eleven verses, which may be divided easily into three sections: 1) a description of the wicked (1-5), 2) curses on the wicked (6-9), and 3) the righteous rewarded (10-11).

Description of the Wicked

*Do you indeed speak righteousness, you silent ones?
Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men?
No, in heart you work wickedness;*

*You weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth.
The wicked are estranged from the womb;
They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.
Their poison is like the poison of a serpent;
They are like the deaf cobra that stops its ear,
Which will not heed the voice of charmers,
Charming ever so skillfully. (1-5)*

Several writers see a problem in the translation of the Hebrew for “silent ones” in verse 1. The KJV, NKJV, ASV, and NIV stick with “in silence” or “silent ones,” while the ESV, NASB, and RSV translate it “gods.” Collins, in the *ESV Study Bible*, says about “gods” in 58:1,

As the ESV footnote explains, this translation is obtained by a change in vowels from the received Hebrew text . . . The received vowels (Hb. *'elem*) yield “in silence,” which does not make much sense, while a slight adjustment of the vowels yields ‘gods’ or ‘mighty lords’ (Hb. *'elim*), which can refer to human rulers who wield their might by God’s appointments.” (1007)

We might argue that translators have no right to change any vowels, except we are told that in the original writings there were no written vowels, and the readers had to add vowels to make the sounds represented, leaving some room for an occasional variation in meanings. Vowel points were added by Jewish scholars around AD 600, based on traditional vowel sounds that scribes had

indicated, so it is difficult to know which vowel should be used here. In the end, we have to interpret any such uncertainty about a word according to the context, which yields two possibilities for the meaning of Psalm 58.

First, if the “in silence” or “silent ones” translation is used, it could mean that the “sons of men” have acted as a panel of judges or counselors who should have spoken out against the injustice being done to David and/or other righteous persons but have kept silent and thus perpetuated or assisted the wrong. Clarke thinks along this line and follows Patrick to see the setting as Saul, after David fled, calling a council to endorse Saul’s attempt to destroy David. He says,

Saul, having attempted the life of David, the latter was obliged to flee from the court, and take refuge in the deserts of Judea. Saul, missing him, is supposed by Bishop *Patrick* to have called a council, when they, to ingratiate themselves with the monarch, adjudged David to be guilty of treason in aspiring to the throne of Israel. This being made known to David was the cause of this Psalm. It is a good lesson to all kings, judges, and civil magistrates. . . . (402-403)

Delitzsch assigns Psalm 58 to the time of Absalom, rather than to the time of Saul (179). He translates verses 2-3, “DO ye really, O ye gods, speak righteousness, Do ye in uprightness judge the children of men? Nay, in heart ye work iniquities, In the land ye weigh out the violence of your hands” (179). In his comments based on a background of Absalom rather than Saul, he says,

Absalom with his followers had made the administration of justice the means of stealing from David the heart of his people; he feigned to be the more impartial judge. Hence David asks: Is it then really so, ye gods (. . . reference to their superhumanly proud and presumptive bearing), that ye speak righteousness, that ye judge the children of men in accordance with justice? . . . violence fills the balances of your pretended justice.” (180-181)

Leupold, who agrees with the title that David wrote Psalm 58, thinks the men addressed are Saul's advisors or counselors who keep silence and thereby judge wickedly. He disagrees with the KJV, in which David addresses his criticism to the "congregation"; he says, "The KJ translation [on 58:1] perplexes all who read it" (439). Leupold gives his own translation of verses 1-2: "Do you, indeed, by silence speak righteousness? Do you judge the sons of men uprightly? Nay, in your hearts you devise perverse things; in the land you deal out the violence of your hands" (436), thereby seeming to make "the sons of men" the ones judged rather than (as the NKJV has it) the ones doing the judging. He says,

Almost all modern efforts at translation grow out of a slight change of the text. By a slight change of the vowels the word *'elem* is read *'elim*, which does mean 'gods' and is then understood in the sense of Ps[alm] 82:1b, where, because of an office which God upholds, judges are regarded as His representatives and are actually denominated 'gods' as His substitutes on earth. But the fact that makes this approach impossible is that elsewhere in the Scriptures this name for judges is *'elohim*, not *'elim*. The interpretation becomes preposterous when some commentators (*Schmid, Weiser, Leslie, Taylor*) state that the Israelites had assumed that at the time of the conquest of Canaan the Canaanite divinities were demoted to a governing council under Yahweh, where they still had the power to rule the various nations of the earth. This their obligation they had performed so wickedly that they are remonstrated with for their inadequacy. This is supposed to be the thought that the Israelites of old found expressed in this psalm! (439-440)

Leupold is right. Isaiah's sarcasm in Isaiah 44 makes it unthinkable that Israel's religious leaders, even Saul, would support the concept that a council of demoted gods actually had a part in ruling the nations. "I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God," is the word of The Lord (Isa. 44:6). To plant, grow, then cut down a tree to use for firewood to cook food with and stay warm with, and finally to take whatever is left and carve it into an

idol to fall down to and worship is ridiculous (Isa. 44:15-17).

Second, if the translation “gods” is used, it could mean that the judges either are called “gods,” as Leupold says, or that the judges are acting like gods and perverting justice by allowing that which Jehovah God denounces and not speaking against the persecution of the righteous, in this case David and his supporters. This would not be too different in result from the position that Leupold and Clark propose. Those who take this position often expand the application to other situations. McCaw thinks that “it may echo the appearance of self-constituted judges as auxiliaries of the plausible Absalom [period] . . . the cause of the psalmist’s vehemence did not lie in some personal grievance but in the general practice of false principles which were inimical to the spread of godliness” (452). Ash suggests that “gods” may refer to rulers or to pagan gods, which could mean God’s enemies are the rulers of pagan nations, if it means pagan gods, rather than that the enemies are the rulers of Israel (Ash and Miller 197-198). However, it seems to refer naturally to the nation’s rulers who imagine themselves gods and ignore the laws of God, whether those rulers were Saul and his court or others acting in behalf of Saul as he persecuted David. Before leaving verses 1-2 and the translation arguments, it might be useful to note that a translation of the Septuagint reads, “If ye do indeed speak righteousness, then do ye judge rightly, ye sons of men. For ye work iniquities in your hearts in earth: your hands plot unrighteousness” (731).

David uses hyperbole in verse 3 to describe the excessive evil demonstrated by the enemies of the righteous: “The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.” This, of course, is not literally possible, so it has to be figurative. It is an example of hyperbole, gross exaggeration to get the point across, similar to a mother’s statement to a child who left a door open after him, “If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a million times to close that door after you.” It is like Psalm 51:5, where David felt so sinful as he repented of his sin with Bathsheba that he said his mother sinned in conceiving him, which has to be figurative, because David was not speaking of his mother’s sin but of his own. Both of these passages are used to try to justify the doctrine of original sin by Calvinists like Barnes and Jones. Barnes spends much time on original sin as the basis behind the actions of

the wicked men David is talking about (137-144). Jones calls Psalm 58 “the history of human wickedness” and on verse 3 expounds on the doctrine of original sin, insisting that “Moral qualities are transmissible” and quoting Cumming’s statement that “The most lovely infant that is ushered into being has within it by nature the germs of those elements which feed the flames of hell” (293). But, as Taylor says, “The passage in Psalm 58:3 speaks of their GOING astray -- not their being BORN astray” (187). And Ash points out that “. . . those who use this verse to argue for infant depravity surely miss the author’s poetic point” (Ash and Miller 198). They also miss the point of Jesus in Matthew 18:3 and 19:14 about the innocence of little children, because they fail to understand that sin is not something one is born with or can inherit but is violating God’s law (1 John 3:4). The doctrine of original sin is negated by the prophet Ezekiel, as he insists on individual responsibility for one’s own sin, not for any sin or guilt inherited from ancestors: “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezek. 18:20). What verse 3 really shows is that “Wickedness can be learned early in life,” as can righteousness, and he is right that it “can be learned,” not inherited (Deaver 193).

Verses 4-5 further describe wicked persecutors as poisonous like snake venom and as deaf to reasoning like the cobra that ignores the attempts of snake charmers to enchant it. We would say that trying to reason with them is like urging ISIS or Al Qaeda fanatics not to harm Christians; it is like talking to a post or a tree, because their ears are closed to truth.

Curses on the Wicked

Break their teeth in their mouth, O God!

Break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!

Let them flow away as waters which run continually;

When he bends his bow,

Let his arrows be as if cut in pieces.

Let them be like a snail which melts away as it goes,

Like a stillborn child of a woman, that they may not see the sun.

*Before your pots can feel the burning thorns,
He shall take them away as with a whirlwind,
As in His living and burning wrath. (6-9)*

Having delivered his rebuke directly to the judges or counselors in verses 1-2 about their hypocrisy, David describes their sinful attitudes in verses 3-5: from their youth they have been liars (3); their poison is like snake venom (4); they are like the deaf cobra whom even the most skillful snake charmer cannot influence -- they will not listen to reason (4-5). Then, in verses 6-9, David prays to God, asking Him to punish those sinful enemies, in effect pronouncing curses on them.

Delitzsch comments on David's figures in verses 1-9, "In no one Psalm do we meet with so many high-flown figures coming together within the same narrow compass. But that it is David who speaks in this Psalm is to a certain extent guaranteed by Ps. lxiv. and cxl." (180). He includes the hyperbole and other figures David uses to describe his enemies' sinfulness -- they are like snakes with poisonous venom and also unreasonable, like a deaf cobra that refuses to be charmed -- but takes special notice of the figures employed in asking God to punish them in verses 6-9. They are like young lions, so he asks God to break their teeth in their mouth so they will lack the power to do so much harm to himself and his men. His use of "fangs" may have led Clarke to say, "But he may probably have the serpents in view, of which he speaks in the preceding verse: *break their teeth -- destroy the fangs* of these serpents . . . Save me from the *adders* -- the sly and poisonous slanderers; save me also from the *lions* -- the tyrannical and blood-thirsty men (404).

Verses 7-8 have three separate figures that the author uses to ask God to eliminate his enemies -- let them disappear as flowing water disappears into sand or into a water channel that removes it from view; let them vanish as a snail appears to do as it moves along leaving its slime trail; let them be as a stillborn child, who does not see life in this world. Let them disappear in the end, and, in the meantime, let their weapons be ineffective: make their arrows be blunted or broken off in flight, so that they do not wound the righteous at whom they aimed.

William Jones leaves us a preachable sermon outline on "The

History of Human Wickedness” by tracing the wickedness from maladministration of justice in verses 1-2 through its lies in verses 4-5 and its violence against the righteous in verses 6-7 to its failure and defeat in verses 6-9, leaving the reward of vindication for the righteous and their getting the rewarding certainty that God truly judges in the earth in verses 11-12 (293-295). One flaw in his outline is that he traces all human wickedness back to original sin as the cause and source of all other wickedness; this idea of inborn sin inherited from Adam is a basic flaw in the Calvinistic thinking and preaching of Protestants in general.

Leupold, commenting on verses 6-9, gives a good description of figures on punishing the wicked; he emphasizes the prophetic or predictive nature of the requests for punishment.

From this point [v.6] onward a gentler tone may be given to the prayer than some interpreters are wont to attribute to it. Though the verbs allow for the precative rendering, ‘May they flow away,’ they allow equally well for the purely predictive translation, the note of certainty of the overthrow of the enemies. We prefer the latter. Thus the prayer indicates that their opposition shall melt or flow away like water when it runs off. Or the futility of their actions may be described by likening any one of them to a man shooting blunted arrows from his bow, arrows that cannot hurt their victims.” (438)

The Reward for the Righteous

*Before your pots can feel the burning thorns,
He shall take them away as with a whirlwind,
As in His living and burning wrath.*

*The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked,
So that men will say,
“Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
Surely He is God who judges in the earth.” (9-11)*

The reward of the righteous may be partially that the persecutions they have endured have not been unnoticed by the

Lord. He is with them even now and knows what they endure. Another of the rewards for the righteous is to see the wicked punished -- to see justice done -- to see that God will ultimately overturn the wicked and destroy their wicked deeds and turn upright the righteous ones and exalt their righteous deeds. When thieves are caught and justice is righteously meted out to them, righteous folk will see that obedience is surely rewarded, though it must often seem a very long time in coming. It must have seemed so to David. After he had fought long and hard for King Saul, the jealousy of Saul's advisors and their misplaced loyalty to the king had brought David and his men more heartache than reward: they were hunted down like stray dogs. Had it not been for the support of God and the loyalty of his men and his friends like Jonathan, David would have been killed. The prophecy of Obadiah would seem to teach men not to rejoice over the misfortunes of their enemies, but David and his men had a vested interest in seeing their enemies punished. Nevertheless, David refused to take personal vengeance on Saul when, as Joab's brother Abishai said, "God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day" (1 Sam. 26:8). David could have killed Saul, or he could have allowed Abishai to do so, but he commanded Abishai not to harm Saul, even though he believed that Saul would someday kill him (1 Sam. 26:23-27:1). So, while David prayed to God for relief from his enemies, he would not take vengeance upon them himself. Leupold comments on verse 10,

When the righteous man is said to 'bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked,' it is a total misunderstanding of this statement to assume that there is some kind of unwholesome gloating, an ungodly bloodthirstiness, involved. 'Bathe' is meant in the sense of getting one's feet wet. This may be quite accidental. But when it takes place, the total defeat of unrighteousness is brought home in the most forceful manner possible. (438-439)

Stek, in the *NIV Study Bible*, thinks he sees in Matthew 26:57-68 an application of Psalm 58 in the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, particularly noting that "that those who do not judge

uprightly (v. 1) will be judged by God (v. 11)” (Stek and Barker 844). This generic application of Psalm 58 is supported by Peter’s generic use of Psalms 69 and 109 to apply what is said there of David and his enemies to all the enemies of the righteous. On verse 10, Barnes notes that:

There is no evidence that the psalmist had any vindictive or revengeful feeling when he uttered the sentiment in this verse (verse 10) . . . The *idea* is that the righteous will have emotions, when the wicked are subdued and punished, which in some respects *resemble* the feelings of the victor who walks over a field covered with the blood of the slain. Still it is not *necessary* to suppose that these are, in either case, vindictive feelings; or that either the victor or the righteous have pleasure in the shedding of blood, or in the suffering of others (144).

A man need not be thought to be rejoicing over others’ calamities when he is glad to see justice being carried out; after all, the purpose of government is to check evil and, in so doing, to reward the righteous with peace instead of persecution by the wicked. Butler quotes R. A. Bertram as saying,

A broad and vital distinction is to be made between *desire for the gratification of personal vengeance* and zeal for the vindication *of the glory of God*. ‘The glory of God’ includes necessarily the real good of the offender and the well-being of society. Desire for *retaliation* is always wrong; desire for *retribution* may be in the highest degree praiseworthy. (406)

Leupold says on verses 10-11:

Since the outcome shall be as described, the righteous man shall witness what happens and thank God for the vindication of his cause, which was and is God’s cause . . . He shall rejoice over the vengeance of God, for it was absolutely deserved . . . This verse [11] is a practical

summary of the whole experience . . . ‘Men shall say’-- for they all see the truth of what took place -- ‘Surely, there is a reward for the righteous.’ This may often seem questionable; it may be long delayed. But God does encourage His own by rewarding their faithfulness to Him. But the greater truth is that ‘Surely there is a God that judges on earth.’ God keeps things in hand and under full control. This is not clearly apparent at all times, but it is so at least on crucial occasions. The prayer closes on this note of a sturdy confidence that is based on the living God. (438-439)

Butler summarizes Psalm 58 as he comments on verse 11:

The godly are not forsaken and given over to their enemies; the wicked are not to have the best of it, truth and goodness are recompensed in the long run . . . Two things will come out clearly after all -- there is a God and there is a reward for the righteous. Time will remove doubts, solve difficulties, and reveal secrets; meanwhile, faith’s foreseeing eye discerns the truth even now, and is glad. (406)

That the righteous will be rewarded when their persecutors are punished along with other evildoers is the theme with which Paul encourages a persecuted church in 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10,

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from

heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ASV) are from the American Standard Version, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1901. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (RSV) are from the Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952 and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Ash, Anthony L., and Clyde M. Miller. *Psalms*. Austin: Sweet, 1980. Print.

Barnes, Albert. *Psalms*. London, 1870-72. Grand Rapids: Baker. Print. Vol. 2 of *Notes on the Old Testament*.

Butler, J. Glentworth, ed. *Psalms I-LXXII*. New York, 1892. Print. Vol. 4 of *The*

Bible-Work. The Old Testament.

Clarke, Adam. *Commentary and Critical Notes on the Holy Bible*. New York, 1848. Print.

Collins, C. John. *ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. Print.

Deaver, Roy C. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Pensacola: Firm Foundation, 1989. Print.

Delitzsch, Franz. *A Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*. 2nd ed. 1867. Eerdmans, [reprint]. Print. Vol. 2.

Dummelow, J. R., ed. *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*. New York: Macmillan, 1952. Print.

Jones, William. *The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary on the Book of Psalms: Psalms XXXIX-LXXXVII*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d. Print.

Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959. Print.

McCaw, Leslie S. "Psalms." *The New Bible Commentary*. Ed. A. M. F. Davidson. Print.

Rawlinson, G. "Exposition of Psalms." *Psalms*. Eds. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell. New York, [c. 1877]. Print. *The Pulpit Commentary*.

Stibbs and E. F. Kevan. *New Bible Commentary*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954. Print.

The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament with an English Translation. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, n.d. Print.

Stek, John H. and Kenneth Barker, ed. *The NIV Study Bible*. Zondervan, 1985. Print.

Taylor, Robert R., Jr. *Studies in Psalms*. Quality, 1985. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Charles J. Aebi is a native of southwestern Pennsylvania. He obeyed the Gospel in 1949 and began preaching in 1952. He has a B.S. degree from Penn State, an M.A. from Abilene Christian, and a Ph.D. from Ohio University. Charles has served for sixty-three years as minister for churches in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and West Virginia and has preached and held workshops in several

states and in foreign countries.

He has served as an elder for several years each in three congregations. He currently serves as a minister and an elder at the Barlow-Vincent church of Christ in Vincent, Ohio, which he helped to start in 2003. He taught Bible for thirty-four years at Ohio Valley College (now University), serving fifteen years as academic dean and six years as chairman of the Bible Department. He retired from the college in 1998 and has taught at the West Virginia School of Preaching since 1999.

Charles and his wife, Imogene, have four children, twelve grandchildren, and one great-grandson. All of the men in the family preach on occasion, all of the men and women teach Bible classes, and all of the grandchildren have obeyed the Gospel. Four of the grandchildren are now at Harding University, eight have graduated, two have master's degrees; one is an M.D.

GOD GIVES ME CONFIDENCE*

Psalm 27

David L. Lipe

Some Introductory Matters

The Book of Psalms is probably the most beloved and widely-read book of the Old Testament. That it is a favorite of many is attested by the fact that it, along with Proverbs, is frequently bound in the backs of copies of the New Testament. It should be remembered that “the Psalms are poems, and poems intended to be sung, not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons” (Lewis 2); thus, the Hebrew title of the Psalms means “songs of praise.” They are expressions of Israel’s religion and were sung by Old Testament believers. They were written during a time spanning roughly the Exodus (Psalm 90) to Babylonian Captivity (Psalm 137). Some are messianic while others are historical. Several reflect the common experiences of the human race. The Psalms express the feelings, attitudes, and interests of the average person. They exhibit a timelessness as they cry out to God in prayer and in praise and have been an inspiration for people throughout the ages.

The purpose of this study is to carefully examine one particular psalm, namely, Psalm 27. The procedure I will use in this study is as follows: I shall 1) make some brief comments on the organization of the Psalms in general, 2) examine specifically the internal organization of Psalm 27, 3) make some comments by way of the relationship of the structure and meaning of the psalm, and 4) make some concluding remarks.

The Organization of the Psalms

In number, the book of Psalms consists of 150 psalms containing several collections or groupings, the most prominent of which are the five collections or “books.” The boundaries of each of the five books are delineated by concluding doxologies. Each of the books has its own distinctive characteristics, e.g., “Nearly all the psalms of book 1 are attributed to David; and the name Yahweh is used almost exclusively when referring to God” (Dorsey 173). Dorsey notes further that in addition to the five

books are other groupings according to author or recipient and genre or function. The internal arrangements of individual psalms present some challenges. On the surface some of the psalms e.g., the acrostic psalms (arranged according to the Hebrew alphabet) seem to be easily identifiable (cf. *Psa.* 119). But the organization of thought within the psalms themselves is often difficult to follow. “The psalmists seem to jump back and forth within a single psalm, from cries for help to reports of victory back to cries for help -- or the like” (Dorsey 174). Although the reader may be inspired by specific verses in the particular psalm, the pattern of thought seems disconnected and even confusing.

The Organization of Psalm 27

In studying the Psalms, it is challenging indeed to analyze the internal arrangement of an individual psalm. This is the case because of the variety of structural patterns, including such arrangements as symmetric, parallel, and linear. In examining Psalm 27, I must agree with Brueggemann when he says, “This Psalm is difficult to categorize under any rubric, for it seems to contain two different and unrelated elements” (152). Verses 1-6 indicate a psalm of confidence, while verses 7-14 sound more like an individual lament. Craigie observes that the two parts differ in both form and substance (230-231). In form, the Lord is referred to in the third person in verses 1-6, while He is addressed directly in verses 7-13. In substance, the first section is a strong affirmation of confidence and trust in the Lord because of the help He has given, whereas the second part is a strong cry for help addressed directly to the Lord.

These kinds of considerations have led many to conclude that the psalm is not one but two, each written independently of the other. Weiser concludes that they could not have been written under the same circumstances, and “they can hardly have been composed by the same author” (245). In contrast, Leupold observes that it would be unreasonable to think that the two parts were from different authors. He asks, “Who would have dreamt of combining things that are so much at odds with one another and presenting them as a unit?” (234).

Other scholars view the psalm to be a unit composed by the

same author. The unity of the two parts is seen by Craigie in a liturgical use of the psalm requiring both parts in its composition and a number of key words common to both sections (231). He notes the following words: *salvation* (1, 9); *opponent* (2, 12); *heart* (3, 8, 14); *rise* (3, 12); *seek* (4, 8); and *life* (4, 13). In addition to these words is the word *hide*, occurring in verses 5 and 9.

Like Craigie, Dorsey understands Psalm 27 to be a single unit expressed in a five-part chiasmus (178). A chiastic psalm is named for the Greek letter *chi*, which looks like the English X. This form reverses the thoughts of the second verse, so that if a line is drawn between the like thoughts, there is reflected an X (*chi*). Dorsey says that this “symmetric configuration allows the psalmist to emphasize particular ideas and themes through matched repetition and to highlight the main point by placing it in the central position of the symmetry” (178). Thus, he understands the entire psalm to be a prayer for deliverance and that the main point is a cry for help, highlighted in the center as the psalmist says, “Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me” (7). [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

The Structure and Meaning of Psalm 27

For the purposes of this manuscript, I shall develop my exposition on the basis of the following outline: (1) an introductory declaration of confidence (1-3), (2) seeking God focused on God Himself (4-6), (3) seeking God stressed by circumstances (8-12) (acknowledging verse 7 [like Dorsey] as the psalmist’s main point), and (4) a concluding declaration of confidence (11-14).

First, consider David’s declaration of confidence (1-3). When David begins his prayer for deliverance in verse 7 as he cries for help, he has already “prepared himself for this prayer by thinking of who God is and what God has done for him” (Cloer 359). He prepares himself for his prayer first by declaring confidence in God (1-3). In these verses, David declares his confidence on the basis of Who God is (1), what God has done (2), and what God will do (3). God is described in three terms -- *light, salvation, and strength*. The metaphor of light implies a force which illuminates and dispels darkness -- here representing enemies (Craigie 231). This is

the only time in the Old Testament in which God is specifically referred to as *light*. The idea that God is the light is reminiscent of Psalm 23:4, in which David is fearless despite the “shadow of death.” God is the psalmist’s salvation or deliverance. He is able to deliver him from all difficult circumstances, even if an entire army rises against him. God is described in the third place as *strength* or *stronghold*. *Strength* or *stronghold* suggest that God is a place of refuge and safety. It is interesting that David emphasizes that God *is* light, salvation, and strength and not that He just provides light, salvation, and strength. David views God as present in his life and not just some transcendent being characterized by indifference.

David also expresses his confidence on the basis of what God has done (2). When enemies came against him “to eat his flesh,” they were the ones who fell -- not David. The idiom “to eat up my flesh” is uncertain as to its precise sense. It might suggest “speech” (thus, slanderous speech) “or it might be a metaphorical description likening the enemies to wild beasts, who hope to devour the flesh of the fallen” (Craigie 232). David might be thinking of the experience he gained while he was being pursued by Saul, or he might be reflecting on the revolt led by his own son Absalom. In any case, it was the enemies who were opponents of God who “stumbled and fell” -- not David.

The psalmist’s confidence is also expressed in his statement about what God will do in the future (3). Although a whole army were to be against him, God would still fight for him and keep him safe. No matter what the threat, the psalmist refuses to be afraid; he remains confident knowing that God will prevail over every threat. David’s source of confidence does not lie in himself but in God. Craigie says it well when he notes that the psalmist “knows about the alternatives but reckons none as finally serious. Life is completely staked on the reliability of God” (153).

Second, consider David’s seeking God focused on God Himself (4-6). Based on his confidence in God, David now expresses his desire to seek the Lord. This desire can be considered in three different points; namely, the *request* (4a), the *reasons* for the request (4b), and the *results* of the request (5, 6). Earlier, we noted that David viewed God as an ever-present source of light, salvation, and strength. This points to an intimate relationship

between the psalmist and God. He now emphasizes his desire to continue this relationship in the form of a request. “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord” (4). This is the one goal of his life. The desire is similar to that of Psalms 73:25 when the psalmist says, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.” The central point of David’s seeking is to “dwell in the house of the Lord” (4). The statement should not be taken literally, as if to refer to a literal house, but figuratively, to denote “living permanently in God’s presence” (Craigie 232).

The reasons for this request are twofold: “to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (4). The word translated *beauty* in the NKJV means “pleasantness,” “graciousness,” and the like. Leupold notes, “It means nothing more than to discover anew how gracious and merciful the good Lord really is” (236). Further, the psalmist would be able to “inquire in His temple” (4). He would be able to come to know God’s will more perfectly. Much speculation concerns the temple and the nature of the sacrifices (cf. 6). Craigie notes, “Apart from hypotheses, however, we are given no specifics. But that does not matter. What counts is the kind of unshakable conviction expressed as ‘confident’” found in verse 3 (153).

The fulfillment of David’s one desire to dwell in the house of the Lord results in some significant blessings (5, 6). The one who lives permanently with God will be safe. David illustrates this in three different ways (Leupold 237). i) It is as though God were to hide such a person in a shelter in the day of adversity until the trouble is passed. ii) It is as though God were to hide his child so that the enemy could not find him. iii) It is as though God were to “set him up on a high rock that is well out of reach of danger” (5). The one who lives permanently with God will be lifted up above his enemies (6). Such blessings for the one who dwells with God will give the psalmist occasions to go to the tabernacle to “offer sacrifices of joy” and “sing praises to the Lord” (6). This can be the only response to the protection given by God.

Beginning with verse 7, the mood of the psalm changes. As we noted earlier, this verse marks the main point of the psalm -- the psalmist’s cry for help. Based on an unwavering declaration of

confidence and the singular desire to seek God strictly for Who He is and what He has done, David can now make the plaintive cry for help, “Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me” (7). This cry for help is marked by three imperatives: *hear, have mercy, and answer*. David does not deny the reality of adversity, nor does he remain silent about it, and the declaration of confidence in verses 1-6 enable him now to cry out to God for help in time of need.

Third, consider the psalmist’s seeking of God stressed by circumstances (8-12). Like verses 4-6, verses 8-12 emphasize David seeking God, but now the seeking seems to be based more on circumstances; he is crying for relief under stressful conditions. Instead of examining these verses in chronological order, I wish to consider them under two different heads: a) the psalmist’s imperatives and b) the psalmist’s motivations.

In addition to the three imperatives of verse 7, the psalmist cries out with additional imperatives: verse 9 -- do not hide your face; do not turn your servant away; do not forsake me; verses 11-12 -- teach me; lead me; do not deliver me to adversaries. The imperatives of verse 9 all “emphasize the intensity of his supplication and the depth of his need” (Cloer 360). David is in difficult circumstances and needs help and needs it now; thus, he is pleading with God to hear him and to have mercy on him.

David makes it clear that there are a number of motivations behind these imperatives: I seek your face (8); you have been my helper in the past (9-10); adversaries are at hand (12). Several scholars observe that the Hebrew of verse 8 is difficult. After much grammatical analysis, Leupold says that David is, in effect, saying this: “In the past I have always thought of Thee and sought Thee; and I shall continue to seek Thy presence in every time of need” (238). It is a fundamental principle that in times of trouble one is to go to God, Who is ever-present, and appeal for help.

Further, David is motivated by the fact that God has been his helper in the past (9-10). David cries out in confidence that his relationship with the Lord is even more reliable than that of a father and a mother. Trying circumstances may drive a father or a mother even to forsake their role as parents, but such circumstances cause God to be even more responsive to his servant

(cf. Isa. 49:15).

Again, David is motivated by the truth that adversaries are at hand (12). These adversaries are false witnesses who have risen against him and whose intention is violence. Witnesses played a dominant role in Israel's society (cf. Deut. 17:6). Mays notes, "The testimony of a witness put one's status in the community and in relation to God in question" (131). The courts did not really have a defense attorney, and the only real recourse was for the accused to appeal to God. Because of false witnesses, David is determined to seek God.

Fourth, David concludes this psalm as he began, with a declaration of confidence (13-14). Trouble prevails all around, but David remains confident, as he declares in verse 13, "Unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." This is the first clause of an unfinished conditional sentence which has had the first part ("I would have lost heart") in English supplied by the translators. Its incompleteness in Hebrew attracts attention and heightens the psalmist's confidence in God. Some seem to think that David might be talking about life after death, but it need not be taken this way. Although some may give up on life, David confidently affirms that he will see the goodness of the Lord while he is still in "the land of the living."

David concludes his cry for help with four imperatives of confidence (14). "The earlier imperatives had been addressed to God to get God to do his share in the relationship" (Brueggemann 154). Now it appears that the imperatives are a reminder to David himself as well as to whoever might find themselves in difficult circumstances. Thus, he says: wait on the Lord; be strong; take heart (courage); wait on the Lord (14). Brueggemann points out that *wait* really means "hope" and thus the psalmist's voice "is fully confident of new life to be given" (154). God is going to respond in the future, just as He has in the past, with every crisis which arises. The intervening words "be strong" and "take courage" are reminiscent of the words of Moses to Joshua because the Lord was certainly going to give him success as he took the Promised Land. In a similar fashion, all of God's servants must be strong and take courage because they will receive the Divine aid they need.

Some Concluding Remarks

In this manuscript, I have attempted an exposition of Psalm 27. To do that I: 1) made some brief comments on the organization of the Psalms in general, 2) examined organization of Psalm 27 in particular, and 3) made some comments about the relationship of the structure and meaning of the psalm. May we, like David, cry out for help in time of need. We can make such an appeal because of the confidence we have in Who God is and what He does for us.

*This manuscript was originally prepared under the title “Salvation in the Lord” and was published in *Crying Out to God: Prayer and Praise in Psalms*. Ed. David L. Lipe. Henderson, Freed-Hardeman University. 2009. Print.

Works Cited

“Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984. Print.

Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 1-50*. Searcy: Resource, 2004. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.

Craigie, Peter C. *Psalms 1-50*. Ed. Bruce M. Metzger. Nashville: Nelson, 1983. Print. Vol. 19 of *World Biblical Commentary*.

Dorsey, David A. *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999. Print.

Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972. Print.

Lewis, C. S. *Reflections on the Psalms*. New York: Harcourt, 1958. Print.

Mays, James Luther. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Psalms*. Louisville: Knox, 1994. Print.

Weiser, Artur. *The Psalms: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962. Print.

Biographical Sketch

David L. Lipe began preaching in 1967 and has been involved in mission campaigns in five foreign countries. He holds Gospel meetings each year and conducts seminars on Christian evidences, Christian ethics, and church growth. He has participated in debates and is an accomplished author.

David was Professor of Bible and Philosophy at Freed-Hardeman University and served as the director of the FHU Annual Bible Lectureship from 1994 to 2015 -- a total of 22 years as director and editor of the FHU lectureship books.

He served as Director of the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies and continues to teach and help with fundraising and development work.

David and his wife, Linda, live in Baxter, Tennessee. They have three daughters and five grandchildren. His hobby is working on old cars; he especially loves the metal fabrication aspect.

David holds degrees from Freed-Hardeman University (A.A., Third Year Certificate); Harding University (B.A.); Harding University School of Theology (M.A.); The University of Tennessee (Ph.D.); and The University of Memphis (M.S.).

GOD GIVES ME SALVATION

Psalms 50

Terry G. Jones

Introduction

The most beloved portion of all the Bible is, undoubtedly, the Book of Psalms. It is unquestionably the most familiar book of the Old Testament and has the honored distinction of being quoted more often in the New Testament than any other Old Testament book. Psalms is the world's oldest book of poetry, a collection that spans approximately a thousand years. Originally sung by the children of Israel, the Psalms are the equivalent of a hymnbook, which provides a treasure of insight into worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God.

As is true with every book of the Bible, there is tremendous value in studying the Psalms. Any study of the Word of God that does not include a thorough search of and meditation upon the Psalms is woefully insufficient. However, when a man positions his parched lips to drink from this inspired fountain, his entire being will be richly and eternally blessed.

It is with thrilling anticipation that we approach the study of this grand and glorious portion of Holy Writ. It is my prayer that this volume, along with the four, God willing, that will succeed it, will bless precious souls for generations to come.

Psalms 50 is one of twelve psalms that are attributed to Asaph. The remaining eleven are Psalms 73-83. Along with Heman and Ethan, Asaph served as one of David's leading musicians (1 Chron. 16:5). The superscription states that it is "A Psalm of Asaph." It is uncertain whether that means it was written by him or for him or if Asaph is credited with placing it in the collection.

This psalm emphasizes the importance of sincere service to God, the judge of all men Who saves the righteous and condemns those who forget the Lord. It is unique in that it depicts a courtroom scene, complete with defendants, plaintiff, witnesses, and judge. It is a call to Israel for repentance, in view of the judgment of God. Certainly, we see in it a prophetic reference to final judgment in the last day. As we direct our focus upon this

text, we will see 1) The Congregation Assembled, 2) The Chastisement of Apathy, 3) The Condemnation of Apostasy, and 4) The Call for Atonement.

The Congregation Assembled (Psalm 50:1-6)

Solomon said, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). [All scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Not only does God see all the deeds of men, He holds them accountable as well. The psalm before us is a clear demonstration of that fact as it depicts the earth’s inhabitants being put on trial before the Judge of all mankind.

The Summons (1). This psalm begins with God’s people being called to appear before Him that their sins might be brought to light. In so doing, witnesses are summoned to observe the proceedings. First, we should notice *the source of the summons (1a)*. Three names for God appear in the opening stanza as He is introduced as “The Mighty One, God the Lord.” This is not an exercise in redundancy, but a proclamation of deep significance. John Phillips provides a powerful explanation.

There are three titles for God here -- El, Elohim, Jehovah. *El* is God as the *mighty* One, the awful One, in whom all the attributes and excellence of deity are concentrated; *Elohim* is God as the *majestic* One, the God of creation, the God of suns and stars and galaxies and of the planet earth; *Jehovah* is God as the *merciful* One who reveals Himself to men and signs contracts with them. This is the One who summons the nations to witness the judgment of the Jews: the God of might, majesty, and mercy. (395-96)

The voice behind this summons is that of the Supreme Ruler of the universe Who has the right to call all men into judgment and the power to execute His will.

Second, we should notice *the scope of the summons (1b)*. God “has spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun to its going down.” All the earth, as represented by the complete circuit of the sun, is called to serve as witness to God’s proclamation

about His people.

The Setting (2). In this second verse, there are three things that are brought to our attention concerning the setting for this event. *The Place* -- “Out of Zion.” This was a usual reference to the city of Jerusalem. Sometimes, it referred specifically to the place of worship to God, which represented the presence of God. *The Perfection* -- “the perfection of beauty.” “The idea here is, that the mountain referred to is *beautiful for elevation*; that is, it rises gracefully. The allusion here is to Jerusalem as it would appear to one approaching it . . .” (Barnes 50). *The Proclamation* -- “God will shine forth.” Barnes provides some excellent insight to this statement:

The meaning here is, that the great principles which are to determine the destiny of mankind in the final judgment are those which proceed from Zion; or, those which are taught in the religion of Zion; they are those which are inculcated through the church of God. God has there made known his law; he has stated the principles on which he governs, and on which he will judge the world. (71)

We are reminded here of the Gospel that was to go forth from Zion. Isaiah prophesied that, “Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:3). The prophet Micah foretold that, “Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Mic. 4:2). Jesus announced the fulfillment of these prophecies when He said to His disciples “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

The Storming (3). The assurance of coming judgment is given and the God of heaven will serve as presiding judge. Three characteristics of God’s coming are set forth in this verse. First,

there is the *sounding* of His coming. The psalmist declares, “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent.” The time of God’s silence having been completed, that silence is broken by the blast of His arrival and the thundering of His voice. In the coming judgment, Paul said, “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16). That there will somehow be a silent coming of the Lord is foreign to clear biblical teaching.

Second, there is the *shining* of His coming. Not only will God’s coming be heard, it will be seen. The awesome power of God will be on display as “a fire shall devour before Him . . .” We are here reminded of the warning of the apostle Paul that “the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

Third, there is the *shaking* of His coming. Verse 3 further states that in the coming of God “it shall be very tempestuous all around Him.” The image here is that of a tempest or a whirlwind. There will be thunder and lightning and strong wind. The coming of God can be heard, it can be seen, and it can be felt. The description here is very similar to God’s coming down to meet Moses on Mount Sinai.

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.” So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was. (Exod. 20:18-21)

The Serving (4). “He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people.” God is here pictured as calling two witnesses to His judgment -- “the heavens” and “the

earth.” He calls upon them to witness because they existed before man. Smith observed that “the heavens and earth are summoned to be witnesses of the judgment of Israel because they are far older than man, and have watched the whole course of Israel’s history (291). It is interesting that God serves as both Plaintiff and Judge. As Plaintiff, He calls witnesses as He then passes judgment on His people.

The Saints (5). There are two notable things in this verse. 1) *The command.* God gave the command to “Gather My saints together to Me.” The question that begs asking would be, “To whom is this command given?” Perhaps Jesus provided the answer when He said, “And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt. 24:31). 2) *The covenant.* The command was for the saints of God to be gathered before Him. Saints are further identified as, “Those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” Israel had entered into a covenant relationship with God that was sealed by the offering of a sacrifice.

And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.” And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.” (Exod. 24:4-8)

The Substantiation (6). Court is in session, the witnesses have been called, and the saints have been gathered. The right of God to sit as judge is substantiated in this verse. It is substantiated first of all by a *heavenly witness*. The psalmist says, “Let the heavens

declare His righteousness.” The heavens bear witness to the righteousness of God. “The ‘heavens’ confirm the ‘righteousness’ of God, for they have continually observed this great attribute in all His verdicts and judgments. They were watching from above when the original covenant with Israel was made at Sinai” (Cloer 687). Secondly, God’s right to judge is substantiated by the fact that He is *a holy judge*. All of His judgments are righteous because He is holy and just. Human courts and judges may be deceived or dishonest and, thus, render inappropriate judgments. That can never be true of God.

The Chastisement of Apathy (Psalm 50:7-15)

God’s silence has been broken, and now He calls for Israel to be silent and listen to His testimony against them. There are three things that God now brings to their attention.

Their Worship Was Insincere (7-11). God did not reprove them for neglect to offer sacrifices to Him, for this they had dutifully performed. The problem was not that their sacrifices were insufficient; it was that their heart was insincere. Their sacrifices were sufficient, but their attitude was apathetic. This passage reminds us that in worship, it not only matters what we do, but also how we do it. Their ritual was right, but their worship was wrong. Jesus informed the Samaritan woman that, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Having made all of those sacrifices to God through the years, Israel mistakenly developed the notion that God was somehow indebted to them. They had observed the heathen nations around them and how their gods had to be fed daily. However, God has no such need. That was the message that Paul had for the idolatrous Athenians. “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:24-25). God reminded Israel that every beast and every bird belonged to Him. They failed to realize that those sacrifices were for their own benefit, not for God’s. What God wanted was the loving devotion of their heart, which was the very thing that was missing.

Their Works Were Insufficient (12-13). God is not like man. He does not get hungry. But even if He did, He would not rely upon man to be fed. God is a spiritual being and is in need of nothing from the physical world. Man's offerings to God are important, but by themselves are woefully insufficient to please God.

The Way of Impunity (14-15). Sincere obedience from a grateful heart is the recipe for pleasing God. In this passage, God reveals His desire for us. First, God wants us to be *thankful* (14a). We are to "Offer to God thanksgiving."

The truth is that God accepts only one kind of sacrifice: the one given according to His will from a heart of joy, thanksgiving, and devotion to Him. He wants integrity and thanksgiving. He requires us to be faithful in keeping our word to him. He seeks gratitude in the innermost being. The spirit of faith, love, and obedience, the involvement of the soul, would be the composite, required accompaniment of the sacrifice that God accepts. The "sacrifice[s]" and "vows" of the people were to be concrete expressions of their love and appreciation of God (Cloer 689).

Second, God wants us to be *truthful* (14b). God commanded Israel, "And pay your vows to the Most High." We must be truthful in keeping our promise to pay our vows to God. "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings" (Mal. 3:8).

Third, God wants us to be *trustful* (15). God does not want us to trust ourselves, or our riches. He wants us to put our trust in Him. He implores, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." We have this wonderful promise from the Lord, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). That ought to encourage us to "trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). God affirms that He will deliver the soul that is thankful, truthful and trustful.

The Condemnation of Apostasy (16-21)

The Lord now turns His attention from the apathetic to those in apostasy. They claimed to be God's people but refused His instruction and despised His discipline.

Their Hypocrisy Identified (16). “In His judgment, God moves on from the sin of formalism, where one has outward action but no inner allegiance, to the sin of hypocrisy, where one professes religion with his lips but disregards it in his life” (Cloer 690). These hypocrites are identified as being wicked. They are condemned by God because, “you declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth,” when they were not willing to live by the same. This is reminiscent of Jesus' description of the scribes and Pharisees. “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do” (Matt. 23:3).

It is very absurd in itself, and a great affront to the God of heaven, for those that are wicked and ungodly to declare his statutes and to take his covenant in their mouths. It is very possible, and too common, for those that declare God's statutes to others to live in disobedience to them themselves, and for those that take God's covenant in their mouths yet in their hearts to continue their covenant with sin and death but they are guilty of a usurpation, they take to themselves an honour which they have no title to, and there is a day coming when they will be thrust out as intruders. (Henry 427)

They Hated Instruction (17). It is not uncommon that those lives bent toward sin despise instruction. Solomon said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7). “Every generation produces its fair share of men and women who ‘hate instruction’” (Wacaster 29).

They Honored Iniquity (18-20). Having condemned them for the sins they have committed, God now turns attention to their attitude toward the sins of others. Just as it is a sin to practice iniquity, it is equally sinful to condone the wicked deeds of others.

One may not be involved in pornography but be guilty of condoning the production and practice of it in the lives of others. Israel was rebuked for their lack of disdain for the wickedness surrounding them.

In this passage, God condemned five specific sins. 1) *Stealing* -- “When you saw a thief, you consented with him . . .” (18a). 2) *Sexual Immorality* -- “And have been a partaker with adulterers” (18b). 3) *Speaking Evil* -- “You give your mouth to evil . . .” (19a). 4) *Slyness* -- “And your tongue frames deceit” (19b). 5) *Slander* -- “You sit and speak against your brother, you slander your own mother’s son” (20). Spurgeon well stated, “If we can acquiesce in anything which is not upright, we are not upright ourselves, and our religion is a lie” (435). Perhaps Paul had this very passage in mind when he wrote,

You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? (Rom. 2:21-23)

Their Horrible Illusion (21). Of this verse, James Smith made the following observation:

These wicked people mistook the longsuffering of God for indifference. They degraded their conception of God into a reflection of themselves. They imagined that when Yahweh revealed himself he would prove to be only like a man. Instead, however, Yahweh was now listing the offenses of which they were guilty, bringing them under indictment in his court (292).

Deception is a terrible thing, and the Bible warns us about it over and over. For example, Paul warned, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal.

6:7-8). Psalm 50:21 reveals that Israel had deceived themselves into believing a horrible illusion. Let us take note of three things from that verse.

The Silence of God -- “These things you have done, and I kept silent. . . .” They interpreted God’s silence as indifference, believing that He really had no interest in their wicked activity, so long as they continued to offer their sacrifices. What they should have been doing was taking advantage of the time to repent and seek forgiveness. The apostle Peter dealt with a similar problem of those who interpreted the delay in the Lord’s coming to mean that He would not return. Peter corrected them by saying, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

The Sin against God -- “You thought that I was altogether like you. . . .” Of all the atrocities they had committed, perhaps none were greater than this. To de-elevate God and drag Him down to the level of man is a severe insult to the Deity of God.

The idea here is, that they thought or imagined that God was just like themselves in the matter under consideration, and they acted under this impression; or, in other words, the fair interpretation of their conduct was that they thus regarded God. That is, they supposed that “God” would be satisfied with the “forms” of religion, as “they” were; that all he required was the proper offering of sacrifice, according to “their” views of the nature of religion; that he did not regard principle, justice, pure morality, sincerity, even as they themselves did not; and that he would not be strict to punish sin, or to reprove them for it, if these forms were kept up, even as “they” were not disposed to be rigid on the subject of sin. (Barnes 79)

The Straightening by God -- “But I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes.” God’s silence is broken and His reproof is now spoken. We may have a tendency to overlook sin in our life, minimize it, or even forget it, but God will do none of that. When God brings judgment, He will set those things in straight order and we will answer for them. “For we must all appear before

the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Call for Atonement (Psalm 50:22-23)

In judgment, there are two kinds of people. There are those who are saved and those who will be lost. Some will be rewarded and some will be rejected. Jesus said, “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded that the Gospel be preached to all the world that the lost might repent and be saved. In Psalm 50, we learn that those who forget God will suffer His wrath (22), and those who glorify God will be saved (23). In this passage, God offers an invitation to His people to do three things.

Observe The Consequences (22). Forgetting God is a serious matter. It always leads to the vilest forms of wickedness.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom. 1:28-32)

A cautionary warning is here given to observe the consequences of these actions. The psalmist said, “Consider this, you who forget God.” Then he mentions two things that must be considered. 1) *The Ferocity of the Consequences* -- “Lest I tear you in pieces.” The image here is of a lion that ferociously shreds its prey. Paul taught that those who forget God will be in severe danger in the coming judgment. “And to give you who are troubled rest with us

when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7-8). 2) *The Finality of the Consequences* -- “And there be none to deliver.” When God brings judgment and punishment, there is no escape. The rich man sought relief but there was none to be found (Luke 16:19-31). As a man lives, so shall he die, and as he dies, so shall he be for eternity.

Offer The Sacrifice Of Thanksgiving (23a). The thought of verse 14 is repeated here as he says, “Whoever offers praise glorifies Me.” The wrath of God is tempered here by His mercy. David prayed, “for You, Lord, are good and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Psalm 86:5).

Order Your Conduct Aright (23b). This psalm concludes with a promise from God that those who align their life with His will can be saved. “And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.”

Conclusion

This psalm epitomizes the overall message of the Bible. God does not want any to be eternally lost and has done everything possible to provide for our salvation. All who will be true to His Word will be saved, and those who forget Him will be eternally lost. “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Rom. 11:22).

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Barnes, Albert. *Psalms*. London, 1884-85. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983. Print. Vol. 2 of *Notes on the Old Testament*.

Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 1-50*. Searcy: Resource, 2004. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.

Henry, Matthew. *Job to Song of Solomon*. Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company. Print. Vol. 3 of *Matthew Henry's Commentary On The Whole Bible*.

Phillips, John. *Exploring Psalms: An Expository Commentary*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002. Print.

Smith, James E. *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*. Joplin: College, 1996. Print.

Spurgeon, C. H. *The Treasury of David: An Expository and Devotional Commentary on the Psalms*. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984. Print.

Wacaster, Tom. *The Songs and Devotions of David*. Vol. 3. Pulaski: Sain. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Terry G. Jones was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and was raised in Toll Gate, West Virginia. He is the son of Linda Jones and the late Glenn Jones. He married Melinda S. Hilvers on August 10, 1985. They have two sons -- Austin (Jillian) and Quintin (Tabitha).

Terry is a 1986 graduate of East Tennessee School of Preaching in Knoxville, Tennessee. He received the A.A. and B.A. degrees from Ohio Valley College in 1996. He worked with the church in Mountain City, Tennessee, from 1986 to 1989. He then moved to Pennsboro, West Virginia, where he currently preaches. He also serves as one of the elders of the Pennsboro church.

He serves as secretary on the board of directors of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and is co-director of Junior Week. He is on the faculty of West Virginia School of Preaching and serves on its lectureship committee. In addition, he is a writer for West Virginia Christian and has served as its lectureship director on six occasions. He also has made missionary trips to the countries of Moldova and Ukraine.

GOD GIVES ME HELP

Psalm 3

Ed Melott

*Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that
rise up against me.*

*Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in
God. Selah.*

*But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up
of mine head.*

*I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his
holy hill. Selah.*

I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.

*I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set
themselves against me round about.*

*Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine
enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the
ungodly.*

*Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy
people. Selah.*

[All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.]

Psalm 3 outlined:

- I. Conspiracy (1-2)
- II. Confidence (3-4)
- III. Courage (5-6)
- IV. Conquest (7-8)

The above outline is given at the beginning of this study to assist the reader as he or she studies this psalm of David. To read this psalm is beneficial; to understand it in its original context is historical and more insightful; however, to truly let the words infiltrate one's heart can be life changing. Bible study without proper application is in some ways unrelated history, which is detached from the reader who may be removed from the writer by

thousands of years and thousands of miles. What do the struggles of a Jewish king who lived three thousand years ago mean to modern man? Does his confidence in God or courage in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties have that which may benefit today's Christian as he struggles with day-to-day challenges to his faith? Athanasius, quoted in *The Pulpit Commentary*, insightfully observed,

To me it seems that the Psalms are to him who sings them as a mirror, wherein he may see himself and the motions of his soul, and with like feelings utter them. So also one who hears a psalm read, takes it as if it were spoken concerning himself, and either, convicted by his own conscience, will be pricked at heart and repent, or else, hearing of that hope which is to Godwards, and the succor which is vouchsafed to them that believe, leaps for joy, as though such grace were specially made over to him, and begins to utter his thanksgivings to God (xii).

At least three avenues of study and application are needed, in this writer's opinion, as we study Psalm 3. They are 1) David, 2) Jesus, and 3) you. Obviously, there is a historical context. We are going to call that the immediate application. Some have misunderstood the nature of prophetic literature and have used phrases such as "double fulfillment." That is a meaningless statement, for how could something find its fulfillment twice? A better understanding is simply to observe that many Old Testament passages of Scripture had an immediate application and an ultimate fulfillment. Psalm 3 is not considered prophetic or Messianic; however, one can see a great parallel in the struggles of David, the great type of Christ, and Christ Himself (Matt. 22:42-45). Certainly, too, we must see ourselves in this text! We should take comfort knowing that our struggles are not unusual or in some way unique to us: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Jesus assured us of the commonality of our suffering when

He said, “Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: **for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you**” (Matt. 5:12, emphasis added).

Conspiracy

Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me.

Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah. (1-2)

The uninspired heading of Psalm 3 reads, “A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.” One cannot be certain of the authenticity of the headings found in the Psalms; however, they have come to us as the accepted tradition for thousands of years. We will study this psalm with that given background in mind. A thorough reading of 2 Samuel 15-18 would assist greatly in the understanding of what David suffered when he penned this song.

After David’s sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah, Nathan informed David that “the sword shall never depart from thine house . . .” (2 Sam. 12:10). David had “sown to the wind” and would have to “reap the whirlwind” (Hos. 8:7). Not only did the first son that he fathered with Bathsheba die (2 Sam. 12:14), but so too David’s house would experience other tragedies. Johnny Ramsey commented,

The terrible impact of David’s sins shattered his family as well as the nation of Israel. Ungodliness of every sort -- even incest and rebellion among his children -- paved the way for some of the truly shocking scenes of ancient history. Perhaps no lesson for parents is more indelibly fashioned than the never-to-be-forgotten decline and death of Absalom. In chapter 18:33 one can weep with David over the end of his insurrectionist boy, Absalom. Guilty of arrogance and anarchy this handsome offspring of the King meets his doom while in the process of dethroning his own father. Word comes to David from a military leader that his enemy is dead. But the King knows that it is his beloved boy who has perished. In contrite agony a penitent King

cries: “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son!” (Ramsey 38)

As one reads of the rebellion of Absalom, one can see the intensity in David’s statement, “LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me” (1). Samuel indicated that “Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (2 Sam. 15:6), and further, that “the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom” (2 Sam. 15:12). David realized that Absalom’s clandestine actions necessitated fleeing his home in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15:14). One cannot help but see shades of Jesus’ own sufferings in King David’s flight from Jerusalem. Each passed over the brook Kidron (2 Sam. 15:23; John 18:1) and ascended the Mount of Olives (2 Sam. 15:30; Luke 22:39). David wept as he went up (2 Sam. 15:30); Jesus would later weep as He looked upon the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). David had not only been betrayed by his son, but also his most trusted counselor, Ahithophel (2 Sam. 15:31). Judas’ betrayal of Jesus can be seen in the actions and even in the death of Ahithophel. Ahithophel took his own life by hanging himself (2 Sam. 17:23). Tragically, Judas chose the same end of his actions and grief (Matt. 27:5). Also consider the parallel in the tender cry of David regarding the death of his son -- “would God I had died for thee” (2 Sam. 18:33). Indeed Jesus came to die for every accountable individual, even those who are His enemies (Luke 19:10; Matt. 20:28). The taunt of David’s enemies mirror what Jesus endured by way of verbal attack upon the cross. David’s enemies said, “There is no help for him in God” (2). Matthew recorded the verbal attack upon Jesus on the cross:

And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads,
And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it
in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God,
come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests
mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved
others: Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel,
let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe

him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God. (27:39-43)

There could be no lower feeling for the servant of God than to be convinced that there is no help from God. This very well could have resonated with David. After his sin with Bathsheba, David pleaded with God, “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me” (Psalm 51:11). He went on to petition, “Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation . . .” (Psalm 51:12). Earlier in the same psalm, David revealed the guilt that he carried daily when he wrote, “. . . my sin is ever before me” (3). With such a consciousness, could it not be plausible that such a terrible accusation that God had forsaken him and would provide no help could truly have crushed the spirit of David? What about Jesus, when He uttered, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46)? How easy it is to allow the taunts of the devil to invade and occupy our hearts like a foreign army that has overpowered a weaker nation!

At this point in the reading of Psalm 3, we are first introduced to word *Selah*. The word is found seventy-one times in Psalms and its meaning is somewhat ambiguous. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia comments, “It is rendered in the LXX by *diapsalmos*, which either means louder playing, *forte*, or, more probably, an instrumental interlude” (2096). Albert Barnes astutely made the following comments,

It occurs only in poetry, and is supposed to have had some reference to the singing or cantillation of the poetry, and to be probably a musical term. In general, also, it indicates a pause in the sense, as well as in the musical performance. Gesenius (*Lex.*) supposes that the most probable meaning of this musical term or note is *silence*, or *pause*, and that its use was, in chanting the words of the psalm, to direct the singer *to be silent, to pause a little*, while the instruments played an interlude or harmony . . . It is probable, if this was the use of the term, that it would commonly correspond with the sense of the passage, and be inserted

where the sense made a pause suitable; and this will doubtless be found usually to be the fact. (28)

For our study, we shall regard the occurrences of *Selah* as an opportunity to pause and reflect upon the sense of the previous statement. Let us see how that applies to David's words here! Consider that he is approaching the Lord with the terrible conspiracy including his son, his trusted counselor, and many people of the nation of Israel. Feeding his own feelings of guilt regarding his own sinful actions with Bathsheba, his enemies are making the accusation that God would not help him. At this moment, we are instructed to pause (*Selah*). Reflection should be made: "How will he respond? How would I respond if I were in his present circumstances? How do I respond in my own life, facing times of doubt and struggle?"

Confidence

But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. (3-4)

Though his enemies were numerous (verse 6 says, "ten thousands of people"), David's confidence in God was apparently unshaken. David lists four things regarding God's role in his struggles. God is 1) a shield for me, 2) my glory (the source of David's glory), 3) the lifter up of my head, and 4) the hearer of my prayers.

David was well acquainted with the function of a shield, though he elected not to use a physical shield in his battle with Goliath (1 Sam. 17:40-51). Armed only with a staff, a sling, and five smooth stones, David challenged the giant. Goliath himself was armed with a spear, a sword, and a shield (1 Sam. 17:45). David's words were words of confidence. To Goliath he said, "And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and He will give you into our hands" (1 Sam. 17:47).

The shield was a well-known part of ancient armor, of use, according to the ancient modes of warfare, when swords, and spears, and arrows were employed . . . They were usually made of tough and thick hides, fastened to a rim, and so attached to the left arm that they could be readily thrown before the body when attacked, or so that, as they were usually held, the vital parts of the body would be protected. (Barnes 29)

God protected David in his battle with the giant and in dozens of subsequent battles in his life. David knew that this encounter would be no different. God is often recognized as the protector of His people -- to Abraham (Gen. 15:1), to Israel (Deut. 33:29), and others. The warrior king often spoke of God being a shield to His people (2 Sam. 22:3). His son Solomon would later write, "Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him" (Prov. 30:5). As David recognized his true protection came from God, so too must Christians today possess such faith.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." (Eph. 5:14-16)

David recognized the Lord as his glory. There can be no doubt that all the glory or honor that man has can come only from God. He is the source of our glory. The reference to the Lord being "the lifter up of mine head" is beautiful and full of meaning for the sufferer. Who has not in time of trouble or deep sorrow and despair naturally bowed his head? David would later write, "I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother" (Psalm 35:14). "I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long" (Psalm 38:6). When our Lord suffered upon the cross, John recorded, "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (19:30). For the Lord to be the lifter up of one's head indicates that

He will raise up, relieve distresses, and restore what has caused such lowness of heart. God is the One Who offers help and removes troubles. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

David’s confidence in God hearing and answering prayer is shared by other Bible writers. The Hebrew writer confidently affirmed, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16). James concluded, “. . . the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (5:16). Peter wrote, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers . . .” (1 Pet. 3:12). John added, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that He heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him (1 John 5:14-15).

“*Selah.*”

Courage

*I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set
themselves against me round about. (5-6)*

Many suffer from severe forms of insomnia. Insomnia is the inability to get the amount of sleep one needs to wake up feeling rested and refreshed (Smith et. al). According to one source, “Anxiety and depression . . . [a]re two of the most common causes of chronic insomnia” (Smith et. al). David possessed such confidence in the protective shield of God that he could pillow his head in the very worst circumstances. He would write in the fourth psalm, “I will both lay me down in peace and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety” (8). Charles H. Spurgeon, in his book *The Treasury of David*, said the following: “A good conscience can sleep in the mouth of a cannon; grace is a Christian’s coat of mail, which fears not the arrow or bullet” (21). The apostle Peter could sleep so soundly, even after the death of James and in contemplation of his own impending execution, an

angel had to smite him on the side to wake him. “And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up . . .” (Acts 12:6-7).

Jesus, the greatest example of faith in God and confidence in the same, could sleep when professional fisherman trembled at the thought of death. When the great storm threatened the tiny fishing vessel, Mark records that Jesus was “in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow” (4:38). These great servants of God could sleep in what would be very challenging circumstances to anyone because of their trust in the sustaining providential power of God (Matt. 6:25-34; Psalm 37:25). David revealed, “I awaked; for the LORD sustained me” (5).

David further showed his colossal courage when he indicated that he would not be afraid of “ten thousands of people” (6). This number undoubtedly indicated an army in battle array. One may say that David was using hyperbolic language; however, consider the advice of Ahithophel: “Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night” (2 Sam. 17:1). This would indicate that the available number of soldiers was much higher than twelve thousand.

The apostle Paul spoke of the position of the child of God when he said, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31) In the same context, he added, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37). A great illustration of this is seen in account of the Syrian army coming to seize Elisha the prophet.

Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! How shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray

thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. (2 Kings 6:14-17)

Philip Bennett Powers wrote, “To trust only when appearances are favorable, is to sail only with the wind and tide, to believe only when we can see. Oh! Let us follow the example of the Psalmist and seek that unreservedness of faith which will enable us to trust God, come what will” (qtd. in Spurgeon 21).

Conquest

Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.

Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah. (7-8)

God needs only to arise and David could easily be rescued. God is here pictured as sitting idly by while David is suffering. Not that God is unconcerned or disinterested in the plight of His servant David, rather, David’s confidence is that when God decides to intercede, victory is a foregone conclusion. David remembers past deliverances with vivid language: “. . . thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly” (7).

This language seems to be taken from a comparison of his enemies with wild beasts; and the idea is, that God had disarmed them as one would a lion or tiger by breaking out his teeth. The cheek-bone denotes the bone in which the teeth are placed; and to smite that, is to disarm the animal . . . he had deprived them of the power of doing him wrong.” (Barnes 31-32)

David ended this song by unashamedly admitting that salvation belongs to the Lord. As mighty a warrior as David was (2 Sam. 17:8), he knows it is God Who brings salvation. So too we must

realize that our efforts for the kingdom of God are only successful in as much as God receives the glory and honor. Paul recognized this when he contemplated what God had done with him, a blasphemer and a persecutor of the church of Christ (1 Tim. 1:12-16). He wrote, “But by the grace of God I am what I am . . .” (1 Cor. 15:10).

God loves all people (John 3:16); however, there is a special sense in which God blesses His people. David knew God’s protection, God’s providence, and what it truly meant to be blessed by God. Let us remember as we face manifold temptations, struggles, and, as it were, uprisings in our lives, that the same God Who watched out for David watches for His people today. Let us serve, praise, and put ultimate trust in God our shield and glory and the lifter up of our heads.

“*Selah.*”

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Barnes, Albert. *Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. Print. Vol. 1 of *Notes on the Old Testament*.

“Selah.” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. Ed. James Orr. Hendrickson, 2002. Print.

Ramsey, Johnny. *Cover to Cover*. Arlington: 1980. Print.

Rawlinson, G. *The Pulpit Commentary*. New York: J. J. Little & Ives, n.d. Print.

Spurgeon, Charles H. *The Treasury of David*. Abr. David O. Fuller. Abr. ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976. Print.

Smith, Melinda, Joanna Saisan, Lawrence Robinson, and Robert Segal. “Can’t Sleep? Causes, Cures, and Treatments for Insomnia.” *HelpGuide.org*. Robert and Jeanne Segal, June 2015. Web. 21 July 2015.

Biographical Sketch

Ed Melott is a native of West Virginia. He and his wife, Kim, have two children, Hunter and Kameron. After making a living in

the construction business, Ed made a decision that he wanted to preach the Gospel as his life's work. After enrolling at the West Virginia School of Preaching in 1999, he began preaching every Sunday at the Proctor church of Christ in Proctor, West Virginia. After graduation in 2001, he ministered to a congregation in Pike, West Virginia, where he worked for about 2 1/2 years. Since January 2004, he has worked with the Steelton church of Christ. Ed has also been blessed to go on trips to India as a missionary to preach and teach the Word of God. Ed is blessed to be on the faculty of the West Virginia School of Preaching, where he teaches Bible Geography.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS

David L. Lipe

Some Introductory Remarks

The book of Psalms is probably the most beloved and widely read book of the Old Testament. That it is a favorite of many is attested by the fact that it, along with Proverbs, is frequently bound in the back of copies of the New Testament. "The book of Psalms has attracted more attention from Christians than any other Old Testament book. Its popularity dates back to the New Testament itself, where one finds frequent quotes and allusions to it. Christians today consider it the heart of the Old Testament" (Dillard and Longman 211). The Psalms have been used in worship by the Jews since the time of David, and Christians have incorporated them into their worship for centuries. Apart from public worship, the Psalms have served and continue to serve the individual as a means of comfort and edification and a guide in expressing joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, dreams and disappointments.

Although the Psalms are Scripture and used in the New Testament to establish and support various doctrinal points, it should be remembered that generally "the Psalms are poems, and poems intended to be sung, not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons" (Lewis 2); thus, the Hebrew title of the Psalms means "songs of praise" and suggests the main purpose of the book, namely: to assist believers in worship and praise to God. They are expressions of Israel's religion and were sung by Old Testament believers. They were written during a time spanning roughly the Exodus (Psalm 90) to Babylonian Captivity (Psalm 137). According to the superscriptions, which do not seem to be part of the original text and are found in approximately two-thirds of the 150 psalms, most psalms were written by various authors, while the remaining ones are anonymous. Seventy-three are ascribed to David, twelve to Asaph (50, 73-83), eleven to the sons of Korah (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88), two to Solomon (72, 127), one to Moses

(90), and one each to the Ezrahites, Heman (88, also ascribed to the sons of Korah), and Ethan (89). Many of the superscriptions appear to be musical directions, while others appear to be references to types of musical composition or directions regarding the occasion for using the psalm.

The Psalms should be allowed to speak for themselves. Some are messianic, while others are historical. Several reflect the common experiences of the human race. The Psalms express the feelings, attitudes, and interests of the average person. They exhibit a timelessness as they cry out to God in prayer and in praise. They have been an inspiration for people throughout the ages. The purpose of this lecture is to give a general introduction to the book of Psalms. I shall examine 1) the structure of the Psalms, 2) the poetic nature of the Psalms, and 3) the literary types of the Psalms. Finally, I will make some concluding remarks.

The Structure of the Psalms

According to the Hebrew text, the Psalms appear to be divided into five distinct sections or books: Book 1 (1-41), Book 2 (42-72), Book 3 (73-89); Book 4 (90-106), Book 5 (107-150). It has been observed from ancient times that “the collection was divided into five books to parallel Moses' five books of the Law” (Cloer 8). Each of these books concludes with a doxology. Although the doxologies differ in wording, the first three books end with the formula, “Amen and Amen” (41:13, 72:19, 89:52). [All scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.] The fourth book concludes with, “And let all the people say, ‘Amen,’” (106:48) followed by, “Praise the Lord!” The fifth book concludes with, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord” (150:6). Following the doxology in the second book, the following words are given: “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended” (72:20).

Although the Psalms were written by many different authors over a period of about one thousand years, “Psalms 1 and 2 seem to introduce Psalms as a whole. Similarly, Psalm 150 individually and 146 through 150 as a group can be seen as a fitting conclusion to the book” (Gardner 469). Gardner observes further that other groupings can be seen within the body of the Psalms, such as

Psalms 120 through 134, all of which are labeled as “Songs of Ascent.” Psalms 135 and 136 have been identified as the “Great Hallel” (the “Great Praise”) and “Psalms 113-118 were known to the Jews as the Hallel, and were recited at Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Booths, and certain other occasions” (470).

The Poetic Nature of the Psalms

As mentioned earlier, psalms are poems. “The Psalms represent poetry set to music” (Woods 505). As musical poems, the main intent of the Psalms is to appeal to emotions and not so much to our cognitive understanding. This is not to say that they do not reflect doctrine, but “they are not intended to be repositories of doctrinal exposition” (Fee and Stuart 207). Poetry was widely appreciated by Israel as a means of learning and remembering God’s instructions. Just as the words of a song can be easily remembered, Israel found it simple to commit to memory and to recall instructions in poetic form. Hebrew poetry, unlike English poetry, does not stress rhyme, nor does it possess the same kinds of metrical structure. In Hebrew poetry, lines are divided into two parts called *stich* which have a certain number of stressed syllables per line (McCullough 11). A few features of Hebrew poetry should be noted.

1. The most distinctive feature of Hebrew poetry is its repetitive style, summed up in the word *parallelism*. This feature was stressed by Robert Lowth in his *Academic Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, published in 1753. Lowth saw in Hebrew poetry that there was a balance in thought in successive lines and suggested three major types of parallelism: synonymous parallelism, antithetic parallelism, and synthetic parallelism.

Synonymous parallelism, the most common type, repeats or emphasizes the thought of the first line in the second. Frequently, the thought of the first line is repeated in the second line in nearly synonymous words. Perhaps the classic example of this is Psalms 19:1: “The heavens declare the glory of God” (first line), “and the firmament shows His handiwork” (second line). Another example is Psalm 2:1: “Why do the nations rage” (first line), “and the people plot a vain thing?” (second line). Other examples include Psalm 49:1 and 83:1.

Antithetic parallelism contrasts the thought of the first line in the second. A single concept is expressed positively and negatively in the same sentence. This type of parallelism is especially common in Proverbs, e.g. “A soft answer turns away wrath” (first line), “but a harsh word stirs up anger” (second line) (15:1). An example from the Psalms is 1:6: “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous” (first line), “but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

Synthetic parallelism does not seem to be parallelism at all, since it neither compares nor contrasts the first line with the second line, “but rather subsequent lines continue or expound upon the thought presented in the first” (Woods 506). Woods mentions Psalm 1:1 as a clear example: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly” (first line), “nor stands in the path of sinners” (second line), “nor sits in the seat of the scornful” (third line). The progression is evident in the three verbs of the three lines (*walks, stands, sits*).

Scholars have observed other forms of parallelism which seem to be variations of the ones just discussed. *Emblematic parallelism* (a variation of synonymous parallelism) illustrates one line by the other (cf. Psalm 1:3). *Climactic parallelism* (a variation of synthetic parallelism) repeats portions of the first line in succeeding lines (cf. Psalm 29:1-2).

Knowing that Hebrew poetry is characterized by the distinctive trait of parallelism explains its repetitive nature; thus, one must be careful not to “over-exegete” psalms and attempt to find distinctive teachings when none was intended by the author.

2. In addition to the general characteristic of parallelism found in the Hebrew poetry, there are other special forms and structures important in poetry and the Psalms. One common poetic technique is the *chiasm*. “Sometimes called *inverted parallelism*, it involves grammatical structures that are repeated in reverse order. An a-b-b-a order of thought is used” (Cloer 15). The name of this poetic device is derived from the Greek letter *chi*, which looks like the English X. Cloer (15) cites a good example of a chiastic arrangement by calling attention to Psalm 51:1:

- a -- Have mercy upon me, O God,
- b -- According to Your lovingkindness;
- b -- According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
- a -- Blot out my transgressions.

A more extended example might be seen in Psalm 27, where David utters a prayer for deliverance with his main point highlighted in the center of the psalm, when he cries: “Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me” (v. 7).

Another form of poetry is the *acrostic* poem, where the Hebrew letters of the alphabet are placed at the beginning of each verse or line in the poem. Although this technique is found in several psalms, perhaps the most notable is Psalm 119. Here the psalmist devotes eight verses for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Since there are twenty-two letters, and eight verses devoted to each letter, the psalm consists of 176 verses.

3. Another feature of Hebrew poetry is the use of figures of speech, such as personification, simile, metaphor, merism, and hyperbole. *Personification* occurs in writing when a nonhuman entity is ascribed the attributes, attitudes, or actions of a human being. The psalmist speaks of the waters as seeing God and being afraid (77:16). Also, he calls upon the sea creatures, fire, hail, snow, clouds, stormy winds, mountains, trees, beasts and cattle, creeping things, and flying fowl all to praise the Lord (148:7-10). With the use of personification, the psalmist enables the reader to imagine how such things would behave toward God, if they were able to express emotion.

Simile is a figure of speech in which two things are explicitly compared using *like* or *as*. A classic example of simile is found in Psalm 42:1: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.” Here, the psalmist compares himself and his desire to be with God to that of a deer thirsting for water.

A *metaphor* refers to the comparison of one thing to another, without the use of *like* or *as*. Psalm 23 is a good example of two extended metaphors, which are metaphors that continue for more than one line or phrase. In Psalm 23:1-4, the Lord is compared to a shepherd who looks after and nurtures His flock. Verses 5-6 constitute a metaphor between the Lord and a good host who

ensures his guest has sufficient food and shelter.

A *merism* refers to the combination of two contrasting words or phrases that refer to an entirety. David says, “You know my sitting down and my rising up . . .” (139:2), indicating that God knows all of his actions. He does a similar thing in verse 8, indicating the omnipresence of God.

A *hyperbole* is an exaggeration used for effect. Thus, a dangerous situation might be pictured as death itself: “The pangs of death surrounded me . . .” (Psalm 18:4). A more memorable example is Psalm 51:5: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” Although this passage has been interpreted in various ways, it seems clear in this penitential psalm of David that he is saying that sin has been part of his life for as long as he could remember. That this interpretation is correct can be seen by an examination of other passages. Psalm 88:15 says, “I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth. . . .” Obviously, the psalmist is not saying that he has literally been afflicted from youth. Again, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (58:3). Here, David assigns guilt to wicked men both before and immediately after they are born. No one thinks that David intends to say that a fetus or baby is wicked and speaks lies. He is exaggerating to make the point that these wicked men have been that way for a long, long time. Similarly, when we make a mistake, sometimes out of frustration we will say something to the effect – “I can't do anything right.” None of us mean this literally, for we do many things right. A former colleague says it well when she says: “If David is given just a thimbleful of poetic license here, he is simply trying to impress on the Lord how sorry he is for his sin and how totally destroyed he feels with losing the favor of his God” (Cargile 8).

Only when one appreciates the poetic nature of psalms can one truly have the rich and rewarding experience God intended for the reader. To fail to do so is to fail to properly understand God's revelation to man through the means of poetry.

The Literary Types of the Psalms

As has been noted, the general type of literature in the Psalms

is Hebrew poetry; however, this type of literature can be divided into subcategories that can help guide the reader into the proper use of the Psalms. Though there are various types of psalms, the three main types are: 1) laments, 2) songs of thanksgiving, and 3) hymns of praise. In addition to these are other types that deserve mention.

1. *Laments* make up the largest group of psalms, most of which occur in the first half of the book of Psalms. “Nearly a third of all the psalms are to be classed as this type” (Weiser 66). Cloer defines a lament psalm as follows: “The lament psalm is generally defined by its mood of calling upon God for help out of a trying situation” (23). Fee and Stuart have identified the following elements that appear in some form in nearly all the lament psalms: address, complaint, trust, deliverance, assurance, and praise (215). They call attention to Psalm 3 as a good example of an individual lament that clearly reflects the above elements.

2. *Hymns of Praise* “center on the praise of God for who he is, for his greatness and his beneficence toward the whole earth as well as his own people” (Fee and Stuart 213). God deserves praise for Who He is, what He has done, and what He continues to do. Psalm 117, the shortest psalm in the book, is a good illustration of this psalm type. It begins with a command for the people to praise the Lord, and the ending forms an *inclusio*, since it repeats the opening line. The word *for* at the beginning of verse 2 marks the reason(s) for praising the Lord -- “For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!”

3. *Thanksgiving Psalms*, as the name suggests, express gratitude to the Lord for something that has gone well. The psalmist may express thanks for God’s goodness, faithfulness, care, or beneficent acts. These psalms are related to laments and hymns of praise in that cries for help characteristically conclude with thanksgiving and praise for God in hearing the cry. Psalm 107 is a good example of a thanksgiving psalm.

4. *Confidence Psalms* are defined by their “[t]one and confidence,” which constitute their main characteristics (Cloer 24). The psalmist expresses confidence in God that He can be trusted not only in good times, but also in bad times. Psalm 23 is a classic

psalm of trust known by many. Probably less known, but an excellent example nonetheless, is Psalm 27.

5. *Wisdom Psalms* concern the kind of life God wants His people to live. This instruction is particularly noticeable in the contrast the psalmist makes between the way of the righteous and the wicked. The book of Psalms is introduced with this type of psalm in its description of the righteous and the wicked (cf. Psalm 73).

6. *Royal Psalms* are not defined by their literary characteristics but by their content, which concerns the kingship. In ancient Israel, kingship was an important institution, for it was through it that God did much of His work. Though many of these psalms deal with the earthly king (20, 21), others focus on God as King (47) and even the Lord Himself (2).

7. *Salvation History Psalms* focus on God's saving actions on behalf of His people. These psalms review the history of the deliverance of Israel out of Egyptian bondage and her development as a chosen people of God from whom the Lord Jesus came. Psalms in this category include 78, 105, 106, 135, and 136.

8. *Imprecatory Psalms* are those in which the psalmist vents his anger to God against enemies and are almost always aspects of laments (cf. 3:7). Some imprecatory parts of psalms are quite harsh, e.g. the psalmist cries in 139:19, "Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men." Further, he expresses hate for those who hate God (v. 21). Similar examples are found in Psalms 58:6-11; 69:22-28; 83:9-18; 109:6-20; 137:7-9; and 149:5-9. "Christians tend to feel uncomfortable with these passages because they seem incompatible with Jesus' teachings about loving one's enemies (cf. Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-31)" (Lucas 60). However, it should be remembered that it is God Who is the hearer of the angry words of the psalmist. The value of the imprecatory psalms is that they "help us, when we feel anger, not to do anger. We should honestly express our anger to God, no matter how bitterly and hatefully we feel it, and let God take care of justice against those who misuse us" (Fee and Stuart 222).

Some Concluding Remarks

Although much more should be said in an introduction to the Psalms, in this manuscript I have attempted to call attention to three main themes: 1) the structure of the Psalms, 2) the poetic nature of the Psalms, and 3) the literary types of the Psalms. These three features should help us appreciate more this revelation of God to man. The Psalms are an invaluable guide for worship, and they help us understand more about God and how we should relate to Him. They are of special benefit in helping us understand how to express ourselves in prayer.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cargile, Becky. *Psalms 51.5: A Linguistic Study*. N.d. TS

Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 1-50*. Searcy: Resource, 2004. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.

Dillard, Raymond B., and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1994. Print.

Fee, Gordon D. and Stuart, Douglas. *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003. Print.

Gardner, Jim L. "Psalms at-a-Glance." *Crying Out to God: Prayer and Praise in Psalms*. Ed. David L. Lipe. Henderson: Freed-Hardeman University, 2009. 468-72. Print.

Lewis, C. S. *Reflections on the Psalms*. New York: Harcourt, 1958. Print.

Lucas, Ernest C. *A Guide to the Psalms & Wisdom Literature*. Vol. 3. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003. Print. Exploring the Old Testament.

McCullough, W. Stewart. "Psalms: Introduction." *The Interpreter's Bible*. Ed. Arthur Buttrick, et al. Vol. 4. New York: Abingdon, 1955. 11. Print.

Weiser, Artur. *The Psalms: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962. Print.

Woods, Clyde M. "Biblical Poetry at-a-Glance." *Crying Out to God: Prayer and Praise in Psalms*. Ed. David L. Lipe. Henderson: Freed-Hardeman University. 2009. 505-10. Print.

GOD GIVES ME STEADFASTNESS

Psalm 112

Don Cooper

I feel honored to have been invited to speak on this lectureship. I thank the director, Andy Robison; the elders of this congregation, who are overseers of the West Virginia School of Preaching; and the committee that was responsible for planning this series of studies from the book of Psalms.

I freely admit that the assignment given me was very challenging. I do not think I can remember a study of the Psalms being presented in any lectureship that I have been privileged to attend. Consequently, my source of references was quite limited. I have two of Brother Cloer's books on the Psalms. But they only went through Psalm 89. However, I hope that something I say on this occasion will be helpful.

From our text: "Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, Who delights greatly in His commandments. . . . He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is *steadfast*, trusting in the Lord" (1, 7; emphasis added). [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted].

From the late, beloved Leroy Brownlow, I would like to share some of his words: "THE BLESSED OF GOD ARE SECURE, unshakeable people. They are not chaff moved by the wind. They are not driven by restlessness, frustration and defeat. They are stable, solid and firm because their roots are grounded in God and His Word" (13).

At the risk of being labeled "negative," I offer my opinion that in the church today, there is a short supply of *steadfastness*. If you are inclined to disagree with me on this statement, just consider the decline in number that the church has experienced in recent years. I was blessed to have begun preaching in an era in which the church was one of the fastest-growing religious organizations in the United States. We boasted a membership of 2.5 million. If current statistics are correct, we now number about 1.2 million. I am told that in the 2015 edition of *Churches of Christ in the United States*,

there are forty-five fewer congregations of the Lord's people listed than in the previous edition.

Further evidence of the lack of *steadfastness* among many congregations is seen in the morning attendance figures. I would suggest that the number in attendance for Sunday morning Bible classes is much less than the number in attendance at the worship hour. And the number of those attending Sunday evenings is usually 40% to 50% shy of that seen at the morning hour. And at the mid-week services, the number present is even smaller still. I recently noticed in the bulletin of one congregation that on a certain Sunday morning, they had over four hundred in attendance. That evening they had sixteen (No, that is not a misprint.). How can so many of our people claim to be *steadfast* when they are so lacking in their duties to the Lord and His church? What is the cause? Simply, they do not fear the Lord, nor do they delight in His commandments (Psalm 112:1). Every faithful Gospel preacher and every godly elder in the church that I am acquainted with is earnestly pleading with the unfaithful to become more *steadfast* in their service to the Master. Phone calls are made, letters are sent, and personal visits are made to those whose souls are in jeopardy. In most cases, all efforts seem to be to no avail. What is the answer? How do we persuade our brothers and sisters in Christ to be *steadfast*?

Some of our brethren have tried just about everything imaginable, including some very extraordinary tactics to swell attendance. I once knew a preacher who promised to kiss a pig if Sunday morning attendance increased by a certain number. It did not work. So he arranged to have an elder dunked in the baptistery on a certain Sunday if a certain goal was reached. I do not know if that worked or not; he quit sending me his bulletin when I chided him for his efforts.

It is my firm conviction that only when a man seriously ponders the promises of God in His Word will that man begin to take seriously his responsibilities as a Christian. In our text, "the man who *fears* the LORD, Who *delights* greatly in His commandments" is the one whom God promises to bless (1, emphasis added).

Fear the Lord

This is not the only place in the Holy Scriptures that we are told that we must *fear* God. The Preacher, the son of David, the king in Jerusalem, (Solomon) wrote, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccles. 12:13).

In the New Testament, we read, “And do not *fear* those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28, emphasis added). Exactly what does it mean to *fear* God? From James Strong, we learn that it means “to be alarmed; in anal. to be in awe of, ie. revere, afraid, fear (exceedingly), reverence” (76).

Some would dare to take issue with the inspired writers, saying that God is such a loving God that man needs not be afraid of Him -- He loves man so much that He would never condemn, punish or kill Him. Of course, those who so ignorantly make such a statement have not searched the Scriptures. There are many examples of God punishing those who were disobedient. We will discuss this a little later in our study.

When I was a child, I was blessed with Christian parents. I knew my father loved me and would do all he could to assure my safety and well-being. He worked hard to provide my food, shelter and clothing. I was not afraid of him in the sense of fearing that he would abuse me or desert me, as some fathers do. Even when I was disobedient, he was not cruel to me even when administering appropriate punishment. As I grew older, even upon becoming a man, I *feared* him, i.e., I respected him. Because I loved him, I tried to dutifully obey him. So it ought to be with my relationship with my heavenly Father.

That is precisely the kind of *fear* that we as Christians should have for our heavenly Father. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). We show our love for God by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3).

Let us never lose sight of the truth that “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). However, we have no fear if we obey Him, as we shall see in further study of our text.

His Heart Is Steadfast

This psalm tells us that the man's heart is *steadfast* because he trusts in the Lord. Blessings from God are promised as a reward. Throughout the Scriptures -- both in the Old Testament and New Testament -- are found promises of God toward His faithful children. And we know His promises are true. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise . . ." (2 Pet. 3:9). Evidences of these promises being given and carried out by God abound for our example and learning (Rom. 15:4). They serve as assurance to those of us who are endeavoring to live "soberly, godly, and righteously in the present age," and by doing so, we are able to look for "the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12, 13).

What is meant by the word *steadfast* or *steadfastness*? Let us first appeal to the usually reliable Daniel Webster, who says that for one to be steadfast, one must be 1) fixed in direction, 2) firm in purpose, resolution, faith, 3) unwavering, or 4) firmly established (769). Scholars who have searched the Scriptures and provided us with meanings derived from the original language thereof seem to agree with Webster. James Strong informs us that being *steadfast* requires that one be "sedentary, i.e., (by impl.) immoveable, settled, Steadfast" (1476).

Even without the help of these and other scholarly men, we have overwhelming proof of God's blessings being bestowed upon those who were *steadfast* in keeping His will. Let us look to a few of them recorded in the Scriptures as examples.

Noah

As mentioned at the start of this study, many of God's children are falling away from the way of the Lord, becoming unfaithful to His Word and the church, forfeiting their salvation. Some attempt to excuse their negligence by blaming it on the environment in which we are living and the cultural differences that exist. I cannot but think of the days of Noah, described in Genesis 6 as being extremely evil. In that sacred writing we are told, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (5). Our loving and merciful God was sorry that He had even made

man. It appears to me that those were some truly wicked days in the history of man.

How did this affect Noah? Did he succumb to the worldly, wicked people who surrounded him? Did he forsake God? Did he lose faith in God? No, no, no! Verse 9 of that chapter tells us, “Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.” Those in this audience and those faithful Christians reading this lesson know the rest of the story about the flood that destroyed the wickedness and saved Noah (Gen. 6-9). “So God blessed Noah and his sons . . .” (9:1). Noah’s *steadfastness*, his faithfulness, was rewarded by God (Heb. 11:7). All who desire an inheritance from God must remain *steadfast*, unmovable in the faith, just as Noah did.

Abraham

How can we who are of the spiritual seed of Abraham forget the many examples of *steadfastness* found in this man’s earthly journey, beginning in Genesis 12? He is called by God to “Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you” (1). Remember, this is during the Patriarchal Age, when God spoke directly to man (Heb. 1:1). Abraham was listening to the voice of One whom he had never seen telling him to vacate his homeland, leave his kindred, and go to some place he had never been and did not know where it was but which God would show him. The promise that God made to Abraham was, “I will make you a great nation, I will bless you And make your name great: And you shall be a blessing. . . . And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3). Did Abraham hesitate? No, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8).

We must not forget Abraham’s wife Sarah, who also had faith in God. “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised” (Heb. 11:11).

Abraham’s faith and *steadfastness* were further confirmed after his son of promise (Isaac) was born and had grown to some size.

“God tested Abraham” by saying to him, “Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen. 22:1, 2). Again Abraham obeyed, and God reaffirmed His promise through an angel who spoke out of heaven (15-18). Receiving that promise sustained Abraham; he remained *steadfast*.

Job

How can we possibly think about *steadfastness* to God without thinking about His servant Job? I know that there are people of the world who probably do not know who Job is, nor do they even care. But we who are Christians, being tried and tempted each day of our lives, are certain to think of Job when troublesome times come our way.

Some might suggest that Job was not a real person, that his name is just used to illustrate human suffering. However, the fact that there is a biblical book bearing his name should give us some indication of his importance in God’s scheme of things. And consider that he is mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel (14:14). And did not the inspired New Testament writer James say, “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord -- that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (5:11)?

In the very first verse of the book bearing Job’s name, we learn of the character of this good man. It says Job “was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.” Job was obviously known for his integrity and good works. But his perfect nature did not make him immune to trials. He was attacked by Satan himself, who accused Job of serving God only for personal gain. He was not only very righteous, but he was very rich (1:3). Time will not allow us to dwell specifically on all that Job endured, both physically and emotionally. Suffice it to say that Job was called upon to bear more than his share of heartaches: loss of family, loss of possessions, sores all over his body, abandonment of friends and more. I believe that Job’s *steadfastness* to God in all of this might have been most sorely tried when his wife said to him, “Do you still hold to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (2:9) Job’s answer: ““You speak as one of the foolish women

speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2:10). In the end, “. . . the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning . . .” (42:12). Job acknowledged that all that he had came from the Lord, and he allowed that since God had freely given him all that he possessed, God should be allowed also to take it away. Throughout all of the trials, Job’s attitude was expressed in these words: “. . . Blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21). Never did Job, like so many today, blame God (1:22).

God Gives Us Steadfastness

According to the apostle Paul, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

The examples that we have cited are but a few of those that we could call attention to. In the Bible abound innumerable examples of both men and women who were tried and tempted but remained *steadfast* to the Lord. Their faith and trust in God was such that they could not allow themselves to turn from Him. They knew that He would fulfill His promises to them if they would remain loyal to Him. We must do the same today if we expect to be rewarded at the end of life’s journey. Consider some of the promises of God directed toward even you and me today.

When being persecuted, remember the words of our Lord Jesus: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11-12). If a Christian is committed to serving God, he is going to suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). “But he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22).

The examples of *steadfastness* that we cited previously were all taken from the Old Testament. But there is an equal number or even more found in the New Testament, including Steven, who suffered martyrdom at the hands of an angry mob (Acts 7:54-60). The apostle Paul suffered much for Christ (2 Cor. 11:22-33). But did he regret having suffered such for the Lord? No, on the

contrary, he dismissed any thoughts of having lost worldly gain and thanked God for the privileges afforded him (Philip. 3:7-11). His *steadfastness* to the Lord was because he believed he would be rewarded for his faithfulness. We could say this about all of the apostles (except for Judas Iscariot), though not as much is recorded in Holy Writ concerning the others than is written about Paul. As far as we know, only one apostle died a natural death (John), and he suffered exile to the Isle of Patmos. Even there, he spent time with the Lord (Rev. 1:10) and called upon men to read His blessed Word (3). Guided by the Holy Spirit, he delivered the message from the Lord to those who would suffer imprisonment and other types of tribulation. The Lord promised, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. . . . Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (2:10).

The “crown of life” spoken of by John is promised to all who faithfully serve the Lord, as evidenced from Paul’s writing to his “son in the faith” Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2). He wrote, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (KJV, 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

As Christians, our battle with Satan will end in victory if we continue to place our trust in Christ and be *steadfast* (1 Cor. 15:57). The following verse is the answer to our quest for everlasting life: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be *steadfast*, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58, emphasis added).

In this life, we are faced with many troubles, but we are promised that “all things work for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Further, we know that “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” and that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37, 39).

One of my favorite hymns is entitled, “God Will Take Care of You,” written by C. D. Martin. It reminds us that we need not be

dismayed -- God will take care of us. It matters not the tests that come our way when we have a loving God Who cares for our every need. May we all do our very best to follow the examples of the faithful who have gone on before us so that we, too, may receive the crown of life.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Brownlow, Leroy. *A Psalm in My Heart*. Fort Worth: Brownlow, 1989. Print.

Martin, Civilla D. "God Will Take Care of You." *Praise for the Lord*. Ed. John Wiegand. Nashville: Praise, 2001. n. pag. Print.

Royster, Carl H., comp. *Churches of Christ in the United States*. 2015 ed. Nashville: 21st Century Christian, 2015. Print.

Strong, James. "fear" *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Strong. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990. Print.

---. "steadfast" *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Strong. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990. Print.

Webster, Daniel. "steadfast." *Universal College Dictionary*. Webster. New York: Random House, 2004. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Brother Cooper has been preaching the Gospel since June 1952. He is an alumnus of Freed-Hardeman College (now University). He has preached in Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. He presently preaches for the Lincoln Avenue church of Christ in Bucyrus, Ohio. In addition to his local pulpit work, he has held many Gospel meetings, spoken on various lectureships and television and radio programs, and written for Christian publications, as well as local newspapers and church bulletins. He has taught song leading, conducted men's training

classes, and founded and directed a youth camp. He has also served as an elder in two congregations where he preached. He and his wife, Jan, have been married since March 1954. They have four children, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

GOD GIVES ME PEACE

Psalm 57

W. Terry Varner

The Hebrew name for the 150 psalms is *super tehillim* or “hymns of praise.” The Greek name is *psalmoi* or “The Psalms,” “The Psalter,” or “The Sacred Songs.” The Psalms was the hymnal of Israel. It is important to realize that the Old Testament contains other psalms besides the 150 that compose the book of Psalms; e.g. Exodus 15, Judges 5, 1 Samuel 2, 1 Samuel 18, etc. The Book of Psalms is considered the most cited of the Old Testament books in the New Testament. The early Christians used the Psalms in various ways.

First, the early Christians appealed to the Psalms as evidence for the Messiah. Alland lists 414 quotations and allusions to the Psalms in the New Testament (895-96). William Alexander, in the famous 1876 Bampton Lectures, lists 126 different citations and allusions to the Psalms, occurring 358 times in the New Testament. He lists Psalms 57:5-11 as alluded to in Matthew 28:9-18 (260). He makes the following observations:

But the Psalms are interwoven with the texture of the New Testament. They are so, indeed, to a degree which can scarcely be imagined by any one who has not directed his special attention to the subject, and marked down, not only certain palmary passages, but literally hundreds of at first suspected hints, allusions, and expressions. . . . The Great Teacher, who saw into the depths of Scripture with such penetrating insight, once spoke of it as a chain of which no link can be broken without rupture or dislocation of the whole in St. John x.35. (4-5)

Second, Alexander suggests that the early first-century Christians used the Psalter to develop 1) Christian Character, 2) Christian Worship, 3) Christian Theology, and 4) the teaching within the Church (6).

In the early church, some *a cappella* singing was composed of “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:15); therefore, the Psalms were of great significance to the worship of the early church. [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] As for a distinction between the terms *psalms*, *hymns*, and *spiritual songs*, as used in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:15, Ferguson writes that

efforts have been made to identify different types of songs from these words. These efforts, however, are misguided. Usage in the Septuagint and other Greek Jewish writings near New Testament times show that the terms were used interchangeably. No precise distinction can be made between the words. (269)

For further study of these terms see, *Ado and Hymnos* in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 1 (164) and Volume 8 (499).

Worship is to be God-centered and not man-centered; therefore, it is understandable that the early Christians sang various Old Testament psalms. With Israel, and with the early Christians, the Psalms are “the grandest symphony of praise of God ever composed on earth” (Oesterley 593).

The Subtitle of Psalm 57

Psalm 57 is one of 116 psalms containing a subtitle. While the subtitle is not inspired, it may suggest to the reader the historical setting, the melody to which the psalm was sung, the character, and the use of the psalm (Cloer, *Psalms 1-50* 9-10).

The subtitle of Psalm 57 is “*To the Choir Director. ‘Destroy Not.’ Of David. A mystery poem. When fled from Saul, in the cave*” (Leopold 431).

The phrase “Destroy Not” from *’al tashet* was “apparently a well-known song [that] began with these words and its melody was to be followed here” (Archer 436). It is argued among Hebrew commentators that the phrase “Destroy Not” is taken from Deuteronomy 9:26, when Moses interceded for Israel. The phrase is also found in 1 Samuel 26:9; Psalms 5, 58, and 59; and Isaiah

65:8. Perhaps, David is recalling the great harm by Saul's inhumane cruelty to Israel and to himself, especially when he had it within his power to kill Saul, God's anointed. "He now uses the same language in supplication to God. The Lord will spare us only if we are merciful toward our enemies" (Wacaster 105). Indeed, Scripture teaches, "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (ESV, James 2:13).

Psalm 57 was written by David, describing his fleeing from Saul, either in the cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1) or in the cave of Engedi (1 Sam. 23:29-24:7). On both occasions, David could have killed Saul, who was God's anointed, but he did not.

The Theme of Psalm 57

Psalm 57 is filled with varied themes. Commentators have written from various perspectives, showing its richness. Some of these themes are:

- In the Midst of the Lions (Ash and Miller 194).
- The Psalmist in the Lion's Den (Rhodes 92).
- Praise in Adversity (Deaver, "Praise" 343; Wacaster 105).
- Prayer of a Man Assailed by Great Foes (Leupold 430).
- The Shadow of Thy Wings (Armerding 104).
- Under the Wings of Providence (Cloer, *Psalms 51-89* 108).
- Before Falling Asleep in the Wilderness (Delitzsch 172).

The Outline of Psalm 57

We offer and will follow the following outline of Psalm 57, from the pen of the late and beloved Roy C. Deaver (*Expositional* 188-190):

- **CALL** -- The psalmist calls upon God in prayer (57:1).
- **CONFIDENCE** -- The psalmist expresses confidence that God will answer (57:2-3).
- **CONDITION** -- The psalmist speaks of his condition (57:4).

- **DOXOLOGY** -- The psalmist issues a statement of praise (57:5).
- **CONDITION** -- The psalmist again speaks of his condition (57:6).
- **COMMITMENT** -- The psalmist stresses his commitment to God (57:7-10).
- **DOXOLOGY** -- The psalmist again issues a statement of praise (57:11).

A Brief Commentary on Psalm 57

Call

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me!
For my soul trusts in You;
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,
Until the calamities have passed by. (1)*

Pursued by King Saul, David had nowhere to turn but to God in prayer. David's repetition, "be merciful to me," shows both the intensity of his prayer and that God is indeed his refuge and strength (Psalm 46). After all, God is "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3; cf. Psalm 59:10, 17; 100:5; 119:164; Luke 1:78; Eph. 2:4). David prays for mercy because his soul trusts in God, Who never fails man. "In the shadow of Your wings" (cf. Psalm 17:8; 61:4; Matt. 23:37) points to safety with God, in a confident anticipation of "the quickening, cordial solace that is combined with this protection" (Delitzsch 174). David believed his calamities would pass away or cease and that a time would come when he would not be in constant flight (Barnes 133).

Confidence

*I will cry out to God Most High,
To God who performs all things for me
He shall send from heaven and save me;
He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. Selah.
God shall send forth His mercy and His truth. (2-3)*

David cries or prays to God with confidence. "God Most High" recognizes both God's sovereignty and omnipotence (2). *Performs*

means “to bring to an end” or “to complete” and is used by David to show his trust and certainty that God will answer his prayer now as He has in the past.

David has no hope of any man being able to deliver him from his calamities with King Saul or whomever. God will deliver him! God will send forth His “mercy” (“lovingkindness,” NASB) and truth (3). God’s lovingkindness and truth are powerful. “Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for You” (Psalm 25:21). Lovingkindness (mercy), an attribute of God, is the foundation of God’s covenant. Truth is an attribute of God that suggests that God will keep His word. Cloer comments on lovingkindness (mercy): “Anyone who claims that there is no picture of grace in the Old Testament has not met up with this word” (*Psalms 51-89* 120).

Selah is used here and in verse 6. The word occurs seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk. As to the meaning of *Selah*, writers differ. The general meaning is “that it marks a pause in the music when the Psalms were sung in the temple services; others say that it means that the reader should stop and think” (Kinney 52). Kinney states that *Selah* and its cognate Hebrew verb have a root meaning to “lift up” (53). We ask, “Lifting up what?” Rabbi Aben-Ezra suggests that *Selah* was “used to give weight and importance to what was said, and to indicate its truth” (McClintock and Strong 513). When considering God’s lovingkindness and truth, we ought to “pause to meditate and give thanks” (Spurgeon 49). Kinney writes that “*Selah* is rather the result of the pause and the meditation upon Him. . . . [picturing] a desire for Him that spurns all that would come between” (57, 62). Therefore, *Selah* or lifting up God in praise results when God’s child has meditated upon God and His teaching. We meditate, reflect, and ought to pause in deeper reflection on what God has done and said. “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

Condition

*My soul is among lions;
I be among the sons of men who are set on fire,
Whose teeth are spears and arrows,
And their tongue a sharp sword. (4)*

David describes his condition among the “sons of men” as reminding him of one whose “soul is among lions” (4). David speaks of his enemies in rich metaphorical language. Lions are fierce, savage, and beastly, with teeth likened to “spears and arrows” and with tongues slandering and abusing (4). The mixed metaphors of lions and military emphasizes how perilous the situation was for David.

Doxology

*Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory be above all the earth. (5)*

“Doxologies are short ascriptions of praise to God which frequently appear as concluding formulae to prayers, [and] hymnic expressions . . .” (O’Brien 69). Often, we express our praise to God in short phrases of joy and gratitude for His abundant blessings and providence in our life. In the midst of deep troubles, David lifts his eyes to God, Who is both sovereign and Lord. “It is not to be understood in the sense that God might do something whereby He would become exalted, but rather in the sense that He deserves to be exalted for what he has done” (Leupold 432). This is equivalent to the New Testament phrase, “Hallowed be Your name” (Matt. 6:10). God’s glory must precede our personal petitions. When we hallow God’s name, we declare God different, distinct from, and above all things. God is responsible “not merely for the existence of all other objects, but for their having the powers and liabilities they do” (Swinburne 11).

Condition

*They have prepared a net for my steps;
My soul is bowed down;
They have dug a pit before me;
Into the midst of it they themselves have fallen. Selah (6)*

David returns the second time to his condition. Saul has planned, connived, and schemed to capture and kill David. His treatment of David was as a cruel, savage beast. It is possible the

phrase, “My soul is bowed down,” serves as a metaphor of David’s inner depression (Ash and Miller 196). David declares of such wickedness that Saul and his servants would eventually fall into the pit of their own making. *Selah* is used here the second time in Psalm 57. (For the importance of *Selah*, we refer the reader to our previous comments under Psalm 57:2-3.) David pauses to meditate upon the end of those who devised wickedness for him and others; i.e. God acts and the wicked are caught in their own trap (cf. Esther 7:10). “Evil is a stream which one day flows back to its source” (Spurgeon 50).

Commitment

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;

I will sing and give praise.

Awake, my glory! Awake, lute and harp!

I will awaken the dawn.

I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples;

I will sing to You among the nations.

For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens,

And Your truth unto the clouds. (7-10)

Psalm 57:7-10 is identical with Psalm 108:1-5; however, “the relationship [between the two Psalms] is not known” (Ash and Miller 196). Such joyous praise to God shows David was fully aware of God’s protection when in peril. David stresses his faith and commitment to God. David’s heart is “steadfast” (7). *Steadfast* means “fixed and resolute.” His heart rests in the shadow of God’s wings. Is this not evidence that David’s lack of fear was because he knew with God all would be well? David’s faith was so steadfast, fixed, and resolute in God as his refuge that “I [David] will sing and give praise” (7).

For David, it is a time of triumph and victory. Rather than the morning dawn awakening him, he awakens the morning dawn with a song of praise to God. David not only calls upon God, but calls for the musicians to join with him with their “lute (lyre) and harp” (8). David and the musicians call upon God with “all the organs of the body, and affections of the soul, to unite their powers in sweetest harmony and concert, to awaken the sluggish morning

with the voice of melody, sending forth the glories of redemption” (Horne 219). His praise and gratitude is “among the peoples . . . [and] the nations” (cf. Rom. 15:9-10).

David extols the greatness of God’s “mercy (“lovingkindness,” NASB) and truth” (3). Cloer writes:

“Lovingkindness” (*chesed*) is the great word for God’s covenant love. This love of His is higher than our highest thoughts and stronger than our deepest emotions. It binds us to the “heavens” and heaven to us. The word “truth” stands for His word and His integrity in keeping His promises. These two attributes of God come from heaven (v. 3). They display the character of heaven and, if we allow them, will lift us to heaven (v. 10). God extends His love and truth to the whole world. (*Psalms 51-89*, 116)

Doxology

*Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory be above all the earth. (11)*

David closes with a repetition of the doxology in verse 5. The doxology exalts the universal sovereignty of God. (For meaning and use of the term *doxology*, we refer the reader to comments under Psalm 57:5.) David “looks beyond his own immediate to the perfect and universal sovereignty of God, which is the final goal of hope (1 Cor. xv.28; Rev. xix.6)” (Kirkpatrick 325).

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations designated NASB are from the New American Standard Bible, © the Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995.

Alexander, William. *The Witness of the Psalms to Christ and Christianity*. 1876 Bampton Lectures. London, 1877. Print.

Aland, Barbara, et al. *The Greek New Testament*. 4th Rev. Ed. Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1993. Print.

- Archer, Gleason L. Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody, 1964. Print.
- Armerding, Carl. *Psalms in Minor Key*. Chicago: Moody, 1973. Print.
- Ash, Tony L. and Clyde M. Miller. *Psalms*. Austin: Sweet, 1980. Print. The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament.
- Barnes, Albert. *Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963. Print. Vol. 2 of *Notes on the Old Testament Explanatory and Practical*. 3 vols.
- Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 1-50*. Searcy: Resource, 2004. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.
- Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 51-89*. Searcy: Resource, 2006. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.
- Deaver, Roy. "Praise in Adversity." *The Book of Psalms: Chapters 1-73*. Vol. 1. Pulaski: Sain, 1989. Print. 2 vols. Southwest Lectures.
- Deaver, Roy C. *An Expositional, Analytical, Homiletical, Devotional Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Vol. 1. Austin: Firm Foundation, 1989. Print. 2 vols.
- Horne, George. *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. London, 1826. Print.
- Kirkpatrick, A. F. *The Book of Psalms: Psalms XLII-LXXXIX*. Vol. 2. 1895. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1904. Print. 3 vols.
- Kinney, LeBaron W. *Acres of Diamonds: Hebrew Word Studies for the English Reader*. New York: Loizeaux, 1942. Print.
- Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of the Psalms*. 1959. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961. Print.
- McClintock, John and James Strong. "Selah." *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*. Vol. 9. 1867-1887. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981. Print. 12 vols.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Eds. Gerald F. Hawthorn and Ralph D. Martin. Downers Grove: Zondervan, 1988. Print.
- Oesterley, W. O. E. *The Psalms: Translated with Text-Critical and Exegetical Notes*. 1939. London: SPCK, 1959. Print.

Rhodes, Arnold B. *The Book of Psalms*. Richmond: John Knox, 1960. Print. Vol. 9 of *The Layman's Bible Commentary*. 25 vols.

Spurgeon, Charles H. *The Treasury of David*. Vol. 3. 1881. New York, 1892. Print. 6 vols.

Swinburne, Richard. *Is There a God?* 1996. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.

Wacaster, Tom. *The Songs and Devotions of David: Psalms 50-72*. Vol. 3. Pulaski: Sain, n.d. Print. 7 vols.

Biographical Sketch

W. Terry Varner has been married over fifty years to the former Lillie L. Garrison. They have four children: Steve is a Funeral Director at Master's Funeral Home in Mannington, Ohio; Scott, an Administrator of the Vocational Schools in Marshal County, lives in Moundsville, West Virginia, and is serving in his 19th year as delegate in West Virginia House; Stuart is Dean of Students at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee; and Sara Perry is a second-grade teacher in Fort Gibson, Oklahoma. The couple has eleven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Terry has preached over sixty years, forty-three of which were in located work in Shadyside, Ohio; Dunbar, West Virginia; North Canton, Ohio; and Harmar Hill in Marietta, Ohio. He left located work in 1997 and presently serves as an elder and evangelist in West Union, West Virginia.

He is one of the four founders of the West Virginia School of Preaching, along with Wirt Cook, Emanuel Daugherty, and Charles C. Pugh III. He has taught as many as five classes and is presently teaching three classes.

Terry serves as research coordinator for the Warren Christian Apologetics Center in Vienna, West Virginia, and general editor of *Sufficient Evidence: A Journal of Christian Apologetics*.

He has enjoyed hybridizing irises since 1968 and presently has thirty irises on the international market. He also enjoys library research, building a library, gardening, hunting, and fishing.

GOD GIVES ME GOODNESS

Psalm 33
Jack Gilchrist

The Psalms are many beautiful songs of worship that were gathered together for use by the Hebrews. These psalms can teach many things and show many aspects of God. Like our songs today, sometimes much is known about the background of a particular psalm, but sometimes, not much has been revealed.

Psalm 33 is one of the psalms that does not have much known about its background; why it was written, on what occasion was it written, and even who wrote it are all pieces of information that remain a mystery to the modern reader. For this reason, it has been called an “orphan psalm” (Cloer 441). Some think that David wrote this psalm, which seems to stem from where it appears in the Book of Psalms more than any other reason. Some also think that Psalm 33 is a continuation of Psalm 32, completing the thoughts found there. “Ten Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament unite this Psalm with the previous one” (441).

This psalm actually introduces itself in the first three verses. It starts with a call for the righteous to praise God. It follows that by giving a reason why the righteous should praise God, “for praise from the upright is beautiful” (1). [All Scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.] The praise of the righteous is aesthetically pleasing. The psalm continues to call the righteous to praise God with a harp, an instrument of ten strings, singing, and shouting. Since this psalm is part of the Old Covenant, verses 2 and 3 of this psalm do not justify using mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship any more than other passages in the Old Testament allow animal sacrifice, the use of incense, or the need of a tabernacle in the New Testament church.

Instead of getting distracted with the side issue of this psalm, it is worth asking, “What can we take from this and other similar passages that mention mechanical instruments of worship in Psalms and apply to our worship today?” What can be applied is the need to worship God with great effort. Notice that the worshiper is told to “play carefully” (3). To “play carefully”

implies that the worshiper is putting effort into how he is worshipping. The effort needs to include worshipping God the way He wants to be worshiped, and this worship needs to be more than just lip service -- it needs to be worship with intention and effort put in by the worshiper to focus on God and the praise of Him. The lasting application is that the righteous must devote themselves to worship God with a joyful understanding of what God wants and with a sincerity in worship because of Who God is.

The psalmist now describes exactly Who the God is that deserves the worship of all mankind. Each one of these descriptions stands alone as a great truth about how good God is. The psalmist's first reason for worshipping God is that His Word is right (4). God is the standard of truth and righteousness. As the source of truth, that means if God says it, it is right. In truth, the words of God have never been proven to have a logical fallacy. If the Word of God had been proven to have a mistake, then all the words of God would become suspect, but because His words have stood as truth for thousands of years, it can safely be assumed that they will not be proven untrue in the future. God's words stand as true and right.

The God described in this psalm is a God Who works (4). God has continued working in all times and continues working today, but here the psalmist specifically points out that God works truth. This is again pointing the reader to understand that God is the standard of truth; therefore, just like He speaks only truth and what is right, everything God does is truth and what is right. It follows that if all God speaks and does is right, then He would love what is right. God loves righteousness and truth and fills the world with His goodness (5). What the worshiper needs to realize is that he is worshipping a God Who is good. The world will accuse God of atrocities, but it does not understand what God truly is: the source of good and truth. Many times, people assume the worst before they understand the reason someone else takes a specific action. Many people also make assumptions about God without understanding that everything God does is for man's benefit, even if it is unpleasant in the moment (Rom. 8:28).

An example of how much God has cared for humanity is found in the creation of the world. It is obvious that the psalmist believes

that God made the world. He also believes that God made the world through His words. God spoke the world into existence (Gen. 1:6-7). Although this is opposed to what some educated scholars may teach, “Scientists have not read all the book of Nature, neither have they always read aright what they have considered” (Scroggie 193).

Specifically, in verse 6, the psalmist looks to the heavens as God’s creation. Not only did God create the sky of this world, but also, the psalmist points out, God created the hosts, or the stars. This is an example of God’s care and goodness. Not only are the skies and universe beautiful to observe, but the heavenly bodies also serve practical purposes, making the earth a better place for humanity. Whether controlling tides and seasons or shielding the earth from meteors, the heavenly bodies are both functional and aesthetically pleasing, proving God’s goodness in His words.

The psalmist moves to another example of God’s creation and care. He points the readers to look at the oceans of the world (7), another example of something that can be beautiful and, again, functional. The oceans of the earth keep the earth running smoothly by controlling temperatures, providing food, and serving many other purposes. God did all this for the pinnacle of His creation: humanity.

Therefore, all the world should fear and stand in awe of the Lord (8). The word *awe* is used here to express something to be “afraid” of or “fear” (Wilson 26). Seemingly, here it signifies actually being scared of the greatness of God. Because He spoke the world into existence, God has a power that is unmatched. Who else can just speak into creation something from nothing? What other explanation is more logical than this: “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Therefore, the Creator deserves the respect of the creation.

In addition to respecting God, humanity needs to realize that if God can create everything out of nothing by His word alone, then the Word of God has power! This is why humanity needs to go beyond respect to awe. Humanity must stand in awe of what God did and can do and then, after standing, crumble at the humbling realization of how small he is in comparison of that power.

Therefore, the psalmist tells his readers, God should be praised for how He created and how powerful He is.

Turning from the omnipotence of God, the psalmist now looks at the omniscience of God. A case is being built for how great God is, especially how much greater God is than man. The “counsel of the nations,” possibly the government mandates made by men, are nothing to God (10). God can overcome the laws of man; God is beyond the laws of men. Not only can the laws of man never control God, but also the plans of the people cannot change God’s plan. It is noticeable in verse 10 that God can change the plans of governments and men, because to Him they are of no effect. James reminds Christians,

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” (4:13)

The psalmist explains to his readers why the ways of man are not worthy: “The counsel of the Lord stands forever . . .” (11). Man’s laws and plans will pass away, but the plans of God are eternal. “Throughout the ages, men have suffered great anxiety over the announced plans of great nations. But the psalmist says that God does not allow such plans to prevail if they conflict with his own purposes” (Willis 63). Long after men living today pass away, God’s plan will stand. His omnipotence and omniscience are eternal, and all His plans reach to every generation. Maybe this points to the idea that God wants all men everywhere in every time to be saved and be His loyal servants (I Tim. 2:4; Acts 17:30). God’s heart is reaching out to everyone.

The psalmist offers this conclusion after looking at all the greatness of God: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD . . .” (12). Those who belong to God are blessed, or happy. Wilson notes that the Hebrew word translated *blessed*, “signifies to go, [and] signifies also to be happy or blessed, because our way or

motion showeth what our end or rest shall be; our happiness in the end lieth virtually in our way” (41). So those who are blessed are those who are in the ways of God. Instead of living in fear of the all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal God, God’s people can rejoice that God loves them and blesses them because He has chosen them as His own special people. Therefore, it is good for people to be God’s people. It is truly a better life -- a blessed life -- to live for God.

One of the reasons that the people of God are blessed is that God chooses them (12). The psalmist specifically states that God has chosen, or made, the nation who chooses Him; it is His inheritance. The nation God had made His inheritance was Israel. “Metaphorically, Israel is said to be God’s ‘possession’” (Vine 121). “This nation had been chosen by God as the people through whom He would work out His purposes. Thus the Israelites received special status in God’s sight” (Cloer 447). In modern times, the church is God’s nation and inheritance in that He blesses His church and uses the church to bring about His ways in the world. To have this special position is an honor, and while it includes much responsibility, it is also a blessing to be selected by God to do His will.

Maybe the psalmist wonders how God chooses His people. In verse 13, he notes that God can see all men. His omniscience is obviously all-inclusive. From His dwelling, He can see each and every person on earth (14). Not only can He see every person, but He made every human. Specifically, verse 15 states, He fashioned their hearts. God knows mankind inside and out. He knows what man thinks, wants, knows, etc. As an observer, He can consider all their work and therefore judge everything man does. God, having all this knowledge, would be able to choose the right people for the right time to bring about His right purposes. Some may find it bothersome that God knows everything about them. It should not be bothersome for the individual who has nothing to hide. The person who is doing nothing wrong has no concern that God knows all things about him.

Verses 13-15 also observe that “The Lord can care for His own because He knows everything that occurs on earth” (Cloer 447). Since God can see all of mankind and since He is Who He is, He

can give the exact care needed to His creation. Therefore, not only does the innocent man not need to worry about God observing everything about him, but also he can be comforted that this observation results in God's people getting exactly what they need from God.

Man needs to realize that God does not bless only his followers, but God gives all things to all people. James put it, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (1:17). The psalmist explains that kings and men are not self-reliant to win their victories (16). Humanity cannot succeed on its own. Human potentates and warriors cannot assume they will win because they have good equipment. In short, they should not put their faith in their horses, because horses cannot save them (17). David wrote, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7). This serves as a reminder to all men everywhere to not be self-reliant, but instead to rely on God.

Verse 18 echoes verse 13 by stating that "the eye of the Lord" is watching. Specifically, it is watching those who fear God and those who hope in His mercy. Here, *fear* implies reverencing (Wilson 159). Earlier in the psalm, the term *awe* or *fear* is used to describe being scared of God (8), but now the word is describing the state of having respect for a greater being. So, those who fear Him are also those who are hoping in His mercy.

Again, the psalmist's goal is to show the followers of God that He is caring for them. He is delivering them and keeping them alive, even in the face of disasters, like famine (19). He is the sustainer of His creation, providing deliverance and food. Later, Jesus would argue that if God ensures the smallest parts of His creation have food, how much more will He make sure His people have all their needs met:

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet you

heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? (Matt. 6:25-27)

Therefore, mankind, especially people who are part of God's nation, can know they will have certain things from God. They know they can wait on God (20). God's people can patiently expect God to defend them and sustain them. Because God has cared for His creation in the past, the created know God will care for them in the future.

One more *therefore* is offered in this psalm. Because God cares for and provides for His people and all people, people can worship him. The hearts of the people should rejoice in God (21). They can rejoice because they trust in His holy name. The name of God is a name of strength and power. It is hard not to notice that those who trust in the great name of the Lord are the ones who are to rejoice. God deserves worship, but He wants obedience. Obedience and worship are not mutually exclusive; God desires and deserves both, but, ultimately, God is more concerned with His creation trusting Him and obeying Him than worshipping Him. God is not concerned about how well worship is practiced if the worshiper is not obedient.

The psalmist concludes by asking God to extend mercy as His people hope in Him (22). The benediction emphasizes what was already stated. God is called to extend His mercy to those who are hoping in Him. That is the great lesson of this psalm, that God cares about mankind's obedience, hope, and trust; and mankind can put that trust in Him because of all He has done, does and will do for His creation. For this reason, because God is so good to humanity, let all the world praise the Lord!

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cloer, Eddie. *Psalm 1-50*. Searcy: Resource, 2004. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.

Scroggie, W. Graham. *A Guide to the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995. Print.

“To Inherit.” *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. W. E. Vine, Eds. Merrill F. Ungar and William White, Jr. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996. Print.

Willis, John T. *Insights from the Psalms*. Vol. 1. Abilene: Biblical Research, 1974. Print.

Wilson, William. “Awe.” *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*. Wilson. Peabody: Hendrickson, n.d. Print.

Wilson, William. “Blessed.” *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*. Wilson. Peabody: Hendrickson, n.d. Print.

Wilson, William. “Fear.” *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*. Wilson. Peabody: Hendrickson, n.d. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Jack Gilchrist is a 2002 graduate of Freed-Hardeman University and a 2005 graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching. He worked with the Massillon church of Christ in Massillon, Ohio, from 2005 to 2010. In January 2011, he began his current work, preaching for the Hermitage church of Christ in Hermitage, Pennsylvania.

Jack married the former Katie Gear in 2002. They have one son, Andrew, of whom they are both unbiasedly proud.

In addition to located preaching, Jack has gone on various mission trips, including domestic campaigns to Georgia and Wisconsin and foreign trips to the Bahamas, Russia, Canada, and multiple trips to Costa Rica.

Jack especially enjoys encouraging young people and young preachers. Due to his enthusiasm for the Lord’s work and his approachability, he is blessed to serve as co-director for Senior Week at West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and teach the books of Genesis through Esther to the first-year students at WVSOP.

GOD GIVES ME SATISFACTION

Psalm 63

Rick Kelley

The Secret to David's Satisfaction

The 63rd psalm was written by a person who was not experiencing a very happy time in his life. The subtitle given to it is, "A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah." [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] Perhaps because it was written under great duress and reflected many of his own experiences, it was reportedly a favorite psalm of Gen. George S. Patton. Let us put the psalm before us in its entirety:

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;

To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.

Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.

Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:

When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.

Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.

My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth.

They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes. But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

Our assignment is "God Gives Me Satisfaction," based upon

this 63rd psalm. That is an interesting title. We could take out the first word and replace it with a blank line. You fill it in. *What* gives you satisfaction? *What* makes you fulfilled in life? Look around at humanity and answer the question. *What* makes people seem happy? *What* gives them the sense of being satisfied? *What kinds* of things do people gravitate toward, in the pursuit of satisfaction and fulfillment?

Here are some possible things that people pursue in order to acquire the feeling of satisfaction: money, food, travel, hobbies, technology, information, sexual experiences, entertainment, power -- even various types of religious experiences, and we could go on.

All of these are satisfying in their own subjective way, or people would not pursue them. But in the face of hardship, it becomes obvious that most of these things are practically useless to provide real, enduring fulfillment. So where can an enduring satisfaction be found? And how was David able to find satisfaction in the face of hardship?

We will examine the psalm and discover the source of David's satisfaction. Also, we will take some time to reflect on the nature of man and why this psalm is relevant to every person.

David Made God the Priority of His Life (Psalm 63:1).

The psalm begins, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is . . ." (1). Obviously, David's priorities are in line: ". . . early will I seek thee. . . ." In verses 5-6, he writes, ". . . my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches."

Many of David's other psalms also demonstrate his sense of priority: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up" (Psalm 5:3). God was the first thing on David's mind when he woke up. He was also the last thing on his mind at night: "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8). This is reminiscent of Jesus, Who made God His priority in all things, as well (Mark 1:35).

Of course, putting God first involves more than habitual prayer (Dan. 6:10, 13; Acts 10:9), important as that is. Putting God first involves recognizing Him in all areas of our lives. That is what Moses meant when he said to Israel:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. (Deut. 6:4-9)

Many Jews still take these sentiments quite literally, to the point of nailing a *mezuzah* -- a small, ornate box containing these verses on a piece of parchment -- on the entry doors of their homes and/or businesses. Also, many wear phylacteries, traditionally during morning prayers, but also at other times (Matt. 23:5). These are little boxes with similarly inscribed parchments inside, worn on the arm and head.

There is certainly nothing wrong with keeping the physical presence of the Scriptures before us. In layman's terms: Keeping a copy of the Bible with you is a good thing. However, it should be remembered that the sacred element of Scripture is in analyzing and applying (James 2:22-25), by hearing and doing (Matt. 7:24-27).

Interestingly, when looking at David, the glaring mistake of his life -- the calamity with Bathsheba and Uriah -- is highlighted by his *not* making God a priority. It is metaphorically similar to Peter sinking when he took his eyes off Jesus. When it came to this instance, David was entirely blinded by his lust, thought only of himself, and initiated an avalanche of hardship on himself (and others) as a result. Not once in the course of all these events did David consult God.

However, David's general attitude of putting God first, "save in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5), made him a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22), and helped him find the ultimate satisfaction in life.

Why Did David Make God His First Priority? (Psalm 63:2-3, 7-8)

David was convinced that his God was the one true God and that the only real, enduring satisfaction in life was found in Him.

In verse 2, he noted the *power* and *glory* of his God. But he was also convinced that this God was *personal* and cared for him. He said that God is loving and kind (3), He is strong (8), and He helps (7). This is a continual and repetitive theme in Scripture. God is not only our infinite Creator, but He is infinitely interested in us. He is not only our Almighty God, but He is also our loving Father.

We are inclined to seek fulfillment and value from a source outside ourselves, but where can we find it? Or, better yet, where can we find it in a way that is consistent, enduring and satisfying? David was convinced that enduring satisfaction in life can be found only in God, and he was right.

What Was the Result of David Putting God First? (Psalm 63:3-5, 7, 11)

His soul indeed found the satisfaction he so desired, and he compared that satisfaction to a tremendous feast: "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness . . ." (5). Therefore, David praised God, and rejoiced in Him:

Because thy lovingkindness love is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. . . . and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: . . . in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. . . . the king shall rejoice in God. . . . (3-5, 7, 11)

At this point, let me ask a question that might sound trite, but be assured: It is not. Why should any of this matter to us? We see that David found satisfaction in God, but why is that of any

concern to you, or me, or anyone else? Cannot other people find satisfaction in other places without God? Let us think together about a couple of things that are true about each of us.

Is Man Unsatisfied?

Having explored the idea that David found his greatest satisfaction in God, we must go back, well before that, and demonstrate a significant premise: *Man is actually unsatisfied.*

There is a sense within all of us that things could be better, both in the world and within ourselves. We know things are not ideal. How do we know this?

Anecdotally, look at how we behave as a species: we want more; we want bigger; we want better; we want faster; we want stronger; we want what is next; we want what is new. We are never satisfied.

But we are unsatisfied in other ways that do not involve possessions or personal ambitions. We also want what is just and fair; we want what is right; we expect the truth, and we know, we are *certain*, that we do not always get it. We know something is wrong.

In this respect, the human being is perpetually unsatisfied, and the fact that there is any dissatisfaction at all illuminates the reality that something inside of us intrinsically knows: *It is not supposed to be this way.* This is not a Christian problem. It is not a theological problem. It is a human problem. And just like our bodies can be tricked into eating things out of habit or craving rather than hunger, our soul can be deluded into finding satisfaction and fulfillment in all the wrong things.

Man Is Unsatisfied

When the apostle to the Gentiles visited Athens, he saw firsthand the number of idols they had built for themselves. Why would they bother to do this if they were not seeking some form of fulfillment?

They certainly were not the only ones, either. The Romans, the Greeks, the Egyptians, and many, many others built shrines to imaginary gods. Paul reckoned with these Athenian philosophers who were always craving to hear about the next new thing (cf.

Acts 17:21) about the true God, the one they called “unknown,” saying that God,

dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; *That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.* (Acts 17:24-27a, emphasis added)

Notice Paul’s reasoning. God does not need anything. Even when He seeks us, it is not because He *needs* us. But there was no doubt to Paul that the Athenians were *seeking* something, which was indicated by all the images they had constructed to their gods. They just did not know what that was.

This is like the experience many of us have when we enter a room but forget why we entered it in the first place. There was definitely a reason we walked into the room, but that reason was lost somewhere between the first thought and the last step. Paul asserted to the Athenians that they merely forgot what they were looking for and told them that what they were really seeking they could find only in the true God of heaven.

He was declaring what the Scriptures said of God all along: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God . . .” (Psalm 42:1-2). “O satisfy us . . . that we may rejoice and be glad all our days” (Psalm 90:14).

Jesus affirmed this truth as well. He said only those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be filled (Matt. 5:6). The ESV renders it: “they shall be *satisfied*.”

It seems obvious from these passages that the human soul was created with a special longing for God -- a desire that could be fulfilled only by seeking God Himself. There are many others who have recognized this, like Augustine, who described it as man’s restlessness, and Blaise Pascal, who, in the 17th century, called it the “infinite abyss” that only God could fill.

In the book, *The Search for Significance*, author Robert S. McGee wrote: “From life’s outset, we find ourselves on the prowl, searching to satisfy some inner, unexplained yearning. But . . . man . . . is never satisfied -- at least, not for long” (9-10).

Most human beings experience this to some degree or another. We have wants, cravings, hungers, and longings that are not only different than food, but greater. Even non-Christians, even staunch atheists -- those who believe that free will is a total, biological illusion -- realize that human existence is fraught with our never-ending scramble for satisfaction.

Prominent atheist Sam Harris, in his lecture to the 2012 Global Atheist Convention in Melbourne, Australia (“Death and the Present Moment”), stated it very simply: “We are all in the business of seeking fulfillment.”

Even the atheist does not disagree with the theist as to whether our deep longings for fulfillment and satisfaction in this life exist. They just disagree about why we have them and how best to fulfill them.

I suggest to you that the only thing that adequately explains this universal self-contemplation, this seeking for answers, this endless quest for satisfaction is the very thing that separates us from all other living beings: the presence of an eternal soul.

There Are Unsatisfying Options from Which to Choose

Having established this, we note a second implication: there are options besides the correct ones to finding satisfaction in life, and we are free to choose them. The reason David could speak of finding a satisfaction that he compared to an exquisite feast without end was he found an endless fountain of nourishment in God. Notice, his satisfaction was not merely *from* God, but *in* God.

When Jesus put forth the option to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6), he was pointing the soul in the *right* direction, but he was equally demonstrating the reality of there being a *wrong* direction and our ability to choose it.

God appeals to us through revelation to subdue the cravings of the flesh and imbibe freely those things that are health for the soul (cf. Prov. 3:5-8). When writing to the Colossian church, Paul spoke of earthly and heavenly attitudes and the choice we are at liberty to

make regarding the same:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. *But now you must put them all away.* . . . (ESV, Col. 3:5-8a, emphasis added)

It is not by accident that Paul mentions sexual immorality, covetousness, and other such things in this passage. People often and wrongly equate their value and purpose in life with their stuff and their sexuality, so much so that they would rather have an unhealthy form of fulfillment in these areas than none at all. There are plenty of unhealthy forms of satisfaction to be found in this world, and we are free to choose them.

Most People Choose the Wrong Forms of Fulfillment

Just like most people would rather eat cheesecake than vegetables, so also most people are content to fill themselves with things that are not healthy for them spiritually. To the infidel, the lists of sins found throughout the Scriptures are the notorious *Thou shalt not*s. They are all the things we are not allowed to do. They represent God taking the fun out of life. But in reality, they are nothing of the sort. They are the dire warnings of a loving God. They are warnings to precious souls that were created to crave and find fulfillment in God. These souls will be inclined -- and will have plenty of opportunity -- to seek satisfaction for those cravings in all the wrong places.

Among other difficulties that go along with making worldly choices to find fulfillment in life is the fact that they result only in the need for more of the same, with a perpetually diminished effect. It is a downward spiral, a dead end. I watched an interview once with the notorious serial killer Ted Bundy. He, not unlike other violent criminals, did not wake up one day and decide to start mutilating other human beings. His foray into murder began with an addiction to pornography at a young age. He described his addiction as one that gradually increased until the only thing that

would give him satisfaction was a mixture of pornography and extreme violence.

This is the logical and metaphoric implication of all forms of worldly satisfaction. There is simply never enough, and the things we will do to obtain enough are sometimes astounding. Solomon was right, “He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity” (Eccles. 5:10).

Remember that the next time you are listening to or reading the news. It is evidence enough that man is unfulfilled and he is searching for his significance and fulfillment in all the wrong places.

The World Cannot Provide Enduring Satisfaction

If you begin to feel very ill, who is better equipped to diagnose and correct your problem: a structural engineer or a doctor? Conversely, how would you like to have your surgery performed by a structural engineer? Similarly, man’s difficulties cannot be understood and diagnosed by those who do not understand or appreciate his nature. Seeking worldly answers from worldly people will not do. We must consult the Architect of the soul:

The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. *He fashioneth their hearts alike*; he considereth all their works. (Psalm 33:13-15, emphasis added)

Man’s origin, sin, and curse, as revealed in Scripture, are relevant to his happiness and fulfillment in life. If a person does not accept this as reality, he is ill-equipped to help. Yes, a doctor can inform you that a building is crumbling, but he is not equipped to do anything about it. Unlike worldly solutions, the Bible message gets at the root of our ills.

According to the Scriptures, when man was created, the situation was very much reversed from what it is now. He had healthy options galore. He had only one unhealthy option (if in the interest of consistency that phrase is fair to use): “And the LORD

God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17).

But man made the wrong choice and thereby offended the holiness of God, tarnished their relationship, and added troublesome things to his life that did not exist before (cf. Gen. 3:16-19).

Perhaps worse, the Bible teaches that he also lost certain things when he sinned, things that -- unlike money or possessions or even other relationships -- he could not regain by simply working a little harder. He lost his innocence (Gen. 3:10-11). He lost his perfect fellowship with God (Gen. 3:9). He lost the beautiful paradise in which God had placed him (Gen. 3:22-24). He lost the joy of eternal living and would now be haunted by death (cf. Rom. 5:19; Heb. 2:14-15).

Since then, the human experience is filled with sorrows, pain, and emptiness. This is the kind of world into which Belgian Nobel Prize nominee (and lifelong cynic) Hugo Claus found himself. He once stated in an interview, “Every day we should wake up foaming at the mouth at the injustice of things” (qtd. in Messerli). Claus ended his life via euthanasia in 2008. He was never satisfied and apparently died that way. His case is typical of millions who live life in that same desperate fog.

As if that were not enough, there is a deceiver who has influence in this world as well, who would like us to develop a taste for the wrong things (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). Sometimes those things are sin. Sometimes they are otherwise rather harmless things like hobbies and activities -- the kinds of things that will keep us just busy or satisfied *enough* to keep us coming back for more.

Like David, let us pursue God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. God alone is the everlasting spring of satisfaction both in this life and in that which is to come.

Works Cited:

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Harris, Sam. "Death and the Present Moment." *YouTube*, 2 June 2012. Web. 16 July 2015.

McGee, Robert S. *The Search for Significance*. 1998. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003. Print.

Messerli, Douglas. "Hugo Claus" *The Guardian*. 1 May 2008. Web. 4 Apr. 2015.

Biographical Sketch

Rick Kelley was born in Akron, Ohio, and has also lived in Tennessee, Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Kentucky. He graduated in 1995 from Lincoln High School in Shinnston, West Virginia, and from the West Virginia School of Preaching in 2004.

In 1997, Rick married his high school sweetheart, the former Samantha Emerson. The couple has six children: Christian (17), Hannah (15), Noah (12), Emma (11), Evan (9), and Leah (7).

Rick has been preaching since November 2000. While in school, he served the Proctor church of Christ in Proctor, West Virginia. He worked with the Prestonburg church of Christ from 2004 to 2014, when he moved to his present work with the Massillon church of Christ in Massillon, Ohio. Since 2014, Rick has been a columnist for *Forthright Magazine* (www.forthright.net).

Rick enjoys spending time with family, hiking, reading, writing, and playing and writing music.

GOD GIVES ME EVIDENCE

Psalm 19

Cecil May Jr.

There are two major sections in Psalm 19, each section featuring a way God reveals Himself to humans. In the things which He made, He shows His power and Deity (1-6). In His Word, He reveals His will for His children (7-13). The psalm then closes with a superb benedictory prayer (14).

The two larger sections also present two lines of evidence for God's existence -- the first intentionally, the second serendipitously. C. S. Lewis was a noted and beloved apologist for Christianity, but his primary area of academic expertise was as a literary critic. He said, "I take this (Psalm 19) to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world" (63).

Creation as Evidence for the Existence of God

God reveals Himself in nature, through what He has made. Philosophers and theologians call this "natural revelation." Many features of creation both reveal truths about God and give evidence that there is a God. Medical examination and careful observation of human beings, who, as the psalmist correctly says, are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (139:14), clearly demonstrate God's meticulous design, marvelous power and protective love. [All Scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Psalm 19 focuses on the visible heavens. If one is blessed to live in or visit a place where artificial light does not obscure the view, a look up into the firmament, the starry sky, speaks clearly of the power and majesty of God. Virtually everyone sees that, except for those whose *a priori* assumptions rule out belief in the supernatural. Earth and the starry heavens combined are called "the cosmos," and what the psalmist is saying is similar to what philosophers refer to as the "cosmological argument for the existence of God."

The stars and planets that make up our universe did not make themselves. The cosmological argument is an argument for God

based on the principle that every effect must have a cause. An infinite regress of causes (e.g., A is caused by B, B is caused by C, C by D, etc., *ad infinitum*) solves no problem. There must be a first, uncaused cause for the whole line of causes. God is that Uncaused Cause. To say, “There is no God,” is to see all there is and say, “It is all accidental; there is no cause.”

An even stronger refinement of the case for a First Cause considers the reality of design, the teleological argument. When design is present and obvious, it speaks even more clearly of a Designer at work.

The apostle Paul confirms the validity of both arguments. Speaking to the inhabitants of Lystra who were convinced by Paul’s miracles that he and Barnabas were pagan gods, Paul said,

Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:15-17)

In Romans, Paul charged that the Gentiles knew God but refused to acknowledge Him, saying,

because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. (Rom. 1:19-20)

Time and space do not allow for refutation of every rebuttal philosophers have offered to these arguments, but they can and have been thoroughly refuted. There are philosophers who believe in God and who demonstrate in their writings that Theism is

reasonable and logical. However, when I read philosophers who are so certain that the arguments for the existence of God are flawed, it helps me to remember that there were learned philosophers at one time who opined that we and the rest of the material world do not really exist, but we are just figments of something's imagination.

It is an everyday occurrence that we learn things about people by studying what they have made -- for example, artists, building contractors, and writers. When we moved to Kosciusko, Mississippi, we moved into a house that had been built by a local builder. Often, when we would visit other people's houses, we would see things about their houses that were similar to unusual features in ours. On asking, we would find that, indeed, the same builder had built theirs. Similarly, God's creation reveals characteristics of its maker, God.

It is enough for most of us to simply look up and consider the precise regularity of the stars, comets, and planets in their movements; contemplate their beauty as addressed in our psalm; and say with Thomas when he saw the risen Jesus, "My Lord and My God!" (John 20:28)

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork. (1)*

The psalmist begins with the visible heavens and leads us from the seen to the unseen. Perhaps David, as a shepherd boy keeping watch over his sheep at night, is looking up into the starry heavens. Anyone doing so, especially when away from the pollution of man-made lights, cannot help but be struck by the majesty, by the sweep and breadth, as well as by the beauty of the vast multitude of stars. They do, indeed, speak eloquently of God's glory.

In this section of the song, the psalmist refers to God as *El*, the generic term for God, which is appropriate when talking about the Creator. Genesis 1:1 uses *Elohim*, the plural form of the same word: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

*Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.*

*There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world. (2-4a)*

“Day unto day” and “night unto night” point to the regular progression that is characteristic of the creation (2). Night follows day as winter follows autumn. The brightness of the day makes possible the commerce and activity of the day, and the darkness aids the sleep of the night, which refreshes us for the next day.

“Day unto day” and “night unto night” also suggest continuous proclamation (2). Both the NKJV and KJV have, “There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard” (3). That translation has the psalmist saying the message of the cosmos is heard by everyone, whatever language they speak. Paul cites the Septuagint version of this verse in a context designed to show that humanity has heard about God. “But I say, have they not heard? Yes, indeed: for ‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world’” (Rom. 10:18).

Newer translations have the psalmist saying that the proclamation of the heavens is made without words -- “There is no speech, nor are there words” (ESV, 3) -- but their message is nevertheless received. “Words which are not words produce knowledge for him who listens in faith” (Ash 85).

Both concepts, of course, are true.

*In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,
Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.
Its rising is from one end of heaven,
And its circuit to the other end;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat. (4b-6)*

In the last part of verse 4 through verse 6, the psalmist focuses on the sun. Since the sun goes down each night and comes up the next morning, perhaps the “tabernacle” is the night (4). As it rises in the morning, it “comes out like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,” which is expressive of happiness, and “rejoices like a

strong man to run its race” (5). Like “the heavens” and “the firmament” (1), the sun also announces its message to the whole world.

The sun is but a part of God’s creation. Many of the nations worshipped the sun as a god. Declaring that the sun was created by God and that its rising and setting declare the glory of God not only evidences the reality of God, but also it challenges pagan beliefs in the deity of the sun.

A modern poet has expressed the same sentiment:

This is my Father’s world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father’s world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought. (Maltbie)

Scripture as Evidence for the Existence of God

While the things God has made testify to the reality and power of God and speak clearly of some of His attributes, “natural revelation” tells us nothing of God’s attitude toward us or of His will for us. For that we must have “special revelation.” God has chosen to reveal Himself and His will through prophecy (inspired men and women) and Scripture (inspired writings). The second half of Psalm 19 speaks eloquently of God’s Word.

Another psalm reminds us, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (33:6). The powerful words of God, which make “wise the simple” (7), also brought all things into existence. God’s mighty deeds are done through His powerful words. “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). Most of creation was accomplished the same way. God said, “Let there be,” and “there was” (1:3).

This same power is still inherent in God’s Word, the Gospel. Isaiah says, “. . . the word of our God stands forever” (Isa. 40:8). Peter quotes Isaiah’s words and applies them to the Gospel: “And

this word is the good news that was preached to you” (1 Pet. 1:25). The gospel is embodied in Jesus, and Jesus states and demonstrates that His Word has power to produce life: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). The context shows that He is speaking of the spiritually dead receiving eternal life through actively believing His Word.

When we faithfully proclaim His message, it still has that power: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16).

A former alcoholic, cleansed and redeemed by the gospel, met some of his former drinking buddies. They were trying to persuade him to rejoin them for a drink, and he was refusing on the grounds that he is a Christian now. They began to ridicule him for believing the reported miracles of Jesus. “Do you really believe Jesus changed water into wine?” they taunted.

He replied, “I believe it, because the Bible says it. I wasn’t there, but I did see Him change beer and whisky into food and clothing at my house.”

Verses 7-9 name the attributes and describe the effects of God’s Word, as embodied in the law given to Israel by Moses.

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.*

The psalmist here uses six synonyms for God’s Word. Psalm 119, the acrostic psalm about the Word, uses eight, with at least one synonym in nearly every verse.

While the first part of the psalm refers to God once and appropriately uses *El* for the creating God, this section about God’s Word uses *YHWH* (translated *LORD*) six times. The Divine name frequently, as here, has covenant connotations.

There are eight characteristics of the Word named in these six

verses: perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, enduring, true, and righteous. It is noteworthy that all eight characteristics are also characteristics of God. Throughout Scripture, God and His Word are used interchangeably, for example: “For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that my name may be declared in all the earth’” (Rom. 9:17).

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; (7a)

“Law” here is *Torah*, which in other contexts has a wider application, but here refers specifically to the Law as given by God to Moses. *Perfect* means “complete, needing no change or no addition.” Paul says, “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12). The wise man says, “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar” (Prov. 30:5-6).

The effect of the law is the converting of the soul, reviving it, bringing it back to what it was created to be.

The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; (7b)

Sure is “reliable” or “certain.” In Proverbs, “‘Scoffer’ is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride” (ESV, 21:24), and, “fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7), but the simple, though still unknowing, will “receive instruction” (1:3-4).

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; (8a)

The Judge of all the earth will do right, and His commandments are “right” as well (Gen. 18:25). He will command us to do only what is for our good and will not forbid anything, except what would ultimately harm us. Because that is true, keeping His precepts brings joy.

The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;(8b)

The pure commandment of YHWH enlightens the eyes, illumines our understanding.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; (9a)

Fear is used in Scripture only here as a synonym for “law” or “commandment” (Ash 86). It points more to the human reaction to the law. To say, “I fear YHWH,” is a way of saying, “YHWH is the God I worship and obey.”

The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. (9b)

A comprehensive, summary statement! Jesus, in a prayer addressed to God, said, “Sanctify them by Your truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The perfect, sure, true, and righteous Word of God makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart and enlightens the eyes.

*More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them there is great reward. (10-11)*

People who diligently study God’s Word and strive to keep it in every detail are often accused of “legalism.” There is, of course, a legalism to avoid. Legalists believe they have kept all of the commandments of God and, therefore, God is obligated to save them. That almost always entails a specific and detailed but pared-down list of “all of the commandments of God.” Such legalism also involves a superior attitude toward the religiously ignorant who have not bought into their list. Jesus phrased it this way: those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Luke 18:9).

This psalmist obviously desires to follow Scripture precisely, but it is not out of a legalistic effort to save himself. It is a true

delight to him to read, meditate, and obey. He recognizes both the value (more than fine gold) and the delight (sweeter than honey) of reading Scripture and obeying it. His heart overflows with gratitude for all that God through His Word has done for him. He is grateful both for the warnings the Word provides and the rewards they promise. Such sentiments as those are missing from the legalistic spirit.

*Who can understand his errors?
Cleanse me from secret faults.
Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins;
Let them not have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be innocent of great transgression. (12-13)*

Having reminded us that God's natural revelation calls us to recognize His glory and His special revelation in Scripture calls us to obedience, the psalmist concludes with self-examination.

"Keep back your servant . . ." is a typical Hebrew way of saying to God, "Keep me back," while affirming one's devotion to God. In the inscription to Psalm 18, David is called "the servant of the Lord." In this psalm, he ascribes that phrase to himself.

Note the distinction in types of sin: "secret faults" and "presumptuous sins." "Secret faults" are likely those hidden even from the perpetrator, sins committed in ignorance of the fact that they were sins. Some folks speak as if they could not possibly have a sin they did not know was a sin, for they know too much Bible for that to happen. Most of us, however, have enough epistemological humility to acknowledge that possibility. Of course, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse." God has revealed His will to us, and we are obligated to study and apply it to ourselves. We should strive to be "innocent" even of sins committed in ignorance, but there are indications that God may look at them differently. Paul said concerning himself, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:12-14).

Presumptuous sins, on the other hand, spring from a rebellious attitude. Moses' law recognized the distinction.

You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, for him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them.

But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. (Num. 15:29-30)

When Christians are walking in the light, their lifestyle is not characterized by continued sin, and the sins they do commit are cleansed by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). For those "who walk in the steps of the faith that our father Abraham had," their sins are not counted against them (Rom. 4:12, 7-8). The psalmist is asking forgiveness from "secret faults" but asking to be kept from "presumptuous sins," recognizing, "if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:26).

The psalmist acknowledges the bondage in which continued sin holds us. Those who comment on modern trends speak often of addiction: to drugs, to gambling, to sex, even to amassing wealth. The Bible speaks of the enslaving power of sin (Rom. 6:16). Both modern "talking heads" and the Bible are recognizing the same truth.

"Then I shall be blameless" (13). "Then" is when I am forgiven of "hidden faults" -- justification -- and when I am kept from "presumptuous sins" -- sanctification. Then I will be blameless and innocent.

Meditative Benediction

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer. (14)*

The Psalmist concludes with a prayer that both his words and his thoughts will be acceptable to YHWH, Whom he calls "my

strength and my Redeemer” (14). A psalm ascribed to David says, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (18:2). YHWH redeemed the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, gave them His law at Sinai, and formed them into a favored nation.

Jesus redeemed His people out of bondage to sin by His death on the cross, called us to a life of obedience and service to others, and formed us into “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Pet. 2:9). The same prayer would be quite appropriate for us to pray: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord Christ, my rock and my Redeemer.”

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

References marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Ash, Anthony L. *Psalms*. Austin: Sweet. Print. The Living Word Commentary Series.

Babcock, Maltbie D. “This Is My Father’s World.” *Praise for the Lord*. Ed. John Wiegand. Nashville: Praise, 2001. n. pag. Print.

Lewis, C. S. *Reflections on the Psalms*. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Dr. Cecil R. May Jr. has taught and worked at Faulker University, Magnolia Bible College, Columbia Christian College, and Heritage Christian University. He began preaching as a Harding University student in 1951 and continues to preach, lecture, and write. He has written for the *Gospel Advocate* since 2012. Cecil and his wife, Winnie, have four children and five grandchildren. Both sons and one son-in-law are preachers.

GOD GIVES ME COURAGE

Psalms 60

John A. Keith

Background

It is virtually undisputed that David is the human author of this didactic (teaching) psalm, which, according to the superscription in the New King James Version, may have been set to the melody of a non-extant hymn called the “Lily of the Testimony.” [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] While the superscriptions at the beginning of this (and every) psalm are not inspired, they are old enough that the “translators of the Septuagint found them attached to the psalms” in the middle 3rd century BC (Cloer, *Psalms 1-50* 10). They have provided information that, while some reject wholly, others say “should be seen as . . . reliable enough to be worthy of the Bible student’s consideration” (Cloer, *Psalms 1-50* 10), with which Leupold agrees, saying that the superscriptions deserve “to be accepted as being accurate by commentators ancient and modern” (447).

Following David’s conquest of Syria (2 Sam. 8:3-14; 10:15-18; 1 Chron. 18:1-13), which included Aram-naharaim (the Armeans of northwestern Mesopotamia) and Aram-zobah (the Armeans of central Syria), the kingdom divided, Syria became independent, this triad of nations quarreled relentlessly, and allegiances were fickle. At one point, Asa, king of Judah, and Ben-hadad, king of Syria, teamed up against Israel and their king, Baasha (1 Kings 15:18-20). During another phase, Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria, joined forces against King Ahaz and Judah (2 Kings 16:5). Finally, in 732 BC, Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III destroyed Damascus and Aram (Syria) lost power forever.

This psalm begins as a lamentation over a lost battle and “was composed before the fortunes of war turned in their favor” (Brownlow). This lost battle is one that is not recorded in Scripture, possibly because David was engaged in another campaign to the north in Damascus, and the Edomites saw an opportunity to attack and defeat Israel. Perhaps after an initial defeat, the armies of Israel, under Joab and Abishai, rebounded and

chased the Edomites back into the Valley of Salt (where the Dead Sea is now) in a sound victory (2 Sam. 8:13; 1 Chron. 18).

The Bible student recognizes that when man walks with God, his relationship with the Almighty is intact, and it would seem here that God's chosen ones had been at variance with Him and He allowed this initial defeat. Subsequently, David taught the Israelites this prayer for help. The psalm divides naturally into three sections: Abandonment (1-5), Appeal (6-8), and Assurance (9-12).

Abandonment (1-5)

We Are Cast Off (1a). The text of the sixtieth psalm begins with David acknowledging God's having "cast . . . off" the Israelites and treating them as foul, offensive, and utterly humiliating to Him (1). One wonders why the God of heaven, Who created man in His own image, would allow such to be the case (Gen. 1:27). If we examine other passages where similar things occurred, we see that *one* thing -- rebellion toward God -- was the cause: "So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels" (Psalm 81:12). We find Paul addressing a similar state in his epistle to the Romans (1:24, 26, 28). There can be no worse tragedy imagined by Christians than to be rejected by Jehovah God!

We Are Broken Down (1b). Additionally, David laments that they are "broken . . . down" and scattered (1). Literally, God has "burst forth" upon them, and they are painfully aware that God is displeased and as a result, life as they know it has been entirely upended (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 829). A similar situation arose when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar pursued Zedekiah. "But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him" (2 Kings 25:5). Is there ever a time in which we sin that we do not stand in jeopardy of God's displeasure or even His anger? Also true is that no matter our effort to justify ourselves and blame God, the fault lies entirely within us, and we are defenseless.

We Are Defenseless (2). The prophet said, "'Present your case,' says the LORD. 'Bring forth your strong reasons,' says the

King of Jacob” (Isa. 41:21), but when we have breached our covenant relationship with The Almighty we have neither case, reason, nor defense for our actions. David admitted they were as though ravaged by a powerful earthquake and their world became like a city that had its walls breached and, unable to defend themselves, they were teetering on the verge of destruction. The once-powerful armies were now discomfited, and as morale was sinking, they must have wondered what would be next, how they could go on, and whether there was a remedy for this disconcerting situation.

We Are Suffering (3). David continues to address Jehovah with the admission that God has shown His people “hard things” (3). It is clear that David knew that regardless of “whoever might be the secondary agent of these disasters, he beholds the Lord’s hand as the prime moving cause, and pleads with the Lord concerning the matter” (Spurgeon 28). Rejecting God will bring hardships without fail. “God allows these hardships to temper the character of His people just as a dad lets his children experience the results of their immaturity and folly” (Cloer, *Psalms 51-89* 162). Throughout the history of the world, man has brought Divine retribution upon himself because his deeds were evil: “And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this” (Ezra 9:13). Further, God’s wrath is reserved for and “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18).

In addition to the hard things shown them by God, David bemoans the forced consumption of the “wine of confusion” (3). The stunning upset endured in the unrevealed battle had a surprising -- shall we say, intoxicating and disillusioning -- effect upon Israel, and “The nation had been rendered unable to function” (Ash 204). “It means properly reeling, drunkenness; and the idea here is, that it was as if he had given them a cup -- that is, an intoxicating drink -- which had caused them to reel as a drunken man; or, in other words, their efforts had been unsuccessful” (Barnes 156). Much like a man who staggers when he has consumed too much wine, the nation of Israel had brought this staggering hardship and disillusionment upon themselves.

We Are Hopeful (4). Even in the midst of all manner of conflict, whether its source be from within or without, resident in God our Savior is a will to aid and assist the truly penitent. God gave them a banner -- a representative, single, identifiable point around which to rally. What this particular banner was, we do not know, but it was something significant that was lifted high to be seen from a distance. The brazen serpent in Moses' day was a type of banner, a rallying point for those bitten in the wilderness, just as the cross of Christ is a banner for man today (Num. 21:4-8; cf. John 3:14-15). Spurgeon quotes Fausset saying that in this instance, "'The truth' here answers to God's holiness . . . the 'banner' is a pledge of safety" (34). The safe play is *always* God's way!

It is just as fitting that we see as a banner the truth of God's Word, as expressed by Christ when He succinctly stated, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The banner of God -- the truth of the cross -- will benefit only the ones who, with proper reverence and dignity, fear and obey God.

We Are Prayerful (1-2, 5). "Restore us again" is somewhat redundant in English (1), for resident in the request to be restored is the idea of reclamation to a previously held estate (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 996). The psalmist pleads with Jehovah to turn His face back toward the nation and is seemingly making a request for help in *overcoming themselves*. The implication is an awareness of their own sinfulness. Why else would God withdraw or turn away?

To heal the breaches of the shaking and turbulent nation is the request which follows, and it gives a vivid picture of the despair and dread with which Israel is overcome. A sense of urgency is implied here, for just as a wall in disrepair is more apt to fail when under strain, so the nation, having put themselves in peril, is more likely to fall beyond the *point of no return*. In short, the plea here is, "Reward us with victory; answer us, we implore!" They had not yet reached the point of the first king of Israel, who, "When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets" (1 Sam. 28:5-6). Indeed, hope is still alive for David's

host!

Appeal (6-8)

In this section, the writer recalls the words of God regarding His people and the enemies of His people, and couched in this memoir is a message of encouragement to Israel and, by extension, to us, as well. Throughout the Bible, we have seen men and women appeal to God through prayer and supplication for the betterment of their situations: Moses, Hannah, Hezekiah, etc., just to recall a few.

God's Pronouncement (6a). In midst of this great psalm, David, too, makes an appeal for God to *remember*, or fulfill, His promise based on the fact that “God has spoken in His holiness.” To what promise does David refer? One writer surmises that “This is a general aspect of the assurances given in the Pentateuch in regard to Israel’s possession of the land of Canaan and to their victory over hostile neighbors” (Coffman). The thrust here is “that the holiness of God was the public pledge or assurance that what he had promised he would certainly perform” (Barnes 157).

God's Portions (6b). David implores God to recall His promise and speaks with confidence and the ability to rejoice in the fact that God is faithful and able to give Israel the victory and David the kingdom. “Faith is never happier than when it can fall back upon the promises of God” (Spurgeon 30).

Feeding upon the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12, and which the tribes realized under the command of Joshua, the good land had been secured. Shechem, a land east of Jordan, and Succoth, on the west side, were harbors for holdouts, but David’s assurance lay within the promise of God that the enemies would be expelled and landmarks erected as an indication of ownership, and they would be portioned to the people of God. “By metonymy these two places represent the territory west and east of the Jordan, respectively” (Leupold 450).

God's Possessions (7). David recounts for the people that God has claimed authority and rightful ownership of these lands and the inhabitants. These representative cities refer to the whole of the land that God promised through Abraham (Gen. 12:1).

Gilead lay on the east side of Jordan and is divided into two

parts by the Jabbok River (Josh. 12:2). Southern Gilead was well-suited for cattle and would be desirable for habitation, as indicated by the desire of the Gadites and Reubinites to remain there prior to the conquest (Num. 32:1-5).

Manasseh occupied land on both sides of the Jordan, and Ephraim was a powerful tribe that lay to the west of it. David commanded this valiant army -- God's helmet -- and praise to God was on his lips because of their military might and ability to provide protection.

Judah refers to Israel in the south. Judah has the distinction of being God's "lawgiver." This is a fitting epithet, because both King David and our Lord Jesus Christ grew from this tribe that represents dominion, leadership, and the government of God. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people" (Gen. 49:10). We recall how John wept when he perceived that none was worthy to open the scroll and one of the elders said to him, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals (Rev. 5:5).

God's Procedures (8). As Gilead, Manasseh, and Ephraim were repositories of God's favor, which speaks to God's power and ability, Moab, Edom, and Philistia are consigned to inferior status and thus, subservient to God's people.

Moab is the "washpot," or "washbasin" (ESV), a reference to the commonest of vessels used in performing the most menial of tasks and is indicative of "the subjugation of that nation by Yahweh" (Walton 536). A frequent ally of Edom, Moab has become "A mere pot to hold the dirty water after my feet have been washed in it" (Spurgeon 30). This implies

that Moab was already subdued, and that the author of the psalm could make any use of it he pleased. It also implies that Moab was not regarded as adding much to his strength, or to the value of his dominions; but that, compared with other portions of his kingdom, it was of as little value as a wash-basin compared with the more valuable vessels in a house. (Barnes 161)

Edom was the nation that descended from Esau, who received a secondary promise that paled in comparison to that given to his younger brother, Jacob (Gen. 27:1-40).

“In I Chronicles 18:12 and in the title of Psalm 60, Edom is described as the enemy which was defeated in the Valley of Salt. As this valley was in the territory of Edom and far from the scene of the defeat of the Aramaeans, the reading Edom is by most scholars preferred to Aram (Syria) in II Samuel 8:13.” (Pfeiffer 133)

So far as we know, Edom still remained to be conquered when this psalm was written, but the promise, “I *will* cast My shoe” (emphasis added), indicates that the subjugation of this Dead Sea area would take place. “Among all ancient nations the ‘shoe’ was a symbol either of departure (Exod. 12:11), or of taking possession” (Edersheim 398). We do not doubt that “taking possession” is the sense used in our present study. The prophecy in the Book of Obadiah concerning Edom leaves no guess regarding the futureless Edomites/Idumeans when the prophet writes that “they shall be as though they had never been” (16). “The reference to Ruth 4:7, 8, which is commonly made, is very doubtful. Probably no more is intended than that Edom will be a slave of so low a rank as only to clean the shoes of its master” (biblehub.com).

The imperative for Philistia to “shout in triumph” is confusing, since the nations addressed in verses 6-8 receive woes or negative comments. There appears to be a textual variation here, which a few of the modern-language translations have corrected, or at the very least, amended. The ESV renders the address to Philistia thus: “over Philistia I shout in triumph,” to which the NIV agrees. However, among the definitions for the Hebrew word for *triumph* (*hiph*) are “to shout in triumph (over enemies) . . . to cry out in distress” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 928), which the KJV, ASV, and others reflect.

Assurance (9-12)

David brings this psalm to a close with a question, the design of which is not to garner information, but rather to prompt the

nation of Israel toward recognition of the power that has enabled them “to be full and to be hungry” -- to be victorious, defeated, and victorious again (Philip. 4:12).

We remember how Peter was bold in his affirmation that he would “never be offended” by Christ, a proclamation of his victory over those contrary to our Lord (Matt. 26:33). But when the situation was shrouded in bleakness, he thrice denied our Lord (Matt. 26:70-74). What a stark contrast and picture of defeat! However, in the second chapter of the Book of Acts, Peter stands boldly and proclaims the Christ of prophecy as none had previously done, and we see him victorious once again.

Another example of this scenario is seen when Israel attacks and defeats Jericho in Joshua 6; is defeated at Ai, because of the sin of Achan, in Joshua 7; and then, when God is obeyed, is victorious over Ai in Joshua 8.

The Searching Question (9). The psalmist asks a rhetorical question to elicit awareness and a proper response regarding “the exclusive commitment to God’s leadership that is needed” (Cloer, *Psalms 51-89* 168). “Who will bring me to the strong city . . . Edom?” (9) In light of the promised blessings to Shechem, Succoth, Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah (6) and the sentences pronounced upon Moab, Edom, and Philistia (8), the question should serve as a reminder -- a banner of sorts -- for the armies of God to rally around Jehovah for the conquest of the “strong city” of Edom; the greatly fortified capital, Petra, or Sela (Isa. 16:1).

The geographical location made Petra nearly impervious to attack, as it was situated in the rough and rocky Arabah, about halfway between The Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. Entrance into the city was through a long, narrow gorge in the mountainous formations around it. The naturally strategic layout made defending the city possible with an economy of troops, as all who entered almost certainly had to use this pass. The alternative was to scale the cliffs behind the city, which was most dangerous and inconvenient, to say the least. According to historical maps, Petra lay well within the territory conquered by David, as his reign stretched at least ten miles to the east of the city and as far south as the Gulf of Aqaba, in the north of the Red Sea (Pfeiffer 109). From

this fact, we can be assured that David's searching question to his armies had the desired effect and greatly aided in the conquest of this enemy of David and his God.

The Sovereign Admission (10-11). The rhetorical question being posed to the children of Israel is answered by David himself as he directs his reply to Jehovah God in the form of another question that anticipates an affirmative response. "Is it not You, O God, who cast us off? . . . who did not go out with our armies [because of our sin]?" (10) He recognizes -- and hopes to share his recognition with the people -- what the prophet asked so poignantly, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3)

The psalmist pleads for Jehovah's Divine assistance, which is a stark recognition of their feeble ability to undertake this campaign without His sanction and His Divine assistance. That he understands the limitation of mere man is realized when he says, "For the help of man is useless." We could reference many verses of Scripture to bolster this truth, but for our purpose, a couple should suffice: "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). Paul wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philip. 4:13). Within the man who can recite these verses with the integrity befitting them lays an acknowledgment of his own human frailty and thus, his dependence upon God. In Jesus' parable of the rich fool, we see one who was afflicted with "I" trouble (Luke 12:16-20). Yes, he had had a measure of success (seemingly without God), but, in the final analysis, he was overcome by his *self-made-man* perception. His confidence was sorely misplaced, his courage was grossly ill-acquired, and, as a result, he perished.

Countless times in Scripture, we see man and God compared and contrasted so that we might be certain that God is in control, and man is helpless by himself. Paul said,

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge

against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:31-39)

Indeed! "If God is for us" -- meaning that we must be in compliance with God's demands -- "who *can* be against us? (Rom. 8:31, emphasis added) Who in this world can defeat us? Remember the words of Jesus our Lord as He warned the twelve of coming persecution: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

The Singular Conclusion (12). Each success story that we read in the Bible is predicated upon mankind's reliance upon God. With such an attitude and in such a state of being in harmony with God, though we are yet afraid, we can have the courage to do the seemingly insurmountable task to which we are called. As a reminder, consider the roster of faithful and valiant men and women in Hebrews chapter 11. Nearly each accolade begins with the positive description, "By faith" (4-8, 11, 13, 17, 20-24, 27, 29, 30). Resident in that two-word phrase is the desire of the one to be faithful to God and, by implication, the courage to do what God commanded.

We can have courage when we acknowledge God by our service to Him. "Through God," that is, sanctioned by God, in light of our faithful obedience to Him; "we," denoting personal responsibility; "will do," an affirmation of faith, confidence and real hope regardless of the outlook; "valiantly . . ." that is, will

gather strength, might, and ability. Inherent in this clause are the necessary things all of us need to have the courage required to “press toward the goal” of heaven (Philip. 3:14): 1) acknowledgment of God and the authority of His Word, 2) acknowledgment of our duty to fear Him and keep His commandments (Eccles. 12:13), and 3) the acknowledgment that God’s promise is true while we are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Our reliance upon God is vital if we would have the courage to be faithful and thus, victorious. We must recognize that it is God “who shall tread down our enemies,” just as Gamaliel stated when, after Theudas and Judas were trodden down and rejected, he rightly concluded, regarding the efforts of Peter and John, “And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it -- lest you even be found to fight against God” (Acts 5:38-39).

Conclusion

“The psalm, therefore, though begun in despondency and sadness, closes . . . with confident hope; with the assurance of the favor of God; and with the firm belief that the object sought in the psalm would be obtained” (Barnes 162).

As with any undertaking, we must have the courage, even after defeat, to reassess the situation and, if it is found worthy, to press on with reliance upon God and His ability to equip us with the necessary strength, fortitude, and courage to overcome any stumbling block that is in our path.

Christ our Lord is a glowing example of this, for He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, *the Son can do nothing of Himself*, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19, emphasis added). He extended this reliance upon God to His disciples and to us when He said further, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; *for without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5, emphasis added). Jesus relied upon God, and it is the case that we are not better than Christ, so we also must rely upon

God and recognize that any confidence or courage claimed apart from God is vain!

The sixtieth psalm is one of initial discouragement and defeat, which causes us to rethink and realign ourselves with the will of God. And when we operate within the Divine realm of the Father, having received His help, we can and will have the courage to do valiantly.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ASV) are from the American Standard Version, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1901. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Ash, Anthony L. *Jeremiah and Lamentations*. Abilene: A.C.U., 1987. Print.

Barnes, Albert. *Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005. Print. Vol. 2 of *Notes on the Old Testament*.

biblehub.com. 2004-2014. 13 April 2015.
<<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/60-8.htm>>.

Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. “*hiph*.” *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Eds. Brown, Driver, and Briggs. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005. 928-29. Print.

---. “*partas*.” *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Eds. Brown, Driver, and Briggs. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005. 829. Print.

- . "shub." *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Eds. Brown, Driver, and Briggs. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005. 996-97. Print.
- Brownlow, Leroy. *Living With the Psalms: Devotions for Today*. Ft. Worth: Brownlow, 1976. Print.
- Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 1-50*. Searcy: Resource, 2004. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.
- . *Psalms 51-89*. Searcy: Resource, 2006. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.
- Coffman, Burton. *Burton Coffman Commentaries*. Abilene, n.d. CD-ROM.
- Coffman, James Burton. *Coffman's Commentary*. Abilene, 2001. CD-ROM.
- Edersheim, Alfred. *Bible History: Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995. Print.
- Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of The Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969. Print.
- Pfeiffer, Charles F. *Baker's Bible Atlas*. Grand Rapids, 1999. Print.
- Spurgeon, C. H. *The Treasury of David: Psalm LVIII to CX*. Vol. 2. Peabody: Hendrickson, n.d. Print.
- Walton, John H., Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 2000. Print.

Biographical Sketch

John A. Keith was born August 26, 1969, in Parkersburg, West Virginia, the son of Ruth Ann (Stewart) Keith and the late Arlon W. (Bud) Keith. He was raised in Newport, Ohio, and is married to the former Tina Holland of Wellsville, Ohio. They have one daughter, Ashley, who blessed their union in 1996.

John began preaching by appointment in 1997, while worshipping with the church at Newport, Ohio. In August of 2011, John spent two weeks in Kenya, travelling and preaching to congregations throughout Nyanza Province. He is a graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching and currently preaches for the 10th & Clairmont church of Christ in Cambridge, Ohio.

GOD GIVES ME MERCY

Psalm 52

Paolo Di Luca

Most of us are familiar with “Murphy’s Law” books written by Arthur Block in the late 1970s. It is generally believed that “Murphy’s Law” (i.e. “If anything can go wrong, it will.”) was born at Edwards Air Force Base, California, in 1949 and named after Capt. Edward A. Murphy, an engineer working on Air Force Project MX98, a project designed to see how much sudden deceleration a person can stand in a crash (“Murphy’s”).

It seems that in reality, the theory was first postulated in written form by the mathematician Augustus De Morgan on June 23, 1866.

It is found that anything that can go wrong at sea generally does go wrong sooner or later, so it is not to be wondered that owners prefer the safe to the scientific. . . . Sufficient stress can hardly be laid on the advantages of simplicity. The human factor cannot be safely neglected in planning machinery. If attention is to be obtained, the engine must be such that the engineer will be disposed to attend to it. (Holt 162)

There are many different corollaries to “Murphy’s Law.” Here are just a few:

- If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.
- Smile, tomorrow will be worse.
- No matter how long or how hard you shop for an item, after you have purchased it, it will be on sale somewhere cheaper.
- The chance of the bread falling with the buttered side down is directly proportional to the cost of the carpet.

- The light at the end of the tunnel will probably turn out to be the headlamp of an approaching freight train.

If we want to boil down the essence of Murphy's Law and all its corollaries into one concise statement, it would probably be: "Life is miserable and nothing is going to turn out right." For this reason, Joseph L. Felix decided to write a humorous exposition of Murphy's Law from a spiritual perspective, entitled *Lord, Have Mercy!* This is an obvious play on words referring to the cry heard from the lips of miserable people as recorded in Scripture: "Lord, have mercy!" (Psalm 4:1; 6:2; 9:13; 25:16; 27:7; 30:10; 31:9; 51:1; 86:16; 102:13; 123:3; Matt. 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30-31; Mark 10:47-48; Luke 16:24; 17:13; 18:38-39). [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version.]

God's mercy is very important and is a subject worthy of study and consideration. Possibly, the essence of mercy is nowhere unveiled for us any more clearly than in the Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan. The victim in that story was in a miserable condition. He had been beaten, robbed, and left on the side of the road, believed to be dead. The priest and the Levite in the story showed no concern for him. "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion" (Luke 10:33).

In the original language, the word translated *mercy* conveys strong feelings of pity, sympathy, compassion, and affection. The Old Testament word is sometimes translated *lovingkindness* and describes the mercy of God as He looks at suffering people and feels love, tenderness, and kindness toward them in their specific need. When we read that God is merciful or that He has mercy, we are assured that He is feeling our misery just as intensely as we are. As the writer to the Hebrews teaches, the reason we can "come boldly to the throne of grace" to receive mercy and grace to "help in time of need" is the One Who sits on that throne is a merciful high priest Who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who sympathizes with us in our weaknesses (4:14-16). Those feelings are the foundation of His mercy.

But mercy does not stop with tender feelings. It acts to relieve

the misery:

So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you." (Luke 10:34-35)

The Samaritan's compassionate feelings led him to a practical demonstration of kindness, concrete actions which were intended to relieve the man's misery and distress. When Jesus asked which one of the three eyewitnesses was the true neighbor to the victim, the lawyer to whom He was speaking answered immediately, "He who showed mercy on him" (Luke 10:37). He used that term -- *mercy* -- to sum up those feelings of steadfast love which were followed by helpful acts of kindness. Because God is full of mercy, He acts to relieve our distress. Psalm 136 provides many examples of some of the merciful things God does for His children. The entire psalm magnifies the mercy of God, and every one of the twenty-six verses tells us something about God, concluding with the comforting words, "His mercy endures forever" (26).

First His goodness is mentioned, then His acts of creation, then His relationship with His people Israel. He delivered them from their Egyptian oppressors (10-12). He took them safely through the Red Sea (13-15). He led them through the wilderness (16). He gave them victory over powerful kings who threatened to destroy them (17-20). He brought them at last into the Promise Land (21-22). But the psalmist gets to the heart of God's mercy in the following two verses. God remembered them in their low estate, in their miserable and humiliating condition, and He delivered them: "Who remembered us in our lowly state, for His mercy endures forever; and rescued us from our enemies, for His mercy endures forever" (23-24). Mercy is God's tender compassion toward us in our distress that causes Him to act on our behalf and relieve our suffering, at the time and in the manner which He knows will be best.

It is profitable for us to remember that grace and mercy are not the same, even if they are such closely-related terms. Both of them offer us help, but *grace emphasizes assistance for the undeserving* while *mercy emphasizes relief for the unfortunate*. Grace describes God's attitude toward guilty lawbreakers and rebels, while mercy describes His attitude toward those who are suffering and distressed.

The same sins which make us guilty also cause most of our misery. So God must deal with our sin problem before He can relieve our distress. That is why we find both His grace and His mercy involved in providing our salvation. "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:4-5).

David, "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1), knew well about the reality of the mercy of God. He learned that "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies" (Psalm 25:10). He also realized, "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; . . . But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children" (Psalm 103:11, 17).

During one of the darkest moments of his life, David prayed what today we call Psalm 52. It is David's Divinely inspired reaction to one dark, wicked deed of an evil man, Doeg the Edomite, followed by the proclamation of fearless confidence in God, even in the face of a brutal and seemingly successful enemy. Doeg was one of Saul's chief shepherds (1 Sam. 21:7). The old king was chasing David, trying to kill him. Doeg informed Saul that David had gone to Ahimelech, the priest at Nob, and that he received from him provisions and Goliath's sword. By doing this, Doeg was trying to gain greater favor with Saul. Saul charged Ahimelech with conspiracy and ordered his guards to kill Ahimelech and his whole family. The guards refused, recognizing that it would be sinful to raise their hands against the anointed servants of the Lord. So Saul ordered Doeg to kill Ahimelech and his family.

So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck the priests, and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore a linen ephod. Also Nob, the city of the priests, he struck with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen and donkeys and sheep -- with the edge of the sword. (1 Sam. 22:18-19)

It is this horrific event that compelled David to turn to God one more time and pen this psalm, in which we notice three major sections: *The Characteristics of a Wicked Man*, *The End of the Wicked*, and *The Characteristics of the Righteous*.

The Characteristics of a Wicked Man (52:1-4)

The wicked man is proud. The first verse charges this sin: “Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?” What Doeg did was a horrible evil. As bad as his actions were, how much worse it was for Doeg to be proud of what he had done! What a perversity! This is one of the characteristics of the wicked. They are proud of their actions. They do not consider what they have done as evil, but something to boast about. Their consciences are not moved when they act with such craftiness because they are convinced they are superior in wisdom and worth. “The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor; let them be caught in the plots which they have devised. For the wicked boasts of his heart’s desire; he blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord” (Psalm 10:2-3).

The wicked man has a sharp tongue. “Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. . . . You love all devouring words, Your deceitful tongue” (2, 4). This is a truthful description of the wicked one. Intentionally, they say things that are cutting and hurtful to others. It becomes natural for them to speak things that cause emotional pain. Human tongues are dangerous weapons, which can severely hurt and damage. In speaking about the tongue, James said,

But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and

cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. (3:8-10)

The wicked man loves evil. “You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness” (3). The wicked person takes joy in evil and loves harmful words. This is the indication of the darkness of the heart. To intend and plan to harm someone and to enjoy its effects is the outcome of the utmost evil. “They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge” (Jer. 4:22). To be happy with evil deeds performed and to attempt to justify people’s unlawful actions is true abomination to the Lord.

The End of the Wicked (52:5-7)

David proclaims that *the end of the wicked is total ruin*. In verse 5, David describes the everlasting ruin that will come upon these who love evil and whose tongue is like a razor. “God shall likewise *destroy you forever*; He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place, and uproot you from the land of the living” (emphasis added). The wicked people may be sitting in a lofty place, in their own mind and/or in reality, but it will not last! God will bring them down from that high place and will place them in ruin. There is no safe place for the wicked to hide; because of their evil, their lives will be turned over by God. Their end is destruction.

The righteous must learn that *the wicked will not win* at the end of all. David does not rejoice over the end result of the wicked. “The righteous also shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying, ‘Here is the man who did not make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness’” (6-7). The man of God recognizes the foolishness of a life of wickedness. The righteous, because of his fear of the Lord, knows that those who think they have done something great have, in reality, accomplished nothing lasting.

The Character of the Righteous (52:8-9)

In the midst of a dark moment, David is able to keep his eyes focused on what is really important and will make the difference at the very end: “But I am like a green olive tree in the house of

God . . .” (8a). *The righteous are strong and fruitful*. David compares himself in the house of God to a fruitful olive tree. He pictures the righteous standing tall and strong with God, enduring any storm that may come. Not only is the righteous man strong when he abides in the house of God, he is also fruitful and flourishing. The righteous man is growing in the proper relationship with God and man because he dwells in “in the house of God.” The righteous is pictured as being near God and as a family member of God. By implication, David is affirming that evildoers will not flourish nor endure the storms of life because they do not abide in the house of God. Furthermore, there is no way for the wicked to be near God or to be a part of the family of God.

Even though evil things happen and the righteous man will experience persecution and rejection from the world, he must continue to *trust in the mercy of God*. “. . . I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever” (8b). The key element to focus on is “forever and ever.” God’s mercy is forever and ever and that gives us reason to trust in God. Though the righteous suffer at the hands of the wicked, the mercy of God will provide comfort and healing to his soul. This is the *one* way we can get through our difficult times.

“I will praise You forever, because You have done it . . .” (9a). The one characteristic of the righteous that is always present is the need to *praise God in any and every situation of life*. David declares his need to praise God for what He has done. In this case specifically, the psalmist is praising God for the mercy that He has dispensed on him. David is able to look at the past and see all the good that God has done, and is also able to recognize the blessing of being the object of God’s mercy in that precise moment and situation.

Finally, because of the mercy received, David proclaims his firm commitment to publicly show his trust in God’s intervention: “And in the presence of Your saints I will wait on Your name, for it is good” (9b). The righteous man does not keep his faith hidden from others, but *will* praise God in the presence of all, and confidently *wait for the proper moment in which God will act on his behalf*. “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him”

(Psalm 37:7). Charles H. Spurgeon provides excellent commentary on the patience of the righteous:

Before or among the saints David intended to wait, feeling it to be good both for him and them to look to the Lord alone, and wait for the manifestation of his character in due season. Men must not too much fluster us; our strength is to sit still. Let the mighty ones boast, we will wait on the Lord; and if their haste brings them present honour, our patience will have its turn by and by, and bring us the honour which excelleth.

“Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” (Psalm 27:14)

Unfortunately, we do not always recognize David’s stand! Somehow, it seems easier to focus on our misery and misfortune than on God’s mercy. The people of Israel had that problem. God promised David in a solemn covenant that His mercy would never depart from David’s family:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. (2 Sam. 7:12-16)

Solomon referred to that promise shortly after he became king (1 Kings 3:6), and again in his prayer of dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 6:42). This promise is the subject of Psalm 89, where mercy is mentioned seven times. In the last mention of the word, the psalmist asks, “Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which

by your faithfulness you swore to David?” (Psalm 89:49)

At times, we all feel that way and are convinced that Murphy’s Law is turning upon us with intense violence. Perhaps, the words of David can help us in those days when we might doubt the mercy of God:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not 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 mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. . . . The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. (Psalm 103:1-5, 8-10)

God’s mercy restrains Him from giving us what our sins deserve. This concept is found in other passages of Scripture:

- When Moses pleaded with God to forgive the people rather than destroy them after their exhibition of unbelief at Kadesh Barnea, Moses made that request on the basis of God’s great mercy (Num. 14:19).
- When Daniel prayed for forgiveness for his people, it was on the basis of God’s mercy (Dan. 9:4, 9).
- Jeremiah affirms: “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not” (Lam. 3:22).

If we received what we deserved, we would feel the fury and sting of all God’s righteous wrath against sin. It is not justice that we need, but God’s mercy. “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those

who fear Him” (Psalm 103:11-13). What a magnificent mercy! God looks on us hell-deserving sinners with compassion, sympathizes with us in our troubles, and then proceeds to remove our transgressions from us as far as our minds can imagine.

This truth is revealed in Jesus’ parable of the unmerciful servant. He owed his master a sum of money that he could never repay on his servant’s salary. Yet, as foolish as it seems, he begged for an extension of time: “Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all” (Matt. 18:26). Jesus went on to say, “Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt” (Matt. 18:27). What a beautiful illustration of mercy! First there is the intense feeling of sympathy, followed by an unprecedented act of kindness in which the master held back the punishment he could have exacted and forgave the servant the entire debt, more than the servant could have ever expected. Christians have received an enormous measure of God’s mercy. We have been forgiven a debt of sin we could never repay and instead have been blessed with daily mercies we can never number. God’s merciful heart aches over the misery that the sin of man has brought into this world. Because of this, our God is referred to as “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3).

When we consider these biblical teachings, it is not surprising that David, in that terrible moment in which he comes to know about the evil deed of Doeg, proclaims: “. . . I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever” (8b). David knows well that his God is *The God of Mercy!* “My God of mercy shall come to meet me. . . . To You, o my Strength, I will sing praises; for God is my defense, my God of mercy” (Psalm 59:10, 17). “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:6).

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture was taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Holt, Alfred. "Review of the Progress of Steam Shipping During the Last Quarter of a Century." *Engineering News*. 1978. Ebook.

"Murphy's Laws Origins." *Murphys-Laws.com*. n.d. Web. 1 June 2015.

Spurgeon, Charles. H. "The Treasury of David: Psalm 52." *Spurgeon.org*. n.d. Web. 25 May 2015.

Biographical Sketch

Paolo Di Luca was born in Milan, Italy; raised in Ferrara, Italy; moved to the States in 2006; and received his U.S. citizenship in 2010. Since 2007, he has served the Bridge Street church of Christ in New Martinsville, West Virginia, as pulpit minister and since 2009 as one of her elders. He is an instructor at the West Virginia School of Preaching, where he teaches Galatians/Romans.

Di Luca is married to the former Cindy Inman, daughter of the late Clifton and Pauline Inman. Clifton was a well-known preacher of the Gospel for fifty years in the Ohio Valley. Paolo and Cindy reside in New Martinsville, West Virginia, and have one son, Marco, who received the Master's Degree in Leadership from Freed-Hardeman University and is now living in Los Angeles, California. Paolo may be contacted at paolo05@gmail.com.

GOD GIVES ME ASSURANCE

Psalm 56

Charles C. Pugh III

Introduction

The biblical psalms are powerfully practical. Leupold sums up this characteristic of this amazing section of Divine revelation when he concludes the introduction to his 1000-page exposition of the Psalms with the following observation:

There does not seem to be any situation in life for which the Psalter does not provide light and guidance. . . . They were born out of real-life situations. They are often wet with the tears and blood of the writer. (28)

One of the psalms which certainly is “wet with the tears” and perhaps even the blood of the writer is Psalm 56. The heading of Psalm 56 is: “To the Chief Musician. Set to ‘The Silent Dove in Distant Lands.’ A Michtam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.” [All scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.] The reference to “The Silent Dove in Distant Lands” may be a tune or melody according to which the psalm was sung (Cloer 90; Weiser 425, et al.). Leupold says it could also “be intended as a hidden reference to David, who was obliged to flee far away as a dove might and take refuge among strangers . . . the Philistines, from the bitter hostility of Saul. . . I Sam. 21” (426). *Michtam* (NKJV; ASV), or *Mikhtam* (NASB), or *Miktam* (ESV), may mean “golden [and] probably points to the quality of the song, denoting . . . an especially delightful [song]” (Cloer 90, 108). Alexander suggests the term “probably indicates the depth of doctrinal and spiritual import” in the psalm (73).

Numerous writers see Psalm 56 and Psalm 57 as companion compositions. These psalms certainly are parallel in several ways. They are similar in structure. Both begin with the same cry; both are divided by a refrain or chorus that appears twice; both end with an affirmation of confidence.

Psalm 56 can be divided into three sections. The first two sections parallel each other (1-4; 5-11). Both of these sections included 1) a *cry to God* (1-2; 5-9) and 2) *confidence in God* (3-4; 10-11). The third section (12-13) implies the psalmist's 1) *commitment to God* (12) and 2) *consciousness of God* (13).

Undergirding the text of Psalm 56 is the writer's awareness that he is engaged in a battle. In a real sense his life is being lived on the battlefield. He is facing enemies who provide great opposition. This psalm is about his attackers and how he needs -- and receives -- the assurance of victory by 1) him being for God and 2) God being for him (3-4; 9-11). It is ultimately all about God (12-13) and overcoming his attackers by faith (trust) in God (3-4; 10-11). Faith is the victory (1 John 5:4). Paul wrote about our battle "against the spiritual forces of evil" (Eph. 6:12), making it obligatory that the Christian "in all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one" (ESV, 16).

The Battle

Observe three characteristics about the battle in which the writer of Psalm 56 was engaged. First, it was a *definite* battle. This was not merely an imaginary or reactionary battle. *Battle* is *biblically an explanation of life*. It is one of the ways Scripture describes life on Earth. For David, the definite reality that his life involved a battle is evidenced in the reality that he was facing:

- Oppressors (1-2)
- Attackers (1-2)
- Adversaries (5)
- Conspirators (6)

In similar fashion, the life of the Christian is not a playground; but it is a battleground. Paul wrote, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil" (ESV, Eph. 6:10). We are to "endure hardship" as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3). *Endure hardship* (Gk. *Sunkakopatheson*) means:

. . . to suffer evil together, to take one's share of rough treatment . . . always ready to faithfully obey his commander without grumbling and complaining; constantly in training whatever hardships must be endured; fighting bravely, never leaving his post even if it meant death; working with his company as a unit, carrying out his specific task . . . rewarded for his service. He was a good soldier! (Rogers and Rogers 502)

Not only is *battle* biblically an explanation of the Christian life, but it is *practically our experience in life*. David, as a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22), experienced what Jesus Christ affirmed one thousand years later when He was engaged in The Battle of All Battles: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (ESV, John 16:33). "Evil never surrenders its hold without a sore fight. We never pass into any spiritual inheritance through the delightful exercises of a picnic, but always through the grim contentions of the battlefield" (Cowman, *Streams* 70). Gospel preachers, during the earliest history of the church, spent precious time and effort "strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Powerful and practical is the truth of the following: "The best things all lie beyond some battle-plain: you must fight your way across the field to get them!" (Cowman, *Springs* 201).

Second, the battle implied in Psalm 56 is a *daily* battle. No less than three times in the text does David describe this battle as one that occurs "all day" (NKJV, 1-2; 5) or "all day long" (ESV, NIV, NASB) or "all the day long" (ASV). It is 24-7! "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross *daily* and follow me" (Luke 9:23, emphasis added).

Third, the ultimate battle implied in this psalm involves

attackers of great *diversity*. Biblical revelation is consistent in setting forth Satan (the devil) as *the* adversary. From the information in the Book of Job, which may be the earliest book of the Bible, through the final book, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, penned by the apostle John in the late first century, Satan is *the* adversary (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Rev. 12:9; 20:2). However, Satan has many minions. David's attackers were diverse in size (number) and skill. He says "*many* attack me" (2, emphasis added). Furthermore, he says they attacked him "proudly" (Hb. *marom*). Cloer says the word is "broad in its definition [as] it swings from a sinister connotation on one side to the meaning of 'strong one' on the other side" (93). It is even used twice to describe the power of God (Psalm 92:8; Micah 6:6). There is a sense in which some attackers who challenge us as we fight for the faith may appear brilliant and powerful. Often Satan outwits those who are ignorant of his designs or schemes (ESV, 2 Cor. 2:11). He is able to blind the minds of people who are not rational (logical) and are unprepared to answer (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Pet. 3:15). It certainly is possible for those who attack faith in God to be cunning (crafty) in such fashion that they influence others to think irrationally (i.e. dishonor the law of rationality). In a marvelous affirmation of the logical certainty of the case for Christianity and the confidence that one who knows it can have, Paul wrote:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (ESV, 2 Cor. 10:3-5)

Fearlessly, Paul affirmed and defended the case for true Christian faith, because it is true and has nothing to fear! Paul was like David in Psalm 56, who declared: "In God, whose word I

praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?” (4). And yet, Paul had barely finished writing the words of the above great text to the Corinthians when he wrote further: “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning [craftiness], your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (ESV, 2 Cor. 11:3). We must balance this blessed assurance of the truth that God gives us with an awareness of our own weaknesses that will result in us giving deep thought to the warning: “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God . . .” (Heb. 3:12).

The Battle of Words

David, as each of us is, was engaged in a battle of words. It is the battle between Divine words and distorted (twisted, wrested) words (2 Pet. 3:15-16). The psalm says, “In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. . . . All day long they distort my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil” (NASB, 4-5). Alexander gives the meaning as “twisting or distorting language by putting false constructions on it” (258). This is what is happening, so obviously, before us today, as it has in principle since the events of the Fall recorded in Genesis 2:16-17 and 3:1-7. Defactualization, deconstruction, revisionism, and other efforts to radically transform human civilization through rewriting both history and the dictionary in the name of such absurdities as political correctness, if left unchecked, will result in the destruction of great masses of humanity physically and spiritually. These distortions of such words as *truth, men, women, male, female, marriage, life, death, right, wrong, good, and evil*, et al., are fundamental to humans existentially and ontologically. This means they are foundational to our very existence and being as humans.

The founders of America, even some of the most liberal among them, still spoke confidently of “the Laws of Nature and Nature’s God,” “truths” that are “self-evident,” the “Creator,” “the Supreme Judge of the world,” and “the protection of divine Providence.”

However, as the battle of words occurs today (between the Word of God and the words of man), the influence of relativism, modernism, and postmodernism is evidenced to the highest levels of leadership in the distortion of words. Is it any wonder that so many are mixed up about the meaning of foundational words that connect to our very existence and being when our leaders write books in which they affirm such propositions as the following?:

Implied in its [the Constitution's] structure, in the very idea of ordered liberty, was a rejection of absolute truth, the infallibility of any idea or ideology or theology or 'ism,' any tyrannical consistency that might lock future generations into a single, unalterable course. . . . The Founders may have trusted in God, but true to the Enlightenment spirit, they also trusted in the minds and senses that God had given them. (Obama 93)

The Book of Proverbs says, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint . . ." (29:18). The absolute truth of the Judeo-Christian ethical revelation formed in the words of the Bible served as the foundation for the establishment of the U.S.A. This is absolute truth. Such is obvious as one studies the founding documents and witnesses government buildings. David was locked into "a single, unalterable course." He said this unalterable course - - this absolute truth --was the following:

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word). In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? . . . In God (I will praise His word). In the Lord (I will praise His word). In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? (Psalm 56:3-4, 10-11)

The Battle of Worldviews

Just as He did for David, God gives me assurance in this battle -- a battle that is definite, daily, and diverse in the attacks and challenges that I face. He gives me assurance, as He did David, through the *inscripturated word* (cf. Psalm 56:3-4, 10-11; 19; 119; 2 Tim. 3:14-17). However, He gives me an assurance that I know, beyond that known to David. I know the *incarnated word* in a way unknown to the psalmist (John 1:1-3, 14; 1 Pet. 1:3-25, et al.).

The ultimate battle in which humanity has been engaged since the adversary (the devil) challenged the first male and female has been a battle concerning how the world is to be viewed and the relationship of man to God as he lives in the world. The correct worldview is simply viewing the world and all that is in it -- its origin, purpose, and destiny -- in harmony with reality (truth). God is the ultimate reality. He is the ground from which all existence and being spring. He made the world and everything in it (Acts 17:24). As Paul affirmed, referencing the Greek poets, it is the case that “in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). The basic foundation of the assurance that God gives me is anchored in this knowledge that His “invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (ESV, Rom. 1:20). The assurance that God gives me to enable me to embrace the correct worldview is then expanded from this evidence in the revelation of Himself in the natural world (the universe, including the Earth, other planets, and stars; plant and animal life; human life) to include His revelation in the sacred writings (the Holy Bible). The assurance brought by this revelation resulted in David’s reliance on God and the removal of the fear of men. “In God, whose word I praise, In God I trust; I shall not be afraid, What can man do to me?” (ESV, Psalm 56:10-11).

The key to the correct worldview is God. Worldview involves the way things really are --reality -- and God is the ultimate ground of reality. No less than seventeen times in the thirteen verses that

compose Psalm 56, David references God or the Lord explicitly or implicitly through use of the second-person pronoun as he addressed God. He had no fear of man, because he feared God.

Trust in God robs fear of its quality of terror; the fear of men is mastered by the fear of God. . . . It is the exclusive recognition of the power and authority of God, the surrender of man's whole being to God which knows but *one* 'glory' -- the humble praising of the Word of God in which alone promise and fulfillment, truth and reality form an inseparable unity. For the psalmist the Word of God is the only warrant of his confidence; it is from that source that he receives strength and hope and at the same time the criterion by which he is able to see the values of life in their true proportions; for man, if left to himself, is always only capable of judging these values from the viewpoint of his own prejudices and distorted feelings. In the light of the perspective of faith, however, a faith which learns to judge all things from the standpoint of God, everything which is human is only 'flesh' (cf. Isa. 31:3), a helpless creature in the hand of his Creator and on that account in the last analysis not a threat to him who knows that he is at one with God. (Weiser 423)

In God, through the purpose, order, and design revealed in creation, and through the remarkable properties of the Holy Scriptures, most obvious in the person and work of Jesus Christ, I am victorious in the battle of worldviews and am given blessed assurance. As did David, I have assurance of *consolation*. I do not have to be afraid, but when afraid, I am consoled because:

- *God knows where I am* (8). He is aware of my wanderings and tossings (Heb. 13:5-6).
- *God knows how I feel* (8). He treasures my tears

(liquid agony) in His “bottle” (2 Kings 20:5; John 11:35). The bottle here may be the skin-bottle in Eastern lands used for water, milk, wine, etc. (Perowne 447).

- *God does not forget me* (8). I am in His daily journal (cf. Mal. 3:16).
- *God hears me when I call* (9). I can activate the greatest power on Earth known to man -- the power of God through prayer (cf. Luke 18:1-8; Eph. 6:18). God has a registry where every prayer is recorded, a bottle in which every tear is stored, and a book where all our groanings are numbered.
- *God is for me* (9). This I know! Most obviously, through the person and work of His Son, I know God is for me! “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

I have God’s assurance for my *motivation* to 1) be faithful and 2) be grateful (12). I have God’s assurance of my *salvation* (13). Salvation is deliverance from sin and death (1 Tim. 1:15). He assures me of security and success (13). He delivers my feet from falling, and, though I fall, He enables me to rise again (Psalm 37:24; Prov. 24:16), “that I may walk before God in the light of the living” (13). To walk before God is to live in His favor and protection. Today, it is living the Christian life -- committed to the Christian worldview in mind, in word, and in deed. It is walking in the light (1 John 1:7) of Him “who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). It brings the assurance of consolation, motivation, salvation, security, and success because possessing all of these is the true philosophy of life.

Conclusion

From one of the military hospitals of World War II came the following: A short time before I was wounded, I was invited by the officers of the regiment to a supper given in honor of a soldier who had been all through the

war and had done many brave deeds but had received no reward for them. After the supper was over, one of the officers said to him, “You have been all through the war and have not told us a single incident in it. Now tell us what you consider the most wonderful thing you have seen in it.”

The soldier paused . . . then rising . . . said, “I was walking near my trench one day, when I saw a young soldier lying on the ground intently reading a book. I . . . said, ‘what book is that you are reading?’ ‘My Bible,’ he answered. I said, ‘Give it up. I read my Bible for years and it never did me any good. Man, give it up!’ . . . He looked at me kind of pityingly, and said, ‘If you knew what the Bible is to me, you would never ask me to give it up,’ and as he spoke, the light on his face became so bright. . . .

Soon afterward a bomb fell near the place where we had been conversing. . . . I thought I would go and see if the young soldier was safe. I found that his head had been completely blown off, but I saw his Bible sticking out of his breast pocket, and here it is (holding it up). I say that the most wonderful thing I have seen during the war was the light on that soldier’s face. . . . (Fant 66-67)

“. . . Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me? . . . So that I may walk before God in the light of the living” (Psalm 56:3-4, 11, 13).

Soldiers of Christ, arise!

Works Cited:

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ASV) are from the American Standard Version, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1901. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Alexander, Joseph A. *Commentary on Psalms*. 1864. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991. Print.

Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 51-89*. Searcy: Resource, 2006. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.

Cowman, Mrs. Charles E., comp. *Springs in the Valley*. 1939. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976. Print.

--. *Streams in the Desert*. 1925. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969. Print.

Fant, David J. *The Bible in New York*. New York: New York Bible Society, 1948. Print.

Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of the Psalms*. 1959. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969. Print.

Obama, Barack. *The Audacity of Hope*. New York: Three Rivers, 2006. Print.

Perowne, J. J. Stewart. *Commentary on the Psalms: 2 Volumes in 1*. 1878-79. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989. Print.

Rogers, Cleon L. Jr, and Cleon L. Rogers III. *The Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998. Print.

Weiser, Artur. *The Psalms: A Commentary*. 1959. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Charles C. Pugh III is in his 49th year of preaching the Gospel of Christ. He is the author of several books and tracts that have gone throughout the world, including the U.S., Canada, Africa,

China, India, and Russia. His most recent publication is *Apologetics: Restoration of Hope for a Nation* (2015). He is one of the founders of the West Virginia School of Preaching, where he serves as an instructor. He also is one of the founders of Warren Christian Apologetics Center and serves as its director. He and his wife, Sharon, live in Vienna, West Virginia. They are the parents of two daughters and one son. They have four granddaughters and one grandson. He may be contacted at director@warrenapologeticscenter.org.

GOD GIVES ME DELIVERANCE

Psalm 55

Phil Gear

Three men were discussing their prayer lives. One said he really enjoyed getting up early in the morning while it was still quiet and enjoying his private time with God. The second said he preferred praying just before bed so he could cover the day's events. The third, a lineman for the power company, said, "I think I did my best praying one day thirty feet in the air while hanging upside down from a utility pole."

David once did some of his best praying while running barefoot up the side of mountain. His son, Absalom, had launched a well-organized rebellion and forced David to flee for his life. While running from the city, word came to him that Ahithophel, one of his most-trusted advisors, had just abandoned him to support Absalom. David reacted by praying, "O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (2 Sam. 15:31). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Ahithophel's wisdom was so highly esteemed that his advice was considered as having the authority of Divine oracle (2 Sam. 16:23). The loss of such a capable advisor dealt a tremendous blow to David's cause. After forcing his father out of Jerusalem, Absalom consulted Ahithophel as to his next move, and was given excellent advice. Ahithophel recommended that twelve thousand men be dispatched to pursue David immediately before he had the chance to regroup for battle. This made sense to Absalom and the elders of Israel, but still they decided to get a second opinion. So they consulted Hushai, who recommended delaying the attack until an overwhelmingly superior force could be mobilized to defeat David. Unbeknownst to Absalom, Hushai was actually a "plant" put there by David himself to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 15:34). Absalom chose Hushai's deliberately wrong advice, and Ahithophel immediately knew his days were numbered. The rebellion was doomed, and he would be called to answer to David for his treason, so "he saddled his donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order,

and hanged himself, and died” (2 Sam. 17:23). David’s prayer for the defeat of Ahithophel’s advice had been answered, although not in the way he may have expected. Ahithophel’s advice was not foolishness, but Absalom foolishly rejected it.

It is generally believed that Ahithophel’s betrayal of David forms the backdrop of Psalm 55. While this is not at all certain, there is nothing in the psalm that would preclude this being true. Purkise called it “A Ballad of Betrayal” (qtd. in Cloer 71). Verses 12-14 clearly refer to the disloyal backstabbing by one who had been considered a friend.

David Was Besieged by His Foes (1-11)

David had more than his share of enemies who were constantly seeking his harm. From his earliest days in public service, attempts were made on his life. King Saul became jealous of David’s reputation as a great warrior and tried to have him killed by the Philistines (2 Sam. 18:25). Failing that, he attempted to eliminate David personally, twice trying to kill him with a spear (1 Sam. 18:10-11; 19:10). David spent the next several years of his life hiding in the hills and caves of southern Judah, attempting to escape the wrath of Saul. “So Saul became David’s enemy continually” (1 Sam. 18:29). The situation became so bad that David once commented, “There is but a step between me and death” (1 Sam. 20:3).

Saul’s death did not eliminate the threats to David’s life. He was able to ascend the throne of Israel only after a bitter civil war with Saul’s family and supporters (2 Sam. 3:1). But even then his problems continued. His own son, Absalom, instigated a rebellion designed to take the throne from David, and so nearly succeeded that David was forced to flee for his life (2 Sam. 15:14). As David and his entourage scrambled up the side of a mountain, he was attacked by a descendant of Saul who took advantage of the occasion to vent his hatred for David. And then to learn that his trusted friend and advisor, Ahithophel, had turned on him had to be a painful blow. David truly lived his life besieged by his foes. Fighting and bloodshed characterized so much of his reign as king that God refused to allow him to build the Temple (1 Chron. 22:7-10).

Truly, David was a man constantly harassed by his enemies. You can almost feel the depth of his emotions as he cries out, “Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide yourself from my supplication” (1). There is so much in his heart that he begs God to “attend to me, and hear me” (2). He describes himself as “restless in my complaint” (2). Apparently, he can find no peace of mind and can only “moan noisily because of the voice of the enemy.” The threats coming from Absalom are not imaginary, and they “bring down trouble upon me” because “in wrath they hate me” (3). How does a man find comfort when his own son is trying kill him? Such brings not only fear for his own personal safety, but also the heartbreak of being hated by his own flesh and blood. No wonder he lamented, “My heart is severely pained within me” (4). The word *pained* means “to writhe, to twist oneself with pain” (Wilson 301). He was so writhing in emotional pain he could describe himself only with terms like *fearfulness*, *trembling*, and *horror*. He said his enemies 1) brought trouble down upon him, 2) bore a grudge against him in anger, 3) caused his heart to be in anguish, and 4) terrified him with threats of death. Obviously, David was not confident that he would survive Absalom’s revolt. “See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life” (2 Sam. 16:11). What a dark time in David’s life!

David’s initial reaction was to flee the whole situation, and not just to the safety of a mountain. “And I said, O that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest, indeed, I would wander far off and remain in the wilderness . . . I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest” (6, 8). Who has not felt the desire to just run and hide from life’s hardships? Many refuse to face life’s problems head on, but instead choose to hide from them in their careers, the pursuit of pleasure, in a bottle, or even in suicide. But running does not deal with the problems. It only avoids them awhile and usually results in worse problems later on. Maturity and faith confront problems, not run from them. Wacaster observed:

Surely there is . . . a refuge from all of life’s ills and heartaches. We view this place with the eye of faith. And though it is not to be found this side of eternity, we can

confidently hope to arrive on the shore of that beautiful home of the soul at the end of our pilgrimage. Meanwhile we must face the trials and tribulations of life with courage and determination to remain faithful to our God, no matter what might come our way. (83)

Running from our problems displays a lack of faith in God. No matter how the “windy storms and tempests” rage through our lives (8), we dare not ignore them. We must face our problems and rely on God to see us through them. David did not know what the future held. He did not even know where he was going when he fled Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15:20). He was not even certain that God would bring him back to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15:25).

The situation in Jerusalem was horrifying. A nation in the midst of revolt and civil war is always a dangerous place. Law and order disappear, and violence and bloodshed tend to rule the day. David said, “For I have seen violence and strife in the city” (9). He describes the situation with terms like *iniquity*, *trouble*, and *destruction* (10-11). “Deceit and guile do not depart from its street.” (11.) Honesty, integrity, and decency find no place in a civilization caught in the throes of civil war. Does the “storm” of verse 8 refer to the violence of verse 9? Had Jerusalem become a city engrossed in the brutality of civil unrest and turmoil? No wonder David said, “I am restless in my complaint and moan noisily” (1). Besieged by his foes on every side, he could see no hope for deliverance, except for God. “Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues” (9). He knew the only hope was for his enemies to fight among themselves, and so he prayed for conflict within their ranks. God answered this prayer through the contradictory advice given Absalom by Ahithophel and Hushai (2 Sam. 17:1-14).

David Was Betrayed by His Friend (12-14, 20-21)

While it is always painful to be mistreated by anyone, it is particularly distressing when it comes from one considered to be a close friend, as was the case with Ahithophel. He had been a faithful advisor since David chose him as one of his early counselors (1 Chron. 27:33). So learning that “Ahithophel is among the conspirators” was upsetting to David (2 Sam. 15:31).

But circumstances gave him little time to mourn. All David could do was pray that God would “turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness” (2 Sam. 15:31). He arranged for Hushai the Archite to return to Jerusalem with specific instructions to “defeat the counsel of Ahithophel” (2 Sam. 15:34). David had great confidence in the wisdom of Ahithophel and was afraid Absalom would listen to him. “And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man inquired at the oracle of God: so was the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom” (2 Sam. 16:23). It would be interesting to know what prompted Ahithophel’s treason. While the Scriptures do not answer the question, one must wonder if it had anything to do with David’s relationship with Bathsheba. After all, she was Ahithophel’s granddaughter (2 Sam. 11:3; 23:34). Whatever the reason, David had lost a trusted advisor and a good friend.

“For it was not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it” (12). To *reproach* was to disparage or vilify. Apparently, nasty things had been said about David by one who was considered a good friend whom he had trusted. It was one who “hated” him that had come against him. *Hated* is from a word meaning “to be cold or indifferent to” (Wilson 209). One whom he had counted as a friend had treated him in a cold and indifferent manner, and it hurt. If such had come from an enemy, he could have hidden from it, or at least protected himself, but he was caught completely off guard. It came from a man he considered his “equal,” “companion,” and “acquaintance” (13). Ash and Miller say the word *companion* is used in the Old Testament only of the closest of friendships (190). They had taken “sweet counsel together” as they “walked to the house of God” (14). *Counsel* translates a word that means “consultation, confidential talk” (Wilson 98). They had enjoyed intimate conversation as they made their way to the place of worship. What more cherished relationship could they have shared? Truly, he had been stabbed in the back by one he loved.

David’s description shows just how devious this “friend” was. “He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; he has broken his covenant” (20). He has been completely untrustworthy. His words that were “smoother than butter” actually hid an ulterior motive (21), hiding the war that was in his heart.

They were merely concealing his evil intent to destroy David. The words that were “softer than oil” were in reality drawn swords (21). His misleading language successfully deceived David until it was too late. David was shocked to hear that Ahithophel had aligned himself with Absalom.

Such mistreatment and disloyalty by a close friend and confidant is extremely painful. Jesus experienced it when Judas betrayed Him and Peter denied Him. One cannot but wonder if the actions of these two did not hurt worse than the physical pain inflicted by the Roman soldiers. Jesus Himself said of Judas, “I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scriptures may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me’” (John 13:18; cf. Psalm 41:6). Judas had not just betrayed his Lord, but also his Lord’s friendship. It is difficult to find any way to excuse such dastardly treatment.

Jesus had warned Peter that he would deny Him on that fateful night He was arrested. Peter had vehemently denied such would occur, but it did. When the rooster crowed, Jesus turned and looked at Peter (Luke 22:61). What was that penetrating look that sent Peter out into the night in tears? He had let his Lord down and deeply regretted it. Surely the emotional pain Jesus felt from these two disciples was excruciating.

We all know we will face mistreatment in this world. Jesus told his disciples, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18-19). We can prepare ourselves for this when we know it is coming, but that which comes from those we believed to be friends and supporters will completely blindside us. Such unexpected treacherousness is devastating when our “companion” turns on us.

When one is mistreated by a brother or sister in Christ, there is always the temptation to blame God and walk away from Him: “If that is Christianity, I want no part of it.” People who are in that situation can be extremely difficult to bring back to God. They do not seem to realize how unfair it is to blame God for the actions of His children. This is not the time to leave God, but to cling to Him even more fervently. Let Him deal with His wayward children.

David Was Delivered by His Father (1, 15-19, 22-23)

When David received word that Ahithophel had allied himself with Absalom, he immediately called on God for help. “O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness” (2 Sam. 15:31). He did not curse or swear or express hatred for his new enemy, but instead he trusted the whole situation to God. He pleaded, “Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Attend to me, and hear me” (1-2). He was pleading for God to listen to his complaint. He had no other hope.

David had no doubt God would hear his complaint. “As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me” (16). He would saturate his day with prayer. “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (17). God had never let him down before, and David knew He would not now. God had protected him from King Saul’s jealousy and wrath. He had fought Goliath and won. He had no reason to believe that God would let him down now. “He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle which was against me, for there were many against me” (18). The word *redeemed* means “to set free” (Wilson 343). God had set his soul free, giving him peace from the conflict that threatened him. It was David’s enemies who were in trouble. “God will hear, and afflict them, even He who abides from of old” (19).

David appears to actually call for the destruction of his enemies. “Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell, for their wickedness is in their dwellings and among them” (15). Some have suggested a somewhat unloving motive on David’s part as he appears to call for vengeance. But, as Mullens points out, “The principle here is not so much that David wished for their downfall and prayed to that end, but that this is a result of wickedness and evil and God will handle such judgment himself” (335).

David is not calling for such to happen, but merely recognizing that he is going to personally benefit from God’s justice in this case. There was no reason to pray for their conversion. These were men who “do not change, therefore they do not fear God” (19). They were dishonest and self-serving and had no respect for anything having to do with God. Their position seems so

permanent they feel no reason to change, but they are deceived. “God shall bring them down to the pit of destruction” (23).

David is completely confident that God will deliver him from the treachery of Ahithophel. “He shall hear my voice” (16). “God will hear” (19). He did not know how, nor did he even attempt to instruct God how to do it. He would leave the method up to God, but he never questioned God’s ability or willingness to rescue him.

May we develop David’s confidence in God. He has promised neither to leave nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Cloer said, “We must trust God’s promises as . . . the most reliable entities of this world” (86). We may not know what God is going to do. He has many methods of dealing with our difficulties that are beyond our finite thinking. He can sustain us by removing the trial, as he did by removing Ahithophel. He could choose to bear some of our difficulties Himself (1 Pet. 2:24). Or He can make us strong enough to bear our trials (2 Cor. 12:9). However He chooses to handle our enemies for us, we know that we can follow David’s instructions to “cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you” (22). *Sustain* means to “furnish the means of living” (Wilson 431). He will not allow us to be without what we need. We can be confident that He will “never permit the righteous to be moved” (22). With such confidence in the never-failing power and love of God, no enemy can defeat us. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31) Ash and Miller observed, “Whatever life brings, trust it to God. The person who does, though suffering for a time, cannot ultimately be moved -- any more than God Himself can be moved” (192). The fact is that “bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days” (23). Often those who live by the sword die by the sword, and at a young age. But those whose faith is in God can live with assurance that they will not be destroyed. The wicked may suffer God’s punishment, but “I will trust in you” (23).

Conclusion

No one who stands for the right will get through this life without enemies, and sometimes those enemies will come from the ranks of those we thought were friends. Ahithophel taught David this painful lesson. The question is not whether we will face

betrayal and disloyalty, but how we will handle it.

How does one endure personal betrayal? How does a servant of God respond to such crushing disappointment? The answer is made up of prayer and faithful reliance upon the Lord. The psalmist handles his heartbreaking ordeal with truth and spiritual maturity and provides guidance for us to follow in our time of crisis. (Cloer 72)

Let Satan attack us with what he will; we know that God will deliver us. No situation in life is beyond His ability to handle. We can confidently sing the lyrics of the beautiful hymn “How Firm a Foundation.”

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake! (Rippon)

Works Cited:

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Ash, Anthony and Clyde Miller. *Psalms*. Austin: Sweet Publishing, 1980. Print. Living Word Commentary.

Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 51-89*. Searcy: Resource, 2006. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis & Application of the Holy Scriptures.

Mullens, Leonard. *Book of Psalms*. Vol. 1. Austin: Southwest, 1989. Print. Eighth Annual Southwest Lectures.

Rippon, comp. “How Firm a Foundation.” *Praise for the Lord*. Ed. John Wiegand. Nashville: Praise, 2001. n. pag. Print.

Wacaster, Tom. *The Songs and Devotions of David*. Vol. 3. Pulaski: Sain Publications, 2012. Print.

Wilson, William. *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*. McClean: McDonald, Print.

Biographical Sketch

Phil Gear is a native of Parkersburg, West Virginia, and a graduate of Harding University. He has preached for churches in West Virginia and Ohio and has been with the East High St. church in Springfield, Ohio, since 2000. He also serves as one of their elders. He and his wife, Darleen, make annual mission trips to Costa Rica.

Phil is married to the former Darleen Jones and they have two children: Amy (Luke) Andrick of Galloway, Ohio; and Katie (Jack) Gilchrist of Hermitage, Pennsylvania. They have three grandchildren: Joanna Andrick, Emily Andrick, and Andrew Gilchrist.

GOD GIVES ME COMFORT

Psalm 94

Eddie Cooper

Memories flood my mind as I stand before you this day, of lectureships past when my mother and father were able to come and listen to me preach the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. They were great encouragers of me and my life's work. They are truly missed, and I am humbled by being asked to be a part of this great lectureship program.

Thanks to the eldership for overseeing such a great work involving the training of young men to go out to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. And thanks too for allowing my father to be a part of this great work. He loved you all dearly.

The theme that has been selected is a timely one, needed by all, and has been discussed throughout the centuries. My topic is "God Gives Me Comfort" and is one that all should appreciate, because God is the God of all comfort.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

[All scripture references are from NKJV, unless otherwise noted.]

Introduction

We live in a world that sometimes makes us very uncomfortable. Things occur that cause us great discomfort, and, as a result, we desire to go home and be with God. Comfort in this life that can help us endure the trials and the troubles that we face is so important to the child of God.

The Christian needs to know that there is comfort from above. How do we find comfort in times of trouble? What do we do to receive comfort from God? And how can we know that in times of

difficulty, we can find peace in such situations?

We must realize that there is a God of comfort Who will help us in times of trouble. One of the most encouraging things for the Christian is the knowledge that God does care. Numerous times in Scripture, the word *comfort* occurs, and it is directly associated with God. Thus, the fact that God exists should bring us great comfort.

When we have trouble, we know that God is in control of things and, at times, shows incredible power in protecting us and in punishing others that seek to destroy the cause of righteousness. In our human thinking, we want to know why God allows such activity and does not destroy offenders immediately.

Even as Christ was dying on the cross, the ungodly shouted at Him to save Himself and come off the cross. “Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, ‘He saved others, Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him’” (Matt. 27:41-42). Christ had the power to do so, but if He had, we would have died in our sins.

This psalm mentions the desires we have when we look at things from an earthly perspective. Then we see the spiritual truths that override the vain thoughts of our minds, leaving us with a clear answer to the questions we raise.

Evil Men and a Cry for Judgment

We hear men and women ask often, “How long shall the wicked triumph?” This same question is posed in verse 3. All around us, we see the same type of wicked folk who have a depraved character and are so diabolical in conduct. It appears from our text that these men were not those who made a *pastime* of iniquity or *who occasionally* do evil but those who are engaged in iniquity without regard to God. The wicked are always ready to serve their master.

The enemies of the people of God have always been a proud and insolent sort who because of their power have arrogantly lorded it over the righteous. When men feel that they are prosperous, they acknowledge no need of God and feel self-sufficient and self-boasting. These same people “slay the widow

and the stranger, and murder the fatherless” (5-6).

It should be the case that those who are widowed or strangers or fatherless should excite compassion in us, because these evil workers took advantage of them.

Deep in the heart of man is the sense of justice, the conviction that there is a judge of all the earth who will do right (2). Oppressed people in all ages and in all lands have cried to God for judgment on the evildoer. That cry will certainly, sooner or later, meet with a full response. Look at the picture in verses 1-3 of the psalmist crying out for God to use His vengeance on persecution that had been going on for a long time. Since God is the God Who has the prerogative of Divine judgment, He alone has the right to vengeance. “Vengeance is Mine, and recompense, their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them” (Deut. 32:35).

Their Thinking Was Faulty (8-11)

Those whom the psalmist mentions in our text evidently acknowledged the existence of God, His Creatorship, and His rule over the world but thought that He did not see and would not recompense the evildoers.

Yet they say, “The Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand.”

Understand, you senseless among the people; and you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge? The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile. (7-11)

There are multitudes of people today who feel that God does not see their conduct. How foolish it was for the evildoers to think that God did not hear their arrogant speech or see their oppressive deeds or even take note of the wickedness of man!

Is it not true that people believe that God is not involved in all the compartments of their lives? For some reason, what we do in business, at school, or for pleasure does not seem to bear God’s

scrutiny. Here is the comfort lesson that we need to get: For those who were the oppressed, they could not go beyond God's knowledge. Realize that God is acquainted with all our afflictions. He will sustain us in all our afflictions, and when He comes to judge, He will vindicate us.

Who Is the Instructor? (12-15)

Notice that the man who is Divinely instructed is blessed. The first thing we notice is that he is blessed because of the instruction he receives. This man is instructed to stand in opposition to the foolish among the people.

The Lord is their teacher and is incomparable, supreme, and perfect. Remember this: 1) All things are known to Him, and His resources are inexhaustible. 2) In His method of instruction, His knowledge of each pupil is perfect. God is One Who knows all about us, even our faculties, attainments, and capacities. The Word of God is the best expositor of His providence.

Comfort comes too in knowing that he may be given "rest" (13), even though he sees the retribution taking place. He is able to have a calm, self-possessed spirit. Because of his views of God, the man of God has confidence and calmness, even though the evil triumph over him. From God, he has learned that the wicked has dug a ditch for himself, and if he does not repent, he will perish.

One of the benefits of being in Christ and actively pursuing holiness is that we can rest in Christ Jesus. That ultimate rest is mentioned in Hebrews 4:9, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." To the Christian, rest will come when we finish our work here in the kingdom.

Verse 14 of our text says, "For the Lord will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance." This grand truth is to cheer the heart of the afflicted. The Lord chastens His own, but never forsakes them.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening,

God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there of you whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, to which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:5-11)

Perhaps the explanation that Wayne Jackson gives of this passage in Hebrews would be most helpful:

Though these Christians were suffering various forms of harassment, they had not yet shed their blood on the Lord's behalf in the war against sin, as He did for us. These brothers appear to have forgotten that God allowed hardship to harden (i.e, toughen) us (v. 5a). They must be reminded of Scripture (cf. Prov. 2:11-12), namely that discipline is permitted as an expression of divine love. It helps one to survive when times get rough (vv. 5,6). If we were not disciplined, it would be as if we were not true children [7-8]. (510)

Regardless of what the child of God goes through in this life, His inheritance is sure (1 Pet. 1:4). Because of the faithfulness of God, He will not cast off His people.

Christians can take comfort in knowing that God will be righteous in His judgments (15). At times, it seems that the judgment of God is turned aside from righteousness when the wicked triumph and the poor are oppressed. Since God's promises are true, at the proper time these perversions will be seen in their true light, and righteousness will be supreme. At the day of judgment, there will be the manifestation of God's Divine rule on a grand scale. Those who have continued to live a righteous life will

find comfort. “And all the upright in heart shall follow it,” may have the meaning that they will approve of it and give their allegiance to it (15). They will rejoice in it.

Burton Coffman says the RSV seems to be clearer: “Justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it.” Martin Luther translated it, “For right must remain right, and the upright in heart shall walk in it” (Coffman 181).

A Declaration of Confidence in God (16-23)

The comfort that Christians can have is found in our confidence in God. It appears that the psalmist wants to teach a great lesson on one’s sublime trust in God. There is: 1) Confidence in the midst of formidable enemies. In spite of the psalmist being threatened and afflicted by powerful enemies, he gives us some great lessons on confidence. People of God have always had to deal with those who were wicked. In our society, we have those who are corrupt in positions of power, but men of God have always had to deal with that. Not only were they corrupt, but they enacted wicked laws to serve their own purposes (20). An example of this is Daniel. Those in power “consulted together,” to establish a law to destroy Daniel (6:7). Evildoers will always try to destroy the confidence one has in God (6:11, 15). 2) Confidence in the midst of many anxious thoughts. “In the multitudes of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul” (19). Burton Coffman says on this verse,

The idea seems to be that in the great number of thoughts that passed through his mind, many of them perplexing, vain, profitless, or having no aim or purpose, there was one class of thoughts that gave him comfort; and those were ones which pertain to God. (182)

Have you ever had anxieties or worries of any kind? Did you try to make it on your own, without any thought of what God will do for you? The psalmist was fully aware of despair, in regard to these evildoers. Maybe he was thinking, as we do, “How will this all work out?”

If we take a look at the questions found in verses 16-17, we

may find some of the answers. “Who will rise up against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would have been settled in silence.” In other words, if God had not been his help, the grave would have been his silence. If we do not rely on God’s help, our feet slip. There are times when human help fails because of a lack of faithfulness. Maybe we just do not feel we have the ability to go on, or maybe, at times, there are those who are nearest us that are powerless to sympathize with us. To the psalmist, the Lord was his helper and His mercy held him up (18).

Comfort comes from the confidence we have in Divine support. There are dangers when we fail to remember that God will help us. We may neglect to rely on God and fail to ask Him for help. James says,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (1:5-8)

The reason we may fail to ask is that we think we can do it all by ourselves. When one sees all the evildoers succeeding, it is very easy to fall into unbelief, rebellion, or despair.

God’s help enables us to feel secure. In God, the psalmist would be raised far above the reach of danger. He was “the rock of my refuge” (22).

God comforts us because there is stability in Divine protection. The “rock” is firm, strong, immovable (22). It stands securely and calmly amid the driving winds and pelting storms.

Comfort comes because of Divine retribution. Verse 23 reads, “He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; The LORD our God shall cut them off.” There is a threefold assurance. 1) God has no fellowship with the wicked. God is always just, and, that being His character, He has no alliance with injustice, even when sanctioned by human laws.

All of God's plans are hostile to injustice. He also expects us not to have fellowship with the wicked. "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). Why is it that man would much rather be involved in wickedness than to follow God's wonderful ways? Our responsibility, too, is to reprove the unfruitful works of darkness. In other words, take a stand against evil. 2) God will cut off those who are persistently wicked (23). Those evildoers fail to remember that they are separated from God because of their wickedness. Eternal punishment will involve being cut off from the reward of eternal life. Jesus said, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:46). 3) The evildoer will be cut off because of his own wickedness. On the judgment day, one will not be able to blame others. Man has always played the blame game. Actually, it started in the Garden of Eden. Eve blamed the serpent, and Adam blamed His wife (Gen. 3:12-13).

Conclusion

Comfort from the God we serve should serve the Christian well. We have noticed that God cares for His people and has promised to take care of our physical needs as well. One of my favorite verses is found in Philippians 4:19: "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." He did not say He would supply all our wants, desires, or passions but all our needs.

Another comfort we have in this life is the Word of God. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." The Scriptures were meant to give us comfort.

What a wonderful teaching it is and what a wonderful comfort it brings us to know that after this life is over and after all our struggles and trials, we are going to get to go home to be with God. Paul said in I Thessalonians 4:18, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." If this life were all that existed, there would be little to no comfort for Christians today. But the fact that when we die, we can go and be with the Lord ought to bring each of us great

comfort and cause our souls to rejoice. Maybe those in the text that we have studied realized what Paul expressed in Romans 8:18, “For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Do you have the hope of heaven as your comfort? Do you find comfort in this life, even in the midst of trials? When bad things happen, do you have something on which you can “fall back” in order to bring you peace of mind and help you through the difficult times?

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (RSV) are from the Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952 and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary on Psalms*. AC UP, 1992. Print.

Jackson, Wayne. *A New Testament Commentary*. Stockton: Christian Courier, 2011. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Eddie Cooper is the son of the late Denver and Florence Cooper. He is married to the former Barbara Buckley of Parkersburg, West Virginia, and they have two adult sons. Jason is a psychologist and lives in Crestview, Florida, with his family. Scott is a chief financial officer and manager of a Tennessee Farmers Co-Op in Nashville and lives with his family in Portland, Tennessee.

Eddie is a graduate of Ohio Valley University and Abilene Christian University. He has been preaching for over fifty years and has worked with congregations in Ohio, Texas, and West Virginia. Since 2007, he has been located with the Washington Street congregation in St. Albans, West Virginia.

GOD GIVES ME LOYALTY

Psalm 9

Skip Andrews

Here is my decision: I will be loyal to You because of Who You are and what You do.

I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart;

I will tell of all Your marvelous works.

I will be glad and rejoice in You;

I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High. (1-2)

[All scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

The poet's decision to be loyal is affirmed with four *I wills* in the first two verses of Psalm 9. We do not know if there was any specific occasion that led to the writing of this poem, but we do know that David's life was full of situations that would prompt a song such as this one.

"I will": He would start from the heart. True loyalty comes from love, and true love comes from understanding. David's descriptions of God show great understanding. He calls Him, "O Lord" (1), "O Most High" (2), and "God" (17) and refers to the "name" (2, 10). He also speaks of things that He had done, was doing, and would do (which will be our focus and bases for our own loyalty as we meditate on this psalm). He speaks of his "whole heart" -- a key theme and a necessary goal toward which each of us should move (Psalm 111:1; 119:2, 10, 34, 58, 69, 145).

"I will": He would tell of the Lord's marvelous works, especially the ones itemized in this poem. This telling would be "upward and outward" (Cloer 120) -- upward toward God and outward toward anyone who needed to hear. *Get this*: True praise invites other souls to learn of "the Name" (Philip. 2:5-11)!

"I will": He would be happy and jubilant in all of this -- and it would be "in You" (which is to say that all of this joy would be as a result of the relationship he had with God, which involved seeing Him as He really is).

“I will”: He would sing praise to the Name about which he had learned so much. *Name* is a word that appears 104 times in the Psalms. Almost every time, it is used with reference to God. The more we learn about the Name (I AM THAT I AM; Exod. 3:14), as well as the dozens of other names, titles, and descriptions of the great I AM, the more likely we are to be loyal to Him.

So verse 2 appropriately closes with one of those titles: “O Most High.” This one is used thirty-one times in the Old Testament (Baker 837). “The writer sees God as He really is -- the almighty One -- and is eager to render the proper praise to Him” (Cloer 121).

Now, let us look wholeheartedly at five bases for loyalty in verses 3-18 as we move toward the final request in verses 19-20.

One: You Maintained My Cause

*When my enemies turn back,
They shall fall and perish at Your presence.
For You have maintained my right and my cause;
You sat on the throne judging in righteousness.
You have rebuked the nations,
You have destroyed the wicked;
You have blotted out their name forever and ever. (3-5)*

In these verses, the argument is that David knows the events of verse 3 *will* happen because the events of verses 4-5 *have* happened. David’s confidence about the future (sooner or later) is certain -- there are enemies, and three things will happen to them. They will:

- Turn back -- be driven back,
- Fall -- stumble, and
- Perish -- be lost, reduced to disorder, “destroyed” (6), “perished” (6), “perish” (18).

The picture that these three terms draw is clear -- back, down, and done! Also note that the word for *perish* is used in other places in Psalm 9. These themes recur regularly in this short poem, and they really are a base from which David’s loyalty operated (think

of the encounter with Goliath in 1 Samuel 17).

But the confidence of verse 3 has another element -- the doom of the enemies is certain because of the presence (face) of God. Kirkpatrick describes this as a “manifestation of victorious wrath” (44; cf. Psalm 21:9; 34:16; Ezek. 14:24). The presence of God explains the fall of David’s enemies.

This leads to his thoughts about what had already been done and what he had learned about God (4-5). God had “maintained” (accomplished, completed, with a goal in mind) David’s “right” (his legal case or claim) and “cause” (his plea, followed by a correct judgment) (4). God had done this because that is Who He is and that is what He does: “. . . Thou dost occupy the throne, a righteous judge” (The Modern Language Bible, 4). Verse 5 illustrates how God had already done these things in a way that David *knew* He had done them. This judge Who does right had “rebuked” (sharp criticism; Isa. 54:9; Nah. 1:4) the “nations” (heathen, KJV) according to the law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7-8; Hos. 8:7). They were blotted out, just as the generation that was destroyed in the flood (Gen. 7:23). Cloer wrote, “The victory was complete, decisive, and eternal” (122).

Today, we can choose to be loyal on this same base. God is not different, our enemies are not different, and the outcome will not be different (Rom 8:28-39).

Two: You Abide Forever

O enemy, destructions are finished forever!

And you have destroyed cities;

Even their memory has perished.

But the LORD shall endure forever;

He has prepared His throne for judgment.

He shall judge the world in righteousness,

And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness.

(6-8)

There is a contrast here between the enemy (6) and Jehovah (7-8). The enemy is ruined, it has cities that are destroyed, and its memorials have been destroyed. Horne translated verse 6 as: “The destructions of the enemy are completed [*sic*] to the utmost; and

thou, O God, hast destroyed their cities, their memorial is perished with them!” (44) David knew right from wrong, and he knew that his enemies were wrong. It was right, then, for God to punish His (and David’s) enemies forever. God is the supreme judge, and His servants can know that He is thorough and fair, even when it involves punishment of sinful nations.

Think about some of the words in verse 6:

- “Destructions”: Ruin, “no more of them” (Barnes 78).
- “Finished forever”: Always, perpetually ended.
- “Destroyed cities”: “You have” is a reference to the fact that God did this (even if it was by their stepping into their own pits, nets, and snares [15-16]).
- “Memory has perished”: The remembrance of them is destroyed.

In other words, the ungodly are *not* forever -- no matter how hard they try to be.

Now, for the other side of this contrast: Jehovah is forever. And let us sing His praises (1-2), as the previous psalm teaches us to do -- “O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth” (1, 9).

The word *endure* in verse 7 is the same as the word *sat* in verse 4 -- God is on the throne always -- He endures as the eternal sitting One, ruling over everything and everyone. Nothing, no one, no force, no belief, no union of things or forces, no new place in time can unseat Him. Get the picture? The picture will always have Him on the throne!

“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!’” (Rev. 19:6)

Why is this so? God is unchangeable, and “The unchangeableness of God, therefore is at the same time the ground of confidence for the righteous, and the ground of dread for the wicked. The eternal principle of right will ultimately triumph”

(Barnes 78).

David illustrates this truth in verse 8 by claiming that God will “judge the world in righteousness.” A thousand years later, Paul repeated that claim in Acts 17:31. The claim has not changed!

In David’s day, the claim could be proved by two things:

- Past events (all the way back to Eden) and
- The nature of God -- He is always right.

In Paul’s day, the claim was proved by:

- The resurrection of Christ from the dead and
- The nature of God -- He is always right (Acts 17:22-31).

But not all judgment is condemnation. The nature of God is such that He desires to bid us to “come,” not to “depart” (Matt. 25:1-46). So, let us believe in His “uprightness” with all of our hearts (8). *Uprightnes*s is always plural in the Hebrew text (Baker 605). All of God’s doings, all of His judgments, all of His divisions are “uprightnesses.” So if we approach His throne of righteousness with a desire to learn and do what He requires, He will find in us the heart He seeks, and He will invite us home forever.

“Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deut. 5:29)

Today, we can choose to be loyal on this base. God does abide forever. He has been just, He is just, and He will be just. And His justice includes providing us with the way out of our sin (Rom. 3:24-26).

Three: You Are a Refuge

*The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed,
A refuge in times of trouble.*

*And those who know Your name will put their trust in You;
For You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You. (9-10)*

Are you ready to learn something else about God? He is a refuge -- stated twice in verse 9. This word refers to a stronghold, a high tower or fort, a rock (Davis 676; Kirkpatrick 46; Psalm 18:2; 46:7, 11; 48:3; 2 Sam. 22:3). He serves as this refuge for the oppressed (crushed, broken in pieces) who are having extreme troubles involving distress and anguish. David does not itemize the troubles here, which means that we do not need to itemize either. Is something -- anything -- crushing you today? Then flee to Him as a bird to the mountain where refuge is (Psalm 11:1). This implies that God has the two complementary characteristics of mighty strength and tender mercies. "God is the One who reaches out to us in our 'times of trouble' (le'iththoth bathstSarah). He is a place of protection for 'the oppressed,' the mistreated, crushed, downtrodden, and those in the kind of circumstances in which all hope is cut off" (Cloer 123).

The application of this knowledge about God is easy to make if we just will. "Know" (a word that is used more than eight hundred times in the Old Testament -- from knowing facts to developing deep understanding) the "name" (*name* is often used as a way of including everything we do know or can know about His character) (10), and be drawn to Him by what you know right now. This is what *trust* is -- to have confidence enough to go to a place (refuge) or a person (O Most High) for His glory and your needs (2 Kings 18:5; Psalm 4:5; Jer. 49:11).

He has not -- not ever -- forsaken a person who sought Him. Do we seek Him? Do we study about people who sought Him in the Bible? Do we study the verses where *seek* and *sought* are used? Do we look for seekers? Do we train people to be seekers?

He will not forsake such a person, so let us choose to be such people.

The more intimate our knowledge of God, the more entirely shall we trust in him; the more we learn of his real character, the more shall we see that he is worthy of universal love. It is much to say of any one that the more he is known the more he will be loved; and in saying this of God, it is but saying that one reason why men do *not* confide in him is that they do not understand his real

character. (Barnes 80)

I can be loyal to Him on this base by understanding that it is impossible to learn something about God that will give me the right to refuse to trust Him. But let me not forget that I can miss this point. Contrast what Israel said about God in Deuteronomy 1:27 with what was true about Him according to Deuteronomy 4:37. Both of these statements are part of the same speech that Moses made at the end of his life (Deut. 1:1-4:40): “And you complained in your tents, and said, ‘Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us’” (Deut. 1:27). “And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power” (Deut. 4:37).

Knowing that He is in control should encourage us to seek refuge in Him, to turn to Him when we are broken, and to trust Him more and more and more. He deserves -- and we need -- this kind of loyalty.

Four: You Dwell Among Us

Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion!

Declare His deeds among the people.

When He avenges blood, He remembers them;

He does not forget the cry of the humble.

Have mercy on me, O LORD!

Consider my trouble from those who hate me,

You who lift me up from the gates of death,

That I may tell of all Your praise

In the gates of the daughter of Zion.

I will rejoice in Your salvation.

The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made;

In the net which they hid, their own foot is caught.

The LORD is known by the judgment He executes;

The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. (11-16)

I want to study these six verses with this outline as our guide:

- Your presence as a window to Your character (11-12).
- The application of the presence of Jehovah in two ways (13-16).
 - Positively (13-14).
 - Negatively (15-16).

God dwelled in Zion at this time -- which is used here to refer to Jerusalem, as it had become the place where David consolidated his reign early in 2 Samuel. This dwelling has a very important connection to the concept of fellowship and approval. The fact that He did this was a matter of revelation, just as He has revealed that He dwells in the church today (John 14:15-23). This truth *requires* us to sing His praise. It *requires* that we declare (tell, report; Psalm 22:30-31) everything we know about Him to the people -- any people, all people.

“The first step towards their conversion is that they should know the evidences of His power and love” (Kirkpatrick 47). But there is more. Verse 12 shows that since He dwells in Zion, He is able to be the “Avenger of blood, who investigates all offences against His sacred gift of human life, and demands satisfaction for them” (47).

He does not let anything slip from His memory, especially the outcries of the poor, oppressed ones who have developed humility during their troubles. Yes, He remembers (the root of this word means “to bend or bow down,” [Kirkpatrick 47]).

So now to the positive and negative applications. On the positive side, David desires (13-14):

- Mercy -- gracious favor (Exod. 33:19; Num. 6:25; Psalm 26:11),
- Considering -- to see, take note of (my affliction), and
- Lifting -- raise, exalt (from the entrance of death).

These gifts will put him in the position to fulfill the four *I wills*

of verses 1-2 -- His commitment to loyalty.

Zion will be his starting place to relate his song of praise about that which God has done. His “audience” will include the daughter (citizens) of Zion. His message will be salvation -- the deliverance, help, victory, and accompanying blessings that came from the dweller in Zion. Now turn your attention to 1 Peter 2:6-12 and see the New Testament commentary on our Zion, our cornerstone, our standing, our merciful God, our praises, our lifestyle, and our audience:

Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

“Behold, I lay in Zion

A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,

And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient,

“The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone,”

and

“A stone of stumbling

And a rock of offense.”

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

On the negative side, David gives a poet’s powerful picture of

the law of sowing and reaping (15-16). The nations (the enemy) have dug a pit, set a net, and laid snares against the child of God. And it is certain that the “prey” will be caught in them. But the nations have made themselves the prey. And the Lord (Jehovah) is the One Who executes (same word as *maintained* in verse 4) *this* correct judgment upon them.

So here is another base from which my loyalty can operate. David then tells us “Higgaion. Selah” (16). What does *that* mean? *Higgaion* is rare, found in Psalm 19:14 (“meditation”); Psalm 92:3 (“harmonious sound”); and Lamentations 3:62 (“whispering”). In view of the context, I have decided to view it as David’s encouragement for us to study and really think about this -- meditate, mull it over, talk about it quietly with yourself. *Selah* (a word whose meaning has not been determined -- it may just be a pause of some sort).

Five: You Are Our Hope

*The wicked shall be turned into hell,
And all the nations that forget God.*

*For the needy shall not always be forgotten;
The expectation of the poor shall not perish forever. (17-18)*

Let us begin with a brief word study: *Expectation* (18): This comes from the word that is translated *cord* in Joshua 2:18, 21. The cord that Rahab tied from her window was her hope for being spared when her city was taken. Hope and faith go together (Heb. 11:1), and when she linked them with acceptable acts of faith, they led to her salvation (Heb. 11:30-31).

Now, let us go back to Psalm 9. The people (wicked nations) that forgot God had no faith, so how could they have had hope? Oh, they had false faith and false hope, but -- that is not of any use when coming before the One Who is sitting to judge right! Verse 17 says that they shall be “turned into hell.” What does that mean? *Turned* is from a verb that is used more than one thousand times in the Old Testament (Baker 1108). It has many usages. *Hell* is the realm or world of the dead (Sheol), often referring to the grave. Combining the two terms here presents the idea that David is reminding us of the ultimate end of such lives. Their purposes for

living the way they do will be thwarted, and their journey to Sheol will result in eternal loss.

The end of verse 17 confirms this -- David is not just writing about dying and being buried in a grave.

In 1784, George Horne wrote

The true state both of “nations,” and the individuals of which they are composed, is to be estimated from one single circumstance, namely, whether in their doings they remember, or “forget God.” Remembrance of Him is the well-spring of virtue; forgetfulness of Him, the fountain of vice. (49)

So what does *forget* mean? In the next psalm we have the answer: “The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts” (4; cf. Rom. 1:18-23; Psalm 50:22-23; Isa. 65:11-12; Job 8:13-14).

This brings us to verse 18, where our word *expectation* occurs. As we have noted, it is translated *cord* in Joshua 2:18, 21. Now let us see it as a spiritual principle that is *like* a cord. Here are some examples from Baker (1243):

- Hope can come from our manner of life (Job 4:6).
- True hope is from God (Psalm 62:5).
- Hope is rooted in reverence for Him (Prov. 23:17-18).

This expectation, or hope, will not be forgotten. In other words, God will not fail to remember the needy, poor, afflicted, misery-ridden, humble soul -- which is the opposite of what the nations do to Him. (Note: The word *forget* in verse 17 is used only twice in the Old Testament -- Psalm 9:17 and Isaiah 65:11 [Strong’s 7913]. But its root is the same as the word in Psalm 9:18, which is much more common [Strong’s 7911].)

I can be loyal to Him on this base by being a person of faith, hope, and action that shows the Lord that I remember Him. And I can be this type of person on behalf of other people (as Rahab was). This is how I can help the nations to remember God -- by

remembering Him myself!

Here Is My Request

*Arise, O LORD,
Do not let man prevail;
Let the nations be judged in Your sight.
Put them in fear, O LORD,
That the nations may know themselves to be but men. (19-20)*

The first part of my request, O Lord, is that You would stand up (arise) from Your position and prevent men from being victorious in this case, as You have done many times (19). Let the heathen receive “a lesson” (Kirkpatrick 50). It is Your right to be strong, so please “Summon them to Thy Presence” (50).

The second part of my request, O Lord, is that you place them so that they will know that learning to fear You is the lesson that will show them what they are -- “but men” (20).

One would think that men would not grow so vain as to deny themselves to be but men, but it appears to be a lesson which only a divine schoolmaster can teach to some proud spirits. Crowns leave their wearers *but men*, degrees of eminent learning make their owners not more than *men*, valour and conquest cannot elevate beyond the dead level of “*but men*,” and all the wealth of Croesus, the wisdom of Solon, the power of Alexander, the eloquence of Demosthenes, if added together would leave the possessor but a man. May we ever remember this, lest like those in the text, we should be *put in fear*. (Spurgeon 113)

Loyalty is a word that reminds us of pledging allegiance, understanding a cause, knowing the past, honoring people and principles, and even dying for the cause. Whatever prompted David’s poem, it is a clear commitment on his part to be loyal. His commitment was made on the five bases we have studied:

One: You Maintained My Cause (3-5).

Two: You Abide Forever (6-8).

Three: You Are a Refuge (9-10).

Four: You Dwell Among Us (11-16).

Five: You Are Our Hope (17-18).

Every one of these is about the fact that David had been learning the character of God -- so he really could say, "God gives me loyalty."

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Baker, Warren, and Eugene Carpenter. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, Old Testament*. Chattanooga: AMG, 2003. Print.

Barnes, Albert. *Psalms*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969. Print.

Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 1-50*. Searcy: Resource, 2004. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.

Horne, George. *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Oxford, 1784. Print.

Kirkpatrick, A.F. *The Book of Psalms*. Cambridge: University, 1910. Print.

Spurgeon, C. H. *The Treasury of David*. Byron Center: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1970. Print.

Verkuyl, Gerrit. *The Modern Language Bible*. The New Berkeley Version in Modern English. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Skip Andrews was born in Detroit, Michigan. He is the minister for the Dresden church of Christ in Dresden, Tennessee. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching and received a B.A. and M.A. from Ambridge University. Skip has taught for the Georgia School of Preaching and Bear Valley Extension School of Preaching. He and his wife, Helen, are the parents of one daughter and one son and they have five grandchildren.

GOD GIVES ME REFUGE

Psalm 46

Cecil May Jr.

*God is our refuge and strength, A very present help
in trouble.*

Therefore we will not fear,

Even though the earth be removed,

*And though the mountains be carried into the
midst of the sea;*

Though its waters roar and be troubled,

Though the mountains shake with its swelling.

Selah

*There is a river whose streams shall make glad the
city of God,*

*The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most
High.*

God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved;

God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.

The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved;

He uttered His voice, the earth melted.

The LORD of hosts is with us;

The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

Come, behold the works of the LORD,

Who has made desolations in the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;

He burns the chariot in the fire.

Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!

The LORD of hosts is with us;

The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

[All Scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

God Is Our Refuge in the Darkest Times of Greatest Calamity

*God is our refuge and strength, A very present help
in trouble.*

Therefore we will not fear,

Even though the earth be removed,

*And though the mountains be carried into the
midst of the sea;*

Though its waters roar and be troubled,

Though the mountains shake with its swelling.

Selah (1-3)

It is said of Martin Luther that whenever he heard any discouraging news, he would say, “Come, let us sing the 46th psalm, and let the devil do his worst.”

Like the Shepherd Psalm, Psalm 23, Psalm 46 is often read at funerals. Both offer appropriate comfort for those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, but both also hold precious assurance of help and comfort in the varied vicissitudes of life.

A refuge is a safe hiding place away from trouble or danger. God gave Moses a refuge (from the terrible power of His own glory), saying, “I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand” (Exod. 33:22). Fanny J. Crosby, the blind author of hundreds of the hymns we sing, found inspiration in God’s words to Moses for the song, “A Wonderful Savior.” It includes the words, “He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock . . . And covers me there with His hand.” So did A. M. Toplady, who wrote, “Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.”

As I was writing this manuscript, a horrendous earthquake hit Nepal in Asia, killing thousands, including at least four known members of the Lord’s church. The earth, literally, was moved, and Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world, was severely shaken. Resulting avalanches killed several experienced mountain climbers.

Among the questions frequently asked about God’s providential care for His children are those brought on by the fact that in many calamities, some Christians are spared, some are seriously injured, and some die. The writer of Hebrews recognized

this dilemma. He recounted many victories of God's people that they accomplished by faith (Hebrews 11:4-31) and then added,

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again." (Hebrews 11:32-35)

However, he does not forget the "others."

Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented -- of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." (Hebrews 11:36-40)

These "others" were also faithful and under God's care. "They were sawn in two" (37) likely refers to Isaiah who, according to an ancient Jewish tradition, was sawn asunder by the wicked King Manasseh. These "others" had as much faith in the same God as did Abel, Rahab, and the other heroes and heroines of faith enumerated in Hebrews 11. Their outcome on earth was different, but they were still greatly blessed.

In the early days of the church, Peter and John were

miraculously released from prison (Acts 5:17-42), but Steven was stoned to death (Acts 7) and the apostle James, the brother of John, was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:1-3). John the Revelator

saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed just as they had been, was completed.” (Rev. 6:9-11)

God is always good. He always cares for His people, and His faithful servants are always cared for. If they are beheaded here, they will have a white robe and rest in heaven. Jesus says, “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” (Luke 12:4-5) It is almost amusing that He says, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do” (Luke 12:4). Mortal man may think the power to kill is the ultimate power, but Jesus says, “If that is all they can do, don’t worry about them.”

The promises of God are sure and they promise the best for His faithful children, but the best is according to God’s definition, not ours, and it is on His timetable, not ours.

Remember that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). That is not just a proof-text to buttress certain doctrines; it is a definition expressing the very essence of faith. Faith confidently believes what a person has said. Faith in God is certainty that He will keep His word, and it is based on evidence that He has and does. It makes no sense to say, “I lost faith in God because my son died or my business failed.” God has never promised that His faithful children will never face calamity, will never lose a child, or fail in business. On the contrary, the

story of Job shows terrible calamities can befall a righteous man. Even apostles can have unhealed infirmities that hinder their work (2 Cor. 12:7-8). “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

While God does not promise to keep calamities from befalling us, He does promise to give us strength to persevere through them, to provide a way of escape to prevent our being overwhelmed by them, and to bring good from them if we continue to love Him as one of His faithful children. He is “a very present help in trouble” (1). That means He is always near.

God’s Presence Gives Assurance and Makes All Things Bearable

Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah

There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God,

The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.

God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; (3-5a)

Although there are many ways God provides for us a refuge in times of trouble, ultimately God Himself is our best refuge. Moses wrote, “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms . . .” (Deut. 33:27a).

“There is a river . . .” (4). Just as a stream flowing out of Eden to water the whole garden contributed to it being a paradise (Gen. 2:6), a river helps make Jerusalem, “the city of God” (4), another paradise, with “God in the midst of her” (5).

Job suffered the loss in one day of all that he had, including his sons and daughters, and was stricken with painful boils from his head to his feet. Popular theodicy of that day held that such calamities could only come as just punishment from God for heinous sins, but the Bible introduces us to Job as one who “was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). Throughout his trials, Scripture says, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22).

Job’s three friends believed Job had to have done something deserving of his terrible losses, or the losses would not have

happened, and in a series of speeches they attempted to get Job to confess, or perhaps remember, what he had done.

“Worthless physicians all,” Job called them (Job 13:4). He did not claim to have never committed sin, but he argued vociferously that he had done nothing of the magnitude to deserve what had occurred. He begged God to explain what had happened to him, even while knowing he had no standing to ask.

For he is not a man, as I am, that I may answer him,
And that we should go to court together.
Nor is there any mediator between us,
Who may lay his hand on us both.
Let Him take His rod away from me,
And do not let dread of Him terrify me.
Then I would speak and not fear Him,
But it is not so with me. (Job 9:32-35)

God then answered Job from a whirlwind (38:1), asking him a series of questions he could not answer, beginning with, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding” (Job 38:4). Someone said God asked Job forty questions and modern science has answered only thirty-eight of them; Job, of course, could answer none. Job realized that if he did not have those answers, he should not have expected to understand the ways of God or why God does what He does. He realized that He has God, and that is better than answers and better than a life without calamity.

Job says,

Listen, please, and let me speak;
You said, “I will question you, and you shall answer Me.”

I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear,
But now my eye sees You.
Therefore I abhor myself,
And repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:4-6)

God vindicated Job in the presence of his friends and restored

Job's fortunes.

A prologue and epilogue lets us, the readers, in on a secret Job did not know. There is a benevolent purpose in the sufferings of the godly, and life's bitterest losses fit this Divine purpose, if we but knew all the facts. The prologue tells us God knew Job's faithfulness and integrity and He knew Satan could not entice him to reject God. The epilogue shows God intended to restore Job's fortunes.

God Himself was Job's refuge and strength, as He is ours.

The prophet Habakkuk had to learn the same lesson. Habakkuk saw God's people perpetrating violence, iniquity and contention. "Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse justice proceeds" (Hab. 1:4). Knowing that such wickedness does not accord with the character of God, the prophet did not ask "Why?" He asked "How long?" (Hab. 1:2)

The Lord assured him that judgment was coming. "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own" (Hab. 1:6). The Chaldeans, or Babylon, were dreadful and powerful and came in violence. Habakkuk did not see how that helped anything.

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil
And cannot look on wickedness,
Why do You look on those who deal treacherously,
And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours
A person more righteous than he? (Hab. 1:13)

Habakkuk could not see how God could punish Israel by a nation who was more wicked than Israel; so God said He would then punish the Chaldeans by yet another nation. Habakkuk gave up in confusion, saying,

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines,
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food,

Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls --
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
The Lord God is my strength. (Hab. 3:17-19)

For Habakkuk, like Job and the author of Psalm 46, it is not circumstances or earthly rewards but the knowledge that God is near that is our refuge and strength.

God's Help Comes in the Nick of Time and Brings Victory and Peace Where There Was War

God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.

The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved;

He uttered His voice, the earth melted.

The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

Come, behold the works of the LORD,

Who has made desolations in the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. (5b-9)

“Just at the break of dawn” (5), or “right early,” the help of God comes.

“The nations raged” (6) and “makes wars cease” (9) calls to mind the second psalm.

Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away their cords from us.”

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;

The Lord holds them in derision.
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:
“Yet I have set my King
On My holy hill of Zion”

“I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
‘You are my Son,
Today I have begotten You.’ (1-7)

Four entities in Psalm 2 conspire to keep God from establishing His Son, His anointed, His Christ, as king over His kingdom. They are the “nations” (1), the “peoples” (1), the “kings” (2), and the “rulers” (2). Many think that Christ came to earth to establish his kingdom and when He ran into opposition, He changed His plan and postponed the kingdom to His second coming. This psalm says when God ran into this specific opposition, He laughed at their puny efforts and established His Son on His throne as king anyway.

If we could find a place in Scripture that tells us when and where this specific opposition arose, we would know exactly when Christ established His kingdom. In Acts 4:24-28, we find exactly that. Peter, together with some members of the early church, recite in unison the first part of Psalm 2. They identify Herod as the King, Pontius Pilate as the ruler, and the Gentiles as the Romans involved in Jesus’ crucifixion, being assisted by “the people of Israel,” and, speaking to God, identify “Your holy Servant Jesus, whom you anointed” as the One they conspired against (Acts 4:27). When that occurred, Jesus did not change His mind and postpone His kingdom; rather, God established His Son as king in Jerusalem in spite of their puny efforts to stop Him.

That brings us to the Messianic Age, which is where and when “He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire” (9). In Isaiah 2:2-4 (and its parallel at Micah 4:1-3), the prophets prophesy peace in the Messianic Age: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.”

The Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom are mostly “spiritualized.” The prophesied kingdom is spiritual, not physical -- “not of this world” (John 18:36). Promises made to Israel are fulfilled in spiritual Israel, through the line of promise, not of flesh (Gal. 3:29). The material temple, the fleshly Aaronic priesthood, and the animal sacrifices are superseded by a spiritual house and a holy priesthood of all believers and spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5). The promised peace is a peace within the kingdom, where love and brotherhood of the redeemed for each other supersede the strife and rivalry between different nations and social classes.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And he came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. (Eph. 2:13-18)

In practical terms, that means Christ is our peace, removing in the kingdom the enmity that exists in the world between, for example, blacks and whites, reconciling both in one body through the cross. The brotherhood that I as a white Christian sense with a black Christian is stronger than the connection I would feel with a white non-Christian.

When we are in Christ, He is our refuge from strife and enmity with everyone else in Christ, regardless of race, nationality, economic or social status.

God Will Be Praised for Being Our Refuge

*Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the
earth!*

*The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our
refuge. Selah (10-11)*

Twin commands: “Be still and know” (10).

“Be still,” wait patiently on God and do not panic. Similar words were said by Moses as he was leading God’s people out of Egypt. The waters of the Red Sea lay before them and Pharaoh’s army was coming up rapidly behind them. The situation appeared dire. “And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today’” (Exod. 14:13). “Those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint” (Isa. 40:31).

“And know that I am God” (10). Recognize His sovereignty, His omnipotence, the complete safety to be found in Him when He is our refuge. This knowledge shall extend far beyond Israel, among the nations and in all the earth. He is to be praised for the very fact of His sufficiency as our refuge.

It is the Lord of Hosts Who is with us, the God of Jacob Who is our refuge. He does not just provide our place of safety. He is Himself our place of safety!

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Crosby, Fanny J. “A Wonderful Savior.” *Praise for the Lord*. Ed. John Wiegand. Nashville: Praise, 2001. n. pag. Print.

Toplady, Augustus M. “Rock of Ages.” *Praise for the Lord*. Ed. John Wiegand. Nashville: Praise, 2001. n. pag. Print.

GOD GIVES ME BLESSINGS

Psalm 67

Mark Jones

Who among God's people is not guilty of singing praises unto the Father in a careless and thoughtless manner? Have you ever considered the consequences of such actions? For many first-century Hebrews, their lack of attention to Psalm 67 brought eternal condemnation as they rejected a kingdom open to all nations. Yet Psalm 67 clearly links the salvation of all nations with the blessings of the Law of Moses and the promise of Abraham (which was to be fulfilled by the Messiah). In an effort to keep us far from such negligence of God's will, this lecture's examination of Psalm 67 and the topic "God Gives Me Blessings" focuses on the recognition of a blessing, the appreciation of a blessing, and the purpose of a blessing.

Introductory Material

Let us first take a look at the text in its entirety, along with a few concepts of this lecture worth noting.

*God be merciful to us and bless us,
And cause His face to shine upon us, Selah
That Your way may be known on earth,
Your salvation among all nations.*

*Let the peoples praise You, O God;
Let all the peoples praise You.
Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy!
For You shall judge the people righteously,
And govern the nations on earth. Selah*

*Let the peoples praise You, O God;
Let all the peoples praise You.
Then the earth shall yield her increase;
God, our own God, shall bless us.
God shall bless us,
And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.*

[All scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

The Promise of Abraham

The promise of Abraham is the collection of blessings given to Abraham and renewed to Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 12:1-2, 7; 13:14-17; 15:4-5, 7, 13-16, 18-21; 17:1-21; 18:10-15, 17-19; 22:16-18; 26:2-5, 24; 28:1-4, 13-15; 31:3; 32:28; 35:10-12; 46:3-4; 48; 49). It was this promise that gave Israel the right to Canaan, the guarantee of a large nation, and a return from Egypt. This promise also stated that the nations would be blessed by a person in the lineage of Abraham. The person was Jesus and the blessing was salvation.

The Beatitudes

In a lesson on the blessings of God, the Beatitudes of Christ must come to mind. In a technical sense, the Beatitudes are found in Matthew 5:3-10. In a broad sense, a beatitude is any verse in the Bible following the process of 1) the proclamation of blessing, 2) the current condition of the blessed, and 3) the future condition of the blessed. *Beatitude* is a Latin word meaning “happy” or “blessed.” In the Old Testament, beatitudes develop in a wonderful way. In the Law of Moses, the *future condition* was greatly tied to earthly gain. In Deuteronomy 28:1-6, those who faithfully obeyed the Law of Moses received good fortune in all facets of life.

The Psalms begin to place emphasis on the great blessings of simple service to God. Psalm 1:1-3 proclaims blessings on the one who follows God and shuns evil every day. The *future condition* of the blessed one is simply an established and prosperous life.

The prophets use beatitudes to instruct the Israelites to wait upon the Lord and trust in Him. “Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him” (Isa. 30:18). “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD” (Jer. 17:7). “Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days” (Dan. 12:12). When the *future condition* is lacking, the implication is that God will take care of His people.

In the New Testament, Jesus reveals the true nature of a

beatitude by emphasizing the difficulty of the saint's *current condition* in this world and his *future condition* in the Kingdom of God. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

Jesus also emphasizes the blessing of service to God, in regards to the coming of eternity. "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes" (Luke 12:43).

The New Testament writers focus on the blessings of the faithful Christian at the judgment. "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14).

Let us now return our attention back to the main points of the lecture.

Recognition of a Blessing

In recognizing God's blessings, take note of verse 1: "God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us." The last half of this verse is a reference to the Blessing of Aaron in Numbers 6:24-26. This blessing, which Aaron and his sons were to pray on behalf of the children of Israel, entitled Israel to all the blessings of God as prescribed by the Law of Moses. Deuteronomy 28:1-14 explains that obedience to God through the Law of Moses provided Israel all the physical blessings they needed. The reference to the Blessing of Aaron recalls the fact that a blessing from God requires the intercession of a high priest and the obedience of God's people.

This verse also beseeches God for His mercy. Psalm 67 gives thanks for the harvest and celebrates the blessing of field cultivation, as promised to Israel in Leviticus 26:4 (Keil and Delitzsch 439). The psalmist, like the harvester, knows that one good harvest does not feed a family for a lifetime. Though the harvester should be thankful for the harvest, he must be prayerful that God's mercy will continue upon all future seasons. This prayer of mercy for the continued increase of the physical blessings of Israel is also for the world's recognition that God is the source of all blessings. Notice verse 2: "That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations."

In essence, the psalmist is saying that when an obedient Israel

is blessed, all other nations will observe their blessings and desire to follow God as well. The Old Testament is full of examples of times Israel complained about its blessings and the nations burned with envy for Israel's blessings. It is often difficult to recognize the blessings of God when we focus only on the physical attributes of such blessings. "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?" (Eccles. 1:2-3) The labor of man, no matter how great the profit, becomes nothing more than the curse of Adam (Gen. 3:17) if the mercies of God are not taken into consideration. James teaches, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (1:17). When we recognize the spiritual source of our blessings and make our life's work to serve God and keep His commandments, we shall reap spiritual rewards. "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:9).

Yet how easy is it to ignore spiritual fulfillment for pleasures of this world! James warns his fellow Christians that great turmoil has eclipsed brotherly love "because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (4:3). What was amiss was their longings for physical blessings, and not spiritual blessings. James gives the solution to their problem by saying, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (4:10). This is another way of saying, "God be merciful to us."

And so, it can be observed that the recognition of a blessing follows a particular structure. God mercifully gives good blessings according to the Law of Moses to His obedient children who have been confirmed by a high priest, and they pray with thanksgiving for continued blessings and a spiritual increase. The goal now is to take an Old Testament principle and apply it to New Testament Christianity. This, of course, is not too difficult of a task. Our God is still the merciful provider of good gifts, and the obedient service of His people is still required (John 14:24). The high priest, who is now Jesus, is still the mediator of our confirmation as children of God (Heb. 2:17, 1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Tim. 2:19). Our blessings must be gratefully received and prayerfully used for spiritual increase (2 Thess. 1:11-12). Truly, the only significant change to the structure

of recognizing a blessing is the nature of the blessing itself.

Under the Law of Moses, the blessings of God were primarily physical. Outside of the Law of Moses, the Old Testament patriarchs, including Job, teach us of patience through faith, yet their blessings, even as proof of their faith, were physical in nature. Under the law of Christ, however, the measure of a blessing does not rely on physical forms. That is not to say, God does not give Christians physical blessings, but rather, the greater blessings for the Christian are spiritual in nature.

Consider this parallel. David writes in Psalm 41:1, “Blessed is he who considers the poor; the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.” The blessing of the one who helps the poor is that God will redeem him from his own hard times. Yet, note the difference in Luke 6:20 when Jesus says, “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” In the Law of Moses, there were many laws protecting the poor, yet none of them elevated the poor so that they would be thought of as blessed. Jesus, however, taught His disciples that in the midst of poverty, they were blessed because they had the kingdom of God. And if you “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness . . . all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). Thus, for the Christian, God’s provisions for the physical needs of the saints are secondary to the spiritual blessings of God and the promise of eternal life.

The promise of eternal life began with the prophecy of the Seed of woman and the promise of Abraham (Gen. 3:15; 18:17-18). Both the prophecy and the promise were fulfilled by Jesus. Peter proclaims to the Hebrews who would be baptized into Christ, “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). And again Peter states in Acts 3:25-26,

You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, “And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.

The promise of spiritual blessings in Christ was by no means hidden from the patriarchs; “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13). Herein lays the connection between the physical blessings of the Old Testament and the spiritual blessings of the New Testament: the promise of God. Christians must recognize that their blessings of God are according to the promise of God. “And this is the promise that He has promised us -- eternal life” (1 John 2:25). While the promise of Abraham focused on the accomplishments of the first coming of Christ, the promise of God focuses on the accomplishments of the second coming of Christ.

Paul teaches Timothy that “. . . godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8). Paul mentions two lives of the promise, the redemptive life Christ provides on earth and the resurrected life Christ provides in heaven. In Ephesians 2:12-14, Paul tells Gentile Christians that they were estranged from the covenants, the promise of Abraham and the Law of Moses, but now they have peace in Christ. Far greater than any physical blessing is the peace of God and the hope of life eternal.

Psalm 67 prays that salvation would be made known among the nations. Paul writes that salvation was revealed to the nations in Christ: “the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). With the appearance of salvation come a life more abundant (John 10:10), godliness that is profitable for all things (1 Tim. 4:8), and peace that passes understanding (Philip. 4:7). Adam Clarke, in writing on Jesus’ words of the life more abundant in John 10:10, says:

That they might have an abundance, meaning either of life, or of all necessary good things; greater felicity than ever was enjoyed under any period of the Mosaic dispensation; and it is certain that Christians have enjoyed greater blessings and privileges than were ever possessed by the Jews, even in the promised land . . . Jesus is come

that men may have abundance; abundance of grace, peace, love, life, and salvation. Blessed be Jesus. (Clarke)

If the blessings of God are recognized by the Christian in accordance to the promise of God in Christ instead of the Law of Moses, then our structure of blessing recognition must be modified. God is the giver of blessings to obedient followers through the confirmation of the blood of Jesus Christ, according to the promise of eternal life and the spiritual workings of His purpose. Hence, the Christian should measure his blessings by his abundance of spiritual fruitage (Gal. 5:22-23) while receiving his physical blessings “with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:42).

The Appreciation of a Blessing

At this point, turning our attention to the appreciation of a blessing will deepen our love for God’s great work in our lives. One of the best ways to increase our understanding of a blessing is to do a word study. In the King James Version, the grammatical variants of the root word *bless* occur over 450 times. In the original languages, the root variants appear more than 570 times. The difference in the number of verses between English and original languages is due to contextual rules of translation and meaning. For instance, the Hebrew language calls for a more common vernacular in human interactions such as a “salute” or an offering of “congratulations,” “happiness,” and even a few euphemisms translated in English as the word *curse*, instead.

An elementary yet thorough study of the word *bless* in Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance reveals a few insights (129-131). First, by examining each reference of the English word *bless* and its variants, four root words of the original Hebrew and Greek emerge. According to Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary, the Hebrew words *barak* and *ashar*, with their variants, mean *bless* in most instances (the Aramaic form of the root *bless* is used five times in Daniel) (18, 24). According to Strong’s Greek Dictionary, the Greek words *makarios* and *eulogeo* are the words that commonly mean *bless* (33, 46).

Second, the word *bless* can be divided into two categories:

1) honor and 2) happiness. These categories are based on the original-language definitions and contextual Biblical usage. This division, though simplistic, satisfies the connotative meanings in both Testaments.

Third, the transaction of a blessing is communicated by four relationships. 1) God to man, as in, “God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’” (Gen. 9:1). 2) Man to God, as in, “So the thing pleased the children of Israel, and the children of Israel blessed God” (Josh. 22:33). 3) Man to man, like in the case of Melchizedek blessing Abram (Gen. 14:18-19). 4) God to God, a relationship found between God and Christ.

All of these relationships have fruitful studies, yet our assignment is the blessings that flow from God to man. To further enhance our appreciation of a blessing, let us take a look at the *honor* and *happiness* categories of God’s blessings to man.

The Hebrew *barak* and the Greek *eulogeo* make up the *honor* category. *Barak* literally means “to kneel” and derives from the word meaning “knee” (Gesenius 142). To kneel or to bow before someone bestows honor to that person, thus it fits the *honor* category. It is easy to understand that a blessing is an honor given from man to God, from man to man, and even, in the case of the Father and the Son, from God to God. It is far more difficult to imagine our great God bowing to honor man. Yet, time and again the Old Testament uses this word to indicate blessings from God to man.

In contrast, the New Testament use of the Greek word *eulogeo* almost exclusively demonstrates the relationship of man honoring God. *Eulogeo* literally means “good-speak,” or “to speak well of,” as in a eulogy (Danker 408). In the case of those who curse us, Jesus commands us to bless, or speak well of them (Matt. 5:44). Typically, this word is used to indicate a prayer or a blessing to God. In the few New Testament references of blessings from God to man, *eulogeo* means “to bestow a favor” or “provide with benefits” (Danker 408). The scriptural context of these “favors” and “benefits” are in conjunction with either Abraham’s promise or Christ’s spiritual blessings.

With this in mind, let us return to verses 3-5 of our psalm: “Let

the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You.”

It is not hard to see the reason for praising a God Who righteously judges people and governs the nations. Our God is worthy of our honor, praise, and endorsement. He is “of all, above all, through all, and in all” (Eph. 4:6). And to help man understand how the Almighty God could bow before man to honor him, God sent His Son to show us. It was “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). It was Jesus Who, after washing the disciples’ feet, said, “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). This attitude is explained by Paul when he says,

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but . . . He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death . . . of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him . . . that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.” (Philip. 2:5-10)

As we bow to God to offer and beseech blessings, let us never forget that God has bowed to bless us more than we ever could imagine.

How wonderful it would be if the nations accepted Christ and those who governed walked in God’s light! We know all too often that is not the case. So, we must examine the *happiness* category of blessings to fully appreciate the blessings of God in a world hostile to His people. The Hebrew *ashar* and the Greek *makarios* depict the blessings of God as the state of true happiness regardless of well-being or material success. In both Testaments, the *happiness* blessings are usually identified by their “blessed is/are” beatitude-style presentation. Notice the condition of the blessed believers in Matthew 5:3-11. They are lowly, weeping, meek, yearning for righteousness, in last place according to the rules of the world

(merciful, pure, peacemakers), persecuted, and reviled. Yet even in the midst physical hardships and spiritual yearnings, a Christian is blessed because he belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is not, however, a shallow or misguided happiness or even some sort of temporary euphoria but rather a true happiness that can be found only in loving service to our God. It is believed by many that happiness is produced by a certain lifestyle, yet the Bible teaches a Christian lifestyle is produced by following the path of true happiness. Paul says in Romans 14:22, “Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.” True happiness demands an honest and godly lifestyle. In this lifestyle is the satisfaction of self and soul that no earthly gift could achieve. Although life might not yield to our desires, God has yielded to our needs and has blessed us beyond our worth.

The Purpose of a Blessing

Let us now look to the final verses of Psalm 67 and reveal the purpose of a blessing. The psalmist says, “Then the earth shall yield her increase” (6). This increase is the salvation of the nations. The promise of Abraham gave a blessing to all nations, and that blessing came through Jesus Christ. When considering the correct response to the blessings of God, the psalmist declares his acceptance of salvation: “What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD” (Psalm 116:12-13). If we truly were to name our many blessing one by one, the sum total of those blessings would not equal the greatness of salvation through Christ. The physical blessings of Israel served as evidence for the stored spiritual blessings God would eventually bestow on the nations.

Within this great blessing of salvation, images of the salt of the earth, the lamplight, and the cup of cold water call the Christian to actions that bless others for the purpose of winning souls. No greater honor could God bestow upon the world than the offering of His Son *and* the opportunity for man to spread the gospel of salvation. The psalmist says, “God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us” (6-7). God’s supreme *honor* blessing came when He sacrificed His Son for the sins of the world. The

Christian's supreme *happiness* blessing is derived from a life lived in service to Christ. It is this salvation that affords us to "boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Heb. 13:6) Salvation empowers the Christian to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philip. 4:13).

As the gospel commission renews its destination with each new generation, the desired result remains the same, "all the ends of the earth shall fear Him" (7). Regardless of our circumstances, true happiness will dwell in the soul winner's heart. Psalm 128 states, "Blessed [*barak*] is every one who fears the LORD . . ." and again, ". . . thus shall the man be blessed [*ashar*] Who fears the LORD" (1, 4). Blessings of *honor* and *happiness* come to those who fear God and accept His salvation.

The term *fear*, as used in Psalm 67, indicates worship. It is one thing to be afraid of God; it is quite another to worship Him. Think of all the instances when the wrath of God struck fear into the hearts of even the strongest men. Sometimes that type of fear is necessary to bring one to Christ or to keep another on the narrow road. But consider the power of mercy and the blessings of kindness that lead a lost soul to worship God.

The proper worship of God indicates a true relationship with God. A true relationship with God satisfies all of our needs. To this extent, the psalmist instructs the use of our blessings for the purpose of making man right with God. When we acknowledge how the blessings of God come through Christ, why God would honor us with such blessings, and who ultimately can benefit from our blessings, certainly our relationship with God will remain strong. He has established a path of righteousness that is synonymous with true happiness and expects His people to walk in that path. Our attitude toward these blessings must remain pure and constant so that the greatest purpose of our blessings, the salvation of man, will never be neglected.

God gives me blessings, and those blessings must never be taken for granted. Let us recognize that God sustains our lives and enriches our souls. Let us appreciate the honor God gave us through the death of His Son and the happiness He gives us by the power of the resurrection. Let us purpose in our hearts the mission of man's salvation, the purpose for which all God's blessings flow.

Let us hear Psalm 67 and heed its wondrous message.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

References to the King James Bible are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Clarke, Adam. *Adam Clarke's Commentaries*. Bronson: Phil Lindner, Online Publishing, Inc. 2003. CD-ROM. *Power Bible CD*.

Danker, Frederick William, ed. "Eulogeo." *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. Ed. Danker. 3rd ed. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2000. Print.

Gesenius, William. "Barak." *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*. Gesenius. Trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Print.

Keil, C. F., and F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Vol. 5. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001. Print.

Strong, James. "Bless." *Abington's Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Strong. Nashville: Abington, 1977. 129-131. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Mark Jones received his BA in Biblical Studies from Freed-Hardeman University in 2003. He is currently the minister for the Pumpkin Center church of Christ in Fairview, West Virginia, and teaches Church History and Restoration Movement at WVSOP. He is married to the former Megan McVey of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Their daughter, Lydia, never fails to remind Mark of God's countless and merciful blessings.

GOD GIVES ME PRESERVATION

Psalm 121

A Song of Ascents

Cecil May Jr.

*I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.*

*He will not allow your foot to be moved;
He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The LORD is your keeper;
The LORD is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
Nor the moon by night.*

*The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;
He shall preserve your soul.
The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in
From this time forth, and even forevermore.*

[All Scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Introduction

The titles or headings of the Psalms are not part of the inspired text. They are very ancient, however, and should be carefully considered, not lightly dismissed.

From 120 through 134, each of the psalms is labeled “A Song of Ascents.” The “Songs of Ascent” may be psalms sung by worshippers on the way to the temple in Jerusalem for the three feast days every male who was physically able and ceremonially clean was required to attend: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles

(Exod. 23:14-17). The first of these psalms (120) seems to have been written by someone apparently living in a faraway land among unbelieving people. “Woe is me, that I dwell in Mesech, That I dwell among the tents of Kedar! My soul has dwelt too long With one who hates peace” (Psalm 120:5-6). Mesech is in Asia Minor (Gen. 10:2) and Kedar is in Arabia (Isa. 21:13-16); so he lives among pagans who do not share his desire for peace.

In Psalm 121:1, the psalmist is looking to the hills, likely Zion, the temple of the Lord. In Psalm 122:1, he is on the way to the house of the Lord. In the last of the “Songs of Ascent,” Psalm 134:2, the psalmist invites, “Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the Lord.” This progression seems to fit the hypothesis that the songs are being sung on the way to Jerusalem.

Whenever we today talk about going “up to” or “down from” somewhere, we mean going north (up) or south (down). However, the Jews spoke more literally. With Jerusalem being on mountains (Zion and others), any trip to Jerusalem in Scripture is up and from Jerusalem is down.

The Lectureship Committee’s title for this psalm, “God Gives Me Preservation,” is validated by the psalmist himself. He uses some form of the Hebrew word for *keep* six times in the eight-verse song. (NKJV translates the word as “keep” three times and “preserve” three times.) JHWH is indeed the “keeper of Israel.”

The headings ascribe four of these Psalms of Ascent (122, 124, 131, 133) to David, one to Solomon (127) and the rest are anonymous.

The Text

*I will lift up my eyes to the hills –
From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth (1-2).*

These first two verses are in the first person; the psalmist himself is speaking. The rest of the psalm is someone speaking to the psalmist.

KJV translates the second phrase as a statement, “from whence cometh my help,” affirming that our help comes from the hills. The

Hebrew construction requires that the phrase be a question, and from the ASV on, every translation of which I am aware translates it as a question. It is a rhetorical question to be sure, and the psalmist immediately provides the answer. The psalmist is certain that the hills -- likely the hills of Jerusalem, referring to JHWH's presence there in the temple -- is the place from which help shall come.

The psalmist answers his own question more directly, "My help comes from the LORD" (2). From where else, indeed, could it have come? He looks toward the temple as he prays. Solomon's dedicatory prayer at the building of the temple suggested that special blessings attend when the people "pray toward this place" (1 Kings 8:22-53). Daniel's custom was to open his window and three times each day pray toward Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10). Though he knew he had been commanded on penalty of death not to pray to any god other than King Darius, he continued his three-times-a-day custom (Dan. 6:10). He was praying without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).

The God from Whom the psalmist expects help is the One "Who made heaven and earth" (2). JHWH, the living God, is often distinguished from the idols of the pagans by this expression. Another of the Psalms of Ascent uses the same phrase: "Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8). Paul spoke similarly to the pagans on Mars Hill about the God they worshipped in ignorance, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man" (Acts 17:24). The God Who can do that can do anything! As for the manmade idols of the heathen, on the other hand, "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens" (Jer. 10:11). It is the God Who did make heaven and earth Who is our protector.

He will not allow your foot to be moved (3a).

These words are reminiscent of the psalm Satan quoted and misapplied in the wilderness temptations of Jesus (Matt. 4:5-6; Luke 4:9-11). He invited Jesus to show the kind of spectacular sign

the Jews probably wanted to see.

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written:
‘He will command his angels concerning you,’
and
‘On their hands they will bear you up,
Lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” (Matt. 4:5-6)

The quotation is from Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus’ response was, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’” Some folks mistakenly believe that Jesus quoted that Scripture (Deut. 6:16) to tell Satan, “I am LORD and God, and you should not be tempting me.” Actually, Jesus is telling Satan it would be wrong for Him to do what Satan suggested. God promises watch care over His people, but we should not deliberately put ourselves in harm’s way to “try” or “tempt” God, seeing whether or not He will do as He said.

*He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep (3b-4).*

The promise is first individual (*you* is second-person singular), then national, “He who keeps Israel,” will not, does not, slumber or sleep. Similarly, the promises to Abraham were first individual to him but then expanded to his descendants, the nation. “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you” (Gen. 28:15).

Elijah had a contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, testing whether it would be Baal or JHWH who would be able to light a fire under his respective altar. The prophets of Baal went first and, when they were having no success, Elijah taunted them, among other ways saying, “Cry aloud . . . for perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened” (1 Kings 18:27). Baal, of course, did not hear and did not, could not, wake up. JHWH sent fire that

burned up the meat, the stones of the altar and the water that had been poured on it.

“He will not slumber or sleep” (4). His eyes are ever open to care for His people.

*The LORD is your keeper;
The LORD is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
Nor the moon by night (5-6).*

Keeper, shade, and right hand all imply protection. *Keep and preserve* are synonyms and, as we have noted, provide the theme of the psalm. Finding “shade” is needful and refreshing, especially in the desert areas of the land. *Sun* suggests day and *moon* suggests night, but day and night also suggest perpetual, uninterrupted protection. To be at a protector’s “right hand” is to be at a place of prominence and constant attention.

*The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;
He shall preserve your soul.
The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in
From this time forth, and even forevermore (7-8).*

There is more than one kind of evil. Natural evils like earthquakes, floods, storms, and diseases are morally neutral but bring unpleasant results. God says, “I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity [Hebrew, *ra*; KJV, *evil*]. I, the LORD, do all these *things*” (Isa. 45:8). The same word (*ra*) also is used for moral evil. “Thus they have rewarded me evil for good, And hatred for my love” (Psalm 109:5). The context determines the meaning.

“The LORD shall preserve you from all evil” (7) likely refers to both kinds of evil. He saves from the earthquake and the famine, He heals us from our diseases in answer to prayer, and He provides us with our necessary food, shelter and clothing when we seek His kingdom and His righteousness first (Matt. 6:33). However, the Bible makes it clear those promises are not absolute. The experience of Job (Job 1:13ff), Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2 Cor.

12:7), and Scriptures like “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12) remind us that we do not have a promise that no calamity will ever come to a faithful child of God.

God will also protect us against moral evils, against the wiles of the evil one. Jesus taught us to pray, “And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13). We are promised, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). Gus Nichols used to say, “I believe in the possibility of apostasy but not in the probably of apostasy.” He was speaking of the many helps and safeguards God provides to help us remain faithful.

“The LORD will preserve our soul.” Man is a tripartite being. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 2:3). In many passages one’s “soul” is what is “saved:” “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). We purify our souls by obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22). “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 1:19-20).

“The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in” (8) may refer to the whole round trip, going to Jerusalem and returning home, similar to the “traveling mercies” for which we often pray when going on a trip. And it is not just for today; it is “From this time forth, and even forevermore” (8).

Physical Preservation

God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are still active in the lives of believers. They have not “set the clock and gone home to watch it as it runs down.” They are not tied to either-miracles-or-nothing. We call their non-miraculous care *providence*. Faith in the

promises God has made in Scripture requires faith in continued Divine activity in our world.

God promises to answer His faithful children's prayers: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). Whatever happens to us and for whatever reason, God promises to bring good from it (Rom. 8:28). If we seek His kingdom and righteousness first, He will provide the necessities of physical life, food, shelter, and clothing, as He does for the birds and the flowers (Matt. 6:31). Fulfillment of these promises requires a God Who does things in the world. He commands us to pray for our daily bread (Matt. 6:11).

We understand that we have to help answer our own prayers, but we also understand that our efforts alone, without God's help, would accomplish little.

A Bible teacher in a class of young preachers cited Psalm 37:25: "I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread." The teacher added, "Nor do I ever expect to."

One of the young preachers asked, "What about Lazarus who lay at the rich man's door begging food?" (Luke 16:20-21). The teacher, caught off guard, could only stumble.

The psalmist reminds us, "The entirety of Your word is truth" (Psalm 119:160). It takes all that God has said about a subject to know the whole truth about the subject, but the promises of God, with some stated exceptions, are true.

We often pray for the safety of travelers, for soldiers in battle, for people with apparently fatal illnesses. Most of us, I suspect, have had affirmative answers to such prayers. But sometimes such prayers are not answered in the way for which we prayed. Sometimes two faithful Christians may be riding in the same car, an accident ensues, and one is killed and another survives. The family of the one who survives says with heartfelt relief, "The Lord was with us." If the other was also a faithful Christian, however, the Lord was with him or her, too.

The biblical book Hebrews recognizes this phenomenon. After detailing many faithful servants who accomplished great things and enjoyed marvelous rescues by faith, the Hebrews writer remembers the "others."

Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented -- of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (Heb. 11:36-40)

God always provides what is good for His children, but it is according to His definition of good, not ours, and always according to His time frame.

Spiritual Preservation

JHWH keeps our soul (7). We sing, “No power of hell, no scheme of man could ever pluck me from His hand” (Getty and Townsend). There is biblical basis for that. Jesus said. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

Willful apostasy is possible. One can deliberately walk away and remove oneself from the protective hand of God. The writer of Hebrews warns, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” (3:12). Believers are given many great and precious promises, but when the believer becomes an unbeliever, the promises given to believers no longer apply. But no external force can remove us against our will.

Paul addresses this as he tells us of his spiritual struggle with sin and his ultimate victory in Romans 7 and 8. The struggle Paul describes is not that of an unbeliever. Note Paul’s heart and lifestyle direction as he struggles:

For what I will to do, that I do not practice, but what I hate

that I do . . . [F]or to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good, I do not find . . . For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. (7:15, 18, 19, 22).

He has obviously set his mind toward the Spirit, not the flesh. He too often loses the struggle, in that he yields to sin. He cries out in his distress, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:24-25a). The deliverer is Jesus, the gospel of grace Paul preaches. But even after he recognizes his deliverance and thanks God for it, he acknowledges the struggle continues; he still sometimes sins, against his strongest wishes. “So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25b).

The deliverance is spelled out in Paul’s next words: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). The deliverance is not that the struggle is lessened or goes away, and it is not that Paul never loses the struggle and so never sins anymore. It is rather that as long as he is in Christ and walking after the Spirit, his sins are forgiven.

The same promise is found in 1 John 1:7, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked (ASV) are from the American Standard Version, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1901. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Getty, Keith, and Stuart Townsend. "In Christ Alone." *GettyMusic.com*. Keith and Kristyn Getty. 2001. Web. 1 August 2015.

GOD GIVES ME SECURITY

Psalm 91

Bruce Daugherty

The enduring power of the Psalms has sustained readers in peril through the centuries. Jan Hus quoted them as he was being led to the stake to be burned as a heretic in Medieval Prague. Martin Luther read from them as he was exiled in a Saxon castle. John Milton had them read to him during his imprisonment in Renaissance England. The Pilgrims sang them as they braved a stormy sea and came to the New World. Many songs in Christian hymnals have their basis in the Psalms. Jesus quoted from them as He hung on the cross. The New Testament contains more quotes and allusions from the Psalms than any other book of the Hebrew Bible.

The subject of security is an important and timely study. Nationally, our country is engaged in policies and actions that seek to provide protection from terrorists and secure borders. Locally, everyone has a desire to live in a safe community or neighborhood. Personally, many, often-complex measures are taken to protect one's identity.

But of all security issues, nothing is more vital and important than one's spiritual security. An individual's relationship with God and assurance of Divine protection is of supreme importance. For the Christian, Jesus provides the entry to the desired relationship with God and His protection. "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). [All Scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Psalm 91 gives voice to the assurance of security sought by the believer in God. Its expression of trust and confidence in God is an integral part of the believer's pilgrimage in a dangerous world. This study will make a brief analysis of the psalm. It will also seek to make application in the life of the believer, while calling

attention to the potential misuses of the psalm to avoid. Then, it will briefly observe how the psalm is used in the New Testament.

Introductory Matters

The Hebrews called this collection of poems *praises* in their language. The English title is drawn from the Greek title, *psalmoi*. Over a period of more than 1500 years, the Holy Spirit inspired human authors, like Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph, the sons of Korah, and others, to compose these poems that give expression to the entire spectrum of human emotion. Jesus declared them to be part of the three-fold division of the Hebrew Bible that gave testimony to Himself (Luke 24:44).

The Psalms are arranged into five books within the book, which corresponds to the Pentateuch of Moses. The Psalms have been categorized into some basic types: hymns, laments, thanksgivings, expressions of trust or confidence, wisdom psalms, and royal psalms. The vivid imagery and figurative language contained in them have fixed certain psalms into Western culture. Even in a day of extreme Biblical ignorance, the 23rd Psalm is still often quoted at funerals.

The dominant feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Parallelism links the lines of a poem to one another in a variety of ways. Some parallels complement a thought. Note the language of Psalm 49:1 -- "Hear this, all peoples; Give ear, all inhabitants of the world." "Give ear" signifies what is meant in "hear," while "all inhabitants of the world" explains what is meant by "all peoples." Other parallels make a contrast or comparison, as in Proverbs 15:1, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." And there are parallels that complete thoughts. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

For the people of God today, the Psalms form part of our rich heritage. The Psalms give expression to meaningful worship because of their focus on God and His works. "The joy, thankfulness and emotion of our worship should always be grounded in our understanding and remembrance of God's action for us." (McMillion 3). The Psalms were sung as part of Hebrew worship at the temple, but are most often read in English worship

services today.

Analysis of Psalm 91

This psalm is found toward the beginning of Book 4. It is sandwiched between the only psalm attributed to Moses, 90, and before a psalm of thanksgiving, 92, which was perhaps utilized as a Sabbath song. The psalm bears no descriptive title or indication of authorship.

Psalm 91 has some points in common with the psalm of Moses. In Psalm 90:16, Moses requests, “Let Your work appear to Your servants,” and in Psalm 91:16, God responds, promising that He would “show him My salvation.” “The ‘work of Jahve’ is His realized ‘salvation’” (Delitzsch and Bolton 61). Another common point is the expression, “dwelling place.” In Psalm 90:1, Moses declares, “Lord, You have been our dwelling place (refuge) in all generations.” In Psalm 91:9, the believer says to himself, “Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place.” Despite these common features, any linkage of Psalm 91 to Moses is only conjecture.

While the overall theme of Psalm 91 is easily discernible, there are some interpretive issues. “This psalm presents difficulties on account of the frequent change of person” (Rosenblatt 309). Due to the fact that three, perhaps even four persons are seen as speaking in the psalm, it has been suggested that it be interpreted as an antiphonal, processional psalm. “I suggest that this psalm was read as a responsory: Levite, Israelite, and God” (Eder 117). But this interpretation is not accepted by all commentators. “The theory of Sievers that the psalms were recited antiphonically . . . does not account satisfactorily for the irregular shifting from person to person here. In reality there is no necessity for assuming antiphonies here . . .” (Rosenblatt 309). The use of more than one speaker heightens the drama of the psalm (Delitzsch and Bolton 62).

Another factor in the difficulty of interpretation is found in the fact that an ellipsis is present in the Hebrew text of verse 1 that is not discernible in English translations that supply an interpretive subject and verb. This should serve as a reminder that translations are also commentaries. “Ellipsis is an equally common

phenomenon in the Psalter and its assumption clears up many obscurities” (Rosenblatt 308). “. . . the relation of ver. 2 to ver. 1 meets us at the very beginning as a perplexing riddle” (Delitzsch and Bolton 62). “The *apparent* absence of an independent subject and verb in Verse 1 makes it necessary to consider it as a clause dependent on Verse 2” (Katz 43). Verse 9 also contains an ellipsis, which calls for a choice to be made in translation.

This writer chooses to view only two persons speaking in the psalm. (Ash and Miller 317; Cloer 13). The first is a believer who declares his trust in God (1-13). The second is God Himself, speaking in response to the believer’s declarations of trust (14-16). Views of a third person speaking are to be understood as the believer speaking within himself as he faces the perils of life.

The Perils and Protection of the Believer

Psalms 91:1-13

The psalm opens with a two-verse presentation of the theme of security (Yates 114). In a well-balanced composition, four metaphors for Divine protection are found (Ash and Miller 318). “Secret place,” “shadow of the Almighty,” “refuge,” and “fortress” are all images which convey defense and protection. With these four images, four Divine names are used, giving a personal note of intimacy to this protective relationship (Knight 281). “Most High,” “Almighty,” “Lord,” and “God,” are various names for Deity found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures that give emphasis to the unrivaled power, supremacy, and might that protects the individual who lives in the friendship and fellowship of God (Cloer 13).

The blessings of protection and security are needed because the believer faces numerous perils in life. “Snare of the fowler,” “pestilence,” “the terror by night,” “the arrow that flies by day,” “the pestilence that walks in darkness,” “destruction that lays waste at noonday,” “evil,” and “any plague” are the multi-faceted words which address perils in every age. Some of the expressions also evoke memories of God’s protection during the Exodus. “Pestilence that walks in darkness” brings to mind the safety afforded the Israelites in the houses marked by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exod. 11:4-7). “Arrow that flies by day” may allude to the Egyptian pursuit of the children of Israel when they

were saved by passing through the Red Sea (Exod. 14:30-31). God's gracious actions of deliverance in the past build faith for the future and serve as reasons for praise-filled worship (McMillion 1).

The effects of all these perils can be devastating. "A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand" are poetic descriptions of a great multitude (Ash and Miller 319). Though the vicious attack of evil may destroy countless others, the believer is assured, "it shall not come near you," and, "with your eyes you shall look and see the reward of the wicked." This is because the believer is covered "under His wings," an image from nature often found in Scripture (Deut. 32:11; Psalm 17:8; Matt. 23:37). The believer is also protected by God's truth as a "shield and buckler" (Psalm 84:11; Eph. 6:16).

As if the destruction of a multitude proved to be overwhelming to the believer, verse 9 is a reminder that the Lord Most High is his personal refuge and habitation. As in verse 1, an ellipsis occurs where the verb must be supplied (Ash and Miller 319). Again the words "refuge" and "dwelling place" are utilized to convey the idea of security; so much so, that an all-encompassing generalization is drawn, "no evil shall befall you." Such a sweeping expression should be understood as a generalization or even hyperbole, rather than an unlimited guarantee.

Adding to the security and protection of the believer, verses 11-12 speak of the Divine protection executed by angels. On the basis of this verse and others, a belief in "guardian angels" has developed through the centuries (Yates 114-15). Angels came to warn Lot and rescue him from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:16). Angels kept the Hebrew exiles from harm during the Babylonian captivity (Dan. 3:28; 6:22). The angelic protection is sweeping -- "to keep you in all your ways," even to the point of keeping one's foot from "striking against a stone." Bible students are aware that these are the verses Satan quoted to Jesus during His wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:6; Luke 4:10-11).

The protection of the believer's foot is extended to a poetic image of victory with the treading and trampling of hostile forces that inhabit the wilderness: lions and serpents. Both images can convey Divine protection against actual, physical lions and serpents (Dan. 6:22; Luke 10:19; Acts 28:3-6), or they can be seen

as images representing opposition to God's servants.

They are all kinds of destructive powers belonging to nature, and particularly the spirit world, that are meant. They are called lions and fierce lions from the side of their open power, which threatens destruction, and adders and dragons from the side of their venomous secret malice. (Delitzsch and Bolton 64-65)

“The lion and the young lion doubtless are metaphors of strong enemies, while the adder and serpent suggest stealthy foes” (Ash and Miller 319). The believer who trusts in God is assured of angelic help in gaining victory over these destructive foes.

The Promises of the Deliverer

Psalms 91:14-16

The believer's pronouncements of security, despite the presence of trouble and opposition, bring forth a response from God. God acknowledges that the believer “has set his love upon Me” and that “he has known My name.” The trusting expressions of protection are indications of a close, intimate relationship.

The language of verse 14 means to cling to the Lord with love. It is used with reference to God's love for Israel (Deut. 7:7-8; 10:15). The identity of the Lord reflected in the acknowledgement of His name involves an understanding of His identity, as the faithful protector of those who belong to Him. (Knight 284)

The covenant name of God is indicative of a comprehensive relationship between Creator and creature, between King and subject. “To know God's name is tantamount to knowing God, who He is and what He is, His essence and His character. Such knowledge implies faith and trust and its concomitant motive -- love” (Goetsch 144). This kind of faith and love is not disappointed but instead becomes the reason for God's promise of deliverance and security. God securely sets the believer high above all danger and peril. A triple expression of response is promised in

verse 15: “I will answer him,” “I will be with him,” and “I will deliver and honor him.” The believer can be confident that God will answer his prayer (James 5:16). The believer is assured of God’s presence in troubles (2 Cor. 12:7-12). And the believer can be at peace, knowing that deliverance and restoration to honor will come (James 5:11; 2 Tim. 3:10-11; 4:17-18).

The final verse of the psalm promises the fullest realization of God’s security. The satisfaction of “length of days” is promised and should be taken to mean that God’s providential care will be constant. During this lifetime of protection, God will “show him my salvation.” The “salvation of Jahve,” as in Psalm 50:23, is the full reality of the Divine purpose (or counsel) of mercy. To live to see the final glory was the rapturous thought of the Old Testament hope and, in the apostolic age, of the New Testament hope also (Delitzsch and Bolton 65). The words of Simeon, as he held the baby Jesus, resonate with this promise realized: “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation” (Luke 2:29-30). Only eternity will be sufficient for contemplating the physical and spiritual, temporal and eternal deliverances God has rendered, and only eternity will be long enough for praising Him (Goetsch 145).

Applying the Psalm

When the Gulf War began in earnest in February 1991, this writer was present at a community prayer service offered for families of men and women deployed in the Gulf War. The promise, “A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you,” was repeated again and again that night as fearful families prayed for their loved ones (7).

The psalm’s offer of security has been recited in this way through many wars. “During the First World War Psalm 91 was known as ‘The Trench Psalm,’” (Goetsch 143). Steven Eckstein, Jr., served as an infantryman in World War Two and had an aunt who wrote to him regularly, and in every letter, she included Psalm 91:7. Eckstein was buoyed by her faith and was deeply comforted by the passage as he served on the battlefields of Europe (Knight 280).

But what happens when a soldier falls in combat? What happens when a believer experiences pain or loss? Is God untrue to His promises?

The psalm itself poses a danger. Because its assurance of security is so comprehensive and confident, it is especially subject to the misuse that is a possibility for all religious claims, that of turning faith into superstition. In Judaism and Christianity, bits of the text have been worn in amulets that were believed to be a kind of magical protection for those who wore them. (qtd. in Gaiser 191)

The sweeping security of God portrayed in the psalm can be misunderstood. It can be misused as a blank check that has no conditions or limits. The problem is that the psalm can be turned into a manipulative formula exercised solely for individual benefit. The context of the Old and New Testaments clearly rejects the use of magic or devising formulas that would degenerate into superstition (Deut. 18:10-14; Isa. 44:25-26; Mark 13:22; Acts 8:2-24; 13:6-11; 19:18-19).

But what keeps Christian use of the psalm from falling into superstition or into a more sophisticated view of “health and wealth” gospel? Some Christians simply avoid Old Testament promises that might mislead by not reading that portion of Scripture (Gaiser 193). But Jesus’ use of the passage may suggest a better way.

First, Satan attempted to use the passage as a magic talisman when he quoted it trying to tempt Jesus (Matt. 4:6). Jesus’ refusal to allow the passage to be twisted this way should be a signal to His followers (Gaiser 197).

Second, the psalm is echoed in Jesus’ commission of the seventy disciples:

Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven. (Luke 10:19-20)

This is the essence of discipleship: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24). Appropriate use of the psalm is not as a talisman for the individual, but as assurance of God’s protection as one fulfills God’s mission. “That is, God’s protective care is not ‘mine’ (just as the gospel is never mine); it comes always as a gift, assuring me that God provides all I need precisely so I may take no thought for the morrow and give myself to my neighbor” (Gaiser 198). Christians should read Psalm 91 just as the promises at the end of Romans 8 should be read. Not as magic formulas keeping one out of all harm, but as assurances of God’s presence in a world of peril and trouble. The psalm speaks of protection; “Protection, yes, but hardly the magic that will keep any of us from all harm -- more like the ‘deep magic’ of Narnia that required Aslan’s death for the sake of the world” (Gaiser 199).

New Testament Usage

The accounts of Jesus’ temptation in Matthew, Mark, and Luke all make use of Psalm 91. “Whereas Mark allusively uses Psalm 91, Matthew and Luke explicitly quote the psalm” (Caneday 36). Caneday affirms that Mark’s allusive use (Mark 1:12-13), seen in the words *wilderness*, *wild beasts*, and *ministering angels*, are part of Mark’s mystery that compels the reader to investigate his narrative and see Jesus as the promised One of the Hebrew Scriptures (19). Matthew and Luke both provide greater details of the temptation, which include Satan’s citing of Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus refused to allow the psalm to be twisted and responded, “You shall not tempt the Lord Your God” (Matt. 4:7; Luke 4:12).

But there is another New Testament usage of Psalm 91 that should be noted. Satan’s citation of a portion of Psalm 91, as surprising as it might be to modern readers, probably would not have seemed strange to first-century readers. Josephus believed that God had given Solomon ability to exorcise demons, along with his great gift of wisdom. He tells of an exorcist in his day who made use of incantations and objects purportedly handed down through antiquity from Solomon (Josephus and Whitson 240). An Aramaic Targum of the Psalms, dating from the fourth to the sixth

century AD, presents an interesting paraphrase of Psalm 91. It inserts “demons that go about in the night” and “the arrow of the angel of death that he shoots in the daytime” in verse 5; it also refers to “the company of demons that destroy at noon” in verse 6; and it specifies Solomon as speaking in verse 9 (Evans 51). This rabbinic view of demons in the psalm, while interesting, has been dismissed by some commentators (Ash and Miller 319). But the discoveries at Qumran indicate that the rabbinic tradition reflected in the Targum may be from an older period.

The discovery at Qumran of Psalm 91 in combination with exorcism psalms has pretty well settled the matter once and for all: Psalm 91 was apparently understood in the time of Jesus as offering divine assurances of protection against demonic powers. (Evans 44)

This first-century Jewish demonology may be reflected in Luke 10:17-20 as well as in the temptation accounts of Matthew and Luke. The trampling of the serpents and scorpions and having power over all the power of the enemy has already been noted as alluding to verse 13. All the figures of verse 13 -- lion, serpent, and enemy -- are words that reference Satan (1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9; Matt. 13:28-29). Jesus’ assurance, “and nothing shall hurt you,” surely echoes verses 9-10. The power of Christ over the demonic world emphasized His power over evil and victory over sin. This gives believers in every age confidence to place their trust in Christ, Who has defeated the devil and the devil’s allies.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Ash, Anthony L. and Clyde M. Miller. *Psalms*. Austin: Sweet, 1980. Print. Vol. 10 of *The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament*.

Caneday, A. B. “Mark’s Provocative use of Scripture in Narration ‘He was with the Wild Animals and Angels Ministered to Him.’” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 19-36. Print.

- Cloer, Eddie. "If God Is Our Dwelling Place." *Truth for Today* 6 (1998): 13-15. Print.
- Delitzsch, Franz, and Francis Bolton, trans. *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991. Print.
- Eder, Asher. "Psalm 91 as Responsory." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 28.2 (2000): 117-18. Print.
- Evans, Craig A. "Jesus and Evil Spirits in the Light of Psalm 91." *Baptistic Theologies* 1.2 (2009): 43-58. Print.
- Gaiser, Frederick J. "'It shall not reach you': Talisman or Vocation? Reading Psalm 91 in Time of War." *Word & World* 25.2 (2005): 191-202. Print.
- Goetsch, Ronald W. "The Lord is My Refuge." *Concordia Journal* 9.4 (1983): 140-45. Print.
- Josephus, Flavius, and William Whitson, trans. *Antiquities of the Jews*. Philadelphia: The International, n.d. Print.
- Katz, Reuben M. "A Suggested Translation of Psalm 91:1-2." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 29.1 (2001): 43-44. Print.
- Knight, Leonard C. "I Will Show Him My Salvation: the Experience of Anxiety in the Meaning of Psalm 91." *Restoration Quarterly* 43.4 (2001): 280-92. Print.
- McMillion, Phillip. "The Psalms in Worship." *The Bridge* 40.5 (1999): 1+. Print.
- Rosenblatt, Samuel. "Notes on the Psalter." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50:4 (1931): 308-10. Print.
- Yates, Kyle M. *Studies in Psalms*. Nashville: Broadman, 1953. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Bruce Daugherty serves as the minister for the Beville Road church of Christ in Daytona Beach, Florida. This is his second time to do so. He has worked also with congregations in Reynoldsburg, Ohio; Cervignano, Italy; and Cambridge, Ohio; and taught at the Florida School of Preaching and WVSOP. He holds a Master's Degree in Church History from Harding Graduate School in Memphis.

He and his wife, Gayle, have two sons, Mike and Vince.

GOD GIVES ME PATIENCE

Psalm 62

Aaron N. Burch

Introduction

A few years ago, a student at the West Virginia School of Preaching (we will call him Bob, although that was not really his name) became rather frustrated with one of the other students (we will call him Edgar, although again that was not really his name). One day, at the height of Bob's frustration, he declared: "I prayed for patience and God gave me Edgar." While God may or may not have brought Edgar into Bob's life so that he might develop patience, the Psalms certainly agree that God gives patience. In Psalm 62, the inspired poet wrote:

*Truly my soul silently waits for God;
From Him comes my salvation.
He only is my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be greatly moved.
How long will you attack a man?
You shall be slain, all of you,
Like a leaning wall and a tottering fence.
They only consult to cast him down from his high position;
They delight in lies;
They bless with their mouth,
But they curse inwardly. Selah
My soul, wait silently for God alone,
For my expectation is from Him.
He only is my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be moved.
In God is my salvation and my glory;
The rock of my strength,
And my refuge, is in God.
Trust in Him at all times, you people;
Pour out your heart before Him;*

*God is a refuge for us. Selah.
Surely men of low degree are a vapor,
Men of high degree are a lie;
If they are weighed on the scales,
They are altogether lighter than vapor.
Do not trust in oppression,
Nor vainly hope in robbery;
If riches increase,
Do not set your heart on them.
God has spoken once,
Twice I have heard this:
That power belongs to God.
Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy;
For You render to each one according to his work.*

[All Scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Setting

According to the superscription, David authored Psalm 62 for “the Chief Musician” and for “Jeduthun.” Presumably, this Jeduthun is the same individual David chose to prophesy “with a harp to give thanks and to praise the Lord” (1 Chron. 25:1-3). Although the superscriptions in the book of Psalms are ancient, they are not inspired. So, we should accept the information they contain with reserve. But otherwise, we know little more externally about the author, background, or setting of this particular psalm (Cloer 191).

However, from the text of the psalm itself, we can garner that the poet had some sort of authority or “high position” and faced a particularly distressing situation in which a group of people were “bless[ing]” him on one hand but “curs[ing]” him on the other (4). These individuals, in one way or another, “attacked” the author and sought “to cast him down” (3, 4). While this description might fit any number of settings, the background may easily be the intrigue and duplicity found in a royal court. How many royal advisors and servants have rebelled against their own kings and masters? The Bible itself records those against Ahasuerus (Esth. 2:21-23), Esarhaddon (2 Kings 19:37), Elah (1 Kings 16:8-10), and Joram (2

Kings 9:14-37).

King David also faced the same kinds of plots and intrigues during his reign. They arose from Sheba (2 Sam. 20:1-22) and especially from his own son Absalom (2 Sam. 15-19). Perhaps, then, as the superscription suggests, David composed this psalm during one of these rebellious episodes during his reign (Keil and Delitzsch 5:416).

Structure

The poet uses a number of structural features to reveal the psalm's meaning and theme. One predominant feature is repetition. In the Hebrew text, ten verses (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11) begin with the short *a* sound, producing a strong verbal assonance throughout the psalm. Six of these verses begin with the same Hebrew word, *'ak*, variously translated in the NKJV as *only* (2, 4, 6), *truly* (1), *surely* (9), or *alone* (5). The poet also repeats a type of refrain in verses 3 and 6: "He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved." The term *Selah*, used two times, probably indicates a musical "pause" or rest and divides the psalm into three parts: part 1 is verses 1-4, part 2 is verses 5-8, and part 3 is verses 9-12. The psalmist also repeats several key terms: *silently* (1, 5), *rock* (2, 6, 7), *salvation* (1, 2, 6, 7), *defense* (2, 6), *moved* (2, 6), *refuge* (7, 8), *trust* (8, 10), and *vapor* (twice in 9). From these repetitions, the psalmist displays his trust in God alone as his savior.

The author also uses contrast in the psalm. He contrasts his character with that of his enemies. He relies upon God alone and trusts completely in Him (1-2, 5-7, 11-12), whereas his enemies are wicked (3-4). Additionally, he contrasts the power of God with the weakness of everything else. God can deliver, protect, save, and defend (1-2, 5-8, 11). But in contrast, men can do none of those things, nor can riches or wickedness (9-11). Through contrast, the psalmist again points out that he trusts God alone.

The contrasts and repetitions reveal that this is a psalm of "trust and affirmation" (Tate 119; Cloer 191), "a psalm of confidence" in God (Cloer 191).

Synopsis

The Psalmist's Awful Situation (1-4)

In the first verse, the psalmist affirms that he patiently awaits God and his salvation. The term *silently* indicates his reserve and patience, even in the face of trial. It is “a quietness of soul, a repose of spirit, that comes from relinquishing all fears to God with the firm assurance that God can be trusted to care for those who trust in Him” (Cloer 193). Quietly and calmly, he is able to trust that God will act and that God will save. In fact, he adamantly affirms in verse 2 that God alone can save him. But because he awaits God’s salvation and God is his salvation, he can confidently trust that he will not “be greatly moved” (2). He will not lose; he will not be defeated; he will not fall. Why? Because God is his salvation!

Yet, despite the poet’s deep, patient trust in God, he presently endures a terrible situation. His enemies “attack” him (3), “consult” or plot against him, “lie” to him, and privately “curse” him (4). To his face, they praise or “bless” him, but, behind his back, they despise him (4). In terms of a royal court, they scheme to overthrow him, and they envision his downfall. Nevertheless, he believes that God will protect him with the result that he will not fall. Rather, his enemies will be destroyed and “slain” (3).

The Psalmist's Hopeful Salvation (5-8)

In the second section of this psalm, the author switches from an affirmation to an “expectation” (5). An “expectation” (*tiqvah*) is one’s “hope” (HALOT 1782; NKJV footnote). Consequently, he commands or emphatically encourages his “soul” to trust God (5). Fear could compel him to seek help from someone or somewhere else, but he knows that God “alone” can deliver him from his enemies (5).

The psalmist piles up description after description of God to show that only God can save him. God is his “rock,” “salvation,” “defense” (6, cf. 7), “glory,” and “refuge” (7, cf. 8). A “rock” suggests a place of strength, a position of “protection, safety, and refuge” like the mountains (HALOT 1017). *Salvation* describes deliverance. *Defense* pictures a fortification. *Glory* indicates that the psalmist rejoices in and praises God alone. *Refuge* depicts a

place of protection and safety. Thus, he must “wait” patiently for God to act (5). However, God acts in His own time, not the psalmist’s, and so he must be hopefully or expectantly patient, “trust[ing]” in God’s deliverance and “pour[ing] out [his] heart” in prayer to him (8).

The Psalmist’s Trustful Supposition (9-12)

The psalmist concludes his poem by contrasting God with other possible sources of trust and power (Coffman). Unlike God, “men of low degree” (lit. “sons of man” [*b^ene ’adam*]), perhaps poor or wicked men (cf. Psalm 49:2; Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton) or maybe just a parallel term for “men of high degree” (lit. “sons of man” [*b^ene ’ish*]) (NET footnote; Tate 119), are a “vapor” (*hebel*) (9). That is, they are like a breath. Trusting in them is complete and utter vanity. The word the poet uses here is the same word used for *vanity* in the book of Ecclesiastes. “[M]en of low degree” are no help (9)! But “men of high degree” do not fare any better (9). They are a “lie,” a falsehood, a deception (9). If the psalmist intends a financial contrast between “men of low degree” and “men of high degree” (9), his point is clear -- even a rich man cannot help! Too often, we assume riches are the answer, but they are not. The rich man cannot deliver a person any more than the poor man. In fact, if both the “man of high degree” and the “man of low degree” are “weighed on the scales,” or tested, they are both less than “vapor” (*hebel*) (9). They are less than vanity!

Even worse than trusting a rich man, some may go to sinful methods for security and deliverance. They may use “oppression” or “robbery” (10). “Oppression” can come in many forms -- unfair usury, “extortion,” and even “brutality” (HALOT 987). “Robbery,” of course, is somewhat synonymous with “oppression” but typically refers to a more direct means of thievery. As we might expect, these too are “vanity” (here the poet uses the verb form of “vapor” or “vanity” [*habal*]) (10). Whether honestly or dishonestly gained, the psalmist says not to “set your heart on” or trust in money (10).

Instead, God alone must be trusted. He has “power” (*’oz*) (11) and “mercy” (*chesed*) (12). *Power* refers to “might” or “strength” and in certain contexts refers to fortifications and military strength.

Consequently, God has the ability to defend, protect, and save. The psalmist shows the strength of his belief in God's power through a short numerical parallelism (NET; Tate 119) -- i.e., "once . . . twice" (11). In essence, he is saying that God's power is certain and true. In fact, God was the One Who said He had power. God was the One Who said He could defend. But, God does not lie. God cannot lie! And, thus, He must be able to defend. Yet, God's character is not just that of "power"; it is also one of "mercy" (*chesed*) (11, 12). The term translated *mercy* here is one of the most important words in the Old Testament. The word overflows with meaning. When connected to God's character, it refers to His lovingkindness, mercy, steadfast love, loyalty, faithfulness, etc. Perhaps one of the best ways to express the word is God's "covenant love." That is, God's love that He has for His covenant people. His love in this respect is faithful, loyal, merciful, etc. But in the context of verse 12, if God has this type of love for the psalmist and He has the "power" to protect and deliver the psalmist from his enemies (11), what will He do? Certainly, He "will render to each one according to his work" (12). The supposition the psalmist asserts is that God will protect him and punish his enemies. Why? Because God has the power to protect the psalmist and the covenant love to do so (NET).

Essentially, what the psalmist wants his readers to understand is that he can silently await God's deliverance because of Who God is and what God does. His silence in the face of difficulty is a roundabout way of describing patience. But, how did the poet acquire this great patience?

Synthesis

The Definition of Patience

In this psalm, the author uses the term *silently* (1 [Heb. noun], 5 [Heb. verb]) to represent his patient confidence in God. His "silence" (*dumiyyah, damah*) suggests that he enjoys "rest, i.e., relief from trouble with an implication of being in a right relationship with God" (Swanson). Yet the author is not free from trouble. As he writes, he is enduring trouble. Instead, the type of rest or silence the psalmist possesses is that which is described in Psalm 37:7: "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him." It is

patient rest, a rest that confidently trusts in God and calmly waits on Him to act.

The New Testament expresses this same concept with terms like *patience*, *longsuffering*, *perseverance*, and *endurance*. Such patience endures persecution and trial (2 Thess. 1:4). Such patience is a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22) and comes from the “hope” of eternal reward (1 Thess. 1:3) and from study of the Scriptures (Rom. 15:4). Such patience receives the eternal reward (Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:36; 12:1). Such patience imitates the faith of those who have faithfully served God in the past (Heb. 6:12; James 1:10). Such patience obeys God, even if obedience results in death (Rev. 14:12).

The Design of Patience

This type of patience leads to maturity and growth. James wrote, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (1:2-4). Patience, especially in times of difficulty, develops our Christian “character” (Rom. 5:3-5), purifies our faith (1 Pet. 1:6-9), and helps us achieve the eternal goal (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

The Difficulty of Patience

But patience is not easy. In fact, one of the terms for patience in the New Testament, *hupomone*, means “to bear up” under trial and duress.

The Old Testament patriarch Job struggled with the difficulty of patience. James notes that Job had “perseverance” (*hupomone*) or patience (5:11). Yet a simple perusal of the book of Job shows that Job questioned his suffering, questioned God, and even questioned God’s justice.

Part of the reason Job struggled with patience is biblical patience is connected with trials, suffering, and difficulty. Thus, patience is always connected with the question of why a person is suffering.

The Bible reveals that people suffer for many different reasons. Sometimes we suffer because we have done evil (1 Pet. 4:15).

Sometimes we suffer for doing good or for being a Christian (1 Pet. 4:12-16). Sometimes we suffer because of the choices and actions of others. Other times people suffer because of the nature of this world. This world is a testing ground, a “vale of soul-making.” When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, death entered the world, and, consequently, all of us will die (unless the Lord returns first) and thus all of us suffer (Rom. 5:12). At times, we may suffer because of Divine discipline (Heb. 12:4-11). Sometimes our suffering is the result of Divine testing (Gen. 22:1) or Satan’s schemes (Job 1-2).

The problem is, however, that even when one (or perhaps even more) of these reasons lies behind our suffering, we often still do not know for certain the exact reason we are suffering in a specific instance. Certainly, if we commit a crime, we know why we suffer (Luke 23:41), but sometimes it just is not that clear. Although we as the readers know why Job suffered, because of the prologue to the book, Job did not know, and, as far as the book reveals, he may have never known. Sometimes our suffering is the same -- we just do not know! And, subsequently, we question. The apologist Philip Yancey summarized one of the hardest questions of suffering with the title of his book, *Where Is God When It Hurts?*

The Deity of Patience

So, how then can I be patient when it hurts? How can I wait? How can my soul rest silently? When the world is rising up against me or mine seems to be crashing down, how can I rest? Although the psalmist knew why he was suffering in Psalm 62, he still helps us whenever we suffer, even if we do not know why. The answer, according to the psalmist, lies in the nature of God. We can wait and we can patiently endure because of Who God is and what He is to us. The psalmist was able to be silent because he knew God, he had relationship with him, and he knew what God was for him. God was his refuge, his rock, his glory, his salvation, his defense, his expectation, and his strength. If we have relationship with God, we too can wait, for the same reasons: because God rules, protects, provides, delivers, wins, rewards, and strengthens.

Conclusion

Oh, my soul, be silent, then, when I suffer. Be silent when I face the pangs of death. Be silent when I pass through the “valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). Be silent when I lose the things most precious in the world to me. Be silent when my body fails. Be silent when I am all alone. Be silent when disease ravishes my body. Be silent when fear overwhelms my mind. Be silent when the world rises up against me. Oh, Father God, give me patience!!

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 51-89*. Searcy: Resource, 2006. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.

Coffman, James Burton. *Psalms*. Abilene: AC UP, 1974. *StudyLight.org*. Web.

HALOT. Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. New York: E. J. Brill, 1999. Print.

Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996. Print.

Matthews, Victor Harold, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000.

NET. *The New English Translation Bible*. 1st ed. Biblical Studies, 2006. Print.

Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997. Print.

Tate, Marvin E. *Psalms 51–100*. Dallas: Word, 1998. Print. Word Biblical Commentary.

Yancey, Philip. *Where Is God When It Hurts? A Comforting, Healing Guide for Coping with Hard Times*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.

Biographical Sketch

Aaron Burch is the son of Eugene and Rita Burch of Salem, Ohio. He is married to the former Kathryn Langeman. They have four daughters: Esther, Hannah, Lydia, and Tabitha. Aaron is a graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching (2007) and Freed-Hardeman University (B.A. in Biblical Studies 2009) and is presently working on a master's degree at Freed-Hardeman University. During the first quarter, he teaches *The Life of Christ* at the West Virginia School of Preaching.

GOD GIVES ME RESTORATION

Psalm 80

Steven P. Smithbauer

Psalm 80 is known as the Restoration Psalm by many. Its authorship is attributed to Asaph the son of Berechia, whose name means “gatherer” (Smith 25). King David appointed him to be his choir director over the worship in the Tabernacle, and this service appears to have been hereditary, as the “children of Asaph” are mentioned in Nehemiah 7:44 and 11:22 as coming back to Jerusalem after the captivity in Babylon: “Of the sons of Asaph, the singers were over the business of the house of God.” [Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.]

“He is also called a seer, 2 Chronicles 29:30; and his name is prefixed to twelve Psalms, (Psalm 50:1-23; 73:1-83:18) but whether they were written by him, or for him or his family to sing, is unknown” (Rand). If the psalm we are studying here is dealing with either the captivity of the northern kingdom or of Judah, then the likelihood of Asaph being the literal author is questionable, at best. More likely, it is one of his descendants who wrote it, or the name appears to denote who would perform the song, namely these singers assigned to the temple.

It is clear that the overall theme of the psalm is one of desperate hope that the people can and will be restored to God once more. What is unclear is the time period that is under consideration and exactly what people are being referenced here.

Darrell Conley, in his comments on the psalm, believes it to be written about “Israel, the Northern kingdom as opposed to Judah” (67). His argument is based on the references to Joseph in verse 1, and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, in verse 2, as well as his full brother Benjamin. (Of course, Joseph and Benjamin are the only sons of Rachel, Jacob’s second wife. All the other sons are children of Leah, his first wife, and the handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah). All these, he claims, are tribes associated with the northern kingdom of Israel rather than the southern kingdom of

Judah/Judea (67).

One difficulty with this conclusion, however, is that Benjamin did not belong to the north but the southern kingdom. As Coffman observes in his commentary,

The problem in these verses is the mention of Ephraim and Manasseh and Benjamin with no specific reference to any other of the tribes of Israel. Some have made this the basis of supposing that the falling away of the northern Israel was the occasion of the psalm; but Benjamin did not belong to the ten tribes who rebelled against the house of David. (Coffman)

Additionally, Psalm 80 bears a strong resemblance to Psalms 74 and 79, which are generally believed to be written concerning Babylonian captivity. Both make reference to being the sheep of God's pasture, and there is a plea for God to be merciful and restore them to their homeland.

In verse 1 of the psalm, reference is made to "thou that dwellest between the cherubims." This is an obvious reference to the Ark of the Covenant, which resided in the Most Holy Place of the temple at Jerusalem. This would seem to favor the southern kingdom view, although, arguably, one from the north could also still be faithful to the system of worship under the priesthood and the Law of Moses.

As a matter of historical significance, the northern kingdom was never fully in good favor with Jehovah God! From the beginning, Jeroboam set up idols in Dan and Bethel to keep the people from returning to Jerusalem to worship in the temple (1 Kings 12:26-30). It should also be mentioned that none of his successors could be considered "good" kings, but all of them followed his example of apostasy. Some twelve times in the books of 1 and 2 Kings, it is said of the descending kings that they "did evil in the sight of the LORD" just as their father "Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin." (1 Kings 15:34; 16:2, 26, 31; 22:52).

Yet, there are bright spots in their history. There is Elijah's defeat of the 450 prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18 and God's

revelation later to the prophet that there were seven thousand knees reserved in the northern kingdom who had not bowed to the idol (1 Kings 19:18). There is also the healing of Naaman the Syrian of his leprosy by Elisha in 2 Kings 5.

Additionally, it could not be said that the southern kingdom was much more loyal to God than the north. While at least some of their kings pleased God by continuing to worship at the temple under the Levitical priesthood and celebrating the feasts, their worship to God was not always sincere and undivided. This indiscretion eventually led to their downfall to the Chaldeans and the Babylonian captivity that lasted for seventy years.

So, which is it? Does Psalm 80 refer to the sorrow of the northern kingdom or the south? Perhaps the answer to that is not of crucial importance to us today. Regardless as to which one of the kingdoms -- or perhaps even both together as a whole -- is under consideration, the central message of the psalm remains the same. Specifically that, whoever they were, they were in desperate need of restoration.

It is of significance that, while both kingdoms fell into unfaithfulness to their God and suffered in the extreme by going into captivity, there were examples of the “faithful few” who continued to hold out hope for restoration. Therein is the example for us today! Comparisons could be made and parallels drawn between the Israelites of long ago and our modern nation in which we presently live that are very sobering and encouraging.

From Humble Beginnings, the Israelites Were Brought into the Land under God’s Guidance

The descendants of Jacob, Israel, lived as slaves in Egypt for about four hundred years, but under Moses’ leadership, God delivered them from the Pharaoh. The law was delivered at Mount Sinai, and some forty years later, after wandering in the wilderness, the fledgling nation crossed the Jordan River into Canaan to begin the conquest of that wicked land. The writer of the psalm refers to God as the guiding force behind all this in verse 1 of our text. “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock . . .”

One might notice that similarly the United States had some

humble beginnings that were, in part, the result of those seeking a place to worship freely. Pilgrims came from the Old World to brave the hardships of the unknown continent to escape religious persecution and pursue the understanding of God's Word in liberty. This is evident from the writings of the founding fathers that are replete with references to "providence" and Almighty God. The framers of this nation's Constitution, while perhaps not fully members of the Lord's body, nonetheless had a profound respect for God and His Word and drew heavily upon it as they penned the words that would forge this great nation.

When any people resolve to serve the living God of heaven, happiness and prosperity will come about as a result of God's richest blessings. This is illustrated in the story of the vine, a reference to Israel in verses 8-11 of Psalm 80:

You have brought a vine out of Egypt;
You have cast out the nations, and planted it.
You prepared room for it,
And caused it to take deep root,
And it filled the land.
The hills were covered with its shadow,
And the mighty cedars with its boughs.
She sent out her boughs to the Sea,
And her branches to the River. (NKJV)

Not only did Israel fill up the land of Canaan, but the reference to the Mediterranean Sea and the "River" (meaning the Euphrates), describes the expansion of the kingdom under the rule of Solomon, perhaps the most successful time in Israel's history. This was prophesied in Deuteronomy 11:24, where we read, "Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be."

The Queen of Sheba attests to the greatness of King Solomon in 1 Kings 10:1-7:

And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to

prove him with hard questions. . . . And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built . . . she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.

One of the dangers we face today, as did Israel of old, is becoming forgetful of how the establishment of our nation came about. Notice that it was God Who enabled them, under the leadership of Joshua, to take root in the land of Canaan and to prosper. In Joshua 24:13-14, God states:

And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat. Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.

The rollercoaster-like pattern of Israel serving God and falling away from faithfulness to Him begins here in this passage. There is the implication in this passage that some of the people were already serving idols, some from Egypt and others from the gods of the Chaldeans on the opposite side of the Great River Euphrates, from whence they had originally come through Abraham, thus the admonition to put them away (14). (One wonders how much of this was going on due to the influence of Rachel stealing her father Laban's household "gods" back in Genesis 31!)

In Joshua 24:31, we read, "And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel," but, shortly thereafter, they became unfaithful to God.

Having Fallen, Israel is Now Experiencing the Consequences of Their Actions

Beginning in verse 5 of the text, the psalmist writes, “Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. You have made us a strife to our neighbors, And our enemies laugh among themselves.”

God had allowed suffering to overtake them, but it was Israel who was responsible for their situation. Indeed, the time can come when God will refuse to hear His peoples’ prayers. Observe His reply to them in Judges 10:10-13:

And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim. And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.

And in the New Testament, Peter explains, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). As Johnson noticed, “If you desire to inherit blessing, you must abstain from evil. The conditions are stated by the Psalmist, in Psalm 34:13-17, from which the next three verses [in 1 Peter 3:12-14] are quoted” (Johnson).

When one forsakes the shepherding guidance of God and His Word, inevitably, undesirable and unpleasant conditions will develop. This was true for Israel. Can there be any doubt that this is true for any nation of men living today, as well?

Notice what Paul says about such in Romans 1:26-28:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving

the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.

Just as in days of old, “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 13:34).

While unpleasant, this suffering from the Lord serves to remind us of our need for Him and encourages us to turn again to Him. So it has a positive effect. Hebrews 12:5-7 admonishes:

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

Three times in this psalm what might be construed as the “chorus” of the song is sung in verses 3, 7, and 19, with minor variations only in the names of God. Here, in verse 19 of the NKJV, we read, “Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!”

Conley notes, “Although the psalmist has a keen desire for the deliverance of Israel, he acknowledges that before that can happen, Israel must turn to God. God had not turned away from Israel, but Israel had turned from God. He prays for the repentance of Israel. It is proper and right that he do so.

We should also be earnest in our prayers for the nation in which we live. Paul instructs the young preacher in 1 Timothy 2:1-4,

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Ultimately, either with a nation of people or an individual, the decision to return to God is the responsibility of the one in need of repentance! God will do His part and indeed has done it by providing two things:

1) *The Privilege to Repent.* God grants us the ability and privilege to come back to Him by acknowledging our wrong (I John 1:8-9) and turning away from it. Those who heard Peter's account of the conversion of Cornelius emphatically concluded, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

2) *The Time to Repent.* Because of His abiding love for mankind, His creation, God is patient with us. Why not simply destroy us all as rebels and traitors? God would be well within His rights to do so, and yet He is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (NKJV, 2 Peter 3:9). Just as the metaphorical woman "Jezebel" in Revelation 2:20-21, man is afforded a "space to repent."

Still, it remains in our purview to return to God of our own free will. God will not force us to be restored. He desires it and will accomplish it for us, but it is our responsibility to turn back to Him. Notice the words of Jesus, when He was facing the city of Jerusalem during the final week of His ministry here on this earth: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37)

The True Hope of Israel is Also the True Hope of the Entire World

As with the identity of the people, the last section of the psalm is subject to some controversy and disagreement among Biblical scholars, as well. Some believe that the terms used here describe a

military leader who will act on behalf of the people as a deliverer from oppressors. Others identify the “son of man” in verse 17 as the king of northern Israel. Martin Luther even thought this referred collectively to the people themselves (Barnes). Another commentator believes the term, “man of thy right hand,” refers to Benjamin.

In Genesis 35:18, we have the account of the birth of Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob’s sons. His mother, dying as she gave birth, wanted to name him *Benoni*, ‘the son of my sorrow.’ But Jacob named this son of his beloved Rachel, *Benjamin*, ‘son of my right hand.’ The psalmist calls to our mind that time when Israel was the son of God’s right hand, but now had become the son of God’s sorrow.” (Conley)

However, there is another view of the passage that is worthy of our consideration.

Burton Coffman notes, “Addis entitled this psalm, ‘The Messianic Hope,’ stating that, ‘The psalmist looks forward to . . . the advent of the Messianic age.’ We believe this is correct and that in this we have the only adequate interpretation of Ps. 80:17.” His reason for this view is that there are three terms used here that have, as he puts it, “definitely Messianic overtones” (Coffman).

*And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the
branch that thou madest strong for thyself.
It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of
thy countenance.
Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of
man whom thou madest strong for thyself. (15-17)*

First of all, “the Branch,” which Coffman capitalizes, he believes to be a reference to Christ, as it is in Zechariah 3:8. Indeed, the alternate reading for *Branch* is *Son*, and Christ is called both the “Branch” and the “Son of David.” If such is truly the case with this psalm that the Branch here refers to Christ, then certainly the figure of the Vine becomes even more elaborate! Christ refers

to Himself as “the true Vine” (John 15:1), whereas Israel was a disappointment to the God of heaven! In fact, Jesus continues in verses 4-6:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

The second term, “Man of my right hand,” could also refer to Jesus. Certainly, we know that Jesus is at this very moment reigning at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Numerous passages could be cited here, such as, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1); or, “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12). Coffman finds it hard to believe “that any civil ruler of that whole era would have been referred to by the Spirit of God as “the man of God’s right hand.” To this, another commentator agrees, saying,

. . . and also the man of God's “right hand,” which is expressive of the power of God, because by him, who, in time, became man, even the Son of God, the world, and all things in it, were made; and by him all things are upheld in their being; by him his people were to be redeemed, and have been redeemed from all their enemies. (Gill)

The third is Jesus’ favorite appellation for Himself, namely, “The Son of Man.” Again, Coffman “finds it impossible to deny its reference to Christ here.” He finds himself in disagreement with Barnes, who stated that, “This expression means simply ‘man,’ the language being varied for the sake of poetry . . . It refers to the king or civil ruler.” More than eighty times in the gospels, Jesus

referred to Himself as “Son of Man.” It is perhaps this title that endears us the most to Him, because He was made like us! Hebrews 2:9-11 says:

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.

One of these three references is enough to arouse our suspicion, but all three together make it impossible to ignore the allusion to the Messiah.

Just before the final “chorus” of the song, the psalmist makes one more request in his prayer for the nation. “So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name” (18). If God, the Shepherd, will intervene, they will not fall again! He wants God to “quicken” them, or make them alive again. Barnes says the request is, “Restore life to us as a people; save us from ruin, and reanimate us with thy presence.”

Jesus does this for all today by His sacrifice on the cross. According to Paul in Romans 3:23, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” but “You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sin” (Eph. 2:1).

Thus, the true restoration of all men, Jew or Gentile, rests in the hope that only the Son of God can provide by His sacrificial death on the cross. As He said, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5)! The northern kingdom never did return as a people to God. Judah, after seventy years, began their migration back to Jerusalem but ultimately were guilty of rejecting the very Messiah they were promised and betraying Him to the Romans for crucifixion.

Today, as we live under the New Covenant, restoration is available to us, but we must come to God through His Son. Would

to God that our nation today would learn from its mistakes and not follow this example of unfaithfulness to Jehovah God. Let our prayer be that of the psalmist in Psalm 80: “Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!” (NKJV, 19)

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Barnes, Albert. *Barnes Notes: Heritage Ed.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985. CD-ROM. Myers: e-Sword.

Coffman, Burton. *Coffman's Commentary.* Ivan Jurak ed. CD-ROM. Theophilus.

Conley, Darrel. *The Book of Psalms: Vol. 2.* Print.

Gill, John. *Gill's Commentary.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980. CD-ROM. Myers: e-Sword.

Jackson, William Nelson. *The Book of Psalms, II (chapters 74-150): The Ninth Annual Southwest Lectures, April 15-18, 1990.* Austin: Southwest, 1990. Print.

Johnson, B. W. *The People's New Testament: The Common and Revised Versions, with References, with Explanatory Notes.* Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1972. CD-ROM. Myers: e-Sword.

Jurak, Ivan, ed. *Coffman's Commentary on John.* 1984. Theophilus Vers. 3.0.1, 2000. CD-ROM.

Myers, Rick. *E-Sword Commentaries.* E-Sword Vers. 10.0.5, 2012. CD-ROM.

Rand, W. W., and Edward Robinson. *A Dictionary of the Holy Bible, for General Use in the Study of the Scriptures: with Engravings, Maps, and Tables.* New York, 1859. Print.

Smith, William. *Smith's Bible Dictionary.* Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1965. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Steven P. Smithbauer, a 1982 graduate of Ohio Valley College's B.A. in Bible program, began preaching full-time for the church of Christ in Cameron, West Virginia, on May 16, 1982, where he served for nearly twelve years. He currently serves as the minister for the Weirton Heights church of Christ and has since April 13, 1994. Steve is now in his 33rd year of located work. He has conducted gospel meetings and taught at lectures in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee. He has also been active as a teacher at various church camps in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio and has taught as a substitute teacher for the West Virginia School of Preaching in Moundsville, West Virginia, on occasion. Since 2010, he has also served as one of the elders for the Weirton Heights congregation. He has been married to his beloved wife Teena for thirty-five years, and they have three sons and daughters-in-law: David and Jasmine of Fairmont, West Virginia; Matthew and Rachelle of Wheeling, West Virginia; and Lucas and Aleta of Alliance, Ohio.

GOD GIVES ME PROTECTION

Psalm 17

John Wright

Introduction

The 17th Psalm is one of five psalms that are designated as prayers by their ancient titles. The other psalms to be designated as prayers are Psalms 86, 90, 102, and 142. Psalm 17 is a prayer of David for protection and deliverance from his enemies.

As we study this prayer, let us look first at the prayer itself and then at the lessons we can learn for our own life.

It is generally agreed that the person who is praying is David. He is overwhelmed by danger. He knows that the danger is too great for him to handle on his own. Therefore, he goes to the One Who is great enough to deliver him.

The setting for this prayer is uncertain. It has been conjectured, with a certain amount of probability, to have been written during the heat of persecution by King Saul. Perhaps it was written when David was pursued by the wicked king in the wilderness of Moon (Rawlinson 106). If this is not the specific circumstance for this prayer, this psalm still reflects a setting in which David might pray this type of prayer to the only One Who could save him.

Attend to My Cry

Psalm 17:1

The Hebrew word for *cry* is *rinnah*. It can mean “a shout of joy, a mournful cry, or a wailing.” Here, of course, it is used as a deep mournful cry. A cry like this might be heard when a mother’s child dies or when one is overwhelmed and cries out for help. Such is the case with David. He is overwhelmed with his enemies trying to kill him. The situation is dire, and David has no place else to go, so he cries out to God for help. David calls on God to hear his just cause, to attend to his cry, to give ear to his prayer. If David seems demanding in his request, it does not come from a lack of reverence for God. Rather, it comes from a desperate heart. If God

will not hear his cries, he has no hope for his deliverance or his vindication.

Why God Should Hear His Cry?

Psalm 17:1-7

David knows and trusts God and is confident that if God will only hear his plea, he will be delivered. David's confidence is rooted in four things: 1) his cause is just; 2) his heart is right; 3) God is merciful to those who trust in Him; and 4) his personal relationship with God.

First, David has confidence to take his cause before God, because he believes his cause is just. If his cause is just, God will be on his side. It is interesting how we always think that God is on our side and that we are standing for what is right. As an individual, a congregation, or a nation, we are sure God is on our side. If the Pittsburgh Steelers are playing the Baltimore Ravens, fans on both teams are sure God wants their team to win. We, however, rarely investigate the situation with an open mind to ensure our cause is just. David invites God, saying, "Let your eyes look on the things that are upright" (2). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] We must look at the facts -- see what is right and what is not. If the setting of this prayer unfolds from the events in 1 Samuel 17-31, where King Saul is chasing David, David's cause is just. Saul is driven by jealousy and wants to kill him even as David tries to serve his king.

The second reason David has the confidence to bring his cause before God is that his heart is right before God. David prays to God, "You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and found nothing" (3). David's closeness to God and his understanding of the Lord make him aware that God searches the hearts and minds of His people. David writes in Psalm 7:9-10, "Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end. But establish the just; for the righteous God tests the hearts and mind. My defense is of God, who saves the upright in heart."

David reminds God that He had tested his heart and had visited him in the night. "Visiting him in the night" must refer to that time, usually in the night, when we are alone with God, without any distractions. We invite God to look into our hearts and show us

what He finds. It is only with a heart that wants to please God that we can look at ourselves honestly, being convicted by what we find. It is only at this time that He tries our hearts, smelting them to allow us to see what is pure and what is not. In verse 3, David says that when God did this, He found nothing wrong. David is not declaring that God could find no sin in him, but rather that God had found him just in this matter.

In verses 3-5, David declares that he has purposed within himself to live a righteous life. The man of God cannot accidentally live a righteous life. In order to live a righteous life, we must spend time in the Word of God, so we will understand what God's will is. Once that is understood, we must order our lives in such a way to allow us to accomplish God's purpose. By purposing to live righteously, David will engage in activities that will strengthen him spiritually. He will also commit himself to avoiding those people and things that will tempt him to sin against God.

Many years ago, a friend of mine who was sporting a black eye once again complained to me that every time he went into a bar, he came out several hours later with a black eye. He asked me if I had any suggestions how he could avoid this in the future. The answer was simple: stop going into bars. My friend was sure this could not be the answer. Instead, he decided he would just be careful to whom he spoke while in the bar. I saw him a few days later. He had a new black eye. Obviously, my friend was not willing to take the steps needed to accomplish his goal.

David, on the other hand, was willing to take the steps necessary to live a life that was pleasing to his Lord. Both as a man and a soldier, he tried to treat others right. When fighting for the Lord's cause, he tried not to mistreat his enemies. His goal had always been to follow God's Word and commit himself to not stumbling or slipping as he walked the path of God. He prays for God's help so he will not slip.

David has confidence that God will answer his prayer, because his cause is just and his heart is right before God. This brings us to the third reason that David is confident that God will deliver him. In verse 7, David pleads, "Show Your marvelous lovingkindness." He knows of God's love and mercy. He has written about them

many times in his psalms:

“ . . . Have mercy on me and hear my prayer” (4:1).

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak . . .” (6:2)

“Return, O Lord, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercy’s sake!” (6:4)

“Have mercy on me, O Lord!” (9:13)

“But I have trusted in Your mercy . . .” (13:5).

The fourth reason David has unwavering faith that God will deliver him is his past relationship with God. In 1 Samuel 17, King Saul tells David he is but a youth and not able to challenge the Philistine champion, Goliath. In verses 34-35 of that chapter, David says to Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep and when a lion or bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it.” In verse 37, David proclaims, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine. . . .” In 1 Samuel 17:46, David tells the giant Goliath, “This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand. . . .” In 1 Samuel 18:8, after the defeat of the Philistines, when King Saul and his army were coming home, the women come out singing, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” David’s life had been threatened many times and each time David put his trust in God. It is no wonder that David would now cry out to ask God to deliver him.

Over and over again, David praises God for His mercy and His lovingkindness. David believes himself to have a just cause, and his heart is right, but he also knows that he is a sinner. He asks God to be merciful and to deliver him because of God’s great lovingkindness. God is loving and merciful and saves those who trust in Him. It is on these grounds that David goes before Him. God saves His people in times of trouble not because they deserve it but because of His great love and mercy for us. That is Who God is, and that gives us confidence to approach Him.

David's Petition for God's Protection

Psalms 17:7-8

In verses 7-8, David cries out for God to deliver him. David knows God loves him, but here he calls out for God to show him special favor. The ordinary favor that God has shown David is not enough for the current situation. He needs God to show His marvelous lovingkindness by His right hand. David is asking God to use His great power, the power that comes from His right hand, to save him.

David calls upon God to save him not based on his own merits, but because God saves those who trust in Him from those who rise up against them. It is God's nature to save the oppressed from those who oppress them. God is the God of the weak, the widows, the orphans, and the oppressed. He is the protector of the helpless when they trust in Him. David's enemy is great and powerful. David knows he is lost without God's special favor.

In verse 8, David asks God to keep him as the apple of His eye. The Hebrew word that is translated here as *apple* is translated the same way in Deut. 32:10, “. . . He kept him as the apple of His eye,” and in Prov. 7:2, “Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye.” In Prov. 7:9, the word is translated *black*. In Prov. 20:20, it is rendered *obscure*. Here, in Psalm 17:8, David asks God to keep him as the apple of His eye. The apple of the eye is the pupil. This part of the eye must be especially guarded and protected from damage. David is pleading with God to protect him and guard him as one would protect one's own eyesight.

Next, David asks God to hide him under the shadow of His wings. He uses the expression several times in his psalms.

“How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings” (36:7).

“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by” (57:1).

“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings” (61:4).

“Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice” (63:7).

This expression comes from the way a mother bird will gather her chicks under her wings to protect them. If the chicks refuse to get under her wings, they are vulnerable to attack. In Matthew 23:37, Jesus says, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Unlike Jerusalem, David desires protection from his enemies. They are powerful and prosperous and could eventually chase down and destroy him. By hiding under the shadow of God’s wings, he would be protected from all harm. Likewise, only through God’s protection are we able to be saved from our enemies and not worry.

David’s Enemies are Described

Psalm 17:9-14

In verse 7, David describes God as the “One who saves those who trust in Him from those who rise up against them.” In verse 9, David makes it clear that he is oppressed by his enemies. His enemies are described as deadly, and they have surrounded him. The Hebrew phrase literally means “my enemies in soul.” These enemies have purposed in their hearts to kill him. In verse 10, David says that they have closed up their fat hearts. The fatness here means that his enemies are prosperous and have indulged themselves and have grown fat. In their prosperity, they have grown proud and ceased to be concerned about God and others. Their fatness has encompassed their hearts so they are no longer capable of mercy or compassion. This description is used in other places. We can see it in Deuteronomy 32:15, “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, you are obese! Then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation.” David’s enemies have closed up their fat hearts and have become arrogant and speak with a proud mouth. In Psalm 17:14, David describes them as men of the world. They have been enriched with the things of the world. God has filled their bellies with hidden treasures. Instead of being grateful, they have become

self-centered and care only for themselves and their children. These are the people who are seeking David's life. They have purposed in their hearts to kill David. Their hatred for him has crowded out rational thinking. They will pursue him and kill him at all costs. This type of blind anger is clearly illustrated in Exodus 5-14, where Pharaoh's anger is so great and his heart so hardened that he is willing to destroy himself and his people to satisfy his anger.

In verses 11-12, David describes his enemies as a lion that desires to tear him apart. His enemy is like a lion who is tracking down its prey. Once the prey is discovered, the lion will crouch down close to the ground and fix its eyes upon its victim. Nothing will detract him from attacking. The lion is eager and intent on tearing its prey apart. At the right time, it will pounce and attack, hitting its victim with its full force. The lion's attack will be violent and deadly. To emphasize his point, David again refers to his enemies as a young lion that is lurking in secret places. This lion seeks out the best places to hide and wait for its prey, in order to kill it.

David's Desire for His Enemies

Psalm 17:13-14

Having described his enemies and detailed their wickedness and violent intentions, David tells God what he desires. He asks God to arise and confront his enemy. He wants God to get between him and his enemy before the enemy pounces. The enemy is much more powerful than David, but God is much more powerful than the enemy. God's power is the only thing his enemy will understand. The wickedness of his enemy will be emphasized when compared to the righteousness of God. Righteousness requires two elements: the rescue of and comfort to those who follow God and the correction and punishment of the wicked one. David asks God not only to confront the enemy but also to cast him down. The enemy must bow down before the righteous God just as those who are conquered must bow down before the conqueror.

David pleads to God to deliver his life from the wicked with His sword. The Chaldee Paraphrase renders this, "Deliver my soul

from the wicked man, who deserves to be slain with thy sword.” In verse 14, David again asks God to deliver him with His hand from the men who are seeking to destroy him. In short, David is asking for justice and deliverance that only God can give.

David’s Greatest Desire

Psalm 17:15

David ends his prayer contrasting himself with the wicked one. The wicked one is great and powerful. He is arrogant and self-serving. He has much in this world but does not seek God. David has a right cause and a pure heart. He strives to be upright. He has purposed in his heart to live a righteous life. He loves the ways of God and humbles himself before the will of God. The wicked cares only for himself.

David says, “As for me. . . .” Unlike the wicked, David does not desire the things of this world, but desires only to see God’s face in righteousness. To see God’s face shine upon him is greater than all the riches this world has to offer.

David then declares, “I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.” This can mean one of three things: 1) “When I awake tomorrow, I will have joy in God”; 2) “Whenever I awake, I will have joy in God as I grow in His likeness”; or 3) David has spoken of death as a sleep. “Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death . . .” (Psalm 13:3). G. Rawlinson says, “What awaking can this be but an awaking from the sleep of death? When he so awakes, he says he will be satisfied with God’s likeness” (107). All three options are viable. However, it seems to me that because David is surrounded by his oppressors, he would be saying, “As I go to sleep tonight, my hope is to wake in the morning to discover God has delivered me and that I will see the face of God in my deliverance.” David does not want all the things of this world. His greatest desire is the friendship and the favor of God.

Lessons for Our Lives

God is Our Refuge in Times of Trouble

God is our refuge and strength. There is no place safer for the Christian than under the shadow of God’s wing. God’s protection

will not fail us. However, there are times when the Christian does not view protection in the same way as God does. In Acts 5, we clearly see the Lord protecting the apostles and delivering them from prison. God's protection and deliverance is harder to see as being with Stephen in Acts 7 or James, the brother of John, in Acts 12. It is also hard to recognize with John, the baptizer, in Matthew 14. Each one of these men received the ultimate protection and deliverance. They lived their lives with the purpose of being with God for eternity. They were delivered from this world to never again experience tears, pain, or suffering. They went home to be with their Lord.

We Must Ensure That Our Cause is Just

It is easy to believe God is on our side. As we discussed earlier, we know God is always on the Steelers' side (if they are our team). In many serious issues, we believe God is on our side when disputes occur -- even when our side may be unjust. We must examine our cause and our hearts. Many times, God has used wicked kingdoms to draw His people back to Himself. The people of God called out for His protection, but their cause was unjust because they lacked repentance. Their hearts were not right with God. It is hard for me to understand how America can feel that we enjoy the protection of God when we murder millions of babies every year, when we call homosexuality good when God calls it an abomination, and when we call the Scriptures hate speech. It is hard for me to understand how the church can feel that we enjoy the protection of God when we compromise His Word, neglect the needy, and keep house while millions of people die in their sins without us taking the gospel to them. Let us examine ourselves and make sure we are on God's side.

We Must Examine What We Desire Most

What is it that David desired most of all? We find the answer in Psalm 17:15, "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness." Men and women of God must have as their greatest desire the desire to be with their God and to be like their God. No matter what befalls me, I know I have a home with God. When my wife had cancer, years ago, she

would often tell me, “The worst thing that can happen is I will die, and that’s the best thing that can happen to me because I will be with God.” The faith and the hope of the Christian are comforting in times of trouble. When our greatest desire is to look upon our Lord, the valley of the shadow of death is no longer so frightening.

We Must Remember How God Has Delivered Us

In times of trouble, David looked back and remembered how God had delivered him in the past. He also knew how God had delivered His people throughout history. This fortified David’s confidence in God.

We, too, can fortify our confidence and faith in God’s ability to deliver us today. Our faith is fortified when we remember what God has done in biblical history. This type of faith comes through our knowledge of God’s Word. If we are not studying God’s Word, how can we have strong faith? Through inspiration, the writer of Hebrews reminded the Christians that God had delivered His people throughout history. He did this to strengthen their faith. The Christian today must develop the practice of reading God’s Word daily.

It is also very important for us to stop and remember what God has done to help us in our lives. There have been many times in each of our lives when we have gone through difficult times. Whether it has been times of financial challenges, floods, fires, cancer, or other illnesses, God has always been there. Remembering how God has seen us through all these things builds our faith and creates a spirit of thankfulness within us. It is also very important for us to share these accounts with our children and grandchildren. They, like us, need to understand that God is real and powerful and that He cares for them. In addition to our accounts of God working in our lives, our children and grandchildren must also individually read God’s Word. Otherwise, how can we expect them to obey the Gospel or be faithful to a God they do not know?

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Rawlinson, G. *Psalms*. Vol. 8. McClean: McDonald. Print. The Pulpit Commentary.

Barnes, Albert. *Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker. Print. Barnes' Notes.

Biographical Sketch

John Wright served in the United States Marine Corps for seven years, at which time he left the Marines in order to become a Gospel preacher. He then attended Ohio Valley University as a Bible major, working under Charles Aebi at the Rosemar Road church of Christ his last two years, graduating in 1989.

John preached in Clearfield, Pennsylvania, for almost ten years. He then preached in Washington, Pennsylvania, for over thirteen years.

John now lives and preaches in Wheeling, West Virginia. He has also conducted many gospel meetings, youth rallies, and workshops and been involved in campaigns in several states.

He and his wife, Pam, have been blessed with three children, two daughters-in-law, and two granddaughters. Jeremy; his wife, Hazel; and their daughters, Mikah and Maritessa; currently live in Wheeling, West Virginia. Amanda lives in Wheeling, West Virginia. And Eric and his wife, Alisha, live in Vienna, West Virginia.

GOD GIVES ME AN INHERITANCE

Psalm 37

Andy Robison

On September 11, 2001, a relatively peaceful decade and a collective sense of security and solitude was interrupted by the face of evil. Nine days later, in a speech to Congress, President George W. Bush outlined the American response. Toward the conclusion of his address, he boldly submitted this resolve, "Our nation, this generation, will lift the dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail" (Bush).

Evil is the mark of the world since sin entered it and murder shortly followed (Gen. 3-4). Immorality, selfishness, and violence corrupt the possibility of peaceful living at every level -- individual, familial, and societal. Souls striving for righteousness are left to pick up the pieces and try to be of help to those who are oppressed, downtrodden, injured, and even grieving.

In a pre-Christian setting such as Psalms, when the hope in the resurrected Christ is only partially revealed in prophecy, persecuted fearers of God might easily have and often did turn to despair. Both Job and Jeremiah decried the prosperity of the wicked in their impassioned pleas to the Almighty for justice (Jer. 12:1; Job 21:7-16). God poetically outlined such wickedness in His reply to Jeremiah as He defended the justice of His eventual punishment of them (Jer. 5:6-9).

Indeed, God has the right -- and as a just God, the responsibility -- to avenge such wickedness on behalf of His people. His people have no such right, but God does (cf. Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19). God is the One Who cares for righteous people caught in the plight of injustice.

In the midst of such a plight, though, God's people might become distraught. They will be discouraged and downtrodden. Perhaps this is the reason persecuted Paul would sometimes receive a Divine message of comfort in the midst of his troubled journeys (cf. Acts 18:9-10; 23:11).

Psalm 37 is written in a pre-Christian era to remind inhabitants of the Promised Land of their place in the remembrance of God. David, the author, had plenty of opportunities for such need for comfort.

Technically, the psalm is one of the alphabetical Psalms. “In this psalm the peculiarity of the composition is, that the successive letters of the alphabet occur at the beginning of every other verse, the first, the third, the fifth, etc.” with some exceptions at verses 7, 20, 29, and 34 (Barnes 316).

Theologically, the psalm is focused on the future comfort of the righteous. “Do not let the prosperity of the wicked be a source of vexation to thee, but wait on the Lord; for the prosperity of the ungodly will soon come to an end, and the issue determines between the righteous and the unrighteous” (Keil and Delitzsch 10). “The great riddle of the prosperity of the wicked and the affliction of the righteous, which has perplexed so many, is here dealt with in the light of the future; and fretfulness and repining are most impressively forbidden” (Spurgeon 170).

The psalm serves as more than a reminder -- but an inspired demand -- that in the face of evil, certain attitudes are not to be attendant with the righteous. These attitudes can scarcely be forsaken, except by the power of God inherent in His revealed Word.

Do Not Fret in the Face of Evil (1-11)

Fretting Causes Only Harm.

The opening command of the psalm seems meant to awaken and shock: “Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity” (1). [All scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

The word *fret*, at its root, means “to be hot, furious, burn, become angry, be kindled” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 354). Samuel was hot in spirit over Saul’s disobedience and rejection by God (1 Sam. 15:11). The sons of Jacob expressed this heat of spirit when their sister had been violated (Gen. 34:7). Pursuing Jacob, Laban finally met up with him and showed the same wrath (Gen. 31:36).

Fretting is a natural response of the righteous to the injustice in

the world. As salt poured into a wound, the sight of evil oppressors faring ever so successfully infuriates those who cry for the plight of the persecuted. Righteous indignation is a real emotion (cf. Mark 3:5; John 2:13-17)! Yet, it must be kept in check. The oft-used illustration reminds that a bird may pass by and light upon the hair of one's head, but it is up to the person so affected as to whether that bird may build a nest there.

Fretting is useless because it fails to see the Lord's timing. Grass is used often in Scripture to elucidate the temporary nature of things in contrast to God's will (1 Pet. 1:22-25; Isa. 40:6-8; James 1:10). Likewise, here the psalmist reminds that the wicked will soon be cut down (2).

God Has Promised to Help.

The answer to the hotness of spirit is to continue in good and trust in the Lord's deliverance (3-4).

The Land Promise to Israel was precious, but always threatened by their disobedience (Deut. 28:36-37; Isa. 1:19-20). At contextual issue in this psalm is not the subject of modern Christians dwelling in their chosen nation, but the blessings afforded ancient Israel according to the Land Promise of God (Gen. 13:14-15; 15:7). That is the context. The application to spiritual Israel is not rooted in territory (cf. Luke 17:20-21) but in blessings. The switchover is made in Ephesians 6:2-4 regarding the command to honor father and mother. For Israelites, the promise attached was, "that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Exod. 20:12). For those gathered from every nation, the implication was simply the likelihood of a more blessed life.

Fretting due to the perception of present circumstances was to be replaced with trust that the Lord of justice would work things out in His own time. The desires of the heart, according to God's will (cf. 1 John 5:14-15) would be granted to the faithful. Christians in Smyrna had to learn to look past their persecutions to the reward (Rev. 2:10). Indeed, so did the Christ (Heb. 12:1-2).

Faith then operates in the realm of delight (and not fretting), the opposite of a hot spirit (cf. Prov. 17:22; 14:30).

Christians know the fullness of the abundant life in Christ

(John 10:10). There is reason to rejoice because of the hope that lies before us. Even those actively persecuted are told, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:12).

The transition from fretting to delight is rooted in a willingness to give all care to God (5-6).

The root word for *commit* means “to roll, roll away, roll down, roll together” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 164). Thus, “the idea is that of rolling a heavy burden from ourselves on another, or laying it upon him, so that he may bear it” (Barnes 319). One great discouragement upon another can give the devil his foothold, thus, the verse immediately prior to the passage about the roaring lion (Satan) seeking to devour his prey is an admonition to cast all our care upon God (1 Pet. 5:7-8; cf. Psalm 55:22; Prov. 16:3).

The disciple is never strong enough in himself to make his own righteousness known; only God can bring about justification. Here, He promises to do so. That promise may not even be fulfilled until judgment, but at that time all hidden things will come to light and each one’s praise will come from God, no matter what men may think (Luke 8:17; Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5). All who eventually bow the knee before Christ will also know the righteousness of the righteous (cf. Philip. 2:9-11).

Therefore, the absence of fretting requires patience (7-8). Sometimes evil is abrupt and immediate, and the character of the antagonists is quickly discerned. At other times, deceitful people get away with their evil for years. Some may know it, but not be able to prove it, and be helpless (even if it is provable) to stop it. Anger, in such instances, only hurts the one bearing the grudge. While neither compromising nor commiserating with evil, he must give the burden to the Lord. Anger festering will only make things worse.

The righteous will be heirs.

For evildoers shall be cut off;

But those who wait on the Lord,

They shall inherit the earth.

For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more;

Indeed, you will look carefully for his place,

*But it shall be no more.
But the meek shall inherit the earth,
And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (9-11).*

This passage is the impetus for Jesus' beatitude, "Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Jesus is not promising a millennial kingdom to well-behaved Christians. He is referencing this promise from Psalm 37 that Old Testament Israelites would have known well. His audience for the Sermon on the Mount still lived under that law. There is no promise for an eventual rule on soil, for His territory is now spiritual (John 18:36). Nevertheless, the promise of withstanding the evil and delighting in the future reward remains.

Fretting causes harm. Trust should be placed in God, because He will help. He will make His followers heirs -- in Christ's day, of something much better than the earth -- of heaven itself (Eph. 1:13-14; Gal. 4:4-6; Rom. 8:16-17; 1 Pet. 1:3-4). "Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the wicked; For there will be no prospect for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out" (Prov. 24:19-20).

Do not fret; it causes only harm. There is no need to fret; God will help. Fretting is fruitless; without it, the righteous will be heirs.

Do Not Fear (12-20)

There Will Be a Recompense (12-17)

It is a perpetual problem that wicked people are not satisfied to dwell in their wickedness and keep a happy distance from the righteous. Righteous people are taught tolerance by the Lord (Matt. 7:12). But the wicked need company in their sinful misery (Prov. 27:20; Hab. 2:5). When the righteous stand firm, they resort to character assassination (Jer. 18:18) and even violence (Jer. 11:18-19). Here, the psalmist reports the phenomenon in useful poetic language. The gnashing of the teeth indicates anger (Psalm 35:16; Acts 7:54). The sword is pictured poetically by Ezekiel to indicate the very real war the Babylonians would wage in God's judgment on the rebellious people of Judah (Ezek. 21:14-16). The drawing of the sword and bending of the bow indicates the willingness to use

available wartime weaponry against unarmed, unsuspecting, innocent people.

Such schemes continually come to naught.

Like Haman they shall be hanged upon the gallows built by themselves for Mordecai. Hundreds of times has this been the case. Saul, who sought to slay David, fell on his own sword; and the bow, his favourite weapon, the use of which he taught the children of Israel, was not able to deliver him on Gilboa (Spurgeon 174) (cf. Esth. 7:7-10; 1 Sam. 31; 2 Sam. 1:17-27).

The Lord laughs mockingly at those who wield their weapons against the righteous (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 965). Their day is coming (13). “Their sword shall enter their own heart; And their bows shall be broken” (15). The trifling sums of the righteous outweigh by far the riches of the wicked, for justice is based on righteousness (16). The arms -- the symbol for strength, manipulation, and power -- of the wicked shall be broken; their schemes shall turn against them (17).

There Will Be a Remnant (18-19)

The Lord knows “the whole course of life” of the upright (Barnes 324). He sees how their days will end. He knows victory is in store. He promises protection through the difficult situations, herein illustrated by “the evil time” and “famine” (19).

No, God has not promised smooth paths at every juncture for the righteous. Fires of testing will come (1 Pet. 1:7-9; Psalm 66:10-12), and those must be endured. Still, the apocalyptic imagery of the righteous having a protecting mark (Ezek. 9; Rev. 7, 14) is a comforting image. In the finality of judgment, those who trust in the Lord gain a glorious victory. They had to suffer and they had to wait, but the end gives them satisfaction (Rev. 6:9-11; 14:1ff.).

There Will Be a Retreat (20)

The wicked will be forced to retreat. They shall perish; they shall vanish as does smoke. The other simile used to express the disappearance of the wicked is a matter of difficult translation. Whereas the King James has that they shall vanish “as the fat of

lamb,” the New Kings James has it being “like the splendor of the meadows” (20). The RSV compares it to “the glory of the pastures.” The word translated *fat* in the King James Version is defined by Brown, Driver, and Briggs as “valuable, prized, weighty, precious, rare, splendid,” with a subdefinition of “precious, highly valued” (430). The word for *lamb*s (KJV) is defined variously in terms ranging from “an enclosed riding space erected on a camel’s saddle,” to a “pasture, meadow,” “lamb,” and “battering ram” (499). Barnes opines “that the idea is, that the wicked in their pride, beauty, and wealth, shall be like the meadow covered with grass and flowers, soon to be cut down by the scythe of the mower, or by the frosts of winter,” citing the image’s occurrence in Matt. 6:30, Psalm 90:5-6, Isa. 40:6-8, James 1:10, 1 Pet. 1:24. (325). As something intoxicating, but temporary, so shall the wicked fade quickly.

Do Not Forget (21-29)

There Is a Contrast (21-22)

The contrast between the righteous and the wicked is evident in levels of benevolence (21). The unrighteous will achieve their goal of riches by fraud and deceit, but such riches will not last (James 5:1-6; Jer. 17:11; Jer. 22:13; Ezek. 22:13). Then, at some point, deprived of his lot, he is unable to pay, even if he would so desire (cf. Luke 15:11-16; Prov. 20:17; 13:11). The righteous are generous; they work to give (Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11-12). This author knew a man who promised a teenage stepson, upon marrying the stepson’s mother, that he would work until the day he died to provide for them. At age 85, on the night before his next day at work, he fell and sustained the injury that led to his death the next day. He labored to give; therefore, his descendants were blessed (22) with not only the material benefit, but the influence and the memories engendered by such selfless love.

The Righteous Are Conquerors (23-26)

A good man’s steps are ordered by the Lord in that he finds the way of God in His Word (Psalm 119:105). God delights in him. He allows God’s ways to guide him, and therefore, he is blessed and strong (cf. Psalm 1). He may have troubles that cause him doubt

and temptations that cause him stumbling, but the Lord is merciful and forgiving (1 John 1:8-10). This separates him from the stubborn and willfully wicked (cf. Heb. 10:26; Prov. 24:16).

God promises sustenance for the righteous (Matt. 6:25-34). The psalm's author relates his personal experience, that in his old age and good memory he can yet recall no righteous person nor his descendants left hungry. One wonders about the impact of Lazarus' account on this general truth (Luke 16:19-31).

The righteous is a merciful soul, helping those in need, in accordance with the law of God under which the psalm was penned (Deut. 15:7-11). His offspring remember fondly and are otherwise blessed by his generosity.

In all, these verses indicate there may be some trials for the righteous, but their end is manifest, and it is one of blessing.

Temporary forsakenness and destitution the Psalm does not deny: it is indeed even intended to meet the conflict of doubt which springs up in the minds of the God-fearing out of certain conditions and circumstances that are seemingly contradictory to the justice of God; and this it does, by contrasting that which in the end abides with that which is transitory, and in fact without the knowledge of any final decisive adjustment in a future world; and it only solves its problem, in so far as it is placed in the light of the New Testament, which already dawns in the Book of Ecclesiastes. (Keil and Delitzsch 15)

There Are Consequences (27-29)

God's continual call to shun evil (Matt. 6:13; 1 Thess. 5:22) is here stated succinctly. As nature abhors a vacuum, so one cannot shun evil without doing good. "He who neglects to do good will soon fall into evil" (Spurgeon 177). God, in His justice, will preserve those saints who remain faithful to Him. "As the manna in the pot, which else had melted, was preserved in the Ark of the Covenant beneath the Mercy Seat, so shall the faithful be preserved in the covenant by the power of Jesus, their propitiation" (Spurgeon 177). The righteous, as previously promised in the psalm and in the Law, would be the ones to dwell safely by inheritance in the land.

Do Not Falter (30-39)

There Are Real Fruits of Righteousness (30-33)

God is ever concerned with wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33); so is His servant. Being careful what he speaks, he utters the kinds of things that reflect the character of God (Matt. 12:36-37). God is concerned with justice (Psalm 72:2; Isa. 9:7; 11:2-5; 32:1); so is His servant. His speech reflects what is in his heart (Matt. 12:35). The heart has been trained by God's Word (Psalm 119:11).

As wisdom and justice are characteristics of God, and as evil people hate the things of God (John 3:20), so the wicked will seek to trap, mock, ridicule, and even slay the righteous. It happened to Jeremiah (Jer. 11:19; 18:18), and it happened to Jesus (Acts 8:32-33). The Lord will not suffer such injustice eternally. Recompense awaits (Rom. 2:4-11).

There Is Finality in Judgment (34-36)

Faithfulness to the Lord involves waiting (Isa. 40:30-31). Picturing martyrs, the Apocalypse envisions even the slain asking how long it would be until vengeance took place (Rev. 6:9-11). Indeed, vengeance upon the troublers of the righteous is a righteous thing with God (2 Thess. 1:6). Nevertheless, the righteous are challenged to wait.

They may wait from prison cells, incarcerated unjustly. They may wait in hospital beds, injured or diseased without personal cause. They may wait in troubled relationships, patiently enduring treatment that is less than loving. If faithful unto the end, however long or short it may be (cf. Rev. 2:10), exoneration will follow.

As the wicked watched when they bullied the righteous out of quiet and peaceful living, so the righteous will be permitted to watch when the wicked receive their due. The implication here is not necessarily of one vengeful rejoicing on the part of the righteous. Indeed, the examples of Christ and Stephen call imitators to desire forgiveness for their tormentors (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). Yet in this poetry the polemic is powerful. The psalmist had seen the wicked "spreading himself like a native green tree" (35). The phraseology indicates luxuriant greenness in native soil (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 947). The RSV renders it

the phrase, “towering like a cedar of Lebanon.” A tree is strong (Psalm 1:1-3), and greenness is recurring with the seasons. Yet, however permanent the wicked might seem, “he passed away, and behold, he was no more; Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found” (36).

There Are Futures Conflicting (37-39)

The blameless (NKJV), perfect (KJV) man is to be marked for a beautiful future. The word does not indicate sinlessness, but soundness. Such a one is “an ordinary, quiet sort of person,” or “complete, morally innocent, having integrity; one who is morally and ethically pure” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1071). Transgressors, however, rebel and revolt against God’s revealed will (833). They shall be destroyed and cut off.

As well as the righteous have behaved, their salvation is not in themselves (cf. Phil. 3:9), but in the Lord (39). He is the One Who is able to keep them from stumbling (Jude 24). He is the strength behind the grace that leads to salvation (Eph. 2:8-10; Psalm 9:9; 46:1).

Conclusion

In the midst of President Bush’s aforementioned speech, he predicted the demise of terrorism, as based upon like failures of former, similar schematics:

We have seen their kind before. They’re the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions, by abandoning every value except the will to power, they follow in the path of fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way to where it ends in history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies.

As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego boldly proclaimed faith in the God of heaven to deliver them from the wicked schemes that would have cut them off (Dan. 3:17), the faithful of all ages may trust in God ultimately to provide. The way may be weary and long, but victory is assured (1 Cor. 15:57-58). An inheritance

better than land awaits (1 Pet. 1:3-4). David knew that ancestors had been delivered because of their trust (Psalm 22:4-5). Psalm 37 guarantees that the righteous will be delivered and their descendants will be blessed.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (RSV) are from the Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952 and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Barnes, Albert. *Psalms*. Ed. Robert Frew. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971. Print. Vol. 1 of *Notes on the Old Testament: Explanatory and Practical*.

Brown, F., S. Driver, and C. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997. Print.

Bush, George W. "After September 11th." *The History Place: Great Speeches Collection*. 2015. Web. 22 April 2015.

Keil, C.F. and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms 36-83*. Trans. Francis Bolton. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989. Print.

Spurgeon, Charles H. *Psalms XXVII to LVII*. Peabody: Hendrickson, n.d. Print. Vol. 1, Part 2 of *The Treasury of David*.

Biographical Sketch

Andy Robison was raised in Moundsville, West Virginia. He is a graduate of Ohio Valley College (now University) in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, having received his B.A. in Bible and Vocal Music in 1987. Andy has completed thirty-three hours of graduate study through Harding University Graduate School of Religion (now Harding School of Theology), and returned to Harding for Teacher Certification in 1993-1994.

Andy has been associate preacher for the Pennsboro, West Virginia; and Camden Ave. in Parkersburg, West Virginia; congregations of the Lord's church. He has served as pulpit minister for the Oakhurst church of Christ in Farmington, West Virginia; the Hopewell church of Christ in Washington, West Virginia; and the Harrisville, West Virginia, church of Christ.

Andy taught Bible and directed the choruses at Jackson (Tennessee) Christian School for two years. He has written and co-written several hymns, as well as produced several CDs of a cappella singing for West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. He serves on the board of directors for that camp and is a co-director of their annual Singing Emphasis Week. He manages the Web site churchofchristsongs.com, which contains many of his compositions along with other originals.

He has been with West Virginia School of Preaching since 2011, serving as director since 2012.

Andy is married to the former Marsha Giesler of Rolla, Missouri. They are the parents of one daughter, Hannah, and a son, Andrew.

GOD GIVES ME GLADNESS

Psalm 64

Peter Ray Cole

*The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and trust in Him.
And all the upright in heart shall glory. (10)*

[All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Introduction

The scene set in Psalm 64 is one of adversity between David and his enemies -- the enemies of righteousness. David, in fear, pleads with God to “preserve my life from fear of the enemy” (1). David describes the shrewd and sinful tactics of the enemies who plot against him and then acknowledges that God is able to avenge the wrongdoings of these enemies of righteousness.

Psalm 64 begins in distress but ends in gladness. The turning point in this passage can be summarized in the two words that begin verse 7 -- *But God*. With God’s intervention, David realizes freedom from his fear and his foes and increases in faith, as he concludes by saying, “The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and trust in Him” (10).

The Fear

Fear is powerful. Physically, fear can render us immobile in the face of danger. Several years ago, my wife opened the front door to her parents’ house to find a baby copperhead snake sunning on the front porch. Home alone, she screamed, slammed the door, ran through the house to the garage, put on her dad’s work boots, and grabbed the garden hoe. She came back ready to do battle with the snake. However, the fear of that little -- although poisonous -- snake was so strong that she could not muster the strength to actually use the hoe to cut off its head. Luckily, a passerby saw the commotion and came to her rescue. Emotionally, fear can make us mute and unable to speak up to defend ourselves or a worthy cause, sometimes even in an onslaught of attacks. Sometimes, it is

the fear that we will not know the right things to say. Oftentimes, it is the fear of ridicule and scorn. Either way, we allow our fear to stifle our ability. Spiritually, fear can cause us to be ineffective in service to God. Fear can prevent us from sharing the message of Christ in our postmodern world. Fear can cause us to shrink away from standing firmly for the truth. Ultimately, fear can cause us to be lost for eternity. Revelation 21:8 lists the “fearful” (KJV) along with the unbelieving, murderers, sexually immoral, liars, and others as those who “shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.”

However, the antidote to fear is faith. In the first verse of Psalm 64, David, in faith, calls upon God to save him from the “fear of the enemy.” Matthew Henry writes in his commentary regarding this verse that David seeks preservation from his enemies as well as from the actual fear itself. “*Preserve my life from fear*, not only from the thing itself which I fear, but from the disquieting fear of it; this is, in effect, the preservation of the life, for fear has torment, particularly the fear of death, by reason of which some are all their life-time subject to bondage” (472).

David’s fear is understandable; his life is threatened by his enemies and their ruthless tactics. These external circumstances, which are the focus of this psalm, are causing David great angst. His enemies are wicked and powerful, as David describes in subsequent verses, but they cannot compete with the righteousness of Almighty God. In faith, David enlists the help of God by making three requests of God in the beginning of Psalm 64:

- 1) Hear my voice (1).
- 2) Preserve my life (1).
- 3) Hide me (2).

G. Campbell Morgan, in his *Exposition on the Whole Bible*, states of Psalm 64, “This is the cry of distress, and yet not of despair.” David’s faith enables him to call upon God for help. Had David sunk into despair, he would have allowed his fear to overtake him, and he would have given up. Morgan concludes by saying, “Such trust will issue in gladness, and the inevitable vindication of their faith. In order to do this we ever need to pray as the psalmist does, not so much for deliverance from enemies as for deliverance from fear of them.”

The Foe

*Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,
From the rebellion of the workers of iniquity,
Who sharpen their tongue like a sword,
And bend their bows to shoot their arrows -- bitter words,
That they may shoot in secret at the blameless;
Suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear.
They encourage themselves in an evil matter;
They talk of laying snares secretly;
They say, "Who will see them?"
They devise iniquities:
"We have perfected a shrewd scheme."
Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep. (2-6)*

In verses 2-6, David describes his enemies and their tactics:

At least ten sinful characteristics or actions of the wicked are mentioned in David's description:

- 1) Secret plots
- 2) Rebellion
- 3) Sharpened tongues
- 4) Bitter words
- 5) Shoot suddenly
- 6) Shoot secretly
- 7) No fear [of God or righteousness]
- 8) Encourage themselves in an evil matter
- 9) Laying snares secretly
- 10) Devise iniquities

David is facing multiple enemies who are allied in the same contrived plot against him. His enemies spread false words against him, and they search for matters of which to accuse him. Their weapons are bitter words. We read in James 3 about what a dangerous weapon the tongue is, that it is "full of deadly poison" (8). This is the deadly poison in which David's enemies dipped their arrows.

The contrast of opponents is seen in verse 4, as David says the

wicked “shoot in secret at the blameless.” The blameless are innocent and upright. The blameless are not equipped to fight back with such harsh and unscrupulous tactics as the wicked use. So, it may seem at this point that the blameless are at a disadvantage. Matthew Henry explains that the wicked “are described as military men, with their sword and bow, archers that take aim exactly, secretly, and suddenly, and shoot at the harmless bird that apprehends not herself in any danger” (472).

William MacDonald, in the *Believer's Bible Commentary*, describes Psalm 64 as two archery contests. The first contest is between the wicked and the righteous. The second is between God and the wicked. He summarizes David's situation in the first six verses of the psalm as follows:

The first battle seems to be completely one-sided. The righteous David is opposed by a multitude of villains. He has no arrows; their quivers are full. But he has the secret weapon of prayer and he uses it to enlist the help of his unseen Partner. First, he raises his voice to God for preservation from fear and for protection from the secret plots of the wicked. Then he gives God an intelligence report about the enemy. Their tongues are finely honed, as sharp as a sword. They bend their bows to shoot their arrows of accusation -- bitter words of reproach. Their attacks come unexpectedly from secret hide-outs and without fear of a counterattack (645).

The imagery the psalmist uses of the sharpened swords and arrows dipped in bitterness brings to mind the description of our archenemy -- the “wicked one” -- in Ephesians 6. As Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God, he specifies in verse 16, “above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” While David's vivid description of his foes gives the initial impression of one-sided battle, this soon changes as the battle becomes between God and the wicked.

The Freedom

*But God shall shoot at them with an arrow;
Suddenly they shall be wounded.
So He will make them stumble over their own tongue;
All who see them shall flee away.
All men shall fear,
And shall declare the work of God;
For they shall wisely consider His doing. (7-9)*

Just when it seems there is no defeating the enemy, the tables turn.

David is confident God can and will overthrow the enemy. While David's enemies have many arrows and have plotted many secret and devious plans, God only needs "an arrow." God's single arrow suddenly wounds them. And, in a sense of vindication, God makes the wicked to stumble over their own tongue. The enemy's sharpened tongue and bitter words have come back to puncture them!

When God acts, the wicked are always defeated. Countless stories in the Old Testament attest to this fact: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Pharaoh's army engulfed by the Red Sea, the numerous conquests into the Promised Land, and Gideon's army of three hundred defeating the Midianites, just to name a few. In so many instances in the Scriptures, this idea was fulfilled: "Thus says the Lord to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's'" (2 Chron. 20:15). These tangible examples of physical victories should be reassurance to the faithful today who pursue the cause of righteousness in the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged.

God's victory over the wicked causes all men to fear and to declare His work (9). Not only have the wicked been defeated directly, but also they have lost influence. After God defeats the enemy, "all who see them shall flee away" (8). Matthew Henry states, "Their neighbors shall shun them and shift for their own safety. They *shall flee away*, for fear of partaking in their plagues and being involved in their ruin" (473).

Freedom from our foes is found in the reassurance that we

serve a just God. Freedom does not mean vengeance. God does not execute judgment on evildoers to satisfy us. Rather, His judgments serve as an instruction to all -- even the ungodly -- that His purpose will be accomplished. We must guard against rejoicing at the downfall of the ungodly. Our attitude should reflect Paul's exhortation:

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Rom. 12:17-21)

The Faith

*The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and trust in Him.
And all the upright in heart shall glory. (10)*

God's just judgment on the wicked produces more faith in the righteous.

David begins this psalm in the first-person singular ("my" and "me"), but ends with encompassing "all the upright" (10). This shows the faith-producing power of God's works. What was initially affecting one man, David, enabled a multitude to witness God's power against the foes of righteousness. Verse 9 says, "All men shall fear, And shall declare the work of God; For they shall wisely consider His doing."

From verse 10, we see three results: the righteous will be glad in the Lord, the righteous will trust in the Lord, and all the upright in heart shall glory. MacDonald writes, "The result is that a sense of awe comes over the populace. Word spreads quickly, and men realize that righteousness has triumphed. This causes righteous people to be glad, of course, and to trust in Jehovah. All those who

love what is right will celebrate” (645).

A lesson for us today is that when faced with persecution, we should be glad, and when faced with danger, we should trust in God. Throughout the New Testament, we read that the faithful will be persecuted. Jesus said,

Blessed are those who are persecuted for
righteousness’ sake.

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you,
and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in
heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were
before you. (Matt. 5:10-12)

Persecution is part of the faithful Christian’s life. Paul writes: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). We should not be surprised when we face the poisoned arrows of our enemies. David did not seem to be caught off-guard by the onslaught of vicious attacks; instead, he was prepared to immediately seek the refuge of God, because he remembered that God is the source of victory. Persecution today may take on different forms than in the first century and even in the days of David. However, the tactics of David’s enemies in Psalm 64 may indeed be familiar to those striving to live by the standard of God’s Word: “secret plots of the wicked,” “rebellion of the workers of iniquity,” tongues sharpened like swords, and arrows of bitter words. Like David, we should take comfort in knowing that righteousness will always prevail. We cannot allow the tactics of our enemies -- the enemies of righteousness -- to dissuade us in standing firmly for the truth, in all ways. We may not know what plots may be laid against us, our reputations, or even our very lives. In reality, we need not know because our defense is not in ourselves but is in God -- as long as we are faithfully serving Him. Trust in the Lord!

While we may much prefer the quiet and peaceful life that is free from trials and tempests and the snares of the wicked, we must remember that we are called to “contend earnestly for the faith”

(Jude 3). We are called to “take up the whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:13). We are charged to “preach the word . . . in season and out of season” and to “convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). As faithful Christians, we are actively engaged in the battle for righteousness. We cannot be passive onlookers. And, when we are actively engaged in battle, we will have enemies.

Peace is such a beautiful thought; however, we can be deceived by a false sense of peace. When we think of peace as the absence of conflict, we realize that idea of peace will be elusive, since we will encounter conflict while living the faithful Christian life. Jesus said in Matthew 10:34 that He “did not come to bring peace but a sword.” Like in the days of Jeremiah, we may be deceived and say “‘Peace, peace!’ When there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). Sometimes, we have a false sense of security in the absence of conflict. A calm that puts us to sleep may be more fatal than the storms that keep us wide awake!

As Christians, the peace we need is “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Philip. 4:7). That is the peace that results from following the previous verse: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” Like David, we have the power of prayer to seek the help of God. We will not have absence of conflict as faithful Christians, but can have the peaceful reassurance that we are faithfully obeying and serving God.

Similarly, the gladness we have as Christians is not the shallow feelings of happiness that the world sees as happiness. The gladness we have is deeply rooted in righteousness. Therefore, we can have gladness in the midst of adversity, because our gladness is in the triumph of righteousness over the wicked.

When I study Psalm 64, God gives me gladness. I have gladness because of my faith that righteousness will triumph over unrighteousness, even though sometimes the enemy seems strong and unyielding. I have gladness because my faith is renewed and I am reminded to trust in the Lord. I have gladness because I have faith to call upon God in times of distress, and I know that He will preserve me from the fear of the enemy.

Conclusion

While the fear of our enemies may take on a different form today than in David's time, it is nevertheless a fear we face. Our physical lives may not be in danger, but our enemies today seek to destroy us in other ways. Just like David, our faith is fortified in knowing that God will avenge the enemies of righteousness. And we have gladness in that. Not gladness or joy in the personal demise and downfall of others, but gladness and peace in knowing that the righteousness of God will always prevail.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Henry, Matthew. *Job to Song of Solomon*. McLean: MacDonald Publishing, n.d. Print. Vol. 3 of *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

MacDonald, William. "Psalm 64: Bows and Arrows." *Believer's Bible Commentary: A Complete Bible Commentary in One Volume*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995. Print.

Morgan, G. Campbell. *G. Campbell Morgan Exposition on the Bible*. 1857-84. StudyLight.org. Web.

Biographical Sketch

Peter Ray Cole graduated from the West Virginia School of Preaching in 1998. He continued his education through Southern Christian University, earning a B.A. in Biblical Studies. In 2010, he completed an M.S. in Professional Counseling through Amridge University. He is a licensed professional counselor (LPC) through the West Virginia Board of Examiners in Counseling.

Upon graduation from WVSOP, Peter Ray worked as the associate minister for the Barrackville church of Christ in West Virginia. He has served as the minister for the Washington Street church of Christ in Fairview, West Virginia, since November of 1999. He serves on the faculty of WVSOP and has taught Marriage

and Family, I Corinthians, I Thessalonians-Titus, and Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. He is co-director of the Future Preacher Training Camp at WVSOP. Since 2005, he has made yearly mission trips to India, where he works for a month preaching the gospel and teaching in preacher-training schools. He made his first mission trip to Africa this year. He is actively involved in the West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and currently serves on the board of directors.

In July 1998, he married Amantha Sexton, formerly of Virginia, whom he met in 1996 when she attended the WVSOP Lectureships. The couple is anticipating the arrival of their first child, a daughter, in November.

GOD GIVES ME DEFENSE

Psalms 59

Keith Kull

Introduction

Have you ever felt like you were in circumstances beyond your control, or that your foes outnumbered your friends, or that you were in danger of being overwhelmed by wicked people? Have you ever felt like secret plots were being set up to trap you? If this is true of you, then either you are very paranoid *or* it is all true and you need someone to step up and defend you.

The reality is that all that I have just mentioned was true for the author of Psalm 59. The author, as mentioned in the introduction to the psalm, is David. Psalm 59 is the last in a series of seven psalms (Psalms 53-59), in which David brings complaints against his enemies and asks for God's help and protection. The psalm is set to the tune "al-tashcheth" (a tune long since forgotten), which is translated for us as "Do Not Destroy." This is the third psalm in a row that is set to this tune. It is a *Michtam*, or special song, of David. The historical setting given is "when Saul sent men, and they watched the house of David in order to kill him." [All scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.] The biblical setting is I Samuel 19:1-16. Brother Eddie Cloer suggests that this psalm answers the question, "What does a godly person do when faced with overwhelming circumstances?" (12-15) Cloer suggests three responses to this question: 1) Pray for deliverance. 2) Trust God to help you. 3) Praise God for what He will do for you. This question and the three responses make up the basic outline for this lecture.

Pray for Deliverance

Psalms 59:1-8

Prayer is the first response in a strong defense. God's people need to learn to take their struggles to God. David went to God immediately. In verse 1, he says, "Deliver me . . . Defend me . . ." (literally, "set me on high"). In verse 2, he repeats, "Deliver me . . . save me . . ." Notice also that the source of his consternation is

mentioned in the plural sense: “enemies” (1), “those who rise up against me” (1), “workers of iniquity” (2), “bloodthirsty men” (2). David was not facing an enemy; he was facing many enemies. As Cloer said, “Having one enemy is bad, but having several is worse” (13).

Notice the nature of David’s enemies. They were “workers of iniquity” (2). The word *iniquity* can be translated “evil, unfair, wickedness.” They were men set on doing wrong. They are also described as “bloodthirsty men” (2). They did not mind spilling a little blood if it advanced their cause. David knew his enemies well and realized he needed a good defense.

David also pleads his innocence: “They run and prepare themselves through no fault of mine” (4). The situation was real (3). David was not in denial, but he was wondering, “Why?” He had not done anything to bring on these circumstances. We might say, “But, I didn’t do anything wrong!”

Then David says, “Awake to help me, and behold” (4) or, “Wake up and meet with me; see for yourself.” Is David, in his frustration, crying out to God, thinking that He is oblivious to David’s plight? Or was it the intensity of the situation that made it seem that way to David? Certainly, the Father does not sleep (Psalm 121:4-5). In fact, the point of Psalm 121:4-5 is that God is our helper or defender when difficult times befall us. But are there not times in life when God has not responded to our situations in the timeframe or in the way that we expect or want Him to, and it may feel to us as if God is sleeping? Have not many of us responded, like David, “Wake up!”

All that being said, David’s prayer was a prayer of faith. He definitely believed God would help him. How do we know this? Notice his terminology. God is the “God of Hosts,” and He is the “God of Israel” (5). As the God of Hosts (Armies), He has the ability to defend us. Like Elisha’s servant, we need to open our eyes to see that “those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (II Kings 6:16). God is the all-powerful One Who has the ability to defend. By saying that He is the “God of Israel,” David is declaring God’s faithfulness to His covenant people (5). He keeps His promises to those who love Him and keep His commandments (Deut. 7:6-9). If God was faithful to physical

Israel, then surely He is faithful to spiritual Israel, the church.

Next, David describes the depth of the wickedness of those who were watching him (6-7). They were like scavenger dogs. These were not the pets that we love so much. They are more like the dingoes of Australia and ridgeback dogs of Kenya, worthless dogs known for their prowling and howling. They were creatures of the night that moved around in packs and were known for their belching once they caught and devoured their prey. The picture in verse 7 is of evil men who are not afraid to speak out against God (and thus God's servant) because, after all, "Who hears?" To David, their words were as sharp and cutting as swords. They had no fear in mocking, scoffing, and challenging God's authority. Their rebellion was foolish, but they asked, "Who hears?"

But, David says, God is watching and laughing (8). The idea that David presents here of God laughing at those who would set themselves against God is also seen in Psalm 2:2-4:

The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,
"Let us break the bonds in pieces
And cast away their cords from us."

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.

The idea also appears in Psalm 37:12-13, "The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him, for he sees that his day is coming." On the other hand, David made it clear in another psalm that ". . . the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly; the Lord will hear when I call to Him" (4:3). Paul also makes this clear to God's people today in Romans 12:17-21. God will take vengeance against the ungodly and defend the godly.

How is it that David can have so much confidence in God as he is surrounded by such vicious enemies? Notice what he said in a previous psalm, "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from my fears" (34:4). Experience had built David's

faith and confidence. From other experiences, he knew that God was near, He was accessible, and He would respond to his prayer of faith. Is that not what we have experienced as well?

Those Who Pray Faithfully Must Also Live Faithfully
Psalm 59:9-15

Our brother James said,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (1:5-8)

David was not a “double-minded” man. Notice what he had on his mind:

1) “. . . God is my defense” (9b). It is the same thing as saying, “God is my fortress; my stronghold; my strong tower; my impregnable rock; my divine tower.” We are well aware that David said, “The Lord is my shepherd . . .” (Psalm 23:1); but here he boldly declares, “The Lord is my defense (my rock)!” This idea of God being our “Rock” is a recurring theme in the Psalms (18:1-6, 46; 19:14; 31:3; 46). David believes he is in perfect safety. The world around his fortress (defense) may be evil, but that evil cannot take down his impregnable rock.

2) Therefore, “I will wait for You, O You my strength . . .” (9a). In the midst of overwhelming circumstances, David is displaying amazing faith in God. He is living the words to the popular hymn “Living by Faith” (Wells). In Psalm 62, he says, “He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved” (2). We are called to this same kind of faith (Rom. 8:31-39; Heb. 13:5-6).

3) David is sure that God, in His mercy, will redeem him (10-13). David is not interested that God slay them; rather it would be better for all concerned if He would allow these evil plotters to live and make examples of them. It would be a reminder to both the

godly and the ungodly of God's sovereignty and justness. As I read verses 11-13, I am reminded of wicked Haman from the book of Esther, whose evil pride and plotting against the people of God led to his ultimate destruction. Could these "bloodthirsty men" of Psalm 59 foreshadow the end result of all who scheme against God and His people? What we can be assured of is that God will judge the wicked.

In verses 14-15, David returns to his previous word picture of his enemies. This ugly sight must have disturbed David (he mentions it twice), but his faith would not allow him to lose his confidence in his "Rock."

James made note of the link between the prayer of faith and the life of faith when he said, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (5:16b). Cloer put it this way, "Trust motivates us to pray; prayer motivates us to trust" (14).

David's Conclusion -- I Will Sing God's Praises

Psalm 59:16-17

Let us look once again at the pictures of God that David develops in this psalm. God is:

- 1) The "God of Hosts": the capable God (5).
- 2) The "God of Israel": the faithful God (5).
- 3) His (David's) strength: the strengthening God (9).
- 4) His (David's) defense: His stronghold or fortress (9).
- 5) The "God of mercy": the merciful God (10).
- 6) "Our shield": the God of protection (11).
- 7) The "God who rules in Jacob": the Sovereign God (13).

Therefore, David says, "I will sing praises . . ." (17). While the wicked howl and snarl; the righteous sing the praises of God. Those praises find their source in the fact that our God is a dependable, powerful, faithful defender of His people.

I love David's words in verse 16, "Yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning; For you have been my defense and refuge in the day of trouble." Like most of you, I can relate to his words. I have spent restless nights dealing with troubles. It is

during the night that our troubles seem to be the worst. But in the morning, when the dawn breaks and we see things from a new light, we are reminded once again of the great mercy of God. “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul. Therefore I hope in Him” (Lam. 3:22-24).

What began as a psalm of lament ends as a psalm of confidence. God is my defense.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cloer, Eddie. “Encircled by Enemies.” *Truth for Today* 19.1 (1998): 12-15. Print.

Wells, James. “Living by Faith.” *Praise for the Lord*. Ed. John Wiegand. Nashville: Praise, 2001. n. pag. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Keith Kull has served as a minister with Northwest (formerly Market Avenue) church of Christ since 1975, having served in many aspects of ministry.

He has been married to the former Janet Tedrick for forty-three years, and together they have four daughters and sons-in-law and three grandchildren.

Keith received his bachelor’s degree from David Lipscomb College (University) and has done graduate work at Harding Graduate School of Religion.

He has been active at Northeastern Ohio Christian Youth Camp and taught Bible at the former Stark County Christian Academy. Recently, Keith has been involved in mission work in Kenya.

GOD GIVES ME STRENGTH

Psalm 145

Steve Higginbotham

As many of you know, I grew up about sixty miles north of here in the town of Chester, West Virginia. Chester was, and still is, a small town of approximately three thousand people. Times were different when I was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s. Our house was about a mile from the school I attended, and I would walk that distance every day without fear of being kidnapped or worse.

One day, when I was in fourth grade, I was approached in the hallway by two brothers. I don't think I ever did know their first names. I simply knew them as the "Cicarelli brothers." These two brothers confronted me in the hallway, pushed me up against the lockers, and told me that after school they were going to beat me up. Beat me up? I couldn't understand why. I was a cute, lovable eleven-year-old (just ask my mother). But they weren't buying it. It looked like I was going to get beat up at the end of the day.

So my mind went to work. What could I do to avoid this fight? Even if I could beat up one of them, I couldn't fight both of them. I was in trouble. My mind raced for ways to walk the nearly mile-long walk to get home without being spotted. Finally, it came to me. I had a plan. I contacted some of my best friends, told them what the Ciccarelli brothers said they were going to do to me, and I asked them if they would all meet me at the end of school and we would walk home together. My friends agreed, and about six of us left school together that day. As we left the school property, there stood the Ciccarelli brothers waiting on me, but we, as a group, walked right by them without any trouble at all.

I never did have that fight with the Ciccarelli brothers. My friends walked home with me every day for a week or so, and I guess the Ciccarelli brothers just lost interest in me.

But now, let me tell you why I share this memory with you. Even as an eleven-year-old, I understood that there were things in life that were just too big for me to handle alone. My strength was not sufficient. I needed the strength of others. That simple truth

which I was able to comprehend as an eleven-year-old boy is even more important for me to understand as an adult. The sooner I learn that by my own strength I am unable to overcome some of the things life throws at me, the better off I will be. I need to surround myself with the presence and strength of God. This is what the psalmist did, for note how he trusted in God's strength:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] “I will love you, O LORD, my strength” (Psalm 18:1). “It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect” (Psalm 18:32). “But you, O LORD, do not be far from me; O my Strength, hasten to help me” (Psalm 22:19). “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1) “The LORD is my strength and my shield” (Psalm 28:7). And from the psalm under consideration, we read, “Men shall speak of the might of your awesome acts, and I will declare your greatness” (6).

These passages are but a sampling of passages within just the book of Psalms that declare the strength of God. But this is the crucial question: “How do we tap into that strength?” Going back to the illustration about the “Cicarelli brothers,” my friends possessed strength that protected me, but had I not tapped into their strength by asking them to walk home with me, their strength would have done me no good.

Likewise, God is mighty, powerful, and full of strength. Yet, unless we tap into His strength, it will not do us any good. Consequently, I want to share three things about God that will allow us to tap into His strength and will uphold us when others fall. The more we meditate upon and truly comprehend these truths, the stronger we will be.

God Is My Strength When I Allow the Works of God to Inspire Awe within Me

In Psalm 145, David said, “I will meditate on the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works” (5). He also mentioned God's acts (6), works (9), mighty acts (12), and again, His works (17).

Why would David commit to meditating upon the “works of

God"? I can think of many reasons, but surely one of them would be to tap into His strength. How much comfort do the mighty works of God give to His children? What is there to fear if the God of Heaven, Whose works declare His greatness and glory, is in our corner, fighting along with us? When we consider the works of God, and meditate on His wondrous power, think of the strength and perseverance that can be ours.

Meditate upon what it means for God to have created the world out of nothing (Gen. 1-2). Imagine if you could have been around and watched as God, with the power of His word, simply spoke things into existence from nothing. One minute there is a void, barren landscape, the next minute there are trees, plants, and grass. Who can do this? Imagine watching as God separated the waters from the land (Gen. 1:9). Have you ever stood at the edge of the ocean? If you have, you know of its incredible power. Yet, God overcame the power of the ocean and moved it where He wanted it! This is the God Who walks by our side!

Meditate upon the parting of the Red Sea during the Exodus (Exod. 14-15). Only God has the power to divide the waters and cause the wet, mucky ground to dry up and the waters which were being held back to stiffen or congeal (Exod. 15:8). Then, at His desire, the waters fell back into place, destroying his enemies. Who but God can do such a thing?

Meditate upon the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:17-21). Have you ever tried to picture the scene? On this occasion, there were five thousand men present, not even counting the women and children. This could have potentially been a crowd double or triple the size of five thousand. And all these people were told to sit down and Jesus was going to feed them all with five loaves and two fish. This would be impossible for anyone except God, but nothing is too big for God. I have often wondered how the fish and bread were replenished in the disciples' bags as they served this multitude. Did they get down to one final piece of food, then suddenly, their bags got heavy again, causing them to look in and see that they had been refilled? Or was it the case that every time they handed out a piece of bread or fish, the bags were instantly filled again? I do not know the answer to that, but I do know that if I were present that day, I would have been impressed

with the strength and power of God through this miraculous display.

Meditate upon the raising of Lazarus (John 11). Imagine the tension, anticipation, and excitement that must have existed when Jesus said, “Roll away the stone.” As they must have eagerly peered into the darkness of that tomb, they must have wiped and widened their eyes as they saw the first glimpse of movement in the darkness of the shadows. Then, before their very eyes, he appeared in full view, alive! Who but God can do such works?

When I meditate upon the works of God, I am strengthened because I see the power of the One Who walks beside me. When I meditate upon His works, I more fully understand what Moses meant when he safely crossed the Red Sea and said, “The Lord is my strength . . . who is a God like you . . . ?” (Exod. 15:2, 11)

To use the words of a song that expresses the same idea, “I Stand in Awe” says:

You are beautiful beyond description,
 too marvelous for words,
 Too wonderful for comprehension,
 Like nothing ever seen or heard.
Who can grasp your infinite wisdom,
Who can fathom the depth of your love?
You are beautiful beyond description,
 Majesty enthroned above.
And I stand, I stand in awe of You,
 I stand, I stand in awe of You;
Holy God, to whom all praise is due,
 I stand in awe of you. (Altrogge)

God Is My Strength When I Allow the Ways of God to Humble Me

Not only did David write about the *works* of God in Psalm 145, but also he wrote about the *ways* of God. David said, “The Lord is righteous in all His ways . . .” (17). Elsewhere, the psalmist wrote, “I will meditate on your precepts, and contemplate your ways” (Psalm 119:15).

Once again, we are introduced to the idea of meditating.

However, this time he is not talking about meditating on the works of God, but upon the ways of God. And when we do this, we will surely be strengthened.

When we consider the character and attributes of God, how can we not feel humbled in His presence?

Meditate upon His attribute of longsuffering. Peter affirms that God is longsuffering. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). But just how longsuffering is God?

On one occasion, the apostle Peter asked Jesus the following question, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” (Matt. 18:21) Jesus’ answer demonstrates the longsuffering of God. Jesus answered Peter by saying, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22). How much higher is Jesus’ standard than ours? How many of us would give up on a person long before they reached the point Jesus was describing? But should we not be thankful that we serve a God Who is so longsuffering? In fact, were He not as longsuffering as He is, would not all of us have exhausted the limit of His tolerance? When I consider the righteous character of God and His ways, I am humbled in His presence because He is so much stronger than I am.

Meditate upon His holiness. The psalmist said that the Lord is righteous in all His ways (17). Imagine being so holy that you have never once defiled yourself with sin. Imagine the strength it would take to never speak an improper word, think an improper thought, or do an improper thing. We cannot muster the strength to do that for a single day. God has maintained His purity throughout all eternity.

Meditate upon the justice of God. Abraham said it correctly when he said, “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25) God’s judgments cannot be bought. They cannot be swayed through prejudice. His judgments cannot be altered by personal agendas. He always does the right thing. In contrast with God, how many of us under pressure crumble and do the wrong thing? How many of us have stood by and let injustice rule the day because we were afraid, or because we simply did not care enough to get

involved?

In Malachi 1:6, God asked, “Where is My honor?” and, “Where is my reverence?” It was absent. The people were making offerings to God, but without due reverence and respect. The people were offering to God that which was sick, lame, blind, blemished, and even stolen (8, 13, 14). In response to such action, God reminded the people that He is a “great King” and “His name is to be feared among the nations” (14).

The reason Israel was weak and failing was they had failed to comprehend who it was that they were worshiping. Consequently, they did not give God His due respect. When a man fails to consider Who it is he is worshiping, and why it is that He is worthy of worship, then he will surely fail to worship God acceptably. However, when he properly considers and meditates upon the attributes of the God he is serving and worshiping; he cannot help but be in awe of Him, and humbled in His presence.

The sense of awe of which I write can be observed in the prophet Isaiah (6:1-8). Isaiah had a vision in which he found himself in the presence of God. The Lord was sitting on a high throne, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above the throne was a seraph who cried out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with His glory!” (3) The posts and the door were shaken by His voice and the house was filled with smoke.

Then Isaiah said, “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (6:5). One of the seraphim then flew to Isaiah and touched his mouth with a live coal and told him that his sins were taken away and that he had been purged.

Isaiah then heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, And who will go for us?” (6:8) Upon hearing the Lord’s question, Isaiah responded by saying, “Here am I! Send me” (8).

This vision of Isaiah contains several elements that demand our attention. First, notice the greatness of the One sitting on the throne. Do not miss the majesty, power, and excellence of His presence. Even the angels worshiped Him. We must come to be aware of the awesome glory of the One we serve.

Notice the humility of Isaiah. In the presence of God, he realized his frailty. There is no place for pretense, no “put on face” that could hide who he really was. Clearly, he realized he was in the presence of One Who was greater and mightier than himself, and that he and the One sitting on the throne were not on equal ground. Isaiah was humbled and felt inadequate in God’s presence, much like the prophet Micah, who said, “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God?” (6:6) We must realize that we are not on equal standing with God. God is not our peer, but He is the Most High and Holy God! Such awareness can only invoke humility. But knowing how great God is strengthens us when we come to realize He is with us and His strength will be used to protect us.

Also, notice the graciousness of God. As sinful and unclean as Isaiah was, God purified him and took away his sins. This action was not performed out of any obligation, but rather out of the graciousness and good pleasure of God’s will. We need to comprehend the character and graciousness of the God we serve and worship. How can one who understands the goodness of God not love and adore Him?

And finally, notice Isaiah’s awareness of his indebtedness to God’s grace. In light of God’s graciousness toward Isaiah in cleansing him of his sins, how could he dare remain silent when God asked, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8) Could one who had been given so much refuse or ignore any request of the Giver? Notice how Isaiah was moved from humility to becoming a bold, courageous volunteer for God. That is what meditating upon the ways of God will do for a person. It will strengthen him.

God’s ways are righteous. What good news that is to us! What strength that gives me to know that the One Who walks with me will keep His Word and fulfill His promises. When I meditate upon the ways of God, I better understand what the prophet Micah said when he wrote in utter amazement, “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy” (7:18).

God Is My Strength When I Allow the Word of God to Challenge Me

Not only did the psalmist instruct us to meditate on the *works* and *ways* of God, but he also taught us to meditate upon the *words* of God. “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97).

When we consider the commandments of God, we cannot help but feel challenged. God’s words are so pure and noble. His words call us to a higher level of living. His words expose our weaknesses, but accentuate His strengths.

When I mediate upon His Word, which commands us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44), I must admit that I am challenged. I am challenged when His words command me to avoid fleshly lusts that war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11). His Word demands that I learn to control or bridle my tongue (James 3). And not only does His Word command that I bring my actions and speech under control, but His words command me to control my attitude (Eph. 4:31-32).

The very fact that God’s Word calls me to such challenging tasks strengthens my hope and resolve because I know I serve a God Who is strong enough to have mastered every one of these traits with which I struggle. I am left to ask in utter amazement, “Who is a God like you?” (Mic. 7:18)

I believe my strength in walking the Christian life is in proportion to my knowledge of the God Who walks with me. The Ciccarelli brothers did not concern me when I stood alongside the strength of my friends. Through their strength, I discovered strength and peace of mind. Likewise, when we come to know the strength of the God Who walks with us, we too will discover strength to see us through any challenge and peace of mind to know that God will take care of us.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Altrogge, Mark. “I Stand in Awe.” *Praise for the Lord*. Ed. John Wiegand. Nashville: Praise, 2001. n. pag. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Steve Higginbotham is a native of West Virginia. He was born in Weirton and raised in Chester. Upon graduation from Oak Glen High School in 1980, Steve entered Freed-Hardeman University and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Bible. While at Freed-Hardeman, Steve met his wife Kim (Pierce) Higginbotham, and they have four children together (Kelli, Michael, Matthew, and Anne Marie). Steve has preached for congregations in Nitro, West Virginia, (1984-1989) and Glasgow, Kentucky, (1989-2010) and, since 2010, he has been preaching for the Karns church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee. Steve enjoys writing, has served as one of the editors of *Think Magazine*, and is currently one of the instructors in the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies.

GOD GIVES ME ETERNAL HOPE

Psalm 49

Will Montgomery

The Folly of Trusting in Riches

*Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world:
Both low and high, rich and poor, together.*

*My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart
shall be of understanding.*

*I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying
upon the harp.*

*Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my
heels shall compass me about?*

*They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the
multitude of their riches;*

*None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to
God a ransom for him:*

*(For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for
ever:)*

That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.

*For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish
person perish, and leave their wealth to others.*

*Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever,
and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands
after their own names.*

*Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the
beasts that perish.*

*This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their
sayings. Selah.*

*Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them;
and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and
their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling.*

*But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he
shall receive me. Selah.*

*Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his
house is increased;*

For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.

Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself.

He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light.

Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.

[All Scripture references are from KJV unless otherwise noted.]

As I study the Psalms, the enlarging of my faith eliminates fears. Men have always and still do search for that which brings hope, eternal hope. In the study of Psalm 49, we will see what will not give us that eternal hope or salvation, which is so desired by those who search after it, and what will bring that hope to fruition.

The first twelve verses remind us of the weakness of wealth. It does not matter how rich or powerful we are, or how many material goods we possess. Wealth will not save us. Salvation cannot be purchased with any commodity. As we see in Acts 8:19-20, Simon the Sorcerer thought that he could buy the gift of the Holy Spirit, “But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.”

Verses 1-4 are calling attention to all mankind, both Jew and Gentile, low and high, rich and poor, that it is necessary that they hear and understand God’s message to them not to trust in riches.

David tells us that he is going to speak in order for us to understand. He is going to show a parable and open up dark sayings (hidden things). He asks the question, “Should we fear in the days of evil when we are oppressed by the powerful and wealthy?” We may fear for our physical well-being. But we need to realize that no one can redeem his brother nor give to God a ransom for him. Salvation comes from God alone. All men die: wise, foolish, brutish. All wealth will be left to others. Death is inevitable, as Hebrews 9:27 says, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”

Jesus says that “where your treasure is, there will your heart be

also,” (Matt. 6:21). Where is your treasure? Where is your heart?

The psalmist makes many arguments in verses 5-12 to show the foolishness of riches.

David gives us six reasons why riches are foolish to seek after and put our trust in:

1) Wealth Cannot Save Us

In Luke 12:16-21, the rich farmer found that even though he had amassed great possessions, they could not save him nor could he take them with him. Instead of spending all of his time trying to gain more and ever more, he should have made preparations to die in a right relationship with God. God has the last say. In verse 20, He said, “Thou fool, this night thy soul is required of thee: then whose will those things be which thou hast provided?” Many think that by providing abundantly for themselves and their families that they are being the right kind of husbands and fathers, when, in reality, by not providing spiritual teaching and example, they are condemning their children. Verse 21 is clear: if you lay up treasure for yourself, you are not rich toward God. It is for nothing.

2) Wealth Is Not a Cushion

The psalmist is trying to get us to see that wealth provides no cushion. You cannot insulate yourself from harm. How many stories have we heard about extremely wealthy people who have died terrible deaths with no family or friends or anyone to give them comfort and, perhaps, even penniless? So many times, it is actually the misuse of their wealth in sinful activities which brings about their deaths. Money cannot make one happy. It cannot make you a better person. Ecclesiastes argues that the rich experience more problems than the poor (5:10-12).

3) All Will Experience Death, the Rich As Well As the Poor.

All men find common ground in death and at the foot of the cross.

4) Wealth Is Left to Others

Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun:

because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have labored, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. (Eccles. 2:18-19)

5) The Grave Becomes Our Home

Though the rich have large homes and fine estates, the grave becomes everyone's home. All of us will have a tomb for our bodies to decay in, and the final resting place of the rich on earth is no different than the poor.

6) Despite Riches, People Perish Like Animals

Verse 12 really drives the reality of this point home: "Nevertheless man being in honor abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish." Our physical bodies must die. We are no different than the animals, in regard to the physical body. Hebrews 9:27 has no age limit on it. All men die: young, old, rich, poor. Whatever our station in life, we will die. That is why it is so necessary that we obey God, so that we can say what Philippians 1:21 says: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is vain." (Kercheville)

The psalm goes on to teach us that we must trust in God and not in riches. Material possessions cannot save us. The rich man in Luke 16 trusted in riches and not in God. He found himself on the wrong side of the gulf that is fixed. Lazarus, on the other hand, in his poverty, trusted in God and was and is in the bosom of Abraham.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which

thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21)

Here we find another example of one who put all of his trust and confidence in riches, and yet it seems that that is what caused him to lose his soul.

The rich farmer trusted in material possessions, lands, barns, and crops, and yet this was the very thing that caused him to be called to answer for his soul that night.

He was cavalier toward the important issue of his soul and only thought of temporal pleasure. He was going to amass great wealth and then sit back and enjoy it, with no thought of eternity. So many have this same attitude of living only for the here and now: “Eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:19).

However, God always has the final say: “. . . this night thy soul shall be required of thee . . .” (Luke 12:20). He was a fool. He did not realize that all of the goods and possessions were worthless to him now. He could not take them with him, and they would be left to others or, perhaps, just to waste away.

A wise man will take thought of Matthew 6:19-21:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

And again, Luke 12:15 warns us of covetousness: “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” If you notice, there is a double warning in this verse: Take heed and beware. Covetousness is apparently something we need to avoid.

Jesus points out in Matthew 16:26 the importance of our soul. There is nothing in this world that is worth exchanging for our soul. Once lost, it can never be regained. According to 1 Timothy 6:7, “we brought nothing into this world [materially], and it is

certain we can carry nothing out.” We will leave with what we brought in, our soul. Why put our trust in things that cannot save us?

Much of the world today and sadly some of the church are caught up in the things of this life, as Mark 4:19 points out, “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

We need to trust in the Lord. “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil” (Prov. 3:5-7).

In the next several verses, the writer explains to us the folly of trusting in riches. The rich feel that their wealth causes them to have approval from their friends and family; in other words, that it makes them good, upstanding citizens, that they have achieved the pinnacle of life, that they are invincible. But verse 14 points out that they, like sheep, will be laid in the grave and their bodies will decay. And those still alive (rich or poor) will have dominion over them. The grave consumes the beauty of those who trust in worldly things, and verse 15 tells us that the upright, those who have put their faith in God, will be redeemed from the power of the grave unto the resurrection of life.

There is no need to fear the rich or his wealth or position or power, for he will die like all men. His wealth and power are only temporary. Look again at the rich man and Lazarus of Luke 16. While alive, the rich man thought very highly of himself and thought nothing for poor Lazarus. But then the tables were turned. He saw Lazarus and realized that it was Lazarus who was in the better place now. Likewise, the rich farmer had much in this life, so much that he had to build buildings to house it all, and yet in a moment’s notice, he lost it all.

The rich may be praised by others, but he will descend to the grave, where he shall never see light, meaning, he will never know or have the chance to know the favor of God.

Receiving honor in this life is not necessarily a bad thing. It is not honor that brings destruction. Destruction comes from receiving honor without recognizing that without God there is

nothing. Without trusting in Him and His Word, we have nothing on which to base hope. Those without wisdom and understanding face the resurrection of damnation. “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:28-29).

Men put their trust in wealth, lands, gold, and many other things instead of Almighty God. James tells us not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God. In Dr. Constable’s notes on Psalms, he says, “It isn’t a sin to have wealth provided we earned it honestly, spend it wisely and invest it faithfully in that which pleases the Lord” (Constable).

Does a man have to be a millionaire in order to place his trust in riches? Of course not. A person could lose his soul over a small amount of money, if he trusted more in it than in God. The uncertainty of riches is the problem. Why would you place your trust in something that you cannot depend upon? It is like the story of the wise and foolish men; one built upon the rock and one upon the sand. When we place our faith and trust in riches, we have no true foundation. We have built upon the sand, and when the winds and rain come (which are the trials of life), our building will fall. We need to acknowledge God, Who is our foundation (Matt. 7:24-27).

George Fox wrote a work entitled “Not to Trust in Uncertain Riches” in 1669. He penned these thoughts:

All Friends, be ye as strangers to all things visible and created, but be aquatinted with the Creator, your maker, the Lord God Almighty; for outward things are not durable riches, nor durable substance, nor durable habitations, for they have wings and will fly away; and so therefore be as pilgrims and strangers to the world, and all worldly, created and visible things, and witness redemptions from the earth, that you may reign upon the earth, as kings and priest to God, that you may know a habitation in god, and the riches of his grace and life, that is everlasting, and a substance that fadeth not away, the riches which hath not wings, and

the riches that is not deceitful, that is durable and true. For men trusting in outward riches, and outward things, they will deceive and fail them, and have wings and flee away from them. And so man in that state is deceived, and riches are deceitful to him. Therefore, as I said before, be as strangers and pilgrims to the world, and all things therein, possess, as though you did not; be above all such things, and loose to them in the invisible life and power, which is over all things: for the birth that is born again of the immortal seed by the word of God, that lives and abides, and endures forever, and is above all things; for all things are upheld by his word and power. And so be acquainted with the heavenly and certain riches, the durable substance, and the everlasting possession and inheritance of life, through which you may be acquainted with your maker and Creator, the Lord God Almighty.

Even though Mr. Fox was a founder of the Quaker Society, he seemed to have a grasp of how important it is to trust not in the uncertain riches of this world but the riches that come from God and in Whom we can place our unwavering faith and trust.

In way of conclusion, I want to look back over this psalm and give a short synopsis of the thoughts therein.

Verses 1-4: These verses call on all men everywhere, of every station in life, to prepare for death. It will come!

Verses 5-6: Even though man must face evil and persecution, possibly from great and wealthy men, they need not fear them. As Matthew 10:28 points out, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Verses 7-8: No matter how powerful a man is, he cannot save anyone. Only the blood of Christ can save or redeem a soul.

Verses 9-11: No amount of money will keep a man from death. Even though he believes that his money will save him, it is only a delusion.

Verse 12: Wealth does not guarantee that you will have a longer life here on earth, and no matter how long one lives, it is short in comparison to eternity. “Whereas ye know not what shall

be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

Verse 13: The life plan of those who trust in riches is folly. It is based on a false sense of security that they will live forever.

Verse 14: All men will go to the grave.

Verse 15: But the righteous will be redeemed from the grave.

Verse 16: Do not be concerned over the prosperity of the rich in this life. The tables will be turned in the life to come.

Verse 17-18: No matter how much you have in this life, you cannot take it with you, it will be left to others, and you will have no control over what happens to it.

Verse 19: Again, all men will die, just as the generations before them.

Verse 20: The rich may have honor in this life. But honor alone will not save. Man must have an understanding of God’s Word and be obedient to it, or he is like the beasts of the earth, and there is no hope for his soul.

As we look again at what can be learned from Psalm 49, the following ideas can be gleaned: God, through David, was speaking to all men of the earth. Whether rich or poor, whatever station of life they were in, they needed to listen to the words of this psalm. We cannot put our trust in riches or in men who possess great riches or wealth. Riches will not save us and to trust in riches is folly. To fear rich men is folly. Wealth and power can save no man, and no matter how rich we are, nothing will keep us from death. All will die and go to the grave, and our bodies will decay. Only those who are right with God will live on with Him in heaven. God alone can save. No one will avoid death.

J.C. Choate has given us a real picture of death, in the following:

I AM DEATH

I am death-----
I prey on all mankind;
I come at the darkest hour
When they know not;
I still the heart beat.

And the life blood stops its flow;
I rob men of their future
And turn fair beauty into dust;
I take man from the living
And place him in the grave;
I send him forth to face
Eternity in another world;
You can't avoid my stealthy call
For I will come;
Yea, be prepared to meet me:
I am Death. (Bedwell 151)

(*Note: This writer remembered hearing the poem on “The Voice of Truth International” radio broadcast and was searching for the reference. In doing so, he called on sister Choate, who said that she remembered this being a piece by her late husband and she was happy that he had contacted her and even offered to help find the volume that it was in. He was able to locate it and send a copy to Sister Choate at her request.)

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Kercheville, Brent. “Trusting in Riches.” *West Palm Beach Church of Christ*. West Palm Beach church of Christ. 19 Feb. 2006. Web. 20 July 2015.

Constable, Thomas L. *Notes on Psalms: 2015 Edition*. Soniclight.com. 2015. Web. 20 July 2015.

Choate, J. E. “I am Death.” *Sermons for Funeral Occasions*. B. L. Bedwell. Austin: Firm Foundation, 1960.

Biographical Sketch

Will Montgomery was born in East Liverpool, Ohio, on January 11, 1947. He was baptized, along with his wife, Anita, by Frank Higginbotham in Chester, West Virginia, in 1972. He began preaching while a deacon at the Chester congregation.

Will began located work with the East Liverpool congregation in 1981, where he continues in his 34th year. He speaks on lectureships and conducts two to four gospel meetings per year.

Will has one daughter, Tracy, who is married to John Knight (a deacon at the East Liverpool congregation), and two grandchildren, Jocelin and Tyler Knight.

GOD GIVES ME JUSTICE

Psalm 140

J. D. Conley

Perhaps as never before, Christians need their faith enlarged and their fears eliminated. A study of the marvelous book of Psalms achieves both of these much needed goals. For that, I offer my sincere thanks to the lectureship committee for their timely selection of this year's theme and course of study. My sincere gratitude is also extended to Director Robison for his tireless labor of love with WVSOP and to the eldership of the Hillview Terrace congregation. As always, I deem it a high honor to speak on this fine lectureship program and I am ever grateful for the invitation.

Introduction

Within and without the marbled corridors of our judiciary is found the image of a long-gowned, blindfolded female named Justitia, better known as Lady Justice. In one hand, she holds a sword; in the other, a scale. The sword is indicative of deserved punishment. The scale represents a fair weight. At times, verdicts are rendered upon a slight tipping of the scales, e.g., a preponderance of the evidence. But the blindfold is the guarantee of objectivity. Lady Justice is made blind in order that favor, money, identity, power, etc., find no part in the momentous decisions she makes.

But the one true, living God, Who made heaven and earth and everyone and everything in it, is omni-just. The Scriptures state, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face" (Psalm 89:14). [All Scripture references are from KJV unless otherwise noted.] Therefore it is impossible for God to be a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He needs no blindfold because He is omniscient and always does what is right (Heb. 4:13; Gen. 18:25). The Judge of all the earth, unlike judges on the earth, can never make a wrong decision or render an unjust verdict. This truth, though comforting, can also produce shuddering. God's justice is both satisfying and terrifying, depending on where one spiritually stands at the moment. The

apostle Paul admonishes, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Rom. 11:22). In depicting the dual nature of God, Paul is pointing out that His goodness and severity are simply the aftereffects of His justice. The goodness and severity of God are consequences born out of *our* response to His will. It must be understood that God’s justice is a characteristic of His holiness. If God rewarded evil (or even overlooked it) or punished righteousness (or ignored it), He would be unjust. So apart from His justice, God would be unholy and unloving. In the absence of justice, the one true God could not and would not exist.

A Prefaced Poisonous Peek

Before examining the text, let us take a brief look at an attitude that can quickly kill our faith and magnify our fears, and that is a distorted view of injustice. We hear it all the time in the exclamations, “It’s not fair!” or, “It must be nice!” Honestly, do such thoughts enter our mind when we watch our unbelieving neighbors bring home a new camper, a new boat, a new truck, or all three? Week after week, when we see their beer bottles on the curb, do we ever mumble under our breath, “It’s not fair; they’re so blessed, and I’m a Christian”? When we are headed to Bible class early Sunday morning and the entire neighborhood is sleeping in, do we ever silently declare, “It must be nice”? What about when we scroll our Christian friends’ pages on Facebook and we see their happy, smiling faces and read about their vacation getaways, do we ever feel slighted? That somehow God has forgotten us? Or worse yet, has been unjust toward us? Is it possible that we have been guilty of reacting the way Asaph did? “For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:3). Such an attitude speaks to our shame! Thankfully, Asaph saw the gross error of his way and repented (16-22). The prosperity of the wicked should never be equated with God’s approval. Nor should the austerity of the righteous be regarded as His disapproval. Such is an unjust human assessment of the Divine, just God.

Upon being infused with such poison, we are in dire need of the antidote. Simply turning to the healing leaves of Psalms and

applying the balm contained therein will reinvigorate our faith and soothe our souls. These melodic words of inspiration will buoy our faith and defeat our stress by reminding us there *is a just* God reigning above the azure blue. Due to that blessed and immutable fact, we should hang a “No Admittance” sign over the door of our hearts, banning any insidious thought of God’s supposed injustice.

A Perusal of Psalm 140

Most scholars believe this psalm was composed during the early life of David when he was pursued by Saul. “. . . [T]he contents of the psalm leave no room to doubt that this was written at an early period of his life, in the time when he was subjected to persecution -- most probably in the time of Saul” (Barnes 299). “In tone and language it resembles Psalms 58 and 64” (Perowne 446). These thirteen verses are a stark reminder of three facts, two of which are calming and reassuring. However, the first fact is unsettling and disturbing: it is the deeply entrenched and widely dispersed reality of human depravity. This is not the Calvinistic brand of total hereditary depravity, but the depravity brought on by the deliberate, individual choice to sin. The apostle Paul reiterated this truth to the saints at Rome when he quoted from Psalm 14 in Romans 3:10-18. He clearly told the Romans that this state of depravity was brought about by choice, *not* heredity. Phrases such as “gone out of the way” and “become unprofitable” bear this out (Rom. 3:12). This psalm begins by showing that David was an eyewitness to this undeniable truth.

But the last two facts borne out in this psalm declare God is present and He is always just or fair in His dealings with people. Not only His people, but all people, including His enemies. Therefore, when I read the Psalms, including this one and others, I can confidently say, “God gives me justice.” Thorough is my conviction that He will be fair and equitable with me, as well as my foes. Knowing He is a just God, and not a respecter of persons, is a strong motivation to live faithfully for Him all the days of my life. Therefore, let us strive to be the recipients of His goodness and not His severity.

The first fact as noted above, is disturbing; it is:

The Ever Present-Enemy (1-5)

Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man;

Which imagine mischiefs in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war.

They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.

Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings. The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah.

Consider how much more frightful these verses would be without the knowledge of a just God Who is in control! This section not only informs us of wicked and violent men, but also it tells us they are proactive in their wickedness and designing in their violence, taking their cues from the god of the nether region (Job 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:8). While it is true Satan is not omnipresent, he is nonetheless tireless in traversing the earth. He is busy! Likewise, his servants follow suit. Therefore, wary David cries out in verse 1, “Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man. . . .” This plea of David’s conveys that our ever-present enemy:

Is Persistent

All enemies of God’s people are. They are never content to leave the righteous alone. They do not even need a reason to berate and assault the righteous. In the Psalms, it is repeated time and time again that our enemies will hate and hurt us “without a cause” (35:7, 19; 69:4; 109:3; 119:78, 161). If ever a phrase in the Bible demanded God’s justice, it is this one!

The Davidic plea begins with the heartrending, “Deliver me, O Lord . . .” Question: If God is unjust, why would David implore God for deliverance? Why go to the trouble if God is not just? Does not his plea for deliverance imply God’s justice? Does not his second request for preservation imply the same? Furthermore, since David’s foes are also God’s, does that not lend gravitas to David’s two pleas being answered in the Divine affirmative?

Therefore, God's justice is necessarily implied in the first verse.

David continues in verse 2, "Which imagine mischiefs in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war." This shows that our ever-present enemy:

Is Plotting

And plural are the plots. David recognizes he has multiple adversaries beyond the evil and violent individual of verse 1. They too are engaged in the nefarious activities of formulating plans by which war and discomfiture can be brought against the man after God's own heart. Albert Barnes explains, "The word *mischiefs* in the Hebrew means *evils; wickednesses*. It was not a single purpose; the plan embraced many forms of evil -- doing him wrong in every way possible" (300). Not only are there numerous plots, but there is cohesion between the plotters. They are united and organized in toppling the sweet singer of Israel. Though David feels threatened, he remains steadfast, believing his just God will deliver and preserve him from every shady scheme.

Christians have many plotting against them today, and not just those who adhere to the teachings of the Koran or march under the banner of ISIS. Some of them sit in seats of power in our nation's capital. Nearly every day, verdicts are handed down, laws are made, rules are enforced, wrongful rights are granted, and rightful rights are stripped away. None of these things square with God's Holy Word, making us feel, to an extent, like David. Nevertheless, let us think like David, who said, "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me" (Psalm 35:1). A reading of the entire 35th psalm shows that David believed God's justice would intervene and bring about victory. Reading about David's faith in God's justice assures me when I read the Psalms that God gives me justice.

They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah. (3)

This declares that our ever-present enemy:

Is Poisonous

The enemies of God have the capability to engage in character assassination. David acknowledges they have “sharpened their tongues like a serpent” (3). Other passages in Psalms that convey similar thoughts about the cutting power of the tongue are 55:21; 59:7; and 64:3. Just as a venomous snake carries poison in its mouth, the mouths of men and women, boys and girls, carry a poison all their own in that little member called the tongue. James wrote,

Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. . . . But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. (3:5-6, 8)

Down through the annals of time, God’s people have been slandered and cursed. Multitudes have been wrongfully accused and convicted. By ad hominem attacks, the Lord’s church has been smeared and grossly misrepresented. Christians are being maligned in the press and besmirched on social media. God’s Word is scorned and spat upon daily. Today, if you call yourself a Christian, you are immediately labeled a crazed, wild-eyed zealot -- intolerant, hateful, homophobic, self-righteous, narrow-minded and dumb. All of these injustices and more are heaped upon us. We are inundated from all sides.

But when I read the Psalms, the serpent’s tooth is dulled, the poison is not as potent because God gives me justice. He infuses me with the strength to endure whatever insults are hurled my way. Through His marvelous providence, He may be shielding me from sharpened tongues that would pierce me through and poison me. I derive comfort knowing, “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence . . .” (Psalm 50:3). My faith in His justice is fortified in reading, “The Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth” (96:13). His justice cannot be denied, nor will it be

circumvented because “. . . he shall judge the world, and the people with equity” (98:9).

The end of verse 3 is marked by the *Selah*, the first of three in this particular psalm. This is a fascinating and inspired word, “An isolated word occurring seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk” (Eerdmans 1158). *Selah* is a musical pause injected into the psalm/song for the purpose of meditating over what has just been sung. Some have likened it to *Amen* or *Hallelujah*. Adam Clarke wrote, “*Selah*] This is the truth” (668). The meaning of *Selah* has also been compared to the Lord’s admonition, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 11:15).

With this understanding of *Selah*, what is David wanting the reader to pause and ponder over and embrace as truth? Would it not be the fact that even though our enemy is ever-present, so is our just God? That even though diabolical plans are devised against us, we can depend on God for deliverance and preservation because He is a God Who renders justice? Certainly this is a truth over which we should pause and gratefully meditate.

Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings.
(4)

This verse declares that our ever-present enemy:

Is Purposeful

David knew that the headstrong Saul and his minions concocted definite ploys to overthrow his godly intentions. Those who wield power very often fulfill their evil desires. When the powerful devise ways to afflict and eliminate the righteous, a resounding cry for God’s justice should ascend. Through His just ways, God will see to it that His people are kept out of the hands of the wicked and preserved from violence.

Although God is just and equitable, the righteous nonetheless *must implore Him* to exact justice. Notice that David did not expect God to protect him from wickedness and violence without first asking Him. Instead, David asks and he is specific in his request: “Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me

from the violent man . . .” (4). Just as our enemies are purposeful, so must we purposely ask God for His help. Jesus commands, “Ask, and it shall be given you; . . . For everyone that asketh receiveth; . . . how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7:7-8, 11). Sometimes our prayers become too generic; instead of being specific, we generalize. While God’s omniscience is respected, perhaps it is relied upon to such a degree that our prayers become less thoughtful and deliberate and more nonspecific. Could it be that the presence of so much injustice in the world is partially due to the righteous not being specific in their requests to God? We have clearly been told, “. . . [B]ut in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, *let your requests be made known unto God*” (Philip. 4:6, emphasis added). James said, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss . . .” (4:3). In order for God’s justice to intervene and effect a change upon earth, it must be specifically requested by His children. To make a broad, nondescript request of God is to “ask amiss” (James 4:3).

Our prayers should have a pointed purpose. That purpose should be that God’s justice be exacted upon the evil people and their devices (by name) that plague this earth. Do not confuse this with a cry for vengeance. Vengeance is God’s affair (Rom. 12:19). Christians do not seek retaliation; we pray for our enemies and turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39, 44). But at the same time, we sigh for justice. Since God is just, we are content to leave all in His holy hands.

The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah. (5)

Our ever-present enemy upon whom we seek God’s justice:

Is Proudful

Their pride has filled them up to such a degree that they have complete confidence in the ploys they have devised. They are proud of the traps they have set. They are sure their plans to trip the feet of the righteous will be met with success. Though God’s people are warned not to be ignorant of the devil’s devices (2 Cor.

2:11), that does not mean it is impossible for us to be ensnared. May we “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16). Notice that the word is *gins* and not *grins*. Some recent copies of the KJV have made this typographical blunder. While it is true the enemies of God’s people no doubt grin when the righteous fall prey to their traps, *grins* is *not* the word here. Gray and Adams state, “gins, the word gin is a contraction of engine, so refers generally to mechanical instruments. Here it means a contrivance to ensnare, a trap” (719).

The secrecy and the stealth our enemies employ impress upon us our need for God’s constant guidance and protection. The inspired *Selah* is used again, denoting our need for careful thought concerning the harrowing truth set forth in verses 4-5. May we implore our just God for a swift reversal of schemes, urging Him to “Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape” (10). May our faith be enlarged and our fears eliminated when we read elsewhere in this glorious book, “The Lord preserveth the faithful, and *plentifully rewardeth the proud doer*” (Psalm 31:23, emphasis added). Once more, I am reassured that when I read the Psalms, God gives me justice.

Although the truth about the ever-present enemy is troublesome, it is counterblasted in the balance of this psalm by not one but two faith-enlarging, fear-eliminating facts, the first of which is:

The Ever-Present Elohim (6-11)

Although the terms *God* and *Lord* in these verses are translated respectively from the Hebrew words *Yahweh* and *Adonai*, and not *Elohim* (the Hebrew plural for the Godhead, Gen. 1:1), for alliteration’s sake, I suffer your permission to use *Elohim*. Though not specifically used in this particular text, its use does not diminish or impugn God’s omnipresence. After all, “God the Lord” is integral to *Elohim*.

I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD. (6)

These words assure us that the ever-present God:

Is Personal

This one verse refutes the doctrine of Deism, which purports that God is aloof, remote, and unconcerned about man. Consequently, a deist rejects belief in an omnipresent and intimate God. Yet David writes, “I said unto the Lord. . . .” Obviously, this denotes human proximity to Deity. Furthermore, David states: “Thou art *my* God” (6, emphasis added). Not only is God nearby, but David lays claim to Him. The verse concludes with David’s request that God hear his fervent prayer. Since God is personal, He is positioned and inclined to come to our aid dispensing justice as He sees fit.

O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle. (7)

This verse sets forth that the omnipresent God:

Is Protective

Only a personal God would offer protection to His own, and only an omnipresent God could. How fair would it be of God, Who has told us in this book that He “is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble” (Psalm 46:1), if He deserted us when we needed Him most? He plainly tells us, “. . . [C]all upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (50:15). God not only promises to protect us, but David attests that He has in the past:

He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me. (Psalm 18:17-19)

Far too many place their trust in human-devised modes of protection. Our society is layered in various levels of protection, whether it be national defense, civil defense, or self-defense. Yet

the faith-filled child of God knows that in time of peace or unrest, “. . . except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psalm 127:1). David added, “You have hedged me behind and before, And laid your hand upon me” (NKJV, 139:5). Knowledge of our Father’s protective barrier and His constant watch care over us should enlarge our faith and eliminate our fears!

Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked: further not his wicked device; lest they exalt themselves. Selah. (8)

This verse sets forth that our ever-present, ever-just God:

Is Preemptive

This verse shows David praying fervently for something Christians rarely pray for, i.e., the failure of the wicked. How often is prayer offered in the worship assembly that mirrors the sentiment expressed by David? Privately, do we ever pray that God will foil the schemes of evil people? Why is this kind of praying avoided? If it was proper and good for David to pray in this vein, is it not proper and good for us? “It is right for us to pray that in God’s power and providence the efforts of the wicked will be destroyed” (Deaver 243).

While God is unlimited in His power and can prevent and preclude wicked plans, He nonetheless expects us to *pray to Him* in order to bring about this end. Once again we see that prayer, as in verse 4, plays a vital role in the collapse of diabolical plans. Remember, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). How righteous are we when we fail to pray for the defeat of evil purposes? Furthermore, why should we expect the wicked to fail when we do not ask God for them to fail? Our goal is not only for the wicked to fail, but that after they fail, they will abandon their evil ways and seek to do better. Let us understand that by praying for their failure, we are also praying for their conversion. The final appearance of *Selah* in this psalm underscores the importance of praying in this fashion.

The world is rife with violence committed in the name of Allah. Terrorism’s tentacles are far-reaching and are firmly taking

hold worldwide. But to know the preemptive power of an ever-present God is at hand strengthens our faith and banishes our fears. Jehovah's justice, *if beckoned*, will not allow for the exaltation of evil men.

The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; . . . Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright. Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call. (Psalm 20:1, 7-9)

When I read the Psalms, God gives me justice.

As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. (9)

Our ever-present God:

Is Permissive

Only an all-loving God would grant the apex of His creation the freedom of choice. Odd as it might sound, evil exists *not* because God does not, but because *He does*. This does not mean that God is the origin of evil or that He in any way condones it. His Divine wrath will be meted out in response to it (Rom. 1:18). His justice requires it (Rom. 11:22). But consider how unloving and senseless it would have been for God to create a robotic human race. We would all be mere androids, programmed to blithely obey apart from any individual will or choice. But our just and loving God *did not do that!* Instead, and much to our delight, He created us with free will. How unfortunate that every person that has ever lived has made the choice to sin (Rom. 3:10, 23). Sin/evil is in the world as a result of the misuse of our *God-given* free moral agency. The atheistic assertion that "God does not exist because evil does" crumbles.

Although God bestows free will upon the human race, this is not the kind of permissiveness verse 9 is conveying. Rather, the permissiveness depicted here refers to God's allowance of His/our

enemies to have a taste of their own medicine, in other words: duly-Divine justice. When I read this verse and others from the Psalms, such as 7:16 (“His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.”), I know that God gives me, as well as the rest of His children, justice. May we ever bear in mind, “Evil is a boomerang, returning with added force upon the evil-doer” (Harris 9). Know that God’s justice is not meted out by means of a “tit-for-tat” process. The wicked will get more in repayment than he originally dished out. They may surround (compass) and hurl insults at the righteous, but the fruit of their lips will return at gale force and bury them!

Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again. (10)

This verse too, shows that our just and ever-present God:

Is Punitive

Woe unto the wicked who persecute and afflict the righteous children of God! Justice requires punishment. It is a punishment that cannot be circumvented (Job 11:20; Heb. 10:31; 12:29; 2 Thess. 1:8-9; Rev. 21:8). In this verse, David reveals that it is a punishment that is gravely severe. He utters a prayer for a reversal of mistreatment. Instead, “may hot coals be cast upon them; may they fall into the fire which they have prepared for others; may they fall into the deep pits which have been dug for others. There is a fairness about such an outcome” (Leupold 952). “It is not clear whether these are imprecations or prophecies . . . The language may be parabolic rather than literal, but it is drastic in any case” (Harris 155). Regardless of what kind of language is being employed, the Scriptures unequivocally speak of a literal, fiery, unquenchable hell being the eternal abode of the unrepentant wicked (Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:43-48; Rev. 21:8). Hell is depicted in similar terms to what David uses here. Though God, David, nor we are “willing that any should perish” (2 Pet. 3:9), eternal ruin will nonetheless be the lot of every soul that refuses to repent and obey the Christ. It will be their own fault and not God’s (Psalm 9:15).

His justice demands punishment for sin. When I read the Psalms, I am reminded that God gives the righteous and wicked alike justice.

Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him. (11)

Our great omnipresent God:

Is Powerful

He pursues, pummels and puts out of service the violent man. But there are myriads of evil speakers/slanderers and violent men upon the earth (1 John 5:19). Is God to be blamed for this? Certainly not, since this would make Him unjust. Man alone is responsible for his sin and its consequences (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 6:23). It is the *consequences* for man's sin where God's justice comes into being. Once more, this is where the vital need for prayer should be recognized. With a heartfelt "Let not," David pleads with God (11). May we take this page out of Psalms and apply it to our daily prayer life. If we would but fervently pray, "Let not" (11), "Deliver me" (1), "Preserve me" (1, 4), "Keep me" (4), "Hear me" (6), and "Grant not" (8), regarding a vast array of evil things, would there not be fewer evil things? Through prayer, we tap into God's power to aid us in changing the world (James 5:16). ". . . [Y]e have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2). Jesus says, "For everyone that asketh receiveth . . . your Father which is in heaven [will] give good things to them that ask him" (Matt. 7:8, 11). So let us pray for God's justice. Upon doing so, our faith will be enlarged and our fears eliminated, knowing God will allow evil to track down the violent man and put him out of commission. May we take full advantage of praying to our ever-present, all-powerful God for His administration of justice. When I read the Psalms, I am assured that God gives me justice because He is:

The Ever-Present Exactor (12-13)

Verses 6-11 intimate the justice of God. In these previous verses, the truth of God's justice is implicitly set forth. In the last two verses, His justice is explicitly declared. Let us recognize that what is implicitly taught in the Bible is just as binding and true as

what is explicitly taught. Be that as it may, David addresses the justice of God directly.

I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor. (12)

Most assuredly, the Ever-Present Exactor:

Is Pitiful

How comforting to know that God will not only be with us when we are afflicted, but He will sustain us. The Judge of all the earth will see to it that fair judgment is rendered to the poor. David leaves no room for quibble, boldly stating, “*I know* the Lord will . . .” (12, emphasis added). We too can have this confidence in the equity and fairness of Almighty God. Rest easy: the Lord will defend us! “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31) “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (1 Pet. 3:12-13)

Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence. (13)

Oh, how the Ever-Present Exactor:

Is Precious

Once again, David is emphatic, declaring, “Surely the righteous shall. . . .” Shall what? Give thanks to God, the Exactor of justice, and dwell in His presence. How precious our Father is to bring about such hope, gratitude, and joy in a world steeped with injustice. God is *always* on the side of the oppressed righteous and is *never* on the side of the oppressor. May we ever be grateful that we serve a pitiful and precious Ever-Present Exactor of justice.

Conclusion

This psalm hits hard on the themes of Divine deliverance, protection, and guidance. But underneath each one of those lays

God's justice. Without His justice, neither deliverance, protection, nor guidance -- which the righteous crave -- could be. Without heavenly justice, our faith would be eliminated and our fears would be enlarged, making the Christian life one of futility and hopelessness. But the reality and assurance of God's justice makes this life worth living. May we live it prayerfully, dutifully, and joyfully. As we read the inspired, glorious collection of the Psalms, may we be reminded over and over again of God's ever-present, ever-exacting justice.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Barnes, Albert. *Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977. Print. Vol. 3 of *Notes on the Old Testament*.

Clarke, Adam. *Job-Solomon's Song*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, n.d. Print. Vol. 3 of *The Old Testament*.

Deaver, Roy. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Vol. 2. Pensacola: Firm Foundation, 1989. Print.

Eerdmans, WM. B. "Selah." *The New Bible Dictionary*. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973. Print.

Gray, James, and George Adams. *Chronicles-Proverbs*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d. Print. Vol. 2 of *Gray and Adams Bible Commentary*.

Harris, Arthur. *The Psalms Outlined*. Philadelphia: Judson, 1925. Print.

Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977. Print.

Perowne, J. J. Stewart. *The Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976. Print.

Biographical Sketch

J. D. Conley was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1959. He is a third-generation Gospel preacher and is in his 23rd year of full-time preaching. He preached his first sermon in Larose, Louisiana, at age 15. He majored in Bible at Freed-Hardeman University and is a graduate of the Brown Trail School of Preaching in Fort Worth, Texas. He is now in his 12th year working with the Harmar Hill church of Christ in Marietta, Ohio, where he also serves as one of the elders. He has been married to the former Denise Cooper for thirty-six years. They have six children and five grandchildren. Their son Shane preaches in Guthrie, Kentucky.

GOD GIVES ME ENDURANCE

Psalm 71

Emmanuel Daugherty

It is indeed a great honor to be invited to speak on the West Virginia School of Preaching Lectures. Over the last twenty years, the school has provided an outstanding series of lectures, highlighted by sound doctrine and spoken by men sound in the faith who have preached the truth in love. The Word of God has been the focus of each lecture. We care not for the doctrines and commandments of men. In the words of Isaiah, it is, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (8:20). [All scripture references are from NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

My task this hour is to address the text of Psalm 71. There is no ancient title given to this psalm, nor author identified. It is a psalm in the form of a prayer of an aged believer who, after a lifetime of faithful service, beseeches the Lord to stay with him in his old age and for help to overcome his enemies. It is a psalm of endurance through a long life of service that has, without doubt, had its share of hardships, difficulties and toils. And now, in his advanced age, his enemies have risen up in an effort to overcome and defeat him.

The great expositor of the psalms, Charles Spurgeon, said of the 71st psalm, “Throughout, this psalm may be regarded as the utterance of a struggling, but staggering, faith” (394). Another commentator says of this psalm, “Against his failing strength he now sets a long memory of God’s faithfulness and a growing hope in His life-renewing power” (Kidner 250).

Roy Deaver calls this “a Psalm of Life” (244). The inspired psalmist points out that he has served God from his birth (6), his youth (5, 17), and his old age (9, 18). We shall make an effort to emphasize the “endurance factor” in each of our main points.

Psalm 71: A Psalm of Endurance.

- I. Help and Trust Are Factors in Having Endurance (1-6).
- II. Only with God’s Help Can He Endure against His

Enemies (7-13).

III. Hope and Praise Shall Be Continuous; He Will Depend upon God's Strength to Endure (14-16).

IV. A Cheerful Soul Endures (17-18).

V. The Goodness of God Brings Endurance (20-21).

VI. Worship, Thanksgiving, and Song, Praising God That He Has Endured (22-24).

Help and Trust Are Factors in Having Endurance (1-6).

The author of this anonymous psalm begins by confessing his unbounded trust in the Lord: "In You, O LORD, I put my trust" (1). Jehovah alone is the only One in Whom man can put his trust. It is not in other men, not in machines and technology, not in armies and military might, not in politics or science, not in philosophy, nor man's celebrated ingenuity. Only God, Who made us, intimately knows us, knows our needs before we ask, and is able to satisfy the longings of our heart, is deserving of our trust. It is as Peter said in the New Testament, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). The psalmist entreats the Lord that he not be put to "shame" or to "confusion" (KJV, 1). He knows that if left to his own devices and purely-human resources, he will be put into a state of confusion and shame (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12). Putting their trust in God enables His people not to be put to shame because of sin in their lives or allow their foes to have an advantage over them, wherein the Lord's cause will suffer.

He further petitions God in this section to "Deliver me in Your righteousness . . ." (2). Surely there is a lesson here in that it is only by the Lord's righteousness that any deliverance can come for man! Without God's grace and mercy, mankind could not be saved by any means. Again we see that man is not the author of his own destiny, he is not "the captain of his soul"; it is only through God and His Son that we have any righteousness at all! In this psalm, the writer turns to the theme of "righteousness" repeatedly (2, 15, 16, 19, 24).

He next appeals to God as his "strong habitation," (KJV) his "rock of refuge" (ESV); the place where he can go continually for refuge and safety (3). In the latter part of verse 3, he calls God "my

rock and my fortress.” How important it is to one’s endurance that one have a place of shelter in times of storm! A man may endure the ravages of time and the storms of life if he has built his house on the rock and not on the sand! (Matt. 7:24-27)

In verses 4-6, the psalmist appeals to the Lord for deliverance “out of the hand of the wicked,” “unrighteous and cruel man.” Who are these enemies? Since this psalm is anonymous, we have no clue to identify these wicked men who threaten the soul of this godly man. Without a doubt, he feels vulnerable to their accusations, malicious words and threats. He confesses that God is his only hope and points out that he has been sustained throughout his life from the time he was born, through his youth and into his old age. In the deepest recesses of his memory, the furthest back he can remember, God has sustained him and supported him. Therefore, he will continually praise Him. *Continually* is stressed in this psalm (6, 14). God is a constant in his life.

With all the terrors and temptations of the world, how wise it would be if all our young men and women would put their trust in God our Savior and make Him their rock and refuge continually!

Only with God’s Help Can He Endure against His Enemies (7-13).

“I have become a wonder to many...” the writer says (7). This word that is translated as *wonder, mopeth*, is rare in the Old Testament; “nearly half of its occurrences in the OT refer to the plagues of Egypt” (Anderson 513). The New English Bible translates this phrase as, “To many I seem a solemn warning” (513). The words

‘wonder, sign, portent,’ may refer to a special display of God’s power to strike fear into the heart of His enemies as with the ten plagues which befell Egypt by God’s hand (Deut. 6:22), or at other times to inspire worship, instilling awe and wonderment at the Lord’s work (Ps. 105:5). It can also be a token of a future event (1 Kings 13:3, 5; Isa 20:3) but it is always God who is ultimately the source . . . (513).

Kidner believes this word should be understood as a *portent*, a

curse that would befall his enemies, as in Deuteronomy 28:45-46 (251).

Of the psalmist, one has written, “It is implied . . . that his life was a public life, such as that of a prophet, or leading man amongst his people, or it would not have attracted the notice and excited the wonder of many” (Perowne 518). “Those who have known the psalmist know of amazing deliverances he has experienced and they stand in awe of what they have seen” (Cloer 356). Because of the many wonders that Jehovah has brought upon him through the years he says, “Let my mouth be filled with your praise And with Your glory all the day” (8). Charles Spurgeon remarked, “What a blessed mouthful!” (296) The Sweet Commentary on the Psalms suggests that, “Either he is constantly in a worshipful mood, or he speaks to others of God, that is, he is an edifier” (237).

In verse 9, we learn that the psalmist is an old man and he prays that the Lord will not cast him off in the time of his old age nor forsake him when his strength has failed. Old age brings its own fears as the body weakens and cannot perform as it did in the days of our strength, as Solomon describes in Ecclesiastes 12:1-8. How fearful any life would be to come to its end without the knowledge that God is its keeper! Some commentators believe that this psalm is written by David and is here speaking of the time of David’s advanced age when his son Adonijah is attempting to usurp the throne. Ash says, “In his enfeebled condition he pleads not only for help, but even more for God’s fellowship. Despite his trust, he appears to have come to a moment when God seems remote because of the pressure upon him. See Isaiah 46:3-4” (237).

Though he has been marvelously delivered in times past, he now fervently prays that he will be delivered again; the collusion of his enemies has increased his danger and his age prevents him from defending himself. His foes believe that Jehovah has forsaken him, that now the psalmist will come under their power without God to protect him. How bitter life can be, when friends and helpers are not apparent and our enemies add to our fear by saying that even God has forsaken us! “Let loose the dogs of persecution upon him, seize him, worry him, ‘for there is none to deliver him’” (Spurgeon 297). May all the saints remember: “The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me” (Heb. 13:6)?

As an aside, we need to be mindful of the honor and respect that should be given to men and women in their advanced age. The Law of Moses taught, “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and thou shalt fear thy God: I am Jehovah” (ASV, Lev. 19:32). We are reminded of the grave consequences that befell the children who taunted the prophet Elisha, saying, ““Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!’ . . . and two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths” (2 Kings 2:23-24). This episode, though taking place so long ago, still serves as a warning to the ruffians and hoodlums of this world that there is a just God in heaven who will bring them into account for their insults, jeering, and mocking of aged men and women. These should have their respect and honor and not their scornful derision!

The danger to the psalmist is immediate; his desperation shows through as he pleads to God not to be far from him, pleading, “O my God, make haste to help me!” (12) There is a twofold imprecation, that is, “to invoke evil upon, a curse” (Webster 420), in verse 13. 1) He prays that these adversaries to his soul be “confounded and confused” or “ashamed and consumed” (ASV). He is asking that their plot against his life be refuted and disgraced and 2) “let them be covered with reproach and dishonor who seek my hurt.” “. . . [H]e pleads that he might be in God’s hand of mercy and that the enemies might be under His hand of judgment” (Cloer 357).

Hope and Praise Shall Be Continuous; He Will Depend upon God’s Strength to Endure (14-16).

Putting the thoughts of the adversaries behind him, the psalmist will “hope continually, And praise You yet more and more” (14). Rather than continuing in a state of distress, he turns to worshipping God, yes, even increasing worship more and more. What a wonderful example to us who follow centuries after, to handle our problems in this modern age of fear and despair! Do not get depressed! Worship and praise God more and more! Do not decrease, increase!

Verse 15 of the psalm says, “My mouth shall tell of your righteousness and Your salvation all the day” and then adds, “for I

do not know their limits” (Heb. *no numbers*). God’s righteousness and God’s salvation are infinitely beyond man’s power to calculate or to repeat” (Perowne 519). God’s righteousness and salvation are tied together, for one produces the other” (Cloer 357). The writer of the psalm is ready to praise and tell all day long of God’s righteousness and salvation. These blessings of God are limitless -- they cannot be counted! “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!” (Psalm 139:17).

Are we as eager and unrestrained in our praise of the Lord as this man? Are we prepared and mature enough in heart and mind to “go in the strength of the Lord GOD” and to “make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only” (18)? Enough of our timidity and fear! The times call for boldness, determination, and faith! The time, our time, calls for love of God more than love of self. The church of Christ should be daily praying for strength and power to do God’s will in spite of the railing of our foes -- atheists, humanists, politicians, judges that seem to work against us on every side. These are times that call for us to endure by confidence in God, not ourselves! Jesus said,

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. (Mark 8:36-38)

A Cheerful Soul Endures (17-18).

In this section, the psalmist continues his praise of God and recalls how God has taught him from the days of his youth. We are not left to wonder about how this man was taught by God. His teaching would have come from godly parents and priests who were charged with teaching the law of God to the people of Israel. A passage from Psalm 119 comes to mind:

How can a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed according to Your word.
With my whole heart I have sought You;

Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!
Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You.
Blessed *are* You, O LORD!
Teach me Your statutes (9-12).

Now, in his advanced years, when he is old and grey-headed, he still declares God's wondrous works. He prays for the Lord to preserve him until he is able to declare God's strength to his generation. Some think this is a vow promising that after his deliverance from his enemies, he would declare God's wonderful works. But it seems more likely this vow is a continuation of what he has done throughout his life and is emphasizing that he will only increase his telling of God's great works to others.

God has guided him from the beginning of his life, revealing to him his duty, and protecting him as he has gone along the dangerous paths. He has resolved to declare God's "wondrous deeds" to others. He has already done so by public worship, in his writings, and in his defense of His truth. (Cloer 358-359)

Paul, in his sermon to the people in Antioch of Pisidia, spoke concerning David, "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption" (Act 13:36). This reminds us all that we can but serve our own generation, that though we would seek to save those of our loved ones gone before, that is not possible, nor is it possible to teach and save those who come after we leave this world. Let us "redeem the time, for the days are evil" (Eph. 5:17).

Look at the cheerful attitude and disposition of this man! In spite of his adversaries ganging up on him, in spite of their threats on his life, in spite of his frailty and age, he has displayed an attitude of joy and thankfulness to God for his constant care and lovingkindnesses.

The Goodness of God Brings Endurance (19-21).

"O God, who is like You?" the psalmist exclaims (19). "Your

righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens!” (ESV, 19) All things in heaven and in earth sing the praises of Jehovah God! (Rev. 4:8-11). The prophet Micah declares, “Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy” (7:18).

The psalmist declares that through all the troubles and distresses God has shown him, he trusts Him still and is confident that he will be revived again from this conflict of body and soul. He will yet be restored to his greatness and comfort. The greatness refers not to material and earthly prosperity, but rather to a restoration of his ability to do even more in the Lord’s service. God’s goodness has providentially guided and cared for him throughout his long life. He is overwhelmed by God’s righteousness. “God’s works are beyond comprehension and comparison!” (Ash 238).

Worship, Thanksgiving, and Song, Praising God That He Has Endured (22-24).

The psalmist concludes with great resolve, committing himself to singing God’s praise for his faithfulness. He shall do so with songs and instruments of music. The reference to musical instruments may be a hint that David himself is the writer of this psalm. For it was David, with God’s approval, that introduced instruments of music to the worship under the Old Covenant (2 Chron. 29:25-27), and it was he who was called “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1).

The writer speaks of God as “the Holy One of Israel” (22), a title often found in Isaiah, but rarely so in the Psalms (78:41; 89:18). Only a man who has cast all his care upon the God of heaven (1 Pet. 5:7) and in whose heart is “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Philip. 4:7) is the man who is able with great exuberance of faith to say, “My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You; and my soul, which you have redeemed” (23). Cloer writes, “He describes in these verses his personal praise of God in four ways: ‘I will praise’; ‘I will sing’; ‘My lips will shout

for joy'; and 'My tongue also will utter Your righteousness'" (361).

The psalmist has persevered; he has endured and declares of his enemies, "For they are confounded, For they are brought to shame Who seek my hurt" (24). "This is vindication not vindictiveness. It will be part of the joy of heaven (cf. Rev. 15:3; 18:20)" (Kidner 253). The righteous are saved and blessed, the wicked are thrown into humiliation and confusion. All praise be to God!

Addendum: Sixty-Five Plus in the United States

During the 20th century, the number of persons in the United States under sixty-five has tripled. At the same time, the number aged sixty-five or over has jumped by a factor of eleven! Consequently, the elderly, who comprised only one in every twenty-five Americans (311 million) in 1900, made up one in eight (33.2 million) in 1994. Declining fertility and mortality rates also have led to a sharp rise in the median age of our nation's population -- from twenty years old in 1860 to thirty-four in 2004 (U.S. Bureau on Aging Statistics).

As we age, let us use our longevity to the glory of God, with faithful, loyal worship; by good works and service; and through our finances and soul winning!

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ASV) are from the American Standard Version, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1901. Public domain in the United States.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from the Holy Bible, King James Version (Authorized Version). First published in 1611. Public domain in the United States.

- Anderson, A. A. *The Book of Psalms*. Greenwood: Attic, 1972. Print. New Century Bible Commentary.
- Ash, Anthony L. *Psalms*. Austin: Sweet, 1980. Print. The Living Word Commentary.
- Cloer, Eddie. *Psalms 51-89*. Searcy: Resource, 2006. Print. Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures.
- Deaver, Roy. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Vol 1. Pensacola: Firm Foundation, 1989. Print.
- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 1-72*. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1978. Print.
- Perowne, J. J. Stewart. *The Book of Psalms*. London: Warren F. Draper, 1901. Print.
- Spurgeon, Charles H. *The Treasury of David*. Vol 3. New York, 1881. Print.
- U.S. Bureau on Aging Statistics. Web
- Webster. *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield: G. & C. Merriam, 1965. Print.

Biographical Sketch

Emanuel Daugherty is a native of Barbour County, West Virginia, and is married to the former Judith Null. They have four children, eight grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. He graduated from Getwell Road School of Preaching (Memphis School of Preaching) and Alabama Christian School of Religion (Amridge University). He has preached at the Alkire Road church of Christ in Grove City, Ohio, and the Dewey Avenue church of Christ in St. Marys, West Virginia, and served as the first director of the West Virginia School of Preaching. Presently, Brother Daugherty is preaching for the Salem church of Christ in Glen Easton, West Virginia, and continues his teaching duties at WVSOP.

GOD GIVES ME COMPANIONSHIP

Psalm 139

Steve Higginbotham

The story is told of an elderly lady who, in the 1930s, had electricity run to her house. Of course, she had grown up and lived her entire life without the benefits of electricity. So when the opportunity came for her to have electricity run to her house, she was eager to take advantage of this new technology. The electric company came and wired her home, and installed several lights and outlets. However, several months after the installation, the electric company noticed that hardly any electricity had been used by this lady. So they sent out workers to the home to discover what the problem was. The workers asked the elderly woman if she was satisfied with her service, to which she replied, "Oh yes, it's absolutely marvelous!" Again they asked, "Do you use it much?" She replied, "Every day." The workers then explained to her that according to their records, very little electricity had been used over the past several months, thus there must be a problem somewhere. They asked the lady to explain how she typically used the electricity during a normal day. She said, "Well, I don't need to turn on the lights during the day, but about dusk each evening, when it gets difficult to see, I get up, turn on the light so I can see to light my oil lamp, and then I turn it off again."

While we may chuckle at this lady, we may find that we are not so different from her. You see, her problem was that she did not know how to take advantage of a tremendous resource that belonged to her. And that is precisely our problem with reference to the presence and companionship of God. We, too, fail to comprehend the great resource we have in God's abiding presence and companionship.

The Presence of God: Comfort or Threat?

The psalmist said:

*O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;*

*You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain it.*

*Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me,"
Even the night shall be light about me;
Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
But the night shines as the day;
The darkness and the light are both alike to You.*

*For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.
My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.*

[All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise

noted.]

In other words, we can never escape the presence of God. It matters not whether in life or death, day or night, light or darkness, or even in heaven or hell, God is present.

This abiding presence of God is received by two totally opposite reactions. For some, God's presence and companionship bring great comfort and peace of mind. To others, it is unnerving and disconcerting. With very little thought, one can uncover why people have such differing reactions. The differing reactions have to do with our course of life. Those who seek to serve God find great comfort in knowing that God is present and He will take care of them. Remember, Paul stated, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). His presence assures us that He knows what is happening to us, and will, through His providence and power, make all things work together for our good.

However, for those who are not serving the Lord and are living outside of His will, God's presence can be quite disconcerting. Who wants to do the wrong thing and get caught while doing it? But this is the situation with those who live in rebellion to God. Every evil thought and every evil deed is seen by God, our constant companion.

The Promise of His Presence

Prior to Jesus' ascension back into heaven, He gave the apostles the "Great Commission." He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

As Jesus sent forth His disciples, He promised them that He would be present with them as they went.

Maybe even more emphatically, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'" (John 14:23).

God is not someone we “bump into” once in a while, but rather is One Who dwells with us; Who makes His home with us! What a marvelous thought, and what a life-altering truth!

Would not a knowledge of the presence of God change the way we live, for the better? If we thought about God’s presence, would we not be better, more moral people? If we really had an understanding and a daily cognizance of His presence, would it not affect the way we live? Surely it would.

Try to imagine how the presence of God must have impacted the life of Obed-Edom. The record says,

So David would not move the ark of the LORD with him into the City of David; but David took it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite three months. And the LORD blessed Obed-Edom and all his household. (2 Sam. 6:10-11)

The context and time of the above passage was following the death of Uzzah. God had punished him for touching the Ark of the Covenant, which he was commanded not to do (Num. 4:15). David became angry with God because he thought God had dealt too harshly with Uzzah, so instead of retrieving the Ark of the Covenant, he simply set it aside and left it at the house of Obed-Edom for three months.

But here is a thought worthy of our consideration: “How do we think the Ark of the Covenant, resting in the home of Obed-Edom, affected the conduct of Obed-Edom and his family for the next three months?” Just imagine how much more “God-conscious” they must have been. Did they wake up in the morning and have to give care not to touch it as they walked from one part of the house to the other? Did they ever think twice about speaking unkind or careless words in the presence of the Ark? I am convinced that a physical reminder of God’s presence must have helped them to become godlier during those three months.

Maybe an even better thought worthy of our consideration than the thought above would be, “How do we think the cognizance of God’s presence would affect us today?” How different would our

homes be if we were aware of God's presence? Would we change our speech? Would we be more kind and gentle with each other? Would we turn off the television and open our Bibles? Would we be more discerning concerning our Internet usage?

Here is the reality: God dwells in our homes just as much as He dwelt in the home of Obed-Edom. He is present. Although we do not have the Ark of the Covenant sitting in our living room as a reminder, we do have Bibles that should also serve as a reminder to us. May we allow His presence to make us better, more conscientious, holier people.

The Focus of His Presence

Not only will the awareness of God's presence help us to be more holy, but if we focus upon His presence, we will find strength in the midst of adversity.

During the Babylonian captivity, three Jewish youths, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, had their lives threatened. King Nebuchadnezzar threatened them with a horrific death if they did not bow down and worship an image made in Nebuchadnezzar's likeness.

Instead of capitulating to his demand, here is what the record says:

Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?”

They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”

“Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here.” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. (Dan. 3:19-26)

Do not miss the statement that Nebuchadnezzar made at the end. You might be inclined to pass right over it, but there is a great message contained in it concerning the presence of God.

These young men had been bound and thrown into a fiery furnace. I can only imagine how terrified they must have been. The heat from the furnace was so great that the guards who threw them into the furnace perished. Can you imagine the surprise these three young men must have experienced when they realized they were not in pain and were not burning alive? But ask yourself this question, “If you were thrown in a fire and realized that you hadn’t yet been consumed by the fire, what would be the first thing you would do?” If it were me, I would not press my luck and I would jump out just as quickly as I was thrown in. But this is not what these three Hebrew youths did. No, they remained in the midst of the flame, walking around. You see, they were in the presence of God! Nebuchadnezzar looked into the flames and saw a fourth individual who looked like one of the “sons of the gods” (i.e. someone possessing the traits and attributes of God). Because of this, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were not in a panic concerning their circumstances. In fact, they were so distracted by the presence of God, Nebuchadnezzar had to ask them to “come out” (Dan. 3:26)!

That is what can happen to us when we are focused upon the presence of God. When we focus upon God’s presence and companionship, we are distracted from the unpleasant and

sometimes overwhelming circumstances of life.

When our younger son, Matthew, was six years old, we would sometimes in the evening ask him to run downstairs to get something for us. When we did, he would look at us and say, “You want me to go downstairs?” We would answer, “Yes.” Then he would say, “But Dad, it’s dark down there.” To which I would reply, “Then turn on the lights.” He would then say, “But I’m scared.” And I would come back with, “There’s nothing down there to be afraid of. Now go on and do what you were told.” The next thing we would know is that we would hear Matthew saying to his two-year-old sister, “Anne Marie, do you want to go downstairs with me?”

That conversation replayed itself many times in our home, and what amazes me about it is the power of presence. To Matthew, it did not matter if the person who was with him was just two years old; he just wanted someone to be with him. What protection could a two-year-old girl give him if there was some danger downstairs? None (unless he was planning to use her as a sacrifice and throw her toward the danger while he made his escape). What this reminds me is that none of us like being alone. Life becomes overwhelming when we attempt to imagine dealing with it all alone. But the good news is that as children of God, we do not have to be alone! God is with us. And the One Who stands by our side is not a two-year-old who can offer only moral support. The One by our side is the Great God of Heaven! Surely His presence distracts us from present concerns. Sickness, cancer, old age, loneliness, disobedient children, and death itself do not seem nearly as frightening when we realize God is by our side.

The Peace of His Presence

The apostle Paul said, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). What great confidence and peace this passage gives to the faithful child of God! Herein is a promise that God can and will redeem any situation in which His children find themselves. It is not a promise of ease and pleasure, but it is a promise of providence and redemption. Regardless of what happens in life, God takes notice

and promises us it will be okay.

Knowing this truth can give the child of God great peace. There is an Old Testament example from the life and times of the prophet Elisha that demonstrates the peace we can have in understanding God's presence. The record says:

Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place." And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there." Then the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice.

Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?"

And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom."

So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him."

And it was told him, saying, "Surely he is in Dothan."

Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:8-17)

The above account tells us of a servant of Elisha who arose

early in the morning only to find himself and the city totally surrounded by the enemy. You can almost hear the despair and panic in his voice as he reports the bad news to Elisha. What must he have been thinking? Surely he wondered if there was any way to escape and if not, “What will they do to me? Will they enslave me? Will they kill me? If they decide to kill me, will it be a swift death, or a cruel, agonizing one?” This poor servant was in an unenviable position.

However, Elisha did not seem to share in his servant’s dismay. Instead, he prayed to the Lord and asked the Lord to “open his eyes” (17). The Lord answered his prayer and immediately Elisha’s servant saw the mountain was full of angels, ready for battle. Oh, how the sight of these angels must have given him a sense of relief and peace! What is there to fear when we are surrounded with the presence of God?

That indeed, is the question. What are we to fear when we are surrounded by God’s presence? What calm and peace of mind can be had when we realize that God is present, knows our needs, and will take care of us! Knowing that our circumstances do not escape the attention and care of God allows us to endure the difficulties in life, knowing that God is by our side and will redeem even the worst of circumstances.

I do not want to minimize the storms of life we may be facing or that we may someday be called upon to face. However, I can assure you that no matter how trying our circumstances may be, God will be by our side. His presence is the anchor our souls need as we are tossed by the storms of life.

Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture Index

GENESIS

1-2	286
1:1	82, 101, 312
1:3	103
1:9	286
1:27	111
2:6	182
2:16-17	96, 138
3-4	256
3:1-7	138
3:9	97
3:10-11	97
3:12-13	163
3:15	193
3:16-19	97
3:17	192
3:22-24	97
6-9	64
6:1-7	82
6:5	63
6:9	64
7:23	167
9:1	64, 196
10:2	202
12:1	64, 114
12:1-2	190
12:2-3	64
12:7	190
12	114
13:14-17	190
13:14-15	258
14:18-19	196
15:1	44
15:4-5	190
15:7	190, 258
15:13-16	190
15:18-21	190
17:1-21	190

18:10-15	190
18:17-19	190
18:17-18	193
18:25	105, 288, 304
19:16	215
22:1	65, 229
22:2	65
22:15-18	65
22:16-18	190
26:2-5	190
26:24	190
27:1-40	116
28:1-4	190
28:13-15	190
28:15	204
31:3	190
31:36	257
31	236
32:28	190
34:7	257
35:10-12	190
35:18	240
46:3-4	190
48	190
49:10	115
49	190

EXODUS

3:14	166
5-14	251
11:4-7	214
12:11	116
14-15	286
14:13	188
14:30-31	215
15:2	287
15:8	286
15-11	287

15	70
20:12	258
20:18-21	28
23:14-17	202
24:4-8	29
33:19	172
33:22	179

LEVITICUS

19:32	325
26:4	191

NUMBERS

4:15	334
6:24-26	191
6:25	172
14:19	131
15:29-30	108
21:4-8	113
32:1-5	115

DEUTERONOMY

1:1-4:40	171
1:27	171
4:37	171
5:29	169
6:4-9	90
6:16	204
6:22	323
7:6-9	279
7:7-8	216
9:26	71
10:15	216
11:24	235
15:7-11	263
17:6	22
18:10-14	218
28:1-6	190

28:1-14	191
28:36-37	258
28:45-46	324
32:10	249
32:11	215
32:15	250
32:35	158, 256
33:27	182
33:29	44

JOSHUA

2:18	174, 175
2:21	174, 175
6	117
7	117
8	117
12:2	115
22:33	196
24:13-14	236
24:31	236

JUDGES

5	70
10:10-13	237

RUTH

4:7-8	116
-------	-----

1 SAMUEL

2	70
15:11	257
17	167
17:34-35	248
17:37	248
17:40-51	43
17:45	43
17:46	248
17:47	43

18 70
 18:8 248
 18:10-11 147
 18:29 147
 19:1-16 278
 19:10 147
 20:3 147
 21 134
 21:7 126
 22:1 72
 23:29-24:7 72
 26:8 10
 26:9 71
 26:23-27:1 10
 28:5-6 113
 31 261
 17-31 246
 21-22 3

2 SAMUEL

1:17-27 261
 3:1 147
 6: 10-11 334
 7:12-16 130
 8:3-14 110
 8:13 111, 116
 10:15-18 110
 11:3 150
 12:10 40
 12:14 40
 15-18 40
 15-19 224
 15:6 41
 15:12 41
 15:14 41, 147
 15:20 149
 15:23 41
 15:25 149

15:30 41
 15:31 41, 146, 149
 150, 152
 15:34 146, 150
 16:11 148
 16:23 146, 150
 17:1 46
 17:1-14 149
 17:8 47
 17:23 41, 146
 18:25 147
 18:33 40, 41
 20:1-22 224
 22:3 44, 170
 23:1 126, 328
 23:34 150

1 KINGS

3:6 130
 8:22-53 203
 10:1-7 235
 12:26-30 233
 13:3 323
 13:5 323
 15:5 91
 15:18-20 110
 15:34 233
 16:2 233
 16:8-10 223
 16:26 233
 16:31 233
 18 233
 18:27 204
 19:18 234
 22:52 233

2 KINGS

2:23-24 325

5	234
6:8-17	338
6:14-17	46
6:16	279
6:17	339
9:14-37	223
16:5	110
18:5	170
19:37	223
20:5	142
25:5	111

1 CHRONICLES

16:5	25
18	111
18:1-13	110
18:12	116
22:7-10	147
25:1-3	223
27:33	149

2 CHRONICLES

6:42	130
20:15	272
29:25-27	328
29:30	232

EZRA

9:13	112
------	-----

NEHEMIAH

7:44	232
11:22	232

ESTHER

2:21-23	223
7:7-10	261
7:10	76

JOB

1-2	229
1:1	65, 182
1:3	65
1:6-12	137
1:7	307
1:13ff	205
1:21	66
1:22	66, 182
2:1-7	137
2:9	65
2:10	66
4:6	175
8:13-14	175
9:32-35	183
11:20	316
13:4	183
21:7-16	256
38:1	183
38:4	183
42:4-6	183
42:12	66

PSALMS

1	51, 262
1-41	51
1:1	53
1:1-3	190, 265, 53
1:6	53
2	51, 57
2:1	52
2:1-7	185
2:1	186
2:2	186
2:2-4	280
3	56
3:1	41
3:1-2	40

3:2	41	9:12	172
3:3-4	43	9:13	124, 248
3:5	46	9:13-14	172
3:5-6	45	9:13-16	172
3:6	43, 46	9:15	316
3:7	47, 57	9:15-16	168, 172, 174
3:7-8	47	9:16	174
4:1	124, 248	9:17	165, 174, 175
4:3	280	9:17-18	174, 177
4:5	170	9:18	166, 174, 175
4:8	45, 89	9:19	176
5	71	9:19-20	166
5:3	89	9-20	176
6:2	124, 248	10:2-3	127
6:4	248	10:4	175
7:9-10	246	11:1	170
7:16	316	13:3	252
8:1	168	13:5	248
8:9	168	14	306
9:1	165	17:1	245
9:1-2	165, 168, 173	17:1-7	246
9:2	165, 166	17:2	246
9:3	166, 167	17:3	246, 247
9:3-5	166, 177	17:3-5	247
9:3-18	166	17:7	247, 250
9:4	167, 168, 174	17:7-8	249
9:4-5	166, 167	17:8	73, 215, 249
9:5	167	17:9	250
9:6	166, 167	17:9-14	250
9:6-8	167, 177	17:10	250
9:7	168	17:11-12	251
9:7-8	167	17:13-14	251
9:8	169	17:14	250, 252
9:9	170, 265	17:15	252, 253
9:9-10	169, 177	18:1-6	281
9:10	165, 170	18:2	109, 170
9:11-16	171, 177	18:4	55
9:11-12	172	18:17-19	313

18:32	285	25:16	124
18:46	281	25:21	74
19	140	26:11	172
19:1	52, 101, 103	27	57
19:1-6	99	27:1	18
19:2	102	27:1-3	18
19:2-4	102	27:1-6	17, 21
19:3	102	27:2	18, 19
19:4	102	27:3	18, 19
19:4-6	102	27:4	18, 19, 20
19:5	103	27:4-6	18, 19, 21
19:7	103, 105	27:5	18, 20
19:7-9	104	27:5-6	19, 20
19:7-13	99	27:6	20
19:8	105, 106	27:7	18, 20, 21
19:9	106		54, 124
19:10-11	106	27:7-13	17
19:12-13	107	27:7-14	17
19:13	108	27:8	18, 21
19:14	99, 108, 174	27:8-12	18, 21
	281	27:9	18, 21
20	57	27:9-10	21
20:1	315	27:11-12	21
20:7	85	27:11-14	18
20:7-9	315	27:12	18, 21, 22
21	57	27:13	18, 22
21:9	167	27:13-14	22
22:4-5	266	27:14	18, 22, 130
22:19	285	27:29	263
22:30-31	172	28:7	285
23	56, 179	29:1-2	53
23:1	281	30:10	124
23:1-4	54	31:3	281
23:4	19, 230	31:9	124
23:5-6	54	31:23	312
23:6	132	32	80
23:26	262	33:1	80
25:10	126	33:2	80

33:3	80	37:12-20	260
33:4	81	37:13	261
33:6	82, 103	37:15	261
33:7	82	37:16	261
33:8	82, 85	37:17	261
33:10	83	37:18-19	261
33:11	83	37:19	261
33:12	83, 84	37:20	257, 261, 262
33:13	84, 85	37:21	262
33:13-15	84, 96	37:21-22	262
33:14	84	37:21-29	262
33:15	84	37:22	262
33:16	85	37:24	142
33:17	85	37:25	46, 207
33:18	85	37:29	257
33:19	85	37:30-33	264
33:20	86	37:30-39	264
33:21	86	37:34	257
33:22	86	37:34-36	264
34:4	280	37:35	264
34:13-17	237	37:36	265
34:16	167	37:37-39	265
35	308	38:6	44
35:1	308	41:1	193
35:7	307	41:6	151
35:14	44	41:13	51
35:16	260	42	50
35:19	307	42-72	51
36:7	249	42:1	54
31:1	257	42:1-2	93
37:1-11	257	44-49	50
37:2	258	46	73, 281
37:3-4	258	46:1	44, 182, 265
37:5-6	259		285, 313
37:7	129, 227, 257	46:1-3	179
37:7-8	259	46:1-11	178
37:9-11	259	46:3-5	182
37:12-13	280	46:4	182

46:5	182, 185	50:14-15	30
46:5-9	185	50:15	30, 313
46:6	185	50:16	31
46:7	170	50:16-21	31
46:9	185, 186, 273	50:17	32
46:10	74, 188	50:18	33
46:10-11	188	50:18-20	32
46:11	170	50:19	33
47	57	50:20	33
48:3	170	50:21	33, 34
49	293	50:22	35, 36
49:1	52, 212	50:22-23	35, 175
49:1-4	294, 300	50:23	35, 36, 217
49:2	226	51:1	53, 124
49:5-6	300	51:3	42
49:5-12	295	51:5	6, 55
49:7-8	300	51:11	42
49:9-11	300	51:12	42
49:12	296, 300	52:1	127
49:13	301	52:1-4	127
49:14	298, 301	52:2	127
49:15	298, 301	52:3	128
49:16	301	52:4	127
49:17-18	301	52:5	128
49:19	301	52:5-7	128
49:20	301	52:6-7	128
50	50, 232	52:8	128, 132
50:1	26	52:8-9	128
50:1-6	26	52:9	129
50:2	27	53-59	278
50:3	27, 309	54	1
50:4	28	55	1
50:5	28	55:1	148, 149, 152
50:6	29	55:1-2	152
50:7-11	30	55:1-11	147
50:7-15	30	55:2	148
50:12-13	30	55:3	148
50:14	30, 36	55:4	148

55:6	148	56:12	135, 142
55:8	148, 149	56:12-13	135
55:9	149	56:13	135, 142, 143
55:10-11	149	57	1, 134
55:11	149	57:1	72, 73, 249
55:12	150	57:2	73
55:12-14	147, 149	57:2-3	72, 73, 76
55:13	150	57:3	74, 77
55:14	150	57:4	72, 74, 75
55:15	152	57:5	73, 75, 77
55:15-19	152	57:5-11	70
55:16	152, 153	57:6	73, 74, 75
55:17	152	57:7	76
55:18	152	57:7-10	73, 76
55:19	152, 153	57:8	76
55:20	150	57:10	77
55:20-21	149	57:11	73, 77
55:21	150, 151, 309	58	71, 306
55:22	153, 259	58:1	3, 5, 11
55:22-23	152	58:1-2	5, 6, 8
55:23	153		9
56	1	58:1-5	3
56:1-2	135, 136	58:1-9	8
56:1-4	135	58:2-3	4
56:2	137	58:3	6, 7, 55
56:3-4	135, 138, 140	58:3-5	8
	143	58:4-5	7, 9
56:4	137	58:6-7	9
56:4-5	138	58:6-9	3, 7, 8
56:5	135, 136		9
56:5-9	135	58:6-11	57
56:5-11	135	58:7-8	8
56:6	135	58:9-11	9
56:8	141, 142	58:10	10, 11
56:9	142	58:10-11	3, 11
56:9-11	135	58:11	11, 12
56:10-11	135, 139, 140	58:11-12	9
56:11	143	59	1, 71

59:1	278, 279	62:1-2	224
59:1-8	278	62:1-4	224, 225
59:2	278, 279	62:2	224, 225, 281
59:3	279	62:3	223, 224, 225
59:4	279	62:3-4	224
59:5	279, 282	62:4	223, 224, 225
59:6-7	280	62:5	175, 224, 225
59:7	280, 309		226, 227
59:8	280	62:5-7	224
59:9	281, 282	62:5-8	224, 225
59:9-15	281	62:6	224, 225
59:10	73, 132, 282	62:7	224, 225
59:10-13	281	62:8	224, 225, 226
59:11	282	62:9	224, 226
59:11-13	281	62:9-11	224
59:13	282	62:9-12	224
59:14-15	282	62:10	224, 226
59:16	282	62:11	224, 226, 227
59:16-17	282	62:11-12	224
59:17	73, 132, 282	62:12	226, 227
60:1	111, 113	63	88
60:1-2	113	63:1	89
60:1-5	111	63:2	91
60:2	111	63:2-3	91
60:3	112	63:3	91
60:5	113	63:3-5	91
60:6	114, 117	63:5	91
60:6-8	111, 114, 116	63:5-6	89
60:7	114	63:7	91, 250
60:8	115, 117	63:7-8	91
60:9	117	63:8	91
60:9-12	111, 116	63:11	91
60:10	118	64	8, 306
60:10-11	117	64:1	268, 269
60:12	119	64:1-6	271
61:4	73, 249	64:2	269
62	222	64:2-6	270
62:1	224, 225, 227	64:3	309

64:4	270	71:19-21	327
64:7	268	71:20-21	322
64:7-9	272	71:22	328
64:8	272	71:22-24	322, 328
64:9	272	71:23	328
64:10	268, 273	71:24	322, 329
66:10-12	261	72	50
67	189	72:2	264
67:1	191	72:19	51
67:2	191	72:20	51
67:3-5	196	73	57
67:6	198	73-83	25, 50, 232
67:6-7	198	73-89	51
67:7	199	73:3	305
69	1, 11	73:16-22	305
69:22-28	57	73:25	20
69:25	2	74	233
71:1	322	77:16	54
71:1-6	321	78	57
71:2	322	78:41	328
71:3	322	79	233
71:4-6	323	80:1	232, 233, 234
71:5	321	80:2	232
71:6	321, 323	80:3	238
71:7	323	80:5	237
71:7-13	322, 323	80:7	238
71:8	324	80:8-11	235
71:9	321, 324	80:14	236
71:12	325	80:15-17	240
71:13	325	80:17	240
71:14	323, 325	80:18	242
71:14-16	322, 325	80:19	238, 243
71:15	322, 325	81:12	111
71:16	322	82:1	5
71:17	321	83:1	52
71:17-18	322, 326	83:9-18	57
71:18	321, 326	84-85	50
71:19	322, 327	84:11	215

86	245	94:2	158
86:5	36	94:3	157
86:16	124	94:5-6	157
87-88	50	94:7-11	158
88	51	94:8-11	158
88:15	55	94:12-15	159
89	51	94:13	159
89:14	304	94:14	159
89:18	328	94:15	160, 161
89:49	130	94:16-23	161
89:52	51	94:16-17	161
90	16, 50, 51	94:18	162
	213,245	94:19	161
90-106	51	94:20	161
90:1	213	94:22	162
90:5-6	262	94:23	162, 163
90:14	93	96:13	309
90:16	213	98:9	310
91:1	214, 215	100:5	73
91:1-2	214	102	245
91:1-13	214	102:13	124
91:2	214	103:1-5	131
91:5:6	220	103:8-10	131
91:7	175, 217	103:11	126
91:9	213, 214, 215	103:11-13	131
	217, 220	103:17	126
91:9-10	220	105	57
91:11-12	204, 219	105:5	323
91:13	220	106	57
91:14	216	106:48	51
91:14-16	214, 216	107	56
91:15	217	107-150	51
91:16	213	108:1-5	76
92	213	109	1, 11
92:3	174	109:3	307
92:8	137	109:6-20	57
92:11-12	215	109:8	2
94:1-3	158	111:1	165

112:1	60, 61	123:3	124
112:7	60	124	202
113-118	52	124:8	203
116:12-13	198	127	50, 202
117	56	127:1	314
117:2	56	128:1	199
119	17, 54, 104	128:4	199
	140, 165	131	202
119:9-12	326	133	202
119:10	165	134:2	202
119:11	264	135	57
119:15	287	135-136	52
119:34	165	136	57
119:58	165	136:10-12	125
119:69	165	136:13-15	125
119:78	307	136:16	125
119:97	291	136:17-20	125
119:105	262	136:21-22	125
119:145	165	136:23-24	125
119:160	207	136:26	125
119:161	307	137	16, 50
119:164	73	137:7-9	57
120	202	139	331
120-134	52, 201	139:2	55
120:5-6	202	139:5	314
121	201	139:8	55
121:1	202	139:14	99
121:1-2	202	139:17	326
121:2	203	139:19	57
121:3-4	204	139:21	57
121:4	205	140	8
121:4-5	279	140:1	307, 308, 317
121:5-6	205	140:1-5	307
121:7	205, 208	140:2	308
121:7-8	205	140:3	308, 309, 310
121:8	206	140:4	310, 314, 317
122	202	140:4-5	312
122:1	202	140:5	311

140:6	312, 313, 317	15:3	26
140:6-11	312, 317	15:33	264
140:7	313	16:3	259
140:8	314, 317	17:22	258
140:9	315, 316	20:17	262
140:10	312, 316	20:20	249
140:11	317	21:24	105
140:12	318	23:17-18	175
140:12-13	317	24:16	142, 263
140:13	318	24:19-20	260
142	245	27:20	260
145:5	285	29:18	139
145:6	285	30:5	44
145:9	285	30:5-6	105
145:12	285		
145:17	285, 287, 288	ECCLESIASTES	
146-150	51	1:2-3	192
148:7-10	54	2:18-19	295
149:5-9	57	5:10	96
150	51	5:10-12	295
150:6	51	12:1-8	324
		12:13	62, 120
PROVERBS		ISAIAH	
1:3-4	105	1:19-20	258
1:7	32, 105, 264	2:2-4	186
2:11-12	160	2:3	27
3:5	30	6:1-8	289
3:5-7	298	6:3	289
3:5-8	94	6:5	289
4:23	212	6:8	289, 290
7:2	249	8:20	321
7:9	249	9:7	264
9:10	264	11:2-5	264
13:11	262	16:1	117
13:34	238	20:3	323
14:12	322	21:13-16	202
14:30	258	30:18	190
15:1	53, 212		

31:3	141
32:1	264
40:6-8	258, 262
40:8	103
40:30-31	264
40:31	188
41:21	111
44:6	5
44:15-17	6
44:25-26	218
45:8	205
46:3-4	324
49:15	22
54:9	167
59:1-2	317
65:8	71
65:11	175
65:11-12	175

JEREMIAH

4:22	128
5:6-9	256
6:14	275
10:11	203
10:23	118, 322
11:19	264
11:18-19	260
12:1	256
17:7	190
17:11	262
18:18	260, 264
22:13	262
49:11	170

LAMENTATIONS

3:22	131
3:22-24	283
3:62	174

EZEKIEL

9	261
14:14	65
14:24	167
18:20	7
21:14-16	260
22:13	262

DANIEL

3:17	265
3:19-26	335
3:26	336
3:28	215
6:7	161
6:10	90, 203
6:11	161
6:13	90
6:15	161
6:22	215
9:4	131
9:9	131
12:12	190

HOSEA

8:7	40, 167
-----	---------

AMOS

3:3	118
-----	-----

OBADIAH

16	116
----	-----

MICAH

4:1-3	186
4:2	27
6:6	137, 290
7:18	290, 291, 328

NAHUM		6:13	206, 263
1:4	167	6:19-21	297
		6:21	294
HABAKKUK		6:25-34	46, 263
1:2	184	6:25-27	85
1:4	184	6:30	262
1:6	184	6:31	207
1:13	184	6:33	193, 205
2:5	260	7:7-8	311, 317
3:17-19	184	7:11	311, 317
		7:12	260
ZECHARIAH		7:24-27	90, 299, 323
3:8	240	9:27	124
		10:22	66
MALACHI		10:28	62, 119, 300
1:6	289	10:34	275
1:8	289	11:15	310
1:13	289	12:35	264
1:14	289	12:36-37	264
3:8	30	13:28-29	220
3:16	142	14	253
		14:17-21	286
MATTHEW		15:22	124
4:5-6	203, 204	16:24	219
4:6	215, 218	16:26	297
4:7	219	17:15	124
5:3	191	18:3	7
5:3-10	190	18:21	288
5:3-11	197	18:22	288
5:5	260	18:26	132
5:6	93, 94	18:27	132
5:10-12	274	19:14	7
5:12	40, 259	20:28	41
5:39	311	20:30-31	124
5:43-48	57	22:42:45	39
5:44	196, 291, 311	23:3	32
6:10	75	23:5	90
6:11	207		

23:37	73, 215, 239	10:19-20	218
	250	10:33	124
24:31	29	10:34-35	125
25:1-46	169	10:37	125
25:46	35, 163, 316	12:4	181
26:33	117	12:4-5	181
26:57-68	10	12:15	297
26:70-74	117	12:16-20	118
27:5	41	12:16-21	295, 296
27:39-43	41	12:19	297
27:41-42	157	12:20	295, 297
27:46	42	12:21	295
28:9-18	70	12:43	191
28:19-20	333	15:11-16	262
		16	298
MARK		16:19-31	36, 263
1:12-13	219	16:20-21	207
1:35	89	16:24	124
3:5	258	17:13	124
4:19	298	17:20-21	258
8:36-38	326	18:1-8	142
9:43-48	316	18:9	106
10:47-48	124	18:38-39	124
13:22	218	19:10	41
16:15-16	104	19:41	41
		22:39	41
LUKE		22:61	151
1:78	73	23:34	264
2:29-30	217	23:41	229
4:9-11	203	24:44	212
4:10-11	215	24:47	27
4:12	219		
6:20	193	JOHN	
6:27-31	57	1:1-3	140
8:17	259	1:14	140
9:23	136	2:13-17	258
10:17-20	220	3:14-15	113
10:19	215	3:16	48

3:20	264	7:54	260
5:19	120	7:54-60	66
5:25	104	7:60	264
5:28-29	299	8:2-24	218
6:68	322	8:19-20	294
10:10	194, 258	8:32-33	264
10:27-28	208	10:9	90
10:35	70	10:34	304
11	287	11:18	239
11:35	142	12	253
13:15	197	12:1-3	181
13:18	151	12:6-7	46
14:15-23	172	13:6-11	218
14:23	333	13:22	91, 136
14:24	192	13:36	327
15:1	241	14:15-17	100
15:4-6	241	14:22	136
15:5	120, 242	17:21	92
15:18-19	151	17:22-31	169
16:33	136	17:24	140, 203
17:17	106, 113	17:24-25	30
18:1	41	17:24-27	93
18:36	187, 260	17:28	140
19:30	44	17:30	83
20:28	101	17:31	169
		18:9-10	256
ACTS		19:18-19	218
1:16-20	1	23:11	256
1:16-22	2	28:3-6	215
2:39	193		
2:42	195	ROMANS	
3:25-26	193	1:18	112, 315
4:24-28	186	1:18-23	175
4:27	186	1:19-20	100
5	253	1:20	140
5:17-42	181	1:24	111
5:38-39	120	1:26	111
7	181, 253	1:26-28	237

1:28	111
1:28-32	35
2:4-11	264
2:7	228
2:16	259
3:10	315
3:10-18	306
3:12	306
3:23	242, 315
3:24-26	169
4:7-8	108
4:12	108
5:3-5	228
5:12	229
5:19	97
6:16	108
6:23	317
7-8	208
7:12	105
7:15	208
7:18	208
7:19	208
7:22	208
7:24-25	209
7:25	209
8	219
8:1	209
8:16-17	260
8:18	164
8:28	67, 81, 207 333, 337
8:28-39	167
8:31	46, 119, 142 153, 318
8:31-39	118, 281
8:37	46, 67
8:38-39	211
8:39	67

9:17	105
10:17	181
10:18	102
11:22	36, 305, 315
12:17-21	273, 280
12:19	256, 311
14:22	198
15:4	63, 66, 163 228
15:9-10	77

1 CORINTHIANS

4:5	259
10-13	39, 206
15:10	48
15:28	77
15:57	67
15:57-58	265
15:58	67

2 CORINTHIANS

1:3	73, 132
1:3-4	156
2:11	137, 311
4:4	137
5:10	34
10:3-5	137
11:3	138, 220
11:22-33	66
12:7	205
12:7-8	182
12:7-12	217
12:9	153

GALATIANS

3:29	187
4:4-6	260
5:22	228

5:22-23 195
6:7-8 33, 167
6:9 192

EPHESIANS

1:13-14 260
2:1 242
2:4 73
2:4-5 126
2:8-10 265
2:12-14 194
2:13-18 187
3:6 194
4:6 197
4:28 262
4:31-32 291
5:11 163
5:14-16 44
5:15-16 312
5:17 327
5:19 71
6:2-4 258
6:10 135
6:12 135
6:13 275
6:16 135, 215, 271
6:18 142

PHILIPPIANS

1:21 296
2:5-10 197
2:5-11 165
2:9-11 259
3:7-11 67
3:9 265
3:14 120
4:6 275, 311
4:7 194, 275, 328

4:12 117
4:13 118, 199
4:19 163

COLOSSIANS

3:1 241
3:5-8 95
3:15 71
1 JOHN
1:7 108, 142, 209
1:8-9 239
1:8-10 263
2:25 194
2:15-17 97
3:4 7
4:19 62
5:3 62
5:4 135
5:14-15 45, 258
5:19 317

1 THESSALONIANS

1:3 228
2:3 206
4:11-12 262
4:16 28
4:18 163
5:17 203
5:22 263
5:23 209

2 THESSALONIANS

1:3-10 12
1:4 228
1:6 264
1:7-8 28, 36
1:8-9 316
1:11-12 192

1 TIMOTHY

1:2	67
1:12-14	107
1:12-16	47
1:15	142
2:1-4	238
2:4	83
2:5	192
4:8	194
6:7	297

2 TIMOTHY

1:10	142
2:3	135
2:19	192
3:10-11	217
3:12	66, 182, 206
	274
3:14-17	140
4:2	275
4:6-8	67
4:17-18	217

TITUS

2:12	63
2:13	63, 120
5:11-12	66

HEBREWS

1:1	64
2:9-11	242
2:14-15	97
2:17	192
3:12	138, 208
4:9	159
4:13	304
4:14-16	124
4:16	45

6:12	228
9:27	294, 296
10:12	241
10:26	108, 263
10:31	62, 316
10:36	228
11:1	174
11:4-8	119
11:4-31	180
11:7	64
11:8	64
11:11	64, 119
11:13	119, 194
11:17	119
11:20-24	119
11:27	119
11:29	119
11:30	119
11:30-31	174
11:32-35	180
11:36-40	180, 208
11:37	180
12:1	228
12:1-2	258
12:2	197
12:4-11	229
12:5	160
12:5-6	160
12:5-7	238
12:5-11	159
12:7-8	160
12:29	316
13:5	30, 153
13:5-6	141, 281
13:6	199, 324

JAMES

1:2-4	228
-------	-----

1:5-8	162, 281
1:10	228, 258, 262
1:17	85, 192
1:19-20	206
1:21	206
2:13	72
2:22-25	90
3	291
3:5-6	309
3:8	270, 309
3:8-10	127
4:2	317
4:3	192, 311
4:10	192
4:13	83
4:14	300
5:1-6	262
5:11	65, 217, 228
5:16	207, 217, 314
	317

1 PETER

1:3-4	260, 266
1:3-25	140
1:4	160
1:6-9	228
1:7-9	261
1:22	206
1:22-25	258
1:24	262
1:25	103
2:5	187
2:6-12	173
2:9	109
2:11	291
2:24	153
3:12	45, 237
3:12-13	318

3:12-14	237
3:15	137
4:12-16	229
4:15	228
5:7	328
5:7-8	259
5:8	220, 307

2 PETER

1:5-11	228
3:9	34, 63, 239
	288, 316
3:15-16	138

1 JOHN

1:7	108, 142, 209
1:8-9	239
1:8-10	263
2:15-17	97
2:25	194
3:4	7
4:19	62
5:3	62
5:4	135
5:14-15	45, 258
5:19	317

JUDE

3	274
24	265

REVELATION

1:3	67
1:10	67
2:10	67, 258, 264
2:20-21	239
4:8-11	328
5:5	115

6:9-11	181, 261, 264
7	261
12:9	137, 220
14	261
14:1ff	261
14:12	228
15:3	329
18:20	329
19:6	77, 168
20:2	137
21:8	269, 316, 316
22:14	191